

*Come and hear,
all ye that fear
God, and I will
declare what
he hath done for
my soul.*

Psalm 66:16

The EIGHTH MEETING

James Brauer

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A BALM FOR BITTERNESS

By James Brauer

I DIDN'T WANT to believe what I was reading. Chapter 11 . . . filing for bankruptcy. . . . How could he? He owed me \$14,000! I had my own lawyer. I had promissory notes. I was angry!

Then I remembered what a preacher had recently said: "When the Lord allows you to be placed in a difficult situation, don't focus on yourself and your loss. Focus on others and minister to the one who is hurting you. Maybe he is hurting worse."

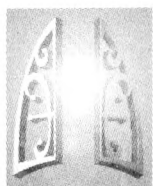
Hmmm. . . . How could he be hurting worse than I was? But I decided to try it. I bought a copy of that famous "footprints" poem, gift-wrapped it, and went to his house.

When he came to the door, he was wary. Maybe he thought I was going to hit him. Maybe other people had already tried. As I offered him the gift and said I was praying for him, I suddenly realized stewardship wasn't about money. It was all about how I managed my relationships, even with people who took things from me. After all, the only thing I can take with me to heaven is . . . other people!

There is no huge miracle in this story. The man didn't get baptized the next week. And he didn't give me back my money. But I simply learned that through giving, my anger and my bitterness disappeared.

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you. Proverbs 25:21, 22, NKJV.

James Brauer is president of the Rocky Mountain Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Denver, Colorado. He is a member of the Arvada, Colorado, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



A CORRELATION OF ONE

By Raymond O. West

I WAS ABOUT ten years old when I got my first vivid lesson on stewardship. On the way to school I spotted on the sidewalk a glasses case, with the address of the owner crudely inked on the inside lining. After school I showed my find to my mother. She suggested that the owner might give me a reward for its return. I practically ran to the address, three blocks from my home, carrying the glasses case intact. The owner, a myopic teenager, wasn't home yet, but her mother opened the door to my insistent knock and accepted the case with barely

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a word of thanks. Disappointed, I turned away. When I was halfway down the walk, she called me back. In triumph I ran back home with my reward, a dime safely tucked in my pocket.

In those days ten cents could buy a double-scoop ice-cream cone or two packs of Wrigley's double-mint gum. For a grand minute or so I had purchasing power. That is, until my reward-oriented mother reminded me of my tithe obligation. No longer could I purchase two candy bars or a frosty milkshake. My coveted silver dime had suddenly shrunk by one tenth. But wait! She wasn't finished yet. A dart pierced my heart when she suggested that maybe I could drop in my own offering this coming Sabbath. That would leave me with four copper pennies.

So it was one cent in the tithe envelope and one shiny nickel in the offering plate. Joyful stewardship was not my disposition, before, during, or following Sabbath school on that particular day. Nonetheless, it was a courageous, if lip-quivering, beginning.

A few years later, my academy sweetheart and I were newly married, we agreed that we would return to God a first and second tithe on all our income. Heaven was quick to respond.

In the fall of 1945 I was discharged from the Canadian Navy just in time for college to begin. Did we dare register for classes, possessing neither work skills nor checking accounts? Our single asset was the Canadian GI Bill of Rights—one month's tuition and a monthly cost-of-living check (\$80 Canadian) for each month served, and even more for good grades.

But now a new obstacle intruded. We had set our hearts on the study of medicine at what was then the College of Medical Evangelists, in Loma Linda, California. But the beneficent bureaucracy declared that my veteran's benefits were effective only in Canada. It would have to be an M.D. degree from the University of Toronto or Montreal's famed McGill University.

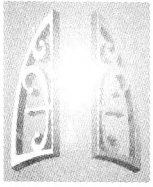
Or would Heaven intervene and give us those coveted veteran's benefits at Loma Linda University?

Perhaps one day we will know how it was that those government officials granted us six years of GI bounties at Loma Linda. But if not, it's okay, for over several decades we have enjoyed heaven's benevolences in abundance. Never have we had a serious want. We've even had some luxuries and been blessed with superb health and happiness.

Good stewardship and blessings in abundance—a correlation of one.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8, NKJV.

Raymond O. West is a retired physician and professor in Belfair, Washington. He is a member of the Belfair Seventh-day Adventist Church.



THE JOY OF LIBERAL FRUGALITY

By Evelyn Johnson

ABOUT nine years ago I resolved to return to God 100 percent of the income He entrusted directly to me. I've been blessed with a monthly Social Security check plus annual farm shares and inheritance incomes, as well as unexpected money gifts.

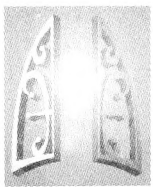
We operate our household with my husband's Social Security check. This pays for the taxes on my income, various insurances, transportation, medical expenses, clothing, food, and the other usual home expenses. God's blessings and my contentment, and even joy, with frugality enable me to return to God about 25 percent of this income also.

All of my needs (not greeds) are met by our awesome God, who multiplies my bank account as He did the widow's oil and meal in 1 Kings 17:8-16.

To God be the glory, thanks, and praise! I appreciate and thank my unselfish husband also.

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days [with peanut butter and jelly (as amended by me)]. Ecclesiastes 11:1.

Evelyn Johnson is a retired schoolteacher in Shelby, Montana. She is a member of the Shelby Seventh-day Adventist Church.



I LOVE MY JOB, BUT THE LORD COMES FIRST

By D. G. Gordon

IWORK for one of the largest car-parts manufacturing companies in North America. I wasn't a Christian when I began work there, and things seemed to be going very well. I worked a lot of overtime, sometimes six days a week, and the pay was not bad.

The company began to expand rapidly. Its reputation is based on production efficiency and quality, so they brought in new and more efficient machines. The nature of my job is multipurpose. I am a punch press operator, setup man, and material handler. My supervisors told me they wanted to train me to operate these new machines.

While this company expansion was going on, the Lord found me sinking deeper

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and deeper in sin, and He rescued me. I accepted Jesus as my Savior and purposed in my heart to follow Him all the way. This was a big change in my life. As a Sabbathkeeper, I could not work on the Sabbath anymore. This was a concern to my employers, who wanted me to continue working on Saturday. When they continued to ask me to work on Sabbath, I told them I could work any time *except* on Saturday. However, my supervisor insisted on training me to operate these new machines. This was fine with me, as long as it didn't mean I had to work on Sabbath.

A few months later, after I was trained on the new machines, my supervisor asked me to work on the afternoon shift, which would break the Lord's Sabbath. I told him I could not work that shift. He informed the general manager, who came to me and told me he would like me to work on the afternoon shift because he would like me to be in charge of these new machines. He said I would also receive a raise of \$4 per hour, which I must say was very attractive. But how could I accept that offer and disobey the Lord? With the Lord's help I was able to say no to the temptation. After all that, the Lord made a way for me so that I do not have to work on the Sabbath, and I have worked for that company for nearly 25 years. I am now on the safety committee and the fairness committee. But I have to decline any promotion that would infringe on the Lord's Sabbath. Even though the company policy says, "No solicitation," my coworkers are my best supporters in my Ingathering. I love my job, but the Lord comes first. So I just want to say, "Thank You, Lord, for always coming through for me."

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29.

D. G. Gordon is a punch press operator for a car-parts manufacturing company in Concord, Ontario. He is a member of the Perth Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in Toronto, Ontario.



ALL GREEK TO ME

By Eugene F. Durand

AFTER fourteen years of pastoring and another four of teaching language, earning the Ph.D. seemed like the logical preparation for securing a position as a religion teacher at an Adventist college. But I had a family to support and no job at the moment. Should I go back into pastoral work?

By God's grace my wife found employment in the county public health department at a better salary than I had earned as a pastor and teacher. At the same time, I was able to secure a government-backed student loan to cover expenses at the university. I devoted full time to my study.

OVER AND OVER AGAIN!

But nagging questions persisted. Was this the right thing to do? What kind of husband and father was I, letting my wife support the family completely for several years? Was it right to make my girls work to earn their academy tuition? Would I find the position I was studying for? Could I pay off the thousands of dollars in student loans? I had no one to sponsor me and no promise of a job when I graduated. In sum, was I being a good steward of my time, talents, and finances?

After two years of classwork under these circumstances, the time came to take my exam for the second language requirement. The first, Spanish, had been a breeze. But for the second language I had chosen New Testament Greek, which I had studied for two years in college but forgotten during the intervening 22 years. After a summer of diligently reviewing that ancient language on my own, the test loomed.

For three months I had read exclusively from the Gospels in my Greek Bible. But the morning of the exam I decided it might be wise to practice reading from some other New Testament book. At random my eyes fell upon Acts 17:16-34, the story of Paul preaching on Mars Hill, in Athens. After studying that passage and praying earnestly for Heaven's help, it was time to leave for the university.

Upon entering the office of the Greek professor, I was handed a Greek New Testament and asked to translate a passage. Out of the 260 chapters and 7,957 verses in the New Testament, he asked me to translate the story of Paul preaching on Mars Hill.

You can imagine the emotions that swept over me! I felt almost too stunned to do the assignment. Needless to say, when I recovered from my amazement (I could hardly refrain from telling the professor what was happening, but I thought it best not to, lest he change the assignment), I was able to complete the translation that was so fresh in my mind.

Given my uncertainty about the course I was pursuing, this experience came to me as the Lord's assurance that I was doing His will and that He would see me through. I can't tell you how it lifted my spirits!

And see me through He did. Two years before I graduated, I received an invitation to join the editorial staff of the *Adventist Review*, where I remained until retirement eighteen years later. It turned out that my previous experience and humble talents were far better suited to that position than to the teaching position toward which I had been working. Even though I had never dreamed of becoming an editor, the Lord put me where I could give the best account of my stewardship.

Oh, by the way: The Review and Herald Publishing Association paid off the entire \$6,000 of my student loan.

How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? . . . I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people. Psalm 116:12-14, NIV.

Eugene F. Durand was an assistant editor of the Adventist Review in Silver Spring, Maryland, before his retirement. He is a member of the Frederick, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



A TAX ON TRUST

By Sherian Atkins Wills

WITH two sons in an Adventist academy, my husband and I were struggling to make ends meet. Convinced of the merits of Christian education, we had sold practically everything of value to keep our sons in school. Then came tax time.

With trepidation, my husband and I filled out the tax forms. We had a small federal tax refund coming, but Virginia state taxes hadn't been withheld from our military-retirement check. We owed \$300! That might as well have been three million. We had no money in reserve.

"What shall we do?" my husband worried. "Perhaps we can borrow it from your mom."

"Not this time!" I exclaimed. My parents were always bailing us out. They were even helping with the kids' tuition. I was determined not to ask for another penny. Instead, I decided to claim God's promises.

Every morning I knelt in prayer and presented our need to God. Every night when my husband came home from work, he would ask, "Did you get the money from your Mom yet?"

"No, the Lord will provide," I would answer. But as the April 15th deadline approached, even I began to worry. Then, feeling ashamed, I'd push my worries aside and renew my fervent prayer.

D-day arrived. The moment I opened my eyes in the morning, my husband's barrage began. "You have to get that money from your Mom today and mail in that check," he said. In fact, he said, he had already discussed the matter with her.

I might as well admit it: God has let me down, I thought. As I drove to my parents' house I began to cry, God, I just don't understand! I sobbed. We're trying to do everything You ask. We return tithe and give offerings. We sacrifice to give our kids a Christian education, and my parents have to pay our bills. It isn't right!

Mom gave me cash, so I deposited it in the bank, wrote out a check, and stuffed it into the tax envelope. Still I couldn't bring myself to mail it. Instead, I felt impressed to pay our taxes in person at the courthouse. As I handed the clerk the forms, she said, "Just let me check your figures."

In a moment she was back with a smile. "Well, it appears as if somebody made a mistake. You don't owe \$300. You'll get a refund."

I was suddenly speechless. A refund? That was impossible, for we had gone

O V E R A N D O V E R A G A I N !

over those figures a dozen times! She took the forms, signed her name to them, and sent them off. I praised God all the way back to return my parents' money.

As it turned out, our figures actually had been correct; we did owe that money. Because the clerk at the courthouse had made the mistake, no penalty was added. By the time we received a payment notice, the funds were available, and we didn't have to borrow anything.

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19.

Sherian Atkins Wills is a free-lance writer living in Bedford, Virginia. She is a member of the North Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church in Roanoke, Virginia.



AFFIRMATION AT A RUMMAGE SALE

By Mary Ann Conrad

WE WERE hard-pressed for funds again. Our son's tenth birthday was in two days, and I had hoped to get him a good, heavy sleeping bag. I knew that the next few years would bring many opportunities for Steve to go on camping trips. I also knew that sleeping in a tent in New England weather requires warmth. But we didn't have the extra cash to go out and purchase something new. We just couldn't afford it.

My husband Bruce and I had come under the conviction that once we started our family, I needed to be at home during the children's formative years. As much as we wanted this, we both knew it would be an act of faith, because up until now we had depended on my income as a nurse for home expenses. Bruce would have to take on this load plus that of building his business.

I didn't mind learning to scrimp and save to stretch our resources if it meant that I could be with the children. So I soon learned where the best thrift shops and rummage sales were held and how to judge the quality of an item quickly. I purchased much of our clothing and home accessories secondhand. But still I found it very hard to go to Bruce with my hand out asking for money each time we needed something extra.

Bruce is a self-employed auto repairman, and at that time our income was anything but steady. Some weeks we had enough money to meet our needs, but other weeks were difficult. We often marveled at how an outstanding payment would come in just when we needed it. Or at just the right moment Bruce would be able to sell a car or other piece of equipment he had bought to fix up. In fact,

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we would often wonder out loud how the Lord would help us meet our obligations “this time.”

I had been watching for sales on camping equipment and scanned the classified ads regularly for a month, but I didn’t see any sleeping bags for sale.

There was to be a rummage sale in a neighboring village the next day. I had never seen a sleeping bag at a sale like this before, but I prayed that God would have one there for Steve. Otherwise, I knew I’d have to go to the discount stores for a cheap sleeping bag that wouldn’t hold up to the use it would get. And I would have to draw from the grocery money to buy it. It was against my better judgment to throw money away on something that wouldn’t last, but time was an issue.

I was at the sale when the doors opened. Scanning the room, I approached a display area for the outdoor items. I saw the usual old lawn mowers and bikes, some sleds, and various sizes of skates in various states of repair. I sighed and kept looking: a tennis racket and exercise equipment, odds and ends of gardening supplies, and some tools. And there on the corner of the stage was what looked like some lightweight canvas rolled up and tied.

Investigating further I found exactly what I had hoped for, an extra-thick sleeping bag. Wow! And it was marked \$3. I looked it over and found it was in great shape and much, much nicer than what I had seen in the discount stores. I didn’t hesitate to pay the price as marked, and with tears in my eyes I drove home rejoicing in a heavenly Father who not only honors us for our home and family commitments, but who also cares about a little boy’s birthday gift.

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him! Matthew 7:11, NIV.

Mary Ann Conrad is a homemaker and registered nurse in West Hartford, Vermont. She is a member of the West Lebanon, New Hampshire Seventh-day Adventist Church.



HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW

By Sandra A. Smith

THE sparrow landed on the ledge just outside my office window. The view was perfect as I watched this little ledge-dweller go about its business of the day. I was reminded of God’s care for the “fowls of the air” and my own experience as a “sparrow.”

Some time ago I was between jobs. With a rewarding job of almost seven years behind me and a new, exciting one on the horizon, I eagerly waited to start

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my new career. There was one hitch; I would not be able to start right away. Circumstances beyond my control did not allow me to start in this new position for four months.

Finances diminished as the bills grew. More so, worrying (a slow killer of the human spirit) festered and grew in my soul. Doubt was slowly replacing the faith that I was given to trust that God would take care of my needs. I constantly was discouraged and depressed. I didn't sleep well.

As I watched the little bird and reflected on my "dark" hour, I realized these trying times made up one of the greatest experiences in my life. I was the steward of faith the size of a mustard seed. God had entrusted to me a measure of faith that I was to develop. No matter what I was going through, God still expected me to trust Him and to carry out the duties that He had called me to do.

One of the responsibilities that I had was that of co-director of the hospitality ministry at my church. This job involved buying supplies to be used by all of the teams that offered the weekly lunch. It also involved buying food to contribute to the once-a-month churchwide potluck. With the start date for my new job some time yet in the future and with limited finances, I had to decide what to do. I could give up the church position or trust and obey. I decided on the latter.

Although worried at times about how much money I had left in the bank, I used my scarce resources to buy what was needed. I was faithful in carrying out well the duties that the Lord had asked me to do. I wanted to give Him my very best, even when it came down to simple things like having enough utensils and food for our church family and guests.

The wonderful thing about trusting in God was the assurance that He would take care of me. My faith, although tiny, was the only thing that I had to cling to. Even though I wavered at times, I did not give in to the temptation of letting go of His caring hand. During my time of financial crisis I never went hungry or homeless. In my darkest hours God constantly reminded me through family and friends that He loved and cared about my well-being and survival.

Four months later I was blessed to start my new job, and shortly thereafter I happily deposited my first paycheck in the bank. Throughout this trying experience I realized that God's eye *is* "on the sparrow" and that He *is* faithful.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. . . . Do not fear therefore; you are more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31, NKJV.

Sandra A. Smith is assistant professor of social work at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts. She is a member of the Boston Temple Seventh-day Adventist Church in Boston, Massachusetts.



RIGHT ON TIME

By Roscoe J. Howard III

IT WAS OUR first month of marriage, and we were filled with wide-eyed zeal and love for the church. I was not yet employed, and my wife was also looking for a job. In two weeks I had an interview with the conference president—perhaps to be hired as a ministerial intern. We were living off our wedding-present money.

That money was running out, and we still had a week and three days until the interview. In fact, all the money we had left was our tithe and offerings. On Friday afternoon, with our food supply almost exhausted and our rent due the day after the interview, I found it very tempting to use that tithe money for more tangible needs. I tried to reason with my wife that God would understand and that He didn't want us to starve or be street people. And who knew if we would even get a job? We could pay back the tithe when we got hired.

In her quiet and unassuming way, she looked at me and said, "We must trust God and return to Him what is His." I remembered how I had spent my tithe when I was in college and how I had regretted it. Somehow I never got around to paying it back because another emergency would always seem to pop up.

Sabbath morning I finally resolved that I didn't want to repeat the mistakes of the past. But I watched with longing eyes as our tithe envelope traveled to the front of the church, to be sung and prayed over, and then consigned to the church treasurer's office.

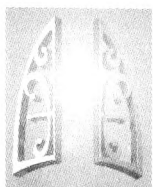
On the way home from church I couldn't stop worrying about what we would do that week without money, food, or a job.

While entering our little apartment, I noticed a large brown envelope stuffed into our mailbox. We assumed it was some belated wedding pictures. We opened the envelope and poured the contents onto the bed. A heap of dead presidents' pictures stared up at us. My wife's mother had sent us 25 belated wedding cards filled with cash.

Hallelujah! We paid our rent, bought food, returned our tithe and a thank offering, and got hired two weeks later.

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. Isaiah 65:24.

Roscoe J. Howard III is executive secretary of the Mid-America Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Lincoln, Nebraska. He is a member of the Allon Chapel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska.



THE PROMISE DID NOT SAY “MAYBE”

By Robert L. Davidson

SEVEN years and three children after Lenna Lee and I were married, our church in Tulsa decided it was time to build a new church. It is well known that young couples seldom have extra funds lying around for philanthropic projects. We were no exception. Our family budget was very tight. However, we wanted to do our part to contribute to the new building.

After much prayer we made a covenant with God and made a three-year pledge to help fund the building. We claimed the promise in Philipians 4:19 that God would supply all our needs. We noted that the promise did not say “maybe.” In our reasoning we planned to raise the money through my work, because we were committed that Lenna Lee, a nurse, should be home with the children. However, we were prepared, if necessary, for Lenna Lee to go back to her nursing work just long enough to pay our pledge. Yet we trusted that God would honor our commitment to our children just as we were determined to honor our pledge to the church.

Not long after this my brother-in-law suggested that I apply for work at Douglas Aircraft Company. I was not sure I wanted to be employed by Douglas. They were highly dependent on government contracts, which meant that work was here today and gone tomorrow.

After worship one evening I told Lenna Lee about Douglas, and we decided that maybe this was God’s plan to meet our pledge. I applied. In filling out the form, I was to sign a statement saying that I would work any day or hour assigned. I could not sign it and honor God’s Sabbath. I left it blank.

The next day I completed the required physical examination and turned in the application form to work at Douglas. The man in charge told me that I needed to sign the statement I had left blank. When I told him I couldn’t because of God’s Sabbath, he became angry. After much discussion, I told him I was sorry I had wasted his time and that he had wasted my time. Suddenly his attitude changed, and he asked me to sit in the waiting room.

A short time later I was called in and asked to approve my application form. Stapled over the statement about working any day was another typed statement that read, “Due to religious convictions, this employee will not be required to work from Friday sundown until Saturday sundown.” I signed on to work at Douglas. The increase in salary would be just enough to keep up with our church pledge and return the extra tithe.

I had worked only a few months when Douglas lost a major contract and

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began laying off workers. There were 23 in my department of math and engineering, and I was “low man.” Every time the pink slips arrived, I expected to be laid off; but each time someone would either quit or move to another department. I continued to work, even with some overtime, for more than three years. When my pink slip finally came, only two of us were left—my boss and myself. By that time we had finished paying our church pledge, I had finished my teaching degree, and was I able to start teaching at Tulsa Junior Academy.

Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. Proverbs 3:9, 10.

Robert L. Davidson is a retired math and science teacher in Claremore, Oklahoma. He is a member of the Claremore Seventh-day Adventist Church.

*You have a stewardship testimony you need to share
and we need to read. See page 224 for details.*