Adventist World November 18 WOP TUESDAY

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FLAG: Tuesday

HEAD: The Difference Scripture Makes

SUBHEAD: How can we know God, unless we know His story in the Bible?

By Karen Holford

Word count: 1187 [incl. article: 1064; biography: 24, Prayer Suggestions: 68 and endnotes: 31]

My husband is looking for a home for our young family. We have small children and the new town is far away. So Bernie is searching alone. He tries to look at houses through my eyes. He explores each room carefully, imagining our life together. Is the kitchen big enough? Is the yard safe for young children? Will everyone be happy here?

After 14 years of marriage and seven different homes, Bernie knows exactly what I like. He knows what I will appreciate about each home, what will annoy me, and what we will be able to change.

Eventually Bernie finds the home where our family will live, love, laugh, cry, and learn for the next 11 years. It’s an exciting moment when he takes me on a guided tour through our new home. I can see that he has looked at everything through my eyes. It needs gallons of paint and a good scrub. But it’s perfect. His careful choice was based on everything he had learned from living with me, listening to me, and studying me closely every day of our life together.

**Facing Complexity**

Choosing a new home is relatively easy. Life, however, is filled with many decisions that are far more challenging. “My wife has been offered a three-year contract to work in another country. She will be able to come home only twice a year. But it will pay for our children’s education. Is it a good idea?” “Should we become pioneer missionaries?” “I’m in love with an amazing man! How will I know if God wants us to get married?” “My husband beats me and our children. How can I keep us safe?”

How can we make the “best” decisions when we are enmeshed in a web of conflicting information, beliefs, and ideas? And the “best” decisions from a human perspective are not always the best decisions from God’s perspective.

**Invitation to intimacy**

The Bible does not give clear, step-by-step instructions for every challenge in our lives. It would be impossible to write a manual for every situation, from the beginning of time until now. People, cultures, and dilemmas change as the world changes.

The Bible is far richer and more useful than a do-it-yourself manual for life. It is an invitation from God to search for Him and find *Him* in every story and every situation. The Bible is filled with detailed pictures of His loving character. These snapshots are like separate frames of a brain scan. Only when we put all the images together can we build a virtual model of the brain and start to understand it as a whole.

The Bible helps us discover the many dimensions of God’s loving character and understand how central He wants to be in our lives, and how to love Him and each other.

We asked our children to help us create a list of adjectives describing God’s character. “Almighty!” “Accepting!” “Brave!” “Bountiful!” “Creative!” “Caring!” We scribbled down the almost 200 words as fast as they could call them out. The atmosphere exploded into joy. We knew that God was incredible. While our human vocabulary was barely adequate to describe His wonder, glory, and love, we suddenly had a much richer picture of our breathtaking God.

**Face to Face**

“The whole Bible is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ,” wrote Ellen White. “Received, believed, obeyed, it is the great instrumentality in the transformation of character. It is the grand stimulus, the constraining force, that quickens the physical, mental, and spiritual powers and directs the life into right channels.”\*

By reading the Bible, and by focusing on the character of God perfectly expressed through the life of Jesus, we come face to face with the Source of all the love in the universe, and we become changed into His likeness. The more closely we become acquainted with Him, the more closely we can listen to His guidance in our lives.

**Through God’s Loving Eyes**

The more intimately we know God, the more deeply we experience how much He loves us and everyone else. When we view our messy lives from God’s loving and patient perspective we are more likely to make wise decisions.

When we face complex situations and we have no idea what to do, we can try listing the names of everyone involved. Then imagine that we are looking at each person, including ourselves, through God’s eyes, and ask:

What are this person’s spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical needs?

What is the best way to show this person God’s love?

Which aspects of His character does God want me to develop in this situation?

How will my responses inspire others to come closer to God?

We can use prayerful reflection to guide us through the complexity of the situation. Remember, even if we don’t make the perfect decision, God still loves us and wants the best for us. He will continue to work His loving purpose through our imperfect choices, just as He did with Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; Joseph and his brothers; David and Bathsheba.

**The Greatest of These Is Love**

Of all the magnificent characteristics of God, love is the greatest. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. . . .Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:7-11).

The most important reason for becoming more closely acquainted with God is that we can experience His kind, patient, forgiving, comforting, accepting, generous love, and fall in love with Him. Once we experience this amazing love for ourselves, we are much better equipped to share His love with the world, and to help others fall in love with Him too.

When life is unbearably painful and our hearts break, our greatest comfort comes from our experience of God’s loving character. We discover that He cares deeply about our tragedies and struggles (Ps. 34:18); He notices every tear we shed (Ps. 56:8); and He understands our vulnerabilities (Ps. 103:13-18). He longs for the day we can live with Him in heaven and He will wipe away all our tears (Rev. 21:1-4).

*Karen Holford is qualified in occupational therapy, family therapy, and systemic psychotherapy. She is family ministries director for the Trans-European Division.*

**Suggestions for Prayer:**

1. Pray for God to help you see how He is lovingly guiding you to answers in His Word to your real-life questions.

2. Ask God to help you develop into His likeness as you focus on His love in the Word.

3. As you study His Word, pray that God will reveal His love to you, and shine His love through you into the lives of others.

(Endnotes)

\*Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character and Personality*, (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1977), vol. 1, pp. 93, 94.