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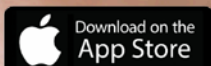


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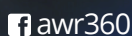
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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

I when I was younger, I would teach my dolls and stuffed animals—and I had some of the smartest stuffed animals and dolls in the neighborhood! I always had a passion for helping others. When I was an older student in a small, two-room schoolhouse, I found creative ways to help other students understand concepts.

Visit nadadventist.org/ajconniehall for more of Hall's story.

CONNIE HALL,
Sparks, Nevada; 2023 Nevada Teacher of the Year

Connie Hall



Cover photo by Art Brondo

Dear Reader: The publication in your hands represents the collaborative efforts of the North American Division and *Adventist World* magazine (Justin Kim, editor), which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

Adventist Journey (ISSN 1557-5519) is the journal of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The Northern Asia-Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the publisher. It is printed monthly by the Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Copyright © 2024. Send address changes to your local conference membership clerk. Contact information should be available through your local church.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A. Vol. 7, No. 11 November 2024. **Adventist Journey Publication Board** G. Alexander Bryant (chair), Kimberly Luste Maran (secretary), Kyoshin Ahn, Judy R. Glass, Wendy Eberhardt, Adam Fenner, Minner Labrador, Arne Nielsen, Calvin Watkins Sr., Ivan Williams Sr., Rick Remmers, Julio Muñoz, Karnik Doukmetzian, legal advisor **Scripture References** Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are taken from the *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

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ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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Wish of a Lifetime

A lifelong Pathfinder's dream to attend "an international camporee" comes true this summer, thanks to AARP.

BY LORI PECKHAM

Camporee is the zenith of experiences for every Pathfinder," says Vernon Norman of Huntsville, Alabama. That's why it was his dream for almost 40 years to attend an International Pathfinder Camporee. This past August in Gillette, Wyoming, his dream came true.

Vernon joined Pathfinders at age 9, more than 60 years ago. He memorized the Pathfinder aim, pledge, motto, and song—and enthusiastically earned honor patches. In 1980 he graduated from Oakwood University with a

Vernon Norman shows his sash as he and his family get ready to head over for a day at the International Pathfinder Camporee at CAM-PLEX in Gillette, Wyoming. *Vernée Norman*

degree in secondary education, biology and religion, and married Margaret Bernard. He began his career as a teacher and then elementary and academy principal, serving in Alabama, North Carolina, and California. A lifelong learner, Vernon earned a master's degree in educational leadership and a Ph.D. in public health.

He also became a Master Guide and Pathfinder director, as Pathfinders remained an important part of his life. He and his wife, Margaret, encouraged their three children to join Pathfinders, and later Vernon started his first club at the church in San Bernardino, California, with his oldest son assisting him. He restarted another club in Riverside, California, gifting them with their first marching snare drum and quint set with carriers so they could have a drum corps. Margaret shares, "I was never a Pathfinder. I just went camping with them and cooked for everyone!"

Vernon and Margaret raised the money to send their three children to the International Pathfinder Camporee in 2004, but there were no extra funds for him to go. Yet even as their children grew up, Vernon's dream of attending a camporee stayed strong, and he looked hopefully toward 2019.

Then in 2016 tragedy struck. "I suffered the massive stroke that has rendered me partially paralyzed on my right side, with total paralysis of my right arm and expressive aphasia," he shares. As the 2019 camporee came and went, he thought that was the end of his dream. Margaret suffers from lupus, so with their physical and financial challenges, it looked impossible.

Renewed Focus

In September 2022 they felt well enough to visit a friend in California. That friend encouraged them,

Vernon Norman's dream of attending a camporee stayed strong, and he looked hopefully toward 2019. Then in 2016 tragedy struck.

saying, "I don't see any reason Vernon shouldn't go to the camporee in 2024. Start saving now, and by 2024 you should have it."

Margaret replied, "You can't save what you don't have." But this inspired them to focus on physical therapy and exercises to increase their strength and mobility. Vernon had always lived an active lifestyle, running marathons, his latest 18 months before his stroke.

As announcements appeared for the 2024 Believe the Promise Camporee, Margaret prayed, "Father, if You want us to go to this camporee, You're going to have to work a miracle." One day in May 2023 she received an online newsletter from AARP. Scanning the headlines, she saw an article about Wish of a Lifetime, a charitable affiliate of AARP. After reading the criteria, she told Vernon, "I'm going to apply for you." She downloaded the application and submitted it.

An Answer to Prayer

A month later a phone interview took place. Shannon Hollis, the Wish manager, explained that she had never heard of Pathfinders. Margaret had sent links on the application and talked enthusiastically about it. A few days later Hollis called and said, "I'd like to give you an update on Vernon's wish."

Margaret went into the bedroom so Vernon could hear the news: "Your wish was presented to two different committees, and it was unanimously approved."¹

"Both of us had tears," recalls Margaret.

She found her voice to ask Hollis, "What does that mean?"

"We will pay all of the expenses to go to the camporee. We'll do it for both of you," Hollis explained. That included airfare to and from Denver, Colorado, camporee tickets, accommodations, a rental car, gas, and food.

"We were boohooing," says Margaret. "It was unbelievable, and it still is."

Tom Wagenlander, executive director and vice president of Wish of a Lifetime from AARP, explains that the goal of the program is "to change the lives of our wish recipients by eliminating impediments to aging with hope and joy. We empower wish recipients to fulfill their hopes and dreams while reconnecting with the people and passions that matter most to them."

For Vernon, Pathfinders is one of those passions. "Vernon's life has been threaded together by involvement with the Pathfinders—usually to the benefit of others," Wagenlander continues. "Wish of a Lifetime was struck by Vernon's irrefutable connection to this



Vernon and Margaret Norman enjoy all aspects of the 2024 International Pathfinder Camporee after Vernon's wish—and prayer—to attend was granted. *Tompaul Wheeler*

momentous event, along with his grit, generosity, and commitment to community.”

In his application to Wish of a Lifetime, Vernon wrote, “At my age (I shall be 70 years old next October) and in my present health condition (providing the good Lord spares our lives to see next August), this may be my last opportunity to realize this wish I’ve had since national camporees started in 1985. . . . The spiritual boost, social interactions with lifelong friends, former students, mentors and mentees, and fellow Pathfinders from more than 100 countries around the world is the closest simulation of what heaven would be like.”

Because Margaret also has health challenges, Wish of a Lifetime offered to include a family member to accompany them. So their daughter, Vernée, met them at the Denver International Airport, flying in from Mexico City. Vernon and Margaret were also met by Shannon, who brought a team to hold up signs of welcome. She made arrangements for the Normans to stay in the guest suite at the Primrose Retirement Community in Gillette, another answer to prayer, as it was easily accessible.

Present Arms!

On Wednesday afternoon Vernon arrived at CAM-PLEX, the camporee grounds, to enjoy the evening program. But first he hoped to find the Kansas Avenue Pathfinder Club from Riverside, California. After some driving around, Vernée pulled their rental van up to the club’s campsite near the outer perimeter of the CAM-PLEX property. When Robert Harris, the director who followed Vernon, saw who was sitting in the front passenger seat, he invited the club to line up beside the van.

“This is the man who started our club,” he told the Pathfinders. “Present arms!” In a touching gesture of respect and appreciation, they all saluted Vernon.

“He was surprised and in tears. It was a precious moment,” says Margaret.

Vernon and Margaret reveled in the program that night, sitting among the 60,000 attendees from all over the world. The next day Vernon arrived at CAM-PLEX in full dress uniform, a process that takes more than an hour to accomplish. He was to be photographed for the camporee newspaper, *Pathfinder Today*, which featured his story on the cover of the Friday, August 9, edition. He was also interviewed on camera by Jean Boonstra (Ms. Jean to *Discovery Mountain* fans) from the Voice of Prophecy, who served as an anchor for the camporee nighttime program livestream. In addition, the local newspaper, the *Gillette News Record*, interviewed the Normans for a feature published August 13 entitled “Lifelong Pathfinder Overcomes Adversity to Attend First Camporee.”²



Robert Harris, director of the Kansas Avenue Pathfinder Club, poses with Vernon Norman at the camporee in Gillette, Wyoming. Harris gifted Vernon with a club T-shirt and a prayer of blessing. *Lori Peckham*

A Little Bit of Heaven

For the next several days the Normans experienced events and activities around the CAM-PLEX. Vernon especially enjoyed watching the drill presentations, sitting on the back of a golf cart with a huge smile on his face as the drums pounded and the Pathfinders in uniform marched in choreographed formations and cheered as they received trophies.

Near the end of the camporee, as groups packed up tents and vehicles to head home, Vernon wanted to say goodbye to the Pathfinder club from Riverside. As the golf cart bounced over the rough dirt streets, Vernon sat on the back gripping the side railing with his good arm and taking in all the sights with large, bright eyes.

Harris, busy folding a tent, spotted Vernon and presented him with two parting gifts: a bright-blue club T-shirt and a prayer. Vernon beamed as Harris held up the shirt, then grasped his arm and asked, “May I pray with you?”

Gathering several Pathfinders around them, Harris closed his eyes and prayed: “Thank You for the opportunity to fellowship, Father. Thank You for this young gentleman and his lovely wife for coming so far and helping us out to continue our program. Bless them on their journey right now, Father God. Continue to bless their family. Continue to bless everything we do. We want to really believe the promise that we’ve done this with You.”

At that moment the dirt path of the sprawling campground felt holy. And the twinkle in Vernon’s eyes expressed more than words could. He had just tasted a little bit of heaven.

¹Learn how you can be the bridge to unbridled hope and joy for older adults in your community at wishofalifetime.org.
²Link: www.gilletteneewsrecord.com/news/local/article_dbf112e3-d871-5c97-a251-ba797527a563.html.

Lori Peckham is communication program director and a professor of writing and speaking at Union Adventist University in Lincoln, Nebraska.



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PATHFINDERS LEARN TO BELIEVE THE PROMISE AMID STORMS AT 2024 INTERNATIONAL PATHFINDER CAMPOREE

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA



On Monday morning, August 5, the 1,000-acre CAM-PLEX Multievent Facilities in Gillette, Wyoming, the location of the 2024 International Pathfinder Camporee, was still. The more than 60,000 Pathfinders and supporters expected to attend August 5-11 had not yet arrived. As clubs began trickling in from across the North American Division (NAD) and from more than 100 countries outside the division,

the vast grounds transformed into a bustling tent and RV city.

The camporee theme, “Believe the Promise,” inspired by Moses leading Israel out of captivity, reminded Pathfinders that God always keeps His promises. This theme became tangible as several clubs faced vehicle breakdowns and flight delays en route to Gillette.

Then a severe thunderstorm warning canceled the inaugural evening program. At 6:00 p.m. MT,

← One Pathfinder celebrates his baptism as Pathfinders from the Southwestern and Atlantic unions, as well as Pathfinders from all unions who made a decision for baptism during the camporee, are baptized on Friday, August 9, 2024, at the Believe the Promise International Pathfinder Camporee. *Hugh Davis/Mid-America Union*

a storm with lightning and wind gusts of up to 70 miles per hour struck CAM-PLEX. Instructed to seek hard shelter, thousands of campers gathered in buildings while others took cover in vehicles, off-site gas stations, or tents.

Inside one building, Energy Hall, Pathfinders played Uno, traded pins, and sang hymns, including “Marching to Zion” and “God’s Army,” to alleviate stress. Evening program host Kendal Brouet, an impromptu song leader, said, “We did song after song after song until I lost my voice.”

While the worst of the storm lasted about five minutes, Pathfinders sheltered for an hour. Once outside, they were greeted by a double rainbow, which many deemed a sign to “believe the promise.”

Rebuilding Together

The “International Village” was the hardest hit, with at least 40 percent of the low-lying international club campsites destroyed by flooding; and Pathfinders from various regions were displaced. “We had to sleep in the car, in the van, because we had no tents,” reported Samson Waweru, director of the Lower All Nations Warriors from Lowell, Massachusetts.

Pathfinder and church leaders sprang into action, purchasing supplies, rebuilding tents, and assisting with cleanup. Several patrolled their regions until the wee hours of the morning.

The Gillette community also stepped in, with churches and schools accommodating at least 700 campers. Locals generously donated supplies, first at the CAM-PLEX



A replica dinosaur skeleton in the exhibit hall at the 2024 Believe the Promise International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette, Wyoming. *Cerron Pollard/North American Division*

gates, then at a drop-off site organized by NAD Adventist Community Services (ACS) and Youth and Young Adult Ministries. By Wednesday, largely because of the support of the Gillette community, more than 200 tents, 200 blankets, and 500 sleeping bags had been delivered to conferences in need.

Later NAD president G. Alexander Bryant reflected on storm recovery efforts. "I saw a unity of purpose. We will not be defeated by this storm. We will work together. That's a great lesson for our young people," he said.

The Parade Must Go On

On Wednesday morning all activities paused for cleanup. By noon most had resumed, organizers undeterred by schedule changes.

For example, Tim Blake, the daily parade's communication coordinator, promised that although the storm had limited the event to Thursday and Friday, every registered Pathfinder could say, "I got to march as a Pathfinder in Gillette."

NAD Youth and Young Adult Ministries leaders Tracy Wood, director, and associates Vandean Griffin and Armando Miranda, were also heavily engaged in the parade. They led at the review stand, with Miranda joining General Conference leaders in saluting Pathfinders as they marched past.

Griffin coordinated the parade's display of vintage vehicles and headed the parade with his renovated 1997 BMW 318i, decorated NAD One Team and "Believe the Promise" logos. Throughout the parade he was joined by Bryant and other leaders.

Serving the Host Community

The Wednesday morning off-site community service schedule stayed intact, and throughout the week Pathfinders contributed more than 10,000 volunteer hours through 45 projects, comprising outreach to older adults, veterans, and active military, community cleanup and beautification, and food distribution. Among notable projects, more than 150 Pathfinders cleaned all 7,700 tombstones and 1,200 veterans' crosses at Gillette's Mount Pisgah Cemetery. And Pathfinders partnered with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) to sort 18,000 pounds of food into more than 600 boxes, then giving those boxes to local families.

Food distribution volunteers Carine Musaza and Noah Matsunaga from the Rolling Hills Pathfinder Club in California shared, "It's nice to connect with the community, learn their names, and share a bit of our own story."

Angi Klamm, state communications director for the LDS Church, added, "It's been amazing to work with the Pathfinders. It's been an honor."

On-site, the NAD ACS oversaw Pathfinders creating 7,000 hygiene kits for local shelters and Grow boxes for the Salvation Army as part of the serving communities and carpentry honors. NAD Adventist Education also spearhead-

ed a Guinness World Record attempt for the most people simultaneously filling backpacks with school supplies. After breaking the time record, volunteers stuffed 6,200 bags, most slated for local distribution.

"Kids just love to feel like they've accomplished something great, so having a Guinness World Record title is special. But the bigger picture is that these will be donated to students in need," said organizer Nicole Mattson, associate director of education for the Lake Union Conference.

NAD Ministries and Others Shine in Exhibits

At the camporee, exhibit halls filled with displays, vendors, and on-site activities encompassed ideas, history, Adventist organizations and culture, careers, hobbies, skills, volunteer services, various honors (230!), and new ways to have fun.

NAD ministry departments were prominent, with departments such as Women's Ministries and the NAD Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries (ASi) offering resources and giveaways.

Two popular new honors, Health Evangelism and Women in Adventist History, were organized by NAD



Pathfinders build grow boxes, an activity hosted by NAD Adventist Community Services at the 2024 Believe the Promise camporee in Gillette, Wyoming. *JeNeen Lendor/North American Division*



On Friday, August 9, 2024, the nighttime program and campgrounds as seen from a plane flying above it during the Believe the Promise International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette, Wyoming. *Pieter Damsteegt/North American Division*

Health Ministries and Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASR). NAD Stewardship also offered an honor with a community service component.

Rick Remmers, NAD assistant to the president, coordinated the prayer tent outside the main halls, where he and 20 other chaplains led prayer and anointing sessions inspired by Moses. The NextGen initiative was launched in 2019 to support young people called to pastoral ministry. This year, the Office of Volunteer Ministries, NAD Leadership, NAD Ministerial Association, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, and NAD Adventist Education hosted NextGen booths, expanding the definition of ministry. NAD education also ran its own exhibit hall.

Jose Cortes, Jr., NAD Ministerial Association associate director, noted that “NextGen aims to inspire Pathfinders to say, ‘Speak, God . . . I am listening.’”

“Believe the Promise” Nighttime Program Inspiration

When the National Weather Service predicted another severe storm on Saturday night, camporee leadership, in collaboration with North American Division union, division, and international leadership, announced on Thursday afternoon to end the nighttime camporee program a day early. The program was compressed to Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Highlights included ventriloquist “Ryan and Friends,” musical performances by Pathfinders, video testimonies,

and a praise team led by Matthew Haus, who wrote the “Believe the Promise” theme song.

The heart of the program was found in nightly messages from Pastor Damian Chandler, returning as the 2019 “Chosen” camporee speaker, alongside a theatrical production. In five acts the production depicted key scenes from Moses’ life, including the unique circumstances of his birth and early childhood; his escape to Midian after slaying an Egyptian slave master; God’s call to Moses, now a shepherd, at the burning bush; the 10 plagues, culminating in the Passover; and the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. The young

cast, primarily recruited via summer camps and online auditions, worked overtime to present two acts on Thursday and Friday.

Each night Chandler used stories, Bible verses, and examples from Moses’ life to convey the night’s themes.

On night one, Chandler introduced an affirmation for Pathfinders to repeat all week: “I believe! I believe! I believe what He said about me! I believe! I believe! I believe who He said I would be!”

Chandler spoke on unmerited favor and God’s relentless pursuit the second night. Roughly 150 people responded to his altar call, contributing to the 1,187 individuals baptized at the camporee.



The NAD Youth and Young Adult Ministries One Team car leads the daily parade on Thursday, August 8, 2024, at the Believe the Promise International Pathfinder Camporee (pictured back to front: Judy Glass, NAD treasurer; Kyoshin Ahn, NAD executive secretary; Tracy Wood, NAD Youth and Young Adult Ministries director; and Vandeon Griffin, NAD Youth and Young Adult Ministries associate director and car driver). *Art Brondo/North American Division*



Pathfinders participate in the drill and drum competition on August 6, 2024, at the International Pathfinder Camporee. *Dawin Rodriguez/North American Division*



At one of the NAD booths Philip Baptiste, secretary-treasurer for the Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries (ASI), hands out collectibles. *Art Brondo/North American Division*



Pathfinders pick up litter in the Gillette, Wyoming, community on Tuesday, August 6, 2024. The trash cleanup was one of several community service projects at the Believe the Promise International Pathfinder Camporee. *Colin Glenn/North American Division*



Crowd gathered at the August 8, 2024, nighttime program during the Believe the Promise International Pathfinder Camporee. *Alvin Goulbourne/North American Division*

One young Pathfinder, Becky, from Southview church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was especially moved by Thursday's messages and decided to commit publicly to Jesus. Her pastor, Darnisha Thomas, said, "Baptizing her was a moving moment, seeing her parents overjoyed as their daughter began a new journey with her Savior, Lord, and Friend."

On Friday Chandler shared a story of his father, Rupert Michael Chandler, defending him in a tense situation on the soccer field. He was 14, playing for his country, Barbados, when a bully offered \$20 to any man that made him bleed. A frightened Chandler then heard a voice louder than that of his enemy—his father, who stepped onto the pitch and said, "The first man that makes him bleed has to deal with me."

"When I knew my father would fight for me, I knew I could face anything," Chandler said. He underlined that, similarly, the plagues were "about God saying to His people, you are not alone."

In his final message Chandler used a wooden door frame to illustrate the Hebrew practice of writing the names of everyone in a household on doorposts and then covering them with lamb's blood during Passover. He urged Pathfinder leaders to "keep painting until every name in the Pathfinder group, your church, or your city is covered by the blood of Jesus."

That evening, attendee Emma Iizuka from Honolulu Japanese Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hawaii expressed that the night shows were her favorite part of the camporee. She added, "To me, the storm showed that Satan might have been trying to shut this all down. But God still provided for us, through all the mess."

In his closing remarks, international camporee executive director Ron Whitehead thanked the many Pathfinder, church, and camporee leaders and volunteers present for their "commitment to give [Pathfinders] the best program possible to point [them] to Jesus Christ." He also thanked Gillette mayor Shay Lundvall and other civic leaders for helping campers navigate the storm. Then he gave the most important acknowledgment, stating, "What makes camporee special is the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all about Him."

A video revealed the main character and theme for 2029—Elijah, "Stand Strong!"—and the crowd erupted with excitement.

Whitehead concluded, "I can't wait to see you at the next camporee or in heaven, whichever comes first."

Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the North American Division; additional reporting from John Simon, Kimberly Maran, Loretta Spivey, V. Michelle Bernard, and Elyse Baltodano. Visit www.camporee.org to learn more.

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BY PHILIP BAPTISTE

In the Middle of It: A Thanksgiving Reflection

As we approach the season of Thanksgiving, we often find ourselves reflecting on the many blessings in our lives—the prayers that have been answered, the breakthroughs we’ve witnessed, and the victories we’ve celebrated. It’s easy to express gratitude when the outcome is favorable, when the struggle has passed, and when we can see the fruit of our perseverance. But what if we could learn to give thanks not just at the end of the journey but “in the middle of it”? What if we could cultivate the kind of gratitude that doesn’t wait for the resolution, but chooses to acknowledge God’s faithfulness even while the outcome is still unknown?

In Luke 17:11-19 Jesus is traveling along the border of Samaria and Galilee when He is approached by 10 men suffering from leprosy. They cry out to Jesus from a distance: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (Luke 17:13, NKJV). Their plea is desperate, and Jesus responds by instructing them to go and show themselves to the priests. In obedience, they turn and head toward the temple, and as they walk, they are healed.

This healing wasn’t immediate—it was in the process of following Jesus’ command that they began to experience restoration. And yet, only one of them, seeing that he was being healed, turned back to thank Jesus. This one man—a Samaritan—came back to praise God before his healing was fully realized. He didn’t wait until his life was back to normal, until he was reinstated into society, or until his future was secure. He returned in the middle of his healing, while the process was still unfolding, and he offered his praise to God.

This story serves as a powerful reminder that true gratitude doesn’t have to wait for the final outcome. It can—and should—be expressed in the middle of the process. Like the one leper, we too can offer thanks even when we’re still on the journey.

As human beings, we are naturally inclined to praise. We celebrate our children’s achievements, we commend our friends’ kind-

ness, and we cheer on our favorite sports teams when they win. Praise comes easily when life is going well, when victories are won, and when goals are achieved. But what about when life is hard? Can we, like the one leper, turn back to give thanks even when our circumstances haven’t fully changed?

In the Bible we see many examples of God’s people offering praise in the middle of their struggles. One such example is found in Acts 16:25, when Paul and Silas, imprisoned for preaching the gospel, began praying and singing hymns to God. They weren’t praising God after their release—they were praising Him while they were still in chains. Their gratitude wasn’t dependent on their immediate circumstances; it was rooted in their trust in God’s character and His ability to work all things for their good.

This Thanksgiving, don’t wait for everything to be perfect to express gratitude. Like the one leper, return to give thanks “in the middle of it.” Embrace the process, trust God in the trial, and allow His presence to fill your cup. Whether you are in a season of joy or a season of struggle, there is always reason to give thanks. We know that God is faithful, and we know how the story ends—Jesus has already won the victory.

As you gather with family and friends this season, take time to reflect on the people, places, and activities that fill your cup. Engage in practices that refresh your soul, and, most important, draw near to the One who offers you living water. Jesus is ready to fill you, not just after the storm has passed, but in the middle of it. Trust Him, thank Him, and let your cup overflow.

Philip Baptiste is secretary/treasurer for Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries.

Can we give thanks even when our circumstances haven’t fully changed?



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