The horse that wouldn't go to church

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Rebecca Nowdesha

August 25, 2015

Samuel had changed. All of his co-workers had noticed. As a foreman at the local flour mill, it was his duty to inspect the transactions and conduct of those under him. The old Samuel had not paid much attention to inaccuracies, lateness, or cheating among his subordinates. These things were common in his culture and foremen often turned a blind eye to such behaviour.

But the new Samuel was different. His recent religious journey had transformed his whole life. Once a member of the dominant religion of his country, he had recently become a Christian, joining a protestant denomination. Then he was introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist message by a local pastor. He eagerly embraced each new truth. As his commitment to Christ and His truth grew, his habits at work changed. He now did his work to please God, not man. Instead of passing over corruption and embezzlement, as is common in his culture, Samuel refused to approve anything that was not just and upright. His convictions brought him into conflict with his coworkers, who soon realized their lucrative habits were at an end unless they could get rid of Samuel.

“What can we do?” They inquired of each other. “How can we be rid of him?” They soon contrived a plot whereby they could be rid of him and his family, forever. Like the enemies of the Biblical Samuel, they decided to use his faithfulness against him.

Samuel was punctual, a trait uncommon in his culture. He was always the first one at church, in spite of poor roads and difficult traveling conditions. Each Sabbath morning a man with a horse and cart would come to collect Samuel, his wife, and their five children and take them over the same road, across the same bridge, to church. Because of Samuel's insistence on punctuality, the cart driver came on time as well.

But the cart driver was late on the morning that our story takes place. Samuel and his family had prayed as usual that God would protect them throughout the day. As usual, they prepared for church and then waited for the driver. When he finally arrived, Samuel and his family quickly arranged themselves in the cart and started off. Or at least they attempted to start. As soon as the driver signalled his horse to begin, the horse began to balk. He snorted and bucked, fighting every effort to make him move. At last he moved forward reluctantly, but only for a short distance. Again he fought, kicked, snorted, and refused to move forward. Again and again the driver urged his stubborn horse to move forward, only to gain a few feet of progress.

“What is wrong with your horse today?” Samuel asked the driver in frustration, "He's never done this before."

“I don't know.” the driver replied. “He didn't want to leave home today. He fought me all the way here.”

The sun climbed in the heavens as Samuel and his family fought their way over the familiar road toward church. They had nearly reached the bridge when Samuel decided he had had enough. Already church service was well underway. He did not want to arrive late. “Please take us home.” he asked the driver. Tired of fighting the stubborn animal, the driver gladly turned back. No sooner had the cart turned around than the horse took off running and didn't stop until he reached Samuel's home. “What was wrong with the horse? Why had God allowed his family to miss church?” Samuel must have wondered. But he did not have long to wait for his answers.

Sunday morning Samuel began work at the flour mill as usual. (He had received special permission to work on Sundays since he did not work on Sabbath.) He had not been working long when a group of his co-workers rushed up to him, falling on their knees before him. They begged for forgiveness. “We were angry at you for your strict honesty and wanted to kill you and your whole family. We knew you always go to church by the same road, so we waiting under the bridge to kill you. We saw how the horse refused to go forward and then raced home when you
turned around. It was a miracle! Your God is the true God!” They exclaimed.

This experience greatly strengthened Samuel's faith and the faith of his whole family for generations. For the rest of his life Samuel served the Lord with faith and power. He is now asleep in Jesus, but the memory of God's deliverance that day lives on in the heart of his daughter, who told it to her son, who told it to me. His faith and missionary zeal can still be seen in the lives of his children and grandchildren. We, too, can gain strength as we remember that the same God who preserved Samuel and his family, still watches over those who choose to be true to Him, at any cost.

Rebecca Cameron Nowdesha is a Bible worker and medical missionary who has devoted her life to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ's soon coming around the world.
Radical skepticism about the claims of the gospels is in vogue, including the “Jesus as myth” position, which argues that Jesus never even existed. It would be nice if we could ignore these anti-Christian arguments, but we cannot. I hear reports of Adventist young people, educated in our Adventist school system, who have their faith shaken when they come across radical skepticism such as the “Jesus as myth” position. As I will argue in a future article, Adventists tend to start with the assumption that God exists and that Scripture is the word of God, then proceed to show how Scripture supports Christian doctrine, including our distinctive Adventist doctrines. Sadly, Adventists also tend to neglect what is sometimes called “pre-evangelism,” the refuting of radical skepticism. So let's examine some of the arguments that Jesus never existed.

Unfortunately, there isn't enough space in a single article to refute all the arguments put forward by the “Jesus as myth” skeptics, so I will focus on one common argument held by all these skeptics. They believe there isn't any first century secular evidence to support the claim that a real man named Jesus, son of Joseph, ever existed.

In How Jesus Became God, author Bart Ehrman, a liberal theologian, wrote “What sorts of things do pagan authors from the time of Jesus have to say about him? Nothing. As odd as it may seem, there is no mention of Jesus at all by any of his pagan contemporaries. There are no birth records, no trial transcripts, no death certificates; there are no expressions of interest, no heated slanders, no passing references – nothing. In fact, if we broaden our field of concern to the years after his death – even if we include the entire first century of the Common Era – there is not so much as a solitary reference to Jesus in any non-Christian, non-Jewish source of any kind” (Ehrman).

RESTRICTIONS TAILORED TO DENY JESUS' EXISTENCE

Notice how the author states there is no first century evidence, nor even a solitary reference from non-Christian or non-Jewish sources. Why exclude Jewish sources, when Jesus is believed to have been born a Jew, in Judea, and lived his entire life in Judea and Samaria? Wouldn't Jews have been most likely to leave a written mention of his life? Isn't it an extremely artificial, even bizarre, restriction to demand external corroboration of Jesus' life from foreigners who did not share Jesus' country, religion, or culture?

EXPOSING EHRMAN’S CLAIM

We should be suspicious of such a restriction because it excludes the historical records of Flavius Josephus (AD 37 – 100) that mention Jesus. In fact, Josephus is as respected and reliable as any ancient historian in the Western tradition. Yes, he was born a Jew and fought against the Romans during the First Jewish-Roman War (AD 66 – 73), but, interestingly, in AD 67 Josephus surrendered to Roman troops commanded by Vespasian, who later became emperor. He defected to Rome and was granted Roman citizenship. He then Latinized his named. He was born Yosef ben Matityahu (Joseph son of Matityahu), but he took Vespasian's family name, "Flavius." Interestingly, he was a friend and an adviser to Vespasian's son, Titus, who commanded the Roman legions at the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, leading to the death of over a million of Josephus' former countrymen, and the enslavement of nearly 100,000 more, according to Josephus himself.

Was Josephus a “religious” source or a “secular” source when he wrote Antiquities of the Jews (c. AD 94), in the Greek language, for non-Jewish readers? Do you see how Ehrman's statement was carefully tailored to omit the fact that Josephus, was a Jew by birth and a Roman by choice, and therefore a credible source, written during the first century?
In Antiquities, Book 18, we find Josephus discussing Herod Antipas's murder of John the Baptist, an important verification of the gospel story. "Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, [emphasis mine] who was a good man... Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion... Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death" (Josephus, Chapter 5, 2).

In addition, Josephus documents that "there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared" (Josephus, Chapter 3,3). This noteworthy passage is referred to as the Testimonium Flavianum, the testimony of Flavius.

At this point the skeptics will jump in and say that this passage was not actually written by Josephus but is a later forgery. The skeptics are partially right: some of the Testimonium probably was added later. Most scholars suspect that later Christian redactors tampered with the passage to add three "interpolations" supportive of Christian orthodoxy: (1) "if one ought to call him a man," (2) "he was the Christ," and (3) the sentence referring to the resurrection.

To dig into this issue in more detail, the earliest extant version of the Testimonium is in a quotation by a fourth century Christian apologist and historian, Eusebius, in his Historia Ecclesiastica (History of the Church) written around AD 324. However, an earlier Christian source, Origen (AD 184-253), wrote that Josephus had written about Jesus, but had not recognized Jesus as the Messiah. This suggests that Josephus had originally written a neutral, objective description of Christ, something like, "He was called the Christ," but Eusebius or an earlier Christian redactor had either left out the word "called" or inserted the entire phrase "He was the Christ" to make it appear that Josephus had endorsed Jesus as the Messiah.

This theory is consistent with Josephus' later mention of Jesus, in Antiquities, Book 20, Ch. 9, 1, where he is careful to state that Jesus "was called Christ," not that He necessarily was the Christ. "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."

This passage in book 20, in contrast with the Testimonium in Book 18, is almost universally acknowledged to be original and un-tampered. It constitutes a separate confirmation of the historicity of a man named Jesus who was called Christ and who had a brother named James.

Thus, the modern scholarly consensus about the Testimonium Flavianum is that Josephus had written a neutral description that was later modified to make it friendlier to Christian orthodoxy. If the three suspected interpolations are removed, the rest of the passage flows smoothly within its context, and fits Josephus' writing style. It also fits well with an Arabic language version of the passage that was discovered in the 1970s, and is likely authentic.

There is very little scholarly support for the view that the Testimonium Flavianum is a total forgery, and in any case the mention in Book 20 of Jesus as the brother of James is a separate mention of Jesus as an historical figure. So contrary to Bart Ehrman's carefully contrived implication, there is indeed a first century mention of Jesus by Josephus, a very reputable naturalized Roman historian.

Now that we've exposed Ehrman's technically correct but misleading claim, we should note that there is also a crucial reason for his arbitrary cutoff point of the end of the first century. There is an early second century mention of
Jesus by an entirely pagan, gentile, Roman historian, named Tacitus.

In his Annals, Book 15, Ch. 44, written around AD 116, Tacitus discusses how Nero blamed the Christians for a fire in Rome that many believed Nero himself had ordered: “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”

Even while acknowledging that the Christians were falsely blamed for the fire, Tacitus is contemptuous of Christianity; he asserts that Christians practiced “abominations,” and he includes Christianity among “all things hideous and shameful.” Tacitus, no friend of Christianity, is merely reporting the historical facts, and these facts are entirely consistent with, and provide an independent secular verification of, what is recorded in Scripture.

Does the fact that Tacitus was writing in the early second century, render his account unreliable? In other words, are historians writing in 2015 about events that occurred in 1930 (the same time gap between Tacitus’ Annals and the crucifixion of Christ), considered unreliable because of the passage of time? To ask that question is to expose the absurdity of the contention. When we write about 1930, we’re writing about recent history. Eighty-five years is but one lifespan; many who are still alive today were born before 1930, including two of my uncles and one aunt.

Strictly speaking, these historical references to Christ do not absolutely prove that Jesus existed, only that many people in the first and second centuries, including very reputable historians, believed and reported that Jesus existed. It should be noted that this is all the proof we have for the existence of an overwhelming majority of historical figures. As historian Michael Grant writes in his book, Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels, if we apply to the New Testament “the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus’ existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned” (Grant 1977).

In other words, if we applied to other ancient historical figures the level of skepticism necessary to deny the existence of Jesus, it would become almost impossible to write history. Those who understand history as a scholarly discipline do not make absurd evidentiary demands. This is why virtually all modern scholars of antiquity agree that Jesus was a historical figure who really lived and died.

THE BEST ARGUMENT IS CHRISTIANITY ITSELF

How was Jesus able to inspire a movement if he never existed? For the first 250 years of Christianity, there was no worldly advantage in being a follower of Jesus, only the very real possibility of persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom. Is it reasonable to believe that the world-transforming movement of Christianity grew from nothing or a non-event? Relying solely on human reason and experience, the overwhelming likelihood is that there was a real person underlying the phenomenon of Christianity. To assert otherwise is the height of irrationality.
Conundrum of the balanced view

Ron Woolsey

Scenario One

The year was 1999, and a denominational publishing house heard my conversion story from homosexuality, and asked me to submit my story for publication, as a resource for our denomination. I was given a deadline of four weeks.

After much prayer and fourteen-hour days of writing, I met their deadline. After many months, I finally called for a status report.

“Oh! You haven’t received your manuscript? It was supposed to have been returned to you.”

“Why would it be returned?” I asked.

“It was rejected. The book committee decided they wanted a more balanced view.”

“Balanced view of what?” I asked. “I was asked to submit my story. Are you suggesting it is unbalanced?” I was alarmed.

“No, they just thought it would be better to have more stories to put into one book in order to present a balanced view,” came the reply.

I wondered aloud, “So stories of victory and success must be balanced out with stories of failure? Why?”

For fifteen years now I have continued to face the conundrum of the balanced view, this puzzle, as time after time I have been inhibited by the need to present a balanced view of the subject of homosexuality and the church. Ironically, I had to have my book published by an outside publisher who in turn sold it back to the denominational publisher to facilitate placing it in all the English-speaking ABCs around the world.

Scenario Two

A few years ago I was invited to share my testimony at a conference on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church. Sadly, I was discredited by one who promoted a view of “once gay, always gay,” and my presentation was therefore reduced to a mere interview. During the conference, this same individual replaced me on a panel addressing the university student body to present “a balanced view”. Critics and skeptics have repeatedly dismissed me as a perfectionist because I share of my personal experience of victory over homosexuality and how God offers salvation from sin rather than in sin.

Through the years, as opportunities to share were becoming less and less, I had made it a matter of prayer to ask God that whatever time I am given, the Lord will make it count. And at this specific conference on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church, He did. In the closing presentation the speaker stated, “When Ron Woolsey stood here opening night, held up his Bible, and said that he found everything he needed in the word of God to turn and walk away from homosexuality, that set the tone for this entire conference.”

Scenario Three

Once again I faced the conundrum of the balanced view when invited to speak at one of our denominational
universities. This time the invitation was held up in committees for months, because of the very “controversial” nature of my story.

“But there are two sides to this issue…” they insisted.

“OK! So, why don’t we present the second side, God’s side…?”

I pointed out that I had graduated from their university, with a degree in theology, with honors, and that I was a conference pastor. Therefore, if straight/gay alliances are allowed on campus, why can’t I be trusted on campus with God’s perspective? Eventually approval came through, and the student body, filled with great interest and appreciation for my message, warmly received me.

Scenario Four

Two issues especially caught my attention at the recent North American Division Ministers Convention and breakout sessions preceding the General Conference Session--women’s ordination and homosexuality.

Though leadership had commissioned much study over the past few years, the “pro side” of the issue was promoted while the “con side” was ignored and even suppressed. The absence of a balanced view was noteworthy.

There were three different seminars addressing the LGBT issue. My ministry, “Coming Out Ministries”, was originally scheduled to have two of these sessions, but one was taken away due to “controversy”. Again, we prayed that the Lord would make whatever time we had, really count, and I truly believe He did.

However, when another seminar, with a very different message, was given more than twice the time we were given, many people who attended both sessions expressed confusion. I explained that both seminars were in fact presenting the same message, but only to a point. Both seminars presented a message of love and acceptance. However, Coming Out Ministries teaches the full gospel - that acceptance from God is conditional upon an entire surrender of the will, including the need of repentance, surrender, discipleship, transformation of character and victory over the sin of homosexuality, as with any other sin issue. Therefore, along these lines, the two seminars parted ways.

At the same North American Division Ministers’ Convention, a lesbian Adventist, a gay Adventist church elder, and the parents of a gay man married to another man presented testimonies. In fact, a gay Adventist was given time for a power point presentation denouncing all efforts to lead homosexuals to victory and transformation. Sadly, no testimony of victory was given. A psychologist even testified that she had never seen anyone overcome homosexuality. Some in attendance turned and waved at me, for I was redeemed 24 years ago and have been married now for 23 years and am the father of five children.

One of the organizers defended these presentations, saying that the gay issue has more than one ideology and therefore, they needed to present a balanced view. However, such a balanced view left many unsettled.

Do we need to present a balanced view by giving equal time to political correctness, conventional wisdom or social sciences?

Is not God’s view balanced in itself? God teaches us that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (King James Version, Jeremiah 17:9).

In 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 we read, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.”
THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF BALANCE

In Proverbs 20:23 we read, “Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good.” God help us if we are weighed in the balances, and found wanting.

We read in Revelation 6:5, “And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.”

Sadly, “not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven…Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:21-24).

Apparently, balance with God is not found between two opposing views, but rather between truth and acceptance, between the law and obedience, between God’s expressed will and our compliance.

You see, “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). The only way we can be found righteous is in the Lord, (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). Perfect balance is found within justification and sanctification, and within pardon/forgiveness and cleansing/transformation.

Christ’s righteousness is imputed, or attributed to us at the point of confession and repentance. In addition, Christ’s righteousness is imparted, or created in us through His grace, His transforming power, when we surrender to Him and to the process. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Notice the balance here.

Micah 7:19 reads, “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Ellen White explains, “Satan stands at the head of all the accusers of the brethren; but when he presents the sins of the people of God, what does the Lord answer? He says, ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?... They were therefore standing before God clothed with the garments of Christ’s righteousness…Every sin of which they had been guilty was forgiven, and they stood before God as chosen and true, as innocent, as perfect, as though they had never sinned” (RH August 29, 1893).

We read in Acts of the Apostles that “John saw the mercy, the tenderness and the love of God blending with His holiness, justice, and power” (White,489)

“When we study the divine character in the light of the cross we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice.” (White, 333).

Now this, I contend, is a balanced view.
Are you all in for Him?

Darcee Christensen

We know the story and we know how it ends. We even have an instruction manual to guide us to the assured victory, yet many still fear the end of time. Though prophecies foretelling catastrophic events and even death decrees might play a significant factor in provoking fear, why do Seventh-day Adventists fear when they know that God will prevail against evil? While non-believers are afraid because they do not know or trust in the scriptures, as Seventh-day Adventists we have the assurance of God’s victory, foretold in His word. Therefore, I believe there is greater underlying motive causing many Seventh-day Adventists to dread what should be their greatest hope.

A COMMITMENT PROBLEM LEADS TO FEAR FOR TOMORROW

Simply put, I have observed that many Seventh-day Adventists today have a commitment issue. Though they may faithfully go to church, pay tithe, and participate in daily devotions, many have failed to seek God and let Him infiltrate every aspect of their life. Instead, they seek worldly success. As a freshman in college, on the brink of my adult life, I am not immune to this same struggle. I often struggle with becoming distracted when contemplating my own future of desire for success. God asks us to surrender completely to Him, but it is sobering to realize that many of us do not entrust 100 percent of our life to God’s will.

For example, we read parables about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, but fail to apply the message to our own life (New King James Version, Matt. 13:44-46). These lessons call us to invest everything in searching after God. Therefore, God wants this goal to be at the forefront of our every thought and decision. I am afraid that we have become half hearted. I believe that those of us who fear the end of time have a subconscious realization of our personal failure to commit entirely to God’s cause. In other words, we are apathetic, and we know it. We understand the standard God is calling us to, but we are too wrapped up in our own selfish ambitions to comply. We are afraid because we know we are not doing all that we can for the glory of God. We do not want to sacrifice the pleasures of this world, and therefore we fear the consequence we know are coming.

A BALANCING ACT THAT LEADS TO OUR FALL

I have often wondered how, throughout history, men and women of God could have chosen the obvious wrong path. What was Eve thinking when she took the fruit? How could all of the disciples abandon Christ at His darkest hour? How could Peter deny Jesus when he had just been warned that he would? How could the priests have failed to accept their long awaited Messiah? How could the antediluvians reject the invitation to enter the ark? Sadly, the sobering truth is that we have continued to follow this pattern. We try to maintain our balance with one foot in the ark, but the rest our bodies are engrossed in the affairs of the earth. However, to be saved, we must be fully inside of the ark of salvation even if this shuts us out from society.

WE MUST TAKE GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS SERIOUSLY

Though we are equipped with warnings and instructions, sadly, we fail to act on them even when they are abundantly clear. First Thessalonians 5:17 calls us to, “pray without ceasing,” and Deuteronomy 6:5 instructs us to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart,” yet many do not even begin to think about God nearly as frequently as they contemplate their favorite baseball team, their next winter vacation or how they will advance within the company. However, the Bible makes it unmistakably clear that there is no middle ground. Either we are all for serving God or we are not. We must take these counsels seriously if we are to be ready for Christ’s soon advent. Jeremiah 29:13 informs us that God is only found when we search for Him with all of our hearts. This leaves no
room for complacency. Ephesians 6:13 guides us to, “take up the WHOLE armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done ALL, to stand.” We should be doing everything in our power to prepare to stand for Christ!

**LOVE FOR JESUS, THE ONLY LASTING MOTIVATOR**

The greatest fear of death or love of life will never enable us to endure the tribulation to come. Our only hope is to fall in love with our Savior so that He absorbs our precious thoughts and time. In fact, this love will give us the desire to fervently study the Bible. We will begin to constantly pour our hearts out before God in prayer. Experiencing this love will be so incredible that we will not be able to keep it to ourselves. We will happily share with all who are willing to listen and we will humbly serve others as Jesus would. To effectively draw others to Jesus, these actions must spring from genuine love for our Savior.

However, following God goes against our natural selfishness. Therefore, if we are to be His children, we must be intentional in our walk with Him. Following God will not offer the glamour and fun that this world uses to entice us. Rather, following God will offer hardships, trials, persecution, and yes - true joy. Second Corinthians 4:9 points out that Christians will be persecuted on every side, but we will never be forsaken. Followers of God may experience pain, loneliness, discouragement, and rejection, but they press on because they know that the joy to come is immeasurable. Nothing can compare to the wonder of basking in God’s presence.

When we truly see all that Jesus has done for us, we cannot make an unworthy sacrifice for His cause!

I especially love the way Ellen White describes this pure joy in her vision of heaven, recorded in Early Writings. “We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that surrounded us that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out, ‘Alleluia, Heaven is cheap enough!’” (White, 17).

We know the story and we know how it ends. We even have an instruction manual to guide us to the assured victory, yet many still fear the end of time.

*Darcee Christensen is a freshman at Southern Adventist University.*
The God of little things

Shane Hilde

Photo: Mary Hilde. This is where I lost my phone.

When we hydrated, we decided to hop in the car and scoot down the road to Thera. Mary grabbed her phone and we were off. Thera was about a 10-15 minute drive, and the town is a tourist trap, making parking a challenge, but thankfully our little Fiat 500 rental was able to fit in the smallest of spaces. We hopped out of the car and headed down to the main strip. I gave a reflexive pat to my pocket to check for my phone, but no phone!

“Wait! I forgot my phone in the car,” I said.

I ran back to the car and looked through it. Nothing. An anxious feeling began to take hold of me as I frantically searched the car. I looked everywhere.

“I can’t find my phone. I don’t even remember where I had it last. I remember taking pictures and set it down…”

The reality of what must have happened hit me, kicking my stress into high gear, as iPhones aren’t cheap.

“Well, we’ll just have to drive back and look for it,” Mary said.

She was taking this better than I expected. I was hating myself for being so stupid as to forget my phone in a foreign country, and to top it off, I had placed my phone in airplane mode. This meant I couldn’t even track my phone to see where I had left it.

We raced back to Oia and checked the two locations we had stopped, but there was no phone, and a hopeless feeling set in. I had left my phone on the bench and now it was gone. I was more upset over losing an expensive phone than I was with what was on the phone. What a waste of money, I thought to myself. And with other misfortunes happening not even a day before, such as Mary scratching the rental car bumper, our Greek experience was quickly turning into a mini nightmare.

I called T-Mobile to see if they could track my phone if it was in airplane mode. The answer was no. They suspended service, and I marked it lost on my iCloud account. I was quite depressed the rest of the day. I secretly wondered if this was God’s doing. I suppose blaming God for anything bad that happens in our lives is a typical human response. Maybe I was spending too much time on my phone and this was God’s way of forcing me off it. While I was upset about the loss of my phone, part of me was relieved I would have a forced break.

A few days later we flew back to Athens to catch a flight to Cairo, Egypt. I woke up in my hotel and checked my email. I had a new message come through from ADvindicate’s contact page. The subject line immediately caught my attention. It said, “Cell Phone Missing.”

“I couldn’t believe it. My eyes quickly fell to the message.

“Dear Sir, We have found a cell phone dropped by the church here in Greece,” a man named Thanos wrote. “We saw you are managing the facebook page of this website and it was the only way to reach out to you.”
“This website” was ADvindicate. He was able to see the notifications on the locked screen and saw that whoever owned the phone also managed ADvindicate’s Facebook page, and from Facebook he visited ADvindicate and emailed me.

Two days after I arrived home, my phone arrived via Fedex.

I said multiple thank you’s to God for watching over my phone and bringing it back to me. I couldn’t help but be reminded that God is interested in the details of our lives. And even though losing an iPhone could be considered a silly first-world problem, God still cares.

Jesus said in Matthew 6 not to worry about life. The birds don’t sow or reap or store their food, yet God feeds them. The flowers or grass aren’t worried about clothes, but God clothes them, and in God’s eyes we are much more valuable. We aren’t to worry about the basics of life, or even things that might seem huge and impossible. God already knows and promises to provide and make a way -- even for a lost phone.
They that wait

Wendy Williams

A couple weeks ago I tried “greeting” for the first time at my church. I enjoyed interacting with many of the members and hearing about how their weeks had gone. But after replying “fine, how are you?” and “I can’t complain,” they walked over to their friends and did just that.

I eavesdropped as one individual told their woes and another responded with greater ones till the conversation became a competition of suffering.

Person one: “My back has been giving tremendous trouble this week.”

Person two: “Oh yeah? My corns are rubbing something terrible.”

Person one: “My arthritis just won’t let me rest today.”

Person two: “My arthritis won’t let me rest any day, so take that!”

Person one: “I forgot where I put my keys and had to look for them for thirty minutes today before coming to church.”

Person two: “Yeah, well, I have a hang nail that snagged my last good pair of thermal underwear this morning, so now I’m going to freeze through church!”

Person one then shakes his head in defeat and silence with no contesting or argument.

Not wanting to imagine what thermal underwear is exactly, I assumed person two won that morning’s round and attended to greeting other stragglers entering the church. In that moment I knew that if I want to continue being a greeter, I must suffer just a bit more and be willing to tell people all about it. So here it goes.

I get migraines. In case you are confusing these with mere headaches and are ready to dismiss my qualifications for championship over “church sob session,” let me elaborate.

When I wake up wondering if someone is using my head as a squeeze toy, I know a migraine is coming and I know I don’t want it. I try to deny its grip over me and tough out the pain. I dread the fact that no matter what I do, it is just going to be a bad day. I know I need medicine and relief, but despite my prayers for removal, the migraine (like a dragon against a knight) wins.

Within an hour of realizing the trouble I’m in, you’ll find me, incapacitated, and lying on the couch in agony. If you happen by chance to find me in this condition, I strongly recommend leaving the light switch in the off position, walking on egg shells, and (as my poor brother has learned) never, ever, dropping a pin! My frustration is at dangerously high levels in this stage, and I wouldn’t want anyone to get hurt!

Somewhere in between yelling at my brother for whispering too loud and frequent pilgrimages to kneel before the porcelain god, I ask my mother to drive me to the doctor. There I stumble in appearing to be only a step ahead of grim death. My hair is partially ripped out of a sloppy pony-tail, and my pajamas are usually accented by a clashing pair of pink and red slippers as I slouch down in a waiting chair that is as pale white as my face.

I hate the waiting room. It seems that everyone, including those who look perfectly well get chosen before me. I want to scream in my jealousy, “You’re not bleeding; you’re not struggling to see straight, so sit down! It’s my turn! I want to see the doctor now!”
I can’t tolerate that people are trying to occupy this same space while their health trials are so obviously insignificant compared to mine.

Soon, but not soon enough for my liking, I am guided to a smaller waiting room for a few more minutes of solidifying torture without end before the doctor walks in.

Upon entry, my doctor takes one glance at me and instructs me to lie down.

I obey without protest and begin waving my hand in conduction to his routine lecture as he tries to teach me the merits of taking my medicine before I am unable to swallow without throwing-up.

He knows my habits well and calls a nurse to shove a dissolvable tablet under my tongue. He then anxiously stands before me, waiting for the transfiguration of his “magic wand cure” to take hold and studies my face for signs of relief.

“How do you feel?”

“It’s only been two seconds,” I groan.

“I want you to stay here thirty minutes. The meds should take affect by then.”

I nod in submissive agreement and he leaves me alone with the hope of soon feeling well again. Half an hour later, I am no better. He frowns and stares down at his chart.

“I can’t give you anything stronger here. Do you want me to call ahead to the emergency room for you?”

This is usually the part where I give him an evil stare over the top of my glasses and look back at him in disgust. He knows better than to suggest such a thing! He understands my feelings about hospitals. He knows my pain is great before I trust his medical power, but that doesn’t mean I want to see the inside of a hospital any time soon!

“Just bring me a baseball bat and waiver, I’ll sign on the dotted line,” I pout.

“What about I shoot-ya-up with something that will make you sleep instead?”

By this time I am incredibly weary of waiting for relief, relief that has not come. Life just seems hopeless and disappointing now.

“Ok.” I shrug my shoulders and flop back down on his table.

Less than twenty minutes later the world swirls around me, and though pain is still present, I surrender to sweet sleep. Finally, relief from suffering!

There’s my story. Do I win?

We are all waiting and suffering through something. We all spend some portion of our life in an uncomfortable “waiting room” for something we need desperately and if you personally haven’t yet just wait, it will happen. Jesus promises that in this world we will have tribulation (John 16:33).

When we are being pinched by the pain of waiting, how do we react?

There are three stages of waiting. The first is the “uh, oh” stage in which we realize something bad has just happened and we need something good from the power of God to change it (preferably immediately).

The second stage is anger and frustration mixed with a time of intense soul searching and dialogue with God.

The third is surrender to the wait. We shouldn’t despair or give up, but we must acknowledge that God has not
forgotten us and we are resting in his hands.

I definitely question why I even get and have to go through my migraines. I don’t understand why I have to suffer and wait through so much misery.

Though I can use my migraines to at least win the “church sob session,” I realize that people like Job would just laugh at my idea of a suffering and a “long” wait.

Job woke up one day and discovered his entire life was being used as the devil’s squeeze toy. He lost everything, even his health. Migraines, back aches and bunions couldn’t come close to the excruciating physical and mental suffering he underwent. He was a great guy, who didn’t deserve to suffer. He had faith in God’s power to heal and fix all his problems, but God refused to wave his magic wand and instantly re-instate him. As his strength waned, he became increasingly frustrated and angry with God (Job 7:16-21).

If you’ve ever questioned or been angry with God for your suffering you can relate I’m sure.

I personally believe it’s ok to voice frustrations and resentment to God for not fixing physical and mental aches we face in our lives. I even think it’s perfectly fine to be angry with God. He’s a big boy; he can handle it. Sometimes I get in his face to tell him about it.

I jump into my little convertible, begin blasting music, and munch on potato chips as I drive all the way up mountain Calvary. There I find Jesus hanging on a cross. He is bloody, naked, shamed, carrying the guilt of the world, pierced, beaten, dirty, and left comforted. I look in his anguished eyes and tell him that my lot in this world is worse than any other and I no longer want to wait for him to fix it. He has wasted his time dying for me. I want relief now, and I want to be compensated for my time spent waiting for relief and rewarded accordingly. I’m not leaving till I’m done putting him in his place and get an answer as to what I ever did to deserve such hardship!

Job didn’t have a car to get up to Calvary. Jesus had not revealed his plan yet. That didn’t stop him from wanting to question God and God granted him an up close audience.

The Bible says that in the midst of the storm God answered Job. “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man: I will question you, and you shall answer me.”

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!” (Job 38:1-5NIV).

Job asked for a meeting with God and he got it. But God turned the table back on Job. He put him in his place.

“You want to question me? You want to be angry? You think you shouldn’t suffer the consequences of sin like everyone else? You think you’ve got all the answers? Did you create you? Do you hold all things in your hands? Are you in control? So you think you’ve got a plan huh? Ok, go ahead, make my day, I’d love to hear it!”

It didn’t take long for Job to get the point. In the midst of the storm and his suffering he surrendered to God’s hand and responds:

I know that you can do all things: no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my council?’ Surely I spoke of thinks I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said ‘Listen now and I will speak: I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. There I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:1-6 NIV)

Surrendering to the wait God has placed before you is not a deficit to God. Often there is no immediate gratification for our trials and suffering, yet God remembers each one like a banker collects interest, and stores them up for us. He sees the big picture. He is still in ultimate control. By the way, the devil had to actually ask God before he could even touch Job with any suffering.
Our wait is merely a storm God uses to draw near us. He will sustain us with strength for today. We may not believe it will be enough for the week, but in the same way a bodily pain must be handled from minute to minute, so is his power. The way in which we handle our wait is a testimony of his plan of salvation. He has held all things together by his cross and will continue to do so in each life.

All we need to know about Job’s outcome is in the first sentence of Job 42:12 (NIV). The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first. This means that we too shall be rewarded not equal to what we had before, but more than we deserve.

Our complaints and trials of every size are not being ignored by God. Our wait is not in vain. The beautiful words of Isaiah 30:27-31 (NIV) say:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?” Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator to the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

None of us can win the “suffering sob competition” because trials will continue as long as the earth endures. We can challenge God to the competition, but he will always win. If in this knowledge you still find yourself wanting to wrestle with God, my only advice is that you watch out for his arms.

Jesus’ outstretched arms upon the cross are the same that offer us the big plan of salvation in the midst of the storm. They are filled with the strength he imparts to us. They are the same that will be raised in victory over earth’s sob session. They are the same that will open wide the gates of heaven and reward “they that wait.”
No place for emotionalism

Mark Sheffield

While the issue of women’s ordination has consumed a lot of committee time in the last number of decades, it virtually roared into prominence in the months leading up to the General Conference in San Antonio. I had not paid much attention over the years. However, when I found myself caught up in the general fever and began to study the matter in earnest, I was surprised by what I observed.

First of all, I was disturbed to observe that many Adventists use their emotions to make spiritual decisions. Secondly, I observed that many resorted to manipulative means to convince others to view women’s ordination through the same lenses as they. I also observed that there were many on both sides of the issue who chose to present arguments based on careful study of the Bible. Good people can, of course, disagree about biblical interpretation.

THOSE WHO BUILD THEIR BELIEFS ON CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS START WITH A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE

I observed that those who voiced a stand against women’s ordination were speaking against a strong cultural tide. Sadly, people who build their beliefs on cultural (and therefore secular) assumptions start with a distinct advantage in any argument because their opinions are readily digested and deemed acceptable by those who are regularly exposed to the predominant cultural thinking of the day. Those who do not present the Bible as the primary source of direction are actually secularists in sheep’s clothing.

Let me illustrate my point about the dangers of emotionalism. Both before and after the General Conference in San Antonio, we frequently heard accounts of the deep emotional pain caused by the discussion of women’s ordination. Undeniably, though the emotions are real, their use is dangerous. Sentimentalism was predominant and promoted the fear that life after a no vote could not go on. In fact, all this weeping reminded me of the crying child who keeps one eye on his mother. We all recognize that children sometimes cry for effect and many children discover that it works. However, the "no" vote did not change anything in the church, except the feelings of many who were in favor of women’s ordination. In many cases, their emotions ran the gamut from hurt to anger and the result has been that many of those who are in favor of women’s ordination are more aggrieved than ever.

EMOTIONALISM DISTORTS OUR VIEW OF THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH US

Sadly, those who based their view of women’s ordination on a cultural or emotional foundation often view those who voted “no” as people who oppose a fair and just view of women in ministry. When this happens, a rational approach to study is removed in favor of an emotional accusation based on a straw man argument and in some cases, those sincere believers who base their position on the scriptures are viewed as a deadly menace.

Manipulative emotionalism extended itself in an interview published at SpectrumMagazine.org August 5, 2015. Charles Scriven interviewed a highly regarded Adventist scientist by the name of Alvin Kwiram, a graduate of the California Institute of Technology and a former faculty member of Harvard and the University of Washington.

The interview appears to be a straightforward discussion of science and faith, but the underlying argument is based on pure emotionalism. According to Kwiram, Adventist scientists are suffering deeply from an oppressive church. Adventist scientists are being “vilified” at the hands of “people with limited qualifications” and “little or no understanding.” Kwiram goes on to compare the current situation of many Adventist scientists to Galileo’s persecution by the Catholic Church.
With all due respect to the scientific credentials of Kwiram, this claim is simply false. Howling mobs of ignorant peasants are not attacking Adventist scientists, many who believe in theistic evolution. Galileo’s persecution at the hands of the Catholic Church bears no relationship whatsoever to the case of modern Adventist scientists. In fact, Seventh-day Adventists embrace an intellectually informed and logical response to modern philosophies such as Darwinism and the consequent tendency to worship nature.

Adventist Today published an article called “Tenderly Caring for Our Wounded.” Allan Martin, a youth pastor in Arlington, Texas, explains that the entire General Conference 2015 in San Antonio was an act of war against the youth. Martin’s solution suggests spiritual triage based on emotion. If necessary, he writes, pastors should apologize for the actions of the church. Pastors should “actively listen and empathize. Initially, it is likely most important to hear their heart and allow them to voice their emotions and reactions.”

He goes on to say that pastors should offer additional resources to support those who have been left traumatized and debilitated by the “no” vote. He even suggested that perhaps counseling and therapeutic referrals would be necessary. From what I could see, Martin did not offer the Bible or prayer as a source of comfort. What he offered was “togetherness” to stand in place of “the touch of God.” In fact, his counsel is based on emotionalism. It is anti-intellectual and it is anti-biblical.

THE SCRIPTURES PROVIDE TRUE WISDOM AND INTELLECTUALISM

Seventh-day Adventists have always taught that the Bible alone is the means of spiritual survival in a lost world and that the word of God is the answer to all our pain and disappointment. This is not ignorant foolishness. This is wisdom.

Studying and understanding the Bible is the most demanding intellectual challenge of all time, far surpassing the challenge offered by any of the so-called hard sciences. To love the Bible means to love logic, evidence, and progress. Many of those who voted in favor of women’s ordination want to make it appear that reason and logic are on their side. However, when their arguments are based on emotion and the prevailing culture, rather than the scriptures, the evidence suggests otherwise.

In fact, when individuals destroy the Bible by promoting highly questionable methods of interpretation, they are relieved of the intellectual demand of a close study of the Bible. Brothers and sisters, when we reject the Bible, we reject the Spirit who gave it. Emotionalism is a dangerous and flimsy rock on which to build one’s house.