

THE JOURNAL

A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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DEALING WITH

temptation and addiction



ON THE COVER

We all face temptations every day. Satan makes sure of that. Even Jesus battled incredible temptations while on earth. In Matthew 4 you can read about some of them, noticing His defenses against the devil's lures. Joseph's time in Egypt also provides encouraging strategies for dealing with temptation; see Genesis 39 to be reminded of how he handled one trying confrontation. When we give in to temptation, we often find ourselves addicted, trapped in a cycle of sin that seems impossible to break. Sometimes these addictions even go on for generations. But God has provided a way out. The Bible promises, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We hope the articles in this issue will help you find practical ways to break free from Satan's traps and find strength and hope in Jesus.



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I'm a Recovering Addict

WHAT COMES TO MIND when you hear the word “addiction”? For most people, mental images of drugs, alcohol, or pornography appear. Many other things can become addictions too, and for a variety of reasons.

I hate to admit it, but I'm a recovering addict.

When I was a child, my parents moved to an Adventist academy out in the country, where they both taught various classes. They wanted to give me every opportunity to make good choices and have a solid spiritual foundation. At that time, they made a conscious decision not to own a TV because they recognized the control and influence that media can have over the mind.

I'd often hear academy students talking about TV shows or movies they had seen, and my curiosity was piqued. When they'd ask if I'd seen the shows, I'd self-consciously answer no. They'd laugh and shake their heads as if I was really missing out. More than anything, I wanted to feel accepted—to be a part of their group. If I only knew what they were talking about, everything would change, I was sure!

I began spending a week at my grandparents' house every summer. During that week, I packed as much TV into my brain as possible. There were no restrictions on what I watched, and if I didn't like what everyone was watching in the living room, I could go into my grandmother's room and watch her TV.

Armed with this newfound media knowledge, I was ready when the students came back to school. Now I would be accepted! I knew what they knew. My plan backfired, though. I was still that “annoying little staff kid” who had trouble fitting in.

My media addiction continued into my college years, unfortunately. The characters in shows and movies became my friends, and I found myself living vicariously through them, watching up to eight hours of TV a day. When I wasn't working or attending classes, I was comfortably seated in front of my television, mindlessly ingesting whatever came on the screen. I no longer cared about spiritual matters and resented family worship. Movie and television plots occupied my mind most of the time.

I'm a Recovering Addict

I've noticed this is how Satan works. He will find weak points in our character and slowly, almost imperceptibly, introduce us to things that draw our attention away from Christ. He knows that Jesus is coming soon and his time is short. So he works "to keep minds diverted from eternal realities. The enemy has arranged matters to suit his own purposes."¹

One evening as I attended prayer meeting, an elderly gentleman shared a news story relating to end-time events as we understand them from Matthew 24. At that moment, the Holy Spirit broke through the foggy shadows in my mind. "You are not ready," He whispered.

*"God,
I am
powerless
without
You."*

I was scared! All my life I had heard about the Second Coming and the signs that signaled Jesus' return. I told myself that when I saw events beginning to happen, I'd turn my life over completely to Jesus. Now I was strongly convicted that things in my life needed to change.

There in the pew, I knelt and prayed, asking God to give me the strength to turn my heart completely over to Him—and giving Him permission to take my addictive tendencies away: "God, I am powerless without You. I've tried to give up my addiction many times, and I keep going back. You're going to have to take the desire away from me." I felt a renewed sense of freedom spring up in my heart as I rose to my feet and left the meeting. I completely trusted that God would give me victory, and He did.

Throughout this recovery time, prayer and personal devotions became my constant companion. As I filled my mind with spiritual nutrition, the frivolous things of the world became less important. I gained new strength to face each day.

I wish I could say that my struggle with media addiction is over, but it isn't. It's a daily choice. As I pray and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, He gives me power to overcome temptation.

Here are a few tips I've found helpful:

1. AVOID THE TEMPTATION

I cut up my video store rental card and stopped going there every week. I moved my TV and VCR out of my room and limited my television time to watching only the news or a program with my family. Recently, I removed a popular video streaming app from my phone to provide some accountability and eliminate unwanted temptation. Romans 13:14 advises us to "make no provision for the flesh."


2. CHANGE ROUTINE

I changed my nightly routine to avoid slipping into natural habits. I began eating dinner at a different time, going to bed and getting up earlier. I spent more time talking or playing games with my family instead of hiding in my room.

3. REPLACE THE ADDICTION

I began reading and exercising to fill extra time after work instead of sitting down in front of the TV. I bought a good quality camera and channeled my creativity into taking and editing photos.

The Great Controversy warns us that "Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind."² In these significant times, just before Jesus returns, Satan has any number of diversions prepared to distract God's people, be it through alcohol, drugs, sex, social media, shopping, food, or even politics!

Recognizing this, we've chosen to address addiction and temptation in this issue of *The Journal*. Perhaps you don't struggle with a particular issue, but you know someone who does. We hope this content will be encouraging, inspirational, and helpful in your spiritual journey and personal ministry. 

¹ Ellen White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 64.

² Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 519.

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Special Quotes

"He is watching over you,
trembling child of God.

Are you tempted? He will
deliver. Are you weak? He will
strengthen. Are you ignorant?

He will enlighten. Are you
wounded? He will heal. The
Lord 'tellethe the number of
the stars;' and yet 'He healeth
the broken in heart, and
bindeth up their wounds.'

Psalms 147:4, 3. 'Come
unto Me,' is His invitation.
Whatever your anxieties and
trials, spread out your case
before the Lord. Your spirit will
be braced for endurance. The
way will be opened for you
to disentangle yourself from
embarrassment and difficulty.
The weaker and more helpless
you know yourself to be, the
stronger will you become in
His strength. The heavier your
burdens, the more blessed the
rest in casting them upon the
Burden Bearer."

The Desire of Ages, p. 329

"The strength acquired in prayer
to God will prepare us for our
daily duties. The temptations to
which we are daily exposed make
prayer a necessity. In order that
we may be kept by the power of
God through faith, the desires of
the mind should be continually
ascending in silent prayer. When
we are surrounded by influences
calculated to lead us away from
God, our petitions for help and
strength must be unwearied.

Unless this is so, we shall never
be successful in breaking down
pride and overcoming the
power of temptation to sinful
indulgences which keep us from
the Savior. The light of truth,
sanctifying the life, will discover
to the receiver the sinful passions
of his heart which are striving for
the mastery, and which make it
necessary for him to stretch every
nerve and exert all his powers to
resist Satan that he may conquer
through the merits of Christ."

Messages to Young People, p. 248

"For every class of temptations there is a
remedy. We are not left to ourselves to fight the
battle against self and our sinful natures in our
own finite strength. Jesus is a mighty helper,
a never-failing support. His followers should
develop symmetrical characters by strengthening
weak traits. They must become Christ-like in
disposition and pure and holy in life. None can
do this in their own strength, but Jesus can give
the daily grace needed to do this work. None
need fail or become discouraged, when such
ample provision has been made for us."

Gospel Workers, p. 418

"The adversary of souls is not permitted to read
the thoughts of men; but he is a keen observer,
and he marks the words; he takes account of
actions, and skillfully adapts his temptations to
meet the cases of those who place themselves
in his power. If we would labor to repress sinful
thoughts and feelings, giving them no expression
in words or actions, Satan would be defeated; for
he could not prepare his specious temptations
to meet the case. But how often do professed
Christians, by their lack of self-control, open the
door to the adversary of souls!"

Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 122, 123

Who's in Control?

CONFESSIONS OF A CONTROL FREAK



MY DAUGHTER WANTED HELP with ninth-grade algebra. But I just didn't feel like reviewing all that with her. *Can't she do it herself this time?* I thought.

Although I was tempted to feel frustrated with this "interruption" to my day, God gently interrupted *me* with a question: "Am I in control, or are you in control right now?"

A dagger pierced my heart as I realized I had put myself in His place again. I prayed silently, "Yes, Lord, OK, I want You to be in control. My time is Yours."

Instantly my peace came back, and I found I was able to sit and do algebra without fretting. I felt relieved that battle was over, but little did I know that the war was not won yet.

PART 2

Later that day we were packing for a trip. Time was of the essence. In the process of packing, one daughter tried on multiple Sabbath outfits, wanting me to help her decide which one to wear on the trip. Knowing this would take time, I felt impatience spurting up in my heart. *This could make us late*, I thought. Before I knew it, I had spoken sharply, telling her what time we had to leave and hoping that would get her to move fast.

Suddenly God called to my heart again: "Were you just in control there or was I?"

"Oh no," I moaned, realizing that I had just taken the reins again, slipping them out of God's hands. God had more than 1,000 solutions to my problem. Why had I not asked for His help? I felt awful and went to apologize to my daughter. "Lord, please don't let that happen again," I murmured.

The Oxford Dictionary says control is "to determine the behavior or supervise the running of, be in charge of, run, be in control of, manage, direct, administer, head, preside over, have authority over, supervise, superintend, oversee, guide, steer." I don't know about you, but I just love to be in control, to manage and direct things. It's so easy to jump in and do what I think needs to be done so things can turn out "right."

"AT YOUR WORD"

In Luke 5 we read about when the disciples went out to catch some fish, but caught nothing at all. Jesus told Peter, a seasoned fisherman, to launch out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch. Somehow his thoughts just tumbled out. "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing." But then Peter's heartfelt awe for Jesus took over, and amazingly he obeyed, even though it did not make a bit of sense to him. Complying, he said the words, "Nevertheless at Your word [because you say so] I will let down the net" (verse 5).

Although Jesus told him to do something that seemed unthinkable and possibly embarrassing, Peter, not leaning on self, obeyed and let down the net. Respecting someone means we fear to cross them. Loving means we want to please them. Peter loved, respected, and trusted his Lord enough to let his agenda go and pick up God's agenda. It was counterintuitive, but it was God's way.

Sometimes God's way is counterintuitive. On Mount Carmel, Elijah the prophet poured water over the sacrifice and altar not once or twice but three times, since God wanted to make it really obvious that there was no trickery or foul play. The fire would be supernatural, and it would end up burning even the water in the trench. "At Your word," Peter said. "At Your word," Elijah said (1 Kings 18:36). And in both cases God worked a mighty miracle in response.

But how do we let go of control and pick up God's agenda? Isn't my life, my day, my schedule, my culture, my way of doing things, of utmost importance? What about God's day, God's schedule, God's way of doing things? What if His ideas and mine don't match up? After my devotional time ends, is His plan for my day on the front burner or the back burner?

Certainly, a great way we give God the reins is through prayer and surrender. When I graduated from a university with my teaching qualification, I did not receive a job offer to teach at a local Adventist school, or any school. Days later I got a phone call out of the blue from Korea. Someone was asking me to come and teach English there in an Adventist language school, but I was not really interested. I had been overseas already and wanted to be home. So I told them I'd pray about it.

True to my word, I did pray over a period of 24 hours. Imagine how surprised I was when God's voice came to me on my knees by my bed, distinctly telling me to go to Korea. Having given God control of my life, I agreed to go. Any other plans I had were put on hold.


God called to my heart: "Were you just in control there or was I?"

net was breaking" (Luke 5:6). When he saw all those fish, he was humbled and oh, so grateful. God had supplied his need extravagantly, as only God can.

God has all the resources in the world at His disposal! There is no shortage. Now the disciples were in awe, and with this experience fresh in their thoughts, they were more than willing to answer Jesus' call and "catch men." We see Peter fall down at Jesus' knees and worship. This story makes me want to worship too.

The devil constantly tempts me to think that happiness is having my own way, living out at least a few of my own fleshly desires and urges. He tells me that if I'm not in control, I won't be happy. But God invites me to take a big step of faith today. Will I truly be God's and God's alone today? Will I be quiet so the Holy Spirit can talk to me? The lower we are in our own estimation, the bigger God can be. Will I be small and let God be big?

It's much more exciting (even if at first, unnatural) to let God be in control, as anything can happen. But there's joy there. "You will show me the path of life; in Your Presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). This is what I want, perfectly described in the blog "Laine's Letters": "His pace, His pleasure, His power, His patience, His perfect love, His passion, His priorities, His purpose, His praise, His peace, all, all, all in His presence."*

Many times God's way is the way of logic and reason, but not always. So I am learning to ask Him what to do when situations come up. As I let down my net when and where He says, the miracles will happen. *Lord, I give my few feeble resources to you. You take control. Show me what You want me to do with them. At Your word I will let down my net. Use this net to show Your greatness.* 

* <https://lainesletters.blogspot.com>

Heather Krick, originally from South Africa, now lives in California with her husband, Bill, who directs literature ministries in the Pacific Union. She is mother to two teens, Savannah and Heidi.

THE REWARD OF SURRENDER

Back to Peter. Having obeyed, he now saw the picture crystal clear: God was in charge, and Peter was not. And a huge miracle happened. "And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY FROM PORN

PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT AN EASY topic to talk about. It would be nicer to pretend it isn't an issue and never appears in Christian homes, especially in the homes of pastoral families. But it does—and more often than we might imagine. In one study, 57 percent of pastors admitted to struggling with pornography currently or in the past.*

Porn has the power to destroy relationships, lives, marriages, and families. Some people believe it's not harmful, arguing that it's not real intimacy, that the people involved are doing it willingly, and, because they are watching it for free, they are not contributing financially to the industry. Some say they are using it for "educational" purposes, or even that it helps them to unwind after a stressful day. But it slowly and insidiously rewires the brain; destroys people's ability to focus on important matters; lowers the threshold of acceptable violence in intimate relationships; creates highly unrealistic expectations about the kinds of intimacy that their spouses, or future partners, will be happy to engage in; and often reinforces ideas of male dominance and control over women.

I have seen porn tear marriages apart as one partner demands more extreme acts of intimacy and their spouse feels that they are constantly being compared with the airbrushed and highly experimental, or dominated, actors in the videos. The more vulnerable partner begins to feel unacceptable and unattractive and that their wishes are not valued.

The internet has given everyone easy access to porn. It is being seen by younger and younger children. Many of them accidentally encounter it when playing on an adult's phone or when searching for something on the internet. And it can be extremely distressing for them. We have powerful internet filters on in our home, but the only time I have ever seen porn was when I was researching Adventist children's websites. I discovered that an innocent website of children's Bible studies had been hacked so that clicking on the site took unsuspecting visitors straight to porn.



Children and teenagers are naturally curious when they see something startling and unusual.

Children and teenagers are naturally curious when they see something startling and unusual. They may watch, often in horror, and then feel so ashamed that they dare not talk to their parents about it. Some children might keep on watching and see all kinds of inappropriate content and even develop an addiction. They are often exposed to increasingly extreme content, which quickly becomes “normalized” in their minds. This can lead to the abuse of others and distorted thinking about their own sexuality.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You must work together as parents to protect your family from the dangers of porn. The North American Division has created a series of excellent resources to help people understand the dangers of porn addiction at www.newfreedomtolove.org. The more you understand the issues around porn, the better equipped you will be to protect your family.

Besides staying informed, be a good example. Model healthy attitudes to sexuality and mutual respect, kindness, and acceptance of each other as a couple. Set good boundaries on the use of devices and the internet in your home. Help your children develop positive hobbies and habits, and talk to them about the issues of porn and addiction. Pray for your family and ask God for wisdom as you deal with this delicate area.

TALKING TO YOUNG CHILDREN

Porn may not be something you really want to discuss with your young child. But it's vital that you talk about it before they access porn by themselves. Even if you manage and minimize their use of the internet, they can still be exposed in other ways, and they need to understand the issues before they ever glimpse it on a screen. When we simply explain what it is and what the dangers are, we give our children a much better chance of making positive choices.

Good Pictures Bad Pictures is an excellent book to help you talk about porn with your child (ages 3-9) in a warm, easy, and sensitive way. The book teaches children why porn can be damaging, how we become addicted, and what children CAN DO to prevent being affected by porn:

- **C** Close my eyes and look away to minimize the effect.
- **A** Always tell a trusted adult what happened—they want to help keep me safe.
- **N** Name porn when I see it so that I know to leave it alone.
- **D** Distract myself by doing something fun that takes all my attention for a while.
- **O** Order my thinking brain by choosing not to view porn, rather than letting my curious and feeling brain take over.

TALKING TO TEENS

One of the best ways to talk about porn with teens is to look for a natural discussion starter. This could be a news item or the latest research on the dangers of porn. It's best if you are sitting or walking side by side so that you don't have to make eye contact during the conversation. Or talk when you are working on a project together so that you both have something to look at and something to do with your hands. Another way to open up the topic is to forward a useful article or comment in a private message on their phone, and then ask them what they think about it.

Porn is not the easiest thing to discuss with anyone, especially your teenager. It's OK to say that you feel a bit awkward about bringing up the topic but that it's really important to you. Use tasteful humor to help you both relax. Make sure everything about your body language and tone of voice lets your teen know that you accept them, whatever experiences they have already had with porn, and that you are not going to blame or shame them. They need to feel that they can be open and honest with you. Try a “little and often” approach rather than having a big, intense conversation. Make it normal to share things you have learned about porn, or watch a helpful video together.

The internet has given everyone easy access to porn.

Many teens are curious about porn, and it's easy for them to have a look and see what it's all about. When researchers wanted to find some college-age boys who had never watched porn to create a control group, they couldn't find enough non-watchers, and they had to change the structure of their research project. Focus on the long-term goals your teenagers have for their life and explore how becoming addicted to porn can seriously affect their brains, their ability to concentrate on their studies and work, their mental health, and their relationships, especially their future marriage and family life. Watch the series "Brain, Heart, World" together, or watch it separately and then discuss the issues together (see resource list for website).

Work together with your teen on an accountability plan, in which you can both be honest with each other about your challenges and set up safe systems to help protect each other from temptations and addictions. Use systems that show each other which websites you have been to and pixelated screenshots of any adult sites that have been visited. Set up boundaries about the use of devices in private spaces and during the night, or make compliance with safety rules a condition of owning their own device.

If you discover that your children are struggling with porn, be kind, accepting, and forgiving. Being critical and judgmental can encourage them to become even more secretive. Buy Ben Dyer's book *Applying the Handbrake*. This resource will help them discover practical, Christian advice for living safely and wisely in the world today. Teens need warm, healthy, loving relationships with their parents, and they need to know that their loving Father in heaven will always forgive them and love them too.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

www.newfreedomtolove.org – North American Division website with a five-part series to explore the issues around porn. It is designed to use with the whole church.

www.protectyoungminds.org – A website to help you prepare and protect your children, help them heal if they have been exposed or addicted, and help you both speak about the issues in your community.

www.thenakedtruthproject.com – A British website designed to educate people about the dangers of porn.

www.brainheartworld.org – A series of three 30-minute videos exploring how porn addiction affects the brain, relationships, and the vulnerable people who are caught up in the industry.

www.axis.org – Discussion guides for Christian parents and their teens on key issues of life and faith.

Ben Dyer, *Applying the Handbrake: A Teenage Boy's Honest Account About God and Porn* (Naked Truth Resources, 2018).

Kristen A. Jenson, *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids* (Kennewick, WA: Glen Cove Press, 2014).

* www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon

Karen Holford is a qualified family therapist and the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division. She has heard many stories of the devastating effect that pornography has had on marriages, families, relationships, and lives.



DEAR DEBORAH

Dear Deborah,

I'm extremely ashamed and embarrassed, but I think I have a serious problem with overeating. In the past year, I've gained more than 15 pounds, and I can't seem to get control.

Even worse, I've been stashing everything from potato chips to sweets and soft drinks in my secret little hiding places so I can binge on the things I love and crave. Sadly, it seems to make me "feel better" at that moment.

Every time I eat something I shouldn't, I promise myself that I won't do it again. I get so angry with myself, but apparently not enough to do something about it. Could this be an addiction?

*Sincerely,
Really Want to Change*

Dear Really Want to Change,

According to WebMD.com, "Anything that alters your mood can become addictive." It is also important to note that other factors could block change and transformation. Some include insufficient sleep, nutritional/vitamin deficiencies, limited exercise, lack of fresh air, inadequate water intake, and more.

For this reason it would be wise to get a checkup by a medical doctor. It would also help to schedule a session with a qualified Christian counselor so you don't have to struggle by yourself. Accountability groups and lifestyle programs in your church or community can also help you make lasting changes.

Another factor preventing change can be that nasty word—fear. This can be a huge obstacle in our endeavor to make good choices and do the seemingly impossible in our lives. But when you think you can't, claim out loud that God can! "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. . . . In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" (Psalm 56:3, 4).

You certainly are not alone in this journey. Millions of people make resolutions each new year to implement life changes. These might include starting lifestyle changes, making financial alterations, overcoming addictions, and escaping toxic relationships.

Rest assured, help is available! God's Word provides many encouraging scriptures, but Isaiah 40:29 comes to mind and offers great hope to all: "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength."

God will help clear the way to a new you. Trust Him for total victory!

Prayerfully,
Deborah



GENERATIONAL SIN

CAN WE BREAK FREE FROM A BAD BACKGROUND?

MY PARENTS DIVORCED when I was 2 years old. Their marriage was dysfunctional, and my dad cheated on my mom. No wonder, though—he grew up without a role model and never even met his father. Yet he knew this fact: His father had affairs with unmarried young women in town. One of the affairs was with my grandmother. She was nearly 30 years younger, and they had three children together. He was a very influential man in a little town in south Brazil. Unfortunately, he never cared to pass his family name to his children; perhaps he couldn't risk losing his reputation. My maternal grandfather also cheated on his wife with multiple women to the point that their 27-year-long dysfunctional marriage could not go on anymore.

As I contemplated my family history, I wondered if it would ever be possible to experience a fulfilling marriage. Wouldn't I have the same inclinations toward unfaithfulness?

If you think that's more than enough dysfunction for one pastoral family, let me tell you some family history of my wife, Hellen. She lost two close family members to suicide—her mother, when she was only 7, and her older brother, when she was 25. Hellen's father has always struggled with drug and alcohol addiction, and we never know what to expect when we call him.

IS THERE HOPE?

Given these backgrounds, Hellen and I wrestled with this question: "With so much dysfunction in our family history, can we be truly happy and provide a stable home for kids?"

Seventh-day Adventist theology does not teach that God is out to curse us; instead, we know He is an infinitely good and merciful Lord whose main passion is to save as many as He can. But we don't talk a whole lot about generational sin and how it actually affects us and, more importantly, how to break the sinful cycle.

Generational sin is a cycle of sinful and immoral behavioral patterns *inherited* from parents and family members passed down through *generations*. These sinful and immoral behavioral patterns have dire consequences to the perpetrators and victims alike, as victims are prone to become future perpetrators, thus perpetuating the cycle.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

Exodus 20:5, 6 and 34:7 clearly state that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations. For instance, Abraham was a man of faith and a friend of God, but it did not keep him from being a coward and a liar. While his name was still Abram, he lied to Pharaoh, making him believe that Sarai—his wife—was actually his sister because he feared they would kill him if they found out the truth.¹ Later on, after having his name changed by the Almighty God and being given a new purpose in life, Abraham lied again in exactly the same way, this time to Abimelech.² This shows us that even though God gives us a new purpose in life, we can still fall back into our weaknesses.

Isaac, Abraham's favorite son, grew up to be a liar as well. He lied to Abimelech about his wife for the same reasons his father did.³ Isaac fathered two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob went on to become a pathological liar who misled his blind father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn.⁴

It is important to realize that, apparently, Abraham and Isaac did not face immediate consequences for their lies. But Jacob, being the third generation, in spite of being cunning and deceitful, was majorly deceived. Jacob, the master con artist, was tricked into marrying the wrong woman.⁵ But it gets worse. Later in life he was lied to by his sons—who learned well the craft of lying from their dad—when he was told that Joseph was dead.⁶

These stories of family dysfunction are just some examples of how generational sin is manifested and how it can potentially worsen at each generation, if the cycle is not broken. It also shows that generational sin will eventually catch up with a person and can affect their whole family and life.

SINS OF OUR PARENTS

At this point you might ask, "Would a loving and just God punish the children for the sins of their parents?" Obviously not, but as awful as it may sound, this was a common belief all the way through the time of Jesus. After the disciples saw a man born blind, they asked Jesus if the blindness was a punishment for his parents' sins. Jesus responded that it was not because of anyone's sin, but so that the works of God could be revealed.⁷ If God doesn't punish us for our parents' sins, why do some families seem to have no break in the generational cycle, jumping from one tragedy to another?

Fortunately, the Bible is abundantly clear in stating that children should not bear the guilt of their fathers; neither should fathers bear the guilt of their children. Ezekiel 18:20 reads: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." Thus, even though children do not bear the *guilt* of their parents, they may bear the *consequences* of their failures and are more susceptible to repeat the cycle.

Ellen White calls it the "law of heredity." She writes, "It is eternally true that the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate the Lord. This is done through what is called the law of heredity. The evil traits of the parents are inherited by the children even to the third and fourth generation."⁸ In other words, it is not that God actually punishes us for someone else's sins—it is that we, knowingly or unknowingly, repeat the cycle in our lives, thus bringing upon ourselves the consequences thereof.

*Our past may
explain our present,
but it does not excuse
or justify our future.*

Every one of us comes to a point where we can deliberately choose to repeat the cycle.

MODERN RESEARCH

Comments from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy have been well-supported and documented by modern research. Psychology refers to a *genogram*, which is basically a diagram outlining family dysfunction over several generations to see where patterns emerge. Genetics can now even forecast a predisposition to alcoholism in future generations. Researchers Howard J. Edenberg and Tatiana Foroud found this out, as revealed in the abstract of their study: “Abundant evidence indicates that alcoholism is a complex genetic disease, with variations in a large number of genes affecting risk. Some of these genes have been identified, including two genes of alcohol metabolism, ADH1B and ALDH2, that have the strongest known [effects] on risk for alcoholism. Studies are revealing other genes in which variants impact risk for alcoholism or related traits, including GABRA2, CHRM2, KCNJ6, and AUTS2.”⁹

Furthermore, our genes can influence us beyond chemical dependence on alcohol and drugs. They can also be a predictor of pathological gambling tendencies. A study conducted by the Department of Psychiatry at the Hospital Ramón y Cajal in Madrid, Spain, concluded, “Familial factors have been observed in clinical studies of pathological gamblers, and twin studies have demonstrated a genetic influence contributing to the development of [pathological gambling] PG.”¹⁰ Similar studies have demonstrated hereditary and genetic predisposition for chemical dependence on nicotine, cannabis, cocaine, opioids, and other substances.¹¹ The University of Minnesota spent years researching 100 identical twins who were separated at the time of birth; they discovered that genes can be responsible for nearly 70 percent of the shaping of personality.¹²

It is due to the influence of genes and home environment—nature and nurture—that the cycle of dysfunction is propagated. This is why those who despised being abused by an alcoholic father are more likely to abuse their own children. It also explains why millions of adults who resented their parents’ lack of patience replicate the same or worse lack of patience with their own children.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Since generational sin is real, is there hope for those who find themselves repeating the cycle? What about those who do not want to ever repeat it?

Yes, there is hope! We serve an Almighty God who gives us the power to overcome anything.¹³

In order to break free from the cycle, we must take five steps. The first step is to accept that we are sinners. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.¹⁴ We must take ownership for our sins and refrain from developing a victim mentality by blaming our ancestors or circumstances. Our past may explain our present, but it does not excuse or justify our future. Every one of us comes to a point where we can deliberately choose to repeat the cycle. Therefore, understanding that we have no one to blame but ourselves for the sins we chose to propagate is paramount for a tangible and perpetual break from the cycle. It is usually after the first step that we may be able to seek professional help to deal with deeper wounds.

Once we take ownership for our sins, we must ask forgiveness of God. At this early stage, we may be tempted to think God cannot forgive us because we knew better and still fell short. Do not trust your feelings—trust the Word of God when it says that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more.¹⁵ Claim the promise that Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁶

The next step is to repent. Repentance means turning around 180 degrees. If you were going in one direction, you go in another. This is where surrender takes place. You make a conscious decision to break free from the habits that enslaved you and ask God to give you the power to overcome.¹⁷

The fourth step is twofold. It is perhaps the most difficult one but is where most of the healing takes place. We must grant forgiveness to those who hurt us even when unsolicited.¹⁸ Some of them don’t even

know the hurt they caused, or might not be around anymore, but either way, we must learn to let go. Note that granting forgiveness does not mean forgetting the wrongs; it simply means coming to terms with the fact that we cannot change the past and we would not retaliate if given the opportunity to. The sinful cycle can be broken only if we are willing to forgive the wrongs against us. If we do not forgive, we carry the sinful cycle with us and replicate it when least expected. Once we grant forgiveness to those who hurt us, it is time to seek forgiveness from those we hurt. We must tell them we are sorry for the pain we caused. Let them know that we cannot change our past, but we are willing to change our present and redefine our future. As we do this, we will remember these tips: Don't explain, don't excuse, don't justify. Simply ask forgiveness and ask God to help us to not do it again.

Finally, the last step is to keep moving even if we fall. We should not seek perfection; seek progress. The chains of generational sins are hard to break, but they are not impossible. They have been so deeply rooted in us that we are likely to relapse to old ways at times. The problem is not falling—it is staying down. Therefore, even if we experience relapses here and there, in the name of Jesus we can keep moving. If we fall, make sure we fall forward and remember that our Savior also fell three times with the weight of the cross on His back. Yet He got up and kept moving because He loved us. Our cross may be hard to carry, but we do not carry it alone.

ENDS HERE

Generational sin has the power to impair your life, but it does not have the power to define it. Hellen and I are living witnesses to that. There was a period in my life when I was far from God, and all I wanted to do was chase women. I had many girlfriends and at times cheated on them. I enjoyed flirting with multiple young women, and I did not care if they got hurt. I justified my actions by stating that “a fruit does not fall far from its tree. All the men in my family did it. I can't help it.”

When Jesus brought me out of darkness into light, I honestly wondered if it would

be possible to stay faithful to only one person for the rest of my life, let alone wait until marriage to have sexual intimacy. As I look back today, I am grateful to God because the cycle of generational sin has been broken. All the things I thought impossible became possible through the power of Jesus Christ.

The same goes for Hellen. By all human accounts, she had every reason to live a dysfunctional life. Yet she is an amazing wife and an incredibly loving and dedicated mother.

If you are struggling and feeling inadequate to break the generational cycle in your life, there is power in the blood of Jesus to shatter any hereditary tendencies. Perhaps your struggle is not hereditary, but something you cultivated yourself. Either way, Ellen White has these encouraging words: “It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all *hereditary and cultivated tendencies* to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church”¹⁹ (*italics added*).

Hellen and I do not have a perfect marriage, but as we look back to where we came from, we cannot help but be grateful to God for His healing power. We love each other and share this love with our children. We will continue to pray and fight for our family because we decided that the cycle ends with us. We pray it will also end with you. J

¹ Genesis 12:10-20.

² Genesis 20.

³ Genesis 26:6-10.

⁴ Genesis 27.

⁵ Genesis 29.

⁶ Genesis 37:32-36.

⁷ John 9:1-3.

⁸ *The Signs of the Times*, August 4, 1887 (vol. 13, p. 471).

⁹ H. J. Edenberg and T. Foroud. “Genetics and alcoholism.” www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4056340/.

¹⁰ Angela Ibáñez, et al. “Genetics of pathological gambling.” <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12635538/>.

¹¹ A. Agrawal, et al. The genetics of addiction—a translational perspective. <https://doi.org/10.1038/tp.2012.54>

¹² Thomas J. Bouchard, et al. “Sources of human psychological differences: The Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart.” <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/2218526/>.

¹³ See Philippians 4:13.

¹⁴ Romans 3:23.

¹⁵ Romans 5:20.

¹⁶ 1 John 1:9.

¹⁷ Acts 3:19.

¹⁸ Colossians 3:13.

¹⁹ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

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THE ADDICTION NOBODY *Talks About*

DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH IT TOO?

ADDICTIONS ABOUND IN TODAY'S world. Alcoholism, drugs, tobacco, sex. But there is one addiction nobody wants to talk about. In fact, few want to admit that they are addicted to it or that they have a problem with it. And yet I have found that it is perhaps the most pervasive addiction that exists—in liberal circles, in the most conservative circles, among young and old. The addiction is gossip.

I know from personal experience how addictive this can be. I grew up listening to the voices of criticism and gossip all around me. Criticism of what people wore to church. How they fixed their hair. How they spent their money. How they raised their kids. Yes, even criticism of the sermon on Sabbath.

At first I was just a social gossip, an occasional slip of the tongue, a little fun at someone else's expense. Nothing dark or ugly. But as the habit grew, so did the addiction, and, totally unaware, I became hooked.

Gossip and criticism can take many forms that are cloaked in acceptable garments. Those who are blatant gossips and snoops, and are proud of it, are easy to spot. But others veil their prying and snooping by claiming "Christian concern." When someone asks for prayer about something, we may think that gives us license to pry and poke, to pick them apart in our conversation with others. We whisper to the whole church the juicy little secrets we've discovered, and then try to make it seem right by asking people to "pray about it." There are also the "righteous" who criticize everybody's faults



We whisper to the whole church the juicy little secrets we've discovered.

"because they ought to know better" and we have the Scripture passages and Spirit of Prophecy quotes to prove it. Oh, I know. I've been there. Done that. Heard it all.

Ellen White writes: "There has ever been a class professing godliness, who, instead of following on to know the truth, make it their religion to seek some fault of character or error of faith in those with whom they do not agree. Such are Satan's right-hand helpers. Accusers of the brethren are not few, and they are always active when God is at work and His servants are rendering Him true homage."¹

After 40 years of thinking I was a Christian, I found out that, in fact, I was destroying people with my tongue. I cried. I fasted. I prayed. I asked God to forgive me and change me. And then God gave me a converted heart and told me to go make things right. I had many wolves to face, and believe me, they wanted me for lunch. I had to repeat over and over to myself that I must learn to gather warmth from the coldness of others. While many people were forgiving, those I had hurt the worst were understandably doubtful and distrustful.

But in Jesus there is freedom from this addiction, just as He can give freedom from every other sin in our lives. Here are the 12 steps that brought me to an awareness of my sin, helped me to face and repent of my sin, and now help me to live a life free from this sin. I pray that these steps might bring healing and freedom in your life too.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

1. Ask God for a converted heart. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart" (verse 17).

2. Ask God to show you if this is a sin in your life. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24). "We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness . . . But when the heart yields to the influence of the Spirit of God, the conscience will be quickened, and the sinner will discern something of the depth and sacredness of God's holy law, the foundation of His government in heaven and on earth."²

3. Confess your sin to God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty."³

4. Confess your faults to those you have wronged. "Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you."⁴

5. Consecrate yourself to God every morning. "Make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.'"⁵

6. Hide God's Word in your heart. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). "Temptations often appear irresistible because, through neglect of prayer and the study of the Bible, the tempted one cannot readily remember God's promises and meet Satan with the Scripture weapons. But angels are round about those who are willing to be taught in divine things; and in the time of great necessity they will bring to their remembrance the very truths which are needed."⁶ God's Word will help us speak only those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23). "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit" (Psalm 34:13).

7. Avoid temptation. To the best of your ability, stay away from circumstances and people that will draw you back into this addiction. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1).

8. Be open about your struggle. Don’t let your pride keep you silent and open the way for temptation. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). If you are in a situation that you can’t avoid, be willing to say, “I have a problem with gossip, and I am trying to get it out of my life, out of my home.” You’ll find that most people are willing to help you by holding their own tongue.



9. Pray for those who have wronged you or about whom you find yourself having critical thoughts. Do it right then and there. “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Matthew 5:44). When criticism and gossip about people begins, I say to my family and friends, “They really need our prayers. Would you mind if we prayed for them right now?”

Then do it. You will notice that your conversation will turn to Jesus and away from the criticism. When my family first started doing this, we found ourselves praying several times a day—even several times in one hour. It was a supreme struggle for all of us, because our habits had become so deeply entrenched. But as we have continued to pray, God has done a work in us—we now catch ourselves before the words are said.

10. Do something kind for someone you have critical thoughts about. Ask God for an understanding heart. “In your association with others, put yourself in their place. Enter into their feelings, their difficulties, their disappointments, their joys, and their sorrows. Identify yourself with them, and then do to them as, were you to exchange places with them, you would wish them to deal with you.”⁷

11. Think about Jesus when you begin to have negative thoughts. “Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. . . . It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.”⁸

12. Trust Jesus completely to work in you. “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). “Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, ‘Without Me ye can do nothing.’ Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly—by abiding in Him—that we are to grow in grace.”⁹

¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 519.

² Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23, 24.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶ *The Great Controversy*, p. 600.

⁷ White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 134.

⁸ *Steps to Christ*, pp. 70, 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

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The Three Angels

DO THEY REALLY HAVE A MESSAGE FOR ME?

GROWING UP SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST and in a church interested in prophecy, I learned about certain topics at a young age.

BLACKBOARD AND BEYOND

I still recall one of our elders rolling a rickety blackboard out onto the stage. On that board there were drawings and terms I had come to know well, such as “the mark of the beast,” “the 144,000,” and, of course, “the three angels’ messages.” As a child I remember it being a frightening topic since it was usually brought up during a sermon about the end of days and was accompanied by strong imagery of tragic events. Whenever I heard the Scripture reading for that Sabbath was found in Revelation, I knew to brace myself for things I did not understand.

As I grew older, I had the chance to study more on my own. Sadly, I was not interested in learning more about the three angels of Revelation 14, because to me they just meant the end of the world. I knew that the three angels’ messages were integral to my faith and my religious beliefs, but I felt no connection to them and did not find them relevant to my spiritual growth. For years I could not have told you what exactly the three angels’ messages were. All I knew were the basics: three angels, they have messages, and Adventists care about them a lot.

*I braced myself
for things I did not
understand.*

TODAY

I finally understand the meaning of the messages and why they are so important. They are finally relevant to my Christian walk. In Revelation 14:7 the first angel reminds us to give glory to our Lord. Every day, I strive to worship my God, my Creator, and live a life that is according to His will. I don’t just limit my good works to the Sabbath day but recognize that if I am to give Him the glory, I must do so with my thoughts and actions each and every day. I seek to obey God and remain faithful even when it is not the easiest task to achieve.

As I strengthen my relationship with God, He helps me to come out of sin and not let it have its grip on me, because I have been made free through Jesus Christ. While on earth, Jesus commanded us to preach about His Father’s kingdom. As I flee Babylon, as I flee sin, I accept Jesus’ command to tell others to flee sin and enter into His kingdom. Putting these things into practice on a daily basis, I can rest assured that by His grace, I won’t receive the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:9), but instead I will receive “the seal of the living God” (Revelation 7:2) and be marked for salvation.

That is what the three angels’ messages mean to me. They mean salvation. Not something frightening, not irrelevant, not tragic, but a calling to walk in His ways and wait patiently for my Father’s soon return. J

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DEATH IN THE FAMILY

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR LOVED ONES ARE UNBELIEVERS?

MY FATHER DIED this summer. He shot his wife in the head, crawled into bed next to her, put the gun in his mouth, and shot himself.

He was 86 and almost blind. He had leukemia, emphysema (the man had smoked for 72 years), and such terrible shakes that he could barely put food in his mouth. (He had joked with his brother-in-law a few weeks before their deaths, “If I don’t do this soon, I’m going to miss.”) His wife of 34 years had, among other things, kidney failure, severe osteoporosis, and spinal cancer. Life had become miserable, even worse.

Thus, he honored their pact: he wouldn’t leave without her. He didn’t. And now, for the first time in my 56 years, my dad is gone.

He was a great father, having given me as a child something that’s hard to put into words: a sense of security (perhaps?) that I’ve carried all my life and will take into the next.

Witnessing to him, though, was tough. He being an atheist and a Jew made it hard enough; worse, for most of my 32 years as an Adventist, he thought it all a front and that I was a CIA agent. Seriously! (Probably having seen too many James Bond flicks, in college I made an offhand comment about wanting to work for the CIA. I then took a couple of trips to the Soviet Union, later joined a new religion, moved to the Washington, D.C., area, and got a job that took me overseas a lot. Thus the CIA hypothesis wasn’t, from his perspective, as ridiculous as it sounds.) He eventually softened up, and my last time with him he said, “I no longer think you’re CIA.”

A God who would sacrifice Himself in order to save even one of us is a God who wants to save all of us.

Progress.

There was more. I had a drama published, *Shadow Men*, as a way to witness to secular people without their knowing they were being witnessed to. He said that because his eyes were so bad he couldn't read the book, but he wanted a copy nonetheless. Much to my happy surprise, in what turned out to be our last phone call together he said he read it.

SURPRISES

A few weeks after he died, I got a call from a woman who had been their live-in caregiver for a few months. She was Adventist. She told me that when things were very hard for them, my dad had asked her to pray. I was stunned. My dad had said that the last time he prayed was during combat in World War II, when there was "one night I knew I was going to die." (I proudly display his medals in my office.) Afterward he felt like a hypocrite and never believed in prayer again—until, obviously, the days he asked that Seventh-day Adventist to pray for them.

I realize, of course, that I'm weaving together whatever threads I can find into hope for his eternal destiny. It's hard, believing what I do and having unbelieving loved ones. I've struggled with guilt: If only I had been a better witness . . . that kind of thing. What's even harder is that because of me he had so many more opportunities to know truth than many others have had, which, of course, would make him all the more culpable.

In the end I retreat to what is always my default position: the cross. A God

who would sacrifice Himself in order to save even one of us is a God who wants to save all of us, including my dad, and every one of our unbelieving loved ones. I'm also more grateful now than ever for the promise of 1,000 years to get the most important questions answered.

"How surely are the dead beyond death," wrote Cormac McCarthy in *Suttree*. "Death is what the living carry with them." I'll carry my father's death, sadly, until my son carries mine.

My dad's ending wasn't an Adventist one. But he wasn't an Adventist, so what did I expect? How glad I am, though, that a loving God, with a compassion I can't conceive, is judge, and that I will be able to say, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:7, NIV), whatever His judgment on my father is. ■

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LANGUAGES OF THE *heart*

*“Listen with ears of
tolerance! See through
the eyes of compassion!*

*Speak with the
language of love.”*

—Rumi, Persian poet



“WHAT DOES IT TAKE to play football?” he asked. Then he proceeded to answer his own question. “A strong body, a brain, and a lot of hard work. But what bothers me is ‘relationships.’ This is much more difficult than anything I ever experienced playing football.”¹

Counselor Chapman looked across the desk with sympathy at the troubled young man and was impressed that Brian² indeed had a lot going for him. He was good-looking, had been a successful student and athlete in college, and was now doing well in his chosen career. He wanted to be married and have a home and family of his own, but for some reason his attempts at becoming involved in a relationship with any young woman seemed to fall flat.

Brian had been raised in a home that included an alcoholic father and a depressed, tired mother. He couldn’t recall any words of love, praise, and appreciation expressed to him by his parents. In fact, even now, remembering some of their critical, condemning words brought him to tears.

*“Gentle words are a
tree of life.”³*

Words of Affirmation is the first of the five basic love languages Gary Chapman writes about in his book *The 5 Love Languages, Singles Edition*. According to Chapman, “For some, this is already their native tongue. They grew up in a positive linguistic environment, hearing many affirming words from their

earliest childhood. These are the people who are known in their social circle as encouragers. They are constantly affirming, encouraging, and expressing words of appreciation to others.”⁴

For those like Brian, who were not so fortunate in their childhood environment, learning how and when to be affirmative, especially on a personal level, while also unlearning ingrained critical and negative responses takes time, guided effort, and practice.

The first assignment given Brian by Chapman was to take the initiative of reaching out to his parents. This he did, timidly at first and then over time with more confidence. During weekly phone conversations he repeatedly expressed his appreciation, love, and care for them. Ultimately his efforts were rewarded with an amazing healing transformation in the relationship between him and his parents. His new ability and comfort with sharing affirmation spilled over into his relationships at work and in his personal life with very positive results.

“For it is in giving that we receive.”⁵

Gift Giving is the second on the list of the five basic love languages, and it is one of the fundamental universal languages of love, according to Chapman. “A gift is a tangible object that says, ‘I was thinking about you and wanted you to have this. I love you and care about you.’”⁶

Beth volunteered to help Julie, an elderly woman, settle into a one-bedroom apartment after moving from her two-story home of many years. Julie’s new apartment was now

filled with many unpacked boxes and furniture, way too much of both for the small living space available. Beth was eager to help Julie sort and get rid of as many things as possible. As they worked together unwrapping countless trinkets, decorative items, and boxes of memorabilia, Beth began to change her “get rid of stuff” attitude as she saw how Julie delightedly exclaimed over many of her keepsakes. In each item she saw with joy the faces of the givers and experienced anew their expressions of love.

For those who did not grow up in a home atmosphere where gift-giving and receiving was the norm, learning this language may be a challenge and require effort to understand and practice. “Fortunately, gift-giving is one of the easiest love languages to learn,” says Chapman. “It just requires listening to people and picking up on their interests and needs.”⁷

“Just as I have done, you also must do.”⁸

Acts of Service is number three on the list of love languages. “Helping others is universally accepted as an expression of love,” explains Chapman.⁹ Service given from a desire to help others is seen in a number of professions, such as medical work, teaching, caregiving, mission work, and volunteering.



Jeff had the reputation of being able to fix just about anything. Whenever retirees, a single person, or just about any church member got stuck with broken equipment at home, electronic malfunctions, computer difficulties, or something not right with their vehicle, it was Jeff they would call for help. He was always ready and happy to lend a hand no matter what or when the need.

Jesus presented us with the best example of caring service when, in the absence of the appropriate servant, He stooped to wash His disciples' dusty feet. After doing so, He encouraged all of them (and us) to follow His example and offer loving service to others. Life presents many opportunities to be of help to those who truly need it. For those whose love language is providing acts of service, jumping in when a need arises is a ready response.

“My favorite place in all the world is next to you.”¹⁰

Quality Time is the fourth in the list of love languages. Chapman points out, “As humans, we have a fundamental desire to connect with others.”¹¹ Roadblocks to quality time between couples and family members can include a lack of conversational skills, work overload, frequent travel appointments for one partner, and the big one—electronic devices. Families may be spending more time together but engaging in less interaction with one another, thus being alone together.

Sarah was raised in a home in which there was very little conversation shared between family members. Not only did she spend much of her childhood alone, but she continued to keep to herself in high school and college and focused mainly on academic achievements. Her choice of a career as a certified public accountant (CPA) further provided her much time alone. It is no wonder that her lack of communication skills was a constant source of frustration and cost her close friendships and meaningful relationships. Sarah needed counseling to help her connect with her emotions and be able to express thoughts, opinions, and dreams with others.

Besides conversing with people, quality time includes quality listening, with the goal of helping others feel valued, understood, and loved. According to Chapman, listening skills include the following components:

1. Maintaining eye contact when listening to someone.
2. Not engaging in other activities while listening.
3. Listening for feelings and affirming those feelings.
4. Observing body language.
5. Not interrupting, especially to interject one's own ideas.
6. Asking reflective questions.
7. Expressing understanding.
8. Asking if there is something one might do to be helpful.
9. Never giving advice unless the other person requests it.¹²

In today's society the pervasive presence of electronic devices has in many ways diminished that nurturing connecting of heart to heart through face-to-face verbal sharing of emotions, thoughts, desires, and joy and participation in enjoyable experiences together as couples, family members, and friends.



“Touch seems to be as essential as sunlight.”¹³

Physical Touch is the fifth love language. According to Chapman, “Tender, affirming physical touch is a fundamental language of love.”¹⁴ We need human touch right from birth in order to stimulate survival, well-being, weight gain, and physiological development. Very young orphan children who are starved for human touch can fail to grow to their height potential and often develop behavioral and social problems. Elderly adults, especially in care facilities, can experience debilitating depression that can lead to physical symptoms when they are devoid of nurturing social interaction and expressions of caring through physical touch.

Marti admitted during a counseling session that she was not a “touchy-feely” person. In fact, she didn’t especially enjoy people hugging her. She grew up in a family in which love was shared by the members, but without much touching. Her personal relationship with a young man was not progressing well because of this issue. His primary language of love was physical touch. Marti’s words of affirmation.

To learn this particular love language, Marti was instructed to begin with her parents by giving them a hug each time she saw them for the next two months. The process was quite awkward and strange for all three of them at first. However, over time the family became more and more comfortable with this new way of showing affection and love. Marti didn’t have to change who she was; she just needed to learn to feel comfortable with a new way of expressing her love and care for others.

SIMPLY PUT

God is all about compassion and love. He made us with the capacity to experience and benefit from love, as well as to share it with others. We may not value or truly appreciate the love languages of others because our own style may be completely different. However, learning to understand and then effectively communicate with the people in our lives is key to meaningful relationships. We can partner with heavenly agencies in sharing encouragement, faith, comfort, joy, and love. 7

INFORMATION SOURCES:

Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages, Singles Edition* (Northfield Publishing, 2017), chapters 1-7.

<https://theconversation.com/alone-together-how-mobile-devices-have-changed-family-time-111478>

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/hands_on_research

¹ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages, Singles Edition* (Northfield Publishing, 2017), p. 31.

² Most names have been changed.

³ Proverbs 15:4, NLT.

⁴ Chapman, p. 38.

⁵ Francis of Assisi.

⁶ Chapman, p. 58.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 60, 61.

⁸ John 13:15, CEB.

⁹ Chapman, p. 73.

¹⁰ Charlotte Eriksson, a Swedish author of poetry, prose, and stories.

¹¹ Chapman, p. 88.

¹² Ibid., pp. 92-94.

¹³ Diane Ackerman, an American-born poet, essayist, and naturalist.

¹⁴ Chapman, p. 99.

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.





A LONG WAY FROM HOME

MANY PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD are refugees. That means that it became so dangerous to live in their home—because of war, famine, disease, political situations, or poverty—that they made the difficult decision to leave and move to a safer place. Many people in the Bible were also refugees, including Jesus. God told His people to take care of refugees and the people who were strangers or newcomers to their country. Let's learn more about refugees in Bible times, and in our world today, so that we can pray for them and show them God's love.



JESUS WAS A REFUGEE

When Jesus was a baby, His family became refugees. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus had to escape to Egypt very quickly because Jesus' life was in danger. Read the story in Matthew 2:13-23.

- Imagine that you are Joseph and Mary and you have a small baby. You have only a few minutes to pack what you need for your journey to make your home in a foreign country. What would you choose to take with you?
- Set a timer for 10 minutes. Run around your house and look for some things that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus might have needed. Bring them back to your family. Look at what you have all chosen. Can you carry everything? Is anything missing? What else might you need? What could you leave behind? What are some things that you can't take with you but would be very difficult for you to leave behind?
- Use this activity to help you think more about the refugees in your area and what they might need.



PRAY FOR REFUGEES IN THE NEWS

Search this week's news for stories about refugees. Read the stories with your family. Stick a news story about refugees onto a large sheet of paper. All around their story, write sentence prayers for their needs.

IN GOD'S HANDS

God cares about all His children everywhere. He is especially concerned about those in danger and those who are sad, struggling, alone, or frightened.

- Draw around your hand and imagine it is the hand of God.
- Draw some refugees in the palm of the hand. As you place them in God's hands, know that He is caring for them.
- Pray that they will feel how close God is to them and how much He loves them.



IMAGINE LIFE AS A REFUGEE

What do you think it would be like to move to a foreign country for a few years for your own safety? Imagine you are Mary and Joseph arriving in Egypt. Your clothes are different. You don't speak the language. You don't have many possessions. You have a young child. You don't understand the culture. You don't know whom to trust.

- How would you learn all the things you need to learn?
- What would help you settle quickly and adapt?
- How would you learn the language?
- What would be the kindest things the local people could do for you?
- How would you let your neighbors know that you are trustworthy and kind?
- What have you learned about Jesus' family, and about refugees, by thinking about His story?

POWERFUL PICTURES



Many great artists painted pictures of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus escaping from Bethlehem to Egypt. Search online for some famous paintings of "the flight into Egypt." Look at some of these pictures. How realistic do you think they are? What is the family taking with them? What can you learn from each picture?

- Draw your own picture of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus traveling to Egypt. Or write a journal entry from Mary or Joseph that they might have made during the journey.
- Search for some photos on the internet of refugees traveling today. How are these different from the old paintings? Look at one of the photos of refugees and imagine the stories the people could tell you. Write their story or write a poem that describes their feelings and their hopes.

PRAY FOR SOFTENED HEARTS

- Take a piece of Play-Doh, salt dough, or clay. Form it into the shape of a heart and feel how soft it is. God wants us to have soft and kind hearts—hearts of flesh, not cruel hearts that are hard like stone (Ezekiel 36:26).
- Think about some of the people the refugees will meet on their journey. Some will be kind and welcoming. Some might treat them badly. Some are officials with specific responsibilities to carry out. Some will be uncertain, and they won't know what to do or say to help the refugees.
- Hold your soft heart. Pray for the different people who will meet the refugees on their journey. Pray that these people will have soft hearts and be especially kind and welcoming.
- Now take your soft heart and press objects into it to make a pattern or design that reminds you of the experience of refugees in some way. Let it dry out, paint it or decorate it, and use it to remind you to pray for refugees around the world.

DIFFERENT REFUGEES, DIFFERENT NEEDS

Think about the different groups of people who travel as refugees. What are their challenges and needs as they move around in all kinds of weather, often with very little shelter or few supplies?

- Babies
- Young children
- School-age children
- Teenagers

- Young adults
- Parents
- Older people
- People who are ill or disabled

Choose one of these groups. List their needs, and think about how they might be feeling as they make their way to a safer place. Then pray for them. Or find a picture of a specific refugee and write a prayer for their needs.





A Long Way From Home

DANGEROUS JOURNEYS



Many people in the Bible were refugees in different ways: Noah's family; Jacob running away from his angry brother; Joseph when he was sold into slavery; Joseph's family when they moved to Egypt; the Israelites when they fled Egypt; Naomi and her family when they moved to Moab because of the famine in Bethlehem; Ruth, who left Moab to move back to Bethlehem with Naomi; and Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Which other Bible characters can you think of who had to travel to a different country or run away because they were in danger?

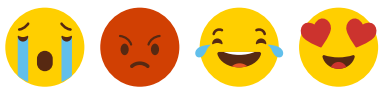
Choose one of these stories. Read it with your family or friends, act it out, or create a scene from the story with things you have in your home. Then choose some of the following questions to discuss:

- What were some of the possible dangers in the place they left?

- What were some of the dangers they might have faced on their journey?
- What were some of the dangers they might have faced in the place to which they traveled?
- Were there any people who were kind to them and helped them settle in their new country?
- If you were a refugee in this Bible story, what would you like someone to do for you?

Make an object with your craft materials, or things you can find, to show the struggles faced by refugees as they meet the dangers of where they are living, the dangers of a difficult journey, and the potential dangers in the place where they are going. Show someone what you made and encourage them to care about refugees too.

ALL KINDS OF FEELINGS



Jacob had to run away from home because he lied to his father and tricked his brother. Esau was so angry that he wanted to kill Jacob. So his mother sent Jacob on the long and lonely journey to her brother. Read the story in Genesis 27 and 28.

- Imagine how Jacob felt when he knew his brother wanted to kill him. Draw or create something to express his fear.
- Imagine how he felt as he said goodbye to his family, not knowing if or when he would see them again. Draw or create something to express his sadness and uncertainty.
- Imagine how he felt when he woke from his amazing dream! Draw or create something to express his hopefulness and joy.
- Read a story of a refugee. Think about their emotions:
 1. when they were living in danger;
 2. when they had to leave everything behind, even the people they love;
 3. when they experienced the kindness of God and others on their long, risky, and challenging journey to safety.

GOD CARES FOR OUR FEELINGS

Imagine that you are a refugee running away from a dangerous place and making a long journey to safety. What are some of the feelings you might be experiencing? Hope, fear, sadness, frustration, confusion, stress, exhaustion, peace, worry, etc.?

- Write each feeling on a different card.
- What Bible verses help you when you have that feeling? Write the verses on the cards too. Place the cards facedown on a table. Turn one over and pray for all the refugees who are experiencing that emotion right now.
- How might God, and those who care for the refugees, help them with their difficult feelings?

HELPING REFUGEES NEAR YOU

Plan something practical you can do as a family, or with your local church, to care for the refugees in your area. What would you like someone to do for you if you were a refugee?

- Maybe there are children who would love to have some of your nice old toys or some good clothes you have outgrown.
- Maybe there is a young person in your school who is a refugee and needs a good friend.
- Find out if there is an organization caring for refugees near you and ask what they need most.

Karen Holford sometimes helps special counselors who are working with young refugees in the United Kingdom.

TIPS TO SURVIVE

THRIVE

*“Yield not to
temptation, for yielding is
sin; Each victory will help
you, some other to win;
Fight bravely onward,
glad-hearted and true;
Ask the Savior to help you;
He’ll carry you through.”*

*—adapted from
Horatio Palmer, 1868*

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

SOME MAY REMEMBER the chorus above from long ago. A very meaningful Bible promise is found in Jude 24 (KJV): “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling [into the temptation], and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”

Not only is Jesus able, but it pleases Him to keep us from sinning. However, that’s not all! He promises to show God that we are faultless.

Who, me? With all my past sins? Yes, you! And the wonderful part is that He does it with exceeding joy—He is so proud of you! It gives Him great pleasure to cover all your sins by His blood so your record in heaven is perfectly clean—faultless.

WHAT IS MY PART?

A great Bible verse to remember is James 4:7. It gives just two steps:

1. Submit yourself to God—that always comes first. We can never do it alone; we need God.
2. Resist the devil. What will be the outcome? The devil will flee from us.

What a beautiful formula with beautiful results!

HOW DO I SUBMIT TO GOD?

Pray earnestly. Be completely honest with Him. Recall past instances of His help with former

victories. Believe His promises to be with you and help you, for there are many in the Bible. Keep in mind God’s assurance in Isaiah 45:23: “I will never go back on my word” (NLT). Submit yourself again and again, but especially when tempted.

HOW DO I RESIST THE DEVIL?

Again, pray. This is fundamental! Then remove yourself physically from the temptation, such as staying away from specific people or places. With certain sins, this is not possible because some sins are in the mind, such as pride, jealousy, selfishness, lust, and covetousness. Isaiah 55:7 says, “Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their *thoughts*” (NIV). Both our ways (actions) and thoughts must be submitted to Jesus. Ask Him to help you cast out the desired evil by purposely focusing on other things, such as doing something good that you enjoy.

“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.’ . . . Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 70). ■

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

East-Central Africa Division

Jane Mutugi, Pastor Benjamin Mutugi's wife, shared this report from North East Kenya Field.

We appreciate what the Lord has done for us during this very difficult time. The emergence of COVID-19 made us stay at home after March 16, 2020. We thank the General Conference for organizing 100 Days of Prayer. My friends Jochabed, Christabel, and I chose to pray together physically while keeping social distance. Daily we would meet at a certain place outside and pray.

We also formed WhatsApp groups that brought women together in Nairobi and North East Kenya Field. In these groups we met every day at 6:00 in the morning to share the Word and pray. At the end of the 100 days, we met via Zoom for a night of prayer, which was attended by women from the UK, SA,

Zimbabwe, and Kenya. We literally had testimonies every single day, including from someone who was scheduled for a kidney surgery but got healed!

The Spirit impressed upon us to reach out to the nearby community and help the needy. We started with those with disabilities. Soon Karura SDA Church joined us and came up with a program that would feed the needy.

One day we visited a young man in the community named Peter. He'd had an EpiFix on his leg for two years! This device helps acute and chronic wounds. We prayed for him. Our exact words were, "Gold and silver we do not have, but in the name of Jesus we believe he could walk."

We appealed to our friends, especially Mr. Mbugua and Deborah at the Central Kenya Conference, who

supported the idea of taking Peter to the hospital. So despite the fear of COVID, we took him to Kenyatta National Hospital.

Miraculously, within a few days the EpiFix was removed and he began physiotherapy. We thank the entire Central Kenya Conference leadership, which funded his treatment at the Nairobi Adventist Hospital for about four months. Indeed, there is power in united prayer (1 John 5:14).

This past spring we went back to check on Peter, and he has a testimony! We sang and prayed together. He told us that at some point he'd almost had his leg amputated, but now he could escort us to his door. I could not believe my eyes! Yes, the Savior heals and restores. This man is a true testimony that God can change any situation.



This is where we started.



Peter can now walk and has hope in the Lord!

In North East Congo Union Mission (NECUM), two Shepherdesses offer counseling and therapy to people who are alcoholics and under drug dependency. They held an event attended by 78 clients. Four accepted Jesus as their personal Savior and were baptized. Please continue to pray for their ministry, as it is bringing hope to many people.



A Shepherdess who is also a literature evangelist shared her books with clients.



An attendee testified about what the Lord has done for him.



Clients received fruit in North East Congo.

Southern Asia Division

Sofia Wilson, ministerial spouse director for Southern Asia Division (SUD), shared a report of what is happening in SUD. Pastors' wives are acknowledging God's calling and are committing to "go." They train spouses, do team ministry, organize women's and children's prayer groups, and distribute free face masks. In 2020 they were able to hold Zoom Shepherdess meetings, prayer times, and programs to promote the "I Will Go" initiative. Christmas gifts were given to struggling pastors' wives and widows in all the unions and attached fields.



Christmas gifts were given to poor pastors' wives and widows.



Pastors' wives who received the Income Generation Fund distributed free masks, vegetables, and groceries during the pandemic.



YOU HAVE A PORNOGRAPHY PROBLEM. (we all do)

Even if you're not consuming it, somebody you know is.

Every day there are over 68 million Internet search queries. **68 million. Per day.** And in those numbers are Christians. 77% of Christian men ages 18-30 view porn at least monthly*. 30% of pastors report they visited a porn site within the last 30 days*.

*Barna Group "The Porn Phenomenon"

Pornography is the **thief** of what it promises to deliver. What do we do about this? New Freedom to Love tackles this head-on, yet with tact, dignity, and honesty. At the same time, it keeps our focus on what's healthy in God's eyes.

New Freedom to Love is a general-audience **video resource** produced by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Learn how to have better relationships – and learn how porn damages them. There are **presentations** for men, for women, and for youth. Presenters are Mike Tucker, Bernie Anderson, Dr. Celeste Holbrook, Troy Beans, and Erik Stenbakken.

All of this is **FREE** at **NewFreedomToLove.org**. It's encouraging and positive. There are **testimonials** from real people (have tissues ready). There are live-audience **presentations**. There are **"unplugged" sessions** where presenters get eye-level personal. And there are **social media videos** for discussion starters or promotion for an event. This is not a resource for "porn addicts." This is a resource for everyone living in today's pornified culture. Visit today. NewFreedomToLove.org.



NewFreedomToLove.Org