Lessons of warning from Lucifer's rebellion

Jul 19, 2015 12:01 am | Steve Wohlberg

We are told that Satan made war against God in heaven and that he continues to make war upon God’s remnant people on earth (Rev. 12:7, 8, 17). Therefore, it makes sense to examine what happened in heaven long ago, so we can resist the devil’s assaults today.

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Lessons of warning from Lucifer's rebellion

Steve Wohlberg

We are told that Satan made war against God in heaven and that he continues to make war upon God's remnant people on earth (Rev. 12:7, 8, 17). Therefore, it makes sense to examine what happened in heaven long ago, so we can resist the devil's assaults today.

LESSON ONE: WAR BROKE OUT IN HEAVEN

Brothers and sisters, we are at war with Satan and need to “put on the full armor of God” that we “may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). God's people will be defeated if they fail to realize that these are days of battle.

LESSON TWO: SATAN IS REBELLING AGAINST GOD

“The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love" (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 33). Don't miss that key word, rebellion. It is critical to understand that we are fighting forces that are in rebellion against God's love, His law, His will, and His ways.

LESSON THREE: REBELLION INITIATED BY AN INTELLIGENT AND HONORED ANGEL

“Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven” (White, 35). Therefore, we who are weak, fallen, and degenerate are NO MATCH for him who was once highest in power in heaven. Our only hope is to humbly rely on God and His word and “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls” (James 1:21). If we do, we will be “more than conquerors through Him [Jesus] who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

LESSON FOUR: SELF-EXALTATION LEADS TO REBELLION

“Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation … ‘Thine heart was lifted up’” (White, 35). Pride is insidious and those infected by it usually don’t recognize their own sin because it is hard to detect, especially in one’s own heart. It’s easy to think we are right, when in fact, we are wrong. Therefore, in order to discern our own pride, we need a standard with which to compare ourselves. That standard is God's Word, His law, and especially, His loving character revealed in Jesus Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can show us our sin (see John 16:8).

LESSON FIVE: DISCONTENT WITH POSITION GIVEN BY GOD

We are told that Lucifer was not content with his position and “though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator” (White, 35). This was part of Lucifer's sin. Though Lucifer was an angel, he wanted more. Likewise, our Creator has assigned each of us a position in His sight. We should be content with His will because God knows what is best.

LESSON SIX: LUCIFER DISPUTED AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Lucifer’s dispute against the supremacy and the authority of Jesus Christ “[impeached] the wisdom and love of the Creator”, and became “the purpose of this prince of angels” (White, 36). Sadly, Lucifer “was determined never again to acknowledge the authority of Christ” (White, 40-41). Practically speaking, we submit to Jesus Christ's supremacy
and authority when we submit to His word, the Bible. Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (NASB, John 8:31).

LESSON SEVEN: LUCIFER ATTACKS THE SIMPLE WORDS OF GOD

“Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah” (White, 41). Therefore, it is essential that Seventh-day Adventists remain people of the Book. “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms … Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support” (Ellen White, The Great Controversy, 595).

LESSON EIGHT: REBELLION OFTEN PRETENDS LOYALTY

Rebellion against God often conceals itself under a pretense of loyalty to God. “While claiming for himself perfect loyalty to God, he [Satan] urged that changes in the order and laws of heaven were necessary for the stability of the divine government” (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 38). “Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe” (White, 42). This is critical information. “I'm not rebelling,” states the rebel. Our only hope is that we must not be ignorant of his Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

LESSON NINE: EVEN PERFECT ANGELS WERE DECEIVED

“Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer's deceptions … His power to deceive was very great” (White, 38,41). Think about it. If sinless, super-intelligent angels were deceived by “the bewildering sophistry by which rebellion would seek to justify itself” (White, 36), what chance do we have? Again, our only hope is in trusting God and His Word first and foremost. “It is written,” was Christ's method of conquering the devil (see Matthew 4:1-11). This is our safeguard too.

LESSON TEN: LUCIFER SAID HE WAS DEFENDING THE ANGELS’ RIGHTS

Satan positioned himself as defender of angelic rights. “Rejecting with disdain the arguments and entreaties of the loyal angels, he denounced them as deluded slaves. The preference shown to Christ he declared an act of injustice both to himself and to all the heavenly host, and announced that he would no longer submit to this invasion of his rights and theirs … The only course remaining for him and his followers, he said, was to assert their liberty, and gain by force the rights which had not been willingly accorded them” (White, 40).

LESSON ELEVEN: WAVERING ANGELS WERE WARNED

Loyal angels “warned all [angels] to close their ears against Lucifer's deceptive reasoning, and urged him [Lucifer] and his followers to seek the presence of God without delay and confess the error of questioning His wisdom and authority” (White, 40). None of us — not even pastors, administrators or even those with doctorate degrees in theology — are a match for Lucifer’s mind. Therefore, some books should never be read and some people should never be reasoned with. At times, we should close our ears “to escape from the snare of the devil” (2 Timothy 2:26). One of Eve's first mistakes was talking to the snake in the tree.

Suffer not yourselves to open the lids of a book that is questionable. There is a hellish fascination in the literature of Satan. It is the powerful battery by which he tears down a simple religious faith. Never feel that you are strong enough to read infidel books; for they contain a poison like that of asps … In reading them, you are inhaling the miasmas of hell. (Ellen White, Fundamentals of Christian Education, 93).

LESSON TWELVE: GOD BORE LONG BUT PRIDE RUINED LUCIFER
Infinite wisdom showed Lucifer his error, but his pride ruined him. "In great mercy, according to His divine character, God bore long with Lucifer … such efforts as infinite love and wisdom only could devise, were made to convince him of his error … Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong … He nearly reached the decision to return, but pride forbade him" (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 39). Friends, if God shows us our error, we must humble ourselves and forsake that error forever, no matter the sacrifice.

LESSON THIRTEEN: WHEN UNITY WAS IMPOSSIBLE

When a third of the angels finally settled permanently on Lucifer’s side, unity with them was impossible because unity must be based on truth (see John 17:17,21). Paul asks us 2 Corinthians 6:14, "What communion does light have with darkness?" The obvious answer is none.

LESSON FOURTEEN: EVERY ONE IS A PARTICIPANT

Once every angel became settled, either on God’s side, or on Lucifer’s side, war resulted, and every angel was involved. “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought” (Revelation 12:7). Significantly, it was not God alone against Lucifer and his comrades; but holy angels engaged in battle too. "Michael and his angels fought." The same is true today. God's people must decidedly resist every satanic attempt to undermine God’s remnant movement and His Three Angels’ Messages (Revelation 14:6-12). Neutrality is impossible. False charity is a mistake. We must actively stand for truth.

LESSON FIFTEEN: GOD'S PEOPLE EMPLOY GOD'S METHODS

“God could employ only such means as were consistent with truth and righteousness. Satan could use what God could not — flattery and deceit” (White, 42). In our efforts to counter Satan’s falsehoods, we must practice the truth, speak the truth, live the truth, and reveal Jesus Christ's love for sinners. Empowered by His pardoning grace, true commandment-keepers must love God, and their neighbors as themselves (Matthew 22:36-40). If we ourselves manifest hard-heartedness, coldness and pride, we reflect the devil, no matter what we profess. Then we too must repent, before it is too late. Remember, "The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love" (White, 33). Jesus wants us to reflect that love which led Him to sacrifice His very life for “the sins of the whole world” to save sinners (see John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

THE LAST CAMPAIGN IS YET TO COME

"The enemy is preparing for his last campaign against the church. He has so concealed himself from view that many can hardly believe that he exists, much less can they be convinced of his amazing activity and power. They have to a great extent forgotten his past record; and when he makes another advance move, they will not recognize him as their enemy, that old serpent, but they will consider him a friend, one who is doing a good work" (5T, 294). It already happened in heaven. Those deceived by Lucifer thought the devil was their best friend. Such misguided confidence destroyed them. "Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict" (Prophets and Kings, 725).

The signs of the times reveal that this “final conflict” is upon us. May God humble us, forgive us, purify us, clothe us in Christ's righteousness, and then use us as polished instruments to lift Jesus and save souls, before earth's last sunset.
In the Ark: Aaron's rod that budded and the jar of manna

Elizabeth Iskander

The ark of the covenant was the most sacred object in the sanctuary. It was a wooden box overlain with gold, with a solid gold cover called the mercy seat, onto which were affixed two sculptures of cherubim with their wings overshadowing the ark (Ex. 25:10-22; 37:1-9). The visible manifestation of God's presence, the Shekinah Glory hovered just above the Ark, between the cherubim. The ark was placed inside the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies, a square room on the west end of the sanctuary that was entered only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest came in to sprinkle the blood of the Lord's goat onto the mercy seat, to make atonement for the people and to cleanse the sanctuary (Lev. 16; Heb. 9:6-7).

The extreme sacredness of the ark is illustrated by the story of Uzzah, who though forbidden by God, was struck dead for touching the ark, (Deut. 10:8; Num. 4:15; 2 Sam. 6:6-7). In another instance, seventy men of Beth-Shemesh were slain for looking inside the ark (1 Sam. 6:19).

Among the contents of the ark, Seventh-day Adventists emphasize the stone tablets upon which God had inscribed the Ten Commandments. Adventists emphasize this because in the middle of the Ten Commandments is the Fourth Commandment.

OTHER CONTENTS IN THE ARK

However, the stone tablets of the law were not the only contents of the ark. There was also Aaron's rod that budded and a golden jar containing manna (Heb. 9:4; Num. 17:10; Ex. 16:32-34). Scripture teaches that the earthly sanctuary and temple were types and shadows of a heavenly original (Heb. 8:5; 9:11; Ex. 26:30; Acts 7:44; Rev. 4:5; 8:3; 11:19). In vision, Ellen White clearly saw the heavenly temple as well as the contents of the ark itself.

In the ark was the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of stone which folded together like a book. Jesus opened them, and I saw the Ten Commandments written on them with the finger of God. (White, Early Writings, p. 32)

Though many amazing and memorable things happened during Israel's founding, none were given the astonishing prominence of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod and the jar of manna that were placed in the ark of the covenant. Therefore, we ought to carefully study the principles these items represent.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that the law of God carries a continuing obligation for the Christian church. In fact, that was the main lesson of Ellen White's vision of the Ten Commandments in the ark. We understand our continuing obligation when we read Ellen White "saw that the Sabbath commandment was not nailed to the cross. If it was, the other nine commandments were; and we are at liberty to break them all, as well as to break the fourth. I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for He never changes. But the pope had changed it from the seventh to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws [Dan. 7:25]" (Early Writings 32).

Do Aaron's rod that budded and the golden jar of manna also symbolize the Christian church's continuing obligation to the principles taught through these symbols? I think they do.

Aaron's rod that budded

The story of Aaron's rod budding is told in Numbers 17, but we learn the background in the previous chapter, where we read of the rebellion of Korah (a Levite), and Dathan and Abiram (Reubenites). These men, along with 250 leaders in Israel, challenged Moses and Aaron's leadership: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy,
every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?” (Num. 16:1-3). Although Korah was a Levite and a Kohathite, he was not content with the Levites' role in administering the sanctuary but wanted to be a priest (Num. 16:8-11). Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, but they refused to come (Num. 16:12-15). However, when Moses commanded Korah and the 250 leaders to appear with censors filled with coal and incense at the entrance to the sanctuary court yard, they came. God sent fire from heaven to burn them up, while the ground opened to swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families, tents, and property (Num. 16:16-35). The 250 bronze censors were then collected and made into a covering for the altar, as a memorial warning against disobeying God's sovereign choice for the priesthood (Num. 16:36-40).

IN SPITE OF GOD’S JUDGEMENTS, THE PEOPLE REMONSTRATED MOSES

Unfortunately, God’s astonishing supernatural intervention had not ended the rebellion. Despite the clearly supernatural nature of the deaths of the rebels, the next day the people blamed Moses, saying, “you have killed the Lord's people.” God then sent a plague on the people, killing 14,700. God allowed Moses to stop the plague, by carrying a censor with incense through the throng (Num. 16:41-50).

God then told Moses to get twelve staffs, one from each tribe, with the leader of each tribe to write his name on his staff. The staff of Levi was to be inscribed with Aaron's name. The twelve staffs were to be placed in front of the ark of the covenant.

“The staff belonging to the man I choose, God said, I will sprout.” So Moses carried out these instructions. The next day Moses saw that Aaron's staff had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. God then commanded that Aaron's rod be kept with the ark of the covenant as a perpetual reminder against rebellion (Num. 17:1-11).

We know that the stories in the Old Testament were preserved for our admonition, “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:10-11; Rom. 15:4). Korah's rebellion was against God's choice on ordination. Korah claimed that “the whole people are holy,” and eligible for sacred office. The contemporary application is obvious: In the Adventist Church today, many are pushing female ordination even though the ordained office of elder/gospel minister is clearly restricted to men (1 Tim. 2:11-3:7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Cor. 11:3; 14:34). I am not the first to draw a parallel between the rebellion of Korah and the movement to ordain women; three years ago Stephen Bohr issued a booklet, “Reflections on Women’s Ordination,” which made the same comparison. But the shoe fits.

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS, YET NOT ALL CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Note that the Korahites' claim that “the whole community is holy, every one of them” was not wrong. Israel was indeed to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). And today's proponents of female ordination are not wrong when they discuss the priesthood of the Christian believer (1 Peter 2:9). But just as God had ordained the descendants of Aaron for the priesthood in Israel's "kingdom of priests," so He has ordained male leadership in the Christian church, notwithstanding the priesthood of all believers. Male elders are to lead the church at all levels. They should be chosen according to the Biblical standard. Elders should spend time listening to all members, especially the women. They may delegate any task to women, including pastoring (shepherding) churches under the authority of male ministers.

The golden jar of manna

The jar of manna was placed in the ark for several reasons, including the reminder to Israel that God had miraculously provided for them during the forty years in the desert. “Let an omer of [manna] be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 16:32).
But the wider context of Exodus 16 makes clear that the manna is also symbolic of God trying to move Israel toward a more healthful lifestyle. The manna was given to Israel after they had been grumbling and hankering after the “fleshpots of Egypt” (Ex. 16:1-3).

**VICTORY OVER APPETITE STILL NEEDED TODAY**

The lesson of victory over appetite was a difficult one for Israel. In Numbers 11, we again find Israel grumbling against the manna and once again longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, for meat to eat (Num. 11:4-6, 13). God acceded to Israel's wailing for meat and caused a wind to blow quail from the coast, landing in the Israelite camp to a depth of three feet. Sadly, everyone gorged on meat, and their indulgence of appetite led to a plague that took the lives of many (Num. 11:18-34).

Despite our obligation to make continual progress in overcoming appetite, the Adventist Church is not progressing. While should now be moving from a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet to a vegan diet, we are actually going the other way. I was troubled to see one of the flagship Southern California churches begin to serve meat to the young adults at Friday Night pre-vespers meals. (When the youth pastor who began this policy moved to another church, this practice ceased.)

Even vegetarian potlucks, a bedrock Adventist sub-cultural expectation, cannot always be counted on. In the June, 2015, Adventist World, there is an article entitled “Potlucks, Fun or Fury?” by Landless & Handysides in which one of their readers asked:

I travel quite a lot, and it's a pleasure to visit SDA churches in different places. I'm disturbed, however, that potluck lunches vary so widely—not so much culturally, but with vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods. Does the church have guidelines on this?

**NEED FOR CHANGE**

The authors note that although in 2007 the church adopted a working policy that advocates vegetarianism, there is no voted policy regarding potluck meals.

We need to vote such a policy, and make sure that churches have the resources and education to present appetizing vegetarian potlucks. “Planning Fellowship Meals” by the General Conference Nutrition Council is one helpful resource.

Moreover, the fundamental belief on lifestyle issues, number 22, needs to be changed from “... we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures” to “... we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible, abstaining from flesh foods in areas where adequate plant-based protein is readily available.” In the commentary section, it must be made clear that church-sponsored meals and fellowship dinners are to be free of flesh foods.

In previous article, I pointed out that the science of meat eating is conclusive, however, meat eating is not just a health issue. In 9 Testimonies, page 156, Ellen White warns that those who will not heed the inspired counsel on vegetarianism will grow careless on other issues, and ultimately lose the ability to perceive present truth:

If we could be benefited by indulging the desire for flesh foods, I would not make this appeal to you; but I know we cannot. Flesh foods are injurious to the physical well-being, and we should learn to do without them. Those who are in a position where it is possible to secure a vegetarian diet, but who choose to follow their own preferences in this matter, eating and drinking as they please, will gradually grow careless of the instruction the Lord has given regarding other phases of the present truth and will lose their perception of what is truth; they will surely reap as they have sown. 9T 156.3
When will God's remnant recognize the significance of the fact that, even today in the heavenly sanctuary, Aaron's rod and the golden pot of manna are still in the ark? When will they understand that these items stand as eternal reminders that God's choice of spiritual leadership must be respected, and that appetite must be overcome? Like the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod and the manna will be relevant until the end of time.
Church needs women ministering to women

Nandipa

My name is not Nandipa, but that may be the name under which you have heard my story. To most people, I am nameless, just a girl who went through a horrendous experience at the hands of Dr. Samuel Pipim. But today I am not writing to appeal for help for myself. I write on behalf of hundreds of thousands of women like me.

Five years ago when I first became a Seventh-day Adventist, I was plagued by grief and nightmares because even though I'd been converted and baptized, I struggled with understanding how God could forgive me for past sins. I was searching for understanding and when I heard Pipim speak, I was touched by the power and eloquence of his sermons. I was convinced that this was a mighty man of God and believing he could counsel me about how to deal with the guilt of my past, I approached him for help. He appeared to understand and suggested that we meet at his hotel room where he said he was counseling others. There he sexually violated me, keeping me overnight against my will, and in the morning violating me a second time.

At first I was paralyzed with shock and horror. However, after some time, I spoke to a pastor about what had happened. He told me to remain silent so I would not damage the work God was achieving through this mighty evangelist. He said that according to Matthew 18, I must write to my abuser, and that the matter was to be handled solely between Pipim and myself. I took this pastor's advice and when I approached Pipim he told me God had appointed him to be my spiritual father for the rest of my life. He told me that only by remaining in constant contact with him would I receive deliverance from depression and suicidal thoughts I was experiencing. He promised he would be there for the rest of my life. He called me his “baby eagle” and his “little girl,” all the while weaving sermons, scriptures and spiritual insights into his letters and calls. During this time, he continually assured me of his love and prayers on my behalf.

Now when I read his letters, I am angry at his betrayal of trust. I see how he used clever, manipulative tactics to silence me and keep me under his emotional control. But at that time, I was too weak to recognize his continued abuse and to understand what was happening to me. I know it may be hard for some to understand why I could not recognize the abusive nature of this man. But I was a traumatized young woman going through intense suffering. I found it easier to believe that somehow my exploiter was a godly man who perhaps made a momentary mistake. I was incapable of imagining that he was in fact a serial sexual abuser posing as a minister of the gospel. It felt unreal. I believed he was my only help.

Everyone respected Pipim. Where once I had been a “nobody” struggling to understand how God could ever forgive my past, I had been noticed by him and was now valued and loved by this mighty man of God. In the aftermath of the sexual violation, it was easier for me to put the puzzle pieces together in a less painful way than to experience the pain of reality. The easiest path was to believe Pipim and therefore I convinced myself that things were all right now. All I needed to do was to forgive and forget and seek to accept God’s love that my abuser kept assuring me was flowing through him to me, because I was his spiritual daughter.

BUT THE AGONY OF LIVING IN DENIAL ATE ME LIKE ACID

In the midst of my darkest despair, when I longed to die, I found courage enough to write to a godly woman on the other side of the world. I had heard her sermons, messages of hope, and I desperately wanted to break away from my chains of hopelessness. Through this woman’s ministry, I was put in touch with others who worked closely to help me break free.
I gained courage enough to speak to conference leaders about Pipim’s assault, but blinded by his public persona, they would not believe me. By this time, I knew that what Pipim had done to me, he had done to others, and I feared and believed he would do it again. Therefore, I wanted to spare other young girls the pain I had experienced at the hands of this man. Trembling, I recorded him the next time he called.

And now finally, after hearing Pipim’s telephone conversation, conference leaders took action and he was forced to resign and lost his credentials. Through the successive months and years, I have continued to try to put my life back together, and have been deeply blessed by the support and counsel I have received from women (and some men) on the other side of the world. Sadly however, Pipim continues to promote himself as a mighty spiritual leader—even though we now know of several other women he has sexually violated, and have reports of other attempts. Like most victims of sexual abuse, I have never received any acknowledgement of remorse from my abuser for what he did to me.

However, through these experiences and the pain I continue to suffer, I have learned deep lessons. Indeed, my faith has been tried severely, and I still struggle because of the assaults, but I know by God’s grace I can make it through anything now, and that God’s kingdom is not far away. Someday my battle will be over, and I will hear “well done.”

I hope to go to Andrews University to do a master’s program, to make a new start and to become a better communicator. As a woman who has suffered abuse, I want to empower other women to identify abuse and understand how to break free from its cycles of pain. I know these are lofty dreams for a little African girl, but with God it may be possible.

I AM ONLY ONE PERSON

I believe women in Africa and around the world need to hear about the liberating gospel for women. Therefore our church must also recognize the plight of abused women and respond to a need for change. The testimonies you hear about the glorious ways that the gospel is spreading like wildfire throughout Africa are true. But you must understand the rest of the story too.

We desperately need a system within our church for women to minister to women. This is especially true in areas like Africa and Asia, where we women are under male authority for almost every aspect of our lives. In fact, nearly everything we do first requires men’s permission. Those who do not live in the African culture probably cannot understand this. In cultures like mine, our fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands make the big decisions (and often even the small ones) for us. Pastors and men who are older than a woman are given spiritual authority over all females, from birth to old age. It means that when men tell us to do something our cultural background leaves us with little choice but to do what we are told. This is partially why I was so vulnerable to Pipim’s continued abuse after the initial incident.

This must change. All women in my culture who suffer under the authority of abusive men need to be educated that first and foremost we are morally responsible to God. And we need to be equipped with understanding and skills. We need to know how we can make our communities safe for our daughters. We need to learn how to teach our sons to be loving and respectful to their wives, daughters and sisters. We need to be able to minister to other women.

It is true, my life has changed and I will survive. But, I will do more than that. I will break free and thrive. No matter how long my struggle continues, I am not going to let this drag me down. However, I recognize this is in large part due to the expertise of a few women living on the other side of the ocean, who helped me at no cost, investing huge amounts of their time. These women talked to me and walked me through biblical healing. To this day, some of them continue to pray with me and remain in contact, still helping me in my journey for healing.

Therefore, I am compelled to help other women like me. Tens of thousands of women within our church are afraid to
come forward about a sexual assault because of the shame—and even re-victimization—they may suffer. Often even sympathetic and willing pastors are not trained to help us in our crises, and due to cultural pressures, few are willing to confront their friends. It is unspeakably difficult to talk to anyone about such anguish, but it is especially hard to confide in a man. And even if we are willing to talk to someone, can we safely go to men? Is it possible that broken and vulnerable women put men, who are empowered with authority, in positions of temptation to lust when we come to them for protection?

As a church, we must look at the larger picture of how desperately women need other women to minister to them. The issue of sexual assault is only one of many. Women in troubled marriages need other women to come alongside them. Women facing depression need other women to pray with them and encourage them. While all of us are called to minister to others, some forms of ministry require training and time. Should trained women work with no remuneration?

We need a system by which women can be equipped and qualified to help other women in deep personal pain. We need a system by which those women in pain can find help from trained women counselors. We need to pay these counselors, and empower them to stop the men who are abusing women. We need women in ministry to teach us from birth. Women need to learn how to think, how to recognize abuse and how to walk with God. Either we need to modify our present system of putting people into ministry, or we need to set up a new one. And with the epidemic of pornography and sexual addiction sweeping the world, the women of the world cannot wait any longer.

Hundreds of thousands of African, South American, Asian and other women around the world suffer intensely. I know. My life would have been so different if I had had a woman in ministry to whom I could have turned when I was first struggling with the guilt of sin in my life. I would never have entered that hotel room and I would never have allowed the continued abuse. I would not have been trapped with only men in ministry to whom I could turn.

We must focus on what matters. Not on a ceremony that sets a person apart for authority over others, but on setting up a system that enables ministry to the women and girls of our church to break the shackles of abuse, and find emotional healing and freedom. What can we do as a church to set women aside to minister to women? How can we train and empower them for service?

These are the questions upon which the salvation of hundreds of thousands of your African, Asian and other sisters depend. Silence nearly cost me my life. It was godly women who cared about what happened to me, a little African girl, and godly women spoke on my behalf. Today, I plead with you. Do not remain silent any longer. Do not turn your back on our need.

**Related articles**
Creation wording strengthened in fundamental belief number six

Rich Constantinescu

On July 6 the Fundamental Beliefs (FB) Committee of the General Conference, led by Artur Stele and Angel Rodriguez, moved to revise Adventist fundamental beliefs 6 and 8 on creation and the great controversy. The proposed amendment was intended to more clearly communicate the Adventist understanding of creation, not to change it.

There were several significant changes in the revised version of FB 6, which also related to FB 8 in its wording about the biblical flood.

The original wording for FB 6 read:

"God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made 'the heaven and the earth' and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was 'very good,' declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)"

The newly proposed wording for FB 6 read:

"God is the Creator of all things. He has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. In a recent six-day creation the Lord made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His creative work, performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-2; 5; 11; Ex. 20:1-8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; 2 Isa. 45:12; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.)"

The original wording of the related part of FB 8 read:

"This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood."

The newly proposed wording for FB 8 read:

"He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11."

Stele said the new statement now quoted the fourth commandment.

"[This] is important for theological considerations of chapter 1 in Genesis," Stele said, "because it allows two different interpretations of understanding of Genesis 1:1."

Stele then said he would like to move these fundamental beliefs and open them for discussion.

North American Division (NAD) representative Lawrence Geraty was waiting at the microphone to speak. Geraty
said he had been a delegate at the Dallas General Conference (GC) session in 1980 when the fundamental beliefs were first adopted.

“The editors have been especially successful in employing gender-neutral language,” Geraty said, “so all Adventist believers feel included . . . A few changes, however, appear to be designed to exclude, and some of these are found in number 6, on creation, at the bottom of page 54. Certainly all the delegates hold the Bible to be our authority.”

Referencing FB 1, which says the Bible is our creed, Geraty said the proposed wording for the creation statement was non-biblical.

“There are interpretations that have been inserted,” Geraty said, “interpretations that are possible, and may even be right, because they come from the writings of Ellen White, but they are not from the Bible.”

Geraty expressed concern these changes open us challenge and charge by critics, that we base our beliefs on Ellen White, and not on the Bible.

Geraty used his time up and was asked by the chair to conclude.

NAD representative Ray Hartwell spoke next and referred the statement back to the committee to include the following change.

“[After] ‘He has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity,’” Hartwell suggested the statement include, “‘God created the universe including the angels and unfallen worlds. Later in a recent six day creation, the Lord made this world’s dominions . . .’”

“In article eight on line 28,” Hartwell said, “when it speaks of the world-wide flood as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11, I would like to recommend to the committee if this is referred back, to use the word global either in conjunction with world wide, or in place of world wide.”

“There are certain Bible scholars that identify worldwide as being only the world the Bible writer knew of in their own personal experience, but not a global flood,” Hartwell said.

Stele requested that instead of using parliamentary rules, that the delegates comments be heard, and then by common consent, the motion be brought back after the committee had worked on it.

Trans-European Division (TED) representative Megan Mole shared some grammatical concerns.

“In line number 40 we have the phrase ‘the same unit of time that we call a week today.’ And I find that language grammatically and for the purposes of clarity problematic,” she said. “For example in Japan in 2011 with the massive earthquake, we found that scientifically, a day was actually shortened by 3 seconds as a result of that earthquake, so I mean, comparatively for such a small event if we could imagine a global, a worldwide flood, how much more impact could that have on the length day or the length of hours or that sort of thing.”

Soon afterward, GC representative Jiri Moscala spoke.

“I am convinced that our theology and our church stands or falls on the creation doctrine,” Moscala said.

He made three suggestions to the motion.

“First, the first three sentences, in this fundamental belief give the impression that God is the Creator of all things at once,” Moscala said. “Namely that He created the entire universe together with life on earth. However, we as Seventh-day Adventists strongly believe that the Great Controversy originated before the Creation week of Genesis 1 . . . Second, it would be helpful to clarify more what does it mean that God created all things . . . Three, it would be very useful to explain that the phrase, the heavens and the earth, and the sea, refer to this world’s three domains,
and that this text is not speaking about the whole universe.”

Next, TED representative Willem Altink expressed opposition to the creation statements. He claimed there was danger in accepting anything but the Bible as our creed, that from the point of mission, we might make it too strict for people to come to Christ.

“Give room for the believers’ growth, and give room for the Spirit,” Altink said.

Altink cautioned that accepting the changes would exclude members who are very loyal to the church, although they agree with the present wording.

GC representative Richard Davidson followed and spoke in favor of the motion.

“Brother Chair, I would simply like to support the three suggestions made by my colleague Dr. Moskala,” Davidson said. “I believe that the quotation of the fourth commandment without any further explanation could be understood by any outside the church, as referring to the creation of the whole universe in six literal days. And this would leave no room for the great controversy occurring before creation week as is clear in many other biblical passages. Thank you.”

NAD representative Jerilyn Burtch followed, opposing the motion to revise the beliefs.

“Ellen White says, ‘The Bible is given for practical purposes,’” Burtch said. “Knowing the questions that we’d be facing today, God let Scripture go to press without a clear statement that the creation week was the same unit of time that we call a week today. There is no ‘thus saith the Lord’ on this point . . .”

GC representative John Bradshaw stood next on the microphone.

“It clearly outlines what we believe as a church . . . I look at the Fundamental Belief number six and I say, we believe that,” said Bradshaw. “I read it again and I say, this is what my church teaches.”

GC representative Lloyd Gibson spoke next in support of replacing the word “global” with the word “worldwide” in FB 8.

“I believe that if we are to give the message of creation with a loud voice,” Gibson said, “as Revelation 14 says, our witness must be clear, without ambiguity.”

Inter-European Division (IED) representative Jeroen Tuinstra’s question was next.

“What do we mean with the word ‘recent’,” Tuinstra said. “Is this six thousand, fifty thousand, or one billion, or what do we mean with the word ‘recent’?”

He then implied that many Adventist scientists and educators would be excluded by taking this action with the beliefs about creation.

“Are we saying that the whole cosmos was created in six days?” Tuinstra said.

Stele replied to Tuinstra’s point.

“In order not to say that the whole cosmos was created in the six days,” Stele said, “we have changed the quotation from Genesis 1:1 to the quotation from the fourth commandment.”

Discussion was then closed for the lunch break.

In the afternoon there were several more objections to the specifications proposed to the fundamental beliefs.
Trans-Europe Division representative Stefan Sigg said he did not believe the beliefs should be a measurement or a tool to persecute or to evaluate others and cited J. N. Loughborough in 1861, speaking against creeds as support.

Eventually, after a few more comments from the delegates, Leroy Chacon moved to close debate. It was seconded and passed.

The responses of the assembly to the motion of the committee were heard and the committee received the item back to deliberate.

Tuesday morning the committee came back with the revised wording for FB 6. Ella Simmons was serving as chair to the assembly and Bill Knott presented the proposed revision of the amendment to the delegation. The amendment read:

“God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of his creative activity. He created the universe and in a recent six-day creation, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the Seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work he performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-2; 5; 11; Ex. 20:1 8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; 2 Isa. 45:12; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.)"

Bill Knott recapped the changes that had been made, and then Artur Stele moved to accept the revised amendment to FB 6. His motion was seconded.

President Ted Wilson then spoke in favor of the amendment.

“This particular version that has now come to you is one that I personally very much endorse,” Wilson said, “and I hope that we will vote this wording . . . I would very much support number six as it has been presented, but that is up to you . . .”

South Pacific Division representative James Standish spoke in support of the revised amendment, saying it is indefensible for Seventh-day Adventists to observe a literal seventh day.

"If the first six days weren't literal days, why on earth do we rest on a literal seventh day?" Standish said.

NAD representative Marvin Brae joked that he was hesitant to appear to disagree with the motion because his conference president was sitting nearby.

"[I'm] troubled by the inclusion of the word 'recent' in there," said Brae, “The bottom line . . . is that we can word these any way we want to, but when we go home we’re all going to interpret it and teach it, according to our interpretations.”

General Conference representative Kathryn Proffitt rose in support and shared a personal testimony.

“My child, my son,” Proffitt said, “attended a Seventh-day Adventist university as a biology major. He left as an atheist because of confusion over this issue. There was confusion with respect to science versus what the Bible says, and I praise God that He does not have to operate in terms of how empirical science humanly defines creation. It really is important when we talk about words like ‘recent,’ or ‘literal days.’ To me it’s clear that, [although] I don’t know about the seconds, or the exact hours . . . ‘even to even’ means sunset to sunset. I also believe that it is important to so many of our other fundamental beliefs. If God could not speak our life into existence, how can he recreate us instantly? So I think it is so important that we as a church clarify for not only the world, but also for our teachers and professors so they know clearly where we stand. I’ve never seen greater integrity among some of the
professors. This is really a point I think of confusion as to what our church teaches and this motion clarifies it according to the Bible principles."

Afterwards, GC representative Clifford Goldstein spoke in support of the motion.

“Yeah, there have been some comments regarding why we need to be so specific with the language,” Goldstein said, “And yet, it’s very important I think most of us realize that this issue didn’t arise in a vacuum. For decades now, there has been an attempt, one way or another, to try to bring into our church an ideology that is completely, totally, foreign, and alien to everything biblical, every biblical principle! And that’s why Dr. Rodriguez was very clear what we were dealing here. We are purposely doing this to exclude evolution. I mean, we take the name Seventh-day Adventist! Is it too much to ask people who take the name Seventh-day Adventist to actually believe the name that you take for yourself? I mean is that a little too hard?”

East-Central Africa Division representative Israel Coffiero favored the motion.

“My children are going to be safe, because evolution has been taking a big toll on our schools,” Coffiero said, “The word ‘recent’ is necessary, and for that reason.”

He called question on the motion to end debate and vote to accept the changes.

The motion to end debate was seconded, voted, and carried. Then a vote was taken on the main motion to amend FB 6 with the proposed wording and it was overwhelmingly carried.
Good morning, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ! God has greatly blessed in allowing us the privilege to worship together in San Antonio on this last Sabbath morning of the 60th General Conference session. We come from all parts of the globe. People filled with the Holy Spirit and ready to proclaim the three angels' messages with greater power as we learn from Jesus everyday what it means to be His followers, united this morning as God's great Advent movement and spiritual family. We thank the Lord for the ways He has led this General Conference Session during the last ten days, and we give Him all the glory for the unity and singleness of purpose in accomplishing His mission for this dying earth.

As I stated five years ago, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's remnant movement made up of those who, according to Revelation 12:17, keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ; and we are on a heaven-directed journey. We must “Go Forward, Not Backward” because we are almost home! I am more convinced than ever that Jesus’ return is near, even at the door! Our session theme song that has served us well for so many years, "We Have this Hope," proclaims the great expectation of Seventh-day Adventists all around the world—Jesus is coming soon! “Jesus viene pronto!” (Spanish), “Jesus revien bientot!” (French), Brehvee Jesus voltara! (Portuguese), Yesu ama-kuja kari-buni sana! (Swahili), Isus prediot skora! (Russian), Yesu-knee-me….Kgauld….O shim-knee-dah! (Korean), Ha-anah-hti—seriahn! (Arabic), Yesu zhai-llie! (Chinese), Yesu jelldee eye-gah! (Hindi), Si Haysus eye mah-lah-pit nang dum-ting! (Tagalog), and in so many other languages of the world we share those words of encouragement and hope. It's the great theme of this 2015 General Conference Session: "Arise! Shine! Jesus Is Coming!"

We long for Jesus’ return, but why are we still here? For some time, Jesus has longed to come back. We have no more time prophecies, those ended in 1844 with the beginning of the investigative judgment. At this very moment, Christ is ministering for us in the most holy place of a real sanctuary in heaven. He wants to pour out the latter rain of the Holy Spirit upon His people to finish His work on this earth. He longs for us to humble ourselves before Him and lean completely upon His everlasting arms. He wants us to share His good news of salvation that we are saved by grace, and that not of ourselves lest we should boast, but it is a gift of God as we read in Ephesians 2:8-9. As we share His righteousness of justification and sanctification that works in us, "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" as Philippians 2:13 tells us. As we share that the work that He has begun He, “will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” as Philippians 1:6 states, but we are Laodicean and need to humble ourselves before the Lord and buy of Him, as instructed in Revelation 3:18, “gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

Yes, Lord, take us, mold us, make us and fill us. Revive and reform us through your daily sanctifying power as we read your Holy Word, your Spirit of Prophecy and earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit in our lives. Yes, Revival and Reformation for this new quinquennium, and until the end of probation. “Revival and Reformation—You, Your Family, Your Church, Your Community.” We want this experience through the blood and grace of Jesus Christ and a daily walk with Him. We want to go home!

We know the signs of Matthew 24 and realize political challenges are now beyond the control of most governments today. Economic conditions are fragile and untrustworthy, natural disasters are increasing in intensity and destruction, social changes are challenging the very Word of God, ecumenism is rapidly growing in its false, non-biblical and neutralizing influence on society and yet we are still here. But God says, “Arise! Shine!” He is telling
us to be powerful testimonies of Christ’s marvelous message to this chaotic world indicating that the great controversy is about to close and Jesus will return for His people! Three times in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, Revelation 22:7, 12 and 20, Jesus Himself says, “I am coming quickly.” Lord, we want to go home! We want to cross over the Jordan River to the Promised Land. Open the way before us. Take us through the water. We place our trust completely in you. Lead us through the raging Jordan to our everlasting home and don’t let us retreat.

Help us to fully depend on you for every need in spite of the temptation to retreat. You are our Rock and Salvation. Help us to cross the Jordan and not retreat!

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 34:1-5. “Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land. Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.’ So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.”

Moses was so close and yet so far. The Bible indicates that when Moses died, God Himself buried him. We know that God raised Moses back to life and took him to heaven as an example of those who will die in Christ and be raised through His reviving power of His second coming trumpet sound.

About a year ago, it was a privilege to stand on Mount Nebo and look out at the vast plains below, north towards the Sea of Galilee, across the Jordan River to Jericho, southward to the Dead Sea. It was a thrilling experience to realize that God spoke to Moses there and let him see the future history of Israel’s ups and downs—their revived commitment to God and their falling away back into self-centered and idolatrous practices. He saw their subjection to foreign powers. He saw Jesus coming as a baby and His wonderful, perfect life and ministry. He saw the agony in Gethsemane, the betrayal, the beatings and the crucifixion. Patriarchs and Prophets, page 475-476, says, “…his heart was wrung with anguish, and bitter tears fell from his eyes, in sympathy with the sorrow of the Son of God… Grief, indignation, and horror filled the heart of Moses as he viewed the hypocrisy and satanic hatred manifested by the Jewish nation against their Redeemer… He saw the last great struggle of earthly powers to destroy those who keep God’s law… He saw the second coming of Christ in glory…” Then he saw the new earth... the Promised Land more beautiful than anything that was spread out before him. Patriarchs and Prophets, page 477, describes it this way, “With joy unutterable Moses looks upon the scene—the fulfillment of a more glorious deliverance than his brightest hopes have ever pictured. Their earthly wanderings forever past, the Israel of God have at last entered the goodly land.”

Let’s go to Mt. Nebo for a few moments where Moses viewed this prophetic vision of the future (video clip on Mt. Nebo).

What a privilege Moses had seeing what God was going to do for His people throughout history up until today. We will soon cross the figurative Jordan into that Promised Land and be welcomed by the Father, by Christ, by the Holy Spirit, by Moses, by Elijah, by Enoch and the angels.

But back to the Israelites, they were still on the east side of the Jordan after their forty years in the wilderness. They had not crossed yet. They spent thirty days mourning the loss of Moses. Not until he had been taken from them did
they fully understand his fatherly role in their lives—his wisdom and counsel. However they were not alone . . . the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night over the sanctuary were constant reminders that the Mighty God was by their side. Brothers and sisters, the Almighty God is with us today in this dome and around the world as we prepare to cross the Jordan—don’t retreat!

As Moses’ understudy, Joshua became the recognized leader of Israel. He was courageous, quiet, faithful, firm, caring, loyal and had complete faith in God. It was Joshua whom God chose to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land through God’s complete and supernatural power.

Our scripture reading in Joshua 1:2 tells us God spoke directly to Joshua saying, “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan.” GO OVER THIS JORDAN, DON’T RETREAT. CROSS THE JORDAN, “you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them . . . every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you . . .” Joshua and the Children of Israel were not to be discouraged or retreat. God continued in verses 6 and 7 with words for us today in San Antonio, “Be strong and of good courage . . . only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.” Seventh-day Adventist believers, be of good courage in the Lord, ask Him to help us keep His moral law and make God’s Holy Word central in all we do. Don’t get stuck on one side or the other of the road. Stay in the middle of God’s will, cross the Jordan, and don’t retreat!

God’s Holy Word, what a precious book this is! His law, His prophecies, His instructions, His gospel, His love letters to us. You can count on the Word of God!

I have three Bibles with me and they are precious. Two of them belonged to ordained ministers of the gospel who have died in Jesus. This first Bible was my grandfather’s, N. C. Wilson. The first N. C. Grandpa was a wonderful student of the Word. He would write me letters of encouragement when I was a young pastor. I loved my Grandma and Grandpa Wilson. They both loved the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy. This second Bible was my dear father’s, Neal C. Wilson. The second N. C. Dad taught me to revere and believe in God’s Holy Word. Dad loved to preach from the Word, an inexhaustible source of God’s instruction. Both my precious mother and dear father loved the Holy Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. They both bequeathed to me a complete trust in and love for a plain reading of the Word of God and a great appreciation for the Spirit of Prophecy. I never heard one disparaging remark from my parents about the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy, only great respect and acceptance. I plead with you to have that same love and respect for this Book and the Spirit of Prophecy. If you haven’t read much from either one for a while, pick up the Bible and read it. Pick up Steps to Christ, The Desire of Ages, The Ministry of Healing, The Great Controversy, Patriarchs and Prophets, The Testimonies or any other Spirit of Prophecy book and read it. See what God will do for your heart and life. Participate with church members all over this globe as we begin this quinquennium by daily reading one chapter of the Bible and approximately two pages of the Conflict of the Ages series. Last quinquennium it was a joy to read the Bible through, and this quinquennium will be the same. Of course, if you are on your own reading program, please move ahead, but let’s experience the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy in our lives everyday.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we fully accept the Bible as God’s inspired Word. We understand the Spirit of Prophecy to be the lesser light, inspired by that same heavenly inspiration that leads to the greater light, the Bible. At the last General Conference session that Ellen White attended, she delivered her message and left the platform. She stopped and returned taking the large pulpit Bible in her hands and proclaimed, “I commend to you this Book.” Brothers and sisters, if we wish to cross the Jordan, let’s seriously read God’s Word letting its instructions, through the Holy Spirit’s guidance, change our lives. David said in Psalm 119:11, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” You can count on God’s Word and His Spirit of Prophecy!

And here is my Bible. I’ve had it now for five years since at that time I lost another precious Bible on an airplane. I bought this one and have cherished it; however, since that time, I have lost this Bible two times, but both times the Lord has miraculously returned it to me. It is precious not only because it is my study and preaching Bible, but
because it is the Word of God! Someone who retrieved this Bible the last time I lost it, gave me a special connection so I won't lose it again. It is "Ted's Bible's Leash!" My friends, I may lose this actual Bible again, but I will not lose God's Holy Word because it can never be lost! God's Word is sure and foundational. It is everlasting and you can believe this Word as it reads!

This precious Book, the Bible, is true and reliable. You can read it in the plain language of your choice and it rings true!

Yes, God actually created this world recently in six, literal, consecutive days and rested on the seventh-day Sabbath, and asks us to do the same as an eternal sign of our allegiance to Him. The Israelites did miraculously cross the Red Sea! God did provide manna! The Ten Commandments were written with God's own finger! The sanctuary service does show Christ's salvation and ministry on earth and in heaven! Jesus did come as a babe, lived a perfect life, died for us, rose for us, went to heaven and will return in like manner! Christ is ministering for us as our High Priest and entered the most holy place in 1844 to complete His investigative judgment! Jesus is coming again! God's Word is accurate and true and can be understood—just as it reads!

Joshua 1:8-9 say, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have a good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage: do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

This was God's signal to the Israelites to cross the Jordan. Joshua commanded the crossing preparation. Joshua 3:1 says Joshua rose early and all the Children of Israel lodged at the edge of the river. The test had come. It was again time to see God's great miracles! Verse 3 says, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it." Verse 5 instructed, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." As we humble ourselves before the Lord and each other, as we plead with God for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit, as we allow the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to make us more and more like Christ, we will see "wonders" among us as the Advent message goes like wildfire!

In verse 9, Joshua told the people, "... hear the words of the Lord your God." God promised to drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land.

The next developments are riveting! Joshua 3:14-16 record, "when the people set out from the camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still and rose in a heap very far away...."

It was the springtime and the water was very high. Patriarchs and Prophets, page 483 reports, "... the host descended to the border of the Jordan. All knew, however, that without divine aid they could not hope to make the passage. At that time of the year—in the spring season—melting snows of the mountains had so raised the Jordan that the river overflowed its banks, making it impossible to cross at the usual fording places. God willed that the passage of Israel over the Jordan should be miraculous."

Many times God leads us into difficult or impossible situations where we give Him the glory when we see how He arranges our progress through that difficulty. Brothers and sisters, cross the Jordan, don't retreat! Do we react by giving God glory when He opens the way for us? That's why God wants us to remember His interventions in our lives and set up landmark memorials to never forget to, "Cross the Jordan and don't retreat."

Verse 17 says the priests who carried the ark into the middle of the Jordan stayed there until the people had crossed the river. Before the priests left, Joshua called for representatives from each of the twelve tribes to take a large rock
from the riverbed to represent their tribe in setting up a memorial. Joshua 4:6-7 say, “... that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord ... And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.”

There has always been a need to remember, to establish something that will constantly remind you. That was the purpose of the stone landmark monument of the Israelites’ crossing—to remember what God had done. That’s exactly why He wants us to remember what is happening here in San Antonio, what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives—that our mission is to proclaim, “Arise! Shine! Jesus Is Coming!” You are the “landmarks.” God has a special purpose for each of us who make up His remnant church to remember how He has led in the past. In Life Sketches, page 196, we read, “In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”

What a privilege to testify of God’s power in leading His Advent movement and what He will do during the final days of earth’s history! Of course, God does not only wish that we remember, He wants us to actively participate in the real mission of His church, the reason you and I are members of this precious Seventh-day Adventist Church. I call on all local church members everywhere to participate in a vibrant Revival and Reformation, You, Your Family, Your Church, Your Community! Lay members, I challenge you to become involved in the daily mission of the church far more than you ever have before. We are counting on you! God is counting on you! You are a “landmark,” a walking testimony and memorial for God’s truth. Become involved in the greatest evangelistic and mission outreach possible. Take time to read and pray about the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist strategic plan, “Reach the World.” It is your plan, it is our plan, it is God’s plan. Evangelism is the lifeblood of the church. All of us are to be in involved in it, either through personal witnessing, small group evangelism, or public evangelism in its various forms. Every time I preach a full evangelistic series like I did in May in Chitunguiza, near Harare, Zimbabwe, I get spiritually re-energized and more grounded in the marvelous Biblical understanding that God has given to us as Seventh-day Adventists. I get so excited about God’s logical, solid precious Advent message. I appeal to all our administrators, pastors and lay people everywhere, become involved in personal and especially public evangelism even if you think it won’t work where you live. Adapt your methods, but reach out. Every effort, under God’s guidance, that you make in reaching the hearts of people will bear fruit. Evangelism is not dead! It is more alive than ever before! God is in it! It’s His plan. He will bless it!

We are in this together under the omnipotent hand of God—church leaders and church members working hand in hand for mission outreach. Watch Him work as we learn to lean completely on His power. Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9, page 117 says, “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those ministers and church officers.” God wants us to unite in the greatest mission outreach the world has ever seen. The latter rain of the Holy Spirit will fall and the work will be finished.

Church members, let the Holy Spirit revolutionize your thinking. Take the church’s mission of outreach into your hands on a daily basis working closely with church leaders and pastors. Let it be total participation. Don’t only get involved in the mechanics of the church. Yes, you do need to be involved in the inner working of the church to keep it moving ahead; but even more, we need a total empowerment of lay people in carrying the burden of the church’s evangelistic and mission outreach along with pastors and church workers. Tell someone else about your relationship with Christ! It’s time to go home! “Arise! Shine! Jesus Is Coming!” Take up God’s command, “Cross the Jordan, don’t retreat!”

Young people of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this is your church. This is your Advent movement. This is your mission. Christ is your Master. Take advantage of every opportunity of service for others in Jesus’ name! Take up God’s command, “Cross the Jordan, don’t retreat.”
Pastors, health professionals and teachers, you are doing a wonderful work for the Lord. Stay strong in God's Word. Remain grounded in the pillars of God's Advent movement. Take up God's command, "Cross the Jordan, don't retreat."

Husbands, wives and families, don't allow anything to creep into your homes that will distract you from God's plans for you and your children. Eliminate any television, social media, music, books and other influences that will distract you from Jesus and His biblical truth. Take up God's command, "Cross the Jordan, don't retreat."

I appeal to all of us in the church to put away differences of opinion, to humble ourselves before God. Now is the time to unify under Christ, our Righteousness.

Counsels to Ministers, page 145, tells us that, "In loving sympathy and confidence God's workers are to unite with one another. He who says or does anything that tends to separate the members of Christ's church is counterworking the Lord's purpose. Wrangling and dissension in the church, the encouragement of suspicion and unbelief, are dishonoring to Christ." God spoke through Ellen White with a pleading entreaty to each of us in Testimonies, Vol. 9, page 219, "I pray that He will soften and subdue every heart . . . Let there be no self-exaltation. If the workers will humble their hearts before God, the blessing will come."

As we unite under God's direction, He is leading His children towards the Jordan in so many ways around the world as heaven touches their lives and those with whom they come in contact. I think of Tihomir Min, a Bulgarian-Vietnamese young man I met last year in Hanoi who shared his personal testimony and ongoing journey towards God's truth. Tihomir wondered about God and his roots while growing up in Bulgaria with a Bulgarian mother and Vietnamese father. When he was about ten, his parents divorced. Tihomir faced challenges in his search for God including attacks by evil spirits as he tried to find peace. He prayed that if there was a God, would He please help him. Suddenly, he began to find relief and encouragement. He finally found a Christian website which offered him encouragement, some CDs and the book, The Great Controversy. Reading The Great Controversy led Tihomir to read the Bible, which excited him greatly and changed his life. He said, "... my life changed when I opened my eyes for God ..." Tihomir felt compelled to travel to Vietnam. He found part of his family there, but he discovered a much larger and greater family—the family of God. While in Vietnam, Tihomir experienced some difficult challenges and looked for a church. He tried to find a Seventh-day Adventist Church, but we do not own a single building and have only a small number of believers in that great city. The Southern Asia-Pacific Division, the Southeast Asia Union, the Vietnam Mission, the General Conference, and others have plans to see God's work established in a stronger way in that major capital city. If there is someone who would like to assist in some way, please contact the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, or our office.

Tihomir searched the internet to find the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hanoi. He finally found information and said he didn't know what we really believed, but wanted to visit to find out. He began meeting with our small Sabbath-keeping group that has primarily ADRA/Vietnam workers. Tihomir continued to attend because he found so many happy and encouraging people. Eventually, he became much more acquainted with Christ and our Biblical beliefs. He was overjoyed to find peace at last. Tihomir was baptized and joined the small Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hanoi. He still has personal challenges and difficulties in his Christian journey, but he is witnessing to so many people in high levels of society and is learning more about walking with God every step of the way. In spite of the problems he still faces, he says that finding God was the best thing that has ever happened in his life. Pray for Tihomir in his daily walk with the Lord as God leads him towards the crossing of the Jordan and the Promised Land.

I think of Dolores Slikkers, a wonderfully loving and generous church member, who, along with her devoted husband, Leon, helped so many students to find real meaning in life bringing glory to God in their professions. Last March at the Andrews University Board meeting, there was a vacant chair in front of Dolores' nameplate and some lovely flowers placed there by Niels-Erik Andreasen, AU president, as a token of respect and hope. You see, Dolores died last December in a car accident, but awaits her coming King who will lead her across the Jordan to the Promised Land along with hundreds of students she helped.
I think of Ricky, a deaf-mute young man from Riveralta, Bolivia, whose prayers were answered after he began to study the Bible on his own. According to Winston Sarzuri, East Bolivia Mission Personal Ministries and Evangelism Director and Robert Costa, associate GC Ministerial secretary, Ricky came in contact with the church and its Biblical teachings through the internet. In the public school where Ricky studied there are several other young deaf students. Among those students without disabilities, there was a faithful young Seventh-day Adventist girl who was asking God how to share with her classmates the love of Jesus, His saving power and the joyous hope it brings. When she realized that Ricky was really interested in studying the Bible, she pushed herself in record time to learn sign language in order to witness for Christ. As this faithful girl shared Jesus with Ricky through sign language, he accepted Christ and all our fundamental beliefs. He became a strong disciple and a Bible instructor who taught the Advent message to eight other deaf students. Last April, all the deaf students from that school attended an evangelistic series in Bolivia led by John Bradshaw of “It Is Written.” The local government leader in charge of the deaf attended the meetings to translate in sign language and was impressed that our church was interested in the deaf group, and she is now interested in Seventh-day Adventist beliefs! She and her deaf husband are in contact with our local pastors to obtain Adventist materials for the deaf. Let’s always show interest in groups with special needs. Take time for those in special situations with whom you can share Christ and this precious Advent message. As a result, a new congregation is on the horizon with many potential deaf-mute as members in Santa Cruz, the largest city in Bolivia. Last April, Ricky was baptized. He came out of the water with glad sign language gestures, telling the world how happy he was to give his life to Jesus.

My fellow church members here in this dome, and those watching worldwide, do not be discouraged as you march towards the crossing of the Jordan. We are nearing home! We are almost there! Do not be distracted or dismayed. Go forward with complete trust in the Creator, the Redeemer, the Lamb and the High Priest, who tells us in Hebrews 4:16 to, “come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” That time of need may be upon you now and it certainly is coming in the near future according to Biblical prophecy when our only hope and salvation will be in totally leaning on Christ, the Rock. He is what we need right now in our worldwide work of proclaiming the Three Angels’ messages entrusted to us by heaven.

Jesus, with His grace, His strength, His matchless love and His righteousness, is the core of the Three Angels’ messages and is the only answer for making it across the Jordan. Let us claim the marvelously comforting and encouraging promises of Psalm 37:5-7, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him . . .”

God is calling you today to join in the final proclamation of Christ’s salvation, His good news and His soon coming! Let’s believe God’s Word, believe the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation, believe the Spirit of Prophecy. Jesus is coming soon! What a day that will be! Cross the Jordan—don’t retreat into disbelief and cynicism.

We are saved through the justifying and sanctifying power of Jesus Christ and Him alone, saved through His righteousness. God’s sanctuary service points to Christ and His righteousness and should be thoroughly studied and shared. Dig deep in your understanding of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Stay away from superficiality and the suggestion to just say, “Jesus” and ignore Christ’s doctrinal truths. My brothers and sisters, our Biblical foundational beliefs and fundamental doctrines all have Christ at the center of each one. What a privilege to share this prophetic message and humbly ask God for revival and reformation through the power of the Holy Spirit. Cross the Jordan, don’t retreat into legalism, mysticism, superficiality or meaningless emotionalism.

The Three Angels’ messages are to be proclaimed with Holy Spirit power by each of us. Live the truth through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and your diligent study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Cross the Jordan. Don’t retreat towards worldly or unbiblical contemporary ideas about theology or carelessness in Christian practical living!

Accept and promote God’s complete health message that can bless us physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Use this right arm of Comprehensive Health Ministry in reaching people in Mission to the Cities and in the rural
It is exciting to see how people are accepting the health emphasis with full commitment to allowing God to control their lives and their lifestyles. Cross the Jordan, don't retreat into skepticism, higher criticism, fanaticism or formalism!

One of these days very soon, we will look up and see a small, dark cloud about half the size of a man's hand. It will get larger and brighter, all of heaven poured out for this climactic event with millions of angels making up that marvelous cloud with a brilliant rainbow above and lightning beneath. Right in the middle of that incredible cloud will be the One we have waited for, the One who is altogether lovely, our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, coming as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We will look up and say, "This is the God we have waited for" and Christ will look down and say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord." At last we will be with Him and receive the reward of the righteous who have depended completely on Jesus. We will figuratively cross the Jordan to begin the final journey through space to enter the Promised Land in heaven. We will be with Him in a perfect setting never again to part as a fulfillment of His promises unfolded in Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible. In verses 3 to 7 we read that "...there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. He said to me, 'These words are faithful and true.' And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 'Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'"

Those are God's promises for you, for me and for this remnant church—His Advent movement. That wonderful Promised Land revealed in Revelation is where we will go as we rise to meet Him in the air. We will cross the Jordan and go to heaven to be with Him forever. What a day that will be! By the grace and righteousness of Jesus Christ, I want to be there that day!

If that is your wish, as you humbly submit to Christ and sharing His love and prophetic messages with the world, would you join me in standing right now?

As we commit ourselves into the hands of Jesus, our Almighty Captain, He will lead us across the Jordan and into the Promised Land! Reach the World with the extraordinary Good News of ultimate victory through the blood and grace of our Creator, Redeemer, High Priest, Coming King and Best Friend, Jesus Christ! "Arise! Shine! Jesus Is Coming!"
What's on your key chain?

Omar Miranda

Recently, while I was sitting in the doctor's office waiting for my son's turn to be seen, I began to examine my key chain. Every time I'm in the waiting room, I examine something different. One time, the ceiling tiles, another, the floorboards . . . I've been told by many people that life with me is crazy, fast-paced, and exciting... but I digress.

I'm embarrassed to say that I spent 30 whole minutes examining all the stuff that I had on my key chain. I discovered that I no longer need half the keys I've been carrying around for years. Armed with this new information, I did what any sensible person would do: I immediately took them off my key chain.

However, immediately after removing them I had a tsunami wave of illogical anxiety about this action. As I sat there, I frantically began to make all kinds of excuses about why I couldn't get rid of these keys . . . on and on went the lame excuses.

Truth be told, within five minutes of removing the same keys I had scrutinized and examined, they were back on my key chain! Why? Because I wasn't ready to let go of what they represented in my past. Bottom line: all these keys represented how I perceived myself—good or bad. In other words, I wanted to hold on to them because I was comfortable with the way they made me feel...about myself. I had been carrying these keys for a long time, and they were now, unfortunately, part of me.

I'm happy to tell you that at that point God decided to enter the conversation. He quickly let me know that I was being ridiculous and was anxious about nothing. He reminded me who I was in Him and told me, "Omar, let the keys go!" In the end I found the nearest trash can, and now those extra keys live there. Because of the lesson I learned from this experience, I can't describe the incredible joy and peace that I have received by obeying God and letting go of things that were holding me down.

THE KEYCHAIN OF LIFE

Silly story, I know, but I saw my experience is a metaphor for all the things that we decide to hold on to in our lives. Things that we think are too important to give to God, when all the while they're causing us untold stress, anxiety, and perhaps even fostering pride. Things that matter to us, or in the past have made us feel good about ourselves, but now, in the light of a relationship with Jesus, are absolutely worthless. (See Philippians 3:1-11.)

IT'S ALL ABOUT CHANGING FOCUS FROM SELF TO JESUS

But how do we just let go of all the stuff from our past? Some of it is small, some of it is big, but all of it weighs us down and holds us back. Admittedly, it's easier said than done, but with God, all things are possible. Simply put: it's all about focus. To be successful, we must change our focus from ourselves to Jesus. And the apostle Paul shows us how. He writes, "I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. My friends, I don't feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. I run toward the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to heaven" (Contemporary English Version, Philippians 3:12-14).

These three verses are like last Christmas fruitcake, they're dense!

You're a mess!
Let's unpack what Paul is saying and see how we can apply it to our own life. Just a reminder: Paul was a psycho!
Before he became Paul, he was Saul. His résumé read: “Super-Jew! In charge of hunting down Christians, torturing, imprisoning, and killing them.” That was his identity. It was who he was, what he did… and he was good at it. So if you think you’ve got a past that causes you emotional pain, guilt, hurt, and shame, Paul’s got you beat!

Later, Paul, now converted and writing from a jail cell, shares with the believers in Philippi (and us) five principles needed to effectively live the Christian life and draw closer to Jesus:

1. Have complete honesty about your present level of spiritual maturity (v. 12). Paul recognizes that although he’s better than he used to be, he’s not yet where he needs to be. For many of us, this is a tough pill to swallow, but Jesus, when He was speaking to a bunch of Pharisees about why He was hanging out with “sinners,” put it clearly: “it’s not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick…” (NIV, Mark 2:17). Jesus makes a pretty compelling point that the sick will never get treatment and get better, if they don’t first recognize and admit that they’re sick. How about you? Like my lame excuses for useless keys, do you excuse your sin? Do you blame the present circumstances in your life? Do you blame your parents for the way they raised you? Whatever excuse you’ve got, stop it! Tell God the truth about sinful you; it’s the first step to allow God to work the miracle of His salvation and sanctification in you.

2. Have appropriate recognition of the true power source (v. 12). Paul recognizes that it’s God (and God alone) who has initiated this positive change in him (verse 12). King Solomon (listen up, he was the wisest person who ever lived) put it like this: “Start with God—the first step in learning is bowing down to God…” (The Message, Proverbs 1:7a). Learning to recognize God’s authority in our lives and being willing to submit to it, is a crucial step in effective and positive life change.

3. Have persistent forward progress (v. 12a). The words that Paul uses in the second part of verse 12 are action-oriented: “running and struggling.” The bottom line is that in order to get rid of bad habits and start new ones, we can’t just sit idly by on our hands and expect God to wave His magic “Holy Spirit” wand over us and “PRESTO-CHANGO!” we’ll all be better. The fact is that although God provides His Holy Spirit power to begin and continue the process of our sanctification, we are still responsible for working to make it happen (see Philippians 2:12). Don’t be deceived. Changing takes hard work! That process will not be quick or easy, because, our sin is stuck deep within each of us and we must do more than have persistent forward progress, we must…

4. Actively forget what is behind and actively focus on what is ahead (v. 13, 14a). It’s not enough for us to work without ceasing; Paul clarifies the process of running and struggling even more by stating that he has to actively “forget what is behind, and . . . struggle for what is ahead.” This means that he had to daily and sometimes minute-by-minute, reprogram his mind and his thoughts to dwell on Jesus and what was right and true.

I’m a recovering addict and have, in the course of my own counseling, helped many addicts to take the steps needed for recovery and sobriety. At the beginning of my recovery process, I didn’t think that I could live even one second without my addiction—much less stop thinking about it. However, I learned that if I could change my thoughts, then my actions would follow suit. And if I could change my actions, then my habits would follow as well. Paul seconds that idea of actively choosing to forget certain negative things/thoughts and willingly choosing to focus on certain positive realities, even if they aren’t in front of you…yet.

5. Keep your eyes on the prize (v. 14b)! Paul completes this process by always keeping the goal in front of him. What is the “goal” and “prize” that he mentions three times in these verses? Well, in the second part of verse 14 he tells us it’s heaven. Paul understands that as long as we’re on this earth, we’ll be constantly struggling to be all that we can be.

Almost fourteen years ago, when my wife and I were having our first child, our birth coach told us that the most effective thing my wife could do to get through labor and childbirth was to have a picture of our daughter to look at and focus on. So when my wife’s contractions began, we pulled out the blown-up ultrasound image of our daughter and plastered it on the wall opposite her bed. My wife focused and pushed … no matter what happened, she knew what the end result of all her labor would be!
Trust me when I tell you this: heaven and eternity with Jesus is worth it all. So, keep your eyes on the prize and don't give up or give in—no matter what!

He is Faithful

I can't describe the incredible joy and peace that I have received by obeying God and letting go of those things, that were holding me down and keeping me from drawing closer to Jesus and becoming more like Him.

Stay on the “narrow road” of life with Jesus, never let go of His hand, and I promise that one day you, like Paul, will be able to say that you have finished the race, kept the faith, and are ready to see God (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Until that time, keep asking yourself, “What's on my key chain?” If there is anything that gets in the way of your salvation, then by God's power, let it go. Keep focusing on Jesus, because He who called you is faithful to finish the changes He began in you (Philippians 1:6).