



## God's Impeccable Timing

Two and a half years ago, the Petoskey Church chose to do a Bible Study Offer card mailing. As church members prepared the cards for mail, Lauri Hughes attempted to take her own life.

Hughes was not yet part of the Petoskey church family. She had been raised Catholic, but was attending a Baptist church at the time of her

attempted suicide. Hughes woke up in the hospital and, furious that she had not died, directed all of her anger and distrust towards God.

When she returned to her home a week later, Hughes found a Bible Study Offer card in her mailbox. Despite her earlier anger and cynicism towards God, she saw the card as a sign. "God, this is it," she said and responded to the offer, signing up for Bible studies.

Initially, Hughes believed the studies would be mailed to her, just as the card had been placed in her mailbox. To her surprise, Petoskey member Brad Jones came to her door.

Hughes was open to personal Bible studies and even seemed to welcome that they would study together. As

*"Hughes' story speaks of a God who is all-knowing and wise. His timing is perfect."*

they studied the It is Written Bible study guides, Hughes was open to everything Jones shared. She carefully asked questions so that she completely understood the material.

"The Sabbath made perfect sense to her," Pastor Cody Francis said. Hughes had always wondered why her church and other denominations kept the first day of the week, as the fourth commandment explicitly pointed to the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. Hughes thought our message was special because we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath.

Amazingly, just two weeks after



On the third Sabbath in July, Hughes was baptized into the Petoskey church."

(continued on page 7)

By Jim Micheff,  
President



*“Before the question, ‘Where are you?’ ever came into the mind of humans, God addressed it to man. It was God who called out to Adam and Eve and asked, ‘Where are you?’”*

## GOD..WHERE ARE YOU?

One evening when I was a small boy, my parents took our family to a travel lecture. After a short time, I became tired and climbed up into my mom’s lap to go to sleep. Just before drifting off to sleep I realized I needed to go to the bathroom. Since our row of seats was close to the bathroom, my mom told me I could go by myself. When I came out of the lighted bathroom into the dark auditorium, I became confused and wasn’t sure which row my family was in. Spotting my mom, I climbed up, settling into her lap. Something didn’t seem right, so just to make sure it was Mom, I opened one eye and looked up. The face looking back at me was a total stranger. I bolted off her lap and out of the row into the aisle. But now what? Where was my mom? There was a movement directly behind the lady I had left and to my relief and joy I saw my mother stand up. I ran to her. My fear was gone, and in peace and contentment I went to sleep, curled up in her lap.

There is so much fear in the world right now. The coronavirus is raging around the globe with no end in sight,

*“No amount of pressure or persuasion could entice Jesus to remove God from the throne of His heart.”*

people are losing their jobs, unsure how they will pay their bills and take care of their families. Race riots and an unsettling presidential election has caused fear in many people. Kids are in and out of school, many not knowing where their next meal will come from or who will take care of them. The future feels so uncertain right now. Why is this happening? It’s easy to ask the question, God...where are you?

Whatever the reason, that question implies that there is a distance between us and God. A few weeks ago, my wife and I were shopping in Sam’s Club. I was pushing the cart and talking to her. The strange expression on the person’s face walking toward us made me look over to Gail. To my shock, she was not there. I had been walking and talking alone. Where did she go? I retraced my steps and found that she had stopped to look at something down a different aisle.

At times our walk with God may feel that way. God doesn’t physically connect us to Him or force humans to serve Him. There is no leash to hold us so we can’t wander off. When I first met Gail, no one forced me to get to know her or spend time with her. I was drawn to her by a desire to be with her. I made it a point to find out what her interests were. I also wanted to know what her schedule was so I could adjust my time to be with her.

It is a special form of love that keeps us near God that incorporates an abiding acknowledgment of God’s presence. We fall into trouble when we become distracted by things that disrupt our connection with God.

Before the question, ‘Where are you?’ ever came into the mind of humans, God addressed it to man.

It was God who called out to Adam and Eve and asked, “Where are you?” What had happened to cause them to hide from God? God didn’t ask the question because He didn’t know where they were. He wanted them to understand that they had rejected their relationship with Him. God wasn’t hiding from them...they were hiding from Him. God hadn’t broken His relationship with them...they had broken their relationship with Him. God doesn’t leave us; we leave Him.

### A Broken Relationship

What was the relationship between God and Man in the beginning? God is the Creator. There is no other Creator, so everything that exists belongs to Him and makes up His kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Adam and Eve knew and embraced God as their Creator. When God formed them, a special place in their heart was established for Him. God alone had claim to their obedience and worship. The relationship between God and Adam and Eve was Creator and Creature,<sup>2</sup> King and Subjects. It was one of authority and submission.

How did they break the relationship? Jesus explained that we cannot serve God and be independent of Him at the same time. He said, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Paul reveals that we choose who we serve by obedience.<sup>3</sup>

Adam and Eve failed the simple test of loyalty and broke the relationship by disregarding God’s command. Their insubordination was acted out in refusing to obey the simple command not to eat from the Tree of



the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was an act of rebellion. In refusing to submit to God's authority, they chose to remove God from the throne of their heart.

At Creation, God gave man the power of choice. Man was not forced to serve or worship God. He could choose. Our freedom of choice was so important to God that the only way to protect it and eliminate rebellion (sin) was to implement the Plan of Salvation. Salvation is offered free of charge – in material respects – but requires the exercise of our will to put God back on the throne of our heart. With that choice, the process of divesting of every ungodly practice and thing begins. We must be loyal to God based only on love for Him – no other motive.

### The Issue at Stake

The Great Controversy is over who will occupy the throne of your heart. Satan subtly revealed the core of the Great Controversy when he tempted Jesus to fall down and worship him. Jesus responded with scripture, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matt. 4:9, 10). No amount of pressure or persuasion could entice Jesus to remove God from the throne of His heart. Satan knows that *reverence* for God, the highest form of love, will lead to a desire to submit to His authority. Obedience is an outward demonstration of reverence, connecting it to worship.

The Bible pulls back the curtain on the Great Controversy and lets us see the issue at stake. It tells the story of Job, who allowed God to be reestablished on the throne of his heart. As a result, God declared him to be blameless, upright, one who feared God and hated evil. Satan made the accusation that God did not occupy the throne of anyone's heart on earth, because no one served Him motivated only by love. God pointed to Job and gave Satan the opportunity to test his loyalty. The challenges and trials Job encountered were not the result of a broken relationship with God nor because he had wandered away from God. Even though Job didn't understand what was happening in the midst of the trial, he declared this loyalty to God even though it appeared that God was causing all his pain.<sup>4</sup>

How was Job able to remain loyal under such pressure? He did it the same way we must. When we allow God to be on the throne of our heart, Jesus begins His work of removing rebellion from every fiber of our being. He will give opportunities to choose to affirm God's authority and customizes each test to the person's strength. He will not permit any to be tempted above that which they are able to bear. As soon as a person has passed one test and gained a little strength, God will give them another test, carefully gauged to their peculiar need. They

gradually grow in strength and grace and finally come to the point where they would die rather than knowingly disobey God. When a person has reached this decision, the work is done; they have completed their training; they are sanctified, ready for heaven.<sup>5</sup> Christ will then present them before the Father's presence with exceeding joy.<sup>6</sup> Satan is defeated, and God stands vindicated. A soul is saved.

So, in the midst of all this chaos and uncertainty around us and we are enticed to ask the question, "God... Where are You?"—remember that God is right beside you and always has been. He has promised He will never leave us. When we feel alone and afraid, it's not because God isn't with us, it's that we have failed to recognize and acknowledge His presence. We need to remember that if God is allowed to sit on the throne of our hearts, then God can't get any closer. And when tempted to doubt God's love for us, we can claim the promise from God to "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid, for the Lord our God, He is the One who goes with us. He will not leave us nor forsake us" (Deut. 31:6). What a comforting answer to our question!

<sup>1</sup> John 1:3

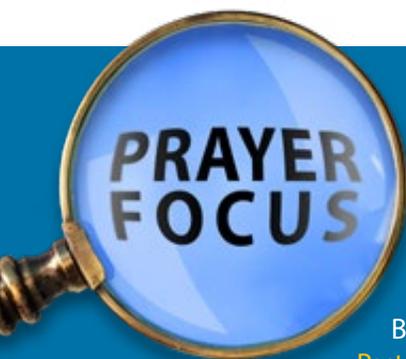
<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:16

<sup>4</sup> Job 13:15

<sup>5</sup> Andreasen, M.L. (1948). Hebrews (Review & Herald Publishing Assoc., Washington D.C.), p. 297.

<sup>6</sup> Jude 24, 25



**Every Monday morning**, the Michigan Conference staff meets for worship and prayer. Here is the list for the following dates. Please join us as we pray for these churches and ministries.

#### JANUARY 4

Manistique/McMillan  
Northwoods/Sault St Marie

**Pastor David Austin**

Bessemer/Greenland/Houghton

**Pastor Sean Brizendine & Ray Holmes**

Bluffview Christian School

#### JANUARY 11

Menominee/Wilson  
**Pastor Tom Hubbard**  
Wilson Jr Academy

#### JANUARY 18

L'Anse Co/Marquette/Munising  
**Pastor Tony Ludwig**  
Marquette SDA School

#### JANUARY 25

Iron Montain/Iron River  
**Pastor Jim Nephew**  
Escanaba/Riverside  
**Pastor Daniel Rodriguez**

Escanaba ACS & Food  
Pantry

#### FEBRUARY 1

Boyne City/Central Lake/Gaylord  
**Pastor Chris Ames**  
Boyne City ACS  
Cadillac 13th/Manton/Mesick  
**Pastor Bon Benson**

#### FEBRUARY 8

Grayling/Houghton Lake/Mio  
**Pastor Jay Clough**  
Houghton Lake ACS Center  
Grayling SDA Elementary  
Mio ACS Center  
Kalkaska/Traverse City  
**Pastor Ben Garcia**  
Kalkaska ACS Center  
Traverse City Elementary  
Traverse City ACS Food Pantry

#### FEBRUARY 15

Carp Lake/Cheboygan/  
Petoskey  
**Pastor Cody Francis**  
Carp Lake ACS  
Petoskey ACS Center  
Frankfort/Irons/Manistee  
**Pastor Mac Mills**  
Irons Food Pantry

#### FEBRUARY 22

Alpena/Onaway  
**Pastor Paul Ratsara**  
Cadillac/Lake City  
**Pastor Ariel Roldan**  
Northview SDA Christian  
School  
Cadillac ACS



# A Personal Unity

By John Gilmore,  
Member, First Flint SDA Church

I love how Jesus interacted with others. And when it comes to handling controversies, He just amazes me! He went beyond the “this versus that” thinking that we see in so many conflicts today. When spies asked Him whether or not to pay taxes, He broadened the options to include respect for both God and Caesar (Luke 20:25). Another time, they thought to pin Him down with a question regarding the resurrection. He pointed out that none of their answers fit with God’s Word (Matthew 22:23-32). And then there was the woman caught in adultery. Should she be stoned? His answer? “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7, NRSV). Then, tactfully, He encouraged the guilty framers to slink away. How often does the solution look like my view or my favorite person’s idea, instead of the option that includes love expressed in justice and mercy?

More recently, the last presidential campaign has grown one of my convictions: I need to guard my intake of public controversies. Haven’t we seen in history whole societies moved by charismatic leaders? Sure, some of them were good, such as (pick your favorite). But then, there were those whom most people would say were bad, like Adolf Hitler and Jim Jones. They, too, had amazing talent to influence people. Is it possible that I could be influenced and unconsciously pick up their kind of spirit? For “we all...by beholding...are changed” (2 Corinthians 3:18). How important then—to spend time listening

to Jesus, especially as we see His return approaching! I want to pick up His Spirit, so much so “that when obeying Him [I] shall be but carrying out [my] own impulses” (The Desire of Ages, p. 668).

In John 17, Christ prayed for unity, oneness among His disciples then and among us now. Today, we also pray for unity. But what kind of unity did Jesus pray for us to have? I see clues in repeated phrases that He used in this prayer. For example, Jesus prayed that we be kept from the evil one (John 17:15), be sanctified through the Word (John 17:17) and kept through the name of the Father (John 17:11). But perhaps the most powerful clue is that our unity should reflect the kind Jesus had with the Father (John 17:11, 21-23). The Son glorified the Father and the Father glorified the Son. And as they shared a common character, so we are called to share the same, Their character of love (John 17:26).

In his victory speech on November 7, 2020, Joe Biden also called for unity—unity among Americans, based on cooperative striving “to restore the soul of America.” Does political action have power to restore America’s soul? I think not. Only Jesus can change our hearts for the best.

Biden earlier said, “Leadership...is about being personal.” He wasn’t the first person to make that connection. Over 2,000 years ago, God got really personal with us. We call it the incarnation, “Immanuel...God with us” (Matthew 1:23). He walked the roads of Judea.

He ate the simple food of the poor. At times, He slept on the ground, and at other times He knew the need for prayer, a need that made His sleep flee. By personal experience, He knows our struggles and our pains, and more.

Jesus performed one of the most personal and uniting actions shortly before He prayed John 17. He saw His crowning sacrifice approaching. He also knew His disciples were not prepared for their great disappointment. They contended for worldly greatness, so the King of kings demonstrated the height of servanthood. He washed their feet, dusty with the dung-tainted streets of Jerusalem, with His own hands. The next day, He cleansed their hearts, still soiled by proud nationalistic teachings, with His blood. Today, He still restores souls, not just in America, but all around the world. He restores our ability to love in spite of the hatred all around us.

How will America respond to Mr. Biden’s appeal? We shall see. More important—how will God’s people respond to Christ’s prayer and His call to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6)?

Jesus calls us to be in the world but not of the world. He calls us to boldly “stand for the right though the heavens fall” (Education, p. 57). He also calls us to be personal, following His example, loving our neighbors in practical ways. If we love our fellow church members the way Christ loves us (John 13:34), could polarization continue among us? And would the world notice our unity? (John 13:35)



Pastor Wes Peppers shares the prophetic message during the abbreviated evangelistic series.

“While COVID-19 has thrown a curve in typical outreach and evangelism, it has also prompted more interest in spiritual things.”

## Evangelism During A Pandemic!

As Pastor Bob Benson followed the news, he couldn't help noticing the increase and frequency of major earthquakes; large scale hurricanes and tornadoes simultaneously hitting the United States; much of the west coast ablaze in fires; and the many hearts growing cold with increased intolerance.

The more Benson thought about it, the more he was convicted that the Three Angel's Messages of warning and mercy should be shared with a world that has reached its midnight hour.

Benson and members of his congregation at the Cadillac 13th Street church began praying for wisdom as to the best approach. They collaborated with Strong Tower Radio (STR), Vicki Griffin of Lifestyle Matters, and Elder Wes Peppers, associate Ministerial secretary for the Michigan Conference.

After thoughtful consideration, they decided to hold a public health and evangelistic series at “The Common's Farmer's Market” in downtown Cadillac. It's a neutral location in a high traffic area. And, because the site had mesh walls, Health and Human Services said they would consider this an outdoor event for maximum air exchanges, allowing more people to attend. With a fixed roof and overhead radiant heaters to keep people warm and dry, the venue was

perfect—with the exception of the noisy train that threatened to disrupt nightly presentations.

In preparation for the meetings, the church outreach team compiled an invitation list of all community interests from VBS, healthy living and cooking classes, Adventurer Club and other events. The church also put up nearly 100 yard signs and mailed flyers, not only in the Cadillac area but in Manton as well.

STR promoted the series on the air, as well as on their Facebook page and website. Because of this, a couple drove about two hours from the Grand Haven area to attend! STR staff also operated the camera equipment on site and managed on-line social media so people could register and attend virtually.

The event began with Griffin's health series on three consecutive Tuesdays: Sept. 15th, 22nd & 29th at 6:30 pm. As people started pouring in for the first message to begin, it was evident that more chairs were needed—not a bad problem to have!

Participants not only came back but brought their friends with them because they said they were learning so much. They also appreciated the give-a-way materials and healthy “snacks” (popcorn, nuts, pretzels, etc.) the church provided.

Attendees were invited to a Sabbath morning presentation with a vegetarian meal afterwards at the 13th Street church, which was well attended. During the health lectures, Peppers advertised the Bible prophecy seminar, which would run October 2-17th, with Sundays and Wednesdays off.



Vicki Griffin and Wes Peppers tag team for the outreach series in downtown Cadillac.

As the health meetings wound down and it was time for the prophecy presentations to start, Benson and Peppers contacted each attendee with a personal invitation. Many of the same people attended both the health series and the prophecy presentations.

Pepper's messages were spot on and a blessing to those who came. As participants left each night, they shared how they were being blessed with new and exciting truths, straight from the Word of God. One attendee said the presentations were very

***(Evangelism During A Pandemic!)***

informative, interesting and held their attention throughout. They did not miss a single meeting.

Not only was the series presented in person, but STR broadcast it on Facebook Live for online viewing. STR also recorded each meeting and

is working to edit them for broadcast over the radio in the future.

So far, there have been three baptisms and one Profession of Faith as a result of the meetings, but there is further follow up work being done. While COVID-19 has thrown a curve in typical outreach and evangelism, it

has also prompted more interest in spiritual things. We praise God for the opportunity to share His message of truth with our local community and the surrounding area.

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**By Robert Benson,**  
Pastor, Cadillac 13th St. SDA Church



Pictured from left: David Shinn & Elaine Sears

“While the center is full of free clothes, bedding, household goods and food, the staff are full of love for Jesus.”

## Holly ACS Making An Impact

**H**olly Adventist Community Services (ACS) is located in a lovely store front in downtown Holly. This small but bold center has captured the hearts of the community around them. On the day I visited, several locals stopped by to deliver food, clothes and support for this “light” in their neighborhood. One supporter who brought in fresh produce said, “I love this the center and the directors!”

Others who came in and needed help were given all that they needed and more!

While the center is full of free clothes, bedding, household goods and food, the staff are full of love for Jesus and want to share it with Holly! After a fire broke out in an apartment building near the center, the ACS team was able to get clothing and other necessities to the families affected by the fire.

When dams broke upstate earlier this year, they loaded a truck full of bedding and dishes to help families. Elaine, co-director of the center, said that as soon as they came and opened the truck, people came so quick that truck was empty in no time.

Dave, the other co-director, shared another story. One day he got a call asking if he could

make use of a table and chairs. He said, “Sure!” He had no idea that later that day a family would come in for food and would need that very table and chairs!

Dave asked the kids, “What kind of cereal would you like?” One of the kids said that they would just like to have a table where they could eat cereal! By the end of that day they had a table and chairs set for their breakfast the next morning. This is just an example of the outreach that is being done by the Holly ACS center. This center and the team are fully committed to the community and serving.

May God continue to bless this community and the ACS center as they work together to be the hands and feet of Jesus!

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**By Chelli Ringstaff,**  
Director, Adventist Community Services



This small but bold center has captured the hearts of the community around them.

# PASTORAL TRANSITIONS



**Pastor Carlos Sotomayor** is the new pastor of the Kentwood and Grand Rapids Maranatha Spanish churches. He was the previous assistant pastor at the Battle Creek Tabernacle Church.



**Pastor Mike Szykowski** is the new pastor of the Centreville and Kalamazoo Countryside churches. He previously ministered at the Alpena and Onaway churches.



**Pastor Cody Francis** is the new District Superintendent for the district two region. He pastors the Carp Lake, Cheboygan, and Petoskey churches. He is taking the place of Pastor Jeff Akenberger, who currently serves as chaplain for Great Lakes Adventist Academy.

## *(God's Impeccable Timing)*

beginning studies, Hughes attended the Petoskey church for the first time. “Brad was pretty persuasive,” Hughes said. Jones explained that he just indicated the importance of fellowship and church family—and she came! New Bible study contacts usually do not begin attending church so soon.

The Petoskey church warmly welcomed Hughes. “They took me in like I was family,” she said. “I’ve never been to a church quite like this one.” As soon as she walked through the doors of the church, members adopted her, befriending and mentoring her.

For the last two years, Jones and Hughes have continued studying together. They finished the *It Is Written* Bible study guides, which laid a solid foundation through studies in Daniel. Hughes completed a few Shawn Boonstra studies as well.

Hughes attended various seminars, and she wanted to be baptized and join this church family. But first she wanted

to quit smoking... and it was a struggle! By the grace of God, during the COVID-19 lockdown, she won the battle over cigarettes.

On the third Sabbath in July, Hughes was baptized into the Petoskey church.

Hughes’ story speaks of a God who is all-knowing and wise. His timing is perfect. Hughes and Jones are still studying today—instead of Daniel and Revelation, they are studying the Discipleship handbook.

Hughes is a light in her own apartment complex now. When one has received the truth, they cannot help but share it. “She’s been blessed,” Jones said, speaking of Hughes, “but it’s been a blessing to me, as well.”

Hughes’ story should be an inspiration for us all. She was just one responder to the thousands of cards mailed into the



Brad Jones and Lauri Hughes

Petoskey area. “But if you get one soul,” Francis said, “it’s always worth it.” One person is always worth it. There are people all around you, just waiting for you to share your light. Jones jokes of his “ninety-year old memory.” Despite his age, he was willing to share his light, and God blessed his efforts.

We have nothing to be afraid of. The God who reached down and touched Hughes’ life will be with you always.

**By Judy Klein,**  
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# MONTHLY CALENDAR

*Due to COVID-19, events on the schedule are subject to change.*

## JANUARY

- Dec 17-Jan 10 GLAA Home Leave
- 1 Office Closed (New Year's)
  - 15-17 CAMPUS Staff Retreat
  - 25-26 Virtual Ministerial Retreat
  - 29-31 Pathfinders Area Coordinators Retreat

## FEBRUARY

- 5-7 Adventurer District Retreat
- 5-7 Father-Son Retreat | Man Camp
- 6 PBE Area Level
- 10-16 GLAA Home Leave
- 12-15 CAMPUS Winter Retreat
- 15 Office Closed (President's Day)

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## NATURE NUGGET

### Why are all the Pine Trees Dying?

By Dr. Gordon Atkins,  
Camp Au Sable Naturalist

Why are all the pine trees dying?" It is a question I am often asked this time of year at Camp Au Sable. Good news! It's not as bad as it looks. In fact, the fall speckle of yellow along the lake and in other wetland areas of Camp is something I look forward to every November!

First, they are not pine trees. We are talking about tamarack, sometimes called larch. Like pines, the tamarack is a conifer, bearing cones which produce seeds, and needles on the branches instead of broad leaves like maples and oaks. Secondly, tamaracks are not

evergreen like the other conifer trees. The needles of tamaracks turn yellow in late fall and are shed for the winter. In the spring, each bud bursts forth a new cluster of bright green needles so botanists refer to this type of tree as "deciduous."

The Christian life is like a deciduous tree. We have to shed the old life of sin in order to obtain the new life from God. Not just once when we first accept Jesus as our Savior, but daily so that we can continually improve, not by our own power, but by the power of God.

Photo By: Joyce Tschetter

