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Messenger

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GOD FIRST



I PROMISE:



To set apart the first moments of each day with God.



To improve my relationships through love, forgiveness and reconciliation.



To practise one new health principle for the potential of living life at its best, as Christ promised (John 10:10).



To ask the Holy Spirit to guide me to those in my daily life who are open to hearing about my journey of faith in Christ, and His gift of grace for them.



To prepare for, and enjoy, Sabbath.



To faithfully return God's tithe: 10% of whatever income He first gives to me.



To give a percentage (____%) of my income as a regular offering.

Vertical column of eight empty checkboxes for tracking progress.

With God's help: _____ Date: _____



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An invitation

When we take a look at our own experience of life in Christ, is it possible that, as one year follows another, there is little or insignificant growth? Call it spiritual malaise, but for sure it's a matter deeper than how we feel. There are many reasons for this. One may be because of the hard knocks life has thrown at us; or perhaps it's the result of being just so busy. Another may be because of disappointment. The list of reasons could easily fill this page, each one with the potential to put our spiritual life on hold, or in a deep sleep. On the other hand, for many, it is life's challenges that draw us to a deeper trust in God.

The front cover image shows a personal 'I PROMISE' sheet. At first glance it seems prescriptive and challenging, particularly with seven promises to make. Take a second look, however, and I think you will find it to be a simple, holistic invitation for us to grow as disciples of Christ, to become more like Jesus. At present, we may only honestly be able to make one promise – not a problem. Others may be able to make several promises and keep them. It all depends on our desire to grow, and where we are on our spiritual journey. Be assured, though, as to what this list is not. The invitation is not a tick-box stairway to heaven!

Christian stewardship is about putting God first in our lives, recognising His ownership of us, and responding to Him in worship, service and mission. Imagine if each of us made and kept even just one promise – what a positive difference we'd experience in our own life, and collectively in our local church and the wider work, be it regarding grace-filled relationships, sharing Christ with friends, or support for the mission of the church with faithful tithes and offerings.

As you reflect and pray about what's on the front cover, consider this reflective thought from J. B. Phillips:

Anyone who has any experience at all of the living God knows that He is nothing at all like somebody who tut-tuts politely at our failings and lays a soothing hand on our anxious little heads. The God who lives in us, if we will allow Him, is not necessarily always gentle: He can be wind and fire and a whole lot of other things. He can give us strength, but He can also show us our weaknesses! He will "increase our faith", but frequently not in the way we want or expect. . . .'

(J. B. Phillips, *Ring of Truth*, Hodder and Stoughton, p. 31.) EDITOR

1. WHAT IS TITHE?

Tithe is one tenth of our increase/income, from either money or product, that is returned to God. It is holy and belongs to Him, the owner of all of our material possessions and lives (Lev. 27:30). The returning of the tithe is our expression of who God is to us, and our faithfulness to Him.

2. WHY SHOULD WE TITHE?

By returning one tenth of our increase to Him, we demonstrate that God is the owner of everything He has entrusted into our hands. The practice of tithing links our worship to our partnership with God through our financial support of His mission and Church.

3. HOW IS TITHE TO BE RETURNED?

Monetary tithe, an act of worship, can be returned online or be placed in the tithe and offering envelope and given when the offering is taken up at church. Some may choose to give online where this option is available.

4. WAS THE TITHING SYSTEM PRACTISED IN THE OLD & NEW TESTAMENTS?

Yes. As the Israelites were about to be established as a nation, tithing was reaffirmed by God (Lev. 27:30-34). The tithing system reaches beyond the days of Moses and Abraham, thus providing a foundation for tithing practices in the New Testament (Matt. 23:23; Heb. 7:1-10).

5. WHERE IS THE TITHE RETURNED?

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church tithe is received by the local congregation and sent on in totality to the local conference/mission/field office. The Church has designated the conference as the "storehouse" for distribution.

6. HOW IS THE TITHE USED?

While distribution percentages vary somewhat in different divisions, the largest portion of the tithe is used by conferences to support the ministry of local churches through pastoral salaries, evangelism and certain other services provided to the local church.

7. WHEN SHOULD I TITHE?

Tithe should be returned before other expenses are met, demonstrating that God is the first priority in our lives.

8. SHOULD PEOPLE TITHE WHEN IN DEBT?

While our financial obligations are important, we are always first indebted to God, the owner of all. Tithing is an act of faith. It demonstrates that we believe that God will provide.

9. IS TITHING EASIER FOR THE RICH THAN FOR THE POOR?

Love is the motive and rationale that leads us to recognise our responsibility, whether we be rich or poor. Without love neither the rich nor the poor will appreciate the real blessings of returning tithe. Tithing becomes natural for all who remember God's ownership and who respond in love and worship.

10. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TITHE AND OFFERINGS?

Yes. Tithe belongs to God, so we return it to the rightful owner. Offerings are given in loving response to God's goodness to us. Through the practice of returning tithe and giving offerings, we worship God and advance His mission to make disciples on earth.



David Neal,
Editor

'I have an idea,' said Bill. 'See the lambs in this pen over here? They're no use to anyone, and if we take them to market we'll get a measly £20 for each one. Look at them; they're as thin as they come: speckled skin, staggering and stumbling all over the place. You know how much we can get for our best lambs, don't you Fred?'

Fred knew very well that the finest-looking lambs would easily fetch £100 at market. They were the best in every way: perfect, even. He could see Bill's point, alright, as it seemed such a terrible waste to burn the best. Their pay wasn't the best, and if there was an opportunity to gain a few more pounds on the side, who'd say no to that?

'What do you think, Fred?' said Bill. 'Well – I'm not quite sure about this,' replied Fred hesitantly. 'Oh, come on, it's a no-brainer,' said Bill impatiently. 'Think of the profit we'll make.'

'Alright; go for it!' But Fred's conscience stirred – just. What if what they were doing was not right? If Bill and Fred had been farmers, there'd have been not the slightest problem – it was something market forces could solve. Farmers they were not – but corrupt priests of Israel they were. All would have been well in their world, but for the 'thorn in their side', Mr Accountability himself: Malachi! He just wouldn't let up – kept harping on about how things needed to be sorted. He even went as far as to draw up a list of charges against the priests and their parishioners, Israel. It read as follows:

1. Offered polluted food on the altar (1:7)
2. Offered blind, lame and sick animals as sacrifices (1:8)
3. Offered routine & disrespectful worship to God (1:9-11)
4. Brought stolen animals to the temple for sacrifice (1:13)
5. Became violent in the process of stealing the animals (1:13)
6. Caused God's reputation to be damaged (1:11 & 14)

And those were just the headline charges! Malachi raised a further 23 charges against Israel. The record has it that the conversation between prophet, priests and people did not go well.

The Lord:

'Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no

Where's the Gospel in Malachi?

pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.' (Malachi 1:10.)

The priests:

'What a burden!'

. . . and the prophet, speaking on behalf of the 'LORD Almighty', accuses them of sniffing at His charges 'contemptuously' (1:13, NIV).

For Israel it was supposed to be the best of times. They were home from Babylon. With homes and temple built, they had freedom, including freedom to worship. There was just one significant problem – they forgot how great and good God had been to them. Led by corrupt and cynical priests, worship became routine, social justice was ignored, and the law of God was broken at will. Malachi could not keep quiet, and so he spoke truth to power against such corruption, calling out both the priests and people.

The tragedy of the Malachi story is that those in power were so far removed from God that, when the Spirit spoke through the prophet, there was no sense of appropriate guilt, no confession and repentance, no teachable spirit, no 'hands up, it was us'. Rather, they reluctantly and cynically engaged in a forced conversation, wondering why they'd been challenged. The lowest point of Malachi is to be found in chapter 2:3, with God angrily informing them of His plans to respond: and yet, as is His nature, He can't help but offer a redemptive way out.

'For I the LORD do not change. . . . Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts' (3:6, 7).

Israel may have changed and bought into the 'I'll do it my way' theology, but the Lord's faithfulness is constant. That's why He's compelled to offer a wonderful, redemptive Gospel invitation: *'Return to me, and I will return to you.'* This is the high point of Malachi's story – one which is sorely needed. As I read these words again, I'm reminded of the Luke 15 story of the lost son, and Revelation 3:20's invitation by Christ to enter our lives and 'eat with us'. This is what God is really like; this is His character, who longs to restore the broken relationship, due to the state we're in.

And as for the six lines of Malachi 3:10?

Where do they fit into this picture? Used most frequently to encourage tithe return, will this be

where we also discover the Gospel? Traditionally, in a Bible study context, we'll usually say, 'Brother James, God's Word promises a wonderful blessing when we return a faithful tithe. Can I invite you to put God to the test, as the Scripture instructs?' Without being explicit, we'll also gently imply that 'blessings' will follow if a faithful tithe is returned. We also genuinely share our personal experience that this is what we practise, and that the Lord has never let us down.

'Put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts.' (Malachi 3:10.)

In the context of Malachi's conversation, that's not a warm invitation, but one of the Lord at the end of His tether. In other words, 'If you really don't trust Me, what else can I do but invite you to put Me to the test?' *'Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord'* (3:13). That seems to me like an invitation of last resort.

'If I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.' (Malachi 3:10.)

Can I suggest that this is where we go on a huge adventure in missing the point? What's the blessing to be poured out as a result of faithful tithe return? The Mercedes? The ever-upwards career path? Permanent good health? Relationships that never go wrong? If that's what we believe, then we're simply 'buying in' to a huge heresy facing Christendom today, called 'The Prosperity Gospel'.

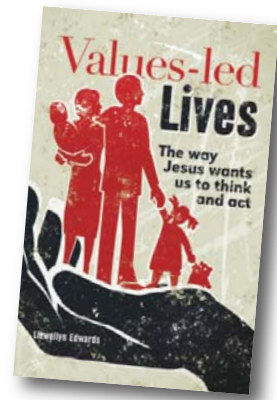
The simple truth of Malachi 3:10 is that I return a faithful tithe because I have already received 'heaven's blessing': no less than the personal presence of Jesus Christ, my Creator, my Saviour, my Friend, my Lord and my soon-returning King.

Back to Bill and Fred. Did it really matter if they offered a lamb for sacrifice that was speckled or perfect? Sure, it did, because the speckled, blind, lame lamb could never adequately represent the character of God. Only a perfect, spotless lamb was able to represent the future sinless 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). In the end, is not Malachi's core issue about true worship? Do I worship Him my way, or His way?

All Scripture quotations in this article have been taken from the English Standard Version (Anglicised) except where otherwise stated.



With this edition of *MESSENGER* we continue our new series about who we are and how we grow in Christ. What does it mean for Christ to be ‘formed in us’ (Galatians 4:19)? How does Jesus want us to think and act? Can values-led lives shape not just what we believe to be important, but – crucially for the Christ-follower – how we live out what is important? To help us on this journey, we’re sharing extracts from Pastor Llew Edwards’ book, *Values-led Lives*.



Part 2:
Sweet – the scent of a values-led life

There was an advert some years ago for a perfume called ‘Impulse’. A man is walking along a street and catches a whiff of an exquisite perfume. He turns; she has passed; he cannot see her face, but cannot resist the impulse to go after her with a flower and say thank you for making the world a sweeter place.

That is like meeting a Christian or a church that is values-led. You encounter them and, either immediately or as you walk away, you sense that you were in the presence of a fragrance that makes your life a better place to be.

The scent is indiscriminate; it is no respecter of persons. It reaches old and young alike, rich and poor, sinner and saint. It is seen in the gentle manner, in the sparkle in the eye, in the warming smile, in the listening ear, in the kind word, in the sympathetic touch. It welcomes you as a friend. It recognises your potential. It encourages your trust. It awakens hope. It replaces fear with a sense of expectation. It has a wisdom that reaches not with the finger of judgement, but with the outstretched arms of grace. The apostle James describes it as ‘the wisdom . . . from above [which] is first pure,

then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.’ James 3:17, 18 (KJV).

Being that fragrance, not just having it, results from a life in which the excelling values of the

The Model of the values-led life is Jesus Christ. In Him the values of the Kingdom of Heaven were manifest in human flesh, for those values are His very character. The values are not a set of rules that He adheres to; they are Who He is – a Person.

Kingdom of Heaven are consciously recognised and then embedded into the head, heart and hands of the disciples of Jesus. It makes one – quite unconsciously – a ‘sweet . . . savour of life unto life’; a ‘living sacrifice’; ‘acceptable, wellpleasing to God’. (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16;

Philippians 4:18, KJV.)

The Model of the values-led life is Jesus Christ. In Him the values of the Kingdom of Heaven were manifest in human flesh, for those values are His very character. The values are not a set of rules that He adheres to; they are Who He is – a Person. Ultimately they are the character of the Godhead and the subject of what we know as the central issue in the great controversy: what kind of Person is He?

The challenge for us as citizens of that Kingdom is to emit the scent of those values in our own lives and community. It is the contention of this series that that is unlikely to happen without a conscious, intentional, accountable, reflective, personal study of the values of the King, which are also those of His Kingdom.

It is the intention of this series to judge no one – that would contradict a manifest value of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 7:1; John

We will explore the beauty of the Kingdom and its values, and how they excel. We will ask what difference Kingdom values make, and then we will explore how we as individuals, congregations, institutions and organisations can become values-led. Finally, we will spend some time gazing on the Person who personifies the values. Ultimately it is by beholding Him that we become changed.

The story is told of a drunk who goes each evening to a drop-in centre where part of the regime includes an evening talk. The drunk attends but doesn’t follow too much – it is foreign to him and his mind is not too clear. There is an assistant there called Harry, who never fails to show the drunk gentle kindness and respect. One evening the drunk is trying to understand the preacher, but finding it all too much he eventually begins to complain and create a disturbance. Harry isn’t there that evening and the other attendants try to subdue the drunk, who simply gets more agitated. The preacher gets involved and in desperation yells at the drunk, ‘You need to be like Jesus!’ The drunk stops for a moment, looks at the preacher and says, ‘I don’t know Jesus. Is He like Harry? If He is then I would like to be like Him because I want to be like Harry!’ I don’t know who that Harry was, but I would assess that Harry was a values-led person. If you had been there, above the alcohol and the smell of urine and cheap cigarettes, you would have smelt the scent of a values-led life.

12:47) – but to inspire and help both our members and our organisations to become values-led.

In our journey we will share stories and their impact as odious or sweet. We will consider how and why people and organisations outside of ourselves are so often values-led.

If you can’t wait to read the next extract, Values-led Lives is available for purchase through the Stanborough Press @ £5.95 + £2.95 p&p. The sales team on 01476 591700 or sales@stanboroughpress.org.uk will be delighted to serve you.

Leaders listen at SEC Evangelism Expo

by Don Roberts

The South England Conference’s Evangelism Expo 2020 attracted an attendance of over 900 at Newbold College on Sunday 5 January. The annual event is typically an occasion where SEC departmental directors and leaders share their plans for the year with local church officers and members. This year, however, the SEC leadership adopted a change in approach.

SEC President, Dr Emmanuel Osei, announced that the usual seminars, workshops and training would not take place. Instead, directors, coordinators and leaders would use the time to listen and engage with members – capturing their thoughts and ideas to help shape the Conference’s strategic plan for the next quadrennium.

The keynote address was

delivered by SEC Church Growth Director, Pastor Wayne Erasmus. Through the story of Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus in Luke 19, Erasmus reflected, ‘Holiness is something that is lived out in the midst of a community.’

The themes of community and of using Jesus’ example as a model for church growth were echoed by the President in his presentation, entitled, ‘Church Growth: A Paradigm Shift – Rethinking the Way We Grow Our Church’. He examined the successes, failures and challenges of church growth within the SEC.

Osei feared that in the past the church may have been guilty of

prioritising baptism, when it should have been focusing on ‘going’ and ‘making disciples that build communities’. Quoting Ellen G. White in *The Ministry of Healing*, he concluded that ‘Christ’s method alone’ – ‘mingling’ with people, showing genuine sympathy, ministering to their needs, and winning their confidence – is the most effective way to make disciples. Osei challenged the congregation not just to be ‘a church in the community’, but to become a church ‘for, and part of, the community’.

The opportunity for members to interact with the leadership commenced with Osei taking questions and comments from

the floor. The audience then separated to attend breakout sessions across the Newbold campus, hosted by the various SEC departments. They were encouraged to approach any department that they had a passion or burden for, and were given the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas and provide feedback. Note-taking by department staff ensured that directors had a record of their interactions with members.

Directors have committed to visiting the churches across the Conference to continue the ‘listening exercise’ beyond the expo. As a result, there is a hold on all departmental events for the first three months of 2020.



Pastor Wayne Erasmus



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Newly baptised members train to share their faith

Newly baptised members of the Stoke Newington church recently completed an evangelism training programme called 'Lifting Up Jesus'. The training was conducted by Bible worker Hazel Willis and Helen Decotou. Hazel commented: 'I thank and praise the Lord for choosing ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. From among those who have completed this course, there is presently a team of committed witnesses and potential disciple-makers who, from week to week, take the streets of Stoke Newington by storm. I continue to pray God's blessings on them from day to day, while I continue to advance the Kingdom of God and Christ by discipling others and making them disciple-makers.'

COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT



Left to right: Hellen Decotou (tutor) and Hazel Willis, together with team members from the school of evangelism



Left to right: Pastor Paul Tompkins, Emily Frazer, Audrey Frazer, Dorina Manda, Tankhulenji Daudo Tembo and Pastor Claudiu Popescu

Scottish Mission: four baptisms in the west of Scotland

Scotland is the least religious country in the UK, with more than 72 percent of its population 'not religious'. In such an environment, reaching out to locals with the Gospel is very difficult due to the prevalence of secularism in socio-cultural life. Despite this, God is working in the hearts of men and women, as the recent baptism in the west of Scotland can testify. On the evening of Friday 29 November 2019, members of Irvine and Paisley Churches, including the

Newark continues to grow

In recent years, the Newark company has seen a phenomenal increase in its congregation. Following the arrival of two young couples, brothers Aaron and Matthew Sammy and their respective wives, Lily and Rebecca, along with their children, more and more young families have joined our ranks.

Among these were Dale and Felicity Shaw, along with their two little girls. Dale was brought up in an Adventist home, but didn't choose at that time to commit himself to faith. He found some of the Revelation stuff too scary! However, his interest grew once he was married to Felicity, who'd become interested herself following conversations with her in-laws, and they both started attending the Newark church with their daughter, Evie. Now that Evie's been joined by Charlotte, her sister, Dale and Felicity have been keen to have their children get to know Jesus for themselves, and they both enjoy the children's Sabbath School and are active in the church Adventurer group.

Dale's dad, Pastor Kyriacou, started Bible studies with the couple early in 2019, which were completed (including some of Revelation's now not-so-scary bits!) before they were both baptised on 7 December 2019 in Grantham Church, but taken into membership of the Newark church. Dr John Ferguson, pastor of Newark, oversaw the service, in which Pastor Peter Sayers delivered the sermon. Dale and Felicity had asked Pastor Kyriacou to baptise them, which he was delighted to do – even with a bad back!

The Newark church members, overseen by Olive Crouch, kindly

Kilmarnock branch (under Irvine), gathered in Glasgow Church to witness the baptism of four precious souls: mother and daughter Audrey and Emily Frazer, Tankhu Tembo and Dorina Manda.

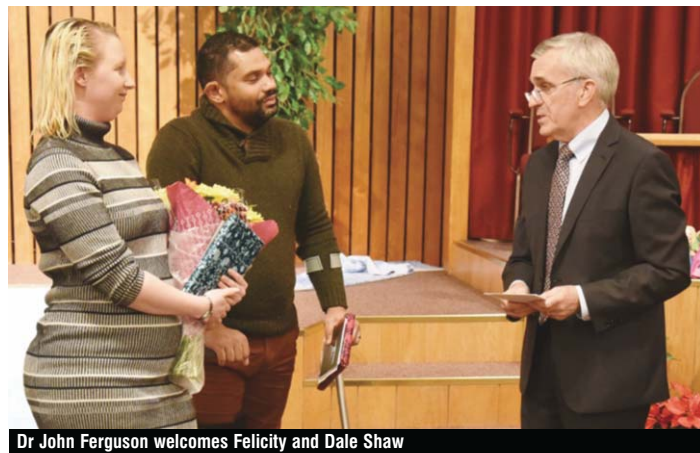
The key biblical text that underscored the service was Matthew 28:19: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (KJV). The highlight of the service was hearing moving testimonies of how each of the candidates came to know the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Audrey and her daughter Emily, both former members of the Church of Scotland, shared how their search for a Sabbath-keeping church and desire to deepen their understanding of the Bible, particularly Revelation, led them to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this journey, they shared the inspiration they received from David and Tricia Fulton, also former members of the Church of Scotland, but now active members of Irvine Seventh-day Adventist Church. Audrey, who had been baptised as a child, said that she felt blessed to be properly baptised by full immersion, and declared her resolve to follow the indisputable truths of the Bible.

Through a Romanian interpreter, for her part Dorina shared her deep conviction to rededicate her life to Jesus after years of searching for the right path to take. Tankhu expressed the joy she felt returning to the church she had known as a child, and ended her testimony with a moving song, which she sang with her two children.

May the Lord be praised for His mercy and unconditional love for Scotland.

YONAH MATEMBA



Dr John Ferguson welcomes Felicity and Dale Shaw

provided refreshments after the service, which was well attended by members of both congregations – and representatives from Lincoln and Netherfield too!

What made this occasion particularly special and memorable was the fact that it was a husband and wife who were baptised together.

We pray for the Lord's blessing on them and their two beautiful little girls, Evie and Charlotte. There is also another reason for them and the Newark family to rejoice, as another little Shaw is on the way!

COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Depending on Christ in Great Yarmouth

Jesus said there is 'more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance' (Luke 15:7, NKJV). Therefore there must have been tremendous joy in heaven on the afternoon of Sabbath 7 December, because five persons in Great Yarmouth testified to their acceptance of Christ as their personal Saviour!

Here's their story:

Several years ago, Tania Overton was introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist Church by Izabela Clarry, whom she met at work. Their two families became friends as Izabela began to share her faith with Tania. This resulted in Pastor Rio Espulgar giving her Bible studies. She was baptised and became a member of our church in Great Yarmouth. Tania came with her children, and before long her husband also started attending with her, but expressed no genuine interest at the time. However, it wasn't long before he was also helping with the church's newly established website. Eventually he started having Bible studies under the tutorship of his wife, and expressed a wish to be baptised.

Meanwhile, their eldest daughter had chosen to give her young life to Christ and be baptised. Norma Borrett arranged to study with her in preparation for baptism. Shauna so much wanted to be baptised along with her dad, but Justin had a smoking problem. He and another candidate were given a goal to aim towards: to stop smoking at least one month before the scheduled baptismal date.

In addition to Justin and Shauna, Tania's mum had also been involved in receiving Bible studies and had been looking forward to baptism. Ana Nunes faced a test several months ago when she made her decision for the Sabbath; the church gave a special prayer for her, and God took care of her case and she remained faithful. Tania is extremely happy that her mum, daughter and husband are now united with her in Christ.

Sharnie-Ann Bright walked into our church one Sabbath morning several months ago, and has been coming ever since. Prompted by the Holy Spirit as she listened to the preacher, she felt impressed at the clarity with which the Scriptures were explained. Sharnie-Ann knew she had to change if she was to become a follower of Jesus.

As an elderly lady, Maureen Dogget suffers from disability. She was



Left to right, front row: Maureen, Shauna and Ana. Back row: Pastor Walker, Sharnie-Ann, Justin, Pastor Espulgar, Pastor Borrett

introduced to our church by Sharnie-Ann, who is her assigned carer. Every single day of the week, Sharnie-Ann visits Maureen three or four times to care for her. We recognise that her commitment goes beyond her required duty, as she is devoted to her task.

Both Justin and Sharnie-Ann discovered that their journey to following Christ was not an easy road for either of them. Pastors Borrett and Walker covenanted to commit every night for a week to help them to become smoke-free (their personal challenge). Together they ran a 'Breathe free' programme, directing them through the step-by-step process of becoming free of their addiction. We set two Bible verses before their sight: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me', and Jesus' statement that 'without Me you can do nothing' (Philippians 4:13; John 15:5, NKJV). Their victory could *only* be gained through Him. We are grateful to the Saviour for giving them that victory.

The baptism service was shared by the three pastors. Maureen Dogget was received into fellowship on 'profession of faith'. We are now planning a further baptism for the near future. We thank God for the joy we are able to share with the angels of heaven for these new lives in Christ.

PASTOR MICHAEL I. WALKER, COMMUNICATIONS SECRETARY
(PHOTOGRAPHS BY NORMA BORRETT)



Pastor & Mrs McIntosh, Matthias Siyaspi (First Elder), Hubert Smiley (Elder), Clovette Richards (Pathfinder Director), Matthew Lawrence (Communication Secretary) and Grace Walsh (NEC Health, Community & Disability Ministries Director) along with the newly baptised

'But grow in grace'

The Dudley Church year-end baptismal service came at the climax of their Pathfinders' day on Sabbath 28 December 2019. This was in collaboration with the special series of Bible classes led by the pastoral team, which included the pastor, elders & young leaders. Eleven precious souls were baptised: Shiloh Sawyers-Brown, Nothando Kumalo, Tai Marriot, Buhlebuzile Nyeruke, Ebony Grace Richards, Jude Richards, Cleve Sawyers, Naomi Sawyers, Sydney Sawyers, Dumisile Sibanda & Thando Sibanda. Pastor Rainford McIntosh preached on 2 Peter 3:18, 'But grow in grace' (KJV). He mentioned that the Christian life is a growing experience – just as an individual who receives a driving licence is not yet an experienced driver, but over time develops further skills and knowledge. We wish all our new friends in Christ great success on their spiritual walk.

DUDLEY COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT



Standing up for Christ

Adriel Hush has been encouraged to follow Christ all his life. In recent times, when faced with philosophical and intellectual challenges to his faith in God, Adriel has stood for the right, finding spiritual strength in prayer. In addition, he finds that reading Scripture helps him significantly. Pastor Roy Morgan has helped him along this journey of faith, leading up to his baptism on 4 January at Nottingham Central Church. Adriel's father, Pastor Alan Hush, had the joyful experience of immersing Adriel, symbolically raising him to a new life in Christ.

DENNIS TAYLOR



Joyce Redfern

'If we hadn't kept prayer meeting going, I wonder if Michelle Stoll would be experiencing a new life in Christ today.' Joyce Redfern has always been passionate about prayer meeting and Sabbath School. As Michelle shares her story on this page, it was during the summer of 2012 that her mother encouraged her to attend prayer meeting at a church they'd often passed by in St Albans. As Joyce points out, 'If the church notice board displays that prayer meeting is 7.30pm on a Wednesday, given that there is always the possibility that someone from the community may attend – then we'd better be there!'

Joyce's understanding of prayer meeting is that it is less of a Bible study and more of a sharing and prayer time. The reason for this is to allow, as she describes, 'for the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct the meeting': not that Joyce is suggesting that the study of the Word be neglected, but that the Bible study hour on Sabbath morning provides the perfect opportunity for that.

When Joyce first arrived in the UK, her visit to a church was a distressing one – nobody talked with her. 'I came to the church, and nobody made me feel welcome.' In a letter to her mother back home at the time, she wrote, 'I'm never going back to church until I come home.' However deep-rooted the feeling was, Joyce kept going back to church, and it's true to say that the experience has shaped how she is today. 'By the time my mother wrote back, I'd already cracked it.' Meet Joyce in church today, and you'll find that she makes it her mission to get to know people. 'Since that difficult experience way back, I have made it a lifelong habit to make the first move. I like connecting with people, and make it my personal mission to get to know them.'

It's such an obvious question to ask, but why? What's the motivation for connecting with people? In response, Joyce is quick to share her personal vision for how church should be. 'We should be a warm and caring church, one that embraces the community in such a way that whenever a first-time guest walks through our doors, their comfort is our concern. Can you imagine what it must be like as a stranger to walk into one of our churches? I want to create an atmosphere that helps create a community where people feel included and welcome – that is important. Anything I can do – we can do – that breaks down the difference between "us" and "them", which helps give a signal to our new friends that "you're family", must be God's purpose for the church.'

In a practical way, to defuse any fear a visitor may have about sharing details, Joyce takes the initiative to share her contact details to stay connected. In most cases, guests are happy to reciprocate.

Joyce continues to practise what she believes. As Michelle Stoll shares, Joyce kept calling, by phone or by text as appropriate, and a warm friendship has developed. 'I had no idea what was going on in Michelle's life, not knowing her situation, but the Holy Spirit kept prompting me to keep in contact. Naturally, I invited Michelle to visit again, and invited her home for Sabbath lunch; and, as our friendship deepened, we started praying together to encourage each other, and continue to do so.'

Those who know Joyce describe her Christian witness to be natural, spontaneous and contagious. Now an octogenarian, with her husband Alan she has recently moved to Grantham, Lincolnshire. 'My mission here is to get to know the community, and already, as I walk along the street, I often stop and enjoy good conversations with them. Can I put it like this? Strangers have already become friends – and guess what? We are not working alone!'

'... I have made it a lifelong habit to make the first move.'

Michelle Stoll's testimony

Today I'm filled with so much gratitude to God to be able to start a new decade with Him at the helm.

I was born in Guyana to two wonderful Christian parents. My siblings and I went to the Catholic church with Mum, but when I was 8 she became an Adventist, and around the age of 12 or 14 I was baptised.

I attended church for a while, but started losing interest. It was a very strict environment, and I became very scared of a God who, I felt, was ready to punish me.

In my early twenties I moved to New York City and stayed with an Adventist friend. One morning a pastor came to visit my friend, and he prayed for us. I remember being forcibly struck by this, one of the most beautiful prayer experiences I had ever had. I felt the presence, the peace and the love of God. This prompted me to start praying at home, and I just went to church very occasionally, but still had no interest in reading the Bible.

Fast-forward to 2008. My husband and I and our two children came to live in England, but by early 2012 I knew my marriage was over. The months that followed were filled with intense emotional pain.

My mum came over and encouraged me to attend prayer meeting at St Albans Church. Everyone was a total stranger to me there, but at the end Joyce Redfern greeted us and wondered if she might keep in contact.

She encouraged us to come to church, and I went very occasionally. Throughout this time Joyce was always sending me texts and cheery voicemail messages. Many times I didn't reply, as I was still feeling so low.

But something struck me about her: she was different from anyone I had ever met before. When I had the courage to telephone her and apologise, she never rebuked me, and I was quite taken aback by that. If Joyce had spoken abruptly to me, I wouldn't be in the church now. I've never felt love from a stranger like I felt from Joyce.

I remember Joyce praying with me in the early hours of the morning. She was so uplifting, sharing positive stories; there was no negativity in her.

Gradually, I started to feel comfortable coming to church. God knows my personality so well. I firmly believe that He sent Joyce into my life to bring me to Him. She has been a spiritual mother, a mentor, a friend and an ambassador for Christ.

I started reading the Bible more and delving deeper, and gradually I found peace.

But I wasn't done. Coming from a legal background, I like evidence, and I want to be firm in my belief; so I asked God to reveal His truth to me. And He has! I am convinced now that there is a God, and He's a loving God, and I'm not scared any more. I just see love.

I would like to say a huge thank-you to everyone in the St Albans church, including Pastor Nathan Stickland, for their love and support of me and my family.



And There Was War – play moves audience to tears

It's not often that the Adventist message of the great controversy is depicted through drama: but this production, directed by Jermaine Wong, did exactly that. Performed at the Catford Broadway on Saturday 14 December to a majority community audience, the production *And There Was War* set out to trace the beginnings of the fall of Lucifer, ushering in the effects of sin – but then it went deeper. It set out before the viewer the intense spiritual, emotional and mental struggles of the angelic host, giving an 'inside perception' of how sin began among God's created beings within an idyllic environment.

The play cleverly revealed the likely thought process of the angels who were created with free choice, yet who chose to allow the seeds of

doubt and scepticism, fuelled by the insinuations and accusations of Lucifer, to lead them to rebel against God.

The interplay of coordinated movements and choreographed actions gripped the attention of the viewers, making them rethink the whole controversy story.

With Lucifer cast out of heaven with his angels, the play did well to chronicle the main testing times for humanity as described in the Bible: namely, the tension of Cain towards Abel, and the test of faith for Noah and his family in building the ark. Perhaps the most gripping dialogue, however, was when, before the Saviour's birth, Mary shared the news of her pregnancy with Joseph. The play successfully reads between the lines of the cultural and religious stigma associated with a man betrothed to a woman who had already conceived. It also highlights how, at every significant stage in the life of Christ (temptation in the wilderness, Gethsemane, the cross, the tomb), Satan was the pivotal instigator behind human actions.

There were good performances by all the actors, especially John Ojeyemi, who played Immanuel, and Toheeb Ibrahim, who played Satan/Lucifer.

Danielle Wong, one of the producers of the play, said afterwards, 'The 7.30pm showing was packed, and the audience feedback has been phenomenal! People are making decisions to take Christ more seriously, non-believers have been moved to tears, and people with mental health challenges are feeling hope.'

Each of the actors, who themselves are on their own spiritual journey, testified of the impact the play had in their lives. Danielle, commenting on this, shared, 'When the curtains closed, the cast members broke down in tears in such emotion as they realised the power of this play and what they just did!'

Indeed, *And There Was War* proved to be much more than a dramatic depiction of the events in heaven. It was a clear appeal to those who are still undecided of where their loyalties lie: to choose Christ today, and to allow Him to make that difference in their lives.

RICHARD DALY (BUG COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR)



Treasurers and treasury staff from the British Isles © Michael Agyei-Asare

Treasurers need fellowship too . . .

The inspiring picture above shows treasurers serving the church in the UK and Ireland. Last November they participated in an intensive three-day treasury advisory hosted by the Trans-European Division in Montenegro. Noting that finance people can lead somewhat isolated lives in the midst of financial ministry, British Union Conference Treasurer, Earl Ramharacksingh, commented, 'The treasury teams really enjoyed the opportunity to meet up with their counterparts from far-flung regions of the TED territory, and we thank Nenad Jepuranović for providing an insightful and engaging programme.'

Making sure that not only employed treasurers experience fellowship, the British Union Conference plans to host its own treasurers' conference for local church treasurers from across the UK and Ireland at the end of April. The purpose, as Mr Ramharacksingh explains, 'is for fellowship, and the joy of supporting and encouraging each other. I cannot say enough how much I personally appreciate the giftedness and talent of the local church treasurer. So my invitation is, "Come and join us at the end of April, and let's share together and encourage each other in Athens."'

MESSENGER NEWS SERVICE



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As supplied, errors and omissions excepted

The day the family came together

Tuesday 7 January 2020



Pastor Andrew and Natasha Davis with their children, Leila, Malachi and Zoe



Pastor Sam and Rowena Davis



Left to right: Sam Gungaloo, Micah Campbell, Matthew Herel, Vili Costescu, Max McKenzie-Cook and Anthony Fuller



Pastor Jonathan Burnett



The Pathfinder honour guard

When Pastor Sam Davis was a ministerial student at Newbold College in the early 1980s, for rest and relaxation he often frequented the gymnasium to play and enjoy a game of five-a-side football with fellow students. Given the then-

bare concrete walls and floor, every kick and every bounce of the ball 'boomed' as the sound bounced around the room.

Sam and Rowena were the parents of two toddlers, Anthea (aged 3) and Andrew (aged 18 months). Full of hope and

optimism about the future, they lived sacrificially in the college's 'married students' accommodation, Binfield Hall. However, they were committed to serving the Lord and His church, and looked forward to graduating, ministerial employment, and settling down as a family. Their future lay ahead, with all the bright optimism any family could reasonably expect: not least, recognising that the Lord was travelling with them.

Thirty-seven years later, those gathered in the same college gymnasium on Tuesday 7 January heard another 'boom' effect, this time created by the beat of the Pathfinder Drum Corps. It was their way of saluting their pastor, mentor and leader, Pastor Andrew Davis, as they led his coffin into the gymnasium: now not only a gym, but a multi-purpose meeting venue.

Leading the family was Andrew's wife, Natasha, and their three young children, Leila, Malachi and Zoe. The unexpected and sudden death of a loved one causes compounded grief. As Anthea Davis Barclay described in the eulogy, 'The loss of Andrew to his family and community is colossal, and he is most desperately missed.'

But, as South England Conference President, Pastor Emmanuel Osei, gave his welcome to all assembled, he gave direction that the intent of the service was to celebrate and give thanks for Andrew's life, emphasising that 'the family mourn as those who have a hope', which was likewise expressed in one of the chosen songs, 'In Christ Alone': *'From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand: Till He returns or calls me home, Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.'*

It was as if Natasha, her immediate family, the Davis family, and the church family had gathered together with almost a sense of holy defiance to challenge the 'power of hell'. It was as if we were collectively

saying, 'Death may take Andrew, but because he is a child of God, and "in Him" he stood, he will never be plucked from "His hand", and neither will we!'

All the same, as Pastor Sam Ouadjo prayed, 'Lord, we are here to hear a word of comfort from You. How can we be glad?' Lament and holy confidence in the Lord meshed together: grief with hope; pain mixed with holy pride in someone who loved people.

As Sam and Rowena Davis gave their tribute, the only reaction of all present was to pray for them. To have to share the story of someone whom they'd loved, nurtured and sacrificed for was stirring. Naturally, they both shared some cheerful anecdotes about Andrew's competitive nature, and the fun they had together. Rowena was quick to highlight how Andrew was loved unconditionally. Sam elaborated on this by saying that 'God took hold of Andrew, changed him, shaped him and moulded him into what it was to be a husband and dad.' What shone through was that Sam and Andrew were best friends, soulmates: but, as Sam concluded, he reiterated the context by saying, 'When God causes you to down the bitter cup of bereavement, remember that He's the one holding it to your lips.'

Andrew's student peer group comprised Micah Campbell, Vili Costescu, Anthony Fuller, Sam Gungaloo, Matthew Herel and Max McKenzie-Cook, now all serving as pastors. Matthew Herel shared on their behalf how the group have all been on an educational, professional and spiritual journey together. He explained how Andrew took the lead to make sure that 'no man was left behind', and that they all finished the course, literally and metaphorically. The biggest tribute they felt they could give him was to remind all present that they are who they are today because of him.

This report does not have space to report on how Andrew was loved by the members he served, first in Brixton, then in the Colchester, Ipswich, Clacton and Newbold College churches. Nor should we forget Andrew's ministry to children and youth. It was in 2019 that he received his Pathfinder leadership Master Guide award.

However, his most recent pastoral appointment was to the Reading district. Local church elders Boikie Osupeng (Reading Central) and Steve Griffiths (Reading Parkside) both spoke of his vision, enthusiasm and passion for outreach and evangelism. From what they shared, it was clear that 'mingling' was his thing. Nothing pleased him more than connecting with people – church people, young people, old people, community people. The 8 November edition of *MESSENGER* reported on the autumn Reading Central evangelistic campaign organised by Andrew – following which twenty people were baptised and are experiencing new life in Christ.

Understandably, it was hard not to feel choked up as Natasha Davis with her three children shared a tribute on a pre-prepared video. Together they shared how much they loved the one they now miss so much.

Pastor Jonathan Burnett, in his sermon, explained how Andrew was named after the disciple Andrew (the introducer) by his parents. As if in a direct challenge to the forces of evil, he reminded listeners of the devil's intention to destroy Jesus. 'If you think you can destroy a seed by burying him, you are mistaken.' Within minutes of making that statement, the preacher appealed for a response, and two young men responded by committing themselves to prepare to serve in full-time pastoral ministry.

As music went from lament to praise, headed by the Reading Community Gospel Choir, the service ended with the choir singing 'Hallelujah' as the coffin and the family departed to the crematorium, once again led by the Pathfinder Drum Corps. As Andrew's remaining family and close friends left, the wider church family stayed behind and reflected. In a strange sort of way, it was good to see the church family together.

Pastor Andrew Davis has left us a legacy of brilliance, excellence and commitment – to his Lord and Saviour, to the church he served, and (by no means least) to his beloved Natasha, Leila, Malachi and Zoe. Maranatha!

DAVID NEAL
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL AGYEI-ASARE
The obituary of Pastor Andrew Davis will be published in the next edition of *MESSENGER*, due on 7 February.

Let God manage you

'And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us!'
(Psalm 90:17, NKJV.)

'God wants you to let Him manage you, that you may be a lovable Christian. The Lord would have the natural and hereditary traits of character come under the pruning knife. Look steadfastly unto Jesus, that you may catch His spirit and cherish the qualities of Christlike character. Then it will be recognised by all who have any connection with you, that you have learned of Christ His meekness, His affection, His tenderness, His sympathy. Never rest satisfied until you possess a loving and lovable spirit. Your words may come from the good treasure of the heart to strengthen, help, bless, and win all around you. . . . Others catch your spirit. The seeds we sow will bear a harvest in goodness, patience, kindness, and love, or exactly the opposite. . . .

'Many, many need melting over. Be sound in principle, true to God, but do not manifest one stern, ungenial phase of character. God does not want you to incur contempt by manifesting a disposition like a ball of putty, but He does want you to be in principle as sound as a rock, yet with a healthful mellowness. Like the Master, be full of grace and truth. Jesus was incorruptible, undefiled, yet in His life were mingled gentleness, meekness, benignity, sympathy, and love. The poorest were not afraid to approach Him; they did not fear a rebuff. What Christ was, every Christian should strive to be. In holiness and winsomeness of character He is our model. . . .

'We should all learn of Christ what it means to be a Christian. Let us learn of Him how to combine firmness, justice, purity, and integrity with unselfish courtesy and kindly sympathy. Thus the character becomes lovable and attractive. The beauty of holiness will disarm scoffers. . . .

'The heart must receive the divine current, and let it flow out in rich streams of mercy and grace to other hearts. All who would win souls to Christ must be winsome.'

Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, page 218

GOD FIRST

ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES



Left to right: Elder Leonard Sitton, Pastor Wayne Erasmus, Lindi Masilela Sibanda, Pastor Rio Espulgar, Pastor Ishwyn Rees

Colchester youth celebrate

Colchester Church's children have been much blessed of late. On Sabbath 30 November, a Pathfinder investiture was celebrated. Denis, the Pathfinder leader, presented the children with awards for their achievements during the year.

Then, on Sabbath 14 December, Ken Jones appeared as Father Christmas to give each of the children a present. The children had great fun unwrapping them all.

KEN JONES



Eleven years later – in the Lord's time

December 14 last year began as a cold, wet day with hail and sleet showers. It could only get better – and it did! By the time of the 11 o'clock service the sun was shining as members, family and friends gathered to witness the baptism of Lindi Masilela Sibanda.

It is eleven years since Lindi first attended Weston-super-Mare Church. She began Bible studies with Pastor Wayne Erasmus, and, when Pastor Wayne left to minister at Newbold College, Lindi later continued the studies with Pastor Rio Espulgar. The message for the morning was given by Pastor Wayne, who chose as his text Matthew 13:45, 46, the parable told by Jesus of a merchant who gave everything he had to obtain a precious pearl. He likened Lindi to the pearl and the merchant to our great God, who gave His all – His beloved Son, Jesus – to make that pearl His own. Pastor Rio baptised Lindi and, on behalf of all the members, welcomed her into the fellowship of Weston Church.

COMMUNICATION SECRETARY, WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Sheepcot Villas retirement homes

Sheepcot Villas is a prestigious development of seven retirement flats for the use of members of the Adventist Church on a life tenancy basis. Flats are of an attractive and traditional design suitable to meet all modern standards and requirements. There is presently one flat available, which comprises an entrance lobby; a well-proportioned living/dining area; two bedrooms (a good-sized double bedroom and a generous single); a bathroom with steam extraction to the outside; and a fully-fitted kitchen. It also benefits from a sunny southwest-facing balcony, overlooking the garden.

For a full list of its other comforts and conveniences please make contact as indicated below.

The grounds are attractively landscaped and screened with trees, shrubs and other foliage, and include pathways, seating areas, and ample designated car parking. The flat is a short walk to the Garston doctor's surgery, with shops, banks and a post office in the locality. Stanborough Park Church is just a half-mile walk away, with a health food and Christian



bookshop located at the nearby BUC offices. There are also excellent transport links: a bus service runs from St Albans Road to Watford town centre via Watford Junction railway station, and an express coach service connects with Heathrow and Luton airports.

Should you be interested in this flat, kindly contact:

Steve Okelo, Treasurer-Secretary
Seventh-day Adventist Association Ltd, Stanborough Park,
Watford, WD25 9JZ. Tel: 01923 672251;
email: sokelo@adventist.uk

Manchester members take to the streets

On 14 December 2019 the children, youth and adults of Manchester Southern Asia Church took to the streets of Manchester City Centre for our yearly singing outreach event. Despite the challenging weather conditions, it was a richly rewarding experience for the participating members of the church – and, we trust, for the public. It was a privilege to share literature about the second coming of Jesus, and books like *Steps to Christ*, *Revelation of Hope*, *The Great Controversy* and Bibles were distributed. Gifts were given to homeless people living on the street. As a church family, we look forward to this event, knowing that hearts and minds are open to the story of Christ during this season.

The following Sabbath, 21 December, the church organised another singing outreach at a care home in the neighbourhood.



The words of the Scriptures in Acts 20:35 (NKJV) came to mind as we ministered: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' This resonated in the hearts of the participants, all children and youth.

We thank God for them, and for the opportunity to bring cheer during the Advent season.

DIAMOND SATHE, COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Feeding the homeless in Bristol

On Wednesday 1 January members from the Bristol Central church were joined by Mercedes Williams, a nurse at the local Southmead hospital, to provide a free New Year meal for the homeless.

A team of 16 was present on the day to receive the guests and to have conversations with them. The newly appointed Personal Ministries leader, Elder Samuel Owusu Poku, and his wife Janet worked tirelessly with the help of other volunteers to take charge of preparing the special food for the meal.

One team member, Dale Grandison, reported that he has been working with the homeless for a number of years, and has built a strong rapport with people in the community. He has been known to make hot drinks from home and to hand them out for those in need, especially in the winter.

When the event drew to a close, guests were each given a goodie bag which contained snacks, a bottle of water, a piece of fruit and a carton of juice. They were very grateful, and said how much they

appreciated us taking time out to provide a meal for them.

With Jamaica Street nearby (where Bristol's homeless community gathers), fifty remaining goodie bags were handed out. The items were eagerly received, and the response was so encouraging that the team is planning to continue this ministry on a regular basis.

LOIS DOE



Hats off to Grantham

Last year the Grantham Church Community Services Department were able to take part in the bi-annual Christmas Tree Festival, held in the local parish church of St Wulfram.

Their main project was to light a tree in the traditional way, but with added small baby hats knitted by the ladies of the 'Knit & Natter' group within the department.

More than 300 hats have been made over a period of several weeks, to be donated to the neonatal units of both Lincoln County Hospital and Pilgrim Hospital.

Also on the tree were 'twiddle muffs' for the elderly in care, and round the base were bags of toiletries for the needy in the immediate area.

A sheet outlining the programme had been prepared and displayed for the public to read of why the unusual decorations had been used.

MIKE COWEN



Left to right: Carole Thompson, Lynne Taylor, Wendy Walmsley, Elizabeth Holden, Ann Eaton and Audrey Howard



A sideways look at the parables

by Karen Shelbourn

A parable can be described as a lesson in story form, and who doesn't like a story? It is a device which illustrates moral or spiritual truth, telling a story about literal things but designed to lead the listener to perceive spiritual insights ('an earthly story with a heavenly meaning'). For example, a parable may be a simile, where one thing is compared to another ('the kingdom of God is like . . .'); or it may be a metaphor, where the thing spoken of is symbolic of something else (for example, the parable of the lost coin).

Probably the most famous parable of the Old Testament is that told by Nathan the prophet, recorded in 2 Samuel 12:1-7. King David had arranged for the murder of one of his officers, Uriah the Hittite, in order to marry his beautiful wife, Bathsheba. Nathan told David the story of a rich man with many sheep and cattle, and a poor man who had just one little ewe lamb, whom he loved like a daughter. The rich man entertained a traveller one day, and, instead of killing one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal, he took the lamb belonging to the poor man.

David was enraged, and saw immediately how unjust the rich man's actions were. He demanded justice for the poor man, even suggesting that the rich man should die for what he had done. Then Nathan spoke those devastating words: 'You are the man!' He went on to tell David what God had to say about his actions: that he was the rich man with several wives, and Uriah was the poor man with Bathsheba; yet David took her from him. David's immediate response was to admit that he had sinned against God.

This seems to be the very purpose of the parables spoken by Jesus. There is immediacy in the parables – they are intended to have the audience get the point there and then. He tells a story; the hearer makes a judgement and applies it to himself, and takes action. Barclay describes a parable as 'a sword to stab men's minds awake'. Jeremias describes the parables of Jesus as 'weapons of controversy'. This is very arresting imagery, and reflects His conflict with Pharisaism. It is readily acknowledged that Jesus could be controversial. Part of His mission was to challenge the thinking and teaching of the traditional religious leadership of His time, and He often used parables – stories – to illustrate those challenges.

Something we must consider when reading the parables is that they were **spoken** by Jesus. They were not written down until years after His death, so the people listening to Jesus may have had just that one opportunity to hear the story. His audiences varied in size; sometimes He spoke parables to just His disciples, or to an individual, or to a 'great multitude'. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy when He used parables to teach (Matthew 13:34, 35).

It was (and is) characteristic of the Jewish mind to be practical, and we can imagine many of the hearers of the parables discussing them with their family and friends – and, as Barclay describes it, asking each other, 'In view of this, what must I do?' Kierkegaard would later say that, when reading the Bible, we must be constantly saying to ourselves, 'It is talking to me, and about me.' There are examples of the Jewish leaders having this experience; but, rather than allowing their minds to be 'stabbed awake', their response was often to look for a way to silence Jesus, rather than accept His words (Luke 20:19).

We know that the disciples did not always understand what Jesus meant; and they sometimes asked Him to explain a parable, and He would do so – the parable of the weeds in the field being an example of this (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Today we have the privilege of having the written word, and technology has given us a range of media by which we can read or listen. We can read and re-read the parables, compare them, group them under different headings, read commentaries about them written by eminent scholars, meditate on them. . . . It is unlikely that any generation before ours has had as much information and commentary about the parables, or as much information about the history, environment and structure of the society

into which Jesus was born. However, there is really only one question: what does Jesus want me to learn so that I can be more like Him today?

Bryan Watkins (1939-2019) d. 21 May.

On 10 June a service of thanksgiving for the life of Bryan Watkins was held at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. The beautiful traditional chapel in the heart of the Welsh valleys hosted a congregation of family, friends and former students. Pastors Mick Smart, Jeremy Tremear and Adriana Fodor led a service that celebrated Bryan's life and God's providence within it.

Bryan was born on 15 July 1939 in Rhymney, South Wales, and was the eldest child of Thomas and Mary Watkins. Contracting rheumatic fever in infancy, it was feared that Bryan's life would end almost before it had begun. The doctor recommended that his father return home from the war when it looked unlikely that Bryan would survive: but survive he did, and as the war drew to a close Bryan was attending the local Anglican church, where he had become an altar boy and chorister. His passion for worshipping God in song began there, and continued throughout his life.

On leaving grammar school, he followed his interest in the sciences to the laboratories of the Ebbw Vale Steel Works. However, Bryan was at heart a botanist – he drew, painted and photographed many of the plants and flowers he studied, and his enthusiasm for sharing these interests led to a career change.

Graduating from Caerleon Teacher Training College, he began by asking his former headmaster for a reference: instead of which, he was offered a job, with the added incentive that he would have a brand-new science laboratory. Bryan became a much-loved and respected teacher at the Lawn School.

In 1960 Bryan met and fell in love with Jean (née Phillips), who was at that time a student nurse.



Four years later they married at Hengoed Welsh Baptist Chapel, and the following year Bryan was baptised into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Over the subsequent years Bryan and Jean were blessed with three sons – Richard, Andrew and Gareth.

It was on the day of Gareth's birth that Bryan was given the news that he would need major heart surgery: the result of the damage caused by the rheumatic fever that nearly claimed his life as an infant. He would later recall that he feared that he would not live long enough to see his children grow up. Thankfully, Bryan was referred to one of the world's leading heart hospitals – The Royal Brompton – and to some relief they advised him that it could be ten to fifteen years before he would need surgery.

Boosted by this news, he was able to look beyond the condition and felt called to teach at a church school; so, after fourteen happy years in secondary education, he handed in his resignation. On his departure, the headmaster addressed the boys at assembly and commended them to follow the example Bryan had set as a Christian and as a gentleman.

The family moved to Grantham, where he took up a post at Dudley House School, little knowing that six months later his heart condition would have deteriorated so rapidly that urgent heart surgery was required. The family were blessed to have made many friends in Grantham, and were well supported by the church. Successful heart surgery followed, and the replacement metallic valve, with its audible clicking sound, would be a source of curiosity to schoolchildren for years to come: some of whom would ask, 'Sir, can we listen to your heart?'

Four years later, Bryan took up a teaching post at Stanborough Park Primary School, later becoming its headmaster. Bryan loved his time at the school; and,

as the campus also had a secondary school, he saw many of those children, including his own, progress from nursery to sixth form.

Bryan and Jean retired to Grantham, where they had lived years before. He was never one to stand still, and busied himself with what he enjoyed – primarily gardening and continuing his active church life with Jean.

He was also a founder member and chairman of The Grantham Alzheimer's Society. In the early days, the telephone helpline was set up in their home. As the organisation grew, Bryan and Jean made many friends in the community, giving talks on the condition to groups of social workers and trainee nurses.

Eventually they moved back to Wales, joining the Seventh-day Adventist church in Ystrad Mynach. Bryan became head elder and continued to work actively for the church. He particularly enjoyed organising the festival services of Easter, Harvest, and of course the Christmas Eve Carol Service.

Bryan's health had been deteriorating, though he was still active, pottering around in the garden. Unfortunately, a fall led to an operation at the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport, where he died peacefully a few weeks later.

Bryan lived a fulfilling life where he treated everyone he met with the same friendly warmth. He lived a life of service to the God he loved and trusted, serving as an elder in Grantham, Stanborough Park and Ystrad Mynach. His teaching impacted many, and the family have been touched by the tributes from those he once taught, which commonly described him as a gentleman, humorous, kind and calming – a great teacher. He loved Jean and his family dearly, and was a man of faith, never expecting to live to his eightieth year.

The family are so very grateful that he did.

RICHARD WATKINS

Carol Joanne Noel (1964-2019) d. 1 June.

Carol was born in Peckham, London, to Mary and Anthony Noel, the fourth of six children. Carol was a bubbly and friendly child who



loved to play. From a young age she took to cutting up her mother's material to make dresses for her dolls. At the age of six, she and her family moved to St Lucia, where she attended school until the age of twelve, when they returned to Bethnal Green, England.

Carol studied art at East Ham College, and fashion at the Medway College of Design. Having completed her studies, she had several jobs in the fashion industry, such as lingerie, nightwear and fabric designer for some prestigious companies.

She loved travelling, and one of her favourite countries was Italy, where she lived for six months. She also worked in St Lucia as a Textile and Design teacher at the SDA Academy and George Charles Secondary School in Castries.

Carol had a flair for fashion and loved to dress in vibrant colours, often mixing colours and patterns that most people wouldn't – for example, stripes and polka dots – and she carried it off.

Carol loved life and people, always greeting you with a cheerful and friendly smile, talking to people and making friends wherever she went. Her friendliness wasn't restricted to people: she also befriended dogs and cats.

Her relationship with God was very important to her; she was very spiritual, and used every opportunity to speak about God. Carol was baptised into Hampstead Seventh-day Adventist Church in the early 1990s, following a week at SEC Camp Meeting at Camber Sands. Once in the faith, Carol never looked back. She got involved in mime ministry and 'Impact', a youth witnessing ministry, travelling to Scotland, Finland and all over London. More recently, Carol attended Ilford Central Church, and was a frequent visitor to Hackney Church.

Carol was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006. She had two operations and moved back to St Lucia after getting the all-clear following treatment.

She became unwell in 2018 and, after undergoing tests, was told that the cancer had returned and had spread to her lungs. Despite this news, Carol never lost hope. She was always hopeful; her faith in God kept her

strong throughout. Her mother, Mary, recalls her saying, 'Satan! In your face: it's a win-win situation. If I die, I win; if I live, I win.' She encouraged so many people in her life, especially during the recent phase of her illness. Anyone who accessed Carol's Facebook page could attest to that.

Sadly, on Sabbath 1 June 2019, Carol lost her thirteen-year battle against the disease, and slipped away peacefully at 4.53am.

She leaves her mother Mary, Aunt Hilda, siblings, numerous relatives and friends to mourn her passing.

We celebrate her life and legacy, remembering her lovely, bright, and vibrant smile, and her strength throughout her illness. We look forward to seeing Carol in the resurrection. She will live on forever in our hearts.

HERMINIA MATHIEU,
COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

Len Eastwood (1943-2019) d. 19 September.

Len was born on 1 December 1943 in Chelmsford, Essex. On 26 March 1968 he married Patricia Jean Palmer, and their union brought about three children: Stephen Eastwood, Kaylene Chadwick and Keren Milanovic.

Leaving Britain to attend Avondale College in Australia in 1968, Len began working at the Sanitarium Health Food Company in Cooranbong to earn his fees while he studied accounts. After graduating he moved to the Greater Sydney Conference, where he spent four years as a clerk in the Treasury Department. Between 1974 and 1981 Len served in the same capacity in the Central Pacific Union Mission office, then located in Auckland, New Zealand, and then as Treasurer for the Sierra Leone Mission and the Masanga Leprosy Hospital. At the end of 1981 Len and Pat returned to England, where he served in various capacities within the South England Conference, the North England Conference, Granose, the British Union Conference and the Stanborough Press until the late 1990s. His last 10 years of employment were spent working with Granovita and then the Co-operative Funeral Company.

During retirement Len enjoyed

life in Carmarthenshire with his wife Pat, but they returned recently, due to Len's ill health, to the Newbold area to be near his daughter.

It was on 19 September that Len died.

His family are now looking forward to and awaiting Christ's soon return, when they will be reunited with a beloved husband, father, grandfather and brother.

PAT EASTWOOD

Pat and the family would like to express sincere thanks for the support received by way of prayers, messages and cards. They have meant a great deal at this sad time.

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Sunset

Sunset times are reproduced with permission from data supplied by HM Nautical Almanac Office.

| | Lon | Card | Nolt | Edin | Belf |
|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Jan 24 | 4.35 | 4.47 | 4.33 | 4.28 | 4.45 |
| 31 | 4.47 | 5.00 | 4.46 | 4.43 | 4.59 |
| Feb 7 | 5.00 | 5.12 | 5.00 | 4.58 | 5.14 |
| 14 | 5.13 | 5.25 | 5.13 | 5.13 | 5.28 |



The blessings of tithing – my story

by Sheena Murphy



I grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home, being baptised at the age of 12, and the idea of tithing was always 'normal' to me. I'd heard the Bible verses, and the first 10% of any income went in the tithe envelope and was put in the plate as it was passed around at church. I never even really thought that much about it. It was just what we did.

I've now been in employment, earning my own money, for 16 years: and during that time I have mostly tithed. Yes, mostly. I admit that I haven't always.

I didn't just stop one day, but it slipped slowly. The Bible describes tithe as the 'first fruit', and that is how I was taught to tithe. I'd earn some money, off went 10%, and then I'd look at how much I had left and what I wanted and needed to use it for.

The 'first fruit' part of my tithing was what stopped to begin with. I'd get my paycheque, pay whatever bills needed paying, buy myself some stuff, and 'oh yes, better work out 10% and give tithe'. I started tithing a couple of weeks after pay day; then I'd let a couple of pay days pass before tithing for both.

One month, I let it go too far. I hadn't tithed in ages, and if I paid all the tithe I calculated that I was 'due to pay', most of my income that month would be gone. I felt pretty guilty, but decided that God would understand that I couldn't afford to do that – and I wiped the slate clean. I cleared the mental 'tithing debt' that I'd accumulated in my mind, and decided that next month I would just tithe on time.

I may have done; I can't remember: but that tithing habit didn't return. I forgave myself for skipping tithing again, and soon I wasn't tithing at all.

One day at work an atheist colleague of mine mentioned that he'd been talking to someone who believed in giving 10% of their income away! He was amazed and had never heard of such an idea. I told him that it was biblical and a lot of denominations teach this, including my church. He stopped short of asking if I tithed, and I felt relieved that he hadn't. What would I have said? Did I believe in tithing? Yes, of course I did. Did I tithe? No.

Well, I thought to myself, that doesn't tally up. Why am I not doing something that I claim to believe? All the 'you just can't afford to tithe at the moment' thoughts passed through my head, but I'd heard too many stories of people worse off than me who tithed, and managed just fine, to deny that I would be lying to myself.

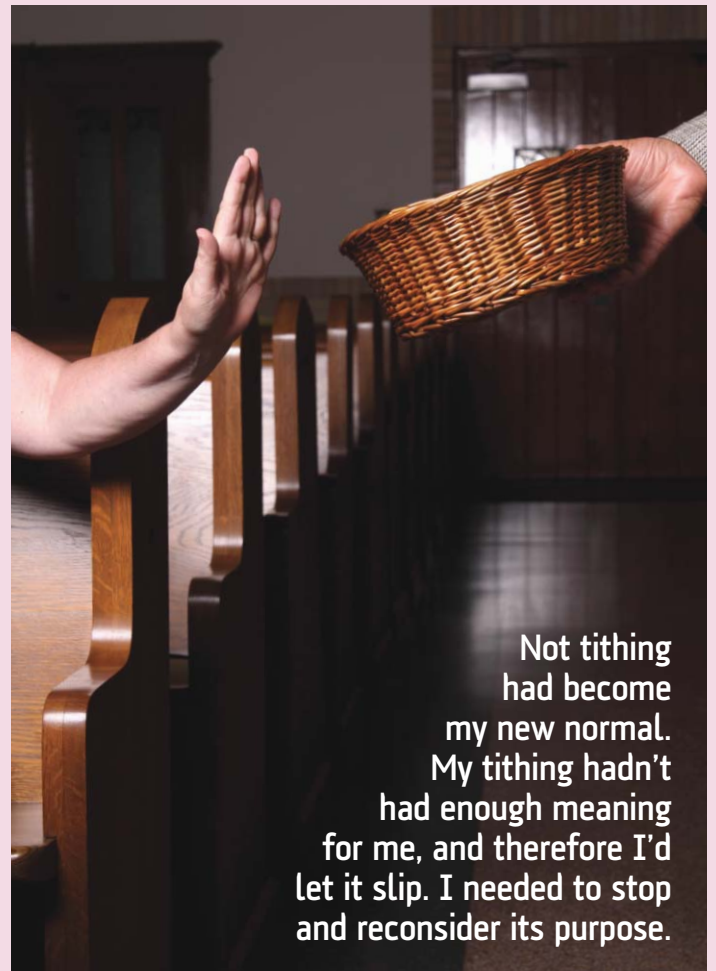
'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' (Malachi 3:10, KJV.)

I knew that verse; I believed that verse: illogical as it may have seemed to my atheist friend, had I attempted to explain. Tithing would bring a blessing, not a lack of funds – and yet I had not been tithing.

I concluded that I'd simply got into the habit of not tithing. Not tithing had become my new normal. My tithing hadn't had enough meaning for me, and therefore I'd let it slip. I needed to stop and reconsider its purpose.

One reason that popped into my mind was that tithing acknowledges that God is first in your life; that He is more important than money. Another reason is to show gratitude.

One of my favourite Bible verses is 1 Peter 3:15. It talks about always being ready to give a reason for the hope we have. It's because I'd lost the meaning, because I'd lost the reason I was tithing, that I let it slip. Habits can be dangerous. Doing or not doing anything just because that's what you do or don't do is never good.



Not tithing had become my new normal. My tithing hadn't had enough meaning for me, and therefore I'd let it slip. I needed to stop and reconsider its purpose.

Always be ready with a reason for your hope in God, a reason for your beliefs.

The Pharisees tithed, but they didn't do it for the right reason. It was an act, a religious habit:

'Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone.' (Luke 11:42, NIV.)

I tithed as a habit, and then I tithed for a while simply because I was feeling guilty if I didn't. That's not a good reason either:

'Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.' (2 Corinthians 9:7, KJV.)

So why do people tithe? Is it out of habit, or do you have a true belief and reason to back up your actions? Do you really believe what the Bible says about tithing being a blessing?

- What do you make of Sheena's story of faithfulness to God?
- What do you think of the final questions she asks us to consider?
- Want to comment? Find these questions on the *MESSENGER* Extra Facebook page to keep the conversation going.