



BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE

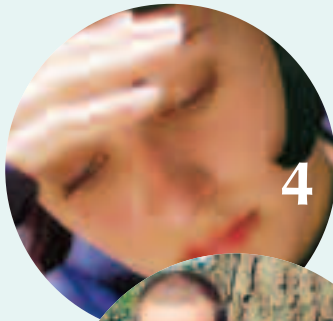
April - May 2005

When life overwhelms

Tsunami of suffering (p. 4)

Separating truth from fiction (p. 16)

Tombs close to home (p. 18)



ARTICLES

- 4 **Why Is This Happening?** — by Roger Palms
- 8 **Suffering: A Bigger Picture** — by Brian Knowles
- 12 **Help for the Sufferer** — Dr. Jim DeFrancisco
- 18 **Short Lives, Lifetime Lessons** — Michael Smith
- 22 **The Blame for Pain** — by Julio Martinez



DEPARTMENTS

- 3 **First Word** — Honoring Mothers
- 7 **Questions & Answers**
- 11 **You Say . . .**
- 14 **Perspective** — Broadening Our Prayers
- 16 **When the Bottom Falls Out**
- 20 **Wealth** — Disciplined Spending
- 24 **Understanding Scripture** — Luke and Acts
- 31 **International Tour** — Portugal



27 CoG7 IN ACTION

SWORD

National FYC

Spring Vale Academy graduation weekend



Did you miss the last issue on creationism? View selections from it and download the last six BAs at www.cog7.org/BA.

Coming in the June BA: Marriage and morality

In the April and May issues of *Now What?*: forgiveness and surviving the death of a baby (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)



A publication of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 139 • Number 3

© Copyright 2005 by the Church of God (Seventh Day)

All material in this issue is subject to U.S. and international copyright laws and may not be reproduced without prior written approval. Permission may be obtained by writing the editor.

The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published monthly, except bimonthly January-February, April-May, July-August, and October-November by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80020. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

Bible Advocate Press

Calvin Burrell: Editor

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Director of Publications, graphics

Richard A. Wiedenheft: Staff Writer

Sylvia Corral, Raul González: Translation, proofing

LeRoy and Hope Dais, Linda Michalak: Correspondence, proofing, clerical

Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
TEL: 303/452-7973
FAX: 303/452-0657
E-MAIL: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
ORDERS: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

The Bible Advocate Online appears at www.cog7.org/BA.

Cover photo: Corel Photos

Honoring Mothers



All that I am or hope to be as a Christian educator I owe to my Grandmother Blanche and my mother, Lottie. Love for the written and living Word dwelt first in them. Grandad and Dad were godly men and good providers, to be sure; it was their wives who passed the faith along.

Grandmother was a teacher. She told me about the years she and her sister taught in rural Iowa before she married and moved to Oklahoma. Long after those days, she taught my siblings, my cousins, and me through the many hymns and scripture verses she knew by heart and through her love for the Lord and His church.

My mother finished high school in 1929, then began a year of “normal school” at teachers college. This prepared her to teach in the one-room schoolhouses of northwest Oklahoma, both before and after she and Dad married. As Mother’s family grew, her public teaching career ended, but she continued the same work at home. Before the days of home schools, Mother took me through first grade at her knee, among her other household chores. She was a champion speller and letter-writer, especially to her children as we went away to school and established homes in distant places.

Gradually, the teaching mantle worn by both previous generations fell on me. My siblings were headed other ways, and anyway, I yearned for it; it felt right. After high school, I enrolled in the same college Mother had attended and prepared to teach math and history. It was in those teen and young adult years that I also sensed God’s call to vocational ministry. How would I reconcile my manifest destiny in the classroom with the growing clarity of that inner voice?

The synthesis came to me through Christian education. In the Church’s schools — Spring Vale Academy, Summit School of Theology, Ministries Training System — I’ve found joy and fulfillment as a pastor-teacher and found a family, too. I married a former student, and our children are passing to their children the same way, truth, and life that Mother and Grandmother passed to us.

This May let’s honor our mothers and consider Paul’s words to Timothy: “I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5).

— Calvin Burrell



Sigfoid Photographs

Why Is This Happening?

Looking beyond our current questions to One who stands by us now and forever. **by Roger Palms**

It was the news they had been waiting for: The mission board that Megan and Sam had applied to said yes. Behind them, two completed careers. Ahead of them, a future in missions. They told all their friends, “God is so good.”

The next day, while visiting a physician because of what was assumed to be an ongoing viral infection, Megan heard a word that she never expected to hear: *leukemia*.

She is in a battle for her life. Hospitalized, white cell count way down, infections a danger, she struggles. Her husband, watching and praying, feels so helpless. Yet something else is happening in her hospital room. When the nurse comes in to draw blood, Megan moves the conversation to the blood of Jesus. When the doctor checks her, she speaks of another Physician. She has her mission field: It is a small, sterile room with lots of machines and tubes.

Why? That’s what people who love this couple are asking. This is not what she and her husband had wanted. It wasn’t even what God seemed to be leading them to. Why has something so bad happened to two people who are so committed to God? If God caused it, He certainly is not a loving God. If God didn’t cause it but allowed it to happen, why?

Living in a “not my fault” world

We hear it all around us; it comes up in many conversations: If I lose my job, it is management’s fault. If my son gets into drugs, it’s the fault of those

guys he has been running with. If my marriage goes sour, it is his fault/her fault. There is only one thing clear: It is not my fault.

If one person smokes and gets cancer, he can point to others who have smoked far longer and don't have cancer, and ask, "Why me?" If a caring, loving mother has a wayward daughter, she can point to other parents who never paid much attention to their kids, yet have no problems with their children.

Whose fault is it when bad things happen? "Not mine," we say. We've made it easy on ourselves. We've decided that we are in a someone-else's-fault world. It must be so because we know the trouble isn't "my fault." Ultimately, when there is no one left to blame for our difficulty, we blame God. Anything bad becomes God's fault.

A man who never had time for God, who ran his own life, now sees life caving in on him and rampages, "Why is God doing this to me?"

A woman who tried so hard to direct her own life gives up and won't try anymore. "God doesn't care about me," she says.

Closer than we think

When a faithful man named Job was losing everything, God was there with him. Through that dark time of his life, Job did not know how everything would end. But he knew that God was still God.

When Jesus, tempted by the Devil, was hungry, thirsty day after day, God the Father was there. When Jesus was beaten, His back cut to ribbons, then hammered onto the beams of a

cross, the Father was there.

Neither the "It must be God's fault because it can't be mine" people nor the people who don't blame God but still ask, "Why?" have gotten it right. We've forgotten who we are as a broken people in a fallen world.

All creation groans

There was once a perfect garden and an innocent couple who lived there. No illness, no pain, and an easy relationship with God. But there came a time when that couple thought they could gain more by acting for themselves than God could give to them. The pleasures and satisfactions of being in harmony with God were given up in a quest for something they thought they could get for themselves. They lost.

And each of us since Adam and Eve has lived that way — separated, dead, to use the word the Bible uses. As dead people in a broken, decaying world, we face sickness, war, emotional and physical pain. There is cancer to get and emotional distress that overwhelms.

Does the situation change with new birth and new life? Yes and no. When a person moves

from darkness to light, from death to life in Christ, he gains a promise: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," Jesus said (John 10:10).

But the fallen world is still our residence; the pain is all around us. Even the follower of Jesus who is in the best of health is going to die of something. It may take him longer to die than it takes others who are in less-than-perfect health, but good living and good health only postpone dying.

Being "eternal life" people doesn't change the fallen world we are in now. But into this world comes the word of God first given to Joshua: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). Never!

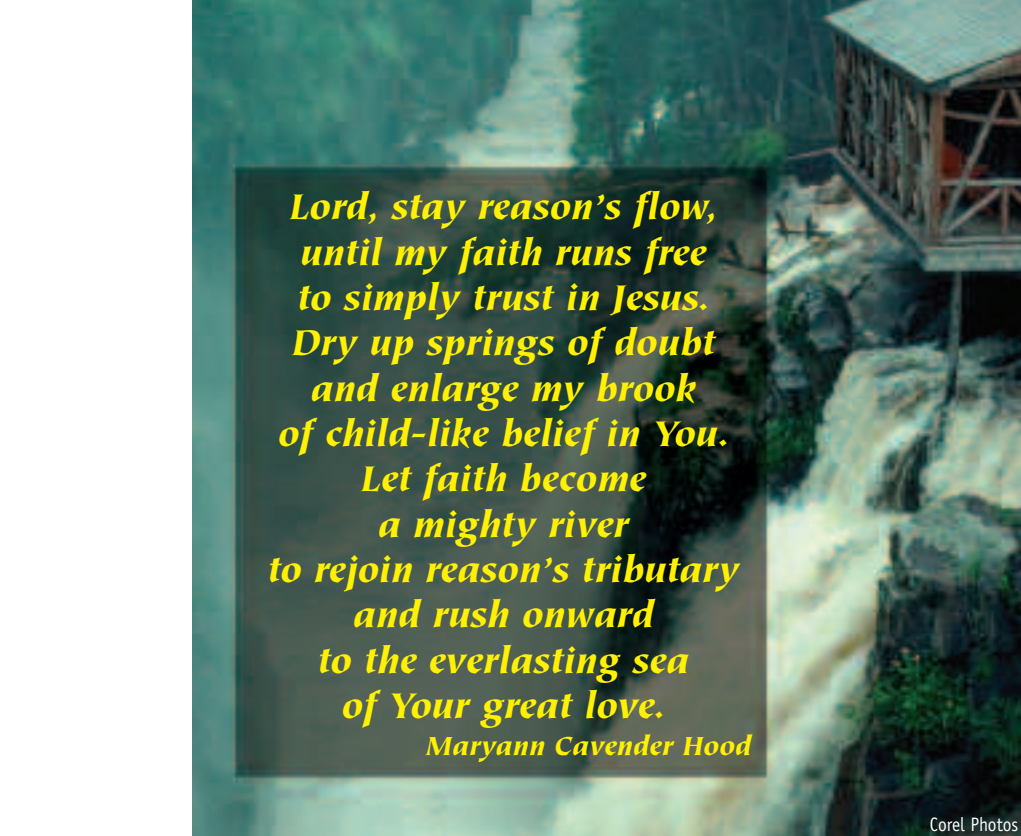
And we who know the meaning of new life can say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15).

God's peace in a fallen world

Why do bad things happen? How could they not happen? Look where we live. Look at who we are. No one has to convince us that we aren't in the Garden anymore. Why are we surprised when bad things hap-

No one has to convince us that we aren't in the Garden anymore. Why are we surprised when bad things happen in bad surroundings?





*Lord, stay reason's flow,
until my faith runs free
to simply trust in Jesus.
Dry up springs of doubt
and enlarge my brook
of child-like belief in You.
Let faith become
a mighty river
to rejoin reason's tributary
and rush onward
to the everlasting sea
of Your great love.
Maryann Cavender Hood*

Corel Photos

pen in bad surroundings?

Someday there will be liberation. We will be set free from the pain of sin and death. That assurance is certain for the person who is certain that "God so loved the world [that includes me] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever [that's me; I can put my name here] believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Bad things happen in a world that God loves. Bad things come to the people God has redeemed. But during this sometimes painful journey we are offered peace. Jesus said:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (14:27).

Today while we still experience the pain of this life, the blanket of God's peace covers us.

Someday — because of a car wreck, because of a terrorist

attack, because of a vicious cancerous growth — I will step out of this fallen world and into the place He has prepared for me. He said so (see John 14:1-4).

True peace doesn't come from having everything the way I want it. It comes from knowing that God is with me. God doesn't cause my pain, but He is there with me in the midst of my pain. As one sufferer put it, "I learn more about peace and contentment in my pain than I do in my comfortable, easy times."

There is something far worse than suffering now. Jesus explained it:

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

Having said that, Jesus then revealed our worth:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your

Father . . . don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29, 31).

Just before the dawn

There is a Balm that helps us in the often-painful process of sickness and death. There is a deeper understanding and commitment when we have struggled and suffered and God brings us through, even giving us a few more years in which to offer ourselves to Him.

Why bad things? Why me? Why does God allow it? Look at the bigger picture of the surrounding love of God, the peace-giving love of God, and the promise "I go to prepare a place for you." Our pain is temporary; there is so much ahead for us.

Years ago, rural people, who had a clearer view of the sky than most city folks, had a saying: "The night is darkest just before the dawn." For so many like Megan and Sam, this is the dark time. Still they are held by the hand of the One who will bring the morning.

Megan and Sam don't know how tomorrow will turn out. They know that God is very near, and they are sensing a love that is more comforting than they ever knew when their life was easy. They are still able to say, as they said that day before the bad news came, "God is so good." **BA**

Roger Palms, former editor of *Decision* magazine, lives in Anoka, MN. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Questions & Answers

Where do you stand on the role of deaconess(es)? Why are women not given opportunity to speak, pray, etc. in the Church of God, when most of the important Bible roles were performed by women?

The word *diakoneo* (#1247 in Strong's) is a verb often translated "minister" or "serve." Its noun form is translated "deacons" in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The same word is used of Simon's wife's mother (Mark 1:31) and of the Galilean women who ministered to Jesus (Matt. 27:55). It is used of Martha's service to Jesus (John 12:2), of Martha's complaint about Mary (Luke 10:40), and of Phoebe's service to the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1).

In the New Testament, women served as helpers with Jesus and the apostles in roles that were common for that time. No full description is given of their duties. To suggest that they ministered in "most of the important roles" is speculative and unsupported by Scripture.

In modern times, women are commonly recognized or appointed as deaconesses in the Church of God (Seventh Day). Some are members of local or district boards. They may meet with the elders and deacons and perform a variety of ministry functions as is fitting for the polity and leadership of each local church.

— Elder Melvin Sweet

In Acts 21:20-26 Paul performed the Nazarite vow, including animal sacrifices, years after Christ's death. Was he just pleasing men, being like a Jew to win Jews (1 Cor. 9:19-23)? Did Paul go too far here? Did he cross the line and sin?

In Paul's conduct (Acts, etc.), as in his writings (1 Cor., etc.), we find a mixture of loyalty to the law (Torah) with disavowal of the law. Like it or not, this is Paul. Our job is to find the paradigm by which he could both embrace and disallow the law of God revealed to Israel.

As I read Paul, that paradigm is this: When Paul

writes of "justification" (the means by which we sinners are redeemed at the start and stand right with God continually), he always refuses our obedience as the method by which this grace is gained. Romans, Galatians, and Philippians stress this point.

On the other hand, when Paul writes of "sanctification" (our lifestyle and daily walk before God as His beloved children), he commonly refers to the law as valid for our instruction and a continuing standard for life. Romans 13, Ephesians 6, and 1 Timothy 5 offer clear illustrations of this.

In short form, Paul affirms the law as a standard for Christians but never as a method of salvation.

Because of this distinction, Paul can appear inconsistent. In one situation, he can insist that Titus not be circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5) according to the law, because the purity of the gospel and grace of God was at stake. In another situation, he permits Timothy to be circumcised (Acts 16:1-3), evidently because it was not considered a compromise in this case and would aid Timothy's mission among the Jews.

To summarize, Paul the messianic Jew was sympathetic to the law (Torah), even beyond what we might feel is appropriate, if he saw in it a chance to draw others to Jesus Christ without compromising the gospel of God's grace. For him, the question was not so much "Which laws of the Torah should Christians obey?" as it was "How can I impact those who operate under the whole law, or under no law, to find the Savior?" (1 Cor. 9).

We tend to think that God has a precise amount of the Torah to which a new covenant believer should be loyal — no more, no less. I doubt that was Paul's approach to the issue. Paul considered himself free to obey more of the Torah, or less of it, without transgressing God's essential will for his life. I believe he was right in this, although it is doubtful that Paul ever compromised God's eternal moral principles, summarized in the Decalogue, for any reasons.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Suffering: A Bigger Picture

All that goes wrong in the world isn't always sin-related. by Brian Knowles

The recent mega-disaster in Southeast Asia has again given rise to the age-old question “If God is all-loving and all-powerful, why does He allow so much suffering in the world?” Why did He allow tens of thousands of people to die in what is commonly called an “act of God” – the recent earthquake and tsunami in Southeast Asia? Pundits have produced a flurry of articles on the subject, and theologians have exercised themselves to explain it.

It is often assumed – erroneously, we believe – that disasters of this scale are inflicted on people because they were guilty of some sin worthy of divine wrath. Of what great sin were thousands of dead or orphaned infants and children guilty? Why should over 200,000 people, going about their daily business, be wiped out without warning or explanation?

Some have suggested that September 11 was inflicted upon some 3,000 unsuspecting people, just beginning their workday in New York’s twin towers and the Pentagon, because of “America’s sins.” If that were the case, surely God could have launched His retribution with more precision instead of randomly.

We cannot assume that all suffering is the result of divine retribution simply because some suffering is. What other explanations should we consider in order to prevent wrong conclusions on this subject?

Time and chance

The world is what it is. The earthquake and tsunami that devastated tens of thousands in

a dozen nations were primarily geological events. It happened because of the laws of physics. As Solomon wrote, "Time and chance happen to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11b).

No matter where we dwell on planet Earth, we live with the possibility of natural disaster or "tower of Siloam" incidents (cf. Luke 13:4). In the Pacific Rim, one or more of dozens of dormant volcanoes could erupt at any time, spewing millions of tons of molten lava and ash upon millions of citizens.

Here in California, we live with the daily threat of earthquakes. In Oklahoma and Kansas, it's tornadoes.

Earthquakes, hurricanes, tidal waves, brush and forest fires, volcanoes, drought, famine, avalanches, and other cataclysmic natural events threaten populations the world over.

Although God can use natural catastrophe to punish wayward humanity — and has in the past — most of the time it seems that such disasters simply happen because of natural forces. When tectonic plates move, all that is mounted upon them moves. When the earth releases pressure from its molten core, it is like the eruption of a geologic boil. The surface climate of the earth is affected by a myriad of factors, the least of which is probably man. Cycles of drought and flood come and go, and it's no one's fault.

The world and all its inhabitants are aging, winding down, living out the laws of entropy. Nothing physical is forever. The earth itself is "waxing old," subject to the forces of nature.

You, Lord, in the begin-

ning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail (Hebrews 1:10-12).

Let's face it. If God exists, then He's responsible for everything else that happens, including all of the so-called "acts of God" that take human lives. The laws of physics exist because the universe exists. It's His world; He made it, and He made it the way it is.

Satan and monstrous men

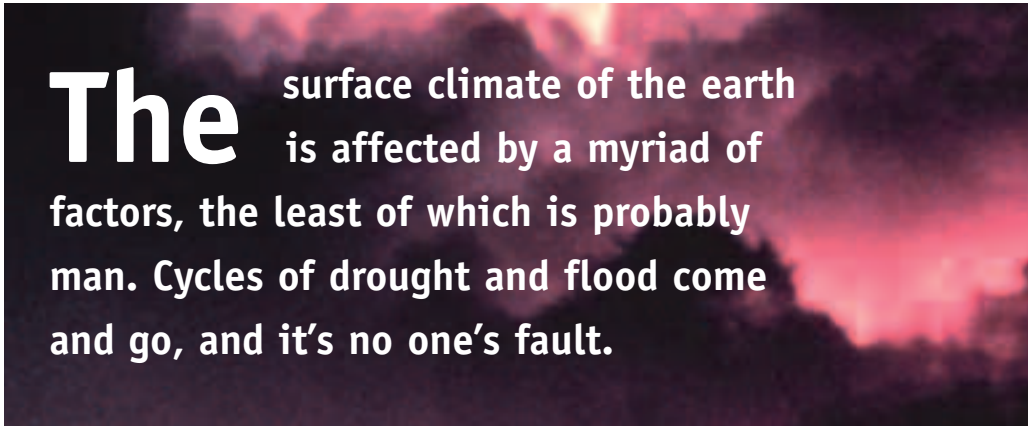
When at first God made the world, He looked upon His handiwork and declared it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Only a short time later, the serpent entered the scene. The Devil is not omnipotent. He is, however, "the prince of the power of the air" and has used storms to attack humanity (Job 1:12, 19). We also learn from Job that Satan can do only what the Lord permits him to do. And if the Lord permits him to do something, it somehow fits God's purposes.

What about man's inhumanity to man? Why are innocents so often singled out by the monsters among us for kidnapping, rape, molestation, and murder? Why did God allow the horrors of the Holocaust to sweep across Europe year after year until some six million Jews were tortured, shot, and gassed to death? Is it because they and their children were so evil?

We live in an age when man's inhumanity to man seems to be sinking to unbearably dark, new depths. Many places in the world look like scenes from a modern Dante's Inferno.

There isn't space here to catalogue the litany of suffering that some persons inflict on others. Only a masochist could wallow with any pleasure in the chronicle of human suffering. The history of humanity is written largely in our own blood. People have suffered and died in the name of religion, ideology, power, and crime. World leaders have murdered more of their own people than have died in all the wars of humanity together. Mao, Stalin, and Hitler were among the world's most lethal mass murderers.

There is no question that, if He exists at all, God allows and seemingly keeps hands off much



The surface climate of the earth is affected by a myriad of factors, the least of which is probably man. Cycles of drought and flood come and go, and it's no one's fault.

When the Good Suffer Bad

As a part-time marketplace chaplain, I talked recently with a man I'll call Mike. After I explained my purpose, he became defensive, saying he was an atheist. He had typical ideas: "I can't see God and have never met Him; therefore, He does not exist." When I shared more about faith with Mike the next week and answered some questions, he stated that he was probably more an agnostic than an atheist.

By the time I saw him again two weeks later, the tsunami had hit Southeast Asia. Mike vehemently blasted me with questions about why would God do this if He is a loving God. I listened and then shared about God's perfect and permissive will and how God chooses not to intervene in circumstances like the tsunami in the sense we think He should.

Mike sarcastically replied, "You Christians have an answer for everything!" As his anger began to control the conversation, I listened and changed the subject. I needed to re-group for another visit.

There is an assumption that good people should not experience bad or evil in their lives. If we're doing good and being good, then only good things will happen. The Bible says otherwise. From righteous Abel in Genesis to the apostle John in Revelation, good people suffer pain and some die prematurely. Abel was murdered and John imprisoned. In Hebrews 11 God's good people are killed, made destitute, afflicted, and ill treated because of their faith.

In Luke Jesus tells of two events current at that time. In the first, men from Galilee had been murdered by Pilate. Jesus asks, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?" (13:2, NASB). Jesus answers His own question emphatically, "No."

Jesus goes on to tell of a tower falling on eighteen people and killing them in the town of Siloam. He then asks, "Do you suppose that those eighteen . . . were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?" (NASB). Again, He answers, "No."

Jesus is teaching that bad things — persecution and tragic death — are going to happen. Circumstances bring many things our way, and God rarely intervenes in the natural laws He has set up. God could have intervened in natural law and stopped the tower from falling, but in His permissive will, He chose not to.

To us, this life is precious. To God, eternal life is more precious. I will share these ideas with Mike and pray that God will soften his heart.

— Abel Zaragoza

evil that happens to many people. The big question is, why does God permit human suffering on such a horrendous scale? Is this question really answerable?

It may be for the believer, but for the unbeliever, it is doubtful that any answer will satisfy.

Human choice and suffering

From the time the first couple was cast out of Eden, to the present, humanity has suffered in one way or another. Except for those who have been called by God, the human race exists in a fallen state. And that state has its consequences.

God has given humanity freedom of choice. What we decide determines what we experience. When does God interfere with our choices? Apparently, only when it suits His purposes to do so. If God has given us free agency, then interfering with our decisions regularly would undermine that freedom. At what point should God step in? When some crazed tyrant decides to murder three people or when he decides to slaughter 300, or three million? If God steps in anywhere, He's got to step in everywhere. That would eliminate freedom of choice.

Even angels are permitted to sin (2 Peter 2:4). They are not mindless automatons. Yet when they sin, they too must live with the consequences of their deeds (Jude 6).

What life is about

Life is about natural and spiritual laws, about truth and consequences, cause and effect. On

continued on page 13

You Say...

Based on fossil evidence, dinosaurs lived on earth at one time. What is their relation to history, and why are they not mentioned in Scripture?

The Bible does not mention dinosaurs because they became extinct about 65 million years ago — eons before Scripture began to be recorded. On the other hand, looking at the meaning of *dinosaur*, from the Greek words *deinos* (“terrible” or “dreadful”) and *sauros* (“lizard” or “reptile”), we realize that the Bible does mention them.

God called Job’s attention to a terrible lizard as an object lesson: “Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, or snare his tongue with a line which you lower?” (Job 41:1). The leviathan, or crocodile, was native to marshy areas of that time. The point is that God maintains control and that no one can make a pet of leviathan (vv. 4, 5), much less leviathan’s Creator.

The Bible fortifies what we learn from fossils of prehistory. Our reaction to dinosaur bones ought to be the same as it is to terrible lizards now extant: to bow in awe before God (42:2).

— *Sheila Enstine*
Ithaca, NY

The Bible concerns itself mostly with this latest period, the last 6,000+ years of earth’s history, and the creation of man. Science asserts that earth’s original creation occurred some 4 billion years ago, with a number of “creations” during that time. The fossil record demonstrates that the majority of past life forms have been destroyed, never to be re-created, though not all. The cockroach and the crocodile (to name just two) have been re-created and have continued for the last 75 million years or so, after each destruction. The last destruction left earth “formless and empty” (Genesis 1:2, NIV), but “He did not create it to be empty” (Isaiah 45:18, NIV). Thus, the earth has not been empty for too long in its total history. Scripture never calls the Neanderthal or the Cro-Magnon “man” simply because they too were part of earlier “creations” that were destroyed in a *tohu/bohu* act. This is why science has never dis-

covered missing links for evolution. There are none. Each species appears fully formed and unchanged throughout its period of creation, or re-creation.

— *Ed Schooler*
Susanville, CA

The real question is, what is the Bible’s intention? To demonstrate the existence of dinosaurs or to reveal the salvation plan to all humans? I think that the Bible’s intention is to present salvation, not to show if dinosaurs existed. That issue must respond to science, not to the Bible.

— *Jonas Guzman Leal, pastor*
San Luis Potosi, Mexico

The Bible is a book about God and His interaction with humanity, not a collection of animal facts or a biology textbook. Numerous species of animals, living and extinct, are not mentioned therein.

The Bible may, in fact, refer to dinosaurs. A creature called behemoth (Job 40:15) resembles some descriptions of dinosaurs. The leviathan (41:1ff) also resembles a dinosaur and is mentioned again in Psalm 74:14; 104:26; and Isaiah 27:1, where clues may explain its extinction.

We need not accept Big Bang, evolution, and multi-billion-year earth theory to accept the existence of dinosaurs. Organizations like Answers in Genesis provide compelling evidence for the co-existence of men and dinosaurs, both created on the same 24-hour day less than 10,000 years ago. (Some scientists who are Christians, however — notably Hugh Ross — believe that the earth may be much older than we have historically thought.)

The Bible is the final authority for faith, and scientific “findings” that contradict it are mistaken by definition. We must read Scripture carefully, however, and not discredit science simply because it doesn’t match traditional views. Most Christians, through faulty biblical interpretation, opposed Galileo’s discovery that the earth revolved around the sun and not vice versa.

— *Israel Steinmetz*
e-mail



www.comstock.com

Help for the

If you're recovering from great pain and loss, or helping someone who is, consider these points:

- ▶ After tragedy strikes so close to home, many people ask, "How can I serve a God who would allow this?" They often go through a personal religious crisis. This is normal.
- ▶ Christians are not immune to evil and suffering. We often experience hurt and confusion, hopelessness and helplessness, and sometimes wonder if God has abandoned us.
- ▶ Accept and deal with the guilt, anger, and confusion. To the Christian counselor or pastor, the problem of evil is an emotional problem as well as a religious one.
- ▶ In evaluating the cause of our suffering, we may ask if we contributed to it. Then we may ask if we can prevent it from happening again.
- ▶ To always blame bad things on human sin is misleading. Natural disasters and many diseases, for example, are not directly tied to our sins.
- ▶ Another overly simple reaction is to blame everything on Satan, without personal repentance. The truth is that we often add to the evil in the world.
- ▶ As every Christian counselor well knows, sin and pathology are closely intertwined. In our call to holiness, we must learn to hate sin in whatever form it comes, while still loving the sinner and seeing the image of God in all humanity.
- ▶ For saint and sinner alike, suffering can seem unreasonable and unjust. God doesn't really owe us anything, and it is His prerogative to go beyond justice to grace — His unmerited favor.
- ▶ Don't fall into the trap of thinking that God brings all suffering to teach us something or to bring some ultimate good. God is not the direct cause of all of our suffering, but He uses our brokenness before Him for ultimate good.
- ▶ Even in the midst of a fallen world, God's grace abounds. We are to cast all our cares on the One who cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).
- ▶ The mystery of hope lies in what is to come. Resurrection is our certainty that evil cannot exist forever. Looking forward to resurrection and appreciating God's present grace, we can give thanks in our circumstances.
- ▶ We should rely on the Lord both to keep us from evil and to overcome evil with good when it happens.
- ▶ We cannot respond to suffering passively. We are called to participate in the sufferings of Christ and to care for suf-

Sufferer

Practical ways to bear our burdens and those of others. **by Dr. Jim DeFrancisco**

fering people (2 Corinthians 1:5, 6). We do this not by showing how much we know, but by showing how much we care. Even if we feel inadequate and don't know what to say, our presence itself speaks encouragement.

- ▶ Be willing to listen. Don't try to rationalize or logically explain the painful circumstances as Job's friends did.
- ▶ Beware of judging and accusing. Ask questions and be sensitive.
- ▶ Avoid giving more reasons to worry or mouthing factual but insensitive statements like "We're all going to die someday." Saying "I know how you feel" isn't as helpful as saying "I really feel for you."
- ▶ We do not suffer apart from God's knowledge. The existence of a loving, powerful God and the reality of suffering are not irreconcilable, though they are paradoxical.

We cannot solve this dilemma, but we can remind those who suffer that God knows where they are and what they're going through (Matthew 10:29-31).

- ▶ In considering the nature of sin and suffering, we are called to be humble and compassionate. We must be wise in discerning truth from error in these matters.
- ▶ Suffering presents a choice. The sufferer can flee from it, rationalize it, or simply endure it. The one helping can reach out or walk away. May God give us the strength to make the right choice. **BA**

Dr. Jim DeFrancisco is a Christian teacher and counselor living with his wife, Sandy, in Mishawaka, IN.

Suffering: A Big Picture

continued from page 10

the basis of time and chance, we may experience the results of any of nature's forces at work, as did the millions of Southeast Asia recently. That's nobody's fault; it's just part of living on this planet. This is the environment in which we live and in which we generally thrive.

Acts of cruelty happen because someone decides to make them happen. God seems to be teaching us that, unlike Cain, we are our brother's keepers and that what we do, or permit others to do, affects all of us. Humanity, collectively, is interdependent. Every decision any individual makes and acts upon affects others. Individual acts have a ripple effect. We don't sin in isolation.

When someone decides to commit an evil act, all of us are affected. Sin's tsunamis break daily on the world's shores, creating enormous suffering all around. Some of us at least are learning that "no man is an island" and that everything we do affects everyone else.

God has set it up that way so that we will all learn that we must live, or die, with the consequences of our decisions. Such lessons, it seems, have eternal implications. **BA**

Brian Knowles lives in Monrovia, CA.

Broadening Our Prayers

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

For years I've regularly attended or visited churches that encourage people to share prayer concerns in some way: a sharing time during worship services, the church bulletin, a prayer chain. In recent years, e-mail has become a vehicle for communicating petitions. The people of God ought to share one another's burdens and pray for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25, 26; Romans 15:1-3; Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 6:18, 19).

But I believe these prayer requests say something about a church. They reflect the concerns that weigh on a congregation most heavily; they reflect what we think about, what we care about, what we worry about. And in this, I believe, there is cause for concern. Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34, NIV). What we ask others to pray about reflects what is most important to us. And I've observed that probably 80 to 90 percent of all prayer requests are about physical health problems. One might conclude that good health is the primary concern of Christians.

To be sure, we should pray for the sick. Also, people may be reluctant to speak publicly about deeper emotional or spiritual concerns and relationship problems. Medical problems are safe.

But what of sick souls? What about people we know and love who don't recognize God as their Creator and Jesus as their Savior and King? What of family members who have turned away from Christianity? Shouldn't there be just as much prayer concern for them as for those with physical maladies? I'm certain that, if asked, we would say we are very concerned about our non-Christian friends, relatives, neighbors, and fellow citizens. But I can't help but wonder if our affirmations of concern are belied by the fact that week after week we hear so few requests for the spiritual

health of others. And we hear so few requests for prayer support for believers who are actively witnessing to someone else.

It seems to me that many in the body of Christ in the Western world (including me) — perhaps in the entire world — have become so influenced by the world that our primary concerns, as reflected in our prayer requests, are physical ones. Is this really the case? Is this the way our Lord would have it?

I offer you this challenge. Every day in your personal prayer time, pray for the salvation of at least one non-Christian. Every time you receive an e-mail prayer request for a sick person, reply that you are praying for that person, but include a request of your own — a request for someone who needs the spiritual healing of Jesus' love. At church every time there's an opportunity to share prayer requests, make sure at least one is for persons or groups who don't know the Lord, and make sure another is for those who are actively ministering to such people.

If we begin to pray regularly about the spiritual well-being of people we know personally, and of the masses of humanity who have never heard the gospel, perhaps we will begin to *do* more to actively share the gospel. And more of the people we love will become part of the body of believers destined to spend eternity with God in a place free of pain, disease, mourning, and suffering (Revelation 21:3, 4).

Richard A. Wiedenheft, an editor-writer for *Focus on Truth*, *The Sabbath Sentinel*, and other Christian publications, now serves on staff of the *Bible Advocate*. He and his wife, Darlene, live near Falls, PA.

Bumble Bee

This big, angry bumble bee flew in our car.
We were driving, a family, for home.
My mom was allergic, could die from one sting,
So results were too serious to play.

My dad had to drive (it'd be bad all to die),
So he told my big brother to grab it.
I could tell from his face that his heart was ajar,
And he crinkled his mouth like a can.

Then waving and slapping and trying to catch
Or just push the thing out to free air.
This bee was an arrogant, devious one,
And he claimed our car's space for his own.

In darting and looping it seemed that he knew:
Mom's tight eyes, Dad's hard voice, Brother's fear.
And all I could do was to sit and to watch
As a courtship of death tangled on.

For minutes my brother grabbed nothing but trail,
Then the bee landed feet on Mom's flesh.
Now time came to crawl as the bee came to crawl
While it fondled the skin of her neck.

His slick, nodding head slowly turned on a swivel,
And his bloated back end dipped and tapped
All six hooking legs seemed like clasps as they
latched
While the barbs of a thorax pricked taut.

A whiny lament then intoned from tight lips
As a player so tickled her cords.
Emboldened by music of sinister tone,
Brother's hand found the courage to strike.

He captured the pest with the swipe of a cat,
And the wings, muffled now, sounded deep.
The captive one snarled and fussed in his cave.
"Just hold him" Dad yelled. "Don't let him
escape."

"But what if he. . ."
"Just keep your hand tight."
And then it got quiet — the scariest part.
All I heard was my mom's trembled breath.

I should have expected the next sound I heard.
You can't cage up a bee for too long.
The scream right beside me, too sharp to be play,
Hurt my heart and pushed deep in my bones.

Then Brother was crying and opened his hand;
The dazzler now slithered away.
A bloody, warm string of thick goo trailed behind;
He seemed eerily emptied of rage.

He started to fly slower on through our car.
"Don't worry, guys," Dad said. "He's all bumble
now."
And then two were crying; I added the third,
And big brother extended his palm.

And there in the middle the stinger was lodged,
And from there paths of blood trickled down.
He's been disarmed," said my dad. "He's got
nothing left."

"Dad, it hurts. Did you want him to sting me?"

"I did," said my dad. "It was part of the plan.
"What would have killed Mom, you could take."
And the bee buzzed around just as big as before,
But the proof in that hand couldn't lie.

He'd spent all he had, and still Brother had won:
That's how Father protected his Bride.

— Ryan Summers

Having disarmed the powers and authorities,
he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing
over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

When the Bottom

Experiencing trouble is a good time to separate truth from fiction.

Life undergoes a drastic reversal — a disaster, a great loss — and you find yourself asking . . .

Why me?

What now?

Where do I go from here?

Perhaps the house you worked so hard to get is in pieces, or ashes, and your possessions are scattered to the winds. Maybe you've sustained injury, said goodbye to a close friend or family member through death, or lost your job and financial security. You're wondering what will happen now that the bottom has fallen out of life.

Many answers may come to our troubled minds in times like these. But are they good answers? The rough places in life call for tough truth — biblical truth that gives hope and exposes fiction.

The boldfaced statements that follow are somebody's version of "truth." You have probably heard them stated by well-meaning people. We follow each statement with another take, in light of Christian Scripture.

This disaster came as punishment from God.

Probably fiction. The Bible does talk about God forming light and creating darkness, making peace and creating evil (Isaiah 45:7). This includes pain and suffering. By not removing evil from the world and by giving humans the option of choosing evil for themselves, God is, at least indirectly, responsible for both natural disasters and human troubles that befall us.

But God doesn't often match up natural tragedy with our personal sins on a one-to-one basis. Even natural elements, which He created exclusively good (Genesis 1), have the potential for evil and can bring suffering to many without regard to faith or conduct. Think tsunami.

While setbacks and sorrows can result from our poor choices or from the poor choices of others, many of life's storms fall randomly on all kinds of people. The Bible character Job, for example, lived rightly in the eyes of God and still experienced the worst of calamity: the loss of

his livestock, servants, children, and health (Job 1:13-22; 2:7).

No, disaster is not usually a punishment for sin.

You should give thanks for all things; everything that happens is good.

Fiction. Neither half of this statement is correct, although both parts come close to Bible words. Scripture says we should give thanks "in" everything, not "for" everything. The reason, obviously, is that not everything that happens in this life is good. Many bad things take place every day, and we certainly don't give thanks for them. However, we can give thanks in the midst of problems and disasters because God works in all circumstances to bring about something good for His people (Romans 8:28).

Trouble is no good reason for thanksgiving. A God who turns trouble to triumph is!

God won't give you a burden greater than you can bear.

Fiction. Read closely: The worst of life's hardships were intended to be more than you can bear — alone.

God knows our weakness and He knows our limits. He does promise that He will never give us more burdens than we can carry *with Him* (Matthew 11:28-30). Without God, any burden may be unbearable. We need His strength to endure it all.



Photo: J. K. Nakata, U.S. Geological Survey

Falls Out

God is always with His people, walking with them through the dark passages of life: sorrow, despair, depression, anxiety, gloom, physical or emotional pain. He promises that no matter how deep the waters of tragedy or how hot the fires of suffering, He will not let us drown or be burned (Isaiah 43:2). God bears our burdens *daily* (Psalm 68:19). But in order for Him to do so, we must cast the whole load on Him and refuse to carry it ourselves. The Bible says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7; see also Psalm 55:22).

Paul, a diehard missionary for Christ, wrote about his experiences. He described being “under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8). Paul knew the reason he faced such trials was so that he wouldn’t trust in himself but in God (v. 9).

Good comes out of bad.

Truth — a promise, in fact, for those who are believers in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28). This verse says that God is the mastermind working behind the scenes, fitting all things together for ultimately good results. With Him nothing is haphazard or by chance. Even before we were born, God determined good purposes for us as His children (Psalm 139:16). The Bible assures us that God knows what plans He has for us — plans for a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

God sees everything — not just our present pain, but our past and future as well. Though we cannot see it now, He has a design in mind to work the negative for positive results in His time and way. Helen Keller, for example, became deaf and blind when she was 19 months old. She struggled to overcome almost impossible odds through physical and emotional stress. But Helen became one of the world’s most admired women for her work among the blind and disabled.

Have you heard the saying “God has a wonderful plan for your life”? A realistic Christian revised it this way: “God has a plan for your life. It has a wonderful end, but it may not always seem so wonderful along the way.”

Tomorrow will be better.

Truth or fiction. People may say, “Everything will be OK,” but in reality, tomorrow could be worse in this uncertain world. Today’s rebuilding and regrouping can be lost again.

If that happens, a golden tomorrow still awaits those who hope in Christ — a tomorrow that will be infinitely better than today. This world is not our final home. If we’ve come to know Jesus Christ and trust His sacrifice for our sins, we’ll live in an eternity free from death and



destruction and pain and suffering. Paul even said that the sufferings we endure on earth can’t compare to the good things awaiting us for eternity (Romans 8:18).

Whatever the challenge or loss you face today, God knows about it and cares. Trust and obey Him through Christ, and the eventual victory — the eternal Home — is sure!

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Want to read more?

You can order the complete text of the new Light for Life tract, *When the Bottom Falls Out*, available through the Bible Advocate Press in April. Contact the BAP for more information.

Short Lives, Lifetime Lessons

When death visits a congregation — twice.
by Michael Smith



Phil and Eva Lawson

The congregation erupted in applause and excitement after Phil Lawson made his surprise announcement during prayer time in our Conroe, Texas, church. After nearly seven years of marriage, Phil and his wife, Eva, were expecting their first child. This couple made a habit of opening their home to teens and planning activities for the youth group.

Eva's pregnancy had typical challenges, but she managed them well and delivered a healthy baby girl in October 2002. But back home, she began to feel worse. A week later Eva was rushed to the hospital and slipped into a coma.

For ten long days our church and loving friends everywhere prayed for a miracle that did not come. Eva died less than three weeks after daughter Tearyn was born, and our hearts broke.

For most of our church youth, Eva Lawson was their first close acquaintance to die. It would not be their last.

New family

During this tragic time, the Williams family started attending church in Conroe. The Williamses spoke openly about how the church had dealt with Eva's death with strong faith. They encouraged us, ministered to us, and quickly became part of our church family.

Their son, John Bailey (J. B.), age 12, soon started coming to church with a change of clothes to go home with his new friends. A well-behaved young man who loved a good time, J. B. was thrilled to find boys his age in church. He visited our home frequently and always came to Sabbath class smiling and willing to participate.

Winter retreat

Our youth leaders, Jason and Rose Rodriguez, planned a winter retreat for the district youth beginning January 1, 2004, near Mineral Wells, Texas. J. B.'s bags were packed and his room cleaned days ahead.

That January 2 in northern Texas was a beautiful day. For the almost 200 youth, a variety of games was set up around the camp, and J. B. made the rounds playing each game multiple times. Those Friday p.m. "free time" activities were a dream come true for him.

After supper, as youth headed out to campfire, J. B. collapsed and did not respond. A similar thing had happened on a Saturday night back at Conroe: J. B. passed out after running. We had called the ambulance then, but he revived quickly and was fine when the paramedics arrived.

Soon after that first incident, J. B.'s parents took him to a specialist to make sure there was no major problem. J. B. had had heart surgery at two months, after being born with a faulty heart valve. The doctors said he would be normal after surgery, and after this checkup, they cleared him again.

Surely, he'll come around just like last time, I thought. But J. B. was not responding. One youth leader, Dusty Hinds, began CPR along with one of the camp's kitchen personnel, but there was no response. When the ambulance finally arrived, I called J. B.'s parents back home to let them know what was happening.

Shocking death

Elroy Gold, Jr., Jason Rodriguez, Wayne Hrenyk, and I arrived at the hospital shortly after the ambulance. We called J. B.'s parents again, prayed, waited, moved to a counseling room, prayed and waited some more. When the doctor came in, we knew it was bad news by the look on his face. He said he had tried everything he could to revive J. B. The doctor pronounced him dead at 8:40 p.m.

It was the news we could not imagine hearing. How could such a beautiful day turn so wrong? How could an energetic, full-of-life, 13-year-old boy die?

Back at camp, we asked the Conroe youth to step out under the night sky, around a picnic table. Somehow I found the breath to say, "J. B. died at the hospital."

Immediately, the tension burst into tears and screams, and the entire group was quickly awash in tears and disbelief.

We ended camp the next morning as parents from many places drove to be with their children. Dennis O'Banion drove the Williams family to Mineral Wells to meet with the doctor. We, too, wanted to meet with J. B.'s parents, but we were not sure how they

would feel about that. As it turned out, they were not only willing but wanted to meet.

About 25 parents and campers, mostly from Conroe, had gathered in a hotel conference room when J. B.'s father, mother, and sister came in. Just as he did when Eva died, Calvin Williams ministered to us. His thoughts were not about his own grief but about how much he wanted us to be encouraged. He told us that God is good even in the worst of times, that J. B. was a Christian, and that we would all see him someday in the kingdom — just as the Bible promises for those who love God. Instead of lashing out at God, this bereaved father delivered a message of faith to our children that will stick with them the rest of their lives.

Lessons

We made the long drive back to Conroe and crawled into bed around 10:00 Saturday night. It had been barely more than 24 hours since J. B.'s death, but it felt like a lifetime. J. B. was buried on January 8 near my

home. I drive by every day and think of him. I wonder what I could have done to prevent this from happening. I will never know.

I do know what I can do in the future. I can hug my three sons a little more. I can forgive them a little sooner when they do wrong. I can talk with them a little more and listen better when they are talking. I can be more patient with them when they struggle. I can cheer a little louder when they score a goal. I can be a better father, a better husband, a better example of Christ to them and to others I have the privilege of teaching.

Through the experience of losing Eva, then J. B., our youth have learned that life is short and can change quickly. I pray that our adult examples will guide them through their struggles and teach them that God is good even when our hearts hurt beyond belief. [BA](#)

Michael Smith, his wife, Janet, and their sons live in Willis, TX.



Andrew Smith, Kevin O'Banion, and J. B. Williams

by LeRoy and Hope Dais

Disciplined Spending

Mary is on an emotional high when she goes shopping. It is the highlight of her week. But shopping causes anxiety for Jane: *Is there enough money in the checking account to pay for my purchases?*

Does spending money push your anxiety button or give you a high? Do you enjoy shopping and purchasing products so much that you care nothing about how you will eventually pay for them?

Credit cards and easily accessible loans have caused many people to change their approach to spending during the past six decades. They have cast caution to the wind. Their failure to reconcile what they spend with what they earn has resulted in unbridled debts,

exploding numbers of bankruptcies, and devastated households.

Many shun a financial truism: To keep our financial household on a solid foundation, we must spend less than we earn. When the totals for these two categories are reversed, we become debtors and lose a portion of our liberty (Proverbs 22:7). We become servants to our creditors and to our uncontrolled desires for things we neither need nor can afford.

Discretion and discipline

A shopper must understand the difference between needs and wants. Needs are what he must have to live: food, clothing, housing, etc. Wants may range from things that enhance his

lifestyle to extravagant luxuries. Whether expenditure for a “want” is excessive may depend upon a person’s income. If he finds it difficult to evaluate whether his spending is self-centered and excessive, he should look at his support for gospel ministry and assistance to those in need.

The selection of items available to a shopper increases continually. Because the advertising industry uses powerful methods to promote products, a person doesn’t even have to enter a store to be enticed to buy. Most newspapers are more a buyer’s catalogue than they are news. TV commercials bombard viewers for what feels like half the time the set is on. To shield against such barrages, a person must continually distinguish between needs and wants.

Blessing or curse?

Until credit cards were introduced in the 1950s, purchasing on credit was more difficult than it is today. Now large banks are showering consumers with appeals to accept and use their credit cards. And most merchants readily accept payment via these plastic substitutes for money. They know that customers are likely to buy more when they have the convenience of using a card. One lady even commented, “Credit cards go so much further than money.”

A friend recently said that her daughter would soon graduate from college, not owing anything. In contrast, her daughter’s roommate has spent her college years buying anything she desires. She now owes \$70,000

on credit cards. Just think: owing such an enormous amount at graduation, before even entering the work force.

It's not that our friend's daughter wasn't familiar with credit; her parents had given her a card at age 16. While she still lived at home, her parents taught her the wise use of credit cards: All charges would be paid each month, or the card would be taken away. That discipline continued during her college years.

It takes both discretion and discipline to use credit cards properly, as a trustworthy convenience. If the balance builds month after month and the accumulating interest pushes the debt total skyward, such conveniences are a curse.

Training youth

When children want a certain toy, they want it now. Parents responding wisely will help their youngsters learn patience, endurance, and planning. When they are taught to put funds aside, they can then experience the joy of purchasing with their own money.

The amount of a purchase and the fund-accumulation period will depend on the child's age. A five-year-old shouldn't have to wait long to purchase a small toy, whereas a ten-year-old can work longer to earn funds for a bicycle.

As in all matters, parents must model what they hope to teach their offspring. Living one lifestyle, they can't teach their children another. In an instant gratification society, folks want things without delay. High school graduates want a new

car. Young couples want a house as large as their parents'. College graduates want a salary as big as a twenty-five-year career person's.

Plan ahead

Spending can be enjoyable and safe when people learn to plan ahead, save ahead, and, instead of following the bad example of others, live by God's principles to set a good example for others.

For those who aren't now budgeting, careful record keeping for several months will help you prepare a fairly accurate budget, categorizing such basic items as housing, food, clothing, transportation, recreation, etc. To follow biblical teaching on giving and saving, folks should take a percentage for tithes and offerings and another percentage for savings from income before dividing the remaining amount for expenditures.

A budget is not an unchangeable "law." It needs to be adjusted periodically to allow for changing circumstances. It is a valuable tool because it specifies how much we are allowed to spend for certain categories each month, and it raises a red flag when we overspend. A properly managed budget will keep us out of debt.

(Some prefer to call it a spending plan.)

God's help

God owns all things, including us (Psalm 24:1). He provides strength, health, work, and income. As stewards of the resources He provides us, we are accountable to Him for how we spend money and use possessions.

As we turn our cares and worries over to God and trust in Him completely, He will give us peace and contentment in carrying out our responsibilities.

LeRoy and Hope Dais serve the Conference offices in Denver, CO.

Becoming Debt-Free

If you have debts other than a mortgage on your home, you are by no means alone. But you don't want to be a part of that multitude any longer than you have to! Because debt payments are a burden, you'll want to work hard to become debt-free. Here are some steps to reaching that goal:

- Pray for the Lord's help.
- Set up a budget.
- Determine what you could sell to help reduce debt.
- Make a list of what you owe.
- Set up a debt repayment schedule (begin with the smaller high-interest debts).
- Control credit card use.
- Change your lifestyle; be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5). The Lord will reward your determination.

— *LeRoy and Hope Dais*



The Blame for Pain

What God can do when we accept responsibility for our own suffering. by Julio Martinez

Skjold Photographs

On a certain Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples saw a man who had been born blind. The disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2).

People in those days commonly believed that God punished sinners with diseases. Because this man’s blindness was from birth, the disciples couldn’t quite decide who to blame. Either God punished the man for his sins before he was born, or his parents were sinners and God punished them with a blind child.

Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (v. 3). Sin wasn’t the cause; the man was

born blind for another reason: so that God’s glory could be more clearly seen. With a word and touch from the Great Physician, the man saw for the first time in his life.

The same question comes up often today: Who’s to blame for our pain? Though Jesus pointed His disciples away from human culpability in the blind man’s case, and though the suffering caused by natural disasters is not anyone’s fault, in other tragic cases the blame for pain must be placed squarely on ourselves. Perhaps we have failed to control our passions, as Samson did. His weakness for women and penchant for violence kept him in constant trouble and brought about his captivity, blindness, and death.

Perhaps we’re suffering the sad consequences of an illicit love affair, as David experienced. An unforgiving heart, an unhealthy habit — the endless list proves that much of our sadness and struggle in life is of our own making.

Here we’ll look at “the blame game” and what God can do for us in those instances where suffering points to our own attitudes, behaviors, and choices as its cause.

God

The blame game often begins far from self: We point to the supposed absence of any divine control. Those who think terrible situations in our world happen because there is no God take this tack. If He did exist, His goodness wouldn’t let evil, suffering, and injustice prevail.

Even those who admit the existence of God may blame Him for what they perceive as His severe and unjust nature that permits cruel happenings on earth. In their minds, God could not be the good and loving Being the Bible proclaims Him to be. If He were, then evil and suffering couldn’t exist. His goodness wouldn’t allow it. God should protect good people so that nothing bad could ever happen to them.

Divine prevention

We also point a finger at God’s failure to prevent pain and sadness, even when it results from our own poor choices. Think about this. What would our world be like if God didn’t allow human-caused suffering?

“No! Adam and Eve, don’t eat from that tree.”

“Stop, Cain! Don’t kill Abel.”

“Ham [father of Canaan], don’t look at your father’s nakedness.”

“David, do not lie with the wife of Uriah.”

“You in the city of Corinth, don’t take advantage of your brother.”

Such dictation would have its advantages: Nothing bad could ever happen to anyone from another person, and all suffering that has its source in human behavior would be eliminated. That would be terrific!

Or would it? How would we feel if God stopped us from doing wrong each time we thought about it? If everyone did only what God wanted, we would have fewer problems, but we wouldn’t have free will. And it wouldn’t make much sense if God eliminated a portion of the world’s evil and suffering by forcing us to do what’s right, would it?

Instant punishment

Or perhaps God should be blamed for His failure to send immediate justice when human failure resulted in suffering and evil. Say a careless driver loses control of a vehicle and kills a little boy on his way to school. Presto! A heavenly Judge appears and takes the driver’s life. Would the parents of the little boy still suffer? You bet they would.

Immediate punishment, then, would not be the solution. Not only would it fail to prevent the consequences of wrongdoing but also would not give us any opportunity to repent. And God

couldn’t show His love and mercy and goodness to us. If God had justly punished Adam and Eve the instant they sinned, there would be no human race today.

Because He loves us, God is patient and waits for us to repent of wrongdoing. Until we do, some sin and suffering will still happen; we cause it! God’s goodness is supposed to move us to repentance, not to a denial of His existence nor a belief that He is unjust (Romans 2:4).

Ultimate justice

God has a plan to end evil and suffering for all humanity. Soon and very soon, He will bring justice for those who have suffered in spite of their faith in Christ and obedience to God. And He will bring another kind of justice to those who have suffered and caused others pain through unbelief and sin, without repentance. He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by His son Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31).

God has determined that each of us will stand before Him on that day to give account (John 5:22; Romans 14:10-12). If something bad has happened to a good person, it will be judged on that day, and justice will be carried out (Romans 12:19b). God is going to judge not one person but the entire world in fairness, making right all the wrongs of the present age. He will bring comfort to those who are suffering and do them justice: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

The sources of pain and

death in the natural world will be repaired as part of the reconciliation of Christ (Romans 8:18-23; Ephesians 1:10), and natural catastrophes will become headlines of the past. God will deal with evil, suffering, and the bad things that happened to good people as it pleases Him. Perfect justice will be done in His time. No more will there be any suffering by our own hands, nor anyone suffering for no cause, but all things will be made new for the glory of God and the joy of humanity.

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

Then, as with the blind man, God’s glory will be fully seen by us. We can wait for that day to come! **BA**

Julio Martinez, his wife, Brenda, and their three daughters live in Montreal, Quebec, where he serves as lay pastor of the Church.

God is going to judge not one person but the entire world in fairness, making right all the wrongs of the present age.

Gospel birth and growth are matched in a terrific twosome from one pen . . .

Luke and Acts

Often overlooked about the New Testament is that it contains a two-volume set on the origins of Christianity, written by a medical doctor. Luke was the beloved physician and part-time traveler with Paul who penned the Gospel by his name, as well as the book of Acts. Luke's command of the Greek language and his knowledge of the political history and geography of Rome are of rare, high quality.

Luke and Acts are about the same length. Together they make up 28 percent of the total New Testament — slightly more than all 13 letters of Paul combined. They also share several characteristics. First, both reveal the author's meticulous care and research regarding time and place; Luke was a historian. Second, they reveal his concern for all races and genders — not just for Jews; Luke was a humanitarian. And third, both Luke and Acts display Luke's dedication to excellence. The best is all he wrote!

The second of this fine pair is sequel to the first. Luke's Gospel

records Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection to ascension. In Acts he picks up the same story with Christ's ascension and carries it from the Day of Pentecost through the early expansion of Christian faith: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and finally Rome.

Footnote: Despite the high quality of Luke's literature and the invaluable contribution he makes to our grasp of those first century years that changed our world forever, his name does not appear in either writing.

Luke, Mark, and Matthew are Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew and Mark stand closest in content, Luke also shares much in common with them. However, Luke records more than 30 sayings, parables, and events (in chs. 9—19) not found in another Gospel. Further, Luke's accounts of the birth of John the Baptist (ch. 1) and the birth and childhood of Jesus (ch. 2) are unparalleled.

Acts stands alone as inspired church history — the only biblical report of the apostles after

hearing the Great Commission on the lips of their ascending Lord. Although by no means a complete record nor even a modest biography of the twelve apostles, its straight-line record of the growth of the gospel north and then west across the Mediterranean world reflects Luke's care as historian, geographer — and theologian.

It is not the facts of Acts that pose questions but the explanation and applications thereof. Today's interpreter asks, "Do events in this book serve as mere *descriptions* of the early church, or do they also serve as *prescriptions* for the present church?" This is the problem of biblical precedents. Such practices as baptism of infants, weekly Lord's Supper, election of congregational deacons, tongues-speaking, and even snake-handling have been taught or defended on the basis of incidents in Acts.

The question is, do the Acts narratives function only as a report of what once happened under the control of God's Spirit? Or do these incidents also function in a normative way to tell us what might happen again, or even should happen, among us in the twenty-first century? Thoughtful Bible students have concluded that what is only narrated or described in Acts does not function in a prescriptive or normative way unless it can be demonstrated that the author intended it to function in that way, or unless it is explicitly given as an imperative elsewhere in Scripture.

Ten Days to Paradise

It was not a high and holy place, but Jesus spent eternity there one week.

On Friday He rode into town, this rabbi from Nazareth, and a crowd went out to meet Him. They knew Him from Galilee where He exorcised demons and overruled the deep, and from Bethany where He returned life to Lazarus who lacked it four days. As He entered the eastern gates on a white donkey, some thought it the inauguration of a new king. People sang. Praises rang. Children played. Flowers fell. We watched in admiration and hope, while some frowned.

On Sabbath He worshipped at the temple, cleansed it with white-hot anger, and restored the house of prayer. The crowd was horrified at the frenzy, especially its leaders. Who was this Man to overturn their temple? We watched and held our breath while they fled the violence and plotted vengeance.

On Sunday and Monday He returned to teach, and they stood by with counterpoint. By what authority? John's baptism? Greatest commandment? Whose Son is Christ? These were their tests, their taunts, their tricks. His temple answers and parables mystified them,

deepening their jealousy and evil resolve. His prophetic seminar from the Mount of Olives mystified us, and we marveled.

On Tuesday He dined with His disciples. Final Passover; first Lord's Supper. Breaking the bread, drinking the cup, bowing at the feet of betrayers and deniers, He blessed us with His love, joy, peace; He promised us the Comforter. They were outsiders to the Upper Room, perfecting plans and waiting their time. We sang a hymn, followed Him to the prayer garden, and soon fell asleep.

On Wednesday He faced down 15 hours of fiery hell, starting at midnight. From prayer to betrayal: swords, clubs, a kiss. Abandonment and false accusation. Trial and denial. Scourging . . . scorning . . . spitting. Despised and rejected, He carried the cross and received its nails in His flesh. Like a criminal king, He reigned there, flanked by thieves. Crown of thorns; curtain torn. They exulted, celebrated, paid the promised silver, gambled for His clothes. We hid, as it were, our faces, and He died alone.

On Thursday and Friday He slept cool and hard in a borrowed tomb, His pillow a stone. They sealed the place, set the

guard, secured the scene. We watched from afar, prepared spices to anoint His body, prepared ourselves for Sabbath, nursed our broken hearts, and wondered at heaven's silence.

On Sabbath He rested a third day, the seventh of His Father, until Hades exploded His release. Coming to visit the tomb at sunset, we felt the earthquake, saw the angels, heard their announcement, and ran to report it with astonishment, bewilderment, disbelief. Heaven's grace had its final word, and hell was done.

Early on Sunday, while we still wavered between hide and seek, agony and ecstasy, He walked, talked, and ate with us, much like before. Gently confronting Mary's tears, Thomas' doubts, and Peter's guilt, He showed Himself alive by irrefutable proofs for 40 days — and it was enough. Because He lives, so did we!

It was not a pretty town or time, but we found paradise there.

— Calvin Burrell

The Church of God (Seventh Day) will observe the memorial of Christ's death at sunset on Friday, April 22, in each congregation. Believers are invited.

*As I loved John, so is My love unto thee;
Dread nothing, fear no one; all grace
surrounds you,
And naught will ever separate you
from Me.*

*Not Satan nor vicious principalities —
Take rest, have peace; I, Jesus, will
crown you.
As I loved John, so is My love unto thee.*

*Soaring peak, abyss, crises now or to be;
In My name, triumph's bright bugle shall sound through,
And naught will ever separate you from Me.*

*Though yet in a pane darkened you dimly see,
Soon, My friend, face-to-face sitting down, we two.
As I loved John, so is My love unto thee.*

*Dying, living, heartbreak, or catastrophe,
Gun or persecution: They'll not confound you,
And naught will ever separate you from Me.*

*Be there any sickness, pain, or poverty,
My blessings will always abound toward you.
As I loved John, so is My love unto thee,
And naught will ever separate you from Me.*

Francis Freed

CoG7 in Action



What's new with . . .

➔ **SWORD**

- Activities at the G. C. convention

➔ **National FYC**

- April 20-23 National Youth Week and Hunger Lock-In

Publications

- Support the BA in May

Spring Vale Academy

- May 27-29 graduation weekend, Owosso, Michigan

G. C. Convention

- July 4-9, Denver, Colorado



SWORD

Sharing the Word and Offering a Real Difference

Christy Lang, Director

SWORD, the young adult ministry of the Church, is open to those 18-35, single or married. Young adults serve our church in many areas — local, district, and Conference-wide. Pioneer Missionary Training team members are mostly from SWORD. LITES and CoG7 Web teams, too, involve people of SWORD age. Your donations support their ministries through retreats, convention programs, and service projects.

Sign up for e-newsletter

Are you between 18 and 35, or do you work with young adults? Keep current on SWORD events and info with an e-mail newsletter in your inbox. Simply go to www.cog7.org, then select the "Discussion" menu and "Mailing Lists" from the submenu. Choose the "SwordALL" list to subscribe to the SWORD e-newsletter.

Volunteers needed

SWORD is looking for people with a heart to serve young adults in the Eastern Canada, Western Canada, and Northeast districts. Know anyone interested in filling one of these representative positions? Contact the SWORD director: 319-365-2334 or sword@cog7.org.

Program at G. C. convention

Information about the SWORD program at the 2005 convention is on the SWORD Web site. Visit <http://sword.cog7.org> for more about young adults in Denver this summer and about helping them stay faithful and active.

National FYC

Kurt and Kristi Lang, Directors

The heart: It's at the very center of our being. Without this little fist-sized organ pumping in our physical bodies, we cannot live. And without the heart of Jesus at the center of our pursuit for the meaning of life, our spiritual bodies cannot live. Our purpose for living takes a continued pursuit into the heart of Jesus, the central issue of life itself.

Youth (ages 13-22) who attend the July 4-9 convention in Denver can experience this journey as we delve deeply into knowing the Jesus who gave us life.

Theme: "Pursue the Heart of Jesus"

- Passionate praise and worship
- Dynamic workshops by the best youth workers
- Abstinence and purpose workshops by Lakita Garth (www.clubvarsity.org)
- Concert by Lauren Evans (www.laurenevans.com)
- Unique social and service opportunities in the Denver area
- Motivating youth worker workshops

Go to our NFYC Web site (<http://fyc.cog7.org>) for up-to-date information on G. C. '05!



'Youth Flash'

Youth Flash is a weekly e-message to encourage and equip people ages 13-22 in their daily walk with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Please encourage youth in your church to sign up!

If you are a pastor or youth worker, *Youth Flash* is the best way to stay informed on National FYC. You'll get ideas for Bible studies and topics of interest to youth. Enjoy great devotional thoughts, jokes, inspiring quotes, music reviews, and more by signing up at <http://cog7.org/mailman/listinfo/youth>. Do it today!



Missed an issue? *Youth Flash* archives can be seen at <http://home.cog7.org/ministries/nfyc/youthflash/>.

NFYC e-mail: nfyc@cog7.org

Men in Ministry

The following men were recently approved by the License and Credentials Committee for ministerial license and vocational ministry in the Church:

Isaias Aleman, Austin, Texas; Alexander Ciurana, Houston, Texas; Nauldy Henry, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Rafael Parra, Haines City, Florida; Neftali Retana, Los Angeles, California; Abel Salazar, San Antonio, Texas; Clinton Thompson, Waterbury, Connecticut; Juan Velis, Rancho Dominguez, California; Ernesto Mendoza, Las Vegas, Nevada.

General Conference Convention

Preachers and topics for the main worship services July 4-9 in Denver, Colorado, are . . .

Tuesday: Elder Al Haynes - "A Spirit-Filled Heart"

Wednesday: Elder Lynn Taylor - "Heart of Discipleship"

Thursday: Elder Antonio Vega - "A Heart for the Lost"

Friday: Elder Dale Lawson - "A Heart of Compassionate Service"

Sabbath a.m.: Elder Loren



Spring Vale Academy seniors (above, L to R):

Daniel Chesney - Harrisburg, PA; Angela Alvarez - Robstown, TX; Kezia Steinmetz - Yakima, WA;

Mitch Coulson - Holland, MI; Heather Pereault - Owosso, MI; Ryan Miller - Kentwood, MI; Kelsi O'Banion - Conroe, TX; Brian Moten - Saginaw, MI; Josh Edwards - Port Austin, MI; Lea Acosta - (not pictured) - Crystal City, TX. Graduation exercises are planned for May 27-29 at the Owosso, MI, campus.

The SVA Flames (right) win first place in the 26th Annual Flames Classic Invitational. Senior Brian Moten won MVP.



Stacy - "A Heart for Unity"

Sabbath p.m.: Elder Whaid Rose - "A Heart for Worship"

Prayer partners are needed for these speakers and for the entire convention. If you will pray and fast, please contact planning chairperson Michael Vlad: mdvlad@hotmail.com.

Growth in North Carolina

On Super Sabbath, January 8, the Statesville church saw its sanctuary filled as over 300 from North Carolina and Georgia came together for praise, fellowship, and edification. Elder Whaid Rose gave the keynote message for the afternoon service, focusing on the kingdom of God.

The worship team led in songs, both Spanish and English. Pastor Jeff Endecott gave the morning devotion focusing on our unity in Jesus Christ. The day ended with a prayer of blessing by Pastor Rose as pastors and lay leaders knelt at the altar, then ministered to all who came for special prayer.

Have you registered for the convention July 4-9?

Please do **one** of the following:

- E-mail your name and address to convention@cog7.org.
- Fax your name and address to 303-452-0657.
- Call 877-264-7329 to leave your name and address.
- Write us at P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.
- Register online at www.cog7.org.



Pastors and leaders of the Church in India are shown with William C. Hicks, director of Missions Ministries, and Ramon Ruiz, president of the International Ministerial Congress. More on Elder Hicks and Ruiz' missions trip to India and Southeast Asia, February 20-March 4, will appear in the June BA.

Calendar of Events

- April 16 - Super Sabbath, Port St. Lucie, FL
- April 22 - Annual Lord's Supper Service in every church
- April 20-23 - National Youth Week and Hunger Lock-In (541-995-8678 or nfyc@cog7.org)
- April 23 - Oklahoma Quarterly Fellowship in Fairview
- April 29 - May 1 - Southeast Women's Retreat (772-468-0860)
- April 29 - May 1 - Colorado (Central District) Women's Retreat (303-659-7000)
- May 5 - National Day of Prayer in the U.S.
- May 6-8 - Men's Forum, Jasper, AR (870-446-5736)
- May 20-22 - Singles and Young Married Couples (ages 18-35) Conference at Camp Carter, Fort Worth, TX; contact Jacqueline at 405-473-7227 or sword-southwest@cog7.org.
- May 29 - June 2 - MTS intensive mobile classrooms, Dallas, TX (Spanish); Owosso, MI (English); contact 303-452-7973 or training@cog7.org.
- June 12-18 - Dover Family Camp near Kingfisher, OK
- June 14-19 - Midwest Youth Camp at Mark Twain State Park, Hannibal, MO; contact Tim Kendrick (972-880-2740; t-kendrick1@ti.com)

End of a Journey

Harold A. Walker, a minister of the gospel who served the Church in New York City for many years, died January 3, 2005, at the age of 83. Beginning his ministry with the Jamaican Conference, Elder Walker joined the ranks of the North American Ministerial Council after migrating to the United States. His last pastorate was at the Brooklyn Community Church of God (Seventh Day), where he was succeeded by Elder Whaid Rose in 1984. Recently preceded in death by his oldest child, Elder Walker is survived by his wife, Joyce, and two younger children. Services were held in Brooklyn on January 9, with interment at the Walker estate on the Island of Jamaica.

Ministries Training System

From 300 to 400 members are attending regional classrooms in 2005, lifting the level of Bible and ministry skills around the Church. Among this group, 100 or more men sense God's call to fully prepare for pastoral service. For them, intensive mobile sessions help clarify ministerial calls, outline a study track toward vocational ministry, and move quickly toward that goal.

Intensive sessions for prospective pastors are scheduled in Dallas, Texas, and Owosso, Michigan (both May 29 - June 2); in Denver, Colorado (July 4-8); in Sis-Q Meadows, Oregon (September 1-5); and La Puente, California (September 4-8). To pre-register for any of these, e-mail training@cog7.org.

International Tour

Portugal

Historically, Portugal is a heavily Catholic country of ten million people, where the Protestant Reformation was slow to make itself felt. As far as the church knows, no organized Christians there kept the seventh day before the early twentieth century, when a Seventh-day Adventist missionary, Paul Meyer of Switzerland, arrived. He met several people interested in studying God's Word, and the first Adventist temple opened in Lisbon.

In 1928 Alberto Mendes and other brethren left the Adventist church over importance given to the writings of Ellen White. As a result, three denominations of non-Adventist, Sabbath-observing churches remain in Portugal: Igreja Universal de Jesus Cristo (IUJC), Igreja de Cristo, and Congregación Cristã de Portugal (CCP).

Around 1955 contacts were made between the church's first pastor, Francisco Navalho, and leaders of the Church in Denver, Colorado: Charlie Taylor, W. H. Olson, and A. B. Craig. But these contacts were not pursued further.

Since 1995 IUJC and CCP have made cooperative efforts leading to publication of literature, exchange of preachers, and joint services. In 2000 IUJC and CCP resolved to create an alliance and requested admission to the International Ministerial Congress. The church's objective is to promote cooperation between churches identified with the "seal of God" (Revelation 12:17; 14:12) and unify efforts to preach the true gospel all over the world, using the love of Christ and faithfulness to the commandments of God.



Alliance of the Churches of God (Seventh Day)

Lay pastors (5) - Manuel Martins, Manuel Santos, Paulo Coelho, Vitor Quinta, Modesto Aguiar

Members - around 120

Churches and missions - Lisbon (2), Almada, Baixa da Banheira, Alverca, Porto, Torres Vedras

Web site - www.iujc.pt (Portuguese, English, Spanish)

Radio broadcast - 30 minutes per week on a local station

Gospel music group - Jubal, with one CD

Written tools (Portuguese) - *Comprender* ("Understanding") magazine, *Boletim Informativo* (monthly paper on Church news), Bible study booklets

Social support - visitation, medical visitation at home, financial and food donations

International Ministerial Congress - cooperation with churches in Europe

Main problems now - materialism and indifference to God's work; prayers are needed!

Present main tasks - prayer, knowledge of God's Word, evangelization

By tradition, the Church members, pastors, and deacons are people who, besides their activity in the ministry, have their own professional work in society and do not get paid for any services rendered to the Church. On the contrary, they contribute to sustain Church expenses.

You can contact the Portugal church through the following addresses: Apartado 9827, 1911 Lisboa Codex, Portugal; e-mail: mail@iujc.pt.

Future of your church look a little “empty”?



It doesn't have to! Your partnership with the
National FYC youth ministry will keep our
church “swinging” into the next millennium!

Church of God (Seventh Day)
NFYC — Youth Ministry
(303) 452-7973
nfyc@cog7.org • <http://fyc.cog7.org>

**We need your talents,
time, and support.
Contact us today!**

Bible Advocate
(USPS 054-160)
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
USA

Periodicals
Postage Paid
at Broomfield,
Colorado and
additional offices