Should We Ever Leave the Church?
Doug Batchelor /5

Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?—1
Heinz Hopf /10

Why Am I in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
Estere Galeniece /21

How Youth See Our Church
Michael Younker /25

Why Some Are Leaving, But I’m Staying
Scott M. Bennett /42

A Generation of Young Disciples!
Janet Evert /46

Letters /2
The Future’s Looking Brighter! S. Lawrence Maxwell /3
Why I Stay in the Church Albert Kim /33
The Love That Compels Me Shawn Brace /39
Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?—2 Heinz Hopf /50
The Church: Its Condition and Its Destiny Ellen G. White /62

Previous Issues of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM /64
Statement of Mission /67
S. Lawrence Maxwell
Editor

Adventists Affirm is upbeat on the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is not that we don't see the problems. We know the issues over music, worship, divorce, homosexuality, women's ordination, evolution, sanctification, and more. But even when we point out trends that we think lead in a wrong direction and caution against popularizing errors, this springs from a confidence in God's calling and destiny for His church. So we come to you with happy bells heralding a brighter day for the church.

To change the metaphor, this is definitely not the time to jump ship. In our opening article, Doug Batchelor of Amazing Facts makes this abundantly clear and gives good reasons for staying in the church.

We welcome author Heinz Hopf, former president of the Baden-Württemberg Conference in South Germany, to the pages of Adventists Affirm. If we ever think of leaving the church, Hopf encourages us to ask as Peter did, "To whom shall we go?" The words of eternal life are preached in the Adventist church!

These articles encourage us to remain with our church whatever her shortcomings may be.

We have split Elder Hopf's article into two parts and used them like an embrace around a cluster of articles by and about Adventist youth. We invited five young people to write testimonies of why they have stayed in the church. Their views and experiences may differ in some respects from ours, which is only to be expected. They took the assignment seriously, writing thought-provoking, encouraging essays.

Latvian-born Estere Galeniece reminds us that external conditions are not the deciding factor for spiritual life. She tells us what is, and how the church figures into the picture.

Then Michael Younker describes our church as today's youth see it. Anyone with a morbid approach to Adventist youth will be happily surprised by Michael's assessment.

Albert Kim represents many Adventist students on secular campuses. He tells us of his own pilgrimage and the factors that have kept him firmly anchored in the church.

Shawn Brace returns this fall to his studies at Andrews University after a year in Scotland. He is very open about his relationship with the church, despite the problems he sees. He stays by the church because of the unfailing love of Jesus.

Rounding out our testimonies is Scott Bennett's steadfast, encouraging outlook. He has no plans to leave the church. He's staying by, and he tells us why.

Janet Evert is not a college student, but she shows that we should stay with the church because of the good things that are happening, especially among our youth. Confessing that she always
used to be suspicious of teenagers, she tells us what she has discovered since she started editing *Young Disciple.* To her amazement and joy, she has found that there are in our church today hundreds of teenagers who love to study the Bible and share with others what they find.

Finally, we share a challenging and heartening selection from Ellen G. White on the church's calling and its future.

My personal excitement over the future of our church is based not only on these upbeat articles, but also on my own recent experience with Adventist young people. For five of the past six years I have enjoyed the delightful job of teaching college freshmen and sophomores at a little school variously called George King Institute or (after we moved to a new location) the Center for Personal Evangelism. Those young people are the most consecrated group I think I've ever met. For one thing, they couldn't join the school unless they spent a summer canvassing, something that demonstrates unusual commitment. Many got up at 4:30 for their personal devotions, usually reading the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy. They canvassed through the dreadfully cold winter months, two weeks, sometimes three weeks at a stretch while taking a full load of college subjects.

They searched for Bible study interests, they gave Bible studies, they assisted evangelistic meetings, some did the preaching night after night. One of our students was invited to a large church to give Bible studies, she thought. When she got there, the leaders put her to work training church members to give studies. She goes out knocking on doors, then takes her students to interested people and gets them started. She told me the church members suddenly realize they are doing evangelism and are thrilled.

Many of our students have advanced to the point where they are teaching and encouraging younger youth. This summer (2002), two of them helped lead 15 students as they sold $91,000 worth of Adventist books in ten weeks. Others helped lead a slightly larger group that sold $115,000. A group of 30, led and trained in part by our students, sold $154,000 worth in those same ten weeks. Rocky Davis, literature ministry director for the Southern Union, told me on the phone that during this year's summer "vacation," some 200 Adventist young people placed $750,000 worth of books in non-Adventist homes. At about $10 a book, that's a wonderful lot of books silently witnessing to a tremendous number of families.

And who is doing all this evangelism? Adventist young people. As Ellen White said, "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the world" (*Education,* p. 271).

In case you haven't noticed, that army is already forming, going out to Affirm to the world the wonderful truths Adventists believe. That's why I say the future of our church looks bright.
Is it time now to jump ship? How can we know what to do?

"Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31).

Two teenage brothers, Bo and Joe, decided to take advantage of the warm weather one Sunday afternoon and drove to the ocean pier for a swim.

"I cant wait to dive in," said Bo.

"Me either," answered Joe as they parked the car.

They changed into their swim trunks and headed for the pier. Above a rocky shoreline it led out to where waves crashed on the pilings below.

"Last one in is a rotten egg!" yelled Bo, charging down the pier and diving off the end.

"Hey, wait for me!" Joe called as he ran to catch up.

More cautious than his brother, Joe paused to look over the end of the pier before diving. To his horror, he saw the body of his brother floating in the surf, his neck broken by the rocks inches below the water surface. A young teenager had lost his life by diving when the tide was out. He didnt know when to jump.

You may be thinking Bo was not very smart for not stopping to look before he dove, but many today are doing the same; they are diving out of the church like lemmings running blindly off a cliff into the sea. They do not stop to look before they leap; they do not ask whether there are rocks below. They see a problem in the church and follow those who say, "Last one out is a rotten egg!"

Discouraged. It is easy to get discouraged when you consider all the potential problems one may encounter in a church. Myriads of voices constantly remind us of our churchs hypocrisy and failures. Independent ministries provide a stream of tabloid information, regurgitating present rumors and past scandals, the squandering of money, lack of the Holy Spirit, the famine of real Bible preaching, the general worldliness... as reasons to leave the church.

You may be thinking, "Is there any virtue in pretending we are the Titans captain and going down with the ship? Cant I be part of Gods church without being part of a specific denomination or organization? Must I endure pathetic preaching and spiritless fellowship week after week forever? Is there never a time to leave the church? Or is there, sometimes please?"

Before I answer that question, it is imperative that we first answer another. Why do we join a church? Once we understand that matter it will be easier to evaluate when to leave.
Why Join? I took a survey as to why people join a church, and here are some of the answers I received. (This was not a scientific study, but based on the consistency of answers, I think it is very accurate.)

1. Its the church of my parents.
2. Its close to our home.
3. The people are friendly and loving.
4. The music is beautiful or invigorating.
5. The preacher is handsome or dynamic.
6. They have a good childrens program.
7. The building is impressive.
8. The important or influential people go to this church.
9. The services are exciting. 10. The church needs me.

Though each of these elements may be good in and of itself, nonenot one of themis the right reason to join a church.

There is only one right reason to join a church. It can be divided into two parts:

(1) The foundation teachings of the church, what we might call the doctrinal pillars, are the true teachings of the Bible, and (2) you are committed to following truth.

You may be surprised but, yes, there is a time to leave the church! Ive been asked this question many times so I have thought carefully about my answer.

When the fundamental doctrines of the church are no longer the teachings of Christ, when you are no longer allowed to discuss and practice your convictions of truth within its fellowship, then you have no choice but to go somewhere else.

But my next question is, When that happens, will there be anywhere better to go?

Paul and the Leaking Boat

There is a true-adventure story in the Bible about a terrible storm in which Paul and his shipmates nearly drowned. You can read the vivid details in Acts 27. Paul was traveling to Rome along with a boatload of passengers, several of whom, like himself, were prisoners facing trial before Nero. Shortly after leaving Asia Minor they found themselves trapped in a terrible tempest. For fourteen days and nights "neither sun nor star . . . appeared" (v. 20). The little ship, burdened with 276 souls, was lashed by the merciless wind and sea. As it pitched and rolled, the passengers threw practically everything overboard, including, no doubt, their lunchmany must have been dreadfully seasick! The situation got so bad that most gave up any hope of survival (v. 20). The last place in the world they wanted to be was on that boat . . . but, please notice, nobody jumped overboard.

In the same way, there may be times when you think that Gods ship, the church, with all its problems and faults is the last place in the world you want to be. But I promise you, you are much better off tossed about in the church with sinners than floundering in the water with sharks.

Exiting? Reading on, the Bible tells us that as Paul and his shipmates neared land, some of the sailors tried to get off the ship under pretense of wanting to help. "Some of the sailors planned
to abandon the ship and lowered the emergency boat as though they were going to put out anchors from the prow" (v. 30 TLB).

In other words they were saying, "Were going to take a lifeboat and paddle off by ourselves; well leave the others to go down with the ship."

Some people in the church are doing this now. They are branching off by themselves. With divine authority Paul told the soldiers in charge: "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (v. 30).

Did the soldiers say, "Every man for himself!" and join the offshoots by heading for a lifeboat? No. The Scripture states: "Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off" (v. 31).

The empty lifeboat was cut away to drop into the sea in order to keep the crew together.

**Together.** Why is this story in the Bible? For our encouragement and instruction. Paul is saying that unless we stick together were not going to make it to the kingdom.

In 1519 Hernando Cortez landed near the site of Vera Cruz, Mexico. When he detected a lack of resolve among his troops he burned the ships of his small fleet to eradicate all thoughts of retreat. I believe as we, Gods people, near shore (the end of time) God is reminding us that we must stay together through the storm. I think He wants us to cut the ropes to the lifeboats and commit ourselves to staying with the ship.

Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). Likewise, those in the church who are constantly looking over their shoulders at the lifeboats steer a crooked course. How can we effectively win souls into the church if we are forever planning to leave it?

When someone encourages you to be an escape artist, tell them, "Why should I leave? God has promised to bring me safely to shore if I stay with His ship."

**What About Sinners?**

They may answer that there are so many sinners in the ship that it cant possibly be Gods vessel. But, in our Bible story, Paul tells us that the ship, steered by pagan seamen, contained among the idol-worshipping passengers many a criminal on his way to judgment. There were many different kinds of people of whom very few were good, yet the message was that they all must stay together.

Eventually they did have to leave the ship, when it broke to pieces on the rocks. At that point, they had to grab what was left of the ship just the pieces and make it to shore. But do notice that when there was no more ship for them to stay in, holding tightly to the pieces got them safely to land.

Look again at that battered old ship, for our ship will be shaken too. Pauls leaky ship managed to stay in one piece until it struck land.

**Trouble Coming.** This, I think, is how Gods church is going to be in the last days. I believe that here in North America, where we have so long been free, it will become illegal for our church to operate as a visible organization approved by the government. The organization of our church, the ship, very well may break apart as we strike the rocks at the end of time. If and when that happens were each just going to have to make our own way to land through the dangerous water, clinging to any parts of the old ship still floating, gathering in small companies to strengthen and encourage one another.

The great final tribulation will be preceded by a small time of trouble. At this time government restrictions and regulations will make it impossible for commandment keepers to worship openly. The church will be forced underground.
"As the decree issued by the various rulers of Christendom against commandment keepers shall withdraw the protection of government and abandon them to those who desire their destruction, the people of God will flee from the cities and villages and associate together in companies, dwelling in the most desolate and solitary places. Many will find refuge in the strongholds of the mountains" (The Great Controversy, p. 626).

Spared to Witness

Acts 27:24 gives one of the reasons why God will preserve us in His church. It reads: "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

In case you missed it, God is here promising Paul that his life will be spared so that Paul can witness to Caesar. In the same way, near the end of time, each one of us may be called to be a witness to worldly powers if we remain faithful. Like Paul we may be imprisoned and brought before kings and rulers. God wants us to bring the last message of hope to a dying world. If we jump ship, well miss that opportunity. We are doomed to drown in the dark abyss if we try to cross the stormy ocean with nothing but a rubber duck and a bathing suit.

Are there problems in the church? Yes, big ones! Is this a new condition? No. The sad history of Gods people is one of compromise and backsliding. But over and over the Lord told His leaders to stay with the people and struggle to effect revival. You cannot clean a house from the outside; you must be inside it. You cannot bail out a boat if youre in the water; you must be in the boat.

When Elijah was hiding in his cave God asked, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"then sent him back to His wayward people (1 Kgs 19:9, 15). When the Lord consigned the children of Israel to forty years of wandering because of their unfaithfulness, Moses wandered with them. Even more importantly, God went with them. Consider for a moment how many times in their history the Israelites backslid, and yet still they remained Gods people. Why? "Chiefly," as Paul explained, "because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2).

Unique People. Thats what makes Seventh-day Adventists unique among the worlds faiths and denominations. God has committed to us the oracles of truth. We are modern, spiritual Israel. "Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12).

And if the church is the object of Gods supreme regard, it stands to reason that it is the object upon which the devil concentrates his most intense rage. "The dragon was wroth with the woman" (Rev 12:17).

Just as a wolf scatters the sheep of the flock away from the shepherd in order to bring one down, the devil is working frantically to separate Gods sheep from the Shepherd and from one another, so he can claim us as his prey. Divided we fall!

When the final crashing wave breaks the ship apart, grab onto anything that floats and swim for shore! I dont know what form that wave will take, whether government decrees or religious persecution, and I dont know when it will come. But I do know that things are going to get a lot worse than they are now. We need to be firm in our beliefs. Otherwise we will be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14).

The way to be ready is to be daily in prayer and Bible study, to be putting on the robe of Christs righteousness. When the final storm breaks upon us and those last waves hit, that robe will be our life jacket.

Faith. Thats the way it is with our church. Some people feel that it is the church that will safely bring them to the shores of eternal life. These people are only along for the ride and lose their faith in times of storm. Others have placed their faith in Christs life, death and ministry and live in obedience to Him. They are daily placing their faith in Him through prayer, study and service. They are also in His church, but they know that when the waves hit, He, not the
church, will be the one to hold them up. So long as the ship is afloat, they are on board, not as tourists, but as crew members. Not until the ship sinks do they try to make it to shore by any other means.

Friends, that's the kind of person I want to be, the one wearing the life jacket of Christ's righteousness. It's the only way to survive.
Why Am I in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Estere Galeniece
Sophomore, Andrews Academy
What gives a young person resolve to stay in the church?

You have heard that a great many young people are leaving the Adventist church. Well, I am not one of them. I have chosen to stay by, and you might like to know why.

A Good Start. I was born into a Seventh-day Adventist family. By loving me with all their hearts, my parents taught me to love Jesus. As I was growing up they taught me why I should love Him and what He did for us all. I knew all the famous people in the Bible and their stories. I studied the Sabbath school lesson and knew the memory verse for every Sabbath. The words the apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy certainly applied to me: "From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:15-17; NIV throughout article).

But is that what being an Adventist is really all about: knowing all the Bible stories, being a good boy or girl? Is that what saves us in the future? Sadly enough, it seems that this is what many people think. Some think that if they were born into a functional family, if mommy and daddy loved them and all was good, their lives were set, their future assured. They had all they needed to have, a good childhood. True, it is one of the greatest advantages to have a good start in life. However, after the start, there is the rest of life. The day comes when we must make our own choices, not mom or dad.

Other Side.

Yes, it really is a great privilege to have loving, God-fearing parents. However, the coin has another side to it, too. There are many kids who have grown up in hostile homes and environments who today are in church. They love Jesus and the people around them with all their heart. It may sound ironic, but it is a fact that harsh circumstances are sometimes the most favorable for the development of a godly character.

I have often found people who have lots of beautiful characteristics living in conditions which are totally opposed to goodness, purity, or love. Usually these people have a much clearer insight into the spiritual world, stronger faith, and a firmer grasp on their Lord Jesus Christ. They have a higher ideal of spiritual life, not only because of the filth they have to live in, but because they know what is what. They know the price.

Such development of a Christ-like character comes, not by what we draw from this world, not by how rich we are, or how smart we are, or how much information we are able to gather, but by what we draw from Jesus in whom we must be anchored. Only in Him do we find both security and nourishment. The stronger the contrary winds are, the more we are thrown back on Him. The more we seek Jesus, the less interested we are in watching degrading TV shows.
and other corrupting things. The more we think and talk about our Redeemer, the deeper become our faith and our consciousness of His presence.

**Resistance Needed.** It is ironic, but resistance strengthens muscles. Its one reason why John pays special attention to young people: "I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 Jn 2:14-17).

There is a great need for resistance in our spiritual lives. The more resistance, the stronger and the better we shall be. Don't let anybody make the excuse, "If only circumstances were more favorable, my life would be better. I would go to church. I would be active in youth or missionary work. I would be a real saint." Here are some important questions we should ask ourselves. How can a young man or woman keep the purity of a Christian life encountering the tricks and unwritten laws of this world? How can you in your circumstances reach the ideal Christian character? Is it possible to attain the highest goals outside the church? Is it possible without the Word of God? The Bible gives the answer: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:9-11).

Listen, my friend, if your desire to be a child of God depends on circumstances, it is a poor affair. It is a tragedy. It depends on you! What do I mean by this? If in your thoughts you focus on God, Jesus Christ, you will have enough power to turn enemies into friends and hostile circumstances into blessings. You will be able to overcome or to change negative influences in your behalf. You will not be their slave. Your ship can sail against the wind if you trim the sails correctly and keep a strong grip on the helm. Then the blasts that blow in your face may be used to carry you triumphantly into the haven of your desire. Remember, you decide what you want to be in church, to be with God, or to be in the world.

**Why Others Leave.**

I have noticed many reasons why teens leave the church. Those who grew up in a Christian family are sick of hearing spiritual talks. They have heard them all before and "know everything." They were spoon fed and do not realize that now that they are older the time has come to make their own decision whether to follow Jesus or the world. The time has come to apply what they learned from the Bible to their own lives. This is the start of the problems they don't know how to deal with.

There are those who want to have fun and who do something stupid "just for fun." They hope to prove to mom and dad that they are old enough now, and can handle anything on their own, except paying the bills, of course. Those who grew up without interest in the Bible don't have a strong will to hold on. It is hard for them to stand against peer pressure and realize that they would be much better off if God were in control rather than to be under the influence of drugs or partying friends. They don't know about that greater Power that can carry them every step of their lives.

Many teens feel ashamed to be Adventists and fear criticism and ridicule. They are afraid that they will not be able to justify their high calling. They have noticed the keen critics that all true God-fearing teens have to face. There is no doubt that some of us have experienced that, too. But whether that is the case or not, however unobtrusive and quiet a believers life may be, there will always be some people standing close by, who, if not actually watching for his/her fall, will make the worst of his/her failure and rejoice over any slip or inconsistency.

We do not need to complain of that. It is the way of the world. There will always be a tendency to judge people who profess to be living by the highest law. Their judgment is without love or mercy. You might wonder, "Why does it have to be like that?" It is because Gods people need to be trained to close themselves to every destroying thought, influence, or
opinion. At the same time, they must remember that they are the "light" and the "salt" for this world. It is called responsibility.

On the other hand, it is a reasonable and right requirement that we Seventh-day Adventists should "have a good report of them that are without." Don't be angry if you are tried by a higher standard, do not wonder, and do not forget that there are always keen eyes watching your life, listening to your words, judging your deeds. Where? Everywhere! In your home, in your relationships with your friends, at school, and your social activities. We are to remember that and shape our lives so that the critics may be disappointed. Really, that is a great responsibility.

**Why Am I in the Church?** I go there not because my parents make me. I don't attend church because it offers many "fun" activities or simply because more than half its members are teens who are very good friends of mine. No! I go there because the church is the expression of God's will and has special promises. Jesus is my example and He teaches that despite the words and deeds of people I am to be at church every Sabbath. This is my free will, and my own decision to be in the house of God.

For me the church is the highest university in the world. It is also the heavenly embassy and hospital. In this university I learn about my Savior, His love, His plans for me, and the truth which is eternal. Some may say, "That does not refer to me, and it's all boring anyway." Really? But let me tell you what applies to all Christians at any given time. Obedience to God always needs to be kept alive. Always! But as for evil ways and practices of this earth, the Adventist must stay away from such things. If the people say "Do this" and Jesus says "Don't," they can talk as much as they want. We are bound to turn a deaf ear to their exhortations and threats. We are called to "keep our hearts" from every evil.

Moreover, the world is a poor judge of our faith and an incompetent critic of our behavior. It does not know much about the Bible, or about the experiences Adventists go through and why they love Jesus. But it knows what cheating means, and bad tempers, dishonesty, and so on. It is by our daily behavior, in the things we do, that unbelievers judge what and who we are. There is no use for Adventists to just talk. The world wants to see our actions. They want to see the love, mercy, honesty, forgiveness, integrity, and faith Adventists preach about. They want to see Christ's power working in us and through us. We must live in such a way as to extort, even from those who do not love us, the confession, "We find no fault in them." And that is the highest education.

**Ambassador.**

I am heaven's ambassador. My church is also a heavenly embassy and I am its ambassador. It constantly reminds me that in our common lives we must have the motto, "This I did not do, because of the love of the Lord." And, again, "I did this in order to advance the interests of my Father's kingdom." This is absolutely necessary in the life of every Adventist teen. My Jesus teaches me that, unless we are prepared to be in a minority, and now and then to be called "narrow minded," "fanatic," and to be laughed at by other teens because we do not do what they do, but abstain and resist, then there is little chance for us to be true witnesses for Jesus and His kingdom.

My church is also a hospital where all kinds of sicknesses are healed. Jesus is the Healer of our hurts and bruises. He forgives every sin and grants hope and strength for every new day. Even more, Jesus Himself is among His people in the church. He said, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Mt 18:20). There was a time when "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." Then Jesus turned to those who were left in His small church and asked the question, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Peter understood the danger of leaving Christ and answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:66-68). If you have Jesus you have everything. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn 5:12).

Furthermore, I live in a world today which offers various temptations to both young and old. But there are no circumstances in which we must give up our faith in God or have our
garments spotted by the world. Whatever the circumstances, if God puts us in this world, if we keep holding onto His hand, and if our eyes are focused upon Him, our characters will become brighter and purer. They will look as white as snow in contrast to the blackness of this filthy world. Is it possible? Yes! Remember the words of Paul, "Dont let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. . . . Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. . . . Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:12-16).

Finally, whatsoever Jesus says unto youthat and that onlywhatsoever He says unto you, do it! Here is the key to why I am in the church.
Are young people looking for the right things in the church?

It is a certainty that when a person begins to seek a relationship with God, he begins a journey of twists and turns with unforeseen results. With most people, this journey toward God begins by sincerely pushing out some "feelers" toward spiritual things during their high school and college years. I am in college, so I know of what I speak. It is during these years that we young people bump into people who think things very different from what we were taught as younger children; some of these new ideas are downright contrary to what we were taught. But it is not the contrary things I wish to discuss. It is rather the filters that everything religious must pass through in our experience.

As such, this article is more an excursion through my experience than an objective analysis. But since I arrived at conclusions held by a minority, and as my perceptions of religion were turned upside down from my initial impressions, I think it useful to examine my spiritual journey, if it may benefit even one. I hope it is more than informative, but helpful.

The Three Filters of Spiritual Receptiveness

Besides scientists, youth are probably the most extensive testers the world has known. Anyone who has had much experience around us younger folk will understand. (Or perhaps they remember their own growing-up experience!) But now, let’s take a more detailed look at how we actually handle our filters, and how it might be possible to change clogged filters for a cleaner set.

Emotional: Me, Me, Me! First and foremost is the emotional filter. This filter is often clogged and leads some youth to do rather interesting things. Unfortunately, it is often this filter that functions as a preliminary filter for all the rest, sometimes leaving the others inactive.

A large number of youth imagine that true religion is a simple, pleasurable emotional state of mind. The problem for them is that God is not a fireworks show on display for the amusement and entertainment of our feelings and senses. This is a serious problem to overcome, but it must be done to properly enjoy the true, controlled emotions of that outward-oriented love that God desires us to have.

God designed our emotions; indeed many of the most important spiritual chapters in my life were marked by very emotional experiences, though for these experiences to actually impact me in the long term, there needed to be some substance for my mind. Spirituality without emotion is dead. I have discovered that there is a way to integrate proper emotional experiences into true religion. And it is very important that we convey to our youthful peers that there is an emotional aspect to spirituality, but that it plays a role opposite to that which it used to play in our lives. It no longer functions as the focal point; rather, it is an additional result of the overall experience. I will relate this to my personal experiences in more detail.
further on.

**Practicability Bug.**

The second filter is practicability. It is like a bug that bites youth hard. I still suffer from it myself. Even if I agreed with some doctrine, if it wasn’t easy to put into practice it often fell by the wayside. If it wasn’t doable in an afternoon (or less), then it just took too long for me. This is extremely applicable to spiritual things.

As one of the key influences in his conversion from Catholicism to Adventism a friend and classmate of mine remarked to me that Adventism doesn’t require silly debates and conversations about whether or not he had fulfilled his weekly Mass requirement. (He said this, of course, as an older, wiser adult, not a crazy, emotional youth.) He told me that formerly he and his friends would often debate whether or not what they had done the previous week satisfied the Mass service requirement, wondering whether attendance at weddings or other events on other days might not be enough to get their parents to excuse them from Sunday Mass! When I heard this, I could only remark that it sounded like another truly sad story of legalism, an obstacle of significant weight to many young Adventists also, who see only the law code of "dos and donts" and not much else in Adventism. This is a great deterrent to many of our post-modern thinkers.

**Intellectual: Its Easy to Despise Doctrinal Stuff.** The third filter is intellectual. There is a strong intellectual element in youth, and doctrinal issues must pass through it. Even if doctrinal issues don’t fully emerge from the mind until the later college years, they enter during the early teen years. This was my experience not so very long ago. It is important to youth that they be aware of the truth as it is in doctrines. No adult wants to be completely and absolutely dead wrong, and youth are no different.

Raised with all the right doctrines available from childhood, the biggest problem for most Adventist youth is not with the doctrines per se, but with their presentation. Too often I have heard complaints from friends struggling over the value of our correct doctrines, and telling their stories of their encounters with parents who seemed to convey to them that if they simply would attend church and believe and do the right things, they would be good Adventists. My friends wanted to know Why?

That was the intellectual filter coming into play. They questioned the validity of Adventist practices and doctrines, because they had no clue to the meaning behind them. In their experience with Sabbath school and church, it had been portrayed to them as a cultural thing that was "right" simply because it was "right." They had never truly been taught, by Scripture, by example, and by personal experience, what the foundations of Adventism were actually about. They had been told to put their questions and understanding aside and trust the traditional beliefs of Adventism. They were not taught to investigate through a personal relationship with God the reasons for their faith. Without this personal relationship, doctrines don’t make sense, no matter how they are presented.

**Getting Through the Filters: Spirituality in Practice**

Youth are sensitive to spiritual things. And sometimes a whole lot more so than older people think. Peer pressure, the emotional baggage we carry, and our practicability bug often interfere with the message, but we listen to serious spiritually oriented stuff. It just sometimes shows up later.

More to the point, how can true spirituality be "filtered through the filters" of spiritual experience? To help illustrate my point, I will refer to British author C. S. Lewiss account of giving a theological discourse to some members of the Royal Air Force.

"I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, Ive no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, Im a religious man too. I know theres a God. Ive felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And thats just why I dont believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone whos met the
Lewis wrote that he had to essentially agree with the man, adding that the man probably had a real experience with God in the desert, and in turning from that emotional experience to doctrines, he would leave something real and take something less real. Then Lewis added this insightful illustration.

"In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of colored paper. But here comes the point. The map is admittedly only colored paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America" (Mere Christianity, pp. 135, 136).

To me, Lewiss story boils down to this. True spirituality involves all three of the filters I mentioned above. In this story, it is made quite clear that actually to get anywhere (like America, or heaven, which is better than America!), you must have a grasp of the whole picture. You cant just sit around letting the water tickle your toes and call that sensation "God" (emotional), neither can you just take off on a boat and hope that youll make it to America (practical). Finally, you cant just daydream about America by looking at the map and expect to actually get there (intellectual).

More of This Three-Fold Thing

Most youth are not fools. When they are given emotionally appealing Sabbath school presentations and religion, they take it and enjoy it, thinking it is spiritual. Sometimes, older, educated Adventist adults may have progressed "beyond" an emotional religion and are satisfied with a knowledge of the truth to fill their needs spiritually. Between these two is the practical element. Simply "doing" the right thing becomes their spiritual experience and understanding.

While none of the above elements will get you a spiritual life by itself, and I am not suggesting any specific order of importance, there is a certain order that brings most people (myself included) to the proper understanding. Generally you must first be struck emotionally by a long, reflective look at the Cross. The conversion of the heart usually precedes the conversion of the mind, since the emotions come into action before responsible thinking.

Next, an intellectual understanding should be sought, that the conversion may not rest only in the heart, which can be moved by the impressions of the moment, but grounded in the mind. Ellen White wrote, "It [truth] is placed in the heart by the Holy Spirit, who molds its beauty to the mind that its transforming power may be seen in the character" (Mind, Character, and Personality, 1:324).

Truth seems to start in the heart, attacking our emotions that seek only self, but seeing the Cross reverses the picture. Such impressions of the Cross come only from the Holy Spirit. When the heart and mind are transformed, then one is capable of knowing the practical path that must be followed. You just cant hear Gods voice fully until both your heart and your mind are in tune. And you cant experience complete spirituality until you listen to the song that both the heart and mind are singing, and listen to the words.

Examples.

In my understanding of spirituality, I find several examples from Scripture. In the story of Job, God let Satan strip him of everything dear to him, his family, his livestock, eventually even his health. This was, without a doubt, an extremely negative emotional experience; it shattered
Jobs understanding of practical principles as well. How could God allow Job to suffer such emotional turmoil? Jobs friends criticized him; even his wife urged him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). His life, practically, was torn from him. He could no longer function normally, not in his state of severe physical pain.

Yet, Jobs spiritual life did not depend on his emotional state or his ability to live comfortably. He had submitted to God more than just his emotions and his everyday life; he had submitted his mind, his intellect. Though deprived of everything else, he desired to "reason" (Job 13:3) with God. It must be noted that Job was rebuked for his boldness, for who can "stand before" God? However, Job was commended for his reasoning before God (Job 42:7). Job recognized that "wisdom" belonged to the Lord (Job 28:20, 23), and this was the object to be sought.

Proverbs 9:10 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." I propose that one meaning of this passage can be found by carefully noting the placement of the emotional word fear before "the Lord." The emotional subjection to God is to "fear God." It seems clear that only when we subject our emotions to God and make the focus of our intellect (knowledge) the holy Word of God, may we receive wisdom and understanding in spiritual matters.

To summarize, to reflect the image of God is to reason like God, to feel emotional responses like God, and to act according to Gods manner.

The "Irresistible Witness" in Jesus

Sometimes, the Lord chooses unusual methods for getting our attention. It is a mistake to assume that God knows that we humans will just naturally seek to "find" Him, and then be naturally attracted to the truth of His gospel message. The truth of His message is utter and complete foolishness in the eyes of the world, and we who dwell in Christ must remember this in our efforts to witness.

Certain things are simply not tangible in the knowledge of mankind, namely love, peace, and most importantly, the mysterious way of salvation. No matter how hard I try, I still cant figure out why it is possible for a lousy person like me ever to enter through the pearly gates. The salvation of souls is not a science that has been or can be discovered by scientists. Yet, though it may be a mystery, it is astoundingly simple to practice, though few actually practice it. The person connected with God who labors with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Savior, for in the influence that attends the practical carrying out of the divine commission there is a captivating and compelling, though unseen, Spirit that attends the work, producing results.

In all our efforts we should make our religion attractive, because then it will possess the essence of the true righteousness of Jesus. We should be optimistic, for through our peace and joy a spiritual element may be found, the so-called meat and drink of a true connection with God.

Power. Long ago Ellen White discerned that "Our power is not in our talents of education or means, neither is it in our popularity; it is in self-sacrifice, our willing obedience to Jesus Christ. Those who truly surrender all to Him, will carry a weight of influence, and will carry others along with them, because they walk in the light. Brain power will be inefficient, purse power of little account with God; but heart power, thorough godliness, humble fidelity, will bear a weight of influence that will be irresistible" (The Youths Instructor, Sept. 6, 1894).

I have witnessed first hand the power of the Holy Spirit when the gospel message is given with all three aspects in harmony and unity. The problem with some youthas with people of all ages is that they want only one part of these three inseparable pieces. Young people are rightly accused of desiring the emotional/entertainment aspect, which by itself is not sufficient. Too often youth discern in their preachers or teachers an appeal only to the intellectual/reasoning aspect of spirituality, which they are simply not ready for. Or their teachers lack the emotional element in their presentation, which the youth correctly discern is not true and complete spirituality.
Reaching Others: "The Chosen Agency"

"Our confession of His faithfulness is Heavens chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked with our own individuality" (The Ministry of Healing, p. 100). Indeed, without an outlet for exercising your faith, it is in great danger of withering away.

If you continue to live within your personal comfort zone and never practice through experience your faith in God, it cannot grow and develop. Remember that no one can be forced to accept Jesus and His truth, but everyone is invited to do so. Life and death are the choices placed before us, and it is for each person to choose which he will have.

The Secret of Enjoying Church

A friend of mine wrote me saying that, like so many of us, she sometimes had trouble finding church worship services meaningful. Things such as the location and environment of the church service, the style of music, and the sermon preached didn't always appeal directly to her tastes, yet she recognized that church wasn't about pleasing people, but God. Furthermore, she added that it was still possible to find church enjoyable, by remembering that 1) church is about God, 2) the key to enjoyment is involvement, and 3) having a "personal relationship with God" reigns supreme in our spiritual journey and the joy we experience along the way. Through these practical principles, it is indeed possible to enjoy our experience in church.

Correct Priorities.

The last time I checked, the focus of proper worship in the Bible is not the people worshiping, but the God who is worshiped. Anyone who says that worship doesn't involve the sacrifice of personal preferences needs to check his Bible. When in our stubbornness and selfishness we want to reshape church as a social event that entertains us and brings us personal satisfaction, we essentially throw out what the Bible describes as true worship, and we lose our focus on what God is all about. In the accepted worship services of the patriarchs and apostles, there was only one Person who was worshiped, God. Only when we also set our priorities correctly will we be able to understand and enjoy church worship services.

Involvement.

As my friend noted, if you live life sitting back and expecting everyone else to make you happy, you are in for disappointment. Show me a church where all the members do nothing but sit back to enjoy the service, and I can point you to a church that is spiritually dead. Without participation, no group can survive. And for true enjoyment, mutual participation must occur. Only when all members, from young to old, have a function to perform in some capacity, will a church truly thrive. Entertainment is no longer needed when everyone is participating. Happiness can be found when you spend all your time and energy seeking it for yourself, but when you strive to put it into others lives, it mysteriously finds you.

Know the God Whos Personal! Without a doubt, the most beautiful words I can hear anyone say are that they value having a "personal relationship with God." This is the rock upon which all true religion and spirituality are founded; it is the only foundation that will hold the weight of grasping the higher truths of God.

I cannot emphasize enough the spiritual reality that is discovered when a person values a personal relationship with God over all else. Truly, the surest method in forming a firm connection between youth and the church as I see it is to form that personal relationship first. Youth should be taught the power of prayer and a personal relationship with God. As Ellen White noted, "Prayer is heavens ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the
development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 564). As I continue to seek God I see the powerful truth of these statements.

Only when youth realize the strength and guidance that God alone has to give their individual lives through their prayers can they truly appreciate all the sound doctrine they have been taught. When they have that vital, life-sustaining, personal connection with Heaven, their eyes will be opened to see the formerly thin, vague and disconnected strings of harmony that exist throughout the entire Bible intertwining themselves, uniting into an ever-thriving and ever-living vine. From this ever-growing vine of spiritual understanding, the wisdom from God can then take root in their lives, producing a deeply planted faith that works, not grounded in the knowledge of a form of true doctrine, or on the traditions of belief, but in the union of a personal walk with God and His revealed Word. It is through beginning this journey that I myself have found a much greater appreciation for spiritual things that simply did not exist before my prayer life began.

Correct doctrine will appeal as a result of an individuals personal labor to unite his life with God. Only by following personal conviction can established doctrine truly bear fruit in the mind of a young Christian. For, in my experience, the energetic efforts by some to present our long-standing doctrines convinced my mind, but my heart was still unconverted. Their efforts failed to connect the personal walk with God to a correct understanding of doctrine. But once I understood the whole picture and my heart was converted, then my mind truly understood more of that which constitutes a right relationship with God, which continues on in this life.

I close with a word of encouragement from Ellen White:

"He who would build up a strong, symmetrical character must give all and do all for Christ. The Redeemer will not accept divided service. Daily he must learn the meaning of self-surrender. He must study the Word of God, getting its meaning and obeying its precepts. Thus he may reach the highest standard of Christian excellence. There is no limit to the spiritual advancement that he may make if he is a partaker of the divine nature. Day by day God works in him, perfecting the character that is to stand in the day of final test. Each day of his life he ministers to others. The light that is in him shines forth and stills the strife of tongues. Day by day he is working out before men and angels a vast, sublime experiment, showing what the gospel can do for fallen human beings" (*In Heavenly Places*, p. 148).
Unbelievable events have shaken the world in the past several months. School shootings, parents murdering their children, children murdering their parents, the fall of the World Trade Center, brutality in the Near East, possibilities of mass killings with bio-weapons. Even nature has seemed to careen out of control. How much clearer can the signs be that the books of this world are coming to a cataclysmic close? Yet the rate at which youth are leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church is even more alarming. In this discussion, before I explain why I am still in the church, I must present the truth about why many are leaving it.

The Way It Was

Ten years ago, I could walk into a Sabbath school, church service, or prayer meeting, and in most churches I would find myself in a sacred place of worship. I would be surrounded by reverent fellow believers. They were there for two purposes, to commune with their Creator and to recharge each other spiritually through supportive socialization. Today, I walk into a Sabbath school, church service, or prayer meeting, and in many churches I find myself in a theater, rock concert, or party surrounded by thrill-seekers and entertainment lovers. What has happened?

The direction that the Seventh-day Adventist church has gone and is going is a discussion that cannot fit into the space of this article. But to summarize, the church in some places seems to have lost sight of the power of its unique gospel message and the power of the Holy Spirit to draw sinners to Christ and has decided to follow the world's example, using advertisements, eye catchers, exciting worship styles, seductions, and even deceit to bring individuals into the church. Instead of bringing people out of the world and into the church with our unique God-given gospel, we have conformed a gospel (that isn't even ours to conform) to the wishes of the world. Sadly enough, we are now sending people out of the church and into the world.

How It IsWhy They Leave

With this said, let's discuss why youth are leaving the church. First, many are seeing un-Christlike behavior in their parents, pastors, and friends. Though we are often touted as scattered, unstable, unthinking young people (which is partially true), we are not blind to the false attempts made by many of our leaders and friends to "act" like Adventists. Listen to this statement from Ellen G. White:

"Lessons of great importance may be learned from the history of Daniel and his companions. These youth were bound together in the sacred bonds of Christian fellowship. Daniels name is placed first on the record because he exerted a strong influence over the other three, who looked upon him as a leader. Had he failed to take a firm stand for the right, had he pleased and indulged self, his companions also would have failed. They would not have been handed
down to us as young men signally honored by the God of heaven" (Manuscript Releases, 4:129).

**Disappointment.** Youth who are like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego see around them those who call themselves Christian but are unsure of their way or have no real Christian experience. This can spell disaster for sincerely struggling youth. Though this is not an excuse, it is a hard fact that there are people who at certain stages in their walk need the support of other fine Christians. If God has put someone there to support them, and that "someone" fails to exemplify Him even for a moment, they leave the church. It no longer seems genuine to them.

Second, the church appears to feel the need to entertain the youth rather than to teach them the meaning of worship. As mentioned earlier, the church has seemed to commercialize the gospel to bring youth in from the world and to "fire up" youth that are in the church. Unfortunately, this form of "spreading the gospel" spells disaster for several reasons.

Youth that are in the world come into the church many times out of what I call "heaven-sent curiosity." It used to be that they would find a place of rest, a place of love and peace unmatched by anything the world can offer. They would find a haven that was utterly opposite to the world and its attractions. This was enough evidence that there was a Divine presence, not only in the church but also in the people.

Youth who had been scarred by many years spent doing worldly things would find our church a place where they could begin a new life in Christ. If they had the urge to smoke, they could confide in church members. If they were tempted to go to rock concerts, they could attend vespers instead and flee from the temptation. If they were tempted to attend a party that could lead them to sin, they could find strength to overcome at prayer meeting.

**No Different.** Today, with the acceptance of the new worship styles mentioned earlier in this discussion, worldly youth are walking into our church and saying to themselves, "You dont have anything different to offer us." The church is involved in many of the practices of the world and therefore, it no longer represents a different, life-changing place. Worldly youth will look inside, and they wont see any opportunity to dramatically change their life. And if this is what brought them to the church in the first place (the desire to change their life for something better) and they dont see that opportunity because our church has embraced the world so much, they will turn away.

Youth who are in the church often are being entertained instead of being taught to reverence God, keep their lives pure, and spread the gospel to others. They need to find church and Sabbath school so inspirational that they will come week after week, and attendance will increase. Again, there is folly in the "attempting to make church fun" idea. If the church is not different from the world, then what incentive do youth have to stay in the church? *If the church is focusing on entertainment, be assured that the world can do it BETTER!*

The church service employs soft-rock praise songs, but there are better musicians, better instruments, and better sound systems in the secular world that can do a better job with soft rock than the Seventh-day Adventist church can. The same goes for the "magical illusions" performed at the pulpit, or the inert social gatherings we call Sabbath school. The world can do it all better. With the exception of our Seventh-day Adventist gospel, the world has everything we have and better. The church and its worship styles are causing the youth to develop an appetite for entertainment. The moment Adventist youth see through the "forest" out into the world and become aware of its superior entertainment, they drop the faith.

No matter how strong the prayers for them are, no matter how strong the influence of God-fearing parents, pastors, and friends may be, no matter how strongly the Holy Spirit impresses their consciences, all youth still have free will and will ultimately take whatever course they choose. The responsibility of any particular lost youth lies not on the parents, friends, or leaders, but on the youth themselves. In some cases, our only option is to intercede on their behalf with all sincerity. This is a sorrowful happening, but it only reminds us of the fact that this world is sinful, and that there is a devil walking about as a "roaring lion, . . .
seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

**Why I Stay**

With everything said so far, it will be easy for me to state why I am still in the church:

1. I see through the entertainment ploys of the church as a whole and choose to practice a "primitive form of godliness" instead of participating in the desensitizing worship styles.

2. I believe that the Seventh-day Adventist church contains God's chosen people and that our gospel is one that we have an obligation to share with others.

3. Having parents who are converts who came from the world and being a convert myself, I see nothing that the world has to offer me that can come even close to the promise of eternal life.

4. I feel that I can be an effective witness to my fellow youth and give them the support that they are searching for, but not getting, in the church as it is at present.

Every Friday evening our home is blessed with a youth group Bible study. In this study we learn about God's will for our lives by reading the Bible. We do not look to "study guides" or specially prepared lessons to learn. Nor do we feel the need to make the evening a "fun night."

By diligent searching of the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White, and through a beautiful closing group prayer, we have enriched our lives spiritually and recharged ourselves for the coming week and the pressures it will bring. This study is neither a dry nor boring time. It balances the social, spiritual, and mental needs of its participants without giving them an appetite for worldly excitement.

Shouldn't we all "dare to be a Daniel"?
Why I Stay in the Church

Albert Kim
Junior, University of Michigan

What are some things that can help youth stay?

One of the most alarming trends in the North American Seventh-day Adventist church is that an escalating number of young people are leaving. Whether they are Adventists from birth or recently converted, the church seems to have a problem retaining them. I know of no single clear-cut reason for this emigration, but in looking at my own life and experiences I feel that I can identify some of the reasons. As a current 21-year-old junior biochemistry major with a history minor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I have been able to view our church from a public school standpoint.

1. My Relationship with God

The first and foremost reason why I have stayed in the church is my personal relationship with God. This is the most important aspect of life, and I feel that many young people today are missing it. Daily prayer and study of the Word have made a huge impact on my decisions. However, this is definitely easier said than done. As a student at one of the most prestigious and liberal institutions in the country, I have had to balance work, school, music and sports with God. For me, it is a daily struggle to keep up with my Bible study. Even when the Bible study has faltered, however, daily prayer has gotten me through the tough times. I have seen direct answers to my prayers, and this has given me the conviction that my faith is true.

I feel that the church must stress daily prayer more in its youth ministries, but let it be presented in such a way that it does not sound like a burden or a duty. It is a proven fact that if you pray, God will answer. I am convinced that if we can get more youth to pray daily, God will make a difference in their lives. The Bible says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you," and that's a promise.

2. My Parents

Second, my parents have played a role in keeping me in the church. I believe that strong, spiritual parents are needed in most cases in order for a child to become spiritual. Going home every weekend to have spiritual discussions about various topics with my parents has kept me sharp and focused. Whenever I have a problem with something, they always point me first to God. Communication between parents and children about spiritual matters is something that may be lacking in many Adventist homes today. Parents do not seem to know whom their children are associating with, or what they are doing. Either that, or they are too restrictive, fostering rebellion. Some just do not seem to care. Keeping kids in the church starts with parenting.

3. A Strong Youth Group

Third, a strong youth group is essential to keeping young people in the church. This may sound
like an obvious statement, but it is not as obvious as it sounds. In many churches today a strong youth group is non-existent, mainly because many Adventist youth leave their home churches to go to Adventist boarding schools and universities. Adventist education is important, but at what expense?

There are many good things about the Adventist education system, some of which I will mention in a minute. But there is a major problem that needs to be addressed. Because of the relative rarity of Adventist schools, many Adventist youth end up having to leave their homes to attend a boarding academy. That may be a problem in itself, but it is especially unfavorable for the youth left at home with no other youth in their church. It can be devastating to the youth left behind. It was for me. All my church friends suddenly got up and went away, and I was left with no Adventist teenagers to fellowship with.

There is no easy way to correct this problem, but I venture to say that at least for high school, staying home to go to school, whether it be to a public or a private high school, may be better. Obviously this differs on a person-to-person basis, and I am asking only that parents and children alike approach this major decision with prayer, instead of automatically assuming that the child will go away for high school. This, however, is my opinion, mainly because I went through the experience of being left behind.

Influences. For the first eight years of my educational career I attended the Metropolitan Junior Seventh-day Adventist Academy in Plymouth, Michigan. In a small school of 50 (there were two students in my eighth grade class), I was able to make close friends. Those eight years shaped me into the person I am today, and I can honestly say that I truly enjoyed my time at Metro. My teachers, from Mrs. Arvidson, Mrs. Steward and Mrs. Marla Haynes to Mrs. Yount, gave me one-on-one attention and developed me as a person and a Christian. My teachers were an inspiration to me, as were the people around me. I am very grateful for that Adventist school.

After I graduated, however, a huge decision awaited my parents and me. We had to decide between my attending public school and my attending Great Lakes Adventist Academy in Cedar Lake, Michigan, a boarding school. All of my church friends were either at GLAA already, or were planning to go there. After much prayer and thought, my parents and I settled on public school. All of us felt it would be better for me to be living at home while attending school, despite the fact that it was a public school. Looking back, I believe this was the right decision for me.

4. I Reaffirmed My Convictions

Up to that point in my life, I had been sheltered from the "real world," so to speak. Metro was small, isolated, and very tight-knit. I knew that smoking, drinking, and drugs were bad, but that was about it. I could attend all of my schools functions, because, obviously, it was an Adventist school. Sabbath was an integral and important part of my life.

Because I knew I had been sheltered, I went into public school with a very set mentality. I imagined the things that I would face in high school and prepared myself the whole summer to deal with them. For instance, I knew going in that I would not be able to attend any Friday night functions, and I set my mind on that. I knew that there would be drugs and alcohol, and I told myself I would not do any of that. I knew there would be evolution, and I reaffirmed my belief in Creation. Basically, I imagined it all before it would happen, so that I could deal with it.

What It Takes. All it takes to "survive" public school is a strong conviction in your faith, and a strong will. In fact, getting your beliefs challenged will strengthen you. It was not hard for me not to participate in the Friday night football games and dances, or the Saturday soccer games or tennis matches, because I believed in the Sabbath and its sacredness. Many youth are afraid to stand up for their beliefs, because they think people will look at them differently, and that it will be embarrassing. People do look at you differently, but in the end they respect you much more for standing up for your beliefs. There are almost overwhelming pressures, conscious and unconscious, assailing todays young people. Adventists are different in many ways even from
other Christians. For youth, this is a hard fact to deal with, but I believe that a daily walk with God will help; in fact, I know it will help. A daily walk does not suddenly appear, it is a daily struggle. It is possible, however, and worth every effort. After all, it is eternal life that we are dealing with.

Then college came, and with it came another big decision. The University of Michigan, Andrews University, Harvard, or Yale? I did what I always did with hard decisions, I prayed for God to show me the way. Two days later He gave me an answer in a form I could not argue with: Michigan. For me, it was shocking, because Andrews had been my first choice. I had many friends who were going there or were already there. But God had another plan for me. I did not simply assume that I would go to Andrews just because I was Adventist, for "the Lord works in mysterious ways."

5. Seventh-day Adventist Campus Ministries

Unbeknownst to me, on the campus of the University of Michigan there was a group forming that would change forever the way Adventists think about public universities. Headed by Dr. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, the first-ever Campus Ministries program was starting. I had not known about it, but God knew; and He sent me to Michigan to help with this movement that I am sure will sweep the nation. I let God lead, instead of going with my instincts.

The Campus Ministries program has provided me with a strong Adventist group on campus that is based solely on the Word. The extremely diverse and multicultural student group Adventist Students for Christ, of which I am currently the vice president, boasts approximately 45 members, while the campus church is about 50 members strong. We are multicultural, and yet we have no problems that way. How do we worship with all the "different" worship styles? We focus on the Word, and the Word alone.

The question of making church more "entertaining," or that church is not entertaining enough is one problem that may not go away for a while. As long as youth do not realize that church is a time to get closer to God, no change in attitude will occur. As for "entertainment," church should be a place that a person enjoys going to. At the same time, the danger in making church purely entertaining is that people lose their focus on the big picture. God is not found in celebrations, He is heard in the "still, small voice." Once people and youth realize that the Bible is the most important part of our worship and daily lives, everything else will fade in importance.

Hymns. Was I a person who grew up singing only hymns, listening only to "kosher" Christian music? Absolutely not. Our youth group was among the most progressive youth groups in the Detroit area in terms of non-hymn Christian music, from Vineyard to Jars of Clay. But after a while we realized that although these songs sounded good, if one were not careful to focus on the words and, instead, got caught up in the music, one could have difficulty finding spirituality during song service.

Emotion and spirituality are not the same thing, contrary to popular belief. Hymns may not be the most exciting way to go, and one can absolutely get caught up in hymns also; but there should not be a large-enough problem with it to warrant complaint. What we youth did was to combine hymns and regular praise songs into worship.

6. Strong Role Models

Speaking of my youth group, for me, the Detroit Korean Adventist Youth (DKAY) has been a huge blessing. My best friends are my church friends, and we do everything together. Comprised at times of 35 people, and at other times 20, everyone is included in everything, whether it be a Christmas program, dinner on Sabbath, or a walk in the park. There are age gaps, but everyone hangs out together, regardless of being married or not. The older youth provide advice, support, and an example to follow. Very rarely is there a Sabbath when we do not gather for fellowship in the afternoon or go to someone's house for dinner.

DKAY may be an exception to the norm, but it is not impossible to build a tight-knit group like
ours. And there is no doubt in my mind that this helps keep youth in the church. Even though their parents may stop coming to church, our youth still come to church. A strong youth group does not mean a large youth group. A strong youth group is one that does not have cliques, is spiritually motivated, and gets along. A strong youth group is one in which you make your best friends. Its a group that makes you look forward to going to church on Sabbath.

A strong youth group provides role models for young people, and it also provides opportunities to get involved. The importance of good role models is something that I cannot stress enough. Being around spiritual people is bound to make you more spiritual. Consequently, being around those who strive for academic excellence in addition to spirituality only pushes you harder. DKAY in the last five years has produced four valedictorians, 11 varsity letter winners, and a 100% college attendance rate. In addition, 10 of our members have gone on mission work, and everybody (I mean everybody) plays at least one musical instrument. Being in this kind of environment pushes you to become the best Christian you can be, first and foremost, but also pushes you to excellence in other areas. Not only that, but a strong youth group provides leadership opportunities.

7. Church Involvement

One of the things I have noticed on my visits to other Adventist churches is that often the amount of youth involvement in programs is not substantial. Either the youth worship with the adults, which means that they do not participate at all in the church program, or only a few people participate in the service or in after-church programs. This, I believe, is a very serious problem. Youth will not stay in churches if they do not feel that they have ownership. Getting youth involved in leadership is a very important step in ensuring that the youth stay. What if there are very few youth who are of leadership age? Get them involved anyway.

8. Know Your Church

Finally, I encourage the youth to take a critical and Bible-based look at the Adventist church and its beliefs. What they will find is a church truly based on the Word, and the Word alone. Even if church may not be “entertaining” enough, the fact that the Adventist church has the present truth should play a big part if the youth of today will take the time to search and meditate.

At high school and university I have walked into the parties and smelled the weed, smoke, and alcohol. I have been faced with the senior prom, Homecoming dances, Saturday football games, Friday night parties, bars. I am a huge sports fan, so not being able to go to the largest football stadium in the world on Saturday has not been easy. Though I am a sportswriter, I am not able to attend Saturday events; Saturday events in general are out. Not being able to socialize on Friday nights has hurt me in terms of friendships I might have made. I have experienced the side that students who go to Adventist schools do not experience. It is not easy, but it is very satisfying. Being able to stand up for your beliefs, to know that you are different and that you know the truth is priceless. To be able to know that you are on the front lines, working and witnessing for God, is a privilege. It is a duty.

The reason I stayed in the Adventist church? I can see that I am making a difference, however small, every day. Whether it is in my youth group, or my student group, or through the newspaper, or talking to a friend, I am making a difference. You can make a difference, too. Just pray, and God will show you the way.
The Love That Compels Me

Shawn Brace
Junior, Andrews University

What is the main motivator to keep a person in the church?

I suppose you could ask my mother why she is still married to my father after more than 28 years. Sadly, in this day and age of divorce both inside and outside the church, the question wouldn't be all that out of place. I mean, my father is bald, he has slowed down tremendously (I see it when we play ice hockey), and my mother contributes more financially to the family than he does, since she has the higher paying jobhe being a pastor. Why not dump him and get a newer, more vibrant man?

You could probably ask the same of me and the Seventh-day Adventist church. The music is old-fashioned, I'm not allowed to dance or wear jewelry, and they steal my money. Why not dump the church for a newer, more vibrant model that fulfills my needs and preferences?

Jesus Bride

Like my mother, I have responded to a Man who loves me unconditionally. And though the music may not always meet my preferences, so what? My mother doesn't always feel excited about cooking for my father, either, but she enjoys doing it because it makes him happy. I enjoy doing things for the Lord because it makes Him happy.

Too many times we think of our own preferences whether they be music, entertainment, or worship style rather than the Lord's. How the Lord must weep when we are more concerned about ourselves than about Him.

The last couple of months I have realized one thing that has done more for my appreciation of the Lord than anything else. I didn't choose to be born; it was by the grace of God that I was brought into this world (though my parents also played a minor role, I'm told). Ellen White reminds us, "To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life" (The Desire of Ages, p. 660).

As far as I'm concerned, God doesn't owe me any favors. In fact, I'm the one who owes Him a lot of my whole life. Paul says, "For you were brought at a price" (1 Cor 6:20). That price that Christ paid was His blood shed on the cross for me. Paul adds, "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Praises. Paul must have understood this important truth to endure all that he went through: the beatings, floggings, shipwrecks, stonings, imprisonments. If anyone had a right to complain, it was Paul. Yet through all those difficult experiences, we read that he sang praises to God even when he was in prison. Wow! I find myself complaining over the smallest thing while doing the Lord's business. The sermons too short or too long, the music is boring, Vegeburgers taste nasty, I can't go out to eat on Sabbath, etc., etc.

Unfortunately, many of us do not understand the gospel as Paul did this man who wished to know nothing but "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). As a result, we can't help but think
only about Numero Uno.

But if we, like Paul, surveyed "the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died," our "richest gain" we would "count but loss, and pour contempt on all [our] pride." That great hymn by Isaac Watts ends, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small: love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

This wonderful Man who became a "curse" (Gal 3:13) and "endured the cross" (Heb 12:2) so I could live, has asked me to be His bride. Can I turn down His loving appeals? How could I?

Even if church were the worst place in the world, it would be the least I could do for the One who has done so much for me. We show our love for Christ by showing love to His church, however imperfect it may be at times.

**Honor.**

It is now my job and wonderful honor, as the bride, to help with the preparations for the great wedding day when His name will finally be vindicated before the whole universe. What a great day when that verse in Revelation comes true, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Rev 19:7).

Ellen White reminds us, referring to 2 Peter 3:12, "It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Christs Object Lessons*, p. 69). Not hastening His coming so much for the personal happiness of little old me, but hastening it so Christ can finally reunite with the souls He loves so much, and for whom He gave up so much.

**Lights and Remnants**

For the longest time I really despised the fact that we threw around the word "remnant" like it was going out of style. It seems that we Adventists have, at times, been quite arrogant in proclaiming this message to the world. We've had a "holier-than-thou" attitude. But recently I have grown to appreciate the fact that we are Christ's representatives here on earth; we are His remnant.

As I write this I am living in Scotland. I have a friend who told me the other day that I am the only American he knows. Needless to say, his image of Americans is largely based on his impressions of me. Yes, hes probably seen movies about Americans, read books, heard songs, but none of those compare to his impressions of me. And I can tell him as much as I want about how Americans are, say that were the nicest people who only love each other, but if my actions show otherwise, all my talking, I am sure, will mean nothing.

Many people have heard about Christ; maybe even read parts of the Bible. Perhaps they've heard a song or even a sermon, but nothing compares to their impressions of a "Christian." I can even say great things about Christ, how He demonstrated His unconditional love for us by dying on the cross. I can wax so eloquent that the person I speak to will be awe-struck by my words. But if that person doesn't see Christ's love and character reproduced in my life; if they don't see that unconditional love in my life for my fellow man, all my talk will mean nothing.

Paul calls us to this in the great love chapter: "If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the chaffing of a rusty gate. If I speak God's word with power, revealing His mysteries and making everything plain as day...but I don't have love, I'm nothing" (1 Cor 13:1, 2, *The Message*).

You would generally think that a person who claims to follow someone else would act like them. So when a person sees a Christian's actions, they must assume that that is the way Christ acts.

We have a responsibility as Christ's church to demonstrate His character to the world. More than that, though, when Christ's love reaches our hearts we *will* demonstrate His character.

**Lights Shine.** I've always liked Jesus' comparison when He said we are the light of the world.
This analogy was not a command; Christ was trying to point out that our lights will shine automatically when His love reaches our hearts. He says, "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Mt 5:14). Many of us try to put up our big neon-fluorescent signs, calling attention to the fact that were a city or that were Christians. But Christ says to us, "Listen, dont worry about all your fancy signs. Youre a city! Regardless of anything you do or dont do, people are going to see your light anyway!"

The great news is that we do not have to worry about our lights; they will shine automatically when you and I understand Christs love for us. Too many times we worry about the light bulbs and try to fix them, but fail to plug the cord in. We are focusing on externals and failing to reach the heart of the matter.

**Love Compels.** This is what Paul was speaking about in 2 Corinthians 5:14, one of my favorite texts: "For the love of Christ compels us." It is that love of Christ that turns our lights on. When we understand "what is the width and length and depth and height" of "the love of Christ," we will be so overwhelmed that we will be compelled to live for Him without a whole lot of effort or thought.

Revelation 18:1 tells us that before Christ can come the earth must be "illuminated with His glory." But the only way that the earth will be illuminated with Christ's glory is for Christ's people to reflect that love in their own lives. Isaiah tells us joyfully, "Arise, shine: For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isa 60:1-3).

This world is filled with darkness right now; it is looking for something to show them the way. What a great privilege we have, as Christ's church, to allow "His glory to be seen upon [us]," so that the Gentiles "shall come to [our] light."

Will we respond, as a church, to Christ's love and reflect His glory to the world? I hope we do. Because, as Ellen White reminds us, "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 69).

When we all come to a full understanding of Christ's love, the rest will take care of itself. Thats why Im staying with the church. Christ's love compels me to. I want His light shining through me to lead others to Him.