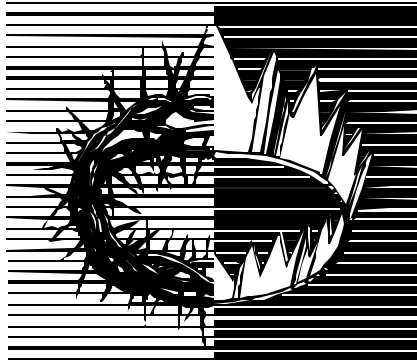


TITHE AND OFFERING READINGS



2001

ATTENTION!

Dated material to be adapted,
translated, and distributed to
Seventh-day Adventist churches
before December 2000.

TITHE AND OFFERING READINGS

2001

Footprints of Faith

by
Stephen Chavez

Edited and prepared by the Stewardship Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA. ©2000

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Unless otherwise specified, the New International Version is used for all scriptural references.

INTRODUCTION

Tithe and Offering Readings are designed to be used as offertory remarks during Sabbath worship. The 2001 *Tithe and Offering Readings* follow the approved international Seventh-day Adventist Calendar of Special Offerings. They may be adapted by divisions, unions, conferences, and churches for use in their country, territory, and culture.

The author of this year's *Tithe and Offering Readings* is Stephen Chavez.

Stephen Chavez has been on the *Adventist Review* staff as assistant editor for almost seven years. Prior to joining the *Review*, Chavez was a pastor in the western United States.

Steve is a dedicated runner, and he keeps fit by running at least 10 kilometers five to six days a week. In addition to his responsibilities at the *Adventist Review*, every week he tutors elementary children, visits senior citizens, and leads out in Earliteen Sabbath School. His other hobbies include reading, music, cooking, and fixing things. Steve and his wife, Linda, have two young adult children.

We welcome your comments, and suggestions for future authors and themes for the *Tithe and Offering Readings*.

SABBATHS WITHOUT DESIGNATED OFFERINGS

There are *six Sabbaths* in 2001 that do not have designated offerings. Each Division Committee is to designate these offerings for use in their Division, Conference, or Union. The Sabbaths are: January 13, February 10, June 9, August 11, October 13, and December 8.

The titles of the readings of these non-designated offerings are noted as “**Scheduled Offering: Division.**”

THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERINGS FOR 2001

Unusual Opportunities and Attached Union	March 31
Southern Asia Division	June 30
Euro-Asia Division	September 29
Inter-American Division	December 29

Special Offerings

RECOMMENDED, to adopt the Calendar of Special Offerings–World 2001, as follows:

JANUARY

6 Outreach/Church Budget
13 Division
20 Church Budget
27 Conference/Union

FEBRUARY

3 Outreach/Church Budget
10 Division
17 Church Budget
24 Conference/Union

MARCH

3 Outreach/Church Budget
10*+ Adventist World Radio *+
17 Church Budget
24 Conference/Union
31 Church Budget

APRIL

7 Outreach/Church Budget
14+ World Mission Budget (IDE Projects)+
21 Church Budget
28 Conference/Union

MAY

5 Outreach/Church Budget
12*+ Disaster and Famine Relief*+
19 Church Budget
26 Conference/Union

JUNE

2 Outreach/Church Budget
9 Division

16.....Church Budget
23.....Conference/Union
30.....Church Budget

JULY

7.....Outreach/Church Budget
14+.....World Mission+
21.....Church Budget
28.....Conference/Union

AUGUST

4.....Outreach/Church Budget
11.....Division
18.....Church Budget
25.....Conference/Union

SEPTEMBER 1

Outreach/Church Budget
8+.....World Mission Budget+
(NSD - Church buildings in China)
15.....Church Budget
22.....Conference/Union
29.....Church Budget

OCTOBER

6.....Outreach/Church Budget
13.....Division
20.....Church Budget
27.....Conference/Union

NOVEMBER

3.....Outreach/Church Budget
10*+.....Week of Sacrifice (Global Mission)*+
17.....Church Budget
24.....Conference/Union

DECEMBER

1.....Outreach/Church Budget
8.....Division
15.....Church Budget
22.....Conference/Union
29.....Church Budget

*Reading provided by corresponding entity +Worldwide Offering

TITLES OF READINGS

- 1 Useful Gifts
- 2 When a Little is a Lot
- 3 What Price Commitment?
- 4 The Desires of Your Heart
- 5 A Heavenly Principle
- 6 The Tyranny of the Nonessential
- 7 Unlikely Heroes
- 8 The Real Struggle
- 9 A Life of Both/And
- 10 Reaching the Unreachable
- 11 Unconditional Acceptance
- 12 Do You Hear What I Hear?
- 13 A Heart to Minister
- 14 Foul Weather Friends
- 15 He is Risen
- 16 Choices
- 17 Our Responsive God
- 18 Enough is Enough
- 19 Meeting the Need
- 20 Signs Along the Way
- 21 Captivating Love
- 22 The Right Thing
- 23 Sowing and Reaping
- 24 We are Witnesses
- 25 Impulsive Giving
- 26 Proof of Our Praise
- 27 Empirical Evidence
- 28 On the Borders of the Promised Land

29	.Anchor Points
30	God's Faithfulness
31	Exercising Our Options
32	For Better, For Worse
33	.Staying Centered
34	.Adding Our Voice
35	God's Agents for Redemption
36	. . . Being a Survivor
37	Tell It to the World
38	Beyond the Call of Duty
39	.Beyond Bookkeeping
40	.God's Flawed Family
41	.Judged by Our Actions
42	. . . Our Only Hope
43	God of the Unimaginable
44	. A Few Sticks of Furniture
45	. . . Outside the Comfort Zone
46	. . . Publishing Good News
47	. . . Jesus' Ordinary Friends
48	. . . Looking Back, Looking Ahead
49	. . . A Frightening Scenario
50	. . . Knowing God
51	.Christ's Irrational Kingdom
52	. Living Confidently in Uncertainty

**SCHEDULED CONFERENCE/UNION
OFFERINGS**

SABBATH	TITLE	DATE
4th	The Desires of Your Heart	January 27
8th	The Real Struggle	February 24
12th	Do You Hear What I Hear?	March 24
17th	Our Responsive God	April 28
21st	Captivating Love	May 26
25th	Impulsive Giving	June 23
30th	God's Faithfulness	July 28
34th	Adding Our Voice	August 25
38th	Beyond the Call of Duty	September 22
43rd	God of the Unimaginable	October 27
47th	Jesus' Ordinary Friends	November 24
51st	Christ's Irrational Kingdom	December 22

SCHEDULED SPECIAL OFFERINGS

SABBATH	TITLE	DATE
10 th	Adventist World Radio	March 10
15 th	World Mission Budget (IDE Projects)	April 14
19 th	Disaster and Famine Relief	May 12
28 th	World Mission	July 14
36 th	World Mission Budget (NSD - Church Buildings in China)	September 8
45 th	Week of Sacrifice	November 10

1-January 6

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Useful Gifts

Today is Epiphany, when, according to Christian tradition, the Magi visited Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus with their expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. According to Ellen White, these gifts were used to finance the family's trip to Egypt to escape King Herod's efforts to destroy all the baby boys around Bethlehem.

The gifts of the Magi represent two characteristics of the offerings we bring even today. They were tokens of the love and loyalty to the newborn King, but they were also useful gifts that helped further Jesus' ministry on earth.

Our offerings today are both a statement of our allegiance and loyalty to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and a means to accomplish God's will on earth.

Appeal: On this, the first Sabbath of the New Year, let's remember that our offerings are not just a means to provide for the financial needs of our local, regional, and worldwide church, but they're also a declaration of our loyalty to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Prayer:

2-January 13
Scheduled Offering: Division

When a Little is a Lot

Jesus was always generous and sensitive to the needs of those who followed Him, so His disciples surely weren't surprised when they were surrounded by people who wanted to listen to Jesus' stories. And when it became late the disciples may have thought they were doing the compassionate thing by sending the people away so they could find food for themselves and their families.

But Jesus said, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37).

His disciples protested: "That would take eight months wages."

Then Jesus asked, "How many loaves do you have?" (They apparently didn't even know what resources were already on hand.)

After a quick survey they reported to Jesus, "Five—and two fish."

Under normal circumstances five loaves and two fish won't go very far. But in this case it was enough to feed 5000 men, plus women and children.

Appeal: Most of us have limited resources, but if we take a look around at all the material, emotional, and spiritual blessings we enjoy, we'll see that we can afford to share what we have. And the results will be remarkable.

Prayer:

3-January 20
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

What Price Commitment?

On this date in 1918, following the Bolshevik Revolution, all church property in Russia was confiscated and religious instruction in schools was prohibited. For most of 80 years Christians were forced to abandon meeting and worshipping together.

Today in some parts of the world, people risk the loss of family, the loss of livelihood and property, even the loss of life when they worship God according to their consciences.

When we acknowledge God's lordship in our lives, we don't limit our offerings to amounts that can be described in terms of dollars, lira, deutch marks, yen, or rubles. "You are not your own;" wrote the apostle Paul, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19,20.) God doesn't claim only our pocketbooks, He claims all our time, talents, and influence,

Appeal: When we return our offerings each Sabbath and live our lives to God's glory throughout the week, we demonstrate our love and faithfulness to God just as do our fellow believers who fan the flames of the gospel when they worship in secret.

Prayer:

4-January 27

Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

The Desires of Your Heart

You've heard the fable of the magic lamp from which a genie appears and offers to grant its master three wishes. One lad, when asked how he'd use three wishes, said, "I'd ask for money, good looks, and three more wishes."

God's people don't have access to a magic lamp; we have something better. In Psalm 34:9 David wrote: "Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing." In other words, when we offer ourselves to God's service, He takes care of all our material, emotional, and spiritual needs.

We may or may not become wealthy, famous, or successful in terms of how the world thinks of these things. But God has promised to provide us with the things that are most important. His promise is: "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:3,4).

Appeal: When we dedicate all that we are, all that we have to God's service, He takes care of the rest.

Prayer:

5-February 3

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

A Heavenly Principle

Warfare often brings descriptions of horrific cruelty and suffering. But it sometimes provides us with stories of unbelievable bravery and self-sacrifice.

On this date in 1943, the allied troopship S. S Dorchester was struck by an enemy torpedo in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic. As the ship began to sink, and there were too few life jackets for everyone on board, four chaplains (two Protestant ministers, one Roman Catholic priest, and one Jewish rabbi) voluntarily surrendered their life jackets so that four others could survive.

One survivor recalled seeing the four chaplains standing—their arms linked—praying as the ship began its final descent into the ocean depths. Said one witness: “It was the finest thing I have ever seen, or hope to see, this side of heaven.”

Self-sacrifice is a heavenly principle. Whenever it’s seen, we’re reminded: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, what whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

Appeal: We’re not often asked to sacrifice to the point of giving up our lives, but God does ask us to put His interests and His kingdom first in our lives, and in the way we use the talents entrusted to us. May we be as faithful as those who have given all they had to give.

Prayer:

6-February 10
Scheduled Offering: Division

The Tyranny of the Nonessential

The stress and hardship of daily life is something that we're all familiar with. We all face the struggle of providing food, clothing, and shelter for ourselves and our families.

Jesus' promise is: "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6: 32, 33). Then, freed from the mundane and ordinary tasks of providing for our own needs, we can focus on living lives of discipleship, listening to the Holy Spirit, and looking for opportunities to push back the frontiers of God's kingdom.

Unfortunately, the life of discipleship runs counter to our natural impulses. The great preacher, Peter Marshall, recognized this when, in his role as chaplain to the United States Senate he prayed, "Lord, save Thy servants from the tyranny of the nonessential. Give them the courage to say 'no' to everything that makes it more difficult to say 'yes' to Thee."

Appeal: Those words, spoken 54 years ago today, are as important as they've ever been. The resources we dedicate to God, today and everyday, are indications that our priorities have been influenced by God.

Prayer:

7-February 17

Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Unlikely Heroes

Have you ever noticed how God sometimes chooses unlikely heroes?

Take Gideon, for example. When the Lord's angel appeared to him, he was hiding, threshing grain at a winepress. After all, if he threshed his grain at a threshing floor, Midianite raiders might take from him the harvest he'd been working on all season.

Ironically, the angel's first words to Gideon were: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior" (Judg.6:12). Yet when the angel revealed that God had anointed him to overthrow Israel's oppressors, Gideon tried to avoid God's call by pointing out that he was the least in his family, which was the least of the tribes of Israel.

Then Gideon tested the Lord *twice* to see if he could find an excuse to stay out of the struggle.

God greatly values humility. With his relatively insignificant talents (in his view), God used Gideon to accomplish a great victory over the Midianites.

Appeal: Let's not look at our resources as insignificant. We may not have as much as others, but what little we have, willingly offered, is extremely valuable in the struggle between good and evil.

Prayer:

8-February 24
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

The Real Struggle

In the last 2,000 years Christianity has become one of the world's great religions. Yet from its very beginning as a tiny, unorganized group of followers who worshiped a crucified and risen Messiah, Christianity has been the object of Satan's wrath.

On this date in the year 303, the Roman emperor Galerius Valerius Maximianus issued the first official decree that made Christians enemies of the state. It wasn't the first time Christians have been persecuted, and the history of persecution continues even to this day.

For most of us, persecution isn't the problem; complacency is. Christianity and Christians are well-accepted in many parts of the world. And it's possible—in fact, probable—that at some point in our Christian experience, we'll slip into a rut and do things according to habit instead of a conscious decision.

Appeal: Our struggle is to stay pliant and sensitive to the lordship of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is accomplished by faithfully listening to God's voice throughout the week, and especially as we return God's tithes and our offerings to the Lord each Sabbath.

Prayer:

9-March 3

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

A Life of Both/And

We often think of Christianity in terms of either/or. We are either good or evil, we are either living in darkness or light, we are headed either to heaven or hell.

But a story in Luke 10 resists that simple dichotomy. Martha was preoccupied. Noticing that she was carrying the burden of meal preparation all by herself, she approached Jesus and pointed out that Mary wasn't doing her part. "Tell her to help me!" she demanded of Jesus (Lk. 10:40).

"'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered. 'you are worried and upset by many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'" (vv. 41, 42).

Sometimes we give the impression that we have to be either one or the other. The truth is that we have to be both Mary and Martha.

Appeal: We have to be like Mary and spend time sitting at Jesus' feet—learning of Him, leaning on Him, and casting all our cares on Him. But we also have to be like Martha—lifting the load He's given us to carry; knowing that we're not working alone.

Prayer:

10-March 10

Scheduled Offering: Adventist World Radio

Reaching the Unreachable

For 30 years Adventist World Radio has broadcast the gospel to people in places that are impossible to reach in any other way. Thousands and thousands have responded to the call.

Here's a letter from a listener in Vietnam: "Since the day I was born until now, I had no joy that can compare to the joy that I have in my heart since I began to hear about peace and happiness on AWR. I save money to buy Bibles. I introduce the radio program to other people, and we study together and listen to the program. Many have accepted Jesus as their Savior.

"All the children love the stories, and the adults love the preaching. The more they listen, the more their hearts are changed. Some with physical illnesses have been healed completely. We praise the Lord."

Appeal: Adventist World Radio broadcasts in nearly 60 languages to unreachable places, introducing people to the joy of salvation. Please support the Church's international radio ministry. Share your joy in Jesus with countless others worldwide through your gifts and prayers

Prayer:

11-March 17
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Unconditional Acceptance

Charlotte Elliott was an English devotional and hymn writer born on this date in 1789. At the age of 33, Ms. Elliott contracted an illness that left her an invalid for the last 50 years of her life.

Elliott's most famous hymn, "Just as I Am," reminds us that God's grace is our only hope for being rescued from a life of estrangement from God to a life of full acceptance as one of God's children.

Society's acceptance is always predicated by an "if": "I'll accept you if you're smart (good looking, rich, talented, etc.)." But God's grace is predicated on only one thing: our need of it.

As God's grace is reflected in our lives, we respond to it unconditionally. We return our tithes and bring our offerings not because God will bless us if we do (although He will), but because we count it a privilege to respond to His love and honor Him with these tokens of our love and allegiance. God has done everything, all we can do is respond.

Appeal: As Charlotte Elliott wrote:

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!"

Prayer:

12-March 24
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Do You Hear What I Hear?

“In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions” (1 Sam. 3:1).

Those few words describe a tragic time in Israel’s history. The people had grown complacent and the spiritual leaders had become more concerned with forms and rituals than with reflecting God’s character to the nation’s neighbors.

But all was not lost; God approached the boy Samuel. Thinking that he had heard Eli’s voice, Samuel went to Eli and asked what he wanted. Eli sent Samuel back to bed. Two more times it happened.

Then Eli realized that the Lord was trying to communicate to Samuel, so he told Samuel, “If he calls you, say ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’” (1 Sam. 3:9).

When is the last time God tried to get your attention?

God promises, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28, 29).

Appeal: If we believe that we are living in the last days, we have to believe that God is trying to communicate with us today. Our response should be the same as Samuel’s: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Prayer:

13-March 31
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

A Heart to Minister

Jesus once told a story that many of us may find somewhat uncomfortable. It concerns two men, one extremely rich, the other unimaginably poor.

In that story the rich man enjoyed the best of everything—food, clothes, and worldly pleasures. Lazarus, on the other hand, had nothing; his only companions were the mangy dogs who licked his sores, his only comfort the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

The rich man may have thought he was doing his duty by simply letting Lazarus eat leftovers from his table, but God required more. The rich man had the resources to relieve Lazarus' suffering, but he did next to nothing.

Appeal: Our salvation is by grace. It doesn't depend on how much or how little we do for those who are less fortunate than we are. But sharing our resources with those who have less than we do is an indication that we have been touched by God's grace, that He has given us a heart to minister to "one of the least of these" (Matt. 25:40). This too, is what it means to be a faithful steward.

Prayer:

14-April 7

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Foul Weather Friends

This is the weekend when most of the Christian world remembers Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was one of the few times in His public ministry when Jesus allowed His followers to publicly honor Him.

The event was loaded with significance: Jesus rode on a donkey, the vehicle used by Israelite royalty on ceremonial occasions. The crowds who lined the way spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road, another sign of deference to a member of royalty. And finally, they raised the cry, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" a title used exclusively by one anointed as a king—or Messiah. The future looked bright. But less than a week later Jesus was arraigned, condemned, and crucified.

The Lord has no shortage of disciples when the way is easy. But when the way is difficult and there is little moral support, only those who have made a habit of staying close to Jesus will be able to stay the course.

Appeal: Only a daily relationship with the Lord will help us keep our bearings and know what's truly important. The offerings we bring today indicate our willingness to accompany Jesus through times of plenty as well as in times of want.

Prayer:

15-April 14
Scheduled Offering: World Mission Budget

He is Risen!

Today we are celebrating one of the greatest events in the history of the universe—the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The risks taken by the Godhead to secure our salvation are impossible to imagine. And the benefits of God's sacrifice are too significant to ignore.

Think how our lives have been altered by the simple fact that Jesus conquered death. Death is no longer a mystery that we approach with fear and resignation. "I hold the keys of death and Hades," says Jesus (Rev. 1:18). And because Jesus lives, we know that all who sleep in Him will be resurrected when He returns.

Jesus' resurrection is the finest example of the power of self-sacrificing love heaven and earth will ever see. In the centuries since Jesus' resurrection men, women, and children have reflected this same spirit of self-sacrificing love—spending themselves and their means to share the good news that Jesus conquered death.

Appeal: Today we walk in the footsteps of those first disciples who raised the cry, "He is risen." He is risen indeed! May our generosity be influenced every day by this most significant event.

Prayer:

16-April 21
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Choices

This is the planting season in most parts of the Northern Hemisphere. And although many of us grow gardens, not many of us are dependent on what we grow for survival. But some are, and can identify with the words of Psalm 126:5, 6: “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”

These few words reflect the time when a person faces a choice: He can either use the grain he has saved over the winter to keep his family fed for just a few weeks, or he can sow it for a harvest that will feed his family for another year.

It’s not an easy choice. No wonder they sow in tears!

Appeal: The temptation is always to live for the moment, to do what seems best in the short term. But God’s promise is that those who take the long view—even if it means enduring heartache and tears—will enjoy a bountiful harvest both now and in eternity.

Prayer:

17-April 28
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Our Responsive God

Sometimes Jesus told parables to describe what God is like. Sometimes He told parables so that we would know what God is not like.

In one story Jesus told about a judge who was known for his unresponsiveness: he “neither feared God nor cared about men” (Luke 18:2).

But even this callous, unresponsive character couldn’t resist the nagging of a persistent widow. Her pleading for justice became so tiresome that he eventually said, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming” (vv. 4, 5).

Our heavenly Father doesn’t respond to our requests because He wants us to leave Him alone. Rather, He responds to our needs as any earthly parent would: He grants whatever is for our good, and withholds that which would be less than ideal.

Appeal: God’s gifts to us are not given grudgingly, but with a heart in harmony with the deepest desires of our hearts. May our offerings—our time, our talents, our influence, our finances—be given to Him in the same spirit.

Prayer:

18-May 5

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Enough is Enough

One of David's psalms, evidently written near the end of his life, has these words: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Ps. 37:25).

Most of us can remember a time when we survived on very little—when we had hardly any cash in our pockets and practically nothing in our cupboards. Financial obligations felt like quicksand that threatened to pull us into the depths of desperation.

Yet you may recall such circumstances as times when you felt especially close to God. The reason? You had to throw yourself on the mercy of a loving, personal God. Rather than feeling abandoned, you were thankful for every little token of God's care. You may not have been blessed with unusual riches, but you always had enough.

Appeal: Part of responding to God's lordship in our lives, even when we have plenty, means being willing to recognize our total dependence on Him. Everything we have, everything we are, comes from the hand of a loving, merciful God. And whether we have much or little, we'll never be forsaken.

Prayer:

19-May 12

Scheduled Offering: Disaster and Famine Relief

Meeting the Need

Famine in the Horn of Africa, earthquakes in Turkey, mudslides in Venezuela, the Crisis in Kosovo—these are just a few of the disasters that hit the headlines a year ago. On behalf of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) was there to provide aid to survivors.

ADRA meets needs when disasters strike but also assists with long-term rehabilitation as families rebuild their lives. Each year the Seventh-day Adventist church sets aside one Sabbath to collect a Disaster and Famine Relief Offering to provide resources for ADRA to respond on our behalf.

Appeal: Today is the Sabbath set aside for ADRA. What you give today will make a difference in the number of lives ADRA can change this year.

Prayer:

20-May 19

Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Signs Along the Way

On this date 221 years ago (in 1780), a large part of New England (in North America) experienced a period of unusual darkness. Our Adventist pioneers saw this as a direct fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, "In those days . . . the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light" (Mk. 13:24).

This event, and the falling of the stars on November 13, 1833, combined to give credibility to the message of William Miller and other nineteenth century Adventist preachers.

On May 19, 1780, when a motion was made to adjourn the Connecticut State Legislature because of the darkness, Colonel Abraham Davenport remarked: "I am against an adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty."

Appeal: Until we see Jesus literally coming in glory, our duty is to dedicate ourselves, our talents, our influence, our means—and everything else of value—for Christ's kingdom and His glory.

Prayer:

21-May 26

Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Captivating Love

The Bible tells a tragic story about a husband and wife, Elimelech and Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. When their homeland was crippled by a famine the family went as refugees to the neighboring country of Moab. There the two young men married Moabite wives, Ruth and Orpah.

In the space of about ten years Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion died, widowing the three women: Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to go back to their homes and families, and Orpah did.

But in responding to Naomi, Ruth spoke some of the most tender words in the Bible: “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Something in Naomi’s life, something about the way she reflected God’s love, captivated Ruth. Following God’s leading, Ruth left her past and walked into God’s providence, becoming one of the forebears of the Messiah.

Appeal: What will people see in your life—the way you spend your time, energy, money? Will it lead anyone to leave what’s familiar and join you in your pilgrimage toward the kingdom?

Prayer:

22-June 2

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

The Right Thing

There are some stories so familiar that we can hardly imagine how they must've sounded to those who heard them for the first time. The story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) is one of them.

A man travels from Jerusalem to Jericho, a road infamous for treacherous places where people had been beaten and robbed. By and by a priest comes along, but he does nothing to help. Likewise a Levite passes by without stopping. To Jesus' hearers, this was scandalous. If a priest and Levite won't stop—those who are paid to be religious—who will?

Along comes a Samaritan. The age-old animosity between Jews and Samaritans cannot be overstated. Imagine the enmity between Hutus and Tutsis, or Albanians and Serbians, and you can begin to imagine how Jews felt about Samaritans.

Given our fondness for happy endings, we'd like to think that the Jew and the Samaritan became friends and their families socialized with each other, but that is not likely the case.

The Samaritan did the right thing because it was the right thing, not because of any reward or recognition he might receive.

Appeal: To each of us come opportunities for reflecting God's character in our homes, communities, or businesses. Let's not honor God just for the hope of a reward, but because being faithful to Him in all aspects of our lives is the right thing to do.

Prayer:

23-June 9

Scheduled Offering: Division

Sowing and Reaping

He made a living as a shoemaker. But reports of the non-Christian cultures discovered by British Captain, James Cook, in the Pacific captured the imagination of William Carey and awakened in him a zeal for being a missionary.

Carey became a Baptist preacher and demonstrated a remarkable aptitude for learning foreign languages. He became the first modern Christian missionary to India, and his letters back to his homeland in England proved a powerful stimulus for other missionary endeavors.

William Carey died 167 years ago today. And even though he spent most of his career with little apparent success, today's missionaries are still reaping the seeds of faith sown by Carey and many others.

Today's missionaries go from "everywhere to everywhere." And although the gospel has been proclaimed in most of the countries of the world, there are still places where Christ—His life, death, resurrection, and soon return—is still unknown.

Appeal: Today's mission opportunities aren't just for doctors, ministers, or teachers. We can all participate in the church's mission to take the gospel to the world just by being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Whether we go to a foreign country or not, we can still support those who do with our prayers and financial support.

Prayer:

24-June 16

Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

We are Witnesses

The situation in Israel was precarious. The prophet Elijah had announced God's judgment sentence against wicked King Ahab, and the nation was plunged into a three-year drought. Fields dried out and crops withered. Creeks dried up and rivers shriveled to a trickle.

God led Elijah to the village of Zarephath, on the Northern edge of Israel's territory. There he found a widow preparing to use her last bit of flour and oil for a meal for her and her child. In that desperate situation, Elijah asked the woman to prepare a little food for him.

The woman protested, but Elijah promised that God would take care of her material needs. The woman honored God by putting Elijah's needs above her own. Then, as long as the famine lasted, the widow and her son never lacked food. Every day became a reminder of God's providential care.

Appeal: We are witnesses of God's every day care for our material, emotional, and spiritual needs. We may not wear the latest fashions, drive the nicest cars, or live in the most expensive neighborhoods. But thanks to God we can meet our financial obligations, and we have food and shelter. Isn't it an adventure knowing that we'll never lack any good thing when we make God first in our lives?

Prayer:

25-June 23

Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Impulsive Giving

The progress of God's work depends upon the systematic giving of God's people. But is there room in your giving patterns to do something impulsive?

All four of the Gospels tell the story of a woman who was so captivated by Jesus' love and mercy that she did something totally impulsive.

You know the story: How she spent the equivalent of one year's wages, went to a party to which she was not invited, and anointed Jesus with the expensive perfume. Then, she cleansed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped His feet with her hair.

Some of those who witnessed this display were offended. She was a woman of dubious background, and letting her hair down in public was a symbol of immorality. But she was motivated by one thing: the desire to show Jesus just how much He meant to her.

Appeal: Systematic giving is a good thing. But it's easy to slip into a pattern of doing it out of habit rather than as an expression of our love and devotion to God. If you hear the Holy Spirit asking you to do something impulsive today, why not do it?

Prayer:

26-June 30
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Proof of Our Praise

A popular worship song of the last few years has these words:

“He is Lord, He is Lord,

He is risen from the dead and He is Lord;

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess

That Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Of course, it’s easier to sing about the lordship of Jesus Christ than it is to live it. Christ’s lordship embraces all that we say and do; including how we spend our money and our leisure time.

The time is coming when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10, 11).

It’s not just returning God’s tithe and our offerings that demonstrate our allegiance to Christ and His kingdom; it’s how His lordship is revealed in what we do with all of our money. It isn’t only how we observe the Sabbath that shows our loyalty to God and His principles; it’s how we live our lives the rest of the week as well.

Appeal: Only God knows if, when we sing these words, we really mean them. Everyone else will have to watch and see how we live. That’s where it will be apparent whether Jesus really is Lord of our lives.

Prayer:

27-July 7Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Empirical Evidence

One of history's greatest scientists, Sir Isaac Newton, received his Master of Arts degree from Trinity College, Cambridge on this date in 1668.

Newton is generally credited as the one who "discovered" gravity, but he was also a dedicated student of the Bible. He studied Theology and Church History most of his life, writing more than a million words on these subjects. With his mathematical mind, Newton was especially fascinated by the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and he embraced the principle of prophetic interpretation "a day for each year" (Ezek. 4:6).

Jesus' return is the world's only hope that real love, peace, mercy, and judgment will replace hatred, warfare, violence, and injustice.

As the world spins closer to its destiny, its inhabitants need a clearer demonstration of God's character. Just as the natural world is governed by certain observable laws (such as "what goes up, must come down"), so are our lives governed by spiritual laws, like this one: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed in His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Appeal: May God's character be reflected in all our lives as we dedicate our offerings and all we have to Him.

Prayer:

28—July 14

Scheduled Offering. World Mission

On the Borders of the Promised Land

Joshua was one of the few of his generation who had seen firsthand Israel's deliverance from Egypt, its "baptism" through the Red Sea, and its wanderings through the wilderness for nearly 40 years.

On the border of the Promised Land, only one thing stood between Israel's past and its future: the fortified city of Jericho.

As Joshua left his fellow pilgrims to plan the assault of Jericho, a warrior with drawn sword suddenly appeared. "Are you for us or for our enemies?" asked Joshua.

"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come" (Josh. 5:13, 14).

More important than knowing whether God is on our side is asking whether we are on His side. How often do we have discussions, make decisions, and ask God to bless our plans; instead of deferring to His wisdom, seeking His will, and then making our plans accordingly.

Appeal: Israel had nothing to fear as long as they made themselves available to do God's will, and did it. That same attitude will take us into the promised New Jerusalem and be reflected in all we do for God's kingdom.

Prayer:

29—July 21

Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Anchor Points

Somehow it's become fashionable to believe that if we're faithful to God, we'll never have to experience anything unpleasant or tragic; that God will somehow reward our faithfulness with some kind of heavenly insurance policy.

Yet God's people throughout history have almost always had to endure different kinds of trials in their walk with the Lord.

The wise man in Matthew 7, did not, by building his house on a rock, prevent the storm. But having a solid foundation saved him from losing everything he had.

On this date in 1829 a woman named Priscilla Jane Owens was born in Baltimore, Maryland in the United States. She was a public school teacher and poet. One of her more famous poems had this famous first line: "Will your anchor hold in the storm of life?"

The chorus of that gospel song affirms: "We have an anchor that keeps the soul/Safe and secure while the billows role/Fastened to the Rock which cannot move/Sheltered firm and deep in the Savior's love."

Appeal: The Bible says, "In the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling; He will hide me in the shelter of His tabernacle and set me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:5). That sounds like a safe place for ourselves and all that we've dedicated to Him.

Prayer:

30-July 28

Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

God's Faithfulness

One of the most energetic and effective preachers of the early Christian Church was the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11 he catalogued the many hardships he endured as one of Christ's disciples: "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea . . ." (vv. 24, 25).

But Paul had to acknowledge that, in spite of his suffering for Christ's sake, God had refused to grant him relief from some kind of physical affliction that plagued him; Paul called it "a thorn in my flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7).

More than once Paul begged God to remove this thing, but each time the Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

Appeal: Part of accepting God's lordship in our lives is accepting with humility the trials He asks us to carry, as well as the blessings. We dedicate our tithes and offerings to Him because we know that in all things He will be faithful.

Prayer:

31-August 4

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Exercising Our Options

On this date in 1944 Anne Frank and her family were arrested in Amsterdam. For two years Anne and her family had hidden themselves from the forces that occupied the Netherlands during World War II.

When they were finally discovered, the Frank family, who was Jewish, was deported to concentration camps. Before the war ended, they had all perished, with the exception of Anne's father, Otto Frank.

The Diary of Anne Frank is remarkable for the insight it gives into the life of an adolescent who watched the world pass by while she was hidden away in a desperate attempt to survive.

Our lives, by contrast, are filled with options. We can exercise our power of choice to do what we want, when we want, where we want to do it.

The question is whether we're using our freedom primarily to please ourselves, or whether we're using it to follow the Lord's leading. Being God's stewards means that we have the authority—indeed, the responsibility—to act on behalf of our heavenly Father.

Appeal: Many people today don't have the freedom to live as we do. Let's use our freedom to build up God's kingdom by being generous in returning our tithes and offerings.

Prayer:

32—August 11
Scheduled Offering: Division

For Better, For Worse

In the Bible Job is described as a man who “was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Yet the things that made Job a wealthy man—his flocks, his servants, his family, even his physical health—was systematically taken away from him without explanation.

We tend to reason from cause to effect. If we’re good, God will reward us; if we’re bad, He’ll punish us. Yet the story of Job reminds us that there are cosmic movements we are unaware of that make it seem as if no one is in control.

Job was certainly not a “fair weather friend,” because the Bible says about him: “In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (Job 2:10). In other words, he didn’t blame God for his troubles. He didn’t know the reason for his misfortune, but through it all he maintained his relationship with God. Job said, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15).

Appeal: Like Job, we can honor God in sickness or in health, with much or with little. But through it all, may we never lose sight of the fact that we serve a living God.

Prayer:

33—August 18
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Staying Centered

The gospel of Mark contains a story about a woman who had been sick for 12 years. The record states: “She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors, and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse” (Mk. 5:26).

The physical healing sought by this unfortunate woman is almost exactly the same as the spiritual void that most of us feel at some point in our lives. It’s the feeling of general dissatisfaction you feel when you look inside a refrigerator or pantry stocked with food and you can’t see anything you want to eat.

People sometimes seek to fill this void with pleasure, excitement, wealth, achievement, work, substance abuse, illicit relationships, etc. Indeed, it’s possible to spend all of one’s time, energy, and material goods in the mad dash to fill that spiritual and emotional void.

But only one thing will bring true satisfaction: a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Appeal: If Christ is at the center of our lives, all our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs will be met—abundantly. We can surely afford to be generous with the blessings He has entrusted to us.

Prayer:

34-August 25
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Adding Our Voice

The book of Revelation describes God's throne in heaven as being surrounded by four living creatures who never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

Since these creatures keep repeating this phrase over and over, some might wonder whether this is a form of punishment, like writing on the chalkboard 500 times, "I will not talk in class."

More likely, however, these creatures are symbols of all the heavenly beings who vie for the opportunity to be closest to God's throne and honor Him by singing His praises.

One day soon we'll have the opportunity of joining this chorus of never-ending praise. But we don't have to wait until then to honor God.

The apostle Paul reminded the believers in Corinth: "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Appeal: We can honor God now by simply being faithful to Him in all our everyday duties. When we honor Him in ways both small and large, we demonstrate our willingness to be loyal to Him throughout eternity.

Prayer:

35-September 1

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

God's Agents for Redemption

Before Paul became the great apostle to the Gentiles, he was Saul, the persecutor of the church. Steeped in years of tradition and mis-education, he went from city to city imprisoning people who believed that Jesus is the Messiah.

We know the story of Paul's Damascus Road experience, how he was thrown to the ground by the force of a blinding light, and how he heard a Voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4).

But there's another important character in this drama: the man Ananias. "The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying'" (Acts 9:11).

Just as Saul had to overcome his prejudice about Christ, Ananias had to overcome his presuppositions about Saul. It wasn't enough that Ananias heard God's voice, he had to act on what he heard. Ananias acted, and he became the first Christian to cooperate with God in getting Saul on the right track.

Appeal: God uses human agents like Ananias all the time. They are the people who go where God wants them to go, do what God wants them to do, and say what God wants them to say. Are you one of those people? Am I?

Prayer:

36—September 8
Scheduled Offering: World Mission Budget

Being a Survivor

On this date in 70 A.D., 60,000 Roman troops, under the leadership of General Titus, captured the city of Jerusalem following a six-month siege. More than a million people perished in the siege, and following the city's capture another 97,000 people were sold into slavery.

Jesus, speaking decades before the destruction of Jerusalem, warned His followers, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Lk. 21:20). And because they heeded Jesus' warning, "Not one Christian perished," according to Ellen White (*The Great Controversy*, p. 30). Taking advantage of a brief, providential break in the siege, Christians fled the city and saved their lives.

It's very likely that those who survived couldn't take everything as they escaped the city. They were forced to make choices.

Although it's tempting to believe we can have it all, we still have to make choices. We either make service to God our highest priority, or we serve our own selfish interests to the detriment of our relationship with God.

Appeal: Sacrifice is a fact of life on the way to the kingdom. But it's also a fact that God will abundantly bless whatever we dedicate to Him.

Prayer:

37-September 15
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Tell It to the World

On this date in 1874 Adventist pioneer, John Nevins Andrews, his 16-year-old son Charles, and his 12-year-old daughter Mary, boarded the steamship, Atlas, in Boston Harbor. They were bound for Liverpool, and on to Neufchatel, Switzerland. The Andrews were responding to an invitation from the General Conference to become the first officially-sponsored Seventh-day Adventist workers to serve outside of North America.

In the 127 years since Pastor Andrews and his family left their family and friends to make new friends for Christ in Europe, countless gospel workers have served in challenging circumstances, often at great personal risk. Their spirit of sacrifice has left us a movement that literally spans the world.

Today around the world there are more Adventist gospel workers than we had members back in 1874. And although many things have changed about how gospel workers get to their place of labor, and what methods they use to communicate the gospel once they get there, one thing that hasn't changed is how our faithful giving keeps the church growing.

Appeal: Whether we're talking about our own local congregation, or a solitary witness taking the gospel to a frontier where it is not yet known, our systematic, sacrificial giving is making a difference that will only be revealed in eternity.

Prayer:

38-September 22
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Beyond the Call of Duty

One of the most romantic stories in the Old Testament concerns Abraham, his servant Eliezer, and a young lady unknown to either of them.

Eliezer had been commissioned to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham's son. When he reached his destination, he asked God for a sign: "See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac" (Gen. 24:13, 14).

No sooner had Eliezer said "amen" than a "very beautiful" young woman appeared carrying a water jar on her shoulder. When Eliezer asked her for a drink, she responded by giving him a drink and volunteering to water his camels also.

While most of the world's inhabitants satisfy themselves with doing as little as they can, this story shows that God places a great premium on those who go "beyond the call of duty."

Appeal: By her act of selflessness, Rebekah demonstrated that she was not only familiar with basic hospitality, but she was acquainted with the One who loved the world so much that He set in motion a plan of redemption. May our lives reflect that same spirit as we dedicate to Him God's tithe and our offerings.

Prayer:

39-September 29 Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Beyond Bookkeeping

It may be that religious people present God with a challenge as real as those who have yet to become acquainted with Him.

That's because outward forms of religious practice can sometimes mask the fact that the fire and the passion has gone out of the Christian's life. Public worship can become a mere ritual, returning tithe and giving offerings can degenerate into a mere exercise in bookkeeping.

The Lord told Isaiah, "Is not this the kind of fast I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice . . ., to set the oppressed free . . . ? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked to clothe him . . ." (Isa. 58:6, 7).

After we've given ourselves and our means for the support of the Lord's work in His church, there are still times when our time and financial resources are needed to help solve some of society's problems.

Appeal: When we do what we can to meet the needs of society around us, the Lord's promise is sure: "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I" (Isa. 58:9).

Prayer:

40-October 6

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

God's Flawed Family

One of the clearest indications that God sees things from a different perspective than we do is in the list of Jesus' descendants found in Matthew 1. The list is remarkable for two reasons: First, for the number of familiar names in the list—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Hezekiah, etc. All have character flaws familiar to us.

The second reason this list is remarkable is because of the names of four women who are part of Jesus' lineage. Women were generally ignored in olden times, and the women listed had their own rather "colorful" pasts.

Tamar (v. 3) tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into having children with her.

Rahab (v. 5) was a prostitute. Yet she became part of God's family and became the great-great-grandmother of King David.

Ruth (v. 5) was adopted into God's family after being born in Moab, the homeland of Israel's traditional enemies.

Bathsheba (v. 6) had an illicit affair with King David, yet she became one of Jesus' ancestors.

Appeal: God's family isn't perfect. Everyone has to live with some regrets. Still, there's a place in God's heart and in His family for us all. Let's remember God's amazing grace as we return to Him our tithes and give our offerings today.

Prayer:

41—October 13
Scheduled Offering: Division

Judged by Our Actions

On this date in 539 B. C., the Persian armies of Cyrus the Great captured the city of Babylon and ended the reign of King Belshazzar.

For years the Babylonian kingdom had been in moral and physical decline. In this setting the prophet Daniel remained a standard of righteousness and morality. It was Daniel who read God's judgment sentence that was written on the wall of Belshazzar's banquet hall by a bloodless hand: "You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting" (Dan. 5:27).

Apart from the heavenly judgment, to which every person is subject, we are also being judged by the people whose lives intersect our own. Our co-workers, fellow students, neighbors, and family members are evaluating the genuineness of our religious experience. Our actions are the criteria by which people judge us—and God.

Appeal: How we live, work, play, spend our money and our leisure time are all indications of our relationship with Jesus. Do we reflect God's love, mercy, and justice in all areas of our lives, and do our actions show it?

Prayer:

42-October 20
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Our Only Hope

“When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, you have taught me to say:
‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’”

Many of us are familiar with these words; we’re also familiar with the circumstances under which they were written. American attorney Horatio G. Spafford was waiting for his wife and four daughters to make the ocean journey from Europe to the United States, when in 1873 he learned that the ship on which they were traveling sank as a result of a ship collision. He received a telegraph message from his wife with just two words: “Saved alone.”

Mr. Spafford boarded a ship bound for Europe, and at a spot near where his four daughters drowned, he penned those famous words.

Horatio Spafford was born in 1828, 173 years ago today. Although inspired by a great personal tragedy, Spafford’s words have, for decades, reminded us that God is the source of spiritual strength—even in the face of unimaginable grief.

Appeal: God is our only hope that someday our grief will turn into joy. And we can all resonate with the last stanza of Spafford’s verse:

“And, Lord, haste the day when our faith shall be sight.
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend—
Even so—it is well with my soul.”

Prayer:

43-October 27
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

God of the Unimaginable

Nestled in the middle of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is this amazing promise: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).

We all know that God is able to answer our prayers, but this verse tells us that He is able to do "immeasurably more" than what we ask.

But that's not all. According to this verse, God can do more than all we ask or imagine. In other words, God can do the unimaginable.

Those of us who have been followers of Jesus for any length of time can trace the way God has guided our lives in ways that we would have considered unimaginable.

And the best is yet to come. About the glories of eternal life Paul also wrote: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Imagine, all the creativity, all the resources of heaven, dedicated to making eternity a place of endless delights.

Appeal: All the money in the world can't buy as much as a stepping stone in the New Jerusalem. But the financial resources we've been entrusted with now can do a great deal of good in the hands of a God who can do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

Prayer:

44-November 3

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

A Few Sticks of Furniture

The story is told about a young couple who, when they decided to get married, could fit everything they owned inside a small automobile.

Returning from their honeymoon, they went to visit the wife's parents, who went through some of their old furniture and found a few things they could give the newly married couple—a table and a few chairs, a bed, a night stand, a bookcase, etc. The parents gave the newly married couple so much that they had to rent a small trailer to haul the furniture to their own apartment.

As they were leaving, the groom kept saying to his father-in-law, "You're too kind. We really don't deserve this. How can I ever thank you for your kindness!" On and on he went.

Finally, his father-in-law replied, "Look, I don't want to hear anymore about it. I've already given you the most precious thing I have—I've given you my daughter. What's so special about a few sticks of furniture?"

If anyone doubts God's love for us, all he or she has to do is look at the sacrifice paid for our redemption: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

Appeal: Gratitude and generosity are heaven-born characteristics. May they be born in our hearts today as we return God's tithe and our offerings.

Prayer:

45-November 10

Scheduled Offering: Week of Sacrifice (Global Mission)

Outside the Comfort Zone

It's hard to imagine there was a time when Seventh-day Adventists believed the Gospel Commission extended no further than the Atlantic Ocean in the east, and the Pacific Ocean in the west. They believed that going to every nation, kindred, tongue and people could be done right at home in the United States.

Fortunately, it wasn't long before the church realized its mission was for the whole world, and today we see tremendous progress. We've scattered literature like leaves of autumn. We've sent thousands of missionaries. We've broadcast satellite TV programs. We've established work in 205 countries.

Yet major parts of the world still remain virtually untouched by the good news about Jesus. Today we need a fresh and larger vision for the needs of the world. Once again, like the early Adventists, we need to move outside our comfort zones and traditional thought patterns, and find new and fresh ways to reach the unreached with hope.

Appeal: There's nothing more important in all the world than sharing the love of Jesus with people who don't know Him. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing the new life and hope that Jesus brings. Today you can help reach the unreached with hope by supporting the Annual Sacrifice offering. 100 % of your offering today goes to frontline Global Mission projects around the world.

Prayer:

46-November 17
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Publishing Good News

In the fall of 1848, at a “Sabbath Conference” in Topsham, Maine, James White said, “I have wanted to print our message for some time. But before we can do so, we must have money. I certainly have none to launch such an enterprise.”

But on this date, November 17, 1848, at another general meeting of early Adventists in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Ellen White was taken into vision. When it was over, she spoke to her husband: “I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown me to be like streams of light that went clear around the world” (*Life Sketches*, p. 125).

The fulfillment of Mrs. White’s vision came the following year when James White responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit and published the first issue of *The Present Truth* (forerunner of the *Adventist Review*).

Appeal: For 153 years the Adventist publishing work has been one of the most effective means of preparing the world for Jesus’ return. That everyone can know the gospel in his or her own language is the mission of Adventist publishing, radio, and television ministries. And that is accomplished by our faithful financial support.

Prayer:

47-November 24
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Jesus' Ordinary Friends

Everyone knows about Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha; the one Jesus resurrected after he had been dead for four days. Beyond that, the only thing we know about Lazarus is that Jesus called him, "our friend" (Jn. 11:11). That's it.

If Lazarus was a builder, we don't know what he built. If Lazarus was a writer, we don't know what he wrote. If Lazarus was a businessman, we don't know what his business was.

Lazarus is a lot like most of us. When we die there won't be a building with our name on it, there won't be a bridge or highway named in our memory, there won't be book with our name on the cover; we're just ordinary people.

Yet we can be sure that Jesus would not have called Lazarus to life if there wasn't something special about him. And that special thing was simply this: he was a friend of Jesus.

Appeal: Our value to Christ's kingdom comes not from talents prized by the world, but from our willingness to dedicate ourselves to His service. It is not the amount of our tithe and offerings that matter as much as our willingness to reflect God's generosity in our giving and in our lives.

Prayer:

48-December 1

Scheduled Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Today is the first day of Advent, the first of four weekends in which most Christians joyfully remember Christ's first coming, and eagerly look forward to His coming again.

The Christmas story is full of ironies: the Sovereign of the universe made His appearance as a defenseless baby. Jesus' parents, by worldly standards, had little to offer in terms of wealth or social standing.

The Bible says about Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, he "was a righteous man" (Matt. 1:19). Other than that, the Bible is silent. But in spite of Joseph's lack of theological training or his modest social standing, God saw in him a worthy candidate as Jesus' earthly father.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary he said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). Again, it isn't likely that Mary had any higher than average intellectual or social advantages. But something elevated Joseph and Mary above any other couple on earth at the time.

Appeal: The primary qualifications that God looked for in Jesus' earthly parents are the same things He looks for in us: humility and a desire to be used by Him. The Advent season is a good time to remember that one of the greatest gifts God give us is the opportunity to use our talents for His service.

Prayer:

49-December 8
Scheduled Offering: Division

A Frightening Scenario

This second week of Advent is a good time to spend a moment reflecting on those who first appeared to honor Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus' first admirers were shepherds, the bottom-dwellers of their contemporary society. Shepherds were considered so undesirable that they weren't allowed to testify in a court of law.

The Magi were foreign astrologers and worshipers of "other gods." They knew the ancient prophecies of Israel, just as they were familiar with the oracles of ancient Egypt, Persia, or Babylon.

Yet it was these two groups—shepherds and Magi—who first broadcast the news that a Baby had been born a King in Bethlehem. While most of Israel practiced its religious rituals, God was revealing this most daring act of divine intervention.

The implications of this scenario are frightening to consider. Could it be that while we're preoccupied with performing our religious exercises, God is using other individuals and groups to prepare the world for Jesus' coming?

Appeal: For the most part, the Jews missed Jesus' first advent because, in part, they believed that outward practice is more important than an inner life of dedication and commitment.

Dedicating our tithes and offerings to God is a symbol that He owns the rest of our lives as well.

Prayer:

50-December 15
Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Knowing God

We can't let this third week of Advent go by without mentioning a couple individuals who are central to the story of Jesus' birth.

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout" (Lk. 2:25). The Bible says that through the Holy Spirit God had told Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah.

There was also a prophetess, Anna, 84 years old. "She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying" (Lk. 2:37).

God rewarded the faithfulness of both Simeon and Anna by allowing them to see and then proclaim the coming of the Messiah. But how was it that these two recognized the Baby with Mary and Joseph while everyone else—even the priests and teachers—failed to discern His presence?

Could part of the answer be that the priests and rulers spent their lives knowing things about God, while Anna and Simeon dedicated themselves to knowing God personally.

Appeal: There's no shortage of people who know a few facts about God like they would know about any other historical personality. But it's quite a different thing to know God as a friend, a Savior, a companion.

May our lives reflect the fact that God is a reality in all our lives.

Prayer:

51-December 22
Scheduled Offering: Conference/Union

Christ's Irrational Kingdom

Today, on the fourth week of Advent, we want to spend a moment reflecting on this kingdom Jesus came to establish.

At Christmas we celebrate the coming of a King, a King who was born in a stable. He was a King who came, not to demand homage, but to give away His life in service to His subjects; and ultimately to die at the hands of those He came to love into His kingdom.

Jesus said during His ministry, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39). He said, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:21). He said, "Whoever wants to be first must [be] a slave" (Matt. 20:27).

Appeal: In a world that honors the mighty, the rich, the famous, Jesus said His kingdom will be filled with the poor, the meek, the merciful. But the path of service to God and our fellow creatures is bright with joy, significance, and meaning. And the rewards of walking that path will satisfy our material and spiritual needs both now and forever. That is Christ's gift to us.

Our gift to God is when we humble ourselves to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

Prayer:

52-December 29

Scheduled Offering: Church Budget

Living Confidently in Uncertainty

On this date in 1876, popular American hymn writer, Philip P. Bliss, died when the train in which he and his wife were riding plunged off a bridge into a ravine 60 feet below. Bliss died at the age of 38.

Philip Bliss wrote many hymns during his short life, including “Wonderful Words of Life,” “Let the Lower Lights Be Burning,” “I Will Sing of My Redeemer,” and “I Gave My Life for Thee.”

In a few days we’ll begin turning the pages of a new calendar. We don’t know what the next 12 months will bring. We like to think that the future will be bright and free from sorrow and disappointment. But since we live in a sinful world the best we can hope for is that God will be with us through the next 12 months, as He’s been with us during the last 12 months.

The Bible contains hundreds of great promises, and perhaps this one is a good one for the new year: “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Appeal: In an uncertain world, God can be trusted with our lives, and everything else we hold dear.

Prayer: