
youth
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THE
GOODNESS
OF GOD

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THE GOODNESS OF GOD

When pondering the Creator of the universe, many awesome qualities come to mind. The amazing extremes of the vast, limitless expanse of His universe in contrast to the tiny, invisible intricacies of His microscopic world are beyond words. There is no weight too heavy for His shoulders to bear, no detail too delicate for His fingers to handle, no perplexity too complex for His intelligence to figure out, and no stain of wickedness too filthy for Him to cleanse—all according to His perfect will.

But one thing stands out as striking—and that is His overall goodness. God is just plain 100% good. No one has ever met anyone who can match that!

In His earthly ministry to the fallen human race as the Son of man, Jesus explained, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:10, 11). His perfect plan is abundant life for anyone and everyone who will accept Him. He was willing to give up His life to care for us, just as a shepherd does for his sheep.

In this issue of the Youth Messenger, we will delve into some inspiring testimonies from people who have become acquainted with the tremendous goodness of God and have seen and felt it in their lives. Such a level of goodness cannot be left without mentioning it! Most of the world does not appreciate it, often because they simply haven't pursued it. But the apostle makes an earnest appeal to us all:

"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

Yes, this goodness can indeed make a real difference in our lives both now and for eternity, so let's determine to pursue it wholeheartedly!

—Barbara Montrose

Gracious, Omnibenevolent, and Divine

BY NIKITA ESPINAL

God is:

Gracious

On a beautiful day in September 2020, I was baptized in Roanoke, Virginia during the COVID pandemic. At that time, I was living in Boston but officially wanted to move back to Roanoke since that was where I had grown up and still had family there. Since getting baptized, I have seen God work in my life in amazing ways. Life has not gotten easier, but I have seen Him guiding me and I continue to feel His love and presence in my life.

After my baptism, I started applying to different jobs in Roanoke. There was one job for which I applied and interviewed. The encounter went very well and I proceeded to the next round of interviews. That also went well and it was down to myself and only one other candidate. I thought it was the perfect job for me. It was the work setting that I wanted, the pay was great, and while it was two hours away from Roanoke, I figured it was close enough. However, after the last round of interviews I heard nothing from the supervisor. I reached out multiple times and was told repeatedly that they had not made a decision yet.

In January 2021, the opportunity presented itself to go to missionary school. I was hesitant to go because I still had not heard back from the job and did not want to miss this opportunity to move back home. However, with the encouragement of my family and friends, I made one of the best decisions of my life. I decided to quit my job in Boston and go to missionary school.

A few months into missionary school I finally heard back from the job letting me know that they had chosen the other candidate, but by then I no longer wanted the job and was thankful that they had taken so long to respond. If they had responded sooner and offered me the job, I would not have gone to missionary school. Attending missionary school was a very last-minute decision, but it was the fresh start and spiritual boost I needed—and it gave me the opportunity to move back home to Roanoke afterwards, just like I had wanted!

God is: *Omnibenevolent*

Usually you find a job first and then move to a new place, but after missionary school I went back to Boston, packed up my things, moved to Roanoke, hoping and praying that God would provide me with a job. I moved in June 2021 and started applying and interviewing at different places. I got a couple of offers but turned them down because they were not a good fit. Then, I reached out to a woman I happened to meet a few years before at a work conference in Rhode Island. She was from Virginia, and we had exchanged contact information and she told me to reach out if I ever moved back to Virginia. I hadn't kept in touch since then but when I



moved back, I thought of her and indeed reached out, asking if she knew of any places that were hiring. She told me of one job in particular that sounded like the perfect fit for me and put me in contact with the supervisor. We spoke and she told me they were hiring and to go ahead and apply.

In August I applied for the job. I really wanted this job and worked hard on the application. It even turned out that one of the references I used knew the supervisor personally. I thought I was pretty much guaranteed the position, but I submitted the application and heard nothing back. As the months went by and I still hadn't heard back or found a different job I started to get discouraged. I started to think that maybe I had made a mistake in leaving my job and moving without having secured a job first. But I loved being back in Roanoke and I became very involved in my church, which really helped my spiritual life. Even though my professional life wasn't going the way I wanted it to, this allowed my spiritual life to become the priority, which made it all worth it.

In December, I started working at a call center. It wasn't the job I wanted, but I really needed the money. I worked there for three months and I didn't enjoy it at all. My supervisor and coworkers were great, but the type of work I was doing really wasn't enjoyable to me. On the contrary, I felt anxious every time I drove to work and was not able to breathe a single sigh of relief until my shift ended. My family and I kept praying for a better job.

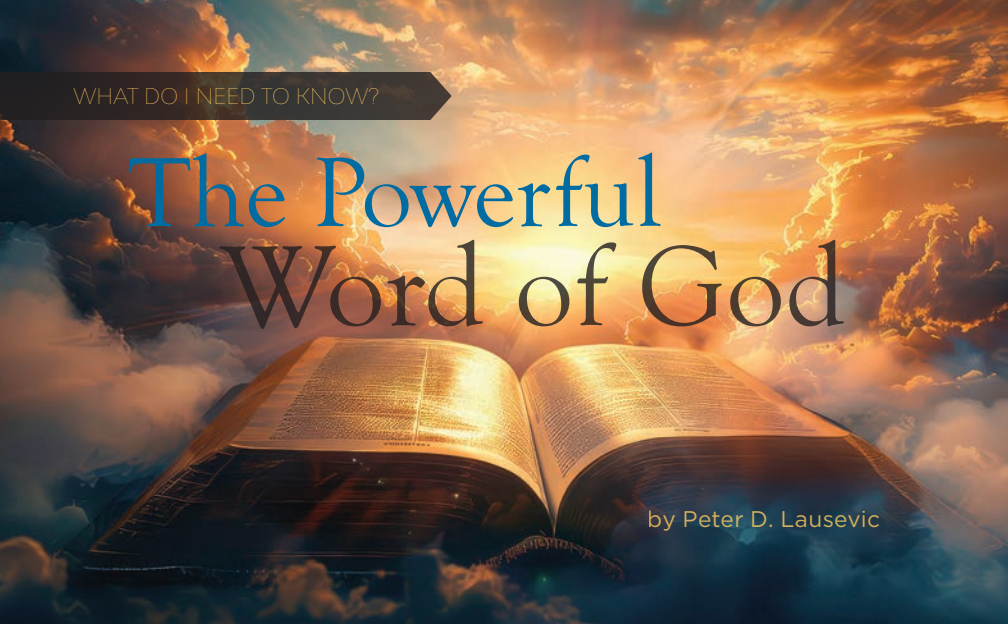
God is: *Divine*

In March 2022, my coworkers and I found out that the call center was closing down and that all the workers were being given the option to continue working from home. Around the same time, I got a call from a woman whose name was vaguely familiar but I wasn't sure from where. I answered it and she greeted me and said, "I see that you applied for a job with us back in August and I am only just seeing it now. I know it's been seven months but are you still interested in the position?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I was so excited and shocked at the timing of the call. I didn't want to continue working at my current job and them closing down made it the perfect time to transition over into a new job! I answered that yes, I was still very much interested in the



position. The interview and hiring process went very quickly and smoothly and I ended up working my last day at the call center on a Friday and starting at my new and current job on a Monday.

To this day, I am at a job that I love. Everyone on my team is so supportive, encouraging, and best of all, they're all Christians. I've never been at a job where there is a prayer request wall in the office and I can talk about God and pray with my coworkers. I have been able to grow both professionally and spiritually through this job—and I am so thankful to God and how He led me to where I am today. Little did I know that God had started leading me to this job years before when I met the woman at the conference. I had been looking for a job for months and wanted this job according to my own timing, but He brought me into this job exactly at His perfect time. I want to praise Him with Proverbs 3:5, 6: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."



The Powerful Word of God

by Peter D. Lausevic

HOW POWERFUL IS GOD'S WORD?

The Christian life is often compared to that of a soldier. The apostle Paul made this very clear to Timothy: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). The reason why we are soldiers is because our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). We are in a real battle with Satan. He is not willing that anyone be saved if he can prevent it.

Therefore, because we are in this all-out war, we are urged: "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 6:13).

Being participants in this spiritual war, which part of our armor is the most important? Can we survive without any part of it? No, we are told, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

Notice the word "whole" in this text. This indicates that every bit is just as important as the other. If you don't have the shield, you have no protection. If you don't have the helmet; the enemy's darts will find just that spot. Remember the stone that David picked up in the riverbed found Goliath's weakness in his forehead with lethal results. But if you don't have your sword, you cannot even defend yourself and don't belong out on the battlefield. Although every part of our armor is important, we want to emphasize "the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

POWER IN THE WORD

As we have seen in Ephesians, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. But what kind of sword is the Word? "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). It is quick and powerful and even sharper than any two-edged swords in this world. Why? Because it is not only able to cut the flesh like the swords in battle; it cuts to the soul and spirit and is even the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart! That means even our motives. It is more powerful than any device that man has made with all the sophisticated, computerized technology in the world. The Word of God is even more powerful than the crowning work of God's creation—man himself.

Do you see now why it's so essential to have the Bible in your life, leading, guiding, and strengthening you? It makes you a new person—a better person than you ever dreamed!

As powerful as is the Word in the above paragraph, is this the limit of its power? The psalmist tells us in Psalm 33:6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." God used His word to create all the things around us. In an instant, "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9). All God had to do was speak His word and that Word created all He spoke just as fast as He spoke it. It might be easier for us to try to imagine how God could make the world out of substance that already existed—but in Hebrews 11:3 we see even greater power: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." The scientific notion that matter cannot be created nor destroyed does not apply to the power of the Word of God. He creates something out of nothing. Now, that is powerful!

But, did the Word create something out of nothing and then leave it to take care of itself? No! In Hebrews 1:3 we are assured that Christ is "upholding all things by the word of his power." The only reason why we or any other living thing has any existence in this earth at all is because of the power of the Word of God. Of course, most of the world refuses to believe that God's Word is so powerful. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water" (2 Peter 3:5). And then when God's Word let go of keeping this world in that order, "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Peter 3:6). Without

the power of this Word in keeping this world and upholding it, there would be nothing but chaos—the same type of chaos that will be seen in what many people view as the apocalypse. “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

So, the Word of God is so powerful that it can create something out of nothing, and then, that which it originally created is maintained by the same Word. The waters do not rise higher on the face of this earth because of the law of gravity. But that law of gravity was created by the Word of God and exists by the Word. When the Word allowed it, the gravitational pull was changed and there was a worldwide flood of mammoth proportions. Now the same Word gives us the assurance that this massive worldwide flooding will never happen again: The Creator assures us: “Neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done” (Genesis 8:21). Instead of a worldwide flood, this world, by the same Word, is now reserved to a destruction by fire (2 Peter 3:9, 10).

Because God created all things through His Word (He “spake and it was done”), this Word can enter into the deepest parts of what it created. Thus the Word of God is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”



POWER TO CHANGE THE HUMAN HEART

After David's sin with Bathsheba, he desired more than mere forgiveness. He wanted to have that sin blotted out of existence. He earnestly prayed: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). Not only did he want them blotted out, but he further says: "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:2). In order for this to happen, he had to specifically admit his sin unto God: "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). One of the first steps was to recognize that his great sin was not so much against Bathsheba, as grievous as that was, but it was against God Himself: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51:4). The reason is because God created Bathsheba—and when a person defaces what He had created, they are defacing Him.

David wasn't so worried about the temporary consequences of sin—he just wanted to be clean before God: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:5–7). In reading Psalm 51, we cannot but associate ourselves together with David's struggle that the guilt of sin has placed upon him. Oh, if he could only be freed from sin! He therefore cries out to God: "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities" (Psalm 51:9). Oh, if only this could take place! Is it really possible to blot sin out of our memory?

Is it possible to transform the filthy, sinful life into that of purity? Job, in answering Zophar the Naamathite, said: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4). Naturally this is impossible. Jeremiah compares this possibility as seen in the natural world: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23). It seems so impossible. "There may be an outward correctness of deportment without the renewing power of Christ. The love of influence and the desire for the esteem of others may produce a well-ordered life. Self-respect may lead us to avoid the appearance of evil. A selfish heart may perform generous actions."—*Steps to Christ,* p. 58. But the corrupt heart is not changed; it still desires to do evil secretly when undetected by others.

What is the only way for the corrupt human heart to actually be changed into a heart that delights in righteousness? David continues in Psalm 51:10: "Create

in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." The only way for this to take place is by the supreme power of creation. God must create this completely new element in us. He must create something out of nothing, something good out of something that is completely depraved and evil. This power of creation must first take away the wicked heart (or mind) and then make a totally new one. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

This change is so great that Jesus explained it to Nicodemus in that nighttime interview as if it were a completely new creation. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It is starting all over again. The life was once full of the works of the flesh: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness" and other sins. (Read Galatians 5:19–21.) Now, after a person is born of the Spirit (See John 3:5), he no longer has the fruits of the flesh—but instead of these wicked elements, the fruits of the Spirit become manifested. These new results are described as follows: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22, 23).

The change is so radical that "the things they once hated they now love, and the things they once loved they hate. The proud and self-assertive become meek and lowly in heart. The vain and supercilious become serious and unobtrusive. The drunken become sober, and the profligate pure."—*Steps to Christ,* p. 58.

But how is the heart created anew? How is the life changed into a new being? How are we born again? "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). Here is that power again: It is by the Word of God. The same Word that created the heaven and earth is still working in this corner of the vast universe. The Word of God is creating clean hearts out of unclean ones.



WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS?

The power in the Word does not work upon everyone. Why not? There is a specific requirement that needs to be fulfilled. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The word of God is only effective in those who have faith in Its eternal power.

The Word of God is the Gospel, for both have the same effect: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). How do we know that the gospel (which in essence is Christ) is the Word? Speaking of the different names of Christ, John says in Revelation 19:13: "And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God." So the reason that the Word is so powerful is that the Word is Jesus Christ "and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14. This Word was "In the beginning . . . and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1–4).

By accepting the Word of God in our life, It will create faith in us, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17. Thus, faith created in us by the Word of God will overcome the world, "for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

In order for a clean thing to come out of an unclean, the Word of God is necessary to create that change. But, as we have read earlier, God not only created the world by the Word, He is also "upholding all things by the Word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). So, we would have to conclude that the only way to maintain our born-again experience is by the same Word of God. This is confirmed in Colossians 2:6: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." We are to continue in Christ (in our Christian walk) the same way we started. How did we begin the new creation? By the powerful, eternal Word of God.

But how can we communicate with Christ the Word now that He has departed? The angel that spoke to John in vision said: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). Christ is speaking to us today through the prophets. The Bible

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is full of these revelations from the throne of Deity. Thus we can say that since this (the words of the prophets in the Bible) is the testimony of Jesus, the Bible is Christ's Word to us. We can communicate with Him through prayer and listen to Him through the study of the Bible. As we realize and believe, the Word of God will be "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Not the dead letters on the pages of the Scriptures, but as we read and study, those words on the written page are Christ Jesus speaking directly to us through them.

CONCLUSION

Jesus said: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). The psalmist also said: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:9–11).

"As faith thus receives and assimilates the principles of truth, they become a part of the being and the motive power of the life. The word of God, received into the soul, moulds the thoughts, and enters into the development of character.

"By looking constantly to Jesus with the eye of faith, we shall be strengthened. God will make the most precious revelations to His hungering, thirsting people. They will find that Christ is a personal Saviour. As they feed upon His word, they find that it is spirit and life. The word destroys the natural, earthly nature, and imparts a new life in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to the soul as a Comforter. By the transforming agency of His grace, the image of God is reproduced in the disciple; he becomes a new creature. Love takes the place of hatred, and the heart receives the divine similitude."—*The Desire of Ages,* p. 391.

As you think upon the power of the sacred written word, will you not right **now** accept the Word of God as the ultimate molding influence in your life?



A Love Story
Set to God's Tempo

By Roxanne Terceros

From heartbreak to harmony:
How God led me to a love I never expected

Every love story is different. Some follow a neat, familiar script, while others unfold more like a symphony—beautiful, layered, and full of unexpected transitions. Mine is the latter. A story written not by coincidence, but by the gentle, persistent hand of God.

WHERE IT BEGAN FOR ME

I was born on January 22, 1993, in Panorama City, California, to Carlos and Nancy Fountain—both recent converts to the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement. I spent the first three years of my life in southern California alongside my three brothers: Caleb, Jeriel, and Ebert.

Our journey then took us to a church-owned property in Northern California called Moriah Heights. This peaceful place would be my home for the next 20 years, and where I spent most of my childhood and early adulthood immersed in family, faith, and community.

LONGINGS OF THE HEART

It is a holy desire to long for companionship. In Genesis 2:18 we read, "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Ellen G. White expands on this in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, writing:

"Man was not made to dwell in solitude. . . . Even communion with angels could not have satisfied his desire for sympathy and companionship."—*Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 46.

From a young age, I sincerely desired marriage. My mother had married at 18, and I hoped to follow in her footsteps. That dream, however, did not happen as fast as I imagined. It took seven more years to fulfill. . . . As you may be aware, that really feels like a very long time when you are young. Some people need to wait even longer. But when we allow God to be the One to lead the way, it is worth the wait!

EXPECTATIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

Like many young women, I had a list of qualities I wanted in a husband. It is wise to have standards based on the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, but over time I realized that some extra things I expected were unrealistic or too fixed. Sometimes, holding onto our own ideas too tightly can keep us from seeing the special path God has planned for us.

For example, God told Boaz to marry Ruth—a widow who had been converted from a heathen land. She had a beautiful character and was following the true and living God. The Lord's purposes are far greater than mere appearances; the name of Ruth ended up being in the genealogy of Jesus Christ when He came to earth as the Son of man. So, as I learned, the more important pursuit is in listening to God's voice rather than my own checklist of things that may not be essential in His sight.

Fear also played a role in my journey. I saw good marriages fall apart, read sobering counsel in *Messages to Young People*, and became overwhelmed by the risky weight of making a wrong choice. I prayed fervently, made mistakes, and learned painful lessons—but God was merciful and always redirected me just in time before lifelong disappointment could occur.

SURRENDERING MY PLANS TO GOD

One of the most pivotal moments in my life happened while driving home after a regular day at work. I had just experienced a heartbreak. Tears welled up as I prayed one of the most sincere prayers of my life:

"Lord, I'm done searching. I made a fool of myself. I don't know what to do anymore. If you want me to marry, You will have to show me clearly. If not, I'll be okay. I just want to serve You."

At that moment, I let go completely. Meanwhile, I had now been tasked with organizing a youth music camp and decided to pour all my energy into that project. It was a turning point of surrender and purpose.

Less than two weeks later, I sent by email a formal invitation for help from a church brother I had seen once in person, but never really met:

"Hello Brother Isaac! My name is Roxanne Fountain, and I am organizing the music camp in California. . . . Please let me know if you are willing and able to come and help us with this project."

He responded with kindness and enthusiasm:

"Hello Roxanne, good morning! Thank you so much for your message and kind invitation for the music camp in California. By the way, many congratulations for the event! I regularly attend events similar to this one around the world, and I can say that they are truly a blessing to all young musicians in our church! Of course, I would like to visit California and help you with all I can do."

WHEN THE LORD SPEAKS THROUGH SILENCE

The year before I sent the invitation to him, this brother had been walking through grief while I was finishing my degree and attending missionary school in Australia. I recall my church friends preparing a sympathy card for him after hearing about the loss of his spouse. Though I had never met him, I felt the weight of his pain and signed the card with a prayerful heart. That piece of paper would travel all the way to Bolivia.

More than a year later, he and I found ourselves working side by side on this music event in California. What started as a simple collaboration gradually grew into a meaningful friendship—and, in time, a beautiful love story written by God Himself. Then, in July of 2017, Isaac stepped into my church for the first time. Remarkably, just a few weeks later, we began courting, as if every step had been perfectly timed by a divine Hand.

FACING THE UNFAMILIAR

As our friendship deepened, I had to face the reality that Isaac was a widower and ask myself the hard questions: What does it mean to marry a widower? I found honest answers in articles and personal testimonies online. One comment particularly worried and shook me: "When you marry a widower, you are marrying two people. The other may be gone, but they will never not have existed." That truth brought me to tears. Of course, I wanted someone who throughout his entire lifetime would have loved only me—but love is not diminished by grief. Isaac hadn't chosen to lose his first wife. She had died—and he had the Biblical approval to love and to be loved again.

I remembered something I had studied at missionary school: remarriage after the death of a spouse is honored in Scripture.

"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; . . . but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law." (Romans 7:2, 3).

Through prayer and deep reflection, I came to peace with that reality and embraced the story God was writing.

GOD'S QUIET WHISPERS

As I sought assurance, God spoke to me—not through grand signs, but gentle whispers:

• Kindness: One day in Bolivia, while we were at a stoplight, a man began cleaning the windshield for money. Although Isaac had signaled "no," the man continued. I expected frustration, but instead, Isaac smiled, shrugged, and said, "At least I have a clean window now," handing the man a coin. I heard: "This is a good man. His positive spirit will bless your marriage."

• Respect: On another occasion, Isaac asked for my opinion on a significant decision. A thought gently came to mind: "He will listen to you and values your input. This matters in a marriage."

• Faithfulness: I reflected on his faithfulness to Natali, his first wife who had died—in health, in sickness, and until death. A quiet voice reminded me: "He was faithful before. He will be faithful again."

SAYING "YES"

"God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe."—*Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 46.

Just three months after our courtship began, we were engaged. Then, on July 22, 2018, we became husband and wife at Moriah Heights—the very place where we first met. As I walked down the aisle, my heart was filled with full confidence—not only in Isaac, but in the One who had brought us together.

STILL SAYING "YES!"

Eight years and two beautiful daughters later, I am still saying "yes." Yes to love. Yes to growth. Yes to God's plan. Our marriage hasn't been free of trials—far from it. But we've faced them together with prayer, communication, patience, forgiveness, and love. God has carried us through, and His grace sustains our home.

WHAT I LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

• God's timing is rarely our own, but always better.

• A surrendered heart can hear God more clearly.

• Real love grows through trials, not in their absence.

A FINAL WORD TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Dear young people, I appeal to you: Serve God first. Like Joseph, purpose in your heart to follow Him in every season of life. Give Him your full strength. Pray boldly. Surrender your dreams, your fears, your desires—and be ready to listen when He speaks. His promises are not imaginary. They are real.

"And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:22).

If you let God write your love story, it may not be predictable—but it will be perfect!

The Effects of Social Media on Me



PART 1 IN A SERIES
BY CSONGOR MATYAS

Social media has become a ubiquitous aspect of modern life. While it has revolutionized communication and interaction—with the youth being among the most active users—social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tiktok have significantly impacted the way young people interact with each other and the world at large. While social media has its advantages, it can also have negative psychological effects on young people's self-esteem, body image, and mental health, just to name a few. This article will explore how social media can impact young people's self-esteem, body image, and mental health.

PERFECT OR IMPERFECT PROFILE PIC?

Have you ever struggled to take the perfect profile picture? The one in which you "look the best?"

We understand that your social media profile picture is the first impression you make on people who visit your profile, therefore we also understand that it is important to choose a picture that represents you well and gives the right impression.

There is a lot of pressure to present oneself in a certain way on social media. Young people are often aware that their online profiles can be viewed by peers, potential employers, or even strangers, which can make them anxious about how they are perceived.

The Bible teaches us however that, we—human beings—were created perfect in the image of God. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). This verse affirms that, before sin, we were reflecting the character and nature of God. Man's creation in God's image is a testament to the inherent value and worth that God has placed on humanity.

The Bible also teaches that God's perfect creation was marred by sin. As a result of disobedience to God, man was separated from Him and lost his perfect character and spiritual eyesight. This separation from God caused a fundamental shift in the way humans view and interact with the world. Instead of seeing things as they truly are, humans began to view everything through the lens of sin.

This separation from God and the consequences of sin affect every aspect of human existence—including self-worth, relationships, and mental and emotional health. Today's youth often falsely boost their self-esteem through social media. Social media platforms provide a space for individuals to curate and present their idealized self-image, showing only the best aspects of their lives, leading others and eventually themselves to the belief that their life is in perfect order.

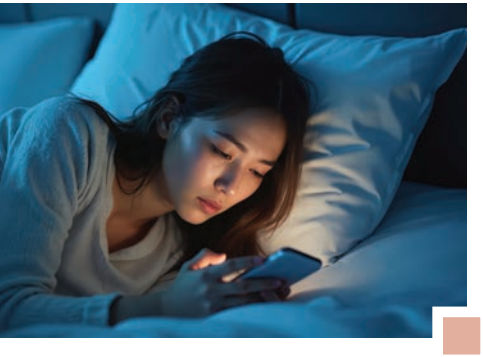
Individuals may also seek validation through the number of likes, comments, and followers they receive, which can lead to a false sense of self-worth based on external validation rather than internal factors such as character, integrity, and values based on Biblical principles. Unfortunately, this false sense of self-esteem can be short-lived and may even result in anxiety and depression when the individual is unable to maintain the façade they have created on social media.

However, in the Bible we find hope for reconciliation and restoration through faith in Jesus Christ. Through His sacrifice on the cross, we can be reconciled to God and experience the fullness of our original perfect creation. To achieve this we need to spend more time in studying the word of God and understand just what the value of a soul is in the eyes of God.

The value of the soul is immeasurable. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus asks, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" This verse emphasizes that the soul (a human being) is of greater value than anything else in the world, as nothing can compare to its worth. We also know that Jesus paid a very expensive price, laying down His own life in order that you and I may be called the sons and daughters of God. We don't need to try to paint a different image of ourselves, of our character or even our look; in the eyes of God we have a value that cannot be measured or compared with any earthly value.

PERFECT OR IMPERFECT BODY IMAGE?

Social media can also impact body image, particularly in young people. Social media platforms are full of images that promote unrealistic beauty standards. Young people are constantly exposed to these images, which can lead to



dissatisfaction with their bodies and even body dysmorphia.

The constant pressure to conform to societal beauty standards can also lead to harmful behaviors, such as extreme dieting or excessive exercise. Furthermore, the use of filters and editing tools on social media can give a false sense of what is considered beautiful or desirable.

The Bible teaches us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

This means that our bodies are sacred and should be treated with respect, regardless of their outward appearance. If we take care of our bodies and treat them with honor in all the aspects of heath principles found in the Bible, the Holy Spirit will dwell within us. As followers of God, we should not conform to the false standards of society (including those presented on social media) in order to try to find happiness or acceptance. Instead, we should focus on cultivating inner beauty, including qualities such as love, kindness, and humility—developing a character that will long outlast any temporary fame on any social platform. By doing so, we can honor God and show reverence for the temple of the Holy Spirit that is our body.

PERFECT OR IMPERFECT MENTAL HEALTH?

Social media can also negatively impact mental health. Studies show that social media use is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and stress in young people. It can cause addiction, leading to decreased productivity and a sense of emptiness. How easy it is to get caught up scrolling through feeds, clicking on links, and watching videos, and before we know it, hours have passed! In fact, studies have shown that people spend an average of 2–3 hours per day on social media, which can add up to over 1,000 hours per year.

Research has shown that people who use social media excessively are more likely to experience the symptoms of depression and anxiety than those who use it in moderation. This may be due to the constant barrage of information and stimulation that social media

provides, which can create a sense of overwhelm and lead to feelings of stress and anxiety.

Social media can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness. While social media platforms can help us connect with others, they can also contribute to feelings of disconnection and loneliness. This is because social media often presents an idealized version of life that may not accurately reflect reality, leading people to feel disconnected from their real-life experiences and relationships.

The Bible teaches us to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable (Philippians 4:8). This means that we should be mindful of what we consume on social media and avoid negative content that can adversely impact our mental health. We are encouraged to observe and study nature, where the power, majesty and love of God is revealed to us all.

"The evidence we have of God's care and love for us is expressed in the lessons Christ gave to His disciples upon the things in nature. . . . The eye is not to be fastened upon deformity, upon the curse, but upon the riches of the grace of Christ that has been provided so abundantly, that we may live in this world, and act our part in the great web of humanity, and yet not be of the world. As pilgrims, as strangers looking for the bright things of God, the joy that is set before us, seeking a city whose builder and maker is God, and by beholding the provisions made for us, the mansions Jesus has gone to prepare for us, talking of the blessed home, we forget the annoyances and the fretting cares of this life. We seem to breathe in the very atmosphere of that better, even the heavenly country. We are soothed, we are comforted; we are more than this, we are joyful in God."—*The Upward Look,* p. 15.

By taking a break from social media and instead admiring the natural world, we can reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, boost our physical health, and gain a deeper appreciation for the beauty of God's creation. As the psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psalm 19:1). By spending more time outside, we can experience the wonder of God's creation and cultivate a deeper connection with Him.

He is longing to connect with you! He wants you to study a bit more His social profile and as the Bible teaches, behold the glory of God, which is His character. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). This way you too, can have a better social profile, not according to what's currently trending but according to the unchanging eternal profile of a loving God. This is what we wish for you from the bottom of our heart.



Finding My Purpose: From Myths to Reality

AN INTERVIEW WITH ADAM HAGABIMANA

Youth Messenger: Were where you born, and why in that specific place?

Adam Hagabimana: My parents were from Burundi, but during the civil war there, they had to flee to an immigrant camp in Tanzania, where I was born. After two years, we moved to America and arrived in Cleveland, Ohio—and eventually, when I was six years old, we ended up settling in a rough neighborhood in Memphis (ranked #1 as the city with the highest crime rate in the nation.)

YM: Were both of your parents Christians—and do you have siblings?

AH: Yes, they were Pentecostal—and out of 13 children, I was number 12. My father was a Pentecostal minister, although that position was not how he earned his living.

YM: What do you remember most about your childhood?

AH: I was very active and had a lot of interests; so, I was always in and out of something new—sports, Rap music, and even school.

YM: Do you have memories about specific moments from those years?

AH: Once I caught myself yelling at God since it seemed that Americans were always judgmental people, trying to tear you down. There I was at the age of less than 10, yelling at the sky, but then I instantly was surprised at why I had done such a thing. Then, by the age of 11, the school was giving us lots of random novels to read and I found them fascinating.

YM: What was your favorite subject in school?

AH: Science, but also Reading, especially fictional novels by Percy Jackson. This type of reading was essentially Greek mythology which I ended up half-believing. The influence of these novels confused my mind for a long time, since we tend to believe what we wish to be true.

When we have invested a lot of time in something, we end up allowing it to immerse us in a strange sort of comfort zone. I found myself wishing I were, as they say, a half-blood. The book habit helped my reading skills, since practice at anything develops your abilities—although not always for the best.

AH: What followed?

As I got older, I moved from novels to fictional animation. Lots of hours were spent watching TV shows. Over time, I enjoyed sports such as basketball and soccer. My goal was to join a basketball league. I was quick but not very tall, so that was the end of that.

Then, I tended to become involved in multiple fights a day. Fighting was entertainment where I grew up; the fights were short and weren't taken seriously. But argumentation and conflict were the way of life. For one year, from the age of 13–14, I was even in a gang. The gang would get me to fight a lot of people, besides the fights I found for myself. But eventually that became a bore. . . .

YM: So, evidently you got tired of that life. How did you break out of it?

AH: During the dark days of COVID, I was 15 years old and began to have some suicidal thoughts. One thing that was scary was that for 7 years already, my brother-in-law had told me we were living in the end-times, in the time of the judgment. This had bothered my conscience for a long while. Now that COVID had hit, those ideas all seemed to be more real. So, I began watching gospel videos on TikTok and this brought me hope. One of the videos had an invitation to give your heart to the Lord. So, I got on my knees and invited Jesus into my heart. I then sought to become more like my brother-in-law, a very conservative Seventh-day Adventist believer in whom I discerned a genuine Christian lifestyle.

YM: Did you want to have that kind of lifestyle?

AH: Yes, so for a while, all I would do was pray, read the Bible, eat, and sleep. This was all that mattered to me, and it was enjoyable. Reading the prophecies of Heaven helped me forget about other people's opinions and my own deficiencies, etc. I focused on the fact that God loves me and wants to save me.

YM: But you still had to go to school?

AH: Yes, around that time they had a program to enable immigrants to get help, and they included me in that category. God was working with me to overcome my bad habits with my friends—so I would now just get into verbal arguments with my friends about salvation, whether Jesus

was God, etc. It was tempting for me to doubt God, but I would still hold firmly to my belief that Jesus is God. During that time, I got into an argument with every single kid there as to whether Jesus is God. Even the teachers got involved. A few believed, but around 80–90% did not. People would yell that I didn't know what I was talking about, but I did not give up. Then I would get in trouble with my parents for causing an uproar at school, but they felt better that at least it was about God.

After about a year, I outgrew this and was taking long walks with God. Although I had not been baptized, I now liked to dabble in prophecy and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

One day, when I was 16, some backsliding occurred. A guy who had been constantly taunting me—saying that he would beat me up—now managed to draw me into a fight. Just chest shots, not head shots, but another guy who was filming it became involved. I had sort of won the first fight, but now I was fighting that guy while the other one was doing the filming. This fellow now went full-throttle at my arms and was really hurting them. So, I went straight for his jaw and hit him very hard. As a vegetarian, I was able to pack quite a powerful punch. Unfortunately, the video went viral around the school and even inspired memes.

YM: What next?

AH: There was no major consequence. People just laughed, but I felt badly because I didn't want the poor fellow to be bullied as a result. By then, I had just turned 17 and my parents announced that they were moving to Nashville and I agreed. Somehow, I knew it would be a good idea to get away from my crowd. So, now I became a bit of a recluse and just stayed away from everybody. Guys tried to make friends, and some girls who were very beautiful tried to get to me know me. But I stayed away from everybody.

At this time, my dad started to get very sick. He had already had one seizure and started to have more health problems—and eventually COVID. In search of help, he went to White Creek Wellness Center, an SDARM institution that teaches natural remedies. When he left for White Creek, my dad was unable to walk. But with prayer and the health practices he learned there, he came back much better.

One time when being transported by ambulance to the hospital, he took my hand and was clearly afraid that he was going to die. It seems that regardless of the age, everyone needs sympathy in such a situation.

Finally, one day my dad again needed to be taken to the hospital. As a Christian pastor, he was praying to God and had a special sense of peace. At the entrance to the hospital, he passed out. At that moment, I went away privately to pray that if my dad was ready, that the Lord would take him—but if not, then he would be preserved.

When you see someone that you really love and respect as a strong, confident, hardworking, kindhearted person suddenly dying, it is hard. They could not resuscitate him. Only my older sister, mother, and I were there. I started to weep; my mother started to pray in anger, demanding that God bring him back right now. I did not like for her to be addressing God in such a way; and she started crying. I was holding his hand and it turned cold. . . .

After my father passed away, I prayed, "Lord, make me someone that You can be proud of and that my father could be proud of." At such a moment, I really wanted to live right in God's sight, so I made a covenant—a pact with God, a month before my 18th birthday.

Now I really wanted to find a Sabbathkeeping church. An old acquaintance of mine was occasionally visiting the SDA Reform Movement Church in Nashville. Bro. Septimiu then studied with me, as well as Gabriel, Timothy, and others. Also, on my own, I enrolled in a Christian homeschool program to be able to graduate with my high school diploma. That way I could finish school yet stay away from bad company, by God's grace. At the same time, I was eager to learn as much as I could, as quickly as I could, in order to prepare for baptism.

The Lord convicted me to take care better of my health, so I interned for a while at White Creek Wellness Center before attending Plymouth Leadership College in California, followed afterwards by my baptism in the SDA Reform Movement Nashville Church.

Then in June 2024, I attended the Bible study seminar in Roanoke, followed by the Youth Convention there. I made sure to saturate myself in all the best places most conducive to spiritual success and be careful not to get myself into trouble.

After that, I started my trade school and on-the-job apprenticeship as an electrician. The Lord is so good to me; I never really imagined that this is how things would go, but God is clearly leading the way. He is my Teacher and Guide—and life is such that I need to learn many things very quickly. Sometimes the path seems overwhelming, but I find jewels under the pressure. Since making my covenant with the Lord, no day has been easy, but every trial has been well worth it.

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Amen!





BY ELLEN G. WHITE

The Joy That Is Set Before Us

God asks the youth to serve Him with consecrated minds. The call that He gave to the humble fishermen on the shores of Galilee He gives to each soul. "Follow me," He says, "and I will make you fishers of men."

The men of the world are ambitious for fame. They desire houses and lands and plenty of money, that they may be great according to the measure of the world. It is the height of their ambition to reach a place where they can look down with a sense of superiority upon those who are poor. These souls are building on the sand, and their house will fall suddenly. Superiority of position is not true greatness. That which does not increase the value of the soul is of no real value in itself.

The qualities which shine the brightest in the world have no place in the kingdom of God. Birth, position, wealth, and high-sounding titles find no special favor with him. Today, as when He walked among men, Christ passes these by, and accepts the men and women in the humble walks of life, who have His glory in view. The words He uttered on the mount are truth for all time. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Whatever his learning, his wealth and position, heaven estimates the transgressor as the least of all God's creatures; and the humble and obedient are regarded as of more value than the most exalted and wealthy and honored of earth.

Christ invites the youth to wear His yoke and lift His burdens. "Come unto me," He says "take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;

for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The reason we do so little in winning souls to Christ is that we have so little of Christ in us. The usefulness of the Christians will depend upon the measure of the grace he has received; and the measure of grace he receives will be proportionate to the use he makes of the blessings that God gives him.

You will have some estimate of your own worth when you become a laborer together with Christ, to fill the world with His righteousness. The Lord expects you to proclaim the message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." You are to work to bless those who have no sense of their need of a new heart, a new life and purpose. Someone must tell sinners of their great need; and those whom God has accepted as His sons and daughters must work as Christ worked. "If any man will come after me," the Saviour said, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Those who heed this call will study the meekness and lowliness of Christ, and will join with Him in His efforts to make the world better.

The commission Christ gave to the disciples He gives to all connected with Him. We are to make any and every sacrifice for the joy of seeing souls saved. Whatever work is done in the name of Jesus to bless and elevate and restore human beings to the image of God, is as acceptable to the Lord as was the work of Moses or Joseph or Daniel. You who are the elect and chosen ones are to receive the divine commission to yoke up with Christ. You must never grow weary in well-doing. The highest honor that can be conferred upon human beings, be they young or old, rich or poor, is to be permitted to lift up the oppressed, comfort the feeble-minded, and support the weak. The world is full of suffering; go, heal the sick, pray for the hopeless, preach the gospel to the poor.

The message of mercy that Christ brought from the Father to

The Lord expects you to proclaim the message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." You are to work to bless those who have no sense of their need of a new heart, a new life and purpose. Someone must tell sinners of their great need; and those whom God has accepted as His sons and daughters must work as Christ worked.

Christ encircles the world with an atmosphere of grace. All who choose to inhale this life-giving air will have eternal life.

man was meant for the ears of the world: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me." Everlasting life has been purchased for man at an infinite cost. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Through this matchless gift, Christ encircles the world with an atmosphere of grace. All who choose to inhale this life-giving air will have eternal life.

That Christ should take human nature, and by a life of humiliation elevate man in the scale of moral worth with God; that He should carry His adopted nature to the throne of God, and there present His children to the Father, to have conferred upon them an honor exceeding that bestowed upon the angels—this is love that melts the sinner's heart. It is too much for the human mind to grasp, that God, having gathered together all the riches of the universe, and laid open all the resources of His power, should place them in the hand of His Son, saying, All these I give to you for man. These are my gifts to him. Confer them upon him, that he may know that there is no love like mine, and that his eternal happiness consists in giving Me his love in return. As the sinner contemplates this love, it broadens and deepens into infinitude, passing beyond his comprehension.

Colaborers with God are to fill the space they occupy in the world with the love of Jesus. The world needs spiritual workers, who will plant the seeds of truth in every heart. Christ calls upon us to be "instant in prayer." By this He means that the heart is constantly to go out after God, while we watch for opportunities to do good to the souls that are ready to die.

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." God has chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. Therefore stand fast. Your hardest conflict will be in keeping the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life. In order to do this, you must die daily. If you serve God faithfully, you will meet with prejudice and opposition; but do not become provoked when you suffer wrongfully. Do not retaliate. Hold fast your integrity in Jesus Christ. Set your face as a flint heavenward. Let others speak their own words, and pursue their own course of action; it is for you to press on in the meekness and lowliness of Christ. Do your work

with steadfast purpose, with purity of heart, with all your might and strength, leaning on the arm of God. The true and exalted nature of your work you may never know. The value of your being you can measure only by the life given to save you.

The apostle gives us his experience and the experience of his fellow laborers in their work. "We are troubled on every side," he says; "yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." If we work the works of Christ, the mind will gather strength and firmness to resist the adversary of souls. The apostle says, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." "Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

For every soul who is growing up into Christ there will be times of earnest and long-continued struggle; for the powers of darkness are determined to oppose the way of advance. But when we look to the cross of Christ for grace, we can not fail. The promise of the Redeemer is, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."—*The Youth's Instructor,* November 2 and 9, 1899.



Test Your Reading!

ACROSS

4. Today's youth often _____ boost their self-esteem through social media.
5. The men of the world desire houses, lands, and money, that they may be great according to the measure of the _____.
7. Social media can contribute to feelings of isolation and _____.
9. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of _____.
10. Adam's father went to White Creek Wellness Center, which teaches _____ remedies.
11. One thing revealed in Nikita's story is that God is _____.

DOWN

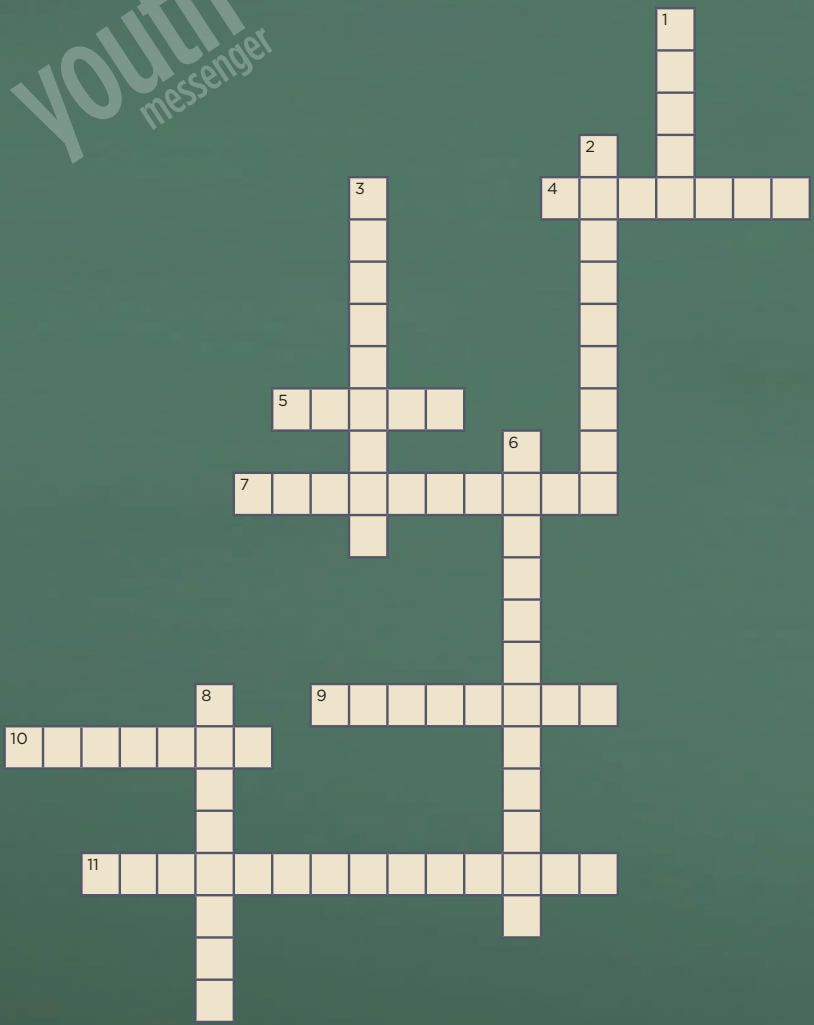
1. Without the power of God's Word keeping and upholding this world, there would be nothing but _____.
2. Our eternal _____ consists in giving God our love in return for His.
3. Ruth was a widow who had been _____ from a heathen land.
6. Reading the prophecies of Heaven can help us forget about people's opinions and about our own _____.
8. The dream of _____ does not always happen as fast as we might want.



ACROSS
4. FALSELY
5. WORLD
7. LONELINESS
9. PROPHECY
10. NATURAL
11. OMNIBENEVOLENT

DOWN
1. CHAOS
2. HAPPINESS
3. CONVERTED
6. DEFICIENCIES
8. MARRIAGE

youth messenger



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Abide With Me

by Elizabeth Clark Hardy

In the glorious golden morning,
When my heart with peace is filled;
When my feet are on the mountain,
And my soul with joy is thrilled;
When thy grace is all-sufficient,
And thy love a boundless sea—
Then, in peace and joy and gladness,
Lord, dear Lord, abide with me.

When the fields are ripe for harvest,
In the noontide's blinding heat;
While I bear my sheaves, and lay them
Meekly at thy blessed feet;
When in weariness I labor,
Glad thy servant, Lord, to be,
Let me feel thy presence near me;
Lord, dear Lord, abide with me.

When the evening shadows lengthen,
And I wander to and fro,
Groping blindly through the valley
Where the bitter waters flow;
When my eyes with tears are blinded,
And thy face no more I see,
Then I need thee, sorely need thee—
Lord, dear Lord, abide with me.

When the stepping-stones to heaven,
Shining bright before me rise;
When, with all thy ransomed children,
I am lifted to the skies;
When my cup of joy o'erfloweth,
Or thy chastening grievous be—
Cometh joy, or cometh sorrow,
Lord, dear Lord, abide with me.