

A Deeper Experience

DAY 1—TO KNOW AND BELIEVE

“Can a mother forget the baby who is nursing at her breast? Can she stop having tender love for the child who was born to her? She may forget her child. But I will not forget you” Isa. 49:15 (NIRV).

Can children fully understand the love of God if those children never felt love from their father on earth? In my experience, it is very hard to understand. I had four fathers. My birth father divorced my mother when she was pregnant with me. My birth father’s rejection hurt my heart. My mother’s second husband was an alcoholic and very abusive—he even tried to kill my mom. My next stepfather was kind but greedy. He, and two friends, robbed three banks. He was put in prison, and my mother divorced him.

My childhood years were terrible. I was always nervous, had low self-confidence, and felt that no one truly loved me. It was hard for me to make friends in school. As a teenager, I wanted to be accepted by other students, but my search for love only left me feeling empty and alone. I did not know that my Father in heaven was already working to support me and to fill my empty heart. “Before I formed you in your mother’s body, I knew you. . . . I have called you by your name; you are Mine” (Jer. 1:5; Isa. 43:1). “I will be your Father to you. You will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18). “When my father . . . forsake[s] me, then the Lord will take care of me” (Ps. 27:10).

When I was 19, a friend invited me to go to a Christian music concert at her local church. One person from the music group announced this invitation: “*If your life is empty and you feel alone, will you try Jesus?*” His words and the music touched my heart, and I answered the call to come forward and accept Jesus.

I was reading the Gospel of John when I read this phrase: “the Father Himself loves you” (John 16:27, first part). That touched my heart! I had heard that Jesus loved me, but could I really believe that the Father loved me? All I knew about God the Father was that He seemed far away from me—somewhere in heaven—and that God could see everything I do. I was afraid of God. When I read the Bible, I fell-in-love with Jesus. Why did Jesus come? Jesus came to show us the love of His Father God. When Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father,” Jesus answered, “Don’t you know me, Philip? I have been with you such a long time! A person who has seen me has also seen the Father” (John 14: 8, 9).

I had to accept that God the Father truly loved me through His Son, Jesus Christ. “Truly, the first step to a relationship with God is that we must know and believe how much God loves us; because through God’s love we are attracted to and led to come to Him” (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 104, 105). “But God shows His own love to us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Also, “God was bringing the world back to Himself through Jesus Christ. He did not count people’s sins against them. . . .” (2 Cor. 5:19).

When I understood that God loves me without limits, I found strength to forgive my earthly fathers for rejecting me. God gave me grace to move on. I know now that I have a heavenly Father and that I am a daughter of the Most-High God, the King of kings. Our heavenly Father understands the human need for love and acceptance. God did not forget about me.

So what about my fourth father? I was 11-years-old when my mother married again. Because all the other men left us, I wondered if this new man would stay. He did stay! I adopted him as my dad and love him the

same as my natural father. He has given me freedom from fear and love that any father should give. My mother is dead now, but my dad is still an important part of my life. A good father is worth more than a blood-related father.

How about you? Have you been abandoned by a parent or family member? Do you wish to feel accepted and secure? Do you desire to be loved unconditionally? "Live in contact with the living Christ, and God the Father will hold you firmly by the hand and will never let you go. Know and believe that God loves you, and you are secure; God's love is strong and protects us from all the false beliefs and attacks from Satan" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 119). "The name of the Lord is like a strong tower. Godly people run to it and are safe" (Prov. 18:10).

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Father God, we praise You for loving us first.
- We praise You that You attract us with Your love (Jer. 31:3).
- We praise You for Your love that never fails.
- Lord, we praise You for Your healing power.

Confession

- Lord, please forgive us for any sins that prevent us from experiencing a deeper relationship with You. [Spend a few moments in personal, silent prayer, allow the Holy Spirit to search your hearts and show you any sins you may need to confess privately to God, not to other people.]

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, we pray, the same as Paul did in Eph. 3:17-19:
 - That You will live permanently in our hearts as we learn to trust You.
 - That our hearts will feel Your love deep down.
 - That we will understand how wide and long and deep and high God's love is.
 - That we will be completely filled with God's love.
- We ask that You fill us with Your love and help us to love others like Jesus.
- We pray for families that experience chaos, sorrow, and confusion in their lives.
- In 2019, please bless the hundreds of thousands of outreach activities around the world. We pray especially for Total Member Involvement evangelism efforts in India, June 2019, and Papua New Guinea, May 2020.
- We pray for Adventist members who experience persecution or are in prison because of their beliefs.
- We pray for a spiritual renewal among Seventh-day Adventist young people who attend public colleges and universities worldwide. Help them become bright examples for Christ.
- We pray for the 69% of earth's people who have not received a clear explanation about Jesus.
- Lord, we pray for the seven (or more) people on our individual prayer lists. May they let the Holy Spirit work in their lives. We also pray for the personal needs of the people in this meeting and for our local prayer requests.

Thanksgiving

- Father, we thank You for those [name specific people] who have loved and cared for us.
- Thank You that You were with us and had a plan for us before we were born (Ps. 139:13).

- Lord, thank You that even if I was the only one who needed it, You would have died to save me (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 187).
- Thank You for answering our prayers even before we ask.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"The Wonder of It All" (SDA Hymnal #75); "And Can It Be?" (SDA Hymnal #198); "I Will Sing of Jesus' Love" (SDA Hymnal #183)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "For the Father Himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16:27 NIRV).
- "The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness'" (Jer. 31:3 NIRV).
- "See what great love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 2—FROM THE INSIDE OUT

“I tell you the truth. No one can see God’s kingdom unless they are born again” (John 3:3 NIRV).

I was a mostly good child growing up. I did not rebel against my mother; I paid attention in school and respected my teachers. I did not go to wild parties, drink alcohol, or experiment with drugs like other young people in my high school.

After I became a Christian, I was proud that I was a good person. I ate the right foods, replaced my rock music with Christian music, dressed modestly, taught the Sabbath School lesson, organized evangelistic events and outreach, and I even shared my personal story of my experience with Jesus. I gave my heart to Jesus, was baptized, truly believed the Bible, and looked forward to eternal life in heaven. My whole world focused on the church and its activities and doing good things. If you looked at my life from the outside on the surface it looked like I was living a righteous holy life. However, I soon learned that my Christian experience was not really good deep in my heart—and how much I needed Jesus.

One evening I went to a meeting at my church about Christian living. The speaker said that you must be born again, or you are not in a saving relationship with Christ. She quoted from Ellen G. White: “The Christian’s life does not change or improve the old self, but gives a total new nature. The Christian “dies to” the old self and sin. The old life is finished, and the Christian lives as a completely a new person” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 172). That strong truth made me understand: there is more to living as a Christian than I thought! It was true, my life *was* different than before I received Christ, but it was only changed and improved. I *was* a Christian, but my old self was still alive. I still had a temper and my feelings were easily hurt. I was proud and wanted people to do things my way. I had not yet given up myself to Christ. I thought I was saved by all the good things I was doing, but I was missing the *joy* of my salvation! I had accepted Jesus, but I did not have the *love* of Christ; I had yet given myself up to Him. I needed Jesus to change my heart.

How do you give yourself up to Christ? First, it is very important to understand and admit that you need a Savior—you must choose Jesus.

“Education, culture, doing our own will, human effort, all have their proper influence, but here they have no power. They look like correct behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot make the heart pure. . . unless you receive a new heart, new desires, purposes, and motives, leading to a new life, ‘you cannot see the kingdom of God’” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 18). I could not change my heart, but I could decide to give myself to Jesus. I responded to the gift of repentance and confessed my sin of self-righteousness, self-importance, self-desires, and self-pity, and then give myself fully to Christ, for Him to control.

Second, make time to get to know Jesus who gives us eternal life. “And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only True God, and Jesus Christ who You have sent” (John 17:3). As I take time to read the Bible and pray, I will know more about my Savior Jesus and experience a more loving relationship with Him, my life will begin to have new meaning. Jesus begins the process of making something beautiful from my

life. My mind is made new—new attitudes and new feelings are developed. My desire to serve God will become deeper and improved.

You may say, “I was born into this church. I’ve been a Christian all my life!” “I have never been out in the world!” “I’ve worked for Jesus as long as I can remember.” These things may be true, and praise the Lord for that! However, you can have all this and still not have Jesus in your heart.

Maybe you have also felt impressed by the Holy Spirit that your Christian experience is shallow. What can you do? You can pray this prayer: “God, see what is in my heart. Know what is there. Test me. Know what I’m thinking. See if there’s anything in my life you don’t like. Help me live in the way that is always right” Psalm 139:23, 24 (NIRV). Give your heart and life to Jesus and, one by one, He will show you parts of your life that need to be changed. As you partner with Jesus, your life will never be the same!

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Father, we praise You that You have forgiven us from all sin and unrighteousness.
- Lord, we praise You that You are able to keep us from falling into sin and that You present us to the Father with great joy (Jude 24).
- We praise You for us aware of our sin and showing us your mercy.

Confession

- Lord, please show us areas in our lives where self is still alive.
- Please forgive us when we have been self-righteous, selfish, and felt sorry for ourselves.
- Please show us areas in our lives that need to be changed [take few moments of silence].

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people’s needs)

- Lord, please help us to know Your will, and help us to live worthy of You.
- We pray for the people in spiritual and mental prisons to be set free from their guilt.
- We ask You to fill us with the fruit of righteousness.
- Lord, we pray for a mighty wave of Adventists who will serve God. How? By loving others and by sharing with people from other cultures and religions.
- Please raise up (call) brave and loyal students (like the Waldens) who are willing to serve you in difficult places.
- We pray for the 62 million people in the 28 least-reached cities of the former Soviet Union (Euro-Asia Division).
- We pray for God to raise up (call) brave missionaries willing to work among the 746 people groups in the 20 countries of the Middle East.
- We pray for the 1,000 Missionary Movement in Northern Asia-Pacific Division and Southern Asia-Pacific Division. As these young people serve in countries such as Taiwan, China, Russia, and Burma, may they be baptized with the Holy Spirit and empowered to do God’s work.
- We also pray for our list of seven or more people [name the names if appropriate].

Thanksgiving

- Lord, thank You for individuals who have guided us to make a decision to follow You.

- Thank You for not leaving us to our past failures and mistakes.
- Thank You for the gift of repentance and for showing us that we need You.
- Thank You for knowing the beginning to the end and for answering our prayers in Your time and way.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Lord, I Want to be a Christian" (SDA Hymnal #319); "Be Thou My Vision" (SDA Hymnal #547); "Give Me Jesus" (SDA Hymnal #305); "I Would Be Like Jesus" (SDA Hymnal #311); "Nearer, Still Nearer" (SDA Hymnal #301)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "When anyone lives in Christ, they are a new person; old things have gone; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17 NIRV).
- "But the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. He saved us. It wasn't because of the good things we had done. It was because of his mercy. He saved us by washing away our sins. We were born again. The Holy Spirit gave us new life. God poured out the Spirit on us freely. That's because of what Jesus Christ our Savior has done" (Titus 3:4-6 NIRV).
- "I will give you new hearts. I will give you a new spirit that is faithful to me. I will remove your stubborn hearts from you. I will give you hearts that obey me" (Ezek. 36:26 NIRV).
- "I have been crucified with Christ. I do not live any longer, but Christ lives in me. Now I live my life in my body by faith in the Son of God. He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 3—THE GREATEST BATTLE

“And when you look for me with all your heart, you will find me.” (Jer. 29:13 NIRV).

“The whole heart must be give itself up to God, or we can never be changed to be like Him. We need to grow and be like God’s character. . . . Our fight against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. Letting go of self, giving up all to God’s will, requires a struggle; but the soul must obey God before it can become holy” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 43). Since childhood, I wanted to be like Jesus. Daily I gave my life to Him, and I prayed for Jesus to change me. He answered my prayer in a most interesting way.

My father-in-law, George, moved in with us after his wife died from cancer. We were happy to have him closer to us and wanted him to be part of our young daughter’s life. We hoped that living in our home and joining in family worships would have a positive spiritual influence on him.

We lived on a farm with a barn, lake, grassy field, and animals that walked on the property. George loved being outside, so this was the best place for his retirement. Every morning he walked by the lake. One day when he did not return from his walk at the usual time, my husband went looking for him. He found George in a blackberry bush where he fell. Over the next few weeks, George complained that his legs and feet felt numbness, and it was hard to walk. Tests showed a tumor that had grown very large onto his spine. His doctor scheduled surgery to remove the tumor, but it made him forever paralyzed from the waist down.

Instead of sending George to a nursing home, we decided that I would care for him at home. I had no nurses’ training, only short lessons for patient care by the discharge nurse when we left the hospital. My day included bathing George, caring for his bed sores, giving him his medications, and helping him move from bed to chair, then back again. It was really embarrassing to him because he could not take care of himself anymore, and I suffered from his grief and frustration.

My husband and I planned a weekend trip and made plans for a young man to care for George while we were gone. The night before we left, I tucked George into bed, kissed him on the forehead, and reminded him that we would leave in the morning for the weekend. With that, George became angry and yelled, “I’m *your* responsibility! You have no right to leave me with someone else!” I shouted back, “You are a selfish, unfair old man!”

Instantly, I felt guilty that my actions were wrong and not like Jesus. Weeping, I ran to my room and fell onto my bed. “Lord, what is wrong with me? Why can’t I control my temper? Are you really working in my life?” The answer came so gently, “I am working in your life. I am answering your prayer to be more like Me. You have inner anger against George. He takes your time, leaving you feeling overwhelmed with no way out. Anger and complaining is sin, and if you give it to Me, I will give you grace to continue caring for George.”

“Many people who truly give their lives to God’s service are surprised and disappointed to find themselves facing challenges and suffering from trials, problems and confusion like they never experienced before. They pray for their character to be like Jesus, for help to do the Lord’s work. They are placed in situations that

seem to bring out all of their evil nature. . . . [Then] Jesus gives them opportunity to fix these mistakes and to prepare them for His service" (*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 470, 471). "Repentance means that you feel sorry that you sinned and will turn away from sin. If we do not understand that sin is bad, we will keep on sinning. There will be no real change in our lives until we stop sinning and turn away from it in our hearts" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 23).

I saw what inner anger looked like, and I did not want it in my heart. I confessed my sin and promised to live for God. I asked Him to forgive me and give me a new heart. I got up from my bed, dried my eyes, and asked George for his forgiveness. Peace filled my heart, and my defeat was turned into victory. One day, we had to move George in a nursing home because his care became impossible for me to provide. One evening, we received a call telling us to come because George had suffered a stroke. My husband sat beside him and whispered in his ear, "Dad, you know Jesus loves you? If you ask in your heart, He will save you." We saw that George understood because a tear trickled down his cheek. In his last moments, I believe that George accepted Jesus as His Savior.

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You that You give us strength and support us when we are weak.
- We praise You that when we fall, You do not forsake (abandon) us.
- We praise You, Lord, that You cast our sins into the deep sea and remember them no more.

Confession

- Lord, forgive us when we allow self to control us.
- Please forgive us when we have not been good examples of You to others.
- Forgive us for when we hold onto sin instead of allowing You to remove it from our lives.
- Lord, please search our hearts. See if there is any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:23, 24). [Spend a few moments in personal, silent prayer, allowing the Holy Spirit to search your hearts.]

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, help us to be patient and kind, showing Your love and pity to those who annoy and accuse us.
- Please help us to patiently continue through hard times, especially when love is not easy.
- We pray for people who care for elderly and/or sick family members. Give them patience, strength, and love.
- Lord, please calm the anxiety of people facing terminal illness. Give them courage and the peace of Jesus.
- We pray for the 202 million people in the 41 least-reached cities of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division to know Jesus.
- We pray for the Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department of each local church as they seek God's plan and reach out to their communities with loving service, Bible study, and personal witnessing.
- We pray for Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) as they meet practical needs of people around the world.
- We also pray for our list of seven or more people [name the names if appropriate].

Thanksgiving

- Thank You that You promise to guard what we say or do (Psalm 141:3) so that we encourage and not hurt each other.
- Thank You for the Christlike love You give us for those who are difficult to love.
- Thank You that as Your character grows in our lives, others will see You in us.
- Lord, thank You for hearing us, for answering our prayers, and for working to accomplish Your will.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Rejoice! Ye Pure in Heart" (SDA Hymnal #27); "Live Out Thy Life Within Me" (SDA Hymnal #316); "O for a Closer Walk with God" (SDA Hymnal #315); "Because He Lives" (SDA Hymnal #526); "Abide with Me" (SDA Hymnal #50)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "The steps of good people are guided by the Lord, and He delights in their way. Though they fail, they will not be completely cast down; for the Lord upholds them with His hand" (Ps. 37:23, 24).
- "But those who trust in the Lord will receive new strength. They will fly as high as eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not grow weak." (Isa. 40:31).
- "The Lord gives me strength. He is like a shield that keeps me safe. My heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart jumps for joy. With my song I praise Him." (Ps. 28:7).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 4—THE VALUE OF SURRENDER

Definition: Surrender means to give up control of something to someone else.

“I tell you, it will be the same in heaven. There will be great joy when one sinner turns away from sin. Yes, there will be more joy than for 99 godly people who do not need to turn away from their sins.” (Luke 15:7 NIRV).

Eddie grew up in a log home, and is the youngest of four children. His brothers and sisters were much older and had lives of their own. His father and mother were always busy managing a bar in the small town where they lived. Eddie was often left alone to take care of himself. Every weekend, Eddie went to the local movie theater and many times he came home after he watched two movies and there was no one at home. Sometimes he sat in the family car long after other seven-year-old children were asleep in their beds and cried for his mother to come out of the bar and take him home.

When Eddie was 14, his mother became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, and things deeply changed. Instead of working at the bar, his mother began going to prayer meeting and church services. Eddie joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church with his mother and registered for church school. However, by the time Eddie was 17, he lost interest in church. Two years later, he joined the military service, and his pastor encouraged him to get re-baptized before fighting in a war. Eddie agreed that it was a great plan to do when he came home from the military on temporary leave. He studied the beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church for a second time. This gave Eddie Bible knowledge, but he still did not have a heart-to-heart relationship with Jesus.

Eddie found that trying to satisfy church standards on his own was a challenge. He was tired of trying to be a Christian, pretending at church, trying to obey. He had no power to continue the Christian life and fell back into his old ways. What was wrong? “There are people who say they serve God, while they depend on their own works to obey His law without God’s help. They try to make a good character and be saved without God’s help. They do not feel any deep love for Jesus, but they try to do good works and obey God so they can go to heaven. A religion like that is worth nothing. . . . Saying you are a Christian without having a deep love [for Christ] is only pretending to be a Christian and is a heavy burden” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 44).

Eddie’s mother and sister went to an all-night prayer meeting at the church on New Year’s Eve. They prayed for Eddie. They saw the answer to their prayers over the next few weeks when things started to go wrong for Eddie. He lost his girlfriend, his job, and his car. *Why is my world breaking down?* he wondered. One night, after drinking with friends, Eddie came home drunk. He cried out, “God, if you are real, I need you! I know a lot about you, but now I want to know you personally!” A sweet, quiet, small voice came into his foggy mind: “I AM real, and I love you.” This broke Eddie’s heart. “How could You possibly love me after how I have sinned?” he asked. “I’m so tired of the way my life is. Please make me a true Christian. I want to serve You all of my life, but I cannot do it by myself.”

That night, Eddie surrendered his life to Jesus and accepted Him as Lord and Savior. By faith, Eddie believed that his sins were forgiven and that he was a new person in Christ Jesus; his old life was finished. Through simply believing God's promise, the Holy Spirit began to work on Eddie's heart. Eddie began a new life, and he did not turn back.

"Now that you have given yourself to Jesus, do not go back to your old ways, do not leave Him. Every day say, 'I belong to Christ; I have given myself to Him;' and ask Him to give you His Spirit and keep you by His grace. By giving yourself to God and believing Him, you become His child. You are to live in Him. The apostle Paul says, 'You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living your lives in Him.' Col. 2:6, NIRV" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 52).

Eddie began to read the Bible and learned to pray. As he studied the Bible and learned more about God's love through the life of Jesus, his own life changed. The drinking, smoking, and other life choices that before made him happy were no more part of his life.

Eddie's mother suggested for him to read the book *Steps to Christ* to help him in his new life. He found it difficult to read at first—his mind was distracted many times—but as he continued reading one page at a time, the book became precious to him. In that book, Eddie learned about God's love, and by faith accepted God's promises. He finally found peace.

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You that You never give up on anyone.
- We praise You for Your wonderful works for people.
- Lord, we praise You for the joy we find in Your presence and for giving us a hope and a future.

Confession

- Please, Lord, forgive us for holding onto things that separate us from You.
- Forgive us for when we try to live the Christian life on our own.
- We confess that we need to have a personal relationship with you, not just to know about you.

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, we ask You to give us fully surrendered hearts to live in obedience to Your Bible.
- Please baptize us daily with the Holy Spirit and make us more hard-working in our efforts to win people.
- We pray that our loved ones who have left the faith will remember what it was like to be in a relationship with You and will desire to be reunited with You. Help them feel and accept Your love and forgiveness.
- Please fulfill your promise in Joel 2:25: give us back the years sin has destroyed in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones. Give us faith to believe You will keep Your Word.
- We pray for the 16 million people in the 6 least-reached cities of South Pacific Division. We pray for the Holy Spirit to fall on members every day as they reach out in love to people who do not know you yet.
- We pray for the Holy Spirit to help us know how to reach the 406 million people in the 105 least-reached cities of Northern Asia-Pacific Division.

- Please bless the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries that trains and supports chaplains and interested members to minister to people in prison.
- We also pray for our list of seven or more people [name the names if appropriate].

Thanksgiving

- Thank You, Lord, that You gave us the Holy Spirit to continually guide us into all truth.
- Thank You for working to answer our prayers in ways we cannot see.
- Lord, we thank You in advance for answering our prayers, not because we are worthy, but because Jesus is worthy.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Come, Thou Fount" (SDA Hymnal #334); "Have Thine Own Way" (SDA Hymnal #567); "All the Way" (SDA Hymnal #516); "Because He Lives" (SDA Hymnal #526); "Faith is the Victory" (SDA Hymnal #608)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "Here is what we can be sure of when we come to God in prayer. If we ask anything in keeping with what he wants, he hears us. If we know that God hears what we ask for, we know that we have it" (1 John 5:14, 15 NIRV).
- "Then the Lord will answer, "My people always wander away from me. But I will put an end to that. My anger has turned away from them. Now I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:4 NIRV).
- "I have not come to get those who think they are right with God to follow me. I have come to get sinners to turn away from their sins" (Luke 5:32 NIRV).
- "Don't just tear your clothes to show how sad you are. Let your hearts be broken. Return to the Lord your God. He is gracious. He is tender and kind. He is slow to get angry. He is full of love. He won't bring his judgment. He won't destroy you." (Joel 2:13 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 5—THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTNERSHIP

Definition: Privilege means a right or benefit that is given to some people and not to others; a special opportunity to do something that is an honor.

“When anyone lives in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone! The new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIRV)

When I gave my heart to Jesus at age 19, my whole life changed. Bible study and prayer became my daily time with God. I looked forward to going to prayer meeting, Bible study groups, Sabbath School, and church—anywhere that the Bible was presented and testimonies were shared. I was hungry for more and more of Jesus. The more Christ filled me, the more my interest in music, entertainment, clothing, everything, changed! My Sabbath School teacher, who was very dear to me, used to say that when we fully give ourselves to Christ, giving our lives to His service, we will “no longer live following our old desires, but we will follow Jesus’ life example through faith and reflect His character. . . . We will now love the things used to hate and we will hate the things we used to love” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 58).

I found this to be true. A desire began to grow in my heart to tell everyone that Jesus loved me and forgave all my sins, that now I was clean and precious to Him. “The moment a person accepts Jesus’s love and forgiveness, they will want to tell other people about their precious friend Jesus; the truth that saves us and makes us holy cannot be held quiet in our hearts. If we are covered with Christ’s righteousness, and are filled with the joy of His Holy Spirit living in our hearts, we cannot stop telling other people about Jesus. If we have learned that the Lord is good, we will have something we must tell other people” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 78).

Where could I begin? I didn’t have the smallest idea how to share Jesus with other people, so I prayed and asked God what I should do. The thought came to my mind, “You have received freely, so give freely” (Matt. 10:8). This was easy to say but hard to do. *What do I tell people about Jesus?* I thought. During my worship, I found this quote: “The people who were saved from demon possession showed through their life experience the evidence that Jesus was their Savior. They could tell about what they knew; what they themselves had seen, and heard, and felt of the power of Christ. This is what everyone can do when their heart has been touched by God’s grace. . . . We can tell how we have tested God’s promises, and found them to be true. We can witness to what we know about Jesus’ grace. This is the witness our Lord asks us to share because without our witness the world is dying without hope” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 340). I waited for the Lord to give me opportunities to witness for Him.

I was working as an office greeter when breaking news interrupted the television, alerting us that a bad hurricane hit Florida in the U.S. and was moving north along the Atlantic coast to North Carolina and South Carolina. As we watched the news, Ginger, one of my co-workers, asked, “What is happening? Things are just crazy!” I said, “Jesus is coming!” I had not been working there long and was surprised that I answered so directly! I quickly returned to my desk. Soon, Ginger came near my desk and sat down in a chair. She said, “Tell me about Jesus coming. I want to know!” I prayed and gave her a short Bible study on the signs of Jesus’

second coming. I also shared about how I prepared my heart to know Him as our Friend and to be ready to meet Him. Then, I invited her to do the same. The Lord opened a door, and I decided to walk through it.

God has given me the privilege of working with Him for almost 40 years. I've been a Bible worker; taught Bible at an Adventist school for six years; preached in front of thousands of people in the Philippines. Also, I shared my testimony with hundreds of high school students during weeks of prayer; and have done seminars for women's retreats, camp meetings, and churches. These have all been wonderful opportunities to share what God has done for us, but the most successful way to bring people to Jesus is by reaching people through love and mercy, by meeting their needs and earning their trust. Then you can invite them to follow Jesus.

"People who wait for Jesus' coming must say to the people of the world, 'Behold your God!' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is showing God's character of love. God's children should show His glory. Their own life and character must show what God's grace has done for them" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415).

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You that You have changed us. We are new creations!
- We praise You for the security we find in You (Isa. 49:16).
- We praise You for the daily mercies You give us.

Confession

- Lord, forgive us for when we have not shared our faith because of fear.
- We confess that we need Your strength to be good witnesses for You.
- Lord, please show us areas in our life that keep us from being a positive witness for You.
- Forgive us, Lord, for not being a good example of Your character of love to others.

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, please bless the hearts of all people in ministry who are tired. Help them remember that they are doing Your will. Please let them see the results of their work, even if it is only one person saved.
- Lord, we remember our Sabbath School teachers. Please let them know how important their work is for our children.
- Lord, we seek your guidance for the many Centers of Influence, health and family programs, and Pathfinder clubs around the world.
- We pray that more and more young adults will get involved in Mission to the Cities.
- We pray that You will help us love and encourage new members.
- Lord, please show us how to send more truth-filled literature (printed and electronic) into our communities. We pray that people will read it and that the Holy Spirit will convince them of Bible truth.
- Lord, we ask You to protect missionaries working in dangerous places.
- Please send literature evangelists, student volunteers, authors, media specialists, and financial supporters to spread words of hope and life.
- We pray for our lists of seven names. Please work powerfully in these lives. We claim 1 John 5:16.

Thanksgiving

- Thank You that You answer our prayers according to Your will.
- Thank You for using us to share with others!
- Thank You, Lord, that Your promises are true and trustworthy.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Lift High the Cross" (SDA Hymnal #362); "I Love to Tell the Story" (SDA Hymnal #457); "Trust and Obey" (SDA Hymnal #59)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say" (Luke 12:12 NIRV).
- "The words I speak are like that. They will not return to me without producing results. They will accomplish what I want them to. They will do exactly what I sent them to do" (Isa. 55:11 NIRV).
- "But make sure that in your hearts you honor Christ as Lord. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect" (1 Pet. 3:15 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 6—THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE

Definition: Repentance — To feel sorry for past sins and mistakes and to turn away from them and to want to do what is right.

“So make yourselves humble. Put yourselves under God’s mighty hand. Then he will honor you at the right time” (1 Pet. 5:6 NIRV).

Mr. G was a respected teacher at a small boarding school in the hills of Eastern Washington in the United States. This school taught reading, writing, math, and vocational skills, and also taught how to live as a good Christian. Students learned how to give Bible studies, preach evangelistic meetings, and be leaders in their home churches by teaching Sabbath School lessons, preaching, and doing community outreach. Mr. G was important to that education.

Mr. G taught from the book *Steps to Christ* for his eleventh-grade Bible class. He used hands-on learning to teach his students the gospel, and how to walk with Jesus and live in Him everyday. Mr G.’s life was an example of God’s power. He taught his students the importance of starting everyday with Jesus Christ. “The first thing you do every morning is to give yourself to God. Let your prayer be, ‘Lord, take all of me as completely Yours. I give You all of my plans. Use me today in Your service. Live in me, and let all my work be done in You’” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 70).

Mr. G taught Bible class to the eleventh grade and carpentry to ninth-grade boys. The carpentry class was divided into two parts. First, they studied a book; next, they practiced what they had learned in a useful way. One day during class, Mr. G was helping three boys build a supporting wall, while three other boys played on a pile of wood. Mr. G asked the boys to stay off the wood because it could fall and hurt someone. The boys continued to wrestle on the wood, and when Mr. G went over to talk with them, a large piece of wood fell on his foot. Mr. G jumped around in pain, holding his foot. The boys, thinking this was very funny, laughed and pointed at him. Instantly, Mr. G became upset and shouted angry words. Like Moses, who lost his temper with the children of Israel, Mr. G lost his temper in front of his students.

Running into a nearby office, Mr. G cried out to God, “I messed up, Lord! I can’t teach anymore!” Jesus’ mercy and compassion comforted Mr. G’s heart and brought him to repentance. “Many times Satan leads people who are thoughtful and want to live for God to spend too much time thinking about their own mistakes and weaknesses. Satan hopes to defeat these people and separate them from Jesus Christ. . . . Rest in God. God is able to keep us safe. If you will rest in God’s hands, He will give you strength to win the fight against sin because He loves you” (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 71, 72).

While Mr. G was praying, the thought came to him, “You can’t stay in this office all day; you must go and tell those boys that you gave a wrong example of Jesus by your actions.” Humbled, Mr. G returned to the boys, who were standing outside and blamed themselves for Mr. G’s behavior. “I did not represent Jesus to you

today, and I am sorry," Mr. G apologized. The boys tried to comfort him saying "It's OK! Everyone loses their temper. It's normal!"

The next class period for Mr. G that day was Bible class. He had assigned his students to read the fifth chapter in *Steps to Christ*, titled "Consecration," and write down a thought from that chapter. When Mr G entered his classroom, he did not feel emotionally ready to teach. The students came in and sat down. One of the girls put her assignment on his desk. Mr. G looked at her paper, and his eyes read one sentence: "Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ Jesus" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 70). That one sentence was just what Mr. G needed.

Years later, Mr. G received a letter from one of those boys. "I know that you were not proud of your behavior that day in carpentry class," the letter read. "But I want you to know that your example of humbling yourself and making things right, apologizing to us, touched my heart. Now that I am a father, I have had to ask my children many times to forgive me when I failed. Your example has helped me be a better father."

"We will often have to bow down and cry at Jesus' feet because of our mistakes, but we should not feel discouraged. Even if we make mistakes, God does not reject or leave us. No; Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God, praying for our salvation" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 64).

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You for our Advocate, Jesus Christ, who prays for our salvation.
- We praise You because You can turn our defeat into victory.
- We praise You, Lord, that even if we fail, we are not rejected and forsaken.

Confession

- Lord, please show us the areas in our lives that need Your Holy Spirit to fix and improve us.
- Forgive us for when we lose our patience with others and speak angry or impulsive words.
- Please give us Your strength to apologize when we have hurt others.

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, we ask You to give us Your spirit of peace when we experience things that bother us.
- We pray for the 8,208 Adventist schools with almost 2 million students. Help these schools to always teach Bible truth and lead young people into mission and service.
- Lord, give us wisdom to reach people who have no interest in religion. Let Your Holy Spirit break down the barriers to people with worldly hearts.
- We pray for the unreached people groups in Asia, including Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. Many people have never known the name of Jesus. Give us special wisdom for helping their needs.
- Bless us as we reach out to people enslaved to worshipping spirits and idols. Help us to understand their beliefs and introduce them to Jesus who wants to save them personally.
- Lord, please inspire Seventh-day Adventists around the world to pray more faithfully. Help us to pray together for the Holy Spirit to fall on us. We ask You for the promised fulfillment of Joel 2, Hosea 6, and Acts 2.
- We pray for the 541 people groups in the 18 countries of Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Please lead them to know the truth in the Bible.

- Show us how to meet the physical and spiritual needs of refugees. Help our church be known for our love of all people, no matter who they are or where they come from.
- May we faithfully and fully proclaim the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. May we focus all our teachings on the love and righteousness of Jesus Christ.
- We also pray for our list of seven or more people [name the names if appropriate].

Thanksgiving

- Thank You, Lord, that You are able to keep us from falling (Jude 24).
- Thank You for repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (renewed restored relationships).
- We thank You for Jesus' example of service. Please give us the strength to follow His example.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Just When I Need Him" (SDA Hymnal #512); "I Must Tell Jesus" (SDA Hymnal #485); "Whiter Than Snow" (SDA Hymnal #318)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "God is faithful and fair. If we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure." (1 John 1:9 NIRV).
- "My dear children, I'm writing this to you so that you will not sin. But suppose someone does sin. Then we have a friend who speaks to the Father for us. He is Jesus Christ, the Blameless One" (1 John 2:1 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 7—THE GLORY OF THE PURPOSE

“What I tell you is true. Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matt. 25:40 NIRV).

“Angels who have never sinned serve humans who are lower in character and class, but selfish people would be embarrassed to do this same service work like angels. Jesus Christ’s self-sacrificing love fills everything in heaven and makes heaven perfect. People who follow Jesus will also be filled with the same self-sacrificing love and they will do works of humble service.” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 77).

“Lord, I do not think I can do this! You made a huge mistake this time! I want to work for You, but not here!” I cried to the Lord after He put me in a high school for teenagers who needed to complete their education certificates and prepare for future jobs. Many of these children were homeless, victims of abuse, or involved in gangs, drugs, and even prostitution. I had worked over 20 years teaching in a protected Christian school environment, and this new job felt like more than I could patiently endure.

Students entered the classroom on the first day holding up their pants and wearing hoodies that covered their faces. Trouble happened within the first hour as one boy began to shout threatening curses toward two other young men. I was totally uncomfortable with their fight about to begin. I felt afraid. The students’ bad language, music, and perverted images displayed on their computer screens made me wish for my protective environment. I did not belong here. I felt like a lamb among wolves. Like the disciples on the stormy sea, I cried out, “Lord, save me!”

I had been reading Jeremiah for my daily worship, and the Lord reminded me of these words: “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will save you, says the Lord. . . . They will fight against you, but they will not win the battle over you, for I am with you and will save you,” says the Lord” (Jer. 1:8, 19 NIRV).

Praying for help, I asked the Lord to fulfill His promise given to Jeremiah to bring peace into the room. Then, with an unnatural courage, I told the students, “I will not allow this kind of behavior in my classroom. Each of you must sit down and quietly begin your work.” Imagine my surprise when the students quietly obeyed! I praised God in my heart, praising Him for His goodness and mercy. The next few weeks, I continued to ask the Lord to take me out of that school. I believed I did not belong there. God answered my prayer in an unusual way—by showing me the truth in my own heart.

I was working with a student at the computer when he asked me a strange question, “Jodi, you came from a Christian school, right?” When I answered, “Yes,” he said, “Then why are you here with *us*?” That student’s question touched my heart. The Lord spoke to my heart, “You are not ready to minister to the world. You will not be able to show my love to these children until you stop judging others and being afraid. You are here to make a difference in their lives, to show them My character.” God was right! I was not ready to minister because I did not have love. I answered the student, “I guess I just want to make a difference in your life.” Later that afternoon, I had the same experience, this time with a young girl.

What difference could I make for these students at this school? I began with little things, for example serving a healthy breakfast so the students could start the day with a good meal. I earned the student’s trust by listening to their stories, sharing their sufferings and by becoming a friend and mentor.

When the 2004 tsunami hit Asia, the students wanted to learn my opinion of the tragedy. I told them that the tsunami was a sign of Jesus' coming soon. One of my students, who boasted that he was raised in church, said, "Doesn't it talk about that in Revelation?" I asked him to read the Bible verses. The students were very serious when I explained that Jesus was warning the world to be ready. I said that if anyone wanted to know how to prepare for Jesus' coming, I would be happy to tell them. Later that day, a girl came into my office and said, "Please, I want to know." I told her about Jesus' love for her and her son and led her to receive Christ as her Savior. Throughout that year, I had several opportunities to present Jesus to my students and lead them to accept Him.

"God never leads His children in a different way than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and understand God's plan they are fulfilling as coworkers with Him" (*Conflict and Courage*, p. 278).

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise you for understanding our sufferings.
- We praise You for the people who have taught us how to be faithful, leading us to a closer relationship with Jesus.
- We praise You for Your never-ending faithfulness to us.

Confession and Claiming Victory Over Sin

- Father, please show us which sins to confess openly and which sins to confess privately. We claim Your victory over those sins.
- Lord, forgive us for doubting Your leading. Forgive us for trying to find our own way out of a challenging situation, when You may have put us there for a reason.
- Forgive us for when we allow fear or prejudice to keep us from sharing Your love with others.

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, we pray for Your protection for defenseless children and teens. We ask You to guard them from people who want to take advantage of them.
- Lord, may the people who take care of homeless children have hearts filled with compassion, gentle hands, and kind words.
- We pray for the family members of children who are in rebellion against authority. Please give family members Your grace to deal with the situation with love and understanding.
- We ask You to raise up urban missionaries to plant churches for the 806 people groups in the 20 countries of Inter-European Division.
- Please send workers to start churches for the 948 people groups in the 38 countries of Inter-American Division.
- We pray for the burdens on the hearts of our own church members and everyone here at this prayer time.
- We pray for the seven names we've written down on our cards. Father, You alone know every situation that our friends, family, and co-workers are experiencing. Guide them in Your path and bring them close to You.

Thanksgiving

- Thank You for Your love and compassion toward us that never fails.
 - Father, thank You for always watching over us with tender love.
 - Thank You for understanding and having mercy on us in our weakness.
-

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Lead Them, My God to Thee" (SDA Hymnal #653); "Rescue the Perishing" (SDA Hymnal #367); "Seeking the Lost" (SDA Hymnal #373); "Work, for the Night is Coming" (SDA Hymnal #375); "Far and Near the Fields are Teeming" (SDA Hymnal #358)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "Stand up for the weak and for children whose fathers have died. Protect the rights of people who are poor or treated badly. Save those who are weak and needy. Save them from the power of sinful people" (Ps. 82:3, 4 NIRV).
- "But this is what the Lord says: 'Prisoners will be taken away from soldiers. Stolen goods will be taken back from the powerful Babylonians; for I will fight against those who fight against you, and I will save your children'" (Isa. 49:25 NIRV).
- "Here are the beliefs and way of life that God our Father accepts as pure and without fault. When widows are in trouble, take care of them. Do the same for children who have no parents. And don't let the world make you impure" (James 1:27 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 8—THROUGH THE VALLEY

“The Lord is close to those whose hearts have been broken. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed” (Ps. 34:18 NIRV).

We were on a two-week mission trip in Iloilo City, Philippines, when I was called to the church business office of the church. “Missy, you have a call from the United States—come quickly!” My heart beat fast as I ran to the office and picked up the phone. Breathless, I said, “Hello?” I heard a sad voice say, “Jodi, Danny is dead!” I gasped in disbelief. “How? What happened?” I asked.

My youngest brother, Frank, told me that our oldest brother, Danny, an alcoholic and drug addict, was found dead with a needle in his arm in a motel room. Danny overdosed on heroin and alcohol. In shock, I hung up the phone and fell weeping into my husband’s arms. I was too far from home to be with my family and had to wait another week until our mission trip was over.

During the long flight home, childhood memories filled my mind. I remembered special moments playing with my brother. I remembered how he had protected me. I thought about Danny’s life and the choices he made. My heart hurt for him to have a better life, to know God and find peace and satisfaction.

Danny always made friends easily. He seemed to be the “popular” one. But when Danny entered high school, his friends partied, drank alcohol, and tried drugs. Soon Danny became an alcoholic and drug addict, which often caused him to go to jail and rehab centers by court order. Finally, the court got a lawyer for Danny and the lawyer warned him that if he did not leave town and go away from his friends, he may end up in prison. So Danny came to live with my husband and me.

While Danny was in our home, he showed an interest in religion. Danny joined our family worship and even signed-up for a Bible study course through the mail. Danny knew all the right answers and completed his Bible lessons quickly. His life was changing, and Danny thought he was stable, so he went back home. Soon, Danny was back with his old friends and into the drugs—this time worse, using stronger drugs, which ended up killing him. God’s heart must have broken to see Danny, who Jesus died to save, in that condition, lowered to a slave of drugs and bad habits. “God’s love sheds tears of heartache over people God made in His image who will not accept His love” (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 13).

I felt sorry for Danny. Watching his struggle with addiction hurt our family. Many times Danny took advantage of our parents, stealing from them to support his addiction and lying to cover it up. Our parents could not allow Danny to keep living in their home, so then he became homeless. My mother’s heart broke to think of her son sleeping on the street in the winter, eating in shelters, if he even ate at all, wandering the streets in search of more drugs. She gave him many “second chances,” but he never changed. Danny died alone. I am so tired of this world and Satan’s taking advantage of people who are weak and without Jesus. It was never God’s plan that humans should experience a life of suffering pain and loneliness, enslaved by Satan.

I often question if Danny believed that God loved him. I question what Danny was thinking about in those last moments of his life. Did Danny call out to God? Will he be saved? I will never know the answer in this life, but I am sure that our Heavenly Father had His hand over Danny from the time he was born. I know that God's love was always with Danny, always reaching out to him with lovingkindness and offering him salvation.

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You for the gift of Jesus, who died to save us and our loved ones.
- Lord, we praise You that You hear us when we pray to You and that You answer according to Your will.
- We praise You for Your life-changing power.

Confession and Claiming Victory Over Sin

- Father, please show us which sins to confess privately. We claim Your victory over those sins.
- Forgive us for times we have not been willing to follow Your will written in the Bible.
- Thank You that You forgive us according to 1 John 1:9.

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Father, we pray for people who may be victims of their environment or controlled by addictions. Please break the chains that hold them! Help us to win them back to You through our love and concern.
- Lord, please give us understanding, compassionate hearts for family members who have taken advantage of us. Help them to see Your love through our actions.
- Please teach us how to proclaim our church beliefs clearly, creatively, and following the Bible. May the love of Jesus be at the center of everything we believe.
- We ask You to prepare young people to start churches for the 789 people groups in the 9 countries of North American Division.
- We ask You to prepare volunteers to serve the 70 people groups in the Israel Field.
- We ask You to send medical missionaries to start churches among the 830 people groups in the 11 countries of East-Central Africa Division.
- We ask You to encourage people to pray for the 2,568 people groups in the 4 countries of Southern Asia Division. We especially remember Hope TV India and Asian Aid School for the Blind.
- We pray for the work of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division's publishing houses.
- We pray You will do as You promise in Psalm 32:8, by leading and guiding us as we do the Ten Days Outreach Challenge.
- Thank you, Father, for sending the Holy Spirit to convert the seven people on our prayer lists.

Thanksgiving

- Lord, thank You that Satan has no power over us.
 - Thank You that You provide a way of escape so that temptation cannot overwhelm us (1 Cor. 10:13).
 - Thank You that if You set us free, we are free indeed! (John 8:36).
 - Thank You, in advance, for answering our prayers.
-

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"Does Jesus Care?" (SDA Hymnal #181); "Hiding in Thee" (SDA Hymnal #525); "Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary" (SDA Hymnal #476); "We Would See Jesus" (SDA Hymnal #494)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "And my God will meet all your needs in keeping with the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19 NIRV).
- "He heals those who have broken hearts. He takes care of their wounds" (Ps. 147:3 NIRV).
- "I will say about the Lord, 'He is my place of safety. He is like a fort to me. He is my God. I trust in him.' He will certainly save you from hidden traps and from deadly sickness" (Ps. 91:2, 3 NIRV).
- "When anyone lives in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone! The new is here! (2 Cor. 5:17 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 9—A STRENGTH GREATER THAN DOUBT

“I know who I have believed in. I am sure he is able to take care of what I have given him. I can trust him with it until the day he returns as judge” (2 Tim. 1:12 NIRV).

“The test is positive; you are pregnant!” I could not wait to share this good news with my husband. Our daughter was almost two, and this pregnancy would make our children’s age 2 years apart, which was perfect for our family. Our joy twice turned into sadness. Later that same day I experienced some pain in my lower abdomen and ended up in the hospital. Testing showed that I had an ectopic (outside of uterus) pregnancy. One of my fallopian tubes had broken, causing life-threatening bleeding inside the body. Surgery repaired the physical damage, but it did not fix my disappointed heart.

After many years of trying and failing to get pregnant, my doctor told me that it was impossible because of the tissue damage caused by the bleeding. I decided to prove my doctor wrong! In my heart I said, “I serve a big God; He made a miracle for Sarah, allowing her to get pregnant with God’s power, and He is able to make a miracle for me.” I put all my faith in God’s hands, and soon I became pregnant again. God answered my prayer! We were so excited. Our faith in God’s promises and our love for Him increased.

My husband and I were walking along a peaceful river on a sunny Sabbath afternoon when I felt a pain in my body. I had felt this pain before, but I quickly ignored it. Later that evening, the pain got worse, and I went to the hospital again. Tests proved my fears were true—it was a second ectopic pregnancy, and I needed emergency surgery.

What happens when a Christian puts all their in God’s promises, only to be disappointed? Where is the good spoken of in Romans 8:28? I felt doubt. I questioned, *Why, God? I do not understand! Why did you answer my prayer, then take it away? Why did You disappoint me?*

I lay in my hospital bed feeling very depressed. I was physically in pain and emotionally tired. I did not want to see anyone! My nurse told me that hot water would help me feel better and helped me into the shower. Tears streamed down my face. I thought I should pray but could not. I felt totally abandoned by God. The water from the shower was like the dark clouds of a storm. The devil suggested that I think, “Is this how God rewards people who trust in Him? Is this how God shows His love?”

But God did not leave me. I was impressed to repeat the following words aloud: “God loves me.” I wasn’t sure I could—or even wanted to. But I was impressed a second time with great force, so I said, “God loves me.” I repeated the same phrase three times, each time focusing on a different word. “GOD loves me.” “God LOVES me.” “God loves ME!” The third time I said it, the darkness left me! I returned to my bed totally exhausted and wanted to be alone.

When the hospital chaplain entered my room, she looked at my chart and asked, “Mrs. Genson?” When I responded, she came to my side and took my hand in hers, saying, “It’s hard to lose a baby, isn’t it?” The clouds returned! Not wanting to cry in front of her, I covered my head with my blanket and said aloud, “God

loves me! I know who I believe in! I have given my life to Jesus Christ, and what He decides to do with me is OK, because I gave my life to Him." After saying this, the clouds of doubt left me again.

These words that Jesus spoke to Peter later comforted my heart: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7). I struggled with God over my loss. I could not understand why it happened, especially when I had faith in God. It would be ten years before I understood that God wanted me to experience that faith must reach beyond the clouds to what we cannot see. God wanted me to understand that His grace makes our weakness to be perfect. I prayed for a miracle, and God gave me one. But I learned that the real miracle was God's strength was greater than my doubt, and He could take care of me through any difficult experience. Like Job, I can say, "Even if God kills me, I will continue to trust Him." "God knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come out as pure gold" (Job 13:15; 23:10).

"God gives us lessons of trust. God wants to teach us where to look for help and strength when needed. Through these lessons we learn about God's will and plan for our lives. Faith grows stronger when we experience doubt and fear" (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 116, 117). "In heaven the things we do not understand that have annoyed and disappointed us here in life will become clear. We will see that our prayers that seem not answered and our disappointed hopes have been our greatest blessings" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 474).

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You that You are the Father of all compassion, the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-7).
- We praise You for healing our broken hearts and healing our wounds.
- We praise You for letting us give our burdens to You. You will support us in our time of grief because You have also experienced grief.

Confession and Claiming Victory Over Sin

- We ask for Your Holy Spirit to point out any sins that are separating us from You.
- Forgive us, Father, when our doubts overcome our ability to trust in You.
- Thank You for the forgiveness You so wonderfully offer.

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, we pray for wisdom and grace to accept our disappointments, knowing that You love us and will work all things for good, though we may not understand it now.
- We ask you to strengthen our faith when we face doubt and fear.
- Please let our families be examples of Your love in our homes and communities. We ask You to bring peace into homes, heal broken relationships, protect the defenceless from abuse, and show Your power to make situations that look hopeless become holy experiences.
- Help our church members, pastors, and leaders around the world read God's Word every day. Help us to pray to You everyday. Remind us that without You, we can do nothing.
- We ask You to encourage people to become nurses and doctors to start new churches among the 1,978 people groups in the 22 countries in West-Central Africa Division.
- We pray for the 49 million people in the 19 least-reached cities of Trans-European Division.
- We pray for the seven people on our prayer lists. Give them hearts to know You as the Bible says in Jeremiah 24:7.

Thanksgiving

- Father, thank You that because Jesus is praying and pleading for us, we have a hope and a future.
- Thank You for comforting us in all our troubles, so that we may comfort others.
- Thank you, God, that Your strength is made perfect in our weakness.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"I Know Whom I Have Believed" (SDA Hymnal #511); "Moment by Moment" (SDA Hymnal #507); "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" (SDA Hymnal #517); "It Is Well with My Soul" (SDA Hymnal #530)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "Come to me, all you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 NIRV).
- "Do not be afraid. I am with you. Do not be terrified. I am your God. I will make you strong and help you. I will hold you safe in my hands. I always do what is right" (Isa. 41:10 NIRV).
- "Give your worries to the Lord. He will support you and keep you going. He will never let godly people be shaken" (Ps. 55:22 NIRV).

A Deeper Experience

DAY 10—LET GO OF THE THORNS

“Brothers and sisters, I don’t consider that I have taken hold of it yet. But here is the one thing I do. I forget what is behind me. I push hard toward what is ahead of me. I push myself forward toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it. The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus himself.” (Phil. 3:13, 14 NIRV).

Our biological father abandoned me and my older brother. Because our father left our mother when we were very young, we never met him. All we knew about him was that he was a sailor, tall and handsome with red hair and freckles, and spoke with a southern accent. We tried to find him, but we failed, so we gave up. I grew up questioning why our dad did not want us, which left a scar on my young heart.

I was clumsy, often tripping over “nothing” on the playground. Other children teased me at school. My hair was short and cut square around my pale face. I did not have the happiness that is normal for an eight-year-old. I was teased and made fun of.

Because I often played alone, I did not like recess, but physical education class was even worse. We played kickball, also called soccer baseball, which I hated. The game involved kicking a ball and running around bases. As the children lined up, captains chose their teams. I was always the last person chosen. The teams took their positions, and I was sent far outfield because I was not very good at this game. Then my team began to yell, “Move back! Timmy is up!” Timmy always kicked the ball really hard. I just stood with my arms crossed. Suddenly, I heard the other kids yell, “Dumb DeWeese! The ball is coming to you! Catch it!” Looking up, I saw the ball coming straight to me. I stretched out my arms and caught the ball! In disbelief the other children cheered, “Yay! Dumb DeWeese caught the ball!” For one moment, I was a hero that my classmates praised, but that did not last long. Everything went back to normal when it was my turn to kick the ball and I struck out, causing my team to lose the game.

I felt insecure and had low self-esteem through my teens and adulthood. Early childhood experiences can affect who we become, but we do not need to stay that way. I had every reason to be bitter and angry. My father had rejected me, I had no friends and was easily taken advantage of because I desired to be accepted. The more I focused on my reasons to be bitter and angry, the more I became bitter and angry. It was like I gathered a bunch of thorns. But holding onto our past bitter experiences becomes too much to bear and may affect our health later in life. We become slaves to our feelings.

I read this quote by Ellen White recently:

“Many people in life focus on their mistakes and failures and disappointments, and their hearts are filled with sadness and disappointment. While I was in Europe, a woman who was focusing on her mistakes and failures was in deep distress, wrote a letter to me, asking for encouragement. The night after I read her letter I dreamed that I was in a garden, and the owner of the garden was leading me through its paths. I was gathering the flowers and enjoying their fragrance, when this woman, who had been walking by my side, showed me some ugly thorns that were blocking her way. This woman was there mourning and grieving. She was not walking in the pathway, following

the guide, but was walking in the thorns. 'Oh,' she cried, 'it is sad that this beautiful garden is ruined with thorns.' Then the guide said to her, 'Leave the thorns alone because they will only hurt you. Gather the roses, the lilies, and the pinks.' Have you had some bright and happy times in your experience? . . . When you look back at your life experience do you find some happy memories? God's promises are like the sweet smelling flowers, growing beside your life's path. Let the beauty and sweetness of God's promises fill your heart with joy. . . . It is not wise to focus on and gather all the unpleasant memories, sins and disappointments of your past to talk about them and mourn them until we are overwhelmed and want to give up. A depressed soul is filled with darkness, shutting out the light of God and casting a shadow on the pathway of others" (Steps to Christ, pp. 116, 117).

I chose to let go of my thorns and gather the roses. When Jesus came into my life, I discovered who I was in Him! I was once a skinny little girl who thought she could do nothing right—but I became a child of God, a royal princess of the King of kings (1 Pet. 2:9). I am not fatherless anymore because God became my Father (Ps. 27:10; John 16:27). I am not rejected and without friends anymore because my Father in heaven calls me His friend (John 15:15). I know I have great value because He gave His life for me (John 3:16). That is a reason to rejoice!

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR THE PRAYER TIME

Praise

- Lord, we praise You for Your life changing power!
- We praise You that You have called us Your friends (John 15:15).
- We praise You for choosing us to be Your children.

Confession and Claiming Victory Over Sin

- Lord, we claim Your victory over the sin in our lives.
- Forgive us for focusing on the "thorns" of the past and allowing those experiences to discourage us. Thank You that if we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us (1 John 1:9).

Supplication and Intercession (Praying for self needs and other people's needs)

- Lord, we pray for our church leaders around the world. Please give them wisdom as they make important decisions and lead Your people.
- We ask for Your grace to forgive those people who have hurt us. Lord, please bring healing and renewal to families.
- Lord, may each of us be a friend to the friendless, showing God's love to those in need of care.
- We pray for our children. Please give them power to stand boldly for You when they experience challenges and pressure. Help them to make wise choices and follow Your truth (Isa. 44:3, 4).
- Teach us to follow Christ's example by helping to meet the daily needs of people close to us. Prepare us to serve as medical missionaries, community volunteers, and friends to people in need.
- Lord, fill our church with a mighty revival. We pray for Christlike godliness to fill Your church in the final days. Help us to stand for truth even if the heavens fall.
- Lord, show us how to share the gospel with Muslim people groups. We pray that they accept and respond to Your offer of grace.
- We pray for the seeds of truth sown in Japan during last year's Total Member Involvement outreach. Please send laborers to work and pray for Japan.

- We pray for the seven names on our lists. Please show each person how much Jesus loves them.

Thanksgiving

- Lord, thank You for Your promise: "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).
- Thank you, Lord, that You can fill us with joy and peace.
- Thank You that You are already working in the hearts of people we are praying for.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO SING

"A Child of the King" (SDA Hymnal #468); "Blessed Assurance" (SDA Hymnal #462); "There's Sunshine in My Soul" (SDA Hymnal #470); "Wonderful Peace" (SDA Hymnal #466)

PROMISES TO CLAIM AS YOU PRAY

- "My father and mother may desert me, but the Lord will accept me" (Ps. 27:10 NIRV).
- "What should we say then? Since God is on our side, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31 NIRV)
- "Can a mother forget the baby who is nursing at her breast? Can she stop having tender love for the child who was born to her? She might forget her child. But I will not forget you" (Isa. 49:15 NIRV).