

Adventist World

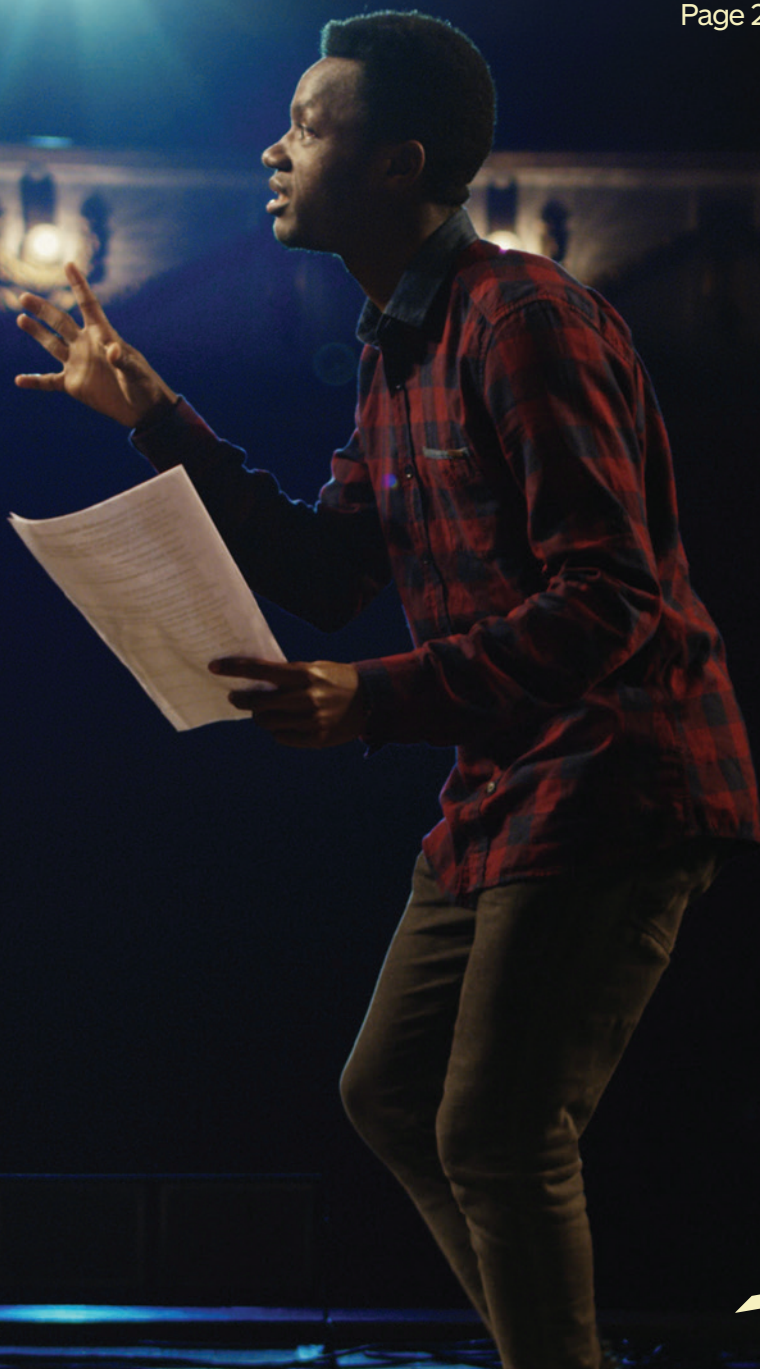
7-8/2021

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“Grab Them by the Ears”

BY BILL KNOTT

They had a well-deserved reputation for eating assembly speakers alive.

The school principal who introduced me to 250 teenagers crowded into the chapel seemed nervous, even frightened. He gave the briefest introduction, then hurried to the back where he could have a better view of how the lions disassembled another Christian.

The raw and coiled energy in front of me was palpable, ready for a job, a lunge, an opening that would end my opportunities as an assembly speaker. My palms got sweaty as I heard the muttered wisecracks from the pride. Some licked their lips in anticipation of my demise.

And so I reached back into the library of all the stories I had ever told to children, teens, adults, and savage beasts. I found the one that had some likelihood of keeping me alive.

“Four down, three over,” I began, trusting that the mystery of these words would buy me several more minutes of existence. *“Four down, three over . . . He counted the bricks in the massive old fireplace, looking for the one behind which the treasure was hidden . . .”*

Amazingly, it worked, and not because the opening seemed clever. At its heart, it was a gospel story—a story about deceit, betrayal, conversion, and forgiveness. Twenty-five minutes later the teens broke into applause.



So began my role as the storyteller of their era. Invitations to assembly services came frequently, followed by a plea that I would speak for the winter Week of Prayer—so long as I told stories, it was implied. And when they graduated from that academy three and four years later, the classes voted that I preach at their baccalaureate services—so long as I told a story, it was implied.

Five years later I would meet young adults in the grocery store, the gym, the church, and they would begin the conversation with *“Four down, three over . . . That story you told is still my favorite.”*

There is no mystery in this tale, for storytelling and story listening is how human beings have learned since time began. The ear detects, the mind selects, from a narrative of redemption and renewal a personal appeal that might never leap up from a page.

A story is a temporary covenant between a teller and a hearer to spend some minutes traveling together to a moment other than this one and some place more interesting than here. Both pretend that the journey doesn't lead to now—that the story isn't really about the present—this place, this moment, our challenges. But it always is, and always should be. We learn best by indirection, by the testing of new truths in “someone else's” story that really are the things we need to know.

Consider your calling as a storyteller of the grace that rescued and redeemed you. You will tell it well, for you know better than anyone else what it means. And mark my words: you will see the world respond with attention, interest, even joy.

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.

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Mexico volunteers load up a water tank for a family affected by the forest fires that swept through the La Sierra Madre Oriental Mountains in March. ADRA Mexico provided water tanks, pumps, and hoses to 165 families living in municipal communities in the Nuevo Leon and Coahuila states as part of a project initiative distribution, May 8, 9.

Photo: Daniel Gallardo/ADRA Mexico



“For months church buildings remained closed in most of the country. However, the Lord held His church through the efforts of all those committed to mission and discipleship.”

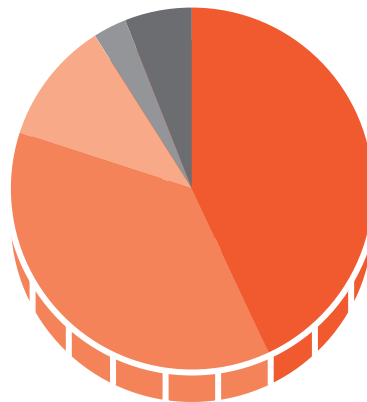
—Gabriel Cevasco, Argentina Union Conference secretary, in response to the pandemic state of the church during the union executive board. The lingering effects of the pandemic have not prevented the church in Argentina from moving forward. Almost one fifth of Adventist pastors in the country have been infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic.

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The number of finalists that competed on the last day for the Heroes II Bible Trivia Game World Championship. Ian (14) from the Philippines emerged as the first-ever champion. He won the best-of-three series in the finals against Canadian finalist David. From May 19-22, during the General Conference Global Virtual Campmeeting, qualifying rounds were initiated on four occasions to determine who would qualify for the final round. After a four-day qualifying event, 16 names emerged on top.

How Stories Impact Giving

As part of a Mission Offering study, a survey was done in the North American Division territory March 2016. Members in the NAD territory were asked how personal stories shared by church members or former missionaries influenced their giving. Here is the response from 780 members.



- **43% Most Effective**
- **37% Somewhat Effective**
- **11% Not Sure**
- **3% Less Effective**
- **6% Not Effective**



Want to learn more? Use the QR code to access the complete Mission Offering study.

Source: Researchers Petr Činčala, René Drumm, and Duane McBride, commissioned by the General Conference, supervised by ASTR, n = 780

Mission Offering: Giving in the North American Division. March 2016, pp. 16-17.

More Than 2,300

The number of new believers who joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church after a recent four-week evangelistic campaign livestreamed across dozens of islands comprising the Caribbean Union Conference. The virtual event drew thousands of viewers every night and finished with the largest number of baptisms ever during the territory's annual evangelistic efforts. The hour-long evangelistic program ran five days every week. It featured music by young people from throughout the territory, and prayer and study on Bible topics. More than 25,000 viewers connected every evening, with more than 50,000 viewers during the Sabbath worship programs.

May 24, 2021

The day that Nasr-Eddin Mofarah, minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments for the Republic of Sudan, visited the Adventist Church's headquarters. Mofarah was joined by Amira Agarib, deputy chief of Mission at the Republic of Sudan Embassy in the U.S., and Putrus Komi, advisor for Christian Affairs to the minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments. In addition to Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists, GC representatives included individuals from various departments, the Adventist health-care system, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

“It is truly a wonderful thing to see so many young people working together in teams to share the ‘Most solemn message ever given to mortals.’ Voice of Youth is a Spirit-led initiative that propels the younger generation like arrows into the world with God’s message of warning, comfort, and hope.”

—Gary Blanchard, youth ministries director of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in response to the Southern Asia-Pacific Division youth initiative. More than 200 Voice of Youth teams held online and physical evangelistic meetings, which so far have resulted in 4,015 newly baptized disciples.

“Australia needs young people who put others and the common good before their selfish interests and who are committed to changing the world by first bettering their corner of existence. I firmly believe that Christian education plays a vital role in applying that stability to the fabric of society.”

—Kristian Stefani, an Adventist education graduate, during the Christian Schools Policy Forum Dinner in the Great Hall at Parliament House in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia. He was one of four Millennials chosen to share at the event on May 24 on how Christian education impacted his life.

600 Liters

The amount of medical-grade oxygen per minute that is made in the new oxygen production system at the Metas Adventist Hospital, Surat in India. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) delivered this system to ramp up critically needed oxygen production at one of the largest Adventist hospitals treating COVID-19 patients. The system, known as Pressure Swing Adsorption Generation Plant, was airlifted from Italy in May and is installed at the 300-bed facility located in the state of Gujarat in western India. ➔



Photo: ADRA in India

Food Entirely Healthy . . . and Delicious

By Adventist Record

Addington Samoan Seventh-day Adventist Church has become the first Pacific church in New Zealand to complete the Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP). Twenty-three families (comprising 44 participants) completed the 10-week evidence-based program, which aims to implement healthy lifestyle changes to prevent and facilitate the reversal of common lifestyle diseases. Participants said they are now hoping to influence others through their example.

Local pastor Fa'afetai Matai initiated the running of CHIP for his Christchurch-based church using funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Pacific Peoples (MPP) as part of its "Resilient and Healthy Pacific Peoples" COVID-19 recovery fund, and also through the support of Adventist Health Ministries in New Zealand.

When talking about the impact and benefits of CHIP, Matai said, "There is a real challenge with our church family regarding noncom-

municable diseases. Education, I believe, is one vital tool that can help alleviate the issues by highlighting some of the causes and present real solutions of which the people will have to implement.

"The benefits of CHIP will go a long way for most of these guys—perhaps all of them—and to change the culture of the church in terms of diet, we have to tackle the problem when we admit each one of us is responsible for our own health."

The results were immediately noticeable, with overall weight loss, lowered blood pressure, and reduced blood glucose levels among the participants. Some participants' physicians said they were astonished at the change, commending their patients for what they were doing. One participant had his medication reduced, as his blood pressure had dropped so much.

Darren Folau, Regional Partnerships Community Initiatives manager for MPP, attended the graduation service for the church.

Samoan church in New Zealand completes health-improvement program.

"I found the entire Addington Samoan CHIP program completely necessary and so refreshing," he said. "To see it led by Vincent and Fono made the biggest difference in terms of uptake and genuine interest and participation."

Folau explained that training the facilitators within the organization brings a sustainability element to the program design. Additionally, ensuring the delivery was done in the Samoan language meant that the program's specific nuances and key messages were being heard in a culturally appropriate way.

"The education around healthy food choices and especially being able to make Pacific food entirely healthy—and delicious—is how our *tupuna* [ancestors] viewed food, and somewhere along the way, our generation has forgotten this," Folau added.

It is believed that one of the main reasons the program was so well attended and supported was that it had the full support of the church.

"It is so important when wanting to make a cultural change that you get as many people on board as possible," said Adrielle Carrasco, New Zealand Pacific Union Conference health director.

"Having the full support from church leadership, including the pastor and elders, the health team, and from government agencies, means that we will see a real change, with everyone working together and making lifestyle changes as a whole. I pray that the positive health habits the church has implemented over these past weeks will stay with them well into the future." ☺



The graduation dinner of the Comprehensive Health Improvement Program featured plant-based dishes.

Photo: Adventist Record

Young Adventist Missionaries Will Spend a Year in the Amazon

By Tatiane Lopes, South American Division, and *Adventist World*

In Brazil, One Year in Mission participants have completed their training and are now deployed.



In the first stage of the One Year in Mission program, young volunteers were trained at the Northwest Mission Institute near Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil.

Photo: Jonatas Correa, South American Division News

A desire to be relevant to other people and participate in practical outreach prompted Luana Collen, 22, to leave her social work studies at a Brazilian university to spend a year in mission.

"In 2018, when I was 19 years old, I participated in an outreach project close to my home [in southern Brazil] for the first time," Collen said. "Now I have decided to leave my region and live this experience in the Amazon."

Collen is one of 36 young people taking part in the 2021 One Year in Mission (OYiM) project in northwestern Brazil. Each one left home, work, or college to live the experience of being full-time missionaries in the region.

The initial training program usually takes nine weeks, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this time it lasted only five weeks. Training is intensive and started early, with cleaning the training facilities, helping in the kitchen, and taking Bible classes, among other activities, educational psychologist Eunice Bertoso, who is also a volunteer and coordinator for the first stage of the project, explained.

Bertoso shared that being a missionary in the Amazon rain forest was a lifelong dream for her, from the time she used to hear mission stories as a child at church. As soon as she and her husband retired, they decided to volunteer in the region.

STRATEGIC PREPARATIONS

Training of the OYiM missionaries took place at the Northwest Mission Institute (NMI), located close to the Amazon city of Manaus. The facilities, surrounded by nature, foster fellowship with God and provide volunteers with the first chance to reach out to residents in the area and experience some of the challenges of being a missionary.

Ronivon Santos, a pastor and NMI director, explained that the facilities also welcome other groups of missionaries. "The Amazon is a region where the need for missionaries is great, so we coordinate several concurrent long-term and short-term mission projects," he said.

The intensive training that young volunteers get as soon as they arrive seeks to prepare them to continue serving in a specific community in the Brazilian states

of Amazonas, Acre, Roraima, and Rondônia, leaders said.

"It's exciting to see young people give up so many things to be missionaries," Anderson Carneiro, youth leader in the region and OYiM coordinator, said. "The graduation at the end of the training period heralds the beginning of a dream come true for each one of them."

MISSION SCHOOL

"I have no words to describe the joy of receiving this diploma," Elane Cavalcante, 18, said. She will serve in the Canumã community in Amazonas. "Perhaps this is one of the most important graduations in my life," she added, visibly moved.

Several regional church leaders attended the graduation ceremony, including the president of the Adventist Church in northwestern Brazil, Sérgio Alan Caxeta. "Our region includes inhospitable, still unreached places," Caxeta said. "These young volunteers are now part of an army of evangelists."

On May 31 the young volunteers left the place to travel to their Amazonian communities, where they will now apply all that they learned to reach others for Jesus. ☺



Photo: AdventHealth

Adventist hospitals, clinics, and health systems around the world have struggled to respond to the enormous international health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adventist World editor Bill Knott recently sat down with Terry Shaw, president/CEO of AdventHealth, the largest Adventist and the largest Protestant health-care system in the world, to talk about delivering uniquely Adventist health care under emergency circumstances.—Editors.

KNOTT: Unlike the biblical story of Joseph and the famines predicted for Egypt, your health system couldn't know 18 months ago that a great crisis was coming. What did AdventHealth already have in place that allowed you to navigate through the pandemic?

SHAW: Like all health-care organizations, we prepare and we process for the unknown. We have drills for the mass influx of patients. We're used to getting ready for the immediate and the emergent, but no health system could ever be ready for a worldwide pandemic. I'm especially proud of our clinical team and the epidemiologists who worked overtime and were critical to our planning. Without them, this pandemic would have been an even harder

experience. Beginning in March of 2020, as we watched the crisis unfold in Italy and then in New York, they reached out to doctors in both places to find out what was working as the world struggled to understand this new disease. They prepared a very comprehensive COVID-19 best-practice process that we socialized across the company—medications, patient care, resources. That amazing work by our clinicians drove down mortality rates across our system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a huge global emergency, and it has also been a very personal story. Talk to me for a moment about what it's like to be leading a massive health team, but also experiencing the effects of the pandemic near at hand.

Losing more than 3.7 million people worldwide, including 600,000 in the country where AdventHealth operates, is an enormously sobering and difficult reality. Everyone knows someone who has been terribly impacted by this pandemic. Throughout history people have lived through many tough times. I remember my great-grandparents and my grandparents talking about the influenza crisis of 1918-1919, and the trauma associated with two world wars. This pandemic is the testing time of our generation, and it's going to be remembered forever for the immense losses of life, for the isolation and loneliness it created, and for protections we all had to agree to live with to make it through. When I look at the past 16 months, it almost seems surreal.

A major newspaper recently quoted an emergency room physician as saying, "We never trained to see this much death." What do you do when the scale of mortality is this big?

Our team members are trained to care for patients so they can get

better and go home. People choose health care as a career, so they're able to help others get well. But we don't train for this amount of death and dying on a daily basis. It's a terrible thing to watch those you care for succumb to disease day after day, week after week, month after month. We've had hundreds—thousands—of COVID unit workers who are doing their best to give excellent care to very sick people. But these front-line workers also have the strain of trying to make sure their own families are safe—that they don't somehow bring the coronavirus to those they love. The mental and emotional strain on our team members has been tremendous. Couple that with a society that doesn't necessarily appreciate the sacrifice these health-care workers are making, and it's been a real emotional drain for health-care workers.

Many experts have talked about the pandemic in military terms. After months of fighting the disease and caring for the wounded, does that language resonate with you?

Our team members are called “front-line workers” for a reason. And whether that's inpatient care, outpatient care, or one of our multiple vaccination sites, it's a war we're fighting on many fronts. You don't do just one thing to win a war. You plan, you resource, you deploy, you perform your mission—in dozens, even hundreds, of places. Our whole health system in one sense became “front line.”

You've undoubtedly heard many compelling stories from the 85,000 employees of AdventHealth. Which ones moved you most?

At several of our acute-care sites, elderly couples—one spouse in the hospital and one not—arrived at a sixtieth anniversary and couldn't be together. So employees brought

one spouse down to where they could put their hand against the glass to “touch” their loved one on their special day. Employees bought iPads so hospitalized patients who didn't have a device could talk to their families. Other AdventHealth workers visited patients' homes after they were discharged to make sure they were OK because they knew the patient was living alone.

When you became president of AdventHealth in 2016, you said in your first major address that “no patient is ever discharged from our care.” That was—that is—a remarkably Adventist approach to health care. What does it mean in the context of COVID-19?

That commitment to whole-person care caused us to innovate during this crisis. Among other things, we put up a COVID hotline and staffed it with people who understand that commitment. You can't imagine the contacts we received—people all over the globe asking for help in understanding or treating COVID-19. Technology allowed us to continue the caregiving process for those we discharged with a link to the home: someone would always be checking on you after you left our facility. When our hospitals in some regions were crowded to capacity, we began a system of home monitoring of COVID patients, with as many as 800 patients at a time being electronically monitored in their homes.

Many people assume big health-care systems are all about patient volume, and turnover, and bottom-line finances. How has AdventHealth made good on your pledge to stay engaged with those who seek your care?

First, if we're going to care for people—body, mind, and spirit—we have to lean into doing that better

than we did yesterday. For us, that means rolling out programs that meet consumers where they are in terms of their mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Second, we need to see our workforce through the right lens and take care of them accordingly. At AdventHealth we see our workforce as team members, not just “employees.” We leaned into our service standards—Keep Me Safe, Love Me, Make It Easy, and Own It—to guide our decisions on supporting our team members and our patients.

You've said that caring for the whole person includes caring for your team members just as fully. What steps has your system taken to watch out for their mental and emotional health during this pandemic?

One of the first things we did was to turn our twice-a-year employee feedback process into an ongoing, everyday process. Team members can tell us what they need, how they're feeling about their work at any time. We're also doing monthly reviews of how our employees are coping, where their needs are, and what we can do better to support them. In addition, we developed programs to guarantee our team members employment through the worst parts of the pandemic and specifically the times that we shut down some of our services. Our HR and IT teams created a redeployment app for team members to find other areas within the organization to work. We also invested in providing hotel rooms for those who worked in COVID-exposed units; we provided child care and expanded our benefits, including additional mental health services. All of this provided stability for our team members and for the communities we serve.

I've heard about an internal campaign designed to “get behind the mask” of employee



Photo: AdventHealth

mental health during the pandemic. Tell me about that.

We ran a campaign called “Fine Is Not Fine.” When you ask me, “Terry, how are you doing?” I’ll generally say, “Fine.” For us, however, that word “fine” hides a lot of problematic realities in many employee lives. Whether they recognize it or not, employees working through this prolonged pandemic are probably not “fine.” “Fine” could be a cover for a host of emotions brewing beneath the surface. And so we encouraged employees to watch out for each other—to make sure their colleagues are OK. All employees in our system can get access to free mental health care if they feel they need it—if the stresses in their professional and personal lives require it.

The logistics of coordinating personnel and resources at 50 hospitals and hundreds of outpatient and senior care facilities in 10 U.S. states must have taxed every system you have. What did you learn about redeploying human and material resources during this crisis?

We’ve watched the COVID-19 pandemic surge and ebb around the world and in the U.S. at differ-

ent times in different places. There were moments when we needed 50 people to relocate to a community tent temporarily to set up a vaccination tent, and we found them. We reached out to employees, and many of them actually checked our internal websites and volunteered to go where they were needed—they redeployed themselves in an efficient, organized way. You may have heard we turned the entire Orlando downtown basketball arena into our national centralized warehouse. It took hundreds of people to make that work. We transferred nurses across 10 U.S. states to pandemic hotspots where they were needed. All of this was organized through our COVID-19 command center. The lines of authority out of that command center were very well understood and very well defined. If I needed to wear jeans today and bring my truck to haul supplies from one place to the next, that’s what I did.

You actually did things like that yourself?

Yes, and everybody else around here. When you’ve got team members like that, you stay loyal to them. We didn’t lay anybody

off in the process. We lost \$US700 million in the first two and a half months of the pandemic, but fortunately we had borrowed \$US1 billion just one month before the crisis hit. Once we were able to get back to work, we’ve been able pay it all back. Last year obviously wasn’t what a CEO would like it to be, but, with God’s grace, it wasn’t insurmountable. It was a great blessing from the Lord to have an amazing team and a solid balance sheet as we moved through this pandemic.

Ultimately, Terry, you’re the one casting a vision for the largest Protestant health-care system in the world. What message are you trying to communicate as we watch this international crisis begin to ease in many places?

Bill, regardless of who you are or the type of care you need, our responsibility is to be prepared to care for you as a whole person—body, mind, and spirit. Our watchword every day is simple: “God, grant us the wisdom, the compassion, and the resources to care for each person as if there was no other person to care for.” ©

The Peace That Passes All Understanding



When we submit our fears and ourselves to Him, He promises to save us and give us His peace.

When I was 7, I was traveling by ship with my family from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Montevideo, Uruguay—a two-hour trip in good weather. The storm hit us suddenly. Waves were crashing against our large ship, and I could feel it moving like a rocking chair, from side to side.

I lay down and closed my eyes tightly. I tried to picture the disciples in the storm on the Lake of Galilee, and I remember thinking: “This is what it must have felt like.” I prayed that Jesus would calm that storm as well. I knew that story, and in the middle of a storm it gave me peace.

It has been more than a year since we all started experiencing the present global pandemic together, probably one of many storms we will have to endure. We may have sensed the loss of control over our lives, filling us with a sense of helplessness similar to what

the disciples experienced that night. For many of the disciples, the sea was their area of expertise, perhaps even a second home. Could it be that the place they thought they controlled turned into their worst nightmare?

The storm was not only a physical challenge. It shook their strength, their faith, and their hope.

They couldn’t understand how Jesus could be sleeping so peacefully. They wondered silently. Then they shouted their fears. *Did He not care for them?*

We too are immersed in a big storm. Jesus is with us, just as He was with the disciples. He shows us that we are completely powerless

over even the things we thought we could control. Our efforts are in vain if He is not on board.

The darkness seemed to hide Jesus from their sight, but as He woke up, they saw a preview of what would come. Lightning revealed His face, and they saw heaven’s peace in His eyes. They cried: “Lord, save us: we perish” (Matt. 8:25, KJV). “Never did a soul utter that cry unheeded,” writes Ellen White.*

Never did a soul utter that cry unheeded. What a powerful statement! When we submit our fears and ourselves to Him, He promises to save us and give us His peace. Our hearts can rest assured in Him, no matter the circumstances.

In Mark 4:36 we read that there were also other boats that followed Jesus. They also suffered in the storm. They also were blessed by His peace. People around us will be blessed by the peace Jesus gives us when we look to Him.

Where do we find ourselves during this storm? Can we identify with Jesus and His heavenly peace? Do we feel like one of the disciples crying out to Him? Or do we, perhaps, feel like those rowing desperately to reach the shore? Are we like those who simply wanted a little more time with Jesus and followed Him from a distance in another boat?

Regardless of our current situation, Jesus promises His presence and His peace. He is ready to enter our storm and say: “Peace, be still.”

That’s good enough for me. ©

* Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 335.

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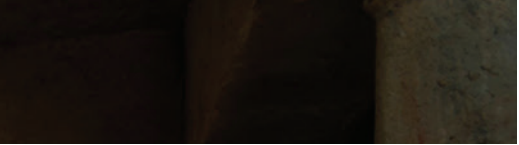
Focus on Stories

The Master Storyteller

Do you know
the end of
the story?

BY SYLVIA RENZ





Grandma, tell me a story!" I begged as I crawled into Grandma's warm bed. She sighed. She probably would have preferred to sleep a little longer. I cuddled closely against her back and listened carefully, because I didn't want to miss a single word. Grandma spoke softly and slowly—stories of little Samuel in the tabernacle, of brave David with his sling, and of Jesus who loves all the little children.

Children love stories—and Jesus loves children! And He enjoys stories. How do I know? Well, He did not inspire the authors of the Bible to pen a collection of chemical formulas. Likewise, Scripture is not a collection of astronomical calculations, engineering formulas, or anything about quarks and photons. What we need to know about God and His love for this world is what the Creator told us—first to Adam and Eve, and later, to biblical authors inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Many people contributed to the writing of His great story, adding one piece of the puzzle after the other. Some of these pieces are part of the picture frame or even its corners. The overall picture is still incomplete, and in some places there are still some pieces missing. We can leave these parts alone or carefully fill in the gaps with our imagination.

WORD PICTURES

Imagination is a wonderful gift from the Creator because it creates new places in our mind, reminding us of the ingenious Inventor whose human name is "Jesus." He tells us stories through the fascinating animals He created. Just think of the lanternfish, which lights its own lamp to attract prey. Unfortunately, it also wants to eat the curious little fish, a fact that we might like less. This illustrates, however, the dark side of the great story: eating and being eaten. This world has been taken hostage by God's enemy—we learn all this from the tragic story of Eden and the stories that followed.

How did the author of Genesis find out about it? Did he watch a video or see a vision? Or did the Son of God tell him personally what it was like at Creation or at the Fall? After all, Moses was privileged to intimately communicate with God, as a friend talks to his best friend (cf. Ex. 33:11). Perhaps Moses didn't need any moving pictures at all. The Master Storyteller was able to choose His words in such a way that the listeners became part of the story. It was as if they had watched the Creator planting a lush garden and, at His word, saw the jasmine bush shooting out of the ground, the surface of the earth suddenly being covered with a soft green carpet.

Moses saw flashing schools of herring cutting through crystal-clear, unpolluted seas. He heard the love song of whales, and his heartbeat was in tune with the hoofs of Arabian horses thundering across the plains. How skillfully did the Creator fashion Adam, blowing into him the life-giving breath as if by a kiss! Adam was then sent to the elephant, the zebra, and the monkey to give them their names.

Suddenly Adam felt very lonely in this menagerie. As the Creator watched His first human creature and the deep longing in his eyes, He gently laid him on the ground and closed his eyes. While Adam slept, God took a rib from his side and closed the gap over his heart (where there had been hard bones before) with soft, living tissue. God fashioned this "material" into a woman, who, together with her husband, became the "image of God."

This story is told with so much attention to detail that it warms my heart every time I read it. Adam recognizes Eve as his exact counterpart, as "bone

of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). We are indivisible! In these few words and sentences we can already perceive the "instruction manual" for happy and harmonious marriages. All this is told in timeless words that can be understood by both young and old, educated and ordinary.

THRILLERS, DRAMAS, LOVE STORIES

Even genealogies can tell us "stories." "Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar"; "Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth" (Matt. 1:3, 5). Each name represents a story, family drama, hope. "David the king begot Solomon by . . . the wife of Uriah" (verse 6)—goose-bump moments that paint a disastrous tragedy before our eyes, but at the same time point to God's great mercy, which can write straight on crooked lines.

Together with the New Testament authors we believe that the whole Bible was written for our correction and instruction (2 Tim. 3:16). All these stories of failures and victories are intended to strengthen our trust in a mighty God, who did not feel too powerful to use flawed human "scribes."

CLIFF-HANGERS AND MEMORY AIDS

When the Master Storyteller lived on earth, He knew how to captivate the attention of His listeners. A thousand comparisons from everyday life served as memory aids—the leaven, the splinter in the eye, the patched overcoat, the vine, the fig tree, ravens and lilies, a city on a mountain. With all these images Jesus illustrated His values and how God treats us. He often dressed His revelations about God's kingdom in exciting stories. His comparisons painted everyday

When the Master Storyteller lived on earth, He knew how to captivate the attention of His listeners. A thousand comparisons from everyday life served as memory aids.

situations for His audience: the woman who is desperately searching for a lost silver coin that was part of her wedding dowry; the shepherd to whom a single sheep is so important that he ignores his tired feet and faces the long way back into the mountains, all the while calling and searching until he finds what was lost. Children enjoyed listening to Jesus because He was able to connect to them through stories.

I found more than 50 stories in the New Testament, some of them very detailed. One such is the story of someone who was attacked by robbers and left half dead (Luke 10:30-37). We can literally “see” how the priest gathers his clean robe in disgust as he crosses to the other side of the road and walks past the bleeding victim. He doesn’t want to pollute himself. The Levite too changes to the other side! But then someone approaches who is despised by pious people: a Samaritan. Do we bend over the unconscious man *with him*? Do we rummage *with him* through his bag for the wineskin so that he can disinfect the wounds and bandage them? Can we hear the

Samaritan groan as he heaves the injured man onto his donkey? The next inn is far, but nothing can keep the man from his service of love. He ignores his own fatigue as he tends to the wounded man in the rented room all night long, and then pays the landlord extra for the care of the recovering traveler.

Even if a modern reader doesn’t fully grasp the dangers of the route or all the circumstances of the rescue operation, we can all picture ourselves in this scene. We too are disturbed by the question: Who was a “neighbor” to the victim? That’s why Jesus’ appeal, “Go and do likewise,” can also reach our hearts.

OBSTACLES

Jesus never spoke in complicated ways—and yet sometimes even His best friends didn’t understand Him. When Jesus prepared the disciples for His suffering, they couldn’t grasp His words: “This saying was hidden from them” (Luke 18:34). Why didn’t they understand? Did it have something to do with their expectations? After all, Peter had sharply criticized his Lord, inwardly rebelling against God’s plan of salvation (cf. Matt. 16:21-23), because this path didn’t coincide with his own agenda. Peter wasn’t the only one.

Our convictions and cherished attitudes may prevent us from correctly understanding our Lord’s masterful stories. In Matthew 13:11-13 Jesus adds another reason why He often clothed His thoughts in stories. These stories are told so that we can put our trust in God, remember His deeds, and obey His commandments. But we will understand them correctly only if we open our hearts and minds to the Master Storyteller, something that can happen only when we allow the Master Teacher, the Holy Spirit, to do what He does best (John 16:13).

PRECIOUS JEWELS

These stories are as precious as jewels. As John is exiled on the island of Patmos, God’s angel shows him the New Jerusalem in a story with moving pictures. The angel measures the walls and gates with a golden yardstick. The measurements suggest Jerusalem’s perfect dimensions: streets of gold, foundation stones in the walls made of jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. Every Israelite high priest had worn such precious stones on his chest. They were supposed to show that he cared about the people of God, about every tribe (cf. Ex. 28; Rev. 21:19, 20). Their names were also engraved on pieces of onyx on the priest’s shoulders. What stories do these precious stones tell, which now shine and sparkle in the light of God’s grace?

I am particularly moved by a “mini story” found in the last chapter of the Bible. It communicates a “maxi content.” In only a few words it describes the criteria for our eternal happiness. The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem are God’s servants, whose names have been entered in the book of life. They love God and “serve” Him. The next words offer a great summary: “They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4).

His name, on my forehead. There is no better way to describe the transformation and connectedness to Him who yearns to spend eternity with us. ☺

Sylvia Renz is a widely published author and enjoys her active retirement with her husband, Werner, in **Alsbach-Hähnlein, Germany**.

To Be Continued . . .

An abundance of voices assaults us from every corner. These voices can be heard in every conceivable media—time-tested print, fast-moving social media, heart-thumping video, or mind-engaging audio. Some of these voices shout; others whisper. They all seek to get our attention, for they want to tell us a story.

Scripture is only one voice among the many—and yet it is the completely different one. It plots awe-inspiring divine interventions and some great human exploits. It lets us see the highs and lows of human history and is unabashedly honest and transparent as it points us to God’s persistent story line. It goes like this: *God is love*—and this love wants to communicate itself to us! We often call this story line the “cosmic conflict,” or the “great controversy,” for it moves from the perfection of Heaven’s throne room to a perfect garden on a newly created blue planet to the devastation of the Fall and the post-Flood world.

In the center of God’s story line we see a cross standing on a hill outside the gates of Jerusalem with the God-man Jesus hanging with His arms spread out. As we consider Jesus’ death and resurrection, we need to recalibrate our mixed emotions. We hear Him say to the former demoniac on a shore next to Lake Galilee: “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (Mark 5:19). We also hear the psalmist exclaim: “My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits” (Ps. 71:15).

And suddenly we get it. God’s story didn’t finish on the cross or when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on a door of the Wittenberg church or when William Miller and thousands of Advent believers looked in anticipation up into the sky on October 22, 1844. God’s story is our story too. “To be continued” is not just part of the closing credits of a TV series or found on the last page of a cherished volume. Our lives and witness offer the continuation of the cosmic conflict, adding a small piece to the puzzle. That’s the reason we are called to share our stories in the larger context of God’s story with our children. While my story or your story may be

Our lives and witness offer the continuation of the cosmic conflict, adding a small piece to the puzzle.

distinct from Moses’ or Daniel’s story, it’s part and parcel of the continuation of God’s plan to save this world.

Listen to the way Ellen White put it: “Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in cooperation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God.”

Yes, your story—my story—is unique and uniquely needed. Someone, somewhere, needs to see, hear, or even just observe that story and be encouraged to step into the story line that will be continued into eternity. ☺

* Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941), pp. 326, 327.

Gerald A. Klingbeil serves as an associate editor of *Adventist World*.

Focus on Stories

Looking Back

Early Adventist “Social Meetings”

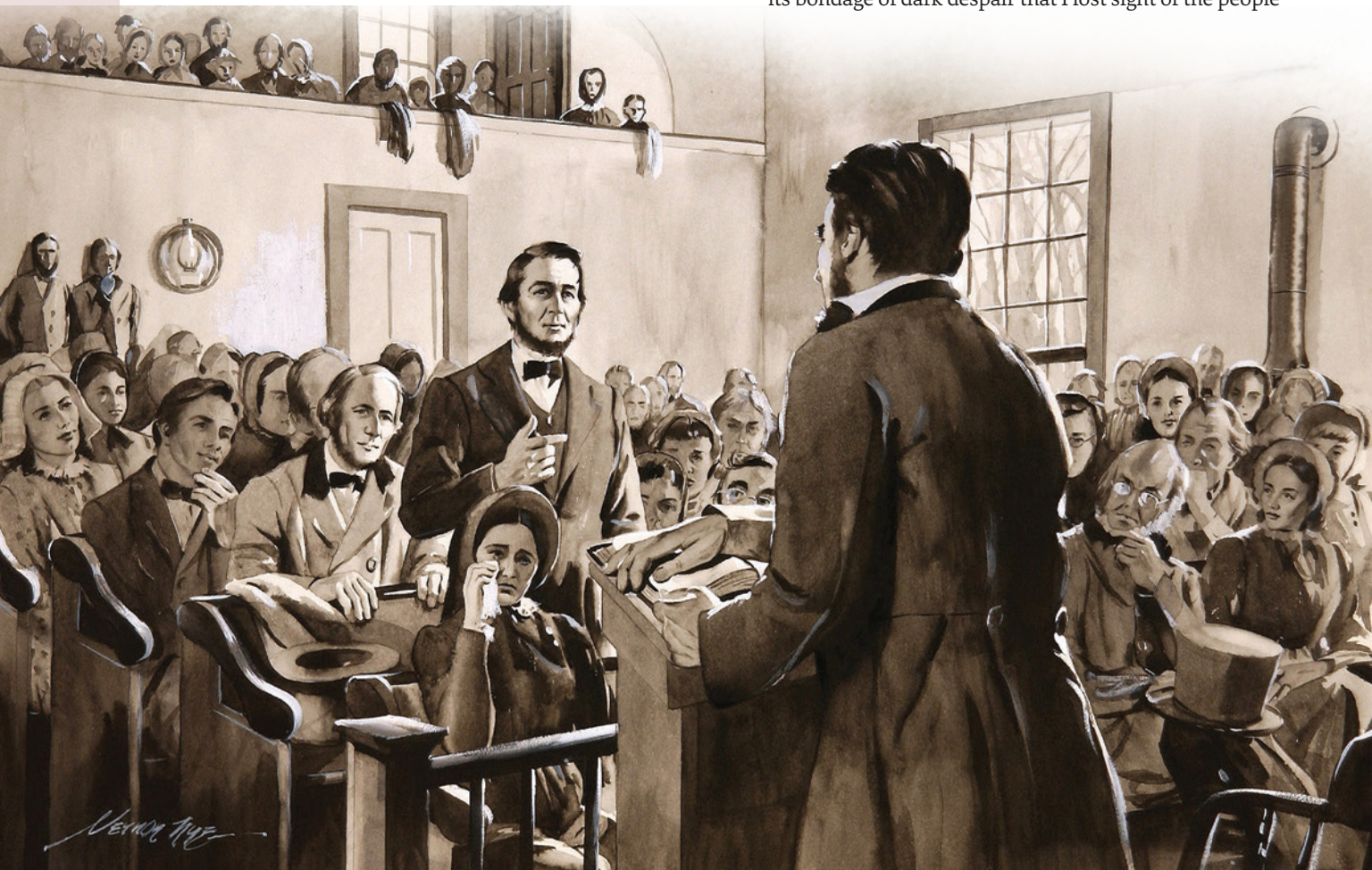
A call for testimony revival

Early Adventist worship had different essential elements that connected people to God and each other. Bible study in Sabbath School and preaching the Word through a Bible-based message were complemented by the “social meeting,” or planned sharing time.

It might occur in connection with Sabbath School, follow the morning sermon, or appear in an afternoon meeting. There was a culture of speaking in church with sincere testimonies of encouragement, experience, providence, answered prayer, and praise, as well as confession and even exhortation.

As a young girl Ellen Harmon was introverted and shy. During 1843 or early 1844 she found the courage to pray out loud for the first time during a meeting at her uncle’s home in Portland, Maine, United States. She had struggled with doubts about her conversion. This prayer transformed her Christian experience.

She said, “As I prayed, the burden and agony of soul that I had so long endured left me, and the blessing of the Lord descended upon me like the gentle dew. I praised God from the depths of my heart. . . . The Spirit of God rested upon me with such power that I was unable to go home that night.”¹ Shortly after this, at a Millerite meeting in Portland, she shared her testimony: “The simple story of Jesus’ love to me fell from my lips with perfect freedom, and my heart was so happy to be liberated from its bondage of dark despair that I lost sight of the people



around me and seemed to be alone with God. I found no difficulty in expressing my peace and happiness, except for the tears of gratitude that choked my utterance as I told of the wondrous love that Jesus had shown for me.”²

Levi Stockman, an Adventist minister who had privately talked with young Ellen about her struggles, was present at this meeting. He was so affected that he “wept aloud,” praising God for the blessing given to the girl he had recently seen so overcome with discouragement and fear.

Ellen, later to be called to prophetic ministry as the Lord’s messenger, was soon asked again to share her testimony at a nearby Christian chapel. As she expressed her love for Jesus with subdued heart and tearful eyes, the “melting power of the Lord came upon the assembled people. Many were weeping and others praising God.” A call for sinners to rise for prayer was made with wonderful effect.³

PLANNED TESTIMONY TIMES

These dynamic expressions of living faith and revival as illustrated by Ellen White’s early experience were characteristic of early Adventist worship. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Seventh-day Adventist worship included planned testimony times. People were invited to respond to the message given and share their own experience with God.

The “social meeting” was a significant feature at the organization of the Michigan Conference in 1861 and of the General Conference in 1863. “Our ministers had unusual freedom in preaching the Word, and the social meetings were excellent, especially the general conference meeting on Sunday evening. . . . The time was filled up with short testimonies from many brethren and sisters. A calm, sweet, melting spirit pervaded the meeting making it the best of the kind we ever witnessed.”⁴

Church leaders at those conferences placed social meetings at the heart of evangelism and church organization. They recommended that when an evangelist held meetings in new areas, “a leader be appointed, and let social meetings be continued till such time as the individuals become thoroughly acquainted with each other, and ascertain with whom they can have fellowship, and who are qualified for the important duties of officers of the church.”⁵ Then the congregation would be organized.

This approach was affirmed by Ellen White in Australia in 1894. J. O. Corliss introduced the personal sharing time to the small “Seven Hills” congregation following a moving message from Ellen White. “We then had a social meeting. This was a new exercise to those who had newly come to the faith, but Elder Corliss called upon one after another to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus until

Sharing personal experiences with others helps us understand our need of God’s blessing and builds relationships between people.

all but one of the believers bore testimony.” Ellen White observed: “We keep before them the fact that the social meeting will be the best meeting in which they may be trained and educated to be witnesses for Christ.”⁶

SHORT AND MULTIFACETED

She gave practical counsel that these sharing times should not be dominated by one or two people. “There should be a spirit of confession to God, and an acknowledgment of His blessings, with thanksgiving.”⁷ “In conclusion I would say, on the Sabbath, when the people assemble for worship, let the discourse be short, and let all be given an opportunity to bear testimony.”⁸

Sharing personal experiences with others helps us understand our need of God’s blessing and builds relationships between people. It provides a living way for the Holy Spirit to impress hearts and connect people to God.

The Bible is filled with stories of struggles and personal faith. The Holy Spirit uses these stories, along with our own, to bring personal and congregational revival. One of the reasons we love the Psalms is that they honestly express heart need, confession, petition, promise, praise, and stories of the mighty acts of God.

In these last days the wonderful promise to us is clear: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11). What would happen if every church had sharing and testimony meetings? Satan would be overcome through both the redeeming blood of Jesus and the word of our testimony. ☺

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 31.

² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 41.

⁴ [James White], “Michigan General Conference,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861, p. 148; see also [James White], “The Conference,” *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1863, p. 204.


⁵ J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, M. E. Cornell, “Conference Address,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 15, 1861, p. 156; see also *Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* [1863], pp. 8, 9.

⁶ Ellen G. White, “Meeting at Seven Hills,” manuscript 32, 1894.

⁷ Ellen G. White letter 279, 1905, in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 9, p. 97.

⁸ Ellen G. White letter 187, 1904, in *ibid.*

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Focus on Stories

Interview

Do Stories Matter To Preaching?

What would Jesus say to that?

Associate editor Lael Caesar talked with Noah Washington, associate pastor of the Emmanuel-Brinklow Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ashton, Maryland, United States, about stories and preaching. —Editors.

How did you come to gospel ministry?

I was 7 or 8 years old. Elder C. D. Brooks was preaching, “Stay With the Ship.” And I heard a voice saying, “Do that.” I started looking around to see who might be telling me that. Everyone was engaged in the sermon, crying, receiving the sermon. And it was at that moment, at that age, that I felt God was calling me to ministry.

At Pine Forge Academy God dealt with me and honed some skills.

I was fifty-fifty; some of it was just a novelty. By the time I got to Oakwood, I just settled into it.

You’ve had some physical struggles.

Yes. The summer of 2009 I caught Lyme disease. It has been a difficult journey. But one day while I was crying alone—I didn’t want my family to see me—I turned on the TV and heard Wayman Tisdale¹ say, “I’m here to tell you, with the help of God you can get through whatever you want to in life.”

That spoke to me. And so I just decided that though I have very dark days and difficult patches, I’m going to try to keep standing and keep pressing through.

Let’s talk about your preaching. How do you prepare a sermon?

I actually don’t think I can preach well. I just have this philosophy that if it doesn’t make sense to me, it won’t make sense to anybody else. So while I’m working on it, God is dealing with me. And as most humans, I don’t like to be dealt with. But the Spirit of God said, “You got to preach the whole gospel. You have to preach stuff



that is still being worked out in your own life.”

I was sent to you when I asked for someone who does great narrative preaching. What do stories have to do with preaching? And what do stories do to your preaching?

As I think, stories have everything to do with preaching. For two reasons. First, it was Christ’s method of teaching. He used things that were common to the people of the day, the lilies of the fields, etc., things that people were extremely familiar with on a regular day-to-day basis. And He used those things to communicate

the truth of the gospel. Right? So, first, stories are important because it was the Lord’s method to use stories: one man had two sons; there were 10 virgins, five wise and five foolish.

And second, there isn’t a person alive—and if they are alive, I will check their pulse—there is not a person alive who doesn’t enjoy a good story.

That’s it?

People are made millionaires because they act in a story; or because they write a story—box office [success]! People have been watching even more films now during this pandemic. My wife has taken some time off from work. So two days ago we sat down for a while and watched a good movie on television; and the story line had me captivated from the very beginning. I’m the type of guy that if you tell me, “Hey, Noah, you need to go watch this,” my senses are heightened, because what you’re telling me is the story line is good. So when I go to watch, my senses are heightened. If what I see doesn’t match how you shared it, then don’t tell me to go watch another movie. Because you’ve disappointed me, right?

Every week when the man or woman of God stands up to preach the Word, there is an expectation. There should be an expectation there, heightened because someone has said that the story of Jesus is a good story. So I think stories are important because it was part of Christ’s method, but also everyone loves a good story. Every age, every ethnicity, every culture, they love to hear a good story. And so I think stories are a great way to communicate the gospel.

Who were your heroes when you were seeking to define yourself? And are there places you want to send the people

who read this interview—books, or other such sources?

When I was growing up, I just knew that C. D. Brooks was God’s greatest gift to earth. And it was a thrill of mine to have a relationship with him, to pick his brain. And then, I don’t know if there was anyone who was a better narrative preacher, a better story preacher, than Walter Pearson, Jr. He could make a simple story be ready to go to the blockbuster screen. Just the way he told stories! I would sit in awe, watching *Breath of Life*.²

E. E. Cleveland [was] a great spiritual man. Later, Dr. John Trustee; his preaching really spoke to me. And a final name: Growing up, I guess it was the pastoral culture that the pastor preacher was here, and the people were there. And for me, the first pastor I knew that just allowed me to come into his life, his circle, was Pastor Ronald Edmonds. When he preached, I said, *Wow, this guy believes what he’s preaching*. So I think from Uncle Ron, as I call Pastor Edmonds, I learned power and control and conviction and passion.

And sources?

Certain Sound of a Trumpet, by Samuel Proctor. *The Witness of Preaching*, by Thomas Long. *The Witness of Preaching* talks about different ways you can go about crafting a sermon to reach more listeners. Excellent resource.

Wrap it up for us, Elder.

When you stand before the people, God is literally using you to communicate His will. God uses preaching. And it’s arguably one of the most humbling things a human could ever do. The sermon should be the continuation of what God has been speaking into your life already. ☺

¹ Former professional basketball player who had his leg amputated because of bone cancer.

² *Breath of Life* is a television ministry in North America: C. D. Brooks was its first speaker, followed by Walter Pearson, Jr., and now Carlton Byrd.

What God has done for others
He can surely do for you.

God Is in the Business of Opening Doors

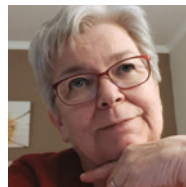
When I look back at my life, I realize that much of what I have done and experienced was because God opened doors for me to pass through. At my birth He gave me a big “parcel” filled with gifts. No, these gifts were not packed in colorful paper and decorated with a bow, but rather placed within my heart and soul. When I gave my life to God, He started unpacking these gifts one by one. He had prepared them for me to fulfill my dreams even before I knew that I had them. God opened doors, inviting me to serve in ways I had never thought possible, encouraging me to take up the gifts He had given me. He helped me to develop my talents and face challenges.

My life is a patchwork of experiences put together by my God, who showed me the way and opened possibilities. He invited me to serve and minister in many ways, with one experience leading to the next, as He placed the right challenges and people in my life at just the right time. The squares in my life’s patchwork are a multifaceted and colorful testimony to what God can do with us if we allow Him to use us. He gave me a family to care for and invited us to serve as missionaries in Africa, broadening my horizon. God gave me a burden to help other pastors’ wives. He then gave me a vision for women’s ministries and opened the door to speaking and teaching. Another door He

My life is a patchwork of experiences put together by my God, who showed me the way and opened possibilities.

opened was serving as a church elder. Many patches are experiences made during our many evangelistic seminars in Ukraine. God even led me through the doors of a TV studio to tape a series of morning devotionals. When I finally started writing books, He sent me just the help I needed before I even asked. It was as though God was saying to me, “Go ahead; I am with you. Write!”

There are so many things God has done for me, and I am grateful for all these experiences. He has given me the courage and an undaunted spirit that is willing to tackle anything He asks me to do. Sometimes I have wondered why I find it so hard to say “No,” but I have realized that with God nothing is impossible, and He will give me the strength and inspiration needed. Knowing that God is there, taking care of me, is like wrapping myself up in the patchwork quilt of God’s loving leading, secure in the knowledge that each experience will make my life richer and happier, even if some of the patches are dark. God has opened many doors, saying to me, “Whether you turn to the right or the left, you will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isa. 30:21, NIV). ©



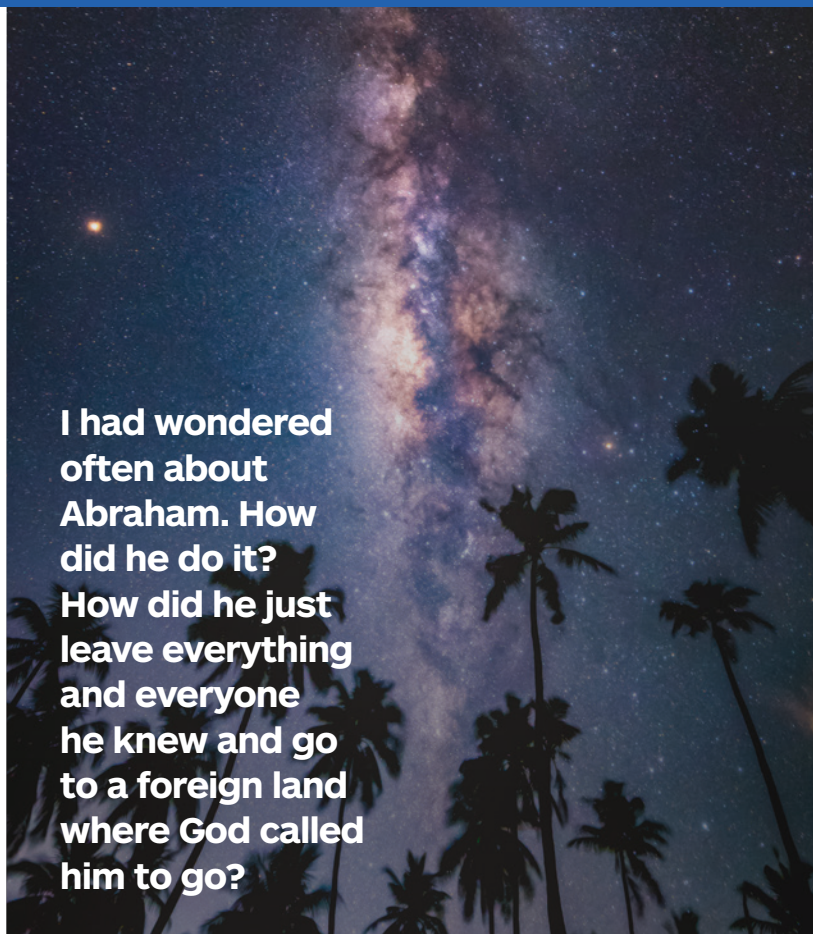
Hannele Ottschowski is a native of Finland and has spent most of her life in **Germany** married to a pastor. She has served the church as a writer, educator, editor, conference speaker, church elder, and translator.

Where He Sends Me, I Will Go

It was November 2016, and I was invited to speak at the American Samoa youth camp meeting in December. I was living in Sacramento, California, at the time. I was excited about the prospect of an evangelism/vacation trip and was looking forward to winning souls for Jesus. I had been traveling throughout that year conducting revival meetings, and this was my last trip of the year. Winter was coming, so I was looking forward to some tropical, South Pacific weather. My expectations for this trip were simply to accomplish the mission for Jesus, engage in some relaxation, and then head back home to plan for the new year. But God had other plans for me. After conducting my speaking engagements for the camp meeting alongside three of my brothers in ministry and seeing 60-plus souls won for Jesus, I was also asked if I could be the main speaker of the 10 Days of Prayer series for the biggest Adventist church in American Samoa. I accepted and was prayerfully preaching each night to win more souls.

On the third night of speaking, the district director was in attendance. He had attended the first two nights as well. After the meeting I was approached by the director and asked if I would consider moving to American Samoa to help with the work there. Immediately in my mind I said an emphatic “No,” but my face stayed composed and polite. I was a little thrown back by the question. I didn’t reply. He continued, “Why don’t you think and pray about it? I will get back to you to see what your answer will be.” I politely agreed and left. When I got back to my room, I had already made up my mind that I would decline. After all, I was Samoan by ethnicity, but felt completely American. I didn’t think I would fit in. I would be out of place and would have to endure significant culture change. There was no way I was going to leave home in California and come to this tiny dot on the map.

God had many ministers here already; why would I be needed? I was positive I was going to decline. But by the time the meetings were over, after praying the Holy Spirit would work on my heart, I accepted. It would mean leaving the United States to come to an island thousands of miles away, knowing nobody, because God had called. I did.



I had wondered often about Abraham. How did he do it? How did he just leave everything and everyone he knew and go to a foreign land where God called him to go?

So on September 22, 2017, I moved to American Samoa. In my first year I felt miserable, but kept a straight face. I hated it. I was homesick and was tempted many times to go back. But I kept praying and working in faith for my feelings to change. I stayed busy with preaching and teaching, but all that was on my mind afterward was “I just want to go home.” I had wondered often about Abraham. How did he do it? How did he just leave everything and everyone he knew and go to a foreign land where God called him to go? Abraham became my source of inspiration, and God strengthened me through his experience. I’m going on four years now, and my feelings have completely changed. I love it here. God knew I would grow into loving it and appreciate His foreknowledge of calling me so I could continue to grow in His grace. There are still a lot of challenges that I face, and I still think often about home, but God has shown me that home is where He calls me to go. ©



Born and raised in San Francisco, California, **Kili Silafau** is one of seven children. He serves the Lord in **American Samoa** as pastor of the Maranatha English Seventh-day Adventist Church.



Two Callings From God

I was just 12 when I knew for sure I wanted to be a psychologist someday. With God's blessing and the support of my parents and later my husband, I finished a degree in that field. After some years of additional training, however, my husband and I decided to become parents. After much praying and walking in faith, we made a difficult decision: At least for a few years, I would set my professional dreams aside for the full-time adventure of motherhood. We believed that solid foundations during Thiago and Maia's early years were essential for their life success down the road.

Those were demanding years, full of challenges and ongoing learning. On the other side, I felt privileged to be there to catch my children's first words and guide their first steps. When they fell ill, I was there to soothe and care for them to the best of my abilities. I loved hearing one of them calling "Mom!" just to add after I responded,

"Nothing! I just wanted to know that you were near!" I'm not sure how much they value my presence now as teens, but I am thankful I was able to be a present figure during their early years. I see it as the first link in a chain of events and experiences I can thank God for.

After six years of full-time motherhood, I thought it would be a challenge to once more find my place in my pro-

fession. But I saw God working and opening doors for me to also grow professionally. For some unexplained reason I felt that my call was to be trained to serve as a psycho-oncologist. Both available training options were in a big city several hours away. They also included classes all day Fridays and Saturday mornings.

A great blessing was to find that my husband could make arrangements and stay with the kids most of those hours. Another invaluable blessing was the willingness of the professor to teach her Saturday class on Thursday afternoons just for me. She also told me I was free to leave her class before sunset on Fridays. With God opening all the doors, I felt I had no choice but to move forward.

After graduation I was blessed to become part of a comprehensive team at an Adventist health-care institution, as the first psycho-oncologist in the mental health department. In my job I provide support, comfort, and ultimate hope to people often in despair. I feel it is my God-appointed mission, and I can't stop praising His name! ☺

I saw God working and opening doors for me to also grow professionally.



Cristina Escudero is a psycho-oncologist at River Plate Adventist Hospital in **Argentina**.

We Serve a Great Healer

God has done so much for so many in our circle here in India. That we are alive today is the result of nothing but God's grace and His love for His children who live according to His principles. Despite the horrific situation India finds itself in during this pandemic, our family has stayed healthy. But I am so grateful to have witnessed God's healing power in the life of one of our dear relatives, Sheila. In October 2020 Sheila was rushed to the emergency room in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. She was having significant breathing issues that were so alarming that going to the hospital was the only option.

The doctors felt fairly certain her chances for survival were minimal as she was already in her 90s. Our family members and friends heard this news and knew there was a Master Healer who could help. So we prayed, on her behalf, that even in her advanced age she would get better and be able to return home to her family. And that is exactly what happened.

When one of Sheila's nieces who lived abroad heard the news of her aunt's illness, she desperately wanted to come to India to see her. But because of the many travel restrictions in place on account of COVID-19, it seemed impossible. But God opened the doors in February 2021, and Sheila was reunited with her niece, who so badly wanted to be with her.

But on the day the niece arrived in Vijayawada, Sheila's breathing issues became considerably worse. The family was prepared to rush her to the hospital again, but managed to keep her somewhat stable until her niece arrived. When she did, she quickly studied the situation and immediately asked for boiled water in a large pot and then added a few drops of eucalyptus oil in it. She carefully helped Sheila to use a towel to cover her head over the pot of steaming water and had her inhale the vapors for 10 minutes. It wasn't long before Sheila began to breathe a little better.

Her niece helped her take warm and nourishing drinks at least four times a day. After a few days, another of Sheila's nieces was able to visit, and it made the sweet, elderly woman feel very happy.

Sheila is doing better now and can speak with much more ease than before. Our family is so thankful to God for hearing our prayers and healing Sheila. ©

I am so grateful to have witnessed God's healing power in the life of one of our dear relatives.



Jeevan Babu Palivela runs his own IT solutions business and lives with his family in **Vijayawada, India.**

Focus on Stories

“Share Me a Story”

Why we share stories



From a distance the scene may appear chaotic. A group of women working around a table kneading dough for pastries and dumplings, flour on their colorful aprons, moving from steaming pots of seasoned steamed vegetables and rice, stirring the boiling beans and potatoes, peeking into the oven at the main dish (the one with the secret ingredient only Auntie Carmen knows). Simmering fresh fruit shiny with honey moved to a cooling rack, cupboards opening and closing for spices to season the stew. A small sprinkle of sugar for the pastries with a wisp of coconut shavings, and the soft sizzling sound of onions sautéed in the right fashion. The room is loud with laughter and interaction! Yet nobody’s task is ignored. Three ongoing conversations happen all at once, and everyone can keep up with the evolving pace of each individual story, kneading in comments, mixing lighthearted words.

As a child I imagined each dish prepared had pieces of stories baked in or delicately stirred through use of observation, insight, a joke, a profound thought, even a cautionary word. The table set and after a prayer of gratitude over the meal, I feasted on these stories as if every word were cooked, prepared, and served just for me. A banquet of stories.

Why do we share stories? Stories help us make sense out of our lives.¹ They engage us in communication at a personal, deeper level, where empathy and understanding take place; where humanity encounters the thin, fragile threads of emotions and logic; the place where the improbable is tangible through personal and shared experiences.² I believe stories can bridge a chasm and shorten a learning curve; we gather valuable lessons from stories that do not belong to us but are shared with us. I think back to that childhood banquet of stories.

INSPIRATION

Sunday morning I set the table for a brunch in honor of Erin, a new friend. I listen to my friends talking and laughing in my kitchen. These friends are family, as we have shared stories, shared a

spiritual journey, reminded one another of meaningful, honest, and true stories we hold on to during emotional fires of our lives. We are cooking this meal together. Erin's mother, Cindy, passed six weeks ago. Being the only child, Erin remained in town taking care of the painful details of closing this chapter of her life. My friends and I all cared for Cindy, visited her, and spent time with her in the last year of a long, painful illness. Erin and Cindy had not spoken in 10 years.

Honoring Cindy's wishes, I was tasked, as the chaplain in the group, to make "that phone call" that changes someone's life. A phone call that is often remembered by exact time, date, and where you were when loss, unknown circumstances, and grief knocked at your door and let themselves in.

I carefully place a small cedar box next to Erin's place setting, a promise we made to be kept.

As my friends all welcome Erin at once, a familiar scene unfolds. Erin arrives and is whisked away

into the kitchen, given a task, and immediately included in the ongoing storytelling. I smile as Erin's overwhelmed expression shifts to laughter. *Maybe this is why sharing stories is so important: to be together, as He invited us to be. Sometimes I forget how God provides the opportunity to share our spiritual journey, our emotional connections to others. As Christians we have the most amazing story to share!*

The table set and after a prayer of gratitude over the meal, the cedar box is opened, and Erin slowly takes out six recipe cards. She recognizes the food items that she helped prepare are courtesy of her mother's recipes. Under the recipe cards is a picture of Cindy holding little baby Erin. Speechless, she shakes her head: "She left these for me?" Erin looks around the table at those who cared for her mother: the nurses, the physical therapist, the chaplain. No formal titles now, just friends. I tell her that we all listened to Cindy's stories about her beautiful daughter who had six

favorite dishes. I remind her of the beautiful prayers Cindy would lay at the Creator's feet, humbly, in honest request that Erin would "come back home." "She prayed for me?" Erin whispers. *So much to share.*

The silence is heavy, brief, but the moral of the story is embraced. Just like that, the stories begin. No tears. Instead, a movable feast of precious memories for Erin. Cindy left more than recipes for a meal. She left Erin the reminder of prayer, spiritual feeding of the soul, so much thicker than thin threads from the emotional to the logical. A bridge to mend a 10-year chasm through a meal to nurture the body. Laughter will be not be spared, for Erin is truly feasting on words prepared, cooked, and served, just for her. ©

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2008), pp. 25-29.

² *Ibid.*

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Writing From the Heart

Stories are a powerful ministry! Sharing stories requires us to write from the heart, be vulnerable. Think of stories you have heard. How did they impact you? What do they say of our faith? How do they demonstrate our spiritual journey, our emotional connections to others? Writing a story allows you to craft a meaningful, inspirational message. Three most common types of story writing begin by recalling an experience that provides a moral to the story (the words of wisdom and inspiration you want to leave with readers):*

Old self versus new self. You perceive and write about changes in yourself because of some transforming moment or event.

Old view of person X versus new view of person X. Write about a person (someone special in your life) and how your perception of them changed because of some revealing moment. This "change" might also reflect a change in yourself.

Old values versus new values that threaten, challenge, or otherwise disrupt the old values. Have you gone through an experience that challenged your values? created a change in your worldview?

HONORING OUR STORIES

Think ahead to questions readers may have:

1. What makes the event so memorable? What physical details come to mind when you think back on the event?
2. Is there a moment of insight in the story when you "grew" spiritually, intellectually?

3. What is the significance of the story?

4. How does your story touch on larger human issues and concerns?

5. How does it minister to others?

6. What makes it something your reader will relate to?

7. What is the theme of the story?

*Adapted from: John D. Ramage, John C. Bean, and June Johnson, *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing* (London: Pearson, 2016).

Surrounded by Fire

God
protects
in amazing
ways.

Stories are powerful. They are memorable. They inspire and move us, and they are meant for sharing. In this month's Global View I would like to share with you an incredible story told to me by Pastor Geoffrey Mbwana, a general vice president here at the General Conference. It's about a small group of Adventist youth who heard God calling them to reach people living in a very difficult and dangerous area. Despite the risks, these precious young people put their trust in the Lord and said, "I will go!" But before moving ahead, they spent much time in prayer, pleading for God to guide them. I believe you will be amazed and inspired by how God answered their prayers.

A RISKY MISSION

Along Tanzania's Indian Ocean coast lies a town of more than 8,000 inhabitants. The town is predominantly of a non-Christian faith, with more than 99 percent of its inhabitants belonging to that faith. It is known to be a highly superstitious town, causing many people to fear the town and its people.

Several attempts were made over the years to introduce the townspeople to the three angels' messages, but none was successful. In the year 2000, however, a group of young people from Adventist churches in a city some kilometers away dared to conduct an evangelistic series in this town. With some simple preparation they went to the town and rented a place to stay. Knowing the work before them was delicate and risky, they decided to spend *two weeks* in earnest prayer, pleading for God's intervention for the salvation of the people there.

Amazingly, a few days later they received permission from the town government to hold religious meetings. It then became public knowledge that young Adventists would be conducting meetings.

The young people continued to pray earnestly, choosing to have their special prayer times early in the morning by the seashore, before the people of the town were awake.

FIRE BY THE SEA

The young Adventists faithfully met by the sea every morning before dawn, crying to the Lord on behalf of the townspeople and for the meetings. One morning, unbeknownst to them, a few young people were sent by the town elders to go and kill these young Adventists before they started their meetings in town. They had learned that the Adventist youth started their day with prayers by the sea at 5:00 in the morning, and decided that

would be the best place and time to kill them.

So one morning the would-be killers went to the shore and found the Adventist youth kneeling in earnest prayer by the sea. As they approached, ready to kill, the attackers saw a wall of fire surrounding the Adventist youth. They were shocked and dared not attack. Terrified, they ran away.

SHINING SWORD

The Adventist young people went on with their plans and started the meetings. But the elders of the city were determined to stop them. They sent their youth to steal equipment and furniture that were being used for the meeting in an open area. But one night when they approached the place where the equipment was kept, the would-be thieves saw a very tall man wearing a white gown, holding a shining sword, and walking around the equipment. They again failed to execute their wicked plan.

Finally the elders in the city said to their youth, "You are cowards and don't know how to do these things! We will take matters into our own hands and destroy these Adventist young people!"

"WE'RE BURNING!"

Soon after, as the meetings were going on in the open area, two elderly people dressed in full traditional regalia walked through the crowd, heading toward the front, where one of the young Adventists was preaching.

But before they reached the front, the town elders started running and jumping, screaming, "We're burning! We're burning!" They rushed toward the preacher, but then went out behind him.

Interestingly, while no one saw any flames, the attackers acted as though they were on fire. Later these

same leaders explained how they wanted to attack the preacher, but saw a wall of fire surrounding him.

NO MAGIC POWER

After this, the young men of the town approached the Adventist young people, inquiring about the superstitious powers they were using to protect themselves against the attacks. The Adventist youth told them they didn't believe in superstition and would have nothing to do with it. Then they asked the young men why they thought they were using some sort of magic as protection, and the town youth explained what they had seen when they had tried to destroy them.

The Adventists happily explained that they serve the living God of heaven and have the protection of divine angels sent by God. It became a big story all across that town and surrounding towns, and in the end many people were baptized. When the news of these miracles spread into the neighboring areas, a journalist came and reported the story in a nationwide newspaper.

Even though working in this area continues to be challenging, there are now three organized churches in that town, with a total membership of nearly 200 people. Several of these youth became powerful lay evangelists, and two of them became pastors.

A WALL OF FIRE

Friends, we are told that the Lord is, indeed, like a wall of fire. In Zechariah 2:5 we read this beautiful description of how the Lord takes care of His own: "'For I,' says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

Affirming this wall of fire protection, we read in the book *The Sanctified Life*, "God smiles upon the humble and lowly ones who

In the day of affliction, when the enemy presses us, we shall walk among the angels.

follow closely in the footsteps of the Master. Angels are attracted to them, and love to linger about their path. They may be passed by as unworthy of notice by those who claim exalted attainments and who delight in making prominent their good works, but heavenly angels bend lovingly over them and are as a wall of fire round about them."¹

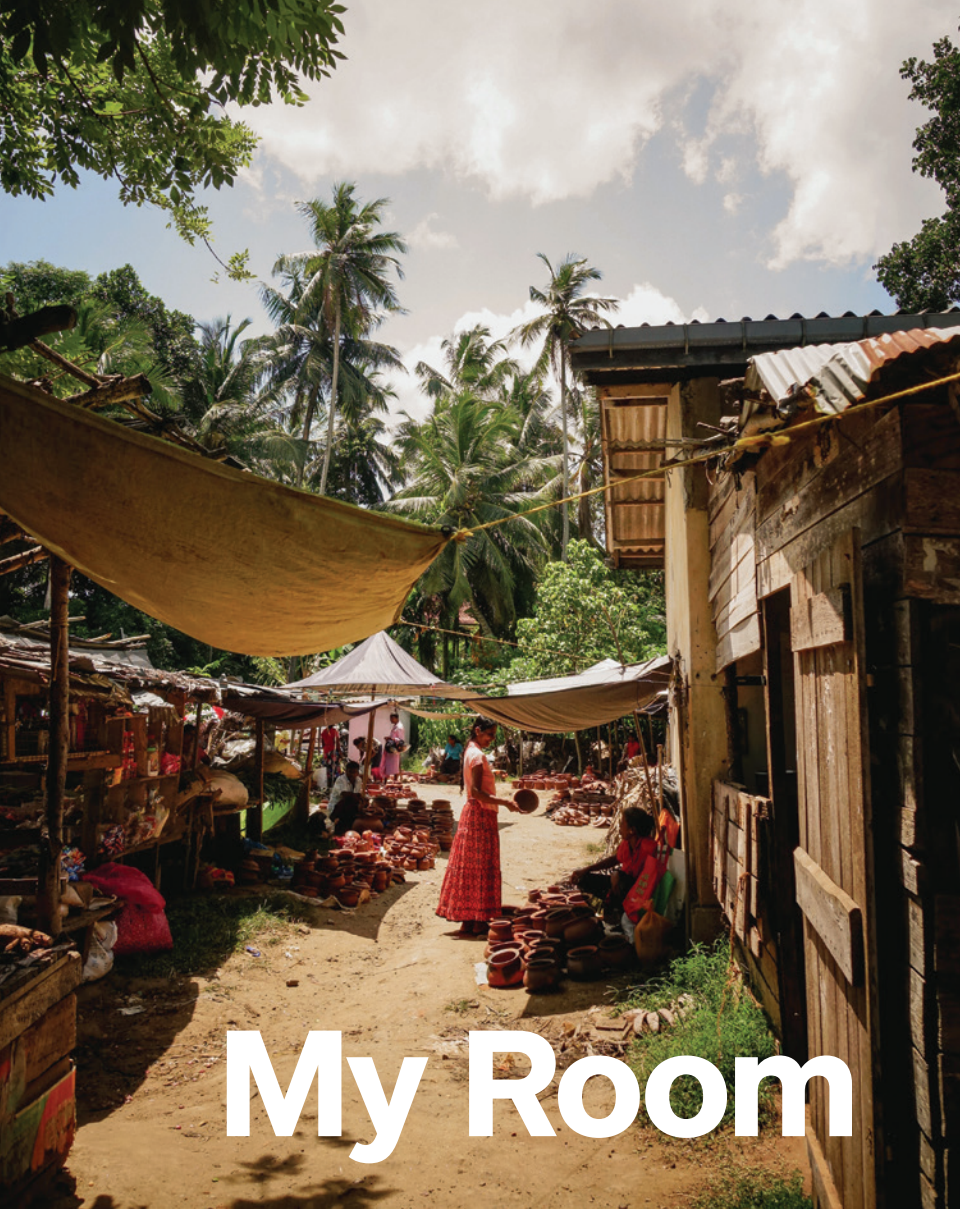
And elsewhere Ellen White offers this beautiful insight: "We must seek to separate sin from us, relying upon the merits of the blood of Christ; and then in the day of affliction, when the enemy presses us, we shall walk among the angels. They will be like a wall of fire about us; and we shall one day walk with them in the city of God."²

May we, just as those dear young people by the seaside did, put our trust fully in the Lord and be willing to say "I will go" wherever He may lead. ©

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1937), p. 13.

² Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1967), p. 30.

Ted N. C. Wilson is president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Additional articles and commentaries are available from the president's office on Twitter: @pastortedwilson and on Facebook: @Pastor Ted Wilson.



My Room



“May I Tell
You a Story?”

BY DICK DUERKSEN

A Seventh-day Adventist church elder told me this story while we were standing in the garden beside his home.—Dick Duerksen.

He had a cow. A good cow with strong legs and a wide back. A cow who knew the way from his garden to the main road. A cow who was willing to carry him there on market day.

Tuesday was market day, and the day before, the man would pick the ripest tomatoes, unearth some potatoes, chop some leafy vegetables, and place a clutch of goose eggs in a safe spot within his ancient market basket. The basket needed new reeds, but he was too busy tending weeds to worry about weaving. His wife was a good weaver. She would fix the basket soon. He knew that.

He milked the cow before Tuesday’s sunrise, placed a cloth over the frothing plastic bucket, and carried it to the outdoor fire, where his wife was preparing a simple meal for him and the two children they loved. They laughed as they ate, sitting on the ground outside the tiny one-room hut that was their home. Then he gathered the basket of produce, mounted the cow, and guided her from the garden toward the road.

It was a good distance. But if he left early, they would arrive at the abandoned store at the edge of the asphalt road in time to find a place on a small passenger van that would take him to the vegetable market in the city.

He could have traded the tomatoes and eggs with his neighbors, but not for money. And even the few coins he would earn at the market would not buy the kerosene and cooking oil his wife needed. Besides, this trip was his only way to learn the news and play checkers with old friends.

On this Tuesday his cow walked easily, and they arrived before the van. He tied her to a dusty tree, told her to be a “good cow,” and wedged himself into an already-full seat. An hour later he was threading carefully through the market. One old man tried to sell him a mangy goat, while several others shouted about who had the best fish for sale. Women sat silently behind piles of cabbages, onions, avocados, and tomatoes. Children ran everywhere, playing games only the young understand.

His place was near a spreading tree on the far side of the market, a spot a wily landowner held for him in exchange for a few fresh eggs. He paid the rent and spread his cloth on the ground, quickly forming his tomatoes into three-sided pyramids. The potatoes he laid in a meandering circle, showing off their carefully cleaned eyes. The leafy vegetables he left hanging over the edge of the basket. Then he leaned back against the tree and waited for his customers. They always came. People who knew

“Let me show you Jesus.” The stranger knelt beside the checkerboard, pulled a book from his pack, opened it, and read.

they could trust his goods to be the best. People with news. City news.

By noon he had only a few potatoes and a couple of beets remaining, so he gathered them and took his cell phone to the charger. The boys with the electrical cords charged him two potatoes for a phone charge, and if he was careful, the charge would hold for a full week.

Back beneath the tree three of his friends had gathered and laid out the checkerboard. *It will be a good afternoon*, he thought.

* * *

Then the man came, a traveler he did not know, a man who seemed to be in a rush to find something he had lost. He stopped, watching as the game unfolded, and then asked his question to the players.

“Do you know Jesus?”

The game stopped, and all four men looked quietly up at the stranger, wishing for him to leave.

“No. I don’t know Jesus,” responded one.

“I don’t know anyone by that name either,” said another, “but I seem to remember that there is a person named Jesus in a village over by the coast.”

“No. No.” The man spoke rapidly and without fear, like the voice of an old

friend. “Jesus is not a person, but God Himself. Do you know God?”

That brought a delicious discussion, with each man describing the God he knew and then arguing that his God was better than all the others.

“Let me show you Jesus.” The stranger knelt beside the checkerboard, pulled a book from his pack, opened it, and read.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am [John 14:1-3, NIV].”

“I would love to tell you more,” the stranger said, “but I am out of time today and do not have any books I could sell you. Here, though, let me tear this page from my Bible and leave it with you. In it you will find Jesus.”

The stranger tore out the page he had been reading and placed it in the closest hand. Then he closed his eyes, said something into the sky, and waved a rapid farewell to the four men beneath the tree.

When the game was over, he put the torn paper into his well-worn basket, and worked his way back through the market toward the van that would carry him to his cow. Once home, he showed the paper to his wife and children, telling them the story of the “Jesus God” who was making each of them a room in His house.

“I must learn about this Jesus,” he told his family. “Imagine! A place where each of us will have our own room. Maybe even with a door, and with our personal name on it. Living with a God who loves us! Ahh! That would be like heaven!” ©

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

Publisher

The *Adventist World*, an international periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The General Conference, Northern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, is the publisher.

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Adventist World is published monthly and printed simultaneously in Korea, Brazil, Indonesia, Australia, Germany, Austria, Argentina, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States.

Vol. 17, No. 7-8



Seventh-day
Adventist Church



Puzzle It Out **A fun Sabbath activity that works your brain!**

Do you like to work on puzzles? I've found that people are very divided on doing puzzles. Some love them, and others do not! Last year, when the pandemic had us fully locked down at home, our family looked for activities we could do indoors and together. As we'd never been "puzzle people" before, we decided to try it. My daughter found a 3,000-piece jigsaw puzzle that had a very complicated but beautiful picture and we set out to put it together.

The first thing we did was find all the edge pieces and worked together to build the "frame" of the picture. Then we looked at the sample picture we were trying to create, and organized the pieces by color, attempting to group similar colors and images. Then we started looking at the shapes of pieces and trying to find pieces that fit together. It took us about six days to complete, and we spent a couple of hours on it each evening. My son hated it. My daughter and husband were determined to

conquer it, and I had a mixture of both feelings. But when we had the final product completed, it was so pretty, and we felt very accomplished. We even framed it and have it hung on a wall as art and to remind us of a very strange time in our lives.

Did you know puzzles are great for increasing your brain-power? Figuring out puzzles is a form of problem solving, and that is a very important skill to develop as we grow up. Puzzles can be a solo activity or one to do with friends and family. They



Bible Treasure

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe”

(Proverbs 18:10).

can be pretty easy, and they can be extremely difficult. It's up to you to go for the challenge you feel like tackling.

Just as in life, we will all come to things that are difficult to figure out, much like a hard puzzle. But we must remember that we are never left alone to work through them. Jesus is always there to help us put the pieces together, line them up, and make them work. He's the Ultimate Puzzle Solver! All we have to do to get His help is ask.

Make a Puzzle of Your Own

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- sturdy paper or thin cardstock
- crayons or markers
- scissors

HOW TO DO IT:

Using crayons and markers, choose a favorite Bible verse (you can use the one above if

you wish) and print it neatly on your paper. Then color the paper however you like. Draw little pictures and shapes and use as many or as few colors as you like. Then cut the entire picture into little shapes with edges, points, grooves, and curves, just like a puzzle. If you are younger, ask a grown-up to do that part for you. When all your pieces are cut, place them in a jar or small bag, shake them around, dump them out, and solve your puzzle!

Happy puzzling! ©



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