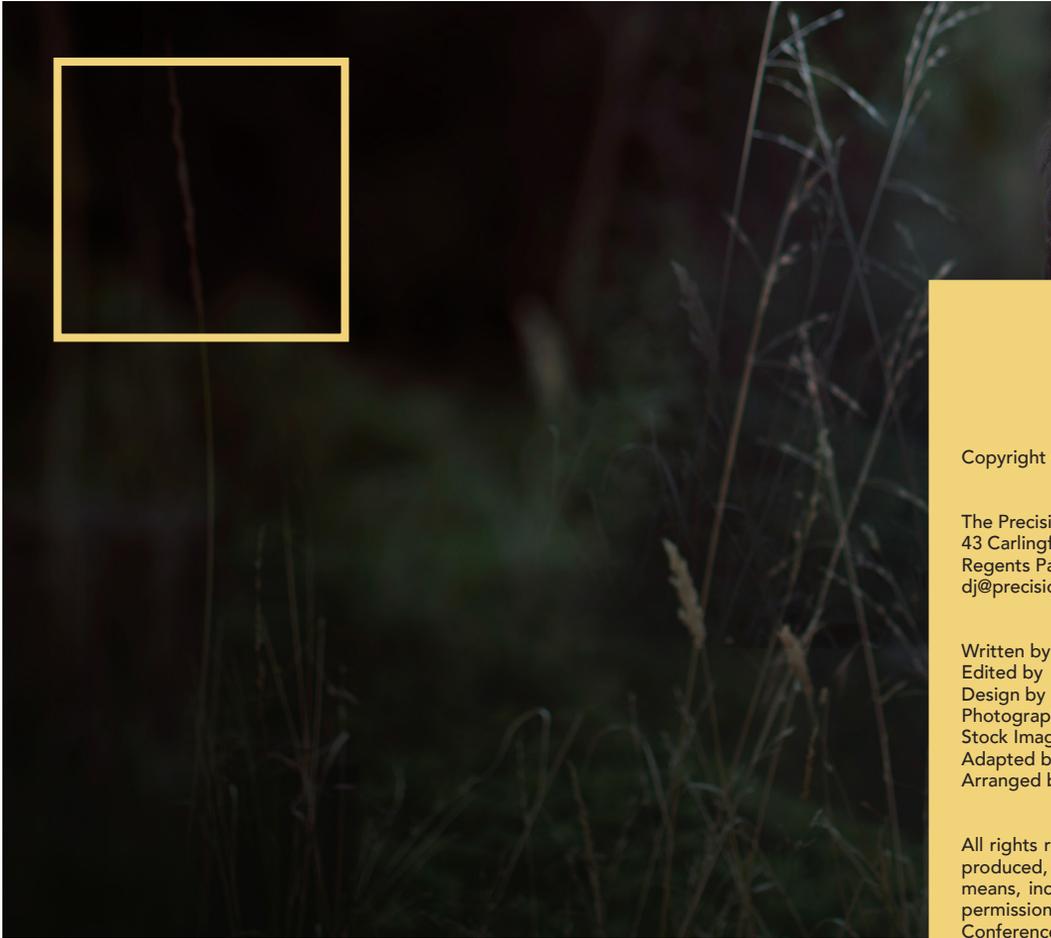




30 DAYS OF PRAYER

Greater Sydney Conference



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is the desire of the Greater Sydney Conference to increase the spiritual temperature in our personal and community lives and, further, to grow together. As a result, we decided that the 30 days of prayer for 2020 would focus on youth/young adults in prayer and touch on some of the questions they struggle with. We believe that this will enable all of us to have good conversations with each other and will lead to deep personal and corporate prayer as we seek His presence in our lives. Pr Terry Johnson

Welcome





The (other) Lost Son

Reflection: Do you know someone like the older son in Jesus' parable? Today, let's pray for the 'older sons' in our Church. They might be people we know. They might be us. Growing up in the Church doesn't make you holier or better. A testimony is your relationship with Jesus—something we all need to experience for ourselves.

Verse of the Day: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." – Romans 3:23

"God saved me. I'm not the addict I used to be. It's all because of Him."

"Praise God!" "Amen, brother!"

The teenage girl squirmed and cringed as expectant eyes turned her way.

"Don't be afraid to share," the youth leader encouraged. "We want to hear your testimony."

"I grew up in the Church," the girl mumbled in response. "I don't have a testimony."

In this teenage girl's mind, a missionary who moved overseas and converted local villagers had a testimony. A person who had been sexually abused and found healing had a testimony. And a heroin addict who battled withdrawal symptoms daily had a testimony.

She was a 'second-generation Adventist' who had family worship every night and went to church every Sabbath. She didn't have a testimony.

This is a common viewpoint for kids who grow up as Adventists. When it comes to sharing testimonies, we think we don't have one or don't feel they are worth sharing.

"When I hear great testimonies from other people, I feel jealous," one young person told me. "I wish I had a cool story like theirs."

"I've never left the Church. Why would anyone be interested in my story?" another said.

I'm reminded of the parable of the Prodigal Son. We usually focus on the younger son. We often overlook the older son who stayed faithfully at home, yet he was also important to his father and needed his father's grace.

Romans 3:23 tells us we are all

sinners who have fallen short of God's glory. It doesn't matter whether you grew up as a Christian or learned about Jesus recently. We need to go through the same process of coming to Christ. Our relationship with Him becomes our testimony.

The teenage girl needed a Saviour as much as that young man.

The testimony she thought she didn't have?

You've just finished reading it.





Drunk in Church

.06

Verse of the Day: "But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'"
– Luke 10:29

He was on his way to Jericho when robbers attacked him. He was broken, bleeding, helpless and hurt.

A priest came by but merely glanced at the wounded man before crossing to the other side of the road. A Levite came along but he, too, refused to aid the traveller.

Surprisingly it was a Samaritan who took pity on the stranger, cared for him and made provisions for him.

The parable of the Good Samaritan. It's a story many of us have heard—or preached about—countless times. Yet how many of us (including myself) are practising what we preach?

He was drunk when he wandered into an Adventist church one Sabbath. His eyes were bleary, his hair unkempt, and it had been a long time since

he last had a bath. In a congregation of affluent members clad in designer clothing, he stuck out like a sore thumb.

"We can't let him in!" Catherine* hissed in horror. "He has been drinking and he smells awful. What would everyone think?"

Fellow church member Lisa* was equally horrified. . . by Catherine's attitude.

"Of course we will let him in," she said. "He has as much right to be here as anyone else."

Although the man couldn't hear their verbal exchange, he seemed to sense Catherine's hostility.

"I just want to kneel," he mumbled, almost apologetically. "I just want a place to kneel."

"Then you'll have one," Lisa assured him.

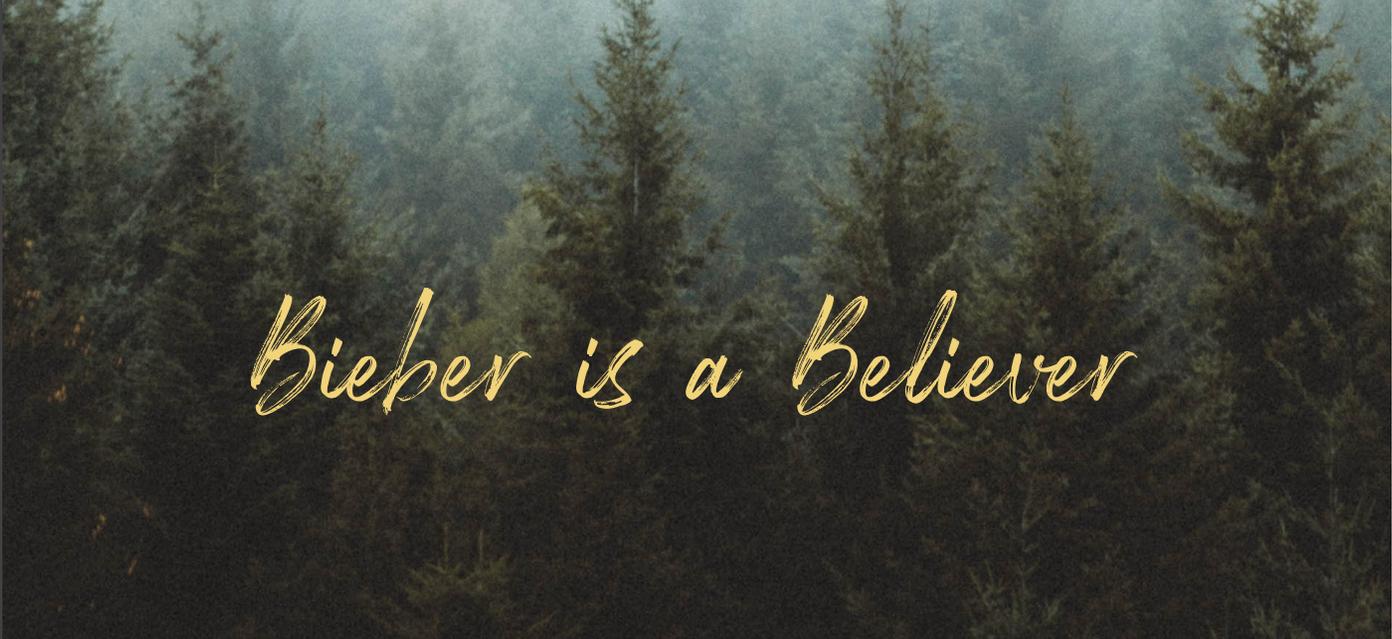
He must have made quite a picture—a desperate, dirty drunk on his knees, seeking solace in the sanctuary.

It's easy to point fingers at the priest and the Levite in the parable. They were the religious leaders of the day. They should have known better. We would have done the right thing. Or would we?

*Names have been changed.

Reflection: Most of us don't have drunk people wandering into our churches on Sabbath morning. But there might be other people who don't quite fit in, who might be considered 'outcasts'. Today, let's pray for them.

Perhaps it's the girl who can't afford to dress like everyone else. The single mother who doesn't get invited to socials. Or the elderly person who wonders why nobody cares. Who are our neighbours?



Bieber is a Believer

Verse of the Day: "... Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you..." – Colossians 1:9

In April 2014, Justin Bieber made headlines when more than 273,000 people signed a petition, urging the White House to deport the Canadian pop star.

"We would like to see the dangerous,

reckless, destructive and drug-abusing Justin Bieber removed from society and his green card revoked," said the petition. "He is not only threatening the safety of our people but he is also a terrible influence on our nation's youth."

Just two years later, the 22-year-old singer won his first Grammy, embarked on a worldwide music tour, and became the first music artist to crack more than one

billion views on video-hosting service Vevo. Media outlets such as American channel CNBC described the transformation as “Justin Bieber’s evolution from troubled teen idol to bankable star.”

“How did Bieber transform his brand so dramatically, regaining much of the music world’s respect, in less than a year?” wondered Uptin Saiidi, segment producer on CNBC’s Power Lunch. He went on to quote sources that suggest Bieber needed a major transformation to stay relevant to his maturing fan base. But Saiidi didn’t mention a certain night in 2014 that had a dramatic impact on Bieber’s life. On that night, Bieber dropped to his knees, sobbing, and told a pastor he needed Jesus.

In 2019, Bieber continued to be unashamedly public about his conversion, newfound faith, and mental health struggles. He asked people to pray for him. But his ‘rebirth’ is still met with scoffing and scorn. And this often comes from the people who

should be encouraging his spiritual journey—Christians.

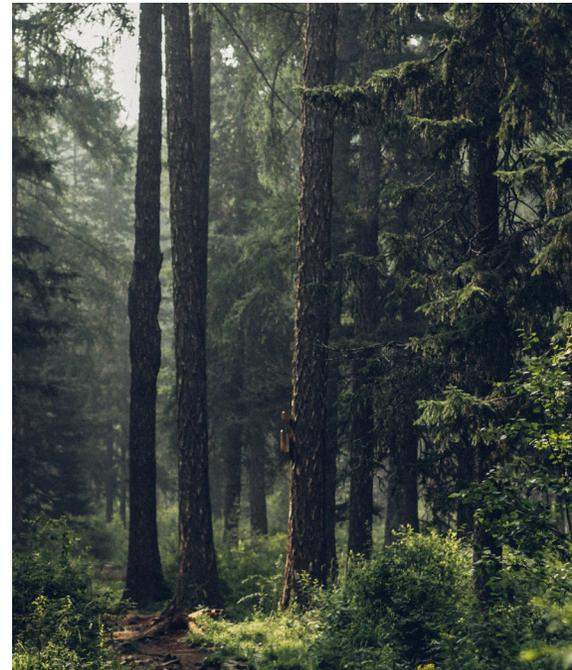
“He talks too much about love and not enough about sin.” “He’s only doing it for publicity.”

Is it so impossible to believe that the same God who changed our lives could have changed Bieber’s?

Reflection: Most of us haven’t committed Bieber’s particular misdeeds but we don’t have perfect pasts. The difference between Bieber’s past and ours is that our misdemeanors will never be splashed across the front covers of glossy tabloids.

Celebrities are really just people like you and me. People who have emotions, people who make mistakes and people who need a Saviour.

Today, let’s pray for these celebrities—that they may find Jesus. We might be the only ones praying for them.



Verse of the Day: "Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always." – 1 Chronicles 16:11

God had answered Elijah's prayers, sending fire from heaven to accept his sacrifice. False prophets had been extinguished at his command. A mountaintop of people had proclaimed that the Lord was God. This humble prophet had just made history.

But this spiritual high wouldn't last. Soon after, Elijah was fearful, broken, and begging God to take his life.

What changed?

It's often said that history is written by the victors. Naturally it's the moments of glory that survive. If Elijah had a Facebook account, Mt Carmel would be his pinned post with loads of likes and countless shares. His subsequent breakdown would be the post that he edited numerous times before giving up and finally deleting. Or perhaps this was the post that he never wrote at all.

The Bible mentions plenty of 'victories'. But it doesn't gloss over or omit the 'losses'. King David was described as a man after God's own heart. He was also an adulterer who had his lover's husband killed. Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. He was also a hot-tempered man who lied about knowing Jesus. Paul was one of the most influential figures in the New Testament and converted thousands to Christ. He also stood back and held the executioners' coats as Stephen was stoned.

Reading about these 'losses' helps strengthen my faith. As Seventh-day Adventists, we may not believe in literal idols of wood and stone but we do tend to put our leaders on pedestals and treat them as idols.

We become their 'groupies' and follow them around. We ask for autographs and selfies. Sometimes we place our faith in them more than the God they serve.

Leaders are human and fallible. They

make mistakes, have breakdowns, and sometimes, like Elijah, their greatest falls come after spiritual highs. The Bible reminds us that all people are imperfect, yet capable of redemption. We can have mountaintop experiences with God, yet still need His still small voice to reassure us. It implores us to keep our eyes on Him and not on each other.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for the leaders in our Church—like us, they are human and make mistakes. May God continue to guide them and give them wisdom.

Never Alone

A dark, moody photograph of a field with the text "Never Alone" written in a golden cursive font. The background is a dark, blurred landscape with some thin, light-colored stalks or grasses visible on the right side. The overall tone is somber and contemplative.

A photograph of a narrow, dirt path winding through a dense, misty forest. The trees are tall and thin, with a soft, ethereal light filtering through the canopy. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and twigs. The overall mood is mysterious and serene.

World Record Egg

.12

Verse of the Day: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." – Matthew 24:14

In January 2019, a picture of an egg was posted on Instagram under the account name @world_record_egg. The picture was accompanied by this caption: "Let's set a world record together and get the most liked post on Instagram. Beating the current world record held by Kylie Jenner (18 million)! We got this."

Jenner's post, the first photo of her daughter Stormi, had recently achieved a total of 18.4 million likes.

The egg post smashed its goal in just under 10 days.

Less than a month later, the account creator was outed as advertising creative Chris Godfrey.

He used the egg's popularity to promote a mental health campaign.

With Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, it's never been easier to find a social media platform where you can share your messages.

Many people have chosen to go offline because they feel overwhelmed by the pressures of social media. It's easy to compare ourselves unfavourably with others while scrolling through their glamour selfies or feel that our filter choice isn't quite right. Spending time online can get addictive when your intended five minutes of screentime becomes an hour or two.

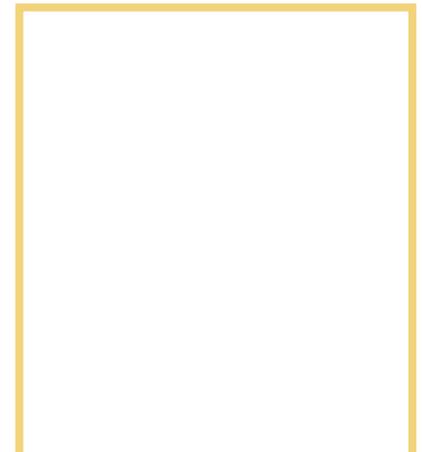
But let's not forget about the positive side of social media. It enables us to keep in touch with people we might otherwise forget, it helps us remember important birthdays and anniversaries, it's also a great way for a big audience to listen to your message.

The gospel needs to be preached to the whole world. While we can't personally fly into every country and talk to its residents, social media is

a means of accessing previously unreached people.

Yes, you'll always get attention (sometimes unwanted) on these platforms. But as Godfrey said, "It's what you do with that attention that counts."

Reflection: Today, let's pray for those who are learning about the gospel through social media and for the messages that our audiences are learning through us. You may be the only 'church' these people ever see. When they look at you (or your social media), do they see Jesus?





Bread and Water

Verse of the Day: But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” – John 4:14

Tom had always wanted to go on a cruise. He loved the idea of visiting exotic countries, meeting new people and sailing on the open seas. Unfortunately, Tom hated spending money, so it was unlikely he would ever get the chance to go. That is, until his brother generously bought him a ticket.

Tom was ecstatic! Once the brochures arrived, he flipped through them eagerly until he noticed something concerning. The brochures were filled with pictures of beautiful restaurants, high teas and themed buffet dinners.

"This looks expensive," Tom thought. But he came up with a great idea.

He went to all the local bakeries and collected all the day-old bread he could find. He then filled as many bottles with tap water as possible. On the first day of the cruise, Tom made his way to the ship with two suitcases. One was filled with clothes and other necessities, the other was filled with bread and bottles of tap water.

How long could you last on dry bread and tap water? By Day Three, Tom was already tired of it. He decided to lock himself in his cabin, away from temptation.

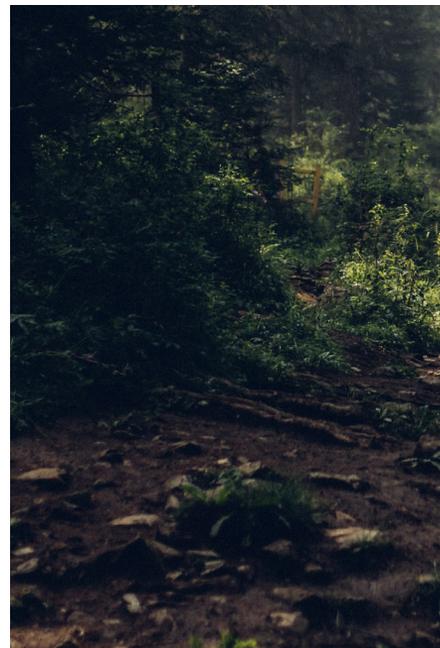
Day Four passed, then Day Five. Tom was missing out on everything. Locked in his cabin, he wasn't visiting any exotic countries. He wasn't meeting any new people. And although he was sailing, he was only viewing the sea from his tiny port window.

On the last day of the cruise, Tom had run out of bread and water and was so weak that he finally decided to succumb. He made his way to the closest restaurant.

"Can I get a bowl of your cheapest soup?" he asked faintly.

The waiter looked at him in surprise. "Sir," he said gently, "didn't you know that all the food on this boat was free?"

Reflection: There are hundreds of people trying to bring their own bread and water when Jesus wants to invite them to a banquet where they'll never hunger or thirst again. Today, let's pray for them. Let's share the good news with them—Jesus is the Bread and Water of Life. There is no need to bring our own when He promises to supply our every need.



Verse of the Day: "...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness..."
– 2 Corinthians 12:9

Jack was a little boy who didn't have a right arm.

It was discouraging being different from everyone else. One day, his teacher called his parents in and suggested they find him a hobby.

They asked Jack what he would like to learn. His eyes lit up. "I'd really like to learn karate."

They were uncertain but eventually relented—if the coach was willing to teach him, they would let him learn karate.

"Not only can I teach your son karate," said the coach, "but I'll make him good enough to win the championship in three weeks' time. Two conditions. Firstly, he needs to follow my instructions. Secondly, he needs to trust me."

Jack was over the moon! He eagerly agreed to the coach's terms.

During his first lesson, the coach taught him a special move and he practised it diligently. By his second lesson, he was eager to learn something new, but had to practise the same move instead.

By the day of the championship, Jack still only knew that one move. Every time he'd asked to learn something else, the coach said, "Just follow my instructions and trust me."

Jack made it to the grand final, competing against the boy who'd won the championship for the past five years.

To his surprise, he won! Afterwards, he asked his coach, "How did I win?"

"I told you that you could do it," his coach said. "As long as you followed my instructions and trusted me."

"But that doesn't explain how I won!" Jack persisted.

His coach smiled. "That move you learned? There is only one move that can counteract your move."

Jack pondered this. "But that other boy was so experienced," he said. "He would have known that move! Why didn't he use it?"

"Because," his coach replied, "the only way to use the move that would counteract yours is to grab your opponent's right arm."

Jack thought his missing right arm was his greatest weakness, but with the help of his coach, it became his greatest strength.

Reflection: Jesus is our ultimate Coach but we can also have an impact on other people's lives. Today, let's pray for those we can mentor and influence in a positive way.

A person wearing a blue beanie and a dark jacket is seen from the back, looking into a dense, green forest. The scene is dimly lit, with sunlight filtering through the trees. The text "Missing An Arm" is written in a golden, cursive font across the center of the image.

Missing An Arm



An Affair to Forgive

Verse of the Day: "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." – Matthew 6:14-15

"We'd been married for nine years when Rick* started acting differently," Elizabeth* recalls. "He was hardly ever at home. And when he was at home, he was

distant and didn't want to spend time with the family."

"He's having an affair," her sister warned.

Elizabeth dismissed the accusation. But her sister was right.

"He moved out a week later," says Elizabeth. "My youngest child refused to go to bed. She wanted to stay up every

night in case Daddy came home.” Elizabeth moved interstate to leave the memory of her failed marriage behind.

Some time after, Elizabeth became a Christian. One morning, she was sitting in church when the pastor read Matthew 6:14-15.

“It was like he was speaking directly to me,” recalls Elizabeth. “But how could I ever forgive Rick?”

“Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea—until he has something to forgive,” says Christian writer CS Lewis.

When people hurt us, our instinct is to hurt them back. But the first step to forgiving someone is relinquishing the right to revenge. This doesn't mean we should accept abuse. But it does mean we can let go of burdens that keep us from moving on.

After all, “vengeance is mine”, God reminds us in Romans. Vengeance

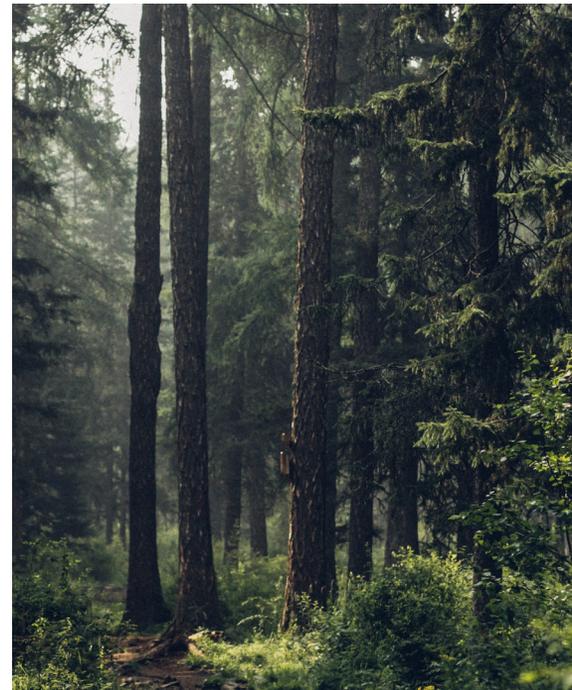
isn't ours to exert. If we believe God's promises, we must believe that there will come a time when He will triumph over our trials. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt, yet he chose to forgive them for what they had done. Paul and Silas were thrown into prison, yet they chose to praise God through song.

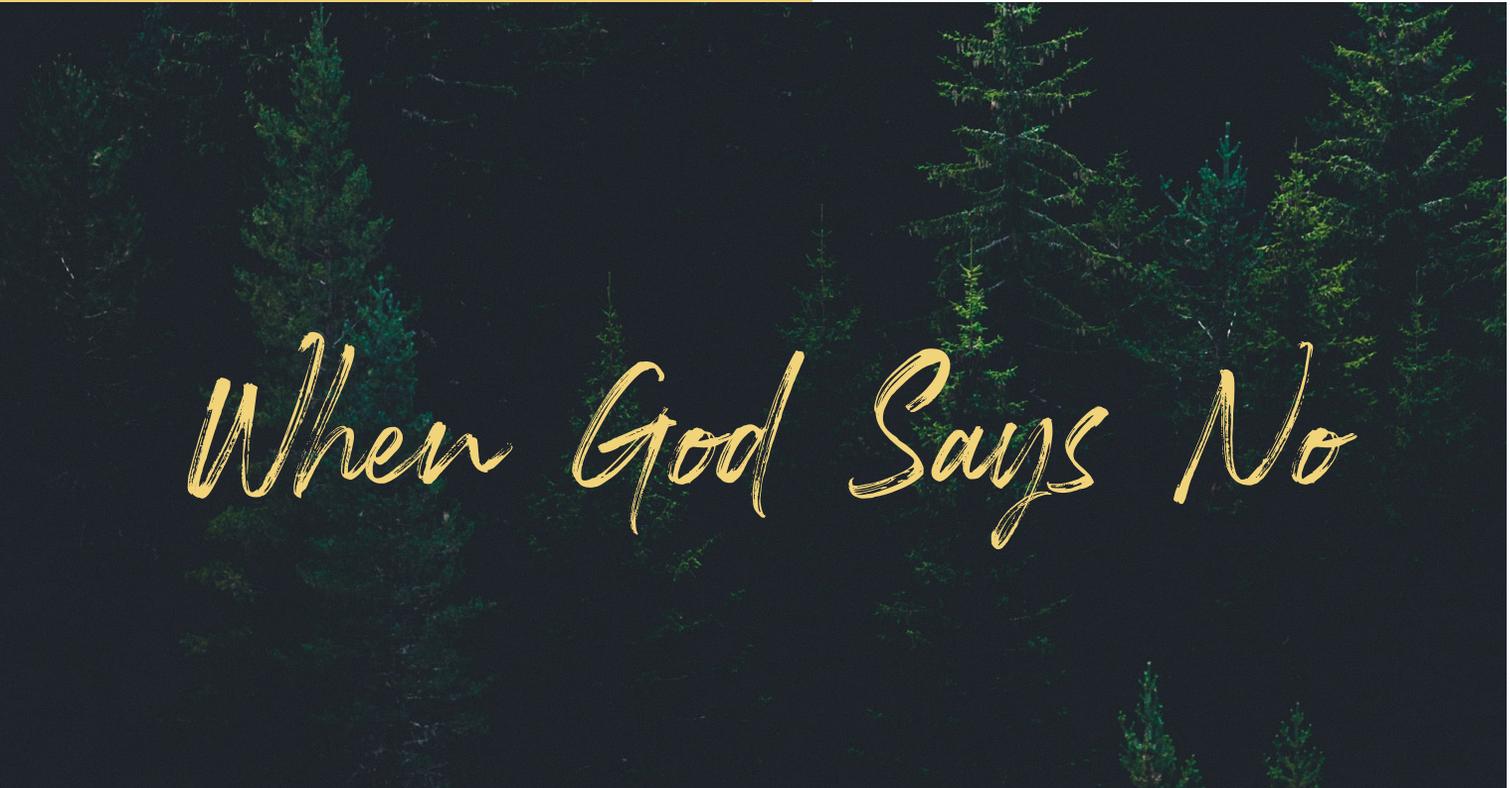
History's most unjust act also led to history's greatest example of forgiveness—a sinless Saviour forgiving us for our sins.

“Forgiving Rick doesn't mean I don't still hurt,” Elizabeth confesses. “But for the most part, I'm choosing to give that pain to Jesus.”

*Names have been changed.

Reflection: Forgiveness is our choice but it's only possible through the strength and grace of God. Today, let's pray to forgive, so that we can experience God's forgiveness as well.





When God Says No

.20

Verse of the Day: "Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." – Luke 22:42

"I think he likes you," his owner laughed as the puppy licked my hand.

I was seven years old and I really wanted a dog. I had pet goldfish. But goldfish were a poor substitute for what I really wanted.

I prayed fervently every day. I made a wish every time I blew out my birthday candles. And I tried to bargain with my parents. I'd study hard in school. I'd do all my chores. I'd never need another present again!

But I never got a puppy. I wondered why God had said no. Was my prayer too selfish? Did I not have enough faith?

Years later I was again praying fervently every day. This time it was for a person. A close friend had just

learned her mother had cancer and wouldn't survive much longer. My friend prayed sincerely. She began fasting regularly. And she tried to bargain with God. But she didn't get a miracle. And she wondered why God had said no.

All she was left with was a wretched sense of heartbreak and abandonment. Why did God seem silent when she needed Him the most?

The Bible gives us various examples of prayers God said no to. Paul asked for a thorn in his flesh to be removed. Request denied. Hezekiah's request for healing was denied—and then granted—but granting his request proved disastrous for Israel.

Even Jesus experienced God's no. One of the most powerful scenes in the Bible is the description of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Knowing that He was about to take the world's sins on His shoulders, Jesus prayed that this cup might be taken from Him. It's worth noting He also

prayed, "Not my will, but Yours."

Who can forget His anguished cry: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

Yet in the midst of sorrow, pain and despair, the plan of salvation was fulfilled. All because God said no.

Reflection: In this life, we may never understand why our prayers aren't answered as we'd hoped. But one day God will show us He could see the bigger picture.

For now, let's trust that He knows best.

Today, let's keep praying for our loved ones. But let's pray as Jesus prayed. Not our will but God's.



Verse of the Day: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” – Romans 14:19

“There is only one way to avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing and be nothing.”

This quote is often attributed to the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Wherever it originates, its message rings true. It doesn't matter how talented, wealthy or accomplished you are. It doesn't matter what colour, race or gender you are. As long as you are doing, saying and being, you leave yourself open to criticism. But that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

In 2013, I joined Toastmasters, a global organisation founded to help people improve their public speaking. The first thing I learned was that

everybody was evaluated. From the leaders of the club to its newest members,

nobody was exempt.

At first, this was incredibly intimidating. I was just a beginner. And I wasn't the only one who felt that way. Several people who had started around the same time as me gradually began dropping out.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that each evaluation I received was constructive rather than destructive, delivered by mentors who had once been where I was or newbies who offered a fresh perspective. Each evaluation gradually helped me to grow as a speaker.

I'm still a member of Toastmasters. In the past six years I've achieved a number of significant milestones: been voted president of my club, won Toastmaster of the Year, managed six clubs as area director, and possess a number of contest trophies. But in one regard, I'm no different from the newest member—my speeches still get evaluated.

Inflammatory personal attacks are painful, vindictive and unnecessary. But we shouldn't put constructive criticism in the same boat. I want our Church to be one that listens to opinions, is open to feedback and doesn't shut down conversation. I want our Church to grow stronger and better through advice from mentors and fresh perspectives from newbies. And no aspect of our Church should be free from evaluation by those who love it.

Otherwise we will do nothing, say nothing and be nothing.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for the church mentors who have served for a long time as well as the newbies who offer a different perspective. May we all work together for God's purposes and not our own agendas.





Thoughts and Prayers

Verse of the Day: *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?”*
— James 2:15-16

“Sending thoughts and prayers.” “You’re in my thoughts and prayers.”

You’ve probably heard the phrase uttered by politicians, seen the hashtag

trending on Twitter and perhaps even said it to someone you know. Sadly “Thoughts and prayers” has made the transition from being a welcome condolence to an insignificant platitude.

An article published by CNN in 2018 stated that the phrase “thoughts and prayers” has reached full semantic

satiation—the phenomenon in which a word or phrase is repeated so often it loses its meaning and also becomes something ridiculous.

Comedian Anthony Jeselnik pointed out the irony of this phrase in his 2015 routine. In regards to “thoughts and prayers”, he says, “Do you know what that’s worth? ...Nothing... less than nothing. You are not giving any of your time, your money, or even your compassion.”

Sending thoughts and prayers has become known as a way to appear empathetic to a tragic situation without offering any practical assistance. The phrase is no longer being taken seriously because it is associated with inaction.

It is actually in direct contrast to what the Bible recommends. The Bible tells us that faith without works is dead.

Yes, prayer is powerful. Yes, incredible things happen in the Bible when

people pray. But there is also evidence that God’s people need to take responsibility and act when the situation calls for it.

The book of James explicitly demonstrates the correlation between faith and action. In James 2:15,16, it says, “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”

Reflection: Today, let’s pray for those we know are in need and do something practical for them as well.

The next time you see a prayer request on Facebook, don’t just type “Praying.” Pray and think about what practical things that person might also need — a visit, a kind note, even a hug. Let’s combine thoughts, prayers AND action.





Power of Accountability

Verse of the Day: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” – Hebrews 10:24,25

It was almost 11pm when I arrived home. After a long day, I was more than ready to collapse into bed. But I made the mistake of glancing at my Fitbit first. Despite my busy day, I still needed to do 2,300 steps to reach my daily 10,000-step goal.

“I’m so tired,” my inner voice whined. “I can do 10,000 steps tomorrow.”

In mid-2019, my workplace embarked on a corporate challenge, forming several teams, to determine who could take the most steps within a period of six weeks. We were more than halfway through the challenge and our team was currently ranking third on the ladder. Each day we checked

the scoreboard and encouraged one another to go for walks. If we thought someone hadn’t uploaded their steps for the day, we would contact them and remind them.

Tired as I was, I didn’t want to let our team down. So I put down my bags and began walking. Such is the power of accountability.

In 2011, the General Conference commissioned a survey of former Adventists to find out why they had left the Church.

It wasn’t doctrinal issues—an overwhelming 79 per cent still believed in the authority of Scripture as taught by the Adventist Church. The top three reasons for leaving? Perceived hypocrisy in other members, marital difficulties and lack of friends in church.

Are these issues that could have been alleviated with some degree of accountability? Perhaps mentors

who talk freely about resolving marital issues and conferences that build on these principles and offer a safe space for honest conversation. Maybe hanging out with visitors instead of your usual crowd at church, and forming genuine friendships—getting to know people beyond the weekly “Happy Sabbath”.

Findings show that four out of ten Adventists manage to leave the Church without being contacted by anyone. If someone left your church, would you notice? And if you left your church, would someone else notice?

Reflection: Today, let’s pray to be accountable for those who need encouragement, support and genuine friendship. Who can you reach out to?

Verse of the Day: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” — Matthew 7:1-2

I once heard a story about a hunter who lived in the remote Alaskan wilderness. The hunter’s wife had died during childbirth and the hunter had become especially attached to the young son she had left behind.

One day, the hunter noticed that their food supplies were growing low. He needed to venture outside and hunt for food. As the weather was cold and stormy, he decided that his young son would be better off staying home. Although he had some initial misgivings, he eventually left the child inside the cabin, under the care of his dog.

While he was out, the hunter was caught in a storm and was forced to

seek shelter overnight. Although he was tired, he could not sleep. How could he have left his child with a dog?

The next morning, the hunter returned to his cabin and found the door opened and the furniture overturned. His dog lay calmly on the floor with blood around its mouth. His son was nowhere in sight.

The hunter’s worst nightmare had come true. Left without food, the dog had turned on his child. Filled with anger, the hunter lifted his axe and killed the dog.

He then began searching desperately around the cabin. Was there any chance his child might still be alive? He heard a faint cry coming from underneath the bed and found his son there, safe and unharmed. With a glad shout, the hunter scooped his son up and spun him

around. It was then that he noticed the dead wolf in the corner. With remorse, he realised that his faithful dog had protected his son and killed the true predator.

Reflection: Today, let’s pray for those we’re tempted to judge. Let’s remember that only God can judge because He alone knows what’s in someone’s heart. Let’s get rid of any barriers that lead to authentic and loving relationships.

A photograph of a misty forest path. Two hikers are walking away from the camera on a gravel path. The forest is dense with tall trees, and the ground is covered in ferns and autumn foliage. The overall atmosphere is serene and mysterious.

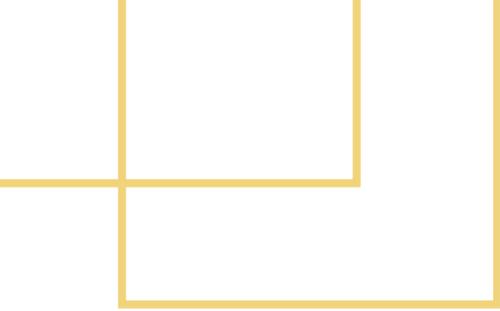
Parable of the Hunter



The Art of Kintsugi

Verse of the Day: The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners — Isaiah 61:1

.30



I first learned about kintsugi from my artist friend Shelley. This traditional Japanese art can be traced back to the sixteenth century and the word 'kintsugi' is translated as 'golden joinery'.

In Western culture, when someone breaks their favourite cup or plate, it is usually just thrown away and replaced. On the occasions when we do try to repair objects, our goal is to remove visible flaws and wipe out all traces of the damage that has been done.

In contrast, a kintsugi craftsman fixes the damage by using gold or silver to fill in the cracks. The irony is that every time an object is cracked and repaired, it actually becomes more valuable.

I can't help but think that the art of kintsugi has some important lessons for us. Is it possible that we sometimes look down on others when they are broken and believe that they have lost their value? It takes a master craftsman like God to see potential value and beauty through brokenness.

God understands that healing isn't necessarily about fixing flaws and getting rid of all visible signs of damage. In heaven we'll still be able to see the scars on Jesus' hands—an eternal reminder of the sacrifice that He made for us.

It is also worth noting that God never throws damaged vessels away. Like the kintsugi craftsman, He lovingly repairs them until they become even more valuable. How do we treat the broken people who we encounter every day?

Just as a hospital is a place for sick people to recover, so should a church community be a place where broken

people can find healing. This can only happen when we learn to look at people through God's eyes. Then we will see people's value despite their brokenness, learn not to discard them during difficult times and understand that their cracks don't need to be removed for them to be beautiful.



Reflection: Today, let's pray to look at others with the eyes of Jesus. We need to love broken people in

A dark, dense forest of evergreen trees, possibly spruce or fir, filling the frame. The lighting is low, creating a moody and somber atmosphere. The trees are layered, with some appearing more prominent in the foreground and others receding into the distance. The overall color palette is dominated by dark greens and blacks.

We Too

Verse of the Day: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." – Proverbs 31:8

Abuse in any form (physical, sexual, mental) is an ugly thing. It is an uncomfortable subject to talk about and it is difficult to think of as something happening in the Church.

Unfortunately it is also a topic that has been taboo and swept under the carpet for far too long. And this is something that needs to change.

Firstly, because there is no denying that it has happened. As Joshua Pease points out in his 2018 article in the *Washington Post*, many Christian churches do so much good—nourishing the soul, comforting the sick, providing services and teaching Jesus' example. But like in any community of faith, there is also sin and it is more common than many want to believe. It leads to failures to report sexual

abuse, respond appropriately to victims and change the institutional cultures that enabled abuse in the first place. Rather than sweeping abuse under the carpet, let's acknowledge its presence, call sin by its rightful name, and make it clear that it is not to be tolerated in our Church community.

Secondly, God calls us to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. In a situation of injustice, the Church community needs to be defending victims and supporting them, rather than suppressing and shaming. The Church community should be a safe haven for the vulnerable and a place of refuge for the hurt.

And thirdly, we need to remind people there is hope. The #MeToo community brought together a group of individuals who have been affected by abuse. I believe that God's heart breaks each time one of His precious children is hurt. He wants to draw them into His loving embrace and

remind them that they are precious in His eyes. As a Church, let's treat abuse victims like God would. Instead of gossiping and causing shame, let's offer them love and hope. Let's point them towards the healing and redemption that He can offer.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for those in our Church who have experienced abuse. Let us be a place where they can find safety and refuge. Let's speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

**Verse of the Day: Then He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."
– Luke 8:48**

It has to be one of the most beautiful stories of healing in the Bible.

The woman had suffered with bleeding issues for twelve uncomfortable years. But somehow she believed that Jesus could cure her. If she could just touch His clothes, she would be healed.

As she wove her way through the crowd, I can almost picture her battling her feelings of uncleanness and unworthiness. But her desperation for healing urges her on until she is close enough to touch His garments. It works! She is healed!

Jesus felt the power flowing out of Him, but He didn't have to stop. In fact, He was on His way to help Jairus' daughter. Shouldn't He have continued on, knowing that a conversation with this woman would only slow Him down?

Jesus understood that this woman needed not just physical healing, but emotional restoration. Lovingly He calls her 'daughter' and tells her that her faith has healed her. She is no longer an unclean outcast but part of Jesus' family. His com-

passion has made her whole.

This reminds me that we serve a God who cares about personal interaction. Jesus recognised this woman's need was just as important as the need of Jairus' daughter. I love that even though this woman was considered an unclean outcast, He took the time to pause and welcome her into His family.

We might consider ourselves too busy to stop and talk to someone or too tired to help them out. But if we want to be like Jesus, we need to show love and compassion to all those in need of His healing.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for those who are seeking healing and restoration. And let's remember that God cares about personal interaction. We should never be too busy to show love and compassion.





Healing & Restoration



Where's Wally?

.36

Verse of the Day: “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” – Luke 12:7

Did you ever have a *Where’s Wally?* book?

The object of the books was to find Wally, a young traveller wearing a red-and-white striped beanie, matching jumper and black glasses. It sounds like an easy enough task until you open the book and realise that Wally is actually very difficult to find. He is usually hidden among a group of other characters who are doing a range of interesting activities and bear superficial similarities to Wally. As you turn each page, Wally seems to become progressively more difficult to find.

A friend and I were once talking about God. She acknowledged that she believed in a higher power of some sort but she wasn’t sure what

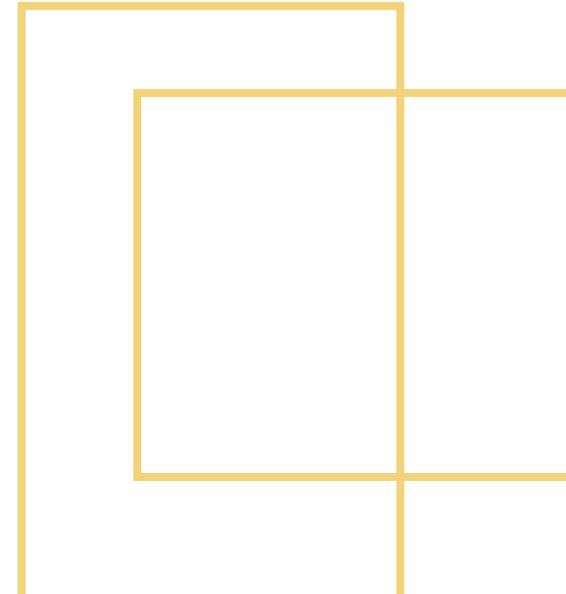
that power was like. She also told me that she found it difficult to believe in a personal God who cared about her as an individual, especially as there were so many other people for Him to look after as well.

I’ve heard of the analogy that God is like Wally. That if we search for Him and get past the chaos and distraction of the other characters, we can find Him. However I’m going to flip the analogy and say that we are like Wally. It’s tempting for us to think that God doesn’t notice everything we do or know who we are personally—that we are just one of a sea of characters jumbled together on the same page. But there is one person who always knows where Wally is and doesn’t have to search. And that person is the artist or the creator who put him where he is.

In the same manner, God has never needed to try and find out where we are. We have never been a random person in red-and-white stripes

amidst a whole group of people in similar clothing. God has always known where we are. The Bible tells us that God even knows how many hairs are on our heads!

Reflection: The people at church shouldn’t be anonymous members we only see once a week. Today, let’s pray for authentic and loving relationships with our church families.





A Step Further

.38

Verse of the Day: *"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." – 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

"Another week is over. Praise God for Sabbath!" the bubbly worship leader announced. "Can I get an amen?"

"Amen!" the group agreed exuberantly. But for the first time, the woman next to me remained deathly quiet.

As the final prayer was said, the participants began to disperse and the woman started to gather her belongings. I felt a strong compulsion to talk to her.

"Excuse me," I blurted out as she started to walk away. Fortunately she turned and looked at me curiously. "Is everything OK?" I asked tentatively.

Her face crumpled. "No, not really."
"Would you like to talk about it?"

"My husband's a pastor," she said frankly. "Sabbath has never been a rest day for our family. Actually, it's the busiest day of the week. There are times when I really resent that."

A few years ago, my colleague Maritza and I planned a video for Pastors' Appreciation Month. We invited pastors to our studio to be filmed, speaking about their greatest struggles in ministry. Then we surprised them by showing them footage of their church members thanking them for their hard work. We then posted the video on Facebook.

We were blown away by the response. Many noted that the video had made them cry; others tagged their pastors on the post and left their own encouraging messages. And it may or may not be a coincidence, but in 2018, the General Conference designated the second Sabbath of October to be Pastors' Appreciation Day.

I'd like to suggest we take it a step further and also recognize the partners and families of those in full-time pastoral ministry.

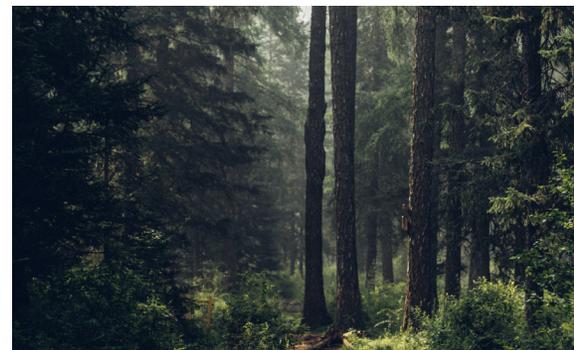
To many congregations, the pastor's spouse is no more than an unpaid volunteer.

They minister behind the scenes yet seldom receive a reward or accolade. They share their partners with the church at any time of the day or night. They are vulnerable to congregation gossip and criticism. Yet they continue to serve faithfully regardless.

One day, God will reward many of these ministerial spouses with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But until that day, we should also give them the appreciation they deserve.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for our pastors—and their spouses. Let's not underestimate the sacrifices that they make for ministry.



Verse of the Day: "... Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" – John 6:9

If you have ever been to my parents' house for a special occasion, you'll also know that you're not allowed to go home hungry. My mum thrives on feeding people. You will have your choice of various home-cooked dishes and will be urged to have second and third helpings. When you finally feel like you can't eat any more, she will hand you a container and persuade you to take food home. The leftovers will be enough to feed you for at least two more meals.

Jesus, on the other hand, just had five little loaves and two small fish. It was barely enough for the young boy's lunch, let alone lunch for five thousand men—and that wasn't even counting the women and children. How could that boy have thought he could make a difference?

To his surprise, Jesus accepted his offering and proceeded to feed everyone. When everyone was satisfied and had eaten their fill, there were still twelve baskets of food left over. That's even more than my mum would give you to take home!

You may feel like you don't have much to contribute or that what you have to offer isn't worthwhile.

The good thing is that Jesus can take any offering—no matter the size—and do incredible things with it. Just as He used five loaves and two fishes to feed more than five thousand people, so He can use whatever you have to further His cause. All it takes is a bit of compassion and a willing heart.

That little boy decided he would rather go hungry, even though he didn't know how much help his lunch could be. Do you have enough of a heart for others, that you are willing to give up what you have, so that they can be blessed?

Reflection: Today, let's pray for those whom we can bless. We don't know how much of a difference we can make, but we know that God can take the sacrifice of a willing heart and multiply it.



A photograph of a narrow, dirt path winding through a dense, misty forest. The trees are tall and thin, with a soft, ethereal light filtering through the canopy. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and twigs. The overall mood is quiet and mysterious. The text "Five Little Loaves" is written across the center of the image in a golden, cursive font.

Five Little Loaves



What Are You

Verse of the Day: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare." – Isaiah 55:2

I like vegetables just fine. I would even say that I enjoy eating them. I never thought that I would crave eating them, though. That is, until I went on a mission trip to Ethiopia.

"Don't eat anything raw here," one person warned our team.

"Don't eat any salad—nothing that's been washed in local water," added another. With the exception of a few meals cooked by the local church members, the main staples of our diet came from the hotel restaurant. Pizzas, chips and soft drinks soon became the norm.

God created our bodies to crave what is good. As fun as a diet of pizza and chips might sound, there is only so much of that you can eat before it starts to take a toll on

your body. And after just over two weeks of surviving on this diet, we were craving fresh fruit and vegetables very badly.

We all have cravings of some kind—and I don't just mean food cravings. We might crave love and affection. We might crave validation and acceptance. We might crave popularity and adventure. But how are you expecting to satisfy your cravings?

Pizza and chips can satisfy your hunger on a short-term level, but the cravings will come back. In the same way, if you're looking for someone or something other than God to fulfil your desires, you're basically eating the spiritual equivalent of pizza and chips. You'll feel satisfied momentarily but only God can give you what you really need to fill your souls.

Reflection: Let's pray to crave the right things—and to let others know where they can find long-term fulfilment.

.43



Verse of the Day: "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

– Philippians 4:11

"Comparison is the thief of joy," said former United States president Theodore Roosevelt. And while it is important to acknowledge and appreciate differences, I believe that Mr Roosevelt's quote is a good one to remember.

When I think about comparison, my mind naturally goes to the story of Leah and Rachel in the Bible. Leah was jealous of her younger sister because their husband Jacob loved Rachel more. On the other hand, Rachel was jealous of her older sister because Leah had no issues with bearing children and Rachel herself was barren. Ironically neither of them was happy, even though they each had what the other longed for.

Have you ever let comparison steal your joy? Perhaps you're single looking enviously at your happily married friend. Perhaps you're a married person wishing you still had the freedom your single friend does. Maybe you're the uni-

versity student who would rather be out in the working world. Maybe you're the worker wishing you were still studying.

The problem is that although we may see the positives in a person's life, we might not see the issues they are experiencing behind the scenes. We might look at people and think they have it all sorted out, yet not know that they are struggling on the inside.

There is nothing inherently wrong in acknowledging and appreciating the differences between you and someone else. But don't let those comparisons affect your happiness and come between you and your relationships.

He was persecuted, imprisoned and constantly running for his life, yet the apostle Paul managed to find contentment in his circumstances. How did he do it? The secret is in Philippians 4:13—"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Reflection: Today, let's pray for contentment in Christ and our circumstances. Don't let comparison steal your joy.





*Comparison Versus
Contentment*

.45



Mental Health Myths

.46



Verse of the Day: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” – John 13:35

A few years ago, I learned that one of my best friends from high school had taken his life.

According to Beyond Blue, there are an average of eight suicides in Australia each day and six of the victims are male. Suicide is the leading cause of death in Australian men between the ages of 15 and 54, more than double the national road toll.

There seems to be this misconception that Christians don’t—or shouldn’t—have these struggles. But depression doesn’t discriminate in any form: race, gender or religion.

We need to acknowledge that mental illness is present in our community and make it part of

the conversation. But first, we have to get rid of the myths surrounding it:

1. Mental illness is not a choice. I’ve heard well-meaning church members suggest that people wrestling with depression should just “try and be happier” and “pray the sadness away”. Would you tell someone with a broken arm that it would heal if they just tried to pray it away? While God’s ability to lift our spirits should not be underestimated, neither should the pain associated with mental illness.

2. Mental illness is not a sin. You are not more of a sinner than anyone else because of your condition. I’m reminded of Job’s friends in the Bible who wondered what sins he had committed to deserve his difficulties. Viewing depression as a sin can make people feel like they’re failing in their walk with God. It can also discourage

them from seeking out proper treatment.

3. Depressed people don’t always look depressed. I recently heard a story about a boy at an Adventist school who had admitted to suicidal thoughts. The principal was shocked. This boy was smart, popular and liked by everyone. Be aware that the happiest and most confident people you know might be the ones struggling the most. If you or someone you know needs help, contact Lifeline or other local support services.

Reflection: Today, let’s pray for those struggling with mental health issues and think about how we can best support them. Church was never intended to be a place for perfect people, but a place where broken people can find compassion, support and healing.

Verse of the Day: “When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.”

– Exodus 17:12

In Exodus 17, the people of Israel are attacked by the Amalekites. As Joshua leads the people into battle, Moses watches from a nearby hill. As long as Moses held his hands up, the people of Israel began winning. But whenever he put his hands down, the Amalekites began winning. When Moses grew too tired to lift his hands up, Aaron and Hur went on either side of him and kept his hands up until the Israelites were victorious. They were his cheerleaders until the battle was finished.

This story resonates with me for two reasons. First, Moses wasn’t afraid to accept help. When placed in a situation where he knew he couldn’t keep going alone because his arms were too tired, he wasn’t too proud to let Aaron and Hur assist him. In our busy society, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed and under pressure, yet it

can be difficult for us to acknowledge that we need help and accept it from others. Like Moses, we need to recognise that accepting help is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it is actually a sign of strength to admit when we need others.

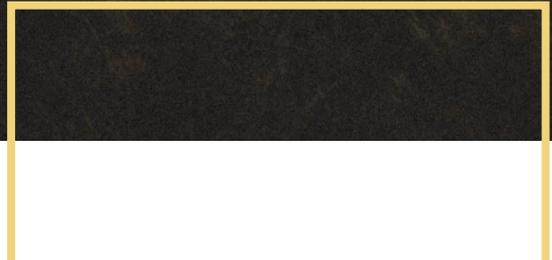
Second, there is no mention of Moses having to ask Aaron or Hur to help him keep his arms up. They were present at the battle, they recognised Moses’ needs and they willingly supported him for as long as they needed to.

How great would it be to have these types of relationships with our family members and friends? Firstly, to acknowledge when we need help and to accept it from others. Secondly, to look out for those who need a helping hand and to offer support in those times of need.

Reflection: Today, let’s pray to be cheerleaders like Aaron and Hur. Let’s keep an eye out for those who need help. And when we recognise they need help, let’s hold their arms up and keep cheering them on until their battles are won.

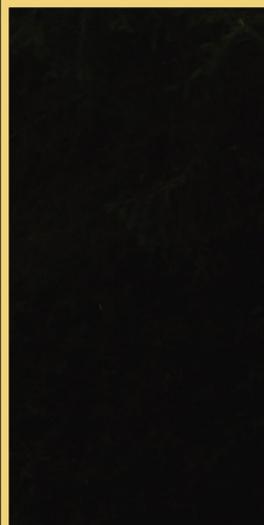


Cheerleaders





Road Rags



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**Verse of the Day: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."
– Romans 12:18**

I once heard a story about a female motorist who was tailgating another car in heavy traffic. Suddenly the traffic light turned yellow. Although the male driver of the other car could technically have sped up and sailed through before the light turned red, he chose to stop instead.

The woman behind him was furious. She had missed her opportunity to go through the intersection and had dropped her mascara and lipstick on the floor. She honked her car's horn in frustration, rolled down her window, and

began swearing angrily at the man.

A police officer interrupted her mid-rant and had her step out of her car. He took her down to the police station where she was fingerprinted, searched and placed in a holding cell for a few hours. She paced up and down her cell in a huff.

Eventually the police officer let her out and politely escorted her back to her car.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked the officer angrily.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the officer replied. "You see, I was behind your car when you were tailgating the driver in front of you. I saw you start blowing

your horn when he had done nothing wrong and start swearing at him and trying to cause a fight. Your car had all these bumper stickers on it—'What would Jesus do?', an advertisement for your local church, a reminder to always be loving and kind. Naturally, of course, I assumed you had stolen the car."

Reflection: Yes, we're called to be at peace with everyone—even the people who tailgate us and cut us off. Today, let's pray for patience and good temper, so that we can reflect Jesus and show love to others on the road.

Verse of the Day: "Do everything in love." – 1 Corinthians 16:14

In October 2019, Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig was accused of unfairly judging mothers, in a cartoon that suggested mums love social media more than their children.

The controversial cartoon depicted a mother looking studiously at her phone while pushing an empty pram, not realising that the infant had fallen out.

This cartoon was accompanied by a four-line poem saying that the mother was 'busy on Instagram' when her baby had fallen out. It went on to suggest that the child was 'unseen and alone, wishing that he was loved like a phone'.

Parenting writer Nama Winston described the cartoon as blatant mummy shaming, pointing

out that mums could be using their phones for any reason from organising carpools to sending emails.

Many people replied to Leunig with their own cartoons and captions. But one in particular really caught my attention.

Drawn by Perth mum Paula Kuka, the top half of the cartoon depicts a mum doing all kinds of tasks, from balancing groceries while a child pulls at her hand, to helping push a child on a bicycle. The top half is captioned "What I did."

The bottom depicts a mum pushing her baby in a pram while looking at her phone and is simply captioned "What you saw."

I think most of us can agree that being a parent is not an easy job. And if you disagree, you're probably not a parent!

As a child, I remember being in awe of how many tasks my mum could fit into one day and I'm sure many of you feel the same about your own mothers.

Paula's cartoon is a reminder that we can look at someone and not see the full picture.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for two things. First, let's remember not to judge another person's situation, knowing that only God can see the full picture.

Second, let's pray for the busy parents in our congregation and look for ways to help them out. Can you look after a baby during the service so that the child's parents can hear the sermon for a change? Can you offer to babysit so that Mum and Dad can have a night out to themselves? Even a word of affirmation may be enough to lift their tired hearts.



What You Saw

Verse of the Day: "So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." – Matthew 10:31

Have you ever wondered how much you are worth? A website called Human For Sale says it can tell you. All you need to do is fill out the answers to a simple quiz and the website will judge your monetary value. The criteria you are evaluated on include athletic ability, your level of education, the income you earn, the amount of exercise you do, your weight and your sense of humour. Would you want to try it?

Perhaps you don't want to give away so much personal information. Well, you can also figure out how much your body would be worth on the black market. There is no shortage of infographics available online to tell you how much certain organs and body parts are worth.

But there is an obvious problem with relying on these websites. If your worth is calculated by subjective things such as your level of education and your annual income, does it mean you're worth less as a person if you don't meet Human For Sale's requirements? If you only have one kidney, should you consider yourself less important than a person who has two kidneys?

Fortunately there is a better way of knowing how much you are worth. And this way comes straight from the Bible. 1 Peter tells us that we were not redeemed with perishable items like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

Take a pause and think about that for a minute. The Creator of the Universe chose to give His life for you. You are so valuable that only the sacrifice of a pure, unblemished Saviour could redeem you.

Why is it important to know your heavenly worth? Because if you can understand how precious you are to God, you can understand that every other human being in this world is worth the same amount. Then you can treat them accordingly.

Reflection: Today, let's pray to remember our worth and the worth of everyone around us. And let's treat one another like the valuable people we are.

.54

A dark, atmospheric photograph of a dense evergreen forest. The trees are silhouetted against a very dark background, with some catching a faint light. In the top-left corner, there is a white square with a thin gold border. In the top-right and bottom-right corners, there are solid dark grey rectangular shapes. The text "Knowing Your Worth" is written in a gold, cursive script across the center of the image.

Knowing Your Worth

A dark, misty forest path with the text "One Lost Sheep" overlaid in a golden script font. The path is narrow and leads into a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and branches. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and somber.

One Lost Sheep

Verse of the Day: "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." – Luke 15:7

Rachel* has been attending the same church for almost a year. Each Sabbath, she shyly sits in one of the back pews, wondering if today is the day that someone will finally talk to her.

Oh, they've hugged her and shaken her hand and wished her a happy Sabbath. But not one person has bothered to ask where she comes from or what her story is. In fact, she's 99 per cent sure that nobody in this building even knows her last name.

She watches in silent envy as the cool girls walk in and head straight for the front pew. Rachel tried to make friends with them once. But she won't make that mistake again. She is tired of hanging around awkwardly while they ignore her.

A guy around Rachel's age slides into the pew next to her. She looks up in surprise and gives him a hopeful smile. Her smile quickly fades as his eyes flicker over her and land on the girl sitting in front. He taps the girl on the shoulder and they begin an animated conversation, paying no attention to Rachel, whose cheeks are now burning with embarrassment.

It's not like she didn't do the research before she came to this church. Their Facebook page seemed active and lively. The website promised all visitors would be made to feel welcome.

"Today we're going to do some real-life evangelism," the pastor announces, his eyes bright with excitement. "We're going to head down to the local park and start conversations with people in the community. Who knows—maybe you can even invite them to church!"

This is the final straw for Rachel. She picks up her bag and quietly slips out

of the sanctuary.

"Who is that girl?" a voice murmurs behind her.

"I don't know," someone else responds. "I think she's new."

*Name and some details have been changed but this is based on a true story.

Reflection: Are there any Rachels in your church? Today, let's pray for those who are 'unseen' by our congregations. Next Sabbath, make an effort to talk to someone you don't know. You just might make a new friend.



Real Church



Verse of the Day: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” – 1 Peter 2:9

Studies show that more than half of all Christian teens and 20-somethings are distancing themselves from church. The Barna Group, a nonpartisan research company, discovered that almost 60 per cent of people between the ages of 15 and 29 have left active involvement in church.

Christianity is pulling some dramatic stunts to bring this demographic in. Hoping to pique the interest of young seekers, a church in Georgia (United States) created a website URL called yourgreatsexlife.com that redirects to the church website. Another church in Florida ran a web series called MyNakedPastor.com in which a 24/7 webcam followed the pastor around for five weeks. And one youth evangelist even dressed up like the devil and went to the local high school, explicitly telling students that they should NOT attend the youth revival at his church. His ploy worked and the church was packed.

But is “stunt Christianity” really what youth want? A 2014 study indicated that millennials actually prefer

“real churches” to “cool churches”. 67 per cent of the young people surveyed described their ideal church as “classic” rather than “trendy”.

I can’t imagine the early church in Acts resorting to suggestive titles or dressing up to attract attention. Yet their growth was undeniably explosive. They didn’t have slick sound systems or beautiful buildings. But they understood what it meant to deny self. They went out of their way to witness, their passion and love for Christ ran so deep that many surrendered their lives for what they believed in. Could we say the same? It’s not gimmicks we need—it’s the gospel.

Reflection: Today, let’s pray for a return to ‘real church’. I like how writer Brent McCracken puts it: “Many don’t want the church to be like a sceney bar or a stylish boutique. They want the church to be the church: an institution that embraces awkward people, confronts sin, transforms lives, subverts the sovereignty of self, serves others and provides meaning more substantial than the ephemera of fickle fads.”

Verse of the Day: "If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." – Ecclesiastes 4:10

A few weeks ago, my colleagues filmed some short videos for R U OK? Day, reminding people that the simple act of asking can make a big difference.

I'm reminded of this as I've just watched the Duchess of Sussex on ITV documentary *Harry and Meghan: An African Journey*.

When anchor Tom Bradby asked Meghan how she was doing, she thanks him for asking, noting that not many people have asked. She then goes on to admit that she isn't OK.

My heart went out to Meghan when she mentioned that not many people had asked how she was doing. Often we see the stories about her, rather than the person behind the stories. We see the glamour of a Hollywood actress who married a prince. It's easy to forget that without the gloss, she is a regular new mum, still adjusting to parenthood and the challenges it brings.

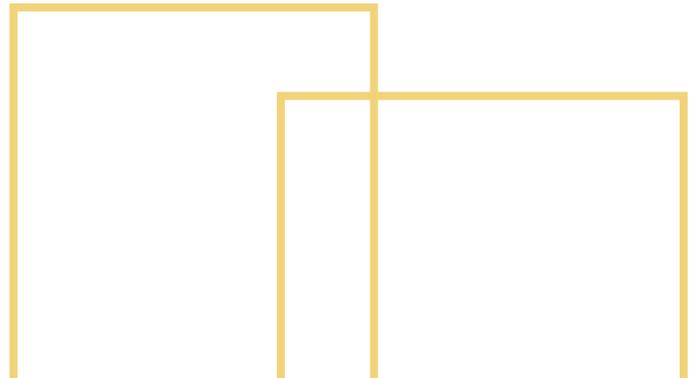
R U OK? Day is a fantastic initiative, but it only takes place once a year. Lifeline volunteer Adam Payne (who also

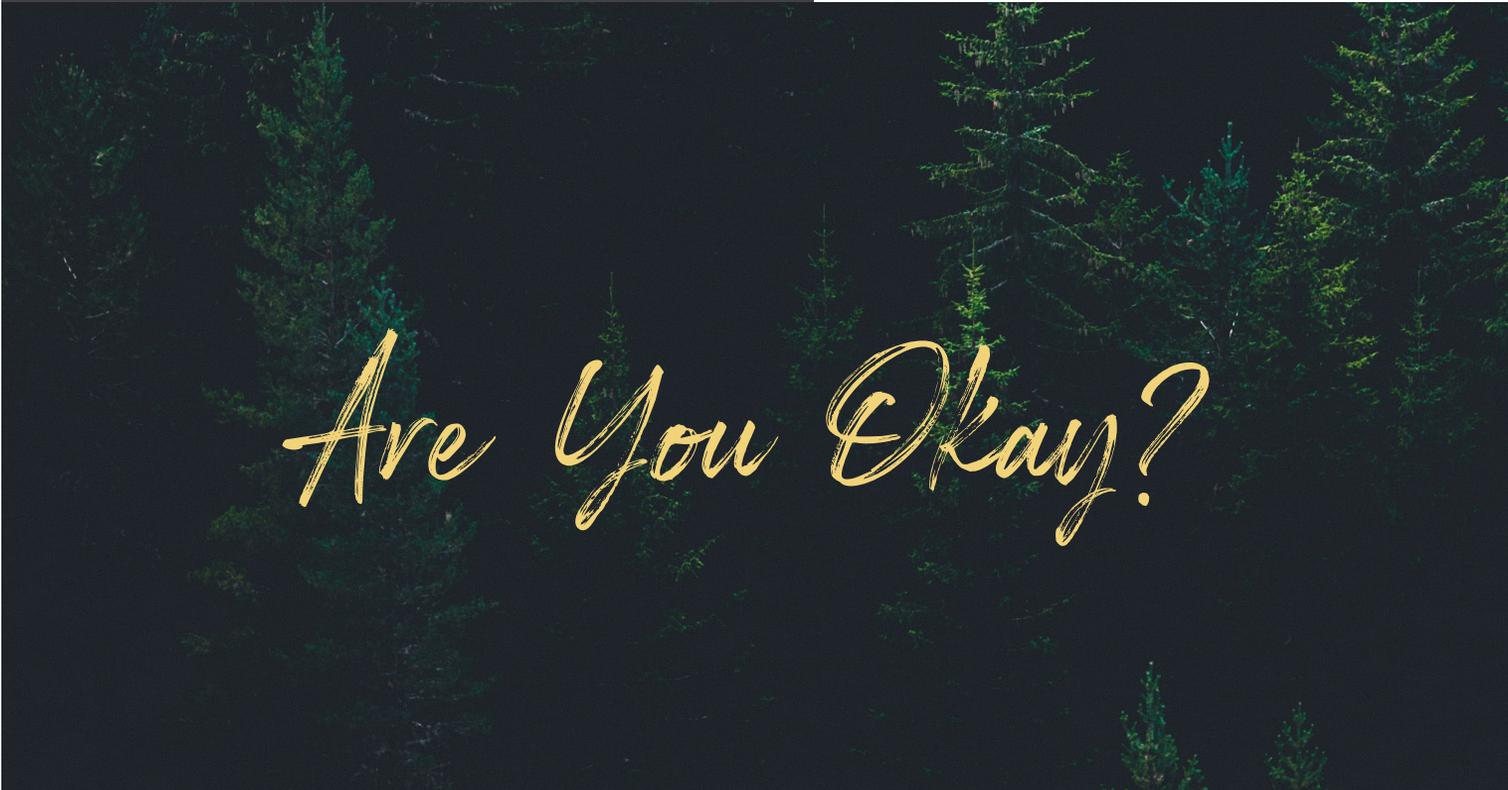
happens to be Christian) told *Eternity News* that part of loving our neighbours is to reach out into our communities with compassion.

"I think Christians in their church communities, including me, often go for years relating to each other at a really shallow level emotionally," he said. "It's really easy to do and feels very comfortable. But we are missing opportunities to challenge each other and grow together as Christians."

Being a Christian is not an easy journey. Thankfully God created us for connection. Let's get to know one another on a deeper level.

Reflection: Today, let's pray for our church communities and ask God to show us where we can form more meaningful connections.





Are You Okay?

.61

A person is walking on a log in a forest. The person is wearing dark blue jeans and white sneakers. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and ferns. The background is a dense forest with green and yellow foliage. The text "In Their Shoes" is written in a yellow, cursive font across the center of the image, enclosed in a thin yellow rectangular border.

In Their Shoes



Verse of the Day: “Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” – 1 Corinthians 12:14

In the 1920s, brothers Adolf and Rudolph Dassler were partners in a shoe company. Soon they were selling more than 200,000 pairs of shoes per year.

No-one can cite an exact reason for the pair’s sudden spat during World War II. But it was enough for the brothers to break up their business and form their own companies. Adolf’s workers refused to marry, serve or even interact with Rudolph’s workers and vice versa. It became known as “the town of bent necks” because people would glance at your shoes to figure out which side you were on.

Sadly the two brothers never reconciled. Eventually they would be buried in the same cemetery, but as far from each other as possible. You may be wondering what rel-

evance, if any, this story about an old feud between two brothers might have for us. Well, you’ve probably heard of the companies they ended up forming.

Adolf, commonly known as Adi, chose to use part of his first name and his surname, when it came to naming his new business—Adidas. Meanwhile, Rudolph’s brand became known as Puma.

The feud between Adidas and Puma purportedly ended in 2009, when employees agreed to play in a football match together to coincide with the UN’s World Peace Day. The brands are no longer owned by their founding families and Rudolph’s grandson Frank has even switched teams, accepting a job with Adidas as head legal advisor.

But in the midst of their animosity, neither company noticed the rise of their real rival. Today, Nike is indisputably the champion of

the global footwear industry. Its 2014 sales brought in revenue of \$US16.2 billion, larger than Adidas and Puma’s combined, which made global sales of \$US8.1 billion and \$US1.56 billion, respectively.

Working independently, Adidas and Puma both had some success but if they had put aside their petty differences and pooled their talents, they could have been so much more. Is there a lesson in this for us?

Reflection: Today, let’s pray for our Church. As members, we may have different perspectives. But this should never get in the way of our true mission—sharing the love and gospel of Jesus.



Seventh-day
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