

My God and I

BY WILLIAM G. JOHNSSON

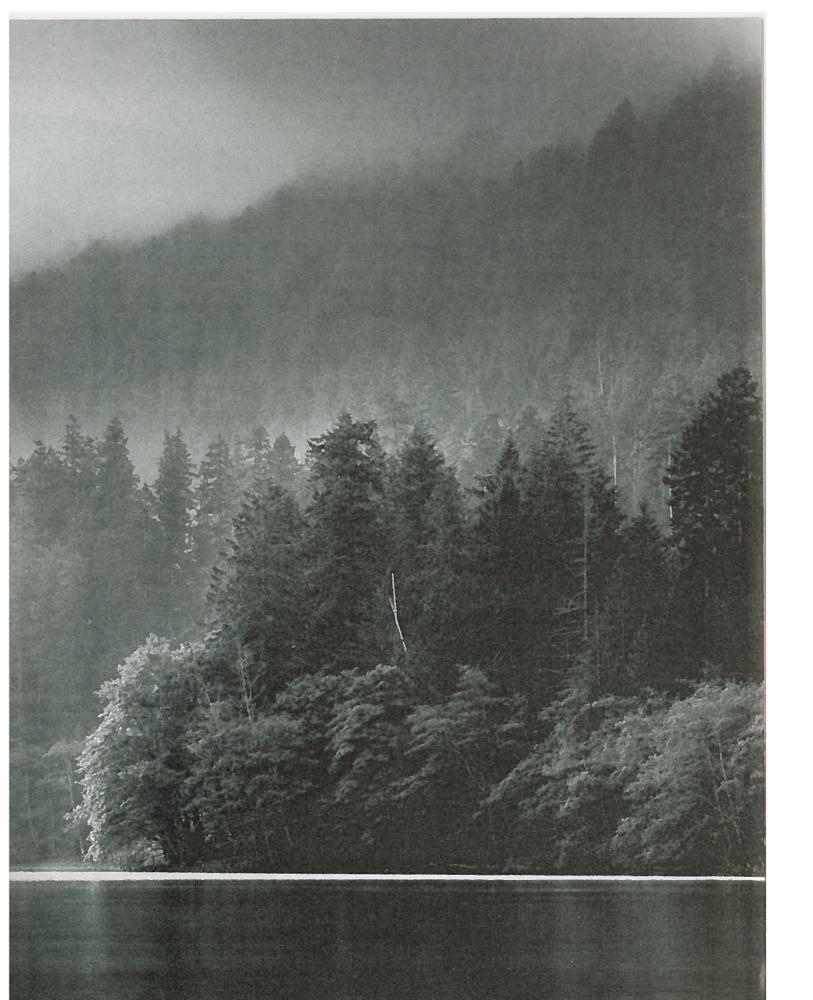
This year, let's make God first, and last, and best in everything.

God is God—He deserves our best.

And we become fully alive only in Him.

Today's crazy pace would shut God out. We have to plan and work hard to ensure that does not happen to us.

Read on and learn how some Adventists order their lives so they can walk in the Son light.



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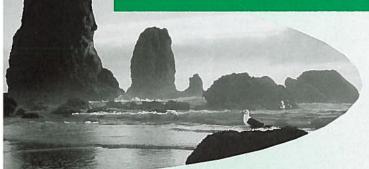
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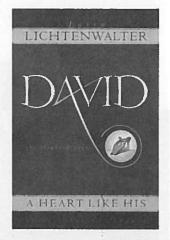
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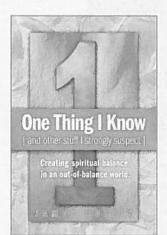
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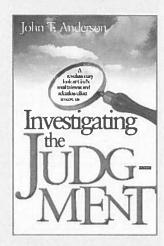
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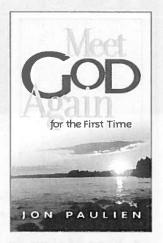
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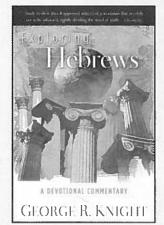
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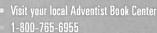






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Wirecladifierent

I tailor my devotional approach to suit my personality.

BY ROY ADAMS

VER THE YEARS I'VE LISTENED TO tons of advice on healthful living: what to eat and when to eat it; calories and ways to avoid them; bad cholesterol and how to keep it from your plate. And there's much about water and work and exercise and rest and vitamins and organic eating, etc., etc.

The surest way of coming down with something would be for me to focus on every last detail of all that good advice. The approach that preserves my sanity and my health is to disregard the multitude of detail and try to find what works for me.

And that's exactly the direction I take as regards personal devotions. I find it difficult to follow the many good "programs" out there. Wired the way I am, I default to a more freewheeling devotional regime—unstructured, unscripted, spontaneous.

Yet there's method to my madness.

Before I Face the Day

My devotional life centers on the Bible—the one stable, recurrent element of the whole experience. Because of my distance from the office, I find it convenient to divide the daily time into two segments. Arriving at the office before the workday begins, I go into the first segment with just the lower lights burning in my room, creating the ambience I find most conducive to meditation and prayer in the morning.

My focus during this early-morning segment centers on

the "softer" portions of the Bible. rich in encouragement, promises, and the human experience. In this category I place the Psalms, Job, Isaiah, and the Gospels. And a marker tells me exactly where to begin that day. The time isn't long in the morning—a half hour at the most. So I readsometimes silently, sometimes aloud, two to three chapters, or long enough to find some arresting admonition or promise to carry me through the

My Favorite Devotional Quote

"No outward observances can take the place of simple faith and entire renunciation of self. But no man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul" (Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 159).

day. That done, the lower lights turn off and in the semidarkness of my room I spend the final moments with God in prayer.

Rising from prayer, I reflect on the day ahead. And depending on what I see, I turn to one or the other—sometimes several—of those promises that have meant so much to me across the decades. When I feel burdened, I turn to Isaiah 40:29-31: "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. . . . But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength" (NKJV). When I feel overconfident, I turn to John 15:5: "For without Me you can do nothing" (NKJV). When I feel rattled, I go to Isaiah 26:3: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (NKJV). When I feel the need for wisdom, I go to James 1:5: "Ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault" (NIV). When I feel utterly overwhelmed, I turn to Psalm 20:1, 2: "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; . . . send thee help from the sanctuary." And when I feel I'm forgetting what it's all

about, I go to Revelation 21 to renew the vision of our final destiny: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. . . . And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes'" (verses 1-4, NKJV).

My preference would be to do all this at home, but traffic considerations bring me to my office early—which is not all bad. It's a neat thing, in fact, to get down on my knees in the very place where I'll spend many hours of my working day and, before talking to colleagues or any visitor, invite God into that space early in the morning.

And When the Day Is Done

The second segment of my devotions happens at home, following evening family worship. Up in my study I spend time reading the Bible from Genesis on—or from whatever place I choose to start that particular year. Again there's a marker that tells me exactly where I stopped the day before. Some years I don't finish every book, not because I get bogged down in Chronicles or Ezekiel, but because of the exciting things I can't help but stop to view along the way.

Perhaps the most beautiful and rewarding of these stops comes when a text or passage grabs hold of me, sends me digging round about it, and calls my mind to other scriptures far beyond. (And remember that I'm describing devotions here—not Bible study, as such.) My heart smiles broadly when the text leads me to pull commentaries off the shelf, check out references in Ellen G. White and other works that bear upon the theme at hand, and consult the original language. Doesn't happen like that every day—sometimes not for many days. But when it does, I'm invigorated, buoyed up, as if I've been transported to another world.

Open to the Unexpected

The devotional mood can carry through the day. Sometimes I stop for minute meditations, with some spectacular nature scene on my computer screen in front of me.

Sometimes at home, in a room other than my study-away from magazines and books and papers and everything else that looks like work-I get down, cross-legged, on the floor (a posture I mastered eating around low tables in Korea). Squatting in that quiet spot, I spend time—10 minutes, 20

minutes, a half hour—doing nothing, just waiting, letting thoughts of God and thoughts from God fill the soul.

I can go on, but you get the idea. There's no script. Sometimes I journal. Other times the last thing I want to do is write. That's how I'm wired. And I share all this personal, private stuff, so that perchance I can encourage someone out there who happens to share my peculiar temperament.

No, one does not always make huge strides through the Bible following my way. At the end of such a devotional period you frequently cannot say: "I covered seven chapters today!" But what you feel, deep down inside, is that you've been with God.

Making Time

It's a daily struggle finding time—adequate time, quality

time—for prayer and meditation. Two things I keep in mind, however: one is to never give up the struggle, however discouraging it becomes at times; and the other is to remember that God made me different. I'm wired different. And I must seek the approach to God that suits my circumstance, that fits my personality.

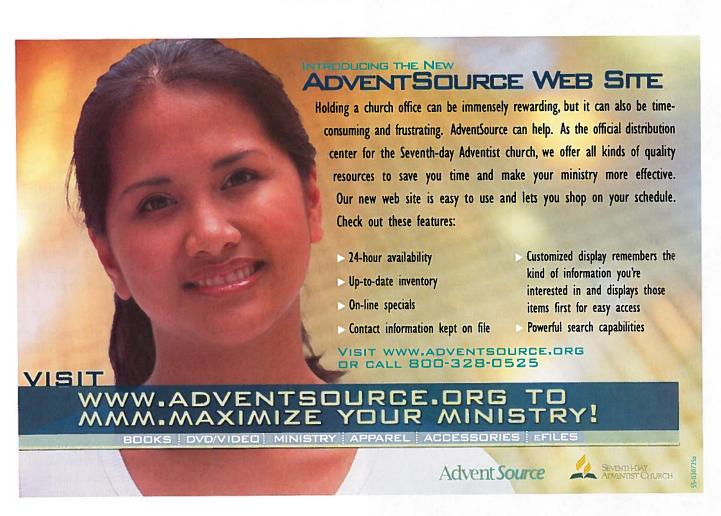
Whoever you are, however you're wired, seek Him in your own way-but seek Him earnestly. And you will find

Roy Adams is an associate editor of the Adventist Review.



"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

-Psalm 8:1, NIV.





My Weekday Routine (or Breaks From My Breakneck Schedule)

BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN

OR ME, TALKING AND SHARING WITH A best friend is a vital part of maintaining a sane existence in this hectic world. And when I have the perfect Best Friend, it is crucial that I keep my end of the relationship strong. This is done through committed communication—prayer and dedicated study.

I've already told you that my life is pretty hectic. I assume complete responsibility for supercharging my schedule with work, coaching, exercising (includes operating a recreational soccer team), attending graduate school, and managing the responsibilities of being one half of a married couple. I have made the choice to lead a fast-paced life. But I have also made the choice to include my Best Friend in everything. His inclusion in the mayhem starts each weekday morning with the shrill beep of my white plastic-covered Spartus alarm clock (OK, after a few pushes of the snooze button).

In the Morning Quiet

Before I rise, I talk to God. I would get up to do this, but any motion on the bed ensures that our 100-pound German shepherd (who sleeps on the floor at the foot of the bed) deems it time to leap upon me and smother me with wet, searching kisses. Trust me, after a good-morning greeting like that, the special, quiet moment of waking with God is ruined.

My conversation with God lasts about 15 to 20 minutes. After thanking Him for the previous night and for waking up, I continue with thanks for family and friends. I ask for His guidance for the day and especially mention certain

family members. The list changes sometimes. After reminding Him that I need wisdom and strength, I tell Him that He and I will chat later.

At Work

During a few moments at work in the morning I read a short devotional. Sometimes it is from a devotional book; other times it is a chapter from a Christian tome. Past favorites include Max Lucado, C. S. Lewis, Charles Mills, Ellen G. White, and Karl Haffner. I plan to begin this year with James Coffin's One Thing I Know (and Other Stuff I Strongly Suspect) and Walking Through the Bible With H.M.S. Richards.

A quick prayer of thanks for the inspiration contained in the pages I've just read is typical. Then I get into my daily routine of checking e-mails, opening mail, writing and editing articles, and, of course, attending committee meetings. KidsView, marketing, art, covers, scheduling—these are just a few of the necessary sessions we squeeze into our days on a frequent basis.

Have a Good Night

The next part of my day begins as I rubberneck the way home through D.C. rush hour drudgery. (Remember my "chat later" message to God? That chatting, which has been going on much of the day, certainly comes in handy while sitting in traffic!) Upon arriving home, I breath a quick prayer of thanks as I crash through the door and receive enthusiastic tail wags and more wet kisses from the dog. I then jump into after-hours activities from a multiple-choice list that includes dog walking, class, homework, community service, coaching, housework . . .

At bedtime Jesus and I meet up once again. My husband (when he isn't working late) and I share a devotional thought (right now we are reading Rick Warren's book *The Purpose-driven Life*) and prayer. Then I usually read a few chapters from the Bible. Sometimes I don't. I'll read something else—just for variety's sake. Once the words on the page start to float and swirl before my

eyes, I douse the light and coast into dreamworld.

I must be honest with you. Every day is not the same. Plans and duties change. So do my devotional practices. I may immediately get embroiled in something at work and not read a morning devotional. And I know it is going to

I have made the choice to lead a fast-paced life. But I have also made the choice to include my Best Friend in everything.

take my husband and me more than 40 days to read Warren's book. But the important thing is that I remember to keep the communication lines open—and my feet grounded in God. Without Jesus my whirlwind of breakneck activity would sweep me up and spin me out of control. I thank God for the breaks from my grind, absolutely delighted that He is always just a thought and prayer away.

Kimberly Luste Maran is an assistant editor for the Adventist Review.





Alone With God

Finding a time and place when God and I could be together

BY CHITRA BARNABAS

WAS ABOUT 7 YEARS OLD WHEN I FIRST saw someone pray. At the time I was attending a Roman Catholic school in India and had only once accompanied my friend to Mass. I thought to be a Christian meant lighting candles, crossing myself with "holy water," and kneeling in prayer in front of a favorite saint's statue.

My ignorance about prayer was the result of several things. My dad, a devout Hindu, had fallen in love and married my mom, a Protestant Christian. Interreligious marriages were greatly frowned upon at the time. As a result my parents were shunned by their parents, colleagues, and friends. In fact, I never knew any relatives from my father's side. My parents were terribly crushed by this treatment, so religion was not on the agenda at our home.

After several years of bitterness, however, my mother, who had been reared as a Christian, returned to her roots. I was about 10 years old when I first accompanied her to church on a Sunday morning. It was there that I was introduced to a new way of praying. Since then God has worked in marvelous ways to bring my family to a knowledge of His love and saving grace. I have seen God's hand guiding my life and my loved ones through the years.

Although my mother did not attend church every week, she started to read her Bible regularly. While reading the Bible, she discovered the truth about the Sabbath. She once informed me that she would join the church that kept all 10 of God's commandments, including the fourth. She prayed earnestly that God would lead her to that kind of a church. Up to that time she had never heard about the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Several months later, while I was playing with my sisters in front of my house, someone handed me a pamphlet announcing prophecy meetings that were about to convene. I ran into the house and handed the pamphlet to my mother. As a result we started attending the meetings regularly. My mother was overjoyed one evening when the evangelist preached about the seventh-day Sabbath. She knew she had finally found the right church!

When I was a child, I believed that prayer was merely a list of things you requested from God. I felt good if I prayed. However, I felt guilty if I failed to pray. But as I grew older I realized that I could not live without prayer. Prayer provided me with the strength I needed to face the challenges of the day. In addition, it proved to be my anchor during times of turmoil and despair.



"I waited patie

However, I was still not satisfied with my prayer life. I felt that something was lacking. I found that my days were crowded with unceasing activity, with not much time allotted for prayer. I realized that I suffered from the "Martha syndrome." Martha in the Bible was just like me, bogged down with busy activity, all of which might have been important. Unfortunately, she failed to sit at Jesus' feet while He spoke the words of life.

A Plan Emerges

One morning when I was wrestling over my twisted priorities, I decided that something needed to change. More than anything else I longed to experience a deeper intimacy with God. Eventually I realized I needed to deliberately set aside an hour devoted to God. Failure to do so would result in numerous priorities barging in and taking precedence. I decided that the early-morning hours would work best for me.

My husband, Dan, leaves very early for work. I decided to step out of my house right after Dan left. My plan was to spend an hour walking around my neighborhood communing with God. In this way I would avoid being distracted by telephone calls or by the myriad other unfinished chores that were sure to beckon me at home.

I have grown to treasure this private time with God. Most of the neighbors are still asleep, and everything is quiet and serene. The stillness of the morning envelops the whole neighborhood. Most mornings the dew still glistens on the grass. The sweet fragrance of the flowers in season fills the morning air. The beauties of nature that surround me intoxicate my senses. I feel as though I am alone in the "garden" with my Lord.

I use various approaches to prayer during this time. Most of the time is spent in thanking God for His countless blessings. I also spend time in uplifting the names of loved ones and others in prayer. Many times God reminds me about someone who is in need of prayer. I even pray for myself

that God will lead in the brand-new day that lies ahead. In addition to this, time is spent during the day in studying the Bible and having worship with my family.

At times the words of a favorite hymn come to mind. I sing softly to myself or meditate on the words. Many times I repeat Bible verses that I have memorized. At other times I remain silent and allow God to speak to me. I have discovered that this is not easy to do and takes a bit of practice; I'm still working on it! By the time I finish walking a mile

My days are crowded with unceasing activity.

or two, I feel refreshed and strengthened to face the pressures of the day.

I stand amazed at the way God has led in my life. By all human calculations I really should have been a non-Christian—

maybe even an atheist. I feel humbled that God chose me. He had a different plan for my life. Often I feel like the psalmist who exclaimed: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:13-16, NIV).

Chitra Barnabas is project coordinator at the Adventist Review.



itly for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry."
—Psalm 40:1. NIV.

The Gentle Whisper

Connecting with the Divine through solitude

BY BONITA JOYNER SHIELDS

HE THOUGHT OF SOLITUDE FILLED ME with anxiety for much of my life.

As a child I remember how I tried hard not to be the last one asleep in the house, because then I'd come face to face with all the quiet that night offered. The background noise of my older brothers and sister talking or watching television lulled me to sleep.

As a youth in boarding academy, the desire to live in a room by myself never entered my mind. And the nights were the longest when my roommates would have to be away for one reason or another.

As a young married woman, I dreaded the times that my husband would be away from home. I could handle several hours by myself; even an entire day. But if the truth be known, it wasn't until I was 35 years old that I could stay in a house alone overnight.

The Delmar family of Gaithersburg, Maryland, had two kids and six television sets that stayed on up to 17 hours a day. It was part of nearly every significant moment in their lives, and stayed on right up until the time the mother drifted off to sleep at night. I think the mother's explanation of why she chose to have it impact her life as much as it did is telling: "I think that's the reason I have to have the TV on," she said. "If it's not on, I think. I think, I think, I think. . . . That's the thing about TV," she said, "you don't have to think."

What is it about solitude that fills people with dread and drives them away? Is it possible that the dread of solitude is

one reason that drives our frenzied society to its hyperactivity?

The Solitary Life

In the fourth century, men and women entered the desert en masse in a movement known as the Monastic movement. These "desert fathers and mothers," as they were called, exited society in order to lead a solitary, contemplative life of prayer. They were seeking a deeper experience with God. While I'm not advocating a reclusive lifestyle (neither did Jesus), I've had a fascination with these men and women of faith, and have learned much from them about the spiritual discipline of silence.

In his book *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*, Belden Lane explores what the desert meant for these ancient men and women, and what it can mean for us today.

Using the term *desert* as metaphor, Lane states, "The so-called desert is any place of solitude, simplicity, and emptiness—a barren wasteland, figuratively—to which one withdraws for undistracted communication with God." ³

Yet Lane warns us about the risk involved in our lifting the desert experience too far out of the context of the geographical desert as a metaphor. We risk creating a "sterilized and sanitized" religious experience, knowing not the pain, risk, or demands that the actual geographical desert gives.

My husband, Roy, and I traveled to Israel in 1999, and took a bus trip into the desert. As a resident of a densely

"The early morning often found [Jesus] in some secluded place.... With the voice of singing He welcomed the morning light." The Ministry of Healing, p. 52.

populated metropolitan United States region, I find it difficult to describe the feeling of standing in a place where the landscape is barren and seemingly lifeless, the fierceness of the wind cuts like a knife, and the sound of silence is deafening. The desert beckoned feelings of anxiety—but also of anticipation.

Yet many of us are uncomfortable with silence. It forces us to think—and acknowledge the pain, risks, and demands that life presents. It confronts us with questions that we may not even know how to articulate, but are lying on the surface, begging to be answered.

It connects us with the Divine.

It Wasn't in the Wind

The prophet Elijah stood on Mount Carmel and boldly proclaimed the Lord as the true God (see 1 Kings 18). Then he, along with the other Israelites who were present, slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal. He then ran almost 30 miles in the rain. After Elijah came down from this adrenaline rush, Queen Jezebel threatened his life. What did this invincible prophet do? He ran for his life!

Going a day's journey into the desert, he lay down under a broom tree and, in his depression, asked the Lord to take his life. After the Lord sent an angel to feed him and strengthen him, he trav-

eled 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he spent the night in a cave.

When he was in the cave, the Lord asked him what he was doing there (verse 9). After the prophet engaged in a small pity party, the Lord decided that Elijah needed a fresh glimpse of Him.

"Then a great and powerful wind . . . shattered the rocks, . . . but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave" (verses 11-13, NIV).

Like Elijah, how often do we work ourselves into a frenzy, doing the Lord's work (which is a good thing) but forgetting to take the time to listen to the gentle whisper of the Lord of the work? We mistakenly think we will find the Lord in accomplishing great things for Him, yet overlook the fact that we find His power for the work in the silence of His presence.

"To submit to silence in prayer is to admit that we stand naked before God, without even words to cover ourselves.

Creating Solitude

Solitude isn't something that happens spontaneously in most of our busy lives; we have to be intentional to create it. For some people, carving out 30 minutes of solitude is a major accomplishment; others are just getting started with two hours.

While I realize that for many people it may not be feasible to take an extended personal spiritual retreat, I would like to share a few ways that I try to carve solitude into my everyday life, with the hope that they will spark some ideas of your own of how to create solitude in your life.

As I mentioned in the article, I have my "sacred space" in our house where I like to meet with the Lord. I find myself looking forward to when I can go there and just "be."

Find a place in your house, away from distractions, that you can go to regularly, and that your family knows is "your space." And surround it with beauty! A candle, a pretty basket to hold your books, a vase of flowers—whatever it takes to make it a place of beauty as well as solitude.

I like to listen to the radio when I travel to and from work. But now I try frequently to keep the radio off and use this quiet time to talk with God, or just to gather my thoughts for the day ahead.

Fortunately we have a prayer chapel at work. (But any quiet place will do.) Sometimes I'll just take five minutes to go in there and meditate. Those five minutes of solitude and reflection do wonders to help me refocus on what's important for the day, and to act instead of react.

Roy and I usually walk together. However, often I will take a walk by myself, just to have some quiet time that involves exercise, since my work is sedentary. (I don't do this one as much as I should.)

During supper I like to have the television off and not answer the telephone. They may seem like small things, but I have found that their absence creates a more peaceful, relaxed environment.

Words are the fig leaves we continually grasp in the effort to clothe our nakedness."

Words, of course, are necessary. (I'm a writer!) Even God revealed Himself as "the Word . . . made flesh" (John 1:14).⁵ I'm not advocating an anti-intellectual, overly emotional relationship with the Lord. But, like Lane, I can't help wondering if we clutter our lives with an overabundance of sound and activity and words—even in prayer—to quiet our fear of silence, and to conceal our nakedness of mind and spirit.

Experiencing the Desert

I have a chair in the corner of my bedroom. Technically it belongs to Roy and me, but we both know it's really Bonita's chair! (Our cats, however, haven't learned this yet.) This is sacred space for me; it's where I retreat for solitude: to read, talk with God, and get away from the crowds. No one bothers me there. Sometimes when I can't sleep, I'll just sit there in the middle of the night, look out the window, and talk with God.

One of my former colleagues used to take a week for a personal retreat and go camping by himself. I admired him for doing this, yet wondered what a person does for an entire week by themselves in a tent and sleeping bag. Of course, the unexpressed concern was What does a person do with that much solitude?

This past spring I decided it was time for me to take an extended personal spiritual retreat. (No, I didn't go camping; I'm not there yet!) I left home on a Sabbath morning and headed out to a personal retreat center, where I got a room, meals, and all the solitude I could handle until Sunday afternoon. Even before leaving on this relatively short excursion, though, I wondered how I would fill up that much time with solitude.⁶

What I discovered after spending this time reading, writing, praying, walking, eating, thinking, planning, crying, laughing, and sleeping—almost all of it in silence—was that my body, mind, and spirit craved more (especially the *sleeping!*). No distractions. No noise. No places to go, people to see, things to do. A peace and calm worked their way deeper into my soul. I felt that I had more deeply connected with the Divine.

These times of solitude aren't ends in themselves in that I seek to seclude myself from others as a way of life. Actually, anyone taking time to detach from the busyness of modern life to connect with the Divine can't help reaching out to others. I am discovering as I get older that these times of solitude help me stay emotionally strong so that I can relate to others more calmly and lovingly.

"True contemplation can never fulfill itself in 'the false sweetness of a narcissistic seclusion.' It has to re-enter the world of others with its newly won freedom. . . . The contemplative returns to the ordinary, not in spite of her detachment from it, but because of that detachment. No longer driven by fear of rejection and loss, she is able now to love others without anxiously needing anything in return."

Now I can understand how Jesus could spend entire nights alone in prayer. This time of solitude—of connecting with the Father—gave Him the power to fulfill His mission. And I believe it is this time of solitude in our lives that will give us the power to live more effective, fruitful, and loving lives.

The Gentle Whisper

The thought of solitude no longer fills me with anxiety. I now schedule solitude into my life. I enjoy being the last one to bed so I can hear the tick, tick, tick of the clocks in a house devoid of sound. I embrace those times of travel where I have a room to myself for a few nights. I take pleasure in those times when Roy travels and I'm in our

house alone overnight, and learning to depend solely on the Divine for companionship. (Though I do enjoy it when Roy returns home!)

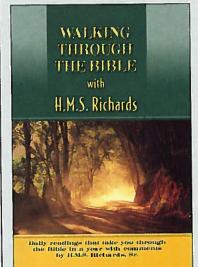
The only thing about solitude, though, is that it makes me think, think, think . . . and the Lord faithfully whispers back

Lane, p. 75.

Bonita Joyner Shields is an assistant editor of the Adventist Review.



Walk through your Bible with H.M.S. Richards—again.



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David Finkel, "TV Without Guilt," Washington Post Magazine, Jan. 16,

Thid

Belden Lane, The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 20.

Interestingly, Sarah Sumner in her book Men and Women in the Church, explains that according to the Greek, the word Logos can be translated in various ways: Jesus is the Word, Jesus is Reason, and/or Jesus is Logic.

[&]quot;My first experience at this retreat center was mistakenly entering a dining room designated "No Talking." I'd never eaten a meal in a roomful of people without a word being spoken. After my initial discomfort I entered the dining room again—this time intentionally—and enjoyed myself immensely.

"Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

—Psalm 32:11, NIV.

Getting Intimate With God

It's not a moment or a single event; it's a series of moments and events.

BY CARLOS MEDLEY

S WITH MANY CHRISTIANS TODAY, finding time to get more intimate with God is a continuous challenge for me, too. However, it is also a rewarding delight. As I have gotten older my devotional life has taken on new dimensions. Here are just a few ways that I connect with God.

Bible Reading and Prayer. At the core of my devotional life are Bible reading and prayer, our sources of life and

strength. Though I'm not a morning person, there's nothing more rewarding than reading the Bible early in the morning to connect with God.

Communing with our Savior before the hustle and bustle of the day sets in is truly a joy. Nothing is more rewarding than reading a scriptural passage and meditating on it. For me, these are the times God speaks in the loudest and clearest voice.

Quiet Time. Before I leave home in the morning, or take up chores in the home, I cherish the all-too-infrequent opportunities of meditating while I dress and prepare for the day. In peace and quiet I keep a prayer on my lips as I focus on the upcoming challenges of the day.

Family Worship. Along with personal Bible study and prayer, family worship is a must in the home. Turning off the television and taking the telephone off the hook while we share the Word with loved ones is an essential part of our devotional life and development.

Christian Media. Beyond the Bible, I've found some Christian videos and DVDs to be powerful tools that make the gospel come alive. With compelling visuals and lifelike action, videos have become an effective platform for telling stories. And what better story to portray on screen than the story of redemption. To see Bible stories played out on screen by people adds a profoundly new dimension to the sacred truths.

Walking in Nature. Nearly everyone knows that walking consistently is good for physical health. However, I've found

that beholding the handiwork of God's creation holds many spiritual benefits. The simple act of walking through a park or garden and beholding the beauty of nature feeds the soul and gives us another reason to praise our Creator.

Music. Although they've long since passed away, I can still remember my dear grandmothers. Their songs often filled the kitchen as they prepared meals and cleaned up. Those songs helped to sustain their spirits throughout the day.

Being a musician, I have felt God's presence while listening to a CD or playing a musical instrument. For many Christians the very act of singing or playing a musical instrument is worship, communion with God.

Recently I was asked to play the piano for four worship services at the General Conference. Being out of practice, I started preparing several weeks in advance. During my practice time it became clear that God was using the music as a channel to commune with me. The very act of practicing old hymns or contemporary praise songs revived my soul and lifted my spirits. Often I would start the practice session

feeling tired and depressed, but by the time I finished, my soul would be revived.

These are a few examples of how I commune with God. You may have found others. Through it all, I've learned that God's desire to speak with His children is so intense that He will use a thousand different channels. If we simply take the time to listen, how enriched our lives would be.

For many the very act of singing or playing a musical instrument is worshiping and communing with God.

Carlos Medley is online editor of the Adventist Review.



Read the Bible in a Year?

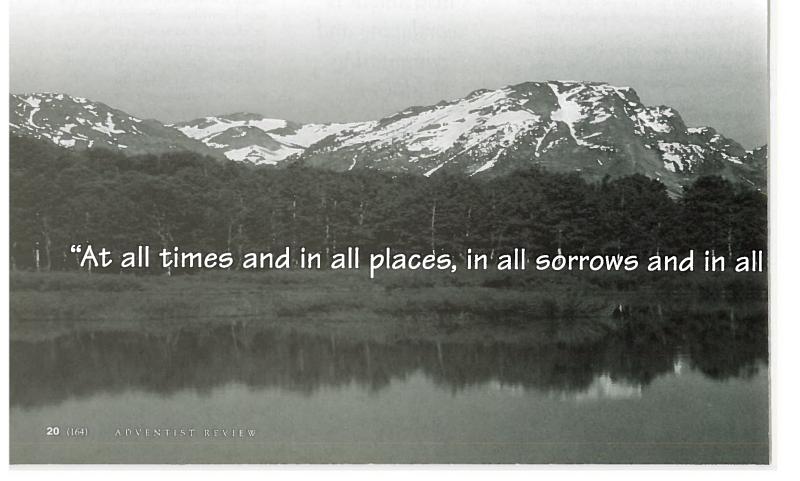
It seemed impossible, but was it?

BY MERLE POIRIER

K, I CONFESS. I'VE NEVER READ THE Bible through in one year, or any time period, for that matter. Oh, it isn't for a lack of trying. The first of the year rolls around, and "read the Bible through" is right at the top of my list of resolutions. I've even gone the next step and started at the beginning (where else?) with Genesis. Many years, in fact. I'm guessing I've read the book of Genesis eight to 10 times. One year, with a certain amount of satisfaction, I actually made it into Exodus. This is easy, I thought with confidence. So Exodus is a tad bumpy once you get past the Ten Commandments, but this is doable. But it seemed that every time I closed the Bible and then returned to Exodus, Moses had added more chapters, and finding the

end of it was—well, it appeared to have no end. One year I remember making it briefly into Leviticus, but it was short-lived. This just wasn't as easy as it looked.

One year I took a different approach. Forget the Old Testament for now, and start with the New. Yes, that's it—parables, miracles, and the life of Christ—why didn't I think of that before? It worked fine until I got to Romans. Why do they put the Bible together like this? You get just far enough to think you've got something going, and they plant an impossible book in your path, and you're finished. My admiration for the likes of saints such as H.M.S. Richards, who read the Bible through not just once a year but several times, suddenly soared. How did they do it, and what was wrong with me? Reading the Bible through must have some-



thing to do with retirement.

Sound familiar? I hope so. I'm counting on the fact that plenty of people like me have every intention of reading their Bible through in a year—or any given amount of time—but have never been successful. But I'm also here to say, with cautious optimism, that by the time you read this article I will be among those who *have*—and in one year at that. No, I did not opt for an early retirement. I simply discovered a new way of doing things, and it made the difference. Here's what I did.

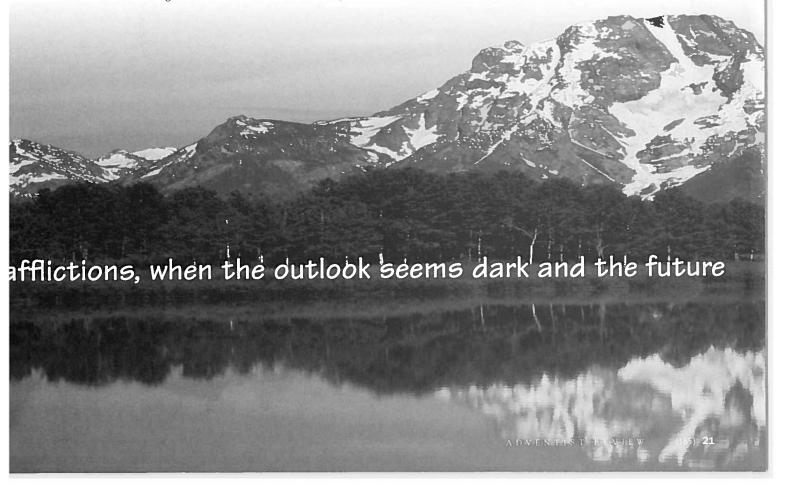
- 1. I just did it. This time I didn't get hung up on a magic starting date such as January 1. In 2003 I started on January 27, and the plan I selected had me reading Matthew 18:1-21 and Exodus 16; 17; and 18. So that's where I started. As I had free time I went back and picked up the beginning of Matthew and Exodus, and surprisingly it didn't affect my ability to understand where I was, even though I had started in the middle. I discovered that simply putting my decision into action—rather than the date I started—was what was really important.
- 2. I found a plan that fit my lifestyle. I'd like to say that I studied all the different plans available (and there are many), but I didn't. Prior to this, I had never followed any plan, and I think my success now is largely because I found one that worked for me. While it shouldn't add stress to our lives, a plan should give some structure as well as a measure of where we should be at a given point in the year.

I happened on a plan in the Canadian Adventist Messenger, and it appealed to me. This plan has a reading of the New Testament in the morning and a reading of the Old Testament in the evening. I didn't adhere to the morning

and evening plan, but made up a schedule that worked for me. But it did help to read both the Old and New Testaments at the same time. Both are unique and appealing in different ways. Often I would be thoroughly enjoying one more than the other, and that gave me a reason to continue. When we read only one or the other, we can get bogged down, and that's discouraging. For example, when I was reading Leviticus (which, I might add, has earned an unfair reputation), I was also reading Matthew and Mark, which were easier and, yes, sometimes more interesting. This was important in keeping me motivated.

3. I chose a Bible translation without devotional comments that was easy for me to read and understand. Most of us have an abundance of Bibles in our homes, and we might think that any of them will serve this purpose well. Maybe, but I think the choice of Bible made a difference in my success.

Today's Bibles are rarely just the Scriptures. Many have become specialized devotional Bibles for men, women, couples, and singles; Bibles designed to be read in one year, with added commentary; Life Application Study Bibles; etc. I own many of these, and in using them for Bible study, I discovered I was spending a lot of time reading the commentary or devotional thoughts and neglecting the Bible. Oh, I'd read the accompanying text, but the contemporary thoughts were much easier to read, sometimes humorous, and often gave me something to think about. The Bible didn't do that—oops, see what I mean? These were becoming a distraction and diverting me from my task. And while I actually found a Bible with commentary that was interesting and applicable, after I'd spent my time reading the



application I didn't have time for my Scripture reading!

So out to the Christian bookstore I went and purchased a Bible—and that's all it is. It has a concordance and references in the center margin. It has a soft maroon leather cover, gold-leaf pages, and larger type that is easier on the eyes. I dedicated this Bible as the one I would read throughout the year.

4. I found a good Bible reference companion. I'm full of questions. I'm constantly interacting with the text and wondering why this or why that. I get frustrated if I'm a little lost or lack understanding. This can be a problem if you've decided to read the Bible through in one year, because time is not on your side. You have to stick to some type of schedule, or you won't get it done.

Often Bible reference books are four-inch tomes on deep theological discussion and debate, original meaning of language, and 2,000 years of history. While all of that has its place, I don't have the time to read six chapters of exposition on two verses. I needed a quick and easy reference guide that would give me context, maybe some history, and throw in some vocabulary now and again.

I stumbled across a wonderful Bible reference companion that did all this for me. While it may not be the only one of its kind, it is one that I can recommend. *QuickStart to the Books of the Bible*, by Greg Brothers, describes itself as "a reference for bright, busy people." It has lived up to its name and description, since it gives quick and easy information; and I have no problem considering myself bright or busy.

5. I made sure I had a highlighter and pen handy. To make the Bible something I looked forward to reading each day, I needed to interact with it as if in conversation. As

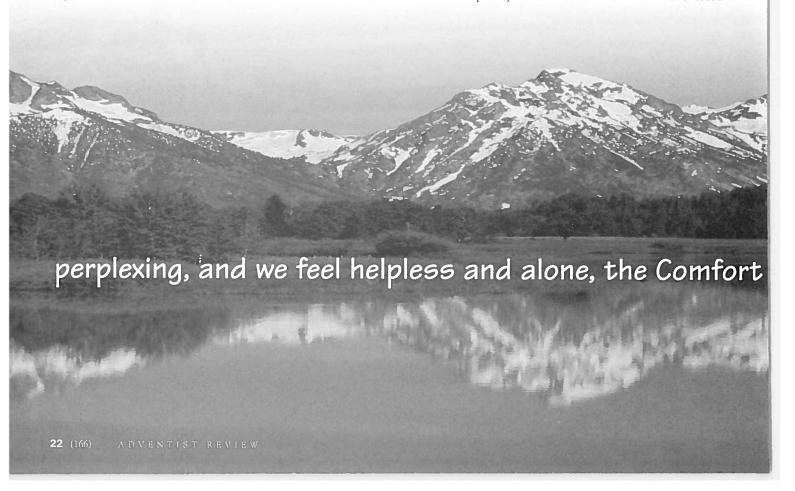
I read, I let it speak to me, and whatever moved me, had a familiar ring, or was particularly apropos I highlighted. I wrote in the margins. I made notes and wrote questions. As I look back through the pages I'm struck with what I noted, and marked, and with the variety of colors. It has become in many ways a private journal—not in the typical sense, but one that speaks between me, the Bible, and God.

6. Before I began, wherever I was, I prayed. This is crucial and incredibly important. I didn't make a big deal of it; I didn't kneel, or pray a long list of confessions. My prayers were short and simple, almost like taking a deep breath in and then out. Help me, God, to find You today, or something similar. I prayed for guidance, impressions, interest, meaning, or application. It often didn't take more than 30 to 45 seconds, but they became some of the most valuable seconds spent.

7. I read to discover God, not to understand deep theological issues. This was my most important breakthrough, and it actually came just about the time I hit Leviticus. I had never successfully read past this book, and I didn't want history to repeat itself. I knew I needed to see Leviticus from a different perspective. That's where *QuickStart* came through for me.

"Leviticus is more than just a book of rituals. It's a book about relationships—a step-by-step manual, as it were, that describes how God and His chosen people should love each other."* That was a new concept. I decided to read Leviticus and look specifically for the relationship. It's there; I don't know how I missed it before!

I made looking for God my new purpose in each book I read. I was quickly overwhelmed at how much is revealed.



Each book is rich in His all-consuming love for His people. The Bible became a love letter, whether it was through history, prophecy, or biography.

8. When all is going well, expect interruptions. The devil is totally consumed with ways to distract me from my Bible-reading time, and he's blatantly obvious about it.

My first plan involved waking up about 15 minutes earlier and going to a quiet place in the living room. This worked well for about three weeks. The house was quiet, dark. Spouse and kids were nestled under the covers. I was pretty smug about it until my youngest daughter started waking up 15 minutes earlier. So I switched to evenings. My church and school committee schedules suddenly exploded, and the help for homework rose exponentially.

I began to realize that spending 15 minutes with my Bible was often shorter than the time spent on a phone call with a friend, which I always seemed to be able to manage. When I put Bible reading in that context, my 15 to 20 minutes became easier to find. I looked for time spent waiting in the car, sitting at a doctor's office or music lesson, waiting for church to begin. Suddenly many short intervals of time were out there just waiting to be discovered.

9. I said to myself, "If you fall behind, don't panic." I did; at one point, one entire month. Somewhere I missed an entire month of reading in the Old Testament. I managed to keep up with the New, but my time in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had been much more difficult to manage. I didn't panic; I just made it happen. Even though I was on the "wrong" day, I kept up with my daily reading so that I wouldn't fall farther behind. There are times to catch-up: airplane rides, vacations, days off, Sabbath afternoons (won-

derful catch up times). Over the Thanksgiving holiday I made up about 25 days of reading in Ezekiel.

Falling behind is inevitable, but catching up is possible.

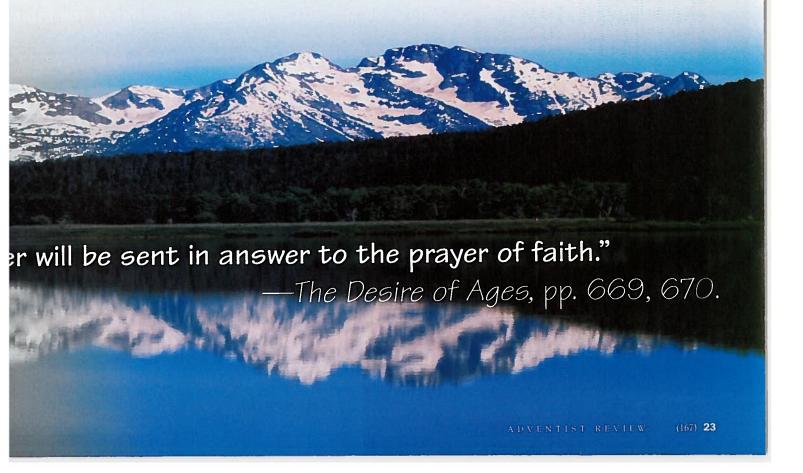
I came to realize that the one-year mark is a goal, but not the purpose. The purpose is to discover God in the pages of the Bible in 365 days. If it is 385 or 400 is not as important as why I'm doing it and the blessing I will receive.

I fully expect to finish reading the Bible on January 26, 2004. But, interestingly, while I started out committed to reading the Bible in a year, along the way the one-year goal faded and was replaced by the joy of reading and uncovering what a wonderful God I have—One who loves with an overwhelming sense of passion; Who yearns to have me turn to Him and spend a few moments with Him each day. It is for that reason that I sit down to read.

I think I know why H.M.S. Richards was able to do this so easily—he'd fallen in love.

Merle Poirier is technology projects coordinator for the Adventist Review.

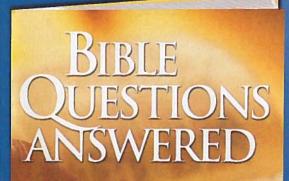




^{*} Greg Brothers, QuickStart to the Books of the Bible (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), p. 55.

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Journaling Through Our Days

BY ELLA M. RYDZEWSKI

OR CENTURIES CHRISTIANS HAVE found writing to be an important part of their worship hour. I use the term *hour* loosely, since it can be shorter or longer. But journaling definitely adds to the quality of our worship time.

Journaling has become popular in recent years; you would think the current culture had discovered it. But throughout history people have kept diaries. By doing so, they have added substantially to what we know about past history. Even books of the Bible can be considered journals. David's psalms make up a true spiritual diary. John Wesley kept a diary for more than 50 years.

There are all sorts of journals—spiritual, health, daily events, family, books read. Almost every part of life can be recorded in a journal. It can be brief or take up several pages.

Here we will talk about spiritual journaling. Spiritual journaling doesn't eliminate other kinds of journaling; it integrates them. Because we are whole persons, every aspect of our lives as Christians is spiritual.

Purpose

The overriding goal of journaling is to build on our relationship with God. Through journaling we discover God's activity in our lives. We can look back and see where we have come in our spiritual journey. Some make a point of looking back at the same day in previous years when they make an entry. It is only by seeing how the Lord has led us in the past that we can face the future with confidence.

Preparation

Finding a journal can be as easy as buying a loose-leaf notebook and paper or a spiral notebook from a local grocery store. This type gives freedom in writing, in expression (one can include sketches), and in length.

However, I would encourage finding something special. You can find high-class journals with beautiful covers in bookstores or gift shops. Years ago when I began journaling on a regular basis, it was because I found a journal that met my needs. I have been purchasing through Upper Room Publishers a volume that includes dates and a daily Bible text. Aesthetically it appeals to me because every few pages there is a nature photograph and a quotation from a Christian writer. The spaces aren't large, but I don't usually need a lot of space with my current time limitations. I can also plan on purchasing one every year with different photos and quotes but the same convenient size and format.

Sunday has a whole page, and I use it to continue my Sabbath entry. Every Sabbath I take the journal to church and pen notes from the sermon.

Invest in a good pen that smoothly rolls the words across the page. Or maybe you already have a special pen and haven't used it for fear of losing it—one received as a gift from a friend or family member. Different colors of ink also give variety.

A private space created for uninterrupted writing is important, a quiet place in a comfortable chair (it's best not to use a bed—you might fall asleep) in a favorite room or on a porch. Put some flowers nearby; enjoy scented candles and

Rachmaninoff. All of these feed the senses. But some may prefer silence and a simple desk.

Make time for journaling. How nice it would be to journal without rushing, entirely focused on writing. But this isn't reality for most of us. Journaling is too often done on the fly, and we find ourselves skipping days. We live demanding lives, with the majority of us in full-time jobs. Yet we need this discipline to nurture our busy lives.

Morning journaling begins the day with God's promises or a review of the events of yesterday. Others may find journaling a refreshing break in the day. Still others like the evening hours after work or just before bed to analyze the happenings of the day and what they mean personally. Then they can be turned over to God and rest.

If I skip a day or more, I go back and fill them in when I have more time, usually on Sabbath. At those times I often write about the daily Bible texts that are supplied—either paraphrasing them or telling what they mean to me.

Always begin with prayer, asking God to show you anything you need to know; surrender your will to Him, and ask for His Holy Spirit.

Remember the date. As one journalist notes: "Date each entry in your journal, noting the time, place, and any details regarding your mood and emotions that will be necessary for context when you read back your work later."

Writing style. Almost all writers keep journals, but one doesn't need to be a writer to keep a journal. We write to keep our life in perspective, not to publish it. We need to fight any compulsions to edit. It is unnecessary to make it grammatically correct or to write in any prescribed style.

Make it free-flowing and rapid while the thoughts are fresh. If nothing comes, try free association by starting with a meaningful word for the day. Write it on scratch paper, circle it, and draw lines out to other circles you fill with associated words. When you are finished, you can write a paragraph or more from the words you have used.

Where Have I Seen God Today?

A recent book, *The God Hunt*, has revolutionized my journaling. Karen Mains has written a delightful volume encouraging us to recognize God as He intervenes in our everyday lives. How are we experiencing God's presence today? She lays out four basic principles:

- 1. Any obvious answer to prayer
- 2. Any unexpected evidence of his care
- 3. Any help to do God's work
- 4. Any unusual linkage or timing

And I would add one more:

5. Any beauty that has been noticed in nature or in another person

I call these God moments. Enjoy them like a child—with delight, laughter, and joy. They lighten up your writing, and you have them for future reading and enjoyment. We find moments of peace in choosing to see God all around us. And we can find humor in circumstances in which we might have become frustrated.



Mains began her journaling by recording how and when she sighted God in her daily workaday world. After more than 30 years she has quite a body of evidence for His presence! She says there has never been a day when she had nothing to write in her God Hunt section. She states that without a doubt, the journaling of prayers is the one thing that has most prodded her spiritual growth.

Journaling makes the spiritual life less abstract and more knowable. Journalists will better see where they once were, how they strived, and how far they've come. And by recording answered prayers, we know what we've prayed about and God's response. Such a record is the ongoing song of a life—a beautiful composition that flows into eternity. These spiritual notes make us aware of the constant intervention and presence of God in our lives-His guidance on the journey of the soul. Reviewing journals, even years later, builds and maintains faith. It shows that where He has led in the past is trustworthy and that He will lead in the future.

People forget, and the most important thing we can do is to record the God moments in our lives, especially answered prayers. Prayers are being answered all the time, but we haven't written them down. We see and hear evidences of His presence every day and forget them. We experience "coincidences" frequently and then forget them. The best thing we can do for our spiritual life is to write (or record—there are people who may want to tape their experiences) for remembrance.

Mains invites us to join the God Hunt, for all the seasons of life are hunting seasons.

Health

There is a new book just published entitled 10 Essentials of Highly Healthy People, by Christian medical doctor Walt Larimore. In it he strongly recommends journaling for health. He recommends keeping a record of health habits. Every day I write in my journal what I have done to exercise that day. One could also periodically record weight and measurements or even the daily diet.

People struggling with weight problems can write how they feel after overeating or eating something they would have been better off without. By noting how they felt before giving into the temptation and what circumstances brought on the overeating, they can see a pattern and gain knowledge about what circumstances and places to avoid.

Journaling is also good for psychological health (which also affects the physical). It is healthy to put our problems out there where we can see them.

Insight

Journaling can help solve problems. In a spiritual journal we can write prayers about them and ask for solutions. We can record possible solutions, pros and cons, and what ifswhat if I did this or that?

By recording daily experiences we might otherwise forget, we find out what works and what doesn't.

Spiritual journals often include prayers. Sometimes we may prefer to write out our prayers. When one can't get the words together or focus, writing comes to the rescue. Writing a letter to God unburdens oneself to the one who can carry the load.

I have used the Lord's Prayer countless times, yet fresh thoughts still come as I meditate on history's most famous prayer. I often write out my personal understanding of this sample from Jesus Himself.

Although I use my journal for prayers on occasion, I find it best to have a separate prayer journal or list. I even have a separate disk of prayers that I occasionally use to review on the computer. Prayer needs variety for most people different ways, different places, maybe even different times. On the other hand, there are people who like the stability of set times and places. It all depends on our personality.

Bible Study

Another method of journaling requires the use of the Bible, and I do this one frequently. In my case I have chosen a journal that has a daily Bible text with it. I like to read this text, analyze it, and think about what it means to me personally. I might write down a paraphrase of the text or what it means to me at this current point in my life. Sometimes the text releases memories or associations that I can write about. I often analyze the verse from a theological perspective and write down possible interpretations. It is amazing how many ideas can come to us at these times.

Another kind of journaling is to paraphrase whole Bible chapters or books. I have paraphrased the book of John thus far, bringing to it my learning and understanding of the narrative. This can be done in conjunction with a commentary as well.

Communication keeps us in touch with one another and with God. Through His inspired writers He has given us His letter. Let's respond on a daily basis by writing back to Him.

Ella M. Rydzewski, now a freelance writer, was an editorial assistant at the Adventist Review when this piece was written.



"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

-Psalm 90:12.

I Trust You!

As I faced the death of a loved one, prayer became the breath of my soul.

BY RUTH WRIGHT

ONDENSING A YEAR OF EARNEST prayer into a few words isn't easy. These are bits of my conversations with God during a very difficult time.

June 2002

Lord, today the specialist gave Mom and me the bad news: She has metastatic carcinoma of the right lung. Can't understand it—she's always lived so healthfully, so carefully. She's 84, but she still can walk a mile. And she's such a wonderful help to us, living in our home. Why, dear Lord? Help us—help me—to cope with this news.

July 2002

Mom doesn't want any further tests or treatment, Lord. She doesn't want to know where the primary cancer is. Guess I don't blame her. Why go through it all? She's so full of faith in You that it helps me stay calm. Thank You for strength for both of us. And Lord, please do what's best for

Mom—not what I want, but what You see is best. Please.

August 2002

It was a wonderful day, Lord! Thank You for helping us with the planning, and that everything went so well at the family reunion. We told the relatives it was to honor Mom and celebrate our fortieth anniversary at the same time; but really, Lord, we don't know how many more family gatherings Mom might get to attend. So thank You again for bringing so many of our family together safely—all five of her own children, three of her living stepchildren, grand-children from far away, even a darling great-grandbaby.

September 2002

Lord, thank You for another year of life! But as I celebrated my birthday, I kept thinking about dear Mom. How much more time does *she* have? My Internet research seemed to indicate that people with her diagnosis live only a few months—with or without treatment. Guess she made

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust,

abverses review

the right decision not to have chemo or radiation. But it's almost incomprehensible, watching her go through her daily routine, that she's probably not going to be with us a lot longer. Lord, *please do what's best for her*. I trust You in this.

December 2002

Decorating for Christmas, dear Lord, I'm thinking, Mom may not see another Christmas. It's so sad I can hardly stand it! But Lord, I trust You to do what's best for her. You love her far more than I do. And You hold her life in Your hands. She's trying to stay healthy—exercises regularly, skips desserts, takes vitamin and mineral supplements, drinks a lot of carrot juice. Will any of it do any good? I have to leave this with You, Lord. It's just too heavy for me.

January 2003

Please be with Mom in Florida, Lord, where she's gone to stay a few weeks with my brother and sister-in-law. May this be a good, happy time for her in warmer weather. The plane ticket seemed the best birthday gift we children could give. Please do what's best for her. You know what *I* want, but Your plan is always best. I miss her—she's always such a help with the household chores—but Lord, please surround her with Your love.

April 2003

Oh, dear Lord, I see Mom failing. And sometimes I hear the sounds in that lung—her breath making bubbling sounds as we sit at the table playing Scrabble. Help us, Lord! Rather, help me, because I can see her trusting You at every step. She's still cheerful and still helpful. Please

my God."—Psalm 25:1, NIV.

strengthen my faith that You're allowing what's best for her and for everyone else. Help me to be the support she needs, not a drain on her strength.

May 2003

On this Mother's Day my sister and I planted two big flower beds of colorful impatiens and begonias. But Lord, how long will Mom be able to enjoy them? I just thank You that she's not in a lot of pain, though her energy level is pretty low. And thank You for this time together—precious time!

June 2003

Today, Lord, we finally signed up for hospice care at home. Mom wasn't ready for it earlier; but she's losing ground now, getting weaker. When I told her it would help me, she finally agreed. And Lord, I'm so thankful to have someone to call on 24 hours a day, a nurse to visit weekly, a home health aide to come twice a week. Thank You that someone designed a plan to help families in this situation. And Lord, please do what's best for my dear mother. I do trust You. But I'm afraid, too, of what the future may bring.

July 2003

Oh, dear Lord, we're back from the funeral. Thank You so much for all You've done to carry us through this. I don't understand, but I do believe You always do what is best for Your children.

Thank You that my sister and brother were with us the final weekend of Mom's life. And my dear sister-in-law who's a nurse—what would I have done without her? And our pastor, bless him, stayed with us until the funeral home

people came, even though he was supposed to be at Vacation Bible School. The Waynesboro Adventist Church our family attended when we were children had such a beautiful meal after the service. And our own Silver Spring church and my coworkers sent so much food! With all the relatives here, we'll surely need it. Thank You, O Lord, my strength, for this outpouring of love and care, and for giving me courage to cope with so many things during this stressful time.

I trust You, Lord. You've promised a resurrection—and I can't wait to see my dear mom again!



Ruth Wright is an administrative secretary at the Adventist Review.



And He Runs With Me

I pray best on my feet.

I enjoy the

presence of a

loving and

personal

God.

BY STEPHEN CHAVEZ

IVEN THE CHOICE, I PREFER ACTION over inaction. When I was a parish pastor, I discovered that a pastor's life is not so much a life of quiet study, reflection, and meditation as it is a life of activity punctuated by interruptions, impossible demands, and daily crises.

Early in my ministry my Day-Timer was as essential to my devotional life as my Bible and whatever devotional material I happened to be reading at the time. Every morning I set aside a block of time for reading and reflection. But whenever I remembered a letter I needed to write, a phone call I

needed to make, or someone I needed to visit, I'd jot it down in my Day-Timer, allowing the Holy Spirit to help me prioritize that day's activities. I can't tell you how many times I'd make a phone call or a personal visit, only to have the person say, "How did you know I had to talk to someone?"

On the Road

Now that my parish is no longer confined to one congregation, my prayer life has evolved into a less structured but, for me, more meaningful practice.

Almost every morning, a little after 5:00, I lace up my running shoes and, after dressing appropriately for the season, head for the door and hit the road. Nine months out of the year I do most of my running in the dark; it's surreal, almost dreamlike. Other than the headlights and taillights of passing cars, there are few distractions. During the 60 minutes or so that I'm out pounding the pavement, God and I process the things involved in living a life of discipleship.

I often tell my friends I'm addicted to running. Part of it is the physical sensation of having so many endorphins coursing through my body during and after my run. But the greater part is having uninterrupted time with my Creator. Many are the times the solution to a problem has presented itself. Rarely do I run without remembering some friend, family member, or acquaintance who needs prayer. Often I pray for problems at the office, my local church, the world, that only God can solve.

I don't pray the entire time, nonstop. Part of the enjoy-

ment of praying on the run is just being in the presence of an all-wise, all-powerful, loving, and personal God.

Take a Walk

But that's not all. For most of our married lives my wife and I have owned dogs (or have they owned us?). And for most of those years it's been my responsibility to take them on walks. So after I get back from my morning run, and before I go to bed each night, the dogs and I enjoy the quiet, calming sensation of being surrounded by nature.

The dogs, Rocky and Zoey, sniff the thousand different

scents that line the path through the park near our home. Sometimes they chase deer into the woods or scare squirrels back up into the trees. I doubt they notice wispy clouds that reflect the sun's rays before it crests the horizon, the sliver of a new moon as it rises in the velvet sky, or the glitter of fireflies that make the trees sparkle. They surely don't see the canopy of stars that reminds me of God's many promises.

In the morning God and I preview the events that are already on my calendar, and I pray to be prepared for the inevitable unscripted surprises. In the evening, in addition to reflecting on the magnificence of

God's creation, I reflect on the day's activities—the things that warm my heart, as well as the things that shame me. I always go to bed with a clear conscience.

Many people have a specific place where they pray and meditate—a quiet corner, a chair, maybe a room where the distractions of life are shut out and they can focus on God and His providence. And indeed, when deadlines loom and life's pressures seem overwhelming, I have places at home and at the office where I can go to my knees and pray for guidance. But for everyday, routine communication with God, my special place is on my feet, running with God; or often, just strolling through His creation, listening for His voice.

Stephen Chavez is managing editor of the Adventist Review.

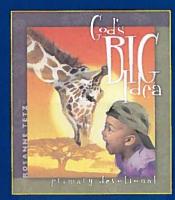




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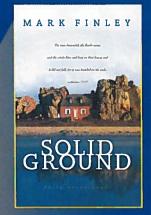
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GOD'S BIG IDEA

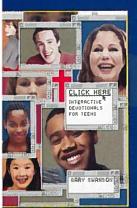
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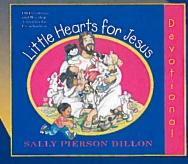
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