

NO APOLOGIES NEEDED

By James R. Nix

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”—Proverbs 22:6.

Most of us who were born into Adventist families grew up during the years now considered by some among us—or, sadly, who formerly were among us—as being a time of embarrassment. That’s because they view much of what our church taught and did back in the 1950s and ‘60s, both in terms of theology and lifestyle, as being either simplistic, legalistic, or outright error.

For example, they claim that during the years of our youth we were taught that salvation was gained by what we did, not by Whom we knew. Besides, because we saw ourselves as the remnant described in Revelation 12, and we believed that we had a unique end-time message found in Revelation 14 to share with the world prior to Christ’s return, they claim that the church we were raised in was self-righteous, self-centered, and bigoted. Plus, in the view of these self-avowed arbiters of the “facts” (as least as they see them), Ellen White was crammed down our throats, and, if not that, she certainly was set up as some kind of final judge over almost everything pertaining to Adventism. And on and on goes the litany of criticism of the way the church treated (or mistreated) us. As a result, many of the on-coming generation perceive that such was the way things really were.

The sad thing is that nowadays it is not just those outside the church who are saying such things. Some members—even a few church employees—view our recent denominational history in the same light. Unfortunately, for some, this may have been the possibly was the Adventism they experienced, but, fortunately, not everyone who lived during those years looks back on them that way. So, at the risk of being considered either naive or brainwashed, I want to state for the record why I’m glad that I was raised in the Adventist Church when I was. Instead of focusing on the problems, I want to celebrate Adventism. I want to share some of the many reasons why I feel blessed for having grown up Adventist during that so-called legalistic/embarrassing era.

Before sharing my reasons, I want to say that I’m the product of my church. I was both born and raised Seventh-day Adventist—in fact, I’m a sixth generation Adventist. I attended Adventist schools from first grade through the Seminary, as well as Sabbath school, church, and Pathfinders. Along the way, I gave my heart to Jesus and decided that I wanted to spend my life serving Him. In short, both my conversion and walk with Christ are linked directly to my Adventist upbringing, thanks to God’s love being modeled to me by family, teachers, pastors, and others in the church. Now let me list ten reasons why I’m not only glad that I’m a Seventh-day Adventist but that I grew up in the church when I did. I shall start with the Bible.

1. RESPECT FOR GOD’S WORD, THE BIBLE

I’m glad for the emphasis on the Bible that my church taught me. Admittedly, things were simpler back then—we pretty much all used the same version of the Bible. This helped unify the church. While I appreciate various versions, and find this proliferation of versions has caused some problems. When I grew up, memory verses in Sabbath school, and Bible texts in school, were still there to be learned and lived. In Sabbath school we had “Bible sword drills”—usually between the boys and the girls. And though more often than not we lost to the girls, still, Bible Word that I still use were being stored in my mind.

At the risk of sounding very old fashioned and “legalistic” to today’s generation, let me mention another thing I was taught—either in Sabbath school or church school. My church taught me that I should never place anything on top of the Bible. For me, that always placed the Bible in a category by itself. I know that many now claim that back then Ellen White’s writings were often viewed as being superior to the Bible. But nobody ever told me not to put anything on top of her books. Rather, my church taught me, even as a young child, that God’s Word is always uppermost, and for that I will always be grateful.

I should add, my church also taught me songs to reinforce the importance of the Bible in my thinking. I probably first learned the following little chorus at Sabbath school either in Kindergarten or Primary.

THE B-I-B-L-E

**The B – I – B – L – E,
Yes, that’s the book for me;
I stand alone on the Word of God:
The B – I – B – L – E.**

(No. 116 in *Happy Songs for Boys and Girls*.)

I also was taught a hymn back then called

GIVE ME THE BIBLE

**Give me the Bible, star of gladness gleaming
To cheer the wanderer lone and tempest tossed,
No storm can hide that peaceful radiance beaming,
Since Jesus came to seek and save the lost.**

REFRAIN:

**Give me the Bible—holy message shining,
Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way.
Precept and promise, law and love combining,
‘Till night shall vanish in eternal day.**

(No. 15 in *Singing Youth*; no. 655 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 272 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

2. THE SOON RETURN OF CHRIST

I am glad that when I grew up in the church there was a sense of urgency about the Second Coming of Christ. My teachers taught me that Jesus was coming—soon. They didn't know when, but they were convinced that it was soon, very soon. Long range plans, whether for our church, school, or my family, were always tempered with the thought, "If Jesus hasn't come by then." Probably like me, many of you can recall wondering whether you'd grow up and get married before Jesus returned. Some now look back on that age and laugh about how naïve people were then, but I'm thankful I was raised by a church that was excited about Christ's return and that believed it would happen during my lifetime. To this day does the influence of this belief prevents me from settling down and becoming enamored with this world and its allurements. I was taught clearly that there's a better place being prepared for me, and that Jesus plans to return soon to take me there. This belief helps me keep my earthly possessions in perspective. Although I am a junk collector *par excellence* (by the way, spell that "junque"—not 'junk'—collector! Thank you!), knowing that it all will be destroyed when Jesus comes helps me keep in balance the value of earthly things in contrast to eternal realities.

A song we used to sing enthusiastically in Sabbath school reinforced what my church taught me about soon being in my heavenly home:

WE ARE NEARING HOME!

**Just over the mountains in the Promised Land,
Lies the Holy City built by God's own hand;
As our weary footsteps gain the mountain's crest,
We can view our homeland of eternal rest.**

CHORUS:

**We are nearing home! We are nearing home!
See the splendor gleaming from the domes afar!
See the glory streaming thro' the gates ajar!
There we soon will enter, never more to roam,
Hear the angels singing! We are nearing home!
We are nearing home!**

(No. 142 in *Singing Youth*; no. 642 in *The Church Hymnal*, where the hymn is titled “Just Over the Mountains.”)

Though I still often say regarding long-range plans, “Let’s do such and such—‘if Jesus hasn’t come by then,’” or “‘if we are still here,’” yet as I have grown older I also have adopted some of William Miller’s thinking as my own . One of his most famous statements, written shortly after the great disappointment of October 22, 1844, was,

“I have fixed my mind on another time, and here I mean to stand until God gives me more light, and that is to-day, to-day, and to-day until he comes.”¹

Recently, a quotation from a letter that Miller wrote to a friend a few months earlier, after the spring disappointment in 1844, also has influenced my thinking about the nearness of Christ’s return. It’s in addition to my realization that I should be living each day as though it were my last. Let me give you the setting for this statement from Miller. Were you to go back in time and read any of the newspapers leading up to the spring expectation of Christ’s return (and, I might add, the same is true leading up to the October 22 date), you will find the newspapers full of ridicule, not only for Millerites in general, but in particular for William Miller himself. He was the object of scorn in newspapers, both in editorials and the scurrilous stories printed about him and his followers. He was the butt of jokes told throughout the land. He was the object of verbal attacks from the popular pulpits of the day. In short, if anyone humanly speaking ever had a right to be angry with God because Jesus didn’t return as expected, it would be William Miller. But listen to what he wrote to Elon Galusha on April 5, 1844, just a few weeks after the March 21 date that Miller first thought would be the end of the 2300-year prophecy of Daniel 8:14. After acknowledging all the abuse being heaped upon him, and telling his friend not to worry about him, Miller then described why Galusha shouldn’t worry about him. He wrote,

“Why then should I complain if God should give a few days or even months as a probation time for some to find salvation. . . . It is my Saviour’s will and I rejoice that he will do things right.”²

It’s as if Miller is saying, “Let them print cartoons about me in the newspapers; let them ridicule me in their editorials; let them tell jokes about me; let them attack me verbally from a thousand pulpits—what’s all that to me if even one more sinner for whom Christ died can be saved?” For me today, yes, I still believe with all my heart that Jesus will return soon. But if He chooses not to come during my lifetime because He wants to save a few more of those for whom He died, what’s it to me! Like Miller, I believe that Jesus will do all things right.

¹ William Miller letter to Joshua V. Himes, November 10, 1844; quoted in Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, 1853, p. 278.

² William Miller letter to Elon Galusha, April 5, 1844; quoted in George Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 1993, p. 162.

As I was growing up, it seems to me that we used to sing about the second coming a lot more than we do now. Back then, no hymn could stir an Adventist audience quite like “Lift Up the Trumpet.” When someone like Brad Braley at a General Conference session, Youth Congress, or camp meeting would strike the first chord on the large organ, the congregation in unison would fill the hall with the glad anthem. The excitement seemed literally to make the rafters vibrate!

LIFT UP THE TRUMPET

**Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring:
Jesus is coming again!
Cheer up, ye pilgrims, be joyful and sing;
Jesus is coming again!**

REFRAIN:

**Coming again, Coming again,
Jesus is coming again!**

(No. 40 in *Happy Songs for Boys and Girls*; no. 141 in *Singing Youth*; no. 541 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 213 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

Does my heart still thrill with excitement at the thought that Jesus is coming soon? Indeed it does! Thanks, church, for teaching me about the Blessed Hope and for giving me such a wonderful future to look forward to!

Before leaving this topic, I want to share a very unexpected experience involving one of my academy Bible teachers. Shortly before his retirement, this man was in Loma Linda for some meetings. The day before his committee began, he stopped by to visit me in the Heritage Room in the university library where I was working. Part way through our visit he said that he owed me an apology. In fact, he went on to say that with retirement just ahead of him he was trying to find as many of his former students as he could in order to apologize to all of us. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out what in the world my favorite academy Bible teacher would need to apologize for. But I didn't have to wait long to find out. He said that he wanted to apologize to me because Jesus hadn't already returned. He explained that when he taught my class he was so positive that Christ was about to return that by teaching me that the second coming was almost here he had obviously taught me a falsehood, so he now wanted to ask my forgiveness. I looked at him in shock and amazement! “Elder _____,” I blurted out, “you don't have anything to apologize for! That's one of the most important things you taught me!” I meant it then, and I mean it today.

I repeat, I am glad that when I was growing up I had Adventist teachers and pastors who believed strongly in the soon coming of Christ, and were genuinely excited about it. They also were the people who helped me to fall in love with Jesus, so why shouldn't I be excited about His soon return?! I hope that today's pastors and teachers

are as enthusiastic about the Second Advent as were those when I was in school, but I confess to sometimes wondering. I remember my surprise several years ago when my daughter, at the end of her junior year in academy, was talking with me once about our church. Among other things, she mentioned the soon return of Christ. She wanted to know if our church really still believes it. I asked her why she wondered. She replied, “I know you believe it, Dad, but if the church still believes it, why don’t we ever hear about it in church?” After all, we are Seventh-day *Adventists*. Does our belief in the soon return of Christ still come alive in our classrooms? Do the young people in our churches still catch the sense of excitement that Jesus is about to return? I hope so.

3. THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH

I’m glad that I grew up in a time when the Sabbath was carefully observed by Adventists, from sundown Friday evening to sundown Sabbath evening. By sunset on Friday, our house had been cleaned, our baths had been taken, the Sabbath meal had been prepared, and we were ready to welcome the hours of the Sabbath.

A few years ago I was visiting another division as a guest camp meeting speaker. During one of our meals in the workers’ dining room, I couldn’t help but overhear a conversation going on among several local pastors sitting at the next table. They were saying how glad they were to have lived long enough to see the church get over its legalistic view of Sabbathkeeping. And they were laughing about some of our past “rules” such as that it was all right to get your feet wet in the ocean on Sabbath, but not to swim, etc. Finally, I had taken about all I could, and I turned and said to them, “But we still face the challenge of helping our members understand the concept of holiness in time.” Abruptly their conversation changed as they admitted that the concept of holiness in time is something that we as a church are losing.

I recognize that what you decide is appropriate to do on Sabbath may sometimes differ from what I feel comfortable doing. This was forcibly impressed upon my young mind when a missionary couple, home on furlough from South America, visited my family. During the conversation the minister commented upon several changes he had observed in the church after being out of the United States for six years. One thing in particular was regarding Adventists riding their bicycles on Sabbath. To me, that had never been an issue. I was raised knowing that on Sabbath I shouldn’t be riding my bicycle up and down the street with the neighbor kids like on other days, but the fact that merely riding a bicycle on Sabbath was viewed by some as being inappropriate was a new thought to me. You see, I was raised by my grandparents. My grandfather was a busy, old fashioned family doctor who still made house calls at night. Often when I was young he would be gone before I got up in the morning and would get home at night after I had gone to bed. But Sabbath mornings were different. He and I usually took a leisurely bike ride before breakfast. Consequently, that was my once-a-week chance to spend time with him. So, obviously, the simple riding of my bike didn’t seem wrong to me.

Despite such differences of opinion in terms of what constitutes proper Sabbath observance, still I am glad to have been raised when the concept was taught me that the hours of the Sabbath are holy—they are different from the hours in the other days of the week. If anecdotal information has any factual basis to it at all, what I hear now is that a growing number of Adventist young people—even dare I say it, some families—see nothing wrong with going to the mall on Friday night or Sabbath afternoons, eating out in restaurants, teachers running in marathons and getting others to cheer them on, etc. If the trend continues, I fear that Sabbath for Adventists will become like Sunday is for most Protestants. When I was young, even the songs they taught me to sing reinforced what my church was trying to help me learn:

HOLY SABBATH DAY

**Holy Sabbath day of rest, By our Master richly blest,
God created and divine, Set aside for holy time.**

CHORUS:

**Yes, the holy Sabbath rest, By our God divinely blest,
It to us a sign shall be Throughout all eternity.**

(No. 19 in *Singing Youth*; and no. 381 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

As I have said, I am glad that I was raised in a time when the sanctity and holiness of the Sabbath were strongly emphasized. My life has been the richer as a result of recognizing the specialness of these 24 hours of time each week. Probably for this reason I still feel uncomfortable every time I read in one of our church bulletins or some church publication directed specifically to Adventists that such-and-such an activity is going to be held next “Saturday.” Every fiber of my being wants to cry out. “*No. It’s God’s Holy Sabbath that we’re talking about, not Saturday!!*” I am fearful that as a church we are in grave danger of losing a sense of the uniqueness and holiness of the Sabbath. If ever that happens, we truly will have lost much.

4. REVERENCE IN CHURCH

Although today it may seem to be a bit quaint, I’m also glad that my church taught me reverence and respect in the house of God. I’ve heard the argument by some that what I was taught was merely cultural, and that the culture has changed. That may be debated. But what I am sharing are reasons why I feel fortunate to have been raised in our church when I was. View it however one wants, I’m glad that I was taught not to talk out loud in church, or to applaud, or make other loud noises, and that when I came to church I did so my clean Sabbath clothes” that generally were not worn on any day of the week. Learning that has been a blessing for me because to this day all those practices continue to remind me that the church sanctuary is special—it is the house of God. I have come there to worship, not to be entertained.

Yes, when I was growing up I was taught that the church sanctuary was for worshiping in, while the foyer was reserved for greetings one's friends, and the fellowship hall and/or the school gymnasium were reserved for secular activities. Keeping that distinction in my thinking has been helpful to me through the years. I still know that when I arrive at church I am there to worship. This knowledge guides how I enter into the entire worship event. Thanks to what I was taught, church for me is not a social club designed to meet the needs of what some today call "cultural Adventists" or "pew warmers." Rather, I know that I have come there to worship God, my Savior and Friend. For that, my life has been the richer. And again, my church reinforced its teaching through music. My church taught me to sing

BE SILENT, BE SILENT

**Be silent, be silent, A whisper is heard;
Be silent and listen, Oh, treasure each word.
Tread softly, tread softly, The Master is here;
Tread softly, tread softly, He bids us draw near.**

(No. 28 in *Happy Songs for Boys and Girls*; no. 601 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 479 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* where it is titled "Tread Softly.")

5. THE BAPTISMAL SERVICE

Although I am as thrilled as the next person about the explosive growth of our church in recent years, I can't help but feel a bit nostalgic for the baptisms in my small church as I was growing up. To this day, they bring back warm memories. Baptisms were not squeezed in between the offering and hymn of meditation just before the sermon. In the old adobe church where I worshiped as a child, baptisms took as long as they needed to take. Especially on such occasions, the Holy Spirit was never rushed.

No matter whether it was one or two students from the church school who were being baptized, or a sizeable group resulting from an evangelistic series, the program was the same. The candidates for baptism were called to the front of the church where they were introduced, asked if they accepted Christ as their Savior and believed the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They were then voted into fellowship, subject to their baptism. Next, while the candidates and the minister retired to back rooms to prepare for the baptism, one of the church elders led the congregation in singing hymns. By the time the participants were ready, several hymns had been sung. Then, between each individual baptism, an additional stanza of some hymn was sung. Even now, in my mind's ear I can hear the soft sounds of the water lapping at the four sides of the baptismal tank resulting from the candidate having just been immersed, and the soft, reverent sobs coming from the congregation, coupled with the heartfelt "amens" after each individual came up after being baptized. And the memory of the old hymns we sang on such sacred occasions still tugs at my heart and brings a tear to my eye. One of those hymns that we sang in my little church was

TAKE THE WORLD, BUT GIVE ME JESUS

**Take the world, but give me Jesus; All its joys are but a name,
But His love abideth ever, Through eternal years the same.**

REFRAIN:

**Oh, the height and depth of mercy!
Oh, the length and breadth of love!
Oh, the fullness of redemption,
Pledge of endless life above.**

(No. 596 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 329 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

Another one we used to sing at baptisms was

THERE IS A FOUNTAIN

**There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins:
And sinners plunged beneath that flood, Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains, Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood, Lose all their guilty stains.**

(No. 163 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 336 in the current *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

6. EMPHASIS ON HEALTH AND TEMPERANCE

When I was growing up in the church, we had temperance oratorical and poster contests in school, and it was considered taboo practices to serve at church functions that contained caffeine, such as caffeinated tea, coffee, and cola drinks. Nothing containing meat, black pepper, or mustard was served at church potlucks or other church-related functions that I attended. And most certainly, alcoholic drinks were not served at Adventist weddings. In my family, I was even taught not to eat between meals.

Some today consider all this to be legalistic, or at least out-of-date, but I want to thank my church for teaching me that my body is the temple of God, so how I treat it is important. I'm glad I was taught that God isn't merely trying to give me a few extra years of healthy life here on earth, but in fact He is trying to prepare me for an eternity with Him. As a result, I was never tempted to smoke, drink alcohol, or do drugs. In addition to the above, I was taught moderation in whatever I ate, something that admittedly I don't always practice as well as I might, but thanks to my church, at least I understand the concept. Consequently, whenever some new diet plan or teaching comes

along in society, I still check the latest fad against what God showed Ellen White. If there seems to be no agreement, I don't give the new claim another thought. Of course, I realize that not everything Ellen White wrote about diet and health has yet been confirmed by medical science. But even during my lifetime, watching medical science flip this way and flop that—including even regarding vegetarianism—I never cease to be amazed at how often when all the dust finally settles, the final conclusion agrees with what God showed a woman with a very limited formal education more than 140 years ago.

So, I am grateful to my church not only for teaching me that my body is the temple of God, but that there is one demonstrably reliable source in the area of health and temperance against which I can gauge current health claims and fads as I attempt to determine which to adopt and which to ignore. And, yes, my church also taught me a song that reinforced what it was trying to teach me regarding the importance of health and temperance.

DARE TO BE A DANIEL

**Standing by a purpose true, Heeding God's command,
Honor them the faithful few! All hail to Daniel's band!**

CHORUS:

**Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone,
Dare to have a purpose firm! Dare to make it known!**

(No. 179 in *Singing Youth*.)

7. ADVENTISM'S PROPHETIC IDENTITY AND MESSAGE

As I was growing up, I was taught that Seventh-day Adventists have “the truth.” I realize that with many today this concept is out of vogue, but, frankly, I'm glad I grew up believing in the prophetic identity and message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—including the fact that what our church teaches and preaches is “truth.” I was taught that the history of our movement was predicted centuries in advance in Revelation 10, that God's end-time remnant are identified in Revelation 12, and that our prophetic assignment, including the message God wants preached just before Christ returns, is given to us in Revelation 14.

Granted, some may have seen in our claim a kind of exclusivity or something to boast about, but I don't recall ever being taught that. On the contrary, I was taught that joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church was both a privilege and a solemn responsibility. In fact, the MV Society taught me a motto back then that both challenged and excited me: “The Advent message to all the world in this generation.” God was counting on me as part of His remnant people to do my part to help warn the world of Christ's soon return. That was an awesome concept for a young person to ponder! And

of course, we sang about it.

I'LL SHARE MY FAITH

**I'll share my faith with others on life's way.
I'll share my faith; there's no time for delay.
When Jesus calls for volunteers,
I'll hasten to obey.
I'll share, share, share my faith Ev'ry day.**

(No. 3 in *Singing Youth*.)

8. ADVENTIST LIFESTYLE

I know that to some I may sound extreme with this one, but I'm thankful that when I grew up in the church I was taught not to go to the theater, dance, listen to popular-type music, read novels, wear jewelry, play cards, bowl, play pool, or even be enamored with professional sports. Were we too rigid back then? Probably so. Would my guardian angel really leave me at the door were I to venture into a theater? Even though young, it didn't take me very long to figure out that if anything, rather than leaving me at the door to the theater, the Holy Spirit, or my guardian angel—someone—stuck right with me, working on me even harder.

But why am I glad that my church tried to teach me about the potential dangers posed by these and other lifestyle issues? Because, for the rest of my life I will always stop to think whether doing whatever activity that was once on the taboo list is really the best way I can use my time and money. By not reading, watching, and doing a lot of things that others in our society read, watch, and do, I don't have my mind cluttered with a lot of things that others must unclutter their minds of when they decide to follow Christ. Those things that I never learned to do, which later I discovered I shouldn't be doing anyway, I didn't then have to unlearn. It is my hope that in our rush to undo our alleged legalistic past, our church doesn't go so far the other way in terms of lifestyle issues that basically we leave no standards in place to teach our young people. I would have been robbed of many valuable insights had that been true when I was growing up in the church.

I'm not going to go through these issues one by one, but whether it is the extremely competitive nature of sports, which is the exact opposite of Christ's teachings about how to treat others, or the vivid portrayals of sex and violence on the Internet, cable television, and in the theater, not to mention novels that one can read, I am so grateful that my church taught me to be very careful about what I put into my mind. There are some places that an Adventist Christian just shouldn't go, and some things that we simply shouldn't do. Thanks, church, for teaching me that! Although I've slipped at times in my life, thank you for holding the standard high by teaching me that there really is a line out there that the Adventist Christian shouldn't cross. My life has been the better, and my Christian experience the richer, because you taught me that.

And you also reminded me of this in the songs you taught me:

I WOULD BE LIKE JESUS

**Earthly pleasures vainly call me; I would be like Jesus;
Nothing worldly shall enthrall me; I would be like Jesus.**

CHORUS:

**Be like Jesus, this my song, In the home and in the throng;
Be like Jesus all day long! I would be like Jesus.**

(No. 70 in *Singing Youth*; no 311 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

There was also a little chorus that my church taught me:

I WANT TO BE READY WHEN JESUS COMES

**I want to be ready when Jesus comes;
I want to be ready when Jesus comes.
Earth's pleasures grow dim
While I'm waiting for Him;
Lord, keep me till Jesus comes.**

(No. 124 in *Singing Youth*.)

9. THE WORLDWIDE ADVENT MOVEMENT

I am glad that I grew up in a church where worldwide outreach and mission were stressed. As a child I saw that I was part of something much bigger than the little local church where my family worshiped Sabbath by Sabbath. Whether it was the solicitation of funds for the “poor and needy” through the annual Ingathering campaign, the Pathfinder fairs that I went to year by year, the camp meetings that my family went to nearly every summer, or even the occasional Youth Congress or General Conference session that I attended, through various means my church helped me remember that there is more to the Advent movement than just my local church. And yes, when I was growing up, we still viewed ourselves as a movement, not just a church in the formal sense of the word.

Every Sabbath someone read the Mission Story during Sabbath school. Today’s “Mission Spotlight” is informative, but as a young person it did me good occasionally to have to wrestle with pronouncing names of persons and places that sounded foreign to my American English-speaking ears when my church asked me to read the Mission Story. No doubt we sometimes murdered the pronunciation, but we were excited to be part of a church that was carrying the Three Angels’ messages to far-flung places that otherwise almost none of us would ever have heard about. It gave us a broader world

perspective than most of our neighbors had.

As I noted earlier, I was raised by my grandparents. My grandfather, a busy physician, had an activity that he and I often did on Sabbath afternoons. Back in those days, most so-called developing countries were struggling to get medications of any kind for their citizens. Consequently, my grandfather decided that he could do his part in a small way to alleviate the situation. He would ask representatives of pharmaceutical companies to give him samples of various medicines, surgical gloves, and other items that were in short supply at our medical clinics and hospitals around the world. Then he and I carefully wrapped the packages in heavy paper on Sabbath afternoons, meticulously tying the packages with string, with each place where the strings crossed being double-tied with square knots in order to make certain that our packages survived the trip to intended destinations. Most of those packages went to Adventist institutions where Grandpa knew the physician in charge, but not always. Many years later when I was in Papua New Guinea, I asked to be taken to our Sopas Hospital (now, unfortunately, closed) in the highlands. Why did I want to go there? I wanted to see where some of the boxes of medications had gone that I as a kid helped my grandfather pack. More recently, I was in Nigeria. When asked what I wanted to see while in that country, I replied, “Ile Ife Hospital.” Nobody could understand why, but for me it was quite simple. It was another place for which we had wrapped and sent packages when I was a kid. This concept of volunteerism was also reinforced in my mind through singing.

THE CAPTAIN CALLS FOR YOU

**There’s another task to do, There’s a battle to renew;
And the Captain calls for you, Volunteers! Volunteers!
Rally to the throbbing drum! Shout the word, “We come, we come!”
Volunteers! Volunteers! Volunteers!**

CHORUS:

**Christ before us, Christ behind, Christ on every side!
For the rescue of mankind, On to glory ride!
Volunteers! Volunteers! Volunteers!**

(No. 4 in *Singing Youth*.)

To this day, I see myself as part of a worldwide movement—one that is marching to ultimate victory—thanks to what my church taught me when I was growing up.

10. HYMNS AND DISTINCTLY ADVENTIST-ORIENTED CHORUSES

I’m glad that when I was growing up, my church taught me to sing hymns and distinctly Adventist-oriented choruses. The songs I was taught in church, school, and Pathfinders reinforced the beliefs of my church. In saying this I am not downing the currently popular evangelical Praise Choruses, but every time as hear them it strikes me

that many are quite superficial. All I'm saying is that I'm glad that as I was growing up we sang hymns and choruses that had theological or doctrinal content, and that were distinctly Adventist-oriented.

In all candor, as a small child there were a couple of hymns we occasionally sang that I had no idea at all what they meant. Still, something about them fascinated me. One was

WE ARE LIVING, WE ARE DWELLING

**We are living, we are dwelling, In a grand and awful time,
In an age of ages telling—To be living is sublime.
Hark! the waking up of nations, Gog and Magog to the fray;
Hark? what soundeth? Is creation Groaning for her latter day?**

(No. 359 in *The Church Hymnal*, and no. 617 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

As a child, I didn't have the slightest idea who or what Gog and Magog were, nevertheless my young mind was put to the stretch singing about them. Another hymn that similarly challenged my young understanding was the second stanza of

COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING

**Here I raise my Ebenezer, Hither by Thy help I've come,
And I hope by Thy good pleasure Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, Wandering from the fold of God;
He to rescue me from danger Interposed His precious blood.**

(No. 291 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 334 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

Again, I didn't have a clue as to what an Ebenezer was, but the thought of raising one intrigued my young mind.

As I was growing up, hymns like Del Delker's theme song, "The Love of God," spoke to my soul while at the same time stretching my mind—especially the last verse:

THE LOVE OF GOD

**Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill,
And ev'ry man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;**

**Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Tho' stretched from sky to sky.
CHORUS:**

**Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and
strong!
It shall forevermore endure—The saints and angels' song.**

(No. 7 in *Singing Youth*.)

As a youngster, I could resonate to that kind of love, even if today I still can't fully comprehend it.

I'm not going to list the hymns that I learned as a child that blessed me, but to this day as I go about my work I find myself humming or softly singing the hymns I was taught. And why do these hymns mean so much to me? because they are part and parcel of who I am as an Adventist—they almost express better even than the spoken word who and what I am.

I am fearful that in this regard we as a church may be shortchanging our young people. After all, what they learn to sing when young is pretty much what they will sing the rest of their lives. Sometime back I was leading an academy denominational history tour in New England. Usually when we got to William Miller's grave—the last stop on our visit to the Miller sites—I ask tour groups to join me in singing a stanza or two of "Lift Up the Trumpet." Figuring that possibly these academy sophomores might not know that hymn, I asked them. My hunch was confirmed; not one of them did. So I asked, "Do you know 'We Have This Hope?'" Again, not one of the students did. I then asked if there was a Praise Chorus about the second coming of Christ that we could sing there by Miller's grave. Neither students nor sponsors could come up with one (I have since been told that there is at least one, but no one remembered it that day.)

My point simply is, if we are going to teach young people to sing Praise Choruses, then as a church we owe it to them to write some that are distinctly Adventist—that emphasize our beliefs. What young people learn now is what they will continue to sing the rest of their lives. That's what my church taught me as I was growing up!

WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE

**Sing them over again to me, Wonderful words of life;
Let me more of their beauty see, Wonderful words of life.
Words of life and beauty, Teach me faith and duty;**

REFRAIN:

Beautiful words, wonderful words, Wonderful words of life,

Beautiful words, wonderful words, Wonderful words of life.

(No. 574 in *The Church Hymnal*; and no. 286 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.)

I'm glad my church taught me hymns and gospel songs in addition to the choruses I learned. That reinforced my Adventist beliefs.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the above, I could also briefly add several other things for which I am glad my church taught me. Among these would be,

1. My obligation to return the tithe and to give offerings, that my possessions are not my own, but have all been loaned to me by God. By doing so, my church has taught me stewardship, not only of my funds but also of my time.
2. The Great Controversy theme—that although I can't explain the whys and wherefores of everything that happens in this world, I know that there is a larger cosmic struggle going on in the universe between Christ and His angels and Satan and his angels—and that God has a plan to put an end to the sin problem throughout the universe.
3. That Ellen White was a genuine prophet of the Lord and that His counsels through her on all sorts of topics have authority—including even her depiction of the events leading up to Christ's return that help me as I wait and watch for it. Despite protests by some to the contrary, her insights into the role of the papacy, church unity between Protestants, Catholics, and Spiritualists, wars and financial uncertainties, crime and pollution in the cities—all of these, and much more, have never been contradicted by events themselves. Consequently, I continue to have faith in other things she says God showed her about any number of topics. I'm glad my church taught me to accept her prophetic messages as being valid; doing so has in many, many ways enriched my life.
4. That the history of my church is important. My well-marked academy denominational history textbook attests to the fact that I was taught Adventist history. Apparently my teacher did a good a job, since that was my first introduction to what eventually became my life work—the preservation and promotion of the history of our church.
5. Most importantly, I was taught by my church that Jesus' not only forgives my sins, He also empowers me to overcome them. I was also taught that Jesus is preparing a people who are safe to save—to live with Him throughout eternity. And that through accepting His freely offered robe of righteousness, Jesus is inviting me to be among those saved saints.

In short, in my opinion Adventism is the best thing going. No apologies are needed for that. After all, my church gave me cogent answers to the really big questions

in life:

1. Where I came from.
2. Why I am here.
3. Where I am going.

Were I to live up to everything my church taught me as I was growing up, I cannot think of any better way to live. Because of my love for Christ, I would try to emulate Him in all I do. I would be genuinely interested in helping my neighbors and those less fortunate in our world. I would love and respect my family. I would do only those things that would keep my body healthy. I would be honest in all my business dealings. And at the end of each day when it is time to go to sleep, I'd ask for forgiveness for my failings, knowing that it would be eagerly granted, and I'd awake the next morning asking for grace and wisdom to help me through another day. In short, my church taught me how to live my life to the fullest without guilt, anxiety, or despair. For that I am most grateful.

Please consider carefully this question: If we listen to the voices out there that call for the church to abandon many of its distinctive teachings, thus discarding many of the things it taught me is, what will we give the next generation to replace them? What legacy will they receive in their place?

Can we improve here and there on how we package what I was taught? Very likely.

Did some people in the past take some of the church's teachings to extremes? Yes, unfortunately.

But overall, should we change the best package for living that God has ever devised for His people? With all my heart I hope not!

In short, I disagree with those who say that I was mistreated, misinformed, and outright misled by my church. To my way of thinking, the Devil has stolen a march on some of us by getting us to buy into this false picture. As for me, I will forever be glad that I was raised at a time when my church clearly enunciated what it believed and stood for. With all the distorted charges made by today's critics, no wonder many of our young people find it difficult to accept Adventism. With such a cloud of dust being stirred up, how can they ever be expected to see what they will be missing if they reject what the church offers?

Ellen White opens her book *Education* with this classic statement:

“Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of

existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”—*Education*, p. 13.

A few pages later she wrote,

“Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached.”—*Education*, p. 18.

For challenging me to that kind of thinking and living, I will ever be grateful to my church—to God’s last-day inspired messenger, to my pastors, teachers, Sabbath school and Pathfinder leaders, and to my family—who by both precept and example introduced me to the rich and rewarding Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle. For having done so, no apologies will ever be needed! But if they had they not exposed me to all these advantages—had they kept them from me—they would most certainly now owe me an apology. Thank you, church, for being so distinctly Adventist!

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