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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

A HOLD-DWELLER LEARNS TO SAIL: A PARABLE

PILGRIM'S VOYAGE



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When God says "Jump!"

COLLEEN TINKER

It was the moment my wildest nightmares had never presaged. Richard and I stood in our kitchen sometime in the middle of 1997 and agreed, "We're going to have to leave the church. We can't leave our names on a membership role that implies we believe in a false prophet. We would have no integrity."

My life as I knew it was over. Everything I was, did, and cherished was somehow connected to Adventism. During the next several months we ricocheted among the five stages of grief: denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and

"You just want to take the easy way out so you don't have to keep the commandments and honor the Sabbath," said many relatives.

"I'd invite you to my party, but I can't eat with you," I heard a loved friend say with a nervous giggle that exploded like a kick in my gut after my initial disbelief.

Others were simply silent. After a flurry of initial questions, friends and even relatives just quietly disappeared. Others with less intimate relationships would look away or dive down a different aisle in the grocery store when we chanced to meet.

Still others who prided themselves on their "open minds" would engage me in chance conversations: "Oh, I don't read Ellen White, and I don't believe I have to keep Sabbath to be saved," some would say condescendingly; "I stay to make a difference from the inside;" or, "Oh, you go to Trinity Church?" (Conspiratorially) "I've heard they have a group there for disgruntled Adventists!"

Knowing we had to leave Adventism in order to be true to Jesus was the most heart-stopping, life-changing interruption we have ever experienced. Taking that walk out of Adventism and watching the doors close behind us gave us the sensation of free-falling from a cliff of an unknown height in zero visibility.

Jesus caught us. When everything we knew and loved was gone, He surprised us with joy. He brought us to a vibrant church where Jesus is honored and His word is respected. He placed us in community and blessed us with true fellowship. He has nourished our sons and brought them Godly friends and mentors. Even more, He has given us work to do.

In this issue Ridge Burns, the director of Forest Home Ministries, discusses his insights about God's interruptions in our lives. Our older son Roy shares his retrospective on our taking him from his Adventist bubble during his mid-teens. David Silverstein and Dorene Arbogast let us see how God interrupted their lives to awaken them to the true gospel, and Chris Lee gifts us with a parable that in many ways is the story we all share. In addition, Dale Ratzlaff and Richard Tinker tell how God is interrupting their lives with His call.

We pray that you will not fear God's interruption in your life but that you will find through it His redemption and the peace of knowing you are in the center of His will.



"So does this mean you're going to turn on me and shoot me when the Sunday Law is passed?" asked a family member.

acceptance. Richard spent extra time in the bargaining stage ("I'd like to sue the church for all that tithe I paid!"), while I wallowed more in depression. Who would I be if I weren't an Adventist? I was more Adventist than I was American. I felt I was losing myself.

What would happen to our boys? How could we yank them out of their Adventist nest?

Almost no one we knew understood. Snatches of conversations from the ensuing months are emblazoned in our memories:

"So does this mean you're going to turn on me and shoot me when the Sunday Law is passed?" asked a family member.

"Can't you keep a foot in both camps?" queried a colleague who tried to convince me to keep my position with an Adventist organization that publicly stated its staff were all loyal Adventists.

"You better be sure you know which spirit is blessing you," said a loved one when we shared an amazing provision from God; "the devil can send 'blessings' to deceive people who leave The Truth."

"I'd rather see the boys in a public school than in a non-Adventist Christian school," asserted yet another relative.

"I don't believe that God really whispered things into Ellen's ear; in fact, I'm not sure what I actually believe. But I stay because I think I can make a difference," confided a religion teacher on an Adventist university campus.

Proclamation!

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Thank you for the Cross

DORENE ARBOGAST

I am a third generation Adventist. I was raised in northern California in an environment like many Adventists': very strict, very observant of Ellen White, and very much under the law. My aunt even prophesied Jesus' second coming several different times and made her own charts for the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. As a child I was scared to hear that the end of time was nearly here and that to be ready I had to be perfect and keep all the Ten Commandments.

I went to Adventist schools until the end of my junior year. By then I had a non-Adventist boyfriend, and I chose to go to public high school for my senior year. Even though I was dating a non-Adventist and had left church school, I was still trying to do what God wanted me to do, so I didn't attend my own graduation because it was on Friday night.

My boyfriend and I decided we wanted to marry, but I knew I couldn't be unequally yoked. Consequently, he was baptized into Adventism when he was 16, and we married a year later.

My new husband was a baseball player, and I would get upset with him when he wanted to attend games on Sabbath. We argued every time there was a game. As our three children were born, we continually struggled to have them keep the Sabbath. It was hard to know where to draw the line regarding what was right and what was wrong; we knew for example, that one couldn't swim on Sabbath, but one could put his feet in the water. Trying to figure out proper Sabbath behavior caused us years of turmoil.

As the years went by and our kids grew up, something very devastating happened in our family. Our youngest daughter married at the age of 20. She tried hard to do everything right; she prayed about the marriage; she went to premarital Bible studies with the pastor and her fiancé; she was chaste before the wedding in spite of pressure from her fiancé. All her efforts, however, could not make the marriage healthy, and it ended in an annulment.

I became hurt and bitter. I quit praying entirely. "I'm done with God," I said. "There's no sense in praying if God doesn't answer us!"

Dorene Arbogast is a retired hair stylist who lives with her husband Jim in Auburn, California. They have three children, one grandchild, and another grandchild on the way. Dorene says that her mission in life now "is to bring people to Jesus."



I know now that God does answer our prayers. I've learned, though, that often we don't understand His answers at the time we first pray.

I had never really read the Bible for myself but had drawn most of my religious understanding from listening to my family and pastors. Now, trapped by tragedy, I didn't turn to God. I didn't count on Him at all; in fact, I had decided He didn't care about us because we were never going to become perfect the way I had been taught we should. I stopped attending church, and for about five years I shut myself off from God.

As the years passed, I began to think I should ease back into going to church a little at a time. About the time I began to consider returning to church, my Adventist cousin and his wife came to visit us. They had never come before, but, he said, something told him to come and see us. After staying a few days, they continued on their trip and returned to us the following weekend. He brought us a *Clear Word Bible* and asked how much I had read God's word. I had to admit I had not read much.

He told me to start reading in Matthew and to continue through the gospels. "Just get to know Jesus," he said.

The room filled with light, and in the middle of the light was a cross. I heard a voice—I know it was God—say, "You are saved by the cross." Darkness returned, and all was still. I knew then that it was not the Sabbath that saved me.

I did as he said. As I progressed through the gospels, I started seeing for the first time what Jesus had done for us. I began going to church every Sabbath and even accepted some church offices. I attended a Sabbath school class that was studying just the Scriptures and enjoyed that study a lot.

Months passed, and the day came when our local church hosted an evangelistic series for the community. I attended almost every night and tried hard to convince the rest of my family to come with me, with little success.

One Sabbath night, our youngest daughter accompanied me. During his sermon that evening, the minister had said that only a handful of faithful Sabbath-keepers would actually go to heaven. On our way home she said to me, "I don't understand this. If only a handful of people will go to heaven, I don't have a chance. I can't keep the Sabbath the way he was explaining we should!"

I felt exactly the same way. All my life I had struggled with where to draw the line. At what point did I cross from proper Sabbath keeping and break into trampling the holy day? Everyone seemed to have different ideas about how to keep Sabbath holy. Some people believed their behavior was completely acceptable while others condemned the same activities.

That night as I lay in bed I began praying. I pleaded with God to help me know how to keep the Sabbath properly. All my life I had been trying to do my best to keep it, and I knew I had failed. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get it right. I knew my life-long struggle with the Sabbath stood between me and being right with God, and I just wanted Him to clarify what He wanted me to do.

Then the most amazing thing happened. The room filled with light, and in the middle of the light was a cross. I heard a voice—I know it was God—say, "You are saved by the cross." Darkness returned, and all was still. I knew then that it was not the Sabbath that saved me.

I didn't speak of this astonishing event to anyone for some time. I couldn't believe, at first, that it could be a valid experience, because I had been taught that the cross was associated with the Catholic Church. Anything Catholic, I knew, was dangerous and false.

I stopped trying to understand and continued reading the Bible every day. I kept noticing references to one body of Christ. For example, in John 17 Jesus prayed to His Father asking that the disciples become one as He and His Father are one. As I saw these references over and over, I began to think, "The Adventist church can't be right because we all have to become one in Christ, but they think they are the only true church."

Puzzled but questioning, I planned with my husband to vacation with a couple we had known for years. They had left the Adventist church 21 years before. They had never really said much about why they had left; my friend would only say mystifyingly, "I have Jesus seven days a week."

"How can she say that?" I would fume to myself. "She knows we need to go to church on the Sabbath."

We had been studying on the phone together for a while before we had planned this trip. She had already challenged me about using the *Clear Word*. "What Bible are you using?" she had asked me one day; "What you read is not what the Bible says. Who published that version?"

When I told her the Seventh-day Adventists had produced it, she said, "That's what I thought."

I compared the *Clear Word* with the NIV, and they were so different I could hardly believe my eyes.

Nevertheless, I determined that I would bring our friends back into Adventism. Along with our personal supplies, I packed all our tracts and pamphlets from church.

We began to study together on our trip, always praying first for the Holy Spirit to guide us. I was amazed at what I

The Great



INTERRUPTER

RIDGE BURNS

God has a way of interrupting our lives. He gives us work to do; we form comfortable routines—and then He comes and interrupts us. That bothers us. Our routines make us feel secure, and we don't like it when God jars us from our comfort zones.

Paul and Ananias were contemporaries. They both lived during the very early days of the church, but they had conflicting views. God interrupted them both, and neither was the same again. Perhaps looking at the ways God interrupted their lives will make us see His interruptions in our own lives differently.

Their story is in Acts 9, but we first meet Paul—then called Saul—in Acts 8:1. Stephen, a deacon in the church at Jerusalem, had just given his last sermon. It was so rich in the Holy Spirit's power that he was stoned to death. "Saul"—a rigidly observant Jew—"was there, giving approval to his death."

"This Christianity will wreck our environment," Saul's presence implied; "I approve this man's death!"

Acts 8:2-3 tells us that godly men buried Stephen's body, and they "mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church."

If Saul lived today, he would be looking for people like you. He'd be doing everything he could to interrupt, discourage, and destroy you.

Nevertheless, the church was expanding. In Damascus, about 120 miles from Jerusalem, God was bringing people—many of them Jews—to know Jesus, and it made Saul angry. He determined to destroy the church in that city.

Acts 9:1 describes Saul's fanaticism: "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples." He went to the high priest and obtained a letter

Ridge Burns is the Ministry President and CEO of Forest Home Ministries in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California. As one of the premiere Christian conference centers in the USA, Forest Home provides life changing events and camping experiences for families, youth, and special groups, ministering to over 60,000 people a year.

A graduate of Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, Ridge holds a Doctor of Ministry degree and is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America.

Ridge founded the Center for Student Missions, a short-term urban mission agency. He and his wife, RobAnne, have also taught at Scott Theological College in Kenya, East Africa with the Africa Inland Mission.

Ridge is the author of three books: *Create in Me...A Youth Ministry*, *The Complete Student Mission Handbook* and *No Youth Worker Is An Island*.

Ridge and RobAnne live in Forest Falls, California with their two children - a son, R.W., and a daughter, Barrett.



permitting him to enter the synagogues to search for Christ-followers worshiping there. If he found any, the letter gave him permission to arrest the believers and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. He was on a mission, and the church in Damascus knew of the terror he and his band of followers were aiming at them.

Saul, however, developed a problem. God interrupted his plan.

"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3).

God interrupted Saul with blinding light. He fell to the ground, and Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Called by name

God called him by name. There is nobody who has ever done anything so terrible that God cannot call him by name. No one has ever done anything so horrible that God turns his back on him. God went to Saul—Public Enemy #1—and essentially said, "I know your name. You may be trying to destroy the church, but you can't escape my personal relationship with you. I want you to know this: you are persecuting me, not the church. I'm working through and in these people; when you're destroying and imprisoning them, you're really doing those things to me."

Never underestimate whom God can use. There is nobody so bad that God can't interrupt his life and use him.

A young man came to our camp a few weeks ago and told his story in our Victory Circle. He was one tough guy—full of tattoos—but God took hold of him. After meeting Jesus, this man went to a nice church with nice people who drive nice cars—and God called him to be a greeter.

He stood up and told us, "I look like a poster child for Satan, but God called me to be a greeter, and no one would shake my hand!"

God doesn't look at what we look at. He invades people's lives, even people that we think He shouldn't use. That's the bizarre thing—God seems to pick the wrong people! God picked Saul to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He didn't pick a nice, quiet, academic pastor; he picked Saul who was zealously persecuting the church!

Unlikely calling

Van Dugen is our food service director. He was sleeping under a bridge 12 years ago, but God invaded his life—and we put him in charge of our food. God has blessed this man. He has become a man of God and has a Godly wife. I listen to him telling people how God has used him. By human standards, he has no business being used by God; he should be under a bridge.

But God invaded his life—and He invades countless unworthy lives.

I talked to a mother of pre-schoolers one day. She told me she used to smuggle drugs from Columbia. She would

ingest bags of drugs and expel them when she got through customs. Yet when I talked to her, she looked like a mom; she drove a mini-van. She had been a drug runner?!

Yes—but God interrupted her life.

He interrupts the lives of all those He calls, and He calls people by their names. "Ridge, Ridge... Carol, Carol... Randy, Randy... why are you running away from me?"

Do you feel like God could never use you? You have been anti-everything. You have resisted the changes you've sensed you should make. But can you hear your name? Can you hear God calling you?

The Next Step

Meanwhile, God tells Saul what to do next. I love what he says in verse 6: "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

That is SO like God. He gives us just enough information for the next step but not enough to get us to the end of the road. That really bothers me; I want to know the ending!

The secret of Christianity is to take just one step of obedience to Jesus at a time. Many are frustrated because they don't know how their situations will resolve. If you're in that position, you're in good company with Public Enemy #1!

Verse 7 tells us that Saul wasn't the only one with a problem; the anti-Christian gang that Saul was leading also had a problem. There they were, on a mission to Damascus to kill the Christians, and suddenly their leader was on the ground talking to Jesus. They were speechless! The Bible tells us they heard a sound, but they did not see anyone.

"Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything" (v. 8-9).

The great anti-Christian leader with a drive to make sure the movement didn't grow was suddenly reduced to being led by the men he had organized. This posse of anti-Christian zealots was reduced to a letter and a handful—a blind leader completely dependent upon them for direction and assistance. In one dramatic moment Saul was taken out, and his men were left powerless and without direction.

For three days Saul was blind. All he could do was pray. I wonder if about day two his compatriots broached him about their letter from the high priest.

"Hey, Saul—what are we going to do about this letter that says we can arrest anybody who believes in Jesus?"

Do you think, maybe, that letter might have become almost embarrassing to Saul? He had started on this journey intending to kill Christ-followers. Now he was praying to the very God he had opposed. He could arrest himself!





Have you ever had the experience of having something really important to you suddenly become worthless after Jesus came into your life? Suddenly that job, that security, that IRA or retirement plan, that friendship or pastime became pale because all you wanted was to know who He is.

Let me suggest that this change in what we value should be a common experience with those of us who love Jesus. "The things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace"—and, I might add, in the flash of light on the road to Damascus. Maybe some of those things you hold dear aren't dear when you see them in the light of His glory and grace.

Ananias

The scene shifts. We leave Saul and his men troubled and confused, trying to figure out what to do with their letter of authorization to arrest Christians. Suddenly we see a new person: Ananias.

Ananias was a disciple of Christ in Damascus. I think he was a church-going guy. He had his one-year Bible, and he was up to date in his reading. He listened to Dobson and Swindoll and other Christian teachers every day. He was a great disciple. He knew Jesus well. He spent time praying and meditating, and he spent time thinking about who Jesus is and how he could walk with Jesus in his life. He was great! He was normal. Perhaps he was a leader in the Damascus church. He was aware of what God was doing, and he was excited about the growth and the converts—until God interrupted his life in a different way.

"The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!'" (verse 10).

The Lord knew his name, too! If you don't remember anything else about this discussion of Acts 9, remember this: God knows your name! You're not just an anonymous creature on planet earth. He knows who you are. Whether you're Saul rebelling against God or you're Ananias in fellowship with God, He knows your name. There's a sense in this story of our knowing who God is, and His knowing us.

There's an intimacy and a love that shows in this exchange between God and Ananias.

"Ananias!" God says.

"Yes, Lord," he answered. In fact, I'll suggest what Ananias might have been thinking when he answered God.

"Yes, Lord; how may I help you?" (He obviously recognized God's voice.) "Is there anything I can do for you today? I would love to serve You. I love to walk with You. I love You. I love to be part of You. What is it? I'll do anything! I'll walk forward; I'll raise my hands. I'll sell my SUV; I'll give my money. Whatever it is—that's how I want to live my life!"

Oh, really?

A man from Tarsus

Verse 11: "The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Strait Street.'"

"Oh, yes," Ananias was thinking; "I know exactly where that is. Of course I'll go; tell me what to do!"

"For there is a man from Tarsus named Saul—"

"What?? Do you know who this Saul is?!"

"For he is praying—"

"Praying? What do you mean, he is praying? He is preying on Christians, that's what he's doing! Do you know who this man is??"

"In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"Wait a minute—that's ME!"

Ananias's response was suddenly fearful and pleading. "Lord," Ananias answered (verse 13).

Just in case God doesn't know who Saul is, Ananias explains it to Him: "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem"—just in case You've forgotten—"And he has come here with authority from the chief priests [there's that letter!] to arrest all who call on your name" (verses 13-14)! God, do you know who this is? Do you know what this is about?

Never underestimate whom God can use. None of us can escape the call of God—unless we rebel.

Sometimes God's call is a flash that throws us to our knees—such as Saul had—and sometimes it's a quiet conviction and our simple surrender.

Never underestimate the interrupting call of God on your life. We sit in church; we worship together; we live our lives in our comfortable community, and one day God interrupts our routine and says, "Would you go to Saul and place your hands on him?"

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"But you don't know who he is Lord," we object. "Do you realize what You're asking me to do? Do you realize how HARD this is?"

God's call

There was a family at Forest Home recently. The husband and wife were probably 35 to 40 years old, and they had a ten-year-old and an eight-year-old. I had met them recently at a speaking engagement, and when I heard where God had called them to go, I invited them to Forest Home for a week to rest before they left.

God had called them to Baghdad. BAGHDAD! They are going to raise their kids and live out their marriage in Baghdad ministering to widows who lost their husbands under the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Never underestimate the interrupting call of God on your life. Does anyone want to join this couple? They're leaving in a couple of months, and I'm sure they would be happy for any of you to join them in Baghdad.

The point is only God can call someone to Baghdad. Only God could orchestrate such a move.

In 1988 I was speaking at a youth conference, and there was a big banner in front of the auditorium proclaiming the participants' willingness to go wherever God would lead. I asked for all those who were willing to go wherever God called to come forward and put their hands on the banner. I emphasized that people should only come if they were pledging to go where God would take them.

One boy from Hutchinson, Kansas, was among those who came. He was a farm kid from the middle of nowhere—but God called him to a place that might as well have been around the world. He called that boy to Skid Row in Los Angeles. Today he is the leader of a program called "Say Yes!" He works out of a church called Central City Community Church on San Pedro Street in the middle of Skid Row, and he's ministering to kids who live in boxes and in hotels. He was a farmer; he drove a combine—and today he's ministering to derelict kids.

Never underestimate the interrupting call of God on your life. Here's the problem, however—God's call to you may not, at first, make you very comfortable.

As Ananias said, "Do you know who that is, God? Do you know his reputation? Have you really thought about what you're asking me to do?"

God gave Ananias a direct answer: "Yes, I know what I'm asking you to do." His command was one word: "Go" (verse 15). In essence, God was saying to him, "Quit talking about it; quit complaining; quit giving me your excuses. Just GO!"

Then God explained His urgency to Ananias. "This man is my chosen instrument—"

Saul? The Number One Enemy? Ananias must have been overwhelmed.

Sometimes the amazing call of God on your life doesn't make sense to anyone else. Why would God use someone like Saul?

But God knew Saul's passion. The passion he had to destroy the church would be the same passion he would employ to promote the church.

God continued explaining his call to Ananias: "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (verse 16). It's not going to be easy for him, God said in essence.

"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it" (verse 17). He placed his hands on Saul. Can you imagine how hard that must have been for him? I wonder if he went down the Street Strait and got to the house of Judas and maybe walked by one time and said to himself, "I can't go in there!"

He went in, however, in obedience to God, and he placed his hands on Saul. And then he said the most astonishing words: "Brother Saul..." (verse 17). Wow.

"My brother." With those words he was saying to Saul, "We're reconciled. I forgive you for your vendetta against the church. I release you from all you have done."

Put yourself in Ananias's position. Think of your worst enemy. Or think of Osama Bin Laden. Imagine he has been arrested in your city and brought to your church to stand before the congregation. Imagine that he stands by the pulpit as you watch, and you have been called to come to him in front of the whole church to bless him. Imagine that your son has lost his life because of Bin Laden, but God has asked you to lay hands on him in order to give him sight about who Jesus is. Imagine that God asks you to call Osama, "Brother."

Ananias chooses to trust God. "The Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (verse 17).

Never underestimate the fact that there is an interrupting call of God on people's lives. Further, never underestimate the amazing presence of God in difficult times. There was a partnership between God and Ananias reflected in his words to Saul: "The Lord... has sent me so that you may see..." Ananias was not there alone. He was not there without the assurance, the sense of God's presence with him.

Have you ever had that sense? Perhaps you have issues at work, at home—perhaps you have a junior high-aged child at home—you're struggling to make things work. Like Ananias undoubtedly said, you can walk through your struggles saying, "God, please be with me. I am toast if You are not with me."

Never underestimate the amazing presence of God in your most difficult times. Let yourself surrender to His presence which you can sense when you shut out the competing "noise" that distracts you. When we stand in His pres-





ence, we can experience His power with us.
Are you facing tough times? Do you have to go to Judas's house on Strait Street and you're not sure how you're going to pull it off? Take a lesson from Ananias: you are not there alone.

A new identity

"Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized" (verse 18).

This detail of Saul's story reminds me of a Jewish woman named Sherry we baptized recently in the lake at Forest Home. I did not realize what baptism means to a Jewish believer. It means severing ties with one's family and culture and one's heritage.

God, however, arranged a remarkable "coincidence." A pastor and his wife from Jerusalem were at our camp that week. Salim, the pastor, and Sherry connected. He was the only person who could understand what her baptism meant. She was completely broken by what she was experiencing. As she was baptized she wept and said, "I feel as if I'm giving up on my family, but I need Jesus!" Her being baptized was an enormous act of trust in God because it represented losing all that she knew, but God surprised her with the support of another Jewish believer as she took the biggest step of her life.

When she came out of the water, she was aglow.

Saul's baptism represented an entire break with all that he had known and loved and valued. He was accepting a completely new life—and God arranged for another Jewish believer—Ananias—to help him say good-bye to what he had been and to embrace what God was calling him to be.

"After taking some food, [Saul] regained his strength. [He] spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (verse 19).

What a change! Here's the problem: people didn't believe this change could be real. "All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ" (verse 21-22).

Saul was changed. He went from being Public Enemy #1 to being a Billy Graham overnight. He went from being feared by one group of people to being feared by another. He lost all his friends. What happened to his posse? They didn't know what to do with him.

Saul, though, is an example of what Jesus does. He changes the rules. The problem many of us have is that we

forget that the Holy Spirit changes people. God redeems people, but we don't trust them.

"Prove that you are a Christian before we let you in," we say in effect to people.

"After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him..." (verse 23).

The killer had become the killee. The very thing Saul came to do was now being plotted against him by the same people who had recently been his co-conspirators.

Verse 24: "Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall."

Never underestimate the incredible idea that God can interrupt and use anyone. Never underestimate that God has an incredible call on your life. And never underestimate what God can do through failures. Think of it; Saul's first evangelistic effort ended with his being smuggled out of the city, curled up in a basket like a baby, in order to save his life.

Imagine what Saul must have been thinking: "OK, God, how are you going to use a person like me? Neither the Jews nor the Christians trust me. Of what good am I now?"

If one reads through the New Testament, however, it seems God did have a plan for Saul—who became Paul.

We think God uses "other people"—the successful, visible people. Take great hope from the story of Paul who had to flee town under cover of darkness after his first evangelistic crusade. Take courage from the example of Paul who had to leave his entire community, family, and friends to respond to God's interruption. Be inspired by the story of Ananias whose quiet life God interrupted in order to bring the light of Jesus to his greatest enemy.

Who are you like? Are you like Saul who is rebelling against God? Or are you like Ananias who is serving God as long as it doesn't interrupt his routine?

What would happen if you asked God to interrupt you? !

Never underestimate the incredible idea that God can interrupt and use anyone. Never underestimate that God has an incredible call on your life. And never underestimate what God can do through failures.

On leaving Adventism at 15

ROY TINKER

I grew up in a broken Adventist home: my parents divorced when my brother and I were pre-schoolers, and my dad remarried when I was six. I had never bonded with my mother, so I latched onto my stepmother, and she became my mother. My childhood was really tough, especially because of court-ordered visitation to my mom's house, where I spent half my time until fifth grade. I lived two lives: one at Mommy's house, which was dark, and one at Daddy's house, where I felt security, love, and confidence. In short, I was a mess—but God was working out his plan for my life even in the middle of the horror and the pain. I thank God most of all for giving me a wonderful dad and a wonderful stepmother: they have made all the difference in my life.

Besides love and support, the best things my parents have given me are a love for truth and a passion for integrity. (My parents hereafter refers to my dad and stepmother.) They encouraged me to live for truth no matter what the cost, and they were living examples of what it means to live and love truth.

God wants his children to love truth and be people of truth—after all, he is the God of truth. His working in each of our lives is unique. In my life, he first used my dad and step-

mother to teach me to love the truth. My background of a fragmented life and a mother that didn't know how to love me predisposed me to dissociate and mentally escape from life. I used dissociation as a defense and coping mechanism, which displayed itself in my oft-incomplete schoolwork and my misplaced aggression toward my brother and my peers at school. I praise God for how He used my parents to help ground me in reality and to encourage me to embrace truth as my anchor in life.

New School

When I was in the ninth grade, my parents first suggested that I should leave the Adventist Academy I was attending and go to a non-Adventist school. I fought the idea the way I usually fought big, scary changes in my life. Even though I knew Adventism was non-Biblical, I wanted to stay where I felt comfortable. I wasn't an Adventist in my heart, but I didn't want to move to a new school. Besides, I thought I was finally beginning to "fit in" with my peers and win their respect—probably more a result of teenaged "bonding" than of any noteworthy achievement on my part.

But unbeknownst to me, my parents had been praying and thinking for quite a while about sending my brother and me to a non-Adventist school, particularly a local inter-denominational Christian school to which God seemed to be leading them. They told my brother and me about it and took us on a tour.

And what a tour it was! The whole school seemed to be a place of light. The students' attitude really caught me off guard: they were genuine, warm, and friendly—a welcome contrast to the cold attitude I was used to at my school. Our tour guide was a woman whose children had previously attended the school and was herself a former Adventist. I remember my par-

Roy Tinker, shown here pausing during a croquet game, is a senior at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, California, where he is earning a degree in computer science. He works part-time at Environmental Research Systems Institute, a global mapping corporation, in Redlands, California, and he plays the piano for the worship team at Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands.



ents remarking on how light and warm the school appeared. "Oh, yes!" our guide responded. "That's the Holy Spirit. This is His school."

Back in the car, we talked about our experience. My parents were amazed at the obvious presence of God that pervaded the building. My brother's and my attitudes had changed entirely. I spoke resolutely: "That's my school." My brother agreed.

Moving to a non-Adventist high school was the beginning of a new life for me. It took a long time before I wasn't consciously aware of how friendly the students were and how full of light the place seemed. I remember telling a friend a while later, "You guys really don't know what you have! God is present here." The normal environment they took for granted was revolutionary to me, since I had never experienced the presence of God in a community of Christians before.

Healing my soul

By the time I started attending my new school, our family had been having a home church with the next-door neighbors for about two years. The neighbors had been instrumental in our exodus from Adventism—but my brother and I hadn't been to a youth group since Sabbath school. For quite a while I had been telling my parents we needed to go to a normal church, mostly because I wanted to worship with and get to know people my own age.

A few weeks into the school year, one of my friends from school invited me to a praise night at his church. The high school ministry's band was leading the service, and I really enjoyed it. I didn't know it at the time, but my parents also came and sat in the back. They were amazed that the teenagers there were sincerely worshipping—that it wasn't a show at all. We went to the church service the following Sunday morning and have been attending there ever since.

Besides the main services (great worship and solid Biblical teaching), the most important element of church attendance for me was the church's high school ministry. Every Sunday, a large group of high-schoolers gathered in a room for a worship service. A few months after I started attending, I joined a discipleship group and a ministry team. Through the high school ministry at church, I fully committed my life to Jesus and began to grow spiritually.

Looking back, I am really grateful that my parents had the guts to leave Adventism and to pull me out of the school I had attended for years. My life during high school was like a spiraling plane suddenly overtaken by a new pilot and brought into level flight. God took control of my life as I matured into manhood and set me on a course of serving him with my life.

Probably the best thing about my "new life" after switching schools and joining a great church was that my life was no longer fragmented. Everything I did and all my involvements were all part of my new identity as a Christian. My fragmented soul was healing, not simply coping with life.

I can't say for sure why God placed me where he did instead

of in public school, but I think it might have been because that particular environment—the friends I made and the experience of living with Christians every day—was a jumpstart to my own healing from my childhood and to learning to relate to people in a healthy way.

Christian private school has its drawbacks: it's easy to act like a Christian and "fit in" without genuinely being a Christian or surrendering to Christ. My roommate calls it the "Christian bubble"—where students (and faculty) are sheltered from the real world and are not faced with many challenges to their faith; where it's easy to hide—to look like a Christian and not be living like a true Christian on the inside. Notwithstanding, Christian school was the environment God knew I needed to help me heal from a painful childhood which had been partially shaped by rigid Adventism.

While Christian school helped give me a new foundation of learning to live with a Christian worldview, my involvement with my church and the youth group there was indispensable to my growth as a Christian. The high school pastor took his job seriously: to disciple students, challenge them to grow in their walk with God, and help them become spiritually mature adults who lived with integrity. I grew spiritually through the small group I was in and the fellowship and interaction I had with other students. The best friends I have today I met and became friends with in the youth group.

Living in the world

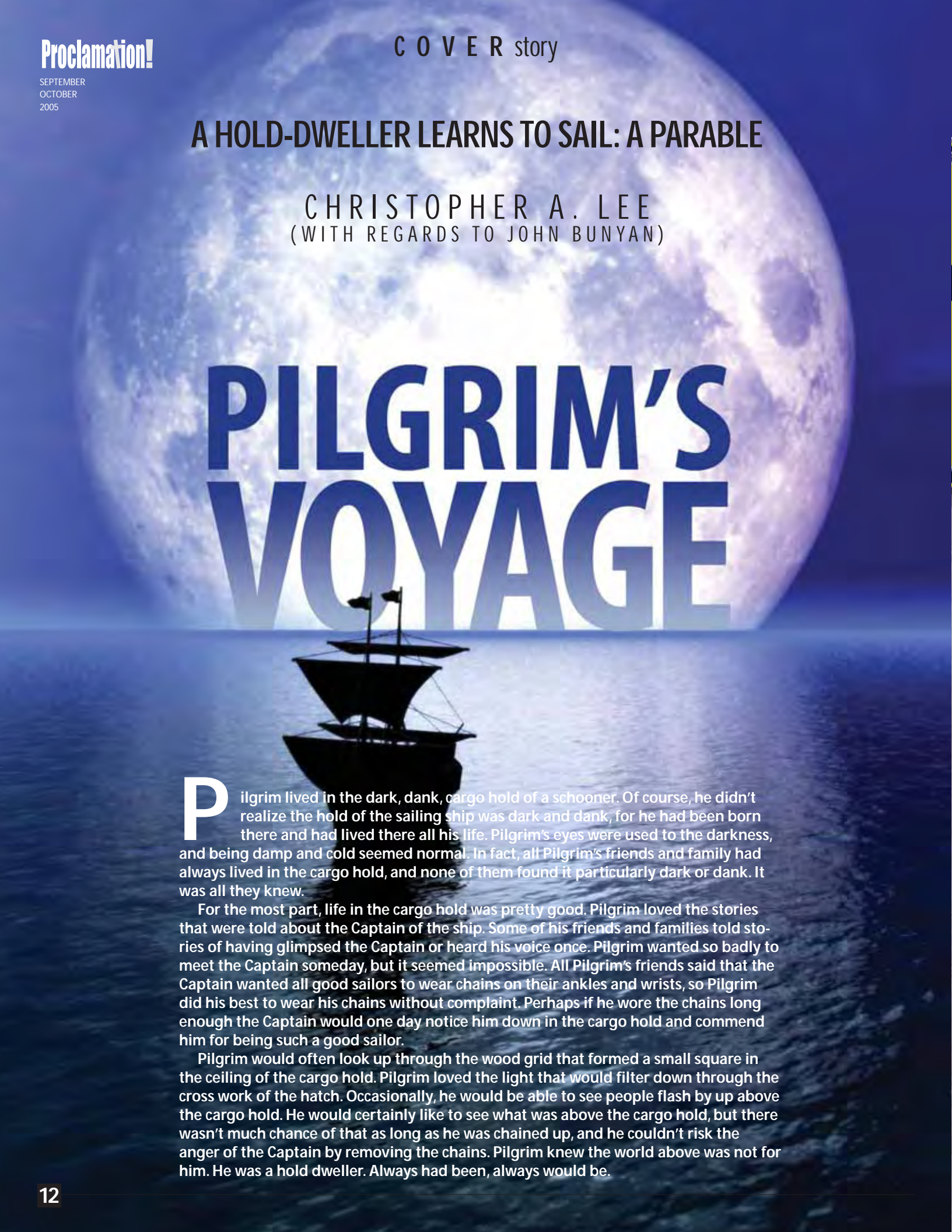
College was a shock to me after living in a Christian bubble for three years (I am going to Cal Poly Pomona in southern California). It was difficult at first to adjust to the non-Christian environment, but God was unfolding another part of his plan for my life.

God has used my college experience to mature and strengthen me spiritually. Real life is tough—working hard, paying bills, keeping the apartment and car maintained, and most of all enduring the drudgery of the daily grind. But through it all, I have learned that Jesus is truly all that I need. His word and his strength have sustained me, and I have learned to place myself in his hands every day and trust him to take care of my needs.

Over the last few years, I have randomly met several people I had known at my old Adventist school. The impression I always got from them is that they don't have any purpose or passion in their lives. They seem to be adrift, simply floating with the current of SDA students that go to SDA schools. I don't know any Adventists my own age that have a close walk with Jesus or a passion for serving him with their lives.

My roommate compares leaving the Adventist culture to being born: it may be warm and cozy inside, but there is a whole new world out there, full of God's blessing and power. Looking back, I am very grateful that God didn't leave me where I was in the Adventist church and at the Adventist academy. He has given me a new life that is full of his grace and power and is anchored in truth. And for that I praise Him. **!**

A HOLD-DWELLER LEARNS TO SAIL: A PARABLE

CHRISTOPHER A. LEE
(WITH REGARDS TO JOHN BUNYAN)PILGRIM'S
VOYAGE

Pilgrim lived in the dark, dank, cargo hold of a schooner. Of course, he didn't realize the hold of the sailing ship was dark and dank, for he had been born there and had lived there all his life. Pilgrim's eyes were used to the darkness, and being damp and cold seemed normal. In fact, all Pilgrim's friends and family had always lived in the cargo hold, and none of them found it particularly dark or dank. It was all they knew.

For the most part, life in the cargo hold was pretty good. Pilgrim loved the stories that were told about the Captain of the ship. Some of his friends and families told stories of having glimpsed the Captain or heard his voice once. Pilgrim wanted so badly to meet the Captain someday, but it seemed impossible. All Pilgrim's friends said that the Captain wanted all good sailors to wear chains on their ankles and wrists, so Pilgrim did his best to wear his chains without complaint. Perhaps if he wore the chains long enough the Captain would one day notice him down in the cargo hold and commend him for being such a good sailor.

Pilgrim would often look up through the wood grid that formed a small square in the ceiling of the cargo hold. Pilgrim loved the light that would filter down through the cross work of the hatch. Occasionally, he would be able to see people flash by up above the cargo hold. He would certainly like to see what was above the cargo hold, but there wasn't much chance of that as long as he was chained up, and he couldn't risk the anger of the Captain by removing the chains. Pilgrim knew the world above was not for him. He was a hold dweller. Always had been, always would be.

One day while Pilgrim was sitting under the small square of light dreaming about the captain, he suddenly noticed that one of the shapes that always darted past the hatch so quickly had actually stopped. A face was peering down at him through the hatch. It was hard to see the face with the bright light behind it. The face looked more like a silhouette, but from the little that Pilgrim could see, the face looked kind.

The man's name was Evangel. Evangel told Pilgrim that he had once lived in the cargo hold himself but had found that there was so much light, joy, and happiness outside of the cargo hold that he couldn't stay any longer. What's more, he claimed that the Captain didn't want people to live in the cargo hold and didn't want them to wear chains. Pilgrim didn't believe him. In fact, he was scared of this person from the light, but somehow he also wanted to hear more.

Evangel pulled out a parchment that contained a copy of all the Captain's orders and pressed it against the hatch so that Pilgrim could see. Evangel began explaining how the Captain wanted all the inhabitants of the ship to live in the light where they could learn to be real sailors. It was hard for Pilgrim to make out the parchment through the grid in the ceiling. The grid obscured the words of the parchment, and there wasn't enough light in the hold to read. For Pilgrim to read he had to pull himself up closer to the hatch. This meant he had to loose the chains on his ankles that held him to the floor. He left the chains on his wrists just to be safe, but was still able to grab the hatch and do a pull up long enough to read a few more words from the parchment.

The Captain's orders were wonderful! They said that anyone who wanted to be a sailor should let go of their chains, come up on deck, and learn to sail! Pilgrim wanted this more than anything in the world, but the thought of leaving the hold was scary.

What's more, Pilgrim's friends and family were becoming very worried about him. They began begging him to sit back down on the floor and put his ankle chains back on. They warned him how dangerous it was to read the parchment and try to interpret the Captain's orders on his own. They warned him about the people up in the light. They warned him how the people in the light would try to deceive him. They warned him how angry the Captain would be if he left the hold.

Pilgrim tried telling his friends and family about the Captain's orders to take off their chains and come into the light, but they just responded that he was trying to twist the Captain's orders. They told him that when the Captain said they should take off their chains it really meant that they could loosen certain links in the chains under certain conditions, but not too much, so it was probably better not to tamper with the chains at all. They pointed out that if you really looked at it correctly it could be seen that the Captain actually endorses wearing chains as the best way to learn to sail. They told Pilgrim

that he should sit down, put the chains back on, and trust those who had been in the hold longer than he.

Pilgrim now felt discouraged. For the first time ever he started noticing how dark the hold was, how damp it was, how cold it was. It seemed like he shivered all the time now, and the chains began to chafe his skin raw. He had dutifully sat back down and accepted the chains that the others were so eager to help him with, but he couldn't help taking longing glances at the small square of light in the ceiling. The hold had always seemed like a good place, the only place he had ever known, but now it seemed oppressive. Pilgrim cried sometimes, and in his despair he began to speak under his breath to the Captain. He didn't think the Captain could hear him down here in the

Pilgrim wanted so badly to meet the Captain someday, but it seemed impossible. All Pilgrim's friends said that the Captain wanted all good sailors to wear chains on their ankles and wrists, so Pilgrim did his best to wear his chains without complaint.

hold, but speaking to him gave him comfort somehow.

One day, Pilgrim was sitting beneath the hatch thinking of the captain, when suddenly the wooden grid of the hatch was lifted out of the way revealing unobstructed light for the first time. Pilgrim stood up in surprise, not even realizing that the chains had fallen from his wrists and ankles. A form leaned down into the darkness and firmly grasped Pilgrim's arm, yanking him up into the light.

At first Pilgrim was so dazzled by the glorious light that he could not make out who had lifted him out of the darkness. At first he thought it might be Evangel, but as his eyes began to adjust, he saw it wasn't Evangel at all, but someone who looked just a little like Evangel. But that wasn't quite right. He could now see that it would somehow be truer to say that Evangel looked just a little like this man. At that moment the man came into full focus, and Pilgrim suddenly realized with astonishment that he was standing before the Captain. In rapture he embraced the Captain with all his might and clung to him. The Captain embraced him back.

"I've wanted to meet you all my life," cried Pilgrim.

"I know," said the Captain in a voice which was matter of fact yet kind and infinitely wise. "I have been near you all your life, but I am very hard to see from the darkness of the hold. Evangel came to you at my bidding. He was once as you are, but now he is a sailor. Are you ready to learn to learn to sail?"

Earnestly Pilgrim responded, "I've always tried to be a good sailor."

"But, my son, you cannot learn to sail while locked in the hold," laughed the Captain.

"But Captain, what about my family and friends? They're still in the hold!"

"Speak to them. When you are ready, another of my sailors will begin to teach you. I will always be near." With that the Captain strode off across the ship.

Pilgrim knelt down by the open hatch and called down into the darkness. He excitedly told the inhabitants of the hold all about how he had met the Captain. He tried to describe the brightness and warmth of the sun, the feel of the cool sea air on his face. He had only begun to describe what he was experiencing when several voices from below began to object that he couldn't possibly have met the Captain on the deck since it was well known that the Captain favored the hold. Some of the hold-dwellers even claimed that Pilgrim had only left the hold so he could carouse on an island full of rum and naked natives. Pilgrim began to explain that he had left the hold to become a real sailor, but before he could finish, several sets of hands reached up from the darkness of the hold, grabbed the hatch, and quickly pulled it back in place.

Pilgrim was stunned. His friends and family didn't want to hear about what he had experienced. They didn't want to hear about meeting the Captain. They had reacted to him with fear and even anger. Instead of joining him on the deck with the Captain they had pulled the grid of the hatch more tightly into place.

Sorrowfully Pilgrim turned away from the hatch and saw another sailor standing there. He too looked just a little like the Captain. The man introduced himself as Disciple.

"How is it that you and Evangel look different from each other, and yet you both look something like the Captain? Are you related?" asked Pilgrim.

"I suppose you could say we are, in a way. The Captain treats us like family, and part of learning to be a sailor is learning to be more like the Captain. After awhile we all start to resemble the Captain to one degree or another. Some resemble him more and some less, but we're all learning. You'll start looking a bit like the Captain yourself as you learn to sail. Shall we get started?"

Disciple taught Pilgrim to tie knots, scrub the decks, trim the sails, and a hundred other things that a good sailor needs to know. There were many challenges, but time went quickly as Pilgrim began to develop his skills. He loved working with so many other sailors with so many different skills. He soon realized that each sailor seemed to have unique talents and

a job that matched their talents. He began to see how the ship could not sail without each sailor in his place. It also became obvious to him that those still in the hold were not engaged in the work of sailing the ship and that they could never develop sailing skills as long as they remained in the hold. He began to long to teach the hold dwellers to sail.

Meanwhile, in the hold, Pilgrim's departure had caused much consternation. Several committees had been formed to discuss why people left the hold. Some thought that if they brightened up the hold a bit then people would be less likely to leave, but most thought that a bright colored hold was against the rules of sailing, so the idea was vetoed. Others thought they should talk about the Captain more. Everyone agreed in theory, but felt that talk of the Captain should be balanced with training in managing shackles. This was tried for a while, but it seemed like only a few had seen the Captain pass by the grid, but everyone knew something about chains, so this approach fell flat. Some thought that if they talked more about sailing, then people would be less likely to leave the hold. Several people liked this idea. Unfortunately, someone who had once briefly been outside the hold scandalously mentioned the sun and the sea. The rest felt that it was inappropriate to talk about things outside the hold. It was agreed that light could be discussed as long as it was in reference to how it looked through the grid. Mention of the sun should be avoided. It was agreed that they could talk about sailing, but not about the sea.

In the end a vote was held to pass a resolution confirming that the only place one could learn to be a real sailor and truly please the Captain was in the hold. Everyone was pleased with the vote and agreed that a strong resolution on the necessity of hold-dwelling in the life of a sailor was the best way to solve the problem of people leaving.

Every once in a while someone in the hold saw Pilgrim pass by the hatch. He looked strong, sun drenched, and happy. He looked like a sailor! The change was hard to explain, so they chalked it up to too much time spent carousing with naked natives.

Pilgrim had not been carousing with naked natives. He had been learning the Captain's commands from the ship's order parchment. He had been learning sailing skills from the Captain and from fellow sailors. He had developed many new skills, and, as Disciple had predicted, he had begun to look just a little like the Captain.

But still Pilgrim longed to have his own job as all the other sailors did. One day while talking with the Captain he asked him for a job that would fit his talents. The Captain turned to him with a twinkle in his eye and said, "I think you know what that job is. You've known since the day I pulled you from the darkness. Now you are ready."

Pilgrim nodded, hugged the Captain then turned and headed for the hatch with the Ship's order parchment in his hands. It wouldn't be an easy job, but somewhere below in the darkness there were future sailors that needed to hear about the sunlight, the sea, and the Captain.



Christopher A. Lee is a graduate of Sunnydale Academy, Union College, and Andrews University. Chris and his wife Carmen left Adventism after 30 years, along with their two daughters, to pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. For the past three years the Lee family has been involved in planting and growing a contemporary church designed to reach the unsaved. Chris is currently the discipleship coordinator for CrossBridge Christian Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, and is also a physical therapist directing Inpatient Therapies at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln.

I give thanks to you, Jesus! CONTINUED FROM BACK

perfect, not even one, and no one is saved by keeping the law. If you believe in Jesus and His Father, you have eternal life and have passed over from death to life. We are already seen in heavenly places as joint heirs with Jesus, and He will never forsake us or leave us. Jesus is our Sabbath Rest and wants to carry all of our burdens, and His Grace is the key to assurance when claimed by faith. His Grace allows us to be seen not as we are but as Jesus is. The measurement for salvation is His perfect life, not our miserable one!

I'll never forget my first wake up call. A year or so after I graduated from dental school, a young man came up to me on the tennis court and with a big smile said, "Are you saved?" I stammered in my surprise with the only answer I knew, "I hope I'll be some day." I was embarrassed to be put on the spot, and I wrote him off as a religious zealot. He probably went to church on the wrong day, anyway. I never saw him again, but I've not forgotten the personal risk he took to share a joy that I didn't know.

I continued climbing Jacob's ladder to Heaven by being a deacon, Sabbath school leader, and church school board chairman, not realizing that Jacob's ladder was an act of Grace let down from Heaven to minister to Jacob when he was totally unable to climb. I didn't know how unable I was until the second wake up call started to ring as I found myself in a divorce. Seventeen years and four children made this personal failure totally crushing. Today, I believe that as sad as that time was, it was necessary for me to hit the bottom rung of my ladder so that, like Jacob, the only direction I could look was up.

Several of my friends were also struggling at this same time, and they wanted to start a home Bible study. That was the last thing on my agenda! Thankfully, however, they pushed me a little, and we started. We didn't have a syllabus, teacher, or the blessing of our pastor. We simply prayed for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and started at Matthew, reading each verse out loud. After chapter one we stopped to share and then read another. We prayed together and went home. Our method seemed a little simplistic at first, but we persisted week after week. The four Gospels took on new meaning, and then when we got to Romans, I couldn't believe what I was reading. Something was surely wrong! Paul seemed confusing and hard to understand because his book seemed to oppose so much of what I had been taught was true. By the time we got to Galatians and Ephesians it started to sink in; Paul was clearly defining the Gospel a second and third time, and there was no mistake. Wow! How wonderful to be saved by His Grace and not by my commandment keeping! How wonderful to be given Jesus' white robe of righteousness and already to be counted as a joint heir and one of His sons! How wonderful to know that Jesus loved me enough to save me just as I was and loved me too much to leave me that way.

We went through Jude and started over again. What a life changing experience to simply wipe the slate clean and

read the Bible in context. It has been said that a text out of context is a pretext, and I'll add that it is a pretext that leads to disaster.

I reached a point when, in listening to lesson studies, children's stories, and sermons, I knew that I just couldn't go back to my former beliefs. How could I ever return to slavery when I had finally breathed the air of freedom? It was difficult to listen to pastors cherry pick through Ellen White's writings to use her instead of Romans as the authoritative voice of the Gospel when she was the source of the mixed gospel that was still binding the church. The issue became clear, and the line in the sand was not a negotiable preference but a conviction: it wasn't meat eating or jewelry wearing but whether my church was interfering with a pure Gospel and the assurance of salvation it brings. Assurance had been the object of my struggle all my life, and it was obvious that others were still confused and struggling fifty years later. Would it have been clearer to them if they had read the Bible alone without the "prophetic filter" of Ellen White? It was for our little study group!

So, I found myself grand-fathered into an organization that I couldn't re-embrace and that didn't seem honest. My predicament was painful because I had been a member all my life. I had history, friends, and family that were all linked in some way to my life in the church. I had no desire to hurt or undermine anyone's experience, but the Gospel was the foundation of the Christian faith. Without it in its purist form, religion was nothing more than paganism. So, with a heavy heart, I left the church of my birth. In leaving, however, I did not leave God! He means more to me than ever. My relationship and prayers have changed. I spend much more time saying thank-you than asking for anything more for myself. He has given me His best gift first, and anything else will just be a bonus. My main prayer is that the Lord will draw my family and friends to Himself so they can enjoy peace and freedom earlier than I did. It is worth any pain or hardship to be humbled enough just to look up!

Nothing in this world offers ultimate joy, happiness, or peace more than reliance on Jesus's gift of His life for our life. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about securing friendships, relationships with a boss or spouse, or our relationship with the Lord. It is impossible through planning or intellect to secure our future. Our retirement accounts, jobs, and friends could be gone overnight. The tighter we hold to the rope that dangles us over the cliff, the more fearful we become. In our heart of hearts we know our limitations. So learning to live an unsecured (not insecure) life resting totally in the burden-carrying capacity of Jesus is the only way to experience security. It is the only way to find freedom from the bondage of sin. It is the only way to have the assurance of living eternally with the Lord.

Thank You, Jesus!



Thank you

Thanks for the encouragement we receive from you on a regular basis—Priceless!

Nothing to say

After reading the letters to the editor (July/August, 2005 *Proclamation!*), I read "The Unity of the Law" by McGregor Wright as you suggested to see what he had to say. I can't believe I went through seven pages to discover he had nothing to say in his endeavor to prove God doesn't mean what He says.

The fourth Commandment says, "Remember THE (definite article) Sabbath Day to keep it Holy—for in six days God created heaven and earth..." It was to be kept as a memorial to God's creative work. The text in Colossians says, "Let no man judge you... of the Sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come but the body is of Christ" [Col. 2:16-17].

You can hardly "remember" something that is to happen in the future. And the text [in Colossians] clearly states these Sabbaths had to do with the body of Christ. [They were] absolutely not connected to the memorial of creation.

And yes, the Sabbath of the 4th Commandment is a sign or SEAL of God. Without it [His seal], any god could have written it. It contains the person—Lord thy God, His position—Creator, His commission, and the expiration date—never. And the opposite of [this day] is a Sunday celebrated as a Sabbath as declared by a man.

Well, I'm sure the coming of the Lord is near, and I fear for you people and your endless endeavors to prove God doesn't mean what He says.

Editor's note: Nowhere does the Bible command people to keep the Sabbath because it is a memorial of creation. Deuteronomy 5:15 says, "You shall remember that you were a slave in

the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day" (NASB). The Sabbath was given to the Jews as a reminder of God's deliverance of them from bondage, not, as the Adventists say, as a memorial of creation. It has always been a symbol of God's rest and redemption.

Further, Colossian 2:16-17 is not about Christ's physical "body". It is about the fact that all the Sabbaths—the yearly, monthly, and weekly Sabbaths—were shadows of Christ's work and the rest Israel would have in Him when He finally came and fulfilled their meaning. The NASB says it this way: "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

Thank you for the Cross CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

began to see in Scripture. I would go to bed every night and read more. As truth and doubt began to fight in my head, I would cry to God, "How can this be right? It isn't what I have been taught all my life!"

The Lord is so amazing; He brought me to Himself. As I began to embrace the truth we were reading in the Bible, my friend told me she had prayed for us all those years since she and her husband had left the church. She taught me that everything happens in God's time.

"You wouldn't have believed what I've shown you in Scripture before now," she said; "it wasn't time yet for the Holy Spirit to show you."

I found the Lord for the first time in my life. I had to tell my family and friends what had happened to me and how I had found Jesus. Even my husband and children thought I was crazy at first—until I showed them in Scripture what God's Word really says. Our children had never attended church much, but even they knew that the Sabbath was right! I had never understood what a hold the spirit of the Adventist religion had on them, on me—on all of us who want to stay in a church that causes us to fear listening to or reading materials from someone who has the mark of the beast: going to church on Sunday.


I thank God that today my husband and children and my sisters and their children have found that their salvation is in the blood of Jesus shed at the cross. The message of the cross, however, didn't go over very well with the rest of my relatives. I found that whenever I told them about God

showing me the cross, they said my experience was from the devil. Their "proof" was that I was no longer keeping the Sabbath.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says it all to me: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." It has been very painful to me for my family to say I don't know or love God because I am not keeping the Sabbath. When I begin to feel discouraged, I think about what Jesus endured when people wouldn't listen to Him, either.

My family members say that I am taking the "easy way" of ignoring the commandments so I can do what I want. I say that the way they are trying to find salvation is the impossible way. We can only be saved through what Christ did on the cross. It wasn't the nails that kept Him there; it was His unconditional love for us. Jesus is the ONLY way to salvation.

I know now without a doubt that the cross of Jesus is everything; without it, we would have no hope. I thank God for showing and telling me that I am saved by the cross. What an awesome God we have! He doesn't want any of us to be lost. He is patient and loving, and He waits for us to let the Holy Spirit do His work in us.

I thank God every day for my friend who helped me finally understand the truth of Scripture. I am praying for my family and friends to know that their salvation is not in a church or a day, but their salvation is only through the blood of Jesus spilled on the cross. 

Permission to share?

I'm a Norwegian former Adventist, and I have just read my first issue of *Proclamation!* Thank you so much for this interesting magazine.

I have read the article "The Unity of the Law" written by R.K. McGregor Wright; may I have permission to have this article translated into Norwegian and distribute copies to my friends in the Adventist church in Norway?

Editor's note: You have permission to share articles with anyone who needs them! Please include the statement "Copyright 2005 Life Assurance Ministries. Used by permission."

Continental Divide

I read Dale Ratzlaff's article "The Continental Divide of Biblical Interpretation" (May/June *Proclamation!*). I read it twice so far. I always entertained thoughts related to his understanding of the two covenants, but I never went beyond 1 Corinthians 15:45-50.

It was the Australian theologian Louis F. Were who introduced me to the spiritual character of Christ's life, teaching and death. 1 Corinthians 15:45-50 seems to shed additional light on Dale's theology. As I read his presentation in *Proclamation!*, I felt that I was on a guided tour through the mystery of Christ's great mission. Thanks!

Please send magazines

I can't give a large donation because I am on a low fixed income, but the May/June 2005 issue is so enlightening. I want to have you send subscriptions starting with this issue to three names. I'm hoping they will read the magazine and realize what I have found out from it. If they write you and reject it, all I can say is you tried and I tried to give them enlightenment.

Please Remove

Remove me from your mailing list. You are forbidden to sell my name or share it with anyone. Remove my name immediately.

Editor's note: Life Assurance Ministries will never sell, give, or otherwise share its mailing list with anyone.

Commendable

You are to be commended for your efforts to reach those who remain in the cult of Adventism. When we first discovered the blessed hope of Jesus Christ, we wanted to share it with Adventist friends. We were certain they would want to know. Instead they looked at us like deer caught in the headlights. Others looked at us with disdain, for we had Left The Truth.

As a fourth-generation Adventist educated in their schools from first grade through college, I had heard these brain-washing phrases all my life: We have The Truth. Pray for ____ that he may find The Truth. If you know the Truth and leave the church, you are lost!

Those statements are always characteristic of a cult.

As theology scholar and author Dave Hunt writes: "Here again, brazenly stated, is the first principle of every cult: Check your mind at the door and believe whatever the group or guru or prophet in charge says." The idea appeals to those who think that by thus surrendering their minds to an infallible authority they escape their individual moral responsibility to God. Others are afraid to think for themselves because that would put them where 'there is no salvation.'" (*A Woman Rides the Beast*, Dave Hunt, Harvest House Pub, Eugene, OR)

The agnostic philosopher Huxely said, "Most ignorance is invincible; you don't know because you don't want to know."

Our Lord said (Luke 9:26), that whoever is ashamed of Him and His word, He will be ashamed of them at His glorious coming. He also states in John 12:48 that those who reject His words will be condemned by those very words. Finally, II John :9 states that those who do not abide in the doctrine (or teaching) of Christ have not God.

I am convinced that only the Lord can open the eyes of the blind.

Grateful

I cannot even begin to tell you how grateful I am to you for your ministry!!

Appreciate your magazine

I appreciate so much your magazine. I was saved in 1969 and just wanted to "preach the gospel" and win souls. Immediately as one enters Satan's territory of unsaved souls, one of his greatest weapons confronts one: what Jesus called "false prophets and false teachers" and what the apostles called "doctrines of demons".

I am ashamed of people who write you on the one hand saying you are telling the truth—but then saying, "Remove me from your mailing list; I don't like your speaking out against other religions or people." Obviously they are not soul-winners; they are not in the war.

The Bible clearly teaches real Christians will be hated, and true Biblical Christianity has never been popular or politically correct. Our salvation is imputed to us by God's grace through faith and by God's word and Holy Spirit. It is really quite simple.

God bless you for standing for truth.

Please Remove

May the Holy Spirit still work on your heart to see Present Truth—Christ is the Way, the Truth, the Life. Please take my name off your list.

Remove our names from your mailing list. I will pray for Life Assurance Ministries that you will come to your senses.

No perfect church

There is not perfect church, but there is a perfect Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I believe it is the function of God's Holy Spirit to convince and convict of sin or wrong. I find no compassion or grace in an organization that uses radio stations, etc. blasting another church. This [Adventist] church brings me closer to Jesus every day. In the final analysis, judgment belongs to God. Please remove my name from your mailing list.

Bitterness in writers' hearts

The *Proclamation!* magazines are all interesting, helpful and backed up with Bible proof. I wish they came oftener. I always enjoy the candid editorials. I don't find criticism or bitterness in any issues and puzzle over this accusation in some letters to the editor. I think the bitterness lies in the writer's hearts.

Letters may be edited for clarity or space.

Mail letters and donations to:

Life Assurance Ministries
P.O. Box 905
Redlands, CA 92373

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

Proposed Schedule

Friday evening:

- 6:00–7:00 Registration/snacks
- 7:00–9:00 Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF) Bible study

Saturday:

- 8:00–9:00 Continental Breakfast
- 9:00–10:00 Worship and Devotional–Gary Inrig, senior pastor, Trinity Church
- 10:00–10:15 Refreshment Break
- 10:15–12:00 Inductive Bible study seminar/workshop, Elizabeth Inrig
- 12:00–1:00 Lunch
- 1:00–4:00 Moderated discussion groups with former Adventist pastors
- 4:30–6:00 Public meeting advertised to the Adventists in the community
Selected former Adventists telling their faith stories
- 6:00–7:00 Supper
- 7:00–9:00 Former Adventist pastors' panel
Pastors will share their stories and take audience questions

Sunday morning:

- 9:30–10:45 Church service at Trinity

Presenters: (confirmed as of September 5, 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
- Richard Tinker, President of Life Assurance Ministries and FAF co-leader
- Colleen Tinker, Editor, *Proclamation!* magazine and FAF co-leader

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 31, 2006.

Call for more information: 909-794-9804

Sponsored by Life Assurance Ministries and Trinity Church of Redlands



TRANSITIONS



Dale Ratzlaff

Life: A Relay Race!

DALE RATZLAFF

As I have journeyed down the pathway of life well past what most would consider to be the half way mark, I am in a position to look back and reflect upon the road traveled. Unlike many of those I know who have, like a tree, lived in one place most of their adult lives, my life looks much more like a relay race than a tree.

I was in the trucking business and hauled hay for a number of years, but the day came when I hung up my hay hooks and passed the baton of the Freightliner on to another.

Leaving out many of the baton passes of my life that are not relevant to the subject at hand, my last baton pass happened when, for health reasons, I resigned from Christian Community Church and passed the baton to Tom Tomforde, my associate pastor, who now is leading the church well, perhaps even better than I was able to do.

Now I am passing on the baton of being President of LAM, Inc. to Richard Tinker. Richard and Colleen are doing most of the work with LAM, Inc. now and deserve to be recognized for their dedication and leadership. I will continue to be a director of the corporation and give my input to this important ministry. As my schedule, health and study time allow, I will continue to write for *Proclamation!*

Carolyn and I are now focusing much of our time on "tent making." Our relay race has not provided much for our retirement, so now we are running hard to make sure we have enough to finish the race. Our goal is not only to be able to provide for our own financial future, but we want to be serious contributors to the ministry of LAM, Inc. from which we are not resigning. Rather, we hope to be able not only to help support the ministry of LAM, Inc. but to be able to continue to send books to those who request them who do not have the funds to pay for them.

I cannot express to our readers the deep gratitude I have for the hundreds of letters and emails I receive from those who have been blessed by reading *Proclamation!* and the books from LAM Publications, LLC. Sure, we get some letters informing us that we have lost our way and need to repent and "come back into the fold." We appreciate these too, as they express a dedication to what the writer believes to be "the truth."

I praise God for what He has done through this ministry, and I thank Him for having given me this work to do. **!**

Running for His Glory

RICHARD TINKER

Relay races are a succession of individual races. Each runner takes the baton and runs with all he has. The next runner's position is determined by those who have run before.

I am most grateful to Dale Ratzlaff for running well during his time as President of Life Assurance Ministries. He leaves a legacy of leadership that has placed this ministry in a strategic position to reach even more of the world with the freeing message of the finished work of our Lord Jesus.

I have enjoyed working with Dale on *Proclamation!* since its inception and also serving on the board of Life Assurance Ministries. I am committed to helping others discover the security in Jesus that I have found. Most of my family and colleagues are still caught in bondage to what Paul calls "another gospel." My mission is to allow the Holy Spirit to use me to call them and others to Truth.

The magazine ministry of *Proclamation!* will continue to grow as more are called to follow the pure Gospel. We hope to increase the

frequency of *Proclamation!* to monthly as well as to expand the internet presence of the magazine.

Life Assurance Ministries is also considering increasing its outreach to areas outside the U.S. as more people respond to the call of the Spirit. As the Bible says, "The harvest is plentiful... Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2).

We are also praying for God's guidance in the areas of media ministry, Former Adventist Fellowships, and weekend retreats for former Adventists.

Pray that this ministry will always keep the cross of Jesus central in all that we do. And pray for me that I will run my part of this race to the glory of our Father, our Lord Jesus, and the Spirit. **!**

Richard Tinker
with his wife Colleen

I give thanks to you, Jesus! DAVID R. SILVERSTEIN

My motive for writing about my spiritual journey is to publically say thank-you to Jesus for His rescue mission in my life. It's so wonderful to experience freedom from fear and peace about the future when I have spent over fifty years struggling to become acceptable to God, hoping some day to be ready for Heaven. In addition, I would also like to reach out to many of my friends who have given up on God because they have given up on the method of salvation we learned from grade school through college.

For decades I felt secure that I was in the true church because we were commandment keepers and had the testimony of Jesus in the testimonies of Ellen White. Ironically, this source of security caused me much torment and personal insecurity. I was left being a defender of the church without having joy in what Jesus had done for me. I had an exclusive, arrogant corner on truth that never seemed to meet anyone's needs. I felt a kinship with "like believers" but never a brotherly connection to other members of God's family. They, after all, were practicing error, and I had the truth!

My spiritual anguish started before my baptism at age twelve and continued through all of my Adventist education. In hindsight, it was a predictable result of combining "Be ye perfect even as your father in Heaven is perfect, and "If you break one of the commandments you've broken them all", and "When you fully reproduce the character of Christ in your life, then you will be ready" with "Only the elect will survive the time of trouble", and "Our name could come up in the Investigative Judgment

at any time and close our probation, sealing our fate forever. On top of those impossible demands, if one reduces "The Sabbath Rest" to a day of rest from work and pleasure and destroys the power of Grace by treating it as a temporary supplement for deficiency in growth toward perfection, the resulting impossibility is overwhelming.

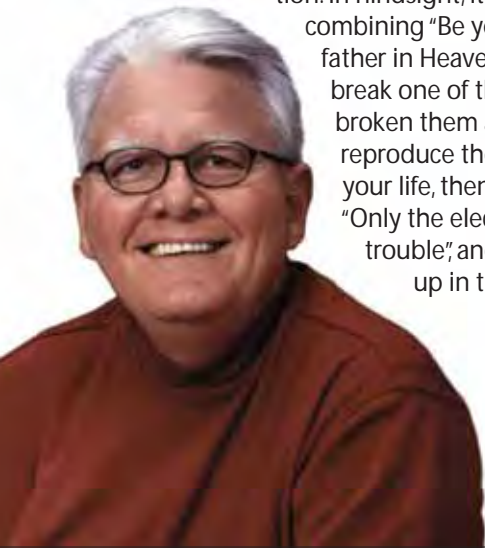
During my senior year, the president of the Georgia Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held a week

To my discouraged friends, I want to say: we should have been taught, "Be ye merciful even as your Father in heaven is merciful." No one is perfect, not even one, and no one is saved by keeping the law.

of prayer at our academy. He said that in order to be right with God a new Christian needs 100% of God's Grace to make up for a lack of growth toward perfection. As the Christian grows he will need increasingly less grace to make up for this deficiency until one day he will need no Grace at all. This kind of blasphemy is what one naturally gets when preaching a mixed gospel of my works and my growth with God's Grace. It is what one gets when not relying solely on the Bible for truth. As Dr. Desmond Ford said, "If you don't fully accept the Good News of the first advent of Jesus the second will not be good news at all."

To my discouraged friends, we should have been taught, "Be ye merciful even as your Father in heaven is merciful. No one is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



David Silverstein, a pastor's son, was a third-generation Adventist who has practiced dentistry in Franklin, NC, since his graduation from LLU School of Dentistry in 1975. Ellen White admonished his great-grandparents not to marry, but fortunately they married anyway. He has four Adventist ministers in his family. His wife is "a wonderful Christian lady" who, despite his pressure to join the Adventist church as a condition of marriage, thankfully stood for her own beliefs. David has four children, one step-daughter, and nine grandchildren!

Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.

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