

STRONGER TOGETHER

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



THANKFULNESS

How to Experience It and Express It

STRONGER TOGETHER

Issue 4
2023



We're stronger as we share our stories, challenges, 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*.

ON THE COVER

Most of us recognize this beautiful passage of Scripture: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (1 Chronicles 16:34). Expressing thankfulness is good for not only the receiver but also the giver and even those witnessing the act of gratitude! This issue focuses on some reasons to be grateful and some tips for practicing the habit of thankfulness.



SCAN TO READ ONLINE



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ASK, BELIEVE, AND Be Thankful

THE BIBLE TELLS US that instead of worrying about things, we should present our situations to God in prayer, petition, and thanksgiving (see Philippians 4:6).

Several years ago, while my husband and I were serving as pastors at a church on the East Coast of the United States, a plea was made by one of the members. Sarah* walked into church while my husband gave announcements, and she shared some sad news.

“Pastor,” she said, “I need my church family to pray for me. I am pregnant, and my doctor cannot find my baby’s heartbeat. He told me my baby was still, and he would have to perform surgery to extract the fetus. I am devastated. I don’t know what to do. But I know there is a God in heaven who hears prayers, and I want my church family to pray for me. I believe God can perform a miracle.”

My husband, moved by a strong faith, invited the congregation to pray for Sarah and her unborn child. Our church members rallied around her, gently laying their hands on her in a gesture of unity as they raised their voices in sincere, earnest prayer. They implored God to safeguard Sarah’s life, ensure the birth of a healthy child, and bestow comfort and fortitude upon both the expectant mother and her unborn baby. In our prayers, we asked for a miracle according to God’s will.

Filled with the divine presence of the Spirit and unified in steadfast faith, the congregation raised a harmonious chorus of prayers for Sarah’s situation. Their prayers reverberated within the sacred confines of the church building, wrapping Sarah in a comforting tapestry of hope and unwavering belief in the Lord’s healing power. After we prayed, she went home trusting God’s will.

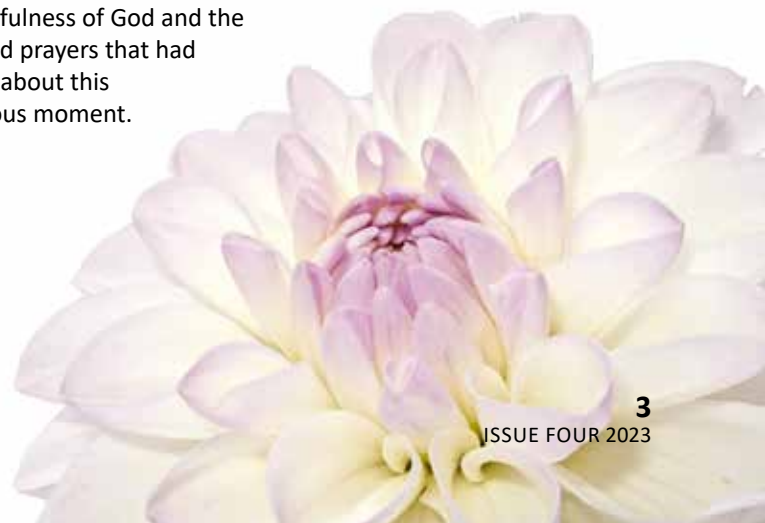
Just a week later, Sarah found herself back in the confines of the doctor’s office. Her heart brimmed with anxious anticipation yet also gratitude for the collective prayers that were offered for her. As the doctor pressed the cool metal of the stethoscope against her abdomen and listened with absorbed concentration, a look of sheer astonishment transformed his countenance.

His eyes, wide with wonder, turned toward Sarah. In a voice imbued with awe, he declared, “This is a miracle! I found the baby’s heartbeat! Your baby is alive.”

A torrent of joyful tears cascaded down Sarah’s cheeks, a testament to her amazement at the remarkable faithfulness of God. She held an unshakeable belief deep within her soul that the collective prayers of her church had resonated within the celestial realm, provoking a mighty intervention from God Himself. The doctor, now privy to this extraordinary turn of events, conceded to the indomitable force of divine intervention, joining Sarah in her awe-inspiring reverence.

NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD

Overwhelmed with gratitude, Sarah returned to the church to share the remarkable news with my husband and the congregation. The sanctuary echoed with shouts of joy and heartfelt praises as the church celebrated the faithfulness of God and the answered prayers that had brought about this miraculous moment.



Ask, Believe, and Be Thankful

Sarah's faith surged from that monumental day, her trust in God delving into newfound depths. Her odyssey became an enduring symbol of the might of faith, the resilience of a prayerful community, and the awe-inspiring wonders that unfurl when God's people unite. Holding her newborn close to her heart, Sarah whispered prayers of gratitude, her heart swelling with perpetual thanks for the love and prayers that heralded this cherished life into her world.

Her journey did more than just fortify her own faith—it acted as a beacon, deepening the faith of all who bore witness to this miracle. It served as a powerful reminder of the potential miracles that can occur when we unite in prayer and seek divine intervention, resulting in an overflow of gratitude for God's extraordinary workings in our lives.

Cultivating a spirit of gratitude within our families and recognizing the unexpected blessings that surface within Adventist ministry not only enriches our lives but also fortifies our faith. By fostering a spirit of thankfulness, acknowledging the blessings woven into our ministry, and sharing tales of unexpected grace, we can uplift and inspire one another. Uniting with others in prayer gives us an opportunity to experience God's power and love. Moreover, utilizing straightforward ministry tools can bolster our service and disseminate the unique Adventist message.

Let's give thanks for the privilege of being part of this ministry, continuously seeking ways to bless others as we navigate this faith-laden journey together. Remember to always ask, believe, and be thankful. This is the result: "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). J

* Not her real name

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

***"I believe God
can perform a
miracle."***





Special Quotes

by Ellen G. White

Let us be thankful every moment for God's forbearance with our tardy, unbelieving movements. Instead of flattering ourselves with the thought of what we have done, after doing so little, we are to labor still more earnestly. We are not to cease our efforts or relax our vigilance. Never is our zeal to grow less. Our spiritual life must be daily revived by the stream that makes glad the city of our God. We must be always on the watch for opportunities to use for God the talents He has given us.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 27

Our lives should be consecrated to the good and happiness of others, as was our Savior's. We should be self-forgetful, ever looking out for opportunities, even in little things, to show gratitude for the favors we have received of others, and watching for opportunities to cheer others and lighten and relieve their sorrows and burdens by acts of tender kindness and little deeds of love. These thoughtful courtesies, that, commencing in our families, extend outside the family circle, help make up the sum of life's happiness; and the neglect of these little things makes up the sum of life's bitterness and sorrow.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 539, 540

In a sense the father is the priest of the household, laying upon the family altar the morning and evening sacrifice. But the wife and children should unite in prayer and join in the song of praise. In the morning before he leaves home for his daily labor, let the father gather his children about him and, bowing before God, commit them to the care of the Father in heaven. When the cares of the day are past, let the family unite in offering grateful prayer and raising the song of praise, in acknowledgment of divine care during the day.

—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 392

There must be no belittling of the gospel ministry. No enterprise should be so conducted as to cause the ministry of the Word to be looked upon as an inferior matter. It is not so. Those who belittle the ministry are belittling Christ. The highest of all work is ministry in its various lines, and it should be kept before the youth that there is no work more blessed of God than that of the gospel minister.

—*Gospel Workers*, p. 63

At family worship let the children take a part. Let all bring their Bibles and each read a verse or two. Then let some familiar hymn be sung, followed by prayer. For this, Christ has given a model. The Lord's Prayer was not intended to be repeated merely as a form, but it is an illustration of what our prayers should be—simple, earnest, and comprehensive. In a simple petition tell the Lord your needs and express gratitude for His mercies. Thus you invite Jesus as a welcome guest into your home and heart.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 357, 358



WHAT HAPPENS?

I THANKED GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE AN ANSWER AND A PRAYER.



“WHAT HAPPENS WHEN people die?”

I remember her face—an old woman, with an intensity in her eyes I didn’t understand at the time. I was standing at her door offering her Christian books.

“Well, I wouldn’t want to just tell you what I think. I’d rather tell you what the Bible says,” I responded. “Would you like me to come back to study the Bible with you?”

“Yes!” She grasped my hand eagerly.

A few days later I sat in her living room getting to know her. She told me her story. Raised Catholic, she was outraged when her friend got pregnant out of wedlock and the priest refused to baptize the baby. Recognizing the hypocrisy, she decided this was not a God she wanted to worship. She had lived her life without reference to God and without cracking open a Bible.

But now she had cancer, and she wanted to know. What was going to happen to her when she died?

PRAYER HEALS

She had energy for only that one Bible study, but what a beautiful study it was. At the end, she smiled and said, “Thank you. That’s what I needed to know.”

But what struck her most about our meeting surprised me. It was my prayer. I had prayed a simple prayer at the beginning of our study, asking for God to guide us.

On future visits, she began asking more and more about prayer. “You pray like you’re just talking to God. Like He’s your friend.”

“He is,” I assured her.

Finally, on one visit, she said with uncharacteristic boldness, “I have been praying.” She pointed to her front window. “I sit there in my chair, and I look up at the sky and I talk to Him. Do you think . . . do you think He minds that?” She looked at me a little anxiously.

“That’s what I needed to know.”

“Oh, He *loves* that! He doesn’t mind at all!” I assured her.

She beamed at me. “You think so?”

The next time I went to see her, she was gone.

Church can leave the most terrible wounds on our picture of the character of God. But that doesn’t have to be the end of the story.

So be the church today. If someone has been wounded

by those who misrepresented God, you can bring healing. You can be a conduit of love, of joy, and of peace.

He heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. And sometimes, He uses us. 7

Nicole Parker is the author of the bestselling *Tales of the Exodus* book series, a narrative experience of the Exodus through the eyes of the children of Caleb and Joshua. The series unpacks biblical principles of how to heal and develop faith amid trauma. She holds a master’s degree in pastoral ministry and a master’s degree in biblical counseling. She is an adjunct faculty member in the religion department at Southern Adventist University, where her husband, Dr. Alan Parker, is a professor. They live in Collegedale, Tennessee, with their four boisterous children.

MARRIED TO A PASTOR?

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CONTENTED CLEANING

CAN WE ACTUALLY BE THANKFUL FOR CHORES?

I PULLED OUT THE BROOM and started to sweep our wooden floors. I worked erratically, annoyed at the task, pushing the broom this way and that and banging it into the furniture. It was Friday. The house was a mess, I had a long to-do list, three small children ran around my feet, and I felt exhausted. I gathered the sweepings into the dustpan as quickly as I could and dumped them with a deep sigh.

As I dragged the broom to the next room, a little voice spoke up.

“Mommy, why don’t you like cleaning our house? It’s so nice when everything looks pretty for Sabbath.” My 6-year-old daughter looked up at me with questioning eyes.

I tried to smile as I swept the hallway, but Bethany’s question wandered through my thoughts. *Why am I so grumpy about cleaning? What if I was more grateful and content about housework instead of seeing it as a boring burden? Isn’t that a bit ridiculous though? I mean, how can cleaning ever be a joy?*

I wondered how my life would change if I cleaned with contentment and gratitude. I remembered Paul’s words: “In everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Could I even be thankful doing the housework? Paul also told the Colossians, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23, NIV). *Now, there’s an interesting thought . . . How do I clean the house as if I am cleaning for the Lord?*

INTENTIONAL CHOICE

That evening my family and I walked around the house. In every room we thanked God for all the things we hadn’t thanked Him for before—kitchen utensils, rugs, and garbage bins. And then we blessed each room as a place where kindness and joy could flourish. If there was something I wasn’t thankful for, I decided to give it away. I started to declutter what we didn’t need and to cherish what filled me with joy.

I made an intentional choice to have a positive attitude about cleaning. It was easy to feel annoyed by the workload. But that wasn’t helpful. Jesus said that everything I was doing for my family, to make the home lovely for them, I was doing for Him. As I cleaned, I prayed, “Jesus, I am so glad I can do this for You, and for my family.”

I couldn’t pour perfume on Jesus’ feet. I’m not a pastor or missionary. But when I am tidying up, sorting



Now I think of housework as art.

the trash, and cleaning the bathrooms, I am still doing it for Him. And that, in a strange way, gives me deep joy. Even when I clean places no one will ever see, Jesus knows I am doing it for Him.

My attitude toward laundry, ironing, cooking, and shopping changed. Each of these tasks became an act of joyful kindness when I said in my heart, “I am doing this because I love Jesus and my family.”

Now I think of housework as art. Yes, art. I love to make beautiful things, and I realized that cleaning and tidying is also creative, because it makes our home a more beautiful place. Focusing on the artistic aspect of cleaning helps me stay positive and enjoy the difference my work makes to the way our house looks. Cleaning helps me stay fit by walking, stretching, and carrying. Sometimes I listen to praise music and sing while I work.

PRAYER CLEANING

As I clean each room, I focus on a different aspect of my prayer life. In one room I focus on praising God. The bathroom is good for confessing because I can imagine that all my sins are washed away forever! I thank God for the clothes we have as I wash and mend and iron. I thank God for providing good food for us as I cook dinner or go to the grocery store. I pray for a specific person during each of my different cleaning tasks. When I visit my grandchildren, my special job is to match dozens of pairs of clean socks, so we turn it into a matching game and make it fun for everyone to get involved!

This “gratitude attitude” toward chores didn’t happen overnight. I recognized that sometimes my negative attitudes came from my own unrealistic expectations about what my home should look like, or how much I should get done in a day. I learned to accept “good enough” cleaning so I can find balance in my life. I still get grumpy about

the housework from time to time, particularly if I feel overwhelmed. Fortunately, my husband knows that if I start to get irritable, the best thing he can do is offer to help me and appreciate what I am doing.

There have been some unexpected results from my experiment with contented cleaning. I now look forward to housework! I see it as a peaceful and soothing break from the intensity of the “thought work” and screen time involved in my ministry. Our children have grown up with a more positive attitude toward chores, because when I showed that I enjoyed them, they were more willing to help too.

It’s good for my mental health because now I enjoy doing the chores. I no longer see myself as an overwhelmed servant but as a “domestic artist.” Working with creativity and love gives me a sense of purpose. I have an increased sense of gratitude for the many things God has provided for us—the things that need cleaning and the things that help me to clean.

God is with us all the time as we work, clean, cook, repair, do yardwork, and care for our families. He cares for us no matter how mundane our work may seem. He longs for us to experience joy rather than sadness and frustration, because our contentment and gratitude blesses us as well as those around us. Jesus invites us to come to Him whenever we feel burdened and overloaded so He can give us rest.

So try your own contented cleaning experiment. And may you find grateful blessings in whatever you do for Him, right in your home, because He sees everything. He knows that you are doing it all for Him, and He will treasure these apparently “insignificant” actions of love forever. ■

Karen Holford is the Family, Women, and Children’s Ministries Director of the Trans-European Division. After being a pastor’s wife for nearly four decades, she now has lots of white furniture and accessories, mostly preloved things that she has painted white or bought in thrift stores.

They don’t show the dust, most white fabrics can be bleached clean, and things coordinate easily whenever they move to another house!



MENTAL HEALTH CHECKUP

HOW CAN YOU PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR HOME?

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES affect a large portion of the population, including those in faith communities. To address this issue plaguing our society, we must seek ways to keep our mental health in a vibrant condition.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.¹ Having good mental health is just as important as having a healthy body. However, the Bible goes even deeper. 3 John 1:2 says, “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.”² It is important to note that physical, mental, and spiritual health are interrelated.

A simple way of measuring emotional and mental well-being is to imagine a straight line with a scale from negative on one end (depression) to positive on the other end (joy). The scale represents what people think and feel about their lives. They might base their assessment on the quality of their relationships, their positive emotions and resilience, the realization of their potential and fulfillment, blessings of any kind, their overall satisfaction in life, or even their sense of fulfillment in ministry. Combined, these things are considered global judgments on life satisfaction.

For most of the population, the spot we identify ourselves with on this scale is somewhere in the middle, indicating a balanced mindset. We might be propelled toward the negative end on bad days or lean toward joy on good days. However, those who have learned to trust God are generally skewed toward joy, with above-average points of global judgment. Those with troubled minds often find themselves leaning to the negative side, causing them to feel off-balance, depressed, and despairing. We need to find meaning and substance in life in order to thrive. When our mind keeps feeding on unfavorable circumstances, our body and spirit are also negatively affected.

We can stay calm and trust God.

Mental health challenges can affect a person at any age. It is reported that 10 percent of children and youth combined have a diagnosable mental health condition.³ However, it is believed that the number is much greater now due to many factors in recent years, including the pandemic. Nevertheless, the main factors are a family history of mental illness and life experiences of being abused, being rejected, or witnessing a traumatic event. Substance abuse is also a key factor causing mental issues.

Deteriorating mental health can generally be observed through changes in thinking, feeling, and behavior. People with emotional or mental issues might be very negative about life. They cry easily, worry a lot, feel fearful, and frequently develop anxiety. They may have sleepless nights or reduced appetite. They may start to isolate themselves and become less motivated by things they were previously passionate about. They may also fall back to immature behaviors.⁴

LINK WITH SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Mental health is related to spiritual health because a troubling thought is often brought on by an unforgiving spirit, hatred, grudges, resentment, bitterness, a doubtful attitude, and a wrongful spirit. According to Ellen White, mental health is “mental clearness, calm nerves, a quiet, peaceful spirit like Jesus.”⁵ Mental problems, she said, were like a disease that develops as the mind succumbs to the devil’s continued promptings of bad thought habits.

Satan is putting his best effort into capturing our minds and enslaving us with negativity. The Bible reminds us in 1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see

whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” As the father of lies, Satan will do anything to destroy the peace of God’s children and marginalize our joy in Christ. All efforts to restore and shield our mental health by ourselves are powerless, for only God’s spirit can overturn evil thoughts and “purify the springs of life . . . changed from sin to holiness.”⁶

Here are some suggestions for promoting good mental health at home:

- Build strong, loving, and caring relationships in the family.
- Be an example in staying positive and in developing a resilient spirit amid trials.
- Help each other develop good self-esteem. When our sense of self is healthy, emotional well-being is greatly enhanced and it is easier to resist negativity.
- Show genuine interest in each other. In this way, family members feel supported and valued.
- Teach children to deal with disappointments healthily. Life does not always sail on a smooth and calm sea; there are storms and waves to deal with. Children must learn to take them as parts of life and move on.
- Be attentive and respectful and listen to each other’s feelings. Practice effective communication; listen without judging and without preconceived ideas.
- Create a safe and positive home environment. Safeguard children against media use. Parents themselves must limit their screen time and spend quality time with their families. Include outdoor activities. Be careful in discussing serious family issues in front of the children.



Satan is putting his best effort into enslaving us with negativity.

- Be a role model in taking good care of your mental health. Practice self-control in all aspects of life; this starts from conditioning or controlling the way we think. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”
- Avoid forming and sharing polarized political ideas, racially discriminatory views, and prejudices.
- Discipline children and youth in a balanced manner. Ellen White said, “Excessive indulgence and undue severity are alike to be avoided. While vigilance and firmness are indispensable, so also are sympathy and tenderness. Parents, remember that you deal with children who are struggling with temptation, and that to them these evil promptings are as hard to resist as are those that assail persons of mature years. Children who really desire to do right may fail again and again, and as often need encouragement to energy and perseverance. Watch the working of these young minds with prayerful solicitude. Strengthen every good impulse; encourage every noble action.”⁷
- In difficult situations, help children and youth solve problems.
- Make time with God a priority for the family. Promote the truth in the Bible, share God’s promises in His written Word, and read the Spirit of Prophecy together.

CONCLUSION

Mark 4:35-41 reminds us of a very important aspect of the Christian life. When the disciples were terrified by a terrible storm, the horrendous waves, and the relentless beating of the winds, Jesus slept peacefully. This incident helps us understand from a mental health perspective that there is no point in being stressed over uncontrollable circumstances. We can stay calm and trust God.

We need to have a full realization of God’s presence and His mighty power over us. We need to see through the eyes of faith and enjoy full assurance of His leading and protection. We need to keep our eyes on God continually and decide to always trust in Him. In every given situation, we may act calmly, sensibly, and consistently with our faith anchored in Him.

If we care for our mental health, we must prioritize our relationship with God. When life turns challenging, God does not always change the situations we face, but He is always with us, and He empowers us to think positively and preserve our minds. **1**

¹ “What is Mental Health?” SAMHSA, <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>, accessed 18 Dec. 2023.

² Unless otherwise indicated, Bible texts are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

³ “Children and Young People: Statistics,” Mental Health Foundation, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people>, accessed 18 Dec. 2023.

⁴ “Warning Signs and Symptoms,” National Alliance on Mental Illness, <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms>, accessed 18 Dec. 2023.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 4, letter 7, 1885, par. 11.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 18.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1954), pp. 263, 264.

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READY, SET, GO!

WE'RE ALL IN THIS RACE TO WIN THE PRIZE.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

“DO YOU NOT KNOW that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it” (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Several years ago my son’s school held a sports day. But that very morning we had to take him to the hospital because he had an ear infection. While at the hospital, he was adamant that he wanted to attend the sports event. So after he was seen by the doctor, his dad took him there to enjoy a little of the day.

He even ran a race with his age group and came in second. He received a medal, but he felt unsettled for a few days because he wanted to be first. As a result, he made comments about eating more so he could be stronger and faster and exercising so he could be the best in the next race. This was the mindset of a 5-year-old—to strive to obtain a prize, to do what he thought necessary to be successful in his race.

WHAT’S YOUR GOAL?

We all strive for prizes in this life. We do all the things we deem necessary to obtain our goals and to achieve success. We get an education, seek a profession, and get married, among other things. All this we do as we run the race of life. Indeed, we should strive, we should obtain, we should be successful.

However, all this is for temporal prizes. There is a heavenly prize we must strive for. We must do all that is necessary by the Word of God through the grace and mercies of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In that race we need not trust in our strength and depend on our own tactics and strategies. Jesus has already made clear the strategic path in His holy Word. He is ready to grant us His strength and to make the impossible become possible.

The best thing is this: All those who enter this race will receive the prize. So what are we waiting for to start this race?

Ready, set, go!



Felisha Francis-Miller is a member of the North Jamaica Conference in Jamaica.



*Jesus has
already made
clear the
strategic path.*



SCAN FOR AUDIO



GIVE TO LIVE

THE MORE ABUNDANT LIFE CAN BE YOURS.

“DAD, YOU SOUND DIFFERENT this evening. What happened?”

Brad* had recently retired. Although he had eagerly anticipated enjoying a carefree schedule, he discovered that life without routine, purpose, and social interaction was becoming dull and depressing. Phone conversations with his son were filled with complaints and discontent.

Then he heard a call for volunteers at a nearby church’s weekly food bank ministry. With nothing better to do, he decided to attend the next food distribution workday and see what it was all about.

On his arrival early that morning, he was warmly welcomed by a group of cheerful volunteers who immediately incorporated him into the busy work of preparing and distributing multiple boxes of food supplies. He was impressed by the jovial interaction among the volunteers. They seemed to really enjoy one another and the work they were doing.

He was impressed by the jovial interaction among the volunteers.

As the morning progressed, he found himself energized by meeting and assisting the variety of community members—including young families, the elderly, and the unhoused—who arrived grateful for the food and friendly service. There was just something about helping in this way that surprisingly fed his own spirit and filled him with joy.

Brad became hooked and is now a regular team member of the food bank ministry, not only assisting on distribution day but also pitching in on various weekdays to stock shelves and freezers with shipments of supplies. Meaning and purpose have returned to his life.

SURPRISE!

We help ourselves when we help others. Here's how that works:

- * Our own worries and concerns often fade in importance with the opening of our heart, mind, time, and resources to the pressing needs of others.
- * Loneliness and depression are less likely with increased social interaction.
- * Overall health is often improved when helping others through the lessening of our own stress level, which can lower blood pressure and improve sleep.
- * Interest increases in improving our own lifestyle habits, such as incorporating more regular exercise and making better food choices.
- * Helping others often results in thankful contentment and a sense of well-being when realizing our own many blessings.

HELPING HELPS KIDS

The physical and mental health benefits of service are not just for adults. Children and teens who engage in volunteering often enjoy the same benefits, such as improved physical and mental health and increased self-esteem. They are prone to developing a more positive outlook on life and are less likely to experience depression than their peers who don't engage in service.

Often parents will join their children in volunteering projects. It can be helping with food distribution, cleaning up someone's yard or a park, handing out warm clothing to the unhoused, or even planting a tree. The rewards of a family united together in selfless projects of service are multiple, priceless, and long-lasting.



IT'S THE BIBLE WAY

Scripture tells us that the poor, widows, orphans, and those in need will always be among us in this life. It's easy to understand why, as our sinful world is filled with situations of poverty and want due to disasters, sickness, job loss, failed health, disability, and infirmity (see John 12:8; Deuteronomy 15:7, 11; Proverbs 19:7; 1 Timothy 6:17-19). Jesus knew of this sad reality. He demonstrated in His life the true remedy, a remedy that provides blessing to the sufferer as well as to the willing, caring helper.

At the base of the human heart is selfishness. However, focusing on ourselves can lead to dissatisfaction, loss of perspective, regrets, depression, and ultimately loss of health and even life. But in reaching outside of ourselves in kindness and service to others, we not only provide blessing but are blessed ourselves as we seek to follow biblical guidelines and the example of our God, who not only sustains all creation but spares no effort to help, guide, and save humanity.

In giving of ourselves to serve others there is life—life more abundant, rich, and satisfying. The following texts confirm that: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

“Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25, NIV). “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38, NIV). **1**

*Name has been changed.

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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.



*“You become rich
by helping the poor;
you become rich
also by helping the
rich! Helping makes
you rich!”*

—MEHMET MURAT ILDAN

TIPS TO

THRIVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

MY CONVERSATION WITH JESUS

Have you ever imagined hearing a knock at your door, and when you answered, it was Jesus? Have you also imagined what the conversation would be like if He were actually there? Maybe it would go something like this:

Me: Jesus, You came down to this world that is full of hate, anger, and unfairness. You are the all-powerful Prince of the whole universe . . . What made You do it?

Jesus: When the precious children I created became evil, I couldn't bear to see them suffer, so I came to be "one" with them and share their lot.

Me: But didn't You know what it would be like? It's awful down here!

Jesus: Yes, I knew. But since I could never be happy living without My beloved children, I lived among them as one of them and paid the price for their sins so I could have them close to Me forever.

Me: But I have so many sins in my past . . . Do you remember "that one"? I have asked You to forgive me for "that one" many times.

Jesus: My dear, precious child . . . please believe Me when I say that I forgave you the first time you asked Me to. I saw that you were sincerely repentant, so I cast "that one" into the depths of the sea and placed a "No Fishing" sign over it. My greatest pleasure is to forgive sins! Please don't listen to Satan when he tries to make you think you aren't forgiven. I have conquered him, and he knows it—My victory is also your victory!

Me: When You went back to heaven, You went as a human being. You could have gone back and taken up the status You had before coming down here.

Jesus: I could have, and in a way, I did—I am both human and divine. But I wanted to be "one" with my human brothers and sisters for all eternity. There will never be any change in My love for you, my cherished child!

Me: When are You coming back to take me to live with You? I really, *really* want to live with You!

Jesus: And I really, *really* want you to live with Me. I will go to get you just as soon as I can, dear one! That time is coming fast.

Me: May I pray for You, Jesus? I know You grieve terribly when You see all that is happening down here in the beautiful world You created.

Jesus: Thank you, precious child. I love you for that, and loving Me is what it will take for you to live with Me.

If you hear a knock at your door today, don't expect to find Jesus there because it's actually better than that . . . He doesn't have to come to your door; you can talk to Him anytime, anywhere. Isn't it amazing that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and our Savior is right there to listen to us? "Little me" is equally important to Him as the most profound matter in the whole cosmos! 7

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



LIFE-GIVING THANKS

SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU THANK PEOPLE
IN THIS LIFE-GIVING WAY.

THE BIBLE IS FULL of expressions of thanksgiving, many penned by King David through poems and songs. Knowing David's story, it's not surprising he felt grateful throughout his life for the steady presence of God. David declared his gratitude repeatedly for God's power, protection, mercy, and love. Here's just one example from Psalm 28:7.*

"The Lord is my strength and my shield;
My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart triumphs,
And with my song I shall thank Him."

In the New Testament, we find Jesus giving thanks as well. Consider these passages from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

- Matthew 26:27: "And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.'"
- Mark 14:23: "And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it."
- Luke 22:17-19: "And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves. . . . And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'"
- John 6:23: "Other small boats came from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks."

Like Jesus, we say "grace" before a meal. We teach our children to thank others for gifts or a kind action. We intuitively know that gratitude is good. We also have growing scientific evidence that being thankful has physical and psychological benefits.



Genuine gratitude is meant to celebrate the other person.

Interestingly, we don't usually think about gratitude as a skill. Yet it doesn't come naturally to everyone. Yes, most of us can muster a basic "thank you." But are there better ways than others to express thankfulness?

THANKFUL FORMULA

Dr. Marshall Rosenberg (1934-2015) was an American psychologist, author, and teacher who mediated conflicts around the world, including among gangs and governments. During his career, he developed Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to help people express needs and desires without harm. He noticed that conflict, aggression, and violence happen when people are denied basic human needs: autonomy, celebration, integrity, interdependence, physical nurturance, play, and spiritual connection.

That makes sense. When our needs are unfulfilled, we feel angry, discouraged, or hopeless. But when our needs are fulfilled, we feel inspired, joyous, relieved, and thankful.

According to Dr. Rosenberg, there is a way to express thankfulness nonviolently. Now, that may sound strange. How can giving thanks ever be "violent"? Most expressions of appreciation are judgments, he explains, and they're often meant to gain something in return such as good behavior, harder work, or connection. For example, "Thank you for being a good daughter," "I appreciate what an excellent worker you are," or "You're the best pastor I've ever had." These are words of praise, compliment, and comparison rather than authentic gratitude.



TEXTS OF THANKSGIVING

Spend some time meditating on the following texts.

- **2 Samuel 22:50:** "Therefore I will give thanks to You, Lord, among the nations, and I will sing praises to Your name."
- **1 Chronicles 16:34:** "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His faithfulness is everlasting."
- **Psalms 9:1:** "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders."
- **Isaiah 25:1:** "Lord, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; For You have worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness."
- **1 Corinthians 15:57:** "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- **1 Thessalonians 5:18:** "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."
- **Revelation 11:16, 17:** "And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give You thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.'"

In these passages, what resonates with you when you consider your own relationship with God? Take a moment to write your own gratitude note to God.

When we intentionally practice authentic gratitude, our relationships flourish.



TRY SOME GRATITUDE!

Think of someone you want to thank. Write them a note using Dr. Rosenberg’s template: Observation + Need + Feeling.

Observation—What did the person say or do that made your life more wonderful? “Your kindness to me” is less specific than “Volunteering to help me rake leaves.” Be as specific as you can be. Doing so makes a person feel seen, which is one of our deeply felt needs as human beings.

Need—What need did the person’s words or actions fulfill for you? Again, be specific. No matter how short the sentence or small the act, your life was enriched. Let people know that.

Feeling—What do you feel *now* when you look back on the experience? Not what you were feeling at the time the person said or did something meaningful for you. Rather, how do you feel at this moment?

When we intentionally practice authentic gratitude, our relationships flourish. See what happens when you thank people in your life in this life-giving way.

Instead, Dr. Rosenberg offers a model for appreciating others and thanking them that is life giving, in his words. It’s a simple template: **Observation + Need + Feeling**. An expression of gratitude offered in this way is meant purely to celebrate what someone else has done for you that made your life more wonderful.

Here’s an example: “You got up early this morning and made me breakfast before I left for the airport. You knew how rushed I’d be and took the time to make my morning easier. Looking back on that small gesture makes me feel so loved and supported. Thank you.”

“Thank you” by itself or “You’re such a good spouse” don’t have the same effect. When we let people know we *see* what they did for us, that what they did met a specific *need* we had, and that looking back now we have lovely *feelings* about what they did for us, we enrich their lives in return. Genuine gratitude is meant to celebrate the other person. No strings attached.

Look back at David’s words in Psalm 28:7: “The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart triumphs, And with my song I shall thank Him.” Can you see David using the template: Observation + Need + Feeling? Yes! Long before Dr. Rosenberg, Scripture—inspired by the Life Giver—was teaching us how to offer life-giving thanks. **7**

*All texts are from the New American Standard Bible.

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

CELEBRATING MY SPOUSE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

IT'S TIME TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION TO THAT SPECIAL PERSON.

SHE WORKS IN THE KITCHEN, like a Martha. Occasionally I hear the clink of dishes and rattle of silverware, and I stop and reflect that this woman has been my companion for longer than she has been with anyone else on earth. Soon she will call, and I will join her for another delightful meal.

She is a wonderful cook. As a pastor, I get to try a variety of different delicatessen delights, but somehow this woman manages to beat them all. She entertains and provides meals for multitudes in our home with ease and grace, all the while visiting and socializing with her guests.

I sometimes watch her in wonder—this woman who is my wife. Week after week she sits alone in the pew listening to her husband as he stands before the congregation. She knows this man better than any other person. She sees his faults and shortcomings, she lives his crises, his personal agonies, and his battles in trying to lead.

She has seen him this morning standing in front of the mirror in less than he wears in the pulpit. But she listens for a message from God through this man. She hears the remarks, the critiques of his

sermons and his leadership, the lectures from people who hope to get a message to the pastor through his wife.


SPIRITUAL GIFTS

She is expected at every function, ministers to many at a hospital bedside. She opens her heart and her soul and ministers as much as her husband does to the many broken and hurting people in the church and carries the weight of unnumbered others she knows need attention and love. She is uncomfortable being in any limelight or leadership role, yet she can instinctively notice a troubled person in a crowd and manage to be by their side at a party. She has a remarkable spiritual gift of sensitivity and caring.

She shops carefully at the sales and yet manages to dress with flair and quiet elegance, somehow appearing neither dowdy nor tactless. At times the balancing act of being a very busy nurse, full-time mom and housekeeper, and first lady overwhelms her. In the solitude of her home she cries from discouragement, yet amazingly, she accepts it all and carries on with dignity and ministers with grace.

No amount of talent can equip anyone for such a role, for it is only by the grace of God that she is who she is and does what she does. God has called, and she has responded to that divine calling. God has used her and set her apart for one of the most challenging of all ministries, and only eternity will reveal the blessing she has been to so many.

Many pastors have lost both their ministry and their marriage because of the stress placed on their relationship, but God has blessed many of us in ministry with a spouse of sterling character and fortitude who, through it all, can still smile and give us a hug when we need one.

Give your pastor's spouse a word of encouragement this weekend. 

Kenneth Crawford pastored for four decades and was most recently president of the Alaska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He is also a pilot, a naturalist, and a writer, having authored numerous books, including *Yuki*, a North American Division reader for grades 4 and 5. He and his wife are retired in College Place, Washington.





\$600 PIE SECRET REVEALED

**READ ON TO DISCOVER THE SECRET OF AN
AMAZING PIE AND GOOD FRIENDS.**

I RECOGNIZE THIS TITLE sounds like fake news, like something you shouldn't read, but nothing could be further from the truth.

A few weeks following the memorial service of Sharon Russell, a beloved member of the College View Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, her Sabbath School class held a fundraiser. "Something Else" Sabbath School organizes an annual event at which members auction their finest baked goods and tasty treats to the highest bidder. The money raised helps sponsor charity projects, which have included providing school lunches for refugee children, Christmas gifts for needy families, money to help a couple rebuild after a fire, and tuition assistance for struggling college students.

As a longtime member of this class with her husband, Malcolm, Sharon had a well-established reputation for her culinary expertise. Though she was famous for taking shortcuts and tweaking recipes by reducing the oil, butter, and sugar, Sharon's pies were second to none, baked in exquisite Cedar Creek Pottery from Beatrice, Nebraska.

Among the array of pastries at the auction was a pie labeled "Blueberry Pie, Sharon Russell's Recipe, Baked by Jan Lemon."

Sharon's absence was still palpable among her circle of friends. And on this night, as bidding wars began over pie in the church fellowship hall, Malcolm was visiting friends in California. Unbeknownst to him, with extensive hooting and hysterical laughter, members Ron Biloff and Marlyn Schwartz bid each other up for their late friend Sharon's pie.



Sharon's pies were second to none.

The auction was a success, raising more than \$3,500. The Schwartzes brought home a \$600 pie, tucked it in their freezer, and waited for Malcolm's return to Lincoln.

THE REVEAL

The surprise pie reveal was planned at The Oven, Malcolm's favorite Indian restaurant. Marlyn arranged for it to be hidden in the The Oven's kitchen until it was time for dessert. As the meal progressed, the story was told, the pie was served, and a small group of friends shared sweet blueberry filling wrapped in flaky crust in disbelief (at the price), reverence (what did each bite cost again?), and warm memories of their absent friend.

None of this would have transpired without friend Jan Lemon, who had made a meaningful effort to recreate Sharon's pie. "I've become quite fond of Sharon's recipe," she reflected.

THE SECRET RECIPE OF SHARON'S \$600 PIE

1. Power walk, Sharon speed, to the freezer section of your favorite grocery store and look for "The Village PieMaker" pies (Sharon's choice).
2. Bring unbaked pie to your kitchen and, while still frozen, pop it out of its disposable pan and place it in your favorite pie plate.
3. Bake and serve warm, or at room temperature, with ice cream.

It took Jan Lemon's oven 90 minutes to bake the \$600 pie.

Sharon brazenly took shortcuts—with good reason. Her mantra was repeated at every bountiful meal around the Russells' table: "I don't like to cook. There are more important things in life than spending my time in the kitchen."

Preparing Sabbath meals for diverse groups on a regular basis meant that Sharon had to think practically and work fast. Though her time-saving methods were admirable, her greatest gifts were her genuine joy and acceptance, which made each person feel intensely welcome in her presence.

"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25, NIV). In Sharon's case, these blessings were selflessly extended to the recipients of her hospitality.

As dinner concluded with a slice of deliciousness, Sharon took great pleasure in announcing her full disclosure; the home-baked pie was store-bought. And her culinary legacy lives on. 7

Ani Holdsworth is a freelance graphic designer in Lincoln, Nebraska, where she lives with her husband, Dr. Benjamin Holdsworth, program director of the religion department at Union College.



The "\$600 Pie" baked in Sharon Russell's pie pan.



Left to right: Malcolm Russell, Marlyn Schwartz, Sharon Schwartz, \$600 pie





LET'S WORSHIP OUTSIDE!

WORSHIP WALK BACKPACK

Before you go on a worship walk, pack a bag full of things you will need. Include water, snacks, your Bible, paper for drawing and writing, and pens or pencils. Bring a camera if you don't have one on your phone so you can take pictures of things that fill you with wonder. You might like to include nature books so you can identify plants, birds, and animals along the way and a magnifying glass to help you look closely at God's creation. Take small bags or containers for collecting nuts and berries or items you would like to take home. You could also include art materials for stone painting or chalk for writing encouraging messages.



I SPY GOD!

Play an "I spy!" game choosing things God has made. One person spots a natural object and tells the others, "I spy with my little eye, something God made that is . . ." They name the color, shape, or texture of the object without saying what they've chosen. When someone guesses what the object is, each person describes something about that object that fills them with wonder and praise to God for making it.



KINDNESS STONES

You will need paint for the stones, permanent marker pens, paintbrushes, and a jar or cup for water. You will also need quick-drying sealant to protect the designs. Diluted white glue (PVA) can seal the paint and make it waterproof. Gather large, smooth stones on your walk, paint them, and let them dry in the sun. Use pens to write encouraging messages or Bible verses on the stones. Then brush a coat of sealant over the design.

Leave the stones slightly hidden so they can easily be discovered by people. Pray that the messages will bring them joy!



BIBLE BAG GAME

Take a cloth bag on your walk, or a plastic bag that is not see-through.

Gather different fallen objects that might be mentioned in Bible stories, such as a stone, seeds, leaves, fruit, sheep's wool (to represent sheep), feathers (to represent birds), scraps of cloth, coins, an eggshell, and other objects. Invite each person to take an object out of the bag and think of a Bible story that mentions the item. Or ask each person in the group to describe different Bible stories that include the object.



SHARING WALK

Pack some sharing snacks to take on your walk and give to others along the way. It is a good way to be kind and show them God's love.



RAINBOW SEARCH

Hunt for fallen natural objects in each color of the rainbow. Or take photos of them if you have a camera. Praise God for all the different objects and their colors!



GUESS MY STORY!

Encourage everyone to gather up natural things that have fallen to the ground. Leave everything else safe to grow. Use the things you have found to create a picture from a Bible story, laying the objects on the ground to illustrate the scene. Then try to guess the story that each person has created.





LEAVE A MESSAGE

Write an encouraging message in the dirt along the path, or use found items, such as small twigs or stones, to create the letters for your message or to make a smile or a heart.



LEAF ART

Flowers need to be left for insect food and pollination, but in many places leaves can be collected and used for arts and crafts. Collect colored leaves in the fall to make pictures and patterns on the ground. Or turn a leaf upside down, lay paper on top, and use waxed crayons to make leaf rubbings. Or make a leaf crown. To do that, cut 2-inch wide strips of card stock that are long enough to wrap around a head and make a crown. Lay them flat, place double-sided sticky tape along the length of the strip, and attach different colored leaves, or pressed and dried leaves, along the strip to form a leaf crown. Remember that you are all princesses and princes in God's kingdom. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24, 25.

PICTURE THIS!

Find something God has made and draw it on a piece of paper. It doesn't have to be perfect. Look at the little details of the shell, leaf, or flower that you found. Use your art materials to add some color to the picture. Include a Bible verse. Hang your pictures up when you get home or send them to a loved one as a gift.



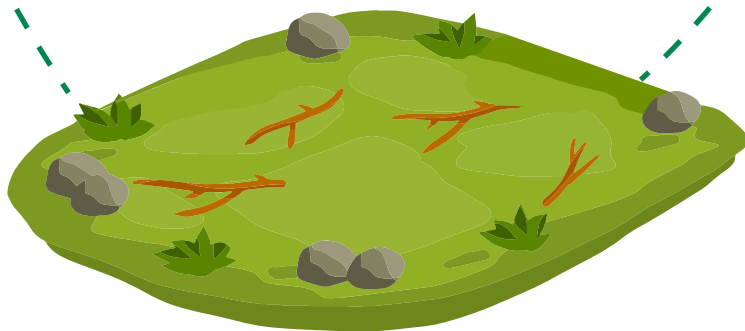
PRAY ALONG THE WAY

As you walk, look for all kinds of things to pray about. Take turns finding things to praise God for and to thank Him for. Tell Him your concerns about a difficult situation you find, like lots of garbage on the ground or not enough rain. Pray for the people you meet along the way, and ask God questions about the things He has made.




GUIDED OBSTACLE RACE

Work with your family to make a simple obstacle course outside with logs, stones, and bushes to walk around and step over. Ask a grown-up to blindfold your eyes, hold your hand, and guide you around the obstacles by telling you which way to move and how high to raise your feet. Then talk about how God and His Holy Spirit guide us through the obstacles of life. How does God help us to find our way in a dark world without falling over? Remember, if we do fall over, He will always pick us up again. Read Psalm 37:24 and Psalm 116:8.



CREATION COLLECTION

Give each person a cardboard egg carton with six sections. Ask them to find something to represent each day of creation: perhaps a white-and-black object for day one; something blue for day two; grass, leaves, or a petal for day three; a flower like a sun or star for day four; a feather for day five; and something from an animal for day six. Show your displays to each other as you rest and remember day seven (see Genesis 1). 



LOST SHEEP

Take a toy sheep with you on your walk, or just a ball of wool. Ask an adult to hide it along the path. See if you can find it. Or ask an adult to hide nearby and cry “Baa!” until you find the “lost sheep.” If you are in a safe place, you could hide and be found too! Read Luke 15:3-7 together.

***Karen Holford** is Family, Children’s, and Women’s Ministries Director for the Trans-European Division. She loves spending time in God’s creation because it makes her feel happy, healthy, and creative.*



Euro-Asia Division

Ministerial couples in Ukraine gathered in July 2023 for meetings. Pastoral spouses met on Zoom with Aurora Canals, General Conference ministerial spouses coordinator.



Ministerial spouses met together in Ukraine.



Ministerial spouses met with Aurora Canals via Zoom.



Pastoral couples gathered for meetings in Ukraine.

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division



Ministerial spouses coordinators attended leadership training in Mponela, Malawi.



Pastoral spouses met for a leadership meeting in Malawi.



Spouses attended a spiritual growth meeting in Botswana.



Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Ministerial Association held a division-wide advisory in March 2023.



Mozambique Union held spiritual growth meetings for ministerial spouses in Beira in July 2023.



Southern Zambia Union Conference held a ministerial spouses leadership seminar in May 2023.



Ministerial spouses attended a leadership meeting in April 2023 in Choma, Southern Zambia Union Conference.



South and West Zimbabwe Conference Shepherdesses held cooking school seminars in June 2023.



Ministerial spouses came together for a spiritual growth meeting in Solwezi, Northern Zambia Union Conference.



Zimbabwe East Union Conference held spiritual growth meetings in April 2023.



Ministerial spouses met for spiritual growth in Benguela, Angola, in July 2023.



Ministerial spouses coordinators, Southern and Northern Angola Union.



Southern Angola Union ministerial spouses.

Southern Asia Division

Rita Gill, Shepherdess coordinator for Northern India Union Section, reports that a three-day union-wide Shepherdess congress was organized at Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India, in May 2023. They were joined by Krupa Victor, director of Shepherdess International for SUD. Sixty Shepherdesses enjoyed presentations, group discussions, testimonies, and music. The program ended with a consecration service by Pastor Benoy Tirkey, president of the Northern India Union Section.



Shepherdesses attend meetings in Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India.

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