

THE JOURNAL

A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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INTENSE EMOTIONS





SCAN TO READ ONLINE

ON THE COVER

Emotions affect every one of us. Sometimes they are passing feelings; other times they threaten to overwhelm us and cripple our daily functioning. In this issue you'll find insights, helpful advice, and inspiration from writers who have stared down difficult emotions and found a way to handle and even overcome them. They have turned to God and found resources that can also help you when intense emotions hit.



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MINISTRY TO PASTORAL SPOUSES AND FAMILIES DIVISION COORDINATORS:

East-Central Africa: Winfrida Mitekaro

Euro-Asia: Alla Alekseenko

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Southern Africa-Indian Ocean: Margret Mulambo

Southern Asia: Sofia Wilson

Southern Asia-Pacific: Orathai Chureson

Trans-European: Patrick Johnson

West-Central Africa: Sarah Opoku-Boateng

EDITORIAL OFFICE:

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600
Phone: 301-680-6513
Fax: 301-680-6502
Email: lowes@gc.adventist.org

Executive Editor: Janet Page
Assistant Editor: Lori Peckham
Senior Editorial Assistant: Shelly Lowe
Copy Editor: Becky Scoggins
Contributing Editors: Beth Thomas
and Jasmin Stankovic
Layout & Design: Erika Miike

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Anchor IN THE STORM

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

Hebrews 6:19 (NIV)

NATALIA* WAS JUST 15 when she met the love of her life . . . or so she thought. She was an only child with disconnected parents and a dysfunctional home environment. Love was not expressed nor validated. She longed for human warmth. When she met Matthew, he said everything she always wanted to hear. But it was short-lived. He left her as quickly as he arrived when Natalia became pregnant.

Her parents demanded that she abort the child or give it up for adoption; otherwise, she could no longer live in their house. These were the only words Natalia ever heard her parents speak about her pregnancy.

The adoptive parents were present at little Ben’s birth to take him away immediately. That was the last time Natalia allowed herself to feel any emotion and the last time she smiled at life. From then on, she sealed her pain and numbed her emotions with boys, alcohol, drugs, and travel.

HEALING JOURNEY

Fast-forward to present time. At the age of 55 Natalia found herself alone, bitter, resentful, guilty, ashamed, and incredibly angry. She never married or had any more children. And

on top of it all, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a disease in which the immune system eats away at the protective covering of nerves, resulting in nerve damage that disrupts communication between the brain and the body.

As Natalia’s therapist, I had the privilege of embarking on a healing journey with her. And what a journey of redemption it has been!

I explained to her that when we don’t take time to acknowledge, feel, and label the emotional pain we experience, we become dead inside and nonresponsive to the world. Life is meaningless, only lived for the moment.

It was challenging for her to open up. Her emotional container had been hermetically sealed for 40 years. Once she allowed herself to peek inside the part of her life that had been frozen for so long, suppressed feelings started melting away.



“Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.”

Psalms 62:5-7 (NIV)

We humans don't like to feel pain. Hence, instead of embracing it, we avoid it. We can avoid it for decades.

We live in a world of uncertainty. Life as we knew it will never be the same. The environment in which we live is out of our control. This alone can bring out major storms; add to that all the emerging emotions sealed away until now, evoked by all the changes, and things become even more complex. But Jesus is the anchor!

CALMING THE STORM


Think of an occasion when you went on a boat ride. Remember how relaxing it was, the beauty of the surroundings and perhaps the good company you shared this ride with. Imagine yourself in that scene.

On the way back to shore from your boat trip, a storm unleashes. You are so close to shore and yet you cannot make it because the storm is too vicious. Now there is only one thing to do. Drop anchor. The anchor does not change the storm, nor does it control it or stop it. The only thing the anchor does is to keep you from tossing around or being carried out to sea. The anchor keeps you put until the storm passes.

The storms are our emotions, negative cognitions, and harmful thinking patterns. These come when we least expect them, sometimes without warning. Until Jesus returns, we will encounter storms. Storms are part of life. Natalia ignored them for decades, continually swept away by feelings that left her in utter emotional exhaustion time and time again. She felt joyless and angry for most of her life.

Jesus and His disciples also faced a storm while crossing Lake Galilee. When they first left the shore, the water was so calm and still that Jesus fell asleep. And then it happened. The storm took the disciples by surprise. Terrified, they scrambled to save themselves, finally calling out to Jesus in fear for their lives. Immediately He stilled the waves, but He was disappointed by their lack of trust. The outcome could have been different if they'd anchored their faith in Jesus and waited in His presence until the storm passed.

These three steps allow us to drop anchor and safely wait for the emotional storm to pass:

1. *Acknowledge the pain.* Notice the emotions and name them. Our brain loves details. Call each emotion by name. Don't hold back.
2. *Pay attention to where in the body you feel the emotion.* Stress, fear, worries, anxiety, and other negative emotions fix themselves in our body. We feel them in our shoulders and stomach, and we can also experience heart palpitations, sweaty hands, rapid breathing, and headaches.
3. *Bring it to the Lord in prayer.* Sit with the Savior as you tell Him exactly what you are going through. This is your opportunity to tell Him (audibly, when possible) everything, in detail, about the pain you are feeling. This is therapy. Bring to memory significant Bible verses that will help you sit in peace while the storm passes. Express your gratitude for the good things (and not-so-good things) that allow you to bend down on your knees before the Creator. Sing worship songs and wait with Him. Find a way to worship Him. Get anchored in Him. The storm will pass, and instead of leaving you emotionally depleted, it will lead you closer to the Savior. The more you practice this process, the easier it will become to wait upon Him. 

* All names have been changed.

Jasmin Stankovic has been a pastor's wife for more than 20 years. She was born in Colombia but raised in Venezuela. She and her husband have three children, and they pastor three churches in Western Australia. Jasmin likes to preach, teach, and fellowship. She also helps manage the ministerial spouses Facebook page and is a contributing editor for The Journal. She holds a master's degree in counseling, and in her private practice she delights in helping others process their life's narratives. She says, "God is in the business of restoring lives. What a privilege it is to partner with Him as He writes redemptive stories."



Special Quotes

Often your mind may be clouded because of pain. Then do not try to think. You know that Jesus loves you. He understands your weakness. You may do His will by simply resting in His arms.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 251

Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 51

When depression settles upon the soul, it is no evidence that God has changed. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." You are sure of the favor of God when you are sensible of the beams of the Sun of righteousness; but if the clouds sweep over your soul, you must not feel that you are forsaken. Your faith must pierce the gloom. Your eye must be single, and your whole body shall be full of light. The riches of the grace of Christ must be kept before the mind. Treasure up the lessons that His love provides. Let your faith be like Job's, that you may declare, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Lay hold on the promises of your heavenly Father, and remember His former dealing with you and with His servants; for "all things work together for good to them that love God."

The Review and Herald, January 24, 1888

I am sometimes greatly perplexed to know what to do, but I will not be depressed. I am determined to bring all the sunshine into my life that I possibly can.

Letter 127, 1903

When someone asks how you are feeling, do not try to think of something mournful to tell in order to gain sympathy. Do not talk of your lack of faith and your sorrows and sufferings. The tempter delights to hear such words. When talking on gloomy subjects, you are glorifying him. We are not to dwell on the great power of Satan to overcome us. Often we give ourselves into his hands by talking of his power. Let us talk instead of the great power of God to bind up all our interests with His own. Tell of the matchless power of Christ, and speak of His glory. All heaven is interested in our salvation. The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They guard us against evil and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. Have we not reason to be thankful every moment, thankful even when there are apparent difficulties in our pathway?

The Ministry of Healing, p. 253



Intense EMOTIONS

WE ALL EXPERIENCE THEM, AND GOD CAN HELP US IN INCREDIBLE WAYS.

I WAS ON A WALK WITH LARRY, one of the dedicated church members in my new district.

“The church nominating committee would like to recommend that you serve as an elder during the coming year,” I said. “But they tell me that you have been asked every year for several years and always turn it down. Do you want to talk about it?”

He hesitated, then he spoke. “I think I can trust you, so I’ll tell you why. Everybody sees me as this wonderful person—except my family. They know what I’m really like, that I have a terrible temper. And if I were an elder, they would know I was a hypocrite. So I just say no. I’ve tried everything to get rid of my temper, but I can’t. Fifteen years ago, while in college, I was studying to be a pastor but changed my career because of my temper.”

I could feel Larry’s pain as he shared what had crippled his spiritual life for years. It was time to give him hope and a plan that would allow Jesus to transform him. “I want to give you an assignment that I believe will change you,” I said.

“I’ve tried everything.”

“Will you try one more thing?”

“Maybe. What is it?”

“You have a Bible?”

“Of course.”

“You know how to find the book of Ephesians in the Bible?”

“Of course.”

“Everybody sees me as this wonderful person—except my family.”

“Tonight, carve out time to be alone, open the Bible to Ephesians, and say this to God: ‘Please show me a verse that will really speak to my heart.’ Then start reading. Ask God to help you stay focused. I can’t tell you how long you will read, but God will show you a verse that will speak to you—maybe softly or maybe in a loud, powerful way. When you find that verse, say, ‘Thank You, Lord,’ and read it aloud several times. The verse will burn itself into your mind as you see it, say it, and hear it. Then write it down, along with a short prayer to God on why that verse really spoke to you. Tomorrow, start with the next verse and go through the same steps. We’ll get together a week from today, and I’ll ask you to share some of those verses and prayers with me. OK?”

“I’ll try it. I’ve never studied the Bible that way before.”

“Great! I believe God will speak to you in new ways.”

During the next few days, I asked God to speak to Larry through the Bible, to rewire Larry’s mind to reflect God’s ways of thinking and responding, and to honor Larry’s efforts to listen to His Word and build a new kind of relationship with Him.

At the end of the week, we got together. “So how did it go?” I asked.

“It was incredible.” Larry excitedly began sharing things from Ephesians that had spoken to his heart and what he had written back to God. He seemed like a new man. He was experiencing a spiritual breakthrough. He wanted to meet each week for several more weeks just to be sure he stayed on track. And a couple of

months later, he accepted the invitation of the church to serve as an elder. Soon he was preaching occasionally at a small church nearby. He told me his first sermon was from Ephesians 1.

AMAZING CHANGE

When God’s Word is allowed to carefully do its work, we should expect to see lives changed. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV).

Here are the parts of the Bible I recommend when people are experiencing intense emotions:

- Anger: Ephesians
- Fear: 1 John
- Lust: Matthew 5-7
- Discouragement: Philippians

But for true change to take place, we must allow God’s Word to have priority in our lives over any other media (movies, TV, YouTube, other books, and so on). Treating God with reverence means we also treat His Word, the Bible, with reverence.

In the Bible the word *fear* is sometimes used instead of *reverence*, which means the Bible describes two kinds of fear. Good fear comes from recognizing how powerful, wonderful, and majestic God is. It results in bowing before Him in reverence and worship. This is what it means when we hear the call to “fear God and give glory to Him” (Revelation 14:7). On the other hand, there is another kind of fear—a gut-wrenching terror that comes to people who hold on to a twisted idea of God that is completely unlike His character, causing them ultimately to back away from Him and into Satan’s arms.

When we take time each day to seek Jesus in Bible study and prayer, we begin to see God and ourselves differently. We see that He is far better than we ever imagined and that we are far needier than we ever realized. We begin to have a new identity in Jesus. We realize that, in Jesus, we are blessed, holy, blameless, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, and empowered. Each day Jesus gives us the good fear—a reverence for the One who made us—and takes away the bad fear that comes from a distorted picture of God’s character.

This daily communion with Jesus motivates us to give glory to God in all our decisions, including what we watch, listen to, say, eat, drink, and think. It takes away our fear of people who are threatening and intimidating. It helps us to shun evil, tell the truth, and hate covetousness. It gives us a sense of God's presence and love throughout the day. It allows God to write His law and character in our hearts and minds. It gives us a clearer picture of God's perfect, undying love for us. It allows Him to transform us!

Will you make time this week to take God seriously enough to reach decisions that will honor Him? Will you make time to carefully listen to His Word, the Bible, each day in order to build that forever friendship with Him? **■**

Dan Serns has traveled the world teaching and preaching about Jesus, Bible truth, and God's final movement on the earth. He is president of the Central California Conference, where he lives with his wife, Lois. They have three grown children. This article originally appeared in Dan's book True Stories of Changed Lives: How God's Final Message Is Transforming People.

Jesus changes lives!

Do you get chills at baptisms and delight in the stories that led people to a decision for Christ?

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FURTHER STUDY ON “FEARING” GOD

- What does it really mean to fear God? **Job 1:1**
- When we fear (or reverence) God, will our fear of people who are intimidating be taken away? **Exodus 1:17**
- What two additional character qualities are identified with fearing God? **Exodus 18:21**
- What will we obey as a result of showing reverence to God? **Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14**
- Can we reverence and glorify God by the way we treat our bodies? **1 Corinthians 6:19, 20**
- When we reverence the Lord, what other relationships will improve? **Colossians 3:17-21**
- When people see Jesus change us, will it help them to glorify God? **Luke 18:40-43**

I CHOOSE TO

- ☐ turn my back on evil influences (Job 1:8).
- ☐ eliminate from my life those things that do not glorify God (Revelation 14:6, 7; Philippians 4:8).
- ☐ invite the Lord to be the center of my home (Joshua 24:15).
- ☐ invite others to take God seriously in these last days before His return (Luke 23:39-42).

MY RESOLUTION

By His grace, I will honor and glorify Jesus in what I think, watch, listen to, say, touch, eat, and drink.

TIPS TO ~~SURVIVE~~ THRIVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

WHO COULD POSSIBLY DO more for our mental health and peace of mind than our faithful, loving God and our compassionate Redeemer? God's Word is *full* of beautiful promises to us . . . and God *always* keeps His promises! Would you like to commit to memory some of them for encouragement and peace, now and in the future?

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

"For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs" (Zephaniah 3:17, NLT).

"Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. . . . The Lord is good to those who depend on Him, to those who search for Him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord" (Lamentations 3:23-26, NLT).

"May the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful" (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, NLT).

"I am with you, and I will take care of you. I, the Lord, have spoken!" (Jeremiah 1:19, NLT).

"Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you" (Deuteronomy 31:6, NLT).

"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11, 12, KJV).

"The Lord says, 'I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation'" (Psalm 91:14-16, NLT).

"For God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5, 6, NLT).

"I am the LORD, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27, NLT).

"The Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever!" (2 Timothy 4:18, NLT).

"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand" (Philippians 4:4-7, NLT).

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). ■

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

I STILL love you

**"HOW DID YOU EVER THINK I COULD HANDLE THIS?"
I ASKED GOD AFTER THE TRAGIC DEATH OF MY SON.**

IN HIS POEM "Come Up From the Fields Father," Walt Whitman looks in on a family getting word from the battlefield. The poor soldier of whom Whitman writes will never be better, he says, but the stricken mother getting the message *needs* to be better. His few words tell as much as a whole book might. They remind me of a time in my own life.

Apricots were ripening on the tree by the driveway that July morning before dawn. In the front yard, leaves of the resurrection lilies lay heaped around the feet of the blooms risen on their tall, thin stems. My husband, Ken, our younger son, Dan, and I were sleeping in the white cottage we called home when there came a pounding on the front door. A floodlight streamed down the hall. Authorities had come to tell us there had been a freeway accident. Our older son, Tom, was dead.

If the horror of the accident was all over for Tom, for us it was just beginning. There were sisters, Sabrina and Su, to phone. Our call would cut their lives in two. There were duties to perform on that unthinkable day. We did them white-faced and sobbing. Friends called and brought us food. Flower arrangements began filling the living room. The friends kept us putting one foot in front of the other, and their flowers told us we were loved. But all we wanted was Tom.

The year following cannot—should not—be described. I journaled my grief in a little book with blue flowers on the cover. Into it I poured my anguish. I wrote the words a mourning mother says aloud with no irreverence at all: *O God*.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



Early on I decided to live and pointed my body at living. I attended women's Bible studies, signed up at a fitness club, and got my hair styled. With Ken I attended a grief seminar. I spent time with a counselor friend. "Jesus is trustworthy," I told myself over and over. Yet tears fell on my breakfast cereal. They erupted in the grocery store. When my chest hurt, I decided I had better quit crying. But when I did not cry, I could not swallow my food.

A passage in Isaiah spoke to me deeply in those early days (and does still, decades later). It goes like this: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God'?" (Isaiah 40:27).

In the passage God's people appear to have been complaining that God has not seen their situation and has not done for them what He ought. When I would read this verse, I always followed it with one that talked about how God keeps track of the stars. "Not one is missing," it says, and I underlined it fiercely (verse 26). But I was struggling. God had let my son die. Was my way hidden from the Lord? What about *my* just cause?

LIVE ON

To decide you will live when your child has died—and to actually live—are two different things. All that plodding year, questions hounded me. If I could have died for Tom, I would have done it in a minute. At times I lay across the bed and pleaded with God. "You said You would send the Comforter in answer to the prayer of faith. I need Him *now*."

After that prayer, I could always get up and walk again, and gratefully I took that as my answer. But the questions I asked were sometimes worthy of the Old Testament writers. "How did You ever think I could handle this?" I asked God. Implicit in this question was one I did not even recognize at the time: "*Do You still love me?*"

It was somewhere in the second year of my loss that a self-revelation occurred to me: *You decided you would live, but you are not living*. (I knew this was true.) *You need a project*.

A project? To a freelance writer such as I had been, "a project" could mean only one thing. And if we were talking about a project of any significance, we were talking about writing a book. But was there anything in the world that would stir me to write? Except for a few sorrowful verses, I had not been writing anything.

*"Jesus is trustworthy,"
I told myself over and
over.*

At that moment it seemed God laid His hand on my shoulder.

MOUNTAINTOP

The story of the early Waldenses was one my mother introduced to me when I was young. These Christians had clung to their faith when it was illegal. In the high valleys at the foot of the Alps they'd farmed, tended livestock, and taught their children from contraband scriptures. The setting for their lives was like that in the child's book *Heidi*. Theirs was the only story that stirred a spark of interest in my heart.

I ordered John Wylie's history of the Waldenses in paperback and tried to read it. It was a copy of Wylie's old book, complete with black and white etchings. The beautiful alpine valleys I loved to imagine were there all right, but the history was daunting. I was not a historian. I put the decision to write about the Waldenses on hold. Maybe it would be too much for me.

As devastated as he was by his own sorrow, Ken was aware of mine. He knew the thoughts I was entertaining and saw Wylie's history lying about the house. One day he came home from the university where he taught with a startling suggestion.

"I have a work-related convention in Brussels in September," he said. "If you'll go with me, after the convention we can take a train down to northern Italy and see some Waldensian country."

I am sure my jaw dropped. I do not enjoy flying. To cross the Atlantic had never been on my bucket list. But now—what was there to lose? I made what for me was an almost unthinkable decision. I would go.

From a phone contact, I learned about several high Waldensian valleys, one having a small town with a Waldensian church and museum in it. The town was Torre Pellice. (I couldn't even pronounce the name.) "We'll go *there*," I said. In late August I started packing my bags, slipping Wylie's history into one of them. In September we crossed the Atlantic.

As planned, on the Friday after the Brussels convention, Ken and I stepped off a little train at the end of a line in the hill country of northern Italy. We pulled our luggage up a hill into Torre Pellice, where the gray clouds hung low. It was drizzling and cold. Though there were Alps somewhere in the distance, we could not see them.

Ken went to find a motel while I stood with our luggage on a street corner at the top of the hill. It was Market Day. Locals swirled around me speaking their strange words and scarcely noticing I was there. Perhaps that street corner felt especially otherworldly because Ken and I were alone. We had no travel agent, no tour group, no connections, no car. We had dropped into this foothill town like space aliens. And in a few more hours it would be Sabbath.

MIRACLE?

Once settled in our motel room, I huddled under a blanket while Ken went out for a walk. When he returned, he had a sparkle in his eye. "Guess what!" he announced. "I've found a Seventh-day Adventist church!"

Now some things, like opening blind eyes or calming a storm with a few words, I call a *miracle*. But I use the word sparingly. For me, *providence* covers most remarkable occurrences in my life. That on Ken's short walk he would pass an Adventist church sign (in Italian) and, knowing a little Spanish, manage to read it and find the church smacked of providence. And that we would end up in a motel on the other side of the Atlantic within easy walking distance of a Seventh-day Adventist church? What would *that* be? The following morning we showed up at the small church meeting on the first floor of the pastor's home.

As it turned out, on that particular Sabbath a group of youth from another town was visiting the little church normally comprised of a few seniors. Among the visitors was a professional translator named Hannah. Hannah took me under her wing.

"We are here because this afternoon we're going into the mountains to see some historic Waldensian sites," Hannah informed me. She grinned. "We promise some good Italian mud in the mountains!"

I pulled Wylie from my bag and showed it to Hannah. "I'm thinking of writing about the Waldenses," I told her. "But I don't see how I can go. I have only this one pair of shoes."

Hannah looked thoughtful. "I think you should come," she said.

That afternoon Ken and I (I, outfitted with "a pair" of plastic grocery bags over my shoes) rode in a convoy with young Italian Adventists into the mountains. The narrow road wound past chalets, fall flowers, and meadows out of *Heidi*. It was wonderful. But it was not until we were padding down a damp, wooded path toward a cave where Waldenses had worshipped and died for their faith that the sense of wonder swept over me.

I turned to Ken. "We never could have planned this!" I said. At that moment it seemed God laid His hand on my shoulder. "*Your son died,*" I could almost hear the words, "*but I still love you.*"

All that afternoon I filled my soul. We went into the dark, historic cave and prayed where a shaft of light reached through an opening in the rocks. We visited an old Waldensian church beside a torrent rushing out of the hills and climbed to the little Waldensian college where early pastors studied in safety above the snowline in winter.

"How often do you come here?" I asked Hannah as we left the college.

She thought for a moment. "Oh. I think we came about seven years ago."

I made a mental note of one more providence. I would add another to my list when the pastor asked Ken how we found the church. "We saw the sign," Ken explained.

The pastor seemed to marvel. "We just put that sign up about two weeks ago."

In bed that night I relived my astonishing day. "Lord," I said, "You've already done so much for me! But before we go, I would really love to see the Alps!" All day Sunday we were still immersed in gray clouds. On Monday at noon we would take the train out.

Monday morning as we were preparing to leave, Ken called me to look out a small window high on the bathroom wall. Through that little window I could see clouds moving this way and that. Splendid patches of blue appeared among them. Throwing on our coats, Ken and I hurried to the edge of town and looked across the valley. There they were—the Alps I would put in my book! They were dusted with snow and lay against the horizon like the sure, immovable love of God. On the train out later that day, I would sit facing back and treat my eyes to those white promises until they were out of sight. ■

Ann Cunningham Burke lives in Southern California, with a view of the San Bernardino Mountains through her apartment window. To the Last Drop of Our Blood: A Story of Government and Religion, a book about the Waldenses and the separation of church and state, was published by TEACH Services, Inc., in 2006.



20 TIPS FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

HOW TO NURTURE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN YOUR FAMILY

SARAH'S PARENTS HAD BOTH lost their parents and experienced abuse in their homes. They started their adult lives running away from their families and making unwise choices. They met and married under difficult circumstances and lived in a city that was heavily bombed in World War II. Sarah's father was an ambulance driver who served during the London Blitz, and he was deeply traumatized by what he saw and experienced. Unable to believe that God could let such things happen, he became an alcoholic.

Sarah met Johnny, whose family had also experienced tragedies and severe poverty. Even though the couple didn't have good role models, they set out to raise their family as Adventist Christians with a healthy picture of a loving and gracious God, healthy relationships, a positive mental attitude, and good values. It wasn't easy because there weren't many books about positive parenting when they started their family. But they prayed and gathered what they had learned about God and relationships from the Bible, from *The Adventist Home*, and from the role models of pastors, youth leaders, and well-functioning families. They managed to raise their three children with tender love and grace, without passing on any trauma from their own families onto future generations.

It's more important than ever to make our homes places of love, peace, joy, hope, and healing, giving our children the best foundation for their mental, spiritual, physical, and relational well-being. In this broken world we are all vulnerable to various kinds of illness, including mental illness. Here are 20 tips we can use to support good mental health in our families.

- Pray for wisdom to guide your family through the complex issues and seasons of life. Prepare well for the next stage in your family life by reading books and going to seminars.
- Keep growing your relationship with an ever-loving, ever-present, ever-gracious God, who delights in you as His son or daughter (2 Peter 1:5-11).
- Help your children to experience that God totally loves them, that Jesus died to show us God's love, that God is with them every moment of the day, and that they bring joy to Him. Make sure they have the most loving picture of God you can give to them (Psalm 103).

SCAN FOR AUDIO



They managed to raise their children without passing on any trauma from their own families.

- Have a few simple rules that are enforced lovingly, calmly, and gently. Physical punishment, harshness, and shouting are hurtful, abusive, and shaming to children and can cause mental health issues.
- Place forgiveness and grace at the center of your family so your children will find it easier to accept God's forgiveness and grace. Don't misrepresent our loving God by saying that He is not pleased with them, that He will stop loving them, or that He wants to punish them. His perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).
- God said that loneliness isn't good for human beings. Make sure your children know you will always love them, no matter what they do. Children are more likely to misbehave when they feel disconnected from you, so show them your love in creative ways.
- Comfort them when they are sad, as God comforts all His children in distress (Genesis 2:18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7).
- If you have a conflict with your child, mend the relationship before bedtime. Disconnection from parents and conflicts that aren't resolved before sleep can increase the risk of anxiety and depression.
- Model healthy conflict resolution in your marriage. A loving and peaceful home is a huge support for good mental health.
- Notice God's blessings and gifts to your family. Share gratitude together (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Look for where God is at work in the world and find ways to join Him in His mission of compassion to your local community. Being kind to others helps protect our mental wellness.
- Make worships and Sabbaths positive and enjoyable. When children are happy during worships, church, and Sabbath, they are more likely to fall in love with God (Isaiah 58:13).
- Listen to your children. Invite them to talk about anything that troubles them so they learn to talk to God about everything too. When we listen lovingly to our children, we can often help them with their difficult thoughts and experiences before they become problematic (James 1:19).



- Help your children learn as many words as possible to describe their feelings. The easier it is to identify their feelings, the easier it will be to express them appropriately when they need to.
- Be a positive role model. Infuse your family life with activities and conversations that focus on healthy emotions. See the children's pages in this issue for some simple ideas.
- Make sure your words and actions are in harmony. Children find it very confusing when you say one thing but act quite differently.
- Help your children to develop in their unique and God-created way and to feel positive about the body and skills God has given to them. Let them explore different interests so they can discover their joys and skills. Support them in their own choices of studies and work, rather than expecting them to do what you did, or what you wish you could have done. Develop their character strengths too.

Don't misrepresent our loving God.

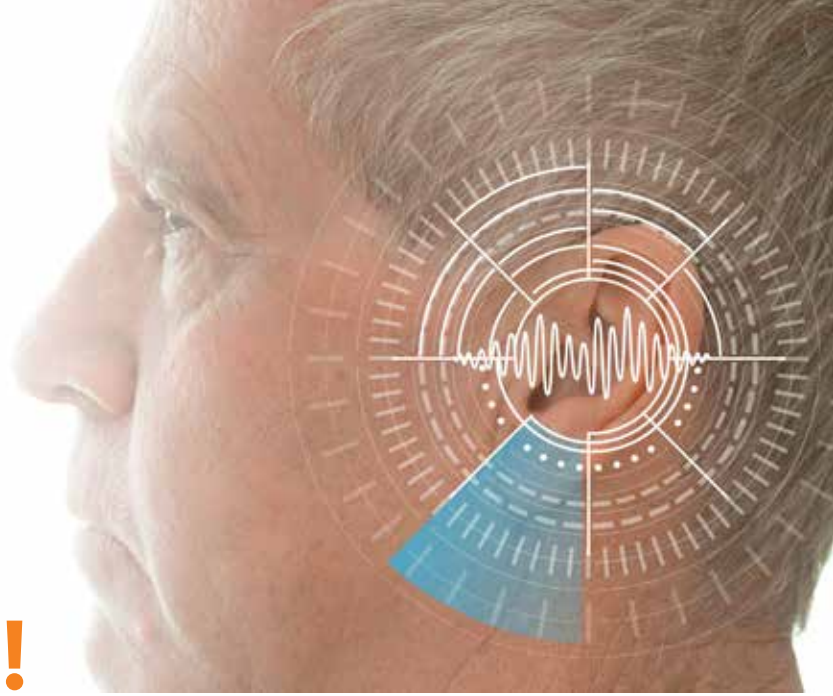
- Don't show favoritism. Bible stories reveal how painful and disastrous it is. We are all equally precious in God's sight (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11).
- Speak positively and kindly to your children to embed healthy thoughts in their minds (Ephesians 4:29).
- Design your home to be well-ordered, tidy, clean, and peaceful. But don't make cleanliness and tidiness a burden. Let children have a few toys at a time so it's easier for them to tidy up. Train them to be tidy and organized, because when we live in a muddle it creates extra anxiety and stress.

Keep learning how to support the well-being of children and young people. There are many things we can do to protect and nurture good mental health in our families when we prioritize it as Sarah and Johnny did. It's just as important to care for our mental health as it is for our spiritual and physical health, because all these dimensions affect each other.

Karen Holford has graduate degrees in developmental psychology, family therapy, and leadership. She is particularly interested in how homes and families can nurture people's well-being.



HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR!



“EVERYTHING IS SO QUIET. I can’t even hear the engine,” commented my husband as we sat in the car ready to exit our garage. “Maybe I’m going deaf,” he stated grimly.

My husband had no history of hearing problems, yet it had become obvious over the past few weeks that something was changing. It caught my attention and concern initially when he complained of some discomfort in one ear.

In the days and weeks that followed, he had to ask me and others increasingly to repeat comments and questions. There were also incidents of his obviously not hearing elements of conversation and sounds at normal volume. Not being a person inclined to seek medical evaluation for every complaint, he preferred to wait the situation out, hoping the problem would clear itself up. However, on the day of his comment in the garage, I knew we were in for an interesting experience.

I CAN’T HEAR YOU

His hearing was worse than ever that morning. It was Sabbath, and we were leaving to visit a church in another city. My husband had accepted a preaching appointment there, and we were prepared to stay for the fellowship lunch. We didn’t converse much on our one-and-a-half-hour trip, as he had difficulty hearing me speak unless I shouted.

We had visited this church many months previously when my husband’s hearing ability was normal, so we were acquainted with the friendliness and warmth of this small group of worshippers. It was no surprise, therefore, that after becoming aware of our problem, they demonstrated utmost kindness and understanding.

The sermon went very well, but the fellowship lunch experience was memorable. My poor husband was seriously compromised in trying to effectively converse with people, and I was kept on my toes in efforts to assist him and others in their communication attempts. In some ways it was a comical situation, but also stressful for us both.

*“Maybe I’m going deaf,”
he stated grimly.*



SCAN FOR AUDIO

He Who Has Ears, Let Him Hear!

“Ears that hear and eyes that see—the Lord has made them both.”

Proverbs 20:12 (NIV)

HOW HEARING WORKS

Major areas of the ear include the external ear, the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear. Sounds enter through the external ear and travel through the outer ear canal, then cause vibrations to the eardrum at the entrance to the middle ear. The three small bones of the middle ear amplify these vibrations as they progress to the inner ear. At this point the vibrations pass through fluid in the snail-like structure in the inner ear called the cochlea. The tiny hairs attached to the nerve cells in the cochlea help convert the vibrations into electrical signals, which are transmitted to the brain. The brain then turns these signals into sounds that help us identify and understand what we are hearing. Anything that disrupts the vibration or electrical impulse progression of sound through this process can alter or hinder the final effect of completed transmission and clear interpretation.

CAUSES OF HEARING LOSS

Many people suffer hearing loss to some degree as they age. Age-related decrease in hearing can happen gradually and may not be obvious in its progression. Other risk factors to hearing ability can include:

2. Illnesses, particularly those that include high fevers
3. Ear infection to the outer or inner ear
4. A history of frequent ear infections
5. An injury to the head or to the eardrum
6. The presence of a foreign body within the inner ear
7. An abnormal bone growth or the presence of a tumor
8. The effects of some medications
9. A buildup of excessive earwax within the inner ear, causing blockage to sound waves
10. Hereditary tendencies related to various aspects of the ear mechanism

Many causes of hearing loss cannot be reversed. However, in the best interest of effective treatment, it is advisable to seek medical evaluation early, especially in situations of rapid hearing loss, discomfort, or pain. The good news is that there is often effective medical treatment available as well as innovative devices that can be very beneficial in restoring lost hearing to some degree.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

Seek medical evaluation as soon as possible if you have a sudden loss or accelerated diminishing of hearing ability in one or both ears. In specific instances early treatment is key to effectiveness. Some signs and symptoms that are causes for concern can include:

- Having to continually ask others to speak louder or repeat a question or comment
- Needing to increase the volume of the television or radio in order to hear more clearly
- Withdrawing from the conversation of others
- Inability to hear sounds that were previously clear, such as your vehicle's motor

1. EXPOSURE TO LOUD NOISES OVER TIME OR FROM A SHORT BLAST



- Hearing loss associated with pain, discomfort, or a ringing in the ear
- Hearing loss that is disrupting your normal daily routine

CARING FOR YOUR EARS

We don't tend to think as much about care for our ears as we do for our teeth or eyes—that is, until something goes wrong with our hearing. Hearing loss can significantly decrease quality of life, contributing to feelings of isolation, depression, cognitive impairment, and decline. Preventing hearing impairment is important and should include:

Protection: from exposure to cold, from frequent or sudden loud noise, and from injury to the ear or head.


Hearing Testing: especially if working in a noisy location or when experiencing hearing changes.

Safe Cleaning Method: Most people don't need to clean their ears regularly, as earwax usually can take care of itself. However, in instances of wax buildup, it is advisable to follow medical advice regarding treatment. Never insert anything smaller than “your elbow” into the ear, as wax may be pushed deeper into the ear canal, causing impaction or irreversible injury to the eardrum. Use Q-tips only to clean the external ear or the part of the ear you can see.

HAPPY ENDING

After returning home that Sabbath evening, my husband at last made the decision to have his ears checked by our medical professional son and daughter-in-law. They found seriously impacted wax in both of his ears. They worked carefully and efficiently at removing the wax

over the following hour, and as they progressed successfully in their efforts, my husband's hearing ability improved accordingly. His joy was complete when he could once again hear our grandson speaking to him.

Ears bless us with not only physical hearing ability but also the capacity to hear with our hearts—people's voice inflections, the sounds of children laughing, soul-stirring music, the whispers and songs of nature, the verbal expression of a beautiful prayer or stirring sermon, the voices of family and loved ones. These all testify to another marvelous gift given to us by a loving Creator through the intricate structure, marvelous mechanism, and amazing blessing of our ears. 

INFORMATION SOURCES:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hearing-loss/symptoms-causes/syc-20373072>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/hearing-loss/types-of-hearing-loss>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-clean-your-ears#best-practices>

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.

MARRIED TO A PASTOR?

Discover a safe place to fellowship, ask questions and learn from others on Facebook and Twitter!



Official groups for Ministry Spouses online:

 [ministerialspouses](https://www.facebook.com/ministerialspouses)
 [@ministryspouses](https://twitter.com/ministryspouses)
 [@gc_ministerial_spouses](https://www.instagram.com/gc_ministerial_spouses)



AN *Anxious* MIND

PANIC ATTACKS AND ANXIETY DISORDERS WERE CRIPPLING MY LIFE.

RACING HEARTBEAT. TINGLY HANDS. Dizziness. Difficulty breathing. And worst of all, a palpable sense of impending doom. All my symptoms pointed toward one conclusion: I was dying. Right there, stuck in a traffic jam on Chicago's Dan Ryan Expressway, *I was going to die*. At least, that's what I thought.

Panic attacks will do that to a person—make you think you're having a heart attack, experiencing a brain aneurysm, or facing some other fatal physical dysfunction. Of course, nothing of the sort is actually taking place. In reality, it's just that your fight-or-flight response has kicked into gear. But as adrenaline runs rampant throughout your body, you're convinced that your life plug is being yanked out of its wall socket.

In my case, I couldn't drive more than a few blocks from home alone without being gripped in terror. Only if I had a "safe person" with me could I go much farther. This kind of thinking obviously led to my having a very dysfunctional life. Allow me to share my personal experience.

KING OF EXCUSES

"Randy, could you go over and measure the Jacksons' house for carpet installation?" Working my way through college, I'd often dodge such simple requests from my boss, the owner of the floor coverings store where I worked. Had the gentleman not already been bald, I'm sure he would have lost a great deal of hair from scratching his head in wonder at my strange (and apparently rebellious) responses. Thank God he was a man of grace!



SCAN FOR AUDIO



It was one of the most difficult phone calls I'd ever made.

But real trouble surfaced as I neared the end of my nine-quarter graduate seminary training. In order to earn my master of divinity degree, I needed to attend several weeks of training in Chicago, Illinois. Ironically, the training center was just a few miles away from where I'd had that horrible panic attack on the Dan Ryan Expressway!

"I can't leave my job just to go with you for a few weeks," my wife, Diana—my "safe person"—said. She was right, of course. In the end, I quit seminary and went to work full-time at the floor coverings store.

Shame is a constant companion of those suffering from mental illness, and I was no exception. *Why can't I just think my way beyond this whole situation?* I wondered. *And what about God? Why doesn't He step in to fix things?*

A LIGHT TURNS ON

At the time, I didn't know that anyone else in the entire world was suffering as I did. I certainly didn't know that any of this had a name—until one night I happened to hear a radio interview. "Persons with agoraphobia often can't go places alone," said the interviewee. "Since they've had panic attacks, they begin avoiding places where they might have another one."

Why, that's me! I thought excitedly. At least now I knew this monster had a name: *agoraphobia*. Maybe there was hope for me after all! And it was the hope factor that kept me going year after year. Oh, I tried to fix the problem on my own. But self-help books and even psychotherapy didn't make much difference. At least, I wasn't any closer to feeling "normal" than I'd been a decade or more earlier. If anything, the demon of anxiety disorders was more deeply entrenched than ever.

As it turned out—and I think God had a hand in what eventually took place—I was able to finish my seminary degree in Seattle, Washington, where Diana and I had moved. But panic disorder and agoraphobia still ruled the day. Unable to properly carry out my pastoral duties due to my problems with traveling, I resigned after a little more than a year.

Eventually, I was offered an editorial position at a Christian publishing firm. I excelled at this vocation, but after 10 successful years, I turned down the invitation to become the senior editor of the publication for which I'd served as assistant and associate editor. Not that I'd wanted to decline, but the inability to travel was the continuing deal breaker. When I found myself turning down the position a second time due to my dysfunction, I grew desperate. I knew it was time to swallow any pride I had left and do a very hard thing.

MAKING THE CALL

"Um, yes, I'd like to make an appointment with a psychiatrist," I told the receptionist over the phone. It was one of the most difficult phone calls I'd ever made. After all, who wants to admit they have a mental illness, let alone make an appointment with a "shrink"? But as it turned out, that phone call made all the difference in the world.



*“I think
I can
help
you.”*



When the day of the appointment arrived, I found myself face-to-face not with a bearded, spectacle-wearing Sigmund Freud clone, but with a completely normal-looking professional. Dr. Wagner not only turned out to be knowledgeable but also reflected a sincerely caring demeanor. It didn't take him long to confirm my self-diagnosis. And then the good doctor uttered six life-changing, hope-inducing words: *“I think I can help you.”*

Dr. Wagner explained to me the combined power of appropriate medication with therapy and the regular practice of long-lost behaviors such as driving alone. But I had a continuing concern: “Will the medication turn me into somebody I'm not?” I asked apprehensively. Dr. Wagner smiled and informed me that I was not destined to grow a third ear or become a serial killer.


Indeed, since those days, the medication he prescribed has had quite the opposite effect. It has actually helped me to become *more* of the person God intended me to be. How? By enabling me to interact with others and the world at large in ways that I simply couldn't have while bearing the oppressive weight of my anxiety disorder.

It took several months to fully experience the joy of rising above anxiety disorders. I learned to love flying on airplanes to meet various professional appointments. And today, instead of causing anxiety, driving alone in a car often brings me feelings of great satisfaction and peace.

Am I totally “healed”? Since I think anxiety disorders are a complex interweaving of biology and environment, I don't know that total “healing” is the goal. In my case, I can still feel anxious sometimes. But my life was rescued from suffering beyond my wildest dreams, and that's good enough for me. Maybe the next generation of intervention will provide biochemical and behavioral healing to an even fuller expression. But I'm satisfied with my life today, which is a huge deal given where I was years ago.

Yes, I found a solution to rising above anxiety disorders. My solution may not be your solution, but today, more than ever before, hope and help are available to address your mental health challenge. If you're suffering as I once did, I urge you to shed the shame, poke stigma in the eye, and get on with your life.

How? A first step should be contacting the right healing professional(s) to help in relaunching your life. As for divine intervention, God's healing touch won't necessarily come through miraculous healing (though it might), but that doesn't mean He's out of the picture. More often than not, He uses human instruments to heal and transform. So while calling upon God for healing is a good thing, calling a psychiatrist and other healing professionals can be a key part in heaven's ultimate healing protocol.

Anxiety disorders are no fun. I know from firsthand experience that they can derail your plans for life. The good news is that you can get back on track and enjoy life in a way that you may have long ago abandoned as unachievable. Trust me—you *can* rise above anxiety disorders. But it's up to you to make the call. 

Randy Fishell is editor of *Guide* magazine, a character-building story publication for Seventh-day Adventist young people ages 10-14. He is the author of the book *An Anxious Kind of Mind: A True Story About Anxiety Disorders*, available at adventistbookcenter.com and Amazon.com. This article originally appeared in *Signs of the Times*, May 2019.

East-Central Africa Division



Shepherdesses from Southern Tanzania Union Mission sang and participated in various activities during an ordination ceremony.

Southern Asia-Pacific Division

Through fundraising efforts from *A Glimpse of God's Grace* book sales, pastoral spouses provided an educational relief fund to 175 PKs (pastors' kids). These are from low-income pastoral families who serve in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Soon assistance will be given to Pakistan Union's PK families also.



Books were sold to raise funds to help low-income pastoral families in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

The coordinator of the Myanmar Union Mission Ministerial Spouses Association reports wonderful progress on Total Member Involvement in Myanmar. Even under the uncertainties, risks, and challenges with the political situation, as well as the gigantic waves of COVID-19, the union and five missions continue to work together. A children's evangelistic series was held in September and

October 2021. The children of the pastors preached, and the children of lay members participated through witnessing with their talents and gifts. Approximately 500 individuals, both adults and children, participated virtually during the meetings, and at the end 75 children were baptized. We praise God for their resilient spirit and the continuing focus on mission and discipleship.



PKs held evangelistic meetings in Myanmar.

Sabah Adventist Mission Ministerial Spouses Association in Sabah, Malaysia, held their first virtual graduation on November 21, 2021. Their programs are watched by over 1,000 viewers via different media platforms such as Facebook and Hope Channel Sabah. You can view the program here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrfBMzptXVc>.



Sabah Mission Ministerial Spouses Association held a virtual graduation.

West-Central Africa Division

Western Nigeria Union held Shepherdess meetings in September 2021 in Akure, Nigeria. Seven presenters spoke on the theme of "Like Jesus in Team Ministry, I Will Go."



In September 2021, Shepherdesses met in Western Nigerian Union.



Ellen White

AND MENTAL HEALTH

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM HER EXPERIENCES AND ADVICE?

ELLEN G. WHITE WAS ONE of the three principal founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She held a unique leadership role in the emerging church: she had the gift of prophecy. In her public ministry of more than 70 years, she received hundreds of visions and dreams with messages ranging from personal counsel to issues pressing upon the newly founded church—in such areas as faith and doctrine, organization and mission, health and education, and so on. Although she wrote prolifically and with authority, she never understood her writings to be additional Scripture. Throughout her life and ministry, she pointed to the Bible as the Christian's rule of faith and practice.

One of her major roles was to help individuals and the church organization to understand and follow God's will. Though she had no formal mental health training, she often served as a spiritual counselor for people who had various emotional and psychological needs. She touched the lives of thousands and gave them new hope with a healthy spiritual, mental, and emotional focus. Her extensive writings demonstrate sympathy for mental health issues. Among other material, she wrote an important chapter titled "Mind Cure" in her book *The Ministry of Healing*. In 1977, the Ellen G. White Estate published a two-volume compilation titled *Mind, Character, and Personality: Guidelines for Mental and Spiritual Health*.

This article will briefly present Ellen White's understanding of mental health, her personal and family experiences, and her role as a counselor on issues affecting mental health.

WHAT'S MENTAL HEALTH?

When Ellen White used the term "mental health," she associated it with "mental clearness, calm nerves, a quiet, peaceful spirit like Jesus."¹ In order to understand her observations on mental health issues, it is necessary to understand her use of nineteenth-century language. For example, she used the words "diseased imagination" to refer to delusional thinking or emotional imbalance and "despondency, which increases to despair" when speaking of depression.² She also used the term "mind cure" to describe mental health issues.

Ellen White's understanding of human nature was based on the biblical view that human nature is inherently sinful and needs external help from God. To her, Jesus was the great healer of the sin-damaged human mind. "It is impossible for us, of ourselves," she wrote, "to escape from the pit in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them." She then quoted Job 14:4 and Romans 8:7 to support this view. She continued: "Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They

may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before [men and women] can be changed from sin to holiness.”³

For Ellen White, there was a convergence of psychology and theology. The two must interplay and, when correctly integrated, provide the most help for the human mind and emotions. For her the true source of mental and emotional health was God the loving Father, Jesus the “Great Physician,” and the Holy Spirit the “Counselor.”

Ellen White strongly advocated a proper connection between the physical, mental, and spiritual in the human experience. “The spiritual life is built up from the food given to the mind; and if we eat the food provided in the Word of God, spiritual and mental health will be the result.”⁴ True mental health was dependent upon establishing a proper balance between the body and the mind. “We cannot afford to dwarf or cripple a single function of the mind or body, by overwork or abuse of any part of the living machinery.”⁵ She used the phrase “physical and mental health” to show the link between the two: the physical and mental dimensions are closely connected and require proper balance and care. She believed that a right environment, right actions, and a proper diet facilitated mental health. She was also a strong advocate of the healing benefits of nature, a right attitude, and acts of service for others.⁶

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Ellen White’s philosophy on mental health, while informed by her study of the Bible and her visions, was connected to her own experience. Through her long life, she was no stranger to emotional pain and psychological challenges. As a child she was introverted, shy, and emotionally sensitive. To this was added the complication of a physical disability. During her younger years, she experienced fearfulness and hopelessness that brought about protracted periods of depression. In addition to her personal struggles, her immediate family was touched with mental disability issues.

Ellen White’s fundamental touchstone for mental and emotional health was an understanding of the loving character of God. As a child she viewed God as a “stern tyrant compelling men to a blind obedience.”⁷ When preachers would describe the fires of an eternally burning hell, she personalized the horror of that experience. She wrote: “While listening to these terrible descriptions, my imagination would be so wrought upon that the perspiration would start, and it was difficult to suppress a cry of anguish, for I seemed already to feel the pains of perdition.”⁸ This led her to doubt her acceptance by God and caused periods of depression. She recalled one occasion: “Despair overwhelmed me, and . . . no ray of light pierced the gloom that encompassed me.”⁹ Her “feelings were very sensitive” and at one point she feared she would “lose” her “reason.” Ellen White recollected that “sometimes for a whole night” she would not dare to close her eyes but “kneel upon the floor, praying silently with a dumb agony that cannot be described.”¹⁰

Her pre-teen and early-teen years were burdened by physical disability. She was severely injured through an accident at about age 9. A broken nose with other complicating damage caused equilibrium problems and prevented her from continuing her education. She also developed a chronic pulmonary disorder that was diagnosed at the time as “dropsical consumption,” or in modern terms, “tuberculosis with complicating congestive heart failure.” Her fears were exacerbated by the thought that she could bleed out at any time from an arterial rupture in her lungs.¹¹ Her physical and emotional trauma combined with her introverted personality prevented her from seeking help.

Finally, at about age 15, she talked with someone who helped her to better understand the loving character of God. She pointed to her interview with Levi Stockman, a Millerite Methodist minister, as providing her with the most help. Stockman was sympathetic to Ellen’s emotional pain and even shared her tears. She wrote that she “obtained” from Stockman “more knowledge on the subject of God’s love and pitying tenderness, than from all the sermons and exhortations to which I had ever listened.”¹² She specifically identified what helped her most: “My views of the Father were changed. I now



Her extensive writings demonstrate sympathy for mental health issues.

looked upon Him as a kind and tender parent. . . . My heart went out towards Him in a deep and fervent love.”¹³ The love of God became Ellen White’s favorite theme throughout her life. She also believed that “Christ’s favorite theme was the paternal tenderness and abundant grace of God.”¹⁴ Her five-volume masterpiece series on the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan begins and ends with this theme.¹⁵ Her most popular book (*Steps to Christ*), published in scores of languages with millions of copies, has as its first chapter “God’s Love for Man.”¹⁶

Ellen White’s own visions and dreams confirmed her conviction of a loving God and compassionate Savior. An early personal dream that occurred before her first prophetic vision brought her into the presence of Jesus, where she realized He knew all her “inner thoughts and feelings.” Yet, even with this knowledge He “drew near with a smile,” laid His hand on her head, and said, “Fear not.”¹⁷ In an interview in the last year of her life, Ellen White said, “I find tears running down my cheeks when I think of what the Lord is to His children, and when I contemplate His goodness, His mercy, [and] His tender compassion.”¹⁸

FAMILY CHALLENGES

Besides her own emotional struggles during childhood and at times during adulthood, Ellen White faced mental health challenges within her family. Her second son, James Edson, evidenced some of the characteristics of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Her niece, Louisa Walling, seems to have had some mental instability with a divorce from her husband. Out of concern for Louisa’s two children, James and Ellen White brought them into their home. Ellen White ended up raising the girls, and they called her mother.¹⁹ Even James White suffered from a series of strokes during the 1860s and 1870s that altered his mental state and brought marital conflict. In 1879 Ellen White realized her husband did not “have sufficient physical and mental health” to give

counsel and advice.²⁰ At one point she wondered if he was a “sane man.”²¹

Ellen White’s personal experience, combined with her visionary guidance, helped her to provide a unique ministry to individuals who also suffered with mental and emotional brokenness. Her writings reveal a consistent compassion for people who sometimes had serious life dysfunction. She engaged to a remarkable degree in close personal work with many such people.

ELLEN WHITE AS A COUNSELOR

Throughout her life, Ellen White addressed mental health and social dysfunction issues. Her scope of interaction with people was varied and diverse. Below are four examples that show how she addressed serious mental health issues, such as obsessive behavior, emotional abuse, alcohol addiction, and sexual dysfunction.

Obsessive behavior. Ellen White’s letter to “Brother Morrell” shows her perception of his mental condition. She described this man as having “large conscientiousness” and “small self-esteem.” It seems that Morrell was obsessive and pathologically perfectionist about his conduct. He felt guilty for the smallest perceived mistake, to the point of mental instability. White wrote of this man’s condition thus: “Brother Morrell’s nervous system is greatly affected and he ponders over these things [his perceived sins and failings], dwelling upon them. His imagination is diseased. . . . The mind has suffered beyond expression. Sleep was driven from him.” She wrote directly: “I saw, Brother Morrell, you must cast away your fears. Leave consequences with the Lord and let go. You try too hard to save yourself, to do some great thing yourself which will commend you to God. . . . Jesus loves you, and if you will consecrate yourself and all you have to Him, He will accept you and will be your Burden-bearer, your never-failing Friend. . . . Believe Jesus loves you and in your efforts to obey the truth, if you err, don’t feel that you must worry and worry, give up your

*Through her
long life, she
was no stranger
to emotional
pain and
psychological
challenges.*



confidence in God and think that God is your enemy. We are erring mortals.” As a complement to her spiritual and emotional-related counsel, she urged this man to adopt health reform and avoid stimulants. “Then,” she wrote, “can the brain think more calmly, sleep will not be so uncertain.”²²

Emotional abuse. Ellen White wrote several letters of counsel to women who were either emotionally or physically controlled by their husbands. In December 1867, she visited the Washington, New Hampshire, Seventh-day Adventist Church with her husband and J. N. Andrews. She first gave oral counsel and followed up with a written “testimony” based on a vision she had received. She provided pointed counsel to Harriet Stowell. After the death of her first husband, Harriet married Freeman S. Stowell, who was 12 years younger and was not practicing his faith.²³ Ellen White’s words are clear and explain the situation: “She [Harriet] is beloved of God, but held in servile bondage, fearing, trembling, desponding, doubting, very nervous. Now this sister should not feel that she must yield her will to a godless youth who has less years upon his head than herself. She should remember that her marriage does not destroy her individuality. God has claims upon her higher than any earthly claim. Christ has bought her with His own blood, she is not her own. She fails to put her entire trust in God, and submits to yield her convictions, her conscience to an overbearing, tyrannical man, fired up by Satan when his Satanic majesty can make effectual to intimidate the trembling, shrinking soul who has so many times been thrown into agitation that her nervous system is torn to pieces and she [is] nearly a wreck.”²⁴

Ellen White supported individuality in marriage and rejected the idea that a spouse must give up his or her personality and self-identity. This testimony was a help to this woman who was driven almost to emotional collapse.

Alcohol addiction. In a letter to a troubled young man in England, Ellen White recognized the effect of alcohol



The love of God became Ellen White’s favorite theme throughout her life.

addiction. Henri Frey worked as a translator for the European mission in Basel, Switzerland. He had a drinking problem. Because of his actions, he was removed from his position as translator. He then wrote Ellen White that he was being persecuted. She supported the decision of the mission but personally appealed to Frey. “I feel the tenderest feeling of pity, and of love for your soul; but false words of sympathy . . . shall never be traced by my pen.” She cogently described his condition: “You find your emotional nature untrue to your best resolutions, untrue to your solemn pledges. Nothing seems real. Your own inefficiencies lead you to doubt the sincerity of those who would do you good. The more you struggle in doubt, the more unreal everything looks to you, until it seems that there is no solid ground for you anywhere. Your promises are nothing, they are like ropes of sand, and you regard the words and works of those whom you should trust in the same unreal light.”²⁵

She continued by emphasizing the power of the will in meeting emotional dysfunction. “You may believe and promise all things, but I would not give a straw for your promises or your faith until you put your will over on the believing and doing side.” Her letter of counsel was interwoven with appeals for this young man to see the help Jesus can give. “I tell you that you need not despair. You must choose to believe, although nothing seems true and real to you.” She concluded with words of hope. “A life of usefulness is before you, if your will becomes God’s will. . . . Will you try, Henri, will you now change square about? You are the object of Christ’s love and intercession.”²⁶

Sexual dysfunction. Ellen White often dealt with sensitive issues. In 1896 she wrote to a leading minister in South Africa. He was guilty of sexually abusing young girls and perhaps boys. This man had written to Ellen White of his struggles, but believed he was not guilty of adultery. She began her letter with a prayer: “May the Lord help me to write you the very words that will be for your restoration and not for your destruction.” She then wrote most directly to him: “I feel sorry, very sorry for you. Sin, my brother, is sin; it is the transgression of the Law, and should I try to lessen the sin before you, I would not be doing you any good. . . . Your mind and heart are polluted else all such actions would be loathsome.” She described for this man the long-term effect of sexual abuse on children, including generational effect. She cited several cases and described how psychological damage was often lifelong. “How can

I present it in such a manner that you will no longer look upon it, as you have done, as no great wrong?" After a lengthy, direct, and sometimes painfully graphic description of his conduct, she appealed to him: "You are a free moral agent. If you will repent of your sins, and be converted, the Lord will blot out your transgressions and impute unto you His righteousness. . . . He will undertake your case, and angels will guard you. But you must resist the devil. You must educate yourself to a different train of thought. Put no confidence in yourself. Never seek the companionship of women or girls. Keep away from them. Your moral taste is so perverted, that you will ruin yourself and ruin many souls if you do not turn square about. . . . Everlasting life is worth a life-long, persevering, untiring effort." Finally she urged him to make himself accountable to "brethren who know this terrible chapter in your experience."²⁷

These four examples illustrate the level of involvement Ellen White had in the lives of many people who had emotional and mental health difficulties. One of the remarkable characteristics of her work is her consistent optimism that people can recover, no matter how broken they may be. Ellen White always pointed them to God as the great healer of mind and soul. Ellen White was wholistic in her approach to healing. She realized that the mind was linked to the body and that God intended humans to have restored social relationships. For her, the most important connection was with a loving and holy heavenly Father. ■

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- ¹ Ellen G. White to D. T. Bourdeau, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 4, letter 7 (1895). Unless otherwise stated, all references below are from the writings of Ellen G. White.
- ² *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948) vol. 1, p. 305.
- ³ *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), p. 18.
- ⁴ "Search the Scriptures," *Review and Herald* (March 22, 1906), par. 6.
- ⁵ "The Primal Cause of Intemperance," *Signs of the Times* (April 20, 1882), par. 2.
- ⁶ See *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1963), pp. 105-117.
- ⁷ *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1915), p. 39.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- ¹⁰ James White and EGW, *Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Seventh-day Adventists, 1880), pp. 152-154.
- ¹¹ J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists with Tokens of God's Hand in the Movement and a Brief Sketch of the Advent Cause from 1831 to 1844* (Battle Creek: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1892), p. 92.
- ¹² *Life Sketches*, p. 37.
- ¹³ James White and EGW, *Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Seventh-day Adventists, 1880), p. 160.
- ¹⁴ *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), p. 40.
- ¹⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1958), pp. 33, 34; *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1939), p. 678.
- ¹⁶ *Steps to Christ*, pp. 9-16.
- ¹⁷ *Life Sketches*, p. 35.
- ¹⁸ EGW interview with C. C. Crisler (July 21, 1914), EGWE.
- ¹⁹ See Merlin D. Burt, "Caroline True Clough Family and Ellen White," Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office, Loma Linda, California.
- ²⁰ *The Judgment* (Battle Creek: 1879), p. 29.
- ²¹ EGW to Lucinda Hall, letter 66, 1876.
- ²² *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 298.
- ²³ Identities confirmed by 1850, 1860, and 1870 federal census records for Washington, NH; *History of Washington, New Hampshire, From the First Settlement to the Present Time, 1768-1886* (Claremont: Claremont Manufacturing, 1886), pp. 535, 630.
- ²⁴ *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 1, ms. 2 (1868).
- ²⁵ *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, letter 49 (1887).
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 11, letter 106a (1896).

Merlin D. Burt, Ph.D., is director of the Ellen G. White Estate and a field secretary for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He previously served as the founding director of the integrated Center for Adventist Research, which includes the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University. He was also professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (2003-2020). Previous to his academic and administrative appointments, Dr. Burt served for a number of years as a pastor in California and Ohio, USA. He and his wife, Sarah, have two sons and a daughter and six grandchildren. This article is excerpted from the book *A Christian Worldview and Mental Health: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, published by Andrews University Press, 2011 (editors, Carlos Fayard, Barbara Couden Hernandez, Bruce Anderson, and George T. Harding IV).



CHOOSE WELL! CHOOSE Happy!



HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY? Every day we have different sad feelings that drain us and different happy feelings that give us extra joy and energy. The feelings that drain the energy out of us are anger, frustration, fear, stress, guilt, shame, and sadness. Happy feelings are things like love, joy, peace, hope, inspiration, wonder, thankfulness, and fun.

Whatever is happening in our lives, we can always choose to experience the good feelings that help us live the amazing life Jesus came to give us (John 10:10). Here are some great things you can choose to do to help you feel better!

CHOOSE TO FOCUS ON GOD'S LOVE!



1 John 4:7-19

- God's love for you is powerful, deep, and unchanging. Imagine He is writing a letter to encourage and comfort you today. Write out that letter and read it aloud to yourself.
- Imagine you are having a goodnight hug on Father God's lap. What will you tell Him about your day, and how will He gently and lovingly respond to you?
- Tell God how you are feeling because He cares about your feelings. Chat to Him about your day and listen to His love in the quietness afterward.



CHOOSE PEACE!

John 14:27

- Think of three times when you felt calm and peaceful. What made you feel so peaceful? How can you do more of those things when you feel worried or afraid?
- Light a candle and watch the flame, or watch a flickering battery-operated candle. Imagine that Jesus, the Light of the world, is shining His peace and love into your life.
- Make a list of things that calm you. Watch waterfalls; listen to birdsong; smell the fragrance of oranges, lavender, and baking bread; massage your hands, etc.

CHOOSE INSPIRATION!

Romans 12:2

- Start a scrapbook or decorate a noticeboard with your favorite inspirational verses and quotes.
- Ask an older person to tell you an inspiring story from their life.
- Make a list of different qualities of God and be inspired by His loving character.

CHOOSE JOY!



Philippians 4:4

- Make a list of 100 simple and small things that bring you joy. Write each one on a separate index card. Choose one idea every day. Write on the back of the card what you did and how it made you feel.
- Write happy thoughts and quotes on slips of paper. Roll them up and keep them in a Joy Jar. Choose one whenever you need some extra joy. Make a Joy Jar for a friend.
- Place sticky notes, tags, or labels on your favorite things. On them write “This brings me joy because . . .”

CHOOSE WONDER!



Psalms 86:8-10

- List three things you can taste, see, smell, touch, and hear that fill you with wonder.
- Watch a video clip or documentary about something in nature that fills you with wonder.
- Make a collection of natural objects that fill you with wonder, such as a peacock feather, shells, bark, stones, etc.
- Take photos or find pictures to illustrate some of the wonders God made on each day of creation. How would you illustrate the Sabbath?

CHOOSE LAUGHTER!



Proverbs 17:22

- Invite everyone in your family to share what made them laugh this week.
- Watch some funny animal videos together and vote for the funniest.
- Ask a lonely or sad person to tell you what they enjoy doing most, and then invite them to do it with you.



CHOOSE GRATITUDE!

1 Thessalonians 5:18

- Stick a sheet of paper on your refrigerator or wall. Write what you are thankful for, and add pictures, photos, messages, Bible verses, and quotes to create a “gratitude wall.”
- Thank God for the different things you enjoy with each of your senses—things you can taste, touch, hear, smell, and see.
- Create and write a special thank-you card for God to thank Him for His love for you.

CHOOSE HOPE!

Romans 15:13

- List five things you look forward to every day. Make those moments extra special.
- Talk with your family about what you are most looking forward to in the earth made new (Revelation 21).
- Think of three times when you were worried about something but things turned out much better than you expected. What can you learn from these experiences?

CHOOSE TO USE YOUR SPECIAL SKILLS!



Romans 12:6

- Choose to do one of the chores in your home in the best way possible. Find a way to make it fun!
- Use one of your special skills to bring joy to someone else.
- Ask an older person to teach you a skill they learned when they were young. Enjoy your time together.

CHOOSE FLOW (POSITIVE DISTRACTION)!

Ecclesiastes 2:24

- Make a list of your favorite off-screen activities. Spend at least 10 minutes a day doing one of these enjoyable things.
- Fill a basket with interesting activities (books, puzzles, crafts, etc.). Dip into the basket when you need a distraction from your troublesome thoughts and worries.
- Read, listen to a good book, explore a simple craft activity, walk in nature, bake a cake, have a lovely hug, etc. Notice how good it makes you feel.



CHOOSE CREATIVITY!

Colossians 3:23

- Make something to remind you how much God loves you.
 - Design a machine to solve one of your biggest problems. How would it work and what would it do? Even though you can't really have this machine, what can it teach you about solving your real problems?
 - Choose one color of the rainbow at a time, such as red, and fill a page with all shades of that color using paint, crayons, markers, pieces of paper, pieces of pictures cut from magazines, etc. Then try orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and indigo. Enjoy the process!



CHOOSE KINDNESS!

Colossians 3:12

- Wrap a small gift and add a tag that says, "If you find this gift, it's for you! If it doesn't suit you, please pass it on to someone else." Then leave it to be discovered.
- Be kind to each person in your family every day. Plan something kind to help others at least once a week.
- Write short, positive messages on sticky notes. Stick them in different places—inside a magazine, in a library book, on a package in a grocery store, on a mirror, etc.



Taking care of your emotions and choosing positive ones, like Paul in Philippians 4:6-11, helps you to stay emotionally, spiritually, and physically healthy. Draw a tree with a trunk, bare branches, and roots. Cut lots of leaves from any kind of green paper. Every time you choose to do something that is good for your mind, body, or spirit, stick a leaf on the tree to show that you are flourishing (Jeremiah 17:7, 8). ■

Karen Holford enjoys using these ideas every day to help her stay happy and healthy! She teaches children, teachers, parents, and adults how to balance their emotions.



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"A chain of earnest, praying believers should encircle the world ... to pray for the Holy Spirit."

Ellen White

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