

# STRONGER TOGETHER



A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES | Vol. 40 | Issue Two 2023



# BOUNDARIES

# STRONGER TOGETHER

Vol. 40  
Issue Two  
2023



SCAN TO READ ONLINE



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## ON THE COVER

Boundaries. Do you set them? Do you keep them? How do you respond to others' boundaries? So often pastoral families feel they can have no boundaries; they must be available to everyone at any time of day or night. But this leads to burnout, resentment, family stress, health impacts, and even spiritual droughts. In this issue we look at how Jesus handled the pressures of earthly life and what other Christians have learned as well. We hope it will help you live the abundant life Jesus wants to give you.



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## NEW NAME

Did you notice the magazine's new name? *The Journal* just didn't say enough about what we're doing together—and how we're stronger as we share our stories and struggles and ideas and prayers. You are not alone in your ministry, and that's what we want you to remember every time you read *Stronger Together*.



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# DISCOVER *God's Will*

HAVE YOU EVER been in a maze? Mazes have lots of twists, turns, and dead ends, and finding your way out can be challenging. Sometimes ministry feels like we are trapped in a maze trying to find our way out. Being trapped in a labyrinth can be a scary and frustrating experience. But ministry should not be like that.

In a similar way, trying to discover God's will for our life can feel like getting out of a maze. How do I know I am following God's will, not my feelings and desires? Is it possible to know God's will for our life? The Bible tells us that not only is it possible, but it is a sign of maturity in the Christian life and something we must agonize to achieve in prayer.

In the book of Colossians, Paul speaks about Epaphras, whom he recommends not just for being a faithful servant of Christ but for praying for the churches with fervor. He writes, "Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (Colossians 4:12, NIV). His prayer teaches us that God wants all His children to know His will and put it into practice.

## IN PRACTICE

Since my husband, Ramon, and I began our ministry, it has always been our practice to follow the Lord wherever He calls. This has resulted in blessings every time, even when we did not see things clearly. I remember one time when we were considering a call to serve in another conference. I was concerned about leaving my children behind, so we took time to pray and reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the



call. But we forgot to ask a crucial question: Is this the will of God? That is the most important question when considering a call. The rest is less important.

As I was wrestling with the call, something strange happened in my backyard. Out of nowhere, two beautiful peacocks appeared on my patio. They took up residency in the top right corner of my garden and laid their eggs there. I was so excited to see these two majestic birds and began to take pictures and videos of them as they roamed through my backyard. My husband wanted to build a little shed for them to protect them from predators and the scorching heat of summer. But I told Ramon to leave them alone and that God would take care of them as He does for all animals.

Then I realized that God was talking to me through these birds. It was as if He was saying, “If I can take care of these birds, would I not be able to take care of your children? You do not need to worry about them. I will take care of them.” That reminded me of Jesus’ words recorded in

Matthew 6:26 (NIV): “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” This assurance strengthened my faith to always follow God’s will, even though things may not be as clear as I would like them to be.

When He calls and we respond positively to His invitation, we can be assured that we are on the right path, following God’s will for our lives. The best place to be in life is where God wants us to be. So wherever you are right now, that is where God wants you. J

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**Aurora Canals** serves as associate ministerial secretary for pastoral spouses and families.

*“If I can take care of these birds, would I not be able to take care of your children? You do not need to worry about them. I will take care of them.”*





# *Special Quotes* by Ellen White

The reason there are so many in perplexity is because they take their case into their own finite hands, and manufacture yokes that are not pleasant for them to wear. They think they understand their needs, and they worry and plan and devise, while Christ stands inviting, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The yokes of human manufacture gall the necks that wear them. Christ says, Try My yoke; it is easy: lift My burdens; for they are light.

If you have not found that rest offered to all who will learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart, would you not better yoke up with Christ without delay? Bear only His burdens. Do not load yourself with cares that weigh you down to the ground. Your troubles come because you are so anxious to manage matters yourself that you do not wear the yoke of Christ.

—*The Review and Herald*, April 25, 1899

Sin has destroyed our peace. While self is unsubdued, we can find no rest. The masterful passions of the heart no human power can control. We are as helpless here as were the disciples to quiet the raging storm. But He who spoke peace to the billows of Galilee has spoken the word of peace for every soul. However fierce the tempest, those who turn to Jesus with the cry, "Lord, save us," will find deliverance. His grace, that reconciles the soul to God, quiets the strife of human passion, and in His love the heart is at rest.

—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 336

When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself. Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie—to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to choose another master; for we are always free to do this. But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe.

—*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 114.

Our God is ever merciful, full of compassion, and reasonable in all His requirements. He does not require that we shall pursue a course of action that will result in the loss of our health or the enfeeblement of our powers of mind. He would not have us work under a pressure and strain until exhaustion follows, and prostration of the nerves. The Lord has given us reason, and He expects that we shall exercise reason, and act in harmony with the laws of life implanted within us, obeying them that we may have a well-balanced organization. Day follows day, and each day brings its responsibilities and duties, but the work of tomorrow must not be crowded into today. The workers in the cause of God should feel how sacred is its character, and they should prepare themselves for tomorrow's work by a judicious employment of their powers today.

—*Christian Service*, p. 248



# JESUS AND BOUNDARIES

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM HIS MODEL?

IT WAS THE WORST night of His life. He knew He would soon be dying, but that wasn't what troubled Him. He feared that His human nature would not be strong enough to endure the painful road ahead of Him. If He failed at His mission, the fate of humanity would be lost in sin forever. The weight of the world was *literally* on His shoulders. The blood dripping from His forehead and His distorted face were clear signs of the torment He was facing.

He was about to do the most selfless thing anyone has ever done. He would willingly be taken as a prisoner, beaten, and put to death in the most torturous way imaginable. Two millennia later, well-meaning Christians would point to this death as an example of why Jesus' followers should allow themselves to stay in situations of mistreatment and abuse.

Yet as we take a deeper look at the story of this world-changing event and the life that Jesus led before this moment, we begin to understand that even selfless living can take place in a state of being that modern psychologists refer to as having healthy boundaries.

To understand what we mean by healthy boundaries, let's contrast this phrase with the two extremes humans tend to embrace: rigid boundaries and porous boundaries.

Someone who lives with rigid boundaries avoids intimacy and relationships and has few close friends. They're unlikely to ask for help and are quite protective of personal information, coming across as detached. This person keeps others at a distance to avoid rejection.

In contrast, someone who lives with porous boundaries overshares personal information and is over-involved with other people's problems. They have a hard time saying "no" to others, fearing rejection if they don't comply. They are dependent on the opinions of others and accepting of abuse or disrespect.





# *We can learn how best to live selfless lives while setting healthy boundaries.*

Somewhere between these two extremes we find healthy boundaries. Someone with healthy boundaries values their own opinions and doesn't compromise their values for others. They are appropriate in how they share their personal information, neither over- nor under-sharing. They are able to communicate their personal wants and needs and can accept when others say no to them.

## **CLUES IN GETHSEMANE**

With these ideas in mind, let's revisit the scene in Gethsemane as described by Ellen White: "The human heart longs for sympathy in suffering. This longing Christ felt to the very depths of His being. In the supreme agony of His soul He came to His disciples with a yearning desire to hear some words of comfort from those whom He had so often blessed and comforted, and shielded in sorrow and distress. The One who had always had words of sympathy for them was now suffering superhuman agony, and He longed to know that they were praying for Him and for themselves" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 687).

We see right away that He doesn't have rigid boundaries. If He had, He would have tried to soldier through alone. But He has brought His three closest disciples to pray with Him. At first glance, we may think He has porous boundaries. After all, He has done a lot for these disciples, and now He is hoping for a little consideration in return.

But there are two clues that let us know this is not the case:

- He tells them what He needs, asking them to pray for Him (see Matthew 26:38).
- He responds to their failure with compassion and understanding, offering an excuse for their weakness as He comments, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

These actions reveal a mindset of healthy boundaries. These boundaries did not change His kind actions toward His disciples, but He was able to accept the reality that they were not strong enough to repay Him for His kindness in the way He would have liked.

This night in Gethsemane is not the first time we have seen Jesus demonstrate healthy boundaries. In fact, there are many instances of boundary-setting that we see in Jesus' life. Let's take a look at a few of those instances as recorded in the Gospels.



*The Gethsemane olive orchard, located at the foot of the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Israel.*

### BOUNDARIES IN MINISTRY

**He didn't help everyone.** Though Jesus freely healed many people, Matthew records that on a visit to Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, He didn't perform a lot of miracles due to the people's unbelief. (See Matthew 13:58.)

**He had expectations for those He was healing.** He encouraged the healthy behavior of asking for what they needed, sometimes asking prodding questions to get the person to the place of requesting help, such as "What do you want Me to do for you?" (Matthew 20:32) or "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6). Several of His healings involved actions on the part of the recipient, such as telling a lame man to "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (Matthew 9:6) or telling the blind man to wash clay from his eyes in the pool of Siloam (John 9:7).

**He didn't allow Himself to be manipulated.** Peter, like most everyone, wanted Jesus to become king. When Jesus tried to tell His disciples of the path ahead of Him that would take Him to Calvary, Peter tried to talk Him out of it. Jesus' response to Peter was quite strong. "Get behind Me, Satan!" He declared. "You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23).

**He didn't give in to demands to prove Himself.** When the Pharisees and Sadducees asked for a sign, He called them out. "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign," He said (Matthew 16:4). Likewise, when He stood in trial before Herod, He didn't perform the miracle Herod was hoping to see but stood silently saying nothing.

**He didn't give in to family demands.** When His mother and brothers came seeking special recognition, He didn't respond to them but instead declared that "whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50).

**He didn't allow Himself to be unnecessarily harmed.** When His former neighbors were about to throw Him over a cliff, He slipped away. (See Luke 4:28-30.)

*Jesus always took time to talk to His heavenly Father in prayer.*





### **He didn't give in to baiting questions.**

When the religious leaders tried to trick Him with questions that seemed to have no right answer, Jesus always found a way around the trap, often asking questions in return rather than simply answering the unanswerable.

### **He didn't allow the crowds to control how He spent His time.**

Luke 5 tells about the crowds that came to hear Him speak and ask for healing. But in verse 16, we catch a glimpse of Jesus setting boundaries in a clear way: "So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."

### **FOLLOWING THE FATHER**

This leads us to perhaps the most important way that Jesus set boundaries. No matter how busy He was, He always took time to talk to His heavenly Father in prayer.

"Jesus was often found in prayer," Ellen White tells us. "He resorted to the lonely groves or to the mountains to make His requests known to His Father. When the business and cares of the day were ended, and the weary were seeking rest, Jesus devoted the time to prayer. . . . Fervent and effectual prayer is always in place, and will never weary. Such prayer interests and refreshes all who have a love for devotion" (*Counsels for the Church*, p. 293).

It is often said that we cannot give what we don't have. What Jesus had to give to the world was something He could not get from the world. To be filled with the gifts He was to share with humanity, He needed to spend time with the Father. This was most important. Even if He had to take a step away from His work in order to spend this crucial time in prayer, this was a practice He had to hold on to. Without this prayer time, He might not have succeeded in the mission He had come to earth to accomplish.

Speaking of Christ's mission, how do we reconcile the healthy boundaries Jesus maintained through His earthly life with the abuse He allowed Himself to endure as "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Acts 8:32)?

First, let's take a look at *who* He was being obedient to as He followed the path to the cross. It wasn't the rulers—He refused to answer Herod's questions. It wasn't the religious leaders—He refused to prove His divinity by coming down from the cross as they demanded. The One He was following was God. This was the key component in the plan He and the Father had put together to save the human race, and Jesus was now following through with the plan.

And that leads us to the next thing we need to ask ourselves: *Why* was He allowing this? Was He allowing the abuse for the sake of abuse? Was He merely enabling His abusers in their sin? No, He had a greater purpose. He was walking this path so that one day we would all be free of abuse and pain and all the other consequences sin has brought to our planet.

As we study the life of Jesus, we can learn how best to live selfless lives while setting healthy boundaries. We can learn how to show kindness for the sake of kindness rather than in an effort to please people and obtain favor. We can learn where to draw lines to allow us to continue serving others without burning out. We can learn to differentiate between sacrifice with a purpose and sacrifice that causes harm to others as well as ourselves.

By following Jesus' example, we can set boundaries, not for selfish purposes, but so that we may continue giving, and serving, and loving for years to come. ■

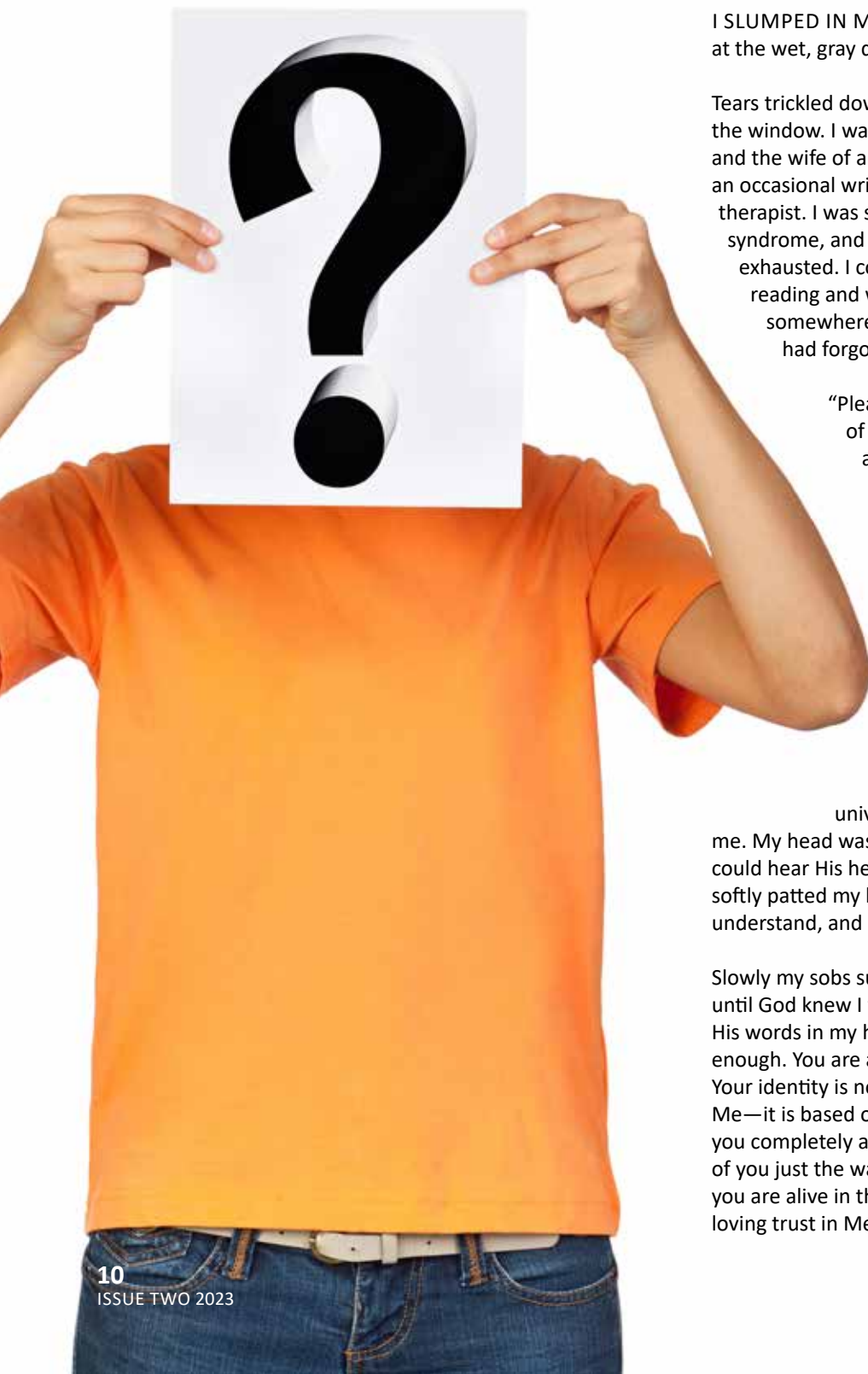
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# IDENTITY CRISIS

**GOD HELPED ME REDISCOVER MY VALUE.**



I SLUMPED IN MY CHAIR and gazed out the window at the wet, gray day. *Who am I?* I wondered.

Tears trickled down my face like raindrops down the window. I was a mother of three young children and the wife of a pastor. I was an introvert. I was an occasional writer. I used to be an occupational therapist. I was struggling with chronic fatigue syndrome, and even the smallest task left me exhausted. I couldn't do anything at church. Even reading and writing were too much effort. And somewhere between motherhood and now I had forgotten who I was.

"Please, Father, help me to make sense of my life. What use am I to You, to anyone, in this useless state?" The tears fell faster as I cried out my prayer.

In my imagination God bent down, picked me up like a little child, sat me on His lap, and cuddled me close to His chest. This was always a wonderful place to be. Loved, safe, and comforted, soothed by a gentle and loving Father with all the time in the universe, even for a broken person like me. My head was pressed against His chest, and I could hear His heart beating with love for me. He softly patted my back. "It's OK to cry, Karen. I'm here, I understand, and I care."

Slowly my sobs subsided and we sat together quietly, until God knew I was ready to listen. And then I heard His words in my heart: "Be still, my little one. You are enough. You are a human being, not a human doing. Your identity is not based on what you are doing for Me—it is based on what I am doing for you. And I love you completely and utterly. I have made every part of you just the way you are. It is enough for Me that you are alive in the world. What brings Me joy is your loving trust in Me, when you come to Me like this,

## *Even the smallest task left me exhausted.*

honestly and openly, with all your challenges and questions, and you trust Me with your very self and you love Me. You are beloved, and I am well pleased with you. This is your time to rest and recover, and one day you will be strong again and we will do great things together.”

I took a deep breath and rested, at peace and relaxed, on His strong and loving chest.

### **ON HIS LAP**

That was almost three decades ago. But I have sat on His lap many times since, for all kinds of reasons, joyful and tragic, to make sense of who I am with God. It is so easy to lose perspective. I hear what my church wants from me, what my children need from me, who my husband would like me to be, what society expects me to be . . . and it can be confusing and overwhelming. So many conflicting expectations and needs and desires. But the most important thing is to understand, first, how God sees me and how He loves me and cares for me. This helps me to gain perspective as I make sense of all the messages in my head and the pushes and pulls of the people around me.

God tells me that I am His child. Uniquely handmade by Him (Psalm 139:13, 14), beloved by Him (1 John 4:18, 19), and gifted by Him to bless others (Romans 12:3-10). Let’s explore these special qualities of our identity.

**Handmade:** Reflect on how God has knit you together and shaped who you are. You are unique, and you bring Him joy. Thank Him for the way He has made you, even the parts that you may not like so much, because He sees you as wonderfully created, and He is far more concerned with the beauty of your heart and soul than He is about your outward appearance.

**Beloved:** Read the love letter to you from God at [www.fathersloveletter.com](http://www.fathersloveletter.com) and respond with a love letter of your own to Him. Your true identity is in the relationship your Father God has with you as His precious and beloved child. You are an heir in His kingdom, a prince or princess. Even if, like me, your life events prevent you from functioning very well for a while.

**Gifted:** God has given you gifts, especially chosen to bring joy to you when you use them to bless and give joy to others. These gifts might be serving others, teaching, encouraging people, giving generously, leading out, discernment, evangelism, faith, wisdom, preaching, pastoring/shepherding, tongues



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(communication), showing mercy (kindness), etc. You can read about these in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 28-30; and Ephesians 4:11-13. When we use our gifts well, our community is strengthened and we help show others what God is like. What are your gifts? You can learn about your spiritual gifts and take a test at <https://spiritualgiftstest.com/>.

How have your gifts been a blessing to you and those around you? How would you like to grow these gifts God has given you by learning about them, practicing them, and using them in different ways? If you are going through a phase in your life when it's not so easy to use your gifts because you are unwell, busy with studies, or parenting intensively, God understands. You are probably using your gifts in ways you don't

*“I’m here, I understand, and I care.”*

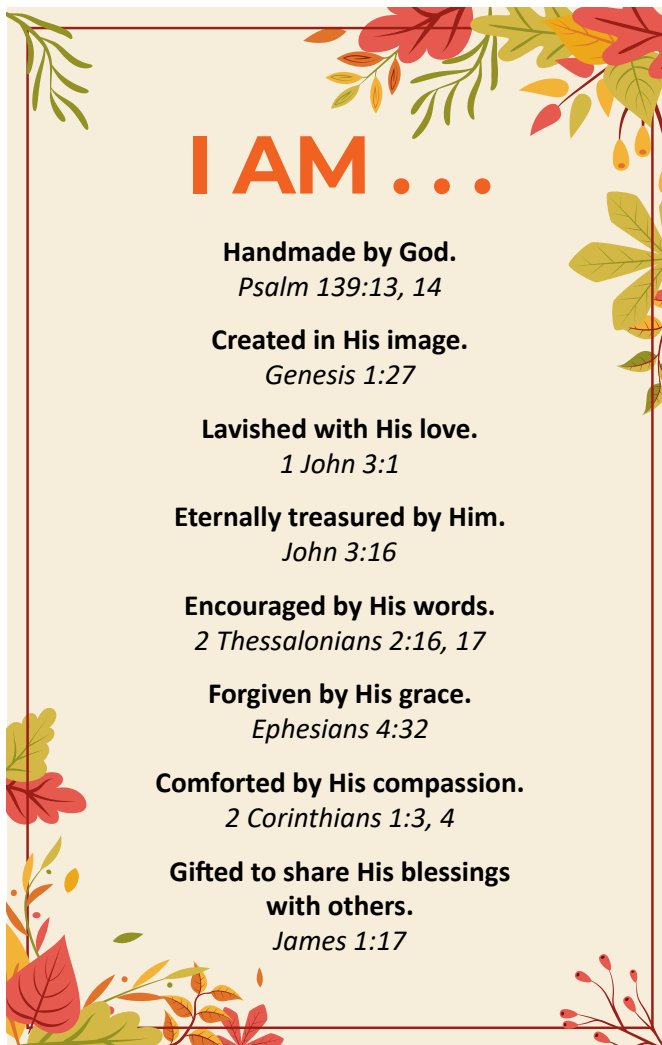
even notice! Or maybe this is an opportunity for others to use their gifts to bless you. Maybe this is your time to rest and receive for a while, and maybe you will find your strength again in the future.

Imagine you are sitting in God's lap and held lovingly against His chest. He smiles at you and wipes away your tears. What are the questions you would be asking Him today? And what do you imagine He would say to you out of the very center of His heart and His love for you?

God does not love you any more or any less because of what you can or cannot do, or what you look like, or how others treat you. You are continually beloved by Him. You are amazing because your Father, the God of the entire universe, loves you, and you are precious to Him. This is who you are; this is your identity, and nothing and nobody can ever take that away from you because you are His child. 

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# TIPS TO

## THRIVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

### LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

MY HUSBAND AND I attended a seminar during which a woman was helping people find enough time to perform all the duties required of them. The attendees seemed to think her suggestions helpful until she said, “You need to lower your standards.”

For Adventists, standards have a special meaning, including integrity and honesty. They also incorporate health principles, such as not smoking, drinking, or doing drugs. Many of us have been told all our lives, “Hold your standards high and never lower them!”

Perhaps if this woman had used a different word, such as “expectations,” the acceptance by the group would have been different.

Do we need to lower our expectations for ourselves? Are they unreasonable and unhealthy? What if we can’t meet all the expectations that we place on ourselves or that others demand of us? What things are more important—our expectation of having the house dusted every week or taking time to create memories with our children and spouse?

When we modify the expectations we place on ourselves, we might find time to create plans for making Sabbaths interesting and fun for our children/

teenagers rather than have the car squeaky clean. We also need to set a boundary in order to have meaningful time with Jesus every day.

For each person, expectations will be different, but it’s important to remember that the enemy has all sorts of “lures” to make us lower our good expectations, one of them being the media. There are many interesting and even good things in the media, but even the good things can consume our time and attention and often need to be curtailed. Time boundaries affect our spiritual relationship with God—the eternal destiny of ourselves and our families is at stake.

Determine what are the non-negotiable things in life. Give them priority space and set boundaries around them. I once heard a saying that I’ve kept with me ever since: “The very worst enemy of the best things in life are the good things in life.”

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

*Many of us  
have been  
told all  
our lives,  
“Hold your  
standards  
high and  
never lower  
them!”*



# THE BEAUTY OF BOUNDARIES

THEY ARE NECESSARY FOR FREEDOM AND LIFE ITSELF.

MOST OF US THINK OF BOUNDARIES as a necessary evil. They protect us from danger, but they also seem to stop us or hold us back when we disagree with them. This is a misunderstanding of the role and function of boundaries. They are actually crucial for true freedom and even life.

Think about it. A boundary-less state equals death. Space is a void with no confines, but also no life. If you lost your skin—the margin of your body—you would die. Even cancer is cells that do not respect their limits and expand where they shouldn't.

The work we see God doing in the Genesis origin story is the work of creating boundaries. From the chaos, the “without form and void,” the tempestuous waters, God delineates boundaries: between light and darkness, day and night, land and water, flora and fauna of all kinds, man and woman—even work and rest.

The original lie tested the boundaries God had established. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was a boundary that actually provided freedom of choice. The enemy questioned that freedom and painted boundaries (between trees, and God and humanity) as negative, reframing the conversation and creating the conditions of suspicion and rebellion. Humans have had a troubled relationship with boundaries ever since.





# *The work we see God doing in the Genesis origin story is the work of creating boundaries.*

## **FIND THE BALANCE**

The body of Christ is not immune from these issues around boundaries. And a lack of clear and healthy boundaries works against God's intentions.


Unfortunately, it is often seen as a mark of heroism not to have boundaries in church work. Pastors, elders, and ministry leaders are often expected to be available 24/7; otherwise they are seen as uncommitted. Christian relationships must be founded on love, respect, and sacrificial service, but giving all the time, giving beyond our means—it is dangerous. Those who have a hard time saying no become burned out and resentful of others and the church. Those who are controlling (not accepting “no”) often have power in church boards or influence among the congregation because no one wants to make waves by standing up to them.

This can create numerous problems at a local church level. Adventists have dietary restrictions and behavioral boundaries that place limits on external things. These restrictions protect us and in many cases are positive. They also show who's in or out or on the margins. Sadly, they are easy to enforce on others and often give us a false sense of achieving something, or being in a right relationship with God, because we remain within these behavioral boundaries. This is works.

We also struggle with relational boundaries. We shy away from interpersonal conflict, are afraid to place restrictions on controlling or manipulative rogue elements (for fear of being unloving), and often mistake the call of being makers of the peace with being keepers of the peace. The problem is that we suffer when we don't enforce our own personal boundaries: we lack moderation, self-care, private spiritual disciplines. We focus on the external to the loss of the internal and interpersonal. We enforce external boundaries on those with whom we have not established interpersonal borders.

Jesus left the crowds (Luke 4:30-32; 9:18). He created boundaries around His work. When Moses was burning out, his father-in-law recommended some delegation or boundaries being set because Moses had trouble saying no (Exodus 18:17–23).

Peter took Jesus aside to “correct His course”—he had a different idea how things should work and wanted to control Jesus. He was overstepping his boundaries. “Jesus rebuked him—and pointed out that his focus was on human concerns” (Matthew 16:22, 23).

Boundaries are a huge blind spot for us. I pray we can learn from the example of Jesus, Moses, and other biblical leaders as well as engage in our own personal reflection and self-analysis about where our boundary problems might lie. Hopefully we can then become a church filled with well-adjusted, healthy, loving individuals. 

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*Jarrod Stackelroth is editor of Adventist Record, the official news and lifestyle magazine for the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Providing roughly 24,000 copies to Seventh-day Adventist church members in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Islands, Adventist Record was established in 1898. This article originally appeared in the June 27, 2019, issue.*



# Got Soap?

**IT'S INEXPENSIVE, IT'S EASY TO USE, AND IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE!**

Question: What is the most effective method of preventing illness and its spread?

Answer: Handwashing.

“Miss this question or one like it on any quiz, and the result will be an automatic failure.”

As nursing students, we heard this solemn statement from more than one of our clinical instructors throughout our training program. Most of us were taught from childhood up

about the need for and benefits of frequently washing our hands, and yet it's so easy to slip away from doing as recommended. Science clearly shows that countless lives could be saved and many health problems averted by the frequent and simple act of washing our hands with soap and water.

## **INVISIBLE ENEMIES**

They are everywhere—on doorknobs, handrails, handshakes, desks, kitchen

SCAN FOR AUDIO



*“Anyone’s life truly lived consists of work, sunshine, exercise, soap, plenty of fresh air, and a happy, contented spirit.” —Lillie Langtry*

counters, shopping carts, items in stores, at work, on airplanes and car steering wheels, in bathrooms, dirty household laundry, sneezes and coughs of those around us, etc. Because we can’t see them and usually can’t even smell them on our hands, skin, and clothing, we tend to forget they are very real and a threat.

Germ, those microscopic organisms that carry harmful bacteria and viruses, can cause illnesses including colds, flu, COVID-19, gastrointestinal upsets and diseases, eye and skin infections, to name just a few. Resulting sicknesses can disrupt normal daily life through missed work and school, loss of income, hospitalizations, epidemics, and deaths.

#### **WHEN SICKNESS STRIKES**

Generally, most of us could benefit health-wise from daily bathing, which promotes increased blood flow and cleansing of toxins and impurities collected on the skin. However, keeping clean is even more vital during episodes of sickness.

Coughing, sneezing, fevers, aches, and general discomfort indicate one has caught a bug. A comfortably warm and cleansing shower can offer relief when one is feeling at their worst. Toxins that accumulate from clogged pores are washed away, congestion is loosened, and circulation is improved, thus aiding the work of the immune system. Fevers can be reduced, muscles relaxed, and symptoms eased. Afterward, with the providing of

fresh, clean bedding and comfortable clothing, mind and spirit alike can be soothed from the discomforts of the illness.

#### **WHY SOAP?**

Soap products have been around for thousands of years. Even before people understood the chemistry of soap making, they had discovered that certain combined materials when mixed with water cleaned better than using water alone. Soap is made from vegetable or animal fats or oils, which when combined with an alkaline metal solution become a specialized type of fatty acid and salt. Washing with water alone is ineffective in eliminating the germy oils we acquire from the multiple contaminated surfaces we meet daily. However, because it is a fatty acid and salt mixture, soap becomes a lather when mixed with water and is thus enabled to break up the dirt, oils, and chemicals that have attached to the natural oils of our skin, allowing all to be washed away in the rinse water.

There appears to be no significant benefit from the use of antibacterial soap products as compared to plain soap and water. Some studies indicate that the frequent use of antibacterial soaps may contribute over time to





antibiotic resistance. In the absence of soap and clean running water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or hand wipes with an alcohol content of at least 60 percent. However, the best and most effective way to remove all types of germs and chemicals from your hands continues to be washing with soap and water.

### WHEN TO WASH

It's important to wash hands in the following instances:

- After returning home from shopping, visiting people, church meetings, or gatherings
- Before and after food preparation
- Before eating
- After playing with a pet
- After using the restroom
- After sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose
- After handling dirty laundry
- After working in the garden or engaging in indoor cleaning
- Before and after visiting a sick person
- Anytime you feel your hands may have been exposed to germy or dirty surfaces


*“Fearfully and wonderfully  
has the Creator wrought in the  
human frame, and He bids us  
make it our study, understand  
its needs, and act our part in  
preserving it from harm and  
defilement.”*

—Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 271

### THE RIGHT METHOD

- Rinse your hands with clean water.
- Apply bar soap, powdered soap, or liquid soap.
- Work up a lather.
- Scrub for at least 20 seconds. (Singing the song “Happy Birthday” twice takes about 20 seconds.)
- Rinse with clean water.
- Dry with a clean towel, paper towel, blow dryer, or just air dry.

### FINALLY . . .

The simple acts of washing our hands, bathing frequently with soap and water, and wearing clean clothing are proven effective and easy ways of eliminating harmful bacteria and viruses from our hands and bodies, thus protecting ourselves and others from the effects and spread of germs and disease. 

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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 Eastern Asia and then worked as a missionary with her husband in India for 16 years. She enjoys music, creative arts, cooking, and reading.

# THE WAY TO SELF-COMPASSION



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**HOW CAN YOU TREAT YOURSELF WITH THE SAME LOVE AND CARE YOU'D TREAT A LOVED ONE?**

I CRADLED A MUG of herbal tea with both hands, tears filling my eyes. The acquaintance I was talking with leaned forward—elbows on her knees, hands folded. A close friend of mine had died suddenly just weeks before, and I was deeply grieving. After talking for some time, I paused. The person listening gently said, “You need to give yourself some compassion.” I remember feeling as if time halted. I thought, *I don’t know what she means.*

## THE HEART OF SELF-COMPASSION

As soon as I got home that day, I opened my laptop and searched for “self-compassion.” As a college professor, I was surprised I hadn’t heard the term before. Growing up in the Church and attending Adventist schools through college, I’d of course heard plenty about compassion for others in Bible classes, during sermons, and at Sabbath School. But giving compassion to myself? I wasn’t taught that, and the idea had never occurred to me.

I delved into library databases and online bookstores. Soon I was reading every piece of scientific literature I could get my hands on. It didn’t take me long to find the two questions at the heart of self-compassion: *In this moment of suffering, what do I need? How can I treat myself with the same care I’d treat a loved one?*

## THE LIMITS OF SYMPATHY AND EMPATHY


Early on my journey to greater self-compassion, I had to relearn the difference between sympathy and empathy.

Sympathy is a sense of pity and sorrow—with an occasional dash of condescension—for another person’s pain. It makes us feel bad *for* others. We keep our distance, don’t get involved, and hope everything turns out okay. That’s why “sympathy drives disconnection,” says vulnerability and shame researcher Dr. Brené Brown.

In contrast, empathy means feeling *with* another person. We start giggling when we see children giggling or cry when others cry. “Empathy,” explains Dr. Brown, “fuels connection,” so it must be good, right? Yes, but it has limits. Feeling *with* others—especially difficult emotions such as grief, loneliness, anger—can lead to overwhelm, sending us right back to the more comfortable distance of sympathy.



# TIPS TO GET STARTED



If you're new to self-compassion, for emotional safety it's important to know you might experience *backdraft*. The metaphor comes from firefighting. When a fire consumes the oxygen in a room or house and a door or window is opened, the new supply of oxygen creates a burst of flames. Similarly, when we suddenly start treating ourselves with more warmth and understanding than we're used to, we might actually feel worse for a time. "Love reveals everything unlike itself" is one expression that captures this experience. If you notice emotional backdraft as you practice any of the suggestions below, that's a signal to slow down, take a break, or talk to a professional before beginning again.

## PRACTICES FOR BEGINNERS

Below are several practices to help you begin growing your self-compassion. Remember, if you notice any emotional pain, slow down, take a break, or speak with someone who can support you.

**Comforting Touch.** We know that babies who are physically neglected often don't meet typical developmental markers. They need to be held, rocked, played with. God designed us this way, to need welcomed and appropriate touch not just as infants but over our lifespan. With that in mind, try various ways of using your own hands to comfort yourself. Some of us do this automatically. One hand on your cheek, both hands on your cheeks, one or two hands over your heart, folded hands in your lap, one hand on heart and one on your stomach, folded arms, or a gentle self-hug. Which ones feel right for you? If you're not able to use your hands, try imagining the options as our brains and bodies respond even to our imagination.

**Letter Writing.** To help us begin treating ourselves as we'd treat a friend, especially when hurting, try writing a compassionate letter to yourself from the perspective of someone who loves you deeply about a *mildly* difficult situation or experience you're having right now or had recently. (Don't pick something extremely painful. We have to start small.) The person could be a parent, grandparent, spouse, close friend, or Jesus. Find a quiet place where you can handwrite, type, or dictate a letter. What would this person who loves you say to you in the situation? How would they say it?

**Childhood Photo.** Find a picture of yourself as a child or ask someone to help you do so. If it isn't already, consider having it printed and framed. Place it nearby on a bedside table or on your desk at work—wherever you'll see it often. (If you have a visual impairment, perhaps a relative or friend could describe a photo of your child self to you.) Does your age change anything about your inherent value in God's eyes? Not at all. Because you are a child of God at every age, you are just as worthy of love, care, and compassion now as you were then. Remembering that can help you be a little kinder to yourself when life is challenging.

**Bible Reading.** Turn to 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 in your Bible. We often hear this passage read at weddings or understand it as a way to guide how we're showing love to others. But this time, read the passage with self-compassion in mind. Being patient with, kind to, hopeful about, and reliable for yourself is transformative. Feel the warmth of this passage as you realize you can give yourself the same love and care that you desire to give others and that Jesus freely gives to you.

# *We're often harder on ourselves than we are on others.*

## **EMPATHY + ACTION = COMPASSION**

When feeling *with* others motivates us to relieve suffering, that's compassion. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to die for and set us free from our sins. Why would He do such a thing? Because He loves us (John 3:16). Because He has compassion for us. God was *moved* by the pain sin brought to our lives, and Jesus *moved from* Heaven to Earth to relieve and ultimately end our suffering.

## **OFFERING COMPASSION TO OURSELVES**

Self-compassion, then, is being moved to treat ourselves in the ways we would treat someone we love and care about—especially when hurting. Sounds easy, but we're often harder on ourselves than we are on others. How do we begin?

According to self-compassion researchers, we first have to notice when we're hurting. In today's busy world, it's easier than ever to push our difficult feelings aside and even ignore our emotional, physical, or spiritual pain. But we can't tend to what we don't acknowledge. Self-compassion begins with being honest with ourselves about hurting. In these moments, I comfort myself with the expression, "It's okay to not be okay."

Then it helps to remember that *all* of us could lose a job, develop cancer, or make a big mistake. When we see ourselves as not unique in our human challenges and shortcomings, we're more likely to be warm and understanding with ourselves. Self-kindness isn't letting yourself "off the hook," suffering alone, or making excuses. Rather, self-kindness nudges us to make changes, ask for help, or hold ourselves accountable and make amends.

Finally, we can remind ourselves that we aren't our feelings. This part of self-compassion is perhaps the toughest. It's similar to recognizing that when we sin or "miss the mark" we aren't sin itself. In other words, *doing* something bad doesn't mean *we* are bad. Likewise, feeling grief, loneliness, or anger—or any other difficult emotion—doesn't define who we are. Instead, we can respond to those feelings by considering their wisdom. Grief can prompt us to slow down life's pace and heal. Loneliness can urge us to seek human connection. Anger can alert us to a violated boundary that needs greater protection.

## **JESUS, THE WAY TO SELF-COMPASSION**

Slowly becoming more loving and caring toward myself has provided me better mental and physical health as well as helped me be more understanding and supportive of others. More than that, though, it has allowed me to see and experience Jesus in a new light.

Through an understanding of self-compassion, I now read about Jesus' life on Earth with a fresh perspective. When He rested, ate with friends, countered the temptations and lies of Satan in the wilderness, He treated Himself with compassion. *In this moment of suffering, what do I need?* When He invited His inner circle of disciples to accompany Him to the Garden of Gethsemane and asked them to hold vigil with their prayers as He spent time alone with God the Father just a short distance away, He was offering Himself what He needed to prepare for the Cross.

Jesus is our example in everything, including in how to relate to ourselves. Practicing self-compassion has helped me and may help you notice how cruel we humans can be to ourselves. In contrast, Jesus offers us compassion, never cruelty. That is why He is Immanuel, God with us. All the more reason to embrace ourselves as the precious beings God created us to be. Jesus Himself is our Way to self-compassion. 2

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*Tanya R. Cochran, PhD, is Professor of English and Communication at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska.*





# Changing **ROLES**

**SOMEDAY YOUR MINISTER SPOUSE MAY MOVE INTO AN ADMINISTRATIVE OR DIRECTOR POSITION, GIVING YOU A NEW ROLE AS WELL.**

WHEN MY HUSBAND WAS ASKED to serve as president of the North England Conference, I had no idea what was required of me. My knowledge base was merely from an outsider looking in—just observations of previous presidents' wives. Thankfully, over 20 years ago, when my husband was first called to the ministry, I wrestled with God and sought Him earnestly, asking Him: "What do You require of me?" My answer came back: "Be a Christian (love Christ)." This mantra has sustained me over the years and became even more poignant in my new role.

One of my earliest observations was my husband's total absorption in the work. If there were more than 24 hours in a day, they'd be filled. The president's role is all-consuming. Because I'm a spouse with my own professional career in senior leadership, we could easily have been like ships passing in the night. Actually, we probably were for the first three years. The COVID-19 pandemic literally brought us under one roof, having Microsoft Teams calls in different rooms. Yet it also allowed those special moments of togetherness, talking, eating, walking, and praying.

With the new responsibility, travel across the conference increases. Sabbaths can be somewhat of a nomadic lifestyle, moving around to different congregations. I took this aspect of my role in stride. On reflection it gave my husband and me time together as we traveled, and I enjoyed getting to know familiar faces as well as



## *Trusting in the promises of God would always bring me through.*

unfamiliar ones. A particular joy was when new companies or churches were being formed or organized; I loved to learn about their history and see how God had led. The commitment of members volunteering their time, often stepping out on a limb under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, really buoys my spirit.

The high days, such as conference, union, and division events, can be amazing. I saw the church from different perspectives, and my understanding increased as to how mission and strategy are translated internationally, nationally, regionally, and locally. These events have a downside in that the president's spouse can be thrown into the spotlight. You may not know people, but they certainly know you.

As an introvert, I am comfortable in my own thoughts and thinking, but I can also be flexible and move into extroversion mode. However, the spotlight saps my energy, and I would then seek to find my own private space and recharge my batteries. Self-reflection and understanding your own style and preferences are crucial to handling the spotlight experiences. With self-reflection the inner critic can raise its ugly head. Here is when the enemy may try to discourage you. Everyone makes mistakes, and in my weakest state trusting in the promises of God would always bring me through.

### **WARNINGS**

At times I have been asked, "What is it like to be a president's wife?" My response has been, "When you are in a local church, there are joys and problems. Can you imagine this being multiplied across a mission, conference, union, or division?"

Your spouse will carry a weight that only Christ the great Burden Bearer can carry. I have always had every confidence in my husband and his leadership abilities, whether as a president or a pastor. When Satan's arrows are being hurled (and these will come), words of affirmation are needed, just as Jesus affirmed His followers. Sometimes your spouse may want to share, and in those times, hear and listen, then together leave all at the altar of sacrifice. Confidences must never be betrayed.



### *I had to make a stand for my children.*



There are also times when other pastors and members wish for you to give an opinion on conference matters. These promptings can be quite subtle or blatantly publicized. In my professional career I have had experiences with handling political environments across national and local healthcare and government organizations. Therefore, my professional experiences were instrumental in my not being drawn into toxic conversations and environments. Instead, I kept a level head and sought counsel from the Word of God.

The impact on children cannot be overstated no matter what their age, but particularly if still a dependent. Several studies point to the pressures faced by clergy children and the high statistics of behavioral problems and leaving the church due to congregational high expectations and public scrutiny. These statistics cross all

denominations. As a president's wife, I had to make a stand for my children. There were certain occasions and events in my children's lives where both parents were required, and these attendances were non-negotiable. Both our children transitioned to university over the conference term, and their father's support was crucial. An equilibrium was achieved because we had historic ways of working collaboratively and supporting our children together. Fortunately, although time was more limited, our established ways of working remained a priority.

As a president's wife you will likely see a General Conference, union, or conference session come around. I realized this was not a trifling matter. I fasted and prayed personally, with my husband, and with close friends for God's will to be done. The Lord impressed on my heart and mind Bible texts that sustained me. I had never sat through a session from start to finish, but I did so because I wanted to be by my husband's side. Whatever the outcome, understand God's plan for your life. My advice is do not become embroiled in politics. (See Jesus' example in Matthew 22.) Moreover, in God's presence is "fullness of joy"; at His right hand are "pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). J

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**Angela Jackson** resides in England and is a former conference president's wife and mother of two children. Professionally she is a national nurse leader, an executive coach, and a mentor. She says, "I would like to develop a resource for spouses of presidents and other leaders. Are you willing to share your reflections, pearls of wisdom, anecdotes, and insights? If so, please email: [ajackson17@hotmail.com](mailto:ajackson17@hotmail.com). All responses will be confidential and anonymized. Together let us change the status quo, turn the tide, and develop a resource to help our spouses who support the leaders of our church."



### *East-Central Africa Division*

In August 2022, a graduation was held for ministerial spouses from Central Rift Valley Conference and South Rift Valley Field. Pastors and pastors' kids (PKs) attended, and the pastors gave their wives flowers. Continuing education in ECD has contributed greatly to team ministry in ministerial families.



Ministerial spouses graduate from a continuing education program in Kenya.



Pastors were ushers for the graduation.



In July 2022, the North East Congo Union Mission held a PK congress.

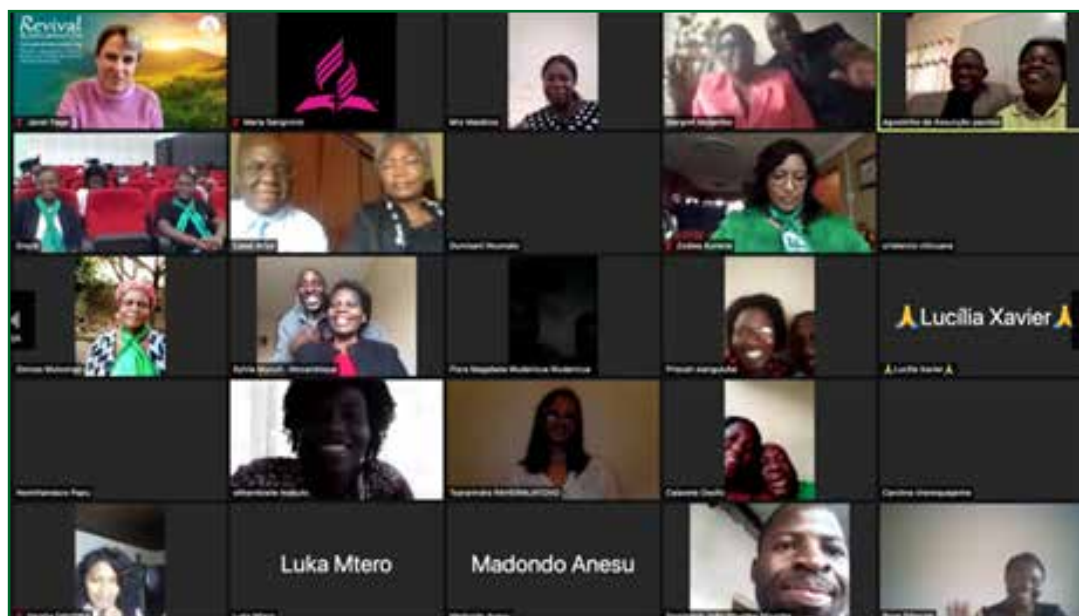
### *Inter-American Division*



In November 2022, pastoral couples met in El Salvador. Ramon and Aurora Canals participated in the ordination program for this special group.



## *Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division*



Janet Page met with the Indian Ocean Union Conference via Zoom.

## *Southern Asia-Pacific Division*

Orathai Chureson, former SSD Ministerial Spouse Coordinator, worked with Adventist World Radio holding a reaping campaign. There were over 1,000 baptisms in Mindoro, Philippines. They praise God for all His leading and blessings upon the evangelistic efforts!



A baptism was held in Mindoro, Philippines, last year.

## *West-Central Africa Division*

In February 2022, WAD held their maiden retreat for military chaplains and their spouses at the Ghana Seventh-day Adventist Church. The retreat will be held each year to address the unique ministerial family issues in the military. Pray for the ministry of chaplains in Africa.



Chaplains and spouses met together at a retreat in Ghana.



*In February 2022, the Cameroon Union Mission Shepherdesses held a retreat in Niamvoudou, a village in the Nyong-Afamba Conference. They donated plastic chairs to a local church.*



*In March 2022, the Kwadaso Sector ministerial spouses had a prayer, a talk, and a liquid soap making day.*



*In March 2022, Central Ghana Conference ministerial spouses worshipped together and donated plastic chairs to a local Seventh-day Adventist church.*



*In April 2022, there was a ministerial retreat at Cotonou, Benin, in the Eastern Sahel Union Mission.*



*In April 2022, the Shepherdesses in the Northern Ghana Union held their union retreat at the Valley View University Techiman Campus.*



*In April 2022, the Shepherdesses in the Southern Ghana Union Conference had their biennial retreat at the Adventist College of Education in Koforidua. On the last Sabbath they formed Sabbath School classes.*





# WHO AM I?



- Before you do the worship activities on these pages with your family, cut out shapes or find objects to make a cardboard wreath. Cut out two identical 12-inch (30-centimeter) circles from corrugated or stiff cardboard. Cut out a smaller circle from the center of the circle to make a wreath shape with a border about 2 inches (5 centimeters) wide. Stick the two 12-inch circles of card together to make a strong wreath shape.
- Write or cut out the letters of your name and stick your name on the wreath.
- Cut out the different shapes or find the objects suggested in each activity. Stick them around the wreath to remind you how much God loves you! Add other shapes and bits and pieces to customize the wreath with your favorite colors.



Read Psalm 139:13-18.

- Use whatever craft materials you have, or use some of the natural materials around you, to make a model of a person. God used clay to make the shape of Adam.
- What is it like to try to make something that looks like a human being? Fun? Difficult? Frustrating? Exciting? What challenges did you face as you tried to make a person? Whenever I try to make a person out of clay, I am very glad that God designed us so beautifully and we don't look like my funny, lopsided models!
- Praise God together for creating us with such expert detail in every way. When you take time to make something special, you really treasure your creations, and God treasures you because you are handmade with love by Him.
- Stick a small photo or drawing of yourself onto your wreath.



## I AM BELOVED BY GOD

Read Ephesians 3:14-19.

- God's love is wider and longer and higher and deeper than you can ever imagine! It is as big as the universe, and that is bigger than we can ever begin to measure.
- Go outside to a dark place and look at the night sky together as a family. Try to count the stars. It's impossible! Imagine that everything you can see, in every direction, and everything you can't see is completely filled with God's love for you. How does that make you feel? You are so beloved by God, and He will always love you this big!
- Imagine that the God who loves you this much sends you a postcard with a message of love on it. Find a blank postcard or cut a piece of white card to the same size. On one side draw a picture that reminds you how beloved you are by God, and on the other side write a message of love that God might write to you today.
- Make a small heart shape out of things you can find around your home. Decorate it to illustrate God's love in some way. Stick this onto your wreath.



## I AM FORGIVEN BY GOD

Read Psalm 103.

- Talk in your family about what you might need to ask forgiveness for and maybe grant forgiveness for. Forgiveness helps everyone feel free and clean!
- Cut a heart out of white paper to show that God washes our hearts with His forgiveness and makes them white as snow. Stick this onto your wreath.

## I AM SEARCHED FOR BY GOD



Read Luke 15:3-7 (the story of the lost sheep).

- Take turns hiding in your home or yard. Hide as carefully as you can and pretend you are a lost sheep and are too tired to bleat! Everyone should look for the person who is the lost sheep. Whenever a lost sheep is found, have a mini celebration! Perhaps enjoy a nice drink or a tiny treat or sing a happy song to celebrate finding the lost sheep.
- Remember that you are so special to God that He is willing to do whatever it takes to find you, even when you feel lost, and He always brings you back to safety. Finding you makes Him so happy He wants to celebrate in the best way possible!
- Cut out a cardboard sheep. Stick fluffy cotton wool onto it and draw its ears, eyes, and hooves. Stick this onto your wreath.





## Who am I?



# I AM GIFTED BY GOD

Read Romans 12:3-8.

- God has given special gifts to every single person who chooses to follow Jesus. He gives these gifts to us to help us show other people how much He loves them. Many of the gifts are things children can do to bless others and show them God's love. Like encouraging people, serving, helping, being kind, and being generous with others.
- Even if you don't have any money, you can be generous in your kindness, your gift of time, and your welcome of others.
- Cover a small box with plain paper and tie some yarn or ribbon around it. Write the name of each person in your family on a different side of the box. If you have more than six people in your family, use a larger box and divide some of the sides into two.
- Pass the box around and write each person's gifts around their name. Tell them when you've seen them use their special gifts from God. Together hold the box as you all thank God for the gifts He has given each of you to bless your family.
- Cut out a cardboard shape of a small gift. Cover it with colored paper and tie some yarn or ribbon around it to make a bow. Write one of your gifts from God on the wrapping paper and stick it onto your wreath.



# I AM A PRINCE OR PRINCESS IN HIS KINGDOM

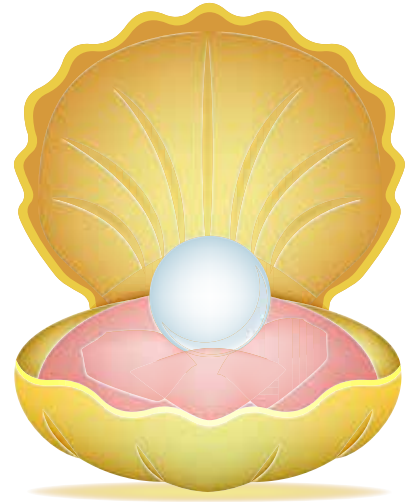
Read Romans 8:17.

- We are heirs of God, alongside Jesus! That makes us princes and princesses in the kingdom of God! You are princesses and princes right here and right now!
- What do you know about princes and princesses? What do they do? How do they live? How do they care for others? The best princes and princesses are very kind and polite to other people, and they do what they can to support people who are struggling by working with charities and aid organizations.
- Go and dress up as if you are princes and princesses—even Mom and Dad can join in if they wish! Then eat a meal together and treat each other as if you are all in a royal family, because we are all in the royal family of God. How does being a prince or princess change how you see yourself and how you treat each other?
- Cut out a crown from gold cardstock or use white paper and color it yellow to make a beautiful crown. Write your name along the bottom edge of the crown and stick it onto your wreath.

# I AM PRECIOUS TO GOD

Read Matthew 13:45, 46.

- You might think you are only tiny, but to God you are super-precious! The most famous and greatest people on earth are no more precious to God than a newborn baby or a child like you.
- We often read the story of the man who sold everything to buy a pearl as if we need to be that man and give up everything we have. But we can also read the story as if God is the man and we are very precious like the pearl. He comes looking for us, digging for us, and when He finds us, He is willing to give up everything to save us!
- Find something in your house that is small and a bit like a pearl, such as a bead, a pearly button, a marble, or even a dry white bean.
- Find an old tray or large shallow box. Have an adult fill it with sand, compost, or dry soil, and then hide the “pearl” in the box so it can’t be seen.
- Take turns removing one spoonful of dirt out of the box and see if you can find the “pearl.” When you do, you must run and find some of your best toys or possessions and “sell” them to Mom or Dad to swap for the pearl. Your parent will tell you when you have enough things to swap for the value of the pearl. Don’t worry! They will give them right back to you after worship.
- You are so precious that Jesus swapped all of heaven to come to earth to find you and buy you with His sacrifice because He loves you so much!
- Cut a circle out of white cardstock or pearlized cardstock to make a large pearl to stick on your wreath. On the pearl write “I am precious to God!”



## FINISHING YOUR WREATH

Once you have stuck all your shapes onto your wreath, you may have some gaps around the circle. You can color in the gaps or fill them in with colored paper. ■

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***Karen Holford** is excited by who she is in God’s loving eyes! And she loves to help others see who they are in God’s eyes too!*

INSPIRATIONAL RESOURCES  
FOR A DEEPER WALK WITH CHRIST