

UNMASKING THE CULTIC SPIRIT

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES, INC

# Proclamation!

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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

## EXPLORING FORGIVENESS

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## Journey through tall mountains

RICHARD TINKER

**T**he mountains were almost impassable. Deep snow covered all but the lowest climbs. From one peak could be seen many more to crest. Discouragement stalked travelers who dared pass through.

But there was a place of rest. A small cottage inn that squatted in a protected valley waited for the weary. Simple rooms had enough beds for even the largest groups that passed through. There was a warm stove to cozy by. And innkeep-

I had to repent of my pride. And I had to give up my feelings of anger to God. He gave me peace and the assurance that He was ultimately in charge of the money I had given.

In this issue my wife Colleen and our pastor Gary Inrig explore forgiveness. Colleen tells how we must repent of sin in our lives that results from the abuse we suffer at the hands of others. She also tells of the transformation of the Worldwide Church of God and the need for repentance and forgiveness by the leaders of that denomination.

Gary Inrig tells how to resolve a wrong done to us when there's no "I'm sorry." This is a chapter from his recently published book *Forgiveness*. His publisher was generous in allowing us to reprint this valuable article.

Patria Rector tells her story of being a happy, secure Seventh-day Adventist until tragic events caused her to ask "Why?" Linda Harris uses the analogy of a garden to portray her spiritual journey.

Samuel Pestes, a former Adventist pastor who resigned from his Adventist pastoral ministry in 1957, gives guidance on how to know if you are involved in a cultic religious group.

As we go to press with this issue we are making the final preparations for the first Former Adventist Fellowship Weekend that will be held at Trinity Church in Redlands, California. More than 90 persons have signed up. Please pray that the Holy Spirit will work powerfully in each presenter and each one that attends.

The Life Assurance Ministries board met recently and voted to start producing a Spanish language version of *Proclamation!* The first issues will be distributed by email. But as funds allow, we will begin production of a printed and mailed version. If you know of people who would benefit from a Spanish version please send their email addresses to: [proclamation@gmail.com](mailto:proclamation@gmail.com).

In closing, I want to thank each supporter of this ministry. We finished 2005 with all bills paid! We look forward with anticipation to see what God will accomplish through each one of you in 2006.

Our journey will take us over difficult mountains, but Jesus gives us a place of rest.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23: 2-3).

## When I left Adventism, I had a terrible urge to sue the church for all the tithes and offerings I had given...

ers were happy to discuss the best direction to take when it was time to leave.

I woke up and realized that I had been dreaming. But the dream seemed so real—like a picture of the work here at Life Assurance Ministries.

A difficult journey through the mountains is the path many of us must take as we leave Adventism. Sometimes it seems impossible to bear the pain of friends and family who don't understand why we must leave. Some of us face the loss of marriages or financial security. But Jesus not only walks with us; He provides the places of rest and support that we need.

Life Assurance Ministries' mission is not the destination, but it is the mountain inn that provides direction and rest for those travelers who are making the journey to knowing Jesus and leaving behind legalism and false religion.

One of the peaks we must pass over is our need to repent and forgive.

When I left Adventism, I had a terrible urge to sue the church for all the tithes and offerings I had given, from the forced tithing at boarding academy to the required tithing when I worked for a Union Conference office. Yes, I had been wronged—but I had also been wrong. I was a willing participant as I not only met the church's requirement but usually gave a double tithe (20%) of my gross earnings. I felt like I was a superior church member. This attitude led me to think that God owed me something back. I had to repent.

## Proclamation!

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Phone (909) 794-9804  
Toll Free (877) 349-6984

[www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org)  
[www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com)  
E-mail: [proclamation@gmail.com](mailto:proclamation@gmail.com)

# “Why?” yields to Trust

PATRIA RECTOR

I was a happy Seventh-day Adventist. When I was growing up, my parents were short on justice and long on grace. I never felt something missing in my life; God never seemed like an ogre. I liked the comfort and security of my established identity as a Seventh-day Adventist. I wasn't even a rebellious teenager! I grew up and married a well-rounded, contented Adventist boy whom I met at a mid-western Adventist college. We did everything the “right” way. We were the products of solid SDA education, and the future looked secure. On Friday nights, while many of our SDA friends were closet TV watchers, we happily turned off the TV and turned on Christian music. We were quite blissful. I was in no way unhappy with my life as an Adventist. I loved my home, church, and family just the way they were. They were all I knew, and I had no burden for change.

On June 6, 1997, my life forever changed when my youngest brother, my childhood best friend, was in a car accident that left him comatose. I was 8 months pregnant with my first child. My happy, blissful life came to a screeching halt in

that moment. A very large part of me went dead when I heard the words across the telephone line. For months he remained in a coma, and I began to hate God—or at least, I hated that He had hurt me! As an Adventist, I felt that God loved me better than those “other” Christians. I, subconsciously of course, felt that because I was “doing it right” with my Sabbath-keeping, he owed me health, wealth, and happiness. I thought He would give me an easy life. Now the question “Why?” began to numb me.

I plummeted into a deep depression, and it is only because of God's grace in giving me that precious baby to nurture that I didn't take my life during those dark days. I began to question deeply. My Adventist upbringing had taught me that God would never cause this disaster to happen, but still, He allowed it. I didn't understand the difference. During this time, I went through all the proper motions. I went to church and led out in Sabbath School every single week. I poured myself into the only thing I knew...tradition. Not ONCE during that time did I pick up my Bible or seek guidance. I just railed at God day after day while publicly slapping a smile on my face so nobody knew. I watched people who had claimed life-long friendship reject my parents as the days and weeks turned into months and years of their caring for an invalid. These were Adventist friends...the only ones I knew who had peopled the only world I had ever lived in. Where was Jesus?



**Patria Rector** lives in Castle Rock, Colorado, with her husband Jerry and their two children. She is a full-time mom and home school teacher. Patria and Jerry have just begun a Galatians Bible study in their home and are targeting current Seventh-day Adventists in the hope of sharing the true gospel with them. Patria is enjoying watching God working in her brother's life. Much to the astonishment of the neurologists, he took his first steps five years after his car accident and continues to make what they call “miraculous progress.”



One Sabbath after I had taught Sabbath school, someone invited me to an interdenominational Bible study. I was quick to decline; I had two babies at home. ("Wouldn't time for *Bible study* be nice?!" I bitterly grumbled to myself). This same person asked me again the next year, and again I declined. Finally, the third year I no longer had an excuse, so reluctantly I agreed to go.

## Cognitive dissonance

That was the beginning of my journey out of Seventh-day Adventism.

I remember thinking about my fellow Bible students, "These people are on FIRE for God. Why is it that they are like this and they're not Seventh-day Adventists?" Somehow I had believed that only Adventists had the privilege of having intimate relationships with God. Yet here was Jesus in a living, breathing, tangible Body. Here, fellow Christians cried with me and prayed for me. Here, Jesus reached my heart.

I began to learn that as Christians we are to expect trials, that the holy God of the Universe owes me nothing. Still, He squeezed His omnipresence into a human body and came here to suffer and die so that I could experience eternal life. And to my astonishment, I learned that eternal life is secured the moment I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior!! The most amazing thing began to happen inside me. I felt new life flickering. Jesus was awakening me to Him. He brought me from a place of pure anger, bitterness and resentment to full acceptance that He is Master and Lord over all.

During this time of study, God lit a fire in me that was unquenchable. I became filled with information about what the Bible says and Who God is. Still, I didn't realize the fundamental differences between evangelical Christianity and Seventh-day Adventism because the lingo is the same. It has taken years for me to begin to comprehend the problematic way that Adventists use terms like "grace" and "assurance of salvation."

## Deception unveiled

One day, as I was listening to a popular Christian broadcast, the host took a call from a person who asked about Ellen G. White. The host very simply answered that she is the false prophetess of the Seventh-day Adventist church. I was stunned—incensed. "He obviously hasn't really studied this well; I will prove him wrong and present him with the evidence," I thought. So began my study of Ellen Gould White....and the beginning of humility.

Was I ever in for a surprise when I discovered that indeed she did make false prophecies. Further, some were edited out

of books and tracts, and other of her early writings were changed from the originals. The more I uncovered in my study, the more overwhelmed I became with the enormity of the problems surrounding her. I began discussing what I was finding with my husband. At first, he was sure I was misreading the information and began studying as well. We even scavenged (on the sly) in my parent's basement and found first edition EGW books, comparing those with more recent editions and poring over quotes. It didn't take long for my husband to see as well. At first, we only spoke about the problems with EGW in hushed tones, even whispers, just in case we were wrong and would be struck down by lightning. You may laugh. I am serious. We were scared to death.

After coming to the conclusion that EGW was a false prophetess, we went through a time of intense grieving. We were angry and couldn't reconcile (and frankly never have) the idea that so many people are aware of her blatant problems and are still unwilling to make necessary

changes. We stayed in the Adventist church for the next couple of years because we thought we could sift out EGW's teachings. After all, there were so many good people in the church. It eventually became apparent that we couldn't sift her out, that perhaps everything we knew about the Bible was somehow tainted by her teaching. We determined that we could no longer stay...yet all of our friends, business contacts, family...all of our LIFE was in the church. For the first time we tangibly understood what it meant to surrender—and we followed Jesus Christ out of the SDA church.

The first Sunday I sat in a church service, tears streamed down my face. I intuitively knew that HERE was the Body of Christ. HERE I was hearing the Gospel. HERE was freedom in Jesus. I was flooded with the most intense, intimate joy I have ever known...joy that has never left or decreased in intensity. This isn't to say that Sunday church-goers have it all right or that we've even found a permanent church home. But it IS to say that we have found pure, sweet, unadulterated freedom in Jesus Christ.

My husband and I are cowards when faced with confrontation, so we didn't tell our families about our departure from the church right away. We finally couldn't live with our dishonesty, so we told them. It wasn't well received. This process of "revealing" is in some ways very painful, yet the joy found in Jesus is so tangible, so immeasurably REAL, that it far outweighs the pain.

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## COLLEEN TINKER

**W**e were having a casual conversation one afternoon with a group of friends. Time has obscured the conversational trail in my mind, but I have a vivid memory of a particular exchange. Someone mentioned the far-reaching effects of childhood abuse, and I responded with an observation which catalyzed a chain reaction of events that unfolded over a period of weeks. Had I foreseen the effects of my words, I'm not sure I would have been so blunt. Nonetheless, I still believe what I said. It went something like this:

"I believe that ultimately we must repent for the sin in our life that results from the abuse we suffer at the hands of others," I commented. "A child has no control over transgressions perpetrated against him and is a true victim; still, the sin of that abuse marks him, and sin develops in him as a result. Abused people frequently grow up and treat other people badly as the result of the abuse they suffer. They don't necessarily want to hurt others, but they do in misguided attempts to protect or defend themselves. No matter what the cause, hurting others is wrong, and ultimately we must repent of the pain we cause that springs from the pain we experienced. Our own pain does not justify the pain we cause."

I was not prepared for the anger that met my response. No matter how I rephrased my sentences, another person in the group could not agree that the victims of abuse must ultimately repent for the sinful effects of that wounding in their own lives. The long-term results played out in the victim's life, this person seemed to be saying, were the fault not of the "victim" but of the original "perpetrator." To my astonishment, the anger appeared to escalate long after the afternoon ended, and ultimately our relationship with that person was permanently altered.

**What is forgiveness?**

Many years ago I spoke with a Christian licensed social worker who dealt in her practice with many children who had suffered abuse at the hands of parents or other authority figures. She told me that part of helping children recover from the



**Colleen Tinker** is the editor of *Proclamation!* She and her husband Richard, who live in Yucaipa, California, attend Trinity Evangelical Church in Redlands where they lead a weekly Former Adventist Fellowship Bible study, a ministry of Trinity church. They have two sons in college, both of whom are studying computer science.

# Forgiven to FORGIVE



anger and trauma of being transgressed against by those they should have been able to trust involved forgiveness—but, she said, “Forgiveness does not mean ‘forgive and forget.’ You have to remember what happened so you can protect yourself in the future. What forgiveness does mean is giving up your right to get even.”

This wise woman continued, “I tell children, you have to give God the burden of ‘getting even.’ That burden is too big for you to carry; if you try to carry it, it will eventually kill you. God is the only one big enough to handle that job, and He asks you to leave that responsibility in His hands.”

Paul emphasized this principle in Romans 12:19 where he says, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Paul, in fact, goes on in verse 21 to say, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

I have had many instances to think about both the social worker’s wise words and also the responsibility I have to be accountable for my own actions. Like everyone else I know, I have experienced people transgressing against me from no cause of my own. Those transgressions, however, left deep marks on me. Over the years I’ve discovered pockets of anger, fear, and resentment in me that have shaped the way I’ve treated those I love, and I am not proud of the unfair bitterness and angry words I’ve handed out many times when I felt misunderstood or trapped.

## Implications

Gradually, I have been learning two things. First, many of the people who have hurt me in varying ways over the years may never acknowledge or even consciously remember what they’ve done. That lack of acknowledgment does not negate what happened, but I have to be able to trust God with both the effects of those transgressions as well as with the people who committed them. I have to give up my “right” to get even with those people and instead trust God Who, in His eternal justice and mercy, is the only One Who can heal my heart and heal theirs as well.

Second, I have had to recognize that even though the way I automatically defend myself may be logical considering how my heart may have been hurt in the past, still the past is over. I have no “right” to inflict on people today my defensiveness born from events in the past.

Further, I have had to admit that I have sometimes sinned out of ignorance. I have done things that I did not realize were hurtful, yet I am responsible for those things. When God brings them to my attention, I must confess and repent of them.

An example that probably resonates with many of us is my eventual discovery that I had believed unbiblical doctrines as an Adventist. Over a period of years, as Richard and I studied the Bible and compared our Adventist beliefs with the word of God, we became convicted that we had unwittingly believed error to be truth. I remember passing through various stages of reactions as the reality of my deception sank into my mind.

I remember being angry that in my sincerity I had believed untruths to be the gospel. I was angry at the church for covering up the problems with Ellen White’s plagiarism, for perpetuating doctrines such as the Investigative Judgment that even many Adventist scholars did not believe, for convincing me that my eternal security hinged partly on my loyalty to a day instead of solely on Jesus Himself.

As I became increasingly secure in Jesus, however, the anger faded, and I began to be aware that not only had I been deceived, but I had helped to deceive others.

I remember the day I sat in front of my computer and realized that during the years I had spent teaching in Adventist schools as well as in Sabbath School classes I had been confirming Adventism and its unique doctrines to perhaps hundreds of students who had trusted what I had said to them. I had taught my students in utter sincerity; nonetheless, I had unwittingly modeled loyalty to a system of deception. I realized then that I had to confess that sin to God and repent even for my sin of ignorance. Since then I have also prayed that God would redeem that sin of ignorance and work His will in the lives of those I taught.

## Greg Albrecht, the Worldwide Church of God, and Forgiveness

In December, 1994, a unique event occurred in Christianity. The Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong in the 1930’s, admitted its error in teaching anti-Trinitarianism and the continuing necessity of observing the Old Covenant feast days and the seventh-day Sabbath. In a video sermon played on the same Sabbath in every Worldwide Church of God in the world, then president Joe Tkach, Sr., confessed the church’s historical errors and taught the truth of the New Covenant gospel of grace. As an organization, the Worldwide Church of God renounced its foundational heresies and embraced evangelical Christianity.

This transformation cost the church over 60 percent of its membership and has resulted in massive downsizing and loss of church property including Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, with its elegant concert hall.

Greg Albrecht, now President of Plain Truth Ministries, was once employed by the Worldwide Church of God, as well as its former Ambassador College. He reflected for *Proclamation!* on his experiences as an executive who once administered Armstrongism, as the now completely transformed WCG refers to its original beliefs:

“Was Herbert Armstrong a false prophet? Yes, I believe Herbert Armstrong was a false prophet. The facts speak to that!

“Was he a heretic? I believe he was a heretic—but I believe I was a heretic, too, so I’m not attributing to him anything that I’m not willing to face myself. And there was a time when I was angry with Herbert Armstrong.

“I came to the point in my life when I said, ‘I blame Greg Albrecht for giving control of Greg Albrecht’s life to Herbert W. Armstrong.’

**To accept God's forgiveness you have to admit that God is God, and you are you, and you've done bad things—and that's hard. I had to admit that I had been a heretic, and I had to accept His forgiveness of me for that.**

**Greg Albrecht, President of Plain Truth Ministries**



"Forgiveness is very important when a person has been involved in a cultic teaching. It was impossible for me to forgive anybody—let alone Herbert W. Armstrong himself—unless I accepted God's forgiveness first. I found that it was hard for me to accept God's forgiveness because—like most people, I didn't really want to at first. To accept God's forgiveness you have to admit that God is God, and you are you, and you've done bad things—and that's hard. I had to admit that I had been a heretic, and I had to accept His forgiveness of me for that.

"But when you do accept God's forgiveness, He empowers you to forgive others. You can't forgive anybody without first accepting God's forgiveness. It's outside of human capabilities to go and forgive people the way the Bible speaks of forgiveness—with God's forgiveness—unless we have first experienced it. But I began to see that that's the way I could forgive people—by accepting God's forgiveness of me."\*

#### **Forgive as we're forgiven**

We cannot truly come to the place of giving up our right to get even with those who have wronged us unless we first come to a place of repentance before God and an acceptance of His forgiveness of us.

Those of us who have been wronged by authority figures over whom we had no control or by the church of our youth do have hope for healing. That hope lies in facing the truth and repenting of our own sins that resulted from the wounds we received.

Paul said in Ephesians 2:3 that we all are "by nature objects of wrath." In Romans 1:20 he further says that "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Romans 5:14 declares, "Nevertheless, death reigned from the

time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come." Again, in 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul says, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

The Bible is clear that every human is born a sinner, condemned to death. We are not condemned or excused on the basis of whether or not we chose to sin; we are "by nature objects of wrath." The astonishing news of the gospel is that while we were dead in our sins, God saved us in Christ (Ephesians 2:5).

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When we realize that we are guilty of sin simply by being born into the human race, we have no honor behind which to hide. Without the cleansing of Jesus' blood, we are hopeless. Without the power of God's forgiveness working in us, we have no option but to turn the wounds inflicted on us into wounds we inflict on others.

Without repentance, we cannot experience the healing of God's forgiveness.

When we do face the truth of our innate depravity and admit it to God, however, we discover salvation. We find that in Jesus' blood of the eternal covenant we are washed clean, and in God's eyes we are counted righteous and forgiven.

We discover in Jesus that our ignorance and wounds no longer define us. Instead, we are made new by His Spirit, and with His power and love we can extend to others the forgiveness God gives us.

In Him we are finally free to forgive. **!**

\* The story of the WCG is powerfully portrayed in the video *Called To Be Free* available through Living Hope Ministries, Brigham City, UT, 84302, [www.lhvm.org](http://www.lhvm.org).

# WHEN THERE'S NO "I'M SORRY"

GARY INRIG

**A**uschwitz is a terrible place. The worst of the Nazi death camps, more than a million people lost their lives there, under the most appalling conditions. It was created in 1940, under Hitler's orders, to deal with people considered undesirable, such as Polish patriots and gypsies. When the Nazis launched their hellish "Final Solution," a horrific attempt systematically to exterminate the Jewish people, it became their primary death camp. Even today, almost sixty years after its liberation, a palpable sense of evil hangs over the camp.

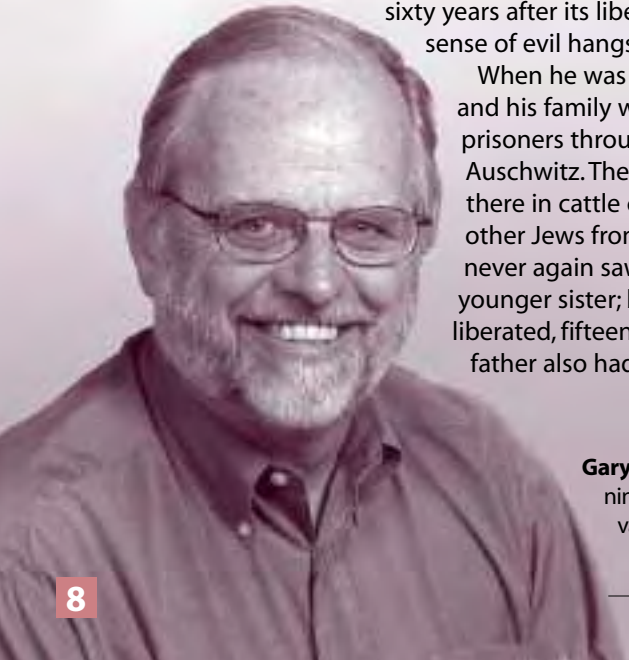
When he was fifteen, Elie Wiesel and his family were marched as prisoners through the gates of Auschwitz. They had been hauled there in cattle cars, along with other Jews from Romania. He never again saw his mother and younger sister; by the time he was liberated, fifteen months later, his father also had died. In 1995

Wiesel returned for the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp. The night before the official ceremony, Wiesel and others gathered at the crematorium for an unofficial ceremony, where Wiesel articulated his feelings:

Although we know that God is merciful, please God do not have mercy on those who have created this place. God of forgiveness, do not forgive those murderers of Jewish children here.

Do not forgive the murderers and their accomplices. Those who have been here...remember the nocturnal processions of children and more children and more children....If we could simply look at one, our heart would break. Did it not break the heart of the murderers? God, merciful God, do not have mercy on those who had not mercy on Jewish children.<sup>1</sup>

Wiesel wasn't merely speaking on his own. His words reflect ancient rabbinic teaching, found in the Talmud: "The Day of Atonement atones for sins against God, not for sins against man, unless the injured party has been appeased."<sup>2</sup> Simply put, there is no forgiveness possible for a murderer



**Gary Inrig** is senior pastor of Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California. He has authored nine books and pastored churches in Calgary, Canada and Dallas, Texas. Dr. Inrig has also taught in various capacities in many seminaries and Bible colleges. He and his wife Elizabeth have three children and five grandchildren.

or for something like the Holocaust. Only victims can forgive, and then only after repentance and restitution. Dead victims obviously can't forgive their victimizers. If forgiveness is impossible, what do you do with the toxin building up inside you?

That is one extreme. On the other hand, we have people going around after a terrible act of evil, declaring the perpetrator "forgiven" before he has shown any remorse or the victims have been buried. In such cases forgiveness turns into a kind of automatic, immediate response that seems to trivialize the offense and minimize the profound hurt that has been inflicted on the victims.

Not long before she died in 1988, Marghanita Laski, one of the best-known secularists in England, said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me."<sup>3</sup> Christians are forgiven people because of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are called and commanded to be forgiving people. That is hard under any conditions. But what if the offender does not, will not, or cannot repent? Do I forgive anyway? Doesn't that merely encourage her in her sinning? That is anything but a theoretical question. Many offenders have no intention of either stopping or repenting. That is the issue we want to address here, and we will begin by turning to Jesus' words that immediately precede the parable of the wicked servant in Matthew 18.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (vv. 15-20).

## Classic Forgiveness: When Forgiveness Meets Repentance

There is a close similarity between what Jesus says here and what is recorded in Luke 17:3-4. The repetition provides an opportunity for us to review the basic pattern of forgiveness set out by our Lord.

Forgiveness begins with *the problem*: *We have been sinned against*. Living in a fallen world means that each one of us has been sinned against, just as certainly as we all have sinned against others. The Lord makes it very clear that the issue is sin, not just a mistake, accident or misunderstanding. In Matthew 18:15 He says, "If your brother sins against you." Sin is a violation of God's standards, not merely something that upsets me or causes me problems. Not

every issue requires formal forgiveness, and, therefore, forbearance is a primary Christian virtue. The "sin against you" suggests that this is an act that is serious enough to break or threaten a relationship. The later statement that you would "win your brother" suggests that a significant relationship was in danger of being lost.

Just as He had in Luke 17, the Lord here in Matthew 18 establishes *the process*. *We must bring sin into the light*. The Lord's command could not be more clear. We are not to complain about the behavior to others or to stuff our feelings inside, making the best of a bad situation. We are to "go and show him his fault, just between the two of you" (v. 15). If this advice were followed, an immense number of problems would be dealt with before they reached the level of ugly, festering sores.

Not long ago a few of us were talking about some forgiveness issues, and a woman, obviously deeply hurt by an offense, mentioned a book she had been reading about forgiveness. She said, "I've learned that, whatever he's done, I'm not supposed to talk about it to him, but to take it to the Lord and forgive him." I felt constrained to quote this passage to her, and to remind her that for his sake, as well as for hers, she should not be silent. She needed to go to him and "show him his fault."

We need to balance what the Lord says here with what He says in Matthew 5:23-24, where He sets out the other side of the coin: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." So then, whether I feel that I have been sinned against or am convicted that I have done something wrong, I am to initiate a meeting with the other person. As Gregory Jones observes, "We need to seek out those against whom we have sinned and be willing to be sought out by those who have sinned against us."<sup>4</sup> The person who becomes aware of the breach in relationship is to take the initiative to deal with it.

The Greek word the Lord uses to describe this encounter, which the *New International Version* renders "show him his fault," is particularly difficult to render into English. The word is the same one the Lord uses in John 16:8 to describe the work of the Holy Spirit: "When he comes, he will *convict* the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (emphasis mine). In such a context, the word describes the process of bringing facts into the light, not for the purpose of making someone feel guilty, but to make the issues clear. To "convict" is to be an act of love, not of animosity. This attitude is underscored by a passage in the Old Testament that encourages the same response, a passage that includes the statement that Jesus called the second "great commandment":

Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:17-18).

In the same way, the New Testament encourages us to loving but firm confrontation: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

The purpose of this encounter is repentance, restoration, and reconciliation. Matthew 18:15 continues, "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over" (more literally: you have gained your brother). David Augsburger notes the importance of the purpose: "For Jesus, this is the goal—the central focus, the true meaning of forgiveness. The primary issue is not inner peace for oneself, not moral rightness with one's own conscience, not assurance of one's own salvation."<sup>5</sup> This may not mean that everything instantly returns to the way it was before. Forgiveness may have been given, but trust needs time to grow.

### **Frustrated Forgiveness: When the process breaks down**

"But if he will not listen" to you (v. 16) takes us to the second step. We are not told that we are to forgive him anyway, even if he refuses to repent. Nor are we just to forget the issue and move on, writing that person out of our lives. We are responsible not to give up; the next step is a group encounter, to "take one or two others along."

There are probably several reasons for this. One is indicated by the statement, "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." This is an Old Testament legal principle (Deuteronomy 19:15), and it suggests the seriousness of what is taking place. The presence of several people is important. It enables the parties to clarify the issues; as they hear both sides, probe for the facts and the underlying issues, try to determine whether sin really is involved, whether the fault is shared or singular, and what future steps could be followed. The presence of a group also increases the pressure on the offender to deal with the problem and not just pass it off as a trivial issue.

But "if the offender will not listen," the offended person is, once again not just to forgive, forget, and move on. The Lord now calls us to "tell it to the church."

We should not read this carelessly. The Lord Jesus has used the term church only once previously in Matthew (16:18), and as far as we can tell, He has given no instructions about what its organizational structure was to be. We should not infer that He intended such issues to be raised and discussed in a general congregational meeting. More likely, the church is portrayed as acting through the involvement of its elders or church leaders. Mature, seasoned leaders should hear the issues, protect the individuals, and come to a conclusion in a context of deep prayer and careful consideration. Their mandate is once again clear: repentance, restoration, and reconciliation.

Even here the process may hit a dead end. Sadly I've observed that by the time an issue has reached this point, most people are entrenched in their positions. They are determined on their course of action and so refuse "to listen even to the church" (v. 17). If that is the outcome, church discipline is to be carried out: "treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Again, we need to read this carefully. First, this is the last step, the end of what is usually a long process, taken only when it is evident that the violator has hardened his or her heart. Second, Jesus never taught His followers to treat others, be they pagans, tax collectors, or anyone else, in an abusive way.... John MacArthur has wisely observed, "This is no license for hostility or contempt. In fact, Christ's treatment of heathens and tax collectors is notable chiefly because of how He reached out to them in love. A similar kind of compassionate evangelistic pursuit should characterize our treatment of those who have been excommunicated in this manner."<sup>6</sup> This is a biblical act of tough love, a calling of kingdom people to kingdom standards in their relationships.

We are to forgive repentant offenders as fully and freely as possible. But we are not simply to forgive, forget, and move on when people refuse to repent. For the sake of both the offender and the offended, we are to pursue truth and a process of restoration.

### **Unilateral Forgiveness: Letting go of the burden**

So what now? I have sought to forgive, but the other person will not repent. She is blind to what she has done, despite what many others have said, and she steadfastly refuses even to consider admitting the wrong of her behavior.

Others must deal with the fact that their victimizers are unable to express repentance, perhaps because they have died or have a medical or mental condition or are confined to prison and legally prevented from making contact.

There are two common responses to such scenarios. Some suggest that we cannot, indeed must not, forgive, unless the person repents. There is strong logic in this, but it also leaves the offender in control. The wronged person is left carrying the load, waiting for the other person's response while she fights a continual battle against bitterness.

Others give the opposite counsel. We are to forgive unconditionally and immediately, whatever has happened, simply because the Lord commands us to do so. I respect the sincerity of such a position, but it is not without significant problems. Is it, in fact, what Jesus requires? What about the clear call in the New Testament to confront sin and to work toward repentance?

Love is not blind. It must make a calculation about what its primary responsibility is in any situation. It would be a violation of God's heart of just love to stand back and forgive per-

petrators, while they are in the very act of ravaging another person. Yet, even in such situations, a believer is commanded to practice enemy love, to avoid repaying evil for evil, to avoid revenge, and to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17-21). There is also an important distinction between the mandate God gives His people to “not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath” (Romans 12:19) and the responsibility of governmental authorities to act as “God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:4). It is not only permissible, it is obligatory for a government to pursue evil doers with the intent of terminating their evil actions. That is involved in Paul’s affirmation that a political leader “does not bear the sword for nothing” (Romans 13:4). To forgo the pursuit of justice and the restraint of evil is to abdicate governmental responsibility. On the other hand, for an individual Christ-follower to pursue revenge or to dispense forgiveness indiscriminately is to abdicate the way of Christian love.

In the 1980s, as Solomon Schimmel tells the story, a nun in New York City was brutally raped by two men, who also cut seventeen crosses into her body with a nail file. The brutality outraged even a city as hardened to reports of violence as New York. However, the police found themselves handcuffed. Although they had found and arrested the perpetrators, they could charge them with only minor offenses. Although the men were obviously guilty, police could not charge them with rape and aggravated assault, because the nun, the only witness, refused to testify against them. She said that she had no desire for revenge and hoped that, by forgiving them, she would make them sensitive to their wrongdoing and motivate them to change their ways<sup>7</sup>

I am impressed by the love and courage of that nun. But I have serious questions about her wisdom. Had she called the men to repentance? Did she think about the other women who would be put at risk, if men capable of such atrocities were set free? What role does civil justice have in such matters?

Forgiveness, as we have seen, is intended to be an interpersonal and bilateral process, when a wronged person extends forgiveness to a person who has sinned against him, on the basis of the offender’s repentance. This is the only forgiveness that opens the possibility of reconciliation. But the Bible also suggests that, when attempts at interpersonal forgiveness have come to a dead end, a Christ-follower is not stymied. There is such a thing as personal or unilateral forgiveness, when the offended party lets go of an offense by giving it over to the Lord, and committing herself to act in love, regardless of the other’s response. Three passages are especially helpful in illustrating how we are to respond when there is no “I’m sorry.”

The first of these passages is Mark 11:25, which concludes a saying by the Lord about faith:

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the

**I am impressed that here Jesus did not do what He had done on all the other occasions when He had forgiven someone. Previously, He had spoken directly to the individual, declaring, “your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20; 7:48). But from the cross, He prayed to the Father on their behalf, putting them in the Father’s hands. He did not ask the Father to avenge Him but to forgive them.**

sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (vv. 22-25, emphasis mine).

When the Lord Jesus described the process of forgiveness in Matthew 18:15 and Luke 17:3-4, He envisioned an encounter between an offended person and the sought-out offender. However, this Mark 11 context is quite different. A believer is standing in prayer (a common Jewish prayer posture, whether in public or private), when he realizes that he is carrying something in his heart against his brother. Strikingly, he is not commanded to go to the brother and confront him with his sin. Rather, he is to forgive him (the Lord’s use of the word makes it clear that sin is involved), right where he is. This would seem to indicate that the procedure given in Matthew and Luke is no longer possible or has proven futile. Because the context is prayer, this is a vertical transaction, a releasing of the person and the matter to God. Apparently this form of forgiveness goes something like this: “Lord, this is now in your hands, not mine. I surrender any desire or attempt to get even in any way. I abandon any perceived right to bitterness and complaining. I entrust this person to you in your grace and justice. I will follow your command not to repay evil for evil and to overcome

evil with good." It is important to recognize that this takes place in a very different arena than that of interpersonal forgiveness. It is distinctive in that it is personal and internal, carried out between an individual and the Lord.

This subjective of personal forgiveness is substantially different from the declared, interpersonal forgiveness that is God's ideal. And it should be noted that the latter is still the goal toward which we work and pray, so that full restoration is possible. But, in the meantime, while I wait, I release to the Lord any supposed rights endlessly to recycle feelings of anger, resentment, or bitterness; I commit myself to act in wise love (after all, I am called to love even my enemies, Matthew 5:44); I resign the effort to make sure the person pays for what was done; I choose to wait for the Lord's vindication, whenever He chooses to settle all accounts (Romans 12:19).

Such forgiveness, the Lord tells us, is key to our ongoing enjoyment of "family forgiveness," "so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." We have encountered this idea earlier, in the distinction between judicial forgiveness, which establishes our relationship with God, and family forgiveness, which enables our experience of fellowship with our Father. Wayne Grudem elaborates on this idea, found not only here, but also in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12, 14-15):

Our Lord does not have in mind the initial experience of forgiveness we know when we are justified by faith, for that would not belong in a prayer that we pray every day.... He refers rather to the day-by-day relationship with God that we need to have restored when we have sinned and displeased him. In fact, Jesus commands us to build into our prayers a request that God forgive us in the same way that we have forgiven others who have harmed us (in the same "personal relationship" sense of "forgive"—that is, not holding a grudge or cherishing bitterness against another person or harboring any desire to harm them).... If we have unforgiveness in our hearts against someone else, then we are not acting in a way that is pleasing to God or helpful to us. So God declares (Matthew 6:12, 14-15) that he will distance himself from us until we forgive others.<sup>8</sup>

The second passage comes in the midst of the climactic moments of the Savior's life, as He was being nailed to the cross. He had already experienced terrible physical abuse and had stumbled under the weight of the cross. He had been thrown to the ground and stripped naked; nails were driven through His wrists as He was fastened to the cross-beam. His Roman executioners roughly raised Him into the air, yanked His legs together, and drove nails through both ankles, impaling Him in agony. All the while the Jewish leaders led the rabble in an orgy of mockery and verbal abuse.

In this context the Savior spoke His first words from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).<sup>9</sup> His executioners, whether Jewish leaders or Roman soldiers, were, at that moment, in no way repentant. Some were callously indifferent; others were cel-

ebating the success of their efforts to rid the nation of Him. Although they were ignorant of what they were really doing, their ignorance wasn't innocence (or they would have had nothing to forgive). However, Jesus, rather than cursing His enemies, prayed for them just as He had taught His followers to do (Luke 6:35).

I am impressed that here Jesus did not do what He had done on all the other occasions when He had forgiven someone. Previously, He had spoken directly to the individual, declaring, "your sins are forgiven" (Luke 5:20; 7:48). But from the cross, He prayed to the Father on their behalf, putting them in the Father's hands. He did not ask the Father to avenge Him but to forgive them. This was not a blanket forgiveness, granted to people whether or not they wanted it. It would become theirs only as they came in repentant faith to see the cross in an entirely different way. Even as He prayed this grace-filled prayer, their hearts were untouched. The soldiers indifferently gambled for His garments, while "the rulers even sneered at him" (Luke 23:35).

The third passage shows us that Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was deeply influenced by this example of his Lord. When he was called to account for his preaching of the good news of Jesus, he stood before his nation's leaders, and, with great courage, called them to repentance because "You always resist the Holy Spirit!... And now you have betrayed and murdered [the Righteous One]" (Acts 7:51-52). Their response was exactly the opposite of repentance; "they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him" (v. 54). Imitating his Master, Stephen prayed, even as he was being stoned to death: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v. 60). Once again, note that he did not say to his unrepentant killers, "I forgive you." Rather, he entrusted them into his Father's hands. He could not declare their forgiveness in the midst of their rebellion, but he could give them over to the Lord. Remarkably, one of the answers to his prayer was found in a man who was "giving approval to his death" (8:1). Saul, better known as the apostle Paul, would not only come repentantly to the Lord, but also become the Lord's agent of forgiveness throughout the Mediterranean world.

In summary, not every case of interpersonal forgiveness is the same. The ideal is bilateral forgiveness, where an act of sin is followed by courageous confrontation on the part of the wronged person and sincere repentance on the part of the offender. But, even when repentance does not immediately occur, an obedient Christ-follower does not abandon the process. He continues to pursue the offender, seeking his restoration. And when all efforts for the present have seemed to fail, he lets the issue go to the Lord in an act of unilateral forgiveness.

## Some Good Lessons from a Bad Example

We have seen how the process ought to work. However, sometimes we learn best by looking at a bad example. Sadly, one of the Bible's great men gives us a case study in

how not to deal with the failures of others. David was a great king who had experienced God's profound forgiveness. But when his own children engaged in a series of terrible acts against one another, David's actions only made a bad situation worse. He illustrates what can happen when we don't do forgiveness God's way.

As we have continually seen, forgiveness means that we need to deal with sin honestly. True forgiveness holds people accountable for their behavior, and if we attempt to deal with sin by ignoring it or by only partly forgiving it, we will cause greater damage. God fully and freely forgave David's sins—adultery with Bathsheba, followed by his arranged killing of Uriah—when David came to the place of confession. That forgiveness did not, however, cancel the tragic consequences that David had unleashed in his family. One of his sons, Amnon, raped his own half-sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22). "When David heard all this, he was furious," we are told (v. 21). But rather than confronting and punishing Amnon, David avoided him. In so doing, he failed as a man, as a father, and as a king. Such an act called for severe punishment—exile, imprisonment, or even capital punishment. David's passivity was to yield a very bitter harvest. Tamar's brother Absalom was infuriated at Amnon's sin and David's tolerance. He burned with a deep hatred toward his half-brother, but he bided his time. Two years later his anger came to full flame in a carefully planned execution-style killing of Amnon, his half-brother (13:23-33). David was once again filled with grief, this time not only for his dead son, Amnon, but also for his lost son Absalom, who had fled for his life into a neighboring country. "King David mourned for his son every day" (13:37). For three years Absalom lived in exile. Finally David's general, Joab, persuaded David to allow Absalom to return. David agreed, but with a condition: "He must go to his own house; he must not see my face" (14:24). So Absalom's sin was never challenged; David's forgiveness was never offered, and reconciliation between the two was obviously never achieved. Absalom's appeal is pathetic: "I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death" (v. 32). But when they did meet, David "kissed Absalom" (v. 33). It was an empty gesture, because the massive issue between them was never addressed. It was not forgotten. Absalom's anger festered and grew until it erupted in a civil uprising, in which Absalom came very close to taking both his father's throne and his life.

David's story, as well as the Lord's continued call for us to be forgiving people, is a reminder that we need to guard carefully against an unforgiving spirit. Anger can become a kind of security blanket to which we cling. Jeff VanVonderen observed,

For some people, unforgiveness serves a very practical purpose. One reason why people don't or won't forgive is because it is a way for them to have the upper hand over another; it holds the other in a position of owing a debt

**But, even when repentance does not immediately occur, an obedient Christ-follower does not abandon the process. He continues to pursue the offender, seeking his restoration. And when all efforts for the present have seemed to fail, he lets the issue go to the Lord in an act of unilateral forgiveness.**

they cannot repay. And feeling held in a constant state of being unforgiven keeps some people scrambling to discover what good behavior it will take on their part to make up for what they have done. In a very real and devilish way, unforgiveness becomes an effective tool to control another's behavior.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever David's intentions, his response clearly didn't work. Absalom's response is a reminder that if people are left scrambling for too long, their hearts may harden, and scrambling will become retaliating.

### **Laying down the load**

In the final analysis, the call of the Lord is that we need to let the issue go to Him. We need to put the person and the problem into the Lord's hands. Some years ago my wife and I were visiting friends at their beautiful lakeside vacation home. Elizabeth was deeply troubled by the way she believed some other people had mistreated me, people who steadfastly refused to imagine that they had done anything wrong. She believed she had dealt with her feelings, but her faithful friend listened to her conversation and finally called her on her attitude: "You're still angry."

"No I'm not. I've let it go."

"Then why do you keep talking to me about it over and over? You're carrying a load of rocks."

They stopped at a spot on the road, and Shirley said, "I want you to collect some rocks, write the names of those people on them, and throw them into the lake." They did

just that, not as a symbol that she was throwing away those people but that she was giving them over to the Lord, releasing once again her feelings of anger and bitterness.

That simple act had a powerful effect on my wife. Since then she has had the opportunity to walk with other women through a similar ritual.

Recently I preached a sermon on the Mark 11 text, in which I tried to unravel how we should deal with people who will not or cannot say, "I'm sorry." At the end of the message, I asked people to write on a card any names the Holy Spirit had brought to their minds—what could be called "Mark 11:25 people." Some might be guilty of terrible sins against you—but they will not own their sin. Others might have died, but the effects of their sin linger. What do we do with such people? I then said, "If you feel so moved by God's Spirit, bring the cards bearing those names to the front as we sing a worship song together, as a symbol that you are giving that person and that issue to the Lord." It was moving to watch hundreds of people come forward, some with deep emotion. I knew only a few of the stories, but I also knew that for many it was a profound moment of worship before their forgiving God.

Now I am not so naive as to believe that writing a person's name on a card is all that it takes to let go of the deep wounds of a person's soul. But I do know that the Lord longs for His people to develop a disposition to forgive rather than to retaliate, to release rather than to hold onto wrongs done to us. It is only a place to begin, but that first

step is often the most important. So I want to challenge you to consider whom the Lord has brought to your mind as you have been reading these pages. What is the most God-honoring way to proceed from here? How will you release that wrong, no matter how deep, to your Lord?

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## Endnotes

- 1 "God of Forgiveness, Do Not forgive." Retrieved March 3, 2003, from [www.wujs.org.il/activist/programmes/tekasim/shoah/elie\\_wiesel.shtml](http://www.wujs.org.il/activist/programmes/tekasim/shoah/elie_wiesel.shtml).
- 2 *Mishnah Yoma* 8:9.
- 3 Cited in John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 48.
- 4 L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 186.
- 5 David Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 25.
- 6 John MacArthur, Jr. *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1998), 152.
- 7 Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds Not Healed by Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61.
- 8 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 369.
- 9 Although nearly all translations of the New Testament contain this verse, it should be noted that it is missing from a number of early and reliable manuscripts. But strong internal evidence and the parallel to Acts 7:60 support its inclusion.
- 10 Jeff VanVonderen, *Families Where Grace Is In Place* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), 28.

## Who pays for this publication?

As we begin 2006 we are praising God for His provision for Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* during the past year. We have added many new names to the mailing list, and God has provided the income we needed to pay all our bills. We pray for each of you who partners with this ministry, and we thank God for you.

For those of who who don't know how *Proclamation!* is funded, here's a brief explanation. *Proclamation!* is a publication of Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.—a non-profit, donation-supported ministry. Subscriptions are free, and we encourage you to send us the names and addresses of people whom you think would benefit by reading it. The magazine has been in circulation since the end of 1999.

Life Assurance also reaches out through two websites: [www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org), and [www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com).

During the summer of 2004, the ministry board contracted with Colleen Tinker to assume the full-time work of editing the magazine and of managing the ministry. Richard Tinker, who was voted president of Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., in August, 2005, continues to donate his time designing the magazine. Dale Ratzlaff, the organization's and the magazine's founder, remains on the board of directors.

All publishing expenses including Colleen Tinker's contracted amount are met by means of tax-deductible donations. We praise God for His provision through the years. We at Life Assurance Ministries depend upon our partnership with you who pray for this ministry and also with you who give.

We invite you to pray about becoming a supporter of Life Assurance Ministries. We need your prayers for God to direct us and to provide for us, and your donations make it possible for us to continue to send *Proclamation!* to those who are searching for Jesus and for the freedom that comes from placing their confidence in Him alone. He alone is worthy!

You may contact us by using the envelope inserted in this magazine.



# Unmasking the Cultic Spirit

SAMUEL PESTES

**A** cult is a simple structure designed to lock you inside a religious or psychological box. It raises walls all around you ostensibly to protect you from danger. Once inside those walls, you see yourself as an "insider." Others are referred to as "outsiders." You find yourself in a world of "us" and "them." Result? Isolation and a false sense of security steeped in a self-righteousness that is expressed by an ego that must be "right" at any price.

This phenomenon is more widespread than we may think and describes the situation in the days of Christ. In building a system for protection against error, the religious leaders in Jerusalem became impervious to anything that did not fit inside their structure. When Jesus came to broaden their horizons and to introduce them to a spiritual reality that went beyond human logic, they locked Him out of their minds. His new approach did not fit inside their religious box. When He indicated there was much reality beyond their limited horizon, they panicked. Their security was undermined. Leaders and followers alike were convinced on "scriptural authority" that they possessed the ultimate truth. They had the writings of the prophets. They had the promises of God. They "knew" that they were right! Jesus would either fit inside their airtight box, or He was shunned as an outsider. Case closed!

## Cultic clues identified

1. Beware of promoters in religion or business who do not identify themselves up front.
2. They often use the Bible to cover their true objectives.
3. These tend to control information by blocking or downplaying any source that could raise questions regarding the validity of their doctrines.
4. Fear tactics and insecurity are fundamental to their success.

I was raised in a Christian home where our parents taught us to love the Lord and to think for ourselves. Check all things by

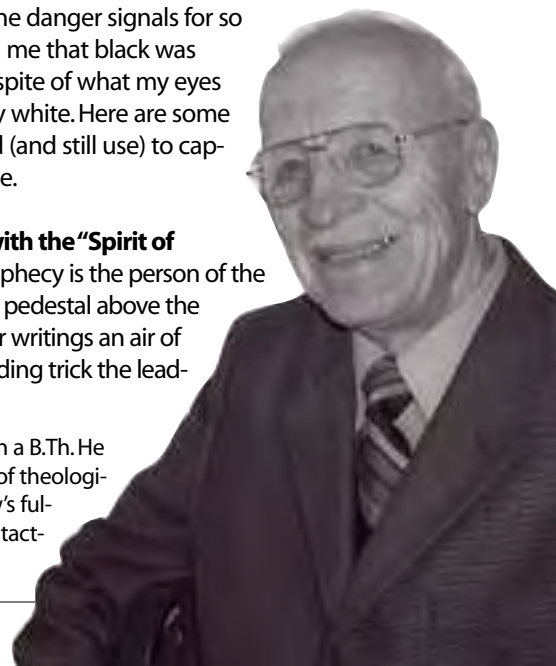
the Word of God, we were told. Most of our neighbors were nominal Christians who did not let religion interfere with their pleasures. As a result, I found myself somewhat alone because I was not comfortable participating in their rowdy drinking parties. We associated on a neighborly basis, but I simply did not fit regardless of how hard I tried.

I decided to serve the Lord by becoming a minister of the Gospel and enrolled in an SDA college where I received my Bachelor degree in theology. At first it was a treat to be accepted as one of the "club." However, I had been taught by my parents not to use the Bible as a tool to support my beliefs, but rather as a gold mine of truth to be explored with an open mind. I soon noticed what appeared to be discrepancies between some of the teachings of that denomination and what the Bible seemed to say. When I inquired regarding some of those problems, I was referred to Ellen White on whose writings that church was structured.

Answers to all Bible questions were to be found in the "Spirit of Prophecy" writings. (Today Adventist scholars publicly try to avoid resorting to Ellen White as their "final authority," but neither the doctrines nor the Adventists' dependence upon her interpretations have changed.) As I look back now, I can hardly believe that I had ignored the danger signals for so many years. If authority told me that black was white, then I "knew" that in spite of what my eyes showed me, black was really white. Here are some of the techniques they used (and still use) to capture and hold sincere people.

**By linking Ellen White with the "Spirit of Prophecy"** (The Spirit of Prophecy is the person of the Holy Spirit) they set her on a pedestal above the ordinary saints. This gives her writings an air of infallibility. By this mind-bending trick the lead-

**Samuel Pestes** graduated from Canadian Union College in 1947 and from Walla Walla College in 1950 with a B.Th. He entered SDA evangelistic and pastoral ministry in British Columbia, Canada, but resigned in 1957 because of theological disagreements. Samuel has published four books. His first, *Christian Be Free*, pub. 1981, discussed the law's fulfillment in the New Covenant. He and his wife Dorothy have two sons and a daughter. Samuel may be contacted by email: [s.pestes@shaw.ca](mailto:s.pestes@shaw.ca)



ers assume the role of infallibility and are responsible only to themselves.

**Isolation.** Isolation from other Christians is seen as a safeguard against spiritual contamination. Worshiping with other Christians in their churches on Sunday makes people vulnerable to the mark of the beast. Bible studies conducted by people of other denominations are to be avoided for fear of polluting one's mind with error. Teachers who give such warnings claim that they are the custodians of all essential truth to the last generation before the coming of the Lord.

**Fear** was and remains the driving motive of the denomination to this day. To solidify their central and separating doctrine in the minds of believers they teach:

- **Going to church on Sunday** is a pagan institution, and people who persist in worshiping on that day will receive the Mark of the Beast spoken of in Revelation.

- **Sunday laws will soon be enacted**, and Satan will use these laws to prepare the world to receive the Mark of the Beast. This scare tactic has been used to win converts to the denomination since the 1840s. The leadership ignore the fact that Sunday laws would not prevent the powerful Jewish lobbies and other groups who prefer to worship on Saturdays, from attending church on that day. Should such laws actually be enacted, they would simply decree Sunday as a national holiday but would not force people to work on a Saturday, or on a Friday, or on any other day for that matter. Yet many innocent victims of this denomination would stake their lives on Saturday observance for fear of receiving the Mark of the Beast.

Nowhere does the Bible connect worship on Sunday, or on any other day that God has made, with the Mark of the Beast. This tactic is the product of human logic and conjecture. In this we have a prime example of how deceptive tactics are used to target and paralyze unsuspecting victims. Christians are called to regard every day as the Lord's day (Romans 14:5,6).

**Insecurity regarding my salvation** was probably the most damaging doctrine I had to overcome. Fear of the final judgment hung over our heads every day. We were taught that we could not be certain of our salvation until we stood before the judgment bar of God at the second coming of Christ. We may repent of our known sins, but we could never be sure of our standing with God, because we might still have some flaw that was not confessed. They seem ignorant of the fact Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension ensure salvation to all who place their faith in Him.

**Fear of God's rejection** was and remains a driving force in the arsenal of this church. In spite of their claims to the contrary, insecurity drives these people to struggle at proving to God that they love Him. Thus they resort to giving lip service to an Old Covenant law given at Sinai solely for the benefit of a rebellious nation (Deuteronomy 5:2,3).

While the old school continues to promote Saturday sanctity, there is a new theological twist among some SDA scholars. Realizing that Saturday observance was never required of the church after the Old Covenant was nailed to the cross, they say

they cling to the Sinai Sabbath merely as a service of love with which they hope to impress God by going beyond that which He requires. How did God regard Cain's "offering of love?" See Genesis 4:5 and Mark 7:6,7. Man-made rules create a breach in the body of Christ by erecting walls between believers. Mrs. White's unscholarly guidelines on Bible interpretation, diet and isolation from the larger body of Christ, have spawned a subculture that has enslaved millions of innocent people. God warned of such last day deceptions in Matthew 24:24.

### When the fog lifted.

What did Jesus mean in Matthew 11:13 when He said, "All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John?"

Probably the clearest picture of the passing of the era of Law and the introduction of the new era of faith is in the Mount of Transfiguration record. In Matthew 17:1-8 we see Jesus accompanied by Peter, James and John standing on a high mountain. Suddenly, Jesus the Man was seen for whom He really was—the Son of God Himself. At that moment, the past, the present and the future were presented in full view. Moses, the mediator of the covenant of Law that pointed to the coming Messiah, appeared on one side of his Lord. On the other, was Elijah representing all the prophets who had predicted the coming of the same Messiah. Jesus, the central figure, commanded the scene.

Recovering from their shock, the three looked again, but to their amazement, both Moses and Elijah had disappeared. There in the brilliance of divinity stood one figure—alone! He needed no man to support Him. He needed no human props. Then, out of the heavens a voice summarized the whole gospel message. Moses, who ruled by law, had fulfilled his purpose. Elijah, representing the prophets, had completed his mission. Their missions accomplished, both retreated to the pages of history. Jesus alone remains! God Himself had just closed off the past with an exclamation mark and a period as the old era was gone!

The eternal Jesus, however, was still there! He stood alone, clothed in the glory and power of divinity. He is God, the beginning and the end! He, the Creator and Redeemer, rules. Then, out of heaven came a voice that still rings to this day:

*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* (Matthew 17:5, NIV)

From that point onward, the apostles knew that all truth was inherent in, and came through Jesus. He opened a window into the mysteries of eternity. Henceforth, all that Moses had taught had to be seen and understood through the eyes of Jesus. Everything the prophets had predicted only served to verify that Jesus, in truth, was the promised Messiah.

Let us not become so accustomed to life in prison that we fear to venture into the freedom Jesus made available to us. He came to open the prison gates and to set us free. The evidence is clear. The choice is ours.

*"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2, NIV).

## Living in the garden CONTINUED FROM BACK

we had let ourselves be pulled into fanaticism, we still felt that we had “truth” to offer—at least to poor, ignorant people on the other side of the world.

Living and working in another culture far from the safe walls of my youth was my turning point. My eyes opened to the fact that wonderful Christians existed outside my greenhouse. They were my friends; they inspired me and demonstrated unconditional love to my family. They were not afraid to talk about Christ and what He had done for them. They were eager to learn and explore more about God. They influenced me to open myself to the rain of God’s Spirit on my heart.

Up until this time, my relationship with God had only involved “religion.” I had been raised with a list of doctrines that I was to believe. These doctrines were like little pebbles trying to support my shallow roots. I realized I did not have a core belief. Stepping into the world had given me a glimpse of the possibilities of a “spiritual” relationship with God—a meaningful, heartfelt one that had nothing whatsoever to do with my behavior. I was slowly awakening to my need for a firm foundation, a single solid Rock that would hold me tight under any circumstance.

It is now over 10 years since the “Linda plant” slowly turned her head to feel and receive the wondrous love of the SON. I have plowed through all the confusing words and rules of my youth to discover ONE simple, life-changing truth: God, in the form of Jesus, gave himself to be the debt-payer for all the sins of the world—past, present, future! He has fulfilled all the requirements of the law through His death and resurrection. And because of what He did, I Am Saved—not because of anything I have or could do, but solely because of what He has done.

I can live with joy now because I have more than the longing for salvation—I HAVE salvation! I don’t fear the future. This truth is both simpler and bigger than any list of requirements or rules. I am in awe of my Savior, and I want to fall before Him in adoration and praise.

### Living in reality

This should be the “happily ever after” end of my story, but it isn’t. Every day I hear whispers of my old greenhouse training: my assurance of salvation is “too good to be true.” “It can’t be that simple.” “Isn’t there something I should be doing?”

Sometimes I share my joy with other plants still in the greenhouse of my youth. For some reason, my sharing makes them afraid. Their first impulse is to pull out a list of requirements and observances and point out all the things that I must make sure I am doing. I have to admit that when the list of requirements is held next to me, I begin to doubt myself. I just don’t measure up. My eyes turn away from my Savior in those moments, and I begin to lose sight of His wonderful gift to me.

I have come to believe that the only “work” I must do is to feed my soul daily with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The writings of Paul feed my soul and are a constant reminder of the simple truth of God’s grace.

Recently I discovered an Old Testament passage that presents a wonderful word picture of redemption in Ezekiel 16:4-14. I go to this passage when I am feeling lonely or misunderstood, or when I need to be reminded of the wonderful reality that is too good to be true.

Ezekiel was giving this message to Jerusalem, reminding God’s people how He had rescued and prospered them, but it is also a beautiful metaphor of how God rescues and claims each of us who are His:

“On the day you were born, your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

“Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, ‘Live!’ I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels...”

The passage continues the story by telling how God covered this child’s nakedness and entered into a covenant with her, saying, “You are Mine!”

## I can live with joy now because I have more than the longing for salvation—I HAVE salvation!

“I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you... I adorned you with jewelry... so you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth... You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen.”

With no effort on her part, with no credentials or illustrious pedigree, this child was adopted into the royal family of God! The clincher for me is verse 14:

“And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Our salvation and righteousness and spiritual beauty are ALL about Jesus and nothing about us. God bestows His splendor on us and declares our beauty to be perfect!

God redeemed us from our abandonment by His atonement in Jesus at the cross. By dying and rising from death, Jesus has reconciled us to the Father. He makes us alive by placing His Spirit in our hearts when we believe this gospel of salvation, and we become adopted into the royal family of God!

Because of Jesus’ finished work on the cross, we can be “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither” (Psalm 1:3).

Now we flourish in the light of Jesus and the nurturing soil of the word of God, and our branches bear fruit produced by the gentle wind and rain of the Spirit.

**Thank you**

Thank you so much for the magazine. I'm glad to see that your ministry exists. I no longer feel so alone. *Sabbath in Christ* and *Whitewashed* were also much appreciated. In 1994 I first walked through the doors of a Seventh-day Adventist church. The first person I spoke to there turned out to be my wife 10 months later. Two years after that, we had our son... I believed what I heard then, and was inspired to read more of those little "red books." I inherited a *Conflict of the Ages* series and read with fascination. Once I started studying my Bible, however, the discrepancies started to pile up. I lasted about four years there before walking away from the Adventist movement—and God, regrettably. About three years elapsed before I reconciled things with my Lord. My first reaction was to try Adventism again; however, I just could not do it. I've tried a few other mainstream churches, but I haven't found a fit thus far...

Today I am churchless and in need of fellowship of others of like mind and heart.... My current interpretation of Scripture is much more liberating, sensible, hopeful, and relevant than it used to be. It came at such a cost, though: my marriage, my church family, a failed business, and most of my friends.

Ultimately, though, the cost of it all was what happened two thousand years ago when God put on humanity for our sake because He loves us all that much...

Thank you again for your much appreciated ministry and interest in sharing with me what you have gained in your walk with God.

**Renounce Satan**

Please remove my name from your mailing list! When Jesus returns I suspect you will be among those calling for the rocks to bury you from His brightness.

Too bad seemingly educated people are so beguiled by the devil as to believe his tripe and lead you astray. Yes, I'll be praying for you all to come to your senses and renounce Satan before it is forever too late.

[I'm] Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, retired after 45+ years of trying to help people love the true God. Not too late for you folks yet. Better hurry!

**Appreciated McBride and Lee**

Please keep up the good work of *Proclamation!* We haven't been Adventists for 30 years due to the "great shaking" back in the '70's. We are so grateful for God's deliverance from the toxic church long ago. However, it was very hard and took a long time to shake off all the Adventist doctrines that permeate your very soul. That's why the article by J. LeBron McBride on a toxic church will help so many trying to escape. The devil definitely keeps people in chains through a toxic church, never really to experience true freedom in Christ who has done it all, now and forever!

We also enjoyed "Pilgrim's Voyage" by Christopher Lee. Even after all these years of trying to share the gospel, our families are still mostly Adventists. They hide in fear in the bottom of the ship. Their minds are so darkened, and yet they see us as lost. But thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, we have, not will have, everything we need for salvation.

We continue to pray for *Proclamation!* and pray that all Adventists will be delivered out of the toxic church into the true church and freedom in the gospel, in Jesus Christ alone!

**Dear Friends at Proclamation!:**

Thanks for sending me two subscriptions to *Proclamation!* and also two books, *Sabbath in Christ*, and *Cultic Doctrine*. Please allow my response.

I am at a loss to relate to the spiritual journey or theology depicted in your publications. My experience in Adventism is much more positive than what yours was. In fact, to my mind, your theological system seems to be unbalanced & unbiblical in numerous ways just as Adventism seems to you.

Regardless of our disagreements, it is tragic to me that your personal vision & mission should be defined by your repudiation of the "faults" which you perceive in Adventism. The truth itself and the gospel commission are much bigger than that.

I have come to the point of closure. Please take me off your mailing list. You do, however, have my love and prayers.

If you publish this letter, and I hope you do, please do so in its entirety, unless with my permission.

Intended with Christian kindness and love,  
Larre Kostenko

**Doing a great work**

You're doing a great work—something really needed by so many of us on the "edge." The Adventist "defenders of the faith" quite often are

**"Why?" yields to trust** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

**"Why" doesn't matter**

I have been astounded to find that I don't have any more answers than I did the night of my brother's accident as to why it happened. The difference is that now I know that "Why?" doesn't matter. By the grace of God, my focus has changed entirely to the fact that it is only eternity that matters. Right here, right now, suffering will continue. Of course I still have days when I weep for my brother. But OH MY! God is so good. He doesn't just do good; He IS the only and the ultimate Good. Even when it hurts, when I can't understand why or what or how, I trust His heart.

I have learned that the God of the Bible is trustworthy. I could not find that truth in Adventism because the church does not represent God as trustworthy. I could never be assured that my eternal life was secure. What if Jesus decided not to remind of me of a sin that I'd forgotten to confess? Would He put a black blot by my name? Seventh-day Adventism teaches a different gospel. If Sabbath-keeping is still a required part of the saved person's life, then Jesus didn't REALLY finish

the work of our salvation. Our observance would be necessary for us to remain saved.

It is these problematic doctrines that caused me to plummet into a deep, dark depression because I didn't trust God. The accident didn't fit into my paradigm. Now I see that God is God and I am man. In Adventism, God's ability to act and do is dependent upon my actions or non-actions. Contrary to that belief, the Bible says that God is completely independent of me in the sense that His purposes will be accomplished no matter what I do or don't do. Knowing this truth gives me such a sense of security. To put it simply, I've learned that in the end it will be alright. I have such a burden for my friends and family still within Adventism. Most Adventists have been inundated with words and phrases like "grace" and "on fire for Jesus" and "salvation." In my opinion, however, few TRULY know what Jesus did at the cross, what He finished there. I pray for each one still within the bonds of Adventism to be released from its grip. I pray that Jesus will make Himself known to them in ways that they cannot deny. I pray that He will use me as His vessel...that HIS light will pour out of me so much that I am no longer seen at all.

the most offensive. Don't let that sway you. Getting to the truth on doctrinal matters is so refreshing and so liberating

The "extreme makeover" by the Holy Spirit is something the legalists can never experience since their works leave no room for God's work.

Bless you all and continue to feed and bless us in the New Year!

## Negative and Foolish

Your publishing is full of negative thoughts—I don't have time for such foolish articles—nothing uplifting or encouraging, only a bunch of gossip and downgrading of the Adventist church and ministers.

Stop my copies and send them to those who will appreciate them; I don't. Although I don't approve of everything the church does, I will not stoop as low as you all do. I go on my way doing all the good I can all the time I can. I have projects in India and Bangladesh and no time to read your articles which don't do anything to improve my Christian experience.

Well, that's that.

Cancel my name

Concentrate on positive matters

Stay in the church

Try to change what you can by staying within

Don't overly criticize the church if you must

[criticize]

That lowers your Christian experience

Engage in spreading the gospel

## The Holy Spirit's rightful role

I just received my first three back issues of *Proclamation!* What a blessing and encouragement!

My heart goes out to those poor letter writers whose eyes are so blinded by the superstitions and fables they have been taught as Adventists that they, like my Mormon friends here in Salt

Lake City, Utah, cannot see their own delusions. As a fourth generation Adventist, I, too, once used Ellen White to interpret the Bible. Instead of reading the plain truth of the Bible, these poor writers want desperately to cling to the belief that they are right even if that means warping the clear word of the Bible to fit the contradictory, self-serving, writings of Ellen White.

I am so thankful for God's gift of the Holy Spirit. For our family worship we have been studying the writings of Luke and Paul. They had a clear understanding of the importance of the Holy Spirit in completing Christ's work here on earth. For any of these letter writers who want to get hung up on the Sabbath to the exclusion of the other nine commandments, I would like to suggest they start with something that I find much more shocking and horrifying—the Adventist doctrine of replacing the rightful place of the Holy Spirit in the Seal of God with something God created—the Sabbath. Even in Ephesians 4:30, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," these early followers understood the importance of coveting the Seal of God—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Look up all the verses in the Bible on the Seal of God, and nowhere is the Sabbath referred to as a "seal!" It was called a "sign!"

Words cannot describe how mortified I am as I think of what the Adventist Church, and more specifically Ellen White, has done by replacing the Holy Spirit with the Seventh-day Sabbath—something God created. It is no wonder that we do not see evidence of the Holy Spirit's working in the Adventist Church. The first commandment clearly states, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The very Being that Christ has sent to prepare our hearts so we will be ready, the Adventist Church denies and replaces with something Christ created! In the Old Testament the children of Israel were instructed to wipe out the heathen nations that did this. On this point alone the Bible is clear. It is highly significant that the "unpardonable sin" is connected with the Holy Spirit. This is an extremely serious matter.

As many of us, as past Adventists, transition out of this "pit of darkness," I pray on my knees for God's forgiveness at the way I have unknowingly done this to the Holy Spirit's rightful role. I also pray for strength and courage especially for our many faithful and honest pastors. They are discovering for themselves these same truths. They wrestle with the financial impact that following their consciences will have on their family's income as they speak the truth from God's Word. We especially need a financial safety net for these dear Adventist pastors and their families.

Your outreach is priceless. I cherish the opportunity to be a financial partner in your ministry as we labor with Christ to bring the Good News to those still blinded by Adventism. May God continue to richly bless you in your work.

Yours in Christ's matchless love,  
Gilbert Jorgensen

## Proclaiming falsehood

Please take my name off your mailing list. I do not agree with what you're proclaiming. When one proclaims truth they must define what truth is. The Bible says, "thy Law is the Truth" (Psalm 119:142). How then can preaching Sunday, a day God never sanctified, be proclaiming "truth" when the fourth commandment says to keep the seventh day, not the first day, holy unto the Lord.

I believe *Proclamation!* Is proclaiming falsehood and not truth. May God help you see your error and may you start to proclaim truth.

**Editor's response:** *Proclamation!* has never proclaimed Sunday sacredness or its replacement of Sabbath. On the contrary, we believe, as Paul states: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord..." (Romans 14:5-6)

What we do believe is that Saturday observance is no longer required since Jesus "forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). Since Jesus Himself fulfilled the law and completed our salvation when he died, rose again, and ascended to the Father, we now rest in Him instead of in a day. Holy days including Sabbath were "a shadow of things to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:17).

## Pray for open eyes

I just received the latest *Proclamation!* I just had to stop what I was doing until I read it from cover to cover. I feel so sorry for [those who write angry letters]. I pray that God will open their eyes.

Thank you for your dedication and faithfulness. The Lord is definitely using your talents for His kingdom.

"To the praise of the Glory of His grace..."

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## 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

## Living in the garden LINDA HARRIS

**T**he garden is a perfect analogy for a person's spiritual journey. Throughout life, a person experiences times of refreshment, growth, dryness, and drought. Sometimes there is weeding, discarding, fertilizing, and nurturing. This is the story of my life in the garden.

I didn't realize at first that my earliest garden was in a greenhouse. From my seedling beginnings, I was aware of the religious world. I came from dedicated Adventist parents. My father was a church school teacher and principal, and because of his job, this young sprout found herself living in a glass house. People scrutinized my behavior, and I can still remember the ever-present knowledge that I must be a good example, that how I acted would reflect on my dad and possibly affect his job. On the outside, I began to resemble an artificial plastic plant.

On the inside, however, I was real: tender, unsure, and full of questions. There were heated discussions around the table about behavior and standards. I pushed for some assurance that there was something more important than appearances. I looked like a perfect little hothouse plant, but inside I felt fear and insecurity. I knew I was not meeting expectations. I began to think that God demanded the same impossible perfection from me that the greenhouse demanded.

I tried hard to be good. In the greenhouse I was protected from "worldly" elements, safe among my own kind. Inside, we lived an "us" and "them" existence. Through the windows I could see other plants that looked much like us in other gardens not protected by glass, but I knew we were different and special. I attended church schools and kept myself inside where I avoided contamination from pesticides and weed seeds.



**Linda Harris** currently lives in northeastern Oregon with her husband Darrel and teen daughters, Megan and Jessica. Linda works at the local public elementary school as librarian and reading teacher. She is happily thriving outside the SDA greenhouse, embracing each day with joy and gratitude for a new life in the SON!

I married within the greenhouse and continued the family tradition of dedication to the church by becoming a teacher. I was a sturdy plant. I developed a deep desire to please God. I felt a sense of urgency to get my life fully in order because I could see through the greenhouse windows that the outside world was becoming a crazy place. If I wasn't strong enough, one day—as predicted—that outside world would come crashing into my place of refuge, and I would succumb and fall to its influence—or be crushed into oblivion.

**People scrutinized my behavior, and I can still remember the ever-present knowledge that I must be a good example, that how I acted would reflect on my dad...**

I wanted my heart purged from all sin and felt it was MY duty to make sure I had eradicated all defects from my character. I had a great desire to be perfect before God and to deserve His favor. In my intensity, I became involved with a group of other greenhouse plants that took this idea of perfection to the extreme.

### Fresh breeze

Thank goodness there was a crack in that greenhouse that allowed a draft of clean air and a stream of pure light to bathe me periodically as I moved inside that stifling canopy. Very slowly I began to see that I had it all wrong. My initial reaction to discovering that what I was involved in was error, was to shield myself from any entering drops of falling rain or nourishment. My heart became dry and brittle, but outside I still went through my "good girl" motions, keeping up the illusion of plastic perfection.

About this time my husband and I decided to leave the greenhouse and become "missionaries" to the world. Despite the fact that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

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