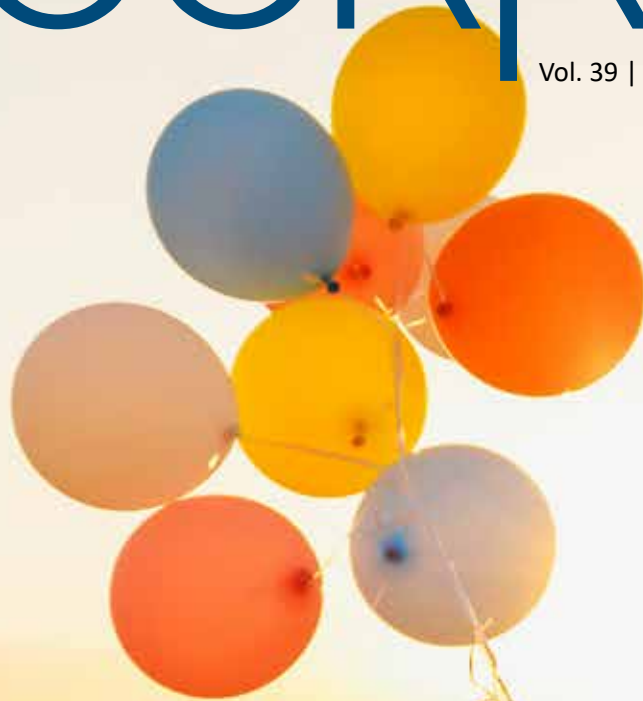


THE JOURNAL

A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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Celebrating
THE SABBATH



SCAN TO READ ONLINE

ON THE COVER

The seventh-day Sabbath is one of the first gifts God bestowed on His creation (Genesis 2), and the redeemed will continue to enjoy that gift in heaven (Isaiah 66:22, 23). Jesus also kept the Sabbath while on earth, going to the synagogue to worship and doing good works to alleviate suffering and need. The Sabbath is a gift of time—something in short supply for most people. We hear the complaints: “I have no time!” or “Life is so hectic!” or “I hardly ever see my kids.” Or “How can I spend time in devotions with everything else pressing in on me?” Can you see how the Sabbath is a gift to solve all these stressors? We hope this issue will help you realize this precious gift, make the most of it, and thank the God who gives it to you every seven days!



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Highlight OF THE WEEK

SABBATH HAS ALWAYS BEEN the highlight of my week. When I was a child, my mother took care to create a special atmosphere on Friday evening, at the very start of the Sabbath hours. As the sun set, casting its brilliant hues of magenta and purple across the horizon, Mom would light our Sabbath candles and Dad would choose a CD of calm, quiet music to set the tone for worship.

As I snuggled into my spot on the couch with a cozy blanket, Mom would begin reading: mission stories, Bible stories, angel stories, stories of God’s intervention. After story time, we sang together—sometimes accompanied by Mom’s guitar or the piano, sometimes a cappella. I felt God’s presence in a special way during those early Sabbath worship moments.

When I became an adult and had a family of my own, I tried to create that same atmosphere for my children: candles, quiet music, stories, and cozy blankets. I always wanted Sabbath to be as special to them as it was for me.

As I was growing up, Sabbath was different from other days. It was more than just going to church. We did special activities on the seventh day that we didn’t do throughout the rest of the week. We went to friends’ homes for lunch; we took walks together in nature; we visited and encouraged the elderly who were lonely. Sabbath, to me, has always been about fellowship with

God and others—and that’s where I find the most fulfillment. Even today, “good” Sabbaths are marked not only by an inspiring church service and sermon but by fellowship with others afterward.

WE’RE HOME

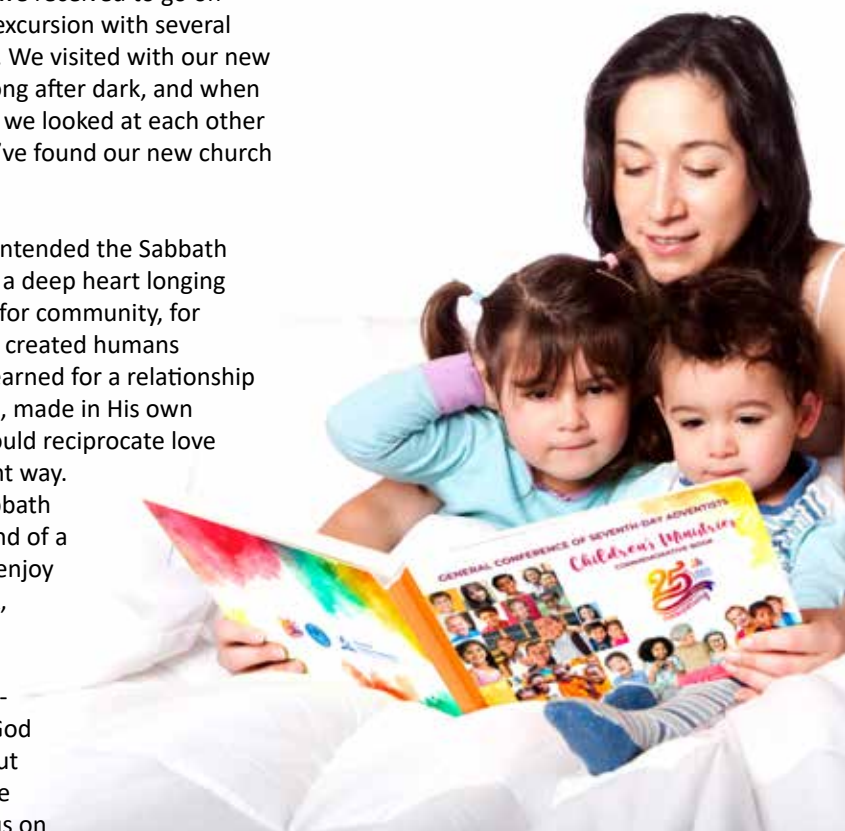
My husband transitioned from pastoring a district to working for the General Conference Ministerial Association several years ago. After we settled into our new home, we began looking for a church to attend. The greeters at the first church we visited welcomed us warmly. The sermon was sincere and the music engaging, but what really made us feel at home was the invitation we received to go on an afternoon excursion with several other families. We visited with our new friends until long after dark, and when we finally left, we looked at each other and said, “We’ve found our new church family.”

I believe God intended the Sabbath hours to fulfill a deep heart longing we each have for community, for fellowship. He created humans because He yearned for a relationship with someone, made in His own image, who could reciprocate love in an intelligent way. He set the Sabbath apart at the end of a busy week to enjoy His handiwork, including you and me. And during that 24-hour period, God invites us to put everything else aside and focus on

reconnecting with Him and with one another.

Pastoral life and duties often seem overwhelming, especially on Sabbath. And with a global pandemic raging, it’s difficult, sometimes even impossible, to enjoy face-to-face fellowship. We hope this issue of *The Journal* will provide some ideas on how the Sabbath can be a delight and give encouragement in these challenging days. 7

Beth Thomas is a freelance writer and editor living in Michigan with her pastor-husband and two children. She is a contributing editor for The Journal.





Celebrating SABBATH

I WANTED SABBATH TO BE THE BEST DAY OF THE WEEK FOR MY FAMILY, BUT SOMETHING ALWAYS GOT IN THE WAY OF THAT GOAL.

“WHY DID YOU SLEEP IN SO LONG?” My angry words flooded the car as we drove to church. “You know I need extra help with the boys on Sabbath mornings!”

Our 3-year-old’s eyes grew big as he listened to my tirade.

“I’m sorry, honey,” my husband sighed. “I’ll try to be up earlier next week and help you more.” He had a right to be tired, and I knew it. He was working almost full-time and going to graduate school at night.

“Thanks,” I mumbled, finally letting myself relax.

Why are Sabbath mornings so hard? I wondered. *I want this to be the best day of the week for our family, and I always get stressed and ruin it for everyone. God, please show me how to make Sabbath a good day for our family!*

God led me to pray about our Sabbaths over the coming months. As I prayed, He gently changed my heart and showed me ways to make Sabbaths a blessing for our family. We’re still far from God’s ideal for Sabbath, but now the Sabbath is our children’s favorite day of the week.

Here are some principles I’ve learned and ideas for applying them:

1. GAIN A NEW PERSPECTIVE.

One of the first things God showed me is that the Sabbath is not a day for performance but for peace in Him. I wanted to keep the Sabbath correctly—be to church on time, see my kids dressed nicely, have the house perfectly clean.

God invited me to rest in His love on the Sabbath. Instead of resenting the time it took to nurse our baby before church, I began to see that as time for me to pray and meditate on His Word. He led me to Ezekiel 20:12: “I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.”

He also reminded me of a verse I’d memorized as a child: “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor

Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

I realized the Sabbath is a day to celebrate what He is doing in our lives, not a day for me to work harder to please Him. It’s about resting in Him, not earning His love. This realization slowly changed my perspective (legalism dies hard!) and gave me permission to enjoy the Sabbath. When I started enjoying the day, the rest of my family did too.

Ellen White wrote: “To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s creative and redeeming power, it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, they delight themselves in Him.”¹

Apply it: Meditate on Isaiah 58:13, 14; Ezekiel 20:12; and other verses about the Sabbath. Ask God to change your perspective on the Sabbath. Make sure your soul is getting fed on the Sabbath. I have found that getting up early for devotions and a sunrise walk starts my Sabbaths out right.

2. TREASURE THE GIFT OF TIME.

The benefits of spending time with family include improved mental and physical health, lowered stress, and better self-confidence. Children’s academic performance improves while their risk of behavioral problems decreases. They learn interpersonal, conflict management, and life skills. During family time we have invaluable opportunities to disciple our children in the journey of faith.

Yet family time often gets sidelined when days are full and to-do lists long. The Sabbath is God’s antidote for our busy lives. “God’s love has set a limit to the demands of toil. Over the Sabbath He places His merciful hand. In His own day He preserves for the family opportunity for communion with Him, with nature, and with one another.”²

We have found that the Sabbath provides us with opportunities to connect with our children on a deeper level than is often possible during the week. On Sabbath, we can relax, listen to their hearts, and truly be family.

The Sabbath is also a perfect time to invest in our children’s spiritual growth. Attending church together as a family is our first priority. We belong to a small church, so helping it become a place our children enjoy has been important to us. This has meant leading out with children’s Sabbath Schools and activities. Our commitments help our children see the value of worshipping God on the Sabbath.

In the afternoons, we sometimes read mission stories, act out Bible charades, or play Bible board games. Our daughter loves to tell Bible stories with felts. Sometimes we paint or color together while watching a sermon or listening to a faith-building audio story.³ We often talk about the sermon on our way home from church to make sure our children understand it. Working on Bible memorization is also a blessing.

About once a month we spend a Sabbath bringing joy to others. Sometimes we invite someone to our home for lunch. Other times we serve our church family or someone in the community. At times serving our church family means sacrificing something the kids would rather do. We believe that’s OK as long as we have other Sabbaths when we can focus fully on our children’s needs.



The Sabbath is about resting in Him, not earning His love.



The Sabbath is God's antidote for our busy lives.

Apply it: Prioritize worshipping God together as a family. Don't resent the Sabbath with your kids or sneak away for a nap (unless you absolutely need it). This is invaluable time with your children. Cherish them on the Sabbath. It is God's gift of time for you and your children.

3. GET OUTSIDE.

Sabbath afternoons outdoors provide so many opportunities to learn about God in His second book. This is our favorite way to spend Sabbath afternoon! Our family enjoys Sabbath walks, canoeing, biking, and nature observation. Over the years, our rambunctious little ones have grown in their ability to slow down and appreciate the beauty of nature.

Ellen White suggested: "We can walk out with [our children] in the open air; we can sit with them in the groves and in the bright sunshine, and give their restless minds something to feed upon by conversing with them upon the works of God, and can inspire them with love and reverence by calling their attention to the beautiful objects in nature."⁴

Apply it: No matter how your family chooses to get outside, remember that these are times to seek God together, not compete or conquer. Ask God to guide your adventures with your children in nature. There are rich blessings here!

4. PLAN AHEAD.

In Bible times, Friday was called the "preparation day" (Mark 15:42). It was the day to prepare for the Sabbath rest. When I was growing up, we did all our house cleaning and Sabbath preparation on Friday. This often meant a stressful scramble to finish last-minute chores.

God helped me see that I needed to begin planning for the Sabbath early in the week. This was especially important when our children were small and teaching them to "help" took far more time than doing tasks myself. I learned to spread out my household duties over several days so I didn't have to rush on Friday afternoon. When possible, I make food ahead of time. We don't always succeed, but we work at it. And when we don't succeed, God has taught me that it's OK to rest on the Sabbath. It's far more important that my heart is in tune with my Father than that my floors are spotless.

We have also learned the importance of planning ahead for God-honoring, kid-friendly Sabbath activities. These kinds of activities don't happen by accident. We try to take time during the week to talk about what we'd like to do on the Sabbath and prepare for it. This way when Sabbath comes we aren't sucked into activities we know are not the best simply because we aren't ready for something better.

Apply it: Plan out a weekly housework schedule (for example, laundry on Sunday, bathrooms on Wednesday, etc.) and aim to follow it. Involve your children in helping you clean and prepare for the Sabbath. Early in the week choose at least one God-honoring activity you can do together as a family on Sabbath and then prepare for it.

5. PRAY AHEAD!

Recently, God has been reminding me of the need to specifically pray for our Sabbaths. I found this made such a difference when our children were little. Sabbaths were so much happier when they'd been covered in prayer.

Somewhere along the way, though, I forgot to pray much about our Sabbaths. I realize now that while we have made Sabbaths enjoyable for our children, we have often failed to help them truly delight in the God of the Sabbath. This breaks my heart, because I know that God has so much more for us on the Sabbath!

God showed me this so clearly last Christmas. Differences of opinion on how to keep the Sabbath have sometimes caused serious tension when our extended family has gotten together. So last Christmas I rose early on Sabbath morning and spent extra time seeking God’s blessing on our day with family. I prayed that everyone would get along, that the children would enjoy the activities my aunt had planned, and that we could truly worship together.

God did bless! It was one of the best Sabbaths I can remember having with our extended family. We enjoyed a multigenerational church service complete with a kid-friendly Bible study, fun conversation around mealtimes, and walks in the countryside around my grandmother’s home. Not once was there a conflict. God truly answered prayer!

Our God is a gentleman. He will not force His way into our time and hearts. But if we truly desire His presence on the Sabbath, nothing can keep Him away.

Apply it: Take time throughout the week to pray about the coming Sabbath. Ask God to show you how to make it the best day of the week for your family. Even more important, ask God to be the central attraction of your Sabbath.

6. CHOOSE THE BEST AND SAY NO TO THE REST.

Sometimes we have to stop our children from doing certain things on the Sabbath. We’ve found that explaining the “why” helps a lot. When our children see that the Sabbath is a gift from God because He loves us, they are much more willing to keep it sacred. Rather than telling our kids “no” on the Sabbath, we aim to fill it with activities that honor God and allow us to be together as a family. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

The difference between what is good and what is best is often found in a step of faith.⁵ It takes faith to see the eternal, to really know God and follow Him. The same is true for our Sabbaths. The difference between an enjoyable Sabbath and a delightful Sabbath with Jesus is found in the faith to reach out and invite our Savior in.

Jesus is inviting us to choose the best for our families on Sabbath. We begin that journey by praying about Sabbath. God may be calling you to prioritize outreach more often on Sabbaths. Or invest time in studying the Scriptures as a family. Or God may simply be asking your family to change your focus in the good activities you are already engaging in.

Romans 14:23 says that “whatever is not from faith is sin.” That stretches me and motivates me to seek God more on the Sabbath. We can be doing all the right things on Sabbath and still be doing them without faith—without Jesus! Let’s not let another Sabbath pass without Jesus as the honored guest in our home.

Won’t you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, I want to connect with You on the Sabbath, to truly delight in Your presence. I want to teach my children how to delight in You too. Forgive me for not delighting in You on the Sabbath. I choose to pray ahead and plan ahead for the Sabbath from now on. Please guide me. Guide our family. Teach us how to truly worship You on the Sabbath together! Thank You! In Jesus’ name, amen. **L**

¹ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 289.

² Ellen White, *Child Guidance*, p. 536.

³ Your Story Hour, Bible in Living Sound, and Discovery Mountain are great options for audio stories.

⁴ Ellen White, *Child Guidance*, p. 536.

⁵ Sermon by Pastor Marc Woodson on May 29, 2021, at the Lincoln Amazing Grace Seventh-day Adventist Church in California.

Shenalyn Page is a homeschool mom and freelance writer in Northern California. She loves to pray with church guests, explore the great outdoors with her husband and three kids, and string words together that tell stories of God’s goodness.

*God will not force
His way into our
time and hearts.*



IT'S THE Small Things

GOD SPEAKS TO US EVERY DAY—WE JUST NEED TO PAY ATTENTION.

I BUY MOST OF MY GROCERIES at our local Walmart. Last Monday, I took my weekly excursion. I parked my truck and headed toward the store. Walking across the acre of asphalt, I passed a man who stood at the back of his car, loading his bags into the trunk. It would help him out, saving him a trip to the cart return, if I took his empty shopping buggy off his hands.

I stopped by his car. "Is that a good buggy?"

Some buggies are hard to steer. They have one wonky wheel that wobbles the whole time. Or they pull to the right, constantly forcing you to correct your direction, and it's impossible to steer with only one hand.

Buggy quality is important. I asked a reasonable question.

He turned from shutting his trunk and placed his hands lightly on the edge of the wire basket. He had a contemplative look on his face as he studied it.

"You know . . ." He paused for a moment. "It is. It doesn't make any noise, and it rolls like a champ." He had a slight sense of pride in his voice as he answered in his Texas drawl.

We smiled, and I took the buggy off his hands.

ON NOTICE

It pays to notice the small things. I think that's how God speaks to us.

He speaks to each of us every day. The question is, do we listen? Sometimes God speaks to us on behalf of someone else. You could be the answer to someone's prayer, someone you don't even know. But if you're not paying attention, you'll miss it.

Recently I read a story about two police officers who responded to a report of a car accident. A mother and her infant daughter were on their way home, and the car had gone off the road in the dead of night. When the officers arrived at the scene, they heard a voice calling from the woods. The cries guided them to the car. Tragically, they found the mother deceased, but the baby still lived. The only explanation the men could come up with was a miracle had occurred, and the voice of an angel had guided them to the child. Fortunately, they had paid attention.

Another story I read told about a person driving home from work one evening. He was on his normal route when he suddenly felt directed to take a gallon of milk to a random house. Though he didn't know the people living in the house, he followed the urging of the Holy Spirit. When he knocked on the door, a woman answered. He heard the



cries of a baby from somewhere inside. He handed the woman the gallon of milk, explaining why he was there. She burst into tears. She told him her husband had died, and she had used the last of her money to pay rent. There was no food in the house for her baby.

These stories make me long to be used that way. How wonderful to both *hear* God speak and then be able to make a difference for someone. I *want* that.

So sometimes I actually do pay attention and I get the message. I'm sure there are far more that I miss. But when I do? The feeling of being used by God to do good in someone's life, to know that God's action—through you—counteracted the plan of Satan to harm someone . . . well, there's nothing else like it.

SUMMER BREAK

Every summer my teacher friends and I go to South Padre Island for a week of sun and relaxation once school lets out. It's a long drive from my home, over 500 miles. We're on the road a good solid ten hours after we add in bathroom breaks, stopping for gas, and eating. This particular summer, we got off to a late start. One woman had a flat tire when she went out to her car, so we had to wait for her to arrive. Then I realized I had forgotten to go to the bank to get cash. We had to drive back into town, which added almost 30 minutes more. My carelessness frustrated and annoyed me.

We passed a softball park on our way to the bank. A woman sat on the curb of the parking lot, next to her van. She grasped her head in her hands and stared at the ground. Dejection shouted from the slumped lines of her shoulders and back. Obviously, something was wrong. I saw her. I saw her need.

*“Are you
OK? Is
there
anything
I can do
for you?”*

We're already late! I'm not stopping. Maybe she's just resting after a jog, I told myself.

I didn't mention her to the others, who were all chatting excitedly now that we were finally on our way. No one else had noticed her.

But God convicted my heart. When I realized I had ignored His voice, tuned out His nudging, it crushed me. I had missed an opportunity to be used.

I prayed, God, please keep her there. If she is sitting on the curb when we pass back by, I'll pull into the park and talk to her. I'm sorry I didn't listen.

I finished at the bank, then hurried back down the road. As we crested the hill, the softball park appeared on my left. She was still there, sitting by her van. It didn't look like she had moved an inch.

I pulled into the parking lot. “Hold on, ladies. I need to do something.”

They all glanced around, confused, surprised we were stopping.

I hopped out of the truck, walked over to the woman, and sat down beside her. “You seem sad. Are you OK? Is there anything I can do for you?”

We talked for almost 15 minutes. She was depressed, anxious about her bills, unsure how she would pay rent, and alone after her boyfriend had left her. I prayed with her and gave her the number to the counselor at my church.

I don't know how her story ended. I never saw her again. But it felt good that I had noticed her, that I had heard God's voice, that I had obeyed His urging in my heart.

It's the small things in life that matter. I pray you will notice the moments God places in front of you. I pray you will allow yourself to be God's hands and feet. I pray you will be grateful for the moments, the gifts God places in front of you.

And I pray that one of those gifts is you always get a good shopping buggy! 7

Paula Peckham is a fifth-generation Texan who splits her time living in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and Rio Bravo, Mexico. You can read her work in two anthologies (both available on Amazon) and on PaulaPeckham.com. Her debut book, Protected, will be available in March 2022.

ANXIETY Attack

Everyone is periodically touched by anxiety to some extent.

WHEN COVID HIT OUR FAMILY, ANXIETY HIT ME.

“I WANT YOU TO KNOW my throat is a little sore,” announced my husband.

We were heading home from another busy Wednesday morning of volunteering at our church’s local Community Services food distribution program.

“Kindly keep that sore throat to yourself,” I joked in reply.

However, it was the beginning of our experience hosting the dreaded COVID-19 illness. Together we weathered headaches, congestion, coughing, lack of energy, extreme tiredness, loss of smell, compromised taste, minimal appetite, fevers, and in general feeling miserable. During our time of isolation and quarantine, we also developed a new appreciation for what must have been the experience of lepers in Bible times—that of being regarded as “unclean and contagious.”

Blessings along the journey of this illness included the appearance of soup, fruit, and juices on our front doorstep and electronic inquiries from friends and family with encouraging messages and assurance of prayers for our recovery.

On Sabbath during the first week of our COVID illness, a crisis arose. I was becoming more and more aware that my husband wasn’t doing well. His respirations were rapid, and he was coughing hard and frequently. His temperature was up and his oxygen saturation levels down. He had no appetite and refused even water. He was pale, lethargic, and stoically convinced there was no problem. My concern and anxiety level intensified as I felt increasingly helpless and afraid.

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal mental health reaction to a real or imaginary threat. Emotions of worry, uncertainty, and fear of the future are common. The body’s stress-response system is triggered, releasing the hormones cortisol and adrenaline to drive the fight-or-flight response. Blood pressure elevates, heart rate increases, and respirations become rapid and shallow. As time goes on, sleep and



We were regarded as “unclean and contagious.”

appetite disturbances can occur, as well as physical aches and pains. Immune system function decreases. Food can become unappealing. Normal thought processing ability can be compromised, and a decreased interest in the performance of routine daily activities is not uncommon.

Anxiety can in some instances serve us well, such as in studying for a test or preparing a special music piece to present in church. However, prolonged anxiety can lead to chronic conditions, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, etc. Contributors to frequent episodes—or ongoing anxiety disorders in some circumstances—can include genetics (family history), thyroid malfunction, and traumatic life experiences. Even a change in season for some—as in the transition of summer into autumn or autumn into winter, with the corresponding decrease in daylight hours—can trigger increased levels of cortisol, which drive the related effect of anxiousness and even depression.

IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE

Everyone is periodically touched by anxiety to some extent. But in today’s world, levels of anxiousness are elevated and more intense than ever due to unusual and extreme factors. These include:

1. The ongoing invisible presence of a disruptive and dangerous pandemic disease
2. Confusion and stress over changing social mandates for protection against COVID illness
3. Concern and fear for those severely affected by the virus
4. Economic and healthcare uncertainties and challenges
5. Weather and environmental crises and devastation
6. Social unrest and escalating situations of upheaval and violence

7. Challenges to churches, schools, and families attempting to function “normally” during these abnormal times
8. Global disease, disasters, famines, wars, and atrocities

Helpful treatment procedures for chronic anxiety disorders often include counseling, medication therapy, and lifestyle adjustment programs. Most short-term periods of anxiousness are resolved when the stressor is cared for and no longer exists. But how can we keep calm, in control, and “anxious for nothing” when stress and fear threaten to overtake us?

ANXIETY MANAGEMENT TIPS

The first step toward maintaining control is to realize that anxiety and stress are normal reactions to challenging situations here on earth. As we take a close look at Philippians 4:6, we find helpful instructions: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by *prayer* and *petition*, with *thanksgiving*, present your requests to God” (NIV, emphasis added).

Prayer: “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22, NIV). We are invited to come to our compassionate heavenly Father in prayer during times of anxiety and fear. He has promised to hear us and give us endurance, strength, and help. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

Petition (request): “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24). During episodes of anxiety, emotions can run high, and often after we have anxiously asked God for help, we continue to stress over our burdens and worries. “We must earnestly cry to God in faith, feeling or no feeling, and then *live our prayers*. Our assurance and evidence is God’s Word, and after we have asked we must *believe without doubting*.”¹ “If we would give more expression to our faith . . . we should have more faith and greater joy.”²





Thanksgiving: We are reminded to include expressions of thankfulness in our prayers. God knows that an attitude of gratitude helps cultivate positive feelings, which benefit physical and mental health. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Additional aids in coping with life’s up-and-down experiences can include limiting our exposure to disturbing news reports; faithfully maintaining healthful lifestyle habits of regular sleep, nutritious and timely meals, adequate use of water, and regular exercise (outside in nature, sunshine, and fresh air); keeping connections with family and friends; and spending daily time with the Lord in study and worship.

“Be anxious for nothing.”

Philippians 4:6

A HAPPY ENDING

That Sabbath I turned to God in urgent prayer for wisdom and direction in my anxiousness and fear over my husband’s condition. As I made my requests, I also expressed my faith in God and asked for His help in my determination to “live my prayer.” Expressing thanks, I left all in God’s hands and enjoyed the calmness that settled over me.

A little later our daughter dropped by for a quick check on us. She didn’t say much as I reported her dad’s disturbing symptoms, but after a few minutes she hurried off. About 20 minutes later our son and his wife, both physicians, entered our house with an air of authority, armed with IV fluid supplies and medications. My husband was cared for lovingly and efficiently. The fluids perked him up, and the medications made a wonderful contribution to his ultimate and complete restoration.

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22, 23, NIV). J

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Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 249-255.

¹ Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 243, emphasis added.

² Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

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TIPS TO SURVIVE

THRIVE

A HAPPY DAY

WHILE TOURING ISRAEL a few years ago, I listened to our guide explain that early Jewish families went to great lengths to lead their children to love God, assuring them that God loved them too (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). One of the things they taught their children was the *happiness* of the Sabbath, because the Sabbath points to a loving God who gave them the gift of the seventh day each week.

For those of us who know what the future holds for Sabbath keepers, this cannot be stressed enough! It is of utmost importance that our children learn to love the Sabbath. 2 Thessalonians 2:10 says that people perish “because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Notice that it doesn’t say people didn’t know the truth, but they didn’t have the *love* of the truth. We might easily give up certain things when we are under duress, but the things we *love* we will cling to and never let go.

How can we make the Sabbath a “delight” for young children (Isaiah 58:10-14)? It involves planning ahead to keep Sabbath not only in their minds but also in their hearts so they will love that happy day.

STARTING YOUNG

When my brother and I were kids, our parents took us with them to visit shut-in people on Sabbath afternoons. We recited our memory verses, sang songs, and gave them a picture we had drawn or colored. Then we were allowed to go out to the yard and play while our parents continued to visit with the people.

On Sabbath afternoons my brother and I loved to plan a Sabbath School program for our dolls and teddy bears while Mom and Dad took a nap. We based our plans on the things we had seen in Sabbath School, plus a few other “wonderful ideas” we came up with. When the folks woke up, they were our audience. We thought our programs were positively fantastic!

My grandchildren liked to sit on the floor while we all sang “O what a wonderful day it will be. Jesus is coming again!” Two people held a white sheet over the kids (the clouds of Jesus’ coming), lifting it up and down, fluttering it over them. The children laughed and clapped their hands as the “cloud” billowed around them.

Making Sabbath the happiest day of the week will help children love the Sabbath. Then when Jesus returns we may be able to say to Him, “Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me” (Isaiah 8:18, NIV). ■

Evelyn Griffin is a retired pastor’s wife. She and her pastor-husband have four children and 14 grandchildren.

Follow **THE LAMB**

A FRESH LOOK AT THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

I GREW UP IN A HOME in which my mother faithfully took my sister and me to church *every* Sabbath. Our church was filled with many wonderful people, including a pastor who was completely committed to preaching “the three angels’ messages.” This phrase was regularly heard from our pulpit. Although I didn’t fully understand what it meant, I figured that whatever these three messages were, they had to be good. I could tell this just by the way people talked about them.

At the age of 12, I publicly committed my life to Jesus in baptism. Two years after this, I made a promise to God that I would speak for Him wherever He opened the

doors. I had no idea that God would literally open the doors for me to speak for Him around the world!

As I grew older, my understanding of these three messages grew as well. But it wasn’t until I was asked to conduct a workshop about them for a youth conference that I felt like I finally got it. When I set my mind to grasp these messages so I could convey them to someone else, it was as if a light bulb went on and I realized what had been sitting in front of me since I was a little girl. For this reason, I consider that youth conference experience to be one of the most valuable of my life.



I figured that whatever these three messages were, they had to be good.

As I reflect on these beautiful messages in Revelation 14:6-12, I believe they form the heartbeat of the entire book of Revelation.

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Before we take a closer look at them, let's get a little context for what is happening in the book of Revelation. Chapters 1-13 picture God's people struggling, surviving, escaping, having good times and bad times. Then Revelation 13:15 speaks of a power at the end of time that will "cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."

Have you ever thought about the fact that if the Bible finished in Revelation 13, it would end with a Christian holocaust? This is no pretty script! This is a death decree that will face God's people! But praise God, this isn't where the Bible ends.

Right after Revelation 13 comes Revelation 14, and as this chapter opens, John sees a glorious scene of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb (Jesus) on Mount Zion. The Bible tells us, "These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4).

This is a group of people who have a pure, undiluted faith. They haven't been influenced by the popular "What's most comfortable for me?" gospel. No! They are people of the Word, willing to do whatever the Bible says. Joyfully they lay down their all for the Lord. As a result, they get to follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

Referencing Revelation 14:4, Ellen White writes, "All who follow the Lamb in heaven must first have followed Him on earth, not fretfully or capriciously, but in trustful, loving, willing obedience, as the flock follows the shepherd."¹

This scene is then followed by three angels flying in the heavens carrying specific messages of love and warning from God to a dying world. Next, we notice a great harvest that represents the second coming of Jesus. From Revelation 14 to the end of the book, we see just victory, victory, victory described for those who put their trust in Jesus, following the Lamb wherever He goes.

So the preaching of the three angels' messages is the catalyst that brings on the rest of the book of Revelation. By embracing and sharing God's final messages of love and warning to the world, we become part of the generation that helps fulfill the book of Revelation, which wraps up this earth's history and culminates in the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Shouldn't we all want to be part of this exciting movement?

THE FIRST MESSAGE

"I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the *everlasting gospel* to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of *His judgment has come*; and *worship Him* who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Revelation 14:6, 7, italics supplied).

As we look at this passage, we find three central themes: the everlasting gospel (which shows that we are saved by Jesus' work, not our own—see Romans 1:16), the judgment (which is a call to flee to the safety of Christ), and worship of the Creator (which reminds us exactly where we came from and how we got here).

*They
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The message begins with the call to fear God. Time and time again throughout God's Word, one of the key identifiers of God's people has been that they "feared God." This means they had absolute loyalty to God and full surrender to His will. It also means they have learned to take God and His Word seriously! Unfortunately, most people don't take God's Word seriously these days. They live and act certain ways based on their fear of society and what others think of them, not their fear of God or their respect of His Word.

Next, we are called to "give glory to God." This has to do with living a lifestyle that brings God glory. The Bible tells us, "Do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Giving glory to God is not natural. Naturally we want to give glory to self! But we are called to die to self so Jesus may live in and through us.

The last part tells us "the hour of His judgment has come." This means that God—not just His people—is on trial here. Satan has told the universe that it's impossible for sinful human beings to be saved and that God is unjust in bringing humans to heaven while Satan and his angels have been cast out. He's right in a way. It would be impossible if not for a perfect Substitute who has taken our punishment and now stands in the judgment in our place. Satan and his angels did not repent when they had opportunity. But when we repent, we are no longer under the condemnation of our sins. We are free in Jesus! As long as we are trusting in the blood of Jesus, God's name and honor are vindicated and He has the right to bring us home (John 5:24 and Romans 6:22, 23).

In essence, the judgment is an urgent appeal for all to confess their sins and flee to the safety of Jesus while probation's door is still open. When we do that, the judgment becomes good news, because the Judge is on our side. The Bible tells us, "For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us" (Isaiah 33:22).

Let's not forget the final appeal of the first angel's message. It is the call to "Worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:7). Interestingly, the only place the Creator God is referred to in the Ten Commandments is in regards to the seventh-day Sabbath. This is an appeal to return to worshipping God on the Sabbath.

THE SECOND MESSAGE

The next two messages are a bit shorter and more cryptic, but not any less significant.

In Revelation 14:8 the Bible tells us, "And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'"

When John was writing the second and third angels' messages, *physical Babylon had already fallen*. So John is not calling God's people out of a literal location but out of a spiritual condition, a condition of spiritual adultery. Babylon actually represents a network of counterfeit religious systems that are leading multitudes to disregard the Ten Commandments of God. These counterfeits are based on spiritual lies instead of the absolute truths of God's Word.

THE THIRD MESSAGE

The third angel's appeal is a warning to those who linger in Babylon, the counterfeit religious systems of the world. It's basically a plea to all God's people still in Babylon: "Don't take the mark. Don't worship the beast. Get out while you still can."

Revelation 14:9, 10 reads: “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”

QUICK REVIEW

These three messages can be distilled down to just two words each: (1) God’s truth, (2) Satan’s lies, (3) your choice. It’s important to recognize that if we want to escape the mark of the beast outlined in the third angel’s message, we must embrace the first and second angels’ messages. Although these three messages are carried by three angels, they come as a unit—a trio—together. This means that we cannot separate these messages. We must accept and embrace the first angel’s message before receiving the second and the third. And we must embrace the first and second angels’ messages before embracing the third. They work *together*.


So, what is it about these messages, swiftly couriered by three angels flying in mid-heaven, that makes them so important, so relevant for us today? I believe it’s because wherever these messages go, people’s lives are powerfully impacted and totally transformed.

Back when COVID-19 hit, the North New South Wales Conference in Australia, where I live and work, quickly adapted and took our evangelistic efforts to an online space. A young man working in Newcastle had an Adventist colleague share with him the website link for our series. Each evening he got online to hear the preaching of the three angels’ messages, and the Holy Spirit began to speak powerfully to his heart. As the series continued night after night, he felt convicted of his need to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It wasn’t just about another spiritual high—it was about following biblical truth all the way, with heart, body, mind, and soul.

Today, this same young man has quit smoking and is involved in church every Sabbath. By obedience to God and His Word and through the power of the Holy Spirit, he has had a complete transformation of character and is actively seeking to win his family and friends to Jesus.

These messages aren’t just random communications from God; they have been tasked by God with a super-special and specific purpose. They are to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus.

Ellen White writes, “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import,—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”²

Today, as the three angels’ messages are zooming around the world, I want to encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can be a “three angel messenger.” This message as a unit will triumph for the simple fact that it is God’s message with Jesus at the center. The everlasting gospel might not be considered politically correct, but it is correct. It might not be considered popular, but these messages bear the signature of heaven and go with the guarantee of future triumph. This world will not last forever. Time is running out. A better world is coming. And there’s only one way from this world to the next. We must follow the Lamb wherever He goes. And if we follow Him, He will lead us safely home! 

¹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 591.

² *Evangelism*, pp. 119, 120

Charissa Torossian serves as a prayer coordinator and evangelist in the North New South Wales Conference in Australia. Her husband, Justin, originally from California, is also an evangelist for the conference, serving as pastor of the Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church in Newcastle.

MAKE SABBATH A *Delight*

IT WAS SABBATH MORNING in the Holford home. We had two young children and a 6-month-old baby. During breakfast Amanda called to say her family had food poisoning, so they couldn't host the family of the visiting speaker. I searched through the freezer desperately trying to expand our simple dinner to feed six more people.

Then Mrs. Smith called to ask if we could bring some flowers from our garden to arrange in the church. Our 6-year-old daughter, Bethany, gathered a fistful of bright dandelions—clearly our garden had more weeds than real flowers! In the meantime the baby got sick all over my husband, Bernie, and he was busy looking for a fresh shirt. Our son took off his best shoes and hid them because he thought it would be great fun to watch us find them again.

It was chaos! By this time we were all running around and shouting at one another.

We finally piled into the car. The baby was wearing only a diaper and a blanket. Bernie and I weren't speaking to each other, and the two older children were squabbling in the back seat.

Suddenly Bethany said, "You know that song we sang last night? 'Sabbath Is a Happy Day'? . . . Well, it isn't really, is it?"

In Isaiah 58:13 God tells us to call the Sabbath a delight. We often lose sight of the importance of *delightful* Sabbaths because we are too focused on the unhelpful translation of not doing "your own pleasure." "Pleasure" might be better translated as "your own business"—doing what you want to do for your own gain, such as work, shopping, or empty entertainment.

Sabbath is an incredible gift from God. It is like an every-week birthday present for the world, designed to help us pause, rest, wonder, worship, love, and rebalance. God doesn't want Sabbath to be a day of "don'ts" because experiencing "no" makes us feel anxious, afraid, and sad, and it's incompatible with the "yes!" of delight He longs for us to experience.



How can Sabbath be your best breathing space?

We're all created differently, and each of us finds very different things delightful, which is why God has created so much diversity for us to explore. What fills you with delight? How can that delightful experience enrich your Sabbath? What is delightful for your family members and your church? When we are experiencing the pure delight of Sabbath, it's an incredible witness to the overworked, overstressed, and over-busy people in our communities.

I've used the acronym SABBATH to explore some of the key components of a delightful Sabbath.

SIMPLICITY AND SHARING

God intended Sabbath to be a day of simplicity and peace for us, not the busiest day of the week! How can you simplify your Sabbaths? How can you make sure the workload for Sabbath is shared evenly so no one in your home or church feels overwhelmed by their responsibilities?

ACTIVE ANTICIPATION

Do you look forward to the Sabbath with eager anticipation? Or is it one of the most challenging days of your week as you juggle multiple responsibilities, unrealistic expectations, driving from church to church, and caring for your children? What would make Sabbath the day your family looks forward to the most? How can everyone in the family have an active part in preparing for Sabbath each week? When our children were young, they took turns choosing and making a special dessert or treat for Sabbath. It gave me precious one-on-one time with each of them too.

BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS

What are the blessings and benefits of Sabbath that you most want to thank God for? How could you express your gratitude in a creative way? If you're not feeling blessed by your Sabbaths, what might help you and your family be enriched by the way you spend Sabbath together? In our family we try to go for a walk for at least an hour. It doesn't take much preparation, and it gives us time to relax, exercise, talk together, and look in wonder at God's creation.

BEAUTIFUL BREATHING SPACE

God intended Sabbath to be a day to pause from work and rebalance our lives. Today we need a breathing space where we can breathe deeply and give a huge sigh of relief that we have come safely through another week. How can Sabbath be your best breathing space?

ASTONISHING AWE

The God of all creation made a day for us to enjoy our wonderful world. Experiencing awe at His handiwork is good for our well-being because wonder fills us with a sense of joy, peace, and beauty. What can you do to bring awe into your home or to seek it in the natural world around you? Choose a few flowers for a vase and explore all the tiny, incredible details of God's creation. Look for something on your walks that you've never examined properly before.

TRADITIONS AND TOGETHERNESS

Creating your own family Sabbath traditions gives you a sense of togetherness and specialness. Sharing what you are thankful for, reflecting on the past week together, eating special foods, having candlelight, and enjoying delightful ways to open and close Sabbath will linger in the memories of your children. They may even continue these traditions when they leave home. What are your favorite Sabbath traditions? Why not create some new ones?

HAPPY AND HEALTHY

Does your Sabbath leave you feeling happier and healthier, or frustrated and exhausted? How does your Sabbath experience enhance your well-being and help you to flourish? Are there responsibilities and expectations you need to let go of? And what would add extra delight to your Sabbath?

Why not take time out to audit your Sabbath experience and to focus on making it a day of pure delight for you, your family, and the members of your church? ■

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Not Your Way

FIVE TIPS FOR BREAKING FREE OF BAD HABITS

“THAT’S MY WAY.” Unfortunately, these words aren’t aimed at reinforcing good habits. On the contrary, “That’s my way” is a common excuse to justify our character defects, hurtful temperamental reactions, or misplaced responses that generate a hostile environment.

Today our characters are being heavily tested. We have many excuses for appropriating this phrase: stress, confinement, exhausting workdays, biosecurity measures, 24/7 cohabitation, changes in our usual way of working or studying, and more. How we face these challenges is our decision, though.

We must be aware that by using this excuse, we are saying, “This is my character, and I will not change.” We deny the possibility of improvement and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Character encompasses both personality and temperament. We cling to our defects because we know it’s not easy to change bad habits long entrenched. The problem is that even though we try to hide them, they usually arise at the most inopportune moments. We make victims of the people we love the most, and the negativity ends up spreading to everyone around us.

Ellen White wrote on this subject: “Repeated actions form habits, and habits form character.”¹ Good habits produce a good character, and bad habits create a bad character. Since character is what we will take to heaven, how can we get good habits?

Just as a good habit must be fed, a bad habit must be “starved.”

Although difficult, it is possible to achieve. The formula is found in *Christ’s Object Lessons*: “Christ has given us no assurance that to attain perfection of character is an easy matter. A noble, all-round character is not inherited. It does not come to us by accident. A noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ.”²

Years ago, my husband and I wrote for *Priorities* magazine some ideas about changing bad habits. I share them as an aid to character transformation.

IDEAS TO CHANGE BAD HABITS

1 The power of God is important. It’s not easy to change habits. However, with God’s help, it is possible. Paul wrote: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Asking God for help will provide the strength needed to bring about change—a strength greater than our will.

2 A good habit should replace the negative. Carolyn was spending a lot of time in front of the TV watching soap operas. She didn’t feel good about herself, so she resolved to learn a new trade she could practice at home. Personal satisfaction and some money were the rewards for the change of habit.

3 New good habits must be firmly established. Good habits must be repeated constantly. The more the habit is repeated, the more it is fixed.

4 Bad habits must be starved. Just as a good habit must be fed, a bad habit must be “starved.” The lack of repetition of it makes the will stronger to say no. It’s possible there will be relapses, but we shouldn’t allow discouragement to affect the process of change.

5 Support is vital. A personal project of change should be a matter of a couple and even family. A lot of support is needed, especially in case of relapses. Phrases such as “I told you—you’re not capable of stopping” shouldn’t be uttered. A word of encouragement will restore faith and hope. On the other hand, good behavior achieved should be reinforced and rewarded in a suitable way.

Let’s pray that the next time we say “That’s my way,” it is to give glory to God for new and positive habits that by His grace are part of our character today. Let us affirm the Scriptures, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

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¹ *The Upward Look*, p. 89.

² Ellen White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 331.

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The Key

I WAS LOCKED OUT OF THE HOUSE AT MIDNIGHT IN MY NIGHTCLOTHES.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

Matthew 7:7, 8

MY HUSBAND, KEITH, AND I enjoyed a lovely evening visiting our son, his wife, and our granddaughter in Trabuco Canyon, California. As it grew late, Keith and I retired to an upstairs bedroom. Because I often get thirsty in the middle of the night, I put a glass of water on the stand at the end of our bed and settled down to sleep.

Around midnight, I got up to go to the bathroom. As my feet hit the floor, I heard a splitting crash. To my horror, I realized I had accidentally hit the water glass and sent it flying, crashing into many bits and pieces on the floor, along with all the water. In the dark, with Keith sleeping and the household all in bed, I contemplated how to clean up this mess. I knew if Keith woke and got up, he would most likely cut himself on the sharp glass blades and slip in the watery mess.

Sometimes I am such a klutz! “Oh, God, help me!” I prayed.

Then I remembered seeing a broom and dustpan in the garage. Not wanting to wake anyone, most of all my dear husband, I tiptoed down the stairs in the dark, felt the solid mass of the door leading into the garage, and silently opened it. As my feet touched the cold concrete garage floor and my eyes adjusted to the dark, I spotted the broom and dustpan. I took a few steps to my goal, grabbed hold of the broom and dustpan, and turned back to the door. I pulled at the barrier. *Locked!*

Shocked, I swallowed in the cold air and prayed, "God, please help me. I need to get back upstairs before Keith gets up in the night and slips in that water and glass. I'm serious. Please help me find a key to this door. Help! Help! Help!"

STRANDED

My nightclothes seemed thinner than I remembered; I pulled them about me closer and shivered in the dark space. For a moment, I contemplated opening the large electric garage door, going outside, and ringing the front doorbell. Yet with ominous noises outside, plus knowing my son owns a gun, I wasn't sure that was a safe plan.

With a pang of fear, I looked about and spotted my son's large, red Craftsman tool chest. The many drawers were stacked row upon row. I opened each drawer and felt for keys with my fingers, beginning to grow stiff with cold.

Keys! There were keys. But which one? I tried frantically inserting one after another in the doorknob, pushing, prodding, attempting to make them fit. None fit the door. "What do I do now, God?"

I began pushing on the solid entry. At once I sensed that small, silent voice saying, "Joyce, what do you tell other people to do when they are in trouble?"

"God, I tell them to praise You in every situation and trust in You and thank You for answering, even when it's a negative situation."

I continued searching for a key, but my focus changed. Instead of panicking, I began praising God and thanking Him in advance for answering, even though I could not see an answer. I prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24).

My self-centeredness came to mind, and I said, "God, forgive me for getting defensive with my husband today. Forgive me also for being critical and judgmental." I was reminded that God asks us to be specific in our prayers for forgiveness, so I prayed Ezekiel 36:26, 27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes."

As my feet hit the floor, I heard a splitting crash.



HIDDEN DISCOVERY

I was in that garage a long time. It felt like a jail, especially when I still had to go to the bathroom. Then I made a final plea and total surrender. I knelt on the hard cement. “This is a 9-1-1 prayer. I am desperate! There is no way to get out without Your intervention. I have searched every drawer for a key and have explored every corner. I surrender this situation to You. You know that if I don’t get up there in time to clean up that watery mess, my husband may slip and be cut; but You may have another plan. Please help me. This battle is now Yours.”

Then I claimed 1 John 5:14, 15: “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

Finally, I got up from my knees in great expectation. I said, “Lord, I choose to believe Your promises, even though I don’t feel them. Yet I trust

*“This is
a 9-1-1
prayer.
I am
desperate!”*

in Your Word.” Then I went to the door and tried that stubborn doorknob. Yes, it was still locked. I knocked, and yes, there was no answer. But I could sense God’s presence in the silence.

I prayed again. This time a quiet voice (impression) came to me: “Joyce, go look in the tool chest.” I had already looked there, but I went to the box again. I saw an opening between the drawers I had not noticed before. I sensed that quiet voice saying, “Put your hand in the opening.”

Although a little fearful of spiders, I put my hand in the opening. My fingers touched a cold, lone key! My hands quivered, this time not from cold but from pure excitement. My heart pounded; I walked to the door again. The key fit the door! Hallelujah!

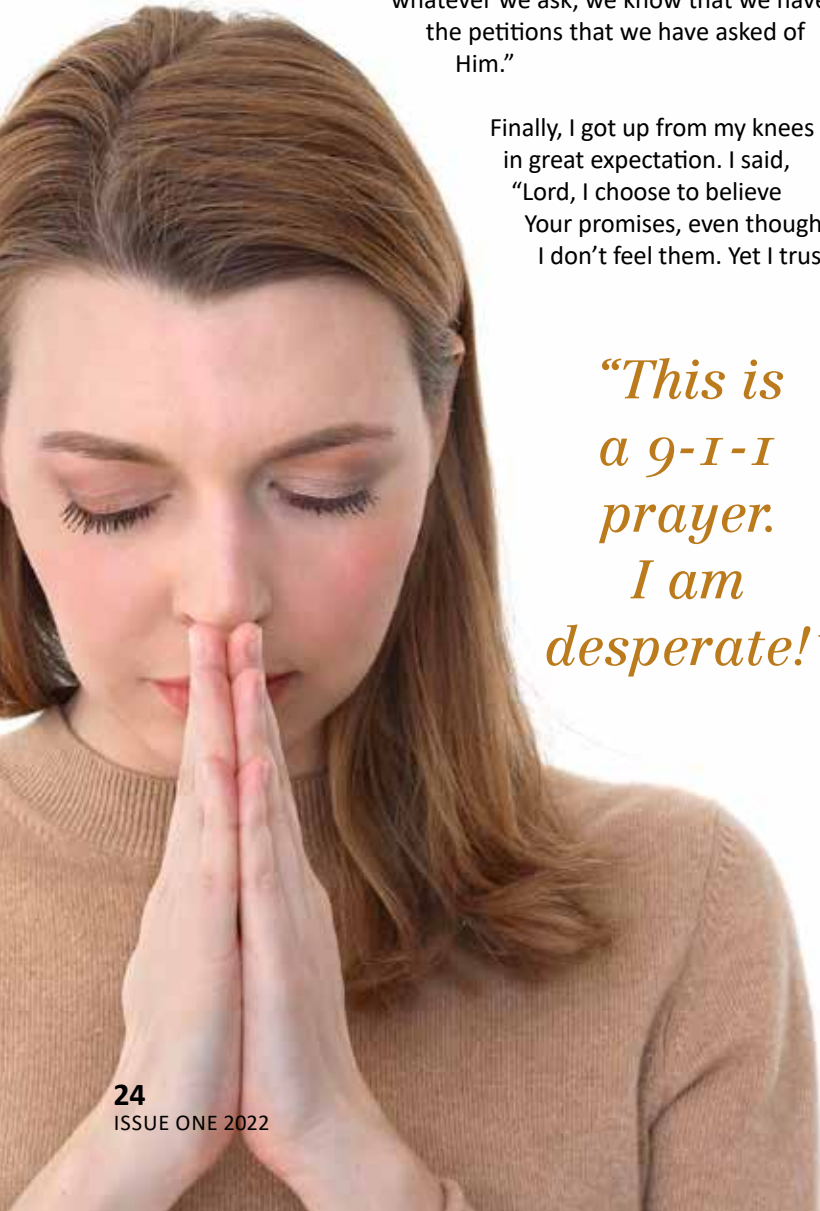
Placing the key farther into the crevice, I heard a click, and that stubborn door opened! It opened!

Racing upstairs, I silently sponged up the water and swept up the shards of glass. By some miracle Keith was still asleep. I put the dustpan down and brushed my shaking hands off. After using the bathroom, I quietly lay down beside him and slept—slept.

Days after, I wondered why it took me so long to find that key and why I hadn’t noticed an opening in the tool chest earlier. Later, I went back to the tool chest. There was no opening between the drawers! There was no space, no place for this key!

Once I had surrendered, God performed a miracle for me. Now every time I go to my son’s home, I visit the garage and look at the tool chest for the opening—or lack of opening. Each time, I am reminded that the key to God’s heart is prayer, unlocking His power into our lives when we ask. It is no longer a cliché to me that there’s no lock He can’t undo, no barrier He can’t get through. ■

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Special Quotes

The Sabbath was not for Israel merely, but for the world. It had been made known to man in Eden, and, like the other precepts of the Decalogue, it is of imperishable obligation.

Of that law of which the fourth commandment forms a part, Christ declares, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law." So long as the heavens and the earth endure, the Sabbath will continue as a sign of the Creator's power. And when Eden shall bloom on earth again, God's holy rest day will be honored by all beneath the sun. "From one Sabbath to another" the inhabitants of the glorified new earth shall go up "to worship before Me, saith the Lord." Matthew 5:18; Isaiah 66:23.

The Desire of Ages, p. 283

Some have made a serious mistake in neglecting to attend the public worship of God. The privileges of divine service will be as beneficial to them as to others, and are fully as essential.

They may be unable to avail themselves of these privileges as often as do many others. Physicians will frequently be called upon the Sabbath to visit the sick and may be obliged to make it a day of exhausting labor. Such labor to relieve the suffering was pronounced by our Saviour a work of mercy and no violation of the Sabbath. But those who regularly devote their Sabbaths to writing or labor making no special change, harm their own souls, give to others an example that is not worthy of imitation, and do not honor God.

Testimonies to the Church, vol. 4, p. 539

In order to keep the Sabbath holy, it is not necessary that we enclose ourselves in walls, shut away from the beautiful scenes of nature and from the free, invigorating air of heaven. We should in no case allow burdens and business transactions to divert our minds upon the Sabbath of the Lord, which He has sanctified. We should not allow our minds to dwell upon things of a worldly character even. But the mind cannot be refreshed, enlivened, and elevated by being confined nearly all the Sabbath hours within walls, listening to long sermons and tedious, formal prayers. The Sabbath of the Lord is put to a wrong use if thus celebrated. The object for which it was instituted is not attained. The Sabbath was made for man, to be a blessing to him by calling his mind from secular labor to contemplate the goodness and glory of God. It is necessary that the people of God assemble to talk of Him, to interchange thoughts and ideas in regard to the truths contained in His word, and to devote a portion of time to appropriate prayer. But these seasons, even upon the Sabbath, should not be made tedious by their length and lack of interest.

Testimonies to the Church, vol. 2, p. 583

My Mess

COULD IT BE THAT GOD CAN BRING A BLESSING FROM OUR MESS?

My life is messy. My house is messy. Dirty dishes are piled up in the sink. Stains smudge the countertop. Half-completed projects are scattered on every flat surface in the house. There is honey on the floor, and somehow I always manage to step in it. Crumbs are my continual companions.

My laundry room is messy, with dirty clothes spilling out of the doorway. Sand and gravel litter the floor from a boy's pair of jeans that have explored the great out-of-doors. Dust hovers around every corner, and spiders make their home there.

My yard is messy. There are dead leaves and forgotten toys scattered around. Abandoned forts and playhouses stand haphazardly around the yard. The grass is overgrown.

My mind is messy too. I can't obtain the words that I need. My thoughts are unorganized. The wrong word seems to find its way out of my mouth first.

I love cleanliness. I love order. But somehow it seems to evade me. I want to have it all together . . . I really do . . . but I don't. I'm tired. I feel like I'm trying really hard. I'm putting lots of energy into life, but it's still messy.

It's so easy to look around at others and conclude that they have it all together. It's easy to assume their lives are perfect. No mistakes. No dirt. No complications. It's a continual temptation to stack myself up next to those around me. And when I do, I come up short every time.

My past is messy too. My life is stained with jealousy, anger, frustration, weakness, and mistakes. I don't have a clean past. It's dirty. I can't even seem to make it through one day clean. I lose my patience far too quickly. I judge too harshly. My pride puffs up in excessive amounts.

I remember the first time a well-meaning person let me know my house was messy. Maybe he thought he was doing me a favor. Maybe he thought I didn't know. And come to think of it, I probably didn't know. But I know *now*. He pointed out the cobwebs behind the curtain in our living room. He was right. There were *lots* of cobwebs and spiders making their home in my home.



It's so easy to look around at others and conclude that they have it all together.

But I felt embarrassed. He was our head elder. I felt small. I felt like a failure. Forever after, I knew that when stacked up against him and his house, I'd failed. The temptation of comparison was immediately embedded into my DNA.

MARY'S MESS

This got me thinking about Mary, Jesus' mother. Mary's life was messy too. She was pregnant before marriage. She was the subject of the hottest gossip. She was viewed as a disgrace. In everyone's eyes, she had messed up. Her mess-up was so bad she should have been killed. No one believed her outrageous story. She was Joseph's second wife. She had stepkids to care for. The lines of her life were disjointed and complicated.

Mary's shelter was messy. No clean sheets. No Febreze. No essential oils. No fancy cooked meal. No holiday cookies baked. No tinsel on the tree.

Mary's delivery day was messy. Bloody, manure-stained. The floors were dirty. No one had mucked the stalls. They were too busy. The stable was messy. It matched her life. Her life was messy. Her dwelling was messy. Her relationships were messy. Her story was messy.


Then Mary became homeless. She and Joseph had to flee in an attempt to save her baby from a jealous king. When she looked around and compared herself to other women, she didn't measure up. She fell short. Her life was so complicated! When she stacked up her life next to the neighbor women, she failed miserably.

I'm sure Mary wanted the perfect life. She wanted cleanliness and order. She wanted clean sheets. She wanted a warm bath. She would have liked the manure removed before she had to give birth to the King of the universe. She wanted perfection. But it kept escaping her. She wanted to have it all together, but it seemed as if everything was falling apart.

And yet from her mess came the greatest blessing the world could, and will, ever know. Out of her mess was born the Savior of the world! This mess, which she wanted to clean up but couldn't, was what brought forth her greatest blessing. Her mess was the bedroom of the greatest gift the world will ever experience. Mary's mess was the starting point of her own salvation.

Could it be that God can bring a blessing from our mess? Is our mess the means by which we receive hope? Does the mess help remind us of our need of a Savior? Stop trying to do better. Instead, rest in the knowledge that God will cover you in grace. God will use you in spite of your mess. God just wants your heart, your willingness.

Could it be that God uses the very mess we want to hide as our greatest blessing and means of reaching others? Oh, I hope so. I hope so because that is all I have to offer. My mess. I offer God my crumbs, my stains, my dirt, my spills, my losses, my mistakes, my mess. I offer what I have. I offer my weakness. I know that's a strange gift, but I give it as a humble offering.

"God, please bless my mess. Will You take my mess as You did Mary's and bring about my greatest blessing? God, will You bless the world around me through my mess?" 

Delinda Hamilton is on the pastoral team in Paradise, California. She is married and has three kids. She lives in a dirty house but prays God can still use her.



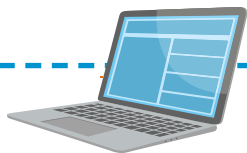
YOUR WEEKLY Birthday Gift!

GOD HAS MADE SABBATH to be like an every-week birthday gift! He wants it to be the most amazing day of our week. Choose a few of these activities to try during the next few months and see which ones you like the best.

CREATION EXPLORATION



- Find something in nature that is an illustration of God's love or character.
- Go on a bug safari. Turn over a decaying log and see how many bugs live underneath.
- Watch a small creature for several minutes and learn what you can about its life. See what it does, what it eats, where it goes, and how it moves.
- Have a nature alphabet walk. Find something that begins with A (ant, acorn, apple) and then something that begins with B (bee, butterfly, branch, bone), and so on.
- Give each person the same page of a paint chart or a handful of paint-chart chips. If you don't have those, cut a strip from a magazine photo that has a range of colors. See how many natural things you can find that match these colors exactly.
- Feel God's world with your bare feet. Walk on different safe surfaces, such as grass, moss, leaves, mud, stones, and sand, and then wash each other's feet.
- Go on a scavenger hunt. Make a list of natural objects you can easily find in your area and take a small bag to put them in. You can look for specific things, or try using broader categories such as something edible, something soft, something heart-shaped, something mentioned in the Bible, etc. Be sure to tear off only tiny parts of leaves or petals so you don't stop the plant from growing and making seeds.



COMPUTER CHALLENGES

- Download the app at SabbathIdeas.org.
- Create a Bible quiz game using Kahoot: kahoot.it/.
- Watch inspiring videos on ignitermedia.com.
- Facetime or Zoom a lonely person or an old friend.
- Make short, inspirational video clips to upload.
- Go Geocaching: geocaching.com. Leave inspiring little gifts in the "treasure boxes."
- Create a Bible puzzle or word search for your family to do.



CREATIVE CRAFTING

- Design, write, and decorate encouraging message cards with Bible verses. Make a stack of them to slip into newspapers, library books, or other places where people will find them.
- Use air-drying clay and make candle lanterns to remind your family that they are lights in the world. Or make items from a Bible story or something that illustrates God's love.
- Draw some beautiful pictures or take photographs to illustrate a Bible verse or a song for your church service.
- Make a Bible verse scrapbook. Let each person choose a Bible verse to print or write by hand, and then decorate the verse with craft materials. Each person can make their own Bible verse scrapbook, and you will learn Bible verses while you do this.
- Make thank-you cards or appreciation cards. Then send a few to people who have helped your family.
- Search the internet for animated Lego Bible stories and find out how to make your own with a video camera or phone.
- Write and decorate a beautiful Bible verse on the pavement or in a park using outdoor chalk. Inspire people passing by.
- Make small gifts to encourage others, such as simple dried lavender bags, Bible verses written with permanent markers on wood slices, etc.
- Find and photograph Christian symbols around your town, such as crosses (look for cross patterns in things that are not specifically crosses), hearts, etc.
- Make a sand, clay, or paper sculpture of a Bible story.

COMPASSIONATE KINDNESS

- Learn sign language from online videos and then sign some Bible verses.
- Find a way to take someone with a disability into a beautiful natural place using a wheelchair, an accessible taxi, etc.
- Sing at a nursing home or visit an elderly person and sing to them.
- Visit a blind person. Read to them and take small gifts they can experience with their other senses, such as food and flowers.
- Deliver home-baked cakes and cookies to a police station or nurses' station in a hospital. Bless those who need to care for others on Sabbath.
- Take a small seasonal gift to each of your neighbors' homes and ask if there is anything you can do to help or anything they would like you to pray about.
- Have a clean-up party at the local park, beach, or beauty spot. Get the right equipment to clean up safely.





MUSICAL MOMENTS

- Get together with friends or church members to sing and play whatever instruments you have.
- Come up with your own actions to your favorite songs.
- Make your own musical instruments from items you have in your home.
- Organize a flash mob in a public place and sing a Christian song; make it intergenerational.
- Create your own music videos or recordings and share them on Facebook or other social media.
- Learn a new children's Bible or praise song from the internet. Explore Paul Field's songs for children: paulfield.bandcamp.com/album/pass-it-on-fit-for-life.



BIBLE BONANZA

- Play Bible Search. Start reading a Bible verse or chapter and see who can be the first to find a designated word.
- Write each book of the Bible on a wooden clothespin. Make several sets and see who can be the fastest to put them in the correct order around a pizza pan or the sides of a cardboard box.
- Rewrite a psalm in modern language or a Bible story as if it were taking place today.
- Imagine you are a person in the Bible; then tell or write your life story.
- Use practical props, such as a bottle of water, a stick, and a feast of food, and lay them out in the order they appear in a Bible passage such as Psalm 23.
- Make Bible story objects out of modeling clay and see if people can guess what they are and which story they are from.
- Buy a colorful play parachute and learn how to use it to tell Bible stories, sing, pray, etc. Then take it into a park and let other people join you. For ideas, see www.throughtheroof.org/shop2/parachute-bible-stories/.
- Create your own Bible game together. ■

Karen Holford loves to help families create delightful Sabbaths that will inspire children to fall in love with God and enjoy His amazing gifts.

East-Central Africa Division

In June 2021 Shepherdesses from Northern Tanzania Union Conference organized evangelistic activities, which included preaching the Word of God, offering health talks, and conducting family life seminars. They also donated blood for sick children and women, distributed books, and visited four retired pastors' families to encourage them and pray with them. At the end of all these activities, 20 souls accepted Jesus through baptism. Thank you for praying for God's work in ECD.



A baptism was held in Northern Tanzania Union Conference.



Shepherdesses in Tanzania visited retired pastors' families.

Southern Asia-Pacific Division

The Shepherdess International chapter at Northeast Luzon Adventist College (NELAC) in Alicia, Isabela, Philippines, met July 31, 2021, and successfully elected officers. They are praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to guide them as they continue to support one another in the challenges of ministry.



A new Shepherdess chapter started in Alicia, Isabela, Philippines.



The Shepherdess International NELAC chapter celebrated a birthday during a choir practice and enjoyed fellowship.



40 DAYS OF PRAYER

FOR THE WORLD AND YOUR MISSION

MAY 3 - JUNE 11, 2022

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