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ONE SUNDAY I SPOKE for a oneday church retreat. I divided the congregation into small groups. The first task was to share one thing about themselves that others wouldn't know. I mixed the groups up a few times. The room filled with conversation and laughter.

When we came back together, I asked how it went. The feedback was unanimous. "We learned so much about each other, and we've been members of the same church for many years!" They were surprised that Kathy played the guitar and that Harry loved to cook. One husband was amazed that he learned something new about his wife.

I have found that people will often light up and start sharing if they know someone is going to listen. Wonderful conversations can start with asking one or two questions: How did you meet your spouse? Do you have a hobby? What was your favorite vacation? How did you choose your career? How did you become a Christian or an Adventist?

This works with neighbors, too. Invite them to a simple meal. The food is not the important part, so don't worry if you're a terrible cook like I am. Getting to know a person is what matters. Listening may open up the

opportunity to pray with them, which can lead to a deeper experience with Jesus.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

One day a coworker stopped me in the hall. "I need your counsel. I have a crisis and don't know what to do." As soon as I sat down in her office, she started pouring out her heart about a problem. I listened for about 20 minutes, nodding my head a few times to signal that I was paying attention.

Suddenly she said, "That's it! That's the answer. I know what I will do! Thank you for helping me understand what to do."

"You're welcome," I answered. Then I prayed for God to guide and bless her. As I went back to work, I was astonished. I hadn't said a word. *All* I did was listen.

Once I asked a family counselor if she enjoyed her work. "I love it!" she replied. "I'm amazed that many people are willing to pay good money to have someone just listen to them."

Listening is not waiting for my time to talk. James 1:19 says: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (NIV). Listening is a gift of love, safety, healing, and acceptance with no judgment or opinions.

My first husband died when I was a young mother. In the months that followed, some people didn't talk to me about what happened or that he was gone. They were afraid it would hurt me and I would cry. Yet telling the story over and over is healing.

When people have lost a loved one or gone through a terrible experience, tell them you want to hear what they are going through. Then listen and don't jump in and start telling them how to deal with it. Let them cry. Pray with them—not an advice or lecture prayer. Pray for comfort and healing.

Taking the time to listen—really listen—is powerful. It builds relationships, opens hearts, and grows trust. It can be life-changing for the one who is listened to and the one who listens.

We gain more wisdom in listening than in giving advice. "To answer before listening—that is folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13, NIV).

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

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THE PROBLEM WAS THE living room windows. They were eight feet wide. My budget would never cover the cost for drapes.

We were stationed at a Navy military base because my husband was a jet pilot. There was housing for families on the base, but we wanted to live in the country. We were told that finding a rental house near the base was next to impossible. But we decided to search the area and found a house that had just come on the market. It was a perfect place to raise our two young boys.

The house was surrounded by cotton fields and a large wraparound porch. Our furniture filled the rooms as if the house was made for us. The living room faced west, and sunsets painted the walls with the colors of a rainbow. A beautiful gift for the end of sunny days. Still, we needed privacy.

My budget for new drapes was \$100, and in 1972, that was generous. However, the width wasn't a standard size, so ordering custom drapes was expensive. I didn't sew, and hiring a local tailor plus the cost of fabric equaled too much money. To make matters worse, three smaller windows in the dining area needed drapes too.

I hung bed sheets for privacy—not a great decoration style. My only resource was to take the problem to Jesus. Farmhouses for rent were nearly impossible to find, and He had provided our lodging. But to be honest, I didn't have a lot of faith. This was not life or death. It was only drapes.

TO THE RESCUE

I called Ellen, my best friend, for help. We had met when our husbands were in the Navy overseas. I had invited her to church, and she had studied and gotten baptized. Her family moved to another state, but our friendship kept growing. (Sometime later, both of our husbands were baptized also.)

Ellen was a talented seamstress. A few days after my call she arrived with her two small children and a sewing machine. With a humble heart, I praised God for His answer. Surely \$100 would be enough for the fabric, and she could do the sewing.

With four children under the age of five, our house was busy. The only free time for a sewing project was in the evening. However, Ellen was studying the book of Daniel and wanted me to join her. We loved studying the Bible together, but this trip was for drapes. We can study Daniel when the sewing project is done, I thought.

Two days after her arrival, I grew worried. We hadn't even purchased the fabric yet, and she was going home in two days.

We agreed to go shopping the next day. Ellen drove to an upscale department store that sold custom drapes. Frustrated, I reminded her that they would be too expensive. This was a waste of time.

She said, "Let's go look."

I followed her, but I was not happy. We were going to run out of time.

And there they were hanging on a rack of returned custom drapes. They were perfect—the right color, correct measurements, and three extra panels that fit the dining area. All for \$100!

Ellen didn't look surprised. I was overwhelmed, and tears started to roll down my face. I believe Jesus was smiling.

Ordering one-of-a-kind custom drapes takes time. That means before we even rented the

I was overwhelmed, and tears started to roll down my face.

farmhouse, Jesus was already planning for the living room drapes. It wasn't luck or a coincidence. This gift was intentional, and it was perfect.

The Bible is filled with promises for salvation, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, faith, healing broken hearts, peace, His constant presence, eternal life—the list is long. Our Savior is interested in every part of our lives. He counts the hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7), He delights in us (Psalm 147:11), and He knows our heart's desires (Psalm 37:4).

In Matthew 7:11, there is another promise: "If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him" (NLT).

We moved, and those drapes fit in our new house, too. I continue to be astonished and grateful at God's answer to my prayer.

Caron Oswald is retired from conference work and lives in Tennessee. She has one son and two grandchildren. She loves to write experiences of God's power and answered prayers in the lives of His believers.





THESE KEYS WILL SOLVE PROBLEMS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS AND REPLACE FRUSTRATION WITH JOY.

"OUR MARRIAGE IS A MESS!" Andrea¹ said. "I don't love Robert and am not attracted to him emotionally or physically. Our marriage looks good on the outside to others, but I want out of it. I can't bear the thought of being with him more when he retires in a few years. He is just so irritating! I wish I'd never married him!"

Lauren, a church leader's wife, was shocked when Andrea told her this in confidence. As she and her husband, David, had become friends with Andrea and Robert, they'd thought they were a great couple. Robert was a well-respected professional in his occupation and a leader in their church. He and Andrea were both heavily involved in many church activities and outreaches and gave a lot of financial support.

Covering her surprise, Lauren assured Andrea that she and David would pray for them, but she didn't know how else to help. She feared they would split due to irreconcilable differences.

Lauren and David prayed for some months, but without an answer. One day, though, Lauren was impressed to tell Andrea of a well-known biblical counseling group she knew about. After more time passed and frustration continued to grow, Andrea and Robert made an appointment to see a counselor in this group.

A few months later Andrea and Robert were both glowing with a new love for each other and true joy. This counselor had listened to both of them and took them through the Scriptures for spiritual counseling. He allowed them time to search their own hearts for spiritual renewal and to listen to the Lord. During one session, the counselor also discovered something in Robert's childhood that could have contributed to behaviors so annoying and unattractive to Andrea.

Andrea was also willing to prayerfully listen and consider this new perspective. The Lord changed her views on Robert's behaviors, and her feelings and affection for him dramatically improved. Robert also made some important changes. Understanding each other better led to a renewed love relationship.

MUTUAL CONSIDERATION

As a pastoral spouse, you have likely seen many marriage situations that seemed hopeless. The differences between individuals cause many conflicts, and not only in marriages. Diverse personalities, convictions, and behaviors can drive us apart in the church, in our extended families, at work, or wherever two people are in close proximity.

This statement by author Ellen White provides insight into this problem: "Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family, for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. When this is the case, each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings and respect the right of the others. By this means mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed. Harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each."

I realize that my personality and character flaws often call on my dear wife, Janet, to live out the above statement, treating me with consideration and gentle, loving forbearance. I often joke with her by saying, "The Lord gave me to you so that you can grow in character to be like Jesus!"

Over the years I have found a few keys to solve problems in conflict situations and replace frustration with joy as we work together in life and ministry. Here are a few:

 Listen and deeply try to understand the other person's meaning and heart before speaking or trying to have our perspective understood. Open, calm, respectful communication can work wonders. James 1:19 says: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (NIV).

- 2. Spend time with the Lord in prayer. Listen to Him and read Scripture and His inspired writings. This can often show us how *self* in us is a major problem. Do I always have to prove I am right? Do I become offended quickly and frustrated when I am not easily understood or agreed with? Here is a profound statement: "If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties." But how do we lay self aside practically? I believe the third key will help answer this important question.
- 3. Let the Holy Spirit baptize us continually and give us a new heart (see Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Galatians 5:22-6:5). Emulating His unselfish love is the answer to so many of our relationship problems. In 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 and Ephesians 4, we see Paul pleading with God's people to have no schisms between them in the body of Christ (the church). He encourages us to recognize that we are all different parts of the body with differing spiritual gifts and that true agape love comes only as God lives in us as the head of the body.



Emulating His unselfish love is the answer to so many of our relationship problems.

Differences Through God's Eyes



REAL EXAMPLE

A conference I know voted in new leadership some time ago. In this diverse conference they found many wonderful members doing very good things. But differences in culture, theological beliefs, financial priorities for use of limited funds, ministry methods, and personalities were causing real friction in families, churches, schools, and the conference as a whole. Church growth, finances, programs, and the morale of members were at a low point.

These new leaders did not know what to do but longed to see this conference, with so much potential, move forward in unity as the body of Christ did in the book of Acts. Over the next few years, they were led by the Lord to put into practice the three keys mentioned above. Here are some of the ways the Lord led them in answer to their prayers:

- A call was given, clearly and consistently, to all members to seek our greatest need of a revival of true godliness through prayer and finding the Lord's will in all plans and activities.⁴
- Through an emphasis on prayer, a deep listening to the Lord and one another was developed.
 Many self-agendas were laid aside to unite people together in mission and fellowship.
- Meetings, whenever possible, began with praise/ testimony and prayer over the real needs and issues facing them. This brought a unity of heart,

mind, and purpose. Amazing ministries to reach the lost were developed, and funds flowed in unbelievable ways to resource the shared vision as a result of allowing God to lead.

- Active volunteer programs were developed, leading to much more lay participation in various ministries and dramatic increases in spiritual and numerical growth in this conference.
- 5. The Holy Spirit's presence brought unselfish love, which changed the conflicts into powerful team progress and victories.

Of course, everything was not perfect and some conflict still existed, but they saw firsthand that God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," according to His power that works through us (Ephesians 3:20, 21). When God leads and His people see His presence, it changes everything for the better!

THROUGH GOD'S EYES

We never would have chosen the disciples Jesus chose to lead the New Testament church in Acts. There were such different and flawed personalities and major weaknesses in each one of them . . . seemingly irreconcilable differences! But Jesus led from much prayer time with His Father and saw those disciples not as they were but as they could be after being transformed by His grace and filled with the Spirit's power. It is the same with us today.

"Lord, help us to see each other and our differences through Your eyes of understanding and love. Give us new hearts and make us one in You!"

- ¹ All names in this story have been changed to protect confidentiality.
- ² Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 205.
- ³ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 119.
- Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, Book 1, p. 121.

Jerry Page is the ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.



No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood. (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:13.)

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 386

The color of the skin is no criterion as to the value of the soul. By the mighty cleaver of truth we have all been quarried out from the world. God has taken us, all classes, all nations, all languages, all nationalities, and brought us into His workshop, to be prepared for His temple.

Letter 26 (1900), Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, pp. 16, 17 "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God. The Saviour has a boundless love for every human being. In each one He sees capacity for improvement. With divine energy and hope He greets those for whom He has given His life. In His strength they can live a life rich in good works, filled with the power of the Spirit.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 225

The Lord desires His chosen servants to learn how to unite together in harmonious effort. It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to God's truth as it is presented in a different manner by another laborer, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples.

Evangelism, pp. 99, 100

istering?

HOW WE BROUGHT OUR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER IN AN AMAZING WAY.

IT SEEMED LIKE A REGULAR Sabbath morning for most of the multicultural members at our new district church. Yet an excited group of people were about to launch a new ministry that day.

I have the privilege of supporting my husband in a church composed of several ethnic backgrounds. We were thrilled when the social committee took the initiative of brainstorming how we could better connect with the regular and former members of our church as well as the community to let them know that we are here to serve. The project was called Community Lunch.

We invited the church through bulletins, websites, and the church app. An announcement was also posted on several community Facebook pages.

Because of the size of our church, it had always seemed impossible to feed 200-plus church members and visitors, so no one had tried it before. But on this Sabbath, the kitchen was buzzing with enthusiasm and joy. And against the odds, we had plenty of food to go around. Most of the church members stayed and enjoyed the lunch, plus we had three community people attend.

STORY TIME

Something beautiful happens when people eat together. Once people are seated and enjoying the food before them, it's story time. Personal stories and testimonies come out that are a blessing for everyone who eats together and participates.

These lunches allow for multicultural and intergenerational interactions. They open the doors for getting to know one another at a deeper level (not just greetings).

One day a visiting woman shared, "I've been looking for God and a church I could be part of. I grew up going to church most Sundays with my parents. In my teens, I decided I didn't want to do the

"I've been looking for God and a church I could be part of."

'God thing' anymore. I left my church and did everything I was advised not to do. I had very dysfunctional relationships. I ended up marrying a guy who was not good to me, had two kids with him, and am currently in the process of a divorce. In the middle of my emotional struggles, I remembered the God of my childhood."

She told us that one day while driving she'd heard on the Christian radio station an announcement about this lunch. She'd never heard of our church, but she decided to come. "I thoroughly enjoyed it," she said. "The kids had a good time with the other kids. People from various ethnic backgrounds were here, and the food they brought was super tasty. I have now attended three times, and I feel good about it."

SAFE SPACE

Why is this so significant? Let me draw your attention to a story found in 1 Samuel 1. It is the story of Hannah. Probably the first thing you think of is "Hannah the barren." And this is true. But there is another side to this story.

We are told that Hannah lived in a very stressful environment. Peninnah, her husband's other wife, taunted and provoked Hannah regularly because of her infertility and for being the favorite of their husband. Her home life was filled with discord, humiliation, and oppression. The Bible says that this caused Hannah such deep sorrow that she would weep until she could not even eat. She didn't have anyone to share her pain and hurt.

In an effort to console her, her husband did what he could or thought best by asking questions: "Why are you crying, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?" (1 Samuel 1:8, NLT).

Have you ever felt there was nobody you could share your sorrows with? Or have you tried to share your story, and people started asking you questions to find the solution or give you the answers? We are often even judged by the story we are trying to share, just like Hannah was by Eli.

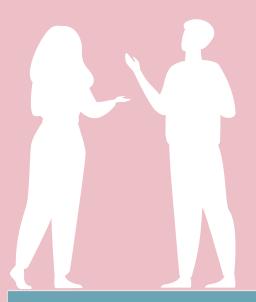
Let me show you the other side of this story. In 1 Samuel 1:15, 16, we can read Hannah's explanation of her story. Regardless of her motives in defending herself against Eli's misconceptions, this allowed Hannah to articulate her story. The moment Hannah had the space to verbalize her deep emotions, something unique happened. You can read it in verse 18: "'Oh, thank you, sir!' she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad" (NLT).

Eli did not promise her a child. Eli did not say that she would have a son nine months later. Eli simply validated her sorrow and acknowledged her prayer for a son. That was it! Why is this so powerful? Because the moment you articulate and verbalize your story, healing takes place!

Most of the time, people are not looking for opinions or answers to their problems. What they need is a safe space to share their story. That's it. Understanding happens when we listen to each other. Contentment happens when we feel heard with compassion. Healing happens when we are able to deposit our stories in safe containers.

HEAR THIS

This is what happened at our first Community Lunch, and I can tell you, the church will never be the same. People who have attended church for decades now have a new appreciation of each other. We have learned about and accepted one another's cultural values. We have grown from hearing people's experiences. Listening well is part of ministry. Listening well is God's love in action. "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry" (Psalm 34:15). We add value to people's lives when we listen to understand.



Have you ever felt there was nobodyyou could share your sorrows with?

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who died in a Nazi prison in 1945. He wrote a book on Christian community entitled Life Together. Here is one quote from his book: "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. . . . Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen" (pp. 97, 98).

In the world in which we live today, we can see many people longing for an ear that will listen without judgment. There is a great need for listening ears: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak" (James 1:19, NIV).

We are still doing Community Lunch every month. We always have community visitors and even former members coming. This act of service has connected our church members like nothing else did before. This is what the church needed. I can see great and mighty things coming our way for the glory of His name.

Jasmin Stankovic is a pastor's wife in Western Australia. She was born in Colombia and raised in Venezuela, South America. She and her husband, Robert, have three children. Jasmin is a registered counselor and is currently completing her master's degree in Christian counseling and psychotherapy. She enjoys friends, hospitality and social events, playing the piano and flute, reading, writing, preaching, teaching, card making, and cooking.

TIPS TO SUBVIVE

"God created human beings in his own image. . . . male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, NLT). Do I believe that? Did He create all people in His image, or just the ones like me?



ONE BLOOD

HOW DID GOD CREATE US?

Since God is love (1 John 4:8) and I am created in His image, He asks me to be like Him. Jesus commanded us to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

If God created us to love, what does Satan create? Prejudice and hate. Some of us, with our human natures, have followed Satan's ways rather than God's. Do I want my attitude toward *all* others to be like God's attitude toward me? He did not specify *whom* I should love, only that I *should* love. Booker T. Washington, one of America's greatest citizens, declared in a much-paraphrased quote, "I permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him."

Some want to differentiate between people, but God's Word says that "He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). We are all of one race—the human race. He makes that plain when He mentions the various "classes" or "categories" of people who lived back then—Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female—we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

The greatest part of an iceberg is underwater. Icebergs can be blasted by mighty winds, yet they continue their course according to powerful water currents. Those who are rooted and grounded in the love of Jesus will find strength in Him to not be swayed by the "raging winds" of popular opinions. They can rise above the feeling that it is necessary to adhere to what others say and think.

HOW DOES GOD TEST US?

Why did God put *that* tree in the garden? It was a test! God created the tree, then gave human beings the power of choice. Does God give me a test? Do I show God that I follow Him or that I follow Satan? When I see certain people, am I like Jesus when He encountered them? We read that when Jesus looked at the rich young ruler, He "loved him" (Mark 10:21). Do I look at people and love them? Do I love the *unlovable*—the irritating person or the one who is *different* from me?

Jesus gave an example of how to follow Him. The good Samaritan could have followed the political correctness of the time and ignored the injured man, as had the other two who passed by before him. But no, he broke from the current prejudices and showed compassion on him, over and beyond immediate treatment.

WHAT WOULD GOD HAVE US DO?

Jesus' heart was "moved with infinite pity" toward people. Do I feel compassion and pity, or do I feel disdain for certain ones? Jesus yearned for people to live with Him for eternity. Do I pray for people as Jesus prays for me?

Sylvia² couldn't stand her mother-in-law (she had good reason). However, she began praying for her—really and sincerely praying for her good. Today she loves and cares for her, even though the mother-in-law has not changed. God changed Sylvia. Prayer is the key! Do *I* need changing? Oh, God, please change *me* too!

- Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 22.
- ² Not her real name.

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

Hospitality

ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM US, START WITH OPENING OUR OWN HEARTS TO GOD'S LOVING HOSPITALITY.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I dreamed of staying at the beautiful Welcombe Hotel near Stratford-upon-Avon. We drove past it every time my father preached to the tiny congregation that gathered in the town.

I grew up and forgot all about the hotel until my husband, Bernie, received an invitation to a retreat for pastoral couples. It was completely free—sponsored by an organization that focused on developing healthy pastoral marriages and families so

that they, in turn, could nurture healthy relationships in their congregations.

"So, where's the retreat?" I asked Bernie.

"It's in a hotel near Stratford-upon-Avon," he said. "The Welcombe Hotel."

I was astounded. "The Welcombe Hotel? Welcombe with a B near the end?"

"Yes . . . do you know it?"



"When I was a little girl, I used to dream of staying there! And now we can go there for real!"

At the start of the retreat, our host welcomed us warmly. "You're probably wondering why we've brought you to the finest hotel in the area. We know you work long hours for your churches, often with very little appreciation. We want to show you how beloved you are to God and to bless you as He would bless you. The extent to which you can love your husband, wife, children, and members of your congregations is the extent to which you have experienced God's love for you. We love 'because He first loved us' (1 John 4:19), and this gift to your marriage is only a tiny glimpse into His magnificent love for you."

We learned many things during our stay that reshaped our relationship and our ministry. But my time at the Welcombe Hotel will always remind me of God's warm, smiling, extravagantly generous and loving welcome for each one of us.

GOD'S HOSPITALITY

Dozens of stories about God's wonderful hospitality are scattered throughout the Bible. In Psalm 23 He leads His sheep by still waters and fresh green grass, and He's right there with them through the frightening and dangerous Valley of Death. He even prepares a feast for those He loves and promises that they will live in the extravagant generosity of His eternal hospitality forever. In Isaiah 55:1 God opens His arms, smiles at us, and says, "Come! Come as you are; I will provide everything you need!"

Many of Jesus' parables have hospitality woven through their narratives. Parties for prodigal pigkeepers. Celebrations for found sheep. Kings hosting banquets for beggars. Neighbors needing bread at midnight. And a room in an inn for a seriously injured man.

In Revelation 3:20 God stands at our door and knocks, patiently waiting for us to open the door and let Him in. He doesn't mind how messy our lives are behind our doors. In fact, the messier they are, the more He longs to come in and help us sort everything out.

No human being is ever beyond the reach of His invitation.



God doesn't mind how messy our lives are behind our doors. God's hospitality is not just about caring for our physical needs. His welcome flows from His deepest desire to be close to us. He wants to make sure there are absolutely no obstacles that prevent us from coming to His door or prevent Him from entering ours. He invites us, every day, to the metaphorical feast that He has prepared, where there is always more than enough to meet every need and basketfuls of blessings for us to share with others.

No human being is ever beyond the reach of His invitation. He inclusively invites every race and kindred, tongue and people, the social misfits and outcasts, the children, the old people, the refugees, and especially those who wonder if anyone will ever notice and love them.

He invites us to come

as we are, with all our

imperfections, brokenness, and messiness, because, as the most loving father ever, He welcomes every child generously and joyfully, even rude, selfish, disrespectful, and destitute children who come home smelling of pigs (Luke 15:11-31). Our loving Father puts on a clean linen apron, kneels to wash our sore and dirty feet, sets the table, and spreads before us a feast overflowing with everything that brings us joy. All we need to do is sit in the wonder of His presence and experience the deepest love we've ever known.

God's invitation for us to come, to spend time being lovingly served by Him, is not just for some distant time in the future. It is also for now. We can pause at any time, sit with Him quietly, and let His generous compassion soothe our tired, aching, and burned-out hearts (Psalm 103).

All our relationships with others, especially those who are different from us, start with opening our own hearts to God's loving hospitality. And then we can pass on His welcoming acceptance to others, just as Jesus did for Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, and the woman caught in adultery. Tidying our home is not nearly as important as working with God to clear away the junk of our selfishness, our pride, and our personal prejudices. What effect might our critical and rejecting attitudes have on other people's beliefs about whether God is able to welcome and love them, too?

Paul urges us to welcome each other as God welcomes us. In Romans 12:9-21, he encourages us to offer hospitality to people, loving them deeply, showing them respect, blessing them instead of hurting and cursing them, comforting them in their sadness, celebrating their joys, and being humble and patient with others, even those who are different from us or who have sometimes hurt us.

This is where true hospitality starts—when we welcome others, generously and abundantly, into the "ever-Welcombe Hotel" of God's love, and invite them to taste God's eternal hospitality. How will you practice this open-hearted generosity with each person you meet? How can our welcoming attitude toward our children, spouse, friends, colleagues, church members, and complete strangers help them to feel welcomed into God's family?

Karen Holford is director of family, women's, and children's ministries for the Trans-European Division. She has been amazed and inspired by the hospitality of grace she has received in God's welcoming arms of love.



Fashily REUNION

For the street of it shall shine like joy and the gates open wide like love, where walls only encircle and a rainbow hovers the nations



and you and I who were
white and dark
shall sample the dripping
fruit
where the river runs smooth
and the branches bend down,
reach down
on both sides of the river

Ann Burke lives in Southern California with a view of the San Bernardino Mountains through her apartment window.



POPSICLE STICKS and Other Gifts

WE DON'T ALL DO EVERYTHING THE SAME WAY—THANK GOD.

POPSICLE-STICK CROSSES make good grave markers for parakeets, but they weren't enough for Jared. He felt they didn't do justice. He wanted real headstones.

Jared's parents had bought three parakeets—one for each of their boys. No one knew that the fumes from cooking with a Teflon pan were toxic for parakeets. The family learned that the hard way.

A special funeral ceremony was conducted, and the family made popsicle-stick crosses to place at the head of the grave for each parakeet. Jared, however, wasn't satisfied.

Children diagnosed with autism often have a difficult time expressing the deep feelings they have inside. Such was the case with Jared. Moments of deep sadness caused by the death of the parakeets seemed to open his mind to a creative solution. Each day, as he walked to school, he passed an old historic cemetery. He decided to stop and check things out. He found two headstones engraved with the exact same day and month when the parakeets died. What a fitting memorial, he thought.

While not large, they were still heavy for this 6-year-old. It took him two trips, but he felt it was worth it when he placed the new markers beside the popsicle-stick crosses. What Jared had done was illegal, but in his mind, he had not done anything wrong. He was simply showing respect for the much-loved parakeets.

GOOD COMPANY

I met Costen in Romania. He was unkempt. He drooled. His words were garbled. Cerebral palsy disfigured his appearance. As I strained to listen, I began to realize that the person on the inside was much different from the one I saw on the outside. Those who knew Costen explained that he was a chess champion and had the ability to play multiple games at once. He was indeed intelligent and highly respected by those who saw beyond his physical disabilities.

Jared's act for the parakeets was not insignificant. Costen's ability to play chess is amazing. And they are not alone. The World Health Organization reports that one in seven, or 15 percent of the world's population, has a significant disability. The way we understand disabilities is critical. It influences the way we treat these individuals. What is not always understood, however, is that our treatment of them frequently shapes their own perception of their worth.

How we see diversity and how we relate to others begins with the way we think.

Ellen White understood the power of influence upon those who struggle with personal identity. She wrote, "Respect shown to the struggling human soul is the sure means through Christ Jesus of the restoration of the self-respect the man has lost. Our advancing ideas of what he may become are a help we cannot ourselves fully appreciate."2 A popular quote states: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." Understanding a person from the inside out and not vice versa is an important first step.

GOD'S ORIGINAL GIFT

When God created the world, He did it with a great deal of enthusiasm. Day after new day He concluded it was "good." Scripture assures us of the power and strength He had as the Creator. His name, Elohim, emphasizes that in Genesis 1. When He created humans in His own image (Genesis 1:26) and placed them in the world that had been created for them, God's excitement burst forth with "It is very good" (Genesis 1:31).

However, that wasn't enough. In Genesis 2 another descriptive name was given: LORD or Yahweh conveyed that He was also compassionate and trustworthy. The full meaning of those names would soon be seen when sin entered. God was indeed trustworthy. God's gift to humans was not only creating them in His image—it included His continued presence. Regardless of the detour caused by sin, despite the spiritual and physical condition of humanity, God promised not to leave.

The Bible clearly expresses the value of every individual. That value is not derived from what a person can or cannot do. Their worth comes from God and is respected by God to such an extent that He radically invested Himself for their redemption (John 3:16). Life is sacred, and it is only God who is in the position to determine one's ultimate right to live

God is our identity both as individuals and as His church "body" (1 Corinthians 12). Our identity from God's perspective is based on who He is and the value He has placed in each person. Diversity does not detour His love. It is divinely inherent in the human DNA.

THE MASK

I not only said it wrong. My thinking was wrong. Terry was my best friend, and I was willing to defend him at any cost. Terry was the only Japanese student attending our school. One day a group of rowdy boys approached us on the playground. When they asked what race he was, I immediately assumed they were prejudiced against him. With fists clenched, I interjected before he had a chance to reply, "He is an American. That's who he is!"



Popsicle Sticks and Other Gifts

I've thought about that experience many times. In my effort to do what I thought was right, I did an injustice to Terry, myself, and the whole issue of diversity. At the time, it seemed that being an American was the one common denominator that settled any differences. With the best of intentions, I disregarded his heritage and his uniqueness. I tried to remake him into my image and that of everyone else at the school.

Since then, I've learned that I am not the only one who has tried to resolve diversity issues by dismissing differences. Doing so is disrespectful. Comparing others with our model of correctness is not helpful.

Aimee Mullins was born without fibula bones in her shins. Her legs were amputated below the knee when she was a year old. She asks for no sympathy. She is a fashion model with prosthetic legs. She reminds us, "I want to be seen as beautiful because of my disability, not in spite of it." Stephen Covey shares that the single most important principle he has learned about interpersonal communication is to "seek first to understand and then to be understood."

However, if understanding is to be effective, it must be from the other person's perspective. Hearing persons, for example, can easily misunderstand the life of a deaf person. To conclude that deaf people are isolated, disoriented, and uncommunicative and live in a world without meaning would be wrong. Such a conclusion almost begs for the deaf to be treated with sympathy. This is a false assumption.

One writer points out, "In the hearing stereotype, deafness is the lack of something, not the presence of anything." In reality, the deaf see their situation as a culture more than a disability. Their culture is filled with history, values, behaviors, art, and its own language. As is so often the case, if we don't have the right starting point, it is not possible to fully appreciate the differences that do exist.



THINK POSSIBILITY

How we see diversity and how we relate to others begins with the way we think. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder observed in the 18th century that we cannot know ourselves without a reference point outside of ourselves. That reference point is Jesus. Any source other than our Creator and Redeemer will lead to destructive relationships and the depreciation of the unique contribution those who are not like us can make. To get it right, we must start right.

The apostle Paul knew it was possible to change perceptions. He could personally say after becoming "a new creation" in Christ that believing makes it possible to see differently. "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view" (2 Corinthians 5:16, NIV).

The story is told of Lawrence, a deacon in Rome in the third century. He understood not only the concept of diversity but also the unique value of every person. During the persecution of the early church, Lawrence was given a position of trust. He cared for the treasury and riches of the church and the distribution of alms to the poor. At the beginning of August 258, Emperor Valerian issued an edict that all bishops, priests, and deacons should immediately be put to death.

The emperor demanded that Lawrence turn over the riches of the church. Early historical records indicate that he asked for three days to gather the wealth. During those three days, he distributed as much of the church's treasury to the poor as possible. On the third day, he appeared before the prefect or regional governor. When ordered to hand over the treasures of the church, Lawrence presented the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the

suffering, and declared that these are the true treasures of the church. He reportedly said to the prefect, "The Church is truly rich, far richer than your emperor." This act of defiance led to his martyrdom.

What Lawrence believed and taught at the peril of his own life was a timeless truth: "Those whom we believe are the students often become our teachers." Diversity of all kinds provides lessons needed for our character development. Ellen White suggested the same when she wrote, "I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God's test of our character."

It took a Jared in my life to start me thinking differently about popsicles and the need for diversity. I've learned that differences are important. Along with Jared, Costen, and a billion others who make up God's family, I have discovered that God appreciates uniqueness. Indeed, God's gifts come in many shapes, forms, colors, races, and perspectives.

- World Health Organization, December 1, 2020 (www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/disabilities)
- ² Ellen White, Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 281.
- ³ Andrew Solomon, Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity, p. 37.
- Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change, p. 237.
- Harlan Lane, The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community, p. 7.
- ⁶ Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 511.

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HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THE BAD STUFF LIFE THROWS AT US?

IT WAS SUNNY that morning in Alabama as Paul rode his bicycle along the smooth highway. Checking his rearview mirror, he spotted his cousin Marv, who had joined him for a short segment of his cross-country journey. Marv was pedaling along several hundred feet behind Paul.

As Paul rounded a bend in the road, he spotted trouble ahead. Three dogs loped along on the other side of the wooden fence that bordered the country road. He could tell they were not house pets. These were some of the wild dogs he had been warned about.

Suddenly the big shepherd discovered the biker and with a howl sprang into action. Leading its two long-eared hound friends, the shepherd wiggled as fast as it could through the fence, followed by the others. Then they gave chase, and how those dogs could run!

However, having already propelled his bike across 4,000-plus miles of roadway, Paul had developed some powerful leg muscles. This gave him an edge ahead of the pack. He shouted "dogs!" over his shoulder and pedaled madly, hoping for the best for himself and his cousin.

NOT JUST DOGS

On August 30, 2002, while Paul was busy at work in his restaurant, he received a phone call from his wife, Mary. Tearfully she told him that her recent biopsy report indicated she was positive for breast cancer. What followed during the next several years was a blur of medical appointments, hospital trips, surgeries, chemotherapy, and various additional treatment interventions in an all-out effort to fight, if not completely eradicate, this dreaded enemy of life and health.

However, the cancer was relentless and unstoppable. On September 7, 2006, Mary passed away, leaving behind three grown children and a devastated husband. In the days, weeks, months, and years that followed, Paul came to know that loneliness, sorrow, and feelings of regret and guilt over missed opportunities with Mary could overtake him at any time.

WARNING!

The side effects of bad situations like this can be expected. At one time or another, almost all of us have been pursued if not engulfed by feelings of:

- Sadness over the loss of a loved one, job, relationship, opportunity, valued possession, or ability
- 2. Guilt and regret over past mistakes and failures
- 3. Discontent with life and longings for the way things were, or could have been
- Doubt and uncertainty regarding personal abilities, achievements, or selfworth
- Fixation on bad experiences, including instances of unfairness and mistreatment
- Fear of all kinds—of the future, of illness, of financial status, of failure, of death

Frequently succumbing to the thoughts and emotions listed above can lead to stress and unpleasant physical symptoms. Over time one can experience elevated blood pressure, heart and respiratory problems, headaches, general aches and pains, lessening of the immune response, and a decrease in energy and stamina. The body and mind are wired tightly together, and what affects one negatively or positively stimulates a similar response in the other. So how are we to deal with the "bad" stuff life throws at us?

PERSPECTIVE IS KEY

Several years ago, an independent 80-year study tracked 1,500 people from their youth to their death. One of the factors analyzed was how hard times and adversity can affect longevity in the general population.

One person in the study was Philip, a serviceman who fared poorly in his attempts to settle back into routine life after returning home from World War II. Already predisposed to discontent, anxiety, and negativity, he found that the hardships he had experienced during the war intensified these traits. This resulted in poor choices, neglect of health, failed relationships, and increased alcohol use. He succumbed to a fatal heart attack at the age of 64.



"The Lord is good; He protects his people in times of trouble; He takes care of those who turn to him."

Nahum 1:7, GNT

In contrast, Carl and Shelley Smith Mydans, news reporters and photographers, were imprisoned and placed in POW camps during the same war. They both survived and went on to live long, healthy, and productive lives. What made the difference?

Leslie Martin, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at California's La Sierra University and coauthor of the book *The Longevity Project*, reported an unlikely conclusion of the 80-year study:

"We found that many people who lived through hard times went on to live long lives. Unlike Philip, for whom the war seemed to push life onto a self-destructive path, the Mydans appeared to turn their war experience into a source of motivation. They didn't see their stress as meaningless—it seemed to fuel them, says Martin. And this ability to think about the hard things we go through as ultimately beneficial seems to be important."

"They didn't see their stress as meaningless it seemed to fuel them."

Thinking ahead, working through changes conscientiously, being judicious about risk-taking, engaging in meaningful work, and consistently choosing a healthy lifestyle—these are all proven actions that matter when it comes to recovery and stabilization following adverse experiences. Most importantly, studies indicate that a person's foundational approach to life is of paramount importance overall.

PAUL'S STRATEGY

After Mary's funeral, Paul was suddenly struck with the reality that he was now completely alone. Being a devout man of faith, he immediately knelt in prayer, first expressing his thankfulness for the 32 years Mary had been with him. Then, in spite of the weight of his own grief, he went on to plead with the Lord for guidance in showing him how he might be able to minister to others who were struggling with loss and sadness.

Considering his prayer, we can easily identify some of Paul's foundational perspectives. These include:

- A fundamental reliance on a close connection with God as his habitual go-to source of strength and support
- 2. A ready attitude of gratitude, which encourages perspective and balance
- A desire to engage in service to others, thus providing purpose and meaning in life and deflecting hopelessness and despair

God answered Paul's prayer for ministry opportunities by leading him ultimately into two unusual quests—that of hiking the nearly 2,200-mile Appalachian Trail through 14 states, followed sometime later by biking the 5,000-mile distance between the two farthest points in the contiguous United States. Both ventures

afforded Paul amazing experiences, including incredible terrain challenges, extreme physical endurance tests, and strength and healing in sharing testimony and encouragement with emotionally burdened and hurting fellow travelers along the way.

BACK TO THE DOGS

Earlier that morning, before beginning their day's biking journey, Paul had asked Marv what his experience had been in the past with dogs. Marv expressed that he had never been afraid of dogs. Now, as Paul pedaled furiously several feet in front of the three feverishly pursuing dogs, a bloodcurdling scream suddenly rent the air, startling Paul to a near fall from his bike.

The dogs had not seen the second biker, and the effect of Marv's purposeful, disarming scream was profound and instantaneous. All three dogs immediately turned and fled up the bank, scrambled back through the fence, and then disappeared over the hillside, never once looking back.

We too can just as effectively deflect those persistent dark, relentless pursuers of our joy and peace of mind by purposely choosing positive and uplifting thoughts—things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable.² Then we will watch as despair disappears, replaced by a health-promoting spirit of gratitude and praise.

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- ² See Philippians 4:8.

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EVERYBODY'S Welcome!

IN GOD'S LOVING AND ACCEPTING family, everyone is welcome. No one is left out! God wants us to feel superloved by Him so that we can share all that lovely love with people who don't feel very loved.

TFAMWORK!

God uses all kinds of people working together in teams to do great things for Him. Draw a line from the team to the job they worked on together. Next to the task, write down some of the things that might have helped their team to work well together.



TEAM	WHAT DID THEY DO TOGETHER?	WHAT DO YOU THINK HELPED THIS TEAM TO WORK WELL?
Jesus and His disciples (Mark 6:30-44)	Built a large boat	
Stephen and seven deacons (Acts 6:1-7)	Mended a very big wall	
Jesus and some servant helpers (John 2:1-11)	Took a picnic to David and his soldiers	
Noah and his sons (Genesis 6:9-22)	Won a battle over the Midianites	
Nehemiah and his helpers (Nehemiah 3)	Made gallons of special drink for a party	
Abigail and her servants (1 Samuel 25)	Made sure the Greek widows received food along with the Jewish widows	
Gideon and 300 men (Judges 7)	Fed bread and fish to a large crowd of people	

If you could be in one of these teams, which one would you choose? Why? Imagine you were right there in the story. Act out the story with your family. Tell each other what it might have been like to be part of that team, and which part of the story you enjoyed the most. What do you think each team learned about God?

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BEAUTIFUL VARIETY

God loves variety! That's why He filled the world He made for us with countless kinds of people, flowers, insects, birds, fish, animals, trees, and other plants. Do something with your family to celebrate God's love of variety. Make a fruit or vegetable salad using lots of different fruits. Create a picture using every color of crayon, marker, or paint that you have. Go for a walk and listen for all the different birdsongs. Or collect as many different kinds of grass as you can find. Photograph or count all the different flowers or trees you can find in your garden, at a park, or along your walk. Think of all the ways the people in your own family are different and how those differences bring joy to you all. Thank God for His amazing love of variety!

THE KIND STRANGER

- · Gather some things together to tell the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Find some rough sackcloth to make a desert, a torn strip of fabric to make a path, some stones, a box to make an inn, seven little people from your toy box (or draw little people on paper or smooth stones), a tiny bottle of water, a strip of cloth for bandages, some small coins, a toy horse or donkey (or draw one on paper or a stone).
- Lay the rough cloth on the ground. Put some bigger stones under the cloth to make hills and
- some smaller stones on top to make hiding places for robbers. Arrange the torn strip of fabric to create a path over the ground. Place the little inn at one end of the path and put a person inside to be the innkeeper. Hide two people behind stones to be the robbers. Then use the other people to be the priest, the Levite, the man who gets robbed, and the good Samaritan.
- Act out the story in the scene. Let the Samaritan use the water and bandages to help the injured man and the coins to pay the innkeeper. At the end

- of telling your story, talk about who is the neighbor to the injured man—the Samaritan, the priest, the Levite, the robbers, and even you. And who is your neighbor?
- Jesus told this story to help people think about their unkind and disrespectful attitudes toward people who were different from them.
 He wanted His listeners to understand the importance of being kind and loving to everyone in the world. When we are kind and generous to others, they can see how loving and generous God is, too.



Take a large sheet of paper and draw the biggest possible heart on the paper. Imagine this is the heart of God. Everyone in the world is loved by God more than we could ever imagine! Write or draw something in the large heart to remind you of God's wonderful love for everyone. Or cut people's faces out of old magazines and see how many different faces you can stick inside the big heart. When you have finished, gather your family in a circle around the heart. Thank God for His amazing love for every unique person in the world. Ask God to show you how you can share His love with a lonely person today.

MAKE A REMINDER

God wants us to love everyone because each person is one of His children and one of our brothers and sisters. Gather your best craft supplies, natural materials, or whatever else you can find. Use them to create something special to remind your family that everyone in the world is precious to God. How does understanding God's love for everyone change how you see the people around you every day? How does that understanding change how you show them His love?

ACT IT OUT

Read John 3:16, 17. These are beautiful verses about God's love for everyone and how He longs for everyone to be saved. Work together with your family to create some actions to go with these two verses. Then show someone your actions, or make a video of yourselves to demonstrate these verses. Maybe you could find another way to share this good news with someone else.

JESUS INCLUDES EVERYONE!

While on earth, Jesus went out of His way to show that every single person was precious to Him, especially those who often felt ignored, unwanted, and unloved. Let's explore how Jesus included everyone. What can we learn from Him to help us be friends with people who are different from us?



PERSON	BIBLE STORY	HOW JESUS TREATED THEM AND WHAT HE DID FOR THEM	
A Roman centurion (foreign enemy)	Luke 7:1-10		
Mothers and children	Mark 10:13-16		
A man who made other people feel afraid	Matthew 8:28-34		
A foreign Canaanite woman with a sick child	Matthew 15:21-28		
A desperate man who was paralyzed	Luke 5:17-26		
A Samaritan woman	John 4:4-26		
A thief on the cross	Luke 23:39-43		
A woman who was being shamed in public	John 8:1-11		
A disciple who betrayed Him	John 21:1-19		
A tax collector	Luke 19:1-10		
A man with leprosy	Matthew 8:1-4		

Which of these stories do you like the best? How would you feel if you were a person in your favorite story and Jesus treated you with such warm kindness? How can you show the kindness of Jesus to everyone you meet?

BE A BLESSING

Think of someone who is from a different culture than yours. Perhaps they are a neighbor on your street or a new student in your school. Invite your family to pray together for this person. Ask God to show you how to welcome this person and their family into your home. Do something to make them feel special. Perhaps you could each share your favorite foods from your own culture. Listen to them so that you can understand more about their life, and find new ways to bless them with God's love.

BFLOVED BADGES





In one church all the children came together to make badges for all the adults. Every badge said: "I am a beloved child of God!" The children went into the church and pinned them on all the grown-ups. Some of the older people cried because they had never known how much God loved them until they read their badges. What could you do for the adults in your church to let them know that everyone is included in God's loving welcome?

Karen Holford is director of family, women's, and children's ministries for the Trans-European Division. She loves finding fun ways to share God's love with others!



Dear Deborah,

About two years ago, our family took a huge leap of faith. We moved very far away from family and close friends with high hopes of helping a struggling, culturally diverse, large congregation in an urban area. Thankfully, we were warmly welcomed and formed meaningful connections after just a few months.

But unfortunately, very little has changed with the initial church challenges we faced from day one. In fact, it seems worse. There are noticeable divisions, almost as if several separate churches are meeting under the same roof. The members seem to argue about everything, and the atmosphere feels stiff and awkward.

Naturally, we are disappointed and ready to move elsewhere. To be honest, I dread going to church each Sabbath. I don't know how we can make it another day. We desperately need help!

Signed, Ready to Give Up

Dear Ready to Give Up,

Change is tough. I've heard it said that sometimes things get worse before they get better. Not fun, but often true.

The good news, for starters, is that we all have one Father. This means that in Christ, we are brothers and sisters, "members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). The fact that the church is one big, diverse family is an incredible reality! The mere thought of it should propel us to praise God for His transforming love. We should also genuinely pray that all will live boldly and holy for Him in unity for this hurting and lonely world.

I'm confident your husband possesses a pastoral heart for his congregation, just as Paul did for the Ephesian believers. Perhaps it would be beneficial to engage the church in a series of messages focusing on who they are in Christ as it relates to their life challenges, differences of opinions, community, and individual relationship with Jesus.

As a follow-up, present hospitality seminars highlighting various ethnic/cultural groups, foods, Bible topics, etc. Afterward, implement monthly hospitality small-group meetings. Encourage individuals to sign up as hosts and others as the guests. Be creative and mix up the groups to foster meeting new people and learning more about them. Swap recipes and make it creative and fun!

Change does take time, but when we practice gratitude and hospitality (especially to those different from us), we show the church (and the world) that we serve a God who loves all people. In essence, we are preparing our hearts for heaven, and that is something to get excited about.

Don't give up just yet—a miracle may be in the making! "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

Sincerely, Deborah



East-Central Africa Division



In April 2021 Shepherdesses from North East Kenya Field spent a weekend together working on their continuing education. They took courses via Zoom and WhatsApp. They came together to pray, encourage one another, and finalize the remaining lessons. North East Kenya is a new field that currently does not have an office, yet they have started their ministry on a high note. Sitting in the front row are the East-Central Africa leaders, who came to support the group and praise God.



In April 2021 the North East Congo Union PKs (pastors' kids) organized a meeting with their parents. They shared the Word of God together, enjoyed a meal, and gave gifts to their parents.



To conclude the event, the parents prayed blessings over their children.



In April 2021 the North-West Burundi Field Shepherdesses held seminars for two days. They prayed for each other, encouraged one another, and had continuing education training.

West-Central Africa Division



In May 2021 the Mid-North Shepherdesses joined the service of one of the churches in Kintampo North District in Ghana.





On May 8, 2021, the Mid-North Ghana Conference Techiman Shepherdesses organized a one-day seminar followed by literature distribution as part of the "I Will Go" initiative.





The South Central Ghana Conference Shepherdesses conducted Retirees Welfare Services at the beginning of 2021. They took time to visit retirees and also distributed food.





In April 2021 Shepherdesses from Osun Conference in Western Nigeria held a prayer retreat.



Konongo Sector of South Central Ghana Conference Shepherdesses held a day of fellowship with Konongo Central Church. On April 17, 2021, special gifts were presented to the widows and older women in the church.



In May 2021 the MBA-Sanaga Conference hosted a Shepherdess retreat in Cameroon.



In May 2021 Shepherdesses from the Nyon et Afamba Conference held a retreat in Cameroon.



In May 2021 the West Cameroon Conference held a Shepherdess retreat.

Mark Finley

1 DAYS OF PRAYER

THE THREE ANGELS' CALL TO PRAYER

January 5-15, 2022

"Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people."

REVELATION 14:6, ESV

