Is it luck?

Today is Friday the 13th. If you want to stay alive, stay indoors.

Believe it or not, that was the conclusion of a [1993 study](#) on the relationship between the unluckiest day of the year and one’s health. It concluded that “Friday [the] 13th is unlucky for some. The risk of hospital admission as a result of a transport accident may be increased by as much as 52%. Staying at home is recommended.”

Christians, of course, don’t believe in luck. The truth is that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17 NIV).

God’s “good and perfect” gifts are all around us. All we have to do is take the time to stop and see them.

If you’re wondering where to look, this week’s edition of Record eNews is a good place to start.
Adventists 'shake Africa for Christ'

Thousands of people have been baptised across East Africa, including 2309 in a mass baptism in the Indian Ocean this past Sabbath (February 7).

MEGA Project Hope PNG: Kandus Thorp

Right now an international team of television producers is in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, to shoot more than 300 TV episodes in preparation for the launch of PNG's first free-to-air Christian television channel. Vice-president of HopeChannel Inc, Kandus Thorp, explains to Record InFocus host Kent Kingston. Please pray for Project Hope.

Read Adventist World

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36 NIV). Amani, and other prisoners in Kenya, have experienced this firsthand.

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
• Calls for clemency for Australians on death row
• Fresh mattresses and linen for Ebola survivors
• Warm fellowship in Romania's Ice Church

The Australian Christian Lobby's Lyle Shelton on what attempts to unseat Prime Minister Tony Abbott say about the ethos of Aussie politics. And where do you stand on the death...
Planting a new garden

Like vegetables, there is little we can do to actually "make" disciples. Yet we all play a crucial role in helping them grow.

Doom and Glare

Have you heard of the “Doomsday Clock”? Well, it’s about time you did. Because it just ticked over to 3 minutes to midnight.

penalty and the Bali Nine?

Will eating like a caveman really help you get healthy and lose weight? Leading Aussie dietician Sue Radd weighs up the costs and benefits of the protein-rich Paleo Diet.

On The Web

Islamic State militants are selling abducted Iraqi children at markets as sex slaves, and killing other youth, including by crucifixion or burying them alive, a United Nations watchdog said.
Cross-eyed Christianity

One eye on God and one eye on money. It's a way of living that will inevitably leave us flat on our faces.
Adventists ‘shake Africa for Christ’

Thousands of people have been baptised across East Africa, including 2309 in a mass baptism in the Indian Ocean, as Adventist Church leader Dr Ted Wilson wrapped up a major evangelistic series with a call for church members “to shake Africa for Christ”.

The baptisms, held on Sabbath, February 7, capped three weeks of evangelistic meetings at scores of sites, including about 100 in Tanzania’s capital, Dar es Salaam.

To celebrate, 40,000 people from the 11 countries of the Adventist Church’s East-Central Africa Division packed a stadium in Dar es Salaam for a grand finale under the banner “Mission Extravaganza”. Two hundred buses from Kenya alone brought church members to the event.

It was not immediately clear how many people were baptised across the division, which made extensive use of television and radio in its January 10-31 evangelistic campaign. Dr Geoffrey Mbwana, a general vice president of the General Conference and a native of Tanzania, led major meetings that were broadcast on television.

Dr Wilson, who is on a seven-country tour and met with the president and other senior government officials in Tanzania, expressed awe at the mass baptism early Sabbath morning.

“A beautiful sight! A wonderful blessing from God!” he said by e-mail.

The newly baptised members headed straight from the beach to the National Stadium for worship services.

Dr Wilson, who took the platform to preach at 1:45 pm, urged the audience to share the news of Jesus’ soon coming in their own communities.

“God calls you to shake Africa for Christ!” Dr Wilson said. “Be in connection and communion with Him every day, being revived and reformed in Him every moment of your life.”

Many of the 40,000 attendees accepted the challenge, and they divided into small groups at the end of the sermon to...
pray for the Holy Spirit’s power to proclaim the Advent message back at home.

[Click HERE to read Dr Ted Wilson’s sermon "Shake Africa for Christ—Jesus Is Coming Soon!"]

Later, Dr Wilson was joined on the stage by Foreign minister Bernard Membe and Agriculture minister Stephen Wasira, who is an Adventist.

Membe, who gave strong affirmation to the Adventist Church in his speech, tweeted two photos of himself on the stage and wrote that he had felt “humbled” to address the crowd.

President Jakaya Kikwete welcomed Dr Wilson and an Adventist delegation to his official residence, the State House, for an evening meal and talks that lasted until about 10:30 pm.

Dr Wilson, who called the meeting “very helpful”, noted that Kikwete has been instrumental in preserving peace in Tanzania and helping to resolve conflicts in Cote d’Ivoire, Burundi, and Kenya.

“He is very knowledgeable about the Seventh-day Adventist Church and very complimentary,” Dr Wilson said.

Dr Wilson—who arrived from India on Thursday and left on Sunday for South Sudan—was met at a VIP terminal at the Tanzanian airport by church and government officials. Pathfinder and Adventist Youth marching teams put on a welcome show.

From the airport, Dr Wilson attended the inauguration of the new headquarters of the recently formed Southern Tanzania Union Mission.

The Mission Extravaganza event officially opened on Friday at the National Stadium with a parade of thousands of people, including Pathfinders, Women’s Ministries members, health workers, pastors, and literature evangelists.

Dr Blasious Ruguri, president of the East-Central African Division, gave a keynote address, followed by presentations from a host of General Conference officers, including Linda Koh, children’s department director; Heather-Dawn Small, Women’s Ministries director; Howard Faigao; publishing department director; and Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, education department director.

The guest of honor, Tanzania’s vice president, Mohammed Gharib Bilal, told the gathering that the government would guarantee the right to worship but people must also respect one another’s right to worship.

“The doors are open, so we may consult and encourage one another,” he said, according to Tanzania’s The Guardian newspaper.

In conversations with Adventist leaders, the vice president and other government representatives voiced amazement with Mission Extravaganza, saying they had never attended a meeting where people showed such respect and good decorum.

The event was a “great witness for the Adventist message and Christ’s power to bring order to our lives through the Holy Spirit,” Dr Wilson said.
Where do you buy your vegetables? At a supermarket? Or maybe a specialty fruit store or farmers’ market? Or do you value the quality, economy and process of bringing food to your table so much that you’ve decided to grow your own?

There’s something very special about ploughing your own garden patch, carefully planting seeds, weeding, watering, harvesting, and then the pleasure of seeing those beautiful veggies on your table one day.

We say we “grow” vegetables but, of course, what we do is a rather small part of the process. We don’t make the sunshine, the earth or the water. And there’s certainly nothing we can do to take a dormant seed and breathe life into it. But still, without doing our part, those beautiful, fresh veggies would never exist.

It’s not entirely different from growing new disciples. At least that’s the way Pastor Wayne Krause, who heads up the South Pacific Division (SPD) Centre for Church Planting, thinks. Talking at a recent three-day church-planting seminar, he says: “This conference is all about making disciples.” What does that mean? “Discipleship is the intentional process to let Jesus grow in and through us,” continues Pastor Krause. “We don’t just want to make church members, we want to serve God by making genuine new disciples—just as He instructed us to do.”

But what does church planting have to do with making disciples? “It is a universal attribute of church plants that they are strongly evangelistic—you don’t plant a new church without reaching out,” states Pastor Krause. “And, we’re either growing or we’re stagnating as individuals and as churches; there is no equilibrium in the Christian life. So church planting is not only about making new disciples, it is also about keeping us moving forward in our walk with Jesus. The Adventist Church started as a church planting movement. We simply want to go back to our beginning, planting new churches and regaining our momentum as a movement, not stagnating and institutionalising.” He stops, chuckles and concludes, “Church planting is the extreme sport of Christianity.” He should know. His church has planted six churches “so far . . .”

Apparently Pastor Krause isn’t alone in his thinking. The church-planting conference has drawn 163 delegates: roughly half are pastors and half local church leaders. “You’re all ministers,” Pastor Krause says, “some of you are paid, some of you are volunteers, but you are all ministering.” The three-day event at Avondale College is also heavily supported by division, union and conference leadership. The sessions comprise a 20-minute talk followed by a
20-minute small group discussion.

Pastors Mark Baines and Chris Stanley.

I sit in on one round table discussion. There’s a young man with a hipster beard who talks about reaching his mates from Melbourne University, a woman of Papua New Guinea (PNG) heritage who now lives in Western Australia, and representatives from Auckland (NZ), country NSW and Sydney. I want to simply observe but the discussion is so engaging I can’t help but get involved.

After the discussion, I talk to Rebecca Lukale. Originally from PNG, she and her husband recently moved to Tom Price, a mining town in WA, where they work in an indigenous community. Tom Price is a 16-and-a-half hour drive north from Perth and a six-and-a-half hour drive east from the ocean. “We’ve started a house church,” she says. “Through friendship, we now have two ladies with their kids coming to church. We also had an African couple coming to church; they moved to Perth. They’re now planning to be baptised which is great! I think there are many other people who we can reach.”

So why is she at the conference? “There are plenty of churches in our community—Jehovah Witnesses, Baptists, Anglicans, charismatic—but no Adventist church.” Why is that such a problem? “A church gives a visual symbol of our presence in the community and also a place for us to meet as we grow. We have the truth and I want everyone in the community to know the truth and to be ready for the second coming. I’m passionate about door knocking, meeting people, getting to know them and inviting them to church. It is about a four-hour drive to the nearest Adventist church. So we need a church in our community where people can come.” She concludes, “Please pray for the town of Tom Price, that soon we’ll have the newest Adventist church in Australia!”

This is just one of the inspiring stories at the conference. Luke and Sau Letele have come with their young child and their friend Ron Piilua. Luke and Ron work on navy ships at Woolloomooloo, Sydney. The three have a dream of planting a church in Sans Souci, a southern Sydney suburb.

“We are focusing on the needs of single mums and young families,” Luke says. Why? “We did a fitness boot camp outreach recently and that’s who showed up. So they chose us, not us choosing them!” “It’s a demographic in great need of ministry,” Sau says. “They have complex emotional needs, generally they face a very difficult financial situation and they are rushed off their feet. We are thinking carefully how to structure our church to meet those needs.” “We won’t have a traditional service; we’re thinking about what the best times are, how to reach the kids; we are thinking out of the box,” Ron adds.

Ron Piilua (far left) with Luke and Sau Letele.
“The vision cast at the conference isn’t about planting one more church, it’s a vision of multiplication—where church planting becomes the DNA of our mission as a church,” says Dr Sven Ostring, director of discipleship movements in Sydney. “Church planting takes us out of our comfort zone—we intentionally step out and connect with a new community. Like Jesus, we learn to be comfortable in their marketplace and then call people to follow Him.”

“There were people here from across the whole division—which was very important,” says Pastor Glenn Townend, president of the Trans Pacific Union Mission. “Mega-churches may work for evangelicals but in Adventism, the way we’ve grown is through moderate-sized churches multiplying. One of the first churches we planted in West Australia spawned four other churches. It has about 80 members today, and some of the churches it spawned have over 100 members. Larger churches tend to foster spiritual consumerism; smaller churches require spiritual participation. You don’t have to guess which model gives more people more opportunity to develop as disciples.” During Pastor Townend’s decade as president of the WA Conference, the conference planted roughly 63 new churches. During that period of intentional church planting, it became the fastest growing conference in Australia.

There are lots of ways to do church. We can show up at 11.10, sit at the back and then drive home at 12.30, critiquing the sermon on the way. Sort of like picking up veggies at the big supermarket and finding a few spots on the spuds. At the other end of the extreme, we can be part of a team, planting a new church, getting out in a new community, struggling to find the right messages and methods to reach new people, making mistakes, innovating, struggling through discouragement and, one day, seeing the very first new Christian give their life to God at our church plant. Sort of like growing our own veggies: it’s a lot harder but could it be a lot sweeter too?

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.
Have you heard of the “Doomsday Clock”? It isn’t a particular cheery timepiece but it’s ticking. At least that’s what the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’ Science and Security Board proclaimed last month. They pushed the metaphoric Doomsday Clock forward to 3 minutes to midnight. That can’t be good.

To the surprise of many, Russia and the US are once again fighting proxy wars in Europe and the Middle East. At the same time China and Japan are uneasily eyeing each other. And Israel and Iran are staring each other down. Is history stuck in a terrifying loop?

Today the US, Russia, China, France and the UK all have nuclear weapons. So do Pakistan, India, North Korea and Israel. And Israel claims Iran is on the path to acquiring them.

There are currently in the range of 45 million displaced people, experts predict faster moving outbreaks of disease as population density increases along with the rapidity and frequency of global movements, and threats from sophisticated and well-resourced terrorism are increasing.

According to Oxfam, the richest 85 people on earth control as much wealth as the poorest half of the world. That is, 85 rich people have as much wealth as 3,500,000,000 poor people. Further, Oxfam reports that if the world’s billionaires were taxed at just 1.5 per cent on their wealth exceeding their first billion, the tax would raise enough money to send every child to school and provide comprehensive healthcare to the world’s poorest. It is staggering.

Then there’s the weather. According to the US National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, last year was the warmest on record; a number of experts predict more frequent and more intense weather fluctuations in the future.

And what of human rights? The Pew Research Centre reports three out of every four humans alive today live with serious restrictions on their religious freedom. As for slavery, the BBC reports that various sources estimate there are between 20 and 30 million in forced labour today.

But there is an alternative way of viewing the present. Bloomberg reports the global average life expectancy for a child born in 2014 exceeds 70 years—it was just above 30 at the beginning of the 20th century! And that’s just the
beginning of the good news.

According to *The Economist*, from 1990 to 2010 one billion people escaped extreme poverty. The World Health Organisation reports global infant mortality rates almost halved between 1990 and 2013, and maternal mortality rates during the same period declined 45 per cent. If all that wasn’t good enough, the percentage of people who are malnourished in developing nations has more than halved since 1969. In the past 50 years we’ve seen enormous progress in the respect for rights of women and minorities in many nations around the world, we’ve seen leisure time increase and an immense world of information opened up to anyone with a mobile phone—the ownership of which is rapidly expanding even in the poorest nations.

Are we living in a golden age of enlightenment and progress or a selfish age of chaos and conflict? Or both?

There’s increasing evidence that as we make astonishing progress, that progress itself creates new challenges. There is even a term for the idea that as things get better, we get worse: affluenza. And there’s evidence to back it up.

In the US\(^1\) and Australia\(^2\), for example, youth suicide rates almost tripled from the 1950s to the late ’90s/early ’00s. Gender selection abortions have exploded in Asia as growing wealth has increased access to sonograms. And the rate of depression? Speaking in the late ’90s, the then president of the American Psychological Association stated: “the rate of depression . . . is now between 10 and 20 per cent [higher than it] was 50 years ago.”\(^3\) Last year, a major report found anxiety and depression increasing at a worrying rate among Australian and NZ teens—particularly girls.\(^4\) And health experts are warning wealthy societies that, due to obesity, this generation may be the first in memory to live shorter lives than their parents.

What are we, as Christians, to make of all of this? While we want a just, healthy, well-educated world, that isn’t enough. In good, bad, dangerous or peaceful times, the human soul needs more than this world can provide. And we are privileged to know, experience and share what that is.

4. http://anp.sagepub.com/content/48/7/606

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*James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.*
Some passages in the Bible seem to be completely out of place. For example, what on earth inspired Jesus to explain that "our eyes are the lamp of our body" right in the middle of some materialism-blasting verses like “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth . . .” and “You cannot serve both God and money”? (Matthew 6:19-24)

What do earthly treasures and the “cannot serve God and money” scenario have to do with our eyes?

I know that looking with my eyes at slick advertisements can have a direct impact on how I use the material blessings God entrusts me with, but could it also be that Jesus was warning me against the folly of following (stumbling?) after Him—with my right eye on heaven and my left eye on earthly treasures?

Maybe He was gently warning all of us against the pitfalls and stubbed toes of "cross-eyed Christianity"—a total loss of focus on what really matters.

Thank God that Jesus is not only the Way but He’s also the Light for our path, and He even offers us eye-salve to help us see.

Jesus is our Path, our Light and our Vision.

What a God we serve!

Julian Archer is the author of Help! I’ve Been Blessed! and writes from Toowoomba, Queensland.