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Adventist University Professor Among the Dead in Nairobi Terrorist Attack

From ANN, September 23, 2013

At least one Adventist family from Nairobi suffered a loss during the terrorist attack in Nairobi’s Westgate Shopping Mall in which more than 60 people were killed and at least 170 injured. Harun Oyieke, a faculty member at Co-operative University College of Kenya, was among those killed. He was the husband of Florence Awino, a professor at the University of Nairobi. The attack occurred at about 11 a.m. on Saturday. Between 10 and 15 terrorists armed with automatic weapons and grenades attacked the shopping mall. Among those killed were South African, American, Ghanaian, French, Netherlands, Australian, British, Chinese, Dutch, Danish, Indian and Canadian nationals. Several members of the Kenyan police and military were also killed or wounded as they attempted to rescue hostages. World leaders, including United Nations secretary general Ban-ki Moon and United States President Barack Obama, condemned the attack and expressed condolences with those who had lost relatives and friends. “This is a time of shock for all Kenyans and all – including the UN family – who are proud to call Nairobi home,” Ban-ki Moon said in a statement. “I express my solidarity with them at this moment of grief and loss.” The siege continued into the early hours of Monday night, when the Kenyan forces broke through and released the remaining hostages. The Somali Islamist al-Shabaab militants claimed responsibility for the attack. Kenyans lined up at Uhuru Park to donate blood for persons injured in the attack. A survivor, Jackson Mwema, was quoted in The Standard as saying the attackers released some hostages. “They were asking our names and demanding that we read some information I couldn’t understand,” Mwema said. Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, who lost his nephew and the nephew’s fiancée in the attack, condemned the terrorists, saying his government would not allow them to break the country’s unity along religious lines.

Reports said the attackers, who had been dropped off at the mall in three cars, overwhelmed security guards by shooting shoppers indiscriminately. They besieged the mall and held scores of shoppers hostage as they exchanged fire with Kenyan police and the military. TV footage and pictures showed bewildered children standing next to dead bodies and wounded shoppers in and outside the mall.

Kenyans responded to the attack by donating blood for the victims and sending messages of hope. The national blood bank had exceeded its annual average of 40,000 liters, and over $600,000 was collected in two days, to which the Adventist Church in Kenya gave $12,000. Vice President William Ruto said Kenyans had defeated evil by meeting it with kindness.

_The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The primary reporter for this story was Dan Okoth._

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It is in many ways a routine development. At the same time it is historic. Pastor Sandra E. Roberts, executive secretary of the Southeastern California Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, has been nominated to become president. It is quite common when a conference president has moved on or does not want to continue in office, for the number two officer (usually with the title of secretary or executive secretary, sometimes vice president) to be selected as the next president. Although women have served temporarily as the top officer on a number of occasions, even in the 19th century, and on many occasions as treasurer or secretary of a conference, this is a first.

Denominational policy specifies that a conference president is to be an ordained minister, and Roberts is an ordained minister because a year ago the Pacific Union Conference in a constituency meeting established a policy ending gender discrimination in the ordination of clergy. She is the first of this new generation of ordained women to be nominated as a conference president.

The report of the nominating committee will be presented to delegates from all of the churches in the conference at a regular constituency session on October 27. Pastor Gerald D. Penick told the committee at its first meeting on September 8 that he did not want to be considered for re-election. "Nine years is enough," he told the committee. Later he told one of the pastors in the conference that he did not want to retire yet, but had not made up his mind as to what he would do next. It is well known among veteran denominational employees that the work of a conference president is exhausting. Under the conference bylaws, the nominating committee selects its own chair.

Dr. Fritz Guy, a noted Adventist theologian who played a key role in drafting the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs statement and faculty member at La Sierra University, was elected chairman, as he was at the previous constituency session. Pastor Ricardo Graham, president of the Pacific Union Conference, met with the committee as an advisor. Roberts has served as the second-ranking administrative officer for the conference since 2004. For five years prior to that she was director of young adult ministries for the conference and from 1995 to 2000 she was a pastor at the Corona (California) Church. She served as chaplain for the church school in Loma Linda from 1992 to 1995 and prior to that as director of the conference's youth camp. She was called to the conference school from Central California in 1987 where she was Bible teacher at Modesto Adventist Academy. She started denominational employment in 1982 as a teacher at Cedar Lake Academy in the Michigan Conference. Roberts has a master's degree from Andrews University and a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Claremont School of Theology. She is the daughter of Adventist missionaries and has spent considerable time traveling around the world. "Roberts' qualifications and experience make her the most qualified person for this important position," Dr. Penny Miller, a faculty member at Loma Linda University and co-chair of the advisory board for the Women's Resource Center at La Sierra University, told Adventist Today when asked for her reaction to the news. "Those of us who know her and have worked with her understand her ability to get things done and the excellence she brings to the challenges at hand. I look forward to her leadership."

"She is a very smart lady ... very principled," a church member and business executive who has served with her on the conference committee told Adventist Today. Victor Tolan, who owns B&K Precision, an international electronics company, has known Roberts since the 1980s when he attended the Corona Church where she was a pastor. "I don't care if there's a man or a woman running the conference, as long as they're qualified," Tolan said. "Definitely, she is a spiritual leader. She never says anything that's not thoughtful. I don't think anyone could find fault with her. ... How the rest of the world will accept her, that's a different story. ... I trust God. I put it in His hands. It's His Church ultimately." Pastor Lawrence Downing, a retired minister who has served in Southeastern California as well as in Southern California and Pennsylvania, told Adventist Today that, "I found her to be an accessible leader. She reads her Email and gives quick responses. I found her to have a good grasp of what was taking place in the [local] church. I found her easy to talk to, responsive to expressed concerns and a listening ear. I do not expect serious opposition to her nomination," although "it is to be expected that the traditional/conservative segment ... will generate flack to the election of a woman as president, but their voices will not dominate."
to decide the matter locally was refused. Despite the 1995 vote, the Adventist Church in China has been ordaining women clergy for a number of years and last year several of the union conferences in Europe and North America decided to do the same. Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the GC, earnestly requested these jurisdictions to defer their decisions until the current study process could be completed, but majorities of 80 percent and higher felt they had waited long enough. It has also been pointed out that because of government rulings in China, the denomination has less influence there.

Pastor Stephen Bohr told Adventist Today that he thinks the election of Roberts as a conference president "would be in violation of the Working Policy and bylaws of the Pacific Union and the General Conference. Further, it would be a kick in the shins and the teeth to the decision making authority of the world church. In this sense it is one step closer to a congregational style of church governance which will eventually lead the church to lose its global identity and relevance. Biblically, it would be in open contradiction to the command of the apostle Paul that the elder/ overseer must (as the Greek clearly indicates) be the husband of one wife and rule his house well. But in a post-modern age of rebellion against every and all authority, the decision is not surprising, especially in Southeastern California where every distinctive doctrine and practice of the church has been questioned." Bohr is senior pastor of the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fresno, California, and director of the independent media ministry, Secrets Unsealed. He is a member of the GC study committee on ordination. (Fresno is not in the Southeastern California Conference.) "I've seen comments about Sandra Roberts possible election ... and some of them are vicious," said Dr. Darius Jankiewicz, chair of the theology department in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminar at Andrews University and one of the Bible scholars that the General Conference has asked to study the topic of ordination. "This discussion degenerates to labeling and name-calling. There are people on both sides who can't be gracious. It's heart-breaking. This the foundational problem in this entire discussion. We can't be gracious and civil and exhibit God's grace in our lives but just attack people. ... The acrimonious nature of the debate is something that will destroy us unless we are very careful." The Southeastern California Conference is the largest local conference in the NAD and one of the largest in the world, despite the fact that its territory only covers five counties east and south of Los Angeles, including the major cities of San Diego, Riverside and San Bernardino. It has more than 70,000 members and it is estimated that there are probably 300,000 Adventist adherents in the area. Its growth rate in the last decade has been about the same as for the entire NAD. California has the largest number of Adventists of any state in the U.S., a total of nearly 200,000 or 17 percent of the total national membership. It includes four local conferences of which the Southeastern conference is the most southern. It includes 143 local churches and at least ten women pastors who are ordained ministers. Some have served in the ministry for decades.

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A panel of scholars will explore the role of the Bible in American life in the present day and throughout history at a conference for scholars, students, clergy and laypersons at Wheaton College this week. Wheaton is a leading Evangelical or conservative Protestant institution and home of the Billy Graham Center. The Bible has always had some level of influence on American culture and Adventists have seen a specific role for the United States in prophecy, especially with interpretations of Revelation 13:11-18 favored by Ellen White and other founders of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Various Evangelical preachers and writers have presented somewhat parallel concepts around notions of "manifest destiny" and American particularity. There is increasing focus on the question of to what extent the Bible is still influencing the country. The topics to be discussed at this conference include the historical influence of the Bible on democracy, current expressions of the Christian biblical narrative, and future influence of the Bible in America. The speakers will include the noted historian of American religion, Dr. Martin E. Marty from the University of Chicago; Pastor Lillian Daniel from First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, United Church of Christ; Father George Smiga, pastor of St. Noel Catholic Church and faculty member at St. Mary Seminary; Dr. Catherine Brekus, associate professor of American religious history at the University of Chicago; Dr. Timothy Beal, professor of religion at Case Western Reserve University; and three Wheaton College faculty members, Dr. Vincent E. Bacote, associate professor of theology and director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics; Dr. Henry Lee Allen, professor of sociology; and Dr. Jennifer Powell McNutt, associate professor of theology and the history of Christianity. The conference will convene October 25 and 26 in Barrows Auditorium, 500 College Avenue, Wheaton, Illinois 60187. It is the first in a series of events to mark the American Bible Society’s Bicentennial. More information is available at http://www.thebibleanddemocracy.com.

“The American Bible Society has worked to stimulate conversation about the Bible since its inception in 1816,” said the organization’s president, Doug Birdsall. “This symposium at Wheaton College is meant to inspire this generation to examine how the Bible has shaped our democracy in the past and consider how it continues to contribute to our national discourse, democratic process and society as a whole.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a regular contributor to the American Bible Society and Adventist leaders serve on the board of a number of national Bible societies around the world. Adventist scholars and missionaries have participated in Bible translation projects sponsored by one or more Bible societies.
Government Shutdown & Debt Ceiling: Let's Play 'What If ...'

September 26, 2013

Unless American politicians change the patterns of behavior they have established in recent years, next Tuesday the United States government will shut down all functions except those deemed "essential" or mandated by law outside the Federal budget. At some point over the following 30 days or so, it will bump up against a cash flow problem unless Congress acts to increase the Federal "debt ceiling" or line of credit. How will these events, assuming they are not averted, affect the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Are they simply meaningless political drama or would they actually cause something that the church would have to deal with at some level? There have been 17 government shutdowns in the U.S. since 1976 and one occasion (in 1979) when the Federal government defaulted (by accident) for a few days. So there is an historical record to look at and try to make some estimates. For example, the independent, nonpartisan Congressional Research Service has reported that the 28-day government shutdown in 1995-96 cost American taxpayers $1.4 billion.

Many of the immediate things that may happen next Tuesday would have little impact on the Church. The 368 parks, museums, monuments and zoos in the National Parks system will all close down, but very few Adventists work for the National Parks. Most government employees will be laid off and this will impact local churches in a few cities, such as Washington DC, where there are a number of members who are government employees. They won’t be paid until the shutdown is over and tithe and offerings will decrease in the meantime. Starting in mid-October, the military will stop getting their paychecks although they will be required to continue to protect the nation. About one in five Adventist families have someone serving in the military, according to a 2009 survey of members conducted by the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University. It is estimated that the majority of these are young adult children and many of these may not be contributors to the household income or active donors at church. Nonetheless, the Church will have some loss of income. Many of the normal municipal functions in the nation’s capital will be stopped, such as trash collection. This will provide the local churches in that area an opportunity to mobilize volunteers and help their neighbors. There are more than 50,000 Adventists in the region and volunteers could pick up trash from the curbs or, at least, help the isolated elderly in small apartments who have the least capacity to cope on their own. It offers a great chance to be visible and demonstrate the compassion of Jesus. The debt ceiling has the potential of greater impact than the government shutdown. There are a variety of reports as to when, precisely, the U.S. government will run out of room on its line of credit; as early as October 15 and as late as November 7. It is important to understand that when this limit is reached the government does not just go out of business or have all accounts frozen, as some think. Instead it will be forced to operate within available cash flow. Taxes will still be collected and fees assessed; cash will come in and there should be enough to pay about two-thirds of the bills within normal time frames. Social Security checks will continue to go out as will veterans checks, at least in the time immediately after the ceiling is hit. Later, these may slip back and come later and later. If the situation stretches on for months and years, eventually senior citizens will find themselves with one less check per year, etc. This has the potential to become an area of great impact on the Church. The majority of church members are over 60 years of age and these older members are more likely to be regular tithers and givers than younger members. 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Administrators in health care have told me that these checks are already slow in coming, so they have learned to manage that gap to some degree, but this won’t make things any easier for them. As you hear various rumors about people being laid off or programs closed down, these men and women need our understanding. They are balancing an unbelievable complex situation. Where things get difficult for funding Adventist health ministries is with the debt ceiling and any changes in the law that may come out of this situation. This is a very complex system, despite the tendency of politicians and commentators to try to simplify the issues, and "dominoes go down" when changes are made. It remains to be seen how these “dominoes” may impact specific institutions and health professionals. There are a number of Adventist churches where the economic fortunes of a hospital are directly tied to church income, and there are many more where a few health professionals among the membership provide a significant share of the tithe and offerings. The Business Roundtable, representing the nation’s largest corporations, released a report in the last few days showing that about half of major companies will probably slow hiring because of the situation in Washington this fall. As a result, the number of unemployed will stay the same and if things continue to be unresolved, then unemployment will increase. Among the employed, hours will be cut back and pay increases frozen. This will increase the pressure on families. An increase in needs in the community will impact the local Adventist
church, even if it currently operates no community services. Obviously, if there are more unemployed people or government programs like food stamps are cut, then where a church operates a community food pantry or soup kitchen, there will be more requests for assistance. Many of these Adventist Community Services (ACS) centers depend on a Regional Food Bank for a large share of their supplies, and those food banks may have their funding cut. Where a local church is not operating a food pantry or ACS center, if things get tough in the community, the pastor may find that he or she is asked by civic leaders to make a contribution or take on “your fair share” of meeting community needs. This has happened during crisis events in the past. Beyond the economic impact that may unfold in the weeks ahead, there are also emotional and spiritual impacts which may be more difficult to see. Some of these impacts may already be underway in some congregations and communities. Bill Hoagland, an expert on government finances who has worked for Republican senators in the past, told a journalist recently, “All the major leading institutions have been brought into question by the populace out there and particularly the conservative populace. They just don’t have the same respect they used to have with the electorate.” Strong, even radical feelings are spreading. This makes it more difficult to maintain the church standard against the discussion of politics. Thinly veiled comments are more likely to creep into Sabbath School discussions and conversations over potlucks. This makes it more difficult to maintain the atmosphere of caring for one another and respect for one another’s opinions. It is also true that whenever there is a crisis in the country, people turn to faith and dropouts return to church. As this crisis deepens, more newcomers will turn up at church, presenting new opportunities for ministry. Home Bible study groups and Simple Church projects will probably have even greater opportunities than typical local churches because of the growing percentage of Americans who are uncomfortable with conventional religious organizations. I remember an old Chinese saying, “May you live in interesting times.” I don’t remember if it was labeled a curse or a blessing. It appears to be prophetic and we will find out which label is correct.
The Silence of the Sheep

By Danny Bell, September 26, 2013

"History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period was not the strident clamour of bad people, but the appalling silence of the good." -- Martin Luther King

I sat watching in disbelief. The program was a local ABC 730 Report interviewing sex abuse victim Todd Jefferis. From 1975 to 1990 hostel warden Dennis John McKenna sexually abused 11 boys including Jefferis under his care while employed at the Katanning St. Andrews School in Western Australia.

McKenna is currently serving a 6 year jail sentence for the abuse but a court inquiry wants to know why so many leading community members did nothing despite being complained to on many occasions. From town council members to police and even the school principal, all are now fronting the enquiry to explain why they did not act in favour of victims and their families.

I was dumbfounded as I heard their excuses and poor explanations. Some even denied the victims came to see them at all. The enquiry heard that letters written to the school’s board never turned up and were never recorded. It was shown that the sufferers were in some cases expelled or victimised by the school for bringing the allegations. The documentary ended.

The natural question that arises from such a shocking story is how can this happen? How can people be deliberately selective in their memory of the events? How can so many be told yet no action taken? How can a small community where everybody knows everybody, not know about the allegations and not talk about it among themselves? What was the common factor that allowed this perpetrator to go unchecked for 15 years, abusing kids under the noses of friends and colleagues?

The answer lies in behaviour I have seen common in small, close-knit communities isolated from larger society. These communities are all around us. The geography and reasons for existence are varied but the ingredients for such a massive failure in duty of care are all too common. Schools, small towns, sporting clubs, charitable organisations and even churches can exhibit worrying signs of being detached from reality and a law unto themselves.

I saw this on a number of occasions while pastoring. People would offer their full support to me leading up to crucial meetings where important decisions had to be made. In the heat of the moment, however, when it looked like an idea was failing, they would back down and grow strangely silent. Some would even deny later that they offered me support at all. I remember feeling confused and betrayed. I was surprised by this strange behaviour. It was something I had never seen or experienced before coming to Christ; at least I didn't expect it to be in the church.

There was a situation once when a church would not even carry out discipline of an elder who had seriously breached church guidelines. After board meetings he would go home and phone his mate, telling him all that was said at the board. He would phone his mate, telling him all that was said at the board. The man he phoned would become irate and begin stirring up the whole church. This led to the elder’s discipline, and so at a special meeting the charges were read by the clerk. The elder surprisingly rose to his feet and said he would dismiss himself from the board – he was caught red handed. Instantly the family and friends of this man on the board stood up and sat him back down and said, “Poppy, you’re not going anywhere.” Church discipline obviously didn’t apply to this man, and the vote was defeated in favour of the elder.

Individuals that do damage can thrive in environments where there are no checks and balances, getting a good reputation through charm or manipulation. As in the McKenna enquiry, it’s not just the abuser who is complicit in the crimes. Those that allow their community to be
infiltrated by manipulators and power brokers are at fault as well. The truth is that all who partake in dysfunctional communities have something at stake. Like a feeding station, these parochial environments create roles where everyone has a part. Unlike larger communities, smaller and close-knit ones provide opportunity for individuals to accelerate through the ranks faster. People are believed and given credibility because of their obvious commitment to “the cause.” That cause is usually a self-serving system where conformity is rewarded with recognition and status.

Any challenges to these well-ordered communities is viewed as an attack. Reputations and positions are at risk, so the agitator must be expelled. Many in these environments have spent years building up a personal stake, so any change is seen as a threat to their ordered way of life. Change that upsets the delicate balance must be eradicated and opposed at all costs. Fear grips individuals who have the most to lose and a state of denial becomes natural, keeping the cold reality of the world outside where it belongs, so to speak.

Churches especially are in danger of creating these types of cultures and dysfunctional styles. We don’t need to be reminded that we have the ingredients. We have seen such disasters unfold in church communities already. When the gospel focus is substituted for a self-fulfilling cause, when we are swept up in a pantomime of selfish desires and ambitions, then we have lost our way and abuse can happen; not just sexual abuse either. An intense need for acceptance and approval can override our sense of right and wrong, and we can become blind to abuse and intolerant of those who irritate us. Environments where the overriding desire is to keep up the status quo, holding on to forms and ways of doing things hide potential communities that will fail those who they are meant to protect and support. Our churches should be places that have a willingness to strive to be better, not be closed minded, repelling change or new things just because it cuts across how we have always done them.

Jesus sent a timely warning to those communities of faith who are living in the last days. He saw how narrow and self-sufficient Christianity would become and warned, “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing’” (Rev 3:17). Surprisingly, this is a strong characteristic of communities that have allowed abuse on their watch to go unchecked. There can be a delusion that all is well when in fact the opposite is true.

The reward of high personal status and selfish protectionism is apparent with communities that abuse and suffer abuse on their champions. Abuse comes in many forms and can have a spiritual impact on those who are most vulnerable if it is not recognised and challenged.

It has been said that denial is the sin that cannot be forgiven because those under its spell see nothing to admit. Jesus is coming; let’s make a thorough spring cleaning of our hearts, holding nothing back, listening out for the cries of the vulnerable and the disenfranchised in our midst. Let’s not like so many sheep play follow the leader while wolves and other menaces to the church ravage the flock of God.

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Dr. David Wilbur: Power and Illusion: Summary – Personal Postscript. Part 16, Chapter 15

By Ervin Taylor Submitted September 23, 2013

This is the concluding segment of the summary of Dr. Wilbur’s book. It should be emphasized that all of the text in this series of blogs in bold font in the body of the text of the chapter summaries have been kindly provided by Dr. Wilbur. My own comments on this concluding segment will follow in regular type.

There is no wealth but life.

John Ruskin, *Unto This Last*

The Necessity of Ideology

To function in the world we need goals and values and we like to have an explanation for our goals and values. This explanation may be thought of as our personal ideology. For the last few thousand years a religion has been the most common way of providing this ideology. For most people religious indoctrination comes through their family and culture and is largely set in place while they are very young and impressionable; usually less than ten years old. For the majority this is then set for life.

Varieties of Need for Religious Belief

Some have thought that the most important benefit of religion is to re-enforce our natural optimism in the face of uncertainty or catastrophe. People do vary greatly in their need for and appreciation of religious support. There will probably never be a universal ideology or religious program that satisfies all human needs. The most desirable human society may be one that nurtures and protects a wide variety of ideologies without letting any one of them become dominant and controlling. Intolerance would be that society’s great “sin.”

Emotion and Reason

Religious loyalties are usually enmeshed with powerful emotions. They do not spring from some rational analysis of the world. The religious claim that reason and faith are both ways to knowledge but faith is clearly used to support a variety of conflicting religious claims while rational analysis only supports one system of scientific understanding. Theology attempts rational explanations for specific religious traditions but is probably irrelevant for the majority of lay members.

The Price of Refuge

The religious refuge has many kinds of costs. The financial cost includes at least that of clergy, missions, schools and memorial architecture. An emotional cost for some religious people is that of separating from an evil world: losing friends and family who won’t share their belief system. There also may be the cost of guilt over breaking victimless rules.

Nihilism about the world may mean giving up on attempts to find happiness in this world as one urgently seeks salvation in another world. Seeking escape through a monastic life may also lead to an emotional life impoverished by the absence of the struggles and rewards of sexuality and family.

Certainty

*She believed in nothing; only her skepticism kept her from being an atheist.*

Jean Paul Sartre, *The Words*

Ideological beliefs that are held with confidence or certainty contain within that confidence a demand to control others, so as to make them do what is in their own best long-term interest. Such certainties have justified innumerable human evils. Our only certainty should probably be that our understandings are conditional and evolving.
Religious history itself is a long argument against religious certainty. Some religions however depend on confident claims that they know the mind of God, to justify their calls for contributions and control of the believer’s life.

The Supernatural

Belief in some form of alternate reality or supernatural realm seems common to all religions. None offers a description of a method for a living human to use in validating this belief. Alternatively we have no method of disproving the existence of this realm. Over many years one may look at the day-to-day operation of the world and find there no evidence that any supernatural power is concerned with human experiences of good or evil.

Origins

Confident claims about ultimate origins are most reasonably judged to be faith statements, whether they are religious or scientific. The Intelligent Design movement has offered some interesting talking points but none seems as compelling as the success of evolutionary models in helping us understand the relationships in the living world. We will never have enough information to be sure of every detail of everything that happened in the past.

Religion as a Political and Practical Tool

Religions may be seen as practical ideological tools useable to encourage or discourage various behaviors that leaders find useful. With confident belief one can justify persecution or destruction of the enemies of the faith or of God, especially when those are thought identical. Religion may also be used to encourage charity and concern for the weak and downtrodden. In any durable and important conflict, religion is usually found on both sides—see, for instance, the American Civil War and Nazi Germany.

Thoughts for Life Regardless of Religion

These are a few thoughts about a satisfying life with or without religion.

Happiness is now.

Respect all life.

One route to happiness is to make another life happy.

There is much beauty, if you look.

Most people are doing the best they can.

The most rewarding thing is to create.

Life has the meaning we give it.

Humor about our life brings perspective and humility.

A better God than those offered is imaginable.

Beware of those who serve an angry God.

Comments (ET)

I wanted to express my appreciation to Dr. Wilbur for providing this series of summaries of a book which, in my view, contains an array of topics that could be used as the basis of many hours, days, months, and years of fruitful discussion.

After reading the many comments responding to how Dr. Wilbur has approached the “power and illusion” of religion, it is clear, at least to this reader, that his approach to how what we understand as the religious impulse of the human species at this stage of our biological and cultural evolution would not meet the needs of the vast majority of those whose religious identification is grounded and defined in terms of the current traditional Adventist world view, which is now significantly shared by a percentage of those who follow the traditions of evangelical Protestantism.

Dr. Wilbur’s approach is especially not helpful to the personality types that are attracted to what classical Adventism offers to its adherents.
—total and complete certainly about what is going to happen in the future and total and complete confidence in what one has to do to make sure that they end up on the “right side” at the end which is coming, they believe, very, very soon.

Dr. Wilbur’s vision of the how and why religion functions is a totally rational and realistic one that strips away the ethos of mysticism and Biblicism that traditional Adventism still retains from its origins. His clear-eyed understanding of how religion functions in the real world of the 21st Century might have to await the coming of the 22nd or 23rd Century for it to be widely appreciated by adherents of a future Adventism.
Chasing Virtue

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
submitted Sept. 25, 2013

I promised a series “Beside the River,” but I’m not quite there yet. I’ll be in my borrowed cabin by the river next week. So this week I found this text in the lectionary readings for this week and decided to ponder it. 1 Timothy 6:11: But you, [child] of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. **Pursue:** To seek, to run after, to set oneself to find and capture. Am I seriously pursuing the life with God, or just idly thinking it would be nice, or reading about it, or talking about it?

**Righteousness:** We all have our definitions of this, but the word simply means straight: a right angle, a rectangle, a life straight with God and with justified margins. Straight means square, but doesn’t necessarily mean it in the sense that we used to use the word a few decades ago—old-fashioned, in a rut, conventional and rigid. It means square with God—reconciled.

**Godliness:** Perhaps this could be seen as a step beyond simply being “square” with God, to being like God. Luke and Matthew, in their stories of the sermon on the mount, make it clear that true, perfect godliness is all about love and mercy.

**Faith:** If I’d been Paul’s editor, I’d have told him he ought to put this first. Surely you must have the faith that clings to God like a baby monkey clings to Mama before you can even recognize, let alone pursue, righteousness and godliness. Perhaps Paul would have answered that faith only develops its muscles by practice at hanging on while Mama leaps through treetops on the way to a destination of which we, the babies, have no conception!

**Love:** Oh, dear, I changed my mind. Do I want to even try to define love?? This is the Mama monkey who brings down one arm from the limbs overhead to give an extra grip to the baby if there seems to be any danger. I saw a wonderful movie last week, from PBS, with a brief scene of a monkey troop at the side of a lake. All the monkeys were heading off at a trot, and one mother’s baby leaped to her back as she ran by. I was glad to have the ability to stop the recording, rewind, and watch again. Sure enough—I’d seen what I thought I’d seen. In less than a second, the mother had paused and made a barely perceptible hand movement. In instant obedience, the baby had leaped up, hardly breaking the mother’s stride. That’s how close I’d like to be in my walk with God—one little hand movement, and I obey. But of course, this pursuit in Timothy isn’t primarily about the love between God and me—it’s about the love that moves on and overflows through me to others. That’s what I want to pursue.

**Endurance:** Not, I freely admit, something I want to pursue. I do want to endure—I have been taught to endure, in fact, through all kinds of trials. So have you, I imagine. But I don’t like it. However, I can see that an endurance that is patient and quiet and trusting would be better than the head-hanging resignation which is all I can sometimes manage.

**Gentleness:** Oh, yes, I’m glad he finishes with this one. Gentleness is, in fact, something I have pursued all my life. I have written down texts on 3x5’s and carried them with me, prayed them into my soul, practiced, stumbled, asked forgiveness, and tried some more. Gentleness is one of the most precious virtues I experience from others, and I want to pass it on.

**To consider:** In what specific, practical ways can we actively pursue these virtues today?

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Peculiar People, Squared

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted Sept. 25, 2013

When Danny DuBosque and his cousin Jonathan Natiuk wanted to know if the new website idea they had would fly, they didn’t go for an expensive focus group or market analysis. They asked Grandma.

Their idea had been born at a table, brainstorming ideas for t-shirts bearing Adventist-themed humor. “I (heart) potlucks” was an early winner. How about simply a big, block “1844”? The two began to think they might be onto something. They looked online, found a company that would make their t-shirts for an affordable price, and set up a website: www.eighteenfortyfour.com. Then they wondered—would anyone think they were being demeaning or disrespectful? That’s when they asked Grandma.

“Grandmothers on both sides, actually,” says DuBosque. “They loved it! So we figured, if our grandmothers, definitely on the more conservative side, were okay with it, we were probably going to be all right.”

They also created a carefully designed mission statement:

*We believe that our Creator is a powerful and mighty God, who also has a wonderful sense of humor! As devout Christians and sixth-generation Adventists, it is our sincere mission to bring enjoyment to our fellow believers while also demonstrating glory and honor to God through the humor that He has instilled within us.

*Our intent is never to offend or degrade the Church, its fundamental teachings, leadership, or members. We seek to find enjoyment in the peculiar, non-doctrinal elements of our unique Adventist culture through humor that is tasteful and appropriate to a broad audience.*

It was in 2008 that they rolled out their new website, with “a couple of t-shirts” on it. DuBosque and Natiuk sent a notice to everyone on their two email lists. To their surprise, they began getting hits from all over the country within days. “The Adventist grapevine is alive and well,” says DuBosque. By Christmas of that first year, sales were beginning to grow. Last year they grossed “around $15-16,000, so we think that’s pretty good.” They also added a third partner two years ago, Tim Putt.

Their main products were t-shirts and the Adventist calendar, featuring such slogans as “FriChik: The Other Beige Meat,” and “1984 Rook Champion.” They’ve added greeting cards so they could use the photography and slogans from the calendars and have a longer shelf life. They are now fielding requests for posters and DuBosque says the company they use can also put these graphics on mugs, laptops, aprons, caps, baby onesies. . . almost anything a customer might want. Up until just this summer (2013) they have used no paid advertising at all. Now they are doing some targeted advertising on Facebook.

Facebook is where some of their ideas come from, as well, though they can’t use all the suggestions that come in. They have many things lying around that are funny, but just won’t
work on t-shirts, or that require more thought or more development. “We want to be funny, but tasteful. We have high standards and want everything we do to be polished and to resonate with lots of people.”

I asked if they had received any negative responses. DuBosque replied, “Very, very seldom. We’ve had overwhelmingly positive responses from ‘both sides of the aisle,’ if you will. Long-term conservatives who have grown up with this stuff laugh and say, ‘Yeah, that’s how it is.’ People who have felt more disenfranchised or marginalized will say, ‘Yeah, see, that’s how it is!’ But both will laugh. We think this humor can be healing. We’ve also received huge support from conference officers, pastors, VPs—I think one of those might even have been a divisional VP. They say they love what we’re doing, that it helps people to see things from a new perspective.

The three partners, of course, do have day jobs. “We don’t expect to retire on this stuff,” says DuBosque with a laugh. “We’ve gained a lot of notoriety, but not a lot of money!” He is a consultant for Family Health Systems in Louisville, KY. Natiuk does audio-visual graphic design, working for the Adventist Media Center in Portland, OR, as well as running a private photography business with his wife. Putt is a graphic designer for Adventist Health Systems.

Their dreams for the future are to continue to gain momentum and build support for a larger ministry. This could go one (or both) of two different directions. They could take a “road show” to schools and churches, adding stand-up comedy, perhaps some puppetry, and blending serious, spiritual messages with their humor. They could also help with marketing other companies or events, such as evangelistic campaigns. They would like to build “brand equity” that could help to create a better image for our church and give others a more positive picture of Adventism.

In the FAQ section of their website, the question is asked, “Why 1844?” Here’s their answer:

“Why not? There's so much to love about our unique and rich culture. Our goal is to embrace that in a way that brings smiles to those in the know. We thought it'd be cool to wear a t-shirt that's a beacon to other Adventists but doesn't make you look like a dork.”
Patience is God’s reminder that growth of character primarily takes place in relationships with others, especially fellow-Christians, particularly those who may not measure up to your scale of perfection. To deal with the mistakes and sins of fellow-Christians is often more difficult than dealing with those of non-Christians, because we think that since they are Christians they ought to know better. How many believers do you know who absent themselves from God’s house of worship because of their dislike of other Christians?

The rise of religious television in the last two decades has brought a tremendous blessing for the sick and the shut-ins. However, the availability of such media has also produced a class of religious couch-potatoes, who find it more convenient and less painful (they think) to stay at home watching their favorite religious media stars on Sabbath mornings. Why should we attend a church with so many imperfect people who push our buttons the wrong way, when we can just stay at home and be blessed by speakers with whom we agree and who give us truths we like, but which we never have to test in fellowship with other Christians? Have you ever noticed that it is not the sins of people in the world that upset you so much, but more often than not it is the sins, mistakes, and shortcomings of members in your own church or denomination that can cause you an inordinate amount of anguish or disgust? After all, these people are Christians and they, therefore, should know better!

There is a great need to take Christ’s word in the Sermon on the Mount at face value, for He said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:49). As you read the context of this verse you will notice that God describes His perfection as letting the rain fall on both the just and the unjust. In other words, He shows perfect love to those who are anything but perfect. Just think of the opportunities before us as we seek to show through our lives something about God’s perfect love to those who are not perfect – even in our own local congregation. What opportunities for personal and corporate Christian growth can be found here? When we absent ourselves from church services we may also deprive ourselves and others of the mutual ministry flowing from the many enrichment opportunities arising from the “one anothers” in the New Testament rather than just depending on your favorite media pastors to “finish the work.”

So the next time when you are tempted to absent yourself from corporate worship in God’s
house, ask yourself these questions:

· **Is Jesus still worthy of worship no matter how I feel about my fellow-Christians?** Am I allowing the critical feelings in my own heart towards others to interfere with giving Jesus worship? Remember that the crucial issue in the great controversy between Christ and Satan is about worship. If an alleged hypocrite stands between you and God, is it possible that he may be closer to God than you are? Often the church is just like Noah’s ark. You wouldn’t be able to stand the stink of the inside unless you knew there was a storm on the outside. If you deprive Jesus of the worship due Him because of fellow-believers you don’t like, how will you respond in the final testing about worship as recorded in Revelation 13:16, 17?

· **Is your only purpose on Sabbath mornings to obtain a blessing – from sermons you agree with and music you like?** There is far more to Christian living than uttering of ‘Amens’ of agreement to sermons with which you agree. Worship is not religious entertainment. The Bible (and remember we are the people of the Book), tells us also to be a blessing to others. It is not all up to the pastor. As you look at this list of Bible passages from the New Testament, ask yourself if you are really obedient to the Lord if you fail to take advantage of all these opportunities for mutual ministry among fellow-believers?

· **The “one anothers” of the New Testament.** Consider how you can practice a “mutual ministry” toward others and with others in building up the local congregation.

| We are members one of another -- | Be kindly affectioned One to Another -- |
| Rom. 12:3-5; Eph. 4:25 | Rom. 12:10 |
| Minister one to another -- | Love one another -- |
| 1 Pet. 4:10 | John 13:34-35; John 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8 |
| Edify one another -- | Exhort one another -- |
| Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11 | Heb. 3:13; 10:25 |
| Teach one another -- | Admonish one another -- |
| Col. 3:16 | Rom. 15:14 |
| Bear one another's burdens -- | Forbear one another -- |
| Gal. 6:2 | Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13 |
| Pray one for another -- | Forgive one another -- |
| Jas. 5:16 | Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13 |
| Care for another -- | Have peace one with another -- |
| 1 Cor. 12:25 | Mark 9:50 |
| Comfort one another -- | Preferring one another -- |
| 1 Thess. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:11 | Rom. 12:10 |
| Have compassion for one another - | Receive one another -- |
| 1 Pet. 3:8 | Rom. 15:7 |
| Serve one another -- | Restore one another -- |
| Gal. 5:15 | Gal. 6:1 |
| Be subject one to another -- | Do not be consumed one of another -- |
| 1 Pet. 5:5 | Gal. 5:15 |
| Submit one to another -- | Do not envy one another -- |
| Eph. 5:21 | Gal. 5:26 |
| Be of the same mind one toward another -- | Do not grudge one against another -- |
| Rom. 12:16 | Jas. 5:9 |
| Be tenderhearted one to another -- | Do not judge one another -- |
| Eph. 4:32 | Rom. 14:13 |
| Be kind one to another -- | Do not lie one to another -- |
| Eph. 4:32 | Col. 3:9 |
| Not preferring one before another -- | 1 Tim. 5:21 |
| Do not provoke one another -- | Gal. 5:26 |
| Be not be puffed up one against another -- | 1 Cor. 4:6 |
The Patience of the Saints is also “patience with the saints”

The “patience of the saints” can also become for you “patience with the saints,” as you discover how God wants to work powerfully and providentially through all your trials, especially your relationships with imperfect fellow-believers, to accomplish His purposes for your life.

- Patience is to exercise patience with the saints (believers), and especially with those who, in your eyes, are not anywhere near being saints.

- Patience is to let intercessory prayer replace criticism and gossip in dealing with those who are not acting like saints. Do not go the phone for gossip, but go to the throne of God in prayer.

- Patience to believe that God will judge those who treat us unjustly.

- Patience is to transmit God’s perfect love toward those who are not even near perfection.

- Patience is to let the imperfect people in your life be God’s reminders that He is not finished with you or them yet.

- Patience is to see imperfect saints as God sees them. Underneath the surfaces of their rough exteriors, many a wounded heart may be hiding. Avoid jumping to quick conclusions, in premature attempts to clean up the church, through your enforcement of church standards.

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**Jas. 5:16**
- Consider one another  *Heb. 10:24*
- Use hospitality one to another  *1 Pet. 4:9*

**Jas. 4:11**  
- Do not speak evil one of another
Patience is Trusting God’s Providence

Definition of Providence: It is the coming together of ordinary events with supernatural timing to accomplish God’s purposes.

To exercise patience is to trust in God’s timing, being firmly convinced that all our destinies are at all times in the direct care of a loving, benevolent, all-wise and gracious God, who has our best interests, as well as His own, at heart. Though all things are not good, we can nevertheless trust Him that He is working all things out for good (Romans 8:28). Read and believe these truths about God’s providence and His sovereignty.

- “Above the distractions of the earth God sits enthroned; all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best.” [1]

- “The Lord would have His people, under all circumstances, manifest implicit trust in Him. Although we cannot always understand the workings of His providence, we should wait with patience and humility until He sees fit to enlighten us. We should beware of taking upon ourselves responsibilities which God has not authorized us to bear.” [2]

- “God engineers our circumstances as He did those of His Son; all we have to do is to follow where He places us. The majority of us are busy trying to place ourselves. God alters things while we wait for Him.” [3]

- “Faith: seeing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.” Philip Yancey. [4]

- “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.” The apostle Paul in Romans 11:33.

The Scriptures are filled with numerous lessons on the providence and sovereignty of our great God. Several years ago my friend James Ayars, Ph.D. (unpublished paper dated 1971) wrote a short paper illustrating how God providentially worked out His purposes in the lives of four major Bible characters: Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Jesus Christ.
Would you take a few moments to thoughtfully examine these four case studies on the providence of God?[1]

Providence Lesson No. 1: Joseph, son of Jacob

Key Statement: How could a loving God allow me to be sold into slavery? I have always been a good boy! I did no wrong, and I don’t deserve this.

Key Text: ‘But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life...And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance’ (Genesis 45:5,7). ‘But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive’ (Genesis 50:20).

Question to ponder: When did Joseph first recognize God’s purpose for His sale into slavery in Egypt? Even before he was on his deathbed he recognized that God had a plan for Him.

Providence Lesson No. 2: Pharaoh, King of Egypt

Key Statement: Who is Yahweh, that I should obey His voice? I know not Yahweh!

Key Text: “But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth’ (Exodus 9:16, Romans 9:17).

Question to Ponder: Was Pharaoh a victim of a divine plot? Or was he, because of pride, a useful exhibit for God to reveal Himself? God accomplished two things through Pharaoh’s life. He made an exhibition of His power and glory, and He accomplished the salvation and deliverance of His people from Egypt.

Providence Lesson No. 3: Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon

Key Statement: ‘Look at this great Babylon I have built.’

Key Text: ‘...in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men’ (Daniel 4:17).

Questions to Ponder: Did Nebuchadnezzar of his own free will go into a seven-year period of insanity? Did God violate Nebuchadnezzar’s free will by intervening in this personal way in his life? This is the king’s own testimony: ‘Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down’ (Daniel 4:37).”

Providence Lesson No. 4: Jesus, the Messiah
Key Statement: ‘What kind of God would let a good man die so cruelly at the hands of wicked men?’

Key Text: ‘For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done’ (Acts 4:27,28)

Questions to Ponder: Was the work of Christ in dying for our redemption the result of a carefully conceived divine plan, devised in the ages before the world began, or was it the natural out-working of the history of sinful men, or was it both?

Patience is far more than enduring trials and irritations with a stiff upper lip. Patience is really to trust the unceasing providence and sovereignty of our God believing that…

· God in overflowing bounty and goodwill upholds His creatures in ordered existence.
· He guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men, and that He directs everything to its appointed goal, for His own glory.[5]

Unless we place our solid trust in the providential outworking of God’s plans, we might open the doors of our lives to legalism, which is our sincere, but illegal and misguided attempts to accomplish by our own power what God desires to give to us as free gifts of His grace and goodness. “Wherever happy confidence in the sovereign power of God for our own lives and the lives of others grows weak, legalism creeps in.” [6] This does not mean that Christians should accept a view of negative events that leads them with resignation to say, whatever will be will be. Nor does it mean that we should pretend that the fate and future of the world is in our hands. There is really no need to despair. We can believe, as Herbert Schlossberg has noted, that “we are not the lords of history and do not control its outcome, but we have assurance that there is a lord of history and he controls its outcome. We need a theological interpretation of disaster, one that recognizes that God acts in such events as captivities, defeats, and crucifixions. The Bible can be interpreted as a string of God’s triumphs disguised as disasters.” [7]

Such a perspective will enable us to sing…

*In His time, in His time*
*He makes all things beautiful in His time.*
*Lord just show me every day*
*As You’re teaching me Your way,*
*That you do just what You say, in Your time.*[8]

You Can Grow Through Trials by…
discerning God’s ultimate purpose in every trial. Every trial is a test of whether we will trust God 100% for everything and in every situation. While the present may not make sense, because faith does not always know where it is being led, it does know and love the One who is leading.

learning to examine the emotions of your heart. These emotions can often provide clues to the presence of the Babylon and beast viruses (discontent, covetousness, unbelief) in your own life.

prayer and intercession for others. Every time you are tempted to criticize someone whose manners irritate you and test your patience, turn that temptation into prayer in their behalf. In intercessory prayer we connect with what is in God’s heart concerning the person for whom we are praying. And since God’s heart is always a heart of love, we cannot help but start loving the ones whom our Heavenly Father loves.

praising and rejoicing in Jesus. In God’s waiting room you will discover that the joy of the Lord is your strength, not just for the future, but for right now. You will actually be able to welcome trials, for “we glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [patience KJV]; and perseverance, character; and character hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).

The Healing of Bitterness and Ungratefulness

The wilderness trials of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land provide abundant evidence on how easily we can become diverted from God’s good purposes by our wrong responses to trials and adversities. Three days following their deliverance at the Red Sea from the pursuing armies of Egypt they were unable to find potable water. And when they did find water at Marah, it was bitter.

“And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, ‘If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the disease on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you’” (Exodus 15:26).

When reading this passage, you wonder, why would God on this occasion reveal His name as ‘Jehovah Rophe’ – I am the Lord who heals? There was no record of any known sickness or disease among the people. And yet, the roots of disease were present – a spirit of murmuring, complaining, and discontent, rooted in a spirit of ungratefulness.
The people seemed to have forgotten all about their prior deliverance at the Red Sea just a few days earlier. The visible problem was *bitter waters*; the real problem was *bitter hearts*. Bitterness of heart and murmuring always lays the foundation of an exhibit of whether difficult circumstances will deter and dilute our worship of the Lord, or whether we will worship the Lord regardless of adversities. This is a reminder of the young man who wrote the following sentences on a card to his girlfriend – “For you I will cross the widest ocean, for you I will climb the highest mountain, et cetera,” followed by a PS – “I’ll be over tonight if it doesn’t rain!”

Are you perhaps struggling with discouragement because trials have embittered your life? Do you feel that God has forgotten all about you? Then this passage of scripture can offer heaven’s hope for your healing, for the health consequences of bitter hearts and ingratitude can be utterly serious. Ungratefulness impairs our spiritual immune system. “Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings – as much a duty as it is to pray.” [9]

When our spiritual immune system is compromised by murmuring and discontent, these attitudes can easily become seedbeds for the infestation of the “Babylon virus.” And the Babylon virus will eventually express itself in beastlike conduct as we try to fix our problems by relying on our own resources, because we believe that God is not BIG enough to handle our problems.

“The Lord showed him a tree. And when he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet” *(Exodus 15:25)*. Would you let Jesus cast His *tree*, the cross of Calvary, into the bitter waters of your life? God wants you to learn to reason about everything in light of the cross, and to build your life on the benefits of His tree, the cross. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” *(Romans 8:32)*. At all times, under all circumstances, learn to think and to reason about everything in your life from the starting point of the cross. May the healing stream flowing from that cross heal you from all the bitter waters in your life.

**Life Applications**

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Recall times when you experienced personal trials which were unjust. Were you able later in retrospect to see God’s hand in them?

2. Think of a time when you ran ahead of God by taking matters into your own hands. What were the results?
3. How is it possible to experience joy in the midst of trials? Read James 1:3-6.

4. What does this text say to you about the possibilities for growth when we look through trials and see beyond to future joy? “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (Hebrews 12:2, 3).

Texts to Remember: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His own will: that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:11, 12).

Truths vs. Lies: You can develop immunity to Satan’s deceptions by replacing Satan’s lies with God’s truths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lies or half-truths</th>
<th>Truths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The closer you come to Jesus the fewer trials you can expect.</td>
<td>The closer you come to Jesus the more you can expect to recognize His presence as you face trials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I cannot have what I want when I want it, it is then OK to grumble and complain.</td>
<td>If I do not get what I want, I will patiently wait for God to provide it for me in His time without giving Him a deadline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trials are signs that God has forsaken you and no longer cares for you.</td>
<td>Trials are opportunities for you to experience the fullness and adequacy of God’s resources for your every need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child of God should have to experience trials.</td>
<td>Trials, correctly understood, can be signs of His tender love for His children.</td>
</tr>
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Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you worship Him in singing

William Cowper (1731-1800), a British clergyman, often suffered from prolonged periods of depression. On one occasion he ordered the driver of his carriage to take him to the seaside where he had planned to take his own life in the ocean. However, a series of providential circumstances thwarted this suicide attempt. Upon returning home, sensing God’s most specific interventions in this and other events of his life, Mr. Cowper wrote the hymn “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.”

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

Endnotes -

[4] For the following four case studies, I am indebted to James Ayars., Ph.D., Pastor of the Ventura Church of Seventh-day Adventists, Ventura, CA
Cosmos

Submitted by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Sept 25, 2013

Fibonacci, for those who don’t know, was a 12th century Italian mathematician who came up with a numerical sequence in which each number is the sum of the two numbers before it. Thus, 1 (plus 0), 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc. These numbers are called the Fibonacci sequence or series, and, graphed, make up something called the Golden Spiral or the Golden Mean. The proportions are found all over nature, and you can see amazing images if you look the term up online and click on an Images page.

In a poetry workshop at a recent all-ages VBS, a small group of (mostly) youth collaborated on a Fibonacci Poem, so called because its syllables follow the Sequence. The poem was written by Della Walters, Kyla Wilkie, Reuben Gulatte, and Debbonnaire Kovacs.

COSMOS (A Fibonacci Poem)

Earth

And

Water,

Wind and fire—

Ancient elements—

Erode and weather our planet,

Constantly changing, rearranging in new patterns.

Body, mind, spirit, and soul sometimes break down, to constantly recreate who we are.

We’re all connected, all related, united in diversity, each of us one unique piece of the kaleidoscope of the cosmos.