

# THE JOURNAL

A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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**SHARING** GOD'S LOVE





SCAN TO READ ONLINE

## ON THE COVER

One of the last requests of Jesus before leaving this earth was to ask His disciples to go spread the gospel. He wanted the whole world to know of His love and salvation. This is why "I Will Go" has become a popular expression among Seventh-day Adventist Christians as they accept Jesus' call to share His love, bringing hope to those around them and even far from them. This issue will remind you of this important gospel commission and give you some practical ideas for sharing God's love with the world.



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### MINISTRY TO PASTORAL SPOUSES AND FAMILIES DIVISION COORDINATORS:

**East-Central Africa:** Winfrida Mitekaro  
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**Southern Asia:** Sofia Wilson  
**Southern Asia-Pacific:** Danita Caderma  
**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](mailto: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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[www.ministryspouses.org](http://www.ministryspouses.org)



# IT TOOK THREE CAR WRECKS!

## WRECK 1

I wrecked one of our cars. It wasn't too bad. The car was still drivable. The insurance company would send an adjuster to assess the damage. We lived in the country, so my husband, Jerry, drove the car to work at the conference office to meet the adjuster.

After the adjuster assessed the damage, he asked Jerry if he worked at the conference office. Jerry said he did, and the man shared, "I grew up going to Pathfinders and went to an academy."

"Do you go to church now?" Jerry asked.

"No, I married a nonbeliever, and we just have never attended church."

Jerry encouraged him to take his family to church.

"I know I should," he replied.

My husband gave him the address of an Adventist church near his home and the pastor's phone number. Then Jerry prayed with him.

"Thank you. I needed that prayer," the man said. "I've been thinking about God and that I need to go to church."

## WRECK 2

About a year later, Jerry wrecked our car. It wasn't too bad. The car was drivable. The insurance company sent out the same adjuster to assess the damage. He met Jerry at the conference office.

"Are you going to church?" Jerry asked.

He looked down and said no. "My kids have soccer practice and other events on Sabbaths. It's just so difficult."

Jerry encouraged him, saying, "Your children need God in their lives." Then Jerry prayed with him and again gave him the address to the church near his home and the pastor's phone number. Jerry also called the pastor and gave him the man's contact information.

Later, I called the insurance company and asked if they often send out the same adjuster. "No, we never do. That is our rule."

I said, "But you did," and they replied, "No, we never do that."





## It Took Three Car Wrecks!

### WRECK 3

A year later, our son Zac wrecked the car. It wasn't a bad wreck. The car was drivable. And the insurance company sent the same adjuster! He assessed the damage and handed Jerry the estimate.

"Are you going to church yet?" Jerry asked.

The adjuster looked down at his feet and said, "No, it's just too hard. There are too many conflicts."

With a smile Jerry said, "Will you please go to church so my family can quit having car wrecks?"

He laughed. "It does seem like God is trying to encourage me that way. I mean, I never see the same person twice, let alone three times, to do an assessment on their wrecked car."

*Sometimes trials  
are opportunities  
to share Jesus.*

Once again, Jerry gave him the address of the church near his home and the pastor's phone number.

I called the insurance company one more time, asking, "Do you always send the same adjuster?"

The reply was the same. "Never. It is not our policy."

"But you did," I said. "Three times!"

They assured me, "No, we never do that."


This time the adjuster and his family began attending church and joined a small-group Bible study with the pastor.

### REDEEMED WRECK

When troubles come, I often say to God, "I don't need this in my life right now! Why me?" Then I remember the three car wrecks and the insurance adjuster.

I am trying to remember to praise God when trials come. They are never convenient. All too often trials can be serious. Yet I have learned that sometimes trials are opportunities to share Jesus, and I ask Him to lead me. I pray, "Please put Your words in my mouth!"

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 43:5).

Our God is longing for us to follow Him to reach the world. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17). 

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





# Special Quotes

The members of God's church are to be zealous of good works, separating from worldly ambition and walking in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good. With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Saviour's love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour, for the influence that attends the practical carrying out of the divine commission is irresistible.

*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 109, 110

We should be much in secret prayer. Christ is the vine, ye are the branches. And if we would grow and flourish, we must continually draw sap and nourishment from the Living Vine; for separated from the Vine we have no strength.

*Early Writings*, p. 73

Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods. There are many ways in which church members may give the message to those around them. One of the most successful is by living helpful, unselfish Christian lives. Those who are fighting the battle of life at great odds may be refreshed and strengthened by little attentions which cost nothing. Kindly words simply spoken, little attentions simply bestowed, will sweep away the clouds of temptation and doubt that gather over the soul. The true heart expression of Christlike sympathy, given in simplicity, has power to open the door of hearts that need the simple, delicate touch of the spirit of Christ.

*The Adventist Home*, p. 485

After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their one desire was the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth's sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts.

*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 547

I have frequently seen that the children of the Lord neglect prayer, especially secret prayer, altogether too much; that many do not exercise that faith which it is their privilege and duty to exercise, often waiting for that feeling which faith alone can bring. Feeling is not faith; the two are distinct. Faith is ours to exercise, but joyful feeling and the blessing are God's to give. The grace of God comes to the soul through the channel of living faith, and that faith it is in our power to exercise.

*Early Writings*, p. 72

By precept and example parents are to teach their children to labor for the unconverted. The children should be so educated that they will sympathize with the aged and afflicted and will seek to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and distressed. They should be taught to be diligent in missionary work; and from their earliest years self-denial and sacrifice for the good of others and the advancement of Christ's cause should be inculcated, that they may be laborers together with God.

*The Adventist Home*, p. 487



# Goodbye for Now...

MY HUSBAND, JERRY, AND I will retire at the June 2022 General Conference Session. These past 12 years have changed my life. Meeting many pastoral spouses and families in the 13 Adventist divisions around the world has been a highlight. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, love, and courage. I know you will give the new director of Pastoral Spouses and Families the support and love you have given me.

I have been inspired by your love for God and your church members, as well as your tireless dedication to love your children to Jesus and reach people with Jesus' love. Remember that if you are married to a pastor, God has called you first to be a parent if you have children and then to be involved with your spouse in ministry.

I have now been called to the ministry of being a grandma! Zac and Leah, my youngest son and his wife, were blessed with twin girls who are 3 years old. Another blessing arrived February 18, a baby boy. Zac and Leah are very active in ministry with the church they pastor in Templeton, California. Their church has a large community garden that is blessing their community. God opened the doors for Jerry

and me to move there, providing an affordable, nice house just one street over from them. So whenever they need help, I can usually walk over to help right away.

Some people say to me, "How can you quit the Lord's ministry to go help with children?" The most important ministry is our children, and I could back that up with a lot of Ellen White quotes! I am also enjoying being involved at our new church, Templeton Hills. It has been many years since we've been able to get involved on a local church level. What a blessing!

I would like to leave you with one of my favorite Bible verses that I pray you will always remember: "The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17, NKJV).

I will continue to pray for you, your families, and your ministry for Jesus. I sign off with this prayer:



*Dear Father in heaven, I pray You will protect and bless each ministerial spouse and their family. Help them to always make You first in their lives. Prepare them to receive more and more of Your Holy Spirit! Show them each day how much You love them and that You have a plan and purpose for their lives that is amazing. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Janet Page*



*After serving the church their whole careers, Janet and Jerry Page are retiring.*



*Tyson Page with his wife, Shenalyn, and their three children, Daniel, Sean, and Sonya*



*Zac Page with his wife, Leah, and their three children, twins Abby and Olivia and little brother, Nathan*



*Janet and Jerry look forward to spending more time with their wonderful children and grandchildren.*



# What If?

I RAN TO THE RAINBOW'S END IN ANTICIPATION.

CLOUDBURSTS AND THUNDERSTORMS pelted my windshield. The little I could see was wavy and indistinct. I was thankful but exhausted when the rain eventually eased up. I still had a lot of driving to reach my Maryland home after this camping weekend in Virginia.

Then the sun came out, shining brilliantly and creating an iridescent rainbow right beside me. I had never seen a rainbow so close! It seemed to touch the earth just a couple of hills ahead of me.

Excited and hopeful, I pulled off the road as close as possible to this irresistibly beautiful arc, locked my car, and went for a walk. The rolling Virginia hills were covered in tall brown grass with pine forests in the background. Thankful for my hiking boots, I trudged along a soggy gully on a quest to get closer to the rainbow's "ground zero." It looked as though the colorful bow had to be touching down just over the next hill.

Worried about losing my chance to see it closer, I started running. The sun threatened to go behind a cloud, and I did *not* want to miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

As I ran, my thoughts kept asking, *What if?* Then I shook myself back to reality. *It's a fairy tale; don't even think about it.* But it had been so ingrained in my mind from childhood that I could not stop thinking about *it*. In my heart and mind I knew there was no way *it* would be there, but I still found myself unable to stop thinking how *it* would pay for the rest of my college education.

Rushing up over the next hill, I saw the rainbow's end touching the ground. As I walked over to the spot and looked down, my heart sank with disappointment. I did not find that pot of gold left for me by a leprechaun. I yelled, "They lied to us! There's no pot of gold."

Embarrassed at how disappointed I felt, I was glad I was alone so no one was witness to it. Not wanting this temporary moment of insanity to ruin a beautiful, natural, once-in-a-lifetime event, I stood on "the spot" watching the colorful bow arch away from me. Lifting up my arms, I let out a primal scream. "Thank You, God, for this moment. This is amazing." I stood there for a while letting my eyes follow the rainbow to a distant hill, taking it all in. The rainbow was vivid in color, changing my shoes and the brown grass around it to purple, blue, green, and orange.

After a few minutes I walked back to my car, sorry I was unable to take a picture. It was 1977, and mobile phones hadn't been invented yet and I didn't have a bulky film-loaded camera in my back pocket. So I have no proof, only good memories.

## LATER

Reflecting on this moment later in life, I thought, *Certainly there must be a meta group for "rainbow standers."* Going to the internet, I looked it up and found nothing. After further searching, I discovered that this is truly a very rare event. In fact, one article stated that rainbows never touch the ground. *So that's why the leprechauns hide their gold there, because they know it will never be found. (There I go again, thinking about that make-believe pot of gold. Back to reality.)*



## *What they had been told all their lives was not true.*

I couldn't prove them wrong; I didn't have a photo of my rainbow event. I did find a few photos of a rainbow touching down, very distant and faint, none as close as my encounter. Apparently, the conditions have to be perfect. It takes a 45-degree angle of the sun behind you, making it possible only a few times a day with the humidity above 75 percent and the raindrops being more than .01 millimeters. Fortunately, I had all those things going for me at that moment.

But remembering how disappointed and betrayed I felt when there was no pot of gold for me, I wondered why we tell children untruths. We say it's just for fun, but they'll find out the truth later and discover that we lied to them. Is reality so bad that we have to play make-believe to somehow get through it, not thinking of future consequences? I never told my kids about leprechauns or even Santa Claus, and it didn't hurt them a bit.

As a retired pastor's wife, I remember convincing a Bible study couple that the Sabbath was Saturday and Catholicism wasn't the remnant church. They were shocked and devastated. The husband was so angry with their priest that he wanted to go over to the parish and strangle him.


"No, no," I said, "you can't feel that way. Maybe he is as deceived as you were." What they had been told all their lives was not true. Such deceit leaves people feeling that they must question everything and trust nobody.

After an evangelistic meeting on the state of the dead, I watched while a young woman fell to the pavement in the parking lot crying.

"Where is my mother?" she screamed. "Where is my mother?" This poor woman had always "known" that her mother was in heaven watching over her. She had a strong physical and emotional response to the realization that this was not true. What had been so comforting to her in the past was ripped out from under her feet, and she went into mild hysteria.

When giving Bible studies, we need to be thoughtful of the emotions we evoke when we dispel long-standing myths. What we have believed all our lives as Seventh-day Adventists is good news to us, but to someone who, for a lifetime, has believed the opposite, it can be shocking and disorienting. Hearts must be handled delicately and with care. We must give the Bible student time to think it over, time to read the Bible texts for themselves, time to pray about it.

In John 16:12, 13 Jesus states, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (NKJV).

We must entreat the Lord earnestly for the truth seekers who need our support and our prayers. We may ask that God will strengthen their hearts for the powerful and faithful teachings that are so foreign to their understanding. God's rainbow of truth is beautiful when seen in the light of the Sun of Righteousness. We must always remember, however, that bright light is painful to eyes that have always been in the shadows. God can teach us how to turn the light up gently and support those who are seeing it for the first time. 

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*Diana Bruch is a retired pastor's wife and former director of Adventist Community Services for the Michigan Conference and Lake Union. She earned a degree in nursing from Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University) and became a certified senior adviser. She enjoys her three children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. She has always loved Jesus and telling stories to help others love Him also.*



# BLANKETS OF BLESSING

**AS WE GOT OUR HANDS BUSY, WE STARTED TO SEE GOD'S HANDS AT WORK.**



"ARE YOU SURE I SHOULD give him this blanket?" my husband asked. "How about the one with the Canada geese instead?" He looked incredulously at the prayer blanket material I had selected for a young man he was working with.

Actually, this was the material *God* had chosen for this young man. This was the fabric He had clearly impressed me to take from the many pre-cut selections in the designated closet at church. Who was I to question His leading? I merely smiled at my husband and gently lifted the yellow fleece covered in dozens of panda bears.

"I guess your friend likes pandas!" I replied with a smile.



He wasn't as amused as I, but quickly and diligently we, along with our friend Laurie, began lifting up prayers for this hurting soul as we tied knots along the fringe of the fleece to hold it together. How symbolic: Just as we were hemming the two pieces of fleece together from the prayer-tied knots, God was hemming this individual together from the pain he was going through. What a loving Savior!

## **BLEST BE THE TIE**

Back in the summer of 2018 God impressed me that the prayer team's yearly budget at our church needed to start reaching more people. And He already had a plan to do it! Norman and Diane Douglas had shown us a prayer quilt a few years prior as a testimony of how God was reaching people through a thriving prayer ministry in Florida. Each quilt was personalized, and the threads that held the batting together were tied into knots as the prayer team prayed for the specific needs of the individual.



*When this beautiful concept was presented to me, I was overwhelmed.*

When this beautiful concept was presented to me, I was overwhelmed. It sounded wonderful! But not having experience in quilting, and not knowing anyone in my local church who knew how to quilt, I put the idea on the back burner.

A few years later God brought to the forefront of my mind the prayer quilts. He reminded me that I knew what fleece-tied blankets were. Then He planted the idea in my head that in the same way the threads on the quilts were tied with prayers for the individuals, the fringes of the fleece could be prayer-tied together as well. It was an intriguing challenge that I accepted.

With the blessing of our lead pastor to use the remainder of our prayer team yearly budget, and with the prayer team's hearty agreement to pilot the prayer blanket ministry for at least two months, we started our journey in faith. We bought our budget's worth of fleece and said, "Lord, we will do the work, but we will need You to provide. We have used all the money we have!" So little did we know then.

But I can now say with certainty that our dear Lord is faithful. He knows our every need and acts before we even become aware of our need to call upon Him. His promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is clear: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." How much healing those within our churches and communities need! God knows how much we hurt with those for whom we are praying. We are His body! And just as one part of the body suffers, every other part suffers with it (see 1 Corinthians 12). What a nearly helpless feeling can come over us when we are acknowledging

this suffering through prayer, but we can be assured that our heavenly Father knows how to ease that suffering! He can push away any doubts the evil one tries to throw in our faces. And the most beautiful thing about 1 Corinthians 12, which tells about being the body of Christ, is the chapter that follows, which inspires us to act and respond in love.

So this is what happened: We started to see the hands of our loving God at work, because He was using *us* as His hands and feet. We prayed for each individual, asking the Holy Spirit to show us specific things to pray over that person. We prayer-tied each blanket, and as we labored and prayed over each ache and pain, we also experienced the healing that God was starting to do in that person's life. Instead of feelings of trepidation over the situations these people were in, we started to experience joy for them and the anticipation of what God was going to do for them through the power of His Holy Spirit!

We asked for God's blessing over these people and were greatly blessed as well. We have not stopped since our humble beginning, and I am overjoyed to share that not once have we lacked a balance in our account to purchase more fleece. God has remained faithful to us! There is no power in any prayer blanket that we have made; however, when a dear soul receives their blanket, there is often a welling up of tears and emotion, an overwhelming acknowledgement that in their specific situation, they are not alone. And often there is a special connection to the color or pattern that makes up their blanket. God has an amazing way of reaching these loved ones!



*Church members of all ages help with the project. It takes about 30 minutes to cut each prayer blanket and about 15 minutes to prayer-tie it.*



*God knows  
how much  
we hurt  
with those  
for whom  
we are  
praying.*



*All photos feature  
recipients of the blankets  
and those who helped  
make them.*

That's just what happened with our friend from the beginning of the story. He was a strong young man, covered in tattoos and drinking his way to suicide. He was in a continual mental uproar from a divorce that had ripped his heart apart, and his friends and family were trying to set up an intervention for recovery. My husband had visited him only once, but this young man asked for spiritual guidance.

Could my husband return with a blanket covered in cuddly panda bears? I remembered the verse when Samuel was seeking out the next king of Israel, going from one brother to the next, realizing that none of the strong, fine men he was looking at had been chosen. God told him, "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

My husband took the prayer blanket we had prayer-tied with over one hundred Holy-Spirit-guided requests and blessings knotted into the fringes. These prayers had been lifted to God's throne as we quoted Scriptural promises and prayed for this man. As he pulled the yellow fleece from the gift bag, the young man's eyes brightened.

"I love pandas!" he exclaimed. "I always have, since I was a boy!" There was an instant connection as he realized that the God of the universe cared for him in such a special way. As he placed the blanket around his shoulders, it was as if God Himself were wrapping His arms around him in love. And when my husband told this young man that each knot represented a prayer that had been lifted up to God on his behalf, the tears began to well up in his eyes. He was not alone.

This touching scene has been played out many, many times in the years since. It is an undeniable fact that this God we serve has a plan and a purpose for each of His dear children! His ceaseless blessings have been demonstrated through this little ministry that has now reached hundreds of people in our church and community, and even around the world. And as for my husband? He will gladly give a blanketful of panda bear prints to a full-grown man, if that is what God wills! Because he knows that these are no ordinary blankets—these are blankets of blessing. J

---

**Sarah Rogers** lives and ministers in beautiful British Columbia, Canada, with her husband, Walter. He is the children's pastor at Church in the Valley (CIV) Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Rogers have four children, ages 2 to 10, and Sarah helps co-lead the prayer team at CIV. In her spare time, she loves to read, cook, travel, garden, make music, and host people. She looks forward to seeing Jesus face-to-face very soon! To learn more about prayer blanket ministry, please send an email to [hello@churchinthevalley.ca](mailto:hello@churchinthevalley.ca), Subject: Prayer Blankets.

# NO PLACE LIKE Home



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## JESUS HAS A MISSION FIELD FOR EACH ONE OF US.

“AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I am sending you”  
(John 20:21).

I’ve always thought of this verse as a commission to be an overseas missionary—maybe to the Amazon jungle, an African desert, or some small island. Many people I know have gone on mission trips and served overseas, but I have never been impressed “to go.” My focus has been on ministry at my home church and doing what I like to call “caring ministry.”

Last summer I felt the “call” to be a missionary in my own country! As churches started opening up after the pandemic, the church I often attend during the summer in another state began having Sabbath School again. Only three to four children attend, plus sometimes a visitor. Noticing that nothing was being done for the children, I went to the children’s room to see what was available to do an impromptu program. Unfortunately, things were not organized for this to happen. It broke my heart that nothing was planned for these precious children to learn about Jesus. It’s a very, very small church, and the members are stretched with many responsibilities. No one was available to do anything.


The next day I, along with my mom, aunt, and cousin, offered to go to the church to straighten things up and decorate the room. Over the next

couple weeks, we gathered props and music and put together a program. My home church graciously allowed us to borrow some props to use in the program.

With the help and generosity of others, my family and I worked together to put pictures on the wall, hang decorations from the ceiling, and make the room inviting. During my vacation, I was able to make final touches to the program and prepare crafts.

What a joy it was to see the children’s faces as they came in and saw the bright improvements to the room. They noticed flowers that had been added and clouds hanging from the ceiling. When they walked into church the next week, it was with smiles on their faces and anticipation about having their own program to attend. The children participated in the program, learning Bible stories and doing crafts. After a couple weeks they were already answering questions about what they had learned.

You may not be able to go overseas as a missionary, but you can share God’s love right where you are. Whether it be making food for someone who is sick, keeping in touch with the elderly, babysitting for a young mom, or helping in a children’s division, you can use your gifts to show God’s love.

Jesus has a mission field for each one of us, and it may be in your own church or community! 

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*Shelly Lowe is the senior editorial assistant for The Journal and enjoys working with children at her home church in Williamsport, Maryland.*

*I felt the “call” to be a missionary in my own country!*





# MINGLING MISSIONARIES

## HOW ONE FAMILY IMPACTED THEIR TOWN

MARK AND JULIE WANDERED around the tiny, postcard-perfect town in rural England with their two young daughters. There were no other Adventists in the whole town. They'd been sent to be "mingling missionaries," and they wondered where to start.

They decided to look for a home with a large lounge space where they could invite people to events and even run seminars. They found the local real estate office and explained what they were looking for. An agent named Anna understood just what they needed. As she showed them around the house, she explained that her husband had left her with three young children, and she was struggling as a parent. "If you ever start parenting seminars here, I want to be the first to know!" she told them.

Mark and Julie were inspired by the message in Jeremiah 29:7, basically saying: "Go to Babylon and be a blessing to the people there." Well, if Anna would be blessed by parenting seminars, maybe other people would enjoy them too.

As soon as Mark and Julie settled their little family in their new home, they baked dozens of cookies, packed them into pretty tins, and took one to each of the neighbors on their small street. Their daughters, Lily and Lucy, stood on each doorstep, smiling, singing, and giving out the cookie tins. After all, who could turn down a gift from a happy child? Julie told the neighbors, "Please enjoy the cookies, and we'll come back in a week to collect the tins so we can use them again!"

The next week they picked up the tins. As they chatted with the neighbors, they learned more about them and offered to help if they were struggling with anything. Julie was a nurse, and Mark had learned car mechanics when he was going through college. After a couple more weeks they invited a few neighbors at a time to join them for afternoon tea—juice and cakes—in their neat little garden.

Every day they looked for ways to be a blessing in their neighborhood. They took old Tom Jones to his hospital appointment. They helped Kate fix her car. And they sat with Mrs. Wilson until the ambulance came after she fell and broke her hip.

They didn't forget about Anna, either. Whenever they were in town, they visited her office with a homemade cake and stopped for a chat. Julie found a parenting course written by Christians that was ready to use. All she had to do was show the DVD and facilitate a discussion around the topics. Anna was excited about the course and suggested they offer it to parents of students at the local school, where she was also an administrator. The school let them have the room for free and advertised the course to all the parents.

Julie was a little nervous on the first day. Would it all go smoothly? Would anyone even come? Anna had shared the course through several of her social media networks. She knew lots of parents who were struggling. The room quickly filled up. The course was designed to encourage parents to talk together, make friends, and share their challenges and ideas.





## *The more they looked for ways to bless others, the more opportunities came their way.*

Soon Julie and Mark had an expanding group of people to bless. They felt impressed to find ways to bless them as often as they could. So they invited two to three parents at a time to meet them in a local café so they could get to know more about their lives and their needs. Each need could be an opportunity to bless them.

Looking for other ways to make friends and bless people, Julie joined a women's craft group and Mark volunteered to help with a football club for teenagers. Even Lily and Lucy joined in with swimming lessons and an orchestra for children so they could make friends with other children and their families.


The more they looked for ways to bless others, the more opportunities came their way. When Anna went into the hospital for surgery, she was very relieved that her children could stay with Mark and Julie. The local town asked Mark to sit on their improvement committee and even gave the couple funding to expand their parenting project and start other community groups.

Mark and Julie befriended people and showed them God's love. Every evening they prayed for each person on their contact list. Then they waited for people to ask them about God and their faith when they were ready to learn more. They believed it was important to let the Holy Spirit be in charge of the timing and the process.

Eight years later, when they moved away to be mingling missionaries elsewhere, there was a church with 40 members in that little town. And Mark and Julie are still "mingling missionaries" to this very day.

### **HOW TO BE A BLESSING IN BABYLON**

Jeremiah 29:7 reads: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." What are some practical ways to do that?

- Pray for your local community, asking God to bless it with peace and enable it to flourish.
- Look for the ways He is blessing you so you can pass on the blessing to others.
- Find out the greatest needs in your community and look for ways to help.
- Ask God to show you where you can be a blessing in your community.
- Make an intentional decision to bless at least one other person in your community every week, or even every day.
- If you have children, involve them in your "blessing" activities.
- Join local clubs or volunteer groups to widen your sphere of influence and networks.
- Visit your neighbors regularly with seasonal gifts, such as garden produce, baked goods, or homemade cards.
- Welcome people into your home and share your hospitality with them.
- Start small projects that will bless your neighborhood: campaign for a safer road crossing, pick up garbage, befriend lonely people, plant a community garden, etc.
- Pray for the people you are blessing and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your interactions.
- Create simple printed cards to share with your neighbors, offering to help them in small ways and giving them your contact details.
- Discover people's birthdays and surprise them with a tiny treat.
- Support small local businesses so that people get to know you. Collaborate with them on ways to bless others.
- As we mingle and bless others, we are living examples of God's love, helping to open their hearts and minds to wonder about Him. When they have a positive picture of God through us, they will turn to Him at just the right time. 

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*Karen Holford mingles by taking the bus to work. She chats with people at the bus stop and along the journey and listens to their stories.*



# Three Stories

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO'VE EVER BEEN LOST  
OR FELT THAT WAY

THE GREATEST STORIES JESUS TOLD are recorded in Luke 15. They describe a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. All are sought after and found with resultant rejoicing. These three stories form a backdrop to three stories of mine. Each describes what it is like to be lost, what it is like to find what seems lost, and the rejoicing that results.

My brother and his family love free food. They forage for food both for eating and for income. They live half of the year in the Yukon and the other half in Costa Rica. One day when I was visiting them in the Yukon, they invited me to go mushroom picking with them. In Canada forest fires prepare the soil for more mushrooms. In this particular year there had been a large fire in nearby British Columbia, and they were expecting a good harvest.

They welcomed another harvesting hand and told me, "You can make a lot of money," which has rarely motivated me. But always game for a new adventure and to do things my brother does, I agreed.

We headed out to a valley filled with blackened pencil-shaped logs, both fallen and upright. It looked eerie. The ground was covered with dirty gray ash. Legend-sized black flies and mosquitoes buzzed around us, attempting to bite the bit of life they found on our few inches of exposed skin or scalp. I coughed, sneezed, and swatted while trying to find those elusive little tan caps that were emerging through the undergrowth. My eyes weren't trained, and I was frankly miserable.

Nothing was beautiful except the blue skies above my head, which were not visible when my eyes were searching the ground for tiny mushroom mounds. I couldn't wait for the day to be done! Who cared about money? This was not how I liked to earn it!

Finally, someone said, "Let's stop for lunch." *Hallelujah*, I thought. We scanned the horizon for our cars. Nothing in sight. Which was north? Not a bit of moss on any of the scorched trees! One person said, "I think we go this way," but another contradicted and said, "No, it's this way."

We wandered, we circled, and we got nowhere. This forest looked like a 1,000-piece puzzle of logs and ash, and we were immersed in the center with no edge pieces! Pooling our strengths, we finally found our way out, a bit shaken that this could happen to us, a team of experienced and educated adults.





## LOST AGAIN

My next story happened in Malaysia. My wife and I had taken a group of Union College honors students there for a field class in "Wealth and Poverty." One of the perks of that trip was a boat ride to a nearby island that served fancy cool drinks under palm-frond umbrellas. In the muggy heat of the South Seas, this was a welcome treat that made us all feel momentarily wealthy!

The island was well-supplied with lush tropical vegetation that exotic birds inhabited. As an avid birdwatcher, I couldn't resist pulling out my binoculars. I told my wife, "Stay with the students. I'm going to go birdwatching for a bit."

I followed the bird calls and was soon immersed in the jungle searching for the Tabon scrubfowl. I quickly lost track of time but then "came to myself" and realized I needed to get back. I was sweating and thirsty. I turned around to retrace my steps. There was no path, no footsteps or trail of crumbs, but I saw the ocean shore and thought, *Oh, this will be easy. It's probably just a few yards down the coast, but which way? Is this shore on the north or south side of the small island?*

The few yards I traveled didn't yield any group. I turned around and went back the other way. Still nothing. I was lost. My legs were beginning to shake. I knew I needed water, but I hadn't thought to bring any with me for my short jaunt. I guessed my brain was feeling the impact of the high 90s humidity and temperature. I couldn't orient myself. Finally, a native person in a small boat rode by. I flagged him down and got the help I needed to return to the group. Rescue and relief felt so good!

## NOT AGAIN!

My third story happened when my wife and I took a vacation in Germany. My middle name is Martin, after Martin Luther, and my heritage is German, so this trip was to see the land of my namesake. I also wanted to locate the hometown of my great-grandfather.

My wife and I enjoy church history, so we readily embarked on this window in the COVID pandemic to "get away." It was a lovely journey with everything falling into place exactly as planned . . . until one afternoon on the tail of our journey when we decided to fit in just one more site. We knew Martin Luther had spent his monk years in an Augustinian cloister in Erfurt. On our return trip to Frankfurt, we decided to veer off the highway 30 minutes and visit this church and monastery. We had plenty of time, so why not?

We parked our car in a convenient spot and walked the straight stone pathway to the *Domkirche*. We loved the spectacular biblically themed stained-glass windows, ornate life-size statues of wise and foolish virgins, a wood carving of Jesus in the tomb, a life-size coffin containing "Jesus," and Elizabeth of Thuringia's (c. 1230 AD) golden reliquary of her face and hands. Then we wandered freely until we were about two-thirds of the way around the crown of the hill and in front of the small medieval church and cloister rooms where Martin Luther had spent his six years of monkhood wrestling with God. Here again we enjoyed the well-marked museum texts documenting Luther's life that were put in place for the recent 500th anniversary of the Reformation. What a great serendipity to our trip.



Erfurt, Germany: Left: Domkirche. Right: Virgins



*The map  
I held in  
my hand  
melted in  
the rain.*



Then, just as we were completing our sightseeing, it started to rain. We'd had beautiful weather, but now the sky was bawling! We decided I'd get the car and then return for my wife. Figuring the car to be about 10 minutes away, I grabbed a small paper tourist map from the reception stand, covered my head with it, and started jogging down the road toward where I thought our car was parked. I ran the opposite way from which we had arrived, reasoning this would be a shortcut. I assumed the church was on the top of the hill, so if I merely completed the circle, it should be easy to find our car.

It wasn't. I ran and ran. I turned this way and then that way on ancient, narrow, shop-filled streets that housed several storied buildings. These provided no gap through which to see the *Domkirche*. The map I held in my hand melted in the rain. Our cell phones weren't working. In the downpour I couldn't read the street signs, let alone the script-sized words on my soaked map. Besides that, my reading glasses were in the car. I was drenched! And I had to admit I was lost.

Then the rain abated. I looked up and saw that this well-prepared tourist town had prominently posted a permanent waterproof sign with a map telling me where I was. On it, I visually identified my location, where the church was, and where my car was parked. I retrieved the car and returned for my wife. The imagined 10-minute jaunt had taken me an hour and a half!

On seeing me, my relieved wife asked incredulously, "What happened?"

I replied, "I got lost."

She'd been sorting through ideas to try, but she laughingly told me she figured she'd first use the opportunity to pray in the very church Martin Luther had, figuring if God heard Luther there, God would also hear her. We rejoiced at being reunited.

### ON THE HORIZON

The Gospels tell three stories of being lost. The first is the story of a lost sheep. The second is a lost coin. The third is a lost son. Each story gives a slightly different perspective on the experience of being lost.

We can assume the sheep didn't know it was lost, but its owner did. The one that was anxious wasn't the sheep—it was the shepherd. Sheep wander around just looking for food. They don't spend their time being afraid or calculating how to avoid danger. They are gentle, humble creatures that focus on feeding and merely require a kindly caretaker to help them safely do what they are designed to do: graze, produce wool, and reproduce.

The coin also did not know it was lost. It was valuable only if it was able to be used by the one who possessed it. Again, the owner felt the loss and experienced an anxious desire to retrieve it. Something valuable was gone. She searched, found it, and rejoiced.

These first two stories are more about the experience of God, who has lost us, than they are about us, who have been lost. On a stretch they can be about our realizing that we have lost something valuable and our joining with a seeking God in the desire to return to Him. Parables, like dreams, can be loosely interpreted to represent different parts of an experience that simultaneously occur.

The son story emphasizes the experience of the lost one. He went searching for a real "life." Not content with boredom or serving his father, he wanted to experience the fun that money would purchase. His brother accused him of consorting with

## *The concept is not about turning away from sin but about turning toward God.*

prostitutes, but the story simply says he squandered his wealth in wild living. The details are left to the imagination.

There is no story of the searching father to begin with. But the thought of his father started to haunt him. At first it wasn't a welcome image, as he was running away. He wanted to escape and enjoy life, but as that enjoyment turned to drought, famine, and the husks the pigs ate, his image of his father changed. He knew his father's servants were fed well, and he began to imagine his father receiving him back as a servant. He didn't deserve to return to his father as a son, but he came to believe that his father would probably receive him back as a servant. As such, he would surely have shelter and food.

The original language simply says, "he came to himself" (Luke 15:17). He thought about who he was, and he realized that he was still the son of his father. He couldn't expect to be received back as a son, but he at least believed his father would receive him back as his servant.

As he approached home, the story says that while he was a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him and ran to his son and threw his arms around him and kissed him. Once he was headed home, his father was more than ready to receive him. He told his father he was not worthy to be called a son, but his father cut off his speech so the part about being a servant was never even spoken. The father ordered a feast with a fatted calf, a robe, and a ring. He said, "My son who was lost is found."

In this instance the story describes the experience of repentance merely alluded to in the previous two stories. The son, dissatisfied with a life with his father, sought a life in wild living. He found it empty. He repented. The biblical concept of repentance is not so much a guilt-driven emotional sorrow for sin as it is a turning toward God. It is like the sky clearing after a storm. Eyes that were blind can suddenly see and orient themselves to a new reality.

The Old Testament word for repentance is *shuv*, which means to turn around, make a U-turn, or turn toward. The concept is not about turning away from sin but about turning toward God and the new life God offers. It is goal-driven, not guilt-driven. In the New Testament the concept of repentance is only slightly altered. The word in Greek is *metanoia*, and it refers to a change of mind or thinking. It's less about behavior and more about the thought processes behind the behavior. The son changed his mind about what his life with his father was like. He changed his mind about what kind of life he wanted. He then changed his direction.

These parables emphasize the searching of the shepherd, the searching of the housewife, and ultimately the initiative-taking love of the father. According to Paul in Romans 2:4, it is the *chrastos* of God that leads to repentance. The word sounds like *Christos*, which means the anointed one or the messiah, but it's entirely different. *Chrastos* is a quality. It means kindness or goodness. In this case it is a quality of God that draws us to Him.

Lost beings long to be rescued. We hunger for kindness and are attracted to goodness. God is never a demanding authority figure, a confining jailkeeper, or a terrible judge, but a waiting Father who searches the horizon for His beloved child. J

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*Ed Allen, D.Min., Ph.D., is one of the academic deans at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, serving as director of music, religion, leadership, and honors. He has served as pastor in several churches in California and Hong Kong. His wife, **Madalyn Allen**, RN, PSY, Ph.D., wrote this article based on one of her husband's vespers talks at Union. She has worked in the Adventist church as an unpaid volunteer, as a registered nurse, as a licensed psychologist, as an independent scholar, and as an adjunct professor at Union College.*

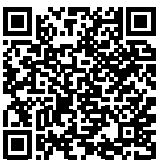
*She completed a post doc fellowship in child and adolescent assessment and psychoanalytic treatment in 2003.*



# Lost Cause?

HE PRAYED FOR HIS SON AT EVERY HOUSE WE VISITED.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



IT HAD BEEN ALMOST 30 years since I met him. It had been almost 30 years since I thought about him, and now I couldn't get him out of my mind. This gentle, kind man with a crushing heartache had displayed a quiet hope.

I was a happy 18-year-old freshman at Union College when I decided to spend the summer canvassing in Colorado. Not only was I in Colorado, far from the cornfields of Iowa, but I was in a beautiful area, Buena Vista and Leadville. While there I understood the reason for the peace and contentment of my Colorado peers. Who would want to live anywhere else?

The scenery, the interesting people, the fun weekend hiking and camping with the Leadville church family, working with my

patient friend Bonnie, enjoying every minute of living with the Sherbondys—all of these memories took a back seat as I thought of him now. Jim Smith,\* the director of the literature evangelist work in Colorado, had come to guide and support us that summer.

He was a people person. Tall and gray-haired, he had a face lined with wrinkles, but his eyes and voice exuded kindness, comfort, and safety. He showed interest in what we had to say. He listened. He chuckled. He cared. He told us about his son John.\* We could all tell that he loved John very much.



## *How can he bare his soul like this to strangers? I wondered.*

John was living a life he had not been raised to live—a dangerous life. He was a hippie and had turned away from God. He had chosen friends who did not have a positive influence on him. His father's heart was broken. When Jim worked with Bonnie and me, he always asked the person with whom we were visiting if he could pray before we left. I was amazed to hear him pray for his precious son.

*How can he bare his soul like this to strangers?* I wondered. In every home, with every person, every time, he explained how he loved this son who was living a life apart from God. He simply wanted his son to return to God. He was leaving it in God's hands.

I wondered at his prayers. Why did he pray so? I concluded that his son was a lost cause. He could never overcome the life he had chosen.

### **FULL CIRCLE**

Years later, a married mother, I listened to a woman speaking at a women's retreat. She told about her life as the wife of a conference president and the work she and her husband were doing in the eastern United States. Her husband? John Smith, the very child for whom Jim had prayed for so many years.

Now it was my time of heartbreak. Sometimes feeling more dead than alive, I prayed for my child. Throwing myself at the feet of God, I pleaded, cried, sometimes able to utter only two words: "Remember me." I thought of Jim Smith. I thought

of his brave hope. I thought of his acceptance of the fact that he could do nothing but pray. And he did. His son had been plucked from a hopeless, godless life. This gentle, hurting father had smiled and prayed and prayed and prayed.

Prayer works. God hears. The lost cause was overcome by God's goodness. I will pray and pray and pray. **J**

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*\* Names have been changed.*

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**Carol Toay** lived in Edgeley, North Dakota, when this article was written. It originally appeared in the *Mid-America Union* magazine, Outlook, in August 2002.

## MARRIED TO A PASTOR?

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# BACK AGAIN

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PAST AFFECTS YOUR PRESENT.

I REMEMBER WALKING HOME from school on a hot afternoon, feeling tired and ready for a cool drink. I was following the path I took every day. I knew that journey so well, but on this afternoon I was absorbed in thought. One moment I was walking with my backpack on; the next moment I saw my backpack fly in the opposite direction of me. I found myself beside the road, startled by what had just happened.

According to onlookers, a man in a car didn't stop at the red light as he turned the corner. I happened to be crossing the street at that very moment. The vehicle hit me at a slow speed, sending me to the side of the road. The driver didn't stop to see if I was injured. So I got up, walked to where my backpack had landed, and continued walking home.

When I got there, I told my parents what had happened. I insisted that I was fine and didn't need any medical assistance. Seeing that I was OK, they agreed to let the matter drop, and I was left with just the memory of the event.

## I REMEMBER

In my mid-thirties I noticed discomfort in my lower back when I stood for long periods or walked for long distances. Upon medical assessment, my doctor discovered that I have a lower back injury and that my back will need to be "adjusted" every so often for as long as I live. The medical team asked me if I'd had any physical trauma earlier in my life.

After I shared my story, the doctor said, "If you had received medical attention at the time it happened, it would have been corrected and you could have avoided back pain today."

An injury that happened when I was 15 years of age is now affecting my present and future physical well-being.

When past hurt affects the present, there is a need for "re-adjustments." When past pain is ignored, it eventually catches up with us. Incidents in your past that have been disregarded as of

## *The driver didn't stop to see if I was injured.*

no importance suddenly show up, disrupting your life. Harvard Health published an article in February 2021 called “Past Trauma May Haunt Your Future Health.” The study indicated that traumatic events can trigger emotional and physiological reactions that can lead to health conditions.

I have lived with back pain for most of my life. The only difference is that now I know how it came about. My back will never be the same, and having three babies with my unknown and untreated back injury didn't help my case. I cannot get rid of the pain completely, but I can follow a strategic plan to minimize it and live everyday life. This pain is part of a story, my story. I will never erase that story or ignore the physical pain. But I have learned to embrace it, manage it, and live with it successfully.

In the same way, emotional pain reflects an “injury” that went unchecked. We often downplay an event or justify it by making it our fault. Sometimes guilt and shame stop us from seeking help; this only amplifies and perpetuates the pain. Ignoring the pain or pretending it never happened is not favorable for our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

Our brain is created to help us deal with pain. The very efficient limbic system is a collection of structures in the brain. The amygdala and the hippocampus are part of this system, with crucial roles to fulfill. Let's describe the hippocampus as the “librarian” of the brain, the one in charge of filing away all our memories. It allocates them to the right “bookshelf” in the brain. The amygdala oversees the processing of emotions attached to our stories/memories.

Memories trigger positive or negative emotions. When we suppress emotional pain by failing to acknowledge it, it will look like the librarian (hippocampus) left “books” lying around (unprocessed story) on the floor and the amygdala (our emotions) keeps tripping over them. When we ignore emotional pain (anger, sadness, fear, guilt, shame, etc.), we will keep hurting ourselves and others.

### **FORGIVING OURSELVES**

A familiar story in Genesis 32 reveals what happens when past hurts still hurt. What do you think it was like for Jacob after deceiving his elderly father? What emotions did he experience? In the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White talks of Jacob 20 years after that day when he walked away from his home, his father, and his beloved mother, never to see her again—20 long years of feeling awful for what he did. Twenty long years of thinking of what could have been if only he had done the right thing, or said the right thing, or made the right decision. What would it have been like if Jacob had waited on God instead?

Some of us have spent years, perhaps decades, ruminating and feeling fearful, anxious, shameful, guilty, worried, and unsure of ourselves, perhaps self-loathing and in pain. This was Jacob's emotional state. And now his greatest fear was encountering Esau—his past.

No matter how much time has passed, our past pain will always find a way to bring discomfort to the present. We can manage our pain or subdue it or ignore it for so long, but eventually there will be no lasting peace and resolution unless we process it and make sense of it.

The river Jabbok (Genesis 32:22) was significant in the life of Jacob. He needed to cross the Jabbok in order to continue his journey to Canaan, the land of his birth, his home. It was also the land of his past. After 20 years, Jacob finally came to terms with his past actions. The Bible says that Jacob encountered and wrestled with God face-to-face by the river Jabbok. Why is this so important? Because God is truth! Jacob encountered his own truth, the reality of his situation. The pain of his actions that was ignored and buried for 20 years.

In Genesis 32:30, it says, “So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’” This is the place where Jacob processed his past and received his liberating blessing. “Satan endeavoured to force upon him a sense of his guilt, in order to discourage him, and break his hold upon God. . . . But Jacob would not be turned away. He had learned that God is merciful, and he cast himself upon His mercy. . . . Such will be the experience of God's people in their final struggle with the powers of evil. . . . Satan will endeavor to terrify them with the thought that their cases are too hopeless; that their sins have been too great to receive



*Emotional  
pain  
reflects an  
“injury”  
that went  
unchecked.*

pardon. They will have a deep sense of their shortcomings, and as they review their lives their hopes will sink. But remembering the greatness of God’s mercy, and their own sincere repentance, they will plead His promises made through Christ to helpless, repenting sinners. Their faith will not fail because their prayers are not immediately answered. They will lay hold of the strength of God, as Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and the language of their souls will be, ‘I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me’” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 201, 202).

Sometimes we choose painful actions, and sometimes those actions are inflicted upon us. Regardless of how they happened, we need to come to terms with those actions to move forward into the promised land. Confronting the truth of our ignored emotional pain is not easy. Facing it will not change the past, but it will surely make the present and future brighter, filled with hope and peace. It will require strength from God, willingness to open up, and determination to make things right. The result: sweet, sweet peace! One of the most significant commodities for us humans. The peace that only God can give.

The healing journey begins to take place when we confess or verbally articulate our pain. We need to acknowledge, recognize, admit, and accept what has happened. When we put our feelings into words, it activates the prefrontal cortex. A wealth of scientific research shows that the less your ability to name your emotions, the more likely they are to hook you and jerk you into self-defeating behavior patterns.

Start by noticing what your triggers are. Then note what automatic thoughts come to your mind when you are triggered. What are those thoughts saying? Are they good and positive or harmful and destructive? At that moment, you have two choices: accept them or reject them. If the messages are contrary to what God says you are, then challenge them against His Word. Repeat God’s promises. When God created, He spoke, and there was life! And this is what we should do—speak God’s truth into our souls enough times until our brain gets the message! Memorize God’s promises so you can recite them the moment you feel triggered.

Have you experienced a Peniel? A place where you have wrestled with God, got ahold of Him, and said, “I will not let You go until You bless me”? Or perhaps you are open to allowing God to facilitate a Peniel in your life. Do you want to feel the peace Jacob received when he encountered his past in the presence of God? He verbally brought it to the Lord in prayer, and so did King David. “Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who **forgives** all your sins and **heals** all your diseases, who **redeems** your life from the pit and **crowns** you with love and compassion, who **satisfies** your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:1-5, emphasis supplied).

Seek professional advice from a Bible-based Christian counselor to help you navigate through your past pain. You can find hope and healing, and your deepest pain will become your greatest ministry. J

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*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 assisting others to 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.”*

# TIPS TO SURVIVE

## THRIVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

### MULTIPLICATION MIRACLE

Allen Rice\* died suddenly and unexpectedly, and I was in charge of the bereavement meal. Usually we planned for 25 to 30 people, so my teammates and I organized a meal for 50 in case there were more than expected.

On my way to prepare for the meal, I stopped to buy a few needed groceries. I put my purse in the child seat of the shopping cart—something I should never have done. When finished shopping, I went to my car and loaded the groceries into the trunk.

While driving to the church, I felt for my purse, but it wasn't on the seat beside me. I pulled over at a wide spot in the road and opened the trunk, thinking I must have put my purse there along with my groceries. It was not there.

Suddenly I knew where it was—in the shopping cart in the parking lot! I hurriedly turned around. Arriving at the parking lot, I saw an attendant gathering up shopping carts. I asked him if he had seen a shopping cart with a purse in it. He had not.

"What's your name?" he asked. When I told him, he made a call. Then he said, "Go to customer service."

When I identified myself at customer service, they gave me my purse. I looked in it, and nothing had been taken. What a relief! God is so good!

### GOD CARES

My teammates and I finished preparing the meal shortly before the funeral ended, so I went to the door of the sanctuary to look in on the service through a small window. The church was *packed* with at least 150 people—friends they had made in their workplace from which they had recently moved! The service ended a few minutes after that, and I heard the pastor announce, "There is a meal being served downstairs, and everyone is invited."

I stood up a bit straighter and blinked my eyes. *We have enough food for 50, but not for 150!* I thought. But instead of going into a panic, I said, "Lord, I know you can do *anything*; *please* do it again! You served 5,000 with five loaves and two fish; *please* help our meal for 50 serve 150." I thought perhaps not everyone would come, but they *all* came. I don't know just how the Lord did it, but He did, and I do know that we had enough because we even had a little bit left over!

God takes pleasure in doing things like this to help His children. He is interested in the most minute circumstances of our lives, and He is right there to help us. Just ask Him, and then trust Him! "Morning, noon, and night, let gratitude as a sweet perfume ascend to heaven" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 253). ■

\* Not his real name

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

*I asked  
if he'd  
seen a  
shopping  
cart with  
a purse  
in it.*



# Balancing Act

**MOST OF US TAKE BALANCE  
FOR GRANTED, UNTIL IT  
BECOMES A PROBLEM.**

SCAN FOR AUDIO



IT WAS JUST ABOUT 9:30 on a Sabbath morning. We teachers were engaged in greeting the Junior Sabbath School children who had already arrived for class. Then we heard it—the distressing sound of someone falling down the nearby flight of stairs. These stairs led from the main level of the church to the basement, where the children’s classrooms were located.

We rushed to the scene and found Nancy\* crumpled at the bottom of the stairs. With her arms full of teaching supplies, she had caught her purse on the railing at the top of the stairs. This caused her loss of balance and subsequent fall. She was hurt and needed emergency transport to the hospital. While Nancy’s mishap this time was primarily due to her purse strap and the stair railing, falling is not an unusual occurrence for her.

Just what is balance all about, and why is it so difficult for some?

## SENSORIMOTOR CONTROL

It can be amusing to watch small children learn to walk. With determination amid multiple attempts and falls, toddlers ultimately succeed in achieving balance. This allows them to not only walk but run, jump, climb, and achieve additional athletic skills.

Most of us take balance for granted, hardly giving a thought to walking across uneven, rocky surfaces or climbing a hill. Our bodies automatically adjust when we carry a bulky load or attempt to navigate slippery surfaces. The skill of walking upright on two feet

is achieved by an amazing, complex set of sensorimotor control systems. These systems include our eyes, which identify and evaluate our surroundings; our ears (the vestibular system), which help us identify spatial orientation and establish equilibrium; and our sense of touch through our feet. All of these communicate vital information to the brain and muscles. We are then able to navigate our surroundings with respect to gravity, direction, and speed needs, while adjusting our posture and stability accordingly.

## WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

What happened to Nancy? Living a more sedentary lifestyle resulted in excess body weight and muscle weakness issues. With lack of strength in her arms, legs, and knees, she finds navigating stairs and uneven terrain difficult at best. Thus, when her purse strap caught on the stair railing, the jolt caused her support-compromised knees to buckle and contribute further to her fall. Although Nancy had bruises, cuts needing sutures, and a large hematoma to her forehead, she had no broken bones. Over time she healed well.

Our sense of balance can gradually become less fine-tuned as we age due to weight issues, weakening of muscles, and genetic issues, but the following factors can also contribute to balance problems:



1. **Diabetes** can cause instability through loss of sensation, nerve damage, inadequate blood flow, and vision impairment.
2. **Inner ear problems** such as infection, injury, obstruction, or a tumor can directly affect balance interpretation and equilibrium ability.
3. **Migraine headache pain** can contribute to motion sickness and eyes becoming sensitive to light, thus disrupting the body's visual information transfer ability.
4. **Foot pain** caused by injury, bunions, corns, or hammertoes can disrupt steady, secure footing.
5. **Low arterial blood pressure** can result in dizziness, feelings of light-headedness, or even fainting when one sits or stands up too quickly.
6. **Medications** such as sedatives, antidepressants, antihistamines, or blood pressure stabilizers often have side effects including vision issues, dizziness, and disruptions to the inner ear's balance mechanism.
7. **Health issues** such as arthritis, stroke, Parkinson's disease, or multiple sclerosis can adversely affect equilibrium.

### CAN BALANCE BE IMPROVED?

Most people find benefit in balance-strengthening and improvement activities such as stretching exercises, walking, biking, climbing stairs, and participating in classes that focus on stability. Studies show that specific exercises can significantly benefit even sedentary individuals with improved strength and balance at any age or stage of ability.

Besides improving balance, you can decrease risk of falls by becoming alert to any potential hazards and safety issues for yourself and those of all ages around you.

Steps to take could include:

- Remove clutter and electrical cords from walkways.
- Keep high-traffic areas clear of furniture or other obstacles.
- Either secure or remove rugs that easily slip underfoot.
- Immediately clean up spilled liquids, grease, or food.
- Place nightlights in bedrooms, bathrooms, and hallways.
- Make sure stairways are well-lighted, are clear of clutter, and have safe railings.
- Use nonslip mats in bathtubs and showers.
- Have ready-to-use flashlights handy in case of power outages.
- Check walkways around the outside of the building for any tripping or fall hazards.
- Live a healthy lifestyle by maintaining good health habits, including routine care of your eyes, ears, and feet .

### LIFE IS ALL ABOUT BALANCE

Besides being able to successfully navigate daily routines physically, we all need to devote adequate time and attention to balancing the needs and responsibilities of life itself. Give thought to the following quotation by Brian Dyson (former CEO of Coca-Cola and now president of Chatham International): "Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them work, family, health, friends, and spirit. And you're keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls—family, health, friends, and spirit—are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life."

Start and end each day at the feet of the only true source of perception, direction, and balance. "Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness . . . make Your way straight before my face" (Psalm 5:8, NKJV). "For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

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\*Name has been changed.

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### INFORMATION SOURCES:

<https://vestibular.org/article/what-is-vestibular/the-human-balance-system/>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/easy-ways-to-improve-your-balance>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/healthy-aging/in-depth/fall-prevention/art-20047358>

<https://www.mercy.net/service/atrial-fibrillation/taking-blood-thinners-safely/>

<https://www.shinecoachingbarcelona.com/en/5-balls-of-life-brian-dyson-speech/>

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



# Let's Mingle!

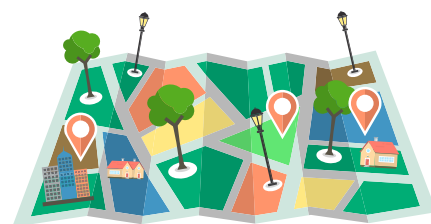
JESUS BLESSED PEOPLE and showed them God's love by mingling with them. Mingling is about being with people, listening for their needs, caring for them, and blessing them. How can you mingle like Jesus and share God's love?

## JESUS MINGLED

Ellen White wrote a beautiful message about how to mingle. Read it together as a family and discuss what it means to you. Talk about the ways you are a blessing in your community. Make a poster together of this quote. Or write it in your own words: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' . . . Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit" (*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 143, 144).

## JESUS MINGLED WITH KIDS!

Jesus mingled with all kinds of people. Every person in the world is a son or daughter of God, and He wanted to show them how special they are to Him. Read the story of Jesus mingling with children in Mark 10:13-16. Imagine you are right there with Him, seeing Him, listening to Him, and feeling His hug of blessing. Act out the story with your family or friends. What do you think He would say to you, and to your parents, to bless you?



## MINGLE MAP

Draw a Mingle Map of your lives. It doesn't have to be an exact map. Just think about the places where you mingle with people who may not know how much God loves them. Perhaps at school, in your street or village, where you go to buy your food, at your sports, music, or craft clubs, etc. Draw a picture of each place on a separate sheet of paper. List the people you know there, and pray for them. Write down some things you could do to show them God's amazing love whenever you are mingling there. Work together as a family to bless the places where you mingle. Are there other places where you could mingle too?

## SALTY PEOPLE



Jesus mingled with people so that He could show them His love and bless them. Jesus also told us that we are the salt of the world (Matthew 5:13). We are salt when we mingle with people and help them “taste” God’s loving character through the way we treat them. Make a list of all the good uses of salt. Then think about how you and your family could be like salt in your communities. For example, salt melts ice and salt can make things taste better. Hunt around your home for examples of salt, and see how many things contain salt. Or make popcorn or other food that tastes better with salt. Eat some without salt, and then add salt and taste the difference! Or make a label for your saltshaker to remind everyone who uses it that they are the salt of the earth!

## LIGHT PEOPLE



Jesus also told us that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). We are lights when the way we live shows people how much God loves them. Ask an adult to help you make a safe lantern. Use a battery-operated candle in an old jar or put a thick layer of salt in the bottom of a jar and place a real candle inside it. Light the candle when there are adults in the room to make sure it is safe. Cut a piece of paper to wrap around the jar. Choose paper that the light can shine through. Write on the paper some of the ways that God shows His love to you, such as being our Forgiver, Provider, Comforter, and Blessor. Then light your lantern and talk about how you can show the light of God’s love to others around you. Ask God to help you be His sparkling light right where you are.

## PRAYER WALK

Walk past your neighbors’ homes in your street or apartment block and pray silently for each household as you pass their doors. Look for clues to see whether children live there or an elderly person, and listen to the Holy Spirit inspiring you about what to pray. God knows everything your neighbors need, so pray that He will show you how to care for them and mingle with them.

## BIRTHDAY BLESSING



Look out for clues that someone in your neighborhood is having a birthday. Even if you don’t know them, you can take them a homemade treat and say you noticed it was their birthday and you wanted to celebrate with them. Read Romans 12:15. What else could you do to be happy with people who are happy?

## MINGLER REMINDER



Bring together your best craft materials, or even just paper, old magazines, scissors, and glue. Make a poster or object for your home that reminds your family to be minglers. What about making something small that you could attach to your school backpack so that you are reminded to mingle and show love? For example, find some wire, thread all kinds of different things onto it, and shape it into a heart.

## IF JESUS MINGLED TODAY

Imagine that Jesus came to your town today. How would He mingle? Where would He go to mingle and be with people (parks, shopping areas, cafés, hospitals)? What might He do to bless people? How could you follow in His footsteps?

## MINGLED PRAYER

Cut a large heart out of cardstock. Write the word “Love” in the middle of the heart. Around the edge of the heart write some different ways God loves us that we can share with others. Then punch some holes around the edge of the heart and tie tags through the holes. On each tag write the name of a person you are mingling with and some special prayer requests that you have for them. Use this as a daily prayer reminder.

## AN ABC OF BLESSING

Make a long list of all the different ways you could bless people as you mingle with them. Try to find at least one activity for each letter of the alphabet: A – Appreciating them, Assisting them; B – Baking for them; C – Card making, etc. **7**

*Karen Holford carries tiny toys in her purse in case she meets a sad child who needs cheering up. She also keeps Band-Aids to give to people who are hurt.*



### *Euro-Asia Division*

#### **THE MINISTERIAL SPOUSES IN ESD STAYED BUSY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, total quarantine was enforced throughout the ESD area. Initially it was for a period of several weeks, but then it was extended for more than a year and a half. All churches in every ESD country were immediately closed. We appreciated the existence of a TV channel and opportunities of broadcasting worship services union- and division-wide. Our pastors took in the situation very quickly, and virtually all the churches started conducting online worship services.

Their spouses stood with them in the front lines as they continued to work in a new reality. Talented and devoted daughters of the heavenly Father kept taking care of church members by visiting elderly people, helping with medicine or food deliveries, distributing masks, and offering spiritual support. They also didn't give up missionary work and social projects.

#### **ONLINE MINISTRY**

Christian music, prayer, and God's promises are of great comfort to people during such uncertain and dark times. Due to restrictions, for a long period of time it was impossible to conduct events or concerts in person for big groups. Therefore, online programs through Zoom or YouTube became popular.

We had to conduct our PK (pastors' kids) congresses online, as we saw a great need for fellowship and support among our teens and youth. Lockdowns and quarantines



*Field school for ministerial spouses in West Russian Union Conference (WRUC).*

isolated people, and online congresses gave PKs the opportunity to communicate, learn, support and be supported, ask burning questions, and find answers.

Thousands of people from different countries of our division watched and participated in dozens of prayer conferences, online trainings, and programs and concerts. In particular, the online program of Ukrainian Union Conference—"Healing of Soul's Traumas"—got lots of positive feedback because people received the spiritual and psychological support they needed, as COVID-19 brought not only physical illness but also depression, anxiety, family conflicts, financial uncertainty, and other problems. Special joy came when we saw secular people and members of other denominations take part in our online programs and prayer meetings to hear God's message.

Also, we started to use social media more actively. Instagram, Facebook, and other social networks became platforms where our pastors' wives could share their



*Decorations for the "I'll Go, Let's Go Together!" congress in Ukraine.*



*Ukraine PKs met online for a congress.*



*Sewing masks in WRUC.*



*Pastors' families distributed food packages in Ukraine.*



*Special programs for children in Ukraine.*

testimonies or knowledge with one another or do missionary work. Some pastors' wives even started to record and upload music videos on YouTube.

### OFFLINE MINISTRY

As soon as COVID restrictions were lifted or at least eased, our sisters began to use any means to serve people's needs. They organized musical concerts outdoors in the parks or squares and invited people to join meetings in health or sports clubs. Eventually they started culinary classes and "Over a Cup of Tea" meetings (with mask mandates, social distancing, and other obligatory requirements). After long isolation, people were eager to socialize, so not only our church members but also non-Adventists joined these events with pleasure.

Some churches started social projects and opened their doors for people in need, distributing secondhand clothes and shoes, organizing soup kitchens, providing masks, etc. Many of our sisters were involved in this ministry; they put in effort, time, and money to meet people's physical as well as spiritual needs. During the pandemic we saw a great need for masks. Even medical institutions were short of supplies, so many of our sisters volunteered and sewed masks, which were given to hospitals and social institutions.

Another area where we saw an opportunity to serve was to help parents with children. As schools and kindergartens were closed, children spent all their time at home, and parents urgently needed help to keep them busy. When it was allowed to gather in person, pastors' wives organized Vacation Bible Schools for children. These programs were in high demand, especially in small towns and villages, where there is a lack of things to do. Many children from non-Adventist families attended and later joined Sabbath Schools.

### SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR MINISTERIAL SPOUSES

We also took care of our sisters who worked so much for others. In order to support ministerial spouses, the division and unions organized online events for pastors' wives. Some of these involved sharing testimonies, praying together, and studying the Bible. We appreciate the help of the General Conference workers who accepted invitations to such meetings. Also, we invited church administrators, professors from our educational institutions, and ministers from other divisions as speakers.

Some territories went beyond this and used the time to develop their department ministry and organize online trainings for pastors' wives. Spouses could attend webinars about spiritual growth principles, parenting guidelines, physical and mental health care, and other topics important for improvement of their ministry and personal life.

Thanks to God, we continue our work and believe that the Lord will help us pass through all these challenges. We don't know what the future holds, but may we always answer to our Lord: "I will go. I will go to the places where I can proclaim the three angels' messages and use the gifts and talents God gave me to help my neighbor."



*Special meeting for ministerial spouses in Ukraine.*



**10** DAYS OF  
PRAYER

# BACK TO THE ALTAR

January 11–21, 2023

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."

JOHN 4:23, NKJV

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