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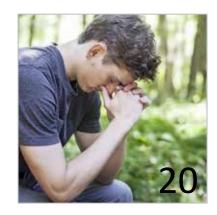


ON THE COVER

I Will Go is an initiative of the world church that encourages every member to follow Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28-to go and make disciples of all nations. According to the official website, "I Will Go involves all church members in reaching the world, inspiring and equipping them to use their God-given spiritual gifts in witness and service for Christ." You can read more about this initiative at iwillgo2020.org. The General Conference Women's Ministries website also has information and resources to help vou: women.adventist. org/i-will-go-reach-my-world. Sounds good, right? But what do we need to do before we go? How do we prepare ourselves to follow where Jesus leads? That's what the articles in this issue address. We hope they help you feel ready to accept the call . . . and go!







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I Just Want to Sleep

JERRY AND I HAVE TRAVELED over 200 days a year since 2010 as we've worked internationally for the General Conference. So many of my opportunities to share Jesus with someone have been in an airport or on a plane.

But I never asked God to put a person next to me on the plane that I could witness to. I wanted to be left alone.

I was always very tired when I got on a plane. I wanted to collapse and sleep. I did not want to talk with people. Life is so very busy!

Yes, I felt guilty about it. I would think of Pastor Mark Finley, an international evangelist, and others who seem to witness everywhere. I would mutter, "He probably gives people complete Bible studies on the plane and baptizes them in the airplane restroom before landing."

I finally surrendered to God and prayed, "If You want me to witness to someone, put them in the seat next to me. And please give me the right words to say."

YOU ASKED FOR IT

One day we were headed home to Maryland with a connection in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The flight was delayed. I was complaining to Jerry, "Why do we have this unusual connection through Addis Ababa? We don't usually connect through here. It is one of the worst airports anywhere."

After several hours, we finally boarded for the long trip home. Settled in my seat, I prayed, "Lord, it would be so nice if no one sat by me. These seats are so narrow!" I wanted to lie down and sleep during the flight. "But Lord," I added, "I want to be surrendered to Your will. If You want me to witness to someone, put them next to me."

Then two women sat down beside me. There went my extra room. I tried to be friendly and smiled at the woman next to me. She didn't make eye contact. She put on headphones—a clear sign: Do not disturb me!

I Just Want to Sleep

Oh, good, now I don't have to talk to her! I thought. I tried to relax, but I kept thinking I needed to talk to her. I noticed she and her traveling partner had on safari pants and hiking boots.

She took off her headphones when drinks and snacks were served. Quickly I asked, "Are you returning from a safari?"

"No." She put on her headphones again.

I thought, Well, Lord, I tried.

Still, the Holy Spirit urged me to try again. When our dinners appeared, her headphones came off once more. I blurted out, "Where are you coming from?"

With a disgusted look and no eye contact, she said, "Gimbi, Ethiopia."

As she reached for her headphones, I exclaimed, "Gimbi! We were just there about a year ago!"

No response.

"Why were you there?" I asked.

Annoyed, she said, "We were volunteering at the hospital. I was working with surgery. I am an anesthesiologist, and so is my friend."

"Oh, that is so nice you would do that," I said. Then I learned she was from Portland, Oregon.

Jerry was listening to our short-worded conversation and asked, "Do you work at the Adventist hospital?"

"No, the veterans hospital," she responded as she put on her headphones.

Well, it was obvious she didn't want to talk to me! I had known of an anesthesiologist named Cheryl Becker* who had worked at the veterans hospital in Portland. Her mom attended a prayer group I led and would ask for prayers for her daughter to pass exams in medical school and many other needs. A big burden of her mom was Cheryl's conversion.

When the flight attendant picked up the dinner trays, the woman put her headphones down. I quickly asked, "Do you know Cheryl Becker?"

For the first time, she made eye contact. There was silence. "I am her."

I was shocked. "I was a prayer partner with your mom, and we prayed for you to make it through medical school and many of your other needs," I said.

She just stared at me. Finally, she said, "Thank you. I needed those prayers."

I knew Cheryl's mother had died and had tried to push religion on Cheryl. I said quietly, "I know your mom was pushy about religion, but she had a sincere heart and really loved you."

"Yes, I believe that," Cheryl said.

I told her I had continued to pray for her through the years. We talked about her mother and a few other things.

Cheryl told her friend about the amazing providence that God had coordinated. But her friend was negative. "Oh, it's just a coincidence. Those things happen."

That was the end of conversation. The lights were turned off, and we went to sleep.

After landing, as we were waiting for our luggage, Cheryl came walking up and said, "I don't believe it was an accident we met on this flight. You have given me a lot to think about."

"God loves you," I responded.

She nodded. "I believe that now." Then she walked away.

I have learned that when we surrender our lives totally to God and follow His will at any moment, He will give us amazing opportunities to share Him with others.

No, I did not go through the 28 Fundamental Beliefs or have Jerry baptize her in the airplane restroom. But I know God is working in her life, and I believe I will see her in heaven.

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

^{*} Name has been changed.







YOU HAVE A CALL

"YOU SAY WE HAVE A CALL? What do we do now?"

Many of us have faced this situation in our families. The very first thing to do is to consult God to be sure we are following His will. Read Proverbs 3:5, 6 and let those words be your guide. This is crucial, since leaning on our own understanding is so easy to do!

Some have a very hard time moving, and others are willing to say, "We need to accept this call!" Many of us are somewhere in between.

There are several questions we need to ask ourselves:

- If the call is for my spouse, will our children and I be able to find a ministry and be a blessing?
- Is the timing right in our lives?
- Are there any health issues?
- Do our personal gifts and skills match the description of need?
- If there are children, is this beneficial for them? What is the school situation for them?
- Is this financially possible? (Remember, God blesses financially those who trust Him.)

As you attempt to answer these questions and make your decision, you may need to ask clarifying questions of those who sent the call.

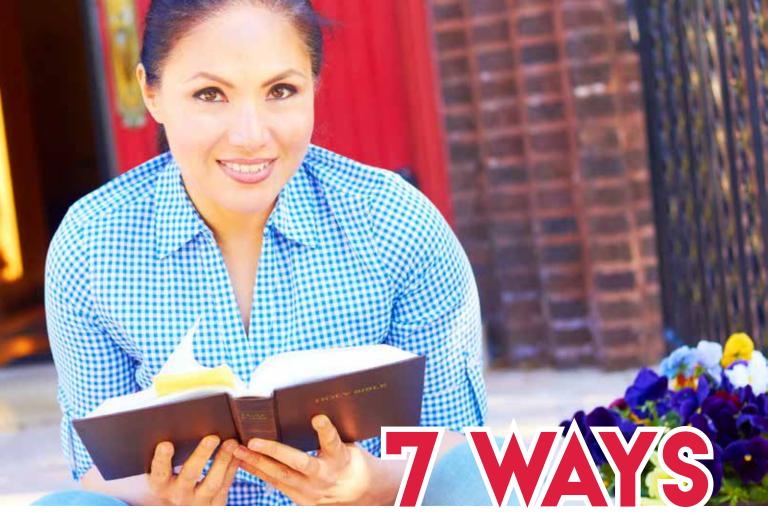
TRY THIS PLAN

My husband and I have used the following simple plan many times in making major decisions, especially when receiving a call. First, we spent time in fasting and prayer, dedicating this small activity to God, asking Him to strongly impress our minds. Then we each took a sheet of paper and divided it down the middle from top to bottom. On one side we wrote the heading "To accept"; on the other side we wrote "Not to accept." Then each of us wrote every reason we could think of why we should accept the call. On the other side we wrote the reasons to not accept.

Once that was done, we (separately) looked through our "reasons" and selected the one that was the most important one on each side and compared them. Then we chose the *next* important reasons and compared them, and so on until we reached the end of our lists.

Once we finished separately, we came together and shared our findings. Under the guidance of God, we felt we were better prepared to make an intelligent and godly decision because we had fasted and prayed, thought through carefully the issues involved, and could see them right before our eyes.

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



TO SATURATE YOUR LIFE WITH SCRIPTURE

TRY THESE IDEAS TO MAKE GOD'S WORD PART OF EVERY DAY.

IF YOU'VE CHOSEN TO READ THIS, chances are you have met or are one of those Christians who aim to read the Bible every year. Bible reading plans are often printed out and laid next to our reading areas, but somewhere around February (or 1 Chronicles—whichever comes first), the boxes stop getting checked off. The important thing is you tried, and you realize the importance of reading God's Word. But don't let the discouragement stop you.

Since this is not about why you should read the Bible but rather how you can saturate your life with Scripture, I will not go deep into that topic.

Just know that the Bible is literally Godbreathed (2 Timothy 3:16) and is God's very word to us. It's His love letter and His guidance for our lives, and the very key to knowing who God is.

Reading the Bible guards against false teaching, changes our hearts to be more like Christ, and challenges us in every way possible.

I would say those are reasons enough! So how can we saturate our lives with Scripture and keep God's Word in our hearts? Let me share seven practical ways that have helped me personally.

1 SET ASIDE TIMES EVERY DAY.

I've caught myself going a whole day without stopping to read the Scriptures. Don't let this be you! Set alarms to wake up early in the morning. Set timers to remind you to read before bed. Whenever you feel you want to spend time in the Word, do it—but it helps to create habits. We are, after all, creatures of habit.

The Bible is literally God-breathed.

DON'T JUST READ THE BIBLE—

In this fast-paced world, it's tempting (and unfortunately common) to read fast just to say we've done it. Resist! Take your time. Don't just read the Bible. Study it.

3 MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). Take time to memorize Scripture. It will make it easier to resist temptation and help you discern what is good in your life.

USE SCRIPTURE ART IN YOUR HOME.

Sure, you could keep some sticky notes on your bathroom mirror, but you could also try putting up framed verses on your walls to make it pretty. Display your favorite scriptures all over your home in sweet, attractive ways.

5 LISTEN TO AN AUDIO BIBLE.

This is fantastic, especially when you have a long commute. The Bible itself talks about the "hearing" of the Word, so I think this fits quite nicely. Sometimes you will hear something that you missed while reading, and when you go to read it later, it will be reinforced by what you heard. You can even find audio Bibles that are dramatized or read in an engaging way if you're afraid it will put you to sleep.

6 SHARE GOD'S WORD.

Don't hide your light under a bushel! Share what you have learned with others! This not only spreads the Good News but also reinforces what you have already learned. You never really know something until you tell someone else. That's probably why my friend in medical school tells me all about the things she learns before a test, now that I think about it.

PRAY THROUGH SCRIPTURE PROMISES.

The Bible is full of promises for us to claim. Once I became aware of this, I couldn't stop seeing them every time I picked up the Bible. God has so much He wants to bless us with—all we need to do is humbly ask!

Amanda Walter is a pastor's wife living in Maryland. Her website (maplealps.com) has this goal: "Maple Alps is a lifestyle blog that strives to inspire the love of the simple life and the love of God—the only thing that brings a truly fulfilled life."





WE TELL GOD TO SEND SOMEONE ELSE – MOSES

It's hard to think of many people in the Bible God gave more responsibility to than Moses. He was divinely instructed to lead an entire nation out of slavery toward the "promised land"—a duty requiring great resilience and grit. Moses even doubted his ability. "Pardon your servant, Lord," he began, barefooted beside the burning bush. "Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13).¹

I'm guessing God doesn't like it very much when we ask Him to send someone else. He probably sighs and shakes His head—but I imagine what pains Him most is that the faith He has in us far surpasses the faith we have in ourselves. Who are we, mere creation, to question the Creator? Yet, like Jonah, we run from Him; like Gideon, we question Him; and like Moses, we ask Him to send someone else.

In some ways, God did what Moses asked. "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite?" And as if a reply from Moses would have mattered, God said, "He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you" (Exodus 4:14).

Sometimes, a heavy load turns lighter when we know a friend is not only heading our way, but happy to be coming. Moses and Aaron, whose great partnership spearheaded the exodus of the children of Israel, exemplify the essence of what friendship is: a responsibility, an obligation to arrive joyfully when the called can't do it alone.

Author C.S. Lewis writes that true friendships are formed by those who "see the same truth." I wonder what our world would look like if we all shared the same truth. I wonder what would change if every time we heard a friend calling, asking if someone else could take their load, we eagerly ran to share it. "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). I think Moses and Aaron knew what that meant.

I'm guessing God doesn't like it very much when we ask Him to send someone else. But I think in His own way, He often does it anyway.



WE RUN IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION – JONAH

I believe the story of Jonah is a revelation of how much God loves us and how many chances He gives us to reciprocate that love. Jonah was asked to minister to the Ninevites. Apparently, this city was a pretty scary place; the prophet Nahum called it the "city of bloodshed." Basically, God had had enough and needed Jonah to give them an ultimatum: repent or be destroyed.

Despite this seemingly urgent request of God, one with lives on the line, Jonah thought it would be best to run away. God did not approve of this reaction to His request, so by the fourth verse of the book of Jonah, He had already sent a storm to rattle Jonah from his hypocrisy. After boarding a ship, being thrown overboard by the crew, and being swallowed by a great fish, he came to the conclusion he had made a big mistake.

I've always been a bit confused by Jonah. Why would anyone who is confident in the voice of God, confident that it was indeed Him who was calling, be convinced that their way was better?

God probably questions us on this all the time. Phil Vischer says, "It is pretty clear that the whale swallowing Jonah wasn't meant as a punishment from God, it was God saving him from drowning. So it was actually provision to give him a second chance. The whale itself was the start of Jonah's second chance."

But sometimes, we mess up the second chance too. After Jonah returned to the "city of bloodshed," the Ninevites repented, but when God spared their lives, Jonah was filled with rage. He felt that they didn't deserve a second chance. "Is it right for you to be angry?" God asked Jonah.

We run away from God, furious that He called and distracted by the injustices we face. But I don't think we have a right to be angry. It turns out that Jonah was just as much in need of God's grace as the Ninevites. And so are we.

WE ASK WHO'S CALLING – SAMUEL

Samuel is one of the most well-known characters in the Bible. He was a prophet, a judge, and the person who anointed Saul and David, establishing the legacy of kings who ruled Israel. However, before we learn this, we find out that it took him awhile to distinguish it was God who was calling Him. Samuel was chosen. However, though God knew his future manifest, the chosen "did not yet know the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:7).

Samuel spent his childhood in the apprenticeship of Eli, the high priest of Israel. During this time, chronicled in the beginning of 1 Samuel, the boy first heard the audible voice of God in the middle of the night as he and Eli were trying to sleep.

"The Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

"'My son,' Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down'" (1 Samuel 3:6).

This happened several times before the old man told the young one to simply listen.

We aren't the best at that. We become preoccupied by the people and places around us and forget they aren't the central focus of our attention.

God had great plans for Samuel, but before He told him to go, He asked him to listen. And finally, Samuel figured that out.

"Speak, for your servant is listening."

WE ASK WHY - ANANIAS

Sometimes, even the most seasoned of God's called don't want to go. I suppose a lot of the time, our questioning is unfounded, mere self-doubt despite an ocean of confidence God has in us. However, other times, it is understandable why one would be nervous about the call. I believe Ananias falls into this category.

Ananias was the man tasked with returning sight to Saul of Tarsus, a notorious murderer and enemy of God's people. When God called upon Ananias, whom we don't know much about, he answered, "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name" (Acts 9:13, 14).

Basically, Ananias was saying, "Why on earth would You send me to this man? He's a killer, not someone to convert!"

I think it's natural to question grand commitments. It's natural to wonder why we are called. But what is most compelling is the commitment we make despite the questioning, the apprehension, the doubt. Though we don't know whether Ananias was a man of great or little standing in his community, we know he was a faithful follower of Jesus. And despite his concerns, he decided to believe in the power and presence of God.

Upon meeting Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17).

He immediately accepted Saul and invited him into the community of Christ. He instantaneously became his friend, fellow believer, and brother—an eternal connection made despite earthly concern.

"Is it too much," God asks, "to go and call them brother, sister, friend?" I'm guessing God doesn't like it very much when we ask Him why we have to go.

Before God told him to go, He asked him to listen.

WE GO – ESTHER

When God calls, it is not a mistake. It is not a split-second decision, one laced with our skepticism about who He has called in some last-ditch effort to fulfill His desires. God is intentional. He calls "for such a time as this."

I don't know the realities that Esther faced, other than that she was picked by King Xerxes to become his queen. Though this marriage is often romanticized in stories and movies, I doubt it was a fairy tale in reality. Their relationship was probably anything but romance, and if I had to guess, Esther was more pushed than requested to take on her role. However, she believed she was placed in her royal position "for such a time as this."

Her uncle and caretaker, Mordecai, had uncovered a conspiracy that would lead to the destruction of the Jews. Unbeknownst to the king, Esther and her family were part of this sect. And no one was in a position to thwart this genocide, except for her.

"If you remain silent at this time," Mordecai told her, "relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

For such a time as this.

In this moment, she realized her existence fulfilled; it was the moment for which she was created. "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law," she said. "And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). She was willing to risk her life for the lives of those around her because of her dedication to something greater than herself.

And that's what it's about. We are called because we are part of a cause greater than ourselves. So, we go.

We might ask God to pick a replacement, or we might want to run. Sometimes, we don't even recognize that it is Him, or we stand flabbergasted that He would call us in the first place. But who are we, mere creation, to question the Creator?

Before we go, we should already know God called us, His chosen instrument, to proclaim His name. It's just a guess, but I doubt God calls us by accident. So, we go, for such a time as this.

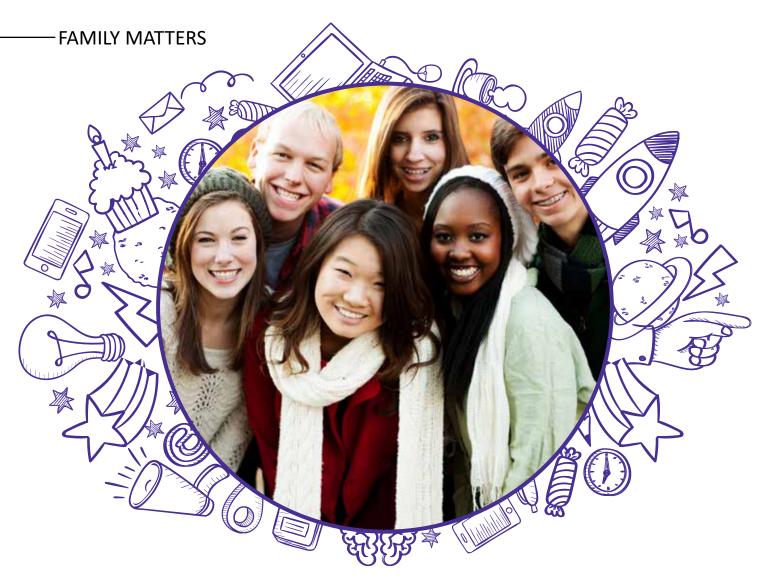
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We are called because we are part of a cause greater than ourselves.

¹ All Bible texts are from the New International Version.

² The Four Loves (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), pp. 97-99.

³ *Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie* (Disc 2, Behind the Scenes: Jonah and the Bible, 00:02:59-00:03:18).



HOW TEENAGERS TICK

WHEN I TOLD MY HUSBAND I was writing an article on how teens tick, he laughed and said, "I know how they tick . . . like a time bomb!"

I smiled. Teenagers are complex and unpredictable beings. We will never fully understand how they tick, but with God's help, lots of love, and some recent developments in neuroscience, we can defuse some of their fears, frustrations, and fury. Whether we have teenagers or not, we can all learn how to be the loving, wise, and patient supporters they need.

REWIRING THE BRAIN

The teenage brain is going through a "rewiring process," preparing the brain for adulthood. This can start in the preadolescent phase and

continue into the mid-twenties for most females and into the late twenties for most males. This amazing process, built into our bodies by our loving Creator, equips our brains for maturity and independence.

This neurological process is like rewiring the electricity in your home. During the work, various parts of your home will be without power until they are reconnected. And you might need to rewire certain areas in completely different ways. During adolescence, the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex of the brain are not as well-connected as they usually are. This means that the pleasure-seeking parts of the brain are not always able to assess the risks involved, which is the job of the rational and cautious part of the brain.

The good news is that teenage brains are at the peak of their ability to learn and be creative, and these are incredible gifts that we need to help them use and develop. Teens are often passionate about making a positive difference in the world, and they ask searching questions about God because they want to understand Him better. We can help them flourish and develop their skills.

HOW TO LOVE A TEENAGER

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NIV).

If there's one experience God uses to grow our patience, it's parenting teens! They often experience complex tangles of emotions, and they can easily withdraw, explode, and behave in unpredictable ways. They need the loving adults in their lives to be calm, reassuring, and forgiving when their emotions spill over. We need to remember how patient God has been with us.

Being a teenager today is much harder than it was when we were young. So be as kind as possible. They need the secure base of loving family relationships to help them steady themselves, even if they push us away. Be gentle and speak kindly, acknowledging their desires and wishes before encouraging them to explore the issues and risks in a situation. Show them your love in thoughtful and creative ways. Let them know that whatever mess they get into, you will be there for them, no matter what. And you will help rescue them, just as God loves us and rescues us from our own mistakes.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Teens are trainee adults. They are just learning, and learners take risks and make mistakes occasionally. Train them to stop and think about the consequences of their choices and behavior. Make safety/escape plans with them, such as a code word when they need you to drive them home or get them out of a difficult or dangerous situation. Be there to catch them when they make mistakes, and be accepting, comforting, and supportive when they are distressed or worried about what you will do or say.

When the painful emotions have subsided, gently discuss what went wrong and what they could do differently next time. Make sure they continue to feel warmly connected to you. Keep in mind that low self-esteem, a sense of hopelessness, disconnection from parents, peer pressure, lack of future goals, and challenges at school and home are some things that will increase their risk factors.

NO RECORD OF WRONGS

We left our 16-year-old son at home for two days when we went to a church conference. While we were away, he called us up and asked if some friends could come over for the evening. All our alarm bells rang! We knew that these parties often escalate and get out of hand. So we took a deep breath and told him that he could have friends around as long as the house looked the same way we left it once we returned the next day.

The teenage brain is going through a "rewiring process."



How Teenagers Tick

It did... but he had to work hard to put everything straight. He was so upset at the behavior of these "friends" that he stopped hanging out with them. We took a risk, we set a boundary for him, and he learned some important lessons without us saying a word.

We discussed the rules for our family with our teens, and they decided on the consequences for breaking them. They would often suggest harsher consequences than we would, giving us a special opportunity to show them grace.

Let them know that whatever mess they get into, you will be there for them.



WHAT'S BEHIND THE ARGUMENT?

Underneath most arguments, teens are really asking one or more of the following questions:

- Do you love me/care about me and my well-being and happiness?
- Are you able to understand what I am feeling right now? Can you empathize with me?
- Are you willing and able to help me when I am struggling?
- Will you always be there for me? Can I depend on you?

If we answer these questions in the way we relate to them every day—regularly showing kindness, appreciation, empathy, and helpful support—and if we express our commitment to them, then this tends to reduce their need to argue with us.

Staying calm, speaking gently, listening to them before answering, responding to their honesty positively, and helping them make their own risk assessments can also help to reduce arguments. If you have a major disagreement, reconnecting warmly and positively with your teen before bedtime is vital. When a painful disconnect lasts too long, it can be devastating for the teen's emotional well-being. As an adult, take the first step to show warmth and forgiveness and set a healthy example.

LOVE ALWAYS PROTECTS

Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). So we took a deep breath and told our teens that if they ever found themselves in difficulty or facing a challenge, such as an unexpected pregnancy, addiction, or the possibility that they were gay, we wanted to be the first people to know. We reassured our children that we would always love them and welcome them, and that we would always be there to help them, whatever their life challenges.

Parenting teenagers can be challenging. Pray for them every day and pray for the wisdom and love to respond to them with kindness and patience. Focus on God's incredible love for you, as described in 1 Corinthians 13. Fill your hearts and minds with His love, and generously pass it on to every teenager in your life.

To learn more about supporting teens, watch Karen's webinar: youtube.com/watch?v=KnNPkWoi2DU.

Karen Holford is the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division and a qualified family therapist. She has a deep compassion for teens, having been one herself.

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"We must learn in the school of Christ. Nothing but His righteousness can entitle us to one of the blessings of the covenant of Grace. We have long desired and tried to obtain these blessings but have not received them because we have cherished the idea that we could do something to make ourselves worthy of them. We have not looked away from ourselves, believing that Jesus is a living Saviour. We must not think that our own grace and merits will save us; the grace of Christ is our only hope of salvation. Through His prophet the Lord promises, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon' (Isaiah 55:7). We must believe the naked promise, and not accept feeling for faith. When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire."

Faith and Works, p. 36

"The goodness and glory of the Lord were to pass before mortal man; and if you plead with the Lord for His help, plead with Him for a view of His glory, the blessing of the Lord will come upon you. When you come to speak before the people, your heart will be filled with love, filled with warmth and divine moisture. When this love is in your heart, the truth will strike its way through coldness and worldliness to the very hearts of the people. It will make its way through all pride and formality, and will leaven the soul with its power until Jesus will be enthroned in the heart."

Review and Herald, June 11, 1889, par. 4

"The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. This is the knowledge that works transformation of character. Received into the life, it will re-create the soul in the image of Christ. This is the knowledge that God invites His children to receive, beside which all else is vanity and nothingness."

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 475

"A revival and a reformation must take place under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend."

Christian Service, p. 42

"God calls for workers.

Personal activity is needed. But conversion comes first; seeking for the salvation of others, next."

Counsels on Stewardship, p. 48



I SPENT A FEW HOURS with some teenage girls this week. I eavesdropped on their excited chatter as we headed home, me in the driver's seat them scattered behind me in the van. A

seat, them scattered behind me in the van. A dinner party awaited them, and all their focus was on what to wear.

Four of the five preferred dresses and heels. The lone denim aficionada distressed herself over the possibility of being different. She really didn't want to wear a dress but couldn't convince any of the others to join her on Team Jeans.

Finally, I couldn't hold back. "Wear what you want! Be brave."

A momentary silence filled the van. Then they resumed their conversation as if I had not spoken. I shook my head. I've forgotten how difficult it is to be different, to stand out when you're that age.

Jesus encouraged His followers to stand out. In Matthew 5:13-16, we read His words:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

We drove home with no more commentary from me. The girls continued their discussion, with the lone jeans fan stressing over her plight. She just didn't have it in her to buck convention and do her own thing.

Occasionally, a brave soul appears, determined to be that mythical drummer following her own beat. A memory surfaced from my first few years of teaching at Burleson High School in Texas. Shelby definitely bucked the routine and normal. Here is a story from 2003.

BACK IN CLASS

A small sigh of relief escapes. It's 4:05 p.m., and my day is about to be kidfree. My class is noisy with chatter and laughter as the students wind down. Anticipation of the 4:15 bell frees them from the strictures of the school day, and they're getting loud.

I don't listen to anything in particular. It's the background noise of my professional life. Yet without warning, a single phrase lifts itself from the general clutter of sound and shoots into my ear like an arrow.

"Did you sniff my head?"

Hmm. That sounded like Shelby. Staring unseeingly at my computer screen, I mentally rewind that, sifting through my vocabulary to find a set of five words that sounds like "Did you sniff my head?" without actually being the five words "Did you sniff my head?" My cranial magnifying glass waves back and forth across my brain but comes up short. No files found. What did she say?

I swivel around in my chair and look. Sure enough, Shelby perches in a desk near mine. She sits sideways in her chair with one knee pulled to her chest, held close by a curved arm, the other foot tucked underneath her. She looks to the right at Jordan, who sits behind her. I assume he is the recipient of her question.

Jordan slouches comfortably in his chair, his long feet propped on the wire basket under Shelby's seat, their weight straining the metal rods. He stares at Shelby with an uncomprehending look in his eyes. He doesn't seem to know what to say in response.

Matt sits one row over, watching this exchange. He has a tiny vertical frown line between his eyebrows.

I look at Shelby. "Did you just say, 'Did you smell my head?'" I speak slowly, enunciating my words with care so there is no chance for mistake.

"Yes." Her answer is cheerful. "I smell heads when I sit behind people. I just lean forward and sniff." She demonstrates for us with the empty air of the unoccupied desk next to her, her pert nose sniffing daintily. The three of us stare.

"I sniffed Matt's head when he sat in front of me." Her voice is bright, happy.

Matt's eyes widen slightly in surprise. Would a person, I wonder, *notice* if someone behind them leaned forward and sniffed their head? Unless they had very sensitive hair follicles that would register that small tug of air, probably not. Matt wears his hair short and tidy. It's not like there's a lot there to disturb.

Jordan has still not said a word, but he now looks at Shelby with interest.

"Well, I guess people's heads smell pretty good." I try to inject normalcy into this bizarre conversation. I picture the fruity concoctions of shampoo and conditioners in my shower. Bottles with names like *Chamomile-Lemon* and *Ginger-Papaya*. My efforts are shot down.

"Matt's head didn't." Shelby doesn't miss a beat.

Matt's eyes widen even further. I can practically see the thoughts racing through his mind. My head doesn't smell good? What does my head smell like?

Attempting to rescue the conversation *and* now Matt, I try once again to make this sound like a discussion I've had before. "Well, Shelby, that sounds like . . ." What does sniffing people's heads sound like? Odd? Weird? Bizarre?

Animals pops out before I can stop it. "It sounds like what animals do."

Arrgh! I give myself a mental slap to the forehead. That's not the effect I was going for in my rescue. Still, I picture the exuberant greeting my dogs give me when I come home, sniffing my legs and shoes to discover where I've been that day and to find out what other dogs I've cheated on them with.

Jordan, I notice through my consternation, has wisely still not said a word. Thankfully, at that moment the last bell rings.

Shelby stands with fluid grace. Her black canvas high-tops peek out from underneath the legs of her jeans. Her silky navy-blue scarf covered in white polka dots flows over her shoulder from where it's wound loosely around her neck.

"Bye, Mrs. Peckham!" She sails from the room with a cheery farewell.

Courage to Stand Out

Jordan, who has never taken his eyes from Shelby's face throughout the entire conversation, also stands and heads out, shaking his head silently, smiling at the floor.

Matt leaves with a frown on his face. I wonder if he'll figure out a way to sniff his head that night to determine how it smells. I wait for the room to empty before I laugh.

PASS THE SALT

Shelby remains a singular memory from the two decades I spent at Burleson High School. As I discovered over the next 16 years, her ability to throw off convention and be herself was rare. A few students came close, but no one else who passed through my class was like her.

Jesus promises us that He will transform us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Students of marketing will tell you it is a human condition that we think of ourselves as "above average." We probably also want to consider ourselves as brave, as heroes. Of course I would try to save a child from a burning wreck. Of course I would step in to protect someone being bullied. Of course.

If that were always true, then why is it so hard for us to stand out, to be different?

Imagine yourself in Noah's shoes. God directed him to build a huge boat so he and his family could survive the flood. Some Bible scholars believe that at that point in the world it had never rained. Noah and his neighbors would have no concept of a flood. The entire idea would seem ludicrous. Surely Noah's neighbors questioned his sanity. Laughed at him. Maybe ostracized him. But he followed God's urging.

Would you be able to do that? Could you be the only one to wear jeans?

The only one to stand up for God?

Where do we find the courage to be different?

I think a good way to follow God's direction—and to plug into His power—is to open the morning with prayer. Quiet time with God sets the tone, reestablishes the connection. Plus, it puts us in a frame of mind

to *listen,* to actively search for the messages He sends. It opens the pipeline to receive what we need from Him.

Let's go back to that salt of the earth reference. Jesus said something about salt losing its flavor. Have you ever tasted salt that didn't taste salty? I haven't. I did a Google search to see if there is some chemical reaction that changes salt to something bland. What I found emphasized that salt does *not* lose its saltiness. If it doesn't taste like salt, it's something else. So, what did Jesus mean?

Well, I wasn't there, so I can't be sure, but I have an idea. Some of you have natural gas stoves for cooking. Have you ever noticed that when you sprinkle salt into a pan, sometimes a grain of salt falls into the flame? For a moment, the salt burns brightly. A flash of brilliance glows in the blue flame. If it were to lose its "saltiness," perhaps that glowing brightness wouldn't appear.

If we were to lose our saltiness, perhaps our brightness would dim, or at least become dull. That shining light we're called to set on a hill would not only be hidden—it would disappear. Maybe that's what Jesus meant.

So, how do we keep our saltiness? How do we allow Jesus to transform our minds every morning?

It all comes down to relationship. We have to be in relationship with God. Talk with Him every day. Listen for His messages. Come to Him when we have problems. Rejoice with Him when something good happens. Treat Him the way we would treat our best friend.

I don't want to miss God's call because I'm afraid to stand out.

What about you? How willing are you to stand out if by doing so you have the privilege of following God's perfect plan? I bet He's standing by, just waiting for us to ask for the courage.

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Dear Deborah,

A few weeks ago, I entered into a way overdue heartto-heart talk with God. It was then that I realized I've spent 12 years as a ministerial spouse and 20 years as a Christian without ever giving a oneon-one Bible study. On top of that, I've never assisted anyone into a relationship with Christ. Of course, I've been witness to many Bible studies and heart conversions through my husband, but never have I had this privilege.

My desire is now stronger than ever to be a soul winner for eternity! But to be truthful, I'm fearful, and I feel inadequately equipped for the task. I don't even know where to begin.

Prayerfully,
Willing and Ready



Dear Willing and Ready,

There is no better place to start your soul-winning process than on your knees with an open heart for God's amazing plans! When you commit to a full surrender for His will and glory, He will prepare and show you the way to be an ambassador for Christ.

The great news is that you don't have to have all the "perfect" answers, because those already exist in God's Word. The most important thing you or anyone can do is to begin each day with a simple prayer like this: "Dear Lord, today I give my life to You in hopes that You can use me to make a difference for Your Kingdom. Show me whom You want me to pray for today and how I can be a witness that will help bring others to You. Equip me and arm me with Your Word and Your Holy Spirit so I can go in confidence and share life-changing truths with others. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Next, you may have a practical question: How do I find someone to study with? If your church has recently held outreach meetings, some of the visitors may be ready to learn more about God's Word. Or your church may have Bible correspondence contacts who have asked for deeper study. Also, do you know any church youth who want to begin baptismal studies? Or how about neighbors who have been facing challenges and asking questions about God? Pray for guidance and ask what topics they might like to explore together. You

could do a word or topical study on one theme, discuss a book of the Bible together, or use one of the excellent study guides produced by various church ministries. Whatever you choose to do, remember that the best Bible studies are not isolated events but part of a genuine friendship.

Enlist prayer partners to join you in this exciting endeavor with Jesus. You might find they are just as interested as you are. Most important, pray for God to guide. He is eager to help and provide you with the resources you need for each moment.

Be assured that whether you share God's Word in person or pray for someone from a distance, you are fulfilling part of God's plan to be a soldier in His army!

Never forget that witnessing goes beyond words. Our actions are an amazing vehicle to remind others who Jesus really is and can go a long way in demonstrating our faith in Him.

Go share with courage, knowing "that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you" (Philemon 1:6, 7).

Sincerely, Deborah



The voice was from my campus pastor on the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University, and his suggestion felt totally crazy. I did not want to be a student missionary; I wanted to stay in California and finish my education. Why would I want to leave my friends and go away to a strange place for a year?

"YOU OUGHT TO GO as a student missionary."

"Bella Vista Hospital in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico," Pastor Dave said, "needs a chaplain for a year. You could go away and be home!"

My father had been the administrator at Bella Vista Hospital while I was in elementary school. I had made many friends, fallen in love with Puerto Rico, and spent hundreds of hours chasing butterflies in the thick bamboo jungle. "Going home" was a great idea. For all the wrong reasons.

I began to dream, called my parents, and turned in a Student Missions application. Three months later I was flying from San Diego, California, to Miami, Florida, and on to San Juan and Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. Twenty-one years old. Eager and foolish. Ready to be back snorkeling in El Mar Caribe!

My first day on the job, Chaplain Fred Hernandez greeted me warmly and led me upstairs to the maternity ward.

"This is the happiest place in the hospital—the perfect place to start as a chaplain," Fred told me as we bounded up the stairs.

In the first room, we met a very happy mother, father, and their three children. We joined them in admiring the new baby, said a brief prayer, shook hands, and left.

That's when Chaplain Fred glanced at his watch, blanched, and said, "Dick, I forgot that I have to be at a TV station downtown in Mayaguez in 20 minutes. I've got to leave right now. You did fine in the first room. I'm really glad you're here!"

I was on my own—a student missionary chaplain who was training to be a minister but who didn't know anything about being a chaplain, a caregiver, or a listener for God.

The next door opened to a very sad 15-year-old unwed mother who was putting her baby up for adoption. I prayed in English and bolted from the room.

Downstairs I slipped onto the medical floor, looking for an "easy" patient, someone who wouldn't show up all my weaknesses. The woman I chose looked deep into my soul and asked, "Young man, can you pray in Spanish?"

"No," I responded, terrified to have been caught pretending to be what I was not.

"Sientate!" she said.

I sat as commanded, listened, and learned how to pray simple prayers in broken Spanish.

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE

Over the next weeks I visited many patients with Chaplain Hernandez and began feeling comfortable "listening" in patient rooms. Slowly, very slowly, I began to feel a bit like a chaplain.

One afternoon I was called to meet with the Rodriguez family in the cancer ward. Grandma Rodriguez had been in the hospital for some time, and it looked as if she might pass away on that day.

I tightened the knot in my thin black tie, put on my blue chaplain's jacket, gathered my thick Spanish Bible, and bounded down the stairs to first floor. She was just one more patient to visit before supper. I was eager to be off duty, and my snorkeling gear was ready.

Mrs. Rodriguez was in a four-bed ward, in the bed beside a large window that looked out onto a hospital garden. I slipped around the privacy curtain and found myself staring into eight expectant faces.

My world stood still. Each person searched my soul for hope and encouragement, for a glint of spiritual strength that would make it easier for them to let Grandma go.

Their hopes revealed the empty desert of my soul.

I was a student missionary chaplain. I was training to be a pastor. I knew enough Spanish to sound wise. I knew enough about God to get along. But these people wanted more than just words. They wanted to feel God's embrace through me. And I had nothing to give.

I wanted to run, to escape the piercing eyes and the smell of death, to get away from this place where my powerless faith was so boldly revealed.

Desperate, I collapsed to my knees, grabbed Grandma's hands, and prayed. "God, forgive me. I have nothing to give. I am empty. Help me!"

Then I dashed from the room, ran out the hospital's front door, sprinted past the giant mango tree, threaded my way through the hospital laundry, and dove far back into a nearby banana plantation, to a good crying spot with soft wet grass.

I had destroyed everything. I had let God down. I had shown everyone that my Christianity was only a façade. Worst of all, I had let the Rodriguez family down when they had needed me the most. They would tell Dr. Angell, the hospital administrator, who was probably already purchasing a ticket for me to fly home.

I had been proud; now I was humiliated. Broken.

Later, after much confessing and pleading with God, I shuffled back to the hospital. I remember everything from that walk. The mangoes rotting beneath their large umbrella-shaped trees. The bright red and green poinsettias. The mud-stained concrete steps where thousands of families had marched into the hospital to find hope.

My head hung low. I tried to be invisible.

Dr. Angell met me at the front door, grabbed my shoulders, and demanded to know what had happened in that room. "What did you say to those people?"

I broke down, told him exactly what had happened, and begged forgiveness. Before he could answer, we were interrupted by the Rodriguez family as they poured out onto the hospital steps. They all hugged me and said a thousand things I did not understand.

When they left, it was only Dr. Angell and me.

"Dick, did you pray in English or in Spanish?" he kindly asked.

"English," I whispered.

"That's not what they said. They praised God for the wonderful compassionate prayer you prayed. The words were just perfect so they could let Grandma go. They thanked God for the prayer you prayed in perfect Spanish."

Dr. Angell went back inside the hospital, and I sat alone on the red-dirt-stained steps, thanking God for sending me.

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Wild, Crazy Neighbors

"LORD, HELP THEM TO BE NICE," I PRAYED. AND WAS I EVER SURPRISED!

WE HAD ACCEPTED a call for Jerry, my husband, to minister in the Pennsylvania Conference. My parents lived two hours from our new location, so we stayed with them while looking over the area.

We spent a day searching for a house to rent. Nothing was available. We returned tired and discouraged. I laid the list of newspaper ads on the kitchen table.

Mom glanced at the paper and pointed to a small ad. "Did you look at this one? You don't have it marked."

With renewed hope, we made an appointment, drove back to see the house, signed the lease, and thanked God for providing.

It was a duplex—two houses attached together. The two sides would have the same roof and a shared porch and yard. All we actually saw was a floor plan on paper. Construction was just beginning, but we were assured it would be ready by the time we moved.

WHO'S NEXT DOOR?

Back home in Colorado, I began to worry about our new neighbors. I started praying that God would give us good neighbors with nice children. Our two boys were 1 and 8 years old. I did not want wild children or wild parties with drugs, alcohol, and loud rock music next door.

One evening, I decided to pray about it in our family worship: "Father, please give us good neighbors with nice children."

"Father, please give us good neighbors with nice children."

With a smile, Jerry prayed, "Lord, give us neighbors we can witness to."

"No, Jerry," I urged, "think of our sons! We don't want wild children or wild parties where they are drunk and doing drugs!"

Every time we prayed together, the same scenario would happen. Jerry would repeat his prayer with a smile: "Lord, give us neighbors we can witness to." And I would remind him, "Jerry, the loud music will keep you awake Friday night when you have to preach the next day!"

Jerry moved to Pennsylvania ahead of us and stayed in a small guest room so he could begin working. I was relieved because now I could pray for good neighbors without him praying differently. And I thought he would forget to pray about it and now only my prayer would be heard and answered!

The boys and I moved two months later when the school year ended. But rainy weather had slowed construction. When we arrived, the house was not quite ready. We noticed construction trash all through the house, no doorknobs, and puddles of water in the basement.

The young owner renting it to us threw up his hands and said, "I don't know what to do!" and left. The driver of the moving van said, "I can give you two days to find another house, but then I have to unload your belongings."

We frantically looked everywhere, even in another town nearby. We couldn't find a house. We would have to clean up the unfinished duplex so we could move in.

The moving van was waiting when I drove up to our place. But I was stunned! In the front of our new neighbor's house stood seven Harley-Davidson motorcycles and one pickup truck. The riders were dressed in leather pants and jackets and had long hair and beards. They stood staring at us with their arms crossed, looking angry and tough.

"I have spent the last two days crying, fretting, and praying over finding another house," I told God. "That didn't work, so I might as well start praising and thanking You for my new neighbors. But I think You have an interesting sense of humor!"

I peered in the rearview mirror and could not see Jerry in his car. When I approached the car and looked in, I found Jerry lying across the seats laughing. Composing himself, he walked over to introduce himself to our neighbors. I followed fearfully, hiding behind him with our two young boys. No one smiled.

MAKING FRIENDS

I tried to meet the other neighbors on our street, but no one seemed friendly. When some time had passed, I told Jerry, "I know I should be giving someone Bible studies, but no one is very friendly. I don't know what to do."

"Janet, just get out and love your neighbors," he said. "Don't worry about giving Bible studies."

It sounded so simple. I said to myself, "Just get out and love my neighbors? Well, how do I do that?"

They stood staring at us with their arms crossed.

·Wild, Crazy Neighbors

The next day, with a prayer, I decided to sit on our shared porch, hoping my neighbor would come out so I could start loving her. In just a few minutes, Lisa* came and sat on the porch too.

Over the following weeks, we became good friends. I knew the appropriate Christian thing to do was to have Lisa and her husband, Stan, over for dinner. But I was really nervous about serving our vegetarian food. At the last minute, I gave up cooking and ordered in pizza.

They came into the house and said, "Pizza? We have that all the time. We were looking forward to trying your different vegetarian food." But we had a wonderful time together.

When Lisa's mom was dying of cancer, Jerry and I had the precious privilege of leading her to accept Jesus as her Savior.

When she died, I thought we needed to have a dinner for the family after the funeral. I am not a great cook and needed help, so I contacted deaconesses in nearby churches and asked for food. I was warming the food at their mom's house when the family arrived. I panicked! I never thought about the fact that this was all vegetarian food and they all ate meat. I knew the family wouldn't like it. "Oh, Lord, help me!" I prayed.

The family members walked by me without speaking. Then one of Lisa's brothers looked down at me and asked, "Why are you doing this?"

With fear I answered, "Because I love your sister."

He grunted and walked away. I was a nervous wreck, but they loved the food. Even the brothers! A couple of them told their wives to get the recipes. I didn't have the recipes and promised to obtain them.

Later, I invited Lisa to hear Jerry preach. Afterward, she said she wanted to be baptized. "Let's study the Bible together," I answered. I was thrilled and humbled.

Sometime later, Lisa shared a conversation they'd had with our landlord. "He told us that a preacher was moving in next door. He said, 'If he gives you trouble, you let me know, and I will get him out!"

I don't know what the landlord thought Jerry would do. Force them to be baptized?

It turned out that Lisa would not allow drinking or wild parties in her house, and she hated loud rock music. Stan played it softly in the basement. They had one son, and he was very polite and nice. We also found out that it was Stan's brothers who owned the motorcycles. We never saw them again until the day Lisa and Stan moved out.

I do believe our wonderful God has a sense of humor and delights to show us His personal care. He had called us to Pennsylvania to serve Him. How could I doubt that He would meet all our needs?

I also learned some important lessons during that time. I learned that people just need someone to listen to them. Usually, we are so busy thinking of what we can share that we never really listen. But when we listen, we hear problems, which opens up opportunities to pray for or with people.

Also, people are usually very open to prayer. And when they see answers, they become more interested in Jesus and what we believe.

God also taught me that the most important thing I can do to reach people for Jesus is to pray for God to show me how to love my neighbors—and then do it.

I want to go wherever God wants me to go, because He knows who lives next door.

* Names of the neighbors have been changed.

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

He looked down at me and asked, "Why are you doing this?"



RON, A 40-YEAR-OLD EX-MARINE who worked for the U.S. Border Patrol, suffered from headaches and neck pain. Because of the constant sound of rushing blood in his head, he found it nearly impossible to get a good night's sleep. Medical tests revealed a dangerous tangle of arteries and veins in the covering of his brain that could result at any time in seizures or bleeding. He needed the help of a brain surgeon.

Dr. David Levy, a practicing neurosurgeon in San Diego, California, describes Ron's situation in his book *Gray Matter*. During his initial consultation with Ron, Dr. Levy explained the physiological details of Ron's condition and the specific surgery needed, along with the risks involved. Ron was quick to understand and agree to the surgical plan.

Because Ron's arthritic neck pain was such an unusual condition for a young, physically fit adult, Dr. Levy began to suspect an emotional cause. He discussed with Ron how emotions have the ability to seriously affect the health of the body, for good or ill. He further added that bitterness is like an acid that eats its container and as a result can become one of the great thieves of joy and health. In conclusion, he startled Ron by asking him if there was someone he had not been able to forgive.

Ron's eyes grew big and serious. He seemed to puff up with emotion, and an angry look dominated his face. Then something unexpected happened. He seemed to deflate in his chair, and when he did so, he muttered, "My mother." He then went on to detail a sad story of the abuse and abandonment he endured as a child because of his mother's addictions and poor choice of partners.



BEWARE OF EXCESS BAGGAGE

Who of us doesn't carry around memories of perceived disappointments, hurtful words, and actions experienced from family, friends, coworkers, or even church members? Who doesn't easily recall incidents when we ourselves missed opportunities and were unkind to or neglectful of others? This all may seem of minor importance when compared with lifealtering traumatic events some have experienced, such as the loss of a loved one due to a drunk driver, or the devastating effects of a school shooting,

suffered during childhood, as was the case with Ron. In comparison, we tend to look at our more minor experiences of hurt, injustice, and regret as a normal part of life, with no hope of escaping the emotional effects. However, there's a price to pay for carrying around the baggage of troublesome memories.

or neglect and abuse

THE BODY PAYS THE PRICE

These memories come wrapped in degrees of sadness, injustice, despair, unfairness, anger, and guilt—all of which cause stress to the body and can, over time, adversely affect our health and quality of life in the following ways:

- Disrupt our peace of mind and enjoyment of life
- 2. Elevate the blood pressure
- 3. Decrease the body's immune response
- 4. Contribute to coronary artery and heart disease
- 5. Produce symptoms of depression.
- 6. Cause or increase physical pain
- 7. Damage or ruin relationships
- 8. Interfere with restful sleep
- 9. Weaken feelings of self-worth
- 10. Undermine the spiritual life

RON'S STORY CONTINUED

Ron, who had the appearance of a fearless marine, had just admitted to being poisoned inwardly by bitterness toward his mother. Dr. Levy acknowledged Ron's right to his feelings. What he had experienced was indeed wrong and undeserved. He then explained how Ron's bitterness was not only affecting his health and happiness, but could also have a detrimental effect on his body's response to and recovery from the upcoming surgery.

He added that he thought Ron needed to forgive his mother—a most astounding suggestion in Ron's mind. Even though Ron had been a churchgoing Christian in past years, it had been a long time since he thought about spiritual matters. Dr. Levy explained how Jesus loves to help us forgive, especially when it seems hard, or even impossible. Further, he explained that our unforgiveness interferes with our experience of God's forgiveness. In Matthew 6 we read: "Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us" (verse 12, CEB, emphasis added).

"Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32, MSG



Ron listened intently, then asked Dr. Levy to help him through the process of forgiving. Ron was asked to repeat after Dr. Levy a declaration of forgiveness: "I choose to forgive my mother for the things she did and didn't do that hurt me such as _____." Ron

was to fill in the blank and continue.

"For thinking of herself and not her children," began Ron as he started to weep. "I forgive her for making poor choices. I forgive her for drinking and not taking care of herself. I forgive her for not being there for me when I needed her."

Ron went on forgiving a number of related grievances he had carried against his mother for years. When he had exhausted his list, Dr. Levy then suggested that Ron might like to ask God to forgive him for holding these feelings of resentment and bitterness, which Ron seemed glad to do. Dr. Levy then asked Ron how it was that God could forgive our sins. Ron replied simply, "Jesus," and then ended his prayer by thanking Jesus for paying for his sins.

After a few quiet moments, Ron sat back in his chair with a big smile on his face. "I feel like calling my mother," he said. "I can't wait to talk to her, Doc. I feel great, like a brand-new man!" Ron's surgery three weeks later went well, relieving the annoying rushing sound. In a follow-up appointment he not only reported significant decrease in neck pain, but also that much healing had taken place between him and his mother.

THE GIFT WE GIVE OURSELVES

For the most part, it doesn't matter the size or impact of the unresolved grievances we carry. The stress and detrimental effect on our minds and bodies can be the same. Forgiving can be very hard, especially in situations in which we need to forgive ourselves. Developing an attitude of forgiveness may take time, and in specific instances it may have to be repeated over again when particularly painful memories resurface. It doesn't mean we are downplaying or choosing to ignore what happened. Rather, we are freeing ourselves from the emotional grip of someone else. In the process, it often happens that we can come to better understand situations and have compassion for the ones who hurt us. Forgiveness is truly a gift—a gift God freely offers us, and a gift we can give ourselves.



"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

-Lewis B. Smedes

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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.



I Will Go Too!

OUR CHURCH HAS ALWAYS been looking for ways to tell other people the good news about Jesus' love. For the next few years, everyone, young and old, is helping to share the love and joy of being friends with Jesus. And that includes you! Here are some simple ideas for sharing God's love with those around you.



BEFORE YOU GO

Before we tell other people how much Jesus loves them, we have to feel His love for ourselves. Learn as much as you can about Jesus' love. Read Psalm 23, Psalm 103, 1 Corinthians 13, and Ephesians 3:14-21 to discover lots of ways that Jesus loves you! Write down everything you have learned about His love. Go for a scavenger hunt in your home and find 10 things that remind you of God's love. Tell each other why you chose those objects. Every day when you eat together, talk about where you saw God's love today and how you shared His love with others through your kind actions and words.

LOVING EYES

Learn to look at people the way Jesus did, through His loving eyes. Fold a piece of cardstock or paper in half. Draw half a heart shape (as big as possible) on the card so that the folded edge will be the center of the heart. Keep the card folded, and cut along the line you have drawn to make a heart. Still keeping the card folded, cut a much smaller heart shape inside the large heart shape to make a heart-shaped frame. Write the words of 1 John 4:19 around the edge of the heart frame. Look through this heart shape at the people around you and think about how much God loves each person. It will help you to share Jesus' love with them.



PRAYING FOR YOUR FRIFNDS

Cut out another large heart shape. Write on this heart all the names of the people you are telling about Jesus' love. Use this as a reminder to pray for them every day.



LIGHT

Jesus is the light of the world, but He also told us that we are the light of the world. Now that Jesus is in heaven, He wants us to show people what He is like by being filled with the fruit of the Spirit and being loving, cheerful, peaceful, gentle, kind, etc. Read John 1:1-12; John 8:12; Matthew 5:14-15; and Galatians 5:22, 23. Go around your house together as a family, looking for the different kinds of lights in your home. Whenever you find a light, talk about how this light is like the light of Jesus, and think of ways that you could be this kind of light in the world. You will find lights to show the way, lights to make you feel happy, lights that show when something is switched on, and lights that tell you something important. What other lights can you find?



POSTCARD PRAYERS

Purchase some blank postcards or cut cardstock into postcard-sized pieces. Write a short, caring prayer on one side of the card and decorate the picture side to show something of God's love. Mail the postcards to people who are sick or living alone.



FILM NIGHT

Choose your favorite
Christian movie or
film series and invite
a family to watch it
with you. Make some
healthy snacks to eat
as you watch. Also,
think of some good
questions to start an
inspiring discussion
afterward.

CHALK MESSAGES

Think of a happy and encouraging Bible verse that would make your neighbors smile and feel loved. Use your colored sidewalk chalk to write and decorate your message on the sidewalk, driveway, or wall. Write a different message each week, or when one fades away, so that people look forward to what you'll write next.

LIGHT WINDOWS

If people passing your home can see your windows, try making a light window. Take a large sheet of black cardstock, big enough to fill the window. Choose a short and simple message to encourage your neighbors. Print out block letters on a computer or practice your design on scrap paper. Ask a parent to help you cut the letters out of your black "window" so that they can be clearly seen. Cut other shapes into the cardstock, such as hearts or stars. Stick colored tissue paper behind the cut-out shapes to make a stained-glass window effect. Then tape this in your front window. Keep the light on at night to share your bright and hopeful message with people who pass by. Why not involve your whole church? Look at some projects and examples to inspire you at stthomascrookes.org/streetsoflight/.

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WORSHIP INVITATION

Choose your favorite family worship activity, one that your friends would enjoy. Invite them to come to your home for a meal, and then do the worship activity afterward. Or invite them for a picnic, talk about God's amazing creation, and have a scavenger hunt looking for examples of things He made each day. Try to find something black and white for the first day and something blue for the firmament and water, or white and fluffy for clouds for the second day, etc.



LIGHT STONES

Share God's love with others by painting stones with cheerful, loving messages and Bible verses. After they have been painted, coat them with a waterproof seal to protect the design.

Then hide them in places where people will find them, or gift wrap them with a tag that reads, "This is a gift. Keep it for yourself or pass it on to share a smile with someone else." See thekindnessrocksproject.com.



BRILLIANT BIRTHDAYS

Invite your friends to a birthday party that shares your faith in a fun way! Choose a theme like "Creation" or "Noah's Ark." Design a cake, play games that show parts of the story, and give away little gifts or books related to the story.



NEIGHBORHOOD KINDNESS

One family walks up and down their street each week, praying for the people who live there. Every couple of months they visit every home with a themed treat: heart-shaped cookies and messages of love in February; a small bunch of homegrown flowers in April with a song of praise for creation; strawberries in June; home-baked bread rolls in September; a thanksgiving gift in October/November; and homemade candle lanterns in December with a special song. Their neighbors look forward to their visits, and they come and talk to this family when life is difficult or when they need prayer. The family has even started a little Bible study group around the kitchen table. What could you do to share kindness and Jesus with your neighbors?

T-SHIRTS THAT SPEAK

Purchase or design your own T-shirts that share God's love. If you have access to the internet, look at some witness T-shirts to give you some creative ideas. Use fabric pens or your printer and special iron-on transfer paper to make your shirts. Always reverse print your design so that it is the right way around when you iron it onto the fabric.

Karen Holford is the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division.

East-Central Africa Division

Winfrida Mitekaro, ministerial spouse leader for East-Central Africa Division (ECD), shared photos of Advent Hill security guards. Shepherdesses at the ECD headquarters had a project during lockdown. They contributed money, bought yarn, and crocheted neck scarves for the security guards for all the institutions on the hill. They used the Kenyan flag colors so the guards would feel at home. Forty-two guards were given a scarf in the hope that they will feel comforted, especially during the night when it is really cold. The ministerial spouses thank God they could put smiles on these workers' faces.



ECD ministerial spouses made scarves for security guards at their headquarters.

Southern Asia-Pacific Division

In 2020 the Pakistan Union received Project COVID-19 fund assistance from Helen Gulfan, women's ministries director and Shepherdess International coordinator at the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Shazia Ghafoor, women's ministries

director of Pakistan Union, distributed gifts (cash, warm shawls, and food packages), along with providing a short devotional and fellowship meal. The 165 recipients included pastors' wives, widows, elderly women, and local church women's ministry leaders.



Women gathered for a devotional, meal, and gifts as part of the division's COVID-19 relief.



Women in Pakistan welcomed gifts of food packages.



Cash was also distributed to help the women recover. Their gratitude was apparent.

WHEN GOD CALLS, HOW WILL YOU ANSWER?



There are so many ways to serve! Learn more in the **I WILL GO** strategic plan.



