All in the serve

Thousands of students across the South Pacific returned to school this past week, ready—or not ready—to tackle assignments in the classroom and their peers out on the field.

While academics and athletics are important, there’s another aspect of school that's just as significant: service. Whether it's a class mission trip overseas, STORMCo or a school fundraiser, the Adventist Record team would like to encourage all our young readers and church members to get involved.

While we're on the subject of service, we would like to give a quick shout-out to those honoured during this past weekend's Australia Day celebrations, including Dr Ian Nicholson (Member of the Order of Australia), Dr James Byrne Pollitt (Medal of the Order of Australia) and Julie Judd (Honourable citizen of Maroondah City Council). Congratulations!

For more service stories, be sure to check out this week's edition of Record eNews.
Church still working on women’s ordination

The Biblical Research Committees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s 13 world divisions have now submitted their recommendations on the subject of the ordination of women to pastoral ministry. However, recommendations from the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) are yet to be determined.

Church remembers fallen missionary

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has commemorated the life of Adventist medical missionary martyr Brian Dunn and relocated his remains from Kola Ridge cemetery to the Adventist cemetery at Betikama.

Eruptions cripple communities in Indonesia

Read Adventist Record

Sitting on the front porch with your favourite Adventist periodical, soaking in the sunshine on a Sabbath afternoon. You know you want to do it.

Watch/download InFocus

I did it my way? Family life educator Trafford Fischer chats with Dannielle Synot about the damage that a culture of individualism can do to relationships.

Also, "Brother George" travels regularly through the Middle East for Open Doors International, encouraging and resourcing the region's beleaguered Christians. For security reasons we can’t see his face or know his full name, but we can hear
Seventh-day Adventist schools in West Indonesia are among institutions serving as shelters in the wake of a series of major volcanic eruptions that displaced more than 25,000 people and left nearby villages mired in ash and mud.

Getting to the core

If you don’t know the direction you’re headed, you may as well go anywhere or do anything. It could be the mantra of post-modernism. And increasingly, it may be the reality of the Christian world generally, and even Adventism.

Attitude of gratitude

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul tells us to “rejoice evermore” and “in everything, give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”. Hang on. Did he just say in everything?
Canberra, Australia

Two medical doctors were awarded during this year’s Australia Day celebrations for their voluntary work with Open Heart International (OHI), the overseas medical outreach program based at Sydney Adventist Hospital.

Dr Ian Nicholson was appointed a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia for his 20 years of work with OHI, making 32 trips to developing nations in that time to provide lifesaving heart surgery to children and adults, as well as training local medical staff and assisting with upgrading facilities.

“Ian is probably our most active surgeon,” said Michael Were, OHI’s manager. “He sits on our management committee and is also our representative to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.”

“I am really honoured and humbled to become a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of my volunteer work with Open Heart International,” said Dr Nicholson. “While it is great to be acknowledged, it certainly is not the reason I continue to volunteer. “What we’ve been able to achieve has only been possible due to the hard work and commitment of so many people. It’s the team spirit and camaraderie, and the difference that it makes in the countries we visit, that keeps me involved.”

Dr James Byrne Pollitt was awarded the Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia for his service to the community as a general practitioner and his seven years of involvement with OHI, ending in 1994. During that time he worked with the plastic surgery team, helping to repair cleft lips and palates in Nepal, as a team physician, surgical assistant, anaesthetic assistant, and physiotherapist.

“I want to give my strong support to the awards made through the Australian Honours System,” Governor-General Quentin Bryce said. “They represent the highest level of recognition accorded by our nation for outstanding achievement and service. They elevate the concept...
of giving to others. They heighten our respect for one another, and they encourage Australians to think about the responsibilities of citizenship in our democracy.”
Melbourne, Australia

On Australia Day 2014, Julie Judd was acknowledged as being an honourable citizen of the Maroondah City Council for her volunteer work with the region’s disadvantaged.

Six years ago, Julie established Vive Café, a voluntary initiative of Revive Church, a church plant in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

“It is an honour to be personally recognised, however the work of Vive Café is very much a team effort and I want to acknowledge the fantastic work of our dedicated volunteers,” she said.

Each Thursday, she and her assistants provide between 90-120 meals for struggling individuals and families in the community. However Vive Café’s approach is vastly different from that of a traditional soup kitchen. Guests are served a nutritious three-course meal by volunteer waiters and are also provided with free entertainment, food hampers, clothes, and most importantly a listening ear.

Julie is a member of the board of Justice Empowerment Mission, which provides aid for homeless women and children. She is also a member of the Outer East Foodshare Board, a committee member of the Maroondah Emergency Relief Network, and on the board of Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing.

“Working with the marginalised in society is a real privilege but not always easy!” noted Julie. “However I believe God has placed this work on our hearts and He gives us the strength and grace to continue to love and serve those less fortunate in our community.”
Church still working on women’s ordination

Columbia, Maryland, United States

The Biblical Research Committees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s 13 world divisions have now submitted their recommendations on the subject of the ordination of women to pastoral ministry. However, recommendations from the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) are yet to be determined.

While five Division Biblical Research Committees reported support for women’s ordination, most of the others reported disapproval. However, almost all division reports clearly stated their willingness to accept the decision that will ultimately be made by the worldwide church.

Last week’s TOSC meeting, held from January 21 to 25 in Columbia, Maryland, was the committee’s third meeting, with a fourth and final meeting to take place in June.

The meeting featured presentations on theology and descriptions of options for moving forward in worldwide unity regarding ordination as it relates to gender.

Among the presenters was South Pacific Division president Dr Barry Oliver, who presented a significant paper on how the church can move forward on the subject of women’s ordination.

“No matter what position we hold, we all need to take responsibility for the unity of the Church and the fulfilment of our mission,” said Dr Oliver. “I have confidence that we can find a way forward together which will in good conscience, be true to the Word of God.”

Theology of Ordination Study Committee chair Dr Artur Stele leads the group discussion during the committee’s third meeting, held this past week in Columbia, Maryland, United States. [Photo courtesy: Ansel Oliver]

According to Adventist News Network, last week’s meetings featured some very intense discussions. However, conversations were always conducted with respect and in a congenial manner.

“I’ve been gratified to see a growing sense of camaraderie and understanding as we’ve moved through this process,” said Dr Artur Stele, TOSC chair and director of the denomination’s Biblical Research Institute.

Dr Stele also said that the time for researching and studying of the issue had come to an end, and that the TOSC will now “be looking to solutions that build the unity of the Church”.

Below is a summary of each division Biblical Research Committee’s recommendation. Each position is presented by quoting directly from the reports.
East-Central African Division

“After thorough examination of Scripture, the writings of Ellen White, and the scholarly papers that are for the ordination of women and those that are against, there is still not light as to whether [women] may be ordained as pastors . . . The committee is almost convinced that there are two possibilities: A. Both sides of the debate on women ordination do not really understand the New Testament passages which read like women ordination should not be considered; B. The whole church has not given much thought as to what women may do uniquely and be affirmed to advance the redemptive ministry and mission of God. So, before there is complete clarity about the authentic Scriptural intent about the issue, [our Biblical Research Committee] says ‘not yet’ to the ordination of women . . . Our committee is convinced that the church needs to continue to ‘seek understanding’ so that the delegates to GC in [San Antonio] in 2015 may produce good results by voting intelligently.”

Euro-Asia Division

“[T]aking into account the cultural context in which the church is to fulfil its service in Euro-Asia Division, and keeping in mind the church’s missiological interests, the [division] Executive Committee discourages the practice of the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry.”

Inter-American Division

“There is no explicit mandate in the Bible for the ordination of women to church leadership, yet there is no command against the same . . . The Inter-American Division is willing to accept the ecclesiastical decision taken by the [Seventh-day Adventist Church] in plenary session.”

Inter-European Division

“Since ordination does not contradict the teachings of the Bible and might foster the mission of the church, we think that there is room for the church to ordain women for pastoral ministry . . . Whatever decision is considered, a basic unity of the worldwide church in faith and practice should be preserved.”

North American Division

“In harmony with our biblical study, we recommend that ordination to gospel ministry, as an affirmation of the call of God, be conferred by the church on men and women . . . The committee humbly recommends that the North American Division support the authorization of each division to consider, through prayer and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, its most appropriate approach to the ordination of women to gospel ministry.”

Northern Asia-Pacific Division

“We recommend that the World Church place “Mission First” as a priority and that we focus on sharing the three angels’ messages with the world. This means that we recommend that both men and women should be encouraged and recognized by the church through ordination to the pastoral ministry . . . We further recommend that the implementation of ordination of women will be determined by each division taking into consideration its impact on mission and unity within its territories.”
South American Division

“[W]omen should not be ordained to the pastoral ministry . . . “The church should further investigate the possibility of the ordination of men and women to ministries other than the pastoral ministry.”

South Pacific Division

“The Biblical Research Committee of the South Pacific Division does not see any scriptural principle which would be an impediment to women being ordained . . . The calling of the Holy Spirit needs to be recognized for both men and women. There is a sense of injustice that needs to be addressed . . . The mission of the church is a primary determinant of praxis, both in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and in its climax as the Holy Spirit is poured out on both men and women during the latter rain.”

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division

“The Old Testament and New Testament demonstrate that no women were ordained . . . Since there is no biblical support for the ordination of woman pastors, then the ordination of women elders should also not be considered.”

Southern Asia Division

“We recognize that there is no direct teaching in the Scriptures or the Spirit of Prophecy that either prescribes or prohibits the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry . . . In the absence of direct teaching in inspired writings we accept the authority of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to take a decision . . . We have no objection if the world church takes a decision to allow certain areas of the world to ordain women to pastoral ministry.”

Southern Asia-Pacific Division

 “[The Southern Asia-Pacific Division] will follow the voice of the Spirit and the world church upon its voted decision in July 2015 at the GC Session.”

Trans-European Division

“We propose that a recommendation be brought to the General Conference Session in 2015, that it approves a revised policy in which unions, whose constituency meetings in session have voted approval and whose division committee has voted approval, be allowed to maintain an inclusive pastoral ministry which removes all gender distinctions within the work of the church in that union territory.”

West-Central Africa Division

“The West-Central Africa Division by consensus does not recommend the ordination of women into ordained pastoral ministry. However, if at the General Conference Session the world church votes in favor of women’s ordination, [the division] will not threaten the unity of the church despite its disagreement to such a decision. Instead, we will consider women’s ordination as a matter of conscience, and will continue to study and pray for light on the subject brighter than there is now.”

*An earlier version of this story reported six Biblical Research Committee recommendations in favour of women’s ordination, and six recommendations against. The discrepancy in numbers has since been amended.
Honiara, Solomon Islands

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has commemorated the life of Adventist medical missionary martyr Brian Dunn and relocated his remains from Kola Ridge cemetery to the Adventist cemetery at Betikama.

The late Mr Dunn, a British missionary, was one of the first missionaries’ to work at Atoifi Hospital before he was killed in 1965.

The commemoration program began on January 19 and was attended by Mr Dunn’s brothers John and Peter.

One of the organisers, James Bouro reports that the weekend program was an emotional and heartfelt one.

“During the program we heard many stories of the kind of person Brian was, and also of his personal background from his brothers,” said Mr Bouro.

“Not only that we were also privileged to still have some of Brian’s students at Atoifi who witnessed the tragic incident give their accounts of what had happened,” Mr Bouro said.

He added that despite all the sorrow and heartache that the tale of the death of the late Mr Dunn had, it only reminds us how our early missionaries’ sacrificed their lives for the gospel of God to flourish in our country.

Mr Dunn was only 25 years old when he tragically died and is survived by his widow who is still alive and well in England.
Sumatra, Indonesia

Seventh-day Adventist schools in West Indonesia are among institutions serving as shelters in the wake of a series of major volcanic eruptions that displaced more than 25,000 people and left nearby villages mired in ash and mud.

Mount Sinabung in North Sumatra erupted several times last week, spewing lava, volcanic ash and gases as high as 5000 metres in the air and affecting communities well outside the established danger zone surrounding the volcano.

The mountain has erupted intermittently since September, with activity intensifying this month. Local sources say lava has flowed continuously since mid-January, with more than 200 eruptions reported in one week.

Three of the 37 Adventist churches near Mount Sinabung withstood damage in the latest series of eruptions, local church leaders said.

“With continuing eruptions, damage assessment is not an option, so it’s difficult to determine the extent of the damage to churches and homes,” said Adventist pastor Trisawaty Sinuhaji.

Joseph Peranginangin, president of the church’s West Indonesian Union Mission, visits Berastepu, a village in Indonesia’s North Sumatra province, where the farmlands of Adventists were destroyed by volcanic ash. Mount Sinabung, in the background, has been erupting all month. [Photo courtesy: Southern Asia-Pacific Division]

Adventist schools in Sumbul Kaban Jahe are accommodating an estimated 700 displaced people. Medicine, blankets, clothing and clean water are all urgent needs, church leaders said.

Adventist churches in West Indonesia on January 25 collected offerings to assist families displaced by the eruption. Offerings will also go toward those affected by flooding in Jakarta and Manado earlier this month.

Mount Sinabung is one of 130 active volcanoes in Indonesia. Prior to 2010, the volcano had been dormant for
Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don’t much care where," said Alice.

"Then it doesn’t matter which way you go," said the Cat.

—Lewis Carol, Alice in Wonderland

The point? If you don’t know the direction you’re headed, you may as well go anywhere or do anything. It could be the mantra of post-modernism. And increasingly, it may be the reality of the Christian world generally, and even Adventism.

So it’s worth reminding ourselves what we’re here for. What is our destination? What is our core mission? Because once we know that, once we remind ourselves of what we’re here for—what we’re called to do—then we will spend our time doing what really counts.

To understand our core mission, we have to understand how God called this very special movement into existence. It all starts in the books of Daniel and Revelation. And many of us have forgotten completely about it. How long since you’ve reviewed these beautiful books to be reminded of their meaning? Could you explain them to others? Let’s remind ourselves of the powerful message that gives our movement its momentum.

Understanding the ancient prophecies

Revelation 10 portrays a mighty angel standing over land and sea with a book open in his hand. Swearing by God the Creator he declares that time is up. After being told to take and eat the book, John finds that while it's sweet in his mouth it gives him a stomach ache. After this sweet-bitter experience he is told to prophesy again (Revelation 10:1-3,5-11). What's it all about?

This passage is probably the strongest allusion in Revelation to an Old Testament passage. It’s a clear reference to Daniel 12:4-9 and it’s vital for God’s end-time mission that his people understand it. Firstly, what is the book? The phrase “a little book open” in the original language means that this book was once shut, but has now been opened (Revelation 10:2).

As Daniel came to the end of his book he was told, “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4,9 KJV).
So the book of Daniel was to be closed to human understanding until the time of the end. But more specifically, one of Daniel’s prophecies was to be closed to human understanding until the time of the end.

In Daniel 8, after seeing the little horn stand against the Prince (the Commanding Officer) of the host, cast down the sanctuary, take away the temple services, and cast down truth and God’s people, Daniel heard the cryptic question, “How long is all this going to go on?” (Daniel 8:13)? The answer given was, “And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days (evenings and mornings); then the sanctuary shall be cleansed’” (Daniel 8:14 NKJV). When Gabriel appeared before Daniel, he declared, “And the vision of the evening and the morning (the 2300) which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days” (Daniel 8:26 KJV). Gabriel also stated that “the vision refers to the time of the end” (Daniel 8:17). In other words the 2300 day prophecy was to be sealed or not to be understood by God’s people until the time of the end.

It’s so clear. The book of Daniel, and in particular the 2300 days, was to be closed to human understanding until the time of the end. When this time came many would run to and fro through the book to understand its messages. So when is the time of the end? Daniel’s last chapter—the very passage that Revelation 10 alludes to—provides the answer: “Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, ‘How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?’ And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things. And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:5-9 KJV).

Daniel couldn’t be more clear—the time of the end is at the end of a period called a time, times and half a time. That period of time is defined in Revelation as 1260 days, which according to the biblical year/day principle is a period of 1260 literal years (Revelation 12:14,6; Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34).

Because of events that took place in 538 AD, the declaration of the Roman Emperor Justinian that the Bishop of Rome was “the head of the church, the true and effectual corrector of heretics” was able to be set in motion. There followed at the hands of the Church of Rome 1260 years of persecution of God’s people. This period ended in 1798 when the Bishop of Rome was imprisoned by Napoleon’s forces. Thus “the time of the end” began” in 1798.

In other words Daniel and John predicted that at the end of 1260 years (from 1798), the sealed portion of Daniel (the 2300 days) would be opened to human understanding. But there is more. John continued, “So I went to the angel and said to him, ‘Give me the little book’ . . . Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings’” ( Revelation 10:9-11 NKJV). God was predicting that after a sweet experience that turned bitter, a movement would rise to globally proclaim the sealed portion of Daniel’s book—Daniel 8:14 in particular.

History informs us that the French Revolution of the 1790s was marked by violence, immorality and atheism. These things reminded Bible students at that time of the signs of Christ's return. As a result they began to study the 1260 day/year prophecy. They knew of Justinian's decree and what happened in 538 AD. When the Bishop of Rome was imprisoned by Napoleon's forces under General Berthier these students recognised in this event the fulfilment of the 1260 day/year prophecy. Bible scholars of many denominations then turned their attention to understanding Daniel 8:14—the 2300 day/year prophecy. Thus the sealed portion of Daniel, which Gabriel said almost 2500 years ago would be sealed until “the time of the end”—1798—now began to be “eaten” or studied.

Most of these Bible students believed, based on Daniel 8:14 and Daniel 9:24-27, that something was to happen in 1843/1844. Many didn’t know or say what would happen. However, William Miller, a Baptist farmer, came to believe that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. His was an inter-denominational group of some 500,000 people. They began to herald the “sweet” news that Jesus was about to return.

But Jesus did not return on that date and they experienced what has become known as “The Great Disappointment!” Sadly many gave up their faith in God after this sweet-bitter experience. However some among this group sought to discover what went wrong. They knew the date 1844 was correct because the 70 weeks or 490 years that were part of the 2300 day/year prophecy were a proven and precise fit—an exact fulfilment: in 27 AD Jesus was baptised right on time; in 31 AD Jesus had died on time; and in 34 AD the 70 weeks or 490 years ended right on time when Steven was stoned and the Gospel began to be proclaimed to non-Jews.

Jesus Himself had acknowledged the fulfilment of this first part of the 2300 day prophecy when, after His baptism in 27 AD, He had declared: “The time is fulfilled . . .” (Mark 1:15). Since this part of the 2300 day prophecy was absolutely correct, then they rightly concluded that the rest of the 2300 day/year prophecy, which ended in 1844, had to be correct.
Convinced that the date was correct, they more carefully examined the phrase “... then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (Daniel 8:14). Miller and his followers had taught that the sanctuary or temple was the Earth. Since the sanctuary (the Earth) was to be “cleansed” (Daniel 8:14), they believed this must be a reference to Christ’s return, when the Earth would be cleansed with fire.

However, as they studied Hebrews and Revelation they discovered there was a sanctuary or temple in heaven, which also needed cleansing (Revelation 11:19; Hebrews 9:23). Examining the sanctuary and its rituals they discovered in Leviticus 16 and 23 that the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) or cleansing of the sanctuary, was regarded by the Jews as an annual day of judgement.

Thus they saw that the cleansing of heaven’s temple was a reference to God’s end-time pre-advent judgement, and that 1844 marked the commencement of that pre-advent judgement. A comparison of the parallel prophecies of Daniel 7 and 8 makes this obvious because in each prophecy there appears a little horn doing similar things (casting down God’s people and His truth or laws). At precisely the same point where in Daniel 7 the little horn is brought to account when heaven’s judgement sits, in Daniel 8 the sanctuary is cleansed (Daniel 7:8-10; 8:9-14). Clearly they refer to the same event.

Out of confusion, a clear mission

But from Revelation 10 these people saw more than just the fulfilment of the prediction that the book of Daniel, especially the 2300 days, would be opened to human understanding in the time of the end, and the fulfilment of the prediction of a sweet-bitter experience. They discovered their mission—they were to “prophesy again”. They got it wrong the first time; now they saw they were to proclaim to the world that the judgement was now in session and that Jesus was soon to come. Their mission was to proclaim the everlasting gospel of God’s gracious saving love in the context of His judgement that had commenced in 1844 (Revelation 10:11; 14:6,7).

This is the core of our mission as Seventh-day Adventists. It should set the priorities of every Adventist member, church, department and institution. There is an urgency to what we are called to do because time IS running out. This is no time to sit down and do nothing. This is not the time to doubt or lay aside this God-given message. To do so is to disobey our Commanding Officer—Christ the mighty Michael Himself, for it is He in whose hand the book of Daniel, and especially Daniel 8:14, lies open (see study “Cloning Christ”, left). It is He who commands us to “prophesy again” (Revelation 10:11). All of us are called to live good lives and do good to others, but we are also all called to share the words of God’s love with others (1 Peter 2:9-12; Revelation 22:17). We will do it in different ways of course, according to our gifts. But do it we must because it's the Commanding Officer who calls us all to “prophesy again”. In fact there is no more important work for all of us as Seventh-day Adventists to do than to share the Gospel in the context of a judgement that is soon to finish.

“A great work is to be accomplished in setting before men the saving truths of the gospel. This is the means ordained by God to stem the tide of moral corruption. This is His means of restoring His moral image in man. It is His remedy for universal disorganisation. It is the power that draws men together in unity. To present these truths is the work of the third angel’s message. The Lord designs that the presentation of this message shall be the highest, greatest work carried on in the world at this time” (Ellen White, Testimonies, vol 6, p 11).

Souls are in peril and we have the solution. The plight of people outside of Christ who face God’s judgement moved the apostle Paul to action (2 Corinthians 5:10,11,14-16). Let us, filled with God’s love for people, arise and fulfil our God-appointed mission for a world in desperate need of His life changing love.

We know where we’re going—what we’re here for. We don’t have to go in circles in a state of confusion. Our Commanding Officer is with us at the head of our mission. Let’s all work together as a team under Christ to fulfil the mission God has given us.

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*Gary Webster is director of the Institute of Public Evangelism for the South Pacific Division.*
At 53, John Kralik felt like he had hit rock bottom. Every aspect of his life seemed to be failing—relationships, family, finances and health.

On New Year’s Day, 2007, he was alone on a mountain—exhausted, frustrated and in the pit of despair. Suddenly he heard a voice say, “Until you learn to be grateful for the things you have, you will not receive the things you want.”

John didn’t know where the voice came from, but it made him think. He decided to try being grateful for what he did have. Inspired by an unexpected thank you note he received, he resolved to write 365 thank you notes that year.

At first, he struggled to find something—anything—in his life to be grateful for. But as the year went by, he found himself writing notes to anyone and everyone—school friends, past business associates, even the barista who served him daily at the coffee shop. And yes, his life did change for the better and he wrote a book about his journey, *A Simple Act of Gratitude*.

After reading John’s story, I immediately started my own thank you note project and a gratitude diary. As I reflect on the 2013 entries and remember what I was thankful for, it’s a real blessing.

Today, John continues to write thank you notes. People from around the world tell him that his book has changed their lives. They say he has taught them to be thankful, no matter how dire their circumstances might appear.

Less than 2000 years ago, another book was written that has a similar message and is still changing lives today.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul tells us to “rejoice evermore” and “in everything, give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”. Hang on. Did he just say in everything?

There are days when it feels like everything is going wrong and you seem to be hit with one challenge after another. When you question whether your life makes any difference to the world. And when someone tells you to be positive, you scoff. They can’t understand what you’re going through.

I’m not advocating we just think happy thoughts and close our eyes to reality. Living as a Christian in this world will never be easy and trials are bound to come our way. We’re not perfect people and we will have bad days. But even in our darkest days, we have reasons to praise God.

Paul’s conscious choice to be thankful didn’t mean he had a life of comfort and ease. He was arrested, flogged, imprisoned, shipwrecked and stoned. If anyone had a reason to lose heart and faith, he did. Yet he chose to keep believing in a God whose strength would make use
of his weaknesses. He chose to rejoice in God’s goodness rather than dwell upon his own infirmities. Will we do the same in 2014?

Vania Chew is PR/editorial assistant for RECORD.