

WISDOM @ BRANCHES

Our Life Source Connection—John 15:4-5

## Table of Contents

Pastoral Perspective	2
Adventist Health	3
Inspiration	4
Parent Connect	4
Parent Connect (end)	5
Recipes	6
Church Board News	7
Stewardship Update	7
Bible Study	8
Bible Study (cont.)	9
Anniversaries & Birthdays	10
Bible Study (end)	10
Answered Prayer	11

**Early Church Inspiration—  
Priesthood of all believers,  
Spirit-filled, gifted and led,  
Spirit-sharing His word to all the world!**

By Jose Alfonso Sierra, courtesy Unsplash

## Pastoral Perspective

### “What Will You Give to Him?”

By Pastor Mercado

As a child I grew up Catholic; and for the most part I considered myself a good Catholic. In fact, I was one of those Catholics that would defend the church with my teeth, so to speak.

The week before Easter is called “Holy Week.” This is an incredibly special week for Catholics when one is called to make special sacrifices for God. I remember that when I was growing up, Good Friday was a solemn day, a day where businesses were closed and all the programming on TV was of a religious nature, at least in Puerto Rico.

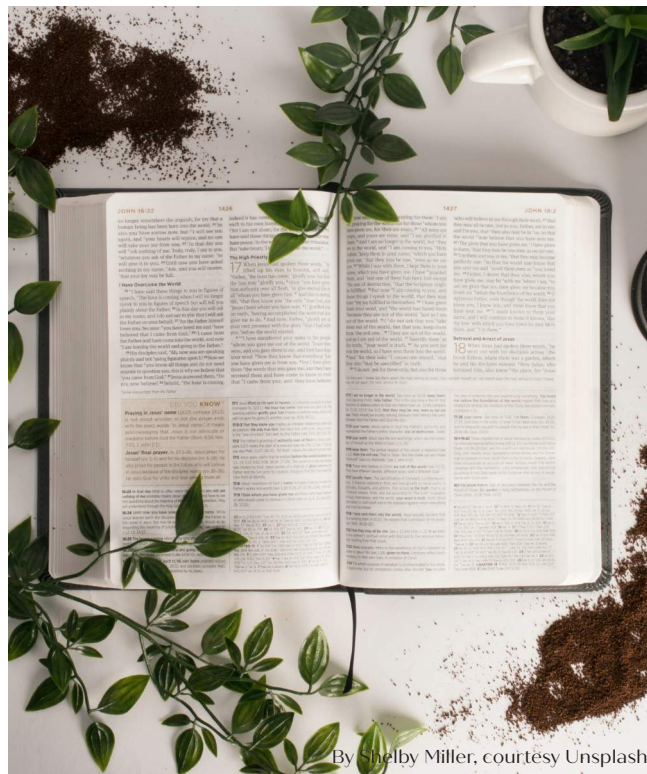
I also remember the fervor of the Catholic youth. We would get up very early on Good Friday so that we could make the pilgrimage to the place called “Mount Calvary,” a touristic place where faithful Catholics would go to commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross.

We would walk there; a pilgrimage that took about four hours each way. I remember that at the end of the day I was exhausted, but in my mind, it was well worth it to sacrifice for Jesus because He had sacrificed for me. Sacrificing for Jesus is deep in Catholic theology, especially during the season of lent.

Maybe you say, “I am glad I am not Catholic.” If so, I would agree with you. I am happy to be a Seventh-day Adventist because I believe it is God’s remnant movement, and that the present truth it has been entrusted with, will help humanity live closer to Jesus and prepare them to meet Him when He returns.

Yet, I believe our Catholic friends have it right, not necessarily with the need to sacrifice for Jesus, but with giving Him our best

The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgres-



By Shelby Miller, courtesy Unsplash

sions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5).

God gave the best that He had to save us, He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). God does not require sacrifices because the greatest sacrifice was performed by Him. Furthermore, there is nothing we can do to earn salvation, for it is a gift of grace by faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9).

However, should not we give our best to Him? Of course, but He only requires your heart. He wants a complete surrender, to be first in your life (Matt. 6:33). As you meditate on Jesus’ sacrifice, what will you give to Him?

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## Adventist Health

### “Food of the Month—Pumpkin”

Are you a pumpkin fan? There are SO MANY reasons to add pumpkin (winter squash) to your diet – it’s loaded with vitamins, minerals, and plant compounds that are good for you such as carotenoids. Pumpkin has been shown to have up to about 12 varieties of these power house carotenoids. Plus, it’s low in calories and tastes great.



By Ben Ashby, courtesy Unsplash

Here are just a few of pumpkin’s benefits.

- It’s good for your vision;
  - Immune health;
  - It may even help reduce your risk of cancer;
  - Pumpkin also protects your heart, lungs & kidneys;
  - It helps battle high blood pressure and it’s good for your skin.
- Sorry, these benefits don’t extend to sugar-rich pumpkin lattes, or pies.
- Canned pumpkin purée, how-ever, can be a great way to get your pumpkin. Add it to your oatmeal, chili, smoothies, casseroles, and you can even make delicious pumpkin pancakes. Just make sure you don’t pick up a can of pumpkin pie filling instead.
- Check out these references to get even more information: [www.webmd.com/diet/ss/slideshow-health-benefits-pumpkin](http://www.webmd.com/diet/ss/slideshow-health-benefits-pumpkin).
  - <http://222.whfoods.com/genpage>.
- Here’s an extra recipe for this month:

By Dr. Lynette Aluoch

### Spicy Pumpkin Hummus (serves 6)

This hummus recipe makes a great dip, snack, or it can be used as a surprisingly yummy condiment on top of burgers or whatever else comes to mind.

#### Ingredients

- 1 cup (240 grams) canned pumpkin purée.
- 1 can (15 oz.) of cannellini beans, rinsed & drained.
- 2 Tbsp. Tahini
- Juice of 1/2 of a large lemon
- 1 Tbsp. Extra-Virgin Olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tsp. Cumin
- 1 ½ tsp. Nutritional yeast flakes
- 1-2 dashes of hot sauce or Sriracha (to taste)
- ½ tsp. Smoked paprika, plus extra for serving
- Kosher salt, to taste

#### Directions

Place all the ingredients in a food processor and blend until smooth. Taste and adjust seasonings. Serve & enjoy!

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**Inspiration**

**“Did You Pray?”**

By Sherman Cox II

**Scripture**

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” James 5:14-16

We work hard. When things pop up in our way, our first inclination is to solve the problem. We seek to fix it. Ain't nothing wrong with that. God expected Adam “to till the ground by the sweat of his brow.” (Gen 3:23)

But sometimes in life we find ourselves with issues that we just can't do anything about. The work is beyond us. Sickness may visit us, and we can't do anything about it. The car breaks down right before an important trip that we have to make. Or maybe the water heater gives up the ghost on the coldest night of the year, and we just don't the money to get it fixed

Even in spiritual matters, challenges show themselves and our attempts to fix them seem to just come up short. It is then the question comes, “Did you pray about it?”

Tremaine Hawkins sang, “When you pray everything will be alright.” Somebody else sang, “Take your burdens to the Lord and leave them there. God expects us to go forth and till the ground. God expects us to solve problems. Yes, God expects us to make a difference for now and eternity by following God's direction.

But do not forget, as we go about doing what God called us to do, that we have a special power.

And we have the privilege of tapping into it. A power that comes from a connection to God that only comes through prayer. Start your day in prayer, and your day in prayer. And watch God do through us that which we couldn't have imagined doing without supernatural power.

**Prayer**

Holy God, we come to you today knowing that you have promised us a glorious future but we wonder about our ability to possess it. Please guide our feet that we might see where we need to go. Please strengthen our limbs so we might have the strength to go. And finally, enlighten our mind that we might perceive thy leading. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.



By Adedotun Adegboireioye, courtesy Unsplash

**Parent Connect**

By Junlan Funez

Dear Parents, are you concerned of the lack of good role models for your children in real life? A few months ago, I was abhorred to read about the news of JoJo Siwa coming out as a member of the LGBTQ community and the praises she received for her bold action as a youth icon.

I only heard about her from a friend of mine last year, whose six-year-old daughter is a huge fan of JoJo. I cannot imagine what kind of influence her example can have among our young girls, which is exactly why people were so excited about her revelation as gay, so that this sinful act can be normalized among youth.

Parents, it is time that we saturate our children's lives with examples of Bible characters to help them combat relentless worldly influence. Make century-old Bible characters relevant in our everyday lives. Help our children see how broken we are as they once were, and yet we can all receive

the same saving grace. Help them see who they can become by growing in faith and work through their Christian journey.

**BIBLE STORY JOSHUA 2 & 6**

Our Bible story today is a simple one: Rahab saved the spies and in turn she was saved for her faithfulness. What complicates the story line is Rahab's profession and the lies she made in saving the spies. But these blemishes in her character are exactly what gives us hope, that no one is beyond God's saving grace. By boldly confessing that God is God in the heaven above and on the earth below (Joshua 2:11), Rahab showed her faith. By putting her life at risk to save the spies and help them escape, she followed through her faith with actions. Covered by God's grace, Rahab's faith and work proved righteous in the eyes of God and was rewarded to be in the family lineage of Jesus. In this way, Rahab's

**Parent Connect (end)**

story perfectly exemplifies our Christian walk. Choose an appropriate angle to tell this story to your children based on their age and understandings. I hope you enjoy this reading together.



**BIBLE VERSE: EPH. 2:8-9**

For it is by grace you have been saved by faith, not by works, so that no one can boast. (N.I.V.).

**BIBLE TRUTH: GRACE + FAITH + WORK = A NEW ME**

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

- ◆ Is it appropriate to lie in some circumstances?
- ◆ Rahab lied about the spies whereabouts to save them. Was her action justified by her circumstances?
- ◆ Rahab didn't know all God's teachings. Had she known, could there be other ways to save the spies without lying? What would you do if you were in her place?
- ◆ Rahab had a sinful past. Did God still love her & use her to do something great?
- ◆ Did you do something disappointing to your parents this

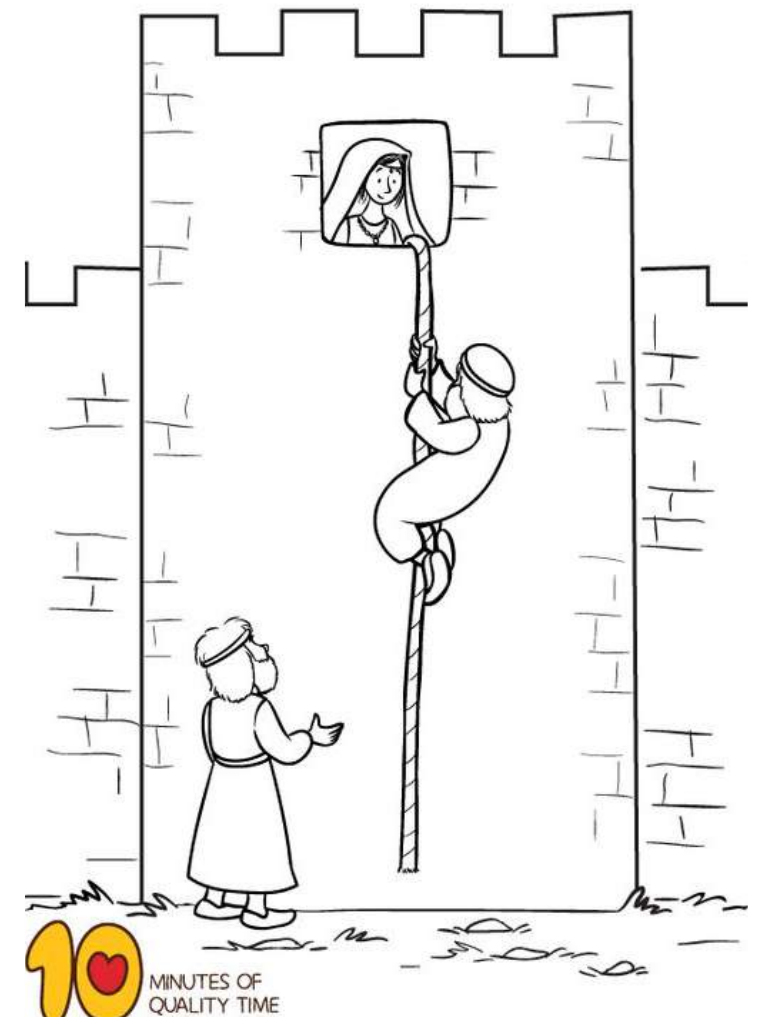
week? Do you think your parents still love you?

- ◆ What great things can you do with the help of God?
- ◆ How did Rahab show her faith? What are some ways we can show our faith?

**THINGS TO DO TOGETHER—**

Watch Rahab's story in Superbook on YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?V=F7sm4tss7IE&list=F7sm4tSS7IE&list=PLA46QIL9zwsPABEzbEW2C7vHQBYb0k3tx&index=1>

Play Hide the spies: use whatever dolls and figurines available on hand to act as spies, take turn to play Rahab to hide the spies indoor or out, and set out a manhunt together!



## VEGETARIAN

### Recipes

Selections by Charlotte Hardy  
Send recipes to charlottehardy@comcast.net, or, text (615) 974-0191 by 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month. Thank you.

#### Kale Salad with Pecan Parmesan

By Marites Walters

#### Ingredients (serves 3-5)

##### Kale Salad ingredients:

8 cups of finely chopped Kale (2 medium destemmed bunches)  
3-5 large garlic cloves  
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice  
1/4 tsp. salt (or more to your taste)  
1/4 tsp. pepper (optional)  
1-2 cups dried cranberries (garnish)

##### Pecan Parmesan ingredients:

1-2 cups roasted pecans  
2 Tbsp. nutritional yeast  
3 Tbsp. olive oil  
1/4 tsp. salt (or more to taste)

#### Directions

Roast pecans at 300 degrees for 8-10 minutes until fragrant or lightly brown.

Wash & drain kale thoroughly. Remove stems & chop leaves very fine.

Dressing Preparation—Process garlic in a blender or processor until minced. Blend the lemon, oil, salt & pepper together to taste.

Pour dressing on kale and toss until kale is well-coated.

Pecan Parmesan Preparation—In a clean blender, process the pecans until pea size. Add nutritional yeast, oil & salt and process until it's a coarse crumb (not powder).

Sprinkle the pecan parmesan all over the kale and garnish with dried cranberries. Enjoy your healthy, yummy kale salad.

#### Jamaican Toto Cake

By Orville Bignall

#### Ingredients (serves 10-12)

3 Cups of sugar  
5 Cups of self-rising flour  
1 Coconut—grated  
2 1/2 Tbsp. Vanilla  
1/2 Nutmeg—grated  
1/2 tsp. All-Spice  
12 oz milk (I prefer plant-based)

#### Directions

Combine all dry ingredients in a mixing bowl & mix thoroughly.

Pour milk on coconut mixture, vanilla & dry ingredients in bowl & mix thoroughly to form a soft doughy mixture.

Place doughy mixture in a greased baking pan & place in a pre-headed oven at 350° for about 50 minutes or until golden brown & when tested, there is no evidence of the doughy mixture.



by Trang Doan, courtesy Pexels

#### Stewardship Update

By Brian & Raylene Wilcox

Did you know—61.2% of all tithe is retained by the KY-TN Conference? How is that tithe distributed?

**55% Ministry:** including pastors & Bible workers, evangelism, youth camp (year-round & summer programs), church ministries, Hispanic Ministries, Ministerial Department, employee benefits, Women's Ministries, Camp Meeting (English & Hispanic), ministerial improvement, youth activities, lay training.

**25% Education:** church schools, Madison Academy, Highland Academy, education staff & college operations.

**12% Administrative** staff, administration general expense, office operation/maintenance, vehicle operation.

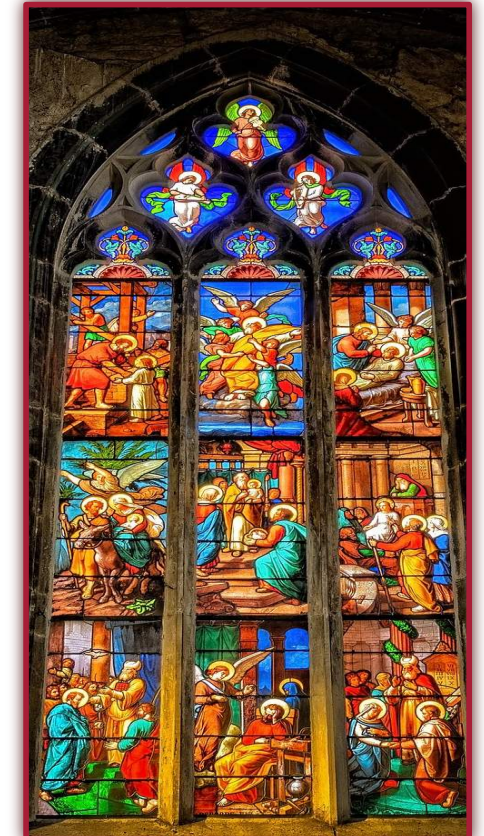
**5% is for Publishing.**

**3% cares for Trust Services & Communication.** NOW YOU KNOW!

#### Report for February 2021

##### Recommended Giving Percentage above tithe 3-5%

Income	\$9,417.64	Income to Date	\$30,525.75
Outgo	<b>7,865.79</b>	Outgo to Date	<b>15,787.25</b>
Balance	\$1,551.85	Balance to Date	\$14,738.50



By Peter H, courtesy Pixelbay

#### Church Board News

##### March Decisions

THE WEBSITE—Sherman Cox of the Web Team shared they will be putting up a temporary website, but same address, so they can make major changes to our site. The temporary site will be up and running in a few weeks.

As they anticipate the changes, he emphasized their hope is the new site will allow department leaders the ability to provide periodic updates to keep the members current on planned events.

The team needs input from leadership as to what they would like to see on the site.

The temporary, and the new, site will have the weekly service, both the Bible Optic and our own church newsletter and Adventist-Giving.

HANDRAILS IN THE SANCTUARY—Adventist

Risk Management did their annual evaluation of our facilities and recommended we put up hand rails on both sides of the wall at the steps to the rostrum.

Kwabena will be bringing some options to the April board meeting.

The board also discussed handling the mic wires and other possible trip hazards to make the rostrum a safer place to navigate.

PRAYER—Keep Brian and Raylene Wilcox in your prayers as Brian's surgery will be soon.

##### April Events

April 9-13 Faith For Today presentations via streaming service will air online. No camera or microphone required. View in the comfort of your home. Get more information at this location: relevantseminars.org/indestructibleYouWebinar.

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## “Victory, the ‘In Christ’ Experience”

By Richard Dickens

Victory in Christ dominates early Christian experience. Paul warns, rebukes, encourages, pens the struggles, challenges, but he, and the other writers recounting the history, portray a church advancing, growing in numbers and in spiritual maturity, the tone hopeful.

At the end of that era, banished to Patmos, John will record his revelations and the last book will unveil the ebb and flow of Christ’s church through the ages. Victory in Christ again will be the last word. The church has hope and victory in Christ all the way to the end

If, however, Revelation had ended with chapter 3, readers would wonder if the church would hear and respond to what the Spirit was saying to the churches, especially Laodicea. My question to us is, how long will it take the Seventh-day Adventist church to respond favorably to the message to Laodicea?

Adventists view the messages to the churches in **Rev. 2 & 3**, as referring to 7 historical periods in church history. But prior to 1856 they viewed the church of Laodicea, the last day church, as referring to Adventists in name only, those who had rejected the Sabbath message. Most assuredly they didn’t believe it referred to them.

Then, in 1856, James White penned an article in the **Review & Herald October 9** issue, that asked 11 questions. Two of which (#s 6 & 11) addressed the Laodicean condition (**Rev. 3:14-21**). Question 6 asked if the Laodicean state was not appropriate of the current Adventist church? Question 11 asked, if that was true, then did the Adventist church have any hope unless it heeded the counsel of the True Witness? That article had a ripple to wave effect throughout the church.

Through 1857, the church began to grapple with those questions, while other leaders & Ellen White’s visions substantiated those conclusions. Something of a revival ensued and many good things were accomplished. Unfortunately, though, it would subside and the church would continue on its Laodicean path.

There were, however, 2 interesting developments theologically. One, the study of the Laodicean message would connect to a greater understanding of the investigative judgment (via Elon Evarts & James White, late 1856 to early 1857) and, then, to the shaking.

First, Evarts would show that the investigative judgment, cleansing of the sanctuary, began in 1844 with the dead being judged.

James White would conclude the judgment would eventually move to the living. Thus, a preparatory work must occur for them to be acquitted in Christ:

It appears that the saints are judged while some are living, and others are dead....The fact that all who have part in that

[first] resurrection are “blessed and holy” shows that decision is passed on all the saints before the second coming of Christ....

It is most reasonable to conclude that there is a special call to the remnant, and a special work to be performed by them, and for them, preparatory to the decisions of the judgment in regard to them, and that their salvation depends upon fully obeying the calls and counsel to them. And we most solemnly believe that this preparatory call and work is brought to view in the testimony to the Laodiceans, and parallel portions of the Word of God.—**R&H, January 29, 1857.**

Second, the year 1857 saw Ellen White receiving quite a number of visions, with the vision on the shaking coming in the Fall. It would be printed in the **Review’s Dec. 31, 1857** issue. In it she writes—  
“I was shown the people of God, and saw them mightily shaken.” What would cause the shaking? “It would be caused by the straight testimony called forth by the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans....

“This straight testimony some will not bear. They will rise up against it, and this will cause a shaking among God’s people....

“I saw that the testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance, and all that truly receive it will obey it and be purified.”(also found in 11179-184, and in *Early Writings* pages 269-273).

This failure to overcome has dogged every generation since. The message in 1888 was a message to arouse to repentance & provided a new revelation of Christ. Yet, by some, it was met with stiff resistance, with Laodiceanism continuing its deadly influence.

The fires in Battle Creek, The Alpha of pantheism, and the loss of the Sanitarium were warnings and calls to repentance but their generation heeded it not as it was intended by God. Thus, no true awakening and yielding to the True Witness and subsequent shaking.

No generation has yet to overcome, but as individuals we can, until a final generation does. She said the “destiny of the church hangs” on our response to the True Witness. In truth, that’s the only hope we have. What begins from individuals can spread, will spread, to impact those around us. Could it be possible that we as a local church can achieve this victory in Christ?

They failed because they would not allow it to accomplish its full work. Do we believe we can overcome in Christ? You might wish to read **11185 (ch.33, “The Laodicean Church”)**.

I would ask then, can we get to the second coming without heeding the True Witness? Can we evangelize effectively with the Spirit’s power without accepting and allowing the Spirit’s message in Revelation 3 to be applied to our own lives? Could it be for some, or many, that the “work of the church,” especially evangelism, is an avoidance of the first work God wants done?

Like Martha, it’s easier to fix a meal than to sit at Jesus’ feet. This is not an either/or but a matter of which comes first. The Cornerstone must be laid before the walls are built. (**Lk. 10:38-42**).

Is this pandemic a call to allow the Spirit to

change us? There’s a spiritual reason this is a world-wide crisis. Why has he allowed our world-wide in-person worship to be interrupted? What is the Spirit saying to our local church, and to us, as individuals? Or, are we more concerned about getting back to what we were doing before Covid?

Is it a call is to repentance? If so, how do I begin the necessary work, since the chief condition of the Laodiceans is one of self-deception (**Rev. 3:17**), very much like the Jews in Jesus’ day (**Matt. 3:7-12**)? We need the eye salve of the Spirit, for we may truly be near the end. Are we ready?

We begin our Spirit-led analysis by contemplating growth in Christ. Paul in **1 Cor. 3 & 4** lays out the Corinthian condition as spiritual infancy. They are born again. They have spiritual gifts but they are still infants. By now, though, they should be mature, displaying spiritual fruit, the likeness of Christ. They should be living Spirit-controlled lives, demonstrating victory over sin. (**Gal. 5:16-25**).

So, Paul notes 2 states, or stages, in the growing process: infancy and maturity. Spiritual stages are not static. By the third time he addresses them, he asks them to test if they are still true Christians (**2 Cor. 13:5**). Apparently, some, perhaps many, had not heeded the call to grow and find victory in Christ. (Some conjecture 2 Corinthians is really 3 Corinthians—we just don’t have a copy of it).

For the rest of the lesson we will concentrate on a few of the major contrasts and conflicts of overcoming sin and Laodiceanism. They involve a spiritual law that **we must be emptied before we can be filled with the Spirit**. To clarify, it’s more of a gradual process than to be taken literally—the whole glass emptied before filled illustration can be misunderstood that you have to overcome all sin before you can receive or be filled with the Spirit.

Even before being born again, the Spirit begins that emptying process. But there is a typical “giving up” experience where we are led to see we cannot save ourselves. That is more at what the emptying involves. It continues throughout our lives—like Paul said, “I die daily.” (**1 Cor. 15:31, compare Rom. 8:10-14**). Are we being emptied & filled?

Only by His power within & yielding to Him can we be emptied & filled. We choose Him and His companionship over the pleasures we used to love to indulge in or found pride in.

First we note the polarity of pride versus humility. This is pivotal because it is a chief characteristic of Laodicea. They are proud of themselves (**Rev. 3:17**). For Paul there is only One identity & only One to glory in—Christ & to be in Christ. **Phil.3:3**.

See **Gal. 3:28ff**. This is one of the most radical passages in the Bible. The in Christ experience moves us beyond our racial, tribal preferences, our socioeconomic standing, cultural preferences, gender dominance—misogyny or misandry, which still thrive today. What is unhealthy, or evil, will be destroyed. What was healthy about our identity will be transformed in Christ.

But there’s another way of looking at “male and female”—he is addressing our marriage loyalty.

Marriage in Christ takes priority even over the male/female marriage bond—say, if a spouse seeks to go in a contrary direction to Christ, or claim allegiance above Christ, or seek to subjugate by imperiously saying, “I am your husband (or wife), you will do what I say!” Becoming as one in earthly marriage is not to take dominance over your marriage to Christ. (**2 Cor. 11:2-3**). We yield where, & if possible, but only in the Lord, and we do so humbly. A love that is humble in Christ, in the Spirit, is the glue that binds two into one.

There is no Jew nor Gentile?—the Spirit is creating a new culture, a new family in Christ. The Spirit will draw us away from allegiance to ethnicity, social classes, or fleshly political parties, sometimes even family or churches, for Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” **Jn. 12:32; 10:1-16, especially v. 16; 4:21-24.**

Compare **Phil. 3 with Gal. 3:28ff**). Our true family is those who are in Christ. He attracts us to others who are like Him, despite earth’s value systems.

Meditate and study these passages on pride versus humility: **Phil. 2:1-15; Mk. 10:35-45; 2 Cor. 10:1; Ja. 4:6, 10; 1 Pt. 3:8; 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12.**

Ask the Spirit—Show me what healthy pride in Christ is, and what is unhealthy pride that still dominates me. No fear, if we have an ear to hear the Spirit, that prayer will be answered.

There is a book, short but filled with much spiritual insight, to help us on our path. The title is *Humility* by Andrew Murray. Like all great books, it is not a book as much to be read as lived. It is available in both print and e-book versions.

The second polarity is competitiveness versus mutual benefit. Hierarchy in the church is not about superiority but mission and flow of divine communication, or exemplification of Christ, with those more open to God’s voice and following His purposes placed in position of being living examples not dictators. A hierarchical structure then reflects, not dominance, but demonstrates a holy example of Him (see **Eph 4:11-16; Jn. 13:15; Phil. 3:17; 1 Th. 1:7; 2 Th. 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12; Ja. 5:10; 1 Pt. 2:21; 5:3**). Leaders are especially called to be imitators of Christ (**1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 1 Th. 1:6; 2:14; Heb. 6:12**). See what Jesus said in **Matt. 23**, as He rejects the Pharisees’ example. In the Spirit there is mutual appreciation and admiration of each other.

In society, envy, jealousy, competing with others to advance self is what is “natural.” Thus, we can’t escape competition. In homes, spouses & children compete with each other. Church members outdo one another to present the best ideas in Sabbath school. John preaches better than Paul. Ask the Spirit to show you where your relationships are built on unhealthy competition and how He can change them as you meditate on **1 Cor. 12 & 13**.

The Spirit can, transform our motives, our sensitivities to & appreciation of others’ gifts & contributions. We can affirm others, encourage others &



## Anniversaries & Birthdays

Anniversaries			
Stephen & Jade Meyer			4/20
Birthdays			
Betty Bolton	4/1	Evelyn Funez	4/12
Ngady Kabia	4/4	Mike Bibee	4/20
Craig Tucker	4/4	Phyllis Dickens	4/20
Nathan Wood	4/6	Kevin Chris	4/23
Elaine Herndon	4/10	Renee' Carver	4/28
Joy Nolan	4/10	Zemi Molla	4/29
Andre Johnson	4/12	Josiah Walters	4/30
Andre Johnson Jr.	4/12		

Photo courtesy Pexels

## Bible Study (end)

allow them to help & serve us. Our fallen competitive nature now focuses on self-betterment & the betterment of others for Christ's glory. We are always part of the body, not the Head. Meditate on **Luke 18:9-14**. What is the Spirit saying to you?

Typically, consensus should be the primary mode of decision-making not majority rule. Decisions based on the majority vote without any attempt, or an anemic one, to reach a consensus on issues important to church body life & unity, only brings a fracture in the body. This is especially true in a home. Remember well, there will be no control freaks in heaven. Contemplate these passages: **Acts 15:1-28; 1 Cor. 3:1-4:1; 12:4-13:13**. Ask the Spirit to guide your thoughts to answer the following questions.

Is my competitive nature healthy? If so, how can I cooperate with You to continue to nurture that? If not, show & help me to change. Whose standards & rewards am I seeking to meet & gain?

Finally, we discuss hardheartedness versus softheartedness. Competition with others that flows from pride, envy, jealousy potentially develops a hard heart. Are we secretly happy when others lose, or, can't compete? Winning becomes all-absorbing to perpetuate the belief in our superiority. The 1850's saw our evangelistic style develop into more of a debating spirit, with little of the love of Christ. By winning, we lost. How are we different today—or, are we better at disguising it?

In a Laodicean condition, our evaluation of others, tends to be harsh, without compassion—thus the gossip mills. Others' supposed weaknesses or faults are magnified while ours are minimized or negated, especially if they wrong us. It's not easy to forgive when we've been hurt. It takes the Spirit to make that happen over time—and sometimes, it takes a lifetime. Your devotional life can shorten the process. So will

God's providence.

Hardheartedness can eventually lead one to commit the unpardonable sin.

Laodicea is not softhearted. Christ is outside of where she dwells, knocking to come in.

Is Laodicea, truly then, a converted church? If Christ is outside, isn't the Spirit outside also? Unlike the six earlier churches, there is no separate group He addresses with approval or commendation. Is she Christian in name only?

This is not implying that all in Laodicea are unconverted for it will depend on letting Jesus in. Some in every generation have & will respond to the True Witness—just as some were in 1856, and are in our day, born again & growing. Unfortunately, they were and are not the majority.

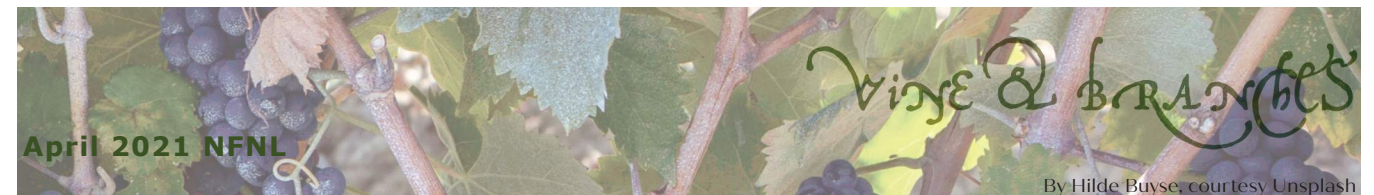
Some are still stuck in infancy, while others are growing to maturity. The goal is helping each other to grow in Christ. Another's weakness is a call to prayer not to gossip or gloating. Meditate on **Matt. 25**.

In the light of Matt. 25, now meditate on these verses that demonstrate the necessity for a soft heart—empathy, mercy, compassion, love & the danger of a hard heart: **2 Chron. 34:27; Mk. 3:5; 8:17; 10:5; 16:14; Rom. 2:5; 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:14; 1 Cor. 13:1-13; Gal 5:13-6:2; Eph. 4:1-3, 15-5:2; Col. 3:3-23; Heb. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:8-12; Ja. 1:19-27**. What is the Spirit saying to you?

Eventually, there will be a revival of primitive godliness, that flows from the message of the True Witness. That will cause a shaking and a gathering in of those who come out of Babylon. Then God will have a final remnant we know as the 144,000. They will know victory in Christ.

I may not deserve, but I would love to help others, to be part of that, much less be numbered with them. How about you?

Now is the time to experience victory. End time crises are upon us, around us and ahead of us. Next month the "how" of abiding victory in Christ.



## Answered Prayer

A Covid-19 lock down left Sandile Khumalo on his knees in South Africa's biggest city, Johannesburg.

The national lock down, among the most stringent in the world, shuttered the three churches where Sandile serves as pastor in the city of 5.5 million people. Tough regulations closed parks and banned jogging, dog-walking, and even the sale of cigarettes and alcohol.

Like Seventh-day Adventist pastors elsewhere around the world, Sandile moved his ministry online and began to live-stream his sermons to members of his three churches: Johannesburg Central, Johannesburg CBD, and Johannesburg Inner city. Sometimes he received encouraging messages from people who had been inspired by his preaching. But he longed to do more to reach city residents. He earnestly prayed to God to send an unbeliever who needed to meet Jesus during the pandemic.



What happened next surprised him.

"Never did I think God would use an unfamiliar method," Sandile said by e-mail.

After more than a month in lock down, South Africa began to ease regulations on May 1 while continuing to enforce strict face mask and social-distancing rules. On May 11, Sandile received a WhatsApp text message on his cellphone from an unfamiliar number. The caller introduced himself as Hilton and sent a photo of a Bible that he had found on the seat of a minivan taxi while traveling to work. Minivan taxis, which carry multiple passengers, are a common sight in Johannesburg.

"I picked up your Bible in the taxi," Hilton wrote. He explained that he had opened the Bible and, finding Sandile's name and contact information inside the cover, decided to write.

Sandile looked at the photo with interest. He owned several Bibles but did not recognize the one in the photo. The Bible looked new, and its burgundy-red leather cover indicated that it was not cheap. Furthermore, Sandile had not ridden in a minivan taxi in years. He checked with his wife

## Supplied by Charlotte Hardy

and other family members, and they confirmed that he had never owned such a Bible.

Hilton was not bothered that Sandile did not recognize the Bible. He was more interested in finding out what the Bible said. He had never read a Bible, and he was eager to start. He asked Sandile whether he would be willing to help him read it. He wanted Bible studies.

Sandile knew at that moment that God had heard his prayers for an unbeliever who needed to meet Jesus during the Covid-19 pandemic. God had answered his prayers in a miraculous way.

"I praise God for this unique opportunity for ministry of which I still cannot make sense," Sandile said. "I hope our interactions will lead to Hilton accepting Jesus Christ as his personal Savior."

Andrew McChesney is the editor of Adventist Mission. This story is reprinted with permission.

