

September 2021

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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

Wine & Branches

Our Life Source Connection—John 15:4-5

Pastoral Perspective

One Word, “Service”

by Pastor Mercado

After presenting the parable to the 10 virgins and the of the talents, both of which highlight our responsibility of watching and being ready for His return, he transitions in talking about how He will judge the nations. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (verses 31-32). You may be wondering, what standard will Jesus use in determining who is a sheep, and who is a goat. He explains it in verses 33-36,

And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

The sheep, of course, symbolize the righteous, those who will be in the kingdom of heaven, and while salvation is a gift of grace through faith in Jesus, the faith of the sheep (the righteous) was characterized by one word, “service.” As Christians, and in particular, Seventh-day Adventists, we must reflect Jesus if we are going to be effective in sharing the three angels’ message with a world that is perishing. Our strategy of asking people to come to our churches so they can hear what we have to say has not worked. We must be willing to go out. We must be willing to find ways in which we can serve those that are in need. Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Should not we do as Jesus did?

The great violinist, Niccolo Paganini willed his marvelous violin to city of Genoa on condition that it must never be played. The wood of such an instrument, while used and handled, wears only slightly, but set aside, it begins to decay. Paganini’s lovely violin has today become worm-eaten and useless except as a relic. A Christian’s unwillingness to serve may soon destroy his capacity for usefulness.

I want to challenge you to find at least one way in which you can serve someone in need. Bring those

ideas to the church, there is no telling what God will do if as a church we become servants.



“Give to us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for—because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything.”

Peter Marshall

Health & Faith

Step Up Your Walking—Your Health May Depend on it!

By Lynette Aluoch

It is estimated that 250,000 deaths per year in the United States, approximately 12% of the total, are attributed to a lack of regular physical activity. Physical activity is protective and extends life. It promotes cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, muscular flexibility and good body composition. Low levels of activity and fitness are associated with markedly increased all-cause mortality rates.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine, the benefits of exercise include:

- Improved coronary heart disease risk factors
- Blood lipid profile
- Resting blood pressure in borderline hypertensives
- Good body composition
- Glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity
- Bone density
- Immune function
- Increased psychological function

Daily Steps—Do you know how many steps YOU take on average every day? This month’s challenge will help jump start your fitness AND rev up your metabolism!

Your Challenge: walk at least 5,000 steps every day, which is about 2 miles depending on how long your stride is. Getting 5,000 steps is a good baseline number for boosting your activity level out of the “sedentary” zone, especially if you have a desk job or you’re just getting back into fitness.

This is important for a LOT of reasons, because being sedentary is linked with all sorts of issues. Plus, ramping up your steps also helps you boost your NEAT – your *non-exercise activity thermogenesis*, which are the calories you burn doing daily activities (vs during workouts). It’s a major player in your body’s fuel burn each day!

You can use an activity tracker, a pedometer, or even your smartphone to track your steps. It doesn’t matter HOW or WHERE you get your steps – you can

even march in place if you have to. The point is to move those legs and be active!

NOTE: If you’re like me and have an active job that makes racking up big step numbers easy every day, challenge yourself by setting a new goal!

5,000 Steps Tip—How are you doing with getting 5,000 steps every day, every week this month? Share with an accountability partner.

If you don’t have a pedometer or activity tracker (and even if you do), here’s a quick way to hit your number of steps—Go for a quick 15-20 minute walk BOTH mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Most of us walk around 3-4 mph (4.5 to 6.5 kph). That should get you to the right number!

Another great way to sneak in the walks at work is to take a “walking” meeting with a coworker—and if you’re working from home, you can stay plugged in by taking your phone with you.

Will you join me? What’s YOUR step goal each day this week for the next 4 weeks?

(Ref: [healthline.com/health/how-many-steps-a-day](https://www.healthline.com/health/how-many-steps-a-day))
Activity, CREATION Health



By Mor Shani, courtesy Unsplash

VEGETARIAN

Recipes

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

From Marjie John's Kitchen

Vegetarian "Chicken" Curry

Ingredients for the Salad

- 20 oz firm tofu drained
- 1 large onion diced
- 1Tbsp ginger purée
- 2 cloves garlic crushed
- 1 Tbsp oil
- 1 Tbsp ground cumin
- 1Tbsp ground turmeric
- 1 Tbsp ground coriander
- 1/8 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 x 14 oz cans crushed tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 6 oz coconut cream

Directions

- Sauté onions, ginger, garlic and oil in a large frying pan for 5 minutes or until onion is clear.
- Add spices and stir while heating to activate flavors.
- Add canned tomatoes and mix well.
- Slice the tofu into strips.
- Add to pan and gently stir through—heating until just bubbling.
- Gently mix through the salt, honey and coconut cream.
- Serve when done.



By Jason Briscoe, courtesy Unsplash

Strawberry Smoothie

Ingredients

- 3 ripe bananas
- 1 ½ cups of almond, soy or rice milk
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 1 ½ cups frozen strawberries
- Shredded coconut (as desired for topping garnish)

Directions

- Place all ingredients except coconut in a blender and blend until smooth.
- Pour into serving glasses & garnish with shredded coconut.

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Parent Connect

Building Faith in God

Children's Ministry

BIBLE PASSAGE: EPH. 3:14-21

"FOR THIS REASON I BOW MY KNEES BEFORE THE FATHER, FROM WHOM EVERY FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH IS NAMED, THAT ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY HE MAY GRANT YOU TO BE STRENGTHENED WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN YOUR INNER BEING, SO THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH—THAT YOU, BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE, MAY HAVE STRENGTH TO COMPREHEND WITH ALL THE SAINTS WHAT IS THE BREADTH AND LENGTH AND HEIGHT AND DEPTH, AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST THAT SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE, THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO FAR MORE ABUNDANTLY THAN ALL THAT WE ASK OF THINK, ACCORDING TO THE POWER AT WORK WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS THROUGH ALL GENERATIONS, FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.

Our Lesson

Hello, children of God! Have you ever worked in a garden before, or been around plants? What kinds of plants do you like the best? Flowers, trees, fruits, vegetables? All of those things are plants, and all plants have a few things in common. For one thing, all plants have what you see in the following photo. Do you know what these are?

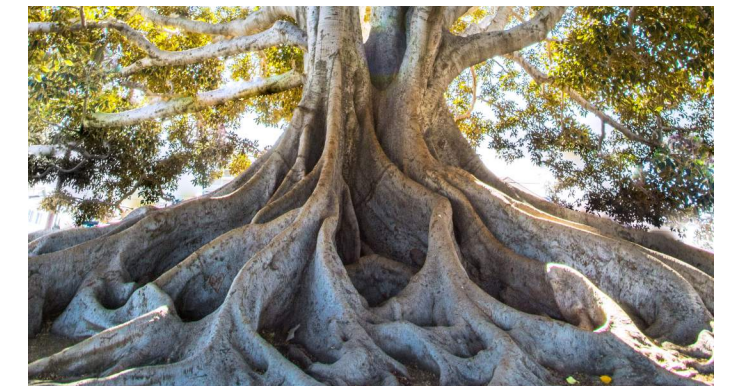
At the bottom are roots. Now, when seeds are planted, roots go down into the ground, burrowing into soil.

After the roots go down and plant themselves, the stems (become the trunk and branches) and leaves and things can grow up out of the ground. No matter how high the plant gets, it will always have those roots that allow it to receive nourishment and grow.

The roots connect the plant to its source of life. That's great for plants, but what do you think it means to be rooted in Christ? Does that even make sense?

How can we be rooted in our faith or connected that

firmly to Jesus? The Bible tells us that we are to be rooted in Christ's love. God many times uses lessons



in nature to help us understand spiritual realities we can't yet understand. This is one of them.

In the letter Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he encouraged them to think a lot on that. This means that we get our spiritual ability to grow and live from knowing how much Jesus loves us. We have a firm, like a rock, foundation in that. We can be absolutely confident that Jesus gives us all we need, because He gave Himself for us! We know He loves us enough to die for us. In fact, His love for us is bigger than we can understand. Think about some really big plants, like oak or pine trees.

They can get really tall! They can be so high you have to tilt your head back just to look at the top. Well, the love God has for us is much bigger than that. And it's much deeper than the deepest roots we can imagine. We are covered in and supported by that love, even though we don't fully know what it means.

But Jesus can help us there, too! He promises to be with us and to guide our hearts. So how do we put our own spiritual "roots" down so we can grow tall like Jesus?

Read Psalm 1. It compares someone who loves and obeys God to being like a tree. So, each of us who loves and obeys God is like a tree. So, that means you are like a tree, but you are not literally a tree, only like a tree. A tree needs "food" to grow just like you. It needs the right food, just like you.

Now we need spiritual food just like we need bread and milk and potatoes and gravy and granola.

So what kind of spiritual food do we need to grow strong like Jesus? What will build our roots of faith?

What do you think? What might encourage and nourish our faith? Well, we can pray and tell Him we want Him to be with us just as a friend walks beside us as we walk to school and walk up and down the halls of your school. He's there beside us, though we can't see Him, when we are tucked into bed each night.

We can grow deep roots by reading the Bible, listen-

Parent Connect (cont.)

ing to our moms and dads tell us about Jesus, our SS teachers and during the church service.

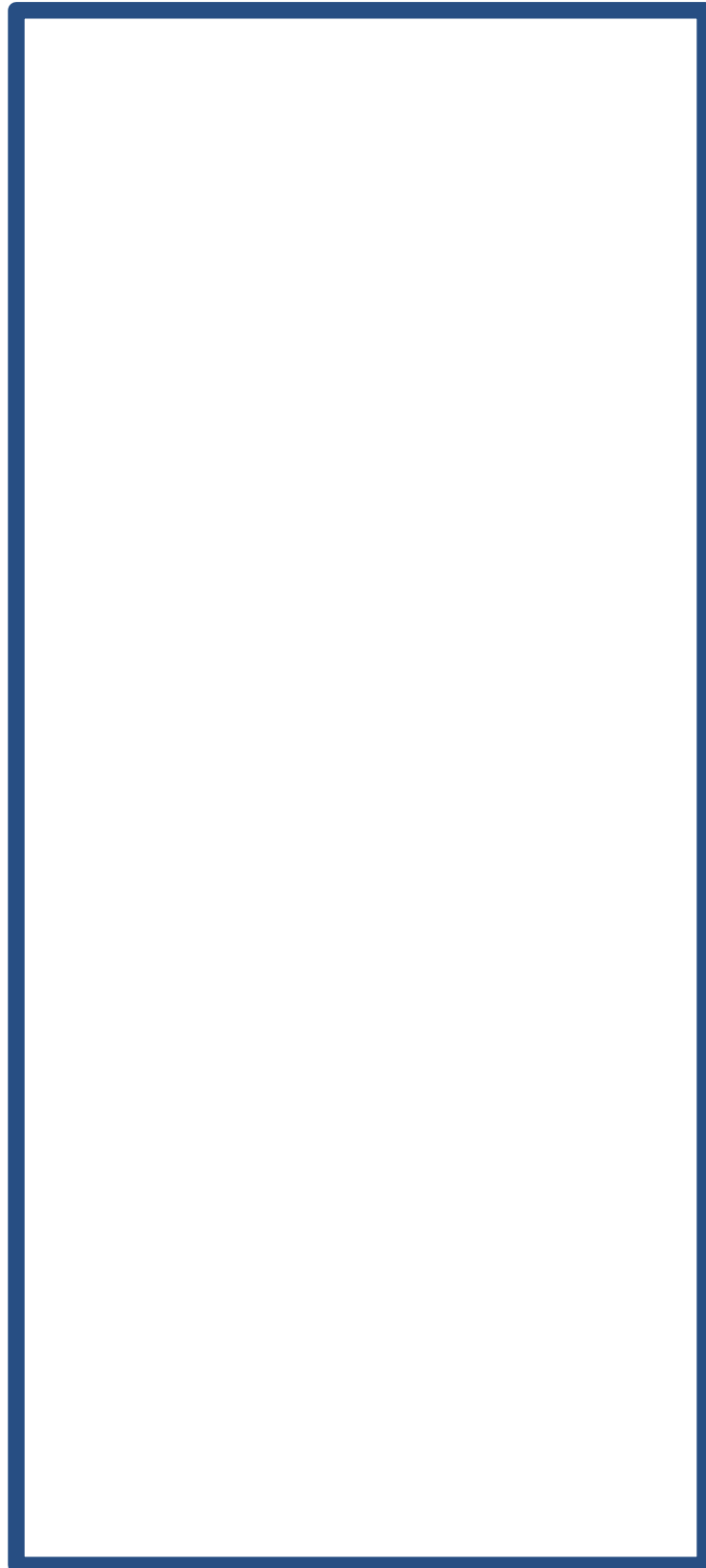
There are many wonderful ways that we grow roots in Jesus, especially just talking to Him quietly when we are alone, even when we are with others we can silently talk to Him. But we need to do and not just listen to Him. As we do what He asks us we will grow.

How we treat others in our family, at church, at school is also how we grow and put down deep roots and grow healthy branches and leaves.

Jesus wants to show His love through us to those around us. Your mommy and daddy love to get a big hug and smile from you. You can help them, and you, grow by giving them a hug when you see them today. Tell them you love them. You'll make their day!

(Adapted from Sunday School Works, July 25, 2021).

DRAW AND COLOR A TREE (IN THE BOX TO THE RIGHT) WITH ROOTS AND TRUNK, BRANCHES AND LEAVES AND PUT NAMES OF PEOPLE YOU LOVE AND ARE SPECIAL TO YOU—SAY YOU NAME ONE BRANCH, "DAD" AND ANOTHER "MOM" AND YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER IS A LEAF, AND PUT YOURSELF THERE ALSO. YOU CAN ADD AUNTS AND UNCLES, TEACHERS, FRIENDS AND PEOPLE WHO ARE PART OF YOUR TREE OF LOVE. NEVER FORGET, GOD LOVES YOU!!!



Parent Connect (end)





Ministry of Intercession

From the chapter, “Prayer in the Last Days”¹

By E. G. White

The season of distress and anguish before us will require a faith that can endure weariness, delay, and hunger—a faith that will not faint though severely tried. The period of probation is granted to all to prepare for that time. Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His victory is an evidence of the power of importunate prayer. All who will lay hold of God’s promises, as he did, and be as earnest and persevering as he was, will succeed as he succeeded. Those who are unwilling to deny self, to agonize before God, to pray long and earnestly for His blessing, will not obtain it. Wrestling with God—how few know what it is! How few have ever had their souls drawn out after God with intensity of desire until every power is on the stretch. When waves of despair which no language can express sweep over the suppliant, how few cling with unyielding faith to the promises of God.—(*The Great Controversy*, 621.)

We cannot depend upon form or external machinery. What we need is the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit of God. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.” Pray without ceasing, and watch by working in accordance with your prayers. As you pray, believe, trust in God. It is the time of the latter rain, when the Lord will give largely of his Spirit. Be fervent in prayer, and watch in the Spirit.—(*The Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897.)

Jacob and Esau represent two classes; Jacob the righteous, and Esau the wicked. Jacob’s distress when he learned that Esau was marching against him with four hundred men, represents the trouble of the righteous as the decree goes forth to put them to death, just before the coming of the Lord. As the wicked gather about them they will be filled with anguish, for like Jacob they can see no escape for their lives. The angel placed himself before Jacob, and he took hold of the angel and held him, and wrestled with him all night. So also will the righteous, in their time of trouble and anguish, wrestle in prayer with God, as Jacob wrestled with the angel. Jacob in his distress prayed all night for deliverance from the hand of Esau. The righteous in their mental anguish will cry to God day and night for deliverance from the hand of the wicked who surround them.

Jacob confessed his unworthiness. “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant.” The righteous, in their distress, will have a deep sense of their unworthiness, and with many tears will acknowledge

their utter unworthiness, and like Jacob will plead the promises of God through Christ, made to just such dependent, helpless, repenting sinners.

Jacob took firm hold of the angel in his distress, and would not let him go. As he made supplication with tears, the angel reminded him of his past wrongs, and endeavored to escape from Jacob, to test him and prove him. So will the righteous, in the day of their anguish, be tested, proved, and tried, to manifest their strength of faith, their perseverance and unshaken confidence in the power of God to deliver them.

Jacob would not be turned away. He knew that God was merciful, and he appealed to His mercy. He pointed back to his past sorrow and repentance of his wrongs, and urged his petition for deliverance from the hand of Esau. Thus his importuning continued all night. As he reviewed his past wrongs, he was driven almost to despair. But he knew that he must have help from God or perish. He held fast the angel, and urged his petition with agonizing, earnest cries, until he prevailed. Thus will it be with the righteous. As they review the events of their past life, their hopes will almost sink. But as they realize that it is a case of life or death, they will earnestly cry unto God, and appeal to Him in regard to their past sorrow and humble repentance of their many sins, and then will refer to His promise, “Let him take hold of My strength, and make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me.” Thus will their earnest petitions be offered to God day and night.—(*Spiritual Gifts* 3:131-133.)

Endnotes

¹Excerpts from the book *Prayer*, pp. 276.1; 277.3; 278.4; 279.1-3.

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.



Bible Study

We study the art of war in Christ. What’s unfolding on the earth hasn’t caught God off guard. He knows what you need to survive in these perilous end times. He seeks to fit you for today’s battle and the final conflict.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Pray and read it through the verses above, asking Jesus to open your minds to understand the scripture as he led those walking with him on the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:27, 31-32). The Spirit of Christ must come as Teacher (Jn. 14:26) for us to be blessed in our study. That’s the experience we need daily. Those who seek it will not be denied nor disappointed.

Eph. 6:10, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

Paul begins this passage of commands by commanding us to “be strong in the Lord” not the strength of the flesh we possess. We are to be empowered by “the strength of His might.” It’s an experience of empowerment that is through Him and supplied by the Spirit. Study these additional passages—Acts 9:22; Rom. 4:20; Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17. Do you understand what Paul describes, or have you experienced this in your own life? To the born again child of God, this is your Spirit-filled birthright. To be strong in your daily life. Yours is to be a new life in the Spirit.

Your old life in the flesh, which was a structure of pride in, and trust in, what you could do, must be seen for what it is, inadequate. Paul was proud of all he could do before he met Christ. He had to learn how weak that really was because what he was fighting was a foe far greater than anything the flesh can resist.

This word translated “strong” is used once by Luke in Acts 9:22 of Paul (Saul) increasing in strength as the Jews opposed him. As the opposition to Paul increased, so the power within him grew to more than meet the resistance. So, in your life, you are to know the indwelling strength of Christ.

Along with the 2 verses already referenced, look at Rom. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1 & 4:17. Ask the Spirit to help direct your understanding and what you are to draw for your experience. If you have time, study another reason why power is not always attendant to our walk. The book *Desire of Ages*, chapter 47, “Ministry” will give you insights. Some challenges require both fasting and prayer to overcome.

Ephesians 6:11 and 13 are parallel. What is the result

Spiritual Warfare

by Richard Dickens

of obeying the command?

He focuses on the “full armor.” It’s used in the NT 3 times. Our English word, derived from the Greek is panoply. It is comprised of two Greek words, “pan” which translated means “all” and “hoplon” translated for “tool” or “weapon.”

Compare Rom. 13:12 with Eph. 6:11, 13. Considering Paul commanding us to put on the armor of light in Rom. 13:12, you might wish to consider looking at how Paul uses light in his writings: Rom. 2:19; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; 6:14; 11:14; especially Eph. 3:9; 5:8-9, 13; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:10.

Do you think there is a relationship between your putting on the full armor and the ability to stand firmly or resist the Devil? If so, how?

This call to stand firm is found in another verse in our passage: Eph. 6:14. How does Paul qualify or define further what he means by “standing firm?” Here are a few more verses where Paul uses the word, sometimes translated as “establish:” Rom. 3:31; 5:2; 10:3; 11:20; 14:4; 1 Cor. 7:37; 15:1; 2 Cor. 13:1; Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:19.

How would you summarize what it meant to “stand firm” in Paul’s writings?

Focus on “put on”—Let’s look more carefully at Eph. 6:14. First, we will consider the latter part of the verse where we are commanded to “put on!” It is literally to be “en-clothed.” In the gospels it is used literally and but only once used figuratively (Lk. 24:49).

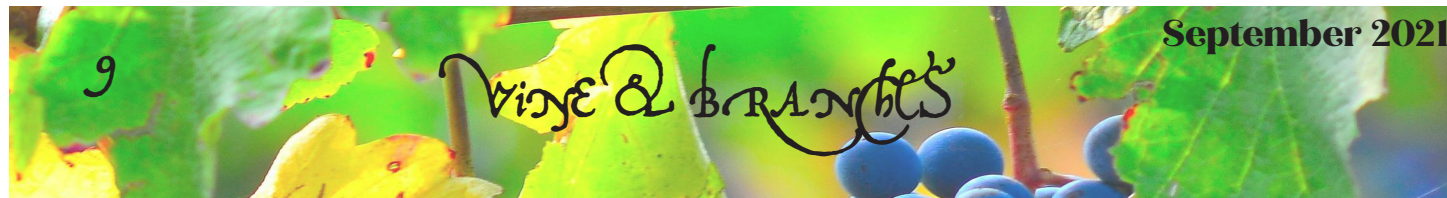
Paul uses it exclusively in a figurative way. Here are his other references so you can get a better grasp of how he means it to be understood—especially look at his other reference in Ephesians: Rom. 13:12, 14; 1 Cor. 15:53-54; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10, 12; 1 Thess. 5:8. Summarize what you have gleaned from your meditation on this word.

In the parallel construction of the phrases of verse 14, “girded” seems to be best understood as a parallel idea to “put on.”

“Gird your loins with truth” and “put on the breastplate of righteousness.”

Both phrases come from Isaiah. Our first phrase occurs in Is. 11:5. The second comes from Is. 59:17 (see vv. 14-21). These passages, contextually, are understood as referring to judgment, especially to the end times which the passages in Isaiah aptly describe. How do you put on truth and righteousness and how will they help in the end of times?

Eph. 6:13 references the “evil day” which can typi-



Bible Study (cont.)

cally easily refer to the time of Jesus as well as the atypical end days. The battle Jesus fought and won at the cross sealed the fate of the Devil and evil.

Thus, all evil days since the cross, especially these evil end times will result in victory for the people of God.

Here is some helpful commentary regarding the typical Roman soldier's gear:

6:14. The "belt" or "girdle" may refer to the leather apron beneath the armor or to the metal belt protecting the lower abdomen. The "breastplate" normally consisted of leather overlaid with metal, and it protected the chest in battle; like the helmet (6:17), it was used only in battle, not for normal wear. Roman soldiers were to face forward in battle, side by side, so the armor needed to protect only their front. In view of Isaiah 59:17 (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:18), this "breastplate of righteousness" is truly "God's armor" (6:13).

6:15. Soldiers needed to wear sandals or boots (technically the Roman caliga, a half boot) so they could advance toward the enemy undistracted about what they might step on; this gear was essential to their "preparation" for battle. Paul takes the image especially from the herald of Isaiah 52:7 who announces good news: sharing the message of Christ advances God's army against the enemy's position.

6:16. Roman soldiers were equipped with large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high, the fronts of which were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wetted to quench any fiery darts launched against them. After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows.

Because the Greek and Roman god of passion (called Eros and Cupid, respectively) was said to strike with flaming arrows, some of Paul's readers may have thought specifically of the temptation of lust in this verse, although Paul probably intended the image to cover more than that danger (cf. Ps 11:2; 57:4; 58:3-7; 64:3; perhaps 120:1-4; Prov 25:18).

6:17. The bronze helmet, equipped with cheek pieces, was necessary to protect the head; though essential garb for battle, it was normally not worn outside battle. For the phrase "helmet of salvation" see Isaiah 59:17; cf. comment on Ephesians 6:14. The sword (gladius, 20-24 inches long) was a weapon used when close battle was joined with the enemy and the heavy pikes that frontline soldiers carried were no longer practical. Thus Paul implies that the battle is to be joined especially by engaging those who do not know God's word (the gospel) with its message, after one is spiritually prepared in the other ways listed here. Paul's ministry was thus particularly strategic, because it included close-range battle advancing into enemy ranks (vv. 19-20).

6:18-19. If prayer for one another (v. 18) continues the figurative image of warfare in the preceding context, it might relate to how the soldiers had to stand together in their battle formation, covering one another by moving as a solid unit. A Roman soldier by himself was vulnerable, but as a unified army a Roman legion was virtually invincible. "Watching" or "being alert" may also be military language (suggested by Jesus; cf. Mk 14:38).¹

So Paul uses the visual of a soldier's armor to teach us about spiritual warfare. We won't be literally carrying a sword or shield, nor have literal protective armor on but we are urged to know truth and practice righteousness as though we are clothed in them. We can only do that by living hourly, moment by moment in the presence of Christ. It is the Spirit's charge to make that happen. The Spirit-clothed Christian is more protected than any soldier in the most technologically developed gear that can be invented. We should spiritually know that in our heart.

Knowing, experiencing the truth about Christ and living like Him should be more important than our fleshly career path because it should be our career path. Our vocation is a means to that end and part of our mission field. Is that our focus or has success in our vocation become our goal? If so, perhaps this is one reason fear and doubt cloud our view of the future crises we are witnessing.

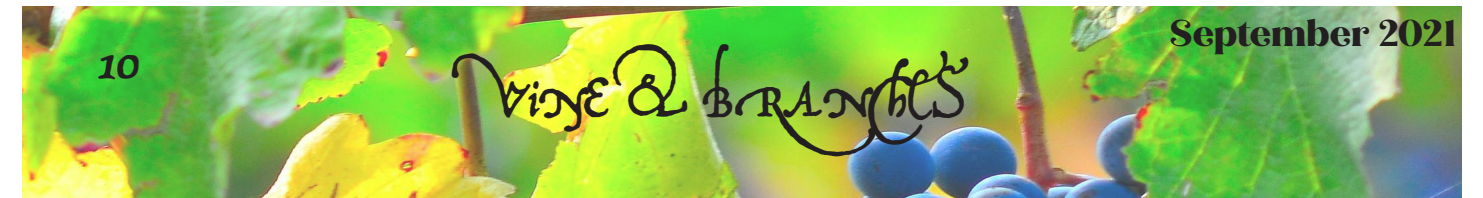
Quite a number of vocations on this planet will not be needed in heaven but the character we allow the Spirit to fashion in this life will determine whether we are there to experience it.

Everywhere we go the Holy Spirit will equip our spirit to bring the good news of peace and reconciliation of God to those we come in contact with but our spirit of peace will be met too often with rejection and sometimes violence and upheaval. The Devil will not yield the ground easily. (Ref. 1 Thess. 5:8).

Paul states that faith can defeat everything the Devil attacks us with (Eph. 6:16). It is both defense and offense. Faith inspires our offense with the word of God, which the Spirit uses to take the battle to the enemy (Eph. 6:17).

Eph. 6:18 states that praying in the Spirit is the power of constant intercessory prayer. I cannot pray at all times by the power of my flesh. I will be distracted, put my guard down, become weak and weary as the disciples were in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus's answer to them was, "keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." (Mt. 26:41). The



Anniversaries & Birthdays

Anniversaries

Marsha Palmer	9/5	Peter Guy	9/15
Amy Cordis	9/6	Lidia Garcia-Guax	9/15
Jonathan Hite	9/6	Michelle Hite	9/15
Raylene Wilcox	9/12	Brian Wilcox	9/16
Alessandra Riethmeier	9/13	Valerie Aikman	9/23
Sochel Thomas	9/13	Edith Kiprono	9/24
Gail Lessman	9/14	Jessica Briggs	9/27

By Mel Poole, courtesy Unsplash

Bible Study (end)

Spirit is our companion and power in prayer. Paul states in Romans—

Rom. 8:26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

Rom. 8:27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (NASB 1995).

Not always, but mostly, there is a conscious sense of His presence in prayer. As we come to the very end, we will need to be in prayer for one another more than we have ever before. Only the Spirit can maintain that kind of prayer life.

In closing, I am going to relate an experience that might help as we face these unprecedented times.

A number of years ago I was reading Fox's *Book of Martyrs* along with the book *The Great Controversy* for my devotionals. I was marveling over the miraculous power the martyrs had when being put to death violently. So I asked God, "Is this real or hopeful fantasy by Christians looking on and recording what happened?" I didn't think God would answer my question. Short of some vision, how could he? Actually, I felt a little sheepish about even asking—as though I were questioning His power to save in times of persecution. So, I went about my day and forgot about it.

A week-and-a-half later, it was an overcast November morning and I and my friend Larry were traveling on a paved road in the country. Larry was talking while I drove.

I could see a pickup to my left ahead traveling fast, kicking up dirt on the cross road. My concern for his being able to stop abated as his rear end lifted up indicating his braking for the stop sign. Our road had the right of way.

Larry said something and I looked over to him. A few seconds later I saw that the pickup had now sped up and we were seconds from "T-boning" in the intersection of the highway.

What flashed in my mind was a picture of me quadriplegic in a wheel chair. I was going better than 55 and so was the pickup. We had neglected to put on our seat belts since it was a short trip out in the country. I did try to brake but nowhere soon enough.

In those split seconds the Spirit interrupted my thoughts and I, not in some vision, but in my mind's eye I could see the Spirit reaching up to Christ and He reaching down and I was flooded with peace and full of joy. In my mind I began praising God. The Spirit had me turn the wheel to the right to avoid a full-blown hit, but hit we did. I had absolutely no fear, no worry, no concern, only joy and happiness as I watched both vehicles get totaled.

I had never felt such a feeling of joy and peace in my life. Prior experiences with Christ have had their joys and peace but not like this. No drug, nor alcohol, nor any other human pleasure have come close to those experiences with Christ, but this was beyond that.

I had a small cut to my knee. Larry had a small cut to his forehead. The two men in the truck had no injuries and they were not wearing their seat belts either. My mind was still praising God. The peace and the joy remained but the mighty power was gone. But I still felt wrapped in Christ, totally clothed by Him.

Larry did not experience the joy nor the peace but he and the others were protected. Those stories of persecuted Christians in times past were not fiction and exaggerated hopefulness expressed by the writers. They were a reality.

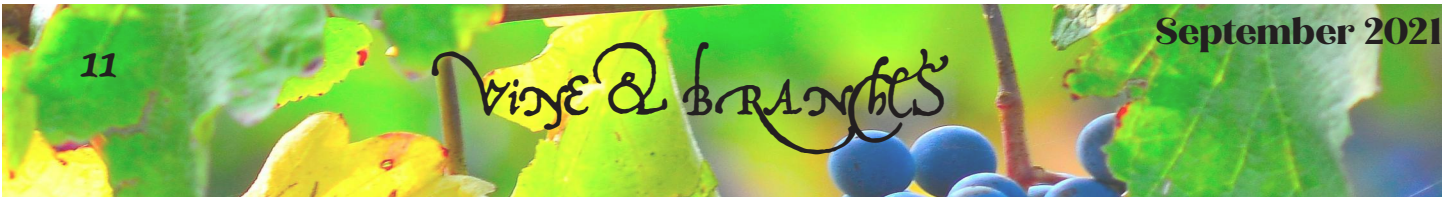
The times ahead will be history's end and the worse calamities to face any age, but I am reminded of the promises in Isa. 43:1-3—

But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...."

This is our present and our future in Christ.

Endnotes

¹IVP New Testament Commentary on Eph. 6:14-19.



Stewardship

by Brian & Raylene Wilcox

How Are We Doing?

I have wondered how we at Nashville First are doing as far as being faithful with tithes and offerings over recent months because of the impact that the pandemic has had on in-person attendance at church. So, I asked the church treasurer, with whom I am very close, and learned some things.

Average attendance at Sabbath services stayed low the first months of this year, but then began to creep upward in April and May. We surpassed 100 in average attendance in both June and July. We can see that giving to conference and world budget rose along with the attendance since an offering call was made and the plates passed.

The even better news is that donations of tithes and offerings have continued to be made even through

Report for July 2021

Recommended Giving Percentage 3-5%

Income	\$11,605.76	Income to Date	\$80,333.23
Outgo	7,927.24	Outgo to Date	61,198.99
Balance	\$3,678.52	Balance to Date	\$19,134.24

those times of lower in-person attendance primarily thanks to the use of online donations through Adventist Giving.

And possibly the best news of all, as of the end of July, is that offerings given for use at the local church – Nashville First S.D.A. – have been greater than our expenses. This is a blessing for our church, but surely it is a blessing for you and me as church members, too.

Malachi 3:8 is familiar to all who have ever heard an offering call, “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings.” But what if God could say to us today, “You have not robbed Me. You have been faithful with your tithes and offerings”?

It is not for Brian Wilcox to know who has given faithfully. Your decision to return a tenth of your increase as tithe and more for offerings is between you and God. But it does appear from the church treasury that a good many of us, whether we have attended in person or not, have faithfully remembered to put into practice the spirit of giving.

Matthew 10:8: “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received. freely give.” [NKJV].

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Church News

Upcoming Events:

Grief 101 (date unknown)

ALIVE Hospice will be offering a Grief 101 class in our church in the near future. It will be a basic class helping attendees become aware of the resources available in our community. This is at no cost to our church. Date and time will be forthcoming.

Lifeline Screening 10/13

More details to come (Oct. 13 is a Wednesday).

Family Retreat 10/15-17

At Cedars of Lebanon and led by Pastor & Lucy Mercado. More details on rates and particulars to follow.

Madison Academy 11/6

The academy will have our worship service on November 6.

International Sabbath 11/20

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