

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES **Proclamation!**

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

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HOW TO LEAVE A CHURCH AND SURVIVE THE WILDERNESS

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The valley of love and delight

COLLEEN TINKER



The sadness was overwhelming. I felt as if I were going through a divorce. I had discovered that the doctrines of the church I'd embraced as my identity were not based in the Bible. Adventism did not respect Scripture as the inerrant word of God. Not only was the Adventist church not the "remnant church of Bible prophecy"; there is no "remnant church"; there is only one true Church that is the body of Christ. There is no "last day prophet"; Jesus Himself is God's final Word.

I didn't want to leave; I loved Adventism. But I couldn't stay, either. To stay and pretend I was loyal would be a lie.

Heavily, I sat at the piano and played idly.

He looked us in the eyes and declared, "Remember, when they persecute you—and they will persecute you—you are blessed."

at Richard and distinctly saw mist in his eyes, too.

Mr. Shoup listened intently with eyes full of kindness as we talked. When we finished he said, "I think I have some understanding of what you're going through. I left the Catholic Church, and many of your experiences sound similar to mine."

As our conversation concluded, Mr. Shoup prayed for us again, and when, fighting tears, we stood to leave, he said the most remarkable thing. He looked us in the eyes and declared, "Remember, when they persecute you—and they will persecute you—you are blessed."

Three times he repeated that message in three slightly different sentences. I remember leaving his office clearly aware that God had spoken His promise to us through the words of that God-fearing man. I also had my first awareness that God had not only led us out of everything familiar but that He was leading us into a new community where He could heal and nourish us.

In the seven-and-a-half years since God spoke His promise to us through Mr. Shoup, He has been faithful to keep it. We have lost friends, clients, dreams, and career advancements. We have gained contentment, joy, the personal awareness of Jesus' presence and love, His work to do, and His faithful provision of our needs. We are learning to trust His plans and His timing instead of our own, and we can say absolutely: there is no greater thing than knowing Jesus.

In this issue Bob Anderson and Greg Taylor share their experiences of leaving what they knew and loved in order to live with integrity. They tell of both God's discipline and His surprising provision. LeBron McBride, a former Adventist pastor and the director of behavioral medicine at a family medicine residency in Georgia, gives his professional insight into the emotional and psychological effects of leaving a toxic church. Stanley Rouhe shares his story of discovering the gospel, and Thomas Francis calls each of us to live in the joy of Jesus.

As you read and reflect, we invite you to embrace Paul's experience:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:7-9).

Suddenly I became aware of the words of the song I was playing: "Tis the gift to be simple; 'tis the gift to be free/ 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be/ And when we find ourselves in that place just right/ It will be in the valley of love and delight/ When true simplicity is gained/ to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed/ To turn, turn, will be our delight/ 'Till by turning, turning, we come 'round right."

With tears and sudden clarity, I knew God was telling me that even though I couldn't see where I was going, He was promising that my destination would be that valley of love and delight. This inexpressibly painful path I was walking was His way of turning me from confusion and compromise and redirecting me onto the path of righteousness for His name's sake.

A few months later our family sat in the principal's office at Arrowhead Christian Academy where we were planning to enroll our sons. We felt a bit as if we were in a foreign country; we knew no one, and we feared no one would understand our experience, but we felt compelled to explain our journey.

"Let's pray before we begin," said Mr. Shoup. Never in our collective experiences had any Adventist principal or teacher begun a personal meeting with prayer. He asked God to direct our conversation and to allow all that needed discussing to be said. Overwhelmed, I peered sideways

Proclamation!

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How God went deep for me:

RESCUED!

STANLEY ROUHE

This is a story about salvation—a deep-water rescue. For years I believed that salvation and the judgment were to be determined by behavior. First God made salvation possible; then, by our attitudes and actions, we proved our worthiness or unworthiness. In effect, salvation was somewhat of a balancing of His “good” and my “bad.” I knew God was perfect and that He would not allow imperfection to be in His presence. I understood that after God considered my best effort, Christ’s righteousness “made up the difference” between my attempts at perfection and God’s standard for me.

I was born to Adventist parents who demonstrated their devotion and sincerity by serving the heathen in the darkest of Africa. My father was a graduate of the College of Medical Evangelists (later Loma Linda University School of Medicine) and determined as a teenager, when God saved him from a nearly fatal injury in a sawmill accident, that he would be a doctor who saved others’ lives.

Over the years he recognized many signs of God’s leading. His family converted to Adventism in Finland when missionaries from America showed pictures of the beasts of Daniel and explained how a remnant of true commandment-keeping believers would survive the frightening end-time prophecies. To my father, a poor boy from Finland, God seemed to lead in later making it possible for him to be accepted into the Adventist medical school.

My mother’s family experienced a similar conversion when she was a small girl. When she grew older she attended nurs-

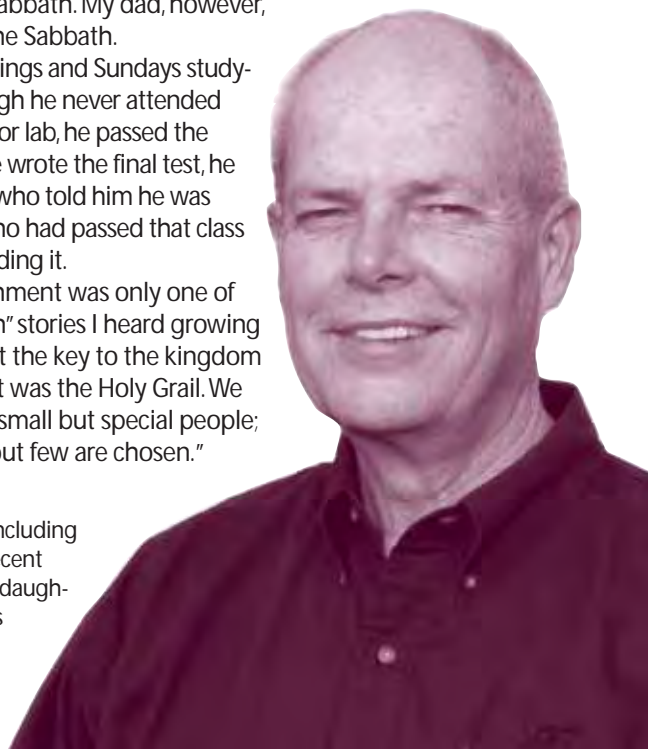
ing school at the White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles. She was dating a good but “worldly” man and was very much in love with him. Her conscience and her mother’s persuasion, however, put an end to the relationship. Soon afterward she met and subsequently married my father.

A couple of years after my dad graduated from medical school, he and my mother answered a call to the Belgian Congo. The official language there was French, and the government required all doctors to take a tropical medicine course in Belgium before practicing in the Congo. Because of various circumstances, my dad started the class late and spoke no French. Further, one of his most important classes, including a lab, was on Sabbath. My dad, however, refused to break the Sabbath.

Dad spent evenings and Sundays studying, and even though he never attended that Sabbath class or lab, he passed the final exam. After he wrote the final test, he met the professor who told him he was the first student who had passed that class without ever attending it.

This accomplishment was only one of the many “Sabbath” stories I heard growing up, and I knew that the key to the kingdom was the Sabbath. It was the Holy Grail. We Adventists were a small but special people; “many are called, but few are chosen.”

Stanley Rouhe was born and raised in an Adventist family and educated in Adventists schools including LLU School of Medicine. He practiced neurosurgery for 30 years in Southern California until his recent retirement. He and his wife of 41 years, Anne Louise (who also grew up Adventist), have an adult daughter, Helena, who is a practicing clinical psychologist and family counselor. Today missions projects through Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California, occupy much of Stanley’s time.



My father spent twenty-five years in the mission field. He operated on hundreds of cases, preached and baptized, made bricks and built buildings, and cared for over 300 lepers. When he was 94 years old, I asked him if he was saved and if he would be in heaven with me. He said, "I certainly hope so; after all, I have been a good Adventist and have spent my whole life in missions."

I replied that salvation is not about what you have done; it's all about Christ. He gives it; we don't earn it. My answer did not sound like good news to my father; he wanted his good works to count for something.

Beginnings

I was born in the Belgian Congo, the third of five children, and we returned to the United States when I was eight years old. I knew we were different. We were not part of the "worldly world"; we kept the Sabbath, and my parents sacrificed so I could be with "our people" in Adventist schools. I was always very religious in spite—or perhaps, because of—the fact that I knew I was deeply sinful. I planned to be a minister even though I was very self-conscious and always felt, in public, that my sinful life was exposed.

I believed in the Sabbath, and this time I was serious about salvation. I had to get my religious life in order; after all, I had the threat of cancer hanging over me.

I avoided the "world," spurning secular literature in favor of the Bible and Ellen G. White's books (my favorite was *Steps to Christ*), and often spent many hours praying that I would be a better Christian following the *Steps to Christ* model. I felt great pressure to be worthy to be a preacher.

During my third year of theology at Southern College, I received the assignment to preach at a small church in Georgia. My sermon was based on the metaphor of the vine and the branches found in John 15, but the life it described was not my experience. I largely lifted the sermon from Ellen White's commentary in *The Desire of Ages*, and as I looked at that small congregation, I felt like a fraud. I really didn't want to preach anymore.

My girlfriend, who later became my wife, commented that I had approached the subject from a somewhat scientific point of view and suggested that if I wanted to do something other than ministry, I could be a doctor and still serve the Lord. I agreed. With great relief I completed my pre-med courses and was accepted into Loma Linda Medical School.

I was busy in my career, and I gradually drifted away from the church. The peculiarities of Adventism seemed increasingly negative to me, and I often found non-Adventists to be more

interesting and nicer people than the Adventists I knew. My parents worried about my worldliness, but my mother relied on the promise that a child rightly trained would return to the Lord. Caught up in managing my time and making money, I gave little thought to my final fate.

Death Sentence

Alarms should have gone off in my head eight years ago when I was diagnosed with cancer and given less than five years to live, but in spite of surgery and radiation, I continued to work just as hard.

Then, four years ago, my brother Lyndon came to live with me for a time. Lyndon had Downs syndrome and had been in foster care and extended care facilities most of his life. During the time he lived in our home, he wanted to go to church. I took him to Riverside Community (Adventist) Church, and as I sat next to him during the services, I realized that Lyndon would be in heaven. A great desire came over me to be with him in heaven so I could see him fully restored in mind and body.

I believed in the Sabbath, and this time I was serious about salvation. I had to get my religious life in order; after all, I had the threat of cancer hanging over me. As I listened to the sermons, they usually sounded pretty good, but sometimes I heard something jarring. They seemed to teach both Christ's righteousness and the need for our own character perfection.

I began reading the Bible. I purchased an interlinear Greek and Hebrew Bible and a Strong's concordance and began hanging out at the Berean Christian stores. More and more questions about the church's doctrines and practices began to surface.

One of the radiology technologists I worked with had an Adventist background. As I voiced more and more of my questions around him, he finally asked one day, "Why don't you go to the Former Adventist Fellowship which meets each Friday at Trinity Church?"

The leadership at the Adventist church I was attending had heard of this Friday evening Bible study, so I offered to go on their behalf and visit the group. Any dissent, I believed, should occur within the church. That group should be meeting at our church instead of at a Sunday church.

Confidently I went one Friday night as an ambassador to bring back the straying ones. They were very friendly, and when the Bible study was over, I suggested that they should hold their meetings at our church instead. Besides, I asked, why was Ellen White such a problem? Even though she copied material, it was the truth!

The group was very polite as I made my suggestions, but then they suggested that I read *Sabbath in Crisis* (now reprinted as *Sabbath in Christ*) by Dale Ratzlaff.

The next day—Sabbath—I read the book, and for the first time in my life I understood the plan of salvation. I accepted the Lord as my Savior and entered true Sabbath rest.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

YOU MUST COUNT THE COST

GREG TAYLOR

There is a tendency in faith communities to share the joys of the Christian life in such a way that it appears to be a life of uninterrupted bliss. Just give your life to Jesus, ask Him into your heart, and you will live happily ever after. All your dreams will come true. You will get all you have ever dreamed of. But such a picture is not entirely accurate. In reality, it is false advertising. It creates unrealistic expectations which can lead to disillusionment and frustration. The truth of the matter is, the Christian life does offer joy, abundant life, personal fulfillment, but it comes at a cost. The price tag is the Cross! The fulfillment and joy are the internal results of a life that is lost in the pursuit of God. Jesus challenged the disciples to count the cost. His path is not one that will grant us all the prominence, success, money, and possessions we desire in our selfish fantasies. Instead it is one that will cost us everything. It calls for death of our personal ambitions for the sake of Christ. Note Jesus' own words to His followers.

Then He said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his

life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" Luke 9:23-25 NIV

The cross did not bring up warm little thoughts of comfort to the people of that time. The cross was an instrument of torture and death. But Jesus calls it the way of salvation! The cross is not an easy road by any means. It may mean the loss of everything we hold dear in this life, but it is the way that brings us to the joy of knowing Jesus to such an extent that all other desires pale into insignificance. Christianity is not a means by



Greg and Paula Taylor and their sons Jordan and Matthew left Adventism during the summer of 2001. Greg spent three years as the pastor for spiritual formation at Crossroads Church in Hagerstown Maryland, and now he is working part time in a prayer and counseling ministry and beginning work on a book entitled *Discovering the Ways of the Spirit*. He and Paula also operate One Flock Ministries, an inter-denominational ministry which help those caught in sectarian systems to find freedom in Christ and community with other believers.

which we gain the whole world; it is a means by which we gain what really matters; a relationship with the Lord himself that can never be taken away. It is a path that brings true life and satisfies the deeper longings of our hearts.

The path to God's ultimate promises is often one that takes us through the wilderness of the cross. Israel left Egypt only to come to an apparent dead end at the Red Sea. The crisis provided the means by which the hand of God could be more clearly revealed. The wilderness wanderings of Israel could have been shortened by their own choices, but they were led by God to at least a year and a half of desert training before the promised land. There was a wilderness training program intended to increase their faith that was part of the promotion. Between Egypt and Canaan was a wilderness of testing and preparation. This is true for all of God's faithful. There is a cross before the crown.

Notice a few examples of this wilderness promotion motif. David was anointed king and then spent seven plus years of his life running from a crazy despotic king. Ultimately he became king, but he went through a time of testing that was to bring out the best in his heart. It was to make him a man of faith, trust, compassion and grace. Joseph was 13 years on a rollercoaster that included slavery, dungeons, rejection and apparent total failure before the promise came true for his life. Yet those experiences made him a capable and tested leader. Moses was 40 years in the desert before the call of his childhood was realized. Paul was in the desert for many years, at least three and possibly as many as 14, before he was released in ministry. Paul, the once "Harvard graduate favorite of Judaism" (taught at the feet of Gamaliel) became a "nobody"—a desert hermit before his calling was released. And Jesus Christ himself spent 18 years as a carpenter in Nazareth after He realized His mission calling at His Bar Mitzvah.

God's ways include wilderness training. His ways include downsizing and death of our dreams for the sake of His higher dreams and calling for us. Graham Cooke discusses the wilderness training this way:

"Every one of us will outgrow our environment on several occasions before we finally meet the Lord. Our choice is to complain, be fearful, and cling to what we have; or move forward knowing that the Lord is leading us and guiding us into a new dimension" (*A Divine Confrontation*, page 252).

My wife Paula and I have become deeply aware of this phenomenon in our own lives. We have been Christians for many



The cross is not an easy road by any means. It may mean the loss of everything we hold dear in this life, but it is the way that brings us to the joy of knowing Jesus to such an extent that all other desires pale in insignificance.

years now. But there came a testing point in our experience where we found ourselves challenged with the greater implications of the Gospel. Through Bible study, prayer, and deepening conviction we came to a point of testing. We came to understand the New Covenant like we had never understood it before. It cut across all that we had been taught in our religious training. We began to walk in the way of the Spirit instead of the written code (2 Cor 3). We came under conviction that we could no longer teach that Sabbath laws and food laws, etc. were binding on Christians. We realized that we could no longer teach these things in good conscience. (You can read our story at oneflockministries.org.) We came face to face with the implications of the truth God was revealing to us. We were going to have to leave a career of nearly 20 years in the SDA ministry. This was a brutally painful

decision. It was agonizing. Words cannot express how difficult it was to leave the church we loved and experience the pain of rejection and loss of friendships and family.

God has been very good to us. But it is important to share the whole story for the sake of those who are considering following Jesus with their lives. This has not been an easy path. We lost most of our friendships we had in Adventism—some we still see now and then, a few are just as close as ever, but very few. By far the majority of our past relationships are gone. People have a lot of fear when it comes to associating with those that once were part of the SDA system once they leave. We have sensed this to the core. It has not been easy.

We were without work for many months after leaving the SDA system. Most churches are wary of the SDA system and for good reason. They have heard of the SDA teachings that make other churches equivalent with Babylon and apostate religion. Most Christians are welcoming of those leaving the SDA system and rejoice with them on their discovery of the truth of the New Covenant. At the same time they are reluctant to hire one of them to be a senior pastor in their church.

After a long season of waiting, we did get hired by a recent church plant to be the pastor for small groups and spiritual formation. The intention of the planting pastor was to go plant another church. He was looking for someone that could do some of the infrastructure work on the church and then take over leadership when he left to plant the next church. To make a long story short, he decided to stay. Since I am not an administrator in my primary gifting, it placed me in a church where there were two senior pastors and not enough administrators. The situation was awkward and painful. When our three year

contract ended, so did our ministry in that community. While we made many lifelong friends in that church, we again found ourselves in a time of limbo.

The enemy has attacked us from the beginning with his harassing lies. We were told early on by people in the SDA system that we would never amount to anything outside of the SDA church. The enemy would remind us of these statements often in our times of rejection or frustration. "You were a fool to leave your old church ministry! You should have just kept your thoughts to yourself! You will never be the pastor you feel called to be! You just threw away a career for the sake of some silly thing called integrity! Is the New Covenant really all that important? You should never have rocked the boat and put your family through all of this."

The truth is, the journey has not been easy. We have suffered rejection, misunderstanding, lies about our character, times of financial insecurity, and times of discouragement. We have had to struggle with our identity. We cannot find our sense of value in our career, in personal ministry accomplishments, or being part of an exclusive community. In Adventism we knew someone almost every place we went—or at least someone who knew someone. There is a certain sense of "belonging" that is part of sectarian systems. Now that is all gone.

Yet, the other side of the story is also true. We have grown in faith in ways we could never have grown in the comforts of the "secure life." We have come to understand in a small way the sufferings of Christ who "Made Himself of no reputation" (Phil 2) and experienced rejection at the hands of those He loved so much. Our appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ has grown profoundly. We have learned so much about the life in the Spirit. We have learned to listen for the Still Small Voice in every experience. We have examined our hearts and come to

grips with our own deep need for Christ for everything in life. We are living—however feebly at times—a walk of faith. We are learning how to put on the armor of God to defeat the fiery darts of the enemy. Our prayer life has deepened dramatically. We have come to hang onto the promises of God as never before. We have found, experientially, our primary identity in Christ, not in what we do or in our ministry successes. Our compassion for people, even those who hurt us, continues to grow. We find love swelling up in us for our enemies. We have joy in our hearts that circumstances cannot take away. And we are constantly involved in ministry to hurting people, those wounded in life, those in impoverished areas of the world, those struggling with leaving sectarian systems, and those dealing with addictions. Our ministry in Jesus' name continues to grow. And in the midst of it all, we have never missed a house payment or gotten behind on our bills. God has always and faithfully made a way. Praise His name!

The reality is we would not trade our current life in Christ for all the comforts of the "safe life" no matter how attractive that might seem at times. We have found that true success is not in large bank accounts, great reputations, large ministries, or prominence of any kind. Success is following Jesus fully and faithfully, no matter the cost. Jim Elliot, the Christian missionary/martyr put it this way, "He is not a fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Paul put it this way:

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor 4:16-5:1 NIV).



God went deep for me: Rescued! CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Gift of Life

Now I realize that I can rest physically on the seventh day, but that isn't the rest God wants me to enter. My salvation through Christ who did all the work and now rests at the right hand of the Father means that I can enter His rest. The work I do now is because of salvation, not for salvation.

The joy and the peace I have now are beyond expression. Do I get upset with myself when I do something displeasing to the Lord? Yes. Do I worry about my salvation? No!

I had to be broken before I understood that salvation is all about Jesus and nothing at all about me. None of my efforts to do the right thing brought me one step closer to eternal security. Conversely, since I met Jesus and was born from above, I realize that my failings do not snatch me out of His hand. I am secure for one reason: Jesus died for me and rose again. He

keeps me; His righteousness covers me. It's not about me; it's all about Him.

"Being born again of the Spirit is an unmistakable work of God, as mysterious as the wind, as surprising as God Himself. We do not know where it begins; it is hidden away in the depths of our personal life. Being born again from above is a perennial, perpetual and eternal beginning; a freshness all the time in thinking and in talking and in living, the continual surprise of the life of God." (*My Utmost For His Highest*, January 20, Oswald Chambers)

It was really only after entering that rest—rest from my works to be worthy—that I truly began to understand how much I needed a Savior. A drowning man gasping and flailing against the deep, I finally quit struggling with my Rescuer and allowed Him to bring me to shore.



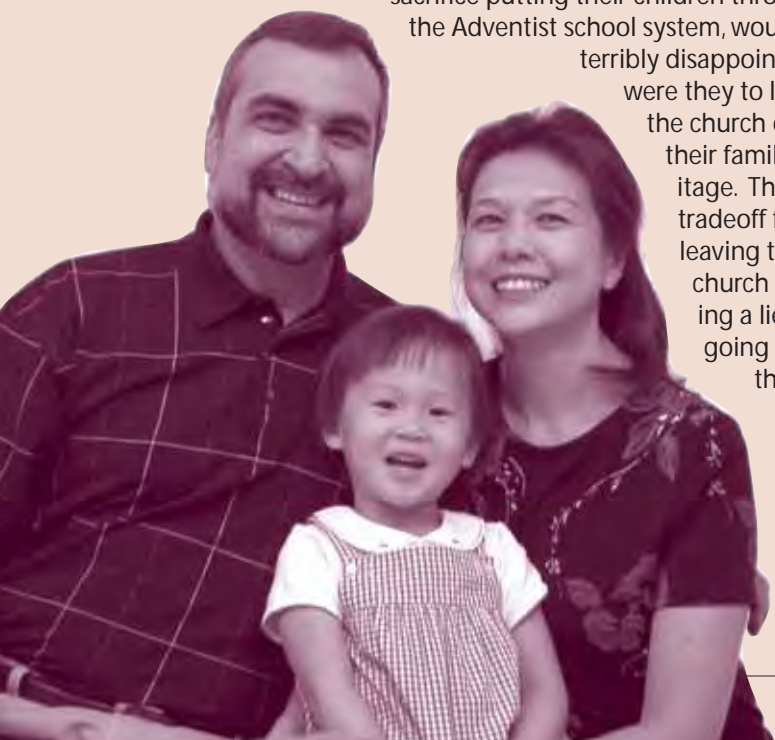
AN APPEAL TO ADVENTIST LEADERS

BOB ANDERSON

I know that there are many, possibly hundreds of Adventist pastors and church leaders who know the truth about Adventist teachings but who are trapped inside the system. These individuals have families to provide for, house payments to make, and retirement pensions to consider. Leaving the church would mean giving up years of dedication, and most importantly, a comfortable salary with benefits. They have fathers and mothers who, after years of sacrifice putting their children through the Adventist school system, would be

terribly disappointed were they to leave the church of their family heritage. The tradeoff for not leaving the church is living a lie—going through

the motions and repeating rehearsed lines in a career that is stagnant and unfulfilling. Worse, as pastors, they are leading God's people astray into a system of legalism, self-doubt and bondage. Surely they are not following in the footsteps of Moses. Further, one must also consider the effect on oneself of staying in such a situation. Being in this situation is much like an adulterous husband still living with his wife who has no knowledge of the affair. Please don't misinterpret this analogy, but there are similar feelings of guilt, betrayal and loss of self worth that are associated with living in denial. This reality not only makes life miserable, but harboring these feelings is not healthy for the soul. If you are one of these leaders in the church, then this letter is to be your first of many steps out of bondage. After reading this letter, you should pray. Tell God of your dilemma, and ask him for a way out. Read the book *A Theologian's Journey* by Jerry Gladson, PhD, available through LAM Publishing LLC, to see that you are not alone in this struggle. I am not a theologian, but from my letter you will see that our paths parallel, and my God can do for you what he did for this former corporate dependent.



Bob Anderson and his wife Ingrid are former Adventists. They left the church two years ago and now enjoy fellowship at Blue Ridge Church of Christ. Bob is a private home inspector. He and his wife live in Staunton, Virginia. They have two grown sons and adopted their three-year-old daughter Libby two years ago from China.

BOB ANDERSON

Dear Adventist Leader,

This is an appeal to church leaders, especially those who hold paid positions within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. You have worked hard to get where you are today, in positions that you currently hold, and hold dear. Many of you have positions that are held in high esteem among colleagues and church members alike. Whether admitted or not, this brings a sense of pride and accomplishment to your life. Not only that, it brings home a paycheck as well.

All of these facts are quite normal and are true of almost every person of title and position, especially in corporate America. There is a difference, of course, between a corporation and a church, but allegiance to both is as strong for those employed by them. This allegiance is bonded in our belief in the foundations on which they stand. If the foundation is shaken, as we have seen in recent corporate scandals, our allegiance can be shaken.

I know this reality all too well. In the late 70s I went to work for Philip Morris, a multi-billion dollar cigarette and food products manufacturer. As an employer, Philip Morris is second to none, offering generous salaries and benefit packages. I thought my career path was set, and I would retire from this company with a comfortable pension. All of my dreams changed in 1985 when my father died from smoking-related lung cancer. The irony was that one of his favorite brands of cigarettes was one that my company produced.

My allegiance to the company was not shaken; it was shattered! I no longer believed in this entity called Philip Morris and developed a desire to disassociate myself from the name and what it stood for. There was one problem; I could not see life beyond Philip Morris. I anguished for a year over what I would be giving up. The time investment that I had in this company, the paycheck, benefits and comfortable lifestyle that I received from it would all be lost if I walked away.

One year after my father's death, my conscience won, and I walked into the plant managers' office and handed him my I.D. badge. On that day, I was liberated. On that day, I did the right thing. On that day, I turned and started walking in a different direction and have never looked back. Life was not easy after I left. I did everything from employment as a sewer worker to scrubbing toilets as a janitor, but I survived and grew. Today, the Lord has blessed me with a career that I love, and I have a clear conscience.

After I had learned the truth about Philip Morris, (i.e. covering-up documents proving cigarettes caused cancer, lying to the consumer, and so on) I just looked to the company as nothing more than a paycheck. I did not believe in the company or its principles but was only there for the money. For one year I worked with that frame of mind, and it was a miserable and unfulfilling year. That year I was living a lie, just going through the motions and working for something in which I had absolutely no faith.

Maybe you're in a similar boat and have that same sinking feeling. I am here to tell you that there is life after the SDA church. There is a career after the SDA church. If your allegiance has been shaken, or even shattered, do not despair; the Lord will provide. Let the Holy Spirit lead you as you think about this matter. God will help you devise a plan to get out. You may have to take two steps back before you can begin to move forward. It may mean sacrifice for you and your family, but look beyond the struggle and think of the rewards. Think of your departure from Adventism as if you and your family were embarking on a mission trip to a faraway land, a land of unfamiliar surroundings and people. If you were going on such a trip, you would place all of your trust in the Lord, knowing that he would provide and pull you through. Just remember, many SDA church leaders before you have taken this leap of faith. I will assure you that if you were able to talk to each one of them, you would find that all are leading more fulfilled lives than they ever would have dreamed.

Oh, how sad if you were to continue to go with the flow. God's creatures of the fields follow his designed patterns and go through the same motions all of their lives. But ah, how blessed it is to be one of God's children, created in his image with visions, plans, and a future of your desires. Our Father wants good things for his children, and our pastures are not to have fences, allowing us access to only part of his blessings. No! The whole world is ours. It is the forces of darkness who erect fences around our lives, but it is Christ who breaks down these barriers.

What's out there? What's beyond the fence of Adventism? For you, I personally don't know. But I know One who does know. I do know that it will be good, and it will be rewarding, and because of the added element of the unknown, it will be exciting! Please don't let money or family tradition stand in your way of the joy that God has planned for you, that's rightfully yours. You have God's permission to start breaking down that fence, so what are you waiting for?

May God bless you and guide you as you consider your situation and as you think about your life hereafter.

In Christ,

Bob Anderson

Appeal

HOW TO LEAVE A CHURCH AND SURVIVE THE WILDERNESS

J. LEBRON MCBRIDE



We have had requests for *Proclamation!* to address the emotional and social issues people face as they leave the Seventh-day Adventist church. Once a person understands the problems with Adventist theology, the problems of disagreeing with and leaving the community become increasingly daunting as friends and loved ones pull away in order to protect their own identities and places in the denominational culture. Lebron McBride drew from his own experience of leaving the Adventist church after spending six years as an Adventist pastor and also from his clinical experience in family therapy as he wrote his new book, *Living Faithfully with Disappointment in the Church*, published by The Haworth Press. This article is drawn in part from this book.

Just as a dog is rarely found with only one flea and a diamond has more than one sparkle, so theological transitions have more than one dimension. Most people who come to new theological understandings do so by diligent study and reflection; they soak in their new discoveries like sponges absorbing water. Usually people come to intellectual insights that are freeing, resonating with their new spiritual convictions. However, in the whirlwind of the stimulation and excitement of their new discoveries, people often neglect a vital piece of the transition puzzle. Far too often, sincere persons are unprepared for the emotional impact of a theological awakening, especially when they have been intertwined in a toxic and controlling church. In fact, the emotional conflict may prove almost unbearable. People may get lost in a devastating transitional wilderness where life feels barren and desolate and the fierce monsters of loneliness, grief, anger, depression, anxiety, and other powerful emotions show their fangs and appear ready to devour them.

This article will address the intense emotional and psychological dimension that may accompany a transition in belief and church identity. Oftentimes toxic churches have, over time, built psychological walls beyond which are wasteland moats around their closed systems. In attempting to leave the system, one has to maneuver among emotional predators to find true freedom. For example, teachings stating that a certain church is the only true church, the "remnant," or "the last day church" are psychological barriers that can be difficult to destroy. Further, destructive churches often develop very strong myths among the members that if they leave the organization, they will be

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eternally cursed or damned and will not survive spiritually. In addition, such churches usually have internal myths about the terrible things that happened to “brilliant lights” that went out of the organization and how they died in great despair. Certainly, there can be no stories of persons deciding to leave and going into other ministries and having success for God. Of course, some churches shun those who do not follow the party line and prevent members from even having contact with excommunicated persons. Other toxic religions build in such social barriers to contact with former members that open discussion and honest dialogue is essentially impossible. People who leave are emotionally cut off in various manners.

When a church's theology supports a closed system and limited or no interaction with “outsiders” who worship differently or who have the “mark of the beast” or some other apocalyptic “mark,” many fear the wilderness that lies outside that church is too threatening to risk experiencing. Anyone who once accepted such teachings or has been brainwashed by them should not minimize the powerful addiction to the church they ensure. These tactics make it very difficult for members to explore options intellectually and emotionally. Again, even when one does somehow break free enough to come to new intellectual and spiritual understanding, the psychological impact of abandoning those teachings may be what sneaks up and destabilizes the person. Those who do venture out of the church do best if they know of the psychological and emotional dangers ahead.

Human beings are social creatures with profound needs of attachment. When we break an attachment to another or even to a church, we usually suffer deep emotional agony. Many dynamics may influence the extent of this suffering: how long the relationship has been in place, how important it has been, what our support network is like post-attachment, what we believe about the attachment, how many areas of our lives the break in attachment impacts, and so on. Therefore, we cannot always judge for ourselves how profoundly the break-up may impact us; much less should we judge how others react to a similar severance. A foundational principle in our dealings with people who leave particular churches, therefore, should be that we not judge each other regarding the timing nor the amount of struggle involved. Although people on similar wilderness journeys from toxic churches have much in common, complications vary enough that a simplistic “one size fits all” type of understanding will not be equally helpful to everyone. Each individual, no matter where in the process of an exodus, must assess carefully and walk by faith while being true to self as well as honest with God.

One model for understanding the severing of an attachment to a church is that of divorce. From working as a family therapist, I know from experience how varied reactions to divorce can be. However, people can usually expect a roller

coaster of emotions during a marital break-up, often vacillating from sheer panic to calm assurance that one can survive. Profound ambivalence is often present; people make emotional progress and then move back again. Clean, fast, simple, and easy breaks in attachments are unusual for caring persons, whether that break is with a spouse or with a church into which one has fully invested oneself.

Continuing with the model of divorce, think of a spouse that has an abusive partner, and compare this relationship to a member of an abusive church. It may, in such cases, be very clear intellectually that one needs to divorce in order to survive emotionally and physically, but emotionally the person

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think of a spouse that has an abusive partner, and compare this relationship to a member of an abusive church. It may, in such cases, be very clear intellectually that one needs to divorce in order to survive emotionally and physically, but emotionally the person may feel confused.

may feel confused. Often the abusive partner has used myths much like the ones already mentioned in relationship to abusive churches in an effort to convince the abused spouse that she cannot survive without him. The abuser may have told the victim such things as: “You will never survive without me,” or “No one would have you but me.”

There is a psychological term called *cognitive dissonance* that describes our internal tension and struggle when we simultaneously hold conflicting beliefs or attitudes, or when our beliefs contradict our behavior. For example, if a person believes that divorce is wrong and honors the marriage vows but simultaneously realizes that staying in an abusive marriage endangers one's children or oneself, the resulting conflict is cognitive dissonance. The reality of the abuse may be clearly evident, but the intellectual belief about the permanence of marriage and the emotional attachment to the spouse may cause the person great internal struggle and confusion. Or to take another example, one may

TABLE 1. Warning Signs of Rigidifying Religion

- When the system becomes more important than the members
- When self identity and individuality are smothered, stifled, or devoured
- When shame is used to control
- When emotional numbing occurs
- When there is coercion instead of invitation
- When questioning is not permitted or is ignored
- When spiritual growth is blocked or stopped
- When authority is used to manipulate
- When most energy is spent maintaining the status quo
- When members are isolated from society
- When the system, leaders, scriptures, other writings, rituals, and so on become more important than a relationship with God
- When leaders are not held accountable
- When the importance of healthy relationships is minimized

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TABLE 2. Psychological Danger Zones When Leaving Toxic Religious Systems

- A temptation of going back to the old belief structure, not because it is any longer valid, but for a security and safety that actually is a false security that will not last.
- A temptation of believing that everything spiritual or religious has to be thrown away—"throwing the baby out with the bath water."
- A temptation of going to extremes of living such as substance abuse or other addictive behaviors to numb out the pain or self-medicate.
- A temptation of the denial of any new concepts and an attempt to shut out any thinking that brings inner conflict.
- A temptation of accommodating and reworking any new belief system to fit the old system to the extent that it compromises integrity.
- A temptation of treating those who do not grasp the newfound theological perspectives in a non Christ-like manner.
- A temptation of getting so hung up on theological hair splitting that a relationship with Christ and the central teachings of the gospel are neglected.

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change a religious practice out of a new Biblical understanding, but the old familiar pattern may result in the new religious practice feeling awkward for awhile. Often when there is change in our beliefs we go through a wilderness experience of emotional ambivalence before our minds and hearts are integrated regarding the belief.

All that has been stated thus far does not do justice to the intensity of the traumatic injuries that many experience on their religious journeys or upon exiting a toxic church. Such churches may incorporate many or all of the characteristics listed in TABLE 1. When people have been born into or have fully integrated into such a system, their normal emotional processes are stifled and their personal autonomy is often compromised. Some destructive religions are very good at pulling people into closely controlled and conforming networks that entangle most, if not all, areas of their lives. This enmeshment results in a profound "gut wrenching" if one discovers that the internalized belief system has major cracks in it or is completely bankrupt.

As the shattering of one's assumptions and beliefs gains in momentum, so does a shattering of the foundation of one's security or of life itself. God may appear absent. Former friends may abandon or reject. If one is employed by the organization, career and income may be lost. Like an

addict that goes into physical withdrawal, so a person leaving the attachment and womb of a toxic religion often has emotional withdrawal. Some even return to their religious addiction in order to get relief. These people can be the saddest cases of all because the cognitive dissonance of such a return ensures that they have no peace—or they go numb to their spiritual experience and become robots going through motions of religious life that have no meaning.

There is a better way. The road best traveled is walking through the wilderness toward the promised land of healing. It is not an easy journey and it is filled with dangers (see TABLE 2), but it is well worth the agonizing struggle of the wilderness to find the promised land of freedom and wholeness.

Considerations When Making a Theological Transition

I would like to suggest some important considerations for making religious transitions such as those we are discussing. No decision of such magnitude should be attempted without much thought, reflection, and prayer.

First of all, do not minimize the stress. In stress theory there is the concept of a "pile-up" of stressors, and I know of few instances where the pile-up of stress is any higher than

when exiting some churches. The stress is not just in one area of life but is pervasive across most domains of living. There can be horrific stress because of the breakdown of a person's support system, social network, family life, mental theological framework, emotional securities, personal history, worldview, in some cases financial and career investment, and so on. For a time a comfort zone is nowhere to be found. Even persons who are very stable can only take so much, and when stress is so intrusive to so many areas of life, there is much at risk. When you survey the wasteland you must cross to get to a better spiritual and emotional land, prepare as best you can and beware of these dangers and risks. Otherwise, you will certainly be blindsided by the wilderness temptations and confrontations. For many, it will not be a short or simple journey. I have known some who continued to feel guilty for years even though they knew for certain they were at a different point theologically and their former way was empty for them. Guilt can be true guilt or false guilt. In cases such as this, one is not dealing with true guilt for a wrong done but with the residual effects of a conscience that has been carefully indoctrinated and is, therefore, overly active with a guilt that is false. I think this is especially true for those who were indoctrinated as children, so beware.

Make sure you have some support in place. The journey may lead to unexpected developments. Friends may not understand and may distance from you or even totally condemn you. Even the unthinkable may occur, and family members may sever ties with you. Therefore, it is best to consider whom you may be able to trust and lean on when everyone else is unavailable. Such support is vital, for out in the wasteland of transition it can become very lonely for awhile. You can always know that God is with you, but it also helps to have some human touch and support along the way.

Support from others who have walked before or are walking with you on this wilderness journey can be tremendously helpful. Such support normalizes your experiences, and you will not feel so lonely and as if you have lost your mind.

Don't waste too much time with rigid minds. It is natural to want to share the excitement of new and fresh understandings, but it takes a lot of wisdom to do so effectively. No matter how much logical knowledge and insight one has to share, if the recipient is not open to dialogue and is threatened by the material, it can be useless. Here we need to be "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves," and we need to apply the principles of seed sowing. Attempting to sow on hard stony ground will not be fruitful, and it is true that the minds of religiously rigid persons cannot be penetrated. Certainly we want to be available to share the good news as persons are open to it, but the quicker we learn to discern those who are eager to dialogue versus those who simply want to argue, the better off

we will be. The more defensive we make persons by our own reactivity, the more determined they become to dig in and argue for their own points and the less they can hear opposing points, no matter how valid. With some it is best to avoid all theological discussion because it will be useless and totally unproductive. This is a difficult lesson to learn, but we must sometimes wait for a more fruitful time. Such a time may be years in coming, or it may never come. Closed minds have closed hearts, and we must leave this to the Spirit of God and know what our limitations are. At times I think it is even useful to attempt to speak to family members or others with whom we continue to interact about a

Timing may vary as to when is the most difficult part of grief. All powerful feelings and experiences can raise their heads and show their fangs in grief: anger, frustration, agony, yearning, depression, anxiety, loss of identity, agitation, despair and so on. Even the shutting down of emotions for awhile can be a reaction in order to get some rest from the intensity of feelings.

truce in matters of religion. It may be that you are not the one that can discuss issues with them, and certainly you may benefit from a moratorium on abusive and degrading discussions they push upon you.

Allow grief and realize that persons grieve in various ways—there is no one correct manner in which to grieve. When there is loss, grief is normal, not abnormal. Our society has popularized certain stages of grief, thus promoting a belief that if you go through the various steps, grief will be completed. However, in real life grief is emotionally all over the place and is rarely a neat progression of steps. It is vitally important to realize that two persons in the same family may not grieve in the same manner or have the same reactions to loss. Timing may vary as to when is the most difficult part of grief. All powerful feelings and experiences can raise their heads and show their fangs in grief: anger, frustration, agony, yearning, depression, anxiety,

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It is so important not to expect a neat and tidy grief package and to remember that anyone who cares deeply may grieve deeply when there is loss. Grief reveals past attachment and caring and will, most likely, wax and wane and subside for awhile before coming forth with a new vengeance. Some grief lasts a lifetime; however, time normally does bring relief. A person may experience some losses long after leaving a destructive church. For example, being part of a special group, the group identity, the apparent closeness of the group, the like-mindedness and so on—although largely false perceptions—are powerful losses.

The loss of family and friends can be traumatic; many cut off suddenly and dramatically and cause a questioning of trust and the validity of all relationships. It is important to remember that those cutting themselves off are responding to their own insecurities and inability to tolerate anything that threatens their fragile belief structure. This self-induced separation may be the most obvious illustration of the bankruptcy of their religion at a deeper level. Truth is not so easily shaken and disturbed. The unfortunate reality is that many times there is nothing you can do to bring any closure to such relationships, and persons who do cut off in this manner often have to demonize you to give themselves an excuse for their behavior.

Don't let criticism and negativity overcome you; move toward the positive. One of the worst things that can occur is that we can take on the characteristics of our theological adversaries and become just as negative and

controlling as they are. It takes grace to accept persons where they are, and it may help if we remember our own past and that we were in the same place at one point. One of the marks of psychological and spiritual maturity is the ability to move to a different understanding without rejecting those who remain at the former level of understanding.

Consider your transition a traumatic experience in many respects. There are, of course, so many great things that happen with a transition to a gospel and Christ-centered approach to living. For me, however, it has been helpful to compare the experience of leaving a toxic church with other cases of trauma. When we transition out of very controlling, unhealthy churches, we usually experience the shattering of our beliefs and ways of living, of practices and habits that we have internalized, and of relationships and securities. It was an important insight for me to realize that when one moves away from the womb of a confining theological world, even if it is a freeing move, one experiences some of the same reactions we find in trauma victims. After a person experiences trauma such as an assault or a war, they are often left with profoundly disorganizing and disorienting results. They do not know whom to trust or to what to cling any longer. They cannot find rest or peace. Their faith is broken. There is profound loss of innocence.

Those who are exiting a rigid church have been in a structure of tight false security that allows little room for questioning and promotes the illusion of having all the answers. Many have, therefore, never allowed their minds to question and explore, and such questioning initially feels blasphemous. It is, though, part and parcel of healthy and mature functioning and growing. Initially, however, the process can be terribly unsettling and feel as if there is nothing to grab for an anchor. The emotional uncertainty can be intense enough in some to be considered trauma.

Positive Points for Surviving Transition Trauma

I have given some important considerations for those exiting toxic religious systems and, while there is some overlap, I will now underscore some positive points on how to survive the emotional trauma.

Accept that ambiguity is much more a part of faith than you have previously been taught. There is not a clear-cut answer for every theological question we have. Questions and honest doubt are parts of genuine faith. Most toxic organizations have an "answer" to everything, but you have to accept their presuppositions in order to believe them. I am not sure where it originated, but the quote: "Why is it that the religious institutions that say they have all the answers, never allow any questions?" holds great insight. Ponder it.

One has to ask if certainty in all areas is really valid or necessary. It appears to me that living with paradox and not being anxious about it is a hallmark of psychological health.

Put your focus on Christ and his acceptance of you

W E B sites of interest

www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

Letters, news, free downloads, online book resources

www.SDAoutreach.org

J. Mark Martin's audio messages, study materials

www.EllenWhite.org

Large collection of information on Ellen G. White

www.FormerAdventist.com

Testimonies of former SDAs, Bible studies, and forum

www.OneFlockMinistries.org

Greg Taylor, author of the book *Discovering the New Covenant*.

www.TruthorFables.com

Large site with information, studies, testimonies, resources

and your journey. Christ accepted the disciples and shared communion with them shortly before they abandoned Him. Their faith was imperfect and in transition, yet Christ accepted them and continued to work with them. He will do no less with you. Christ is much more graceful than what you have internalized from the teaching of your toxic church. He is with you even when it doesn't feel He is, and he will bring you through the wilderness, for he has been there and knows the way.

Remember the importance of forgiveness, but acknowledge that forgiveness may not be immediate and may not bring positive feelings. Just as Christ has forgiven and continues to forgive us, so we seek to forgive others. But it may take time to forgive a religious institution that you feel has harmed you. Even when you choose to forgive, the hurt and pain may remain; forgiveness is not a magical wand that removes all negative feelings. Our acceptance before God is not based upon the perfection or imperfection of our personal forgiveness. If it did, our forgiveness would become a demand of works righteousness. Ultimately, the only way we can forgive an entity that never apologizes is by turning over to God our "right" to get even. We are accepted and the Spirit continues to work with us in that acceptance in spite of our continued imperfection in forgiveness or in anything else. Perfectionism is an example of the all-or-nothing, black-or-white thinking that sometimes remains with us from toxic religion. It is unrealistic, and God's grace reaches us even in the struggles of our daily lives.

Find persons and churches for worship and interaction. Following this advice will take great effort, and you will have to realize and accept that no person or institution is perfect or can provide everything for you. This reality is contrary, of course, to what you may have been taught by church that told it was to be all things to you. Any church that tells us it can do everything for us that we need is simply telling a falsehood. However, once we have believed this fallacy, it may color our view of all other churches, and we continue to expect too much at times.

Don't look for all the points of disagreement with new friends or institutions, but focus on points of agreement. Many theological disagreements arise over issues that are not central to the gospel and are not definitively explained in the Bible. One of the things taught in toxic organizations is that you cannot debate and disagree. In a healthy environment, persons discuss issues openly and do not have to come to the same conformity to be accepted. You need fellowship with others or isolation will stifle and warp your progress. Public worship is needed.

Seek balance in all areas of life. Not one of us is truly balanced, and giving attention to the spiritual, social, physical, and mental areas of life is vital, especially when we are under stress. Do not neglect the importance of physical exercise to assist with emotional agitation and depression.

Avoid extremes. Eat well and find outlets and hobbies that take you away from the intensity of the religious struggles you have been exposed to in your transition. An obsession with theological issues without balance becomes an insane approach to living.

Take a long and meditative look at the foundational Christian concepts such as grace, forgiveness, acceptance, and God's infinite love. If you continue to study only minute details of obscure theology, your relationship with God will not develop. If you constantly feed on negatives your faith will be starved. You need, most of all, to develop your relationship with Christ and find solace and healing in

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his care for you. Careful reflection on the great principles and concepts of Christianity will pay great psychological and emotional dividends.

Conclusion

It is truly a myth that you cannot survive an exodus from a toxic church. There may indeed be emotional trauma as you make the break and in the wilderness once you leave, but even Christ himself spent some time in the wilderness. The temptations of the wilderness are great. The fierceness of the emotional predators that attack you can be devastating. However, once you have made it beyond the wilderness, you will recognize how Christ sustained you even during your weakest moments. You will wonder how you previously got so caught up in all the theological briars and thickets of the old system. You will begin to relish the newfound freedom to commune with Christ without all the distractions of a toxic belief system sticking and jabbing its sharp thorns into your psyche. Best of all, you will find that Christ is the Promised Land beyond the wilderness that brings rest to your soul! **!**

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Come experience the joy of Jesus CONTINUED FROM BACK

that church. They believed with all their hearts in the uniqueness of the movement, in its "remnant" status, its diet, its prophet. Most of my family are still members of that church. I will state here and now that I do not believe that there is a more sincere or a harder-working believer in all the world than a sincere Seventh-day Adventist. I also believe, based on my experience, that there is no more afraid or insecure believer in all the world than a sincere Seventh-day Adventist.

I grew up believing that you open the Bible with your pre-learned beliefs, then you read with the Smorgasbord method using Ellen White's instructions: "Line on line, line on line. Here a little. There a little." No wonder the reformers insisted on the Bible ONLY, as the ONLY written, revealed, Word of God. When I think back to the way I learned the Bible in Church schools, academy, and early college years, the one emotion that stands out the most is fear.

I can remember being taught that in the "last days" we would be hunted, arrested, persecuted, and maybe killed. I remember learning that Catholic churches have torture chambers in their basements in secret places that are all ready for the Time of Trouble when we would have to flee for our lives because we kept the Sabbath. "Sunday keepers," I learned, will be the ones who will spy on us and report us and turn us in for

she would recite one of the most serious quotations that she knew. "Every word, every thought, every action, will come into judgment." Even one unconfessed sin would keep her out of heaven. Hours before she died she was wringing her hands and softly repeating to herself, "I hope I've remembered them all." But Jesus has better news, remember? "He who believes in Him (meaning Himself) is NOT JUDGED" (John 3:18), and "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes Him who sent me, HAS eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). Ah man, I wish my mom could have believed that. That is Joy!

My heavenly Father has granted me the gift of lots of time to sit and read. With a disability, sometimes all I CAN do is read. A personal discipline of mine is to read the Bible through twice each year. I have now read ten translations, complete, in context, front to back. One of the greatest pleasures I have is when I turn the page from Malachi to Matthew. I always compare that experience to a breath of fresh spring air after the stuffy indoor air of winter. (OK, here in Florida that isn't such a good analogy, but I remember the harsh winters in the midwest.) Growing up we spent much time reading, studying, and dwelling in the Old Testament. I really believe that it is in the NEW that we find the words of life. Here is where we meet Jesus. He told the Pharisees, "You search the scriptures (that's the Old Testament) for in them you think you have eternal life. But they testify of ME. Yet you will not come to me" (John 5:39-40). Do you want Joy? Come to Jesus. You want to lose your fears? You want rest? Come to Jesus. You want to have complete assurance and safety in your salvation? Come to Jesus.

So, how do you tell those you love about the Gospel? Jesus said if He is lifted up, He will draw all to Himself. How do you lift Him up? I have found that the best and only sure way is in prayer. It's hard not being able to share the depth of my faith with my loved ones because it makes them angry. Fear causes that anger. It's hard to see them look to the cross, then say, "But I still have to . . ." (you fill in the law, doctrine, rule). I want to weep! Jesus is complete! His work is finished. He is at rest, and He offers that perfect rest to you. You only have to accept it. When He said, "It is finished," He did not mean finished for that day. He meant forever. So keep praying for them. Forever, if need be!

Jesus gave us a new law. He told us to love as He loved us. Have you ever thought of what that meant? He loved us enough to die for us. Yet, at the time of His deepest trouble, ALL deserted Him! Do you know what I would have done? I would have said, "Hey guys, you wanna run? I'm out of here! You all handle your problems on your own!" But not Jesus. He forgave them! He went through with the whole thing, just like He KNEW how it would turn out. He saw the cursing Peter, the running, terrified friends, the murderous Paul, and even the worthless ME! And He did it all anyway!

I'm not so quick to "proclaim the gospel" any more. I will introduce my friend Jesus to anyone. I will talk about Him and

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persecution. I remember the hushed sounds of church members talking in worried tones downstairs in our living room the night that John Kennedy was elected president. I looked out of my upstairs window down the country road, expecting to see neighbors coming to the house bearing "torches" to carry us away. (I know it's silly, but it was REAL, and I remember.) Yet, Jesus said, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for My sake, for great is your reward in heaven."

One of my passions in the last several years has been the studying of church history. The stories of the martyrs have always amazed me. I also marvel that in the last 2000 years, tens of millions of my brothers and sisters have been killed, raped, tortured, enslaved, and imprisoned for their faith. Story after story tells of women, men, even children, going to their deaths, singing praises to Jesus! They were not afraid! Even today, the carnage continues. Persecution is not a future event; it has always been the life-blood of the Christian church. I am also amazed that during all the time I was so afraid of a "Time of Trouble," my brothers and sisters were dying not for the day on which they worshiped but for WHOM they worshiped and because they were known as His. Further, the reports state that they have had their JOY to the end. Jesus still keeps His word!

I can remember the look of fear in my mother's eyes when

Made a difference

I received your free copy of *Proclamation!* and would like to thank you for sending it. I have read it from cover to cover and loved every second of it.

I thank God that I somehow stumbled onto your website. You also sent me a copy of *White Washed and Sabbath in Christ*. I hope to send you a donation soon. I collect cans and bottles for the redemption money, so the next time I have enough collected, I want to send you the funds.

God bless you. You have made a real difference to me and I'm sure to hundreds if not thousands like me.

TRAVIS HULL

McGregor Wright's article excellent

Thanks so much for putting my name on your mailing list. My first issue of *Proclamation!* arrived recently, and I was for some time hardly able to put it down.

...I found McGregor Wright's article on the unity of the law excellent. I'm an evangelical Christian with SDA neighbors and have been discussing Adventism with their pastor after feeling the Lord would have us attend a Revelation seminar. We lasted five weeks so qualified for the free Bible with H.M.S. Richards Bible Helps (using the term loosely)...

Once again, thank you. We feel the Lord has put us here (we prayed for our neighbors before moving to the area) and has orchestrated our contact and growing friendship with them—and I feel He has put me in touch with you. If my name comes to your mind, would you pray, please? The name of the Adventist pastor I'm engaging with is _____. I'd certainly appreciate your prayers. Thanks so much!

Sabbath in Eden

With each issue of *Proclamation!* I scan for

any comments dealing with Sabbath in Eden. You are very silent on this topic. Neither Dale Ratzlaff nor *Proclamation!* has answered the fact that the Sabbath was made before sin and before any law or covenant. Genesis 2:2&3 says God rested from His work and made the Sabbath holy. He obviously told Adam and Eve what He had done, or how would we know about it today? The Sabbath was created for perfect sinless mankind. Why should God destroy or change what was perfect?

McGregor Wright wants to nail this perfect Sabbath to the cross???... Sabbath is not a law but a perfect and changeless INSTITUTION. Eden gave us two institutions, marriage and the Sabbath. God later surrounded these institutions with protective laws.... If the Sabbath was an Eden law and it was nailed to the cross, was marriage in Eden a law that was also nailed to the cross? Are you opening the door to a new twist on gay theology?...

Thanks for your efforts, Colleen and Richard. You are a good "wordsmith" and produce an artistic journal, but until you answer the above, I can only feel great sorrow for your chosen blindness. Satan is blessing your efforts.

ELIZABETH ISKANDER, MD

Editor's note: (After the next letter)

More on the Sabbath

Thank you very much for sending me your *Proclamation!* magazine. We go through every article, including the letters, with a [fine] toothed comb, analyzing them and comparing them to the Bible.... It seems like the old worn-out Protestant arguments are repeated time after time. Nevertheless, it has been very useful to us, as it has helped us to affirm and to appreciate more our belief in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Just as an example, I would like to mention your editor's note to the letter "Nothing to say" in your September/October, 2005 issue. You say: "Nowhere does the Bible command people to keep the Sabbath because it is a memorial of creation." It seems to me that you are blinded by your ideology, as you just have to read the fourth commandment to see that verse 11 starts with the word "for," which gives us the reason why God asks us to "remember the Sabbath day," ("for in six days God created heaven and earth...")

You also conveniently forgot that in Genesis 2:3, it says that "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because (here we have the reason for the blessing and sanctification) in it, He rested from all His work which God had created and made."...

The truth is that the Sabbath was given to mankind, regardless of race or nationality...

Thank you again for your magazine that helps me see in a very distinct way your errors, as I contrast them with the beauty of the Bible and the truths of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Please, keep them coming.

I hope that when you publish this letter, you also print my name. I'm not ashamed of my name or my beliefs.

ANTONIO ROMERO

Editor's note: Genesis 2:2-3 states that God blessed the seventh day because on that day He "ceased" or "rested" from all his work. His work was completely done, and just as Christ completed His work on the cross, so on the seventh day of creation week, God ceased His work of creation. He might just as well have said, as did Jesus, "It Is Finished." He and Adam and Eve were in complete oneness. His blessing the seventh day was (1) without evening and morning, unlike the previous six days, and (2) was not a com-

help them to find Him; I will help them get to know Him and feel the joy of their salvation in Him. But I will not argue "religion" or "doctrine" with anyone. I really believe in Paul's advice to Titus. He told the young preacher to avoid foolish controversies and disputes about the Law, for they are "unprofitable and worthless." When people come to the cross to argue, they go away empty except for their own hot air. But when they come on their knees wanting to know the one who died there for them, they will go away filled with His JOY!

There is an old saying, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." I hope to be that sermon. I hope that in the trials of life, I will be able to wear Jesus' smile. When confronted with legalism, I hope to show the love and spirit of Jesus. I pray that in my life, I will be so transparent that when people look at me, they will see only Him. It is the desire of my life that I may know Him—not just to know about

Him, but really to know Him. To know Him is to become like Him. And when His own see Him, they will be drawn to Him.

Right now, as you read this, YOU are my family, and I am praying for you. Do you really know the good news about Jesus? If you don't, listen... God loves you. He sent His son Jesus to die for your sin. He was buried, then rose from the grave. He's alive and ready to give you life that will never end if you repent of your sin, place your complete faith and trust in Him, and allow Him to be Lord of your life, forever. Today, right this moment, won't you give your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior? It's really that simple. Just ask Him in your own words, and from this moment on, you will KNOW that He died for even you!

Now go tell a brother or sister what you have done! Even call or write the good people of this publication. I know they will be so happy to help you get to know Him.

mand. It was simply God "ceasing," not "observing a day." He was done. He was at rest; Adam and Eve were created and entered that rest with God.

The Levitical Sabbath was a reminder not of creation—God's working—but of His rest. It was a reminder of the unbroken existence Adam and Eve and God enjoyed after His finished work. It was never about the six days, *per se*—it was always about God's finished work—His "ceasing" and rest.

The Levitical Sabbath also looked ahead to the again finished work of God after Jesus shed His blood of the eternal covenant. Again mankind would be able to enter His rest and live in unbroken communion with Him—a communion that had not been possible since Eve ate the forbidden fruit. The Sabbath looked back at God's once finished work and oneness with humanity, and it foreshadowed the again finished work of God and oneness with humanity after the cross.

God didn't ask any human to DO anything at the end of creation related to the Sabbath. His rest simply WAS. Just as Adam and Eve did nothing to enter the sacredness of the seventh day (which was timeless—without evening and morning), so we do nothing to enter God's rest TODAY (Hebrews 4:7) except surrender to Jesus. We again enter the holiness of God's presence. The "institution" of Sabbath at creation was never about "observance" or "holy time." Always it was about God's finished work providing the means of God's people entering the holiness of intimate relationship with Him through no work of their own.

Exodus 16 preceded Sinai by about one month. God gave Israel the symbols of the Bread of Life and His rest simultaneously. They were inseparable. Gathering the manna—the shadow of the Bread of Life—meant also observing the shadow of His rest every seventh day. Both were shadows of the coming Christ (see Colossians 2:16-17).

One month later, at Sinai, God made the Sabbath the symbol of His covenant with the nation of Israel. Until Jesus came, that day would remind them that, originally, God created man to live in complete rest with and in Him, and again, they would be able to enter that rest when the Messiah came.

The entire point of salvation is entering God's rest through His finished work—by no work or observance of our own. The Sabbath was a reminder of that salvation rest. Now that we have the reality in the finished work of Jesus and in our birth from above, we have no more need of the day of reminder. We now have Jesus Himself!

The shadow or reality—it's an eternal choice.

Informative Articles

I am an evangelical Christian, but your articles are very informative and help me clarify what I believe about the Sabbath, tithing, etc. I appreciate your clear use of the Scriptures.

Support

You folks are so precious to us. You are our support group!... God bless you.

Word from a warrior

So, Colleen, you gave up Sabbath on Saturday and now you work on Saturday... It has been established (by people much smarter than you) that Sunday is the first day and Saturday is the seventh day, so Jesus rested on Saturday.

...Your fearless leader... has proclaimed the Ten Commandments were ended at the cross. The Ten Commandments are God's law, so now you can do what you want and not break the law... when we all get to heaven we will keep the Sabbath every Saturday. You, Colleen, are doing the devil's work pulling people away from the truth...

In conclusion, I do not believe in what brother Ratzlaff is peddling. You had the truth and you gave it up.

When I get to heaven I will look for you. I know what you look like, and I will have plenty of time to look for you.

One of God's warriors.

Encouragement

Hang in there, Colleen!!

Negative Tone

Please take me off your mailing list. I don't believe serving as a conduit for complaint and bitterness is a valid purpose.

Your authorship is very narrow. Your tone is negative.

I hope someday you as an editorial board ask some hard questions of yourselves.

Magazine a blessing

I wanted to say that your magazine was a real blessing to our family and my daughter's family. We have been Adventists for 21 years, and we have had some questions for some time. My daughter had been praying for God to show her some answers and had been impressed to go to the internet. She typed in "Adventist" and found the OneFlockMinistries site. After reading Greg Taylor's story, we... studied each subject in our Bibles, and it was like a veil was lifted. Now we want to study for some more answers...

Please continue to send us *Proclamation!* Also, please remember us in your prayers, that we may continue to find answers and the true light of the gospel. Also, we want to find a church we feel comfortable in, and it is very hard coming out of Adventism...

Thank you for the great magazine, and it's wonderful to know we're not alone.

God bless your ministry.

Looking forward to the next issue

I received my first issue in the mail and devoured it cover to cover. How timely was the article "What was nailed to the Cross" by McGregor Wright...

My father went to his grave defending Adventism and never really forgave me for leaving the faith. My mother, who was my worst critic with comments that I was deceived, brain washed, and hypnotized, is now reading her Bible. The Holy Spirit is opening her eyes to many things that the Adventists are in error about. She is falling in love with Christ and is learning that God is Abba Father, not a condemning, judgmental God ready to strike her down if she does not do good works...

My mother, who has a 9th grade education, is beginning to take on some of the staunchest Adventists, pointing to her Bible and saying, "I have to believe what I am reading. The Bible is absolute truth, and if what I am reading is truth, you are wrong."

Praise God. I ask that you pray that people will come into her life to help her continue her journey into the light. Thank you for your wonderful magazine. I'm looking forward to receiving my next issue in the mail. So is my mother!

LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR CLARITY OR SPACE

Life Assurance Ministries, Inc

MISSION

To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

MESSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP WEEKEND

Knowing *Jesus* the Word

February 17 to 19, 2006

Trinity Church, Redlands, California

Presenters: (confirmed as of November 11, 2005)

- Gary Inrig, Senior Pastor, Trinity Church, Redlands
- Elizabeth Inrig, Women's Ministries Director, Trinity Church, Redlands
- Mark Martin, Senior Pastor, Calvary Community Church, Phoenix
- Dale Ratzlaff, Founder, Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine
- Greg Taylor, Pastor and advisor, African former Adventist ministries
- Faith stories by Rick and Sheryl Barker, Patria Rector, Chris Lee, and Geoffrey Drew

Lodging in Redlands:

- Comfort Inn and Suites, 909-335-9988
- Best Western Sandman Motel, 909-793-2001
- Dynasty Suites Redlands, 909-793-6648

Cost for attending the retreat: \$65.00 per person

- Cost includes meals, snacks and printed materials. Please notify us if you are vegetarian.
- Make checks payable to Life Assurance Ministries and return in enclosed envelope.
- **Deadline for receiving registration: January 15, 2006 (NOTE CHANGE OF DEADLINE DATE).**



Trinity Church in Redlands, California is the host church of the FAF weekend.

Yes, I want to register for the Former Adventist Fellowship weekend at Trinity Church in Redlands, California, February 17–19, 2006.

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Number attending _____ X \$65 (each person) = Total amount enclosed \$ _____

Vegetarian? YES ☐ NO ☐

Please return with check or money order in included envelope. Deadline is January 15, 2006.

Life Assurance Ministries, PO Box 905, Redlands, CA 92373

Call for more information: 909-794-9804. Deadline for registration: Jan. 15, 2006

Sponsored by Life Assurance Ministries and Trinity Church of Redlands

Come experience the joy of Jesus

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). Jesus said, "No one will take your joy away from you" (John 16:22).

These statements are outstanding, but when you understand to whom He was speaking, they are unbelievable! Jesus was talking to His chosen ones, His closest ones, His best friends, His students—the disciples who would be the founders and Apostles of His church. These men would all, with one exception, die of horrible painful causes. They would be murdered—executed for His sake. Some would be hacked in two with the sword. Others would be burned, beheaded, crucified, even skinned alive. The one who would not die by murder would be sentenced, for a time, to solitary exile on a remote rock of an island in the middle of the sea, and history tells us would be nearly blind and unable to walk unassisted by the time of his death. How could Jesus possibly promise them that their "joy would be full" and that "NO ONE would take it away from them"?

Can you remember the first time you stood at the foot of the cross and looked at that mangled, bloody Man? Can you remember when you looked at that face and saw that He was looking at YOU—and you looked down and saw the bloody hammer in YOUR hand, and realized that YOU had put Him there and that He had

done all of this for YOU? Can you remember how you fell at the foot of that horrible, beautiful cross and wept and begged Him to forgive you? Can you remember?

Can you remember the first time you understood what Easter meant, when you saw the empty tomb and knew that He was ALIVE? When you heard Him call

THOMAS FRANCIS

your name for the first time and knew that He had done this for you, too? Remember the feeling? That is Joy!

Can you remember the first time you discovered the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus? How all at once it hit you just how simple and free His Grace really is? Remember how that load just seemed to roll from your back and you felt really, completely FREE, for the first time in your life? That is Joy!

Can you remember the first time you realized that you ARE saved? Now? FOREVER? Can you remember how you wanted to laugh and dance and cry—all at the same time? How you couldn't wait to tell all

**I also believe, based on my experience,
that there is no more afraid or insecure
believer in all the world than a sincere
Seventh-day Adventist.**

of your loved ones the good news of how Jesus had set you free? Can you remember that feeling? That is Joy! And Jesus really did mean it when He said that No one can ever take your Joy away!

Remember the first time you really DID tell the ones closest to your heart what you had found? Remember the look of fear, distrust, suspicion, almost anger, in their eyes? Remember how you felt like a dumb school kid standing before the teacher while she tapped the ruler in her hand and glared at you with that chilly look that said, "THOMAS, you KNOW it isn't that easy!" Remember?

Please, I don't want to say anything bad about sincere Seventh-day Adventists. I was raised in that faith and spent most of my life in it. My father and mother were converts a few years before I was born, and they died in that faith. They believed in the doctrines of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16



Thomas Francis lived most of his life in the Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana areas. After careers in radio broadcasting, insurance, and law enforcement, he was forced to take disability retirement because of the complications of diabetes. Raised a second generation Adventist, he is currently a member of College Road Baptist Church in Ocala, Florida, where he serves as an adult Sunday School class teacher. He has two grown children, three grandchildren, and a great-granddaughter. He and his wife Carol live in Ocala.

Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.

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