

# PRAYERS

## PRAYERS *for Ben*

Photo: Southern Adventist University

BY DARYLL WARD

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KEYWORDS: Ben McArthur, prayer by email, suffering, “if it be Thy will”

**M**y prayers, and all Christian prayer, begin with Easter.

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 3/27/16

Heavenly Father, on this day when all of His faithful followers rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ your only begotten Son in whom you vanquished death, remember your faithful servant and my beloved friend Ben McArthur with a full measure of your grace. Fill his heart with the peace that flows from your perfect love. Show him your faithfulness in the trial that has descended on him. Answer his devotion and gratitude for blessings you have already given with still more bounty, I pray. Add to his strength that he may banish the alien that threatens him. In the name of the resurrected one, amen.

### **The Will of God and Disease**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 3/28/16

Gracious Lord whose earthly life is above all else the story of healing and with it hope, begin, I pray, to heal your faithful servant Ben with rest this night. Tomorrow, when he gives himself over to the ministry of medical art, infuse the labor of all who care for him with your invincible love. As you taught your first followers to pray, so I pray now that your Father’s will be done. I put my trust in your plain and glorious declaration that since we have seen you, we have

seen the Father. I do not pray that the Father’s will be done out of uncertainty regarding that will, but out of certainty that your ministry of healing reveals the Father’s rejection of all suffering and death. Much more is this Paternal Will manifest in your resurrection. Confident then as faith in you allows me to be, I do most earnestly pray that the Father’s will be done. And remember as well Callie, Emily and her family, and Mills. In this trial give them the peace that passes understanding. Add your grace to their love of Ben and make it a means of his healing as well. In your name and in the name of the Father and the Spirit, amen.

### **The Sabbath and Enemies**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 4/8/16

Gracious Lord, thank you for coming to us as always in these blessed hours. Again Lord I pray that you will give my friend Ben restorative rest. He needs both rest and restoration. I’m grateful you have sustained him from last Sabbath until this one. I’m sure he is grateful too. He needs more. Reward his gratitude with a full measure of what he needs. It’s been up and down this week. Push back the chaos that drags him down. Fill him with your healing power. Ben loves this holy day you have given us and will gladly rest from the work of recovery, but can only do that if you fight the fight for him. You who against all the odds broke down the walls of Jericho, drowned the Egyptian hordes, set the Midianites to fighting each other and eliminated the army of Sennacherib defeat the enemies of Ben’s well-being and lift him up. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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I do not pray that the Father’s will be done out of uncertainty regarding that will, but out of certainty that your ministry of healing reveals the Father’s rejection of all suffering and death.

Ben loves this holy day you have given us and will gladly rest from the work of recovery, but can only do that if you fight the fight for him.

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### **A Message Thread on Evil**

FROM: BEN

TO: DARYLL

DATE: 4/23/16

It was very good to return to my Sabbath School and church today after many weeks away.

The SS lesson focused on Jesus as healer. In the midst of our discussion something struck me I hadn't considered before. In virtually all of our conversations and prayers regarding healing from serious illness we qualify our entreaty with the proviso of "if it be Thy will." But when we look at Jesus's healing ministry, it seemed always to be His will to heal those He encountered. Are there examples of His refusal to do so?

If we believe that all power is available to us today that was manifested in Christ's life, and if we believe His will for our well-being is a constant, then why would God not choose to heal us now? Wouldn't the qualification—"if it be Thy will"—be strengthened if we had at least one biblical example of Jesus's responding that God would be glorified best by the continuation of the disease? (I know we can point to Lazarus, but Jesus's delay in addressing his illness set up an even greater display of power through his resurrection.)

There may be no contradiction here at all. Help me see it.

Ben

FROM: JAMES LONDIS

TO: BEN, DARYLL, EANDERSON, JERONCIC, LDILLER, ZANE.YI

DATE: 4/23/16

Hello Ben,

It seems to me that in the presence and ministry of Jesus, everyone he encountered as the Gospels tell it, would be healed as a parable of his messianic mission. In some cases, people were healed who neither knew who he was or had heard but still not believed. In the case of the Apostle Paul, he repeatedly prayed that his "infirmity" be taken away, but it was not (speculation runs from poor eyesight to homosexuality).

For me, as I indicate in my book on healthcare, the issue is primarily "healing" in the sense of finding strength, hope and peace regardless of what we face. "Curing" can and does happen, but not consistently as healing would for those who believe. This question, Ben, is at the heart of all theistic faith. It is very challenging, but not impossible to integrate with thoughtful Christian theology.

Praying for your complete recovery nonetheless and hoping to see you soon.

Jim

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN, JAMES, ERIC, ANTE, LISA, ZANE

DATE: 4/23/16

Hi Ben and friends,

The only place in the Gospel narrative that I am aware that comments on Jesus' not healing those who needed it is the reference to a visit to Capernaum where it is said that Jesus "could not" heal many because of the lack of faith he found there. That is problematic in itself, it seems to me, since faith is not best understood as a virtue or an achievement. The connection between healing and faith is puzzling to me, especially when one recalls Paul's conversion where Jesus appears to him when he is actively engaged in enmity toward the Messiah. That story, along with Paul's own interpretation of the significance of Jesus in which he says that faith is a gift, are two reasons why I find the connection between faith and healing puzzling.

But I don't think the Capernaum reference is a helpful place to think about your question, Ben, which points to the formulaic qualification of our requests for healing with the phrase, "if it be thy will." Instead, I recommend the Lord's prayer in which we are taught to pray that God's will be done. That prayer has two powerful implications. God's will is not being done in the earth as it is in heaven. And we are told to pray that the conditions of this world that are contrary to the will of God be subjected to His will.

I suggest that we can pray for the healing of every disease every time knowing that we are praying that God's

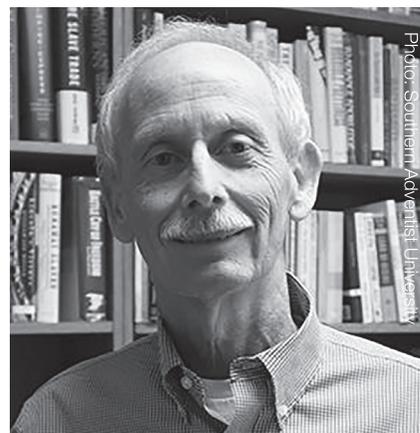
will be done, that it is God's will that the person be well. I agree with Jim's response that your question raises the deepest one possible in relation to what we want to and can say about God.

I remember very clearly my first reading of Karl Barth's assertion that Christian theology does not need to engage in theodicy, the rationalization of belief in God with our knowledge of the world and its suffering. At the time I rejected his

idea. It seemed of great urgency to me that we answer "the problem of evil." But the more attention I have paid to the various answers that have been given to this problem (Rick Rice's recent book *Suffering and the Search for Meaning* offers a compact, lucid summary and typology of those answers) the more convinced I am that they all make the problem worse in that they pose as "solutions." They offer a way to think about suffering that makes it, one way or another, "coherent" with the divine. But that is precisely what evil cannot be. There is no better definition of evil in my mind than the antithesis of the divine will. Evil is what God rejects. God does not want people to be sick.

Consequently, I am almost more offended by theodicies than I am by the horrors that provoke them. (I should mention that Rick has an interesting way of removing some of that offense in that he interprets the various responses to suffering that might be called theodicies as ways of coping with devastating loss that can threaten to shatter any meaning life seems to have. I can tolerate theodicy as a coping mechanism. I find it intellectually obscene.)

When I deliver myself of these sentiments in class or elsewhere the immediate response I get is, "well then why does evil happen?" The simple answer isn't the answer to the question. Children are born with microcephaly because of the Zika virus. OK but why? And to this question I have but one response. I don't



Daryll Ward (left), a humanities professor at Kettering College, wrote his friend Ben McArthur (right), a history professor at Southern Adventist University, messages of prayer before McArthur's death on April 10, 2017.

know. There is only one way I can fathom that evil can be harmonized/coordinated with the divine will and that is by the elimination of evil. I find this idea so necessary as to reject even the distinction between what God wills and what God allows. To speak of evil as allowed by God is to fashion a positive link between evil and the divine will, a thought that seems as incomprehensible as a square circle. If we understand our terms, God and evil, we know that they cannot be combined in a coherent totality. If, as John declares, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all," then God never in any way says yes to evil.

The prayer formula, "if it [be] Thy will" more than

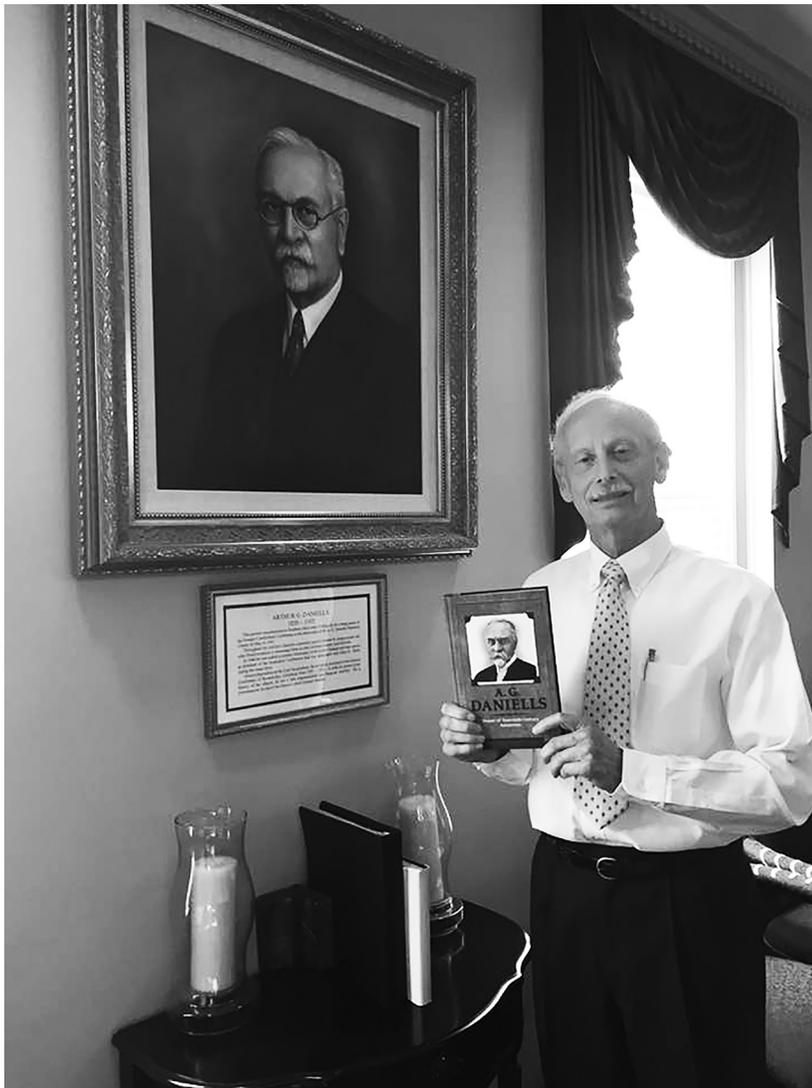
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If we believe that all power is available to us today that was manifested in Christ's life, and if we believe His will for our well-being is a constant, then why would God not choose to heal us now?

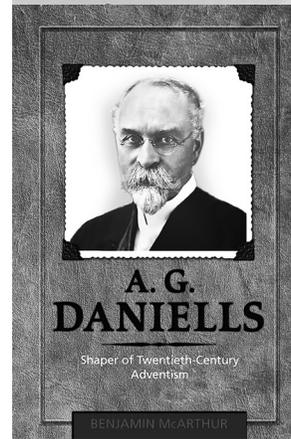
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likely is practiced as an imitation of Jesus in the garden on the eve of his crucifixion. But to interpret the crucifixion as the enactment of the divine will strikes me as incoherent with the resurrection. If the Father wanted the Son dead (a weird thought for a properly trinitarian theology by the way) then there would have been no resurrection. The will of the principalities and powers was the death of Jesus. The will of the Father was the resurrection of Jesus. The will of God in the story of Jesus is the

overpowering of every will contrary to His. The vision of the new earth offers powerful confirmation. When God's will is done on the earth as it is in heaven, then there will be no tears or death because "the former things," those things antagonistic to the divine will, will be no more.



To Students and Faculty  
 of School of Social Work.  
 AGD would approve of  
 your work.  
 Ben McArthur



Dr. Ben McArthur signed the book he wrote on A. G. Daniels, after whom the Southern Adventist University Social Work building is named. Dr. McArthur's book was published in 2016. (Photo Credit: Southern Adventist University School of Social Work Facebook page, September 5, 2016.)

Christian faith is resurrection faith. It is trust and confidence in God who does not let the depredations of evil stand. And Christian faith is, in my heart and mind, inseparable from Christian hope. Our faith makes sense only as hope that God will reverse every evil just as he reversed the torture and death of Jesus.

So, for what it's worth, Ben, I pray for your completed healing, grateful that a good beginning has been made and certain that when God's will is done, you will be whole. With Jim I would say that people like Marie Robinson, who affirmed "He's Been Faithful to Me" during the two years of her mortal illness, experience "healing." But in my mind what they experience is peace of mind that God will, in due course, even if it is after good Friday, vanquish evil, erase it, frustrate it, negate it. On occasion I have offered thoughts such as these to sufferers only to belatedly recognize that they were worse

than useless. If that be the case here, hit "delete."

FROM: BEN  
 TO: DARYLL, JAMES, ERIC, ANTE, LISA, ZANE  
 DATE: 4/24/16  
 Daryll:

"If it be thy will" as a necessary qualification to petitions for health (or most anything) probably finds its greatest support in Christ's prayer in the Garden. That is a strong precedent for our petitions that are necessarily of lesser significance.

But I agree with you: Why wouldn't it be God's will to make us whole? Evil is evil, to be effaced at every turn. Yet where we want physical relief and well-being, God's desire may well be for a healing at a deeper level, as Jim suggests.

Regarding theodicy, I think it will always be with us. An entire book of the Bible is devoted to it, as well as

To speak of evil as allowed by God is to fashion a positive link between evil and the divine will, a thought that seems as incomprehensible as a square circle.

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Christ's fielding a question about why a tower fell and killed people. At the same time (as Job suggests), we aren't going to get satisfactory answers. Even Christ's answer to the above seems veiled to me. Christians can't avoid the matter, if only because for so many people the matter of pain, war, evil of all kinds, calls into question God's goodness or even existence.

Ben

### **Being**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 5/19/16

Dear Lord, there are times, not nearly as often as there should be, when I tumble to the meaning of something I have heard numerous times and just as many times dismissed as wrong, inscrutable, insignificant or trivial when the notion is actually none of those things. Today for a very brief moment I believe I comprehended the wonder that some people experience by considering "being." The mere fact that I am, not what I am or who or how but merely that I am struck me as miraculous. But it was only for a moment. It may be an immediate confirmation of the miracle of your creation of everything. Some say so. But as marvelous and mysterious as it is I don't know what else to do with this, dare I say epiphany? But there is one thing I can do with it and that is offer you my gratitude. And I am also grateful for Ben's being and pray that you might grant it to him in such full measure that he will see the day when his grand-children present him with their own children. In your name, amen.

### **Protest**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 6/6/16

Dear Lord, it's me again praying for my friend Ben. His treatment has weakened his system making more treatment a problem. This is not OK Lord. Of course his cancer is not OK. I want to protest. I do protest. And at

the same time I pray that you will give him your perfect love that casts out fear. This too is a miracle. Give him that unbreakable peace and then give him back his health I pray. One of your prophets once asked his people, "Is the Lord's arm shortened that it cannot save?" So that's my question for you, "is your arm shortened that you cannot save?" I know better Lord. Let me see the truth of what I know. In your name, and the name of the Father and of the Spirit, amen.

### **How Can I Come Before You?**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 7/22/16

Heavenly father, how can I possibly come before you? Unlike the Psalmist I cannot phrase the question on behalf of all human beings. His answer is doubtless the right one, because you made humanity valuable, a little lower than angels. But I am not that paradigmatic man. I am only one man, pitiful in my own eyes and that thought itself is no doubt grounded in pride, the ur-sin. Why should I be anything other than unremarkable? And yet your Son invited all of his followers to come to you as our Father and so I come. I offer gratitude for a life of astonishing privilege and I ask for mercy to pardon an un-submitted spirit. And as you are willing, hear the cries of all who enjoy none of my blessings, who want for everything and are being killed and, worse, tormented all day long. Strengthen my resolve to do more. And could you do more as well, for all who need what you alone can provide, beginning with Ben. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you would come...

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 8/28/16

Gracious Lord, my suspicion that Ben's cancer had moved into his lungs was confirmed by him this evening. The words of Martha fill my own heart. If you were to come Lord, not to end history but merely to help our

Dear Lord, it's me again praying for my friend Ben. His treatment has weakened his system making more treatment a problem. This is not OK Lord. Of course his cancer is not OK. I want to protest. I do protest. And at the same time I pray that you will give him your perfect love that casts out fear.

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friend, your friend and mine, he would not lose his life to these mindless aliens. It is only in your absence that evil does its filthy deeds. Please come Lord and rebuke the devourer. As you know I am reduced to silence confronting the question why you elect absence so often. But here and now please don't remain far away because I am unworthy to ask for your deliverance. Can my sin matter? Surely what matters is Ben's life and health. Come for him, Lord. Not because I ask but because he needs. Amen

### **God Won't Do Your Dishes**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 9/13/16

Heavenly father, a thought occurred to me a while ago. I imagine myself telling people trying to think about you, "God won't do your dishes." I thought as well that I wouldn't deny somewhere sometime you might do someone's dishes. But as a rule it surely is true ... and troubling to me. It expresses my concern that on that level of the ordinary you don't operate. My friend Jill reported our church consultant's recommendations and remarked that what the Kettering church needs to do is help "millennials" see that God is important in their lives. And I thought, God won't do your dishes. Maybe youngsters feel or ask questions about the ultimate meaning of their lives. But its the dishes that occupy most of their psychic space. And then my little accident this evening, ladder crashing off the front of my house and I ride it down, not much worse for the wear. Were you there? Did you shield me from broken bones, paralysis, other crippling injury? I say thank you. I am really grateful. And of course you know what my friend Ben needs. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **Death**

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 10/25/16

O Divine Redeemer, lunch today meant reflections on death with my friend Dave VanDenburgh who introduced his preoccupation with it into our curriculum as a class titled "Death and Dying." We had a most deferential dispute about it, never acknowledged as such by either one of us. The depth of my dissent from his spiritual proposal may be best expressed by my saying that he wants to pervert that loveliest of words, "reconciliation," by joining it to our last enemy, death. No, I say, no, no I am not and will not be reconciled to death, my own or anyone else's. Indeed it is just because you have reconciled the world to your eternally alive self that reconciliation is exactly what cannot encompass death. You did not reconcile yourself to the kingdom of death. Rather you reconciled the kingdom of death to yourself, thereby destroying the destroyer. Neither do I find myself resigned to death. Both reconciliation and resignation treat with death. I offer no treaty. I offer only enmity. Nevertheless, your perfect love has indeed cast out my fear. My wonder at your mighty redemption rises up to ecstasy just because I do not deny the reality of death in the least degree. Oh yes, death is very real. It is really the ultimate alienation. And so I thank you with every ounce of my strength for dissolving that alienation in your reconciliation, your reunification of the world with yourself. It seems all but certain that the day of my death will arrive, I know not when. Although Paul did say that we will not all die. Death may well wear the face of rest in the end, given its ugly work in the days that precede it. But once it has finished with me, you will have only begun. And this affords peace that passes understanding. In the name of the risen one, amen.

## Victory

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 11/3/16

Dear Lord, it was a real kick to see the Cubs win it all. Victory is sweet. Today I offered my class the thought that your cross is what it is because of your victory Sunday morning. We know nothing of the countless mere victims of Roman rule. But we billions who know of your suffering and death know of it because of your return to life, because of your victory. For us it has been a long, blood soaked, agonizing time since that ecstatic morning, a time, however, filled as well with joy in love and in the beauty of the creation. I address you as Lord in reverence and gratitude but also in supplication, for I and all of your creation need you to rule as well as reign. We've been waiting longer than Cubs fans for victory. And Lord I'd be more than thrilled for you to completely heal Ben. I'm still asking Lord. Better yet would be your putting an end to our waiting for your total victory. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

## Love and Need

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 12/19/16

Dear Lord, you turned water into wine so that a wedding party could proceed. I love you for that. You forgave a woman caught in adultery and instructed her to be pure. I need you for that. You touched a leper and cured him. I love you for that. You gave sight to a man born blind. I need you for that. You stanchied a bleeding woman. I love you for that. You raised your friend Lazarus from the dead. I need you to rescue my friend Ben from death. You rose from the dead yourself. I love you for that and rest in confidence that Lazarus, and I and Ben will surely all one day thank you for life everlasting. In your marvelous name, amen.

## Bringer of Peace

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 1/20/17

Blessed Lord, you appeared at the burning bush and called Moses to set your people free. This day, beginning in twilight at sunset, offers peace through your presence. My father's tradition was to quote your call to each of us, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly and heart and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Give Ben rest on this holy day Lord. Give him the rest that we can know only if we are given the gift of your presence. Make it real Lord. Make it unmistakable. You visited a terribly ill teenager in Escalante Canyon, orphaned by his father's suicide and his mother's temporary abandonment and offered him peace. He said, "Lord I sure need it." And you gave it to him, healed him. Come to Ben, Lord, Come. In your merciful name, amen.

For us it has been a long, blood soaked, agonizing time since that ecstatic morning, a time, however, filled as well with joy in love and in the beauty of the creation.

## Table Fellowship

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 2/4/17

Dear Lord, thank you for making this Sabbath holy. Surely you were with us in our discussion in Sabbath School. You blessed Pastor Hafner with spiritual wisdom calling us to welcome everyone, including gay people, into our fellowship as the Kettering Church. The students who shared our table were engaging and in no hurry to leave. So here, amidst turmoil and terror in the world, despite the loss of Chuck Allen at the end of the week, despite Desiree's chronic pain inflicted by an IED in Iraq, despite Ben's and Callie's ordeal, you gave me a sign that we and they will one day enjoy table fellowship with you. It can't come soon enough Lord. In your holy name, amen.

## Goodbye

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 3/26/17

Dear God, thank you for this day that you gave to Ben and me. We do not know, neither one of us, how many more days we will have. Nevertheless all the days that we have we receive as gifts from you. This one let us hear each other's voices. We said goodbye but because of the faith you have given us both we rest in assurance that the time will come when we enter into the eternal youth of life with you. Then once again we will be friends as we were now four decades and more ago, young men filled with an appetite for discovery, for understanding, for truth. In Ben's trial and as the days add their mortal burdens, grant us solace in the knowledge that there will be joy in the morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Held Fast in the Hand of God

FROM: DARYLL

TO: BEN

DATE: 4/9/17

Heavenly father, one of Israel's singers once declared, "if I ascend to heaven, you are there, if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle in the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me fast." Your now ancient poet was acknowledging that there was no way he could flee from you. We do not want to flee so his words may comfort us with assurance that there is no place that we may be carried but that you will be there. And because Jesus, your Son, taught us to call you father we know that to be with you is to be "held fast" in your love. Hold Ben and Callie tenderly in your hand I pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Ben McArthur died on April 9, 2017. He left this message to his students.*

Students:

By the time you receive this note I will be gone. My departure wasn't of my choosing. But I find myself at complete peace with God's will.

Some of you I know relatively well; others I haven't gotten acquainted with, which I regret. I always have great

hopes for our history students. I want each of you to create a future for yourself that will be personally rewarding and of service to your community. Discouragements will come, for sure, but you can find resilience in the knowledge that you have aptitudes and acquired skills that will carry you through.

I'm not one who believes that God has only one plan for each person's life. I believe He can bless your endeavors in a number of areas you might attempt (and don't be afraid to try different things in your life).

You won't be surprised to hear me advise you to continue to read. That's the mark of a history student. It's one path to understanding the human experience. Travel. Make friends. Locate an Adventist church to which you can contribute.

Most important, nurture your relationship with God. This can be done multiple ways, but there must always be intentionality in the endeavor. The peace of mind I enjoyed during my illness came only through an utter confidence in God's leading and salvific ends. This is a great gift that I wish for every one of you.

Your friend,

Ben McArthur



DARYLL WARD is professor of theology and ethics at Kettering College in Kettering, Ohio where he has taught since 2002. He received his PhD from the University of Chicago in systematic theology. His scholarly interests focus on questions concerning natural causality and divine action as well as the logic of analogical predication. He is the immediate past president of the Society of Adventist Philosophers.