

The THIRD MEETING

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

Psalm 66:16

Jack Stout

Valerie Hamel Morikone

Nancy Arellano

Dennis T. Ranalla

Matt Fivash

Charlotte Groff

Ann Morrow

Stanley S. and Bennie Beth Will

Diane Gordon

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SEVEN MONTHS OF MIRACLES

By Jack Stout

I N OCTOBER 1997 our church members decided we wanted a new church building. A man came to show us how to raise the money. He suggested that we go home and pray about how much we could commit toward the building fund.

When I got home, I went into my bedroom and prayed. I felt impressed to commit \$30,000. I reasoned with the Lord that we couldn't come up with that much money, even though it was to be paid over three years. I prayed again and still felt impressed to commit the same amount. I figured God knew something that I didn't.

We didn't have many bills. Our simple house was paid for. We had a van payment of about \$500 a month and the kids' tuition of about \$700 a month. Our business was going okay—not really well, but not too badly.

In December a realtor friend of mine called and asked if we were still searching for a house farther out in the country. I told him that we had been looking earlier in the year, but due to some new commitments, I wasn't thinking of buying any longer. He said it wasn't going to cost anything to look. He said the owners of a certain house had to move because they couldn't afford to keep it.

The next day my wife and I drove by the house. It was just what we had been hoping for: a two-story house, only a year-and-a-half old, situated nicely in the middle of 30 acres. I told my wife that if the Lord wanted us to have it, He'd work out the details. I made my offer and then a couple of counteroffers, but the owners had too much money in it and declined. So we forgot about it for a month or so. Then we started thinking about that house again, and I made another offer. This time it was accepted. Our bank approved the loan, and we moved in about the first of May.

Before long I began to have some major worries. There was a reason. No sooner had we bought the house than our business took a big dive. I began having thoughts that we might lose the house if we couldn't make the payments of \$1,037 a month.

In July our cash flow was so low that I told my wife I was going to stop making weekly payments on our church commitment until our income improved. About a month later I thought, *This is crazy. God should be my priority.*

I started making weekly payments again for the new church, not knowing where the next payment was going to come from. I also started praying that God would help me get out of debt. Almost immediately our business increased, reaching its highest levels ever.

By October we paid off our van, which was about \$13,000. Praise the Lord!

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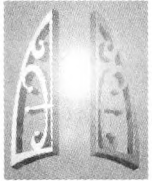
We paid our children's tuition without any difficulty. Praise the Lord! In November we paid off our building commitment two years early. Praise the Lord again! In February, nine months after moving, we paid off our new house more than nine years ahead of the mortgage schedule. Another praise the Lord! I never would have believed it. God taught me three important things during this time:

1. You can't outgive the Lord.
2. The Lord can do mighty things in a very short time.
3. You must have faith to step out and honor your commitments to God.

Now, I know that the Lord doesn't always choose to do things this way. But this is my story. I hope and pray that by His grace my faith in Him would be just as great no matter how He led. To God be the glory!

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Psalm 34:8.

Jack Stout owns a satellite television business in Muskogee, Oklahoma. He is a member of the Muskogee Seventh-day Adventist Church.



FRIENDSHIP OVER RICE AND BEANS

By Valerie Hamel Morikone

IT SEEMED like the beginning of an ordinary Sabbath day. We drove the 50 minutes to our small church to arrive early. My husband dropped me off and, as usual, continued on to a church member's house to see if anyone needed a ride.

Alone at the church, I busied myself with various tasks, turned on 3ABN, and was folding the morning's bulletins. I heard the front door open and shut. Since I hadn't heard or seen a car drive past the church windows, I nervously walked to the foyer to see if anyone might be there.

A man wearing a black cowboy hat and a white shirt with blue jeans and cowboy boots stood there.

"May I help you?" I asked cautiously.

"I've come to attend church," he said.

During the service I thought about this visitor, whose name was Howard. Did he need a place to go to for dinner? Would anyone invite him? Maybe we should invite him, but we live so far from the church! Besides, I argued with myself, I don't have anything special prepared to serve to company.

When the service was over, my conscience was a bit relieved to realize that Howard had left. But my husband mentioned that we should have asked him

over for dinner. We soon left for home, but at a nearby intersection my husband suddenly asked, "Isn't that the visitor?" He pointed to a vehicle crossing in front of us. Making our turn, we followed and decided it was Howard.

Again my husband mentioned inviting him over for dinner. My thoughts screamed "No," but my heart told me that the Lord was giving me another chance. I quickly said yes. We caught up with Howard, driving alongside his car. My husband began making motions from a pretend plate up to his mouth as if eating, and then pointing to ourselves. Howard began nodding, so we pulled in front for him to follow us home. His car began having trouble, so he parked beside the road and got into the car with us.

Arriving home, I nervously began laying out what I had planned for our simple dinner. Brown rice, black beans, some fresh and cooked vegetables, and home-baked bread. It was nothing special.

Howard gave himself generous helpings and said that his favorite food was beans and rice. What I had been afraid to serve to company was just what this man enjoyed eating. God was wanting me to share even the ordinary, simple things with others.

On the drive back to get his car, Howard told my husband that he had become acquainted with Adventists when he became friends with a man who was a church member. The Adventist friend moved away, so Howard made a trip to visit him in another state. Through this friendship he made the decision to join the church. But when he returned home and attended the local Adventist church, he didn't find the friendship that he craved, so he quit going. He was in our state visiting relatives and decided to attend our church this particular Sabbath.

Was I ever glad, then, that we had extended the hand of hospitality to this stranger, regardless of whether I felt prepared to entertain!

And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? Exodus 4:2.

Valerie Hamel Morikone is a homemaker in Williamson, West Virginia. She is a member of the Williamson Seventh-day Adventist Church.



A MOTHER'S LESSON

By Nancy Arellano

NO WAY!" I told my husband. We had recently been baptized, and he had just told me that we needed to add tithing to our already-overloaded budget. As a child, he had been taught Christian principles, including the importance of stewardship, by his ever-faithful mother. To please him—and the Lord—I tried for the next six months to return tithe and offerings—if I had

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money left over from our bills. Our financial situation seemed to get worse.

In the meantime an older couple in our church shared their story with us. During the Depression they were forced to make a choice between returning tithe or buying coal to heat their home. Stepping out in faith, they chose to return the Lord's tithe.

Very shortly after their decision a coal train derailed near their home, and the railroad company offered the coal free to anyone who wanted to clean it up. That was the kind of story the Holy Spirit knew would help my hesitant heart. I decided to truly put God first. We would return tithe and offerings first and then pay bills with what was left.

Slowly, over many months, I came to realize that while we didn't have more money, we didn't seem to have less either. Not only that, but our old appliances kept going and going. Our rusty cars kept running without repairs, and our weekly allowances seemed to last.

Several years later, when my husband quit a good-paying job to start his own business, we decided to apply tithing principles to our new company by setting aside a certain percentage of our profits for charitable work. Eventually, through God's blessing, we were able to start a small not-for-profit corporation (funded by our new business) to help young people with educational scholarships as well as to assist low-income families with specific needs.

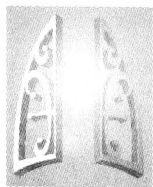
There were times when our company began that it seemed we couldn't afford to pay our own salaries. But each time we would get a "miracle" sale that would be just enough to keep us going. Fifteen years later we've grown from three employees (my husband, daughter, and I) working out of our home, to more than 140 employees working all across the United States and in several foreign countries.

God has been good to us! He's chosen to let us prosper a little at a time as we've gradually learned to be better stewards. We've come to realize that everything we have is from God and that He cares about all aspects of our lives.

God is in control—just as a mother taught her son many years ago.

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. 2 Samuel 22:31, NKJV.

Nancy Arellano is a homemaker in Chesterfield, Indiana. She is a member of the Anderson, Indiana, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



THREE TIMES FIRED

By Dennis T. Ranalla

WHEN I was 30 years old, I again gave my heart to Jesus and was rebaptized into the church. I truly wanted to be a partner with God, so careful stewardship of all of God's blessings became very important to me.

About this time God opened up a job for me at a large hospital. When I accepted the job, I made it very clear to my employers that I did not do scheduled cases on Sabbath. They said that was fine. After I had worked for about a month, my supervisor asked me to do some scheduled cases on Sabbath. I said I couldn't do that and reminded him of the agreement.

He asked me to come to his office. We sat down, and he told me a story about a rabbi who disappeared every Sabbath day. No one knew where he went. This happened Sabbath after Sabbath, so one day someone decided to follow him. The rabbi went into the woods where an old woman lived by herself. The rabbi changed into work clothes and cut and stacked wood all day long. At the end of the day he changed his clothes and went his way.

My supervisor asked me what I thought about the rabbi's doing good on the Sabbath day. I told him that was between him and God. He said I would be doing good by working on the Sabbath. I said I felt uncomfortable with that.

"Okay," he said. "You're fired."

The next morning I was called at 6:30 and asked to come to work. At 2:30 in the afternoon I was told, "You're still fired, but come to work tomorrow." I worked that day, and at the end of the day I was told not to come anymore. The next morning I was called at 7:00 and asked to come to work, so I worked that day, and at the end of the day I was told, "You're really fired." The following morning at 6:30 I was again called and asked to come to work.

That afternoon I was invited to be a guest in my supervisor's office. This time he told me he had worked out the schedule so that I wouldn't have to do scheduled cases on Sabbath. I would just have to take call and do emergencies. And I was no longer fired.

I worked at that hospital eight years, and did only emergencies on Sabbath. Our heavenly Father gives and takes positions. That was 22 years ago, and He is still faithful in providing me with work.

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. Psalm 37:25.

Dennis T. Ranalla is an anesthetist in Dallas, Oregon. He is a member of the Inchelium, Washington, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



REAL NEEDS, GOD'S WORDS

By Matt Fivash

HHEAD ELDER! *How do I get myself into these things?*

It started innocently. I had opened my mouth with a few ideas about how to care for our little church. Then the pastor asked if I'd help as an elder. I agreed, but only if the need was real, and I didn't think there was any real need for my services.

And becoming head elder certainly wasn't on my agenda, not after my mini-stroke. It's been difficult learning to speak again. The words still come slowly. Occasionally the right word waits, it seems, for seconds before my brain permits me to say it. When the words come, they seem to be voiced before I can be certain they are the right ones. Many times I pray that my words make sense to those listening.

In light of this I wondered how I could really help in any meaningful way. But since then I realize I have served our little church as a cook, a speaker, an accountant, a counselor, a musician, and a lot of other things. But I wonder if anyone has found the Christian walk better, or easier, or been drawn closer to God during my watch? Have I been a good steward in God's house?

As a mathematician who sees the world and the Bible from different perspectives, I worry that I've just muddied the waters, that somehow Jesus and His love have been missed. Many times in the small hours of the morning I find I'm thinking about my little church. Did I bungle an opportunity? Did I say the wrong thing? Have I have driven someone away?

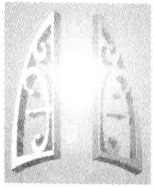
I am thankful that God has ways to let me know how I'm doing. Although I can't quite recall the first time a certain couple stopped by our church for a sermon, they've become members. One Sabbath my wife and I asked them to our home for Sabbath dinner. (Isn't this part of the first elder's job?) After lunch I listened to their testimony with numbed surprise. They told of their search for a church home and how those sermons of mine seemed to draw them to our church.

I had to recheck my notes. Did I really speak those words?

I pray that God will give me the courage and the joy to speak and work for Him in whatever way He asks.

Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say. Exodus 4:12, NKJV.

Matt Fivash is a statistical researcher for the National Cancer Institute in Frederick, Maryland. He is a member of the Catoctin View Seventh-day Adventist Church in Thurmont, Maryland.



GOD'S ECONOMICS

By Charlotte Groff

YOU CAN'T have more money now than you had last year!" snorted my uncle. "I was a sales manager for 30 years, and I know you can't make less money, give more to the church, and still have more left over—it's just impossible!"

Teaching jobs were scarce that year. The only one available paid \$300 less in annual salary than my previous position and involved added transportation costs. With many misgivings, I signed the contract and looked for ways to economize. I had always returned my tithe, but offerings consisted of "wallet-potluck" on Sabbath mornings. Faced with less income, I decided to return a double tithe using the second one for budgeted offerings.

A few weeks into the program, I noticed that something was different. Previously, with the larger salary, I had never been able to save money. Now my bank account grew steadily.

When I mentioned this increase to my unchurched uncle and showed him my bank book, he shook his head in disbelief. "I just don't understand it," he murmured. "Economically it can't happen!" Though a career businessman who understood dollars and cents, he didn't understand that God's economics defy common sense.

During that year, I never missed the cut in salary. As a bonus, the job that looked rather unpromising at first developed into a fine educational position which has lasted more than four decades.

Through the years the tithe has grown, too. In the beginning, it was returned on "take-home pay" only; later, a first tithe was returned on gross income and a second tithe on "take-home pay." Later still, both tithes were returned on gross income. Finally, it has grown to much more than double tithe.

I truthfully can say I have never missed a penny of that money. Returning it is no credit to me. God has done a miracle by stretching the remaining funds far more than I could ever ask or think.

Moses' promises to Israel are still being fulfilled to us today.

The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. Deuteronomy 28:12.

Charlotte Groff is a reading specialist for Coloma, Michigan, Community Schools. She is a member of Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan.



WILLING SPIRIT, EMPTY TANK, FAITHFUL GOD

By Ann Morrow

THE evangelistic series begins in Marion next week. Would you be willing to sing?" An anxious-to-serve newlywed, I impulsively agreed, forgetting that my agreement also committed my new husband and our old blue Ford.

So for the next six weeks we traveled 60 round-trip miles six days a week on the tiny budget of two university students. We loved the Lord and expected Him to provide whatever we needed to fulfill this commitment.

The first three weeks flew past uneventfully, but by the fourth week we were down to \$1.40 between us. Sunday as we prepared to go to the meeting, the gas gauge pointed toward "E."

Every time the car sputtered and stopped, I tightened my eyelids and silently prayed harder. Pushed by feelings of anxiety and guilt, I placed a hand on Lester's arm. "Honey, maybe we should phone and tell them we can't get there tonight—God knows we tried."

"Ann, why don't we give it one more try, before phoning?" He took my hands into his large ones and said a brief prayer.

"Please, Father, help us."

Thirty minutes later we rolled to a stop in front of the Marion Theater. The words "End-Time Prophecies" spelled out in lights illuminated the darkness. We made it on time, but we still needed to get home.

"Honey, I don't know how He'll do it." Lester locked the car door and took my arm.

"But God does," I said. We laughed and went inside.

The meeting went by quickly. A number of people came forward for Bible study and baptism. As we left the theater, that old foe anxiety made another attack. This time I ignored him. The car started up with a purr, and I settled back, waiting on the Lord.

Less than five minutes later Lester pulled into a gas station and told the attendant, "Fill-it-up." At my surprised expression he laughed.

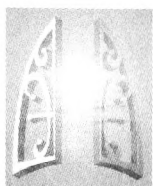
"God came through again. Just before you got up to sing for the first time, Ross our church brother and friend, slipped this into my hand and said, 'God told me you might need this.'"

Lester pulled from his coat pocket an envelope containing five ten-dollar bills.

You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the

five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Matthew 16:8-10, NIV.

Ann Morrow is a teacher and freelance writer in Columbus, Ohio. She is a member of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church in Columbus.



A WEEK'S PAY AND A HOUSE OF FURNITURE

By Stanley S. and Bennie Beth Will

WE WERE married in June 1944, and I began almost immediately pastoring the Charleston, South Carolina, Adventist Church. Pastoral pay was \$27 a week, and Bennie Beth wasn't getting paid for her full-time work as a pastor's wife.

When the annual Week of Sacrifice arrived that fall, we wrestled with the suggestion that each family give a week of salary to this offering. We had no reserve to speak of except a \$100 gift that Bennie Beth's parents had given us as a wedding present, another \$100 given us by the Charleston Church, and a very small amount in the bank that we had been able to save. We had only a few pieces of furniture: an old icebox, a bed, a table and a few chairs, a desk and some books.

Before the Week of Sacrifice offering we discussed our gift and what it would mean to us. Our tithe for the month would be \$12; the sacrifice offering came to an additional \$27. With Sabbath school-church expense offerings added, the total came to \$60. We would be left with about \$40 to pay the rent, food, gasoline, and utilities for the rest of the month. We wondered whether we could do it.

But we made up our minds and wrote a check for \$60, turning it in on the Week of Sacrifice Sabbath. We had decided to trust God and His promises.

The next Monday Stan walked to the grocery store to buy a loaf of bread. While there he overheard a conversation between a serviceman's wife and the clerk.

"Do you know anyone who might buy some furniture?" she asked him. "We have to move."

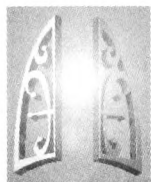
Stan spoke with the woman, asked about the furniture and the approximate asking price, and received the street address. That morning we drove to her home. She had furniture for three bedrooms, a living room (including a piano), and kitchen appliances. We bought all of the furniture for \$300. We kept what we needed (about \$100) and sold the rest.

God honored the faith of a young couple in ministry, and He made arrangements for some much-needed furniture. That experience confirmed our belief in the promises of God. It has helped us through 52 years to return a full, honest tithe and to be generous in giving.

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A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.
Proverbs 11:25, NIV.

Stanley S. and Bennie Beth Will are retired in Naples, North Carolina. They are members of the Arden, North Carolina, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



KEEPING MY PROMISE

By Diane Gordon

I HADN'T bought groceries for some time. Now the cupboards were almost bare, and I knew I had to find some money somewhere to buy a few essentials. In 1985, things on our Alberta farm were very tight. We managed to pay our bills, but it wasn't easy. I planted a big garden, did a lot of mending and sewing, and always checked the secondhand stores before buying new clothes. Despite my best efforts, things seemed to be getting worse and worse.

A few years earlier I had renewed my commitment to the Lord after leaving the church for nearly fifteen years. My non-Adventist husband did not understand my new lifestyle and values. When I refused to help in extra farm chores on the Sabbath, he would shrug his shoulders and say he hoped that this was a passing fad.

Tithing was a problem. To avoid conflict, I had resolved to give to the church 100 percent of my monthly government family allowance check, as this was my money to spend as I wished. But in this crisis, when I found the latest family allowance check in the bundle of mail, I didn't know what to do. Yes, I had promised God to return all of this check to the church, but if I did, I wouldn't have money to buy groceries. And there was no promise of other money in the immediate future, either.

I struggled all morning unable to make a decision. Finally, at noon I endorsed the check and sealed it in a tithe envelope for offering on Sabbath morning. I would keep my promise to God regardless of our needs. I then took my three children in the car and drove to town. I had arranged for a small, personal accounting job to work on for the next few weeks. This would give me some money in a month or so.

When I picked up the set of books, the lady insisted that she prepay me for the job! Never before or in the years since have I been paid in advance for an accounting job. But this time, when I really needed the money, God honored my commitment to Him and provided me with grocery money in a way I never would have guessed.

For with God nothing shall be impossible. Luke 1:37.

Diane Gordon is a bookkeeper in Killam, Alberta. She is a member of the Sedgewick, Alberta, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



LAST DOOR, FIRST CONTACT

By Thomas J. Mostert, Jr.

IT WAS a typical hot, humid, summer Sabbath afternoon in Florida—a very good day to stay inside and keep cool. But during the church service that morning a leader had asked for volunteers to distribute Bible-course enrollment cards to an assigned territory that afternoon. My teenage heart had been touched with a helpful spirit, and I raised my hand. But now my interest in things evangelistic had wilted with the rising temperature. I regretted my decision, but I kept my promise and joined the group for a miserably hot afternoon of missionary work.

We were instructed to ring the doorbell of every house in our assigned area and try to talk to as many people as possible. If no one answered the bell, we were to leave the enrollment card in the door. In clear and ominous tones we were told, “Whatever you do, don’t skip a house, because you never know who might be waiting for your visit.”

The organizers dropped me off by myself to cover a six-block territory. By the sixth block I was a very hot and tired teenager, dying for a cool drink. I had dutifully contacted every house except this last one—a garage apartment at the end of a long, coarse-gravel driveway. It didn’t look as if anyone was home. The curtains were drawn, and there was no sign of anyone in the yard.

“I’ll just skip it,” I said to myself. “It’s not worth the trouble. The leaders are probably waiting to pick me up anyway. I shouldn’t keep them waiting. But—what if someone is in that house waiting for what I have to offer?”

Wearily I trudged up the long driveway and up the steep stairs. I knocked timidly on the door, hoping no one would answer. As I turned to leave, the door opened.

Three months later, at a baptism, the congregation heard the story of a woman who had been praying for God to send her someone who could help turn her life around. I stood proudly to acknowledge that I had made the first contact.

“Well done, my good servant!” his master replied, “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.” Luke 19:17, NIV.

Thomas J. Mostert, Jr. is president of the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Westlake Village, California. He is a member of the Thousand Oaks, California, Seventh-day Adventist Church.