

Adventist World

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A Covenant of Accountability

BY BILL KNOTT

"Self-love is the greatest of flatterers."

Our virtues, more than our vices, require the witness and confirmation of persons outside ourselves. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we may sense we have transgressed God's requirement of deep honesty. Perhaps we told most of the truth, or nearly all of it—or that portion that kept our reputation intact. Depending on how our consciences were formed, however, we may still mistakenly award ourselves the virtue of "honesty" because of a familiar habit of self-flattery.

But to be known as "honest" requires a community of persons beyond me who bear witness to a value and a goal we all share. My "honesty" is ultimately the consensus of a group of people who prize truth-telling—those who have observed my behavior over time, and whose minds have been shaped by the law of God. "Ethical" is not a label I may place upon myself.

We need a community of belief—a gathered company of those who pray to understand both God's will and His standards—to fully grasp what it means to act ethically in our private and public lives. The habits of integrity and acting for the good of others are observable behaviors in a congregation where we gently and gracefully hold each accountable. Other believers help me see what I might otherwise not see. They help me appreciate God's high requirement, even as they help me understand His forgiveness when I fall short of it.

This willingness to be advised by the collective conscience of God's people is a quality particularly needed among those we ask to lead us. Their decisions frequently determine the current spiritual health and well-being of many local congregations. Their actions also become a template for future leaders who will take their cues from what they witness.



Belonging to a church that prizes ethical behavior means we must train those we ask to lead, and then hold them accountable to the standards of God's Word. It also means that there should be consequences when the church discovers that someone in leadership has acted unethically—for personal gain, to nullify the rightful decisions of others, or for the advantage of their tribal or racial group. This expectation

of those we ask to lead—and of each other—is vital because of our belief in the nearness of Christ's coming: *"Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Heb. 10:24, 25).

The world is watching those who call themselves followers of Jesus to see if our lives align with the Lord who emphasized both God's high standard and His grace to help us actually live that way. Our witness to biblical truth will only be as credible as we ourselves are credible as a community that does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with our God (see Micah 6:8).

The church I want to belong to is . . . ethical.

* François de La Rochefoucauld

We believe in the power of prayer, and we welcome prayer requests that can be shared at our weekly staff worship every Wednesday morning. Send your requests to prayer@adventistworld.org, and pray for us as we work together to advance God's kingdom.



On his visit to the Solomon Islands, Prince Charles of Great Britain meets local students in Honiara, including Arina Manele (second from left) from Betikama Adventist College.

Photo: Adventist Record

“Their deaths made me very angry, but instead of being negative, I decided to do something positive.”

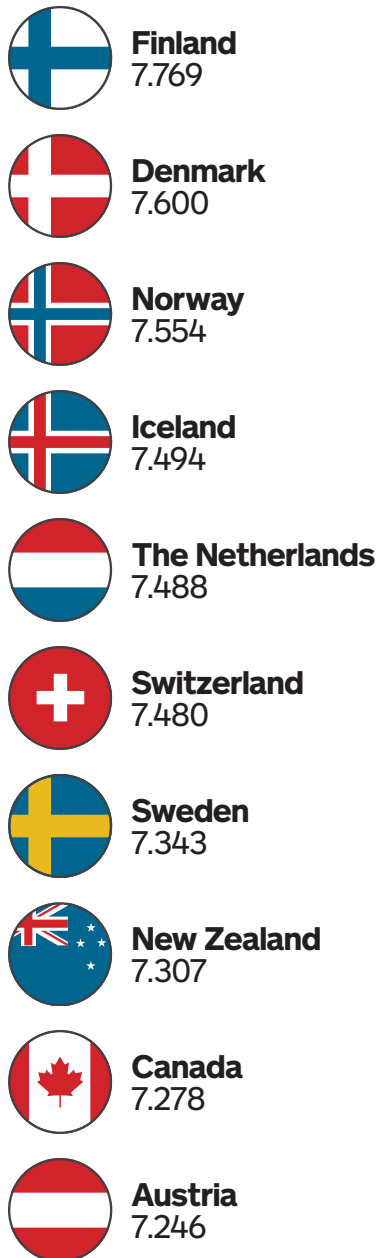
—Skylar Robinson, a 17-year-old member of Tabernacle of Praise Church, an Adventist congregation in Spanish Lake, Missouri, United States. Robinson wanted to make a difference after seeing her peers losing their lives to gun violence. She organized a public event in her city entitled “Putting a STOP to Gun Violence Summit.” About 120 participants concluded the summit by praying over three families who recently lost their teen sons to gun violence.

25

The number of years that Maranatha Volunteers International has been active in the country of Cuba. The recent anniversary was marked by a commemorative service on the campus of the Cuba Adventist Theological Seminary in Havana, in a building constructed by Maranatha volunteers between 1995 and 1997.

The Happiest Countries in the World

March 20 is the United Nations International Day of Happiness.



The above rankings are the average of answers to the question: “Evaluate the quality of your current life on a scale of 0 to 10.”
Source: World Happiness Report 2019

“A gathering like this helps us to meet people who go through similar hardships while we strive to remain faithful to God.”

—Lilia Farias, an Adventist member in Brazil serving in the Manaus Military Police, describing a gathering of Seventh-day Adventist law-enforcement officers from across the country. Participants met for a weekend of connecting, exchanging personal experiences, and sharing faith stories. Among keynote speakers was Colonel Hélio Fernando, representing the Brazilian Army.

“He told me he loved me, and then the phone went dead.”

—Neoma Wisdom, an Adventist member from Paradise, California, United States, which was devastated by wildfires in 2018. Neoma recalls speaking to her husband, Jack, on the phone as he was attempting to drive out of the inferno. “I could hear the explosions through the phone. He told me to please pray for him, to pray the trees wouldn’t fall on them.” Jack, a physician at Adventist Health Feather River Hospital, was in the middle of a surgical procedure when evacuation orders came. Both Neoma and Jack survived, but 86 people lost their lives in the fire.

80

The number of years that Middle East University (MEU) in Beirut, Lebanon, has offered secondary and tertiary education. A recent celebration weekend featured yellowed photos of the visionaries who invested wealth and sacrificed comfort to train generations of gospel workers for the Middle East region. It honored the faith of those who led the school with courage and prayer during Lebanon's 15 years of devastating civil war. It also underlined that MEU continues to prepare the next generation of workers for the Middle East and North Africa region.

“We believe that it is important that people of faith, and those of no faith at all, have the opportunity to appropriately and reasonably live out and express their beliefs in our pluralistic modern society without fear.”

—Michael Worker, Australian Union Conference public affairs and religious liberty director, addressing the release of the second exposure draft of the Australian government's religious discrimination bill. The new draft incorporates many of the key changes that were suggested by religious bodies, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other stakeholders, after the first draft bill was released in August 2019. Worker recognizes, however, that there is still a way to go in addressing some significant flaws that remain.

6,000

The number of public high school students who said “no” to vices and harmful practices during a rally organized by almost 200 students of the Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP). The theme of the celebration was “I Simply Choose Not to Use.” The Smoking, Alcohol, and Drug Free movement (SADFREE movement) is a partnership between AUP, the municipality of Silang, Cavite, and Adventist Community Services of Cavite Adventist Mission.



Photo: Adventist University of the Philippines

2020 General Conference Session

Official notice is hereby given that the sixty-first session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will be held June 25-July 4, 2020, in the Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Indiana, United States. The first meeting will begin at 8:00 a.m., June 25, 2020. All duly accredited delegates are urged to be present at that time.

Ted N. C. Wilson,
General Conference President

G. T. Ng,
General Conference Secretary

Adventist University of Africa Celebrates Grand Opening of Multipurpose Complex

National leaders and dignitaries join celebration and commend AUA education.

By Janet Oyende

The Adventist University of Africa (AUA) officially opened and dedicated the Lindsay Thomas, Jr., Ph.D., Multipurpose Complex on November 3, 2019.

Among government officials who attended was the cabinet secretary of the Ministry of Education in Kenya, George Magoha. The cabinet secretary read a speech on behalf of the president of the republic of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, in which he commended the Seventh-day Adventist Church for being strong on education and health. AUA trains students from across the entire African continent, with current student representation from 30 out of the 54 African countries.

Magoha emphasized the high-quality and innovative programs at AUA that reach the highest standard of excellence in education as well as practical relevance. He urged the university to enhance its diversity in programs so as to avoid duplication of programs with other universities.

AUA chancellor Blasious Ruguri and vice chancellor Delbert Baker extended their appreciation to the

generous donors from Africa, the United States, and around the world, who gave of their means and resources to make the complex a reality.

Among the donors to the complex was Evelyn Thomas, widow of Lindsay Thomas, Jr., for whom the new complex is named. She was represented at the event by Earl Adouis and Giles McGill. Other donors mentioned were Simeon Nyachae from Kenya, Adedeji Adeleke of Nigeria, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the East-Central Africa Division, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, West-Central Africa Division, and AUA Strategic Development Partners, among others.

Other dignitaries present for the event were Guillermo Biaggi, a general vice president of the General Conference; Ray Wahlen, undertreasurer of the General Conference; Kajiado County governor Joseph Ole Lenku; and leaders from across the East-Central Africa Division.

An inaugural concert featured Adventist musician Wintley Phipps. The 1,200-seat auditorium was filled to capacity.

Besides the 1,200-seat auditorium, the new complex contains eight technologically up-to-date classrooms with breakout capacity for groups; an indoor and outdoor amphitheater; social veranda terraces with views of the surrounding hills and environs; administrative offices; a spacious cafeteria, and more.

The multipurpose building is also intended to enhance the academic scholarship and research of both faculty and students, leaders say. Undergirding the external construction is a comprehensive information and communication technology fiber-optic system that supports learning through online education, video conferencing, and web-based education on campus and at partner institutions.

The building has the capacity to meet the needs of AUA and the Advent Hill community, in which the East-Central Africa Division offices are located, both now and into the future, leaders explained. In addition, the building provides facilities that organizations can use for large meetings. ©



The new Lindsay Thomas, Jr., Ph.D. Multipurpose Complex on the campus of Adventist University of Africa

Photo: AUA

International Center for Trauma Seeks to Provide Support, Training

By Andrews University News

The Andrews University School of Social Work is developing a new International Center for Trauma Education and Care. Working in conjunction with several other departments on the campus, coordinators said that the center's purpose is to provide education and tools to support healing from trauma in organizations, churches, and communities around the world.

"We are excited to expand our social work outreach to support long-term emotional healing and help restore people to God's image," said Curt VanderWaal, chair of the School of Social Work. "It's clear that there is an immense need within the church for this type of ministry."

Additionally, a more immediate interdisciplinary response team, the Post-Disaster Mental Health Team, has also been created. "Post-disaster" is defined as a time starting at least 72 hours after a disaster, when there is some stabilization, up to one year after the crisis event. This team will provide emotional support by trained individuals, psychoeducation on trauma, and connections to further local resources.

ADDRESSING TRAUMA

Trauma is at epidemic levels in many parts of society and the world, coordinators said. Although many think of trauma only in the context of war and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it can also be experienced through natural disasters, accidents, illness, divorce, forced immigration, and violence of all kinds.

Experts explain that when individuals endure something that they perceive as physically or emotional-

ly threatening, they often experience overwhelming feelings of stress, fear, and vulnerability, which continue to plague them long after the end of the event. Previous or ongoing traumatizing circumstances can cripple individuals and even whole communities. Long-term effects of trauma can include such mental and physical illnesses as substance abuse, depression, strokes, and heart disease.

"The consequences of trauma are often devastating and long-lasting. Children are especially vulnerable to its life-altering effects, and interventions are needed to help begin the healing process," said Ingrid Weiss Slikkers, director of the newly created center.

EDUCATING COMMUNITIES

The new center's primary goal is to help facilitate long-term healing from trauma. For the past few years, faculty, students, and alumni from the School of Social Work have been traveling domestically and abroad to educate communities about trauma resiliency and restoration, coordinators reported. These groups have worked with local, state, and international educators, ministers, students, refugees, orphans, and children and adults of all ages. In addition to providing training in churches and schools in the United States, including in the Navajo Nation, faculty and students have made trauma education trips to Thailand, Puerto Rico, Ethiopia, and Cambodia.

"These trips have been life-changing for me," said Katelyn Campbell, a Master of Social Work and Master of Divinity student who recently

Andrews University School of Social Work initiative will support churches, communities.



An Andrews University social work student interacts with a child on a trauma education trip in Ethiopia. Andrews University's new International Center for Trauma Education and Care will facilitate more trauma education domestically and internationally in the future.

Photo: Jasmin Wilson, Andrews University

returned from a trip to both Ethiopia and Cambodia. "People are so grateful to receive practical tools for emotional healing—you can see these amazing changes right in front of you!"

With the formation of the Center in August 2019, even more opportunities for education and healing are emerging, including partnerships with other departments on campus. Local schools and churches have made requests for training, and students are becoming involved in hands-on educational experiences by assisting in the planning and delivery of these training sessions. ©

463,637

The membership of Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD), as of December 31, 2018.

In Mongolia, Adventist Church Launches Ambitious Building Project

A groundbreaking ceremony was recently held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, for the Gateway International Education Corporation. The building is being constructed to house various mission and community-related activities. Regional leaders reported that several institutions will be established under the corporation, including an international academy, a vocational school, a wellness center, and an agricultural center. The Adventist Church in Mongolia has approximately 3,000 members.

“I’ve been under a lot of stress about making baby food since my baby doesn’t like to eat what I’ve made.”

A mother who attended a class for new moms sponsored by the Adventist Church in Korea. The class, which focused on how to make organic baby food and how to eat healthfully, was combined with a charity sale benefiting a program aimed at nurturing children through a home-church partnership.

340,000

The number of listeners to a popular news radio show in Toyko, Japan. Adventists were recently given a slot during the prime-time show in which doctors from the Tokyo Adventist Hospital answer health-related questions from listeners. It is the first time in the history of Nippon Broadcasting that a religious denomination has had a spot during prime time, according to church leaders.

“The results of what women do all over the world to share Jesus with their families, friends, and others may not be entirely known until Jesus comes.”

Heard at a Women’s Ministries Conference in August 2019. Women from 54 Adventist churches gathered on the southern tip of Taiwan for a women’s ministries conference that emphasized mission and service. Leaders reported that this year, besides leading out and attending small-group meetings, some of the women were involved in evangelistic meetings that took place across Taiwan.

“Most college students around the world have never heard about or don’t know Jesus, or the message of His second coming.”

Si Young Kim, president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. Seventh-day Adventist youth leaders in the NSD church region recently held a commissioning ceremony for their first Public Campus Ministries (PCM) missionaries at a special service in Gangneung, Korea. The newly commissioned PCM missionaries left to serve in several countries—including China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mongolia—just two days after the ceremony. 📍



Si Young Kim congratulates a PCM missionary.

Photo: NSD



Photo: Elijah O'Donnell

Ethics and Journalism in the Adventist Church

What we cover, and how we cover it, matters significantly.

Someone once wrote: “In politics, the pen is at its heaviest because it is weighed down by the collective responsibility it holds toward its people and their future in the eyes of the world.”¹

The statement applies as much to the church as it does to politics. The weight that rests on those responsible for reporting the movement and development of the church is significant. And the weight borne by the church itself to empower responsible journalism within its gates is even greater.

The church, in our case the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has a responsibility—an ethical imperative—to accurately and consistently inform its members and communities, even when the news is less than positive. At the root of this calling is biblical integrity—the courage to acknowledge our shortcomings regardless of political consequences.

Yet within our faith community we sometimes shy away from, even discourage, the dissemination of news that would compromise our shiny organizational façade or challenge leaders’ interests.

There are, however, several compelling reasons we should reconsider such tendencies.

TRANSPARENCY IS THE NEW NORM

Around the world transparency is among society’s current core values. The shift is driven largely by the Millennial generation, now 24-39 years old. Most Millennials require—even demand—transparency from the organizations with which they engage. They grew up with the Web and social media, both of which offer copious amounts of information for analyzing and assessing just about anything. Organizations that don’t offer this level of disclosure are trusted less, or not at all.

One author writes, “It is clear that trust is the new currency of brand loyalty.”² Applying this to news, we can generally assume that if an organization is honest with bad news, “it is more likely to be trusted with good news.”³

BIAS IS THE GREAT TEMPTATION

Surveying the landscape of news outlets, it is apparent that secular news operations are increasingly comfortable with either an implied or overt ideological bias. While objectivity in journalism has always been far from perfect, in the past it was at least deemed worth the effort. Objectivity was the road to credibility. However, today’s trend of highly polarized news outlets unambiguously interweaving reporting with commentary is difficult to reconcile.

News outlets in the wider world of Adventism face the same temptation—to report from an angle. Report mainly controversial and neg-

ative news if you’re critical of the church; report mostly triumphalist news if you’re not. Bias engenders neither trust nor credibility. The church and its journalists ought to be above it.

THE BIBLE IS AN EXCELLENT MODEL

While the Bible isn’t typically viewed as a journalistic work, its authors nevertheless chronicled and reported on the journey of God’s people, beginning with Creation. A single reading confirms that these authors never shied away from giving a full and honest assessment of events.

The biblical record contains the sullied past of many patriarchs—for our benefit. Because of fair and honest accounts, we have both an accurate history of the church and many lessons from which to learn.

THE DEFAULT POSITION

In 2011 the Adventist Church released the document “Transparency and Accountability in Financial Reporting.” At its rollout, church administrators explained that the document’s principles transcended finances, and that transparency must be the default position of the Adventist Church in all arenas.

That was a step in the right direction, one that should certainly apply to the church’s commitment to keep its members informed through truly fair and balanced news. ©

¹ Aysha Taryam is editor of *The Gulf Today*, an English-language newspaper in the Middle East.

² Kira Karapetian, in *Forbes*, Aug. 8, 2017.

³ Glen Broom and Bey-Ling Sha, *Effective Public Relations*, 11th ed. (2013), p. 253.

ETHICAL

My Ethical Church

What does it really mean to live an ethical life?

News reports remind us daily that organizations often act in unethical ways. Unethical behaviors may take money or other material goods and use them for selfish purposes. Unethical actions always hurt people, particularly those most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the news media remind us that even the church, which calls itself the body of Christ, can engage in unethical activities.

But what is ethical for a church as an institution? Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35, NIV). Jesus also summarized the quintessence of the commandments as loving God and one’s neighbor (Matt. 22:37-39). By reframing the Ten Commandments, I can envision the ethical church I want to belong to.*

THE CHURCH I WANT TO BELONG TO . . .

First, focuses its members’ lives and goals on prioritizing their relationship with God and making Him first in everything. But as Jesus reminded the Pharisee when asked about the greatest commandment, putting God first also means treating all “neighbors” as individuals created and redeemed by God, and therefore of inestimable worth (Matt. 22:37-39).

Second, never views either God or its neighbors as images of its own ideas or as stereotypes created by culture, but as the Bible speaks of them—first, a God to be worshipped, and second, neighbors to be loved and honored.

Third, never speaks of either God or its neighbors in a manner that would diminish their importance or their value as children of God.

Fourth, encourages its members to spend time with God and with those He has brought into their lives, and

helps them refocus on what is important with respect to eternity, rather than focusing only on the immediate.

Fifth, teaches its members to honor those agents whom God has brought into their lives to nurture and encourage them.

Sixth, will never act in a way that threatens or harms life, which is a gift from God, but will help all its members work toward peace and reconciliation, both within their own immediate circles and in the wider circles in which they have influence.

Seventh, supports, values, and strengthens relationships between its members, whether they are married or single.

Eighth, refuses to act in unjust or careless ways, and encourages its members to be faithful stewards of all their possessions, whether physical possessions or how they relate to others’ reputations or accomplishments.

Ninth, always speaks the truth in love, strengthening its members’ understanding of God’s own truthful character and His refusal to deceive or destroy others by deceitful or demeaning words.

Tenth, exhibits and promotes gratitude for all that God has given to it and to its members. The church also remembers that out of the wealth God has given its members they can give to those in need who are less fortunate (2 Cor. 9:6-11). ©

* This is adapted from concepts found in David Gill, *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

Ann Gibson, Ph.D., serves as vice president for finance at the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Between the Ideal and the Real

We often struggle to live God's kingdom values.

Things were so easy in the beginning. Adam and Eve were to care for the earth and the garden they had been placed in. Since they had been created in God's image and likeness, they would reflect God's goodness, His holiness, and, ultimately, His character to all creation surrounding them.

It never happened. Sin separated humanity from God. The Fall brought pain, death, abuse, jealousy, violence, hunger for power and dominion, and so many more evil attitudes to this world. The descendants of Adam and Eve became their own worst enemies.

God had a plan to return His lost children to the garden. He called a people to be His and to shine His light in a dark world (Isa. 49:6). He gave them signs and illustrations of His plan of salvation (think, for example, the Sabbath or the sanctuary); His laws reflected His character and illustrated His kingdom values in practical ways. How children should relate to their parents and vice versa; how fidelity results in happy marriages; how murder, stealing, gossip, and coveting were destructive to any social fabric were urged. God admonished them to care for widows, orphans, outsiders, and those who are powerless, and to administer justice fairly. Deuteronomy 10:12-22 offers a good summary of these principles of God's law (cf. also Ex. 22:16-31).

Reality, however, looked different in biblical Israel. For hundreds of years, Israel's prophets spoke out against abuse and unethical behavior. "Her [Judah's] heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord, and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us'" (Micah 3:11). God repeatedly spoke through His prophets against the attitudes and actions

of His people. "For if you [Judah] thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever" (Jer. 7:5-7).

Israel clearly struggled with idolatry (cf. 1 Kings 12:25-33; 16:29-33; etc.), but God's most recurring accusations involved their ethical lapses and their belief that unethical behavior could be balanced out by abundant sacrifices (Hosea 6:4-6; Micah 6:6-8). The God of Scripture cannot be manipulated by a pious display of religious action or lavish giving. Listen to the rush of His voice ringing right into the twenty-first century: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:21-24). ©

Gerald A. Klingbeil is an associate editor of *Adventist World*.





Why Our Ethics Matter

Thoughts on transparency and integrity

The Bible tells the story of Samuel, God's prophet to the nation of Israel. After he had anointed Saul as the first king of Israel and prepared to assume a less-prominent role, he addressed his fellow Israelites: "I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken? . . . Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes?" (1 Sam. 12:2, 3, NIV).

"You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand" (verse 4, NIV).

"Samuel said to them, "The Lord is witness against you . . . that you have not found anything in my hand"" (verse 5).

At the end of a long career serving God's people, Samuel not only had a clear conscience regarding his service, but the people admitted that everything he did had been achieved with transparency and integrity.

That should be a model for all of us.

Sadly, we live in an age in which integrity and transparency seem outdated relics of a nostalgic past. Even those we think we know well are sometimes less than honest. And some who regularly show up on newsfeeds deliberately blur the boundaries between truth and deceit.

It all starts with character. Some have described character as that trait of doing the right thing when no one is looking. When our minds and hearts are reconciled, our words and actions are consistent. Most of us spend our lives trying to reconcile our thoughts with our actions. God through Jeremiah said, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33, NIV). This doesn't happen in a vacuum.

Transparency and integrity are virtues that require both implementation and cultivation. They come in the spiritual package implanted in us by the Holy Spirit, but they require learning along the way. We are not moral and good

by ourselves. Ellen White wrote: “Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts.”¹

No one has a monopoly on transparency and integrity. It’s a matter that touches us all. Transparent honesty and openness are qualities that make things obvious, easy to understand. They are reflections of character.

Integrity is the virtue of being honest and fair. It is adherence to moral and ethical principles. It is moral uprightness, the state of being whole or undivided. Ambiguity and duplicity are unacceptable behaviors. In their place, some have started to use the term “transparent integrity.”²

AUTHENTICITY AND CHURCH LIFE

How is transparency and integrity lived out in the context of church life? When we speak of transparency and integrity, we’re actually talking about authenticity. Authenticity was seen by Stoic Greeks “as a moral response to declining civic and religious values.”³ In our case, the perspective we hold as Seventh-day Adventists is grounded on our search for holiness, trustfulness, and truth as we adhere to a transcendent worldview of ethics and morality.

The Holy Spirit is transformative in terms of holiness and true authenticity. Authenticity includes being self-aware, showing a balance in processing the opinions of others, acting within the boundaries of ethics and morality.⁴

TRANSPARENCY AND INTEGRITY IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture has much to say about persons who act with integrity and transparency.

King David wrote: “Lord, who can dwell in Your tent? Who can live on Your holy mountain? The one who lives honestly, practices righteousness, and acknowledges the truth in his heart—who does not slander with his tongue, who does not harm his friend or discredit his neighbor, who despises the one rejected by the Lord but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps His word whatever the cost, who does not lend his money at interest or take a bribe against the innocent—the one who does these things will never be moved” (Ps. 15, HCSB).⁵

David also asked: “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully” (Ps. 24:3, 4, HCSB).

God said through the prophet Jeremiah: “I will give them integrity of heart and action so that they will fear me always, for their good and for the good of their descendants after them” (Jer. 32:39, CSB).⁶

Living in integrity and acting transparently is synonymous with holiness and acting righteously. Consider the following:

“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the perversity of the treacherous destroys them” (Prov. 11:3, HCSB).

“Surely You desire integrity in the inner self, and You teach me wisdom deep within” (Ps. 51:6, HCSB).

The path of the righteous is the path of wisdom and integrity, and the result and the effect of righteousness is peace, and quiet confidence.⁷ David prayed, “Give me an undivided mind to fear Your name” (Ps. 86:11, HCSB).

A HIGH STANDARD

For Christians, integrity, authenticity, and transparency are essential characteristics, not

For Christians, integrity, authenticity, and transparency are essential characteristics.

because they are traits universally admired by people who live public lives, but because they were perfectly demonstrated in our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the things that distinguished Peter and John after Christ’s ascension was that people noticed that “these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV).

Let’s fill our minds with the challenge, the opportunity, and the privilege that transparency and integrity bring to us. Trust is all we have as Christians. It is what moves followers to fulfill their own function. Adventists have no other option than being transparent and acting with integrity. ©

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 26.

² www.terna.it/en-gb/chiamo/trasparenzaeintegrita.aspx and thegreatworkplace.com/2568/transparent-integrity-where-is-mr-oz.

³ M. M. Novicevic, M. G. Harvey, et al., “Authentic Leadership: A Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 64-76.

⁴ B. J. Avolio and W. L. Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 16 (2005): 315-338.

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⁶ Texts credited to CSB are from the *Christian Standard Bible*. Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

⁷ Ps. 1:1-3; Prov. 4:18-27, HCSB.

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Toxic Tribalism

What it is. What we can do about it.

Tribalism seems to be on the rise around the world. This trend affects many facets of our lives, particularly our ethics. How do we live in polarized societies? Authors and commentators around the globe have noted that “Brexit” in Great Britain, political polarization in the United States, delegitimization of Muslims in India, and anti-immigrant sentiment across Europe’s political landscape also seem to derive from tribalism.

Thus tribalism is neither confined to primitives, nor to particular regions. Tribalism shows itself as unswerving loyalty to one’s group—usually to the detriment of other persons or groups. Paradoxically, as globalization gives rise to cultural uniformity through technology and social media, underground forces of toxic tribalism engender polarization rather than unity. Escalation in fundamentalism, reflected in political opinions, social rhetoric, and religious discourse, too often results in schisms between right and left, conservatives and liberals. This leads to a breakdown in communication and collaboration—elements essential for societal harmony.

OUR NEED FOR COMMUNITY

All humans have a natural tendency to associate in groups because of our need of being and belonging. Those needs are not evil. It’s a natural human desire to form a community of people with similar goals, needs, and desires. But tribalism turns toxic when it seeks to eliminate those with divergent views, opinions, or identity. It thrives on the notion that the *other* is the enemy; a situation responsible for anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim attacks in places of worship, causing the deaths of innocent worshippers in America, New Zealand, Israel, and Afghanistan. It has resulted in the killings of politicians whose views diverge from those of their assailants. So prevalent is this condition on social media that some believe ours is the age of tribalism.

Unfortunately, even the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its high moral ideals and divine mandate, is not immune to this tribal mind-set, as two accounts illustrate.

Not long ago I preached at a church in a country in which recent government elections had resulted in discord and crisis in reaching Adventist homes featuring intercultural marriages. The political impasse fueling cultural tensions between two major tribes affected married couples who shared strong common beliefs and a Christian heritage. Just as telling, a friend of mine relates how, when he asked someone for help in San Antonio during the most recent General Conference session (in 2015), he was refused, based on his African

attire. He was told: “You folks voted against the ordination of women into gospel ministry.” Incidentally, my friend was not even a delegate to the session.

A WAY FORWARD

Can tribalism be overcome? Can Adventists live above tribalism?

A starting point is to acknowledge that tribalism is our default human mode. While studies indicate that no one is born racist, tribal, or fundamentalist, through socialization, children learn negative attitudes toward those with different identities by observation. Early in life we are often taught that those who look, talk, and act like us are regarded as persons, while those with different identities are regarded as nonpersons. In later stages of life, society teaches the dehumanization of persons with different identities, assigning them labels such as “dogs,” “cockroaches,” “rats,” or “pests.”

Human history sadly reveals many moments when tribalism was not only condoned, but Christian premises were developed to promote these aberrant ideas. Consider African American slavery in the United States, Hitler’s Nazi ideology in pre-World War II Germany, and apartheid laws in South Africa. Sadly, the Christian church has often been complicit in rationalizing and justifying tribalism.

Christ, however, taught principles diametrically opposed to every notion of tribalism. The central premises of tribalism (i.e., superiority, special identity, and pride) are demolished by His teachings and example.

Central to Christ’s teaching was the kingdom of God, one in which race, birth, privilege, or status did not grant entry. Jesus spoke about a new birth, made possible by the Holy Spirit, as its entry requirement. He also taught that ethnicity did not automatically qualify anyone for the kingdom. Christ preached a gospel of inclusion rather than exclusion; of peace and tolerance rather than war and intolerance, saying, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9).

More important, Jesus emphatically stated that the world would know the power of the gospel and the citizens of His kingdom by the unity demonstrated through the lives of His disciples. The disciples had diverse backgrounds, personalities, and political affiliations. Matthew had been a despised publican; Simon was a Zealot, political activist, or revolutionary. Despite their political and religious convictions, Christ, through His life and ministry, united these “liberals” and “conservatives,” leading them from polarization to collaboration, mission, and service for the kingdom.

In times when Christians, including Adventists, are drawing lines in the sand, dividing the world into those

The Christian church has often been complicit in rationalizing and justifying tribalism.

who are *for* “us” and those *against* “us”—at a moment when walls of separation are being erected—Jesus calls us to remember that “he who is not against us is on our side” (Mark 9:40).

The apostle Paul reminded believers that there is no preference for Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, master or serf in His kingdom. Paul understood this personally when Ananias came to baptize him, and addressed this religious terrorist as “Brother Saul” (Acts 9:17).

The book of Acts relates two powerful stories we urgently need to internalize. The Holy Spirit leads respected church leaders Ananias (Acts 9:10-17), Peter, and church leaders in session (Acts 10; 11:1-18) to the realization that there is a place before the cross for everyone. The gospel of Christ turns our natural human instincts and the values of secular society upside down.

Eliminating toxic tribalism from our faith community begins with introspection—searching our hearts to learn how we have espoused or promoted tribalism, and asking for the gift of repentance.

Next, we need to kneel in contrition before the Lord to ask for new hearts and natures to undo the wrongs we have caused, knowingly or in ignorance. We must step out of the walls of our tribal groups to be in Christ.

Third, we must embark on wall-wrecking missions as we practice and preach Christ’s countercultural principles. Let’s invite everyone to tear down their human “tribal” walls for the universal fellowship of Christ. As we surrender our pride, exclusivism, superiority, and tribal identities, we will join that eschatological, wall-less community from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people at the sea of glass to sing God’s praises.

As the world grows darker and more polarized each day, the time is now for the church to demonstrate to the world what Christ’s *ecclesia*, true community, really looks like—wall-less, without caste, and yet priceless in God’s sight. ©

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Feature

Not for Sale

Ethics and church leadership

G. T. Ng serves as executive secretary of the General Conference (GC). The following message is adapted from one he delivered to the GC Executive Committee during the 2019 Annual Council meetings.—Editors.

In a few months we will be in Indianapolis, at the General Conference session. I hear a variety of questions about the purpose of a GC session.

- Is it true that God appoints, but the Nominating Committee disappoints?
- Is there such a thing as righteous ambition, or holy covetousness?
- When is it my turn to serve God in an important capacity?
- What does it take for me to get elected?

ELECTION DEFINED

I couldn't find a proper definition for "church election" in the dictionary, so I came up with my own. "Election in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the corporate process in which duly constituted committees of the body of Christ prayerfully select leaders to serve in positions of trust as stewards for a designated term of service. At the end of the period of service, elected leaders relinquish their stewardship positions and are ready to be reassigned to other service opportunities that fulfill the mission of the church and advance the kingdom of God."

UNDERSTANDING POSITION

Position is stewardship in action. The moment I sit in this chair, I am a steward of that chair, of that position, for a designated period. But if I thought I owned that position, my behavior would surely change.

In this mind-set we own the position, and the position owns us. We are defined by our position, and our self-worth is predicated on it. People tend to respect us for our position, and not necessarily for who we are. And worse, the longer we occupy the position, the more we are enamored with it.

If we change our thinking, our positions take on a new light. We are the stewards, not the owners. We are not defined by our positions, and we accept that our term of office is limited. We are ready to be reassigned

if God wills it. And thus we have peace of mind. Former North American Division president Charles Bradford used to say, "If you cannot accept being elected out, you should not accept being elected in."

"TRUE NORTH" LEADERS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today needs "true north" leaders, because Jesus is the "True North."

True north leaders refuse to be bought or sold. Their integrity is not for sale. Their principles are not for sale. Their leadership is not for sale. And their loyalty to God is not for sale.

In a church election, how must we vote? According to conscience, not political expediency. Work must be done transparently and without conspiracy. We must be driven by pure motives as individuals, not as part of political alliances. We must remember to be faithful servants and not curry favors for another term.

And when we vote, we take care to evaluate qualifications. We need to be content and refuse covetousness, looking to the True North, Jesus Christ, who empowers us to resist being bought or sold. If our terms are to end, we then relinquish them with grace, keeping the words "It is well with my soul" at the forefront of our minds.

That should be our commitment as leaders of this church. ©

A Learner Again



Sometimes God has to get me out of my comfort zone and to confront my fear in order to attain something valuable.

The big day had arrived. I was going to have my first driving lesson, at the ripe old age of 29. After many years of putting off lessons, I finally felt the time was right for me to learn. I wanted the freedom of driving, but I was filled with anxiety. As I shook hands with my teacher and took my place in the driver's seat, I was completely calm on the outside. But on the inside I was silently screaming. I took a deep breath and turned the ignition key. Thankfully, nothing terrible happened, and during the next few weeks I began to get a little more comfortable behind the wheel.

But I wasn't happy with my progress. I thought I should be learning more quickly; I often felt foolish and slow. Whenever I learned a new skill, it seemed as if I immediately forgot an old one. Being a learner was difficult, especially as a "recovering perfectionist." I was used to being competent and in control of my environment—the teacher, not the student. But now I was suddenly making many mistakes.

The clutch was my nemesis. I could never seem to keep the car from stalling. Whenever I saw a red light or a stop sign, a sense of dread would slowly well up inside me, as I knew that I would likely stall the car and irritate other drivers. Some of these experienced drivers seemed to forget that they had been once learners too. They passed me recklessly, honked their horns, or impatiently followed, mere inches behind me. "These are all the things you shouldn't do," my teacher commented wryly.

But as uncomfortable as I have felt, being a learner is good for me. I'm not only learning to drive, but to be kinder to myself and to others on their journeys. My driving lessons are also spilling over into other spiritual applications as I consider my relationship with God.

God is described as a teacher, and the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth (cf. Ps. 71:17 and John 16:13-15). Sometimes God has to get me out of my comfort zone and to confront my fear in order to attain something valuable. Moreover, I have moments when I'm tempted to think that because I grew up in the Adventist Church, I already know all that's needed. Then God has to remind me that there's always more to learn. As Ellen White wrote: "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached. Before the student there is opened a path of continual progress. He has an object to achieve, a standard to attain that includes everything good, and pure, and noble."

The learning process into which God invites me can be awkward and humbling. Yet even when I'm slow to grasp something, He is a perfectly patient teacher. He knows that what He has to teach me will lead me into greater freedom.

What are you learning lately? How do you treat the learners in your life? ©

* Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 18.

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Ethics in a Challenging World

Our morality is rooted in the Bible

What does it mean to be ethical? Answers vary, based on those who respond, where they are from, and who or what determines their morality. Ethics, after all, are based on one's morality.

Culture strongly influences what is considered ethical within a given society. One successful consulting firm offers this definition: "Ethical behavior means acting in ways that are consistent with what society, individuals, and businesses generally accept as good values."¹

In this and many secular models, "society, individuals, and businesses" determine what is ethical behavior. Therefore, depending on cultural norms, what is determined as ethical in one society may or may not be considered ethical in another. These ethics can change based on culture.

While some cultures and secular entities give a nod to biblical principles, such as the Golden Rule of treating others as we wish to be treated, most do *not* acknowledge the authority of a higher, God-given, unchangeable moral law in determining universal ethical behavior.

SUPERSEDING CULTURE

Seventh-day Adventists, however, acknowledge God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, as timeless and superseding all cultures. This divinely given code of conduct determines our ethics. In more than 200 countries and multiple cultures, God's last-day remnant movement seeks to operate based upon His moral law, which outlines ethical behavior toward God and our fellow humans.

This timeless, authoritative moral code of ethical conduct is summarized in such biblical texts as, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27) and "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Rather than replacing the Ten Commandments, these summaries provide a way of expressing the main purpose of God's moral law, upon which we base our ethics and behavior, regardless of time or culture.

PERFECT EXAMPLE

Jesus Christ is the perfect example of ethical behavior. In the well-known Sermon on the Mount, Christ outlines heavenly morals and behavior.

Starting with the Beatitudes, He identifies these heavenly moral values—meekness; a strong desire

for righteousness; mercy; purity of heart; peacemaking—and offers comfort and hope to those who are “poor in spirit” and those who are persecuted.

Christ continues with specific examples of Christian moral behavior and ethical expectations—being a light; keeping the commandments; having pure motives; being faithful to one’s spouse; going the second mile; and loving one’s enemies. Tucked in is a model prayer; encouragement to place one’s treasures in heaven rather than on earth; an assurance about not worrying; and an admonition not to judge others. Jesus ends with the parable of the wise man who built his house upon solid rock, rather than shifting sand.

This sermon, given on a grassy hillside 2,000 years ago, has been acknowledged for centuries as the most powerful discourse on ethical behavior ever given. Yet some assert that its precepts are impossible to fulfill, particularly Christ’s command: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

TRUE MORALITY

Is Jesus setting us up for automatic failure with an impossible request? Ellen White wrote: “Before the world, God is developing us as living witnesses to what men and women may become through the grace of Christ. We are enjoined to strive for perfection of character. . . . Would Christ tantalize us by requiring of us an impossibility? Never, never! What an honor He confers upon us in urging us to be holy in our sphere, as the Father is holy in His sphere! He can enable us to do this, for He declares, ‘All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.’ This unlimited power it is our privilege to claim.”²

Explaining how this takes place, she wrote: “Those who desire to be transformed in mind and character

are not to look to men, but to the divine Example. God gives the invitation, ‘Let *this* mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.’ By conversion and transformation, men are to receive the mind of Christ.”³

We are to submit daily to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ in our lives. Only by Christ’s grace are we saved and grow in submission to Him, thus becoming more like Him all through His power. As Paul wrote: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13). Abide in Christ and grow in Christ. He wants us to become like Him through His power.

These ethics transcend time and culture because they are God-given and universal in application. They are inextricably tied to the gospel.

Ellen White observed: “Through sin the whole human organism is deranged, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted. Sin has degraded the faculties of the soul. Temptations from without find an answer chord within the heart, and the feet turn imperceptibly toward evil.”⁴

ETHICS OF THE GOSPEL

But praise God, we are not left in this wretched condition! “As the sacrifice in our behalf was complete, so our restoration from the defilement of sin is to be complete,” wrote Ellen White. “No act of wickedness will the law of God excuse; no unrighteousness can escape its condemnation. *The ethics of the gospel* acknowledge no standard but the perfection of the divine character. . . . [Christ’s] life is our example of obedience and service. God alone can renew the heart.”⁵

And He has promised to do so. When we are converted and submit our will to His, Christ performs this amazing transformation within us: “I will give you a new heart and put

We acknowledge a moral law, given by God Himself, that is timeless and supersedes all cultures. This moral law determines our ethics.

a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Eze. 36:26, 27).

This is the key to receiving the mind of Christ, to becoming the ethical, moral people He calls us to be as individuals, and as His church.

“The glory of God is His character. . . . This character was revealed in the life of Christ. . . . Christ desires His followers to reveal in their lives this same character. . . . Today it is still His purpose to sanctify and cleanse His church ‘with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.’ No greater gift than the character that He revealed, can Christ ask His Father to bestow upon those who believe on Him.”⁶ ☉

¹ Nick Price, “Ethical Behavior for Board Members Is Culturally Driven,” BoardEffect.com, August 9, 2017, www.boardeffect.com/blog/ethical-behavior-board-members-culturally-driven/

² Ellen G. White, “Let This Mind Be in You,” *Signs of the Times*, Sept. 3, 1902.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 451.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 451, 452. (Italics supplied.)

⁶ White, “Let This Mind Be in You.”

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Tearing Down Walls



It's been more than 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. A recent article in *U.S. News and World Report* captured well the reactions of two women who were directly affected.¹ Angelika Bondick, now 63, described actually missing the wall. It had simply been a given. She said, "I grew up with it, and didn't question it."

Eighty-one-year-old Dagmar Simdorn had a different reaction. "You just stood there with an open mouth and your hand in front of it. . . . The feeling was as if you were soaring, really," she said, tearing up. "You felt like you were floating."

Untold sums of money have gone into the great walls of the world, not to mention the countless lives that have been sacrificed in their shadows. Now many of these walls serve only as tourist attractions.

Walls were a symbol of strength and protection in biblical times. A city without walls was considered weak and vulnerable. Well-constructed walls did a great job of keeping the enemy out, but walls also did a good job of keeping people in. Without even realizing it, citizens could become prisoners in their own city.

History books are full of stories of sieges and people being trapped within the walls of their own city. One of the longest recorded sieges happened to the city of Candia, the capital of Crete. In the seventeenth century, Venice was a major power in the Mediterranean, but its power was on the decline as the Ottoman Empire grew in strength. Unfortunate military events led to the siege of Candia.

The siege began in 1648 when the water supply was cut off and sea lanes were disrupted. Numerous battles occurred over the years, but the residents of Candia refused to give up. Finally, 21 years later in 1669, the city of Candia surrendered. Residents were allowed to leave with whatever they could carry.²

DIFFERENT WALLS

Imagine being trapped within your own walls for 21 years. Is it possible for us to be trapped within our own walls today? We have to admit that too many of God's people have erected their own human-made walls to protect themselves from the enemy. These walls are not physical, but spiritual. They aren't built with hammer and nails or brick and mortar. These

The church was never meant to be self-centered. It was never meant to be an elite club of people who seldom venture out.

walls are built out of ideas, traditions, prejudices, and fears.

The apostle Paul wrote: “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Eph. 2:14). What was this “middle wall of separation”? Paul makes it very clear that it represented the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles.

The Israel Museum in Jerusalem exhibits a partial slab of limestone discovered in 1936 near the site of the second temple. It dates to just before the time of Jesus. The full Greek engraving says:³

No foreigner may enter within the balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put blame for the death, which will ensue.

What must have gone through Jesus’ mind as He walked by this sign, knowing that His death, which would indeed follow, would atone for the guilt of both native and foreigner, Jew and Gentile?

Ellen White wrote the following about those in Jesus’ time: “But the people of Israel lost sight of their high privileges as God’s representatives. They forgot God and failed to fulfill their holy mission. . . . The restrictions that God had placed upon their association with idolaters as a means of preventing them from conforming to the practices of the heathen, they used to build up a wall of separation between themselves and all other nations.”⁴

LESSONS FROM THE TEARDOWN

Jesus was tearing down this wall to make sure no one was without access to His salvation. Paul makes this clear. “For through Him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18).

Walls do three devastating things: they limit, isolate, and insulate.

1. Walls limit vision. You can’t easily see over a wall. There’s a wall called “We’ve never seen it done like that before” or “That’s not how *we* do it.” When walls limit our vision, we tend to say, “If I can’t see it, I won’t believe it.” Walls also limit expression. There’s a wall that keeps us bound by traditions and traditional thinking. Walls can limit creativity and growth.

2. Walls isolate. They keep people out. When we want to be alone, we put up a wall. Even in a crowd of people, we put up invisible walls to protect ourselves. The problem is that these walls isolate us from the very people we should be getting close to.

3. Walls insulate. Isolation keeps people out, but insulation also keeps people in. The church was never meant to be self-centered. It was never meant to be an elite club of people who seldom venture out. The church is to be the gate of heaven. We must not allow anything to block the entrance to God’s kingdom.

In case there’s any doubt, Jesus said, “But woe to you, scribes and

Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men” (Matt. 23:13). In another place, Jesus reiterates this concept: “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Finally, let’s remember that God said, “Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). Whoever desires! Anything that restricts “whoever” from getting to Jesus is a wall that must be torn down. We dare not build a wall where Jesus has placed an open door.

Note what Ellen White wrote: “During His earthly ministry Christ began to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to all mankind. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at naught the Pharisaic customs of the Jews with regard to this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate at their tables, and taught in their streets.”⁵

Let’s pray that God will show us the walls that need to be torn down. Let’s pray for faith and power through God’s grace to break down these walls in order to be effective witnesses as we follow the example of Jesus. ☺


¹ www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2019-10-24/from-alice-in-wonderland-to-walking-the-dog-germans-recall-fall-of-berlin-wall
² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Candia

³ www.timesofisrael.com/ancient-temple-mount-warning-stone-is-closest-thing-we-have-to-the-temple

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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The youngest member of the TIC Media Ministry team, Megumi Rodriguez (left), learns how to use the media equipment.

Faith in Action

Livestreaming the Gospel

A local church in Japan uses technology to share Christ.

Every world region has its own challenges in spreading the gospel message. Japan is no exception.

Japan comprises 6,852 islands. Its four largest islands—Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku—account for 97 percent of its population of 126 million.¹ In comparison, Seventh-day Adventist members in Japan number slightly more than 15,000, a population-to-member ratio of 8,439 to 1.² In spite of the daunting challenges these statistics represent, many native Japanese pastors, missionary pastors from other countries serving in Japan, and laypersons are moving forward in faith to share the good news of Jesus with others. The task may seem unachievable, but with God all things are possible.

TOKYO INTERNATIONAL CHURCH

The Tokyo International church (TIC), situated in a shopping center in the heart of Japan's largest city, has a membership drawn from 20 different nationalities. About 150 people attend regularly. Most of the nonnational attendees are either contract workers, tourists, or spouses of Japanese nationals.

Because TIC is one of only a few English-speaking Adventist churches in Japan, many non-Japanese-speaking people don't attend Sabbath services. Thus, Lift Up Your Voice Media Ministry was born.

THE BEGINNING OF TIC MEDIA MINISTRY

TIC member Rolo Etcobanes recognized the need for English-based Sabbath programs. In November 2017, he began livestreaming services from his apartment, using only a secondhand camera and a studio made of cardboard. Many prayers ascended for the success of the initiative. In time, some young people and the head elder of the church joined to form the media ministry, with the initial goal of livestreaming Bible studies and

Sabbath School lessons in Tagalog. Tagalog is the language spoken by some of the church's regular attendees originally from the Philippines. Later, the group began broadcasting the weekly worship service in English.

Some people questioned the ability of the TIC Media Ministry team to accomplish their goal since they weren't trained in the telecommunications field and lack the experience and skill usually necessary to operate the equipment. But the group isn't discouraged. They jointly share the knowledge and abilities they do have, and are determined to acquire the additional necessary skills—and God is blessing their efforts.

"We started this as a self-supporting ministry, and we have faced many financial challenges," Etcobanes says. "But we are depending on Him who 'is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us' [Eph. 3:20]. God is sustaining the needs of the ministry."

Donations of funds and equipment soon began coming in, and TIC pastor, Mark Duarte, offered his small office, which he shares with Japan Union workers, as a temporary studio. Utilizing limited space with others can easily cause friction, but God, the coworkers say, is teaching them humility, patience, and love.

"Having a media ministry that shares the Adventist message and mission was a vision of TIC for many years," Duarte says. "In God's timing we were able to initiate a humble beginning for Lift Up Your Voice Media Ministries several years ago. Since then, we have received comments from people living in Japan and overseas regarding how they have been blessed by this ministry. We consider it God's ministry, not ours. We're simply serving Him as He continues to open doors.

"Our purpose is to also give our young people an opportunity to serve God by being on the staff of this ministry operating the nec-



Tokyo International Church's Lift Up Your Voice Media Ministry team

essary equipment," Duarte adds. "As they participate, they are also hearing God's Word proclaimed in various venues."

The viewing audience is growing. Members who can't attend church because of sickness or distance are tuning in. People as far away as Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and other countries have also been sending messages of appreciation for the programs. The team broadcasts presentations by Maranatha as well as evangelistic efforts organized jointly by the Japan Union Conference and the General Conference (GC) in 2018.

Looking back over the past two years, the team can see how greatly God has blessed their efforts with viewers who are now able to worship the Lord with them via livestreaming every Sabbath.

"As the youngest team member of TIC Media Ministry, I'm thankful to God for the privilege of helping to spread His message by assisting my teammates in preparing the equipment," says 14-year-old Megumi Tuy Rodriguez. "I'm learning a lot about teamwork and I'm developing technical skills. The media ministry is continuing to train young people who are willing to be part of the ministry."

THE OPPORTUNITY

According to a recent article in the *Japan Times*, Justice Ministry data indicate that "the number of foreign residents in Japan had risen 6.6 percent at the end of 2018 from a year earlier, to reach a record high of some 2.73 million."³ A recent online survey also shows that approximately 22.6 million people in Japan are now using Facebook.⁴ That number is projected to reach about 26.9 million by 2023. These statistics reveal that the opportunity is great to reach out to all those living in Japan—both natives of the country and nonnationals—with God's message of hope and salvation using media ministry. ©


To learn more about Tokyo International Church's Lift Up Your Voice Media Ministry, go to tokyoadventist.org/mediaministry.

¹ worldpopulationreview.com/countries/japan-population/
² www.adventistdirectory.org/ViewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=JPUC

³ www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/22/national/number-foreign-residents-japan-rose-6-6-2018-number-overstayers-grew-almost-twice-much-government-data-shows/#.XfAK3iZZOX0

⁴ www.statista.com/statistics/304831/number-of-facebook-users-in-japan/

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John Loughborough (far right), and his wife, Maggie (directly behind him), attend a Worker's Council at the British Mission House, Ravenswood, Shirley Road, Southhampton, England, in 1882.

Looking Back

Adventists in England

Learning the language
of evangelism

With the Seventh-day Adventist Church firmly established in North America, the attention of early Adventist leaders was drawn to the need to expand and develop the work overseas. In the 1870s, John Nevins Andrews was sent to Basel, Switzerland, to establish a publishing house.

Andrews, knowing the strong ties that existed between Britain and the United States, took advantage of a stopover in England. Although there was no Seventh-day Adventist presence in Britain at the time, there were a handful of Sabbathkeepers. Andrews knew that a major work needed to be done in sharing a message that would seem foreign to many people.

Britain was in the midst of a social and political readjustment as the move from agriculturalism gradually gave way to industrialism during the mid-Victorian era (1851-1875). As seen throughout history, the political and economic climate of a nation impacts religious fervor, and this was the case in Britain, a nation that prided itself in setting the pace of religious and moral conduct, and the chief sender of Christian missionaries to the rest of the world.

THE WORK BEGINS

The church selected ordained minister John Norton Loughborough as a full-time missionary to England. He sailed with his family from New York and arrived in Southampton on December 30, 1878.

Loughborough (1832-1924) had been a minister for nearly 30 years and was a respected church pioneer in the midwestern United States, one of the first to use tents for evangelistic meetings. He led the opening of the Adventist work in California, establishing five new congregations in three years. He served as the president of the Michigan Conference and treasurer of the General Conference. But none of these roles prepared him for the work that lay ahead in England.

Loughborough preached his first sermon in England at Shirley Hall at the invitation of the Free Evangelists, six days after his arrival. More than 150 people attended. He rented the same hall for the next few weeks, delivering 15 evening lectures. Loughborough was eager, and he threw his time and energy into public meetings. Loughborough also decided to replicate the mode of evangelism he was most accustomed to in the United States—tent meetings.

AN UNORTHODOX METHOD OF EVANGELISM

In April 1879, Loughborough's evangelism offered a new and unique approach for Southampton, and for many other parts of the country. In his diary Loughborough relates: "With the opening of spring we purchased and fitted up a sixty-foot tent which was erected in the suburbs of Southampton borough, and meetings began Sunday, May 18, 1879."¹

The first meeting saw an audience of 600. Though the weather was unfavorable throughout the three months the meetings were held, attendance was relatively good. At the close of the meetings the company of those attending worship services in Southampton numbered about 30.

The workforce was meager, with only one ordained minister and two lay workers. But they labored on, and one year later the first baptism took place. Loughborough's diary records: "Our first baptism was at Southampton, February 8, 1880, when six willing souls were immersed. Up to July 2, 1881, twenty-nine had been baptized."²

SLOW PROGRESS AND LIMITED RESOURCES

Some would argue that the fruits of Loughborough's labor weren't impressive. Though attendance was good at his public meetings, with many accepting the teaching of the Sabbath, people hesitated to commit to joining the church.

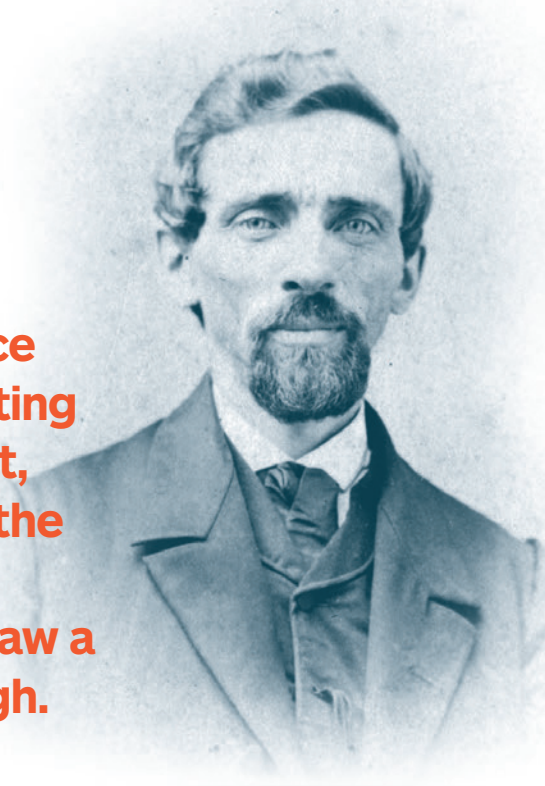
Loughborough confessed: "We met difficulties in the establishment of the work in Great Britain that are not experienced in America. We were constantly told that 'the people in England must be approached in a different manner from that employed in the United States.'"³ The numbers of those baptized seemed low in comparison to the long hours and effort invested.

Loughborough was naturally disappointed with his lack of progress, particularly compared with the success he was accustomed to in the United States. In his reports, however, he showed an awareness and provided an analysis of the challenges he faced. One of those was the lack of appeal tent meetings had among those of the upper economic classes.

The tent provided a circus imagery that people of more humble means reveled in. With makeshift, low wooden seats, and lack of artistry and decorum, tents were despised by the elite and sophisticated of society. Loughborough conceded in his report that to reach the middle and upper classes, it would be necessary to hire respectable halls. The further challenge was the expense of renting a hall.

With a restricted budget and limited resources, Loughborough and his small team of lay members had to rely on funding from North America, and any money they could raise locally. Members distributed free samples of *The Present Truth* magazine: after four gift editions they extended an invitation to subscribe to the magazine. Money gained from subscriptions was used toward hiring venues, purchasing equipment, and producing additional magazines and leaflets.

Through perseverance and undaunting commitment, the work in the British Isles eventually saw a breakthrough.



John Norton Loughborough

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Loughborough had to contend with a lack of acceptance that may have been the result of his being a foreigner, and one who was teaching unfamiliar doctrines. If the British were interested in religion at all, they would be much more likely to support the well-established Methodist and Baptist movements or the established Church of England rather than be associated with a socially inferior organization, and risking loss of prestige and status.

Loughborough also faced opposition from other members of the clergy. During his tent meetings, he had to put up with the opposition of local clergy who, in both pulpit and house-to-house visitation, urged parishioners against decisions for the Sabbath.

Despite these challenges, and with his meager workforce, Loughborough persevered and prevailed. He believed "that God was trying their patience and that all things were possible through Him."⁴ Through his perseverance and undaunted commitment to the task, the work in the British Isles eventually saw a breakthrough. Loughborough laid a firm foundation for other missionaries to build on. ☺

¹ John Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, Mich.: General Conference Assoc., 1892), p. 321.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁴ Nigel Barham, *The Progress of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Great Britain, 1878-1974* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1976), p. 63.

Richard Daly, a pastor, is communication director for the British Union Conference in the **United Kingdom**.

They're Fundamental

Q

What is the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs?

A

The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is a summary of what Seventh-day Adventists believe to be the most important elements of the biblical message to be proclaimed to the world before the second coming of Christ. I will share with you some thoughts on its nature and purpose.

1. UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL TRUTH AS DYNAMIC

Biblical truth deals with the intellect, as well as with the very fiber, of our relationship with God and others. Therefore, truth redefines our self-understanding, our perception of the world, and our view of others. This explains why our Fundamental Beliefs statement incorporates not only matters of theology (e.g., the Godhead, Christology), but also practical aspects of the Christian life (e.g., stewardship, marriage), reflecting a wholistic biblical approach to life and reality. Biblical truth is directly related to cosmic truth. Our Fundamental Beliefs are framed by this overarching theme, thus providing a better understanding of the presence of sin and death, joy and beauty, in the world.

2. THE CENTER OF THE SYSTEM IS CHRIST

Although the cosmic conflict frames our Fundamental Beliefs, what gives meaning to the whole is Christ's work for us. He is the Warrior God who fights for us against evil powers and defeats them, reveals the loving character of God, and died to redeem us. Filled with biblical hope, we look forward with joy knowing that His coming is certain. Every facet of our Fundamental Beliefs statement is interconnected through the mystery of the life, ministry, death, and present work of Christ for us. Each one reveals an important dimension of His saving work. Consequently, we should always seek to find Him in our study of those biblical truths.

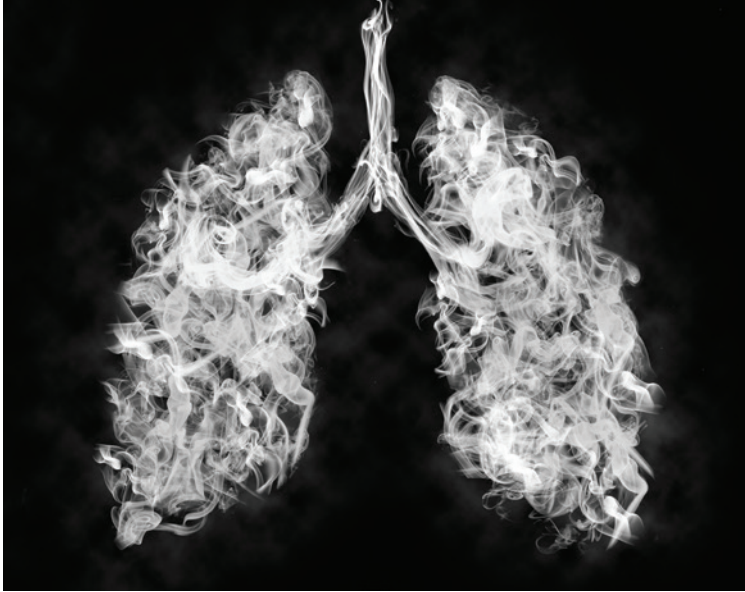
3. A STATEMENT OF TRUTH AND FAITH

Adventists claim that our only creed is the Bible and differentiate between a creed and our Fundamental Beliefs. Both are considered to be an abbreviated expression of the biblical message. Adventists have understood creeds to be fossilized teachings that are practically impossible to change. Besides, the Scripture and Christian history demonstrate that creeds often incorporated nonbiblical elements. Since they are hardly open to correction, creeds tend to perpetuate false teachings. Adventists are open to biblical truth and to its role in judging matters of faith and practice. Accordingly, the study of the Bible could lead the church to rephrase or add to its Fundamental Beliefs. Hence, the authority of our Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is located in its faithfulness to the Bible. New converts are not required to submit to a creed, but to Christ and His teachings as found in the Bible. With respect to our Fundamental Beliefs statement, they should confess that they have "found these beliefs to be what the Bible teaches."

4. COMMON IDENTITY AND MISSION

Since our Fundamental Beliefs summarize the consensus of the world church, acknowledged and reaffirmed at General Conference sessions, they contribute directly to the common identity of the church as a global movement. Persuaded by the fact that through the Bible and the work of the Spirit our community of believers came to a shared understanding of our faith, we find in them a common identity and purpose. This provides the community with a strong sense of mission and of our particular role within the religious world. Our Fundamental Beliefs witness not only to the fact that this is what we believe, but that this is what we teach. This teaching role of our Fundamental Beliefs calls us to proclaim these truths from the pulpit, when giving Bible studies, to nurture church members spiritually, and to pass the faith on to new generations. ©

Angel Manuel Rodríguez lives in **Texas, United States**, after a career serving as a pastor, professor, and theologian.



Health & Wellness

Vaping

Peer pressure versus staying safe

I am 15 years old, and my friends are using e-cigarettes, arguing that it's safe. Cool kids are vaping, and I feel left out. Is vaping really harmful?

Thank you for this important question. You're at a vulnerable age. Peer pressure and the desire to be part of the popular group are huge challenges to making wise and best choices. The short answer is "yes": vaping is really harmful to health.

Electronic cigarettes were developed in 2003 by a Chinese pharmacist. E-cigarettes deliver a vapor, not smoke, that contains nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals that infiltrate the lungs. Hundreds of brands are on the market, and they may resemble cigarettes, cigars, pipes, pens, and even USB memory sticks. They use cartridges filled with nicotine, flavoring, and other chemicals, as well as a battery-powered heating device called a vaporizer. Puffing on the device activates the process, heat is produced, the liquid in the cartridge is vaporized, and the vapor is inhaled through the lungs. This is the process of vaping.

Much has been in the news and media following serious outcomes related to vaping. These include numerous deaths from severe lung damage attributed to vaping, which have been reported around the world.

Here are some important facts to consider:

- Most e-cigarettes contain the chemical nicotine, which is addictive. Nicotine may trigger harmful changes in the adolescent brain. It's also hazardous during pregnancy and can affect fetal development.
- The aerosol contains potentially harmful solvents, flavorings, and toxins that can cause serious lung problems.
- E-cigarettes expose the lungs to different substances, including diacetyl, which is used to give a buttery flavor and can cause "popcorn lung," a severe and irreversible lung disease.

- Potentially fatal poisoning has resulted from accidentally swallowing and/or inhaling e-cigarette liquid.

- Although e-cigarettes are promoted as helping people to quit smoking, those who use or who have used e-cigarettes are less likely to stop smoking altogether.

- Teens who use e-cigarette products are more likely to start using regular tobacco as well.

- Continued use of nicotine can make other drugs, such as cocaine, more pleasurable to the user.

The flavorings, the marketing, and the erroneous concept that it's not harmful to vape tempt teenagers to begin vaping. There's concern that this increases the chance that they will smoke conventional cigarettes later, and current evidence points to this.

Vaping tobacco/nicotine products is the most common form of use by young people, but vaping of marijuana has become more common in middle and high school students. Both forms of use are known to be harmful to academic performance and the psychological well-being of young people.

Nicotine is a dangerous and highly addictive drug. It increases blood pressure, narrows arteries, raises the heart rate, adds to hardening of the arteries, and contributes to heart attacks. E-cigarettes and tobacco products of all kinds contain nicotine and other dangerous toxins. The best choice is not to use these products in any form. God will honor and strengthen your decision to stay healthy. ©

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One Touch Light



“May I Tell You a Story?”

BY DICK DUERKSEN

Karen’s mother had collected many things, few of them valuable. That meant when her mother passed away, Karen and her husband, Henry, spent many frustrating hours sorting the things that remained. Some of the stuff they were able to donate to charities that would give it away to people in need. But most of her collections were of value only to her. That made Karen very sad.

When the house was finally empty, the back seat of Karen’s car was stuffed tightly with memories of her mother, things that were such treasures that she simply couldn’t sell or give them away. More of her mother’s most special stuff stood tall in the back of Henry’s pick-up truck.

“The passenger seat beside me,” Karen remembers, “was home to Mother’s favorite table lamp. It was not strikingly beautiful or anything special, just bright-blue pottery shaped like an ancient water jug. The shade even looked a bit worn. Somehow, the craftsman who had made it had designed the pottery so that to turn the lamp on or off, all you had to do was touch the pottery—lightly. Oh, how Mother loved to show her guests the miracle of her touch light. I just couldn’t let it go.”

“We had just learned of a family near us whose house had burned down while they were away on business,” Henry tells the story. “Both of them were truckers,

long-haul drivers whose giant truck tractors pull trailers full of stuff from one side of the United States to the other. That’s probably why I felt their need so strongly. I used to run a rig myself.”

Truckers can sometimes be a rough sort of people, always on the road, barely living from meal to meal. This family had been far away when a gas tank exploded and burned their house to the ground. There was absolutely nothing left. Nothing at all. Guessing the needs, Karen and Henry piled their pickup high with Mother’s old table and chairs, her bed, a couple dressers, kitchen utensils, pots and pans, and a few other things they thought the truckers might be able to use.

“The truckers had come home the night before and were staying in a small empty house near our place. So that’s where we were heading,” says Karen. “Taking Mother’s best to someone who might actually need and want it!”

The truckers were living at a place down a long and winding dirt road, and the vehicles created a major dust storm as Karen and Henry drove to the house.

“You should have seen their eyes light up when we emerged from the brown dust cloud,” Henry laughs.

At first the truckers, Emily and Chuck,

By morning Karen knew she had no choice. The touch light was not hers. It must be Emily's.

didn't want to admit that they needed anything. "Oh, we'll be OK," Emily told them. "We can get by." Then Emily saw there was a bed in the pickup and she began walking toward it, big tears pooling in her eyes. "We really didn't have a lot of stuff to lose in our old house," she whispered, "and I would really like a real bed with a good mattress."

They unloaded the bed, mattress, box springs, dressers, chairs, table, and then the pots and pans and silverware that Karen's mother had cared for so lovingly. Emily found a place for everything in the new house, each piece helping to transform the empty building into a home.

Then Karen thought about the lamp. Emily and Chuck could use the lamp, right? Yes, they could. But Karen wasn't sure she was willing to give it away. After all, this was her mother's favorite lamp, the one she made her guests touch, the one she had purchased as a Christmas present for herself long ago.

I need to keep it, Karen thought. Right?

At the car, Karen told Emily about the lamp, carefully explaining how a touch light worked, and describing how much fun her mother had teaching guests to turn it on. Emily was awe-struck, like a little girl who has just seen the perfect dolly in a store but knows she cannot have it.

"I watched my husband turn the empty pickup around and drive back

down the dusty road. Then I began walking back toward my car," recalls Karen. "Emily was with me, my neighbor crying her thankfulness again and again, begging for me to accept some payment for my generosity, listing each item with unbounded joy. I listened, but all I could think of was the touch light."

"No," Karen told Emily, "you don't owe us anything. Mother would be pleased to know that you have her things and that you are happy with them."

The women cried together, and Emily gave Karen another big "trucker hug."

Karen had a miserable night. All she could think about was the touch light. Whenever she drifted off to sleep, God would wake her up and remind her of how Emily had loved the lamp. By morning Karen knew she had no choice. The touch light was not hers. It must be Emily's.

After breakfast Karen raised a new dust cloud on the road to Emily's house.

"I have one more thing for your bedroom," Karen gushed when Emily answered the door. "It's really quite awesome; let me show you."

The two women walked to the room where one of Mother's side tables stood beside Chuck and Emily's new bed. Karen plugged the lamp into an electrical outlet and set the lamp on the table, Emily watching through eyes pooled with hope.

"Touch it," Karen said. Emily did, matching the brightly glowing light with a gush of tears. Together they touched the lamp several more times. Turning it on, and off, and on again. Then Emily wiped her eyes and grabbed Karen's hands.

"In all my whole life, this is the very first time someone noticed that I liked something and gave that same thing to me as a gift. No one has ever noticed what I liked before. But you, Karen! You saw. You cared. You gave!" ☺

Dick Duerksen, a pastor and storyteller, lives in **Portland, Oregon, United States**.

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Vol. 16, No. 3



Seventh-day
Adventist Church



The Little Things

Have you ever wondered if God cares about the little things in your life? What about an animal's life?

Jamey, put the napkin on the left side of the plate," Natasha said, leaning over her sister.

"Right," Jamey agreed, moving the floral printed napkin. Stepping back to admire the beautiful table, she felt Gadget brush against her leg.

"Woof," Gadget said with his most pitiful look.

"Now, Gadget," Jamey answered, "you know you can't have any of this food."

Gadget whimpered and hid under the chair. The house smelled wonderful, but he tried not to think about all the delicious food. When two socked

feet appeared in front of him, he decided to try again.

"Careful, Gadget," Chaplain Simon laughed. "I almost spilled the casserole."

Gadget wagged his tail enthusiastically. He hoped Chaplain Simon would give him a nibble of the dish. Instead, he said, "Now, Gadget, you know you can't beg at the table."

Gadget curled up in the sunny spot in front of the window. He watched his family finish setting the table. Gadget lowered his head onto his paws and closed his eyes. When he blinked his eyes back open, Jamey was standing in front of him. Gadget

jumped up excitedly. Maybe she would give him something to munch on!

"Gadget," Jamey said sweetly, "let's take a selfie together."

Gadget snuggled up to his favorite human. Jamey snapped the photo, and all too quickly ran back to the table.

Gadget walked past the pretty table, out the back door, and into the yard. He sniffed at the pile of golden leaves sitting beside the fence, then sat down next to it. Gadget wasn't just sad about food; he felt left out.

Gadget blinked, his eyes closed, and when he opened them, there was Jamey again!



Bible Treasure:

“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows”

(Luke 12:7, ESV).*

This time he didn't jump up.

“Gadget,” Jamey said, motioning for him to follow her. “I was looking for you. Come inside; I have something for you.” Gadget followed Jamey through the back door and into the kitchen.

“Look,” Jamey said, pointing to a little bowl on the floor next to the sink.

Gadget padded over and sniffed. The smell was wonderful. The food looked just like the food the family set on the table, like the food he wasn't supposed to eat.

Jamey grinned, realizing that Gadget was confused. “It's OK, boy,” she said, wrapping one arm

around his neck. “I researched it. Sweet potatoes are good for dogs. Go on, this is for you!”

Gadget took a nibble of his treat. It was delicious! His tail wagging, he ate up every bit of the sweet potatoes. He didn't feel left out anymore. ©

* Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

God does care about the little things—even for our pets. To listen to more stories with Gadget and the Simon family, visit discoverymountain.com. This story first appeared in KidsView, November 2019.

Activity

Make a prayer list, for the month, of all the “little things” you might not think to pray about. Pray about them every day and write down how God answers you. At the end of the month, look back and see how much God cares.



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