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Buddhism, Pentecostalism, Catholicism, and atheism. Today he holds down several full-time jobs and still finds time to be a missionary....

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Former Volunteer Youth Worker at San Antonio Church Sentenced for "Sexting"

Submitted: Jun 20, 2013

By AT News Team

A 20-year-old man who was caught last year exchanging sexually explicit text and Facebook messages with a 12-year-old girl in his youth group was sentenced yesterday (June 19) to six months in jail, eight years probation and ten years as a registered sex offender, according to television station KHOU, the CBS News affiliate in Houston, Texas. Jake Alexander Garcia was sentenced by Judge Ron Rangel in the 379th District Court, reported the San Antonio Express-News.

Garcia was arrested a year ago after being banned from volunteering at the Scenic Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church, a congregation in the northwest suburbs of San Antonio with 582 members. He met the girl through his volunteer role at the church youth group and as the two became enamored with each other, he asked her to send him nude photos via her cell phone. Her mother discovered that the girl did send pictures of herself in her underwear and her father found exchanges on Facebook.

The pastor intervened immediately, banning Garcia from volunteering and the situation was reported to the authorities. Solicitation of a child under 14 is a second-degree felony in Texas, punishable by up to 20 years in prison, the newspaper reported. The defense attorney told the judge that the girl's mother did not want charges filed against the young man and the prosecutor conceded to an Express-News reporter that the girl's father wanted probation.

"Young people have been tempted in all generations to experiment with sex," a veteran youth worker told Adventist Today. "The difference in our era is that an electronic record is often made and it becomes something they cannot shrug off or wiggle out of. A text message sent in the heat of the moment can affect a young person for a lifetime. We owe them careful education and prevention as well as vigilance in reporting to authorities."

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Penang Adventist Hospital in Malaysia Seeks More Charity Cases

Submitted: Jun 16, 2013

By AT News Team

The relatively small hospital operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the southeast Asian nation of Malaysia has told the major newspaper in the country that it is actively seeking charity cases for care. At a news conference last week, Dr. Wesley Toh See Wei, chief executive of Penang Adventist Hospital, said that the health care institution has about $1.3 million available to assist patients in need, according to the New Straits Times.

"Penang Adventist is a non-profit hospital providing wholistic healthcare regardless of race, creed and religious background," the doctor stated. "However, not many patients approach us for help and our growing funds have been under-utilized." At least four charity funds are operated by the hospital, the newspaper reported.

A fund raising art show and auction is scheduled for next week to capitalize a new fund for cancer patients anticipated at a new cancer center under construction on the hospital campus. The event "will feature exquisite calligraphy pieces by the late Datuk Yim Yoo Loon, a renowned Chinese scholar, and photographs by ace cameraman, Fong Peng Chua." The goal is to raise at least $50,000.

About a third of the 28 million population of Malaysia live on incomes below the poverty line of approximately $250 a month. The country has a national health insurance program, although concerns were expressed by physicians in 2011 that it would leave out many patients.

There are 5,400 members in 50 congregations in the denomination's Peninsular Malaysia Mission, which has a total of 31 clergy and operates no schools. The island of Borneo, which contains about a fifth of the nation's total population, is attached to the West Indonesia Union Mission. A 2010 census reported that 61 percent of the population of Malaysia is Muslim, 20 percent Buddhist and only nine percent Christian.

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Atlantic Union College Approved for Two Degree Programs by State of Massachusetts

Submitted: Jun 20, 2013

By AT News Team
The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education voted earlier this week to approve two bachelor's degree programs at Atlantic Union College (AUC), Katy Abel, associate commissioner for the board, told two Worcester newspapers yesterday. The approval requires that the college gain accreditation before it can award the degrees and regular reports to the board, according to the Worcester Telegram & Gazette.

Dr. Duane Cady, interim college president who attended the meeting, told the Worcester Business Journal that AUC through the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS). AUC does not intend to go back to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges that voted in 2010 to withdraw accreditation due to financial problems caused by a loss of enrollment and did so on July 31, 2011. It had been on probation with the accrediting body since 2008.

Adventist Today reported in 2011 that AUC entered into negotiations with Washington Adventist University to open a branch campus in South Lancaster in the former AUC facilities. In October of that year the board of WAU voted not to go ahead with the plan. Since that time, Adventist Today has also reported proposals to operate an unaccredited training center for Bible workers at AUC.

The Massachusetts state board has approved the development of bachelor's degrees in health science and theology, stated the Worcester Business Journal earlier today. Cady told the Telegram & Gazette that "he does not yet have a timeframe" for the development of the programs or when the college may again offer classes.

Colleges and universities in the United States affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been accredited by the regional accrediting associations starting in the 1930s. There was a considerable debate at the time among denominational leaders. Ellen White's position that physicians trained at the denomination's medical school should be eligible for state licensure and the requirement of the American Medical Association that accredited medical schools admit only students who graduated from accredit colleges led to a policy to seek regular accreditation.

"TRACS is recognized by both the United States Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, as a national accrediting body for Christian institutions, colleges, universities, and seminaries," according to its official web site. It was "established in 1979 to promote the welfare, interests, and development of postsecondary institutions, whose mission is characterized by a distinctly Christian purpose [and] encourages each affiliated institution to develop its own distinctives, while providing quality postsecondary education within the context of spiritual development." Most of the well-known Christian institutions are not included in its list of member schools.
ADRA is Assisting Refugees from the Fighting in Syria

Submitted: Jun 18, 2013

By AT News Team

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is assisting hundreds of refugee families fleeing the ongoing conflict in Syria. It is focusing on un-registered refugees, those who are not being helped by neighboring governments and other international organizations.

More than 100 families have been provided with cash assistance to help cover rent in Jordan, said Thierry Van Bignoot, ADRA’s director of emergency management. The agency also partnered with the government of Germany to distribute winter clothing to some 3,500 families living in the Al Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq, Jordan.

Refugees have been leaving Syria for the past two years during a civil war which has killed more than 70,000 people, according to United Nations estimates. More than 1.5 million people have fled, most to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Van Bignoot said ADRA estimates the number of refugees higher than the UN because many have not registered with the neighboring nations or the UN to get on the official records. “Some people are afraid to give their names for fear of retribution,” the ADRA worker explained.

The agency last year partnered with the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization to provide about $140 a month for three months to unregistered families for lodging. Many are staying with designated host families, while some have found basement rooms or small apartments. This assistance helped people such as Amara, who told local ADRA workers that she came to Jordan with her five children while her ex-husband remained in Syria with his new wife. With the extra cash, she was able to pay rent for an unfurnished and unheated apartment. She said she was also able to buy some necessary medication for her heart problems. Another recipient was a man named Musa, who came to Jordan with his wife and six children. Their finances have been depleted after they sold the last of the jewelry they brought from home.

ADRA has identified other needs in the region and is now implementing a project to provide gynecological and obstetrical care to Syrian refugee women in West Bekaa, Lebanon. In Beirut, the agency is planning a school that would provide half-day classes to refugee children, who are without education. Another project proposes a mobile clinic in the Jordan Valley, an area where few nongovernmental aid agencies are currently deployed.

“The needs are huge,” Van Bignoot stated. He estimated that more than 70 percent of the refugees are women and children. Many of the men have stayed behind in Syria.
Atlanta Church Provides Summer Enrichment Program in Science, Technology and Math

Submitted: Jun 19, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Many Adventist churches will offer a week of Vacation Bible School this summer, but one is providing three weeks of intensive enrichment in science, technology and mathematics (STEM). Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church in Atlanta is one of the largest historically African American congregations in the denomination and the largest Adventist church in the metropolitan area. ESMART Summer Academy is being offered this month through Berean Christian Junior Academy, the K-8 school sponsored by the church.

ESMART means "enrichment through science, math, athletics, and research training," program director Alina Mitchell told Adventist Today. She was previously a faculty member in the Ben Carson Science Academy at Morehouse School of Medicine where improved scores in math and science through enrichment programs were documented. "We want young people to develop a love for science and math," she stated.

A total of 18 children ages 10 through 13 in grades five through eight are attending from 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. each day. The program will be expanded in the summer of 2014. "In the mornings they do science and math courses, studying marine science, biology, physics, chemistry and environmental science, Mitchell explained. Mentors help students with individualized math lessons based on a pre-test, as well as lead team building and character development activities. In the afternoons, students learn martial arts and play team sports.

Field trips are a regular part of the program. On one trip students took a Discover Scuba Diving course at a diving center. On another trip they participated in a service project at MedShare International, packing 4,000 pounds of medical supplies for an overseas emergency. They will tour the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and participate in a Public Health Day sponsored by a representative from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), among other events.

Families pay a total of $450 for the materials, lunch, field trips and a T-shirt. There is a ten percent discount for families with more than one child in the program, and parents get a $25 credit if they refer a child from another family who signs up. The church began advertising the program early in the spring.

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Adventist Health Agency will Train Professionals in Ethnographic Approaches to Health Disparities for the State of Maryland

Submitted: Jun 20, 2013

By AT News Team

The Center on Health Disparities in Takoma Park has been awarded a contract by the Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission to train hospital employees across the state in methods of collecting better data about patients’ ethnic backgrounds, according to the *Gazette* suburban newspapers published by Post-Newsweek Media. The improved information will help public health officials, health care institutions and health professionals address disparities in health care and health outcomes among various communities.

The first of the one-day seminars is scheduled for June 28 at the Maryland Hospital Association offices in Elkridge, a suburb of Baltimore. Sessions will also be held in the mountains of western Maryland and on the Eastern Shore. Each seminar will include a panel discussion by hospital patients who will talk about their experiences as well as their reactions to being asked about their ethnic background, language preferences, etc.

Hospitals have long collected demographic data on patients which is used to help understand trends in disease and health promotion factors, but "the accuracy of the data is questionable," said Marcos Pesquera, executive director of the center. Questions about race, ethnicity and language can be offensive to patients which makes the health professionals who ask apprehensive. As health care relies more on electronic medical records, collecting accurate information becomes more important.

An example of the importance of ethnographic information in health care was provided by the center. A comparison of two recent years found that infant mortality among African Americans was 2.7 percent higher than among whites. Among Hispanic and Latino residents those without health insurance were more than five times the proportion among non-Hispanic whites.

The center is an agency of Adventist HealthCare, the organization affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Maryland and New Jersey that operates four hospitals and a number of home health and nursing care institutions. Perhaps best known of the institutions is Washington Adventist Hospital which shares a campus with Washington Adventist University one mile from the District of Columbia.

The training sessions are being conducted in partnership with the Maryland Hospital Association and the Institute for Family- and Patient-Centered Care. Maryland is noted among hospital administrators as having the most highly regulated health care system in the United States.

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Southern Adventist University has won the same award for community service given last year to La Sierra University by the United States Federal government. It was named to the 2013 President's Honor Roll, the highest recognition given for a university's commitment to volunteer service, service-learning and civic engagement, according to a news release from the Corporation for National and Community Service, which administers the awards. La Sierra was the first Adventist institution of higher education to be honored with this award.

The Adventist pastor who shot his granddaughter has been sentenced to 100 hours of community service by the Olmsted County District Court. As previously reported by Adventist Today, Pastor Stanley Wilkinson accidentally shot his 16-year-old granddaughter after hearing a noise outside his home at night. He pled guilty to endangering safety by intentionally firing a weapon and the judge placed a stay on a 91-day jail sentence pending his completion of the community service work and a probation report.

A fund raising event in an Adventist church in a small town in Australia made it possible to purchase needed equipment for local fire fighters. A trivia night hosted by the Oberon Seventh-day Adventist Church generated sufficient funds for the Oberon Rural Fire Brigade to purchase a radio for the fire truck, helmets with lights and two winches used to hoist wet hoses so they can drain, according to a report in the Oberon Review. The town of Oberon is in a rural area west of Sydney in New South Wales.

June 17 was National Eat Your Vegetables Day but Adventist Today has not found a single instance this week in which an Adventist church or institution used this event as an opportunity for health promotion, despite considerable recent media attention to research at Loma Linda University showing the health benefits of a vegetarian diet. Readers are asked to notify Adventist Today if they are aware of such events connected to this national celebration.

A nurse at Hinsdale Hospital, the Adventist medical institution in the suburbs of Chicago, has received the Nursing Excellence Award from www.nurse.com. Pam Reetz is a 23-year employee of the hospital and resident of Downers Grove who works as a clinical coordinator in the progressive care unit, reports the Chicago Tribune.
Thinking About a Response to the GLTB Persons Who Desire to Be Members of the Adventist Church

By Larry Downing

Challenge: Scripture does not, in explicit terms, provide an answer to the question of whether it is consistent within the Christian faith to accept into church membership gay, lesbian, transsexual or bi-sexual people who are in a committed relationship. In my opinion, scripture is silent on this matter. How, then, is it possible to form a reasonable and defensible conclusion when a significant authority is silent? True, there are texts one can turn to that address sexual behavior, such as the commandment against adultery, the requirement that one not lie with a beast, and other passages you have heard or read.

Question: Is it legitimate to apply these texts to the question of the GLTB individuals in committed relationships who wish to be members of the Seventh Day Adventist church?

Within the context of the biblical passages that address sexual practices there are other passages that command us to stone our son if he speaks harshly against us, stone the Sabbath breaker, the adulterer, and the two unmarried who are sexually active one with the other. Does anyone care to initiate an enforcement bureau to police and implement these rules today? This leads us to the broader question of hermeneutics: the art or “science” of textual interpretation. We read a statement, and from that statement questions arise: What was the author’s intent? How was the statement understood by the first hearers? How did they respond? How are we to understand and apply the statement now?

My hermeneutic—my method—is to examine a broad perspective, and from that exercise form a hypothesis, seek support for that hypothesis, and suggest a conclusion.

When we read the Old Testament we find a collection of stories. I maintain we do not find statements of theology or doctrine there. The Older Testament is not a series of “Bible Studies” or a catechism; rather, it is a collation of stories about people. We do not read about a 21st century church or the requirements for membership in a religious organization of our time.

If you were a Hebrew child you belonged to the synagogue. As an adult male you were a child of Abraham. You attended the local synagogue. You also had the right to enter the Jerusalem temple and participate in its rituals. Were it possible for us to change places with those who attended temple services in Bible times, both they and we would be at a loss to understand the worship forms and practices. Ask the first century Jewish priest how we could transfer our membership from one synagogue or temple to another or ask how the temple or synagogue went about dropping a person from membership. The priest would be at a loss to give cogent answers. We might as well ask him to sing the Star Spangled Banner.

I find no record of church groups with established membership criteria during the time period between the Old and the New Testaments.

During the New Testament time period no formal church structure, as we know it, existed. The first Christians did select deacons and presbuteroi. One looks in vain in the NT for a church charter, membership requirement, by-laws, doctrinal statements or creeds.

It was in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries that we first find evidence of an official church organization. It is in this time period that Creeds were proposed, scrutinized, adopted and fought over. Bands of clergy formed and a structure was developed to define piety levels. Debates over what is the “true” doctrine went on for months and years. Heresy trials were common. There was a high risk of expulsion and death for those who believed or promoted teachings that did not conform to the established church teaching.

About one hundred and fifty years ago the Seventh Day Adventist Church was formed in response to the need for the church to own property and carry out other formal organizational matters. The church began to officially recognize certain beliefs as unique and essential to an Advent believer. The 1932 General Conference Year Book included the first Statement of Belief. Not all were pleased with this action.

Church membership in our early years was relatively fluid. People came and went with little official response. In theory, official doctrine is determined by the General Conference in Session. The vote to adopt a particular doctrine as a Fundamental Belief is one thing. Implementation of that vote is another matter. By GC policy, it is only the local church that determines who will be accepted into membership and who is denied membership. For example can an Adventist raise tobacco and maintain church membership? Some Adventist churches in southern United States have said no! In mid-western America, congregations have denied membership to those who raise pigs.

Based upon an examination of the biblical record, my hypothesis is this: Look at the larger picture. With this as a model, I suggest the following: The bible does not address many of the situations that we encounter in contemporary life. We cannot find a text to answer whether it is acceptable for an Adventist to fly in space. How does a person keep Sabbath when circling round the world every few minutes? In the same way, I believe we should not look to the bible writers to answer whether gay, lesbian, transgenderer or bi-sexual people can be accepted into church membership. Our task is to seek and discover how the bible writers addressed our human situation and pay particular attention to how Jesus related to people. Add a generous amount of charity toward all, and apply common sense when addressing sensitive issues. With these factors as a foundation, we can begin our quest to find answers to those matters that take us outside the bible writer’s knowledge and experience.

It is essential in our deliberations to examine the record of Jesus the Christ. Consider how...
with, responded to and blessed many of whom we consider the wrong kinds of people— the political sharks—like Zacchaeus, sinners and publicans. This is a collection of individuals whom many would believe do not pass muster for membership in an Adventist Church. Yet, here they are as heroes in our sacred writings. Who let down the guard?

Put some sanctified imagination to work. Imagine Jesus in a face to face encounter with a gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender or any other kind of sexual behavior that comes to mind. What response on his part comes to your mind? Cruel remarks? Jokes? Scorn? Compassion? Welcome? Love?

Today, when a request may come from two people who live in a committed relationship to become members of your congregation, it is important to acknowledge that the two people have an established relationship that has not been part of traditional Adventism. This is the activating incident—the transition, the point of crisis. Some traditional Adventists believe: This behavior is sin! We are lowering our standards. We will be vilified. In my opinion, the church is the hospital for sinners—and aren’t we all patients? Jesus always welcomed the outcast and those whom the religious society of that era vilified.

Two passages I present for consideration: The first is found in Matthew 16:19. In response to Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” RSV

The second is recorded in Matthew 18:18: In response to the disciple’s question, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” RSV

I suggest to you that these statements are applicable when Christians gather to consider important matters. Decisions are made, and actions are taken. These texts provide evidence that the decisions and actions, though outside of traditional boundaries, have authority. In our decision, might we err? Absolutely! But taking no action is not the answer. Is it possible that your congregation is or will be called to such a transition experience? Might this be your opportunity to expel the old and adopt the new? Could it be that what you face is the Lord’s way of setting you forth on a venture that will lead you to discover a revival of charity that warms the soul and affirms the outworking of Christian faith within this community? I do not have the answers to these important questions. What I can say is that from everything I know about Jesus’ life and teaching and everything others have said about Him, it is difficult to imagine Jesus standing before an individual who seeks a relationship with Him and saying anything other than, “You are my beloved child. Let no one hinder any one of my family who seeks to enter my home.”
This chapter in *The Monastery of the Heart* is titled “Co-Creation.” This term can raise red flags, and different people mean different things by it, so I’ll let Chittister define her meaning for herself:

“Co-creation, to continue the work of God on earth, requires us to tend the land and conserve the waters, to till the garden and protect the animals, to use the things of the earth in ways that enhance all life now—and preserve them for later generations as well.”

Now, for those who believe in a literal coming of Christ, (and I do!) that last line is problematic. My first reaction is to think, “There won’t be many later generations.” My second, following so close on the heels of the first that they’re almost one thought, is, “That’s what Ellen Harmon thought.” Clearly, there could be a few more generations. I hope not, but there could be. So maybe we do have to save the earth for our great-grandchildren. But we have enough to last another century, don’t we? Maybe? If we’re careful? And that ought to be enough, right . . .?

For many Christians, and not just Adventists, environmental issues are unimportant. Jesus is coming soon, and will burn up the earth, so why should we worry about spotted owls and sea turtles and pristine Alaskan wilderness? Didn’t God make this planet for our use?

For me, the answer to those questions (unlike so many, many others!) is simple: When Jesus comes, he might say something like, “I’m about to make a new planet. Show me how you treated the one I already gave you, and convince me that I should let you anywhere near the new one!” (Speaking as a mom, that’s what I’d say!) What will our answer be?

Chittister goes on:

“The human-centered view of creation is a stunted one. It fails to recognize the oneness of creation, the symphony of life forms that depend on one another to bring the universe, pulsing and throbbing with life, to a wholeness that is mutual, that reflects the full face of God rather than simply our own.”

Again, this could be seen differently. It could look like a sort of post-modern touchy-feely definition of life that means a sea sponge is as important in the scheme of things as a Ghandi. Or a Christ, for that matter. Or it could be a call to see the touch of the One Creator’s hand in all things. For me, it resonates. It doesn’t matter how long ago we believe the creation was—we were still made its caretakers. We were asked to till the garden and keep it. How are we doing on that?
Celebrate Your Identity

Submitted: Jun 19, 2013
By Ervin Thomsen

The Security of the Sabbath

“...worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7)

Birthdays! Anniversaries! The 4th of July! Thanksgiving! Christmas! These events all call for celebrations – occasions for remembering a shared heritage, for family togetherness, for remembering our roots and past history by which we define and maintain our identity. Our Creator-God wants us to remember and celebrate the great events of salvation history, creation and redemption, that He initiated, and which define our identity as His very own children. As you study this chapter, keep in mind that God wants you to recall these events, not just on a yearly basis, but as weekly opportunities to delight yourself in Him. It would be helpful to refrain from viewing the Sabbath as a legalistic requirement, but rather as an opportunity to enter into the highest dimensions of God’s purposes for us. Let us explore how genuine Sabbath-keeping can be one of God’s programming tools to protect our God’s given identity against Satan’s constant attempts to steal or re-program that identity that it may serve his purposes.

Your Identity: God’s Work or our Work

Our culture has taught us to think of work as a gauge of our personal self-worth. Thus we may choose to use words to describe the importance of our work in an exaggerated fashion. Just like the person who bragged that he had 3,400 people under him; he was the grounds keeper at the local cemetery. Another way of rating work is to look at how much we work, because our culture has taught us to believe that we are to work first, and then take a well-deserved rest. Rest is only for those who have worked first.

Upon creating Adam on the 6th day, God did not first command Adam to work in the garden, but to rest on the Sabbath in enjoyment of the work God had already done. On that first Sabbath, Adam entered into God’s rest – the delight of personally knowing the Creator who had done all the work in creating a world where everything was good, including humanity whom He had created very good. Since the work of creating the world did not weary God, and since Adam and Eve were not tired from work [for they had not performed any work prior to their first Sabbath], the meaning of “rest” must have a far greater meaning than recuperation from being tired. Remember, Adam’s first full day on planet earth was on Sabbath, the seventh day. Thus his first full day on earth was not for him a day of work, but a day of communion and fellowship with his Maker. The first face He saw was the face of God.

The greatest delight of our lives should be to have fellowship with the One who, even before the entrance of sin into this world, planned and prepared for our salvation from sin as a gift. The Sabbath tells us that though created last, we were nevertheless first on God’s agenda. Seventh-day Sabbath time is God’s special gift of Himself to us.
All who by faith receive the gospel can enter into God’s saving rest, of which the Sabbath is a sign. God wants us to put aside all trust in our own achievements, which can only lead to internal stress, because if we are honest, we will certainly know that we do not through our own works measure up – we’re not even close to His glorious ideal for us. Yet God invites us to trust only in the perfect salvation that He has provided. “And you are complete in Him” (Colossians 2:10)

What is our highest destiny? Our materialistic culture sends us the message that productivity is what really matters. Christian author Phillip Ware exposes the fallacy of this kind of thinking when he says that…

“So often in our busy culture, we feel that resting is a waste of time. We could be getting something done instead of wasting time resting. We could be advancing our cause instead of laying (sic) low and burning daylight on resting. We could be wringing an ounce or two more productivity out of the day if we could only get by with a little less rest. Rest is for down the road when we’re older... or when we go to heaven and don’t have to worry about pleasing our manager... or for when we don’t have to try to keep our family afloat financially... or for those days when we’ve actually gotten our ‘to do’ lists finished. Our modern mindset is that rest is for when we’re weary or sick or have time to rest. To only rest so we can recharge our batteries to work some more is a misunderstanding of God’s purpose for us.” [1]

God designed the Sabbath to deliver us from the rat-race of our performance and production as evidences of our true worth. Comedian Lily Tomlin once quipped that “the trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you’re still a rat.” The frustration of this rat race was expressed on a sign posted at a construction site, which read…

“We work in the ditch to make enough money to buy enough food to eat to gain enough strength to work in the ditch.”

The Sabbath is our declaration of liberty from the rat race. To work without ceasing is to seek to control our lives. To rest is to relinquish control. To rest is to trust God – for everything. Do you want to remove all worries and anxiety from your life? Then trust the One who said…”Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ or ‘what shall we wear?...For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:31-33). Again, remember your identity: God is your heavenly Father!

The Sabbath also has economic implications. On the Sabbath we abstain from work; we are not engaged in the “selling” of ourselves and our services to an employer, even though we could probably use the extra money. Our entire economic world rests on the foundation of earning wages, of buying and selling. Whenever we are involved in transactions of earning wages, we always look out for ourselves by asking, did we earn enough? Was the arrangement fair and equitable? Did we really earn what we are worth? Accordingly, we tend to rate our self-worth in direct correlation to our earning power. In the historical events of man’s first Sabbath on planet earth, God tells us that we are loved, accepted, and valued, not because of what we earn, but just because we are. In our world, there are thousands upon thousands of persons who daily have to
be fed, who have difficulties speaking, and who are incontinent. Yet, we also value them just because they are – created in God’s image. I am speaking here of babies. There are, of course, many adults with these same issues, but we sometimes have difficulties granting them the same value—just for being.

So when we in Revelation 13 read about a time when no one can buy and sell, and we wonder, how will we ever survive such a time of trouble, remember that God gave us the Sabbath, with its *do not work* clause, to prepare us for just such an event. If our identity is securely anchored in what God says about us, we will have no problem in resisting the very real economic pressures that will come to bear on our lives in the last days. Remember, “God has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing.” [2]

The Sabbath, rightly understood and celebrated, challenges the *earn-your-way* concept. That is why legalism, though it appears both legal and logical, is utterly and totally illegal. But the legalist is the last one to know this. “Legalism is the reduction of life to mere technicalities. It substitutes code for conscience, ritual for worship, rectitude for holiness, morality for purity.” [3] Have you ever met people who, like the Pharisees of old, have become the self-appointed enforcers of God’s rules on others? They can quote at length chapter and paragraph ad infinitum, they can persuasively speak about the alleged dangers of lowering the standards, but their hearts are not motivated by any real sense of love for God or for others. Essentially, they are attempting to sell us an earn-your-way arrangement for salvation. It appears legal, but it is utterly illegal, because it bypasses the spilt blood of the Lamb with which He purchased us for Himself. “Christ paid an infinite price for us, and according to the price paid He desires us to value ourselves.”

**Sabbath-keeping is Easy**

In my interaction with some Christians, I have through the years often heard it said that Seventh-day Adventists are trying to work their way into heaven. Some maintain that when we codify the Sabbath in law, it then becomes a “must-do activity” with little or no joy in it. Nothing could be further from the truth. Personally, I look upon our abstinence from work as a celebration that we are not saved by works.

Take for a moment a look at all of the Ten Commandments. Which one appears the hardest, and which one appears the easiest to keep? What is easier…to work or to rest? What would you rather do…work or rest? Why is it then so difficult for some of us to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy? Millions of people every week have their TGIF (thank God it’s Friday) moments, when the time-clock no longer shouts its demands of more and more work. As you look at your own life, have you ever come to a Friday quitting time at which you could honestly say about your work, whether at home or for some employer, that you “got it all done?” And yet, you are still able to celebrate God’s holy Sabbath, for you are not celebrating that you got it all done, but you are celebrating that God in Christ got it all done—salvation’s work has been fully completed by Jesus Christ. Really, thus understood, the Sabbath is a covenant sign by which we celebrate that we are not saved by our work, but by the work of Another, Jesus Christ.
Genuine Sabbath-keeping

Sabbath-keeping is easy, but it becomes hard work when we carry with it the baggage of seeking to enhance our self-worth by impressing God and others with how well we keep the Sabbath, while forgetting that the Sabbath has within it the power to keep us.

Some ancient Jewish rabbis used to say, “We do not keep the Sabbath; rather, the Sabbath keeps us.” Thus understood, the Sabbath is not an inconvenient intrusion imposed upon us by a power-hungry God, but it is truly God’s defense against anything that would damage our relationship with Him, and thus diminish our lives.

- The Sabbath keeps us close to Him who created us and who loves us with an everlasting love.
- The Sabbath keeps us from looking for love and significance in all the wrong places.
- The Sabbath keeps us from the pursuit of false gods who do not satisfy. All idols are really worthless.
- The Sabbath keeps us in close relationship to the One who values us just because “we are,” not because of “what we do.”
- The Sabbath keeps us from finding significance and salvation through our own works.

- The Sabbath keeps us from believing the lie that we are in charge. God is God, and we are not. To act as if the world cannot get along without our work for one day in seven is a startling display of pride that denies the sufficiency of our generous Maker.

- The Sabbath keeps us in the hands of the One who created us, and whose hands were nailed to the cross for us.
- The Sabbath keeps us from living inside the suffocating boxes of our own making by inviting us to breathe the fresh air of God’s life-giving grace.

Jewish Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel has in his writings captured something about the beauty of genuine Sabbath-keeping. He says…

“He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self.” [5]

We have value not because of what we do, but just because we are. What could be greater than connecting with our roots in God as our Creator? Thus Ellen White noted that “we are not
merely to observe the Sabbath as a legal matter. We are to understand its spiritual bearing upon all the transactions of life.” [6] All the transaction of life must ultimately be programmed by the truths of our divine identity, dignity, and destiny.

One of the truths of Sabbath-keeping that should powerfully program our lives is to let God control our lives, and that we must abstain from our attempts, though ever so well-meaning, to control the lives of others. God is in charge; we are not. When we disregard the Sabbath-rest principle as it applies to human relationships, we end up not only putting ourselves in bondage, but placing others in a prison of bondage as well. Our expectations of others can become demands that they by their conduct must satisfy our appetites of greed, covetousness and search for identity.

Just as the Ark of the covenant was God’s resting place (Psalm 132:8) in the same manner you can also there rest from all anxiety, uncertainty and lack of assurance about your salvation. At the Ark of the covenant you can know that you are accepted by your Heavenly Father. The Creator of the universe wants to give you such genuine rest, expressed in this Bible passage, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Life Applications

Questions to Ponder…

1. How do you anticipate the coming of the Sabbath?
   TGIF - thank goodness it’s Friday, or -
   TGIF - Thank God I’m Free…from the rat race. On this day I don’t have to do all the chores that I think I have to do. On this day I can truly live as a child of the King.

2. How can you make the keeping of the Sabbath a gospel celebration that truly focuses on God’s gifts to you, and not on your accomplishments?

3. What makes Sabbath-keeping a chore for you? Why? What can make it a delight?

4. Is it ever possible to make an idol out of the Sabbath? How would you know if this day had become an idol?

5. In what ways does Sabbath-keeping make the remainder of your life a blessing?

Truths vs. Lies:
Replace the lies or half-truths of the enemy with these truths that will set you free:

**Lies or half-truths of Satan**

The harder you work and the more time you devote to work, the more you can be in control of your destiny.

On the Sabbath day you must try to do everything just right in order to impress God with your sincerity that you are trying as hard as you can so He will not reject you.

Your significance and human ‘net worth’ is found in how much you work, what kind of work you do, and how much you earn.

**Truths of God**

Your life is in God’s hands. Rest in Him always, especially as symbolized on His designated day, and trust Him that He will provide for all your needs.

On the Sabbath day you enter God’s rest by rejecting the lie that salvation is by your own works and by accepting the truth that God in Jesus Christ has already accepted you.

Your significance and true worth is found in what God thinks of you as expressed in the price He paid for your redemption.

**Endnotes:**

[1] Philip Ware, “Rest from Your Labor” article, [http://www.heartlight.org/articles/200609/20060904_restfromlabor.html](http://www.heartlight.org/articles/200609/20060904_restfromlabor.html)


*Note: If you are enjoying these chapters and wish to have Dr. Thomsen come to do a seminar at your church or organization, please visit [www.streamofhealing.org](http://www.streamofhealing.org).*
Bill Hagerman, Christian for 27 years and member of Newark, Ohio Community Seventh-day Adventist church since May of 2012, is a hi-octane kind of guy. He owns a hair salon, sells insurance, is a full-time single parent and caregiver, and uses every one of those avenues as a way of doing mission work. Using over 60 Bible versions, he leads two weekly Bible studies, teaches at church, and sometimes takes over church duties for his pastor, Tom Hughes. This year, for instance, Hagerman was in charge of the Easter sunrise service while the pastor was away.

He came to this point on a long and winding road.

The Grandpa

Bill Hagerman loved his great-grandparents, and was fortunate enough to have them as an essential part of his life all the way up until he was married. He says they were the strongest Christians he ever knew and praises God to this day for the foundation they laid.

Grandpa, in particular, had a deft way of managing a strong-willed preteen boy. He was functionally blind, but could read his Bible by leaning close to it, his better eye peering through a strong magnifying glass. Naturally, a loving grandson would offer to read to him, and Grandpa would always agree. But that was only the beginning.

“Say I did something wrong,” Hagerman begins, slipping easily into his trademark storytelling mode. “Grandpa didn’t say anything about it. He would just ask me to look up a particular text and read it to him. I did, but of course I still didn’t ‘get’ it. Grandpa would say, ‘I don’t understand that. What do you think it means?’ and I’d explain it, feeling all grown-up and helpful. Grandpa would say, ‘You’re really smart!’ and that would be that. It wouldn’t be until that night, lying in bed, that I would think, ‘Now, wait a minute! That passage applied to me!’ I knew I’d just been corrected, but he didn’t do it in a way to make me angry or make me rebel.”

Around 12 to 14 years old, Bill was thinking of being a pastor. Grandpa, who was Nazarene, gave him a set of Adventist Bible studies to read. In eighth grade, Bill got a call from H. M. S.
Richards, Jr., because he always got all the answers right. Bill confessed that he actually asked his great-grandfather for help. “Well,” he reports Richards as saying, “you keep studying and keep listening to your grandpa, and you’ll do fine.”

But the path was not going to be that straight for Bill.

The Wanderer

One of young Bill’s greatest loves was music. He had played guitar since he was four years old. As a boy, he started playing with a rock and roll band. When he was 12, they had a chance to play in a bar for the first time. They were so well-received (and made what seemed a lot of money to boys) that this kind of music took over for a while. “That ended my desire to be a preacher,” Hagerman says today, a little ruefully. “I wanted to be the next Elvis.”

He says that for some years he wandered in the rock music world and all its enticements—for one thing, impressing girls! Finally, he met a girl named Cindy who wasn’t that impressed. He was both hurt and hooked. He invited her to hear him rehearse and play again, determined he would make her see how great he was.

At 18 and 20 years old, Cindy and Bill were married. As often happens, the young couple decided they should go to church. The local church close enough to walk to was Catholic, so they went there. They were told that if they wanted to join, they needed instruction, so they went to some classes. Hagerman wasn’t very impressed with the idea of praying to Mary and the saints. In fact, he doesn’t remember that this class mentioned Jesus very much at all. From what he remembered about his great-grandparents, he was uncomfortable with this, but he kept going, until the leader wanted him to kiss a crucifix.

“I didn’t even know what that was! But they showed me, and told me to kiss it. I wouldn’t. They said it was how we show our submission and gratitude for what Jesus did for us. I said, ‘I don’t know much about the Bible, but I’m pretty sure you show your submission by loving God and being obedient!’ They said if I didn’t do it I couldn’t join. So we left.”

The Seekers

The young couple went home, and for the first time, knelt together and prayed for God’s guidance. The very next day, Mormon missionaries stopped by. Cindy called Bill, all excited, to say that God had answered their prayers. The missionaries even gave them free stuff—Bibles, the Book of Mormon, filmstrips, and so on. Hagerman says the real reason he joined, though, was the carpeted basketball court.
Things went well, until a friend who was concerned sat down with Hagerman and showed him from the Bible that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had false beliefs mixed into its theology. When Hagerman was convinced, he didn’t just leave Mormonism, he left Christianity entirely.

I was so angry! I had been honestly seeking God, asking for His guidance, and these people came. I believed He was really leading me. I decided there must be no God at all. And I set out to prove it.”

The Atheist

For four years, Hagerman set himself, with intense determination, to prove the Bible false. He also checked out other faiths such as Buddhism and Hinduism. He wanted to know, not just why people believed this one book, but why we think we need religion at all. What is this deep need human hearts seem to have for something greater than and outside of themselves?

He says this period, which he calls his “atheist period,” frightened his mother very much. As a child, she had been forced to go to church, so she never forced her children. Now her son was completely against God, cursing and insulting God and His followers, and setting out to prove “this 2000-year-old book” wrong. She was afraid it was her fault.

But the Holy Spirit was still working with her son. Every time he thought for sure he had found a fatal flaw in the Bible, an answer presented itself. Hagerman confesses that he was now starting to feel conviction, but he was fighting it. How could he possibly turn to Christ now, after all the curses and insults, after everyone knew how against it he had been? “It would be embarrassing! I wanted someone to follow me! If I couldn’t prove the Bible wrong, maybe somebody else could join with me, and together we could accomplish it!”

One-eighty

The real problem was Uncle Ronnie. A year or so into Hagerman’s “atheist period,” Cindy’s uncle, Ronnie Kuszmaul, gave his heart to God. And as if that wasn’t bad enough, his life totally changed. Hagerman, in his words, “constantly bugged him,” trying to get him to lose his cool, but Uncle Ronnie never took the bait. Then came Thanksgiving, 1986. Cindy wanted to join her family for Thanksgiving, and Hagerman finally agreed, but said that if Uncle Ronnie said one thing about God or religion, he was leaving.

“And then I was the one to bring it up! I think Cindy warned him, because he never said a thing. I had to go and ask him something about church!” Hagerman remembers. And when I asked him
how he knew God was real, he just asked me, ‘Bill, how do you know He’s not?’ I kept arguing, and we ended up talking until the wee hours. I had always felt smarter, superior to him. He said to me, “Bill, I don’t know all the things you do. I just know I’m in love with this Jesus who’s changed my life.”

Early, in the hours before dawn, Hagerman remembers walking across the street to his car. “I looked up to heaven and finally cried out, ‘God, if you’re up there, I really need you! I know I’ve screwed up, I need you. If you can show me that you really exist, I’ll follow you until I die.’

“I had a change of heart and it started instantly.” Hagerman tried to describe the feeling, but couldn’t. It wasn’t that he had no more questions, or even that all his questions were answered. But, he added, “Now that I could trust Bible (because I couldn’t prove it wrong), I could use it to learn about this Jesus. I started studying my Bible with a different pair of glasses on. Instead of fighting it, I started trying it out.”

Hagerman started attending a Nazarene church, as his great-grandpa had. He loved it, but his wife didn’t and never attended much. Finally, he asked her why, and she simply asked in return, “Why can’t we go to the church I went to as a child?” Hagerman was startled to realize he hadn’t even thought of whether Cindy might like something different. “That was selfish,” he says now. So they started going to First Baptist. That was not the end of the search. Hagerman kept studying the Bible, trying out different churches, searching for the one that he believed best reflected the Bible’s teachings.

In the meantime, life still had some curve balls for the Hagermans. They had two children, and Hagerman opened his own beauty salon “so I could say whatever I want!” He plays Christian music, encourages his clients to talk about their lives, prays with them if they are willing, and generally runs a missionary outpost in his salon. However, Cindy began having trouble, and eventually it turned out to be a serious brain chemistry issue. She was not herself, and divorced Hagerman, though sometimes even she didn’t seem to realize that fact. Hagerman took the second job, as an insurance salesman for Modern Woodmen of America, to pay for both households. But his wife was not in a good place, and he got custody of the children.

One day he sat in one of the hairstyling chairs, alone, and cried out to God sarcastically, “Thanks a lot for that helpmate you sent me!” He still seems a little awestruck as he describes what happened. “You might think I’m crazy, but I believe God talks to us. He sure talked to me. I heard him say, ‘What if I didn’t send her to help you? What if I sent you to help her?’” Hagerman was completely convicted that, whatever Cindy’s present condition, he was still responsible for her as much as one adult could be for another. He offered to take her back into his home and care for her. From 2006, that has been his life.
During these difficult years, continuing to search the scriptures, even in the original languages, Hagerman felt led to the Adventist church, which he joined in 2012. He enthuses, “It’s the first church I’ve gone to where I feel like I can take my Bible and not have to apologize for believing whatever it says, or worry about what a manual says, or what someone else tells me!” His pastor, Tom Hughes, calls him an inspiration, and says that people like Hagerman are why he is in the ministry.

Today, Hagerman takes care of both children, his (still-divorced) wife, and two fulltime jobs. That’s aside from the Bible study groups and the talks he has on a regular basis with customers, either in the salon or in the insurance business. One man came to him with 20 minutes of business and stayed for two hours of God talk, ending by giving his heart to the Lord and leaving in peace. “I know I could never do this without God. I don’t know what is coming, but I know he won’t let me down.”