

July 27
2013

IntraVic

How can anyone put his faith in Christ if he's never even heard about Him? How can he hear about Him if no one tells?

Romans 10:14 (Clear Word)



They
Searched
the
Scriptures
Daily...





Dear Church Members,

The last four years have gone quickly, and it is hard to believe that we are already preparing for the next Constituency meeting on September 22. The first step in the process began on Sunday, June 22, with the first meeting of the Nominating Committee, which is now scheduled to meet several times over the next three months.

Over the last six months I have reflected on my role and the upcoming Constituency Meeting and have come to the decision that I do not wish to continue in my current role. The reasons behind my decision are many and varied but I am happy to share a few of them with you.

Firstly, I have held a senior role in the Victorian Conference for the last ten years. I believe that it is time for the Conference to have new leadership with fresh ideas and new approaches. Every leader will have strengths and weaknesses and it is good for the organisation to be guided in different ways at different times. There is a time for change and I believe that time is now, rather than later.

From a personal perspective I feel that I need a new work challenge as well. I believe I can serve the church in many different ways and God will lead to new opportunities. I am grateful for the experience that I have gained working for the church in administration and am happy to serve where ever God leads next.

Leadership of any organisation is not easy and it takes a personal toll on your health and your family. I would like to spend more time with my wife, my ageing father, my children and their partners. I haven't even had time to visit my 'grand-dog' in Perth lately! I cannot serve well in the future if I do not care for my health and my family in the present.

Having made this decision, I communicated with my family and a number of close friends over the last two months to let them know that I felt I should take a new direction. Several weeks before the nominating process commenced, I spoke at length to the AUC President, outlining my decision and the reasons for it. I subsequently informed the AUC General Secretary of my decision.

At its first meeting, the Nominating Committee discussed the position of President and although I was not present and have no detailed information, Dr Barrie Oliver communicated with me that the Committee would like a change. This fitted well with my own plans and desires so I expressed that I was very happy to proceed with making the change. I believe the end result is a good one and Martina and I are at peace with it.

It is rewarding to look back and see some of the significant changes and developments that have occurred in this Conference over the last few years. We have seen growth in membership and now have over 10,000 members and a tithe income of \$12 million. In spite of the declining economic times, we have experienced consistent growth, thanks to the faithfulness of loyal church members.

Our growth has been supported by such things as the rollout of the Youth Pastoral Worker scheme and the rebirth of an Annual Camp as well as a large number of outreach initiatives in many local communities. The proportion of tithe devoted to local churches and evangelism has continued to increase to a point that we wouldn't have dreamt of ten years ago when Pr Denis Hankinson set an ambitious goal to return more tithe to local church communities.

We have also identified five areas of greater Melbourne where our church has little or no presence and have deliberately placed additional Pastoral staff and resources into those areas. We were able to purchase a new school that will slowly build our presence in one of Melbourne's most significant growth corridors. This has helped to support our goal of improving the way in which our churches and schools work together, advancing the mission of the Church.

At an administrative level we have improved our capacity to deal with an increasingly complex and litigious society and the potential risks that this poses for our church. We have developed better systems to protect our children and to manage Human Resource issues for our workforce. We have given careful thought to the management of the considerable assets in our care and have established an Infrastructure Fund and finance scheme to assist with building and maintenance.

My official role continues until the Constituency meeting; however my son, who works in Canberra, takes great delight in pointing out to me that I am now a political 'lame duck' - acting in a caretaker role until a new President is appointed at the Constituency meeting.

In closing I would like to thank the church members of the Victorian Conference for the opportunity to serve in Administration over the last ten years. I would also like to thank the conference employees from our various entities for their loyalty and support. Pastors, teachers, departmental personnel and those working the Aged Care Company have all been an important part of the journey, contributing to what we have achieved in recent years.

I would especially like to thank those closest to me including my PA, Ms Cveta Bakof, and my fellow Officers, Pr Darren Croft and Mr Peter Lynch. Additionally, I have been surrounded by competent and supportive lay members who have given incredibly generously of their time, wisdom, talents and resource on various Conference Boards and Committees. Thank you.

My children and our close friends have worked quietly in the background providing incredible support and assistance for



This is the second edition of our yearly series where we look at a spiritual discipline. Last year you may recall we studied prayer.

In this issue, we are considering the study of God's Word.

As you read, it is our prayer you will be encouraged to again pick up that amazing Book and lose yourself in its mysteries, its wonders, its message of hope, and above all, fall in love all over again with its Author.

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IntraVic Staff

Editor: Pastor Wayne Stanley

Assistant Editor: Sherrie Courtney
sherriecourtney@adventist.org.au

PO Box 215 Nunawading, 3131

03 9264 7777

vic.adventist.org.au

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COMMUNICATIONS

Martina and myself and we both say thank you.

And finally I would like to thank my dearest wife for her love, support and patience. We spent the last couple of years living close to the Conference Office, but have recently returned to an apartment in the city where we feel very much at home and have a sense of new beginnings and opportunities. We are looking forward to a new chapter in our life and work.

The last few years have gone very quickly, they have been fun and challenging and I want to thank you again for the privilege of serving your Conference. We have come a long way; we have a long way to go. I pray that God will continue to bless the Conference and its new leadership. I know that He will continue to lead as we build His kingdom on earth in preparation for His longed for and soon return.

Hearing His Voice

DEVOTIONAL BY SHERRIE COURTNEY



We all want to draw closer to God and be more in tune with His will, but in an age where the devil's deceptions are ever increasing, there is great need to remain alert and discerning. If we, however, follow the model of the Berean Jews of Acts 17:11, referencing what we are told back to the scriptures and seeing if it aligns with them, we have no need to fear.

Peter created a powerful visual image in his first epistle. "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) Quite a scary scenario if you think about it for long enough. Christ created a similarly troubling word picture in Matthew 24 when He said that "False messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect..." (Matthew 24)

I am so grateful for that clause *if possible*. If it were not there, what hope would I have against that wily prowling lion? No matter how alert, if he could deceive even the very elect, I don't stand a chance. Let me share with you a recent 'journey' of mine.

In this busy world we live in, do you sometimes become impatient with seeing through a dark glass, not satisfied with knowing just a little? Yes, God communicates with us through His Written Word, but occasionally, do you just wish you could hear His voice a bit more clearly? Hear Him speak actual words, personally, on a day to day basis... I know I have, so when I discovered a devotional promoted as a means of opening the door to a meaningful dialogue with Jesus, I snatched it up eagerly. For some time I had wanted to take my personal devotions further and this seemed perfect. Little did I know I was entering a maelstrom.

Reading the preface of my new book, I was a little uncomfortable with the author's description of their first glowing encounter with the "Presence of God", but not wanting to be narrow minded, I persevered. My discomfort intensified as the author ascribed as a major influence in their life, a book

WITH THE
DEVIL
PROWLING...
HOW CAN WE
BE SURE?

written by two anonymous "listeners" who sat, pen in hand, waiting to transcribe messages they received from God. It seemed a bit suspect, but longing myself to hear what God wanted to tell me on a personal level on any given day, I overcame my discomfort – the "listeners" may have sounded a bit fishy, but surely God could talk to me in any way He chose – I would know it was from Him, wouldn't I?

A few days later, I was mercifully distracted from that devotional with another book someone gave me. A book, incidentally, that I have also not finished, having been distracted again – but I am jumping ahead of myself.

This new book began by talking about Satan's great success coming through his ability to control minds without those he has ensnared even being aware. For years I have believed that one of Satan's greatest deceptions was convincing people he didn't exist and as I read, I recalled the story of Will Baron, and how when he was deep in the New Age movement, the centre he attended converted to 'Christianity' because the leader, while meditating, had been visited by 'Jesus'. They studied the Bible and 'converted' their eastern mystical new age practices by giving Christian names to them. And they truly believed it was Jesus guiding them as they visited other churches, looking for opportunities to introduce new age techniques under the guise of Christianity.

They were promoting the counterfeit way of reaching out to the authentic, but it was not the Authentic that was being reached.

This book, however, was not talking about new age beliefs and practices as such, but spiritual disciplines that were not aligned with the Bible. I had never heard of the terms being used, so at this point I discarded the book and, deciding to find out what it was talking about, turned to Google.

It surprised me when the first term I typed in brought up a reference to a presentation by one of our pastors in Florida, where he warned against using such disciplines that had no basis in Biblical teachings, but were in fact, rooted in mysticism. And I heard more terms that were alien to me, so more time with Google... time being drawn into a vortex of confusion... and the hours ticked by!

I was reading innocent terminology which at face value sounded very appealing – but which has gradually come to mean for many, something very different. And within this alternative context, more terms were added to my repertoire: labyrinth walking; lectio divina; spiritual direction. Often hand in hand with these were practices such as Christian meditation and yoga and there were many mystic references.

I found myself asking what was so wrong with these various disciplines if they drew us closer to God. With walking a labyrinth, for example, if at each meditation point there was something pointing to Christ? With using a Christian mantra? With calming the speed of our thoughts so we can hear? After all, who hasn't heard people talk about our need to slow down, to silence our world long enough to hear God talk to us? Even Psalm 46:10 quotes God saying "Be still and

know that I am God."

That was when the thought first hit me – Why use ways of the counterfeit to build a relationship with the original? Satan can take even good things and corrupt them, but surely God is big enough to be able to connect with me without having to use ways of eastern mysticism and other such means; ways that are uniquely His own and don't contradict what He has told us through Scripture.

We all know that while it is a useful tool, you can't believe everything on the web, or what you read in print for that matter. Using Google, you can find anything if you try hard enough and as I continued my search, I found most of my favourite Christian authors had some link to mysticism or new age philosophies and connections. I even found a site linking Adventists!

Most of my adult life I had read these authors, they'd helped form how I approached my spiritual life. Was everything they said wrong? Was my church wrong? How can I know - If I do manage to slow my thoughts enough to hear God whisper, can I be sure the next thought is even from Him?

...A lion on the prowl... out to deceive and infiltrate... even the very elect... as this world winds to an end, what hope is there...

Then I recalled that wonderful phrase in Matthew 24. *If possible*. Even before the warning about the prowling lion, 1 Peter tells us to be alert and sober and to cast our cares on Him because He cares for us. And because of that care, God **has** given us a way to know and be sure.

It is through the discipline of reading God's Written Word, focusing on Christ, to whom Scripture points.

Ellen White reinforced this in her introduction for Great Controversy, where she warns that the "following of impressions, **to the neglect of the Scriptures**, can lead only to confusion, to deceptions and ruin. It serves only to further the designs of the evil one."

So yes, read books about the Bible and Christianity, but be discerning and don't let them replace reading the Bible or its teachings. And don't just read the Bible for head knowledge, which is not a bad thing, but also read it prayerfully, allowing the Holy Spirit to move in your heart; as God's Living Word its words will come to life and point you to Christ. Spending time with Him in this way, each day, helps calibrate our reference point, making us more aware of His presence and His will in our lives; we don't need a mystical experience to feel His presence.

And while, "for now we see through a glass, darkly..." does that really matter? We have the promise of the rest of that verse in 1 Corinthians 13:12 - one day we will be face to face, and we will know as clearly as we are known.

We can be confident. So let's remain alert and diligent and immerse ourselves in what we can know is true.

His Written Word.

Sherrie Courtney
IntraVic Assistant Editor

Holy Stories

BY NATHAN BROWN



As we engage with the holy stories of Scripture, we are called beyond these stories—to Jesus as God’s ultimate Word—and back to our own, and how they have changed as a result. After a recent trip overseas, Nathan Brown tells us of the change it has made in how he reads and connects with the Holy Stories of the Bible

At the beginning of this year, my wife and I were offered the opportunity to join a two-week trip to Israel and we had a few days to decide whether we wanted to invest our time and money in taking such a trip. Curiously, while I had not previously had the opportunity to directly consider such a visit to the “Holy Land,” I had resisted the idea of such tours.

I was hesitant about the potential for places much-loved in my imagination to be obscured by the “reality” of souvenir sellers, tour buses and the assorted gimmickry of holy tourism. I doubted whether the places would have the strength of character or atmosphere with so many overlaid centuries, traditions and contemporary distractions to offer an “authentic” or even useful experience or insight. And we pondered the

inevitable questions about the cost of such international travel and the safety concerns in what is portrayed constantly as a volatile and violent part of the world.

However, in the previous year or so, four respected friends had each independently and eagerly told me about trips they had taken to Israel and other “Bible lands” and the boost their respective trips had given their faith, their interest in the Bible and their spiritual focus. The cumulative effect of their enthusiasm meant that I was more open to considering the opportunity when it arose at the beginning of the year.

After about a week of talking over the idea between us, vacillating between enthusiasm, apathy and what else we could do with such international travel, we decided the possibilities—particularly in

light of our friends’ testimonies—outweighed the risks. We booked our places as part of the tour group, worked out how far our frequent flyer points might get us and put it in our diaries for May. Then, amid the other busy things of our lives, I didn’t spend much time thinking about it during the next few months.

THE “HOLY LAND” PUZZLE

So in mid-May, we found ourselves exploring Israel with 51 other Adventists, many of them based around Southern Adventist University. Our first major stop was four days in and around the Old City of Jerusalem—and my uncertainty and

questions returned immediately. Amid the historical and holy places, the competing church bells and calls to prayers, the seemingly endless markets, the crowds of tourists, pilgrims and worshippers, I was still wrestling with why I was there and what I hoped to gain by our decision to be part of the crowds and the craziness.

Many of the “holy” sites in Jerusalem left me feeling uncomfortable. As C S Lewis’ narrator in *Till We Have Faces* asks, “Why must holy places be dark places?” Not only were these usually the most crowded and the most contested places, they were often enclosed in one way or another, controlling access to them and excluding those considered undesirable or not part of the privileged group. And from where I observed, the faith in the holiness of these sites—the belief that, by visiting this place or touching this stone, a pilgrim is able to access or even earn some measure of blessing or even the divine—felt a lot like superstition.

As we visited site after site, walking the old streets with our straggling group, my “holy place” discomfort nagged at me. I found a partial answer to my objections in Sabbath, something we were also privileged to observe in its celebration on

Friday evening at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Because Sabbath is holy time, it comes to everyone everywhere equally, not just to those privileged to be able to travel to a holy place or who happen to live nearby. Abraham Joshua Heschel points out that the first thing described by God as holy was not a place—not a mountain, a spring or an altar—but “it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.”¹ Rather than

Many of the ‘holy’ sites left me uncomfortable... the faith in the holiness of these sites felt a lot like superstition

something to be enclosed, conserved and visited, holy time is to be shared and celebrated in so many places and cultures as it comes to us. It is something God gave to humanity to remind us where we came from, who we are and Whose we are.

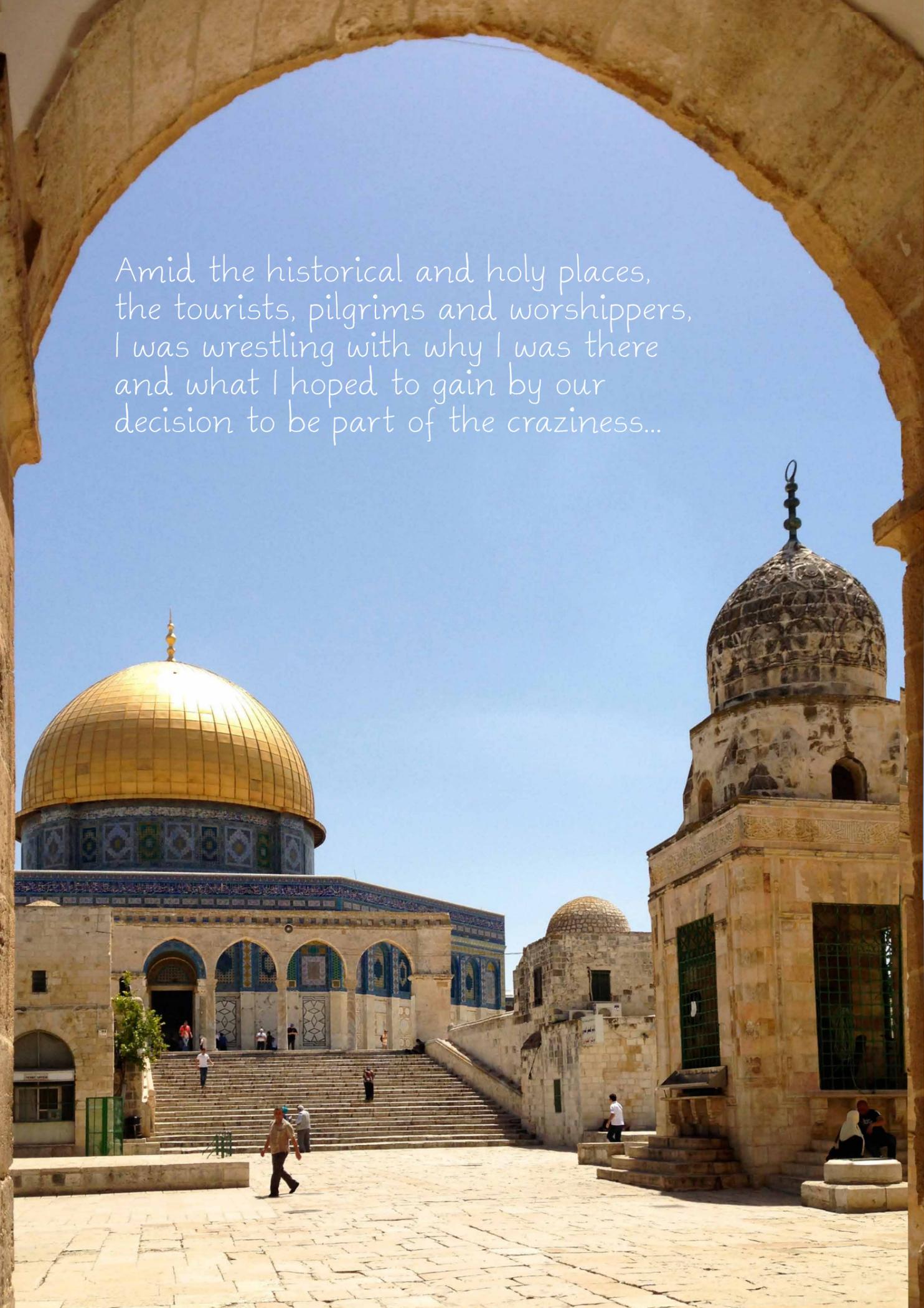
But there was something more to my making sense of our journey to Israel. I stumbled across it on the

morning we visited the site believed to mark the place of the Upper Room in which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, washing their feet, offering them the bread and wine, and going from there to Gethsemane and ultimately His crucifixion.² I had been doing some research and reading around John’s story of the foot washing (see John 13:1–17) for a writing project the previous week, so to walk into that room hit me with the power of that story.

We were in Israel not to visit holy places but to rediscover holy stories—and God gave us these holy stories for the same reasons He gave us holy time. As they are told and retold, these stories are accessible and adaptable to all of humanity—they are essential stories about what it means to be human—and, as they come to us, they remind us where we came from, who we are and Whose we are.

Visiting Israel was one way to re-engage, to re-imagine, to go deeper into those stories. We saw the places in which they happened or they might have happened. We saw the hills, the lake, the desert, the city that formed the backdrop to stories. We heard the people, some of the languages, the bird calls, the wind that would have been





Amid the historical and holy places, the tourists, pilgrims and worshippers, I was wrestling with why I was there and what I hoped to gain by our decision to be part of the craziness...

the background to those stories. And those holy stories will be different in their re-reading and our re-telling because of those experiences.

DIFFERENT STORIES

We all have stories that shape and inform our lives. They tell us what is important, valuable and good—even when we are not consciously referring to them. These stories usually come from our families, our friends and the culture around us. They become the stories we tell ourselves and we tell each other to make sense of our lives and to explain or justify our choices, actions, lifestyle and habits.

As human beings, we need stories to live by, so such stories are inevitable. But the risk is that we only ever consider the stories of our culture, family, time or place. When these stories are unquestioned and unexamined, we have nothing to measure our assumptions about life against other than the stories themselves.

This is why so many faith traditions place value in some kind of ancient holy writings. These stories have been passed down through the generations because generation after generation have found them helpful in examining their lives, finding in them some kind of meaning, purpose and direction. They come from another time and place, so offer a different way of looking at life from that absorbed from whatever the contemporary culture might be.

The stories of the culture that swirl around us have a decided advantage in that they are immediate and constant. They become part of our thinking, part of our lives almost by default and can only be questioned and resisted—when necessary—by consistent effort, which can be assisted and practiced by having other points of reference.

And the holy stories as we have them collected and presented in the Bible are one valuable source of different stories. When we approach the Bible, it can seem foreign, ancient, dusty and difficult—and these are among its strengths. As one Christian leader has put it, the scriptures should “be

read in a way that brings out their strangeness, their non-obvious and non-contemporary qualities, in order that they may be read both freshly and truthfully from one generation to another. They need to be made more difficult before we can accurately grasp their simplicities.”³ These stories are elusive in that they do not belong completely to their first generation, the current

generation or the last generation, yet they speak to and belong to them all.

These different stories are rendered more important and valuable still—but perhaps also more different and difficult—when they are found to be not only ancient and enduring but also hold themselves out to be the Word of God, a collection of stories that so many believe has been inspired, compiled, protected and overseen by the leading of God Himself. This belief understands them as even more removed from our time, place and culture but also endowed with a quality of timelessness and universality. We believe that somehow God is present in and with these stories.

MAKING THEM OUR STORIES

Accordingly, the holy stories collected in the Bible will and must be a challenge to us. They require us to spend time with them, letting them work in our hearts and minds. We recognise in their strangeness a valuable measure for our lives but also that they often do not open themselves to us automatically. They might be puzzling or confusing, might sound harsh or even contradictory, but we simply need to remind ourselves that the stories are from a different place than we are. Yes, they are about essential humanity but they have different tastes, smells, expectations and understandings than we do.

The first and continuing task is to get to know these stories.

From a young age, I was taught to simply read the Bible. Beginning with the gospels, I was coaxed, prodded,

If we believe strongly enough that it is worth doing, it becomes a simple choice to spend a little time each day with God's holy stories...

rewarded and expected to regularly spend time reading these stories. Today, this is still my regular and methodical starting point for the Bible—to read it. I begin in Genesis and, with as little as a chapter a day but sometimes in larger sections, I simply read the Bible through to the end of Revelation. Then I begin again.

I have read the Bible as a whole in this way in a number of translations but, some years ago, I stopped counting how many times I had read it through. Sometimes it might take a few months; sometimes, a few years—it is not a rush or a race. It is simply about regularly spending time with these holy stories and this is one methodical way of doing so.

I appreciate that this is not the most popular way of spending time with the Bible and it is probably best suited to a “word nerd” such as myself, who often reads books for fun. But neither is it impossible for anyone else. It is simply about making a choice to spend a little time each day, if we believe it is something worth doing. And there are a number of advantages of such a systematic approach to the Bible.

First, it becomes a life practice to simply spend some time each or most days with the Bible, if nothing else reminding ourselves that there are different ways to see the world and live life than what is urged on us by so many other voices each day. Of course, any habit can become just a thing we do but with the Spirit's presence, we

should not underestimate the benefits of simply spending time with the stories.

Second, by repetition over time, these holy stories become increasingly familiar to us. They become a part of our thinking and feeling: “Those Bible stories and words weren’t the kind you forgot. It was like they happened to you all along, that they were your own memories. You didn’t always know what they meant, but you did know how they felt.”⁴ These stories can be even more influential in our lives when we don’t merely read them but allow them to echo in our lives, to engage with the stories imaginatively, thinking about what it might have felt like to have been an observer or a participant in the stories we have read.

By working through the Bible in such a methodical way, we are taken to the stories that are far less familiar than the children’s story favourites. These stories offer different insights and challenges, often also shedding light on some of the better-known stories. Rather than picking what we already understand and know, we allow the stories as they have been handed down to us to speak into our lives, rather than reading ourselves into the stories, rather than shaping the Bible into the image of our preferences and expectations, and there are often surprises found in places we would not have gone looking.

However, the biggest benefit of reading the Bible’s stories in this way is that we develop an understanding of the large story behind the many small ones. While it is often out of sight and incomplete, there is a sense of a larger narrative, direction and purpose behind the stories that come and go. This Story is that of God’s activity before, behind, above and through the human stories of our world. This sense of a larger story provides an important context in which the smaller stories should be read and explored—and ultimately offers us the invitation to see ourselves as part of that same Story.

SUSPENDING OUR BELIEF

One of the real challenges for those of us who have grown up with Bible stories is taking the time to go back and re-read and re-imagine these stories. We often talk about a book or a movie requiring us to suspend our disbelief so

A very real challenge for those who have grown up with Bible stories is to re-read them without preconceived bias and discover new applications in their lives

we can get into the story to enjoy and appreciate it fully. But for many of us, perhaps we need to learn how to suspend our belief, to put off jumping to the spiritual applications and moral lessons that a story has always had when told to us, so we can enter into the story anew to enjoy and appreciate it fully—finding new applications and implications for our faith and our lives.

When then-atheist but soon-to-be Christian author and storyteller C S Lewis became a Christian, he was first attracted to the “mythology” of Christianity. He later defined myth as a “real but unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination” and recognised in the Christian story many of the positive elements of mythology. Then, in Lewis’ formulation, that Myth became reality, both in world history and in his life. However, Lewis was quick to add, “Myth remains Myth even when it becomes Fact. The story of Christ demands from us, and repays, not only a religious and historical but also an imaginative response. It is directed to the child, the poet, the savage in us as well as to the conscience and to the intellect.”⁵

When we understand a core aspect of our faith as recipients, keepers and tellers of holy stories—or “true myths,” as Lewis would describe them—we need to learn and re-learn how better to read and tell stories. It will also change our approach to the Bible itself, reading it for its stories and mythic elements rather than settling for it as a mere theology textbook or moral instruction book.

We can even suspend our belief—at least for a time—about the Bible itself. Nowhere does the Bible refer to itself as the Bible. While “The Bible” is usually stamped on the cover, this is more a marketing exercise by the publisher than an accurate description of the stories between the covers. As has been pointed out by many commentators, what we describe as the Bible never has been a single book or even a single genre.⁶ Rather it is a loose collection of writings from at least 40 different authors in different languages, cultures and places, composed over about 1400 years, and including history, poetry, songs, genealogies, legal frameworks, parables, prophecies and more.

While there is a common underlying story and themes that hold these diverse pieces together, we need to suspend our belief and step back from “The Bible” as a single entity to allow us to read the different genres as parts of their own stories, then to be able to reassemble these parts as they reveal the story of God to us and call us to be part of that story.

IT’S ABOUT JESUS

Of course, the central component of the Bible collection is Jesus, the historical Man presented to us in a collection of holy stories within the Bible but whose anticipation and aftermath flood the stories that make up the rest of the Bible. It is hardly surprising that the Bible itself seems intentionally confusing about the Word of God (the holy stories and writings handed down the generations as a revelation of God) and the Word made flesh in Jesus (see John 1:1–18). These two terms can almost be used interchangeably when we talk about how God seeks to reach out to human beings to restore their relationship with Himself.

In the stories Jesus told and the stories told and re-told about His life, death and resurrection, God trusted stories—and human storytellers—to work out His plans for and mission in our world. The four gospels—the four different and extended life stories of Jesus—are remarkably human documents, complete with their preferences, biases, limitations and inconsistencies, exactly as would be expected in the retelling of dramatic,



In the stories Jesus told, some on the banks of this very sea, and in the stories that are told of His life and teachings, God has relied on human storytellers to pass on His plans and mission in our world



traumatic and only partially understood human experiences of Someone gloriously different.

As we allow these stories to soak into our lives, revisiting, re-imagining and re-telling them, they can change the stories we tell ourselves. We can allow them to question and clash with the stories we are repeatedly told about what matters in our lives. And ultimately as we begin to connect more and more with the kingdom of God in our daily lives, these stories can become our primary reference stories, setting our priorities and changing how we live and the world around us.

But the Word-of-God terms cannot be used interchangeably when it comes to what/Who is of greatest importance. We do not and should not worship the stories. Knowing the stories of or about Jesus is helpful but never the same as knowing Jesus. As religious people, we can know the stories, we can learn memory verses, we can argue finer points of theology, we can discover wonderful insights from archaeology and close study of the original texts—but we can still miss their point. As Jesus Himself said to the religious folks and scripture experts of His day, “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life” (John 5:39, 40, NLT).

LIVING HOLY STORIES

As we engage deeper with the holy stories we have been given, we are called beyond the stories—to Jesus as God’s ultimate Word and then back to our own stories. As far as a story goes, the Book of Acts finishes quite unsatisfactorily. It simply fades to black with Paul continuing to tell the story of Jesus in Rome “and no one tried to stop him” (Acts 28:31, NLT). And while the story outlined in the Book of Revelation reaches a more dramatic and final conclusion, this element of our myth-faith that is yet to come true. So it is a story that we are still part of, that our lives and world is shaped by, and in which God invites us to play a part, to add our chapter.

Spending two weeks in Israel—exploring the places of the holy stories of the Bible—was a valuable experience that has changed how I read and connect with these stories. But my greatest insight was to gain a better appreciation of how our faith and lives are shaped by the stories we have been given. That while helpful, encouraging, perhaps even inspiring, travelling to so-called holy places is not as important as filling our lives with holy stories and then becoming people whose lives are changed by those stories.

And when we pause to reflect on what we have to share with the world around us, we should go back to those holy stories. They are the treasure we have to share. They are the stories in which we have found meaning and purpose. They are the holy stories that bring us to Jesus and give us hope.

Nathan Brown

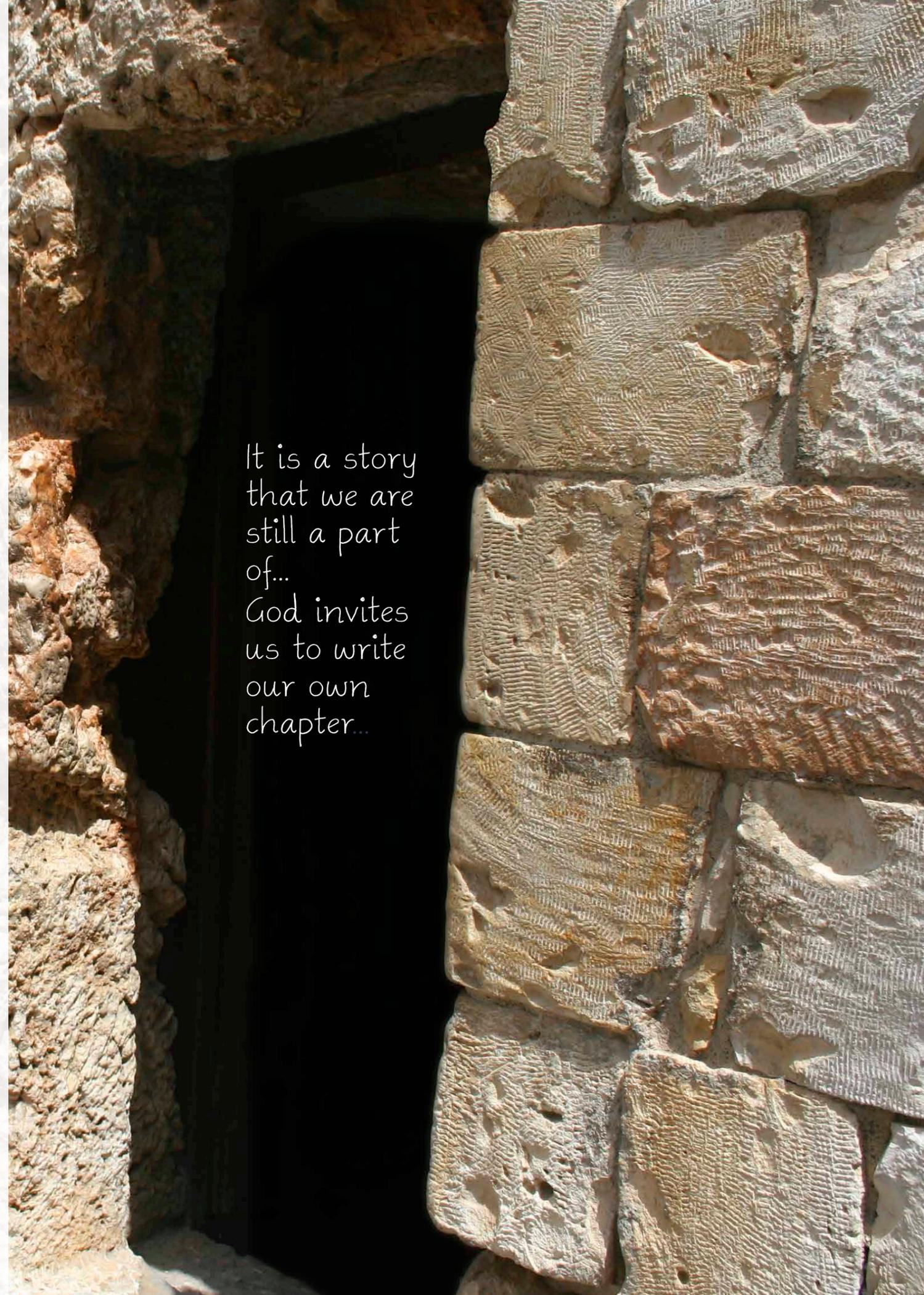
Book Editor

Signs Publishing Company

1. ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *THE SABBATH: ITS MEANING FOR MODERN MAN* (2005 EDITION), PAGE 9.
2. KNOWN TODAY AS THE COENACULUM, IT IS ALSO WHERE JESUS APPEARED TO THOSE SAME DISCIPLES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION AND WHERE THE DISCIPLES MET AND PRAYED TOGETHER AFTER JESUS’ ASCENSION UNTIL THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO THEM AT PENTECOST.
3. ROWAN WILLIAMS, *ARIUS: HERESY AND TRADITION*, PAGE 235.
4. TIM WINTON, *CLOUDSTREET*.
5. C S LEWIS, *MIRACLES*, HARPERCOLLINS, PAGE 138.
6. CARL MEDEARIS, *SPEAKING OF JESUS: THE ART OF NOT-EVANGELISM*, PAGE 124.

PICTURES: CREDIT NATHAN BROWN
PG 6 - SABBATH OPENING AT THE WESTERN WALL; PG 8 - DOME OF THE ROCK ON TEMPLE MOUNT; PG 11 - GALILEE; PG 13 - THE GARDEN TOMB; PG 16 - TABGHA ON GALILEE

It is a story
that we are
still a part
of..
God invites
us to write
our own
chapter..

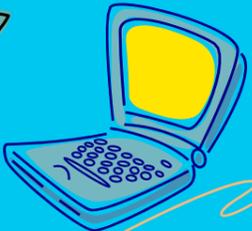


KID'S SPOT

God's Letter to YOU



If you want to tell your friend something, what do you do? You go to that person and say, "Hey, I want to tell you something." Then you share your funny story, whisper a secret, or let them know what you learned in school today. But, what if your friend lived far away? Look at the pictures and circle what you would use to share your thoughts with your far away friend.



When Jesus lived on this earth He went right up to them and said, "Hello, how are you doing?" Now Jesus lives in heaven. But He still wants to talk to us. He still wants to show us that He is our Friend. How does He do that?

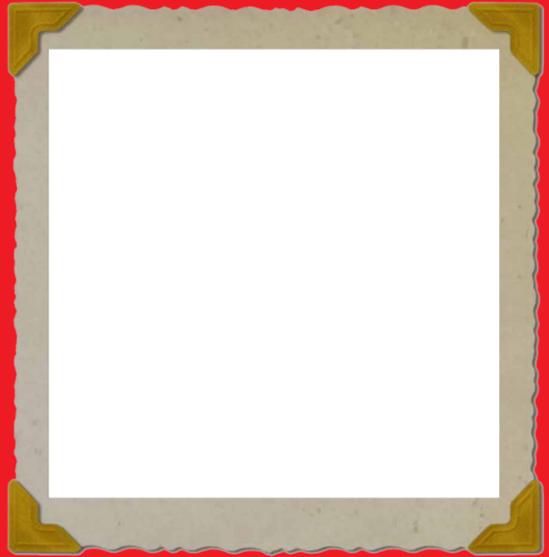


YES! The Bible is God's letter to us!

It's Jesus talking to us from heaven!

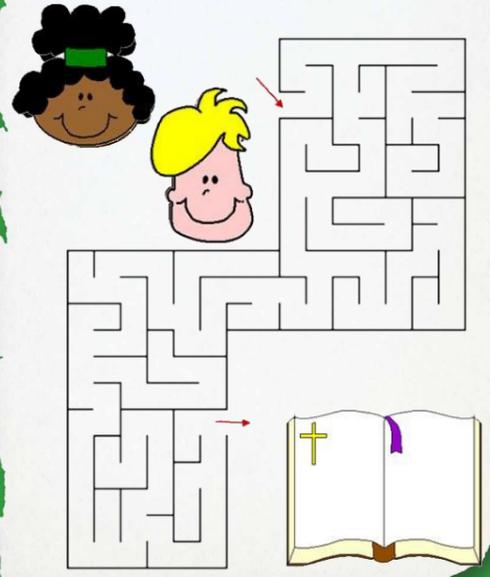
DRAW A PICTURE

Draw a picture of yourself reading God's letter to you - Your Bible!



BIBLE MAZE

HELP THE CHILDREN FIND THEIR BIBLE



FILL IN THE BLANKS

you can find the answer in Isaiah 54:13 of your Bible (NIV)

All your will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their

This month's COMPETITION

Where is your favourite place to read the Bible? We'd love to hear about your special place. Send us an email or write us a letter at the address below and you could be this month's winner!

Get your grown up to make sure we have your entry by NEXT SABBATH

DRAW A LINE TO THE ANSWER



- First Book of the Bible •
- Last Book of the Bible •
- Longest Book of the Bible •
- Number of Books in the OT •
- First Book of the NT •
- Number of Books in the NT •
- Shortest Book of the Bible •
- Psalms
- Thirty Nine
- Genesis
- 3 John
- Twenty Seven
- Revelation
- Matthew

My Prayer..

Thank You, Jesus, for wanting to talk to me each day. I'll look for Your words in my Bible and when I hear a story about You at church or in school.

I want to be Your friend forever.

Amen.

Victorian Children's Ministries

Katherine Darroch
po Box 215 Nunawading 3131
KatherineDarroch@adventist.org.au
Fax 03 9264 7700



What do we do with Holy Stories?

When we come to see the holy stories collected in the Bible as key ingredients to our lives as people of God and as pointers to what is real, meaningful, valuable and good, it will change how we use the Bible and its stories in a number of important ways:

- We need to use Bible versions that do not unnecessarily add to the strangeness of the stories. When we invite people to connect with the holy stories that mean so much to us, we are already inviting them to a foreign experience so we should not create extra barriers to their understanding. We want them to be moved, provoked and challenged by the stories, not confused or discouraged by the language in which they were translated many years ago. It is the stories that are holy—or we might call them “inspired”—rather than the words.
- We need to learn to use study of the Bible text as a way to better understand its stories, not the other way around. The Bible is a work of literature, so understanding languages, culture, history, symbols and meanings should help us read these stories and make them part of our lives. If our close study of the text gets in the way of the stories, perhaps we need to take a step back and re-discover the stories for themselves.
- We need to be more careful in how we use Bible verses, becoming more aware of the story contexts from which they are drawn. For example, two of the most misquoted Bible verses in contemporary Christianity might be Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:28, both used as single verses to assure us that God wants what is best for us. God does want what is best for us but each of these verses have somewhat different meanings when read in their larger context, rarely included in the common use of these texts.
- We need to reclaim the role of storytelling in our churches. God used stories as His major mode of communication with humanity, so should we. Storytelling is not only for children and perhaps not primarily for children. Many aspects of our holy stories are missed or simplified when they are presented as children’s stories. While the Bible should be appreciated and learnt by children, it is first a collection of stories for adults.
- We need to reclaim the role of storytelling in our community outreach. We have been given the gift of powerful, compelling and true stories that can catch people’s imagination and change their lives—but how often do we share them as stories in creative and engaging ways. In our society where biblical literacy is so low, sharing our holy stories might be a simple way of connecting people in our community with the wonder and power of God and the truths about life and humanity. We invite them to suspend their disbelief, while we suspend our belief, and we share a story and let God speak in it and through it.

ADVENT BRASS
in Concert with
Lilydale Adventist Academy Choir
Breezin' DOWN...

Featuring:
Helena Ring
David Butler
James Penn
Lisa Ring
Brendan Mckee
Jarrad Gilson

When:
Saturday 7th September 8:00pm
Sunday 8th September 2:00pm

Where:
Genazzano FCJ College
301 Cotham Road
Kew Vic 3101

Cost:
Adults: \$15 Concession: \$10 Family: \$40

Bookings:
Lisa: 0433 283 996 Ray: 0404 024 045 Maureen (BH): 03 9706 5111
Email: lisa.ring.flute@gmail.com

Phantom of the Opera Les Miserables Chicago
The Lion King Mary Poppins Oliver!
Pirates of Penzance

2013 North West BUSH CAMP
1st November - 5th of November 2013

Powered sites and full catering available. Contact *Cherene* to secure your little piece of heaven on the banks of the Darling River at Wentworth, on 0439 351 070.
Bookings close October 11.

Guest speaker:
General Conference Ministerial Association's Pr. Anthony Kent

Anthony Kent currently serves as the Associate Secretary, Continuing Education, Professional Growth, PREACH. Anthony came to the General Conference Ministerial Association from the South Pacific Division where he served as Division Ministerial Secretary and the Director of the Institute of Evangelists. Anthony's ministry experience includes: pastoring local churches, church planting, public evangelism as a union and division evangelist, and leading study tours and other professional growth events for pastors. He is currently pursuing a PhD through the University of Queensland in the New Testament.

CAR BOOT SALE!
Raising funds for education in Vanuatu and Zimbabwe

FAMILY FUN!

Book a car spot: Only \$20 (YOU keep ALL the profit!)
Find a Bargain: designer label clothing, kitchen items, household goods, books, toys, plus more (entry by gold coin donation)!
Food for sale: Sri Lankan and Chilean cuisine, hot and cold food.
Live entertainment: acoustic performances
Support a Cause: all profits goes towards EdGE Foundation (education in Zimbabwe) and education project in rural Vanuatu.
Address: Nunawading Christian College 161 Central Road Nunawading
Date and time: 4th August, 8am - 12pm

To book a car spot or to find out more information:
Email: mjaworski@ncc.adventist.edu.au
Call Nunawading Christian College: 9877 3555

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Tickets: First class:\$25 Economy:\$15pp Kids: \$5
Bookings by July 17 to George: homanfamily@xtra.co.nz
This is a fundraiser for Nunawading Pathfinders thank you for your support!



**Attention:
Communication
Secretaries...**

Victorian Adventist
COMMUNICATIONS
Needs You!

Have you just taken on the appointment of Communication Secretary for your local church for another church year, or are new to the job?

Victorian Adventist Communications welcomes you to the team and encourages you to keep the good stories coming in.

- Is your church doing something exciting as it shares God's love? Tell the rest of the Conference - it may encourage other churches to try it out.
- Are you holding a special celebration? Share it with your sister churches.
- Have you seen God's hand at work in a remarkable way? Encourage others by telling about it. These are just a few ideas of what we want to hear about.

for more information about submissions, visit Vic.Adventist.org.au and click on the IntraVic News tab.

Victorian Adventist Communicators Group...

Interested in where you can take communications within your own church? Websites, email newsletters, facebook pages, smartphone apps...

VAC has set up a Facebook group where you can post and discuss your ideas, share tips and learn from and encourage each other.

Whether you are a communication secretary or on the team managing your church website, this group is for you...



- sign up for Facebook
- look for Mirek Stekla
- add him as a friend
- send message with your name, church role and mention this group
- you will receive a message when accepted and then you can begin communicating!



Take My Heart

Marcha William

Tonight...

SACRED GOSPEL CONCERT

Plenty Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church
Cnr Centenary Dr & Plenty Rd. Mill Park
Saturday 27th July 2013
Program Starts at 7:00pm
FREE Admission
CDS available after Concert



Looking for a Tree Change?

Consider moving to Nth East Victoria. Wangaratta church invites families, Singles, Professionals and Retirees to join with us. Our region offers excellent climate, and comprehensive Medical, Educational and Recreational facilities. Affordable housing with good shopping is available. A variety of work and busyness opportunities exist. Consider making our church your new home. For further information please contact our Pastor - Quinten Liebrandt on 0424002551, or just come and visit...

New Discipleship Resource to Equip Parents to Grow Spiritually Strong Children

"God yearns to draw the hearts of the whole family to each other and to Him!"
- Fr. Don MacLafferty

Daily Bites

Spend 10 minutes each day after sharing a meal together

Three themed booklets with 24 studies

Contextualised for SPD Adventist Children's Ministries
With permission from the Kids in Discipleship Footprints Ecology
Available from Adventist Book Centres

Bairnsdale time is 10 minutes EARLIER & at Hamilton the time is 12 minutes Later

OFFERING SCHEDULE:

AUGUST

Aug 3	Education/Camping Ministry
Aug 10	Media Evangelism offering
Aug 17	Local Church Budget
Aug 24	Local Church Budget
Aug 31	Local Church Budget



Located at the Victorian Conference Office, Central Road Nunawading, the Book Centre is open from 9-5 Monday to Thursday, and until Midday Friday.

Call 03 9264 7760/61 or visit vic.adventist.org.au and follow menu link to the Book Centre website

Come and Join us for a night of fun and fellowship

Finger Food Tea & Old Fashioned Games Evening

WHERE: Sue Huber's home
37 Bartley Rd, Belgrave Heights

When: 3rd August

Time: 5.00pm for closing Sabbath with Nomi Jackson followed by tea & games

Cost: Ladies - please bring a plate of finger food

Men - please bring drinks

Phone: Judy 0407 510 545

Cherryl 0411 481 930



37 Bartley Rd, Belgrave Heights

Victorian Adventist TV

Visit VictorianAdventist.TV to catch up on an event or guest speaker you may have missed, or would like to hear again.



Victorian Adventists - like us on facebook!

TRUST SERVICES

Ensuring that we effectively manage the resources God entrusts to us all.

A complimentary service to members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, their family and their friends.

To have a new Will prepared for you, please arrange for an appointment by contacting Trust Services at the Victorian Conference.

Phone: 03 9264 7725

Mobile: 0423 784 000

Email: switson@adventist.org.au.



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