

# FOR THE *LOVE* OF GOD



Healing Hearts  
and Mending Divides

**KAREN SPRUILL, M.A.**

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# DEDICATION

**For Isaiah and Sebastian,**

Loving you continues to bless and amaze me.  
May the love of God lead you to your purpose,  
identity, and safe places to belong,  
but most of all, to an eternity with Jesus—and  
Grandma and Grandpa, also!

*Karen*

*“Love is an  
unstoppable force;  
it can  
break down walls  
and transform  
anything it  
touches.”*

*Author Unknown*



# INTRODUCTION

**Y**ou are about to read a book that will challenge your thinking. It is not a devotional read with gentle thoughts and warm revelations. Instead, you may find it penetrating, jolting, and somewhat uncomfortable. Part of the discomfort may come from the topics addressed or the opinions shared. Additionally, you may wonder if it's safe to walk off the well-beaten path of Adventist cultural thinking. Yet, there are treasures to be found in pursuing an authentic experience with Jesus that is joyfully yours.

Although published by Church Support Services, this book does not represent the beliefs of the Pacific Union Conference or any other Adventist church entity. Rather, its intended purpose is to be a vehicle for personal reflection and discussion on matters that affect Seventh-day Adventist members living in the Twenty-first Century. More specifically, it addresses concerns that relate to living like Jesus in a complex and hostile world. How can we love when there is so much misunderstanding and hate?

You will be challenged to think about love in ways that go beyond the shallow waters of an introductory concern for others. Sometimes you may feel like you are out in the deep where the currents pull, twist, and threaten to draw you under.

Karen Spruill uses her journey within the Adventist realm and beyond to touch on some obstacles, prejudices, and distractions that can prevent us from letting Jesus' words shape our lives. Both she and

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her husband, Timothy Spruill, have worked with thousands of people (in counseling and other settings) who have struggled to find and keep love.

We do not come out of the womb with an intuitive knowledge of what it means to love. We can only learn this with intentionality and effort. In the same way, good marriages may sometimes require individuals to make commitments to each other that are more intellectual than romantic. Showing agape love to fellow human beings (regardless of how we feel) is a commitment to God and everything his kingdom represents. Love can thrive in the institutional church—but too often it is missing.

This is why Ellen White said, “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”<sup>1</sup>

Does a lack of conversions mean that our church is experiencing a drought of humility, kindness, and courteous discourse? Maybe.

From the earliest days of our movement, Jesus made it clear that he wanted Adventist churches to be theaters of grace, where in the midst of life’s heart-wrenching drama, compassion and forgiveness could be witnessed and experienced.

“Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said the essence of all scripture can be summed up in how we treat one another. Let that sink in—the essence of everything in scripture!

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“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12, New Living Translation).

Jesus said the most important lesson in all of scripture is focused on interpersonal relationships. How does this affect us? That is what this book is about.

—*Rich DuBose*

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<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G., compilation, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 189. (1909) Review and Herald Publishing Association, Takoma Park, MD.

<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G., *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 4. (1970 edition). Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, CA. Also, compilation, *Christian Service*, p. 13. (1947) General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.

*“Become true*

*so you can write true.*

*Writing is an expression*

*of living, not knowing:*

*of praying, not knowing.”*

*Eugene Peterson*



# PREFACE

(Please don't skip!)

As I grow older, and more used up, I also feel like a vulnerable child in a world out of control. I have lost faith in the places where I used to look for a sense of security. I can be very scared for my community, my church, my city, my state, my country, and the world. You get the holistic picture.

Some days I can feel the edges of my heart growing hard with distrust, anger, and fear. And I know that is not from God, since he is love, and “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18, New International Version). I know I am not alone in this fear for the future. It is too easy to get wrapped up in divisions, philosophies, and fights where we all lose connection with God and each other. I must return to my position in Christ and my place in God’s Kingdom; otherwise, I get lost.

Anyone in my Boomer generation grew up being pretty scared. Walter Cronkite had a Sunday morning TV program recapping the battles of WWII. After my baby brother was born, I was scared he would have to go to war someday. When President Kennedy was elected, we were told this was a sign of The End when a Catholic was in the White House. Khrushchev was determined to take over our country, and Communists were as close as Cuba with bombs supplied by the Soviet Union (USSR).

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Crazy people shot our president, our attorney general, and Martin Luther King. Black Panthers and other protestors burned some of our cities, marched, and resisted the social/political order. Young people discovered hallucinogenic drugs, zoned out to rock music, wandered into Buddhist philosophy and Hindu religion, white witchcraft, and the New Age. “Don’t trust anyone over 30” was a popular chant. College students were shot and killed at Kent State, and humans traveled to the moon. Another president faced humiliation and resignation.

During this time, Adventists continued to conduct evangelistic series focusing on The Mark of the Beast, Sunday Laws, and replicas of the Beasts of Daniel and Revelation. We had to “get ready” for the Time of the End.

I remember how our daughter, at 12 years old, had a part in a depiction of June Strong’s book, *Project Sunlight*,<sup>3</sup> about the End of Time. Military soldiers came to her home to force agreement to the day of worship. I watched the play several times, and each time was brought to tears considering not just the realistic acting but my children’s futures in this “Conflict of the Ages” world. What would their futures be like? Now I wonder what will happen to my grandchildren.

My friend Rich DuBose and I share some very important concerns for our denomination and humanity, even though we don’t always share the same political views. We may be the poster people for how to work together while not voting on the same ticket. Jesus Christ and kindness are the glue for our combined ministries.

During our discussions, we have talked about the need for Adventists to treat each other in loving and kind ways if we wish to fully represent the Kingdom of God and influence this sin-infected planet (you can see our work in *The Eleventh Commandment* book.<sup>4</sup>) We all struggle

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in church, on social media, in families, and at work, to be heard and understood, remaining very polarized as a nation. This tendency to see people as “us” or “them” is tearing at the fabric of our denomination, let alone as we perceive other Christians and religions.

As I have known Rich and his wife, Linda, for many years, I have grown to know many of their stories of background, pastoring, love, health, parenting, and now grandparenting. The three of us have worked together for about 12 years.

Rich is one of the most patient and respectful bosses I have had in writing for my denomination—giving way to my creativity and ideas and promptly paying me! I trust Rich’s heart and his commitment to Jesus Christ. So when he gave me a writing assignment to help show Adventists how to love, I was humbled and challenged. I have often prayed about how to love my family, church members, and clients better. This might be my unexpected answered prayer.

### **Threatened by Dialogue**

I enjoy Barna surveys on topics of relevance for Christians, and a June 2022 survey confirmed what I had heard about pastors, including Adventist pastors. They are leaving their full-time ministry due to political divisions in the congregations. By their own account, U.S. adults are both more welcoming of tough conversations and more threatened by them.

Most notable is the growing certainty that one’s ideas cannot be wrong, perhaps leaving less room for discussion, at the very least—or for a change of heart, at the most.<sup>5</sup> Pastors have been criticized and lost members for endorsing or not endorsing such things as Covid-19 health protocols.

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My husband, Tim, and I discussed the alarming loss of civil language in our country. We are concerned not only about the free use of F-bomb words from the mouths of small children or from anyone in public, but the constant undercurrent of hostility. For those who believe they have been slighted, cheated, ignored, or offended, and thus victimized, the expectation seems to be that —“someone has to pay!”

A few years ago, one of our local surgeons was gunned down at night in a hospital parking building. A friend and professional colleague attended to the grieving family. Tim notes that patient surveys, reviews, and emails regarding all physicians are now so critical and angry that words like “kill” and “shoot” are frequently used. We live in a very angry country.

During the past several presidential elections, and ever since in our social media exchanges, I have known family members who have been rejected or shamed by their political stances when in disagreement. Some people have had their standing as Christians challenged or judged by siblings or children.

Several times I have been asked how I manage to get along with some close family members whose opinions differ greatly from mine. As time has passed, I have reminded myself that I have not had the exact experiences my family members and friends have had that might influence their voting alliances. I really haven't walked in their shoes or had to manage their budgets, children, or parents.

Several times I have been asked how you manage to talk with certain family members. When cool heads prevail, my sibling and I have decided to agree to disagree and to be very cautious around topics of politics and religion. I try to respect those things that might trigger defensiveness

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and anger. I am committed to holding a very special relationship that I do not want to lose. No party line is more valuable than that! And for several others, we can often exchange ideas without labeling, gingerly knowing that we are capable of injuring feelings, and yet convicted at times to genuine sharing, not just avoidance!

I can usually respect others' opinions if I know that person and trust that they value our relationship. It also helps if they do not raise their voices. I can help preserve the relationship by listening without labeling, granting forgiveness if needed, or asking for forgiveness if I have overstepped our intended genuine discussion. That does not mean sticking around for abusive behavior or threats or refusing to share opinions. I usually realize that neither of us is probably going to change our beliefs, and time may prove one of us incorrect about outcomes.

Bottom line: I may not be correct. If you live long enough, you see how science, religion, and governments have changed their stances. I can insist on voicing my beliefs, or I can have a relationship. Sometimes, I just cannot have both.

### **A Hard Assignment**

This may be my hardest writing assignment yet—including five books, many articles, editorials, blogs, and scripts. After months of mulling, thinking, gleaning, and reading, I finally had to start somewhere. In those days and weeks of “knowing” I should be writing, the distractions blew in: family birthdays and holidays, baby showers, volunteer ministry, church member and family illnesses, surgeries, pets, and planning travels.

As my pastor used to exclaim, “This hurts my head!” I’ve been grumpy, impatient, and anxious. Then I realized many distractions and

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interruptions were about loving others with my actions. I am living the assignment—where the rubber meets the road. This has urged me to stay close to Jesus and talk to him more often, recognizing my needs and weaknesses.

There are plenty of songs about love, and they don't address the same philosophies (Love Makes the World Go Round; All You Need Is Love; What's Love Got to Do With It?). Currently, plenty of books are tackling how our country can come together or how people who disagree can still be civil.

I heard one author interviewed who maintains, "We just need to be patient." Within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) denomination, there are frequent calls for unity that sometimes seem like pushes for uniformity. There are deep challenges in marriage, let alone for a worldwide church.

So I dove into the New Testament, looking for "meat" and everything I could see about love. I recommend that venture for everyone with a Bible! I will share some of those texts as I go along on this love exploration. I also looked for books and added quite a few to my Kindle (and read most).

These are books by psychologists, educators, spiritual leaders, Christian authors, and humble advocates. I could agree with many of the philosophies and thoughts, but I got confused by some and decided I could sift what I found helpful from any chaff. After all, humans see all of this as "through a glass darkly."

All former clients, family friends, and relatives are identified with pseudonyms. I have included some thoughts from Ellen G. White in *Christ's Object Lessons* but have limited her quotes since those writings may trigger flight for some readers.

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I use quotes from many sources—I pray you'll also be patient with those who are not Adventist if that concerns you. I have added many items to the list of resources at the end of this book.

Unless otherwise noted, most Bible quotes are from the New International Version (NIV). The pronouns in the scriptures may not be as inclusive as some other versions; I anticipate your mental ability to translate those.

Please try to read a whole section in the Bible, not just the chosen verse. I will do my best to treat scripture as written within the cultures and contexts represented. This book is a document by an Adventist for Adventists. Anyone else from an evangelistic religion or belief in God may also find it helpful!

## **What can you expect in reading this book?**

You can expect some vulnerable personal reflections and sharing on the part of the author, along with input from some of my favorite authors, stories from my husband and myself about anonymous mental health clients, plus some science and psychology tidbits pertaining to loving behaviors.

Part 1 will include my Adventist story, stories of unforgettable people, the Source of all love, our identity and purpose, our religious bias, forgiving and reconciling, love practices, gratitude, and more.

Part 2 contains some essential skills to help convey Love (unless you've mastered those!).

At the end of each chapter is a quick recap with several questions for personal reflection or group discussion.

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**Here is some of what I hope you will remember from this written work of love:**

- Bible study is not the same as scripture engagement and application. Information is not transformation.
- You can have a deeper, more personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- The stories we tell ourselves and tell to the world shape our beliefs about God and the future.
- An emphasis on End Times can result in a fearful distraction from trusting in Jesus and his love.
- Hypocritical judging is different from discernment.
- The mission to show love within the Body of Christ is more important now than ever.
- We can expect “substantial healing” in our human relationships through the Holy Spirit.
- Christians can learn loving skills and practices.
- I am taking a personal risk in approaching how to be better Adventist lovers. Anyone who has known me may throw my love failures back at me. Yet, that is the risk we all take when we choose to follow Jesus. He showed us that love is worth the risk.

## PREFACE

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**For the children and the adults:** I am reminded of one of my favorite children's books, *The Word-birds of Davy McFiffer*.<sup>6</sup> When our daughter was about four years old, she helped me present a children's story during our church service based on the storyline of this book.

Davy, a small boy, is notorious at school, home, and the neighborhood for talking too much.

His neighbor explains to him that words are very much like birds, and that he must guard the door to their cage, his mouth.

Davy learns that he can't open the door and forget to shut it, nor keep it locked.

One day the neighbor overhears Davy calling his playmate a bad name, and the other boy got mad and went home.

Wisdom from the neighbor: "You see, Davy, you didn't let out too many word-birds but you let out the wrong ones. There are good ones and bad ones. The good ones are friendly and say kind things. The bad ones fly around cawing and pecking and saying mean things."

When school was out for the summer, Davy practiced saying good word-birds, such as "I Like You," "Please," and "Thank You."

This country, and our church members, need to let out more "good word-birds."

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*With special thanks to Timothy Spruill,  
my partner in life, and my faithful proofreader,  
who provided research, and drove our daughter to  
doctor's appointments so I could finish this book.*

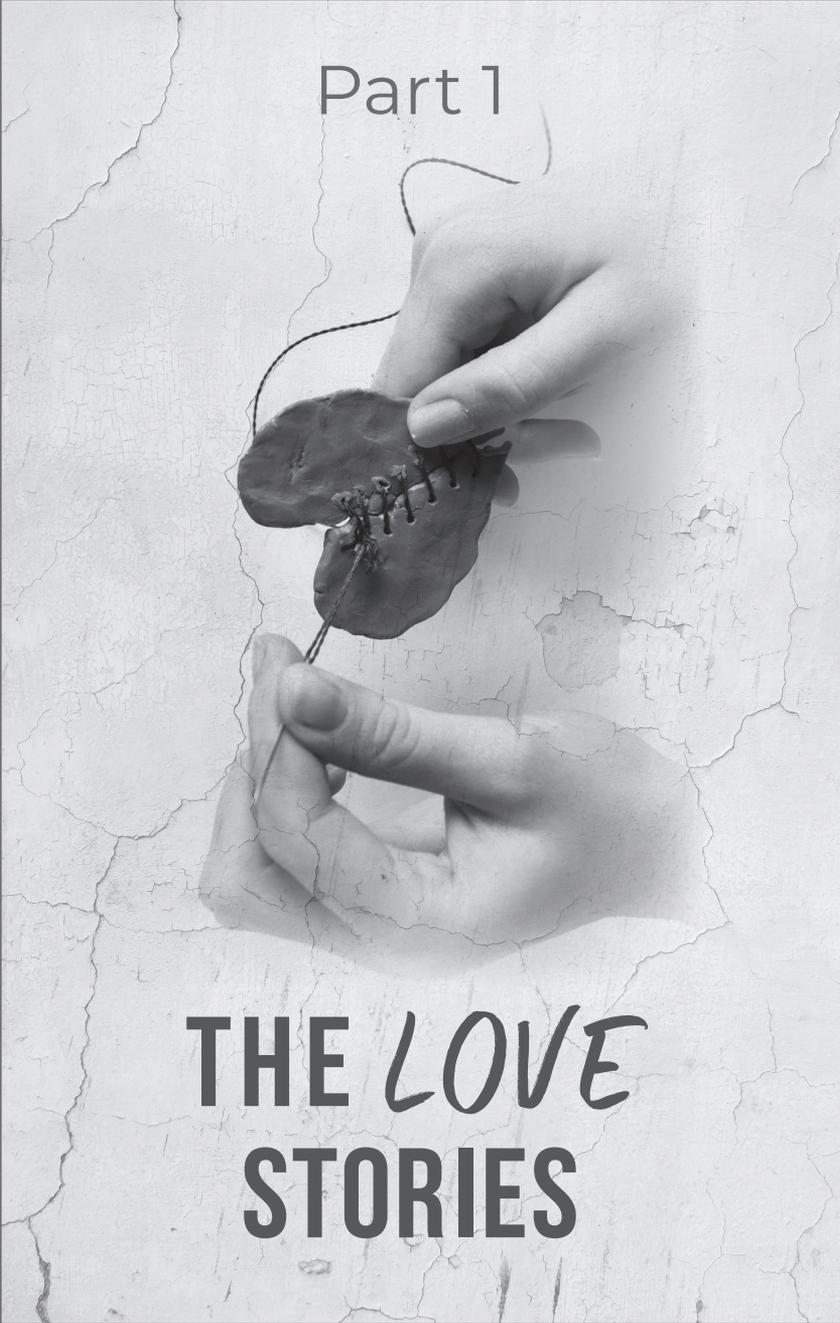
<sup>3</sup> Strong, June. *Project Sunlight* (1980). Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, TN.

<sup>4</sup> DuBose, Rich; Karen Spruill and Michael Temple, *The Eleventh Commandment* (2022). Pacific Union Conference Church Support Services, Westlake Village, CA.

<sup>5</sup> "New Data Shed Light on Polarization in America," July 20, 2022. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from [barna.com/research/polarization-2015-2022](https://barna.com/research/polarization-2015-2022)

<sup>6</sup> Klimowicz, Barbara, *The Word-birds of Davy McFiffer*. (1970) Abingdon Press, Nashville & New York.

Part 1



**THE LOVE  
STORIES**

*“You did not choose me,  
but I chose you and appointed you  
to go and bear much fruit—  
fruit that will last.”*

*(John 15:16)*



## Chapter 1

# WHY ME?

I understand that in Jesus' time and culture, young religious Jewish men would choose a rabbi from whom they wished to learn. Of course, that is not how Jesus operated. He chose his disciples.

Perhaps like me, you may have wondered, “Why did God choose me?”—to try and love a particular person, or be part of a ministry, or attempt to change someone or something. I am struck by the audacity of attempting to show Adventists a better way to love.

I am not a theologian, although I enjoy learning about God and the scriptures; I like to connect people to resources and concepts that they need—I am a matchmaker at heart. I believe that people can find substantial healing in this lifetime. My greatest joy is knowing I have encouraged others to love God.

I'm going to tell you some of my stories as a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Christian and my origins. Perhaps it will bring up some memories for you that you might want to share with someone else as you ponder your own life as an Adventist or as a believer in God.

My earliest memories as a Seventh-day Adventist involve attending church with my mother and later with my little brother. As children attending Sabbath School in a small country Adventist church, we sang

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action songs and had our Bible lessons in sandboxes with moveable cardboard figures. There was usually a week of Vacation Bible School in the summer, and my mother and other adults often helped. Mom invited a non-member cousin to attend, and we made lanyards during craft time. At least once a year, we had a week of evangelistic meetings—enticed with a free Bible or a wooden camel.

My Adventist girl cousins lived nearby and were my best friends for many years—playing house in the corn crib, exploring the barn kittens and chicks, swimming at a lake near our grandparent’s home, and picking berries for our first employment. Yet, much of my early childhood was spent alone with my parents or pets.

As a child, God often used nature to speak to me. My cats, dogs, pet sheep, and later my horse held a special unconditional love in my heart that continues to this day. I considered them my best friends. I also enjoyed hunting for rocks, fossils, flowers, and mushrooms. I dreamed of having an animal “orphanage.”

I spent more than five years as an only child, eagerly awaiting the birth of my first and only sibling when I was in kindergarten. Besides a toddler brother getting into my treasures, I was glad to have a sibling. We played, teased, wrestled, and generally got along with each other until I left home. Then we went on separate paths and memories.

Mom, brother, and I often picked up my aunt and cousins on the way to church since neither of the fathers attended church. We took home the *Our Little Friend* papers and later *The Primary Treasure* and the *Junior Guide*. We heard *Your Story Hour* on our local radio station on Sabbath mornings and played Sabbath card games that Mom purchased when we visited camp meeting for a day in the summer. Sometimes there was

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a church picnic or potluck, and occasionally some members invited us home for Sabbath lunch. Mom enjoyed inviting seminary student families to our house. One of our favorites was an Australian couple.

Somehow, I always knew Jesus loved me, even though probably my highest aspiration was to be a good girl, clean house on Friday, keep the Sabbath, go to church, never wear jewelry, never eat pork or shrimp or clams, not watch TV or get the mail on Sabbath, never go swimming on Sabbath, and grow up to marry a Seventh-day Adventist man—especially since Dad did not attend church, except on rare occasions.

My junior class teacher once admonished the children at a church picnic that we must not “run on the Sabbath,” which struck me as very strange. The visiting ministers at our church told amazing stories from the mission field, along with sessions of casting out demons.

For years I had nightmares of needing to address demons in “the name of Jesus Christ!” In later years, I heard the testimonies or read stories of young people who had left wayward lives to be rescued by Jesus to righteousness. I was troubled that I didn’t have much of a story to tell for my witness since I liked Jesus and wanted to live for him.

My mother impressed my brother and me that we should always pray for my dad, and I worried, not just about the possibility of nuclear war or the sudden appearance of Jesus Christ—but whether Daddy would be in heaven with us. I even cried about never meeting my paternal grandfather and whether he would be in heaven. I saw my cousin and my maternal grandfather get baptized when I was 10 years old, but I don’t remember Grandpa going to church. My paternal grandmother hung out with Methodist ladies and had a Bible and “The Upper Room” pamphlets, so I figured she loved Jesus. Grandma’s favorite exasperation

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word was “Lord,” which I tried out a few times but was struck with guilt since I never ventured beyond “gosh” or “darn,” and Mom even frowned on those terms. Years later, I had the revelation that perhaps I should pray for my Mom just as much as my Dad. I always knew they weren’t very happy.

I attended public school in a rural community of mostly Baptist neighbors—good Christian people who seemed a lot like SDAs—they didn’t smoke, drink, or swear, except they believed in “once saved, always saved” and that nasty “hell place.” They were big on eating pork since we were in the pig county of our state.

My third and fourth-grade teacher kept a picture of Jesus on the mirror by our room sink, and she never stopped praying before lunch in class, even after a law was passed that we shouldn’t pray in school.

Sometimes I attended Baptist VBS with the neighbor, where they had impassioned Bible Sword Drills and crafts. For a couple of years, I went to regular meetings of Pioneer Girls (similar to Pathfinders) at the Baptist Church. We made crafts for our moms and Baptist missionaries.

I enjoyed borrowing books from our small SDA church school library, attempting to keep up with Junior Missionary Volunteer requirements for patches and designations. I went to Pathfinders at my church for a few years, mostly because Mom never got to and thought it would be good for me. I wore the green uniforms, sang strange military-style songs, and participated in group practices (as a scribe, I never could master a correct about-face twirl). I even learned how to carve bar soap into the likeness of a foot. Our club went to a special parade at the state capitol once and a winter sledding day event. Yet, I never felt like I belonged since most of the other kids went to church school together.

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Mom encouraged me to accept communion at church before I was baptized since I understood the symbols. However, I felt legitimate relief after my cousin and I finally got baptized when we were 12 and 13. Several years later, we were invited to a special SDA public high school students' retreat at a small local camp where I met several other girls. I don't remember anything else created for public school students.

### High School Years

Sensing my need for more social life and Adventist friends while I was in high school, my mother moved us to another local SDA church with a larger attendance and influence from our Adventist university/seminary. I felt accepted and loved by our pastor at that time—he even came to my home graduation party. He taught our high school Sabbath School class for a while, and I started to understand his grace-filled sermons. The pastor called us “saints,” and that helped us see ourselves in a refreshing light. I was given a part in organizing the church library, which made me feel valued.

During high school, the Psalms really spoke to my heart as I read them for inspiration during my own devotional time. I could relate to the emotional roller coaster that seemed to be David's writing style. He had hung out with sheep and had been a shepherd. We had sheep on our farm. David understood sheep and people, and God.

In high school, my best friends were a small group of scholarly misfits. I only attended one of our school's athletic games but was required to go to a pep rally every Friday last period, where we shouted slogans designed to energize our team. I was thankful my religion did not require me to sit down during the Pledge of Allegiance as my friend,

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a Jehovah's Witness, had to do. Some female classmates thought I should try out for cheerleading, but that wasn't my reality.

During Home and Family class in my junior year, we were asked to talk about our first kiss, and I had nothing to share other than a forced mock marriage in second grade. I faced public humiliation as others shared their incidents, and thankfully, the bell rang before it was my turn. I never went to a dance, never got to go to a banquet, even though my dad bought me a sparkly pink dress in case, and one year Mom started making me a formal dress. A guy friend asked me to the senior banquet, but potential guilt for Saturday sundown issues made me back out. The unfinished shiny green dress hung in a closet for years.

The summer before my senior year, Mom and I stayed overnight at a camp meeting in my aunt's cabin. During previous camp meetings, I dreaded being dropped off at a Sabbath School tent where I didn't know anyone. This time my aunt had arranged for me to meet her friend's son who was my age. I had met him once before at age 12 when he commented on my weight, but this was five years growing and more good looks later. He asked me for a date and drove his parents' car to a nearby miniature golf course. I was unimpressed with his academy stories about sneaking Cokes on choir trips.

Upon return to campus, after walking and talking, we ended the evening with a quick kiss. I wrote to him several times that summer, but we never got together again. Years later, I learned he was gay and, sadly, had died rather early in life.

Some high moments came during my senior year when I was elected president of two clubs. However, one seemed like a political move to keep another girl out of office. When our senior photos came out, mine

## WHY ME?

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was featured outside the principal's office, which came as a surprise, since I was not one of the cheerleaders. I was also part of the six top academic students that year who got to ride in the principal's airplane as a treat. I didn't know if I would get to graduate with my class, but the school administration changed the senior graduation tradition from Saturday to Sunday after some lobbying by Mom. I studied hard and made good grades, had good relations with most of my teachers, and won the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award for several years.

I was fortunate that I usually felt protected and loved by my earthly father. He called me Suzy-Q and sometimes took me to get ice cream when we visited Grandma's house. One unjust spanking from him stuck with me for years. He hated trying to help me with math, but I knew he loved me. I'm certain that helped me feel love and acceptance from God. Yet, there was always tension in my home about Sabbath, food, and where I would go to school. My father wouldn't approve of me attending an Adventist boarding academy, and I never aspired to since I did not wish to be separated from my family. I did plan to attend our university since that was the promised land where I could be free to be an Adventist with Adventist friends and attend functions—and meet a husband!

### College and Beyond

Right before college, I had a busy weekend where I went on dates with three guys. The first one was a studious guy friend from high school. Then, the second was with a guy from church who had previously taken me to see a movie at the college. And finally, I went on a date with a new friend who had also attended high school. He had started attending church that summer while living with his sister.

## FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

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I dated the new guy in the fall quarter, but that ended after the holidays. On a winter blind date orchestrated by our college roommates, I did meet the man I would marry. He had lots of friends from his Adventist academy, and they had many mischievous stories from their time together at school. Later, after meeting my husband-to-be and his friends and hearing their stories and escapades, I was convinced that they were truly the “wild ones” and not my public school friends. His parents and friends readily accepted me even though I was a “high school” kid.

While I struggled to understand some of the terminologies in my college Old Testament class (like myths), I had plenty of rules to observe related to required worship attendance, measuring dress lengths, weekend curfews, etc. All this was puzzling compared to life at home because my parents trusted me, and I never needed a curfew. A week after my fiancé’s graduation, we got married, and I soon learned that even though he was a fifth-generation Adventist, he struggled with a picture of God focused on punishment. I longed to help him see a Jesus of love instead of a stern old white-haired ruler.

Less than a year later, after finishing my undergraduate degree, I got my dream job. On our first grand adventure as young marrieds, we were immersed in the world of SDA leaders and journalists at the world church headquarters. I was far from the family farm, making new friends and mentors, traveling and speaking for my job, and learning to be an adult with a husband getting a master’s degree. We got involved with an active young adult Sabbath School group and made enduring friendships. As the years unfolded, there are three more graduate degrees between us, a variety of jobs, 11 house moves, four home states, two children and their spouses, two grandchildren, and almost 50 years of marriage—but what have I really learned about love?

# WHY ME?

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## Recap

Our histories impact how we view ourselves, others, and the world. The ability to love and be loved is influenced by our early experiences with family, friends, teachers, and acquaintances.

### **Questions for personal reflection or group discussion:**

1. Were you baptized as a follower of Jesus Christ or into the Seventh-day Adventist Church? If you have never been baptized, how did you make that choice?
2. How did your school years impact your beliefs about God?

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*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:1-3).*



*“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness”... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26, 27). “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (31).*



*“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear... We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:16-19).*



*“...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:2-3).*