



DYNAMIC

Steward

the power to live to submit to abide to give to serve

April-June, 2002²⁰⁰²

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Volume 6 Number 2

Blessed Judgment

*Clifford Goldstein, Editor
Adult Bible Study Guide*

General Conference Sabbath School

It has been said that there is no justice. Perhaps so, at least in this life. But if God exists and He is just, then justice will be realized. Sooner or later we must answer for every evil we have done: for the sullied secrets that occasionally occupy our days and our dreams; for all those wrongs that we long ago justified and then, conveniently forgot. Imagine facing every sinful thought, word, and deed at once, with all excuses, rationalizations, and justifications swept away by the gazing eye of an all-seeing, all-knowing God.

There's no question—judgment will come: God would not be God without it. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ec 12:14, KJV).

The good news of the gospel, however, is that though we face judgment, we don't have to face it alone, with all our sinful deeds to condemn us. For God is not only just; He is merciful. At the cross, His justice and His mercy met. The penalty for sin was paid. That's justice. It was paid in full by Jesus. That's mercy.

The heart of the gospel is this: because of His great love for us, God Himself paid the penalty for our sins, so that we might not only be free from sin's penalty, but declared righteous in Him.

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor 5:19, KJV).

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21, KJV).

No matter who we are or what our past has been, we can here and now (not to mention in the final judgment) stand perfect before God because of Jesus and the provision He has made on our behalf. This is the "good news." This is the foundation of all we believe as Christians. Once we understand this, once we accept this, once we make this promise our own, our lives will be changed. For we will be "born again," and have the assurance now and in the final judgment that we *are* the children of God.

What Must I Do to be Saved?

HMS Richards, Senior
Founder of the Voice of Prophecy

Introduction

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Ac 16:31). This reply to the question of the jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" (verse 30) is clear and right to the point. And the answer ought to be clear when the question is of such supreme importance. Everything depends upon it. Thousands—yes, millions are staking their hopes of eternal life upon it.

- *Ask the group to define and discuss the meaning of the word, "gospel."*

The word *gospel* means "good speaking, good words, or good news." It answers that one tremendously important question, "How can a man or woman be saved?" How can we be delivered from the death penalty of sin and be restored to divine favor as though we had never fallen?

I have only one doctrine

It is said that when one of America's greatest preachers lay dying, a loved one asked, "What doctrines do you believe now?"

His reply? "When I first became a minister, I had 100 doctrines. When I was 30 years old, I had 50 doctrines. When I was 50, I had ten doctrines, but now, at the end of my life, I have but one!" When eager lips urged him to name it, he said, "Now, at the valley of the shadow, my one doctrine is—I am a great sinner and Jesus is a great Savior!"

- *Compare this one doctrine and Acts 16:31. Ask the question, "Can we save ourselves?" In light of this question, discuss Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 8:7.*

We may have a desire for the better way, but we do not have the power to live it. We admit that God's way is best, but we *do* the very opposite. This mental and spiritual conflict is pictured in Romans 7:14, 15, 18, and 24. *Read these texts together.*

The cry of Romans 7:24 is the cry of millions: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" The answer to verse 24 is found in verse 25: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus our Lord!"

Look, and live

There is help in Jesus. We are to look away from our failures ... and sins, and look to Him for help. We are invited to "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

- *Read and discuss the following passages or verses: Numbers 21:5-9 and John 3:3, 9, and 14-18.*

When the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents, all who were willing to look—just *look*—at the brazen serpent raised up on a pole (or cross), were healed. So if the sinner will just look in faith to Christ as crucified for him, he too will be healed from the disease of sin. It is wonderfully simple and simply wonderful—*just look and live!* It is written in Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

Repeat the best text of all the 31,000 verses in the whole Bible—John 3:16. Repeat it over and over to yourself.

Notice carefully what this text includes:

God—an *almighty authority*

So loved the world—the *mightiest motive*

That He gave His only begotten Son—the *greatest gift*

That whosoever—the *widest welcome*

Believeth in Him—the *easiest escape*

Should not perish—a *divine deliverance*

But have everlasting life—a *priceless possession*

Our salvation depends upon the love of God. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1J 3:1).

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life" (Ro 5:10, 11)!



This study is taken from the book, *25 Sermons: After 25 Years on the Air*, VOP, 1955. Unfortunately it is out of print.

Four Souls

Brendon Prutzman, Youth Pastor
Spencerville SDA Church, Silver Spring, Maryland

The book *Four Souls* is an inspiring read for anyone. I found that it primarily reaches out to upper high school and college age youth. The book is about four college friends who set out in search of the “epic life.” They decide to take a year off from school, and any other plans they may have made for the immediate future, and challenge each other by traveling around the world doing mission work.

Four Souls is packed with stories that really make you think about how you approach life and what you are truly seeking from it. It especially makes you reflect on living every day and what you are doing to develop your life as a Christian example in the world.

Another area the volume illuminates is the relationship between the four men. There are journal entries from each of them throughout the book. At times they are close to driving each other crazy, but instead of getting “stuck,” they use their frustrations to “grow” and to better the group. They carry out group exercises by talking and working through problems. There is undeniable value in picking up on some of the insights they gain through this process.



by Trey Sklar, Jedd Medefind,
Mike Peterson, and Matt Kronberg
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quotes

The Gospel . . .

Talk about the questions of the day; there is but one question, and that is the gospel. It can and will correct everything needing correction.—William Ewart Gladstone

The gospel belongs to the poor and sorrowful, and not to princes and courtiers who live in continual joy and delight in security, void of all tribulation.—Martin Luther

When we think of the atonement we are apt to think only of what man gains. We must remember what it cost God and what it costs him now when men refuse his love.—Frank Fitt

Let us not forget that the crucifixion of Christ was, and was intended to be to all the intelligences of the universe, the most significant exhibition of the love of God. “Herein was love.”—J. Gilchrist Lawson

We can learn nothing of the gospel except by feeling its truths. There are some sciences that may be learned by the head, but the science of Christ crucified can only be learned by the heart.—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The gospel is the fulfillment of all hopes, the perfection of all philosophy, the interpreter of all revelations, a key to all the seeming contradictions of truth in the physical and moral world.—Hugh Miller.

My heart has always assured and reassured me that the gospel of Christ must be a Divine reality.—Daniel Webster

The shifting systems of false religion are continually changing their places; but the gospel of Christ is the same forever. While other false lights are extinguished, this true light ever shineth.—Theodore Ledyard Cuyler

In the cross, God descends to bear in his own heart the sins of the world. In Jesus, he atones at unimaginable cost to himself.—Woodrow A. Geier

Stewards of the Gospel

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
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It's good news! It's the gospel! And it is a battle ground. We fight over the meaning. We debate the theology. We argue over its implications. But we apply it only rarely. In the midst of battles which divide the church, we brawl over law and grace. We call each other names, form our exclusive clubs and isolate ourselves in our theological palaces, comforting each other that we are right. Meanwhile, thousands struggle with lives of quiet desperation—seeking to do what is right and hoping to someday find the peace Jesus promised. The average contemporary Christian has a brain full of information, but a head full of confusion and a heart full of pain. Never before has so much been written and debated about the gospel. And never before has the gospel, the “good news” of salvation, been more needed.

A new reality

Stewardship, as the human side of the lordship of Jesus Christ, is based on the gospel. It is the process of integrating the gospel into every area of life. In a day when the world seems to have lost hope, the gospel is still “good news.” In lives desperately seeking understanding and hope, the gospel still brings a new reality. Where sin binds human hearts and lives, the gospel still has the power to shatter the shackles that chain our souls. And we are stewards of this “good news.”

Paul states, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1Cor 4:1-2, ESV*).

Among these mysteries, Paul includes Christ (Col 2:2, 1T 3:16), Christ in us (Col 1:26-27), as well as the gospel (Ep 6:19).

So our stewardship includes how we manage or deal with the gospel—the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. While the gospel can be defined or stated in many different ways, with many different theological nuances, for me the simplest is the best. The gospel is the good news that Jesus has solved the problem of sin in our lives—past, present, and future. He has done everything necessary to save us.

Knowing is not enough

However, simply knowing the concept of the gospel is not enough. Even the devil knows the theory. Being stewards of this mystery of the gospel means we must go beyond the words to understanding, accepting, and integrating this incredible “good news” into our daily lives.

The term “mystery” implies there is something about the gospel that transcends human understanding or explanation. We cannot know the fullness of God’s love or the depths of His pain in saving us. We cannot comprehend the incredible wonder of heaven descending to earth—God made flesh. We can only accept it by faith. Yet, we can experience the reality of salvation. We can know eternal life the moment we believe (1J 5:13).

There are several arenas in which we manage or are stewards of the gospel:

1 *The first is our own walk with God.* Accepting Jesus as Savior is only the first step. Each day we must choose to submit to His eternal reality. Accepting Jesus as Lord, living within us (Ep 3:16-19), is the way we “apply” Him to daily life. Each issue is a choice—to live on our own or in Him. Each moment is a choice—to live in the reality of a sinful world or the certainty of God’s kingdom. Choosing to seek His kingdom puts everything else in the right perspective (Mt 6:33). By faith we accept the Holy Spirit (Ga 3:14) and learn to listen to God’s voice guiding our lives and making the gospel real in the details of living. Will we live by faith (our relationship with God) or will we choose to live by human reason and effort?

2 *The second arena for stewardship of the gospel is in the way we confront the world and its attractions.* Again Paul leads us into the mystery of the gospel: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Ga 6:14, ESV). Here we are faced with the choice of the world or Calvary. We can daily choose to die, to be crucified in Christ. One of the most profound truths of the gospel is that we have died in Christ and been raised to a new life in Him (Ro 6:1-14). We are participants in His death and partakers in His life. Are we willing to accept the reality that we are crucified to the world? We can choose to move forward in faith, serving God and His kingdom. We are in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:14-18). Thus, we invade the kingdoms of this world with the kingdom of God (Mt 24:14). We proclaim the gospel through lives lived in the presence of the King of Kings.

Never before has so much been written and debated about the gospel. And never before has the gospel, the “good news” of salvation, been more needed.

For the gospel experienced, leads to the gospel extended.

3 *The third arena where we are stewards of the gospel is in our relationships with those around us. As we experience the authenticity of grace, we can choose to integrate the gospel into the way we accept and treat others. Once again we are faced with the choice to live by faith. We can choose to see others in the light of the gospel. Because they are the focus of God’s love, we can choose to love others, even when they are unlovable. While rejecting the sin, we can choose to accept the sinner. We can choose to forgive as we have experienced forgiveness. Only one who has experienced the gospel can extend that gospel to others. Those who cannot extend grace to others have not truly experienced grace themselves. For the gospel experienced leads to the gospel extended. We faithfully function as stewards of God’s mysteries as we share it with those God places around us.*

Then how can the gospel attain this power in our lives? How can we reach this experience? It all begins with accepting it ourselves—accepting by faith the reality of Christ dying for us and Christ loving us. Listen to Paul’s words:

“That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ep 3:16-19, ESV).

Partners in Grace

As we focus on Jesus Christ and His love, the Holy Spirit brings understanding and fills us with His fullness. The only real effort we can make is to focus on God and His love—to fix our eyes on Him. As we do, the gospel takes possession of our hearts and minds. His presence transforms our relationships and behaviors. Through surrender we become stewards—partners in grace.

Through choice, we can accept this reality in our daily lives. We can choose to be stewards of this mystery, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). We can live and share the reality—the kingdom of God has come!

** ESV is the English Standard Version, a contemporary biblical translation in the tradition of the Revised Standard Version.*

stewardship window a joyful experience!

The treasurer’s report of the Sarawak Mission revealed the total tithe received from the Putah Seventh-day Adventist Church for the year was fifty cents. How could that be? The village had about 20 families and most of them were farmers. When the leaders asked the members the reason for the lack of tithe, they replied, “We have very little cash.” The church restudied the biblical meaning of returning tithe to God. They were encouraged to return, in kind, a tenth of their increase to the Lord.

Church members argued that the mission just needed their money. In the midst of their anger and confusion, an elder stood up and said, “Please listen to what I have to say!” He challenged each one to return a tithe and offerings from the bounty of God’s blessings for a three-month trial period.

The next Sabbath, smiling members brought to the altar, fruits, vegetables, rice, eggs, and even live chickens! On Sunday two deacons sold the items at the market and took the cash to the treasurer. The next week many more members participated in the worship of giving. It was thrilling to see their happiness as they contributed their tithes and offerings. Since this part of worship became such a joyful experience, they decided to continue for a whole year. At the end of the year the church reported \$5,000 in tithes and offerings! The village became a model to other village churches.

Three years after the Putah members made their covenant, they noticed that people from nearby villages were flocking to their village to help them harvest their produce. One elder asked, “Why are you coming to help us?”

The visitors replied, “Don’t you know that your farms are the only ones that have not been destroyed by rats, and your village receives rain so that your fruit trees bear much fruit? You must have something we do not have!”

What a beautiful testimony to God’s love and how He works to bless His people. And, in turn, how He uses us to bless others.

by **Romulo Daquila**
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The Parable of the Great Banquet

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Introduction

I would like to introduce you to the unsung hero of the parable of the great banquet. In this parable the beauty of the gospel message is illuminated. Found in Luke 14: 15-24, the parable is often thought of as a parable of the judgment.

A key point of this story was that the opportunity to accept Christ would go first to the Jews, and after that, to the Gentiles. Like all of Christ's parables, however, there is a message for us today. As we set the stage for this gospel illustration, let me describe the characters of the story.

Enter, the master

In our parable, the master resolves to have a great feast. We are not told why he is giving the feast. We can assume that he has the gift of hospitality and loves to be with his friends. In an act of affection, he decides to invite his friends to a great banquet. Nothing but the finest will be served to his guests!

When the people do not show up, he instructs his servant to go out and find others to invite to the feast. He is determined that his banquet room will be full. The master in the story represents our Heavenly Father who has invited us to attend the great marriage feast of the Lamb (Rv 19:9).

Next, the servant

As was the custom, the servant would visit the homes of the guests two times to invite them to a feast. The first time he invited the people was to determine how many would attend so that the proper preparations could be made. The second visit was to remind them that the feast was ready, and that they should come.

It was common practice in a day without quartz watches and alarm clocks for the master to send his servant around some time before the feast to remind his guests. In that way, none would be embarrassed by forgetting or showing up late. We know there was a second visit because the text says "At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for the banquet is now ready'" (verse 17). We also know the servant visited every house because the text says "but they all began to make excuses" (verse 18). I believe the work of the servant describes for us the work of the Holy Spirit today.

The truth was that they had changed their minds. Other things had become more important.

The invited guests

We know the guests accepted the first invitation. When approached by the servant, they said something like: "We feel honored to be invited by your master. We are very fond of him. Tell him that we will be present for his great feast." At the time, nothing seemed to be more important than attending the feast of their beloved friend.

When the servant came around the second time, they gave excuses as to why they wouldn't come. The excuses—"I have bought a field, I have bought oxen, and I have just married"—were not the real reasons they weren't attending the feast. The truth was that they had changed their minds. Other things had become more important. They didn't want to attend the feast now. I believe this group represents those of us who have accepted Christ as our Savior but have lost our first love experience and our excited anticipation of attending the marriage feast of the Lamb.

To accept an invitation and then not attend was a great insult to a host. It was a sign that the host was held in very low esteem. It was a declaration of hostility.

The real guests

A description of those who ultimately attended the feast is found in verse 20. They were not the guests invited first. But they were the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. They came, not from the impressive mansions of the suburbs, but from the streets and alleys of the city slums. We can only imagine how they felt. One moment they were scorned by most of the people in the city; the next moment they were sitting in a lavish banquet hall where the rich and famous usually eat.

The great master greeted them as his special guests and sat down with them to a wonderful feast. He treated them as *if they were* rich and famous. This gathering shows us that anyone who accepts the invitation will be welcome at the feast! Our presence at the banquet is not based upon anything we have done, but that we simply have accepted the invitation.

The unsung hero

To discover the unsung hero, we need to focus on the last part of verse 22 and verse 23. The master said to the servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

The servant replied, “What you ordered has been done.” He had already carried out his master’s command, even before the order was issued! For when the servant realized that none of those first invited were going to attend, on his way back to the master’s home, he stopped along the way to invite others to come to the feast. He knew how disappointed his master would be if the banquet hall was not full. Therefore, he kept knocking on doors and giving invitations. He didn’t stop until it was time for the feast to begin.

Lessons of the gospel

The master kept sending the servant until the people refused to come. When I had my “first love” experience I was excited about attending the great marriage feast of the Lamb. There was nothing more important to me than being ready for the return of Jesus. As time went by I found other things taking precedence and drifted away from a close relationship with God.

Then the Holy Spirit would again knock on the door of my heart to remind me of my invitation. I sensed how much God loved me and how much He wanted to spend eternity with me. Again, I would commit to making Him first in my life. More time would pass, and there would be another knock on the door of my heart. The good news of the gospel is that the Holy Spirit keeps knocking, reminding us of the feast. And He will do so until, at our last breath, or at the end of probation, we tell God we do not want to come.

The master was so determined to have his banquet hall full, he told the servant to “Make them come in” (verse 23). Every effort is being made to save us. Every resource of heaven is being employed in the great battle between Christ and Satan. The Holy Spirit will not cease His work on our behalf until we absolutely refuse to attend the feast!

Conclusion

As you are encountered with this message, you will again hear the voice of the Spirit inviting you to attend the feast.

You might feel you are unworthy to attend, or perhaps you have lost your interest, and so you decide not to come. He will remind you that *Jesus* is worthy. His righteousness will be judged, not yours. He will remind you how much God wants you to be at the great marriage feast of the Lamb.

This gathering shows us that anyone who accepts the invitation will be welcome at the feast! Our presence at the banquet is not based upon anything we have done, but that we simply have accepted the invitation.



The Gospel According to Cradle Roll

Bonita Joyner Shields
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This sermon is an abridged version of Pastor Shield's farewell message given at Spencerville SDA Church on January 26, 2002.

Introduction

In life there are lessons we learn along the way. Psychologists tell us that if these lessons are not learned at a particular developmental stage, we will remain “stuck” and must emotionally revisit that stage of life before we can resolve the issue and move on.

I invite you to do some revisiting with me this morning. Think way back in time, past elementary school, past kindergarten, all the way to Cradle Roll. Cradle Roll is exciting! When Kyle was two years old, he would stop and give me a big hug during the week. But on Sabbath, he would rush through the foyer and run right past me without so much as a nod—because he was going to Cradle Roll! What is it about Cradle Roll that is so attractive? I don't see adults rushing through the foyer to get to class!

There is a lesson in Cradle Roll that draws young and old like a magnet. This lesson is described by noted twentieth century theologian, Karl Barth, as the most profound theological truth he knew. The lesson of Cradle Roll is the foundation of the gospel. Yet, it is this very lesson that I believe many of us have not learned.

What is this lesson?

*Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so,
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong.*

As Adventists we have been quite successful with indoctrination. And doctrines are important. When properly understood, they give us a full and accurate understanding of God's character. But if we do not understand the lesson of Cradle Roll, it doesn't matter what else we do. We will be “stuck” in our Christian development. If this lesson goes unlearned, nothing we do or believe will have eternal significance.

Let's return to Cradle Roll together and review this well-learned little “ditty” we sing to our children. It is packed with the gospel, so let's unpack it together.

Jesus loves me . . .

Ah, what a familiar phrase. As infants, we hear it while we are rocked to sleep . . . as children we sing it in Sabbath School . . . as adults we sing it to our children.

Paul's letter to the Romans tells us about this love: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Ro 5:6-8).

This passage tells us that God loved us so much, He willingly offered His only Son—a part of Himself—to come to Earth, live among us, and die by the hands of ungrateful, unholy people. Why? So those same people would have a chance to live the abundant life here and in eternity.

It would be difficult to send your child to a far-off land to people who were eager to *know* God. But, would you send your only child—a part of yourself—to save a

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 5:6-8

bunch of ingrates? To people who had no desire to learn about God, who would humiliate and kill your child?

That's why God is God. He loves perfectly. When we mess up and fall flat on our faces, He still loves us. When we shake our fist at God and yell, "I hate you!" He still loves us. When we "run away from home," certain that there is a better way to live than His way, He still loves us.

I have heard it said to children, "Jesus will only love you if you're good." What an abomination to the love of God! While we were still sinners—ungrateful, unloving, Jesus died for us. *Have you ever been loved like that? Do you believe it is even possible?* As wonderful as this love is, it won't make much difference in our lives without this next element.

Knowledge of the fundamentals of Adventism is important. But what happens when your spouse leaves you? Or when your child dies? What happens when the hopes and dreams of a lifetime shatter into a million pieces and flow effortlessly through your fingers like sand?

... This I know

Many of you have heard that Jesus loves you, but, *do you know it? Do you really believe that He loves you?* Or are you like my friend? She has grown up in the church, attended Adventist schools, worked for an Adventist institution, and yet asks me, "Bonita, why would Jesus love me? I'm not good enough to be loved."

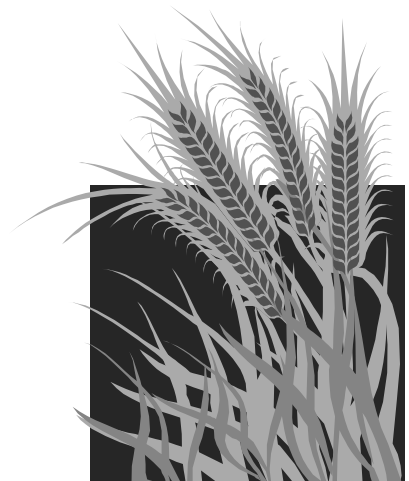
You may not have stated it as she did, but is that the heart cry of your soul? Do you know that God knows you fully and really loves you as He says he does?

We are limited in our understanding of what it means, "to know." We understand it cognitively: "Yes, I know, I understand that Jesus loves me." And, yes, the content of our faith is important and must be based on truth.

We may even go to the next level and give intellectual assent. "I accept the rationale. I am convinced that this is truth." We understand Jesus died for us because He loves us, and we say this is true. Yet James says: "You believe that there is one God. Good! *Even the demons believe that, and shudder*" (Jm 2:19, emphasis supplied).

Our knowledge must go beyond intellectual assent. We must embrace *fiducia*—we must learn to trust. Our belief must reach the depth of our being and take anchor in the soul.

Knowledge of the fundamentals of Adventism is important. *But what happens when your spouse leaves you? Or when your child dies? What happens when the hopes and dreams of a lifetime shatter into a million pieces and flow effortlessly through your fingers like sand?* What will carry you through? A knowledge based solely on cognitive understanding, or a knowledge that shows a trusting relationship with a God who has promised to never leave you or forsake you? What will carry you through? An intellectual assent to a belief system or a soul anchored to a God who loves you with a love so powerful that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it?



... For the Bible tells me so

When we begin to trust God, we take Him at His word. We may not feel lovable, but we trust that He loves us beyond what we can understand.

I have a pet peeve when it comes to our use of the Bible. For many it is merely a book of proof texts, used to prove a theological argument. While one of its purposes is correction and teaching righteousness (2T 3:16), it is much more. It is the story of the relationship of God to us—how we severed that relationship, and how God sent Jesus to restore us to Him. It is the story of Jesus' work of salvation in the lives of humanity, and we are the continuation of that story!

Several years ago, a woman whom I will call Laura shared how she had stood on the precipice of an affair. She confessed, "I finally got past my blindness and saw that I had to turn around because, if for no other reason, God said so, and I knew He loved me more than anyone else." "But," she continued, "It was one of the most difficult and painful things I've ever done, because it seemed so right."

Sin is deceitful and blinding. It makes wrong seem right and right seem wrong. It is only by God's Word that we can determine truth. We need a standard of truth, of righteousness outside of ourselves. And Jesus, the Living Word, is that perfect standard.

The question we must ask ourselves is: Will we continue in broken relationships, or learn from the Salvation Story and trust His word to restore our relationships—even when it hurts? Do we trust that everything God says in His Word is for our own happiness? Will we allow it to rule in our lives?

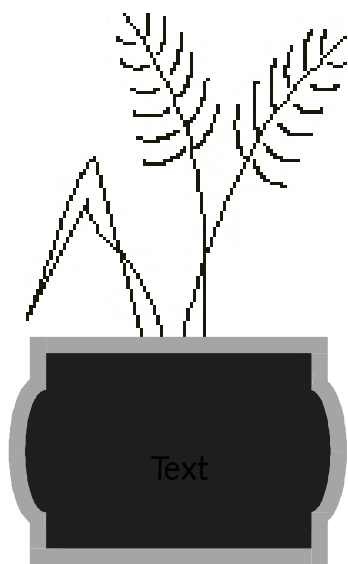
... Little ones to Him belong

Who doesn't desire to belong? Whether to a club or an organization, a family or a person—most of us have this God-given desire within. In a society where broken relationships and broken lives abound, this desire is intensified. Many people, searching for a place to belong, sadly compromise themselves just to experience belonging. Fanatical religious groups capitalize on this human need.

In the midst of our craving for belonging, Jesus challenges us: "Anyone who loves his father or mother ... son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:37-39).

Jesus loves us more than anyone ever can or ever will. Careers, cars, homes, money—even family—all good in and of themselves, cannot take the place of belonging to Him. When we truly believe this and determine that we want to do nothing but obey His Word, we will find that that "hole in our souls" begins to fill. But as Jesus has told us in scripture, looking to Him to satisfy our need to belong does not come easily. Belonging to Jesus requires making some difficult choices.

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Ibid) When we take up our cross and lose our life, we die to our own self-centered ambitions. Dying is scary. It's painful. Dying is the ultimate letting go. Yet, I have discovered that when I allow myself to die, I have never felt so much alive!



“I had to turn around, because, if for no other reason, God said so, and I knew He loved me more than anyone else.”

. . . They are weak, but He is strong

When we belong to Jesus and allow Him to work in our lives, the “down side” is that we become aware of our weaknesses more than ever before. We begin to see how sin has hold of our lives, in our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Then we truly begin to realize our helplessness to live a godly life without the power of Christ.

It’s not pleasant to be confronted with the sin in our own heart. And there aren’t many of us who like to admit our weakness. From the clothes we wear, to the car we drive, to the people we associate with—we spend so much energy trying to convince everyone that we have it all together—that we are strong! The absurdity of it, is we think we’ve even convinced God.

The apostle Paul shares with us: “But He [Christ] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me . . . for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses . . . in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9, 20).

Some of the strongest people I know readily admit their weaknesses. When we are willing to be vulnerable and share our weaknesses with each other, we become what Henri Nouwen calls “Wounded Healers,” agents of healing by giving encouragement and comfort to others through the sharing of our own wounds. The cross is the ultimate witness to the power of vulnerability.

*“Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong!”*

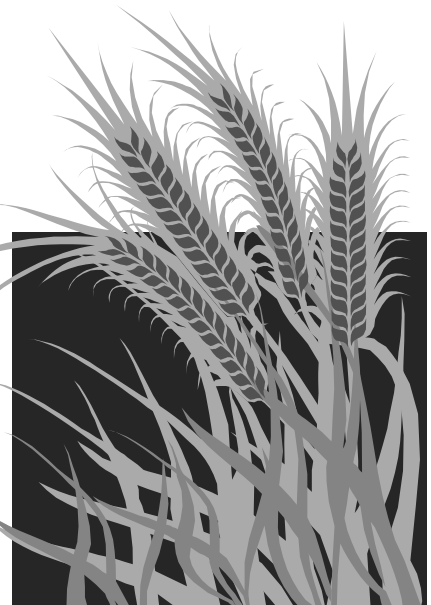
Do you know Jesus loves you? Do you trust that all He tells you is for your happiness? Have you experienced the love, joy, and peace that belonging to Him offers? Do you realize your powerlessness over the sin in your life?

It’s not too late

In the Chinese language, the word “change” is comprised of two symbols: the symbol for death and the symbol for opportunity. With change, something must die. In this season of change, is there something in your life that needs to die so that God can move you farther along the road to becoming more like Him? Whatever it is, along with that death will come an incredible opportunity to allow a time of self-discovery, growth, and intentional living.

We all have difficult choices to make. Jesus wants to help us make those choices. He never promised us an easy journey, but He has promised us that if we will walk with Him, we will know love, joy, and peace as we have never known it before. The world never has been able to give it, and it never will.

Have you embraced the gospel according to Cradle Roll? It’s not too late. Revisit your childhood. Revisit Cradle Roll. Sing the song. Learn the lesson that will make all that you do and believe have eternal significance. Just don’t run into Kyle as you tear through the foyer!



One Sweeping Act

Claire L. Eva
Assistant Director
General Conference
Stewardship Department

Freed to love

In his classic work, *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo tells the story of Jean Valjean, a poor man who is sentenced to prison for stealing a loaf of bread for his starving family. After 19 years, Valjean is finally released. But the law declares that he must carry with him, at all times, papers to reveal his status as a felon.

Before long, Jean finds refuge in the home of a bishop—Monseigneur Bienvenu. During the night Valjean creeps through the house, stealing the valuable silver cutlery he coveted while dining the evening before. Shortly after escaping the bishop's home with the silver, Valjean is arrested by the local gendarme and, in an attempt to escape his punishment, he tells the police that the bishop gave him the silver.

Led by his doubting captors, Valjean is taken back to confront the bishop. His poor life, such as it was, is over. He faces the man he has wronged and knows he will receive his just condemnation—he will be returned to prison for the remainder of his days. His head hangs low, overwhelmed and dejected.

“This man says you gave him the silver, Father!” The crush is about to come.

“Ah! Here you are!” the priest exclaims to Jean Valjean. “I’m glad to see you. Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too ... Why did you not take them?”

And so marks the beginning of a new life for a man surprised by grace—undeserving, pitiable scoundrel that he knows himself to be. The bishop's loving release breaks his pained spirit and sets him free to love as he has been loved. Jean Valjean's life begins at that pivotal moment—by one act of unmerited grace. And that is the gospel! (See Hb 7:26, 27).

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

The gospel is good news. It is the good news that Jesus Christ, God's “one of a kind” Son, lived and died and was raised again, for you and me. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ep 2:8-9).

Adam, again?

Christ came to Earth as the *Second Adam*. Why? Because the “first” Adam failed utterly. Were he here to speak for himself, he would confess it resolutely! So why refer to Jesus as the “Second Adam?” Because he came to do what our father Adam did not do—live a perfect, a blameless life. But His victory was not just for Himself. It was for *all* men, women, and children who have ever lived or will ever live on this earth (Ro 5:12-19)! “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor 15:21).

Before the gospel became reality to me, I feared, perhaps even recoiled, from instruction regarding the example of Christ. Let me explain. Have you a brother or sister who seemed to do everything right? He made the best grades, carried himself with confidence, and received the recognition that goes with those things? Maybe that was all right with you, really. Even though you wished some of his successes might have rubbed off on you. But let's go a step further. How does it feel when others compare you to that sibling?

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:21-31

*What overwhelms my soul is the reality
that everything Jesus did is mine!*

Sarah, a capable college freshman, returned to her alma mater to give an assembly address where her younger sister Jane was a student. After the presentation, the principal of the school approached Jane and said, “Now, *that* is what you have to live up to!” It wasn’t the wisest thing to say. And he probably didn’t realize the impact of his words. But Jane was overwhelmed.

Words like—“You’ll never be like your father!” “Why can’t you be like your brother?” “Ruth wouldn’t do that!”—All have their penetrating effect. Jesus’ example without the gospel is deadly. For it shows us the beauty of a life we will never replicate (Ro 7:7-12).

But now I see

When I discovered the true *good news*, it was like seeing through new glasses! Everything my older Brother did for me was not only an example to follow. Previously my response was discouragement—“How can I ever emulate His perfect life?” Martin Luther declared: “Mine are Christ’s living, doing, and speaking, His suffering and dying; mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, and suffered, and died as He did.”

What overwhelms my soul is the reality that *everything* Jesus did is *mine*!

Jesus Christ, God’s perfect Lamb, took the death of judgment upon Himself, so that we might never have to die that death! Now I can sing, “I would be like Jesus” with new meaning and Spirit-led motivation. For His precious example—His total dependence upon the Father, His sinless, love-filled life—is my guide for growing into His likeness while I am “complete in Him” (Col 2:9). The same robe that covers us, warms us—and through the Spirit, enables us. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ep 2:10).

The only one

Our righteousness, our completeness is found *in Him alone* (Col 2:10). Not in some humanly devised formula that claims to make us righteous in and of ourselves. Lest we judge one another and listen to the Accuser, “Let us remember that we are all erring human beings, struggling and toiling, failing in speech and action to represent Christ, falling and rising again, despairing and hoping” (White, E. G., ST, May 11, 1904, *Bear Ye One Another’s Burdens*).

Even when these “bodies put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:53) and we are home at last, we will lay our crowns at His feet. Not so much out of humility, but from the pure joy that we knew where they belonged all the time.

When Jesus comes again, “at that day Christ will be the Judge ... But those whose life is hid with Christ in God can say: ‘I believe in him who was condemned at Pilate’s bar, and given up to the priests and rulers to be crucified. Look not upon me, a sinner, but look at my Advocate. There is nothing in me worthy of the love he manifested for me: but he gave his life for me. *Behold me in Jesus*. He became sin for me, that I might be made the righteousness of God in him’” (White, E. G., YI, May 31, 1900, *The Price of Our Redemption*).

“Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!” —2 Corinthians 9:11



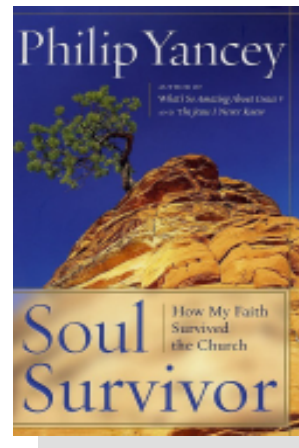
Soul Survivor: How My Faith Survived the Church

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

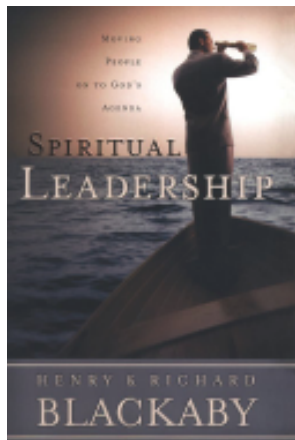
Philip Yancey is one of the more articulate contemporary Christian writers. In this work he tells of the impact 13 different individuals have had on his life to help him survive the cultural Christianity of today's church. He shares his own story and journey and how these thirteen people helped him discover a true relationship with God and grow in spiritual and intellectual maturity.

Yancey grew up in a rigid conservative form of American Christianity that was, in his words, "racist and legalistic." These 13 are the people who helped him "ransom a personal faith from the damaging effects of religion." These individuals are people who stand out in history and list their personal faith as a primary reason for their success. From Martin Luther King, Jr., to G. K. Chesterton and Mahatma Gandhi, the author presents highlights from their lives and writings. At the same time, Yancey shares himself in a way that helps us not only to know him, but also to know ourselves better.

This is an excellent work for those struggling with the institutional church, as well as those who are part of church institutions. We can join in his pilgrimage and learn from Yancey and his mentors.



by Philip Yancey
Doubleday
New York, New York
2001 US\$21.95



by Henry and Richard Blackaby
Broadman & Holman Publishers
Nashville, Tennessee
2001 US\$19.99

Spiritual Leadership

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

Henry and Richard Blackaby have produced one of the finest leadership books I have read. Their leadership paradigm does more than apply biblical language to what leaders do. Instead, they take biblical principles and develop a cohesive spiritual leadership philosophy.

The authors review some of the popular and best definitions of spiritual leadership and then present their own: "Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God's agenda." They then explore the role and tasks of the leader. Their sections on how God develops leaders and the leader's character are among the best in the book. And their five pages on leaders who serve are especially significant. "Spiritual leaders are not their people's servants; they are God's." In closing this section, they state: "Jesus' disciples needed to understand that they were servants of the Lord, and because of this, they would be called upon to serve one another."

This book is a "must read" for any and all who lead or want to lead in the church. We live in a day where leaders are scarce and almost unknown. The church needs leaders—spiritual leaders who catch their vision from God and lead people closer to God while leading His church in fulfilling His mission. This book can help us grow in that leadership.

Living Large: How to Live Well— Even on a Little

*Charlotte Ishkanian, Editor
Mission Magazine
General Conference Sabbath School*

The cover blurb promises to teach the reader how to live happily within any income—even yours. Discover how to give, save, and invest according to biblical principles. Gain realistic, down-to-earth guidance on how to put your financial house in order. Does the book do all this? With today’s emphasis on easy credit and instant gratification, the above challenge would seem difficult at best. But for the most part, the author was able to fulfill his goal and present a convincing case for each of his points.

Written for a conservative Christian audience, the book hits some of the sore spots in Christian stewardship squarely and challenges Christians not only to live up to their faith and within their means, but to do so happily and to enjoy life to the fullest. Two principles the author lays out as the foundation of stewardship are—

- *All wealth belongs to God—*

Albrektson reminds us that, if wealth belongs to God, we don’t have to worry about losing what isn’t ours in the first place.

- *We belong to God—*

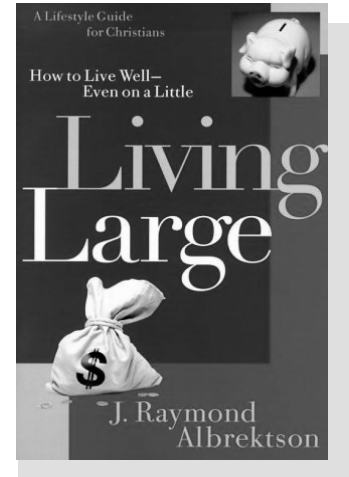
The author reminds us that in creating us, God has given us two things of which we must be good stewards: Our bodies, our lives, and the time He has given us on this earth.

He says we can spend more than we earn and go into debt. We can spend all that we earn and break even. Or we can spend less than we earn and learn to live happily and contentedly within our means, while joyfully giving something back to His work.

In his chapter on money management Albrektson details his own personal resource management philosophy. The first point is to discover the joy of giving, not impulsive, but strategic and systematic giving. Families must tighten the budgetary belt and build up savings for financial emergencies. The key to giving joyfully, he states, is being loose-fisted with what isn’t ours in the first place, but God’s. As a result, giving does become easier.

Without doubt Albrektson is quite generous with his church and would admit to giving far more than a tithe. I differ with his approach to tithing.” I have decided that tithing is not well supported by the New Testament.” The demands of the Mosaic Law are not binding on me as a Christian today” he declares (page 59). Jesus said, “You pay tithe on mint and anise ... and this you ought to do” (Mt 23:23).

To his credit, he suggests that the idea of giving a tithe might be too limiting for some Christians. That it might suggest that once we have given God His ten percent, the rest is ours to do with as we see fit, and this principle is solid. He concludes the chapter with this thoughtful statement: “How much should we give?... At least a tenth. We also have the encouragement of the New Testament: We can’t out-give God... We mustn’t give more than we can give with delight, but whatever amount we are led to give, we need to follow through” (page 62).



by J. Raymond Albrektson
WaterBrook Press
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2000 US\$10.95

Build a cushion of savings, he counsels young adults and about-to-be-weds in chapter 13. He suggests three months’ wages as a primary goal. Then he suggests adding to that in long-term savings and investing amounts. Albrektson emphasizes how much more sense it makes to save to buy rather than go into debt to buy immediately. The same goes for building a savings account. He clearly illustrates the value of saving even a little when young as opposed to saving a lot when one is older. His personal example is clear, and the advice is solid.

The author rounds out his book by going into investing in the stock market, buying versus renting a home, and most important, living ethically and joyfully on what God provides for us. The book would be put to good use in a study group of young adults preparing to be out on their own, or as part of premarital counseling on financial matters.

Halley's Bible Handbook CD ROM

Zondervan US\$24.99

I quote, "Dr. Henry Halley wrote his classic handbook with one goal in mind: to help people know not merely the Bible, but its heart and soul, Jesus Christ." Jesus said it best: "They [the Scriptures] are they which testify of me" (Jn 5:39).

The table of contents or index in the CD ROM list such topics as: * The Habit of Bible Reading * Notable Sayings About the Bible * What the Bible Is * How the Bible is Organized * The Setting of the Bible * Was Jesus the Son of God?—and many, many more.

Just some features of *Halley's Bible Handbook CD-ROM*:

- Complete text of *Halley's Bible Handbook*
- Complete New International and King James Versions
- Current archaeological information and insights
- 90 color maps plus numerous graphs and charts
- Zoom capability lets you enlarge all images

If you are looking for a helpful tool to enhance your Bible study, this is an excellent resource.

editorial

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

Our infant daughter was two weeks old. It was a humid, summer Sabbath and we were attending campmeeting. As I cradled my fresh little one, I felt anything but fresh! We were staying on the third floor of the girls' dorm, and I could hardly breathe in the muggy atmosphere. Still not quite my bouncy self, I was feeling a little blue as new mothers are prone to be.

And then I heard just what I needed. From the main meeting hall, a mellow contralto voice rang out:

"Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. You may have all this world. Give me Jesus."

Everyone needs a little good news now and then! For as author Scott Peck says: "Life is difficult." But the good news is that we have the *good news* all of the time! Jesus Christ is on our side—every day, and nothing can separate us from His love (Ro 8:38, 39). What a privilege we have to share this news as stewards of the gospel!

In this issue of *Dynamic Steward* we speak about Jesus Christ's gift of saving us—the good news of the gospel. I hope you can take some time to reflect on the varied articles presented in the issue on this central message of Scripture. And when the ground beneath you trembles, remember—you are safe in Him! Here are some moving words from someone who realized just that:

"I believe in Jesus. I know my Savior loves me, and I love my Jesus. I rest in His love, notwithstanding my imperfections. God has accepted His perfection in my behalf. He is my righteousness and I trust in His merits. I am His repenting, believing child. He has taken away my sin-stained garments and covered me with the robe of His righteousness. Clothed in this garment, I stand before the Father justified" (White, E.G., 4MR, Nos. 210-259, 1990).

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Exploring partnership with God

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