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IS THIS THE END?

By **Ted N.C. Wilson, Ph.D.**

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For the past several months we have been at war with an enemy—an invisible enemy that has killed tens of thousands across the globe and sickened many more. This enemy, COVID-19, a highly contagious virus, has brought rapid and extensive changes to nearly every area of life—work, leisure, worship, travel, education, and more have all been dramatically affected. The impact of the virus has been so rapid and extensive that it has caused many people to wonder—is this the final crisis? Is this one of the seven last plagues? Is this the beginning of the end?

These are not new questions. On the Mount of Olives two thousand years ago the disciples asked Jesus, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your

coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).

Jesus responded, “Take heed that no one deceives you” (vs. 4). How important it is that with so many rumors, conspiracy theories, and strange ideas swirling around that we are anchored in the Word of God so that we are not deceived! We can only do this by taking time to carefully study the Bible and pray. How important it is to take time in God’s Word!

Jesus continued in His answer: “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be

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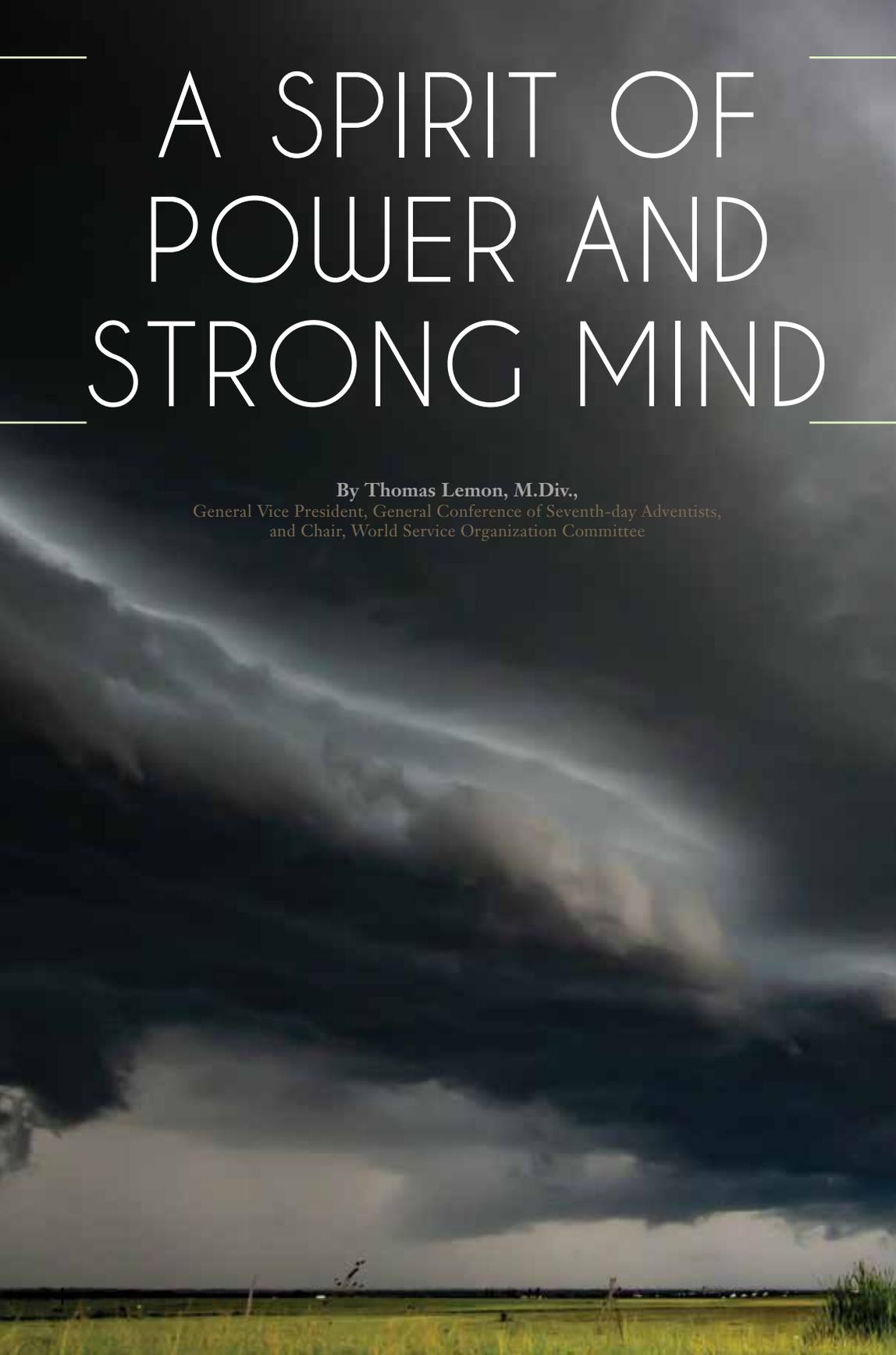
famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are *the beginning* of sorrows" (Matthew 24:4-7, emphasis supplied).

The word "pestilence," is a somewhat archaic word that means "a contagious or infectious epidemic disease that is virulent and devastating." While the world has certainly seen epidemic diseases in the past, COVID-19 seems to have attracted an unusually high amount of global attention and concern. Nevertheless, notice that Christ said these things are "the beginning of sorrows." According to biblical understanding, this is not *the* final crisis. This is not one of *the* seven last plagues, but it certainly is a precursor to what is coming. We can be assured that biblical prophecy *will* be fulfilled, and that we are living in the last days of Earth's history.

Although the coronavirus is not one of the last plagues, it is certainly one of the many signs taking place right now showing that Christ's coming is near. These events remind us that

now more than ever it is time to take courage in God's Holy Word and in the prophetic understanding revealed to us in the Bible. It is through this understanding that we can have knowledge, comfort, and peace. Jesus tells us in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

And more than this, God calls you, in whatever capacity you may be serving, to offer calm through the storm. We, as Seventh-day Adventists, are to be anchors of stability and pillars of hope in these times of crisis as we point people to the strong foundation of Jesus Christ! We are living in the end of time. Whatever opportunities God places before you in your work, be a strong witness for Him through His power. May God be with you as you witness and tell others of Christ, His righteousness, His Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14, and His soon Second Coming.



A SPIRIT OF POWER AND STRONG MIND

By Thomas Lemon, M.Div.,
General Vice President, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,
and Chair, World Service Organization Committee

The storm warning horns blared. The clouds swirled. The media continuously reminded us that we were under a tornado warning. I was out in my front yard, watching the clouds and sensing the wind. Growing up in North America's "Tornado Alley," the situation was not all that unusual to me. I was not afraid. Actually, living in America's heartland brings storms through our region on a more or less regular basis. Spring and summer provide our friendly storm chasers with plenty of opportunities to do just that.

One of my goals in situations like this is to make sure I keep calm and offer encouragement and a faith response to what we don't know to those around me. Prayer is encouraged, and Bible promises are brought readily to mind. Not in fear, because fear accomplishes nothing. But in confidence that our Lord is near at hand, and He is not aloof to our situation.

As I watched the warring clouds, I recalled the story found in the final seven verses of Mark 4. You know the story. Jesus was tired after a long, full day of ministry and after bidding His disciples to cross the lake, He fell asleep in the stern of the boat. A storm threatening fatal outcomes attacked the boat with a fury those fisherman-disciples had never experienced in a generation on

Galilee. In their moment of greatest extremity, they remembered to call on Jesus. They aroused Him from slumber with shouts made even louder by their panic.

All of that played out in my mind as I watched with awe the storm developing around me. In the disciples' case, there was an instant miraculous subduing of the storm by the commander whose authority is never questioned in the natural world. In my case, the main storm passed a short distance north of us, and the threatened tornadoes never materialized. During those fleeting, but intense moments, I didn't know that a friend of mine was flying a corporate jet over that same storm. He posted some photos on social media a few hours later.

When I looked up, I saw a powerful and angry charcoal-gray storm system—the line stretched for many miles across three states. When he looked down, he saw a powerful, yet peaceful looking, bank of white puffy clouds. Of course, he knew those billowing white clouds disguised powerful air currents that could have destroyed (or at minimum severely damaged) his little jet had he chosen to drop down into them. But the appearance from above compared with that from below could not have been of greater contrast. Same storm—different vantage points and vastly

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different impressions.

As I write this, world cultures are spinning headlong into and through a societal maelstrom of heretofore unknown and staggering proportions. No place on our planet has been untouched by the pandemic brought about by a tiny virus that only the best of microscopes can detect. With painful, debilitating, and unnerving illness bringing death to nearly every community, all of us are bound together in a strange and unplanned relationship that can be difficult to sort through. Some of us have lost loved ones and know firsthand what that kind of storm feels like. Most of us have experienced significant economic reversals due to governmental actions intended to provide a degree of safety for the citizenry of the planet. Some of our family members have lost employment, others face significant downturns.

Adding to the problems with world populations reeling from unforeseen health and economic challenges is the unrest, and yes, violence triggered by racist attitudes and other kinds of bigotry. After a few thousand years of human history, it would seem that we could figure it out and fix it. But either through inability or for lack of real desire, these things crop up regularly.

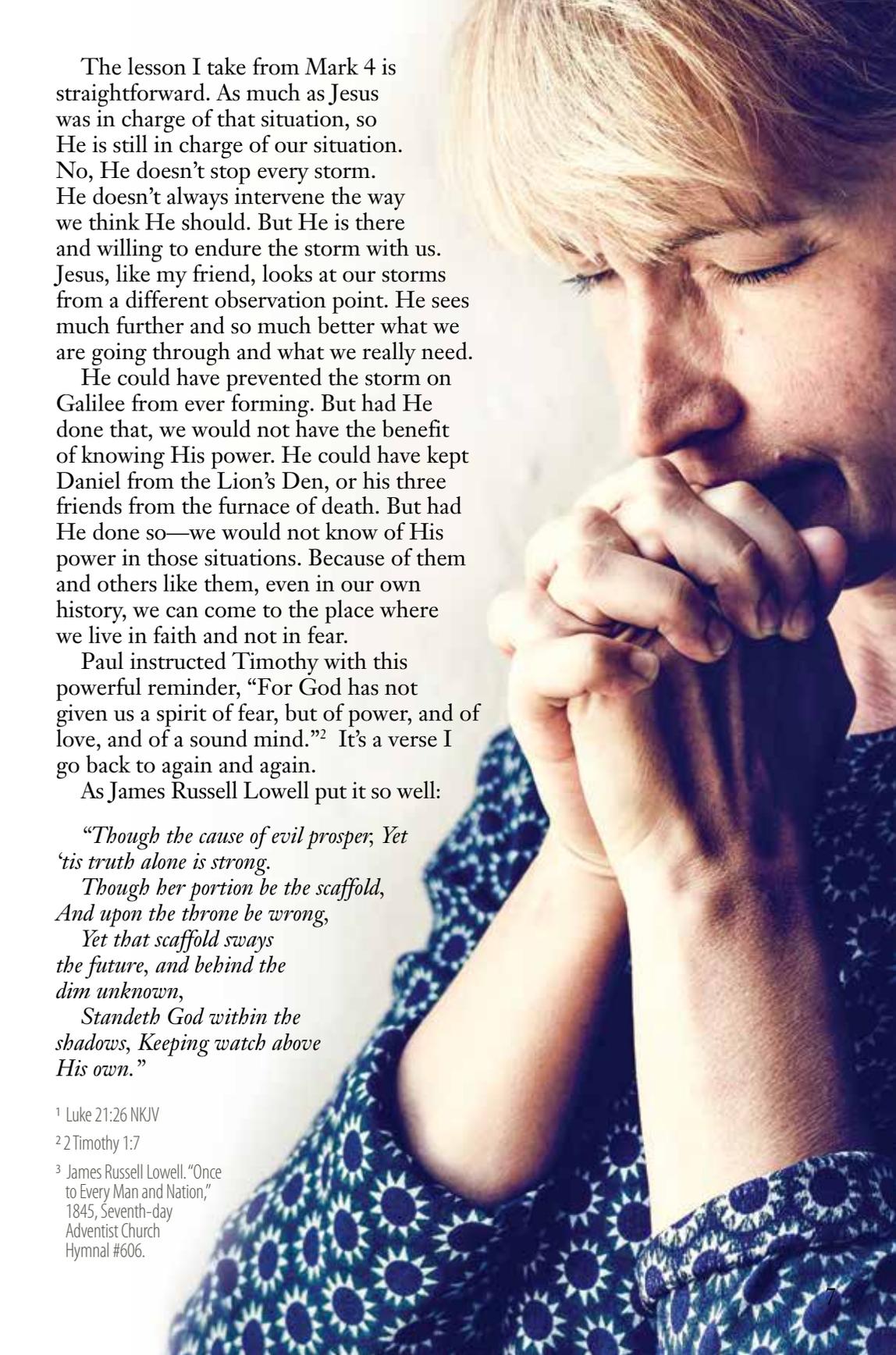
And this time of insecurity is not over yet. Add to all this the continual threat of international armed conflict,

it is little wonder that “men’s hearts are failing them from fear...”¹ Jesus told us all this would happen down near the end of time. And we do still have choices. Perhaps not as many as we did in times past, but ultimately, we can again choose the pathway of faith, or wring our hands in fear.

The disciples figured out that, after all, their struggle against the storm and the panic their failure brought them, faith in Jesus was the better way. It was a decision point they would have to face and re-confront throughout their time with Jesus and beyond. But they did meet it, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit, they did reach a point of victory over their fear. I find no trace of fear and no sense of panic anywhere in the book of Acts. Those first followers of Jesus never prayed for safety; on the other hand, they did pray for courage.

And ultimately, that prayer must become ours. Because the storms crisscrossing our planet, be they typhoons in the South Pacific, hurricanes that plague the western Atlantic, or tornadoes in the U.S. Heartland, will continue. We have the technology to predict their pathways once they form, but we cannot alter their trajectories in the slightest. We can react to the occasional pandemic, putting safety measures into place. Still, we cannot stop it or even slow it until it is well into its cycle.

Jesus, like my friend, looks at our storms from a different observation point. He sees much further and so much better what we are going through and what we really need.



The lesson I take from Mark 4 is straightforward. As much as Jesus was in charge of that situation, so He is still in charge of our situation. No, He doesn't stop every storm. He doesn't always intervene the way we think He should. But He is there and willing to endure the storm with us. Jesus, like my friend, looks at our storms from a different observation point. He sees much further and so much better what we are going through and what we really need.

He could have prevented the storm on Galilee from ever forming. But had He done that, we would not have the benefit of knowing His power. He could have kept Daniel from the Lion's Den, or his three friends from the furnace of death. But had He done so—we would not know of His power in those situations. Because of them and others like them, even in our own history, we can come to the place where we live in faith and not in fear.

Paul instructed Timothy with this powerful reminder, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."² It's a verse I go back to again and again.

As James Russell Lowell put it so well:

*"Though the cause of evil prosper, Yet
'tis truth alone is strong.*

*Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong,*

*Yet that scaffold sways
the future, and behind the
dim unknown,*

*Standeth God within the
shadows, Keeping watch above
His own."*

¹ Luke 21:26 NKJV

² Timothy 1:7

³ James Russell Lowell, "Once to Every Man and Nation," 1845, Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal #606.

IN THESE FINAL DAYS

By Deena Bartel-Wagner, Editor, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries.

It's impossible to escape. Troubling news clamoring for your attention is everywhere—in social media feeds, online news outlets, radio and television. At times, the reports can be fear-inducing and a distraction of our missions as Christians.

The Bible talks about these days. Old Testament prophets warned Israel of what would occur because of their lack of following God's instructions. New Testament disciples and prophets believed they were living in the last days. Yet, here we are, more than 2,000 years later.

The Apostle Peter wrote, "The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers."¹

The Apostle Paul also wrote, "And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through His Son."²

If the believers of New Testament days thought they were living in the final days, how do we reconcile that with what we witness happening today. Jesus clearly told His followers, "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows."³

In fact, just before He returned to Heaven, some of Jesus's last words to His followers were, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know."⁴ It's clear that we are not to focus on the actual date of Christ's

return, but we should live like it could happen at any time.

The end times will come. Revelation outlines what will happen including wars and rumors of wars, pestilence, drought, times when human's hearts will fail them, death decrees, and more. But, the mature Christian will understand that as these events happen, it's not spiritually healthy to declare, "This is it. The end has arrived."

Many people have gone before us facing the crisis of their age. The Christians stood bound in Rome's Coliseum facing death by lions. The Black Plague swept across Europe leaving 25 million dead in its wake. The Dark Ages saw persecution with estimates of more than 50 million deaths. Modern day genocides occurred during World War II's Holocaust in Germany, in Cambodia, Rwanda, Srebrenica, among the Rohingya of Myanmar, the Christians and Yazidis of Syria and Iran, and escalating deaths in Nigeria.

What happens in the world must be viewed as a journey to what will become Earth's closing minutes.

NOT A SPIRIT OF FEAR

When turmoil and events that seem out of our control invade our lives, living in fear can happen. Again, as Christians, we are not to live in fear. Numerous Bible verses instruct us to put our hope and faith in God. Timothy wrote, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."⁵

David described how he handled his fear when he ended up among the Philistines in Gath.⁶ Remember Goliath was the leader of the Philistines and David slayed him in the Valley of Elah. The Philistines knew who David was and how he killed their champion. He'd just shown up in their town carrying Goliath's sword! They began to discuss this among themselves and David became fearful. Then he remembered who he served. He recorded his thoughts to bring him back to center and chose not to let fear overtake him.

*When I am afraid,
I will trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
In God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can mortal man do to me?*⁷

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."

VIGILANT LIVING

Once we choose not to live in fear, what are our options? Noah's response to God can guide us. Imagine you were given the word that the world would be destroyed and your job was to build the one vehicle that could house humans to survive the coming catastrophe.

When God described what He wanted Noah to do, there were four steps the end-of-the world shipbuilder engaged in as his response. First, he'd already been living a life tuned in to God. In Genesis 6:9, Noah is described as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God."

Second, although it seemed that God wanted Noah to do a strange act, he willingly set to the task. Why build a boat when there had never been rain? Even Noah couldn't imagine what rains and floods would be like.

Imagine the ridicule he and his family experienced for the work they did during the construction of the ark. The clear skies, the dry ground, the gatherings of mocking crowds at the worksite would be enough to discourage anyone. But Noah persisted.

Third, in spite of ridicule and harassment, Noah continued his witness to those around him. He spoke truth for 120 years in spite of hurtful words and no evidence that his words were making a difference in anyone's life.

Fourth, Noah worshipped God before the crisis, during the crisis as the floodwaters covered the earth, and after the crisis ended and he stepped onto dry land again. His first act was to build an altar and worship God.

WHAT TO DO TODAY

Theory is good, but putting

things into action is even better. Conspiracy theories, fake and/or inflammatory news, and loud voices should not be the guide as Christians navigate today's culture. Instead, all things must be interpreted using a biblical worldview. According to Summit Ministries, a worldview is any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world, and man's relation to God and the world."⁸

James H. Olthius *says*, "One's Worldview is perhaps best reflected by one's answers to the 'ultimate questions of life': Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What's it all about? Is there a god? How can I live and die happily? What are good and evil?"⁹

Developing a biblical worldview and answering these questions means spending consistent time digging into the Bible. Reading the difficult passages and taking time to understand their meaning. Solomon wrote, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he [in behavior—one who manipulates]."¹⁰

DO YOU NEED A SOCIAL MEDIA FAST?

As you continue to build your biblical worldview, don't allow conflicting voices to interfere with what you are learning. You may need to cut back on media consumption—including social media. If you don't think you have time for Bible study, you may want to track the time you spend on your Facebook feed, sending texts in Twitter, posting in Instagram, or participating in challenges on TikTok.

The latest data draws attention to some startling numbers. On average, adults worldwide spend 2 hours and 24

minutes daily consuming social media.¹¹ The breakdown by continent is:

South America – 3 hours and 24 min

Africa – 3 hours and 10 min

Asia/Oceania – 2 hours and 16 min

North America – 2 hours and 6 min

Europe – 1 hour and 15 min

It's expected that these numbers will increase in the future. But what does this mean in a lifetime? The same study crunched numbers using the World Health Organization's average global lifespan of 72 years. If a child begins using social media at the age of 10-years-old, based on these average numbers, they would spend 3,462,390 minutes or 6 years 8 months of their lives using social

media. That number is only for social media and doesn't include hours spent watching television.¹²

WHAT'S YOUR DISCERNMENT QUOTIENT?

Wisdom and discernment are crucial components in how we view events, process information, and make decisions on how to react to what we see and hear.

As you read or listen to reports, use this checklist to consume information

- 1 Consider the source.—What is the mission or agenda of the organization or individual? Does this align with biblical principles?
- 2 Who is the author?—Are they credible? What other content have they written? Can you discern from their writing their worldview?

As you continue to build your biblical worldview, don't allow conflicting voices to interfere with what you are learning.



- 3 How old is the story that is being told?—Is it current or from several years ago?
- 4 Find supporting sources.—These should be credible sources and have other information about the topic, not just a regurgitation of facts that are copy and pasted from site to site.
- 5 Is the article satire?—Many people read something that is satire, miss that point, and repeat it as facts.
- 6 How does what you've read meet up with the requirements of a biblical worldview?

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

We've talked about Bible study and developing a biblical worldview. These are only a part of the spiritual discipline needed to live in a world and culture that emulates everything but living a God-driven life.

Daily Prayer – Developing a consistent prayer life is built around developing the habit, being intentional in the type of prayer you pray, and going deep in spending time listening to what God wants to impress on your heart.

You Need Other Believers – Finding a church family adds to your spiritual life. You encourage each other, share the difficulties you face, and grow in friendship.

Meditating on the Word – As you spend time in regular Bible study, take time to sit in silence and reflect on Bible passages and how they apply to your life. Study for the sake of study means little if the message isn't applied to daily life.

Hearing the Still Small Voice – In today's noisy world, finding a place to sit in silence can be hard. But it's vital in order to hear the still, small voice, that directs us. Some people are afraid of silence. If this describes you, ask yourself why?

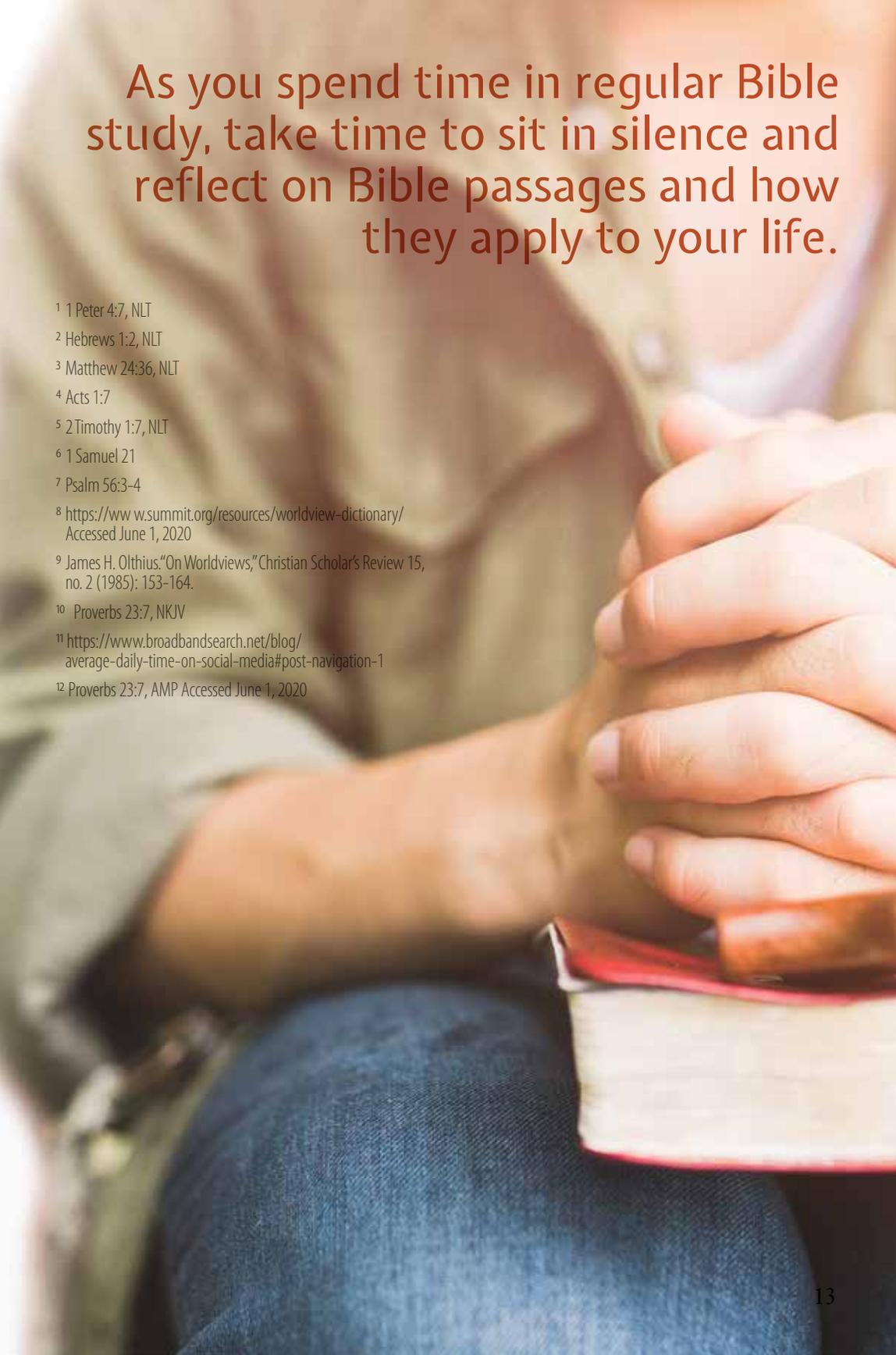
If you aren't used to sitting in silence, start out slowly. Think of this time as sitting with a friend and growing your relationship. Try one day a week for five minutes. Then gradually increase the time and number of days. Keep your thoughts focused on Jesus. If you find your mind wandering, be intentional to drawing them back. Allow God to fill up the silence.

Read a Book – Reading works by Christian authors can help increase our knowledge and broaden our views on spiritual things. The last twelve chapters of *The Great Controversy* offers insight into end-time events. You can download it through the Apple Store (look for EGW Writings 2) or on Google Play (look for EGW Writings).

If you don't have time to read a physical book, audiobooks are a great option that can even be used while exercising or commuting. The Ellen G. White Estate offers free audio downloads <https://ellenwhiteaudio.org/>. ChristianAudio offers a wide selection of books in many different categories—christianaudio.com.

IS IT TIME FOR A RESET?

Are you feeling fear at what you see happening in the world? It may be time for a reset. Cultivating a biblical worldview takes time, work, and commitment. It isn't easy. But, its solid foundation gives you peace to face a certain future.



As you spend time in regular Bible study, take time to sit in silence and reflect on Bible passages and how they apply to your life.

¹ 1 Peter 4:7, NLT

² Hebrews 1:2, NLT

³ Matthew 24:36, NLT

⁴ Acts 1:7

⁵ 2 Timothy 1:7, NLT

⁶ 1 Samuel 21

⁷ Psalm 56:3-4

⁸ <https://www.summit.org/resources/worldview-dictionary/>
Accessed June 1, 2020

⁹ James H. Olthius. "On Worldviews," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15, no. 2 (1985): 153-164.

¹⁰ Proverbs 23:7, NKJV

¹¹ <https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/average-daily-time-on-social-media#post-navigation-1>

¹² Proverbs 23:7, AMP Accessed June 1, 2020

LIVE FEARLESSLY

By CH (LTC) Dan Bray, U. S. Army, Retired MS, MDiv.
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We live in a world filled with multiple issues and concerns. Even a casual glance around us might cause a bit of anxiety. Some of these situations that have captured our attention include social distancing, politics, oil prices, social unrest, and stock market swings.

What approach might a Christian take and not only survive, but thrive, during these tumultuous days of our history?

IS THIS THE END?

I well remember one of the first critical moments of my young spiritual mind in the middle of what was known as the oil crisis during 1973. There were some members of my home church who were convinced that the oil shortage was the “beginning of the end” and Christ’s return was absolutely imminent. There was some fear and angst even among people who professed allegiance to God. In hindsight, of course the world prevailed over the oil crisis and life returned to normalcy.

However, many of these same people simply pointed out to the next “crisis” as the sure sign of the end of time. I have witnessed others proclaiming that a certain president’s religious orientation would certainly usher in end-time events. That too, has now come and gone.

Perhaps a key way to view the “crisis of the moment” is to ask ourselves this question. “Who is in control?”

Even people within the early Christian church faced similar obstacles. They expected Christ to return within their lifetimes. I, too, grew up within the church with the belief that we don’t have much time before Christ’s coming and that I likely would not be the age I am now.

There is a myriad of other conspiracy theories that can garner our full attention if we allow it. Over time, spending an inordinate amount of time on items or situations that are beyond our control can vastly impact our full spectrum including our relationships, our work, and our health.

LIVING CONFIDENTLY AMONG THE TURMOIL

Perhaps a key way to view the “crisis of the moment” is to ask ourselves this question. “Who is in control?” If the answer is “us” then we will continue to endure being on the edge of end of time events and react for the rest of lives. We will never experience a true rest and peace with that approach.

However, if we would answer that ultimately God is in control of all that is happening then we can have the perspective that ultimately my security is safe and we are confident and hopeful.

FOCUS ON LIFE, NOT EVENTS

Here are some suggestions for us

to try as we live within a world of constant chaos and crises.

Take a step back and look at the entire picture. When we focus only the immediate need or the “turmoil of the day,” we are bound to set ourselves up for stress and needless anxiety.

Rely upon God. We have heard this type of phrase many times but I wonder how often do I actually practice it? Is God more than my current crisis? Is He truly able to manage the “whatever” of our lives? If we are able to allow ourselves to accept His role in the scheme of things in life, we can then experience the kind of true rest and relaxation that He has promised. So, no matter what happens, our eternal relationship is still secure without additional worry on our part.

Expect the unexpected. We are not implying that we should become blind to the concerns that face us. Rather, when we place things along an eternal timeline with God in control, we are then in a better perspective to see how God plays out these things. And take notice, it is not necessarily to our advantage...but for His!

Perhaps this quote that I saw at our clinic break-room from an unknown author summarizes it best. “In the end everything will be ok; if it’s not ok, it’s not the end.”

I SURRENDER ALL

By Senior Master Sergeant Shakia Lafleur,
U. S. Air Force, with Deena Bartel-Wagner, Editor,
Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries



When God places a call on a person's life, the unexpected may happen. Surrendering to the call is not always easy, but it is still worth it.

Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Shakia Lafleur grew up in the Pentecostal faith. "My family always considered God to be a top priority, so my upbringing included attending church events as the norm," says Shakia. "I believe that these early influences explain my desire to participate in church."

CHOOSING TO SERVE

After completing an Associate's degree at a local college in her hometown, Shakia needed to decide what she wanted to do in life. "My friends were going to college, but that didn't seem to be the right choice for me," says Shakia. "I had always been drawn to military service in some capacity, so I thought I'd enlist in the Army."

An uncomfortable encounter with the recruiter derailed the choice. "He seemed very insincere and talked down the other branches of service," says Shakia. "One day, I went back to the recruiting office to meet with him, and he wasn't there. I decided to check out what the Air Force had to offer."

Shakia met a completely different reception from the Air Force recruiter who was genuine and seemed honest. Her choice to join the Air Force and

serve as a Civil Engineer Operation's Manager has taken her to Florida, Utah, Diego Garcia, North Carolina, and Okinawa, Japan, Italy, Nevada, Qatar, and Iraq. Currently, she is deployed in Kuwait.

I'M A CHRISTIAN, BUT...

After joining the Air Force, Shakia found herself far from home and the familiar routines, including attending church. "I knew if I wasn't part of a church family and active, I would stray," says Shakia. "There were times in my young adult life that I succumbed to temptations of doing things with friends and co-workers."

Wanting to find a church family to worship with, Shakia joined various non-denominational and Protestant services. She implemented stringent actions in her life to attempt to be a good Christian. But then life took a turn.

"I met a man and we married," says Shakia. "My pastor and spiritual mentor warned me against the marriage, but I was young, and I thought I was in love." It was a difficult time, as Shakia learned that they were not compatible in their faith and did not share the same love for Jesus. Sadly, the marriage came to an end.

Although the marriage ended, Shakia's faith grew despite of the relationship difficulties she experienced. "I decided to study and become a chaplain in the Air Force," says Shakia.

After joining the military, Shakia found herself far from home and the familiar routines, including attending church.

“I enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program and began working on my degree and prerequisites.”

Another struggle began to develop during this time. Shakia learned to be content being single and believed this was God’s plan for her. “I wrestled with marrying again,” says Shakia. “But then I met and married the love of my life. We shared a love for Jesus, but our faith traditions were not the same.”

IS THIS A CULT?

Shakia’s husband, Jean, grew up as a Catholic but converted to Adventism as a teenager when his aunt invited him to attend her church. “Again, I found myself in a relationship and an incompatibility issue,” says Shakia. “I considered myself a non-denominational Christian, and I was concerned about his “cult” religion. During a pre-marital counseling session, my non-Adventist pastor reassured me that this denomination held true to many fundamental beliefs, and so we were married.”

Although perplexed, Shakia understood that they served the same God. “We continued to pray together, but wrestled with our various beliefs,” says Shakia. “My husband attended church with me, but I could see he was unhappy. Eventually, he told me of things that he’d heard from the pulpit that concerned him. It was becoming more difficult to share in our love for God—what I enjoyed doing with

everyone and most certainly wanted to do with my best friend!”

Shakia decided to look for an Adventist church and attend with Jean. “If it was this important to him, I needed to give it a try,” says Shakia.

At the time, Shakia was stationed in Okinawa, and they began attending the Okinawa International Adventist Church. “My skepticism continued,” admits Shakia. “Although I’d been a Christian all my life, my practice was to validate ideas and beliefs after reading various study materials to understand the Bible. Using the Bible to interpret itself was unfamiliar to me.”

How could the beliefs she’d held for so long be incorrect when it seemed that everything she’d read and studied validated them? “I felt like I could only understand the Bible by going through the filters of pastors, preachers, and teachers,” says Shakia.

One activity in Adventist fellowship intrigued Shakia—the potlucks where people came together and ate healthy meals. Shakia watched the people who came and was impressed by their genuine sincerity.

Her Divinity degree classes led her to study a book that contained information on the change of the Sabbath. “I felt like I couldn’t ask people at my church, and I didn’t want to ask my husband about this information,” says Shakia. “I finally swallowed my pride and began to ask him questions. As time went on, I abandoned my studies to become a

“There will be challenges in your career, but you must stay strong in the faith through Christ.”

chaplain because it felt like I didn't know anything. That is when I began to study the Bible for myself. I was merely reading the Bible for what it was and not understanding that history played a part in understanding it. I despised history when I was in school. Now I enjoy it as it relates to God's creation and redemption outlined in the Bible."

I'M AN ADVENTIST, AND . . .

Since her baptism, there have been times when Shakia had to explain her choice of diet and to observe Sabbath. "These have been challenging for me," admits Shakia, "because it does make me feel a little 'different' at times. I try to be neutral in my choice of words, so I don't close the door in conversations with my non-Christian co-workers. This allows them to share something with me, and I can provide a godly answer in return."

Shakia believes that in all things, prayer needs to be the first thing a Christian does. "There will be challenges in your career, but you must stay strong in the faith through Christ," says Shakia. "Are you stationed where there's not another Adventist? Be prepared to start a Sabbath School, use YouTube or social media, or find a way to stay connected with your church family back home. It's easy for work to consume you, even on Sabbath. Don't compromise your faith for those around you."

A FUTURE AHEAD

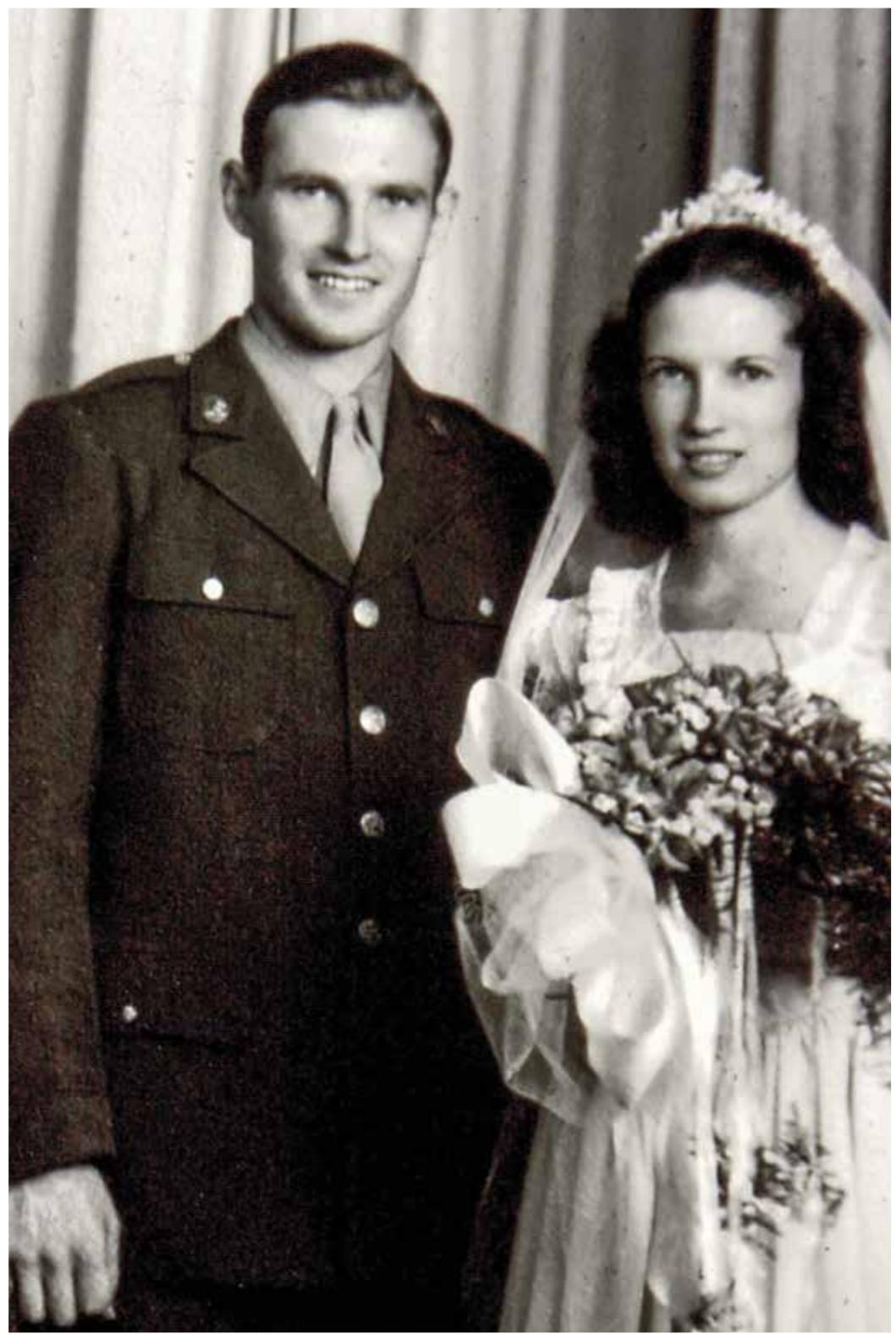
As she looks to the future, Shakia's dreams include earning a Doctor of Philosophy in clinical psychology and working as a counselor. "I'm also currently working to establish a farm business to provide healthy,



nutritious food for both my family and the local community. Knowing where your food comes from is important to me," says Shakia. "I want to help others understand the importance of healthy eating."

INFLUENCING THROUGH PRESENCE AND ACTIONS

Surrender is a daily act for the Christian. For Shakia Lafleur, surrender meant releasing long-held beliefs and being open to the unknown. "I'm still on my spiritual journey, learning more each day about God's word and enjoying the truth," says Shakia. "We're living in a great time right now to impact not only those around us but also nations just by our very presence and actions."



TAKING a STAND for SABBATH

By Lyle Hamel, T/5,

U. S. Army Veteran, with Deena Bartel-Wagner, Editor, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries

As a child, Lyle Hamel always admired the Veterans as they marched down Main Street in Marshfield, Wisconsin. He never dreamed that one day he'd be called by the United States Government to report for duty.

FARM BOY AND MUSICIAN

Growing up in rural Wisconsin, Lyle learned about hard work and sacrifice on the family farm. His parents believed in Adventist education and enrolled their children in both Bethel Church School and Bethel Academy. "The Academy was about one mile from our farm. School started at 7:30 and ended at 12:30," says Lyle. "Our day started early as we had to milk our four cows, eat breakfast, walk to school, and be there before classes started at 7:30 a.m."

Lyle developed a love for music because of his father's interest. "My father founded Hamel Music Company, and the first instrument he taught me to play was the mellophone," says Lyle. "I participated in chorus, band, and musical groups beginning in fourth grade. Each spring, the students participated in a music contest. We proudly brought

back numerous first-place awards for solo and group performances." This training began to prepare him for his future career.

There were fun times, too. In the summer, games of touch football, softball, and ski jumping and ice skating in the winter tested the brothers' physical abilities.

AN INTERRUPTED EDUCATION

Following graduation from Bethel Academy, Lyle was accepted at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC) (now Andrews University). "I was a very contented student enjoying my studies when I received a letter with "Greetings from the President of the United States," says Lyle. "I was engaged to Helen Hoagland, and we were looking forward to getting married." Instead, Lyle would have to put his education and marriage plans on hold and report for induction.

A busload of inductees, including Lyle, travelled to Chicago for their final medical exam. "I passed the exam without any problems. Soon I stood in a roomful of others, raised my hand, and was sworn into the Army," says Lyle. "We then left for Fort Sheridan, where we were assigned to our

barracks. We were issued our Army uniforms, and our personal items were shipped back to our parents.”

The soldiers then began being tested for their skills and what they would be assigned to for their military duty. Lyle had already determined that he would keep the fourth commandment and not carry a gun no matter what. “As a child, I learned about Ted Morrison, who had scars on his legs from being jabbed with bayonets by some Army officers because he wouldn’t bear arms, and wouldn’t report to duty on the Sabbath,” says Lyle. “He had remained true to the Bible. His influence had a lasting effect on me.”

As the testing and evaluations continued, Lyle realized on Friday that it would continue on Sabbath. “I went to the officer in charge of the group and explained why I couldn’t continue with the group the next day,” says Lyle. “He told me that if I couldn’t, I should just get lost for the day, but that I would have to take full responsibility for my not being present.”

SABBATH IN THE ARMY

That first Sabbath in the Army, Lyle took his Bible and “got lost.” On Monday, when he reported back at the testing center, he was told that his processing needed to be expedited because he was a day behind his group. This continued through the rest of his time at Fort Sheridan, and he finished ahead of the other soldiers

who reported for Sabbath testing. “I felt that this was a gentle reminder that I had done the right thing by not going for processing on Sabbath,” says Lyle. “In the future, this assurance gave me the needed courage to stay on the course that I had started on.”

Although Lyle qualified to attend Officers Candidate School and become a 2nd Lieutenant in six weeks, he didn’t accept. This meant he’d be going to Camp Crowder near Neosho, Missouri. “I didn’t know it at the time, but somehow my papers had been misplaced, and they didn’t even know where I was for quite a while,” says Lyle. “Finally, I was assigned to Company “C,” 37th Training Battalion, Branch Immaterial Training Group.”

Again, Lyle’s commitment to the Sabbath and not carrying a gun was tested. Because of his stand, the Sergeant was unhappy with this soldier’s requests and regularly had Lyle pulling K.P. duty.

One day quite unexpectedly, Lyle was called to the Company Headquarters. “I was asked if I’d be the Standard Bearer, which meant carrying the Company Flag,” says Lyle. This is a position of honor, and I gladly accepted.” No longer in the ranks of the Platoon, now Lyle was in front of the entire Company.

Carrying the Company Flag brought its own challenges. “When I needed to retrieve the flag, I had to go against the flow of soldiers coming out of the barracks,” says Lyle. “One of the

“I felt that this was a gentle reminder that I had done the right thing by not going for processing on Sabbath,”

officers got after me for not moving fast enough. The next time we were ordered to the drill field, I went full speed to retrieve the flag. Unfortunately, I tripped and fell on the path that was covered with rough stones.”

Lyle’s hand suffered a significant injury, and blood ran down his arm. He was ordered to see the doctor. Treatment included cleaning and bandaging, and orders to return in one week to have the hand examined.

The injury didn’t keep the Sergeant from continuing to order Lyle to do K.P. duty. A week later, the doctor unwrapped the hand and discovered “proud flesh” where he expected a healed wound. “The doctor wasn’t pleased to learn I’d been on K.P. duty and wrote a “buck slip” that stated I couldn’t perform K.P. until he released me,” says Lyle. “My hand healed slowly. By the time I was released, basic training was over and I moved to another base.”

NEW ORDERS

With Basic Training completed, new orders were issued, and Lyle received an assignment to Ashford General Hospital in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. I was assigned to the dental clinic as an assistant to a dentist,” says Lyle. “My duties included taking x-rays, mixing amalgams, cement, and keeping all the instruments clean and sterilized.”

Again Lyle was committed to observing the Sabbath, so he spoke with Colonel Budge, his commanding officer. “He told me I was just the person they needed. I would be in Charge of Quarters on Sunday, which also meant I was entrusted with the keys to the dental clinic,” says Lyle. “In case of a dental emergency, I would be the dentist on call. I often spent the day reading. On Sabbath, two other Adventist Soldiers who were on base would meet with me in the morning, and we would read the Bible together.”

The Lyle Hamel family, 1986



Lyle's father
instilled a love for
music in him.



NEARER TO HELEN

When Ashford General closed, Lyle was sent to Wakeman General Hospital at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, just 30 miles south of Indianapolis. "I was assigned to the dental clinic, and my duties were the same as before," says Lyle. "It didn't take long for me to feel at ease."

This move also brought Lyle closer to Helen, who was finishing her nursing training at Hinsdale Sanitarium and Hospital. "Every other weekend, I would hitchhike a ride to Hinsdale. We wanted to marry as soon as Helen graduated," says Lyle. "Our wedding date was set for July 23, 1946. I was able to get a two-week furlough. A soldier in my barracks agreed to pick up my furlough papers and send them to me."

The week of leave came to an end. Helen needed to finish her requirements to get her R.N., and Lyle returned to Camp Atterbury.

Every other weekend Lyle hitchhiked a ride to Chicago and took a commuter train out to Hinsdale to spend time with Helen.

One day while reading the newspaper, Lyle learned about a new law under consideration by Congress. "If you had been drafted while attending college, you could apply for separation from the Army," says Lyle. "I immediately reapplied to EMC, so I'd be prepared if the law was passed."

As one of his daily responsibilities, Lyle had to review all "orders" issued from the Army. Congress passed the law, and the day finally arrived when Lyle could request to be discharged. Eager to complete his education, Lyle turned down a generous re-enlistment bonus and another opportunity to attend OCS.

INTO THE CLASSROOM

Lyle returned to EMC, completed

“My decision to be faithful to my beliefs no matter the consequences allowed the Lord to show Himself to me many times.”

his studies, and graduated with a Bachelor's of Science degree and teaching certificates in Agriculture, Biology, Bible, and Chemistry. The benefits of the G.I. Bill helped him graduate with no debt.

Broadview Academy in Illinois would be Lyle and Helen's next post of duty. Lyle would be the farm and dairy manager and teach agriculture. “Shortly after we arrived, I was asked to direct the band. At first, I said no,” says Lyle. “Then I reconsidered and said I would do it on the condition that the academy would send me to Vandercook College of Music to study music formally.”

After Broadview Academy, Lyle taught at Wisconsin Academy, and then Forest Lake Academy in Florida, where he initiated a statewide music festival for Adventist elementary and junior academy students. More than sixty years later, it is the oldest music festival in Adventist music education.

Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) approached Lyle with the offer to conduct their band. He turned it down but accepted the proposal when it was extended again two years later. The band grew during his leadership, and the concerts became popular community events. During his time at Southern Lyle helped establish the Southern Union Music Festival.

Moving into school administration led to Lyle and Helen moving to Sheyenne River Academy in North Dakota. But, teaching music had

captured his heart, and he returned to the classroom at Pioneer Valley Academy in Massachusetts.

From there, Lyle moved on to Newbury Park Academy, and because of a fellow musician's tragic death, he transferred to Pacific Union College (PUC) to lead the college band. Following their time at PUC, Lyle and Helen moved to Pomona Adventist Academy. For the next ten years, Lyle served as the principal, until his retirement.

LOYALTY TO GOD AND COUNTRY

As a Veteran, Lyle Hamel remains loyal to his country. As a Christian, he's loyal to his God. He joined the ranks of those he'd admired as a young boy and chose faithfulness to God in the face of persecution. Each Friday night, this 97-year-old musician puts his trumpet to his lips and plays the haunting twenty-four notes of “Taps” to open the Sabbath.

“I look back on my military experience and know that it was a benefit to me in many ways,” says Lyle. “My decision to be faithful to my beliefs no matter the consequences allowed the Lord to show Himself to me many times. As I faced other difficult situations in my life, God's faithfulness to me during my Army years reminded me that He cared about everything in my life.

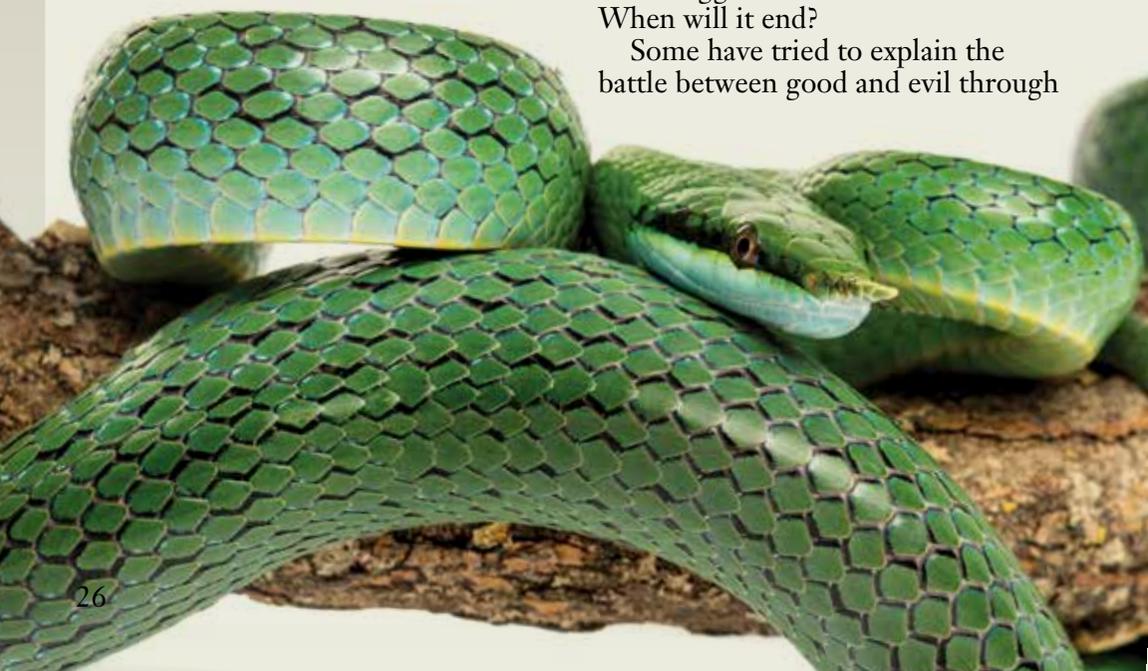
GOD'S Final Victory!

By Washington Johnson II,
Assistant Director, Adventist Chaplaincy
Ministries, North American Division of Seventh-
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Each day the United States Armed Forces are on alert to defend and protect our nation against its enemies. There is never a down moment when national security could be compromised. Threats of ISIS, North Korea's nuclear program, and sectarian tension in the Middle East especially require sound vigilance. Reading and hearing about these events in the news offer sure reminders of the ever-present struggle between good and evil. This thought may prompt a series of questions: How, when, and where did this struggle start? Who is involved? When will it end?

Some have tried to explain the battle between good and evil through



God created a perfect universe based on the principles of divine love and obedience, but Satan's disloyalty and jealousy of God's son were so intense that it disrupted heaven.

Greek Mythology when Pandora opened a box, and evil flew out. But the Bible gives us the true story behind this cosmic struggle that is more action-packed than Star Wars. John the Revelator opens the curtains to this drama with these words: *"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven."*¹

Satan (the dragon) was once an angel in heaven, who over, time and without cause, became jealous of Christ (Michael). God created a perfect universe based on

the principles of divine love and obedience, but Satan's disloyalty and jealousy of God's Son were so intense that it disrupted Heaven. His unjust attacks against the character of God led to open rebellion and expulsion from heaven, along with sympathetic angels (one-third of the heavenly host) who succumbed to his deceptions. The Bible says of Satan, *"Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor."*²

Satan didn't give up there but continued to spread rebellion on earth, disguised as a speaking serpent, using the same arguments that had led to his downfall in heaven. He effectively undermined Adam and Eve's trust in God: "... He said to the woman, *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*³

The impact of eating the forbidden fruit plunged the human race into a crisis and brokenness, creating the need for a complete restoration. The promise and assurance of both restoration and victory came immediately following the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15: *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and*



NAD UPDATES

hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” This required the ultimate sacrifice—the death of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. We can rejoice that His death and triumphant resurrection have given the entire human race hope and certainty that the struggle between good and evil will assuredly come to an end—in favor of “good.” But until then, we must fight the good fight of faith. Paul proposed the only strategy that will assure us victory: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”*⁴

While preparing for a mobilization, I participated in a military exercise that lasted for 14 days. The purpose was to test our warfare strategies and ensure mission readiness and physical endurance. The venue was the California desert with temperatures scorching during the day and unbearably cold at night. Before the exercise, we were told that a flare would be fired on the last day of the training signifying its completion. We were instructed to stay alert—on watch at all times, to remain focused, and not allow fatigue to compromise

the mission. We were not privileged to know the exact date when the military exercise would end but to watch for the flare in the sky.

Some became weary due to the stress and fast pace of the exercise. Others surrendered to the enemy (United States service members in the role of the enemy). But finally, on Day 14, those of us who endured until the end heard the sound of a blast and saw the flare high in the sky. We all rejoiced that the exercise was now over.

As I reflected on that exercise from a spiritual perspective, I am reminded that one day in the eastern sky, when the war between good and evil is over, Christ, the Son of God, will return as a Mighty Conqueror wearing many crowns. Despite the grim outlook of our world, I encourage you to remain steadfast in your faith, and the promises of Christ’s soon return. I challenge you to keep looking for the cloud in the eastern sky, keep praying, keep believing, and keep standing!

¹ Revelation 12:7-8, NIV

² Ezekiel 28:17, NIV

³ Genesis 3:5, NIV

⁴ Ephesians 6:10-11, NIV

TELL US YOUR STORY

In the days before digital photos, printed snapshots of people's stories were kept in photo albums. Those photos were the visual evidence of events, emotions, convictions, and legacies.

At the World Service Organization, we believe your story of service is important. We want to tell it in the pages of *For God and Country*.

We are seeking stories about Adventists serving in uniform. This includes all military—Active Duty, Guard or Reserve, and veterans, law enforcement, firefighters, EMTs, First Responders, Search and Rescue, and others who serve their community, state, province, or nation.

To share your story, contact the *For God and Country* editor at ACMEditor@gc.adventist.org.

**YOUR LEGACY NEEDS TO BE SHARED WITH FAMILY,
FRIENDS, AND THE CHURCH-AT-LARGE.**



A photograph of a bamboo forest path. The path is made of dirt and leads into the distance, flanked by tall, thin bamboo stalks that arch over the path, creating a tunnel effect. The bamboo leaves are a vibrant green, and the lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

THE ACCOMPLISHING OF THE
GOAL OF ALL THINGS IS CLOSE
AT HAND. THEREFORE, KEEP ALERT
AND SELF CONTROLLED, SO THAT
YOU CAN PRAY.

1 Peter 4:7, CJB

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Build a wall of
scriptures around
you, and you will see
that the world cannot
break it down.

— Ellen G. White,
The Review and Herald, April 10, 1888

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