

A List to Remember

The train was pulling out of the station as I was trying to locate my seat. The cars have narrow hallways on one side and small compartments on the other in which bench seats face each other. As the cars rocked and the wheels made that familiar “click click” sound on the tracks, I found my seat. Soon a German college student situated himself next to me.

He spoke to me in German and I replied in English. As soon as he learned I was an American, he seized the opportunity to practice his English!

“Where are you going?” he asked with a deep German accent.

“I am headed to Romania,” I replied with a smile.

“Why would you want to go there?”

“I am the Director of a mission organization,” I explained. “We do mission work there.”

“You are a Christian?” he said with a skeptical look on his face, “and you believe in God?”

“Yes.”

“How can you believe in a God you have never seen? Nor can you prove even exists?” he asked with a wry look on his face.

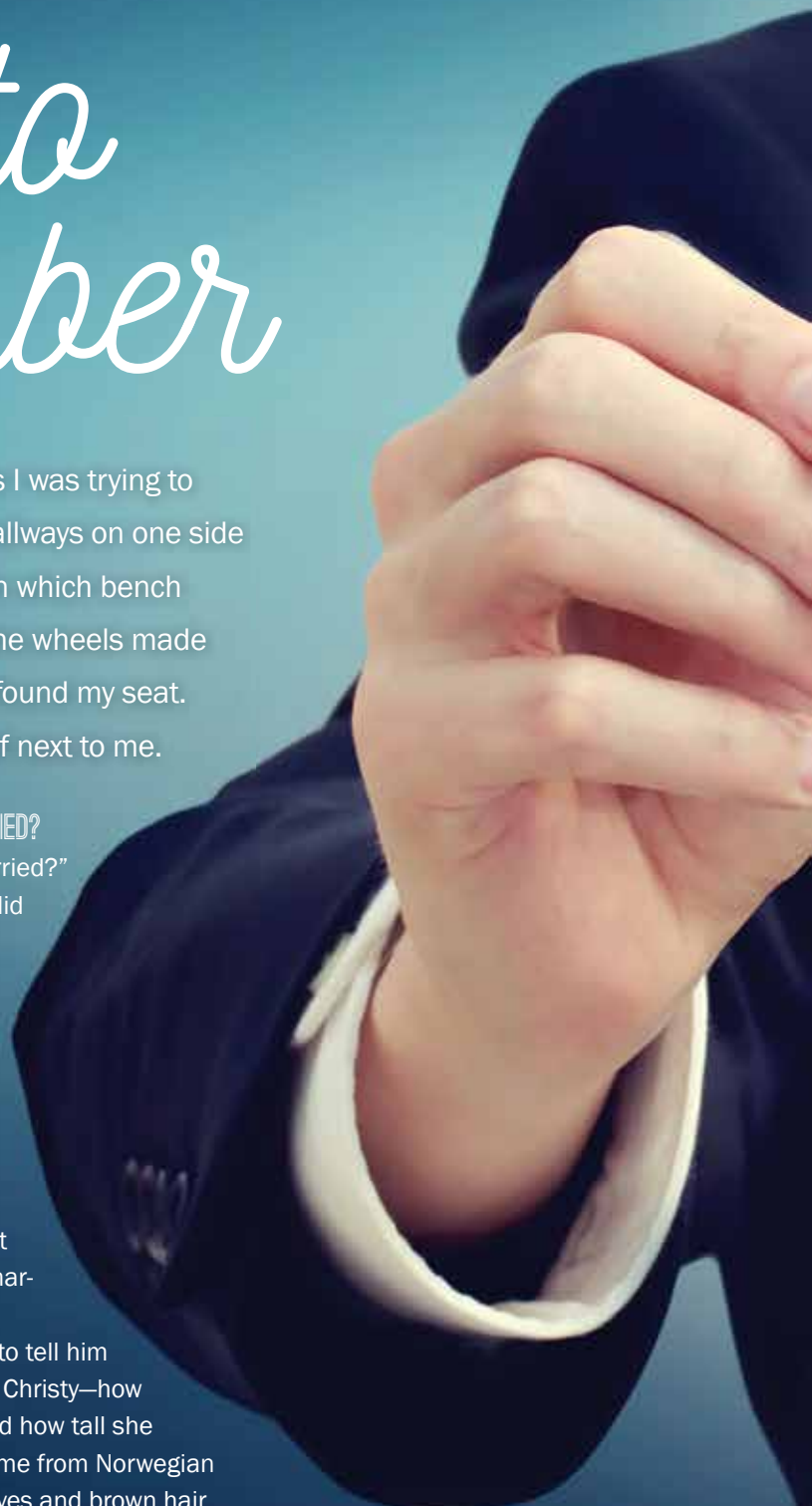
I looked at him with a big smile on my face and *I did not answer!*

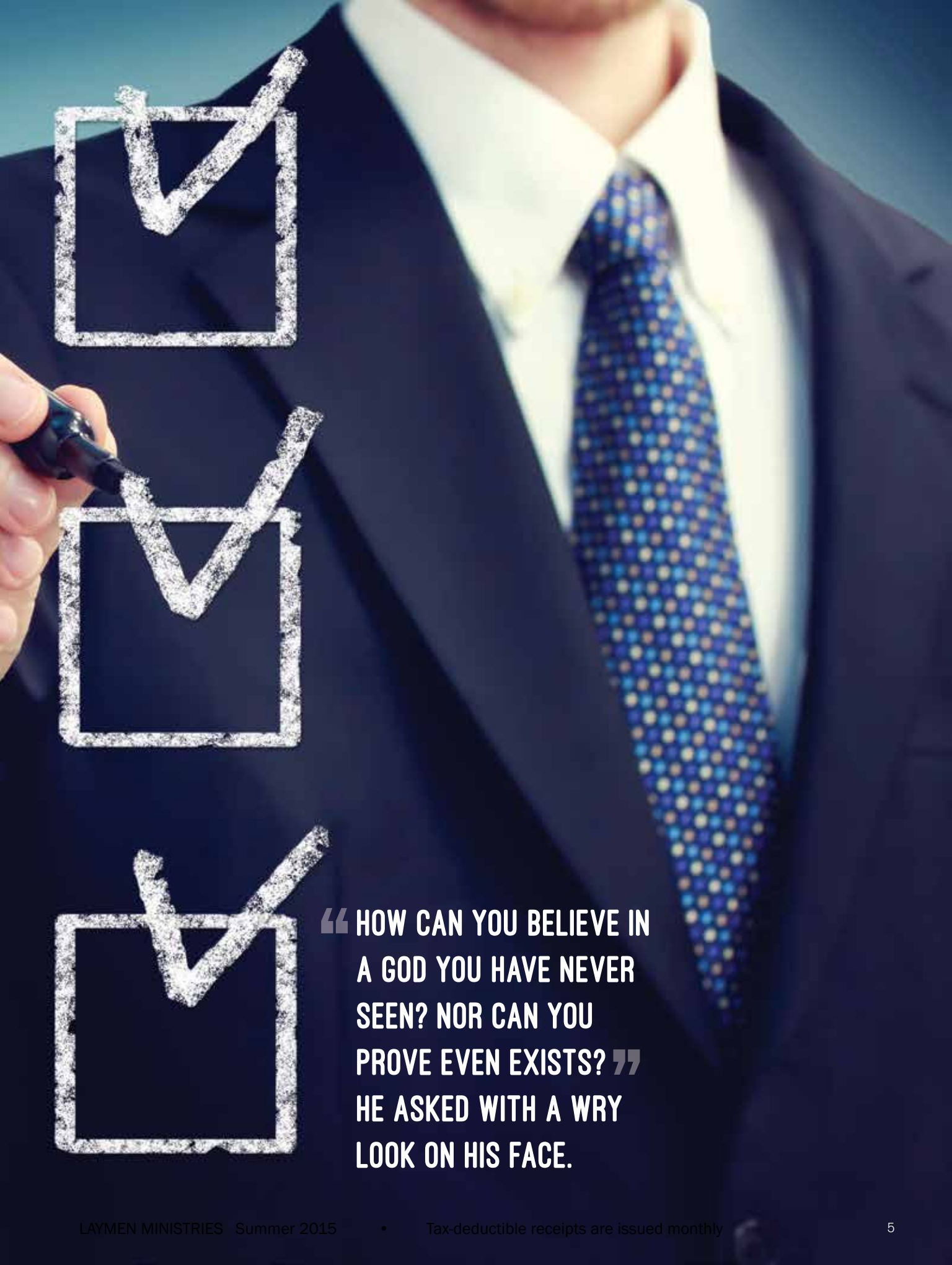
ARE YOU MARRIED?

“Are you married?”

I asked as if I did not hear his previous question. A big grin spread across his face as he said, “When I graduate, I will look for a good wife! How about you? Are you married?”

I proceeded to tell him about my wife, Christy—how she looked, and how tall she is. How she came from Norwegian stock, brown eyes and brown hair, and that we have 4 kids. I told him about home cooked food and how she puts up with all my traveling, etc. After a lengthy discussion, he looked





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with puppy eyes and said, “She is a wonderful wife. I would like to find a wife like her!”

I looked him right in the eye and then asked this question, “Do you really believe I have a wife?”

“Yes!” he said.

“How can you believe that when you have never met my wife nor can you prove she exists?” I probed.

He looked at me in shock! The point was made. He realized one can believe in someone or something that they have never seen or can prove exists!

FLIP FLOP!

Let’s flip flop the whole story—I mean literally turn the whole story upside down. Let’s say that after I told this German student about my wife, he then proceeded to try to convince me that I really wasn’t married! Would he succeed? Of course not! Why? Simple—I know my wife and have had years of personal experiences with her.

Now you understand why I just smiled when this student told me: “How can you believe in a God you have never seen? Nor can you prove even exists?” Just like with my wife, I have had many experiences with God. I know He exists. I have known Him personally for years.

This one point is a serious issue for many young people—is there really a God? Is Adventism, or Christianity, for that matter, just another worldview? Are we just being duped into upholding our moral values and teachings, when they are nothing more than something that has been imposed upon us?

Serious and honest questions need serious and honest answers. What is it that sets Christianity aside from being just another worldview? I will tell you—a real, honest, personal

relationship with God—one that has proved itself over the years! Then when questions come, like: “How can you believe in a God you have never seen?” we can just smile and simply know “that he is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

FAITH PROOF?

I was talking with a 20-year-old young lady on the phone a while back, as she was interested in our *Youth in Missions* program.

“How do you know there really is a God?” I questioned.

“I know because He has revealed Himself to me in many ways in my life,” was her instant answer.

She went on to tell how she was not raised in a Christian home and that she had made some bad choices as a teenager. When she found God, and her relationship with Him became real, her life changed. She went on to say, “I feel sorry for kids raised in the church. They do not appreciate what they have. People like me find God and come to church *because we want to*. They often go to church *because they feel they that have too*.”

I realized years ago that what we need is “faith proof.” The Bible tells us to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) The Lord wants us to put Him to the test. Through answers to prayer and life experiences the Lord most often reveals Himself to us. We may not have physical proof, yet “faith proof” is “the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

I encourage people to keep a small book in which to write down every experience they have with God. Prove Him. Test Him. When a prayer is answered, write it down. When Divine providence happens, write it down.

When a miracle occurs, small or big, write it down.

Then when doubts come to your mind, or you get discouraged or wonder if maybe you have been duped into believing some religious hype, go back and read what you have written.

I love this quotation: “When temptations assail you, as they surely will, when care and perplexity surround you, when, distressed and discouraged, you are almost ready to yield to despair, *look, O look, to where with the eye of faith you last saw the light; and the darkness that encompasseth you will be dispelled by the bright shining of his glory.*”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 1st, 1908

Your little book will remind you where you last saw the light. How many times it has helped me over the years! There are too many experiences; too many Divine appointments to be just an accident. I remember, as He was there in the past, He will be there in the future!

Many a man serving in the military carries with him letters from his wife. He will read and reread those letters as affirmation that she is really there, waiting for him at home. His love is drawn homeward. God has written to us, in His Word and in our experience. Read His letters. He is really there! His love is calling us home.

KNOWING OR KNOWING ABOUT?

A great deception can overtake people of any “world view” especially when it involves religion. Listen to me carefully. There is a big difference between *knowing* someone and *knowing about* someone. You can discover the ideology or philosophy of a person without ever personally knowing and experiencing that person.

People become “fans” of other people. Our society idolizes musicians, athletes or movie stars. One

can know all about that person: where they were born, what they have done, where they go, how they dress and even their favorite foods. You can experience their music or movies and have pictures of them hanging on your walls. But there is a big difference between knowing about them and really knowing them.

Kids raised in the church learn stories about Jesus and maybe even have pictures of Jesus. They can repeat the facts: where He was born and how He died. They know many of the stories. But do they really know Him or only about Him? *To be honest, sometimes it is hard to even know the difference—and that is where the deception comes in!*

We can have what we perceive is a correct “world view.” We can have our moral code—a list of dos and don’ts that we live by. We can even have the 10 Commandments. But all of these fall seriously short of any personal experience with God. Sometimes they even become a cheap substitute.

A friend recently shared his thoughts in Sabbath School class. He explained how we need to stand for right principles and that we simply need to “draw a line in the sand” and not cross over it. In principle I agree, yet I believe there is a danger of making “the line” our experience, and not Christ. I told him, “It is far more easy to stand behind a line than to experience God showing us how to deal with the situation involving that line!”

In giving Bible studies over the years I have explained how the Law of God is like a protecting fortress, a wall of defense that we need to keep safety within. Please, do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting we ever step outside the boundaries of the law. But really, is not Christ our wall of defense? Here is what the Word tells us:

“He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.” (Psalm 62:2) “But the LORD is my defense; and my God *is* the rock of my refuge.” (Psalm 94:22) “For thou hast been a shelter for me, *and* a strong tower from the enemy.” (Psalm 61:3).

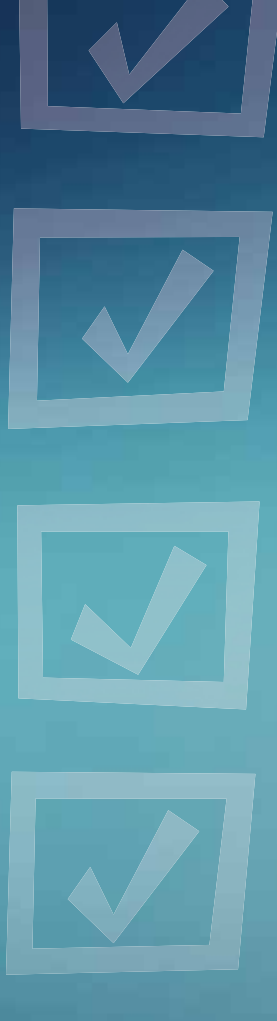
CHECK LIST RELIGION

I will be the first to admit—“check list” religion is much easier than having a living experience with God. Drawing a line in the sand can make one feel comfortable, and even somewhat righteous, knowing you stand on the side of what is perceived to be right or truth.

Here lies the problem. Truth can become one of the biggest stumbling blocks to experiencing God. What! Did he really write that, you may think? Yes! Think this through. We can hide behind truth and miss He who is the “Way, the Truth and the Life.” And the danger is *we mistakenly think that practicing the truth is an experience with God.* To make the matter even worse, those who have the truth cannot be convinced of their need of God because they have—well, the truth! We cannot hide behind a moral code, a checklist, or even systematic theology!

This quotation hits the nail on the head: “The *greatest deception* of the human mind in Christ’s day was that a *mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness.* In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness. A jealous regard for what is termed theological truth often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 309

You may have heard me tell the story on TV about how the Lord asked



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(PSALM 40:8)

me while I was driving my car one Sabbath to stop and fix a lady's flat tire. I argued with the Lord for nine miles before I turned the car around to help. When all was said and done, she told me God had sent me to help her.

I could have been pretty comfortable standing behind that line in the sand. Simply, I do not work on Sabbath, therefore I will just keep on driving! But a living experience showed me how to keep the Sabbath *in Him*. In doing so, my clothes got dirty, it was a pain to change that flat tire, plus I missed hearing a special speaker at church! But what a blessed Sabbath it turned out to be! The Lord used me to answer this lady's prayer and saved her from losing her job as well as her children!

The big lesson here is how to apply His principles in each situation. "Lord, what would thou have me to do?" should constantly be on our lips. Then we also need to be willing to listen to what He has to say. A give and take relationship only happens through a real, living experience.

SHE LOVED THE MAN

There is a story of a young lady who fell in love with and married a man. After the honeymoon was over, and they were settled into their home, the husband came to the breakfast table one morning.

"Well," he said, looking at his lovely bride, "I like to make sure right from the start that there are no misunderstandings. So here, I made up this list for you. Everything will be fine as long as the list is done." He stood up, handed her the paper, kissed her on the cheek and headed off to work.

In amazement she sat down and read the list: Clean the house every Friday. Breakfast at 7 with fresh sliced fruit. Dinner on the table by 6 p.m. Iron all the dress shirts and pants.

Keep the bathroom clean, etc. etc. etc. She began to wonder what she had gotten herself into!

Within a year their marriage fell apart. After the deep pain of that relationship, the woman waited many years before marrying again.

Eventually she found a wonderful husband, and they had two children. Many years later, after the kids were grown, she was digging around in an old box stored in a back room. She found love letters from her husband, pictures of the kids, report cards from school, all of which brought back many good memories.

Tucked in a corner of the box was another piece of paper. She was amazed, as it was the list that her first husband had given her! She glanced over the list. Well, yes, she did that; and she did the other. She did the whole list, as a matter of fact! But the list that had been a yoke of bondage with the first husband became an expression of love, a list of experiences shared, with her second husband.

For us the list is the 10 Commandments. When we truly experience Him, we find that "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8) The list simply becomes a summary of many, many experiences.

Our greatest struggle is to keep alive a living experience and not fall into the pit of rituals, rules and ceremonies. I often wondered why it has been said that Catholics convert to Adventism more than any other religious group. Could it be that many just exchange their rosary beads, penance and other list of rules for a new list? And why are so many churches spiritually dead today? Could it be that many members are simply missing the presence of God, as found in a living, personal experience!

BUT HOW?

How can we have that connection with God? It can be had by simply having faith in, and looking for, what He has done and is doing. We can seek him and find Him, when we really search for Him with all our hearts. Test God! He will reveal Himself to you through Divine providence.

“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow his blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our Heavenly Father is more willing to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to

fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us his blessing. . . The old standard-bearers knew what it was to wrestle with God in prayer, and to enjoy the out-pouring of his Spirit. But these are passing off from the stage of action; and who are coming up to fill their places? How is it with the rising generation? are they converted to God? Are we awake to the work that is going on in the heavenly Sanctuary, or are we waiting for some compelling power to come upon the church before we shall arouse? Are we hoping to see the whole church revived? That time will never come.”— Selected Messages, Book One, p. 121-122.

It is unfulfilling to carry on an imaginary relationship. A real relationship based on love, trust, and respect, like a good marriage, will endure the test of time, hardship, and difficulty. All

of us, at some time, have dipped into the imaginary world of belief based on some sort of moral checklist. God is calling us to Himself, saying, Here I am! I want you to experience Me. And he personally wants to write His list written on our hearts and minds.

To know God is the key to everything in our lives. He is there waiting to prove Himself to you. Put Him to the test. Ask him to open your eyes that you may see Him. Talk to Him. Confess your weakness to Him. Ask him to reveal himself to you. And as He does, write it down, that you may remember how He has and will be there for you! What joy it will bring into your life, home and church!

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3).

Days of Noah Update

Nearly everyday we receive emails, phone calls and letters asking us when will the *Days of Noah* documentary be finished. We are starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel! This series has broadened into a 4-DVD series, so as you can image, there is a lot of work going into this. To keep abreast of what is happening, visit our *Days of Noah* Facebook page: www.facebook.com/thedaysofnoahfilm. We try to keep that up to date and even answer questions and comments.

This summer will be busy with final on-camera narrations. We've purchased a drone to help execute some of the creative video shots yet to do. Two artists are working on detailed illustrations. A computer based render-farm has been built for the time-consuming process of rendering the large animation files that are incorporated into this production. This is a big project, one that we hope will have a big impact in sharing the Three Angels' Messages.

If you have not seen the TV program entitled, *The Days of Noah Interview*, where I interview Michael McCaffrey and Chris Tempel about this production. Please request



a DVD from our office or visit *Laymen Ministries'* YouTube site. It will give you an understanding of where we are in production and more about what this documentary covers!
— Jeff Reich, *Laymen Ministries* Director