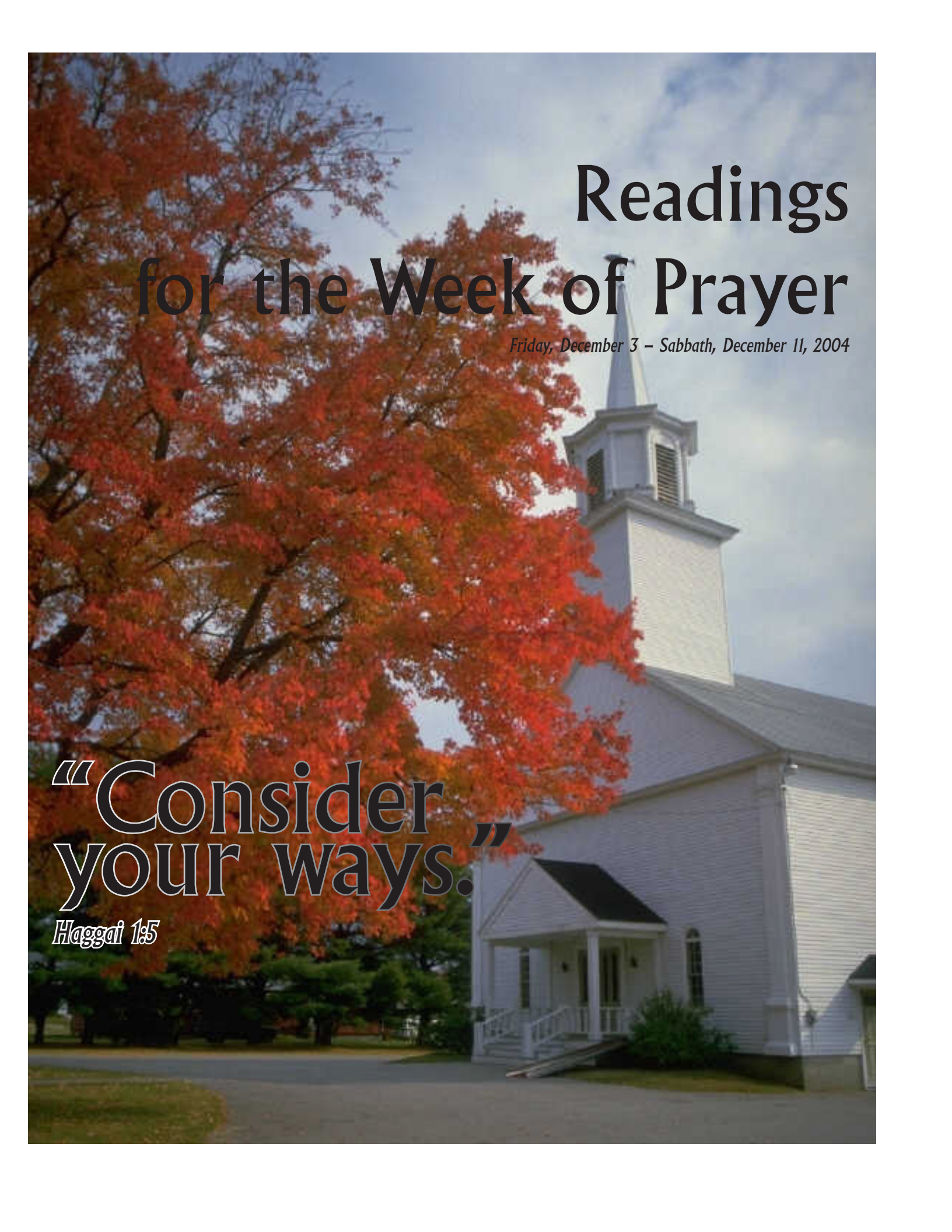




Readings for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 3 – Sabbath, December 11, 2004

“Consider
your ways.”

Haggai 1:5

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the Week of Prayer this year is the analysis of our relation with God, with the church, the truth, our fellowmen and the necessary preparation needed to face the future events. Indeed, when a year draws to a close and the new one begins, it is of vital importance to meditate deeply upon our profession of faith, our spiritual progress, our relation with others, without forgetting our religious, family and social duties.

The conducive thought in all these readings is focused on Haggai 1:5, "Consider your ways." The Lord urges us to meditate at great length on how we lead our life, since, "If ever there was a time when those who have a knowledge of present truth should find their bearings, it is the present time. Although no one is to move independently of his brethren, yet each one must gain a knowledge of his own condition, his exact bearings. The question that each one should ask himself is, 'What is my relation to God?'"

"This very day the Lord desires us to reach a higher standard than we have ever reached in the past. Day by day we are to advance upward, ever upward, until it can be said of us as a people, 'Ye are complete in him.'" —*Upward Look*, p. 202.

"If there ever was a time when serious reflection becomes every one who fears God, it is now, when personal piety is essential. The inquiry should be made, 'What am I, and what is my work and mission in this time? On which side am I working—Christ's side or the enemy's side?' Let every soul now humble himself or herself before God, for now we are surely living in the great Day of Atonement. The cases even now of many are passing in review before God, for they are to sleep in their graves a little season. Your profession of faith is not your guarantee in

that day, but the state of your affections. Is the soul-temple cleansed of its defilement? Are my sins confessed and am I repenting of them before God, that they may be blotted out? Do I esteem myself too lightly? Am I willing to make any and every sacrifice for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ? Do I feel every moment I am not my own, but Christ's property, that my service belongs to God, whose I am?

"We should ask ourselves, 'For what are we living and working? And what will be the outcome of it all?'" —*Last Days Events*, pp. 72, 73.

During this Week of Prayer, we request that brothers and sisters meet and share their thoughts and comments on the readings and pray fervently for a better understanding of the will of God. We also remind you that the last Sabbath is a day of fasting and prayer so that each person can be brought to a closer communion with the Lord. A generous contribution for the progress of His work will be our humble gesture of thanksgiving for the blessings received during the year. May the Lord continue having mercy on His people and pouring His blessings upon each one of us.

—*The brothers of the General Conference*

"Consider your ways."

Haggai 1:5

Readings for the Week of Prayer

December 3-11, 2004

"Consider your ways"

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“Consider from this day and upward.” (Haggai 2:15)

By Ellen G. White

Life is like a voyage. We have storm and sunshine, but we bear in mind that we are nearing the desired haven. We shall soon be beyond the storms and tempests. Our present duty is to hearken to the voice that says, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). We must accept this invitation daily. The past is contained in the book where all things are written down. We cannot blot out the record, but we can learn many things if we choose. The past should teach us its lessons. As we make the past our monitor, we may also make it our friend. As we call to mind that in the past which has been disagreeable, let it teach us not to repeat it. In the future let nothing be traced which will cause regret in the by-and-by.... Every day we live we are making our history. Today is ours, yesterday is beyond our amendment or control. Then let us not grieve the Spirit of God today, for tomorrow we shall not be able to recall this day; it will be yesterday to us....

Jesus Christ has plentiful help and grace for all who will appreciate it. The Lord is our helper; with Him is forgiveness. He alone can blot out the sins of the past. He can strengthen the mind. If we regard the past as no longer our enemy but as a friend to warn us off the ground we should not approach, it will prove a true friend....

Will we grasp and appreciate the good, and refuse the evil? Will we walk humbly with God?... We have only a little period in which to work. We are not to educate ourselves to worry. Keep the eye upward, fixed upon the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus. –*That I May Know Him*, p. 89.

“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This [is] the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” Isaiah 30:21

I know that human beings suffer much because they step out of the path that God has chosen for them to follow. They walk in the sparks of the fire they have kindled themselves, and the sure result is affliction, unrest, and sorrow, which they might have avoided if they had submitted their will to God and had permitted Him to control their ways. God sees that it is necessary to oppose our will and our way, and bring our human will into subjection.

Whatever path God chooses for us, whatever way He ordains for our feet, that is the only path of safety. We are daily to cherish a spirit of childlike submission, and pray that our eyes may be anointed with the heavenly eyesalve in order that we may discern the indications of the divine will, lest we become confused in our ideas, because our will seems to be all-controlling. With the eye of faith, with childlike submission as obedient children, we must look to God, to follow His guidance, and difficulties will clear away. The promise is, ‘I will instruct thee and teach thee...: I will guide thee with mine eye’ (Ps. 32:8)....

If we come to God in a humble and teachable spirit, not with our plans all formed before we ask Him, and shaped according to our own will, but in submission, in willingness to be taught, in faith, it is our privilege to claim the promise every hour of the day. We may distrust ourselves, and we need to guard against our own inclinations and strong

tendencies lest we shall follow our mind and plans and think it is the way of the Lord.... –*That I May Know Him*, p. 249. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” John 15:8. Many shrink from such a life as our Saviour lived. They feel that it requires too great a sacrifice to imitate the Pattern, to bring forth fruit in good works, and then patiently endure the pruning of God that they may bring forth more fruit. But when the Christian regards himself as only a humble instrument in the hands of Christ, and endeavors to faithfully perform every duty, relying upon the help which God has promised, then he will wear the yoke of Christ and find it easy; then he will bear burdens for Christ, and pronounce them light. He can look up with courage and with confidence, and say, ‘I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him’ (2 Tim. 1:12).

If we meet obstacles in our path, and faithfully overcome them; if we encounter opposition and reproach, and in Christ’s name gain the victory; if we bear responsibilities and discharge our duties in the spirit of our Master –then, indeed, we gain a precious knowledge of His faithfulness and power. We no longer depend upon the experience of others, for we have the witness in ourselves. Like the Samaritans of old, we can say, ‘We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world’ (John 4:42).

The more we contemplate the character of Christ, and the more we experience of His saving power, the more keenly shall we realize our own weakness and imperfection, and the more earnestly shall we look to Him as our strength and our Redeemer.... By faith in Christ and obedience to the law of God we may be sanctified, and thus obtain a fitness for the society of holy angels and the white-robed redeemed ones in the kingdom of glory.

It is not only the privilege but the duty of every Christian to maintain a close union with Christ and to have a rich experience in the things of God. Then his life will be fruitful in good works... When we read the lives of men who have been eminent for their piety we often regard

their experiences and attainments as far beyond our reach. But this is not the case. Christ died for all; and we are assured in His Word that He is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle. They used the means which God had placed within their reach; and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results. —*Reflecting Christ*, p. 97.

I thank God for the assurance of His love, and that I have daily His leading and guidance.... The time is not long. We must work and watch and wait for the Lord Jesus. We are called upon to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. All our hopes have their foundation in Christ.

Are our people reviewing the past and the present and the future, as it is unfolding before the world? Are they heeding the messages of warning given them? Is it our greatest concern today that our lives shall be refined and purified, and that we shall reflect the similitude of the divine? This must be the experience of all who join that company who are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. They must be arrayed in the righteousness of Christ. His name must be written in their foreheads. They must rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Christ has engraved the names of His people on the palms of His hands. He will never lose His interest in any dependent soul...

Let all understand that they must make a covenant with God by sacrifice. We need the blessings of the gospel every day and every hour. Every proof of the Lord's power, His presence, and His love, is to be recognized with grateful thanks. Happiness is to be achieved by the right action of the soul toward God. I thank the Lord for this precious thought. Let Him be glorified by the sentiments expressed and by the actions performed. —*Selected Messages*, volume 1, p. 56.

"And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deuteronomy 10:12).

If you will be faithful to God, self shall be crucified; self shall die, and Christ Jesus shall live in us, and He shall be the hope of our calling; we will represent Jesus Christ to the world. Inquire sincerely, 'Am I a Christian?' If I am a Christian, I am looking unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of my faith. In Him my hopes of eternal life are centered. . . . —*The Upward Look*, p. 283.

All we have to do is to keep the vessel clean and right side up and prepared for the reception of the heavenly rain,

and keep praying, 'Let the latter rain come into my vessel. Let the light of the glorious angel which unites with the third angel shine upon me; give me a part in the work; let me sound the proclamation; let me be a colaborer with Jesus Christ.' Thus seeking God, let me tell you, He is fitting you up all the time, giving you His grace.

You need not be worried. You need not be thinking that there is a special time coming when you are to be crucified. The time to be crucified is just now. Every day, every hour, self is to die; self is to be crucified; and then, when the time comes that the test shall come to God's people in earnest, the everlasting arms are around you. The angels of God make a wall of fire around about and deliver you.

All your self-crucifixion will not do any good then. It must be [done] before the destiny of souls is decided. It is now that self is to be crucified—when there is work to do; when there is some use to be made of every entrusted capability. It is now that we are to empty and thoroughly cleanse the vessel of its impurity. It is now that we are to be made holy unto God. This is our work, this very moment. You are not to wait for any special period for a wonderful work to be done; it is today. I give myself to God today. . . .

Are you ready to make the surrender now? You are to put away your sin right now when you see it. . . . Do not make leeway [that] you are going to overcome by degrees; you are going to try little by little to give up sin. Now, while it is called today, heed the invitation and harden not your hearts.

Oh, my soul, why not leave the cursed thing today? Sin crucified my Lord. Why not turn from it with loathing? Why not love the things that Christ loved, and hate the things that Christ hated? He has made provision ample enough for you that you can, through Him, be more, yea, more than overcomers. —*The Upward Look*, p. 283.

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13).

Christ is soon to come the second time. Of this we should often talk. It should be the uppermost thought in our minds. He is coming, with power and great glory, and every eye shall see Him. All the holy angels will accompany Him. Of this company John writes, "I beheld, and



heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beast and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11).

The trumpet has not yet sounded. Those who have gone down into the grave have not yet cried, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' (1 Cor. 15:55). The righteous dead have not yet been caught up with the living saints to meet their Lord in the air. But the time is near when the words spoken by the apostle Paul will have their fulfillment, 'For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

In order for us to be like the Saviour, we must be changed (see Phil. 3:20, 21). Now is the time for us to bring into the daily life the virtues of Christ's life. We have no time to lose. Should we fail in our character building, we shall lose eternal life. We must build on the true foundation. . . . We must do the work of Christ, and be constantly watching and praying. Then we shall be ready for His appearing, prepared to receive eternal life. All who will can be overcomers. Let us strive earnestly to reach the standard set before us. Christ knows our weakness, and to Him we can go daily for help. It is not necessary for us to gain strength a month ahead. We are to conquer from day to day. This earth is the place of preparation for heaven. The time spent here is the Christian's winter. Here the chilly winds of affliction blow upon us, and the waves of trouble roll against us. But in the near future, when Christ comes, sorrow and sighing will be forever ended. Then will be the Christian's summer. All trials will be over, and there will be no more sickness or death. 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev. 21:4).—Manuscript 28, Oct. 24, 1886, 'The Hope Set Before Us,' a sermon preached at Nimes, France. —*The Upward Look*, p. 311. Amen.

Reading No. 2 – Sabbath, December 4, 2004

“Consider it in thine heart” (Deuteronomy 4:39)

By Tzvetan Petkov, Germany

Israel was facing the culminating event of its ancient history, it was about to enter the promised land. Behind were the 40 years of wilderness wandering and centuries under Egyptian rule. All hearts yearned for their own home and the peace in the land that had been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, where “milk and honey flowed”, the land of blessings that was to be the reward of Israel.

But all could not enter this land. A whole generation perished in the desert, due to its unbelief. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard [it]...” Hebrew 4:2.

Even Moses, the friend of God, the only one who had spoken face to face with the Lord, was not allowed to enter Canaan. He could leave Egypt, cross the Red Sea and guide the people for a long time across the desert and up to the border of the Promised Land, which he could contemplate from Mount Pisga. When he was in the eastern part of the Jordan, he wrote Deuteronomy 4:39. “Know therefore this day, and consider [it] in thine heart, that the Lord he [is] God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: [there is] none else.” This message touches us in a special way because as The People of God in the time of the end, we are before the gates of our eternal home: the heavenly Canaan.

“Know therefore, and consider in thine heart”

The first thing the Lord wishes is that His people of the end-time has the knowledge of the truth. Exactly, when “there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders;

insomuch that, if [it were] possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Matthew 24:24, the Lord needs a people that remains firm and that like a light in the darkness illuminates the way towards heaven.

“The prevailing spirit of our time is one of infidelity and apostasy—a spirit of avowed illumination because of a knowledge of truth, but in reality of the blindest presumption. Human theories are exalted and placed where God and His law should be. Satan tempts men and women to disobey, with the promise that in disobedience they will find liberty and freedom that will make them as gods. There is seen a spirit of opposition to the plain word of God, of idolatrous exaltation of human wisdom above divine revelation. Men have allowed their minds to become so darkened and confused by conformity to worldly customs and influences that they seem to have lost all power to discriminate between light and darkness, truth and error. So far have they departed from the right way that they hold the opinions of a few philosophers, so-called, to be more trustworthy than the truths of the Bible.” —*Patriarchs and Kings*, p. 178.

The influence of the world and the fallen churches is felt more and more in our ranks. The enemy uses all his forces to destroy the unit of our family and our church. He tries by means of false doctrines and the compromise of the truth, to confuse the clear difference that exists between holy and profane, good and evil, light and darkness.

Only if we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, can we be protected from error. Only by the means of a daily communion with God and the deep study of His Word can we keep a clear spiritual vision and be able to show the way to others. Exactly in our days, God hopes that His people will make serious decisions



and remain firm only in the truth. Each point of our convictions of faith must be deeply founded on the word of God. The source of all wisdom offers us, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, [and] apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, [and] liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as [for] hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Proverbs 2:1-5.

Moses said, "Know... consider in thy heart." This knowledge must not be only intellectual, but it must be part of our life. It is not enough to be in agreement with the theory of the truth, to confess our faith in Christ and to be registered in the books of the church. "And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." 1 John 3:24.

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." 1 John 2:3

This is the guarantee of true conversion, "This is the genuine evidence of

conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness." –*Christ's Object, Lessons*, p. 129.

"The cause of God in the earth today is in need of living representatives of Bible truth." –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 158.

Do you also want to live this experience? Are you thirsty and hungry for the knowledge of God? God is love and He gives this experience to each one that comes to Him, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matthew 7:7. Even if a mother can forget her children, the Saviour never forgets His. He is our protection and shelter, our strength, our justice, our High Priest, the Lamb sacrificed for our sins.

He has prepared us dwellings in the heavenly Jerusalem, where we will live together in eternity. Trust in Him and bring Him your worries and weaknesses in prayer to Him.

***The Lord he [is] God in heaven
above, and upon the earth beneath:
[there is] none else***

Moses reveals another thing and exclaims: "Know therefore this day, and consider [it] in thine heart, that the Lord he [is] God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: [there is] none else." He declares God is not only in heaven but also on the earth. The psalmist rejoices: "Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, [unto thee] do we give thanks: for [that] thy name is near thy wondrous works declare." Psalm 75:1. Jeremiah warned, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Jeremiah 23:24.

If we think that God is in the earth, we will respect His authority and be obedient to Him. Jesus does not mention anything in vain in His prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as [it is] in heaven." Matthew 6:10. But the danger of idolatry lay in wait for the people of God at all times. The influence of other nations was a temptation for the heart of the Israelites of old. Often, God had to call for a reform to conserve the purity of the faith and the true knowledge of God. In spite of it, the Israelites always turned aside from the straight path. Which is our situation nowadays? The First Angel, in Revelation 14:7 calls with a loud voice: "Fear God and give him glory..."

One of man's favorite idols of all times has been Self. Egocentrism is so deeply rooted in our nature that we practically do not express any thought, word or desire that does not have the seal of our own interests. Consciously or unconsciously, our ego dominates our heart and its ambition robs Jesus of the place that He wishes to occupy in it. Self was what led a perfect angel, Lucifer to rebellion.

"... I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will be like the most High." Isaiah 14:12, 14.

"Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself." –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.

The continuous satisfaction of our ego leads to an ever deeper deformation of our character. Vanity, avarice, pride,

envy, jealousy, cruelty and many other things, are the fruits of this satanic force. Many people who have let themselves be guided by their feelings of greed long enough undergo depression and psychological disturbances. For that reason, Jesus said to his disciples, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24.

Several are the ways in which the evildoer deceives the believers. For some, material things, such as the house, the car, fashion or amusements are a temptation. Especially dangerous for us christians and professed Adventist Reformers is the so called "religious self." A temptation of our sinful nature, is to hide ourselves behind the ceremonial of religious services or a series of good works, to be imbued with a kind of righteousness that does not lead us to overcome sin, but that looks for its own honor and glory. He who has a spirit that sees all others as guilty and considers only himself to be righteous, has an attitude that is just another form of idolatry.

There is no hope to improve or to cultivate our ego. God gives only one solution: our ego must die and a new creature must be born.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ

were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:3, 4.

Once Christ was crucified and died, the Roman soldiers came to verify if he was still alive. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs:

But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw [it] bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John 19:33-35. The apostle Paul uses the death of our Redeemer to illustrate the death of our old man. The sharp spear pierced His side, but He did not feel anything. Only the water and

blood gave testimony, as symbols of the cleansing of forgiveness and the truth of His sacrifice.

It would be interesting to see what would happen if one tried to hurt our ego with words and actions as sharp as spears. Would blood and water come out as a testimony of self's death or ugly and aggressive answers that testify that self is still alive and rules our heart and our behavior?

Those who worshiped Moloc, offered their children in the burning copper hands of this god. Surely, we get angry and say: How is it possible? But, is it not possible

peace to your heart. He will heal your wounds. He will dissipate your offenses and bitterness. Don't you want to be a new creature? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matthew 7:7. The love of money and wealth is nothing else but dangerous idolatry. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matthew 6:24.

The apostle Paul warns his friend and disciple Timothy, "But they that will be



that we also sacrifice our brothers in the faith in the fire of selfishness, envy or ambition? How many disappointed and hurt souls do not attend the church any longer due to the bad example they have seen in us? Separation and rebellion are natural consequences of the glorification of Self.

The apostle Paul tells his experience, "I die daily" 1 Corinthians 15:31. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20. Is it not wonderful to have a Saviour who can set us free from the tyranny of our ego? Jesus Christ "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" 1 Corinthians 1:30, will bring heavenly

rich fall into temptation and a snare, and [into] many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things..." 1 Timothy 6:9.

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, betrayed his Teacher because he had given part of his heart to avarice. Balaam, the prophet of God, could not overcome the temptation of the temporary wealth that was offered to him. His understanding was so darkened that not even the fact that his donkey spoke made him come back to himself.

Finally, he preferred what was temporary to the unperishable wealth of God. Avarice is a disease that attacks the rich as

well as the poor. The third temptation of Jesus in the desert, tested Him exactly in this aspect. Our Redeemer, who gave His life for us, wants each child of God to have sufficient means, not only for himself and his family, but also to help others. As God's property, we have that privilege. We can count on the promise, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that [there shall] not [be room] enough [to receive it]."

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 3:10, 11. Who can be rich without Mammon taking hold of his heart? Only with the help of the Holy Spirit and a daily surrendering shall we be able to overcome this hard test.

The Lord offers us a far more valuable wealth, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Matthew 6:20.

Do you want to receive the reward of an unperishable treasure? Do you want the Lord to take possession of your heart and set you free from avarice?

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matthew 7:7.

Moses remembered that, "the Lord he [is] God ... [there is] none else." (Deut. 4:35) The Apostle Paul states that some had chosen their belly as their god, "Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things." Philippians 3:19.

The first test that our Saviour had to overcome, before beginning his mission as a man, was related to the appetite. "With Christ, as with the holy pair in Eden, appetite was the ground of the first great temptation. Just where the ruin began, the work of our redemption must begin. As by the indulgence of appetite Adam fell, so by the denial of appetite Christ must overcome." *-The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

The famous philosopher and Italian poet

Leopardi (1798-1837), had a passion for the ice cream that the restaurant near his house prepared. This passion developed in such a way that every day he ate kilos of ice cream. After some years, his physician, said to him: 'Mr. Leopardi, you must give up eating ice cream because you are seriously ill. If you do not do it, your liver will be destroyed.' Leopardi's answer was, 'I prefer to die before depriving myself of this pleasure.' The case of this man is not the only one in the history of humanity.

During its pilgrimage on the desert, Israel also had to fight against its idols. Many people who cannot let their desires dominate them, rebel or look for excuses. "Every true Christian will have control of his appetites and passions. Unless he is free from the bondage of appetite, he cannot be a true, obedient servant of Christ. The indulgence of appetite and passion blunts the effect of truth upon the heart." *-Counsels on Diet and Food*, p. 427.

"The health reform, I was shown, is a part of the Third Angel's message, and is just as closely connected with it as are the arm and hand with the human body. I saw that we as a people must make an advance move in this great work. Ministers and people must act in concert. God's people are not prepared for the Loud Cry of the Third Angel. They have a work to do for themselves which they should not leave for God to do for them.

He has left this work for them to do. It is an individual work; one cannot do it for another. 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' Gluttony is the prevailing sin of this age." *-Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 32.

"Let the members of our churches deny every selfish appetite. Every penny expended for tea, coffee, and flesh meat is worse than wasted; for these things hinder the best development of the physical, mental, and spiritual powers." *-Counsels on Diet and Food*, p. 402.

When God takes the direction of our heart, He will also have our appetite, self and avarice under his control. The love of our Saviour leads us to obey Him with joy. Do we love our Saviour with all our heart, with all our strength and understanding or do we deceive ourselves?

The dangers of the gods we meet daily on our way are many. Nevertheless, the solution is not to concentrate the attention on our weaknesses, but in the healing power that only comes from Jesus Christ. God said to Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." Joshua 1: 8.

Our eyes, thoughts and words do not have to concentrate on evil, but on what is holy. This food will give us strength to face the influence of the enemy.

"Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life's cares, perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved.

All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears." *-Steps to Christ*, p. 71.

Jesus wants to deliver his people from all sinful habits. He wants to have on this earth a holy priesthood dressed in the mantle of his righteousness. He wants to prepare us for the outpouring of the latter rain. God invites us: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matthew 7:7.

Do not wait until tomorrow. "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation... But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Hebrew 3:15, 13. Today we can make the decision to live with Jesus and for Jesus. Amen.

“Therefore consider what ye have to do.” (Judges 18:14)

By Julio Sandoza, Brazil

We have reached the end of one more year and extraordinary events are taking place in our planet. The Biblical prophecies that sketch history are being fulfilled with amazing accuracy, because the Word of God cannot fail. The times in which we are living are dangerous and often they demand fast and inevitable answers.

A man who was gently sailing in his boat felt tired and fell asleep. When he awoke, he perceived that the boat was coming near to a water fall and that a chasm and his certain death was before him. And now, what could he do? Nobody could help him! He had to make a very urgent decision. Immediately, he began to row with all his strength against the current, and finally, already exhausted, he managed to fasten the boat to a rock, thus removing the danger of death.

Ethics of the decision

Life does not only demand decision, but it is a permanent decision. Every moment we must make decisions that constitute the model of our acts. The act of living, in itself entails a decision. In many circumstances, our present decisions affect our temporary and eternal future. Many people commit suicide; that also is a decision. Young people ask themselves: What I will do with my life? The most difficult stage of a person's life is the one between 15 and 20 years old; a phase of decisions in which many young people fall into depression and even commit suicide.

Frequently, certain decisions are taken without a serious reflection or analysis, which we can call “preethical” or

emotional decisions because there is not the needed maturity at a moral level. Peter promised to Jesus, “Although all shall be offended, yet [will] not I... But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.” Mark 14:29, 31. Meanwhile, the later experience of this man proves that his first decision was supplanted by another one than marked his whole life, and when questioned about Jesus, “... he began to curse and to swear, [saying], I know not this man of whom ye speak.” Marks 14:71.

Many men mentioned in Biblical history were put in decisive situations. Joseph, in Egypt, was not only tempted to be the lover of a woman of high social rank, but also to participate in the wealth, glory and fame of that corrupt court. “And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.” Génesis 39:12. “His whole future life depended upon the decision of the moment. Would principle triumph? Would Joseph still be true to God? With inexpressible anxiety, angels looked upon the scene.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 217. But he made the correct decision, to be faithful to God; and with an introspective reflection, he exclaimed, “... how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? ... and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.” Genesis 39:9, 12.

As a parallel, the Record shows us the great decision that Pilate had to take; the greatest decision of his life, “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?” Matthew 27:22. And another question shook his confused mind: “What is truth?” John 18:38. But motivated by

political interests and the yearning to remain in his position, Pilate decided to close his eyes to the evidences of the truth and condemned Jesus acceding to the suicidal desire of a crowd controlled by the hatred of Satan.

Will and decision

God created man and He endowed him with will power, one of the noblest faculties. The will is the most elevated principle of the conscious activity that operates in the election of our acts. “This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice.” –*Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

The power of the will includes three important processes; although they work almost simultaneously, they appear like different events. These are: reflection, decision and execution. Reflection leads to reasoning and the methodic examination of the alternatives and possibilities. Decision weighs out the strongest reasons by which we determine what we are going to do. Execution is the mechanism by which the will puts in motion the accomplishment of the action.

A young person in the New Testament, whose will had resisted all educative process, decided to ask his father for his inheritance and to leave to a distant place in search of joy and pleasure. “...and there wasted his substance with riotous living.” Luke 15:13. When he had squandered everything he had, he approached a farmer, who sent him to his farm to feed the pigs. But even under the weight of his frustration and distress, God granted him a new opportunity to put in practice the powers of his will, as it is shown by the later acts of his experience:

1. Reflection: “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” John 15:17.

2. Decision: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” John 15:18, 19.

3. Execution: “And he arose, and came to his father.” John 15: 20.

“Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has

given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him." *—Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

Freedom and will

Man was created free. Freedom was an essential part of man's nature and one of the attributes of God that distinguished man as a partaker of His image. God did not create a robot to serve Him by obligation. He wanted a voluntary service, an obedience motivated by love. In that way, freedom and responsibility were characteristics of the moral image of God in man. But due to the tragedy of man's fall and to the entrance of sin into the world, mankind lost his capacity and the right to exert his freedom, because he became a captive of Satan. Man did not lose his will, because it lies somewhere in the depths of his being, but as freedom is both the ethical support and the battlefield of the will, it was alienated, or rather, it remained in the hands of the enemy of God and man. Sin also represents a dominium; Satan is its leader; sinners are his captives, that is, his servants. A servant is an individual that, although he has will power, he cannot exert it, because he does not have freedom. But Satan uses the potential of his servants' will to execute his intentions and to discredit the government of God; he uses the captive will of man to destroy man himself.

The Gospel and freedom

One of the most glorious declarations of the Saviour, confirms, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:36. The great work of the Gospel consists of setting man free from the slavery of Satan. Such

was the work of Christ described by the Messianic Prophet, "The spirit of the Lord God [is] upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to [them that are] bound." Isaiah 61:1.

"When the rays of divine light penetrate in the dark conscience of the sinner, this one is enlightened. It perceives the unredeemed captive to whom somebody infinitely more powerful than Satan can give back his freedom and the right to use his own will. Man is placed in the same position of Adam, that is, he can choose between continuing being enslaved, or



accepting the liberation offered by Christ. It is there that, "the conscience will be quickened, and the sinner will discern something of the depth and sacredness of God's holy law... [Christ] illumines the secret chambers of the soul, and the hidden things of darkness are made manifest. Conviction takes hold upon the mind and heart..."

He sees the love of God, the beauty of holiness, the joy of purity; he longs to be cleansed and to be restored to communion with Heaven." *—Steps to Christ*, p. 24.

When accepting the call of God, the sinner approaches Him with confession, repentance and faith, and the loving Saviour forgives and justifies him and He declares him free. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to take possession of the soul and to maintain it free from the power of Satan. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." Romans 8:15. "Now the Lord is that Spirit:

and where the Spirit of the Lord [is], there [is] liberty." 2 Corinthians 3:17.

Christian life is born and it remains free. Free from the condemnation of sin by the fact of being justified and, free from the power of sin because the Holy Spirit dwells in us to preserve us from sinning. He activates the process of sanctification. The true believer never uses his freedom as a license to sin deliberately under the presumption that God pardons all sins, because Christ is not a minister of sin. Every sinful practice is a perversion of the will and a bad use of the freedom that we received from Christ. Sin actually hardens and stains the conscience and leads back to the slavery of Satan.

The actions of the believer

In the life of the believer two natures coexist, the human nature (Roman 8:3) judged, condemned and crucified, and the "divine nature" 2 Peter 1:4, of which we become participants by the redeeming work of Christ and the permanence of the Holy Spirit in us. These two natures are in permanent dispute, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Galatians 5:17.

Under this prism, the thoughts, words and acts are subject to the influence of two great ethical powers: the flesh and the Spirit. In practice, this means that we can be carnal or spiritual believers. A carnal believer is he who makes wrong use of his freedom and allows the old nature, either temporarily or permanently to take control of his thoughts, words or actions. This duality between flesh and spirit is condemned by the Word of God, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4. There are many mental enemies of God, and they may be also in the church, people whose lives have not been sanctified and whose undesirable actions and clear apostasy cause much damage to the flock of the Lord. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest,

which are [these]; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told [you] in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5: 19-21. There is no need to practice all this list of sins, it is enough to cherish or to allow a single one of these manifestations of the flesh to attack our new nature, and we will have become carnal Christians.

Reading No. 4 – Tuesday, December 7, 2004

“Consider what great things he hath done for thee” (1 Samuel 12:24)

By Pablo Hunger, Austria

The reward of our acts

Dear brothers and beloved youth, we are living in the solemn time of the judgment and shortly we will have to face our own acts. Our Great High Priest is purifying the records of His people. Each act will be evaluated individually, and each believer as if there were nobody else to be judged. All the Universe observes with special interest the development of this process, and for that reason it is for our own eternal convenience to consider our steps, make a retrospective analysis of our life in this year and decide what we are going to do for God in the next year.

In this balance, you may find victories and defeats, joys and sadness, progress and backsliding. If your faith has progressed, praise the Lord and go ahead, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith.” Hebrew 12:2. If you have been defeated by the enemy, if the love to the world diminished your love for Jesus, if some root of bitterness has separated you from your brothers and the church of Christ, or if some very deep pain hinders the joy and the hope of salvation, give your burden to the loving Saviour. He loves you with the purest love, and as your merciful High Priest He carries you on His breastplate, next to His own heart. Shortly Jesus will return to reward all those who decided to love him and to do His will; He will return to give the reward, “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Romans 2:7). When this Week of Prayer is over, I will pray to the Lord to pour His blessing upon His church and prepare it for the happy encounter with our beloved Redeemer. Amen.

As daybreak dawned, it was dark and cold, but we were all happy because it had snowed and that was a new experience for all of us.

Excited, we decided to go to a very high place in the mountains, to be able to enjoy the snow. In a borrowed car, a Fiat 600, we traveled, a small group of 5 people. It was a small vehicle, but we pressed together so that we could all fit in and share the joy. They asked me to drive and I accepted with pleasure. Another small group, composed of five people, were traveling in a similar car. On the way, I noticed something was wrong with the car, but I did not fully realize the danger were running into until we undertook the return trip. As we were descending the mountain I had to use the brakes, but these did not respond well. I decided to drive more slowly, but the car in front of me suddenly stopped because we had arrived at an important crossroad. I tried using my brakes again, but there was no reaction. I saw I had no other solution but to ask God to intervene. There was a big bus coming in the opposite direction, and if we had a collision we would all surely die. I closed my eyes, prayed to the Lord and swerved to avoid the car in front of us and continued driving along the lane where there was no traffic, at a considerable speed because the road was going downhill. For a couple of seconds it was not I at the steering wheel, but God who had taken over. I could only hear the voice of the other people in the car and the sound the horns of the other cars made. After a deep sigh, I heard the exclamation of those who were with me:

What happened? When I realized we had survived, I opened my eyes and drove to the side of the road. It was one of the most dangerous experiences I have ever had as a driver! We prayed and thanked God for saving us. If I had had time to plan and look for a solution on my own, we would have surely lost our lives because everything was too complicated. God had worked a miracle!

“The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.” Psalm 126:3

A way of strengthening faith

Every time I remember this experience, and many others that the Lord has permitted me to have, I can only be thankful, because if it had not been for the help of the Almighty, I would not be alive. Reflecting on past experiences, strengthens my trust in the fact that God is real and that I should commend myself to Him every day so that He can guide every one of my steps in the right direction and save me from the many dangers that surround all of us.

“It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than in all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others. The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden. His health shall spring forth speedily; his light shall rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon him. Let us then remember

the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the multitude of His tender mercies. Like the people of Israel, let us set up our stones of witness, and inscribe upon them the precious story of what God has wrought for us. And as we review His dealings with us in our pilgrimage, let us, out of hearts melted with gratitude, declare, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people.' Psalm 116:12-14." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 348.

As time goes by these thoughts begin to vanish. If I do not keep them alive in my memory, and specially if everything in my life goes as I imagine it, I end up trusting my own understanding instead of God's help. What will happen at the moment of trial is that I will feel frustrated because I have stopped looking to God and am no longer aware of how limited I am as a person.

Does the same thing not happen in your life? I think that if we are honest with ourselves, we will realize that this is a problem everyone encounters. If we meditate upon our past life, we can reach two conclusions: the most common one which is expressed well in the poem, "Footprints in the sand", is to blame God for the difficult moments we have gone through, to see the thorns instead of the beautiful rose, to see the black dot on the white sheet of paper. But there is another way to look at things, a deeper and more beneficial one, and it is to meditate in the moments where we have clearly seen God's hand stretched out toward us. What would your life be if you had not had those experiences?

We just deceive ourselves if we try to go forward trusting in our own capacity. "And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." Isaiah 5:12. We like to be the centre of attention and have fun; we think that in this manner we are strengthened to go forward. We need acknowledgement. But it is sad when we only look at our abilities and as the prophet says, do not consider the work of God.

It is true that God has given us talents, and it is His wish that we put them to use in His

service so that our mouth may proclaim His wonders. Thus, our experience with Him will be strengthened and we shall grow spiritually, going from joy to joy. Through the glory we give to His name, and through our joyful experience, others may take the decision to walk in the way of God. We should give testimony that it is true what His word says: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it, except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Psalm 127:1.

A powerful testimony

Dear brothers and sisters, do we glorify the name of the Lord for the blessings we receive? The greatest testimonies we can give to the world are the experiences we have lived with God. Nobody will be able to deny what you have experienced if you declare it with certainty and with a heart full of gratitude and peace. If we try to philosophize or rationalize our thoughts we may come across a witty person quite capable of refuting what we say, but this cannot happen with our personal experiences with God.

"How can our testimony have power to win souls? What we need is to know God and the power of His love, as revealed in Christ." –*Testimonies*, vol. 5. p. 743. "Then our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them." Psalm 126:2

This should be our experience if we concentrate in what God does for us each day. By dedicating a few minutes to reflect not only on what your mind knows intellectually, but on what your heart can rejoice upon, and what you are sure the Lord has given to you on that particular day, you can rest assured that God lives and that He is at your side.

"Many who profess to believe the truth for these last days, will be found wanting. They have neglected the weightier matters. Their conversion is superficial, not deep, earnest, and thorough. They do not know why they believe the truth, only because others have believed it, and they take it for granted that it is the truth. They can give no intelligent reason why they believe. . . .

Others are not enlightened or edified by their experience, or by the knowledge

which it was their privilege and duty to obtain. Strength and stability are with truehearted professors." –*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 634.

Let us not forget God's call to Samuel that we read in the introductory verse: "serve him in truth with all your heart." God wants our experience to be a constant relationship from heart to heart. Is your heart beating this moment for the things the Lord works in your life?

Now, I would like to ask you to stop reading and to think about and share the experiences you had today, the joyful moments you lived, and thank God specially for them; maybe for a nice conversation you had with someone, the singing of a bird that called your attention, a dish you ate that you liked so much, or a thought that brought you closer to God. I recommend you to practice this every evening of the prayer week so that our experience with God can be more personal and we may be sure that He is near us.

Plenty of blessings

"The power of God is manifested in the beating of the heart, in the action of the lungs, and in the living currents that circulate through the thousand different channels of the body. We are indebted to Him for every moment of existence, and for all the comforts of life. The powers and abilities that elevate man above the lower creation, are the endowment of the Creator.

"He loads us with His benefits. We are indebted to Him for the food we eat, the water we drink, the clothes we wear, the air we breathe. Without His special providence, the air would be filled with pestilence and poison. He is a bountiful benefactor and preserver.

"The sun which shines upon the earth, and glorifies all nature, the weird, solemn radiance of the moon, the glories of the firmament, spangled with brilliant stars, the showers that refresh the land, and cause vegetation to flourish, the precious things of nature in all their varied richness, the lofty trees, the shrubs and plants, the waving grain, the blue sky, the green earth, the changes of day and night, the renewing seasons, all speak to man of his Creator's love." –*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 17.

Do not have just an intellectual experience with God, He did everything for you on the cross to show you that He loves you. God has kept you until today, and He keeps on holding you with His hand with a love deeper than the one a father shows his child when he holds his hand to protect him from danger.

Open my eyes so that I can see

Do not expect a super special moment, or a great delivery from danger to give glory to God. Maybe that moment will never come and if it does come, it will be too late. Thank the Lord for everything that He, in His mercy, permits you to experience. Even if they seem to be small things, without them your life would be colorless.

Even though I grew up in a Christian family, I did not have peace with God until I had my personal experience with Christ.

I felt very depressed due to my limitations as a human being, and after two weeks of intense wrestling with God, pleading for Him to do a work in me, the simple fact that I felt like a spiritual beggar and dependant on God's mercy changed my life.

"But if we come to God, feeling helpless and dependent, as we really are, and in humble, trusting faith make known our wants to Him whose knowledge is infinite, who sees everything in creation, and who governs everything by His will and word, He can and will attend to our cry, and will let light shine into our hearts." –*Steps to Christ*, p. 96.

This thought expressed by God's servant, opened my eyes to see that I depend on the grace that God gives me every moment and that nothing happens that He does not know about.

"He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen." Deuteronomy 10:21

Have you seen what He did in your life today? Do not let more days go by without praising Him with all your heart so that tomorrow experiences may be even greater.

May God open our eyes so that we can see His hand next to us at every moment whether we want it or not and that this may lead us to glorify His name. Amen.

Reading No. 5 – Wednesday, December 8, 2004

"The righteous considereth the cause of the poor" (Proverbs 29:7)

By Santina Mascera, Italy

The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Psalm 24:1. "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens [is] the Lord's thy God, the earth [also], with all that therein [is]." Deuteronomy 10:14. The Lord is not simply the Creator, the Owner who observes from a distance what happens in our planet, but He is our pious and merciful Father. "The Lord [is] nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them." Psalm 145:18, 19.

Why are there poor people?

It is not easy to understand the reasons why the Lord, who is so merciful, pious, kind and full of love, permits poor people to exist in the church in addition to those in the world. For many, this fact is a true mystery. Anyway, it is good to ask ourselves: Who are the poor? Why do they exist? What are the causes of poverty? Can an immensely rich Father leave his children in misery?

In the first place, we must say that poverty is the result of the distance existing between man and God's plan. In fact, the Lord had given Israel precise instructions to prevent poverty. One of these norms consisted of limiting the complete alienation of the property: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land [is] mine; for ye [are] strangers and sojourners with me." Leviticus 25:23. Other important provisions were taken in the case of the sabbatical year and the jubilee. The Spirit of Prophecy tells us in regard to these: "The

provisions of the sabbatical year and the jubilee would, in a great measure, set right that which during the interval had gone wrong in the social and political economy of the nation." –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 534. Other measures were also taken in regard to the poor, like the laws that allowed "All the gleanings of harvest field, orchard, and vineyard, belonged to the poor." –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 531. Therefore, there would be no beggars in Israel and nobody would suffer for lack of food.

One second reason for which poverty existed seems to have had as an aim the development of liberality. In the same book of the Spirit of Prophecy, we read: "There are many who urge with great enthusiasm that all men should have an equal share in the temporal blessings of God. But this was not the purpose of the Creator. A diversity of condition is one of the means by which God designs to prove and develop character. Yet He intends that those who have worldly possessions shall regard themselves merely as stewards of His goods, as entrusted with means to be employed for the benefit of the suffering and the needy." –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 535.

Why has the Lord put the poor among us?

On the one hand, we read: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land" Deuteronomy 15:11, and on the other hand, the answer is given in the following terms: "Christ has said that we shall have the poor always with us, and He unites His interest with that of His suffering people. The heart of our

Redeemer sympathizes with the poorest and lowliest of His earthly children. He tells us that they are His representatives on earth. He has placed them among us to awaken in our hearts the love that He feels toward the suffering and oppressed. Pity and benevolence shown to them are accepted by Christ as if shown to Himself. An act of cruelty or neglect toward them is regarded as though done to Him.”
–Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 535.

Liberality

An inspired phrase says: “The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven.” *–The Acts of the Apostles, p. 339.* Other texts of the same nature put emphasis on the blessings that are received as a result of liberality. “Spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality. The followers of Christ should rejoice in the privilege of revealing in their lives the beneficence of their Redeemer. As they give to the Lord they have the assurance that their treasure is going before them to the heavenly courts. Would men make their property secure? Let them place it in the hands that bear the marks of the crucifixion. Would they enjoy their substance? Let them use it to bless the needy and suffering” *–The Acts of the Apostles, p. 344.* “Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land... Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.” Deuteronomy 15:11, 10.

The example of Job, the patriarch

We have the same testimony regarding attitude in Job 29:16: “I [was] a father to the poor: and the cause [which] I knew not I searched out.” (That is to say, Job did not act in a superficial way, but he took all the cases seriously and scrupulously and promptly investigated the reasons that had led the person to a miserable condition. “Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and [him that had] none to help him... I was eyes to the blind, and feet [was] I to the lame.” Job 29:12, 15.

The example of Zacchaeus

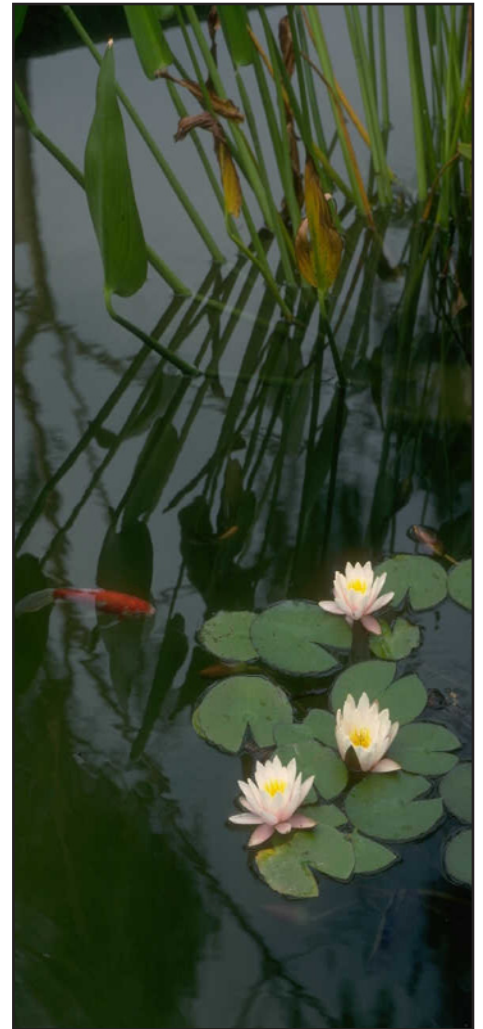
We have another example of liberality in the person of Zacchaeus, after his conversion. “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore [him] fourfold.” Luke 19:8.

On this person, completely renewed by conversion, the Spirit of Prophecy has painted us a picture worthy to be considered: “Before Zacchaeus had looked upon the face of Christ, he had begun the work that made him manifest as a true penitent. Before being accused by man, he had confessed his sin. He had yielded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and had begun to carry out the teaching of the words written for ancient Israel as well as for ourselves. The Lord had said long before, ‘If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase.’ ‘Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God.’ (Lev. 25:35-37, 17). These words had been spoken by Christ Himself when He was enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, and the very first response of Zacchaeus to the love of Christ was in manifesting compassion toward the poor and suffering.” *–The Desire of Ages, p. 555.*

Other cases worthy to be considered

Even the poor were tried on their liberality. Let us think, for example, in the widow of Sarepta, that in spite of the fact that she was in a situation of extreme necessity, she was sensitive to the prophet’s request and gave him sustenance. Thanks to this gesture of faith, she could experience the fulfillment of the divine promises towards those who are generous, and be saved from scarcity and death. 1 Kings 17: 10-16.

Another case worth noticing is the one of the widow who put the few coins that



she had into the box of offerings and was praised by the Saviour. Luke 21:2, 3. The commentary which we have on this case should make us reflect:

“The ‘two mites which make a farthing’ have brought to God’s treasury an amount of money far greater than the contributions of those rich Jews. The influence of that little gift has been like a stream, small in its beginning, but widening and deepening as it flowed down through the ages. In a thousand ways it has contributed to the relief of the poor and the spread of the gospel. Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age. It has appealed to both the rich and the poor, and their offerings have swelled the value of her gift. God’s blessing upon the widow’s mite has made it the source of great results. So with every gift bestowed and every act performed with a sincere desire for God’s glory.” *–The Desire of Ages, p. 616.*

The example of Christ

About Jesus, we read: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9.

"The story of Bethlehem is an exhaustless theme. In it is hidden "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." (Rom. 11:33). We marvel at the Saviour's sacrifice in exchanging the throne of heaven for the manger, and the companionship of adoring angels for the beasts of the stall." *—The Desire of Ages*, p. 48.

He could have been born in a luxurious palace, with all comfort, but he was not. He preferred to live among the poor, suffer the same needs and difficulties as they did and it was in that way that he developed His work of solidarity. We read about Him, "Jesus worked to relieve every case of suffering that He saw. He had little money to give, but He often denied Himself of food in order to relieve those who appeared more needy than He." *—The Desire of Ages*, p. 87.

"Christ's self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross. That man might be saved, He gave all that He had, and then gave Himself. The cross of Christ appeals to the benevolence of every follower of the blessed Saviour." *—Counsels on Stewardship*, p.14.

A call to liberality in our days

We have considered several examples of the past and their touching liberality; now it is our turn to do the same. We have the possibility of helping the poor and needy of our times. The Lord addresses his warm call to us. What shall we do? Besides the noble possibility of doing good to others, we are given the privilege to have similar experiences. Let us see some examples of the divine call:

"[Is it] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." Isaiah 58:7, 8.

"Thus in the night of spiritual darkness God's glory is to shine forth through His church in lifting up the bowed down and comforting those that mourn.

"All around us are heard the wails of a world's sorrow. On every hand are the needy and distressed. It is ours to aid in relieving and softening life's hardships and misery....

"As you engage in this work, you have companions unseen by human eyes. Angels of heaven were beside the Samaritan who cared for the wounded stranger. Angels from the heavenly courts stand by all who do God's service in ministering to their fellow men. And you have the co-operation of Christ Himself. He is the Restorer, and as you work under His supervision, you will see great results.

"Upon your faithfulness in this work not only the well-being of others but your own eternal destiny depends." *—Christ Object Lessons*, p. 417, 388.

It is also significant what the Spirit of Prophecy states about the liberality

of the churches: "Those churches that systematic and generously maintain the work of God, are also most prosperous spiritually." *—Testimonies for the Church*, volume 3, p. 405.

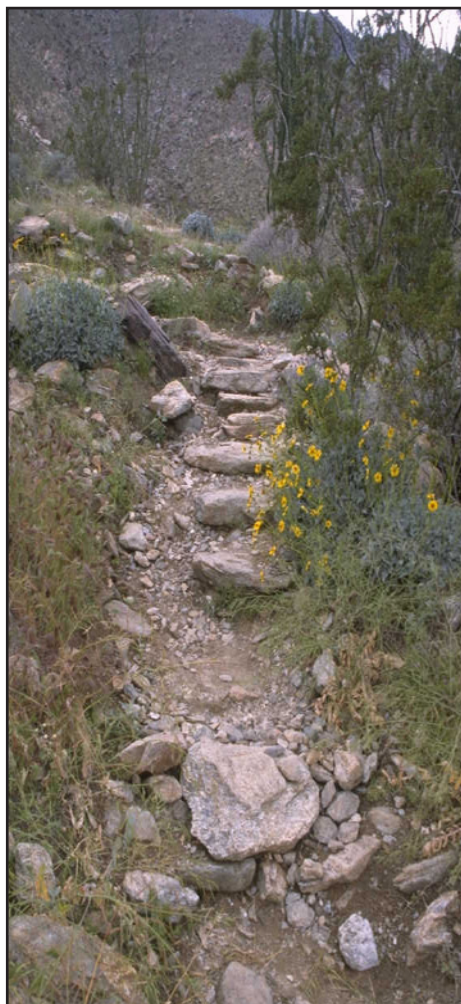
The eternal reward

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, are we interested in showing solidarity to the poor? Do we realize that to respond to their needs and to alleviate their pain is really a sacred principle? Are we conscious of the existence of so many poor widows and orphans who have inherited a situation of which they are not guilty and whom the circumstances have deprived of the tenderest affection? And what can we say of those who due to accidents, hereditary misfortunes, diseases and other reasons that do not depend on their will are bound to live like mutilated or ill? Do we find any satisfaction in providing something worthy? Would it not be a great step forward if those who have lost to their beloved ones or their health, had at least the basic things to be able to survive? Can we rejoice together with them? For those who are sensitive to this voice that asks for help, the Lord has made wonderful promises:

"Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them.... How surprised and gladdened will be the lowly among the nations, and among the heathen, to hear from the lips of the Saviour, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me!'" *—The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." Proverbs 19:17. "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35.

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27. Amen.



“And let us consider one another”

(Hebrews 10:24)

Joel N. Barnedo, Philippines

The most important single ingredient in the formula of success, is to know how to get along with people. Human relations are the most important science in the broad spectrum of living. In my experience as a Minister in the Philippines, I found out that it is not much talking what people need; it is not the explanation of the prophecies that makes them decide for the truth. Our life, our example, and how we as church members deal with each other is what counts. They observe us in our meetings, in our homes, they look to see if we obey what we believe and live what we preach.

People in the world are bored, they have so many problems, and they do not know where to go. Can we give them a positive answer? Can we tell them that Christianity could give a solution to every problem that they have? Can they see real joy and happiness in us? Can we tell them that Christ has really changed our life? Can we cause spiritual jealousy in them so that they may want to imitate us and follow us in our Christian way of life?

Once I read a story about an American missionary who went to Vietnam. He tried to get along with his Vietnamese neighbours and talk about Jesus but they never believed in him. One day, a strong storm hit the village and all houses were destroyed. The American missionary came to his neighbours to help rebuild their houses. So he brought woods, nails, and other materials needed for roofing. He also gave food to every villager affected by the storm. After all that, some of the Vietnamese families asked him, “Is your God like you?” The missionary said, “No, He is a great God” but the Vietnamese, repeated the same question, “Is your God like you, willing to help rebuild houses?” The missionary finally understood why they kept on comparing him with his God, so he answered, “Yes!

God loves people and He is ready and willing to help them anytime.” Then the Vietnamese people began to invite the American missionary in their homes. They learnt to love both him and his God.

I remember a testimony that says: “The angels of heaven look upon the distress of God’s family upon the earth; and they are prepared to cooperate with men in relieving oppression and suffering... Wherefore: He commanded, “Love ye therefore the strangers”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 500. When I was reading the book of Job, I was very impressed with chapter 31: Verse 32; which says, “the stranger did not lodge in the street but I opened my doors to the traveller.” One afternoon, while I was reading that book, I saw a man working in our neighbour’s house. He look very depressed and I smiled at him and tried to begin a conversation. Then I began asking him where he lived and what made him work in the garden of our neighbour. I told him that it was the first time I saw him. So he began to relate to me about his bitter experience in life. He told me he had been an accountant of a big company, but 5 years before he was fired from his job; soon his wife left him with their three children As a consequence, he got sick with depression. That day our neighbour had asked him to work in his garden. I looked at him and told him about God’s love and I told him that God loves all of us and that if he would ask the Lord for guidance, he could be happy again. I told him about the Bible and asked him if he had one. I told him that I was a missionary and I invited him to come to my house that I would give him something. I went to my kitchen and gave him fruits and vegetables for his children. I also gave him a small pocket-book size “*Steps to Christ*.” He was very surprised and began asking me, why I was doing this to a stranger; I told him

that God had moved me to do it because I cared for people whom God loves. Only eternity will tell us, how many souls were won to the truth because of our Christian grace revealed to strangers. I hope that this man can come to the faith one day.

Brothers and sisters, let us look for opportunities to do good and let us lend a helping hand to others. Day by day, I look for opportunities to listen to people and most of them become good friends. I am happy to tell you that every month, our neighbour tells me that my church group is growing and he says that every Saturday he watches as we meet and eat our lunch happily together. He told me that we all seem to be very happy and united. He listens to our songs. I only pray that one day I may invite him to attend our health program on Sabbath. Please, pray that God will bless him so that some day he may find the way to the cross. Sister White writes, “The cultivation of a uniform courtesy, a willingness to do to others as we would wish them to do to us, would annihilate half the ills of life.” —*Adventist Home*, p. 421.

“Whom Should We Consider?”

Do you think this Week of Prayer is merely an occasion to remember our Creator or is it a time to reflect on the importance of our beloved ones, our brethren in the church, our youth who need our support and encouragement because they are surrounded with temptation? They need our visits and prayers. This is also the time to remember our old pioneers who brought us to the truth. They are now retired, maybe widowed, sometimes forgotten by the young members of the church. They also need our comfort and our love. One day, I paid a visit to an old pioneer of our reform movement. She lived in a small

house in the mountains. I and my wife and some young people went there for a visit. We brought her food and fruits, then we sang her favourite song, "I am a stranger here within a foreign land my home is away upon the golden strand, His Ambassador to be." While we were singing, I saw her face was very happy; she told me she remembered the old days when she was working with her husband for the church. She was the best friend of our families when we were young. She told me that she was very happy that I became a minister, and she encouraged me to continue the work my father had left. There are always wonderful opportunities to do good, especially to old warriors of the cross. I can say that this is what our brethren need. Let us bring the sunshine of heaven in our homes, to our children and also to our church.

I would be glad to hear that all of us can engage in missionary work. Let us spend less time in the pulpit but more time to seek our brethren who were one time our members. Let's visit them with a heart full of love, let us show them that Reformers are not destroyers. Sister White said; "Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people.... But tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes... In all men, He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save... And the spirit that is kept gentle under provocation will speak more effectively in favor of the truth than will any argument, however forcible." *—The Desire of Ages*, p.353.

I would like us to remember all the retired literature evangelists, who have worked for our movement in the past. I am a canvasser and I know the hardship and sacrifices of this work. I remember an experience of a canvasser named Brother Lubrico. He told me that one night, they were travelling with brother Raul Escobar and some other canvassers. They were heading toward the north of the Philippines, and this was the most dangerous place of the country because of communists. Brother Raul told brother Lubrico to get out of the car, and the two canvassers then got out. Brother Raul told them they should look for Adventist

believers and then the car left them. The people that they met in the street told them to be careful because it was already midnight. One family invited them to spend the night at their home. The two brothers introduced themselves as Adventist Reform missionaries. The owner of the house told them that they were Adventists, too. When Brother Escobar came back to look for our canvassers, he was happy to receive the good news that they had found an

to what constitutes genuine religion. They feel that they cannot go back to the world, and so they "hang to the skirts of Zion", having petty jealousies, envying, disappointments, and remorse. They are full of fault-finding, and feed upon the mistakes and error of their brethren. They have only a hopeless, faithless, sunless experience in their religious life." *—Christian Service*, p.107.

In this Week of Prayer, the Lord is giving us time to consider one another in love.



Adventist family. Soon after, Brother Raul presented them the truth about the Reform. After some weeks, the family accepted the truth and were baptized. I had the privilege to be assigned as a missionary in that area and I gave them the Lord's Supper until the time of their death. They died in the Lord. Sister White wrote;" It is those who are not engaged in unselfish labour that have a sickly experience, and become worn-out with struggling, murmuring, doubting, sinning and repenting until they lose all sense as

We are living in a very dangerous time. Jesus said in Matthew 24:12, "And because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold". Yes, this is truly happening, not only in the world, but also in the church. Let us not permit this to happen in our church. In unity there is strength. We need Christ to live in our hearts and this will help us to listen patiently to people's problems. Let us be tactful to the tactless; loving to the unlovely; let us do missionary work even when we do not feel like it. When Jesus

is in our hearts we will be ready to pray at the bedside of a dying person, we will be doing the work angels would love to do, helping the sick and comforting those who are sad. My prayer in this Week of Prayer is that we may come nearer to Jesus than ever before and have someone say to us, "I know God sent you today."

I can say that in our modern times; we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider free ways, but narrower viewpoints. We buy more, but have less. We have bigger houses, but smaller families; more conveniences, but less time. We have more ministers, but fewer members. We have many church committee meetings, but less practical visitation, where pastors learn to take their jacket off to help their members plant a garden, or rebuild their houses after a storm. We have more books, but less canvassers. We have many seminars, but less door-to-door visitation. We have more degrees, but less common sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness. We spend too recklessly, but laugh too little; we drive too fast, and get angry too quickly. We stay up late and get up too tired. We read too seldom, are empty, and pray too little. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too little and do not keep our word. We have been to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour to give a pamphlet about the truth. We have conquered outer space, but not inner space. We have cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. Indeed, it is ironic yet true.

This Week of Prayer offers us a time for reflection, when each one of us can ask himself; Who am I? Where am I going? Who is my Creator? Who is my neighbour? Am I a real Reformer? For closing this Week of Prayer, let us read the words in Hebrew 10:24 "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."

May God help all of us to face the coming new year with the resolution that the year 2005, will be a new Era for each of us, an Era of unity, solidarity, and Love.

May our church be called a church that loves. But we cannot have pure love without Jesus. May God bless us all. Amen.

Reading No. 7 – Sabbath, December 11, 2004

"In the Latter Days Ye Shall Consider It Perfectly" (Jeremiah 23:20)

By Branko Cholich, U.S.A.

The anger of the Lord shall not return, until He have executed, and till He have performed the thought of His heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly." Jeremiah 23:20.

To understand the verse above we must first comprehend the mind of the prophet Jeremiah. To do that we shall analyze some passages of his book. The main subject in chapter 22 deals with the destiny of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and of certain Jews who had been captured by the Babylonians in 605 B.C. Then, in chapter 24 the prophet describes how the two last kings of Judah were taken into captivity: Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, 597 B.C., and his son, Zedekiah in 586 B.C.

To understand this more clearly, it is necessary to read certain other verses in chapters 22 and 24: "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! Or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Jeremiah 22:17-19.

"The Lord showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the

carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon.

One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad.

Then said the Lord unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." Jeremiah 24:1-5.

In these three chapters (22, 23 and 24) Jeremiah prophesied that in the latter days, after the Babylonian captivity, God's people, presented in chapter 24 as good figs, would perfectly understand God's dealing with them; that by punishing them through the Chaldeans, God wanted to give them a lesson that they would never forget. By exposing the corrupted kings, false prophets and treacherous priests to sharp criticism by using His faithful prophet Jeremiah, God wanted to turn His people to the right path and save them from a catastrophic destruction that threatened them all, the good and bad.

After many Jews returned from captivity to their land, the necessity of reformation was felt. Ezra, Nehemiah and the post-exilic prophets had continually been calling God's people to make a genuine repentance. Haggai the prophet, using the same expression as Jeremiah, advised the people to consider their dealing in relation to the work of God who always

sent His messengers to warn His people of any danger that they might face. We read the following in God's word: "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and

that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of

well His way of dealing with them in both good and bad times.

Christians In Apostasy

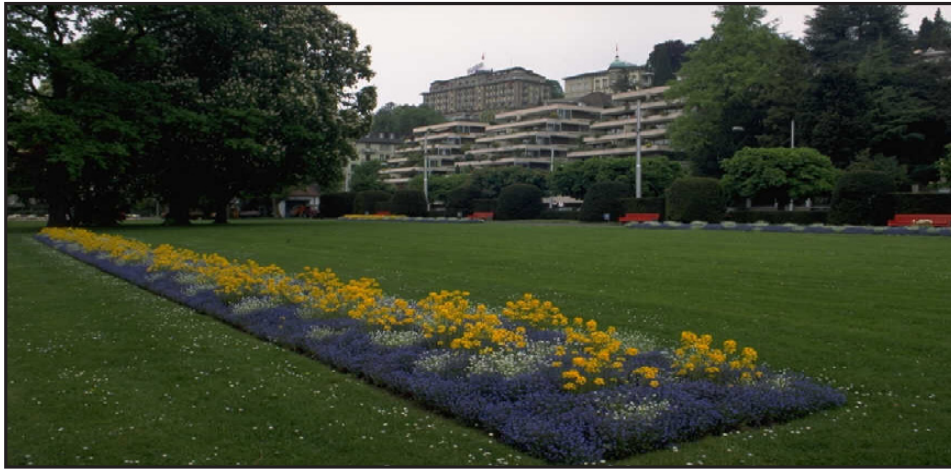
In the very beginning of the New Testament era there were a few sincerely repented followers of Christ's teaching. Jesus Himself predicted that there would be false Messiahs and false teachers. In New Testament times, God's people were not required to erect a building in which they should worship God. Christ said to the Samaritan woman that the time would come when true worshipers would not worship God either on the mountains or in the temple of Jerusalem, but they would worship Him in the Spirit and in truth. Christians were bidden to become living stones in a spiritual house whose foundation is based upon the work of the apostles and prophets, of which the chief corner stone is Jesus Christ Himself.

As in the time of Haggai, who successfully gave a very solemn message to his country-men, Christ ordered His disciples to carry the gospel "unto the uttermost part of the world."

Early Christians built the spiritual temple of God in their own time not only by sacrificing their material goods and time, but by making an even more precious sacrifice, giving their own lives. How many faithful followers of Jesus suffered persecution and died as martyrs for the sake of their beloved Teacher? In the time of great apostasy, which began some centuries after the apostolic age, a small number of believers associated with Babylon the Great, after considering what was their duty in following their predecessors, contributed with priceless sacrifices to build the invisible temple of God.

Laodician Time

Before the time of the seventh church of Revelation chapter 3 a certain number of Protestant teachers paved the way for the work of the third angel's message of Revelation chapter 14. When the pioneers of that great reformatory movement abandoned their work, and another "Haggai the prophet" was sent by the God of Israel to encourage the work and complete the building of the church of Christ, the leaders and the people aroused to do their work considering what



the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem."

And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:

But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." 2 Chronicles 36:14-16.

New Testament Era

In the last two verses of the Old Testament we find a prophecy for the New Testament reformatory work. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Malachi 4:5, 6. Parallel to this prophecy are the words found in Jeremiah 23:5-8.

In harmony with this prophecy Isaiah comforted God's people that their sins had been pardoned, but not before they paid a double price for their wrong work. Then the prophet presented them a message similar to the one of John the Baptist. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished,

the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough place plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 40:1-5.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Matthew 3:1-3.

In Luke 16:16, Christ confirmed that the New Testament era began with the work of John the Baptist. Jeremiah prophesied saying (Jeremiah 23), that a Branch would be raised to the house of David who would execute the judgment and justice and that under His rule all His people would live in peace and security, and that His name would be The Lord our Righteousness. All the prophecies stated above were given to God's people for the corresponding time. His promises of blessings and protection were always given conditionally, that His people should stay faithful in their covenant with Him. God has never failed to fulfill His promises to those who earnestly follow His will and keep His commandments. This He has done from the creation of man on this earth. God always wanted His people to consider and understand

would be required of them in that new movement. The success of the work of the modern Haggai has been enormous. The building of the temple of the Most High had almost been completed. Then, the opposition of the contemporary "Caesar" was manifested by a decree that all the citizens of his vast kingdom had to obey him more than God. A great number of the modern Israel turned secular. They said it was not time to build the temple of God at such a high price. For the sake of life and temporal prosperity they granted freedom of conscience to all their followers.

The Reform Movement

Isaiah the prophet declared that if the number of the people of Israel would be as the sand of the sea, nevertheless only a remnant would be saved. This prophecy was fulfilled. After a strong shaking of the Seventh-day Adventist community, it was announced that the great majority would stay with them, the others became a little flock. The church of God cannot be destroyed. Christ built His church upon the Rock and no satanic power has been able to prevail. The prophet stated: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Isaiah 59:19. Then the spirit of Elijah and Haggai encouraged the reformers of the latter days to rise up and complete the work of the building of the temple of the Lord in perilous time.

Our Time

The message for our time is: You are the children of the prophets and apostles. Consider your way, how you should build the church of God. If we accept the responsibility to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem from the ruins caused by God's wrath as a consequence of the false work of the religious leaders of many generations, then we must consider well what we are doing in our time. We must sacrifice all our personal interests in favor of the cause of God. As in the time of Nehemiah, we must work with one hand and with the other hand keep the defending weapon to protect our church against any attack by the enemy of God. In comparison with the work of the people of God in the time of Haggai the

prophet, our responsibility and the size of the territory of work are much greater. Our duty is to edify a nation, the church of Christ, to such perfection that it will be able to stand the test in the time of the Sunday law. The character of the people of God, both the leaders and members, must all resemble the character of Christ. Every mountain and hill- the haughty leadership- must be leveled down, and every valley- the disappointed laity- must be exalted. And the crooked ways must be made straight. Judgment and justice should be practiced at all levels of our organization. Spiritual food needs to be supplied to all families, workers and leaders in every part of the world. The present truth, Christ our Righteousness, must be the main teaching from all our pulpits. The light of the angel of Revelation 18 has to radiate all over the earth. To accomplish all our work around the world, we should have faithful leaders in every country. God trusts, as always, in faithful people only; He never uses multitudes if they are not firm in the faith. It always happens that the majority turns to apostasy. God never accepted a movement just because it had a great number of followers. His measuring stick, the Ten Commandments, has always been applied when testing faithfulness of any individual, nation, or organization. He uses the same instrument when He measures the spiritual condition of a cherub in heaven, a prophet in Israel, a pagan king, the angel of the Laodicean church, and a beggar in the street. This same standard is applied when testing the faithfulness of you and me.

Closing Events

"We are living in the most solemn period of this world's history. The destiny of earth's teeming multitudes is about to be decided. Our own future well-being and also the salvation of other souls depend upon the course which we now pursue. We need to be guided by the Spirit of truth. Every follower of Christ should earnestly inquire: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, with fasting and prayer, and to meditate much upon His word, especially upon the scenes of the judgment. We should now seek a deep and living experience in the

things of God. We have not a moment to lose. Events of vital importance are taking place around us; we are on Satan's enchanted ground. Sleep not, sentinels of God; the foe is lurking near, ready at any moment, should you become lax and drowsy, to spring upon you and make you his prey."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 601. The investigative judgment began in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 and will continue until the end of the time of mercy. The investigation commenced with those whose names had been written in the book of life to determine if they are worthy of salvation, otherwise their names will be erased. Those who died first were investigated at the beginning of this judgment, which will end during the time of the Sunday Law. That law will be a great test for all those who will be living at that time. All the members of the church of God, who will lead a faithful, peculiar Christian life ahead of that time, will be able to stand that test. Their faith had been built upon the Rock of Ages, and no power will be able to remove their faith. Their cases will be determined when their battle of faith is over and their redemption secured. They will be granted the seal of the Holy Spirit and will receive the latter rain. From that time on, they will sin no more. With that power they will give the last message to all those who have not yet taken their stand regarding the Sunday Law. Many persons from the fallen Christian churches will come out of Babylon to join the saints of God. When all the inhabitants of this earth will at that time have decided to accept either the seal of God or the mark of the beast, then, the end of the time of mercy will be declared in the heavenly courts. Then the prophecy of Revelation 22:11 will be fulfilled.

"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

Conclusion

Now is the time to seriously consider how we are building the temple of the Lord; first our own personal temple, then our family's, and finally that of all the believers.

Let us pray for the Lord to help us to be victorious in this matter. Amen.