

Women's Ministries Emphasis Day

June 9, 2012

Resource Packet for 2012

“Our Testimonies: God’s Delight”

Written by
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*Prepared for Women's Ministries Department
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

General Conference
World Headquarters



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My Dear Sisters:

Can you believe it is Women's Emphasis Day once again? Our theme this year is "*Our Testimonies: God's Delight.*" As women, we know the healing power of telling our story to other women. We can cry together, we can pray together, we can feel the pain, and ultimately we never are the same. Testimonies can bring comfort and can truly change our lives.

When we give our testimony, we are telling what happen when God appeared in our lives. We are sharing our faith by saying who we were, and who we are today.

There are 3 ways to give your testimony:

- **By what you say.** The words you use to let people know who you are. It tells them about the real you. It connects them with you. What you say, how you say it, is the power of your testimony.
- **By your actions.** People watches every day, we may not realize it, but what we do tells them a lot about who we are, more than we may suspect.
- **By the fruit of your life.** Are you living your testimony?

As you go through this packet of material, prepared by Helen Gulfan, Southern Asia Pacific Division Women's Ministries Director, be blessed. Be sure that God delights to hear our story, the story of His great love and what He has done in our lives every moment of the day.

We, at General Conference Women's Ministries, invite each of you to enjoy the Sabbath morning program, but we challenge you to take the Sabbath afternoon to go into your community and share the love of God with those in need, whether in the hospital, the nursing home, the women's shelter, the children's home, or even door to door in your community. You are God's hands, God's feet, and God's touch of love to a world in need. *Your testimony can reach a heart.*

Joyfully,

Heather-Dawn Small
Director

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About the Author

Helen Bocala-Gulfan is the director for Women's Ministries, as well as Shepherdess coordinator, for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD). She has been a partner in ministry to Pastor Alberto Gulfan, Jr., who is the President of SSD. They have three grown children—all married, and one grandson.

Helen enjoys working with women and pastoral families. Studying and giving Bible studies is one of her passions. Traveling, teaching, reading, communicating, gardening, sports, music and, sharing God's love with others are some of the things she takes pleasure in. She loves to observe women grow in their walk with God. It is her hope and prayer that all of us will be ready when Jesus comes again.

Featured Divisions

- North American Division
- Trans-European Division
- West-Central Africa Division

North American Division (NAD)

Carla Baker, *Director of Women's Ministries*

Territory: Bermuda, Canada, the French possession of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, the United States of America, Johnston Island, Midway Islands, and all other islands of the Pacific not attached to other divisions and bounded by the date line on the west, by the equator on the south, and by longitude 120 on the east; comprising the Atlantic, Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, Columbia, Lake, Mid-America, North Pacific, Pacific, Southern, and Southwestern Union Conferences.

A challenge that has a significant impact on North American Division Women's ministries is that over half of women's ministries directors on the union and conference levels are volunteers with inadequate budgets to do their work. Despite this handicap, God is blessing, and they are accomplishing much with little.

A health issue that has become epidemic in NAD is obesity. Closely related to obesity is diabetes, which is also at epidemic proportions. Women in the church and in the community experience impaired mobility, increased risk of cancer and heart disease, and early death because of these interrelated diseases. Since women are the keepers of the family's health, their children are also becoming alarmingly obese and at risk for disease.

We request the prayers of our sisters around the world as we work to help the women of our division overcome these challenges.

Trans-European Division (TED)

Clair Sanches-Schutte, *Women's Ministries Director*

Territory: Aland Islands, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Faeroe Islands, Finland, Greece, Greenland, Guernsey, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, and the southern portion of Cyprus; comprising the Adriatic, Baltic, British, Finland, Hungarian, Netherlands, Norwegian, Polish, and South-East European Union Conferences; the Danish, and Swedish Union of Churches Conferences; and the Cyprus Section, Greek Mission, and Iceland Conference

For the Trans-European Division we would very much like to have prayers for how to reach the secular mind. One of the biggest changes we have is that people are no longer interested in religion and church. They are however, spiritual but we need to find ways of reaching these people. We pray that Women's Ministries will be one of these avenues.

West-Central Africa Division (WAD)

Omobonike Adeola Sessou, *Women's Ministries Director*

Territory: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo; comprising the Ghana Union Conferences; and the Central African, Eastern Nigeria, North-Western Nigeria, Sahel, and West African Union Missions.

For West-Central Africa Division, our major challenge for now is the Socio-Political unrest situation of the northern part of Nigeria. Our members especially our sisters, are living in constant fear of death, worshipping in a church is becoming difficult. We solicit the prayers worldwide for peace at the northern part of Nigeria.

The second challenge is the need to effectively evangelize Muslim women for Christ. It is becoming increasingly difficult for Muslim women to accept the gospel call because of the family and social consequences of the decision. Many of our countries are Muslim dominated. We need the intervention of the Holy Spirit for new methods and inspiration to reach these groups of people.

Our Testimonies: God’s Delight”
Worship Service Outline

Call to Worship

Responsive Reading *“I Will Exalt You, My God the King,”* SDA Hymnal # 705

Hymn of Adoration *“Come, Christians, Join to Sing,”* SDA Hymnal # 10

Invocation Speaker

Scripture Reading Luke 8:47, NIV

Pastoral Prayer Please remember the special needs of women in:
(List of Divisions and other subjects for prayer)

- NAD
- TED
- Your local congregation
- Women’s Ministries around the world

Offertory Reading

Offertory Song or Instrumental

Children’s Story “Fatima Meets a Leopard”

Special Music

Sermon **“Our Testimonies: God’s Delight”**

Closing Hymn *“My Faith Looks Up to Thee,”* SDA Hymnal # 517

Benediction

Song of Hope Congregation

Responsive Reading

(PowerPoint slide)

“I WILL EXALT YOU, MY GOD THE KING” SDA Hymnal #705, from Psalm 145 (NIV)

I will exalt You, my God the King; I will praise Your name for ever and ever.
Every day I will praise You and extol Your name for ever and ever.

**Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom,
One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.**

They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and rich in love.

**The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made,
The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.**

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.
You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

**The Lord is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made.
The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.**

He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him: He hears their cry and saves them.
The Lord watches over all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

**My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord.
Let every creature praise His Holy Name for ever and ever.**

Our Testimonies: God's Delight

Sermon Outline

by Helen Bocala-Gulfan

Scripture Reading: Luke 8:47 (NIV)

“Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed.”

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Quotation from *Desire of Ages*, p. 347. “Our confession of His faithfulness....”
- B. Story of buying a camera lens; our focus
- C. The four D's in this woman's story:
 - 1. Her Desperation
 - 2. Her Determination
 - 3. Her Deliverance
 - 4. Her Declaration

II. DESPERATION (Her Need)

- A. Jesus cared about meeting the needs of people (the crowd)
 - 1. Jairus' plea for daughter's healing; Jesus consented to go at once.
 - 2. Unnamed woman's need. After suffering for 12 years, she needed healing.
- B. All of us have needs. Why don't we come to Jesus?

III. DETERMINATION (Her Faith)

- A. She was in poverty, in weakness, untouchable. (Lev. 15:19, 26-27)
- B. She heard about Jesus. Someone has to share the good news of salvation
- C. Her hopes revived when she heard of Christ's cures. (*Desire of Ages*, p. 343)
- D. She had strong conviction and threw off all restraint for just a touch. (Mark 5:28)

IV. DELIVERANCE (Her Healing)

- A. “The golden opportunity had come....” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 343)
- B. With strong faith developed within her, she touched His clothes.
- C. She was delivered from her great problem and was instantly healed.

V. DECLARATION (Her Testimony and God's Response)

- A. Jesus insisted on knowing who had touched Him. (*Desire of Ages*, p. 344)
- B. Monologue (Have a woman act out the woman's experience using the script included).
- C. Vocal solo – “He Touched Me” (Sung by a woman)

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. The woman lingered, weeping with joy at what Jesus has done.
- B. Keeping God's every gift fresh in our memories is for *our* benefit.

- 1 Faith is strengthened; thy soul shall be like a watered garden.
- 3 Health shall spring forth speedily; thy light shall rise in obscurity.
- 5 The glory of the Lord shall be seen upon Him; therefore REMEMBER...

APPEAL: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Oh, praise the Lord.” (Ps. 150:6)

OUR TESTIMONIES: GOD’S DELIGHT SERMON

By Helen B. Gulfan

Scripture: “Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.” (Luke 8:47 NIV)

Introduction: “Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience....These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 347)

A friend was considering buying a good camera. Knowing her plan, her two sons were discussing the pros and cons of various brands. She heard one say, “A good one is one on which Mom could change the lens from time to time to get good and candid shots.” The other said, “But that would be a hassle for mom and additional weight when she travels.”

They were right, and their comments started me thinking. Today, even with the hassle and additional weight, I would still encourage each of us to change the “lens” of our eyes of faith as we focus on the experience of one poor, sick, exhausted woman. Her name is not given in the Bible. But notice that her story is recorded in three of the four gospels—in Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, and Luke 8:43-48. And an entire chapter in *Desire of Ages*, “The Touch of Faith,” is dedicated to her story. I believe with all my heart that this account was chosen by God to speak to us, for He has a special message for us this morning. Why did Jesus ask, “Who Touched Me?” Didn’t he know? Wasn’t the crowd pressing Him upon all sides? Why did He pursue His inquiry?

To answer this, four D’s will be our focal points for consideration: the woman’s desperation, her determination, her deliverance, and her declaration and God’s response.

I. Desperation (Her Need)

Jesus, the itinerant teacher, was in a hurry. He had just consented to the emergency request of a very respected and important man whose daughter was dying. The frantic, anxious, loving father was in great haste. He wanted Jesus to just touch his daughter, and he knew she would be healed. Oh, if there had only been an ambulance, he would command the driver to drive as fast as he could, with sirens blaring and lights flashing. Then everybody would give way and move to the sides of the road. But in this case, Jesus could hardly move because of the vast crowd pressing Him on all sides.

It was not unusual for him to be pressed by a throng of well-wishers, the curious, and the needy. The woman in our story also had a desperate need. When she heard about this man, Jesus who accepts people regardless of who they are, she came and followed Him. She desired to be healed. She needed healing. And who would not? Both the ruler and the sick woman, representing two classes of people, needed Jesus. We all have needs in life. Why don’t we come to Jesus?

II. Determination (Her Faith)

As we know from the record, this woman had been bleeding for 12 long years and had no more resources to find a cure! She was pale, weak and exhausted. What made it worse was that she could not touch anyone and no one could touch her. It was the law. (Leviticus 15: 19, 26-27) She felt dirty and useless. The bed she slept on, the chairs she sat on, the things she touched—all were considered unclean.

But she had heard about Jesus and what He was doing, especially for sick people! Someone must have shared the good news with her. How wonderful to share the good news of salvation with others!

“Her hopes revived when she heard of the cures that Christ performed. She felt assured that if she could only go to Him she would be healed.” (*Desire of Ages*, p 343).

With a strong conviction of Jesus’ power to heal, she threw off all restraint. Faith was growing stronger and stronger in her heart. Her faith was developed from within as evidenced by what she thought to herself. (We call that positive self-talk.) “If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed.” (Mark 5:28). What a great faith in Jesus!

III. Deliverance (Her Healing)

Notice that this woman did not come boldly like Jairus, who went forward and fell at Jesus’ feet. She came behind and touched the border of his garment. Listen to how the pen of inspiration has described it.

“The golden opportunity had come. She was in the presence of the Great Physician! But amid the confusion she could not speak to Him, nor catch more than a passing glimpse of His figure. Fearful of losing her one chance of relief, she pressed forward....As He was passing, she reached forward, and succeeded in barely touching the border of His garment. But in that moment she knew that she was healed.” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 343)

Yes, she touched Him, and she felt cured. She was delivered, healed. But her heart began to pound when Jesus suddenly stopped. Remember, there was an emergency request from Jairus, the synagogue ruler! When Jesus paused, the crowd stopped with Him. The healed woman wondered, Did He know? Could He possibly distinguish her hand on his robe in such a crowd?

IV. Declaration (Her Testimony and God’s Response)

Instantly, Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” (Mark 5:30).

“The people answered this query with a look of amazement. Jostled upon all sides, and rudely pressed hither and thither, as He was, it seemed a strange inquiry.” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 344).

“Peter, ever ready to speak, said, ‘Master, the multitude throng Thee and pressed Thee, and sayest Thou, “Who touched Me?”’ Jesus answered, ‘Somebody hath touched Me: for I perceive that

virtue is gone out of Me.’ Jesus could distinguish the touch of faith from the casual contact of the careless crowd.” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 344) Have **you** ever touched Jesus in genuine faith?

When Jesus asked, “Who touched Me?” does this mean also that He’s asking, “**What really touches Me?**” From this story, we can be assured of Jesus’ care for us. **He is touched by our:**

1. **Poverty.** In the case of this woman, the Bible says, “She had spent all her money.” Someone observed, “Jesus must love the poor, because He made so many of them. And another responded, “Yes, and He loves the rich, too.” He loves all people, rich and poor, but especially the poor! The woman was very poor, but He gave her his attention first.
2. **Infirmities or sickness.** Jairus’ longed for his daughter’s healing. Jesus quickly consented to go with him. And the woman who touched Him had been sick for 12 years. In this, one of many stories, we see that Jesus loves the sick. We know that He spent most of His time while on earth healing the sick. If you are sick today, let Jesus touch you. He loves and cares for you.
3. **Sadness.** A comforting song says, “Never a sorrow that He doth not share. Moment by moment I’m under His care.” (SDA Hymnal, # 507). Our loving Jesus is touched when someone passes away. Jesus wept when Lazarus died. But God has promised that those who die in Christ, those who trust in Him, He will raise up! Blessed assurance. He comforts those who mourn.
4. **Sins.** God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son to redeem us from sin. He left the splendors of heaven because of His great love and His faithfulness to us. 1 John 1: 9 assures us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“Looking at the woman, Jesus insisted on knowing who had touched Him.” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 344). Listen to her testimony.

(A slim woman enters immediately, dressed in a Bible times costume. She acts with feeling and expression the following monologue.) [Place a small table with a Bible on it and a chair in an appropriate place on the platform.]

Monologue script: Her Testimony: God’s Delight and His Response

(The woman enters holding a red rose. She speaks slowly but loud enough to be heard and with feeling.)

Twelve years, twelve years. . . that’s a long time be an outcast, untouchable—almost as bad as having leprosy. *(As if listening to someone in the audience)* You don’t understand? . . . No, you wouldn’t, I suppose.

Read your Old Testament Bible and you will find out why. . . *(Places rose on table and picks up Bible and reads it)*

“A woman shall be put apart until seven days after she stops bleeding, and anyone who touches her shall be unclean until evening” *(Closes Bible and places it on table)*

Well, if you are bleeding almost every day for twelve years, you are never clean, can never be hugged, or even touched. Get it?

Have I ever seen a doctor? *(Again as if listening to one of the audience)*

Oh, yes. . . .Lots of them. . . .Useless all of them! (*Throws up hands as if in despair*). But I kept on going, kept hoping, until all my money ran out. They would just sit there in their comfortable chairs, (*Sit on chair*) well away from me, of course, ask personal questions, shake their heads, and give advice, none of which helped.

And so I got weaker and weaker as the years went by, (*Get up slowly as if very weak*) and paler and paler. And I knew I couldn't last much longer. (*Slowly as if short of breath*)

And then I heard about Jesus. He wasn't afraid to touch lepers, and they got better.

Maybe.maybe. (*looks up thinking*)

But no. They were men. He wouldn't help me. I am only a woman. (*Shoulders droop again, then suddenly brightening*) Or would He?

I was too scared to go to Him and ask Him.

But, if I could touch Him. . . . No, that would make Him unclean too.

Well, just touch His clothes.

Yes, that is what I would do. . . touch His clothes. No one would ever know. (*Pause*)

It was hard to get close to Jesus. (*Speaks as if short of breath*) I was too weak to walk far, . . . But, after several attempts, I managed to join a crowd who didn't know me and move along with it until I was near enough to brush my hand along the edge of Jesus' clothes.

Then, suddenly it happened! **I was well!** I knew it before I even looked at my hands all pink and rosy again. (*Looks at palms of hands*) I was healthy again!

I felt like jumping up and down and shouting "**I'm healed. I'm healed.** (*Jumps up and down, raising hands up and down*) **Jesus healed me.**" (*Stops suddenly as she realizes what that would mean.*)

But that would never do. . . I tried to melt back into the crowd. (*Draws back*) I wanted no publicity. No questions asked.

Jesus turned and looked at me,

"Who touched me?" He asked.

Silly question, with all that crowd around.

And the disciples weren't slow in telling Him so.

"Who touched me? His look told me He knew all about me.

"Whom have I touched with healing?" is what He meant.

I was ashamed, horrified at what I had done. I, an unclean woman, had come into the crowd. I could be severely punished for this.

Would Jesus give me a lecture about keeping the law? Would the crowd beat me for defiling this holy man? Was Jesus angry because I made Him unclean? . . .because I delayed his mission of greatest urgency? A girl was dying and needed his help, and I polluted him!

Would He expose me in front of all these people? I tried so hard not to be noticed.

But no. He spoke of my faith. . . . My faith? Yes! He is pleased with my simple faith! Falling at His feet, I poured out my whole story, my eyes on the ground. Then, I looked up and saw His eyes. He wasn't angry, He was moved. He called me, "Daughter," and said, "Your God has restored you to health. Go in peace and be freed from suffering." I discovered right there and then that Jesus was delighted to hear me tell my testimony of what He has done for me.

He must have known what my problem was. I didn't want to speak about it, but God in His wisdom would not allow my silence. Jesus knew the benefits I would receive if I acknowledged His goodness and grace.

The woman who had been bleeding for twelve years?

That's me. . . . I don't mind you knowing me now. For I just want to praise and thank God.

Jesus touched me. . . .me. . . .and He made me whole! *(The woman slowly sits down on the floor, with bowed head while another lady sings the song below. If nobody knows how to sing this song, just read the lyrics).*

Vocal Solo: "He Touched Me"

Shackled by a heavy burden,
'Neath a load of guilt and shame.
Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.

Chorus:

He touched me, yes, He touched me,
And oh the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole.

Since I met this blessed Savior,
Since He cleansed and made me whole,
I will never cease to praise Him,
I'll shout it while eternity rolls.

Conclusion

After this brief incident, Jesus started to move on again. But the woman remained on her knees, wrapped in God's presence, weeping with joy, relief and gratitude. Imagine, Jesus had not passed her by. Her suffering was over. She was whole again, and she was clean. Indeed! What a Savior! What a Savior is *mine* to praise and to thank for all His countless gifts to *me*.

Ellen White reminds us that through our expressions of gratitude to God, we bring benefit to ourselves. "It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. . . .The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden. His health shall spring forth speedily; his light shall rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon him. Let us then remember the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the multitude of His tender mercies." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 348).

Appeal

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord." (Ps. 150:6, NIV).

Declare the glory of God. Testify of His goodness and faithfulness. Tell others what He has done in your life. Return in gratitude to Him, like the only one of the ten lepers who expressed gratitude to Jesus.

At this moment, will you each choose a partner and share what you are most thankful to God for? I know each of us have much to thank and praise God for. Let us take 2 or 3 minutes to do this. Then we will sing the Doxology.

Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you for speaking to us. Thank you for reminding us that you delight to hear our story, the story of your great love and what you have done in our lives every moment of the day. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to express our testimonies. We know that this is pleasing to you when it comes from the heart of faith—our worship, our response to your kindness and love. Lord, cause us to be courageous to come back to you and say thank you for every blessing, great and small. In the past, we have been careless. Oh, Lord, please forgive our ungratefulness. From this time on, help us to constantly respond to your grace. In the Mighty, yet loving name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

FATUMA MEETS A LEOPARD

Children's Story

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand...Do not fear; I will help you. (Isaiah 41:10-13)

FATUMA was a girl about twelve years old. She liked to go to Sabbath school, but she lived far from the church. Her parents did not go to church, but they were glad to have Fatuma go.

Often she would get all her work done early on Friday. Then she would walk through the forest to the home of some friends who lived close to the church. She would stay with them on Friday night.

But one Friday she had a lot of work to do. "Oh, oh, whatever can I do to get to Sabbath school on time? She wondered. "If I wait until tomorrow I will have to leave while it is still dark. If I go tonight it will be dark. Really, it would be better to go in the morning, because it will be light most of the way. But if I go now it will be dark all of the way."

She talked to her parents. "We do not want you to go tonight," they said. "You should wait until the sun comes up in the morning."

"But if I wait until then, I will be very late to Sabbath school," Fatuma responded. She was really worried.

Finally, she decided to go that night without her parents knowing "Jesus will care for me." She told herself. "He knows that I want to go to Sabbath school."

She went out to the path in the dark. Then she stopped to pray. "Jesus, I am here this night. I want to go and worship you at church tomorrow. I must go now if I am to get there in time. Please take care of me," she prayed. "I know there are many dangers. There are wild animals. And when I get home my parents will be angry. Please do not let them be angry."

She walked a long way through the dark forest. She was very sure that Jesus was with her. Suddenly right in front of her she saw a leopard. He was sitting in the path. She could not go forward. She did not want to go home. So she prayed, "Please do not let this leopard hurt me. Keep me safe. Send him away." Then she bravely walked right around the leopard and went on along the path.

When she reached the home of her friends, the people asked, "Fatuma, why did you come at night? There are leopards and other wild animals out there in the forest."

"I know there are," replied Fatuma. "I saw one. But Jesus took care of me." The she told them how God had protected her from the leopard. The next morning when she went to Sabbath school she was very happy to be there. She stood up and told the people what had happened and how God had watched over her.

“Our God is a great God,” the people said when she finished. “He is very great indeed.”

Beloved children, will you, like Fatuma, tell others how good God is? How He answers prayers of faith? How kind, how loving and caring Jesus is to you? May I see the hands of those who said, “Yes?” Thank you. You may go back to your seat now and listen to the sermon. Remember that Jesus watches over you.

Proclaiming God's Grace and Healing

Friday Evening Program

PARTICIPANTS:

- ❖ A leader who will give the overview of the presentation, monitor the program, and lead in the scripture reading and the litany.
- ❖ A chorister who will lead in the congregational singing.
- ❖ Two Readers.
- ❖ A woman willing to give her testimony on recovery from any chronic disease (*5 minutes*).
- ❖ A young lady willing to give a testimony on how God helped her overcome addictive habits, such as too much time with television or internet, spending too much on clothes, or unhealthy eating habits, etc. (*5 minutes*)

READER 1: God fervently desires us to come into His presence. He desires fellowship and intimacy with us, His people. He created us for this!

He has made a way for us to come near to Him by sending Jesus, His precious Son, to die for us. We can boldly come into the presence of the King of Kings!

We are built to praise Him, publicly give Him the glory He deserves, and as we do, He comes to meet with His beloved people.

Tonight we will worship Him, sing songs of praise and thanksgiving, read His promises, and hear testimonies of His love and healing. Together we will proclaim His grace and healing!

Responsive Reading: Psalms 105:1-4

Leader: Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done.

Congregation: Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts.

Leader: Glory in His Holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Congregation: Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.

Hymn: "Praise Him! Praise Him," #135, *SDA Church Hymnal* (first stanza only)

READER 2: How would you feel if you were diagnosed with cancer? Or when your body is damaged by a stroke or heart failure? Some of us in this congregation have been through such illnesses. Ms. (name) will give her own story of how God healed her.

Testimony: (Choose from your congregation a lady who has recovered from cancer, stroke or other disease because of God's healing power) (Limit to 5 minutes.)

READER 1: Jesus' power to heal is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah will take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows. Our eternal future also holds the promise of His healing power: "He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." Now we may indeed experience His healing power, but our true healing will not be complete until we are with Him forever.

Responsive Reading: Psalms 103:1-4

Leader: Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my innermost being, praise His Holy name.

Congregation: Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits

Leader: Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

Congregation: Who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.

Hymn: "The Great Physician Now is Near," #254, *SDA Church Hymnal* (first stanza only)

Leader: Let's read together Psalms 30:4-5

"Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name....Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

READER 2: Each of us has times when we face problems and hardships, times when we may become discouraged. It may be because of relationships with our family or friends. Or finances may be scarce. Events make our lives difficult. Thankfully, the clouds usually pass. The challenge is to remember during times of trial that "weeping endures but for a night, and joy comes in the morning." But through both the storms and the sunshine, we can praise the Lord and give thanks for His loving care at all times.

Testimony: (Choose from your congregation a young lady whose life has been transformed by God.) (Limit to 5 minutes.)

Hymn: "All to Jesus I Surrender," #193, *SDA Church Hymnal* (first stanza only)

READER 1: When the storms of life sap our spiritual lives, when we feel oppressed, depressed, lost, far from God's presence, remember the Psalmist's assurance that "the Lord is close to the broken hearted." Our loving Father will send forth the divine light and truth we need to guide us. The Lord is our light; we do not need to be afraid. How comforting to know that no matter how lost and dejected we may feel, God's faithfulness assures us that He is ever with us. We will yet praise Him.

Responsive Reading: Psalms 42:1-5

Leader: As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

Congregation: My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Leader: My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Congregation: These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Leader: Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.

Hymn: “Just When I Need Him,” #339, *SDA Church Hymnal* (first stanza only)

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:9

Leader & Congregation all together: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

READER 2: Perhaps we may find it hard to believe that God wants to heal people because not everybody is healed. The apostle Paul had a thorn (pain, suffering, or physical infirmity) in his flesh. He pleaded with God three times to remove it. God refused. But God gave him sufficient grace and power to live with his infirmity. God certainly doesn't always heal in the ways we expect. Because He is Sovereign, He has many options. He may heal in several ways--either instantly or through medical procedures and knowledge. Just because we doubt, just because we haven't experienced healing, or because we don't think miracles happen now doesn't mean God is not healing His people.

Solo: “Amazing Grace,” #103, *SDA Church Hymnal*

READER 1: I invite the congregation to stand and read responsively the *Litany of Healing*.

Litany of Healing

Leader: God the Father, your will for all your people is health and salvation.

All: We praise and bless you, Lord.

Leader: God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

All: We praise and bless you, Lord.

Leader: God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence.

All: We praise and bless you, Lord.

Leader: Lord grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured or disabled, that they may be made whole.

All: Hear us, Lord of life.

Leader: Grant to all who are lonely, anxious or depressed a knowledge of your will and an assurance of your loving presence.

All: Hear us, Lord of life.

Leader: Grant to all who minister to those who are suffering wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience. Mend broken relationships, and restore to those in distress soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

All: Hear us, Lord of life.

Leader: Sustain and support those who seek your guidance, and lift up all who are brought low by the trials of this life.

All: Hear us, Lord of life.

Leader: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world.

All: Hear us, Lord of life.

Leader: You are the Lord who does mighty wonders.

All: You have declared your power among us.

Leader: Hear us, Lord of Life.

All: Heal us, and make us whole.

Hymn: "Jesus Lover of My Soul," # 489, 490, *SDA Church Hymnal* (first and last stanzas)

READER 2: Prayer

O Lord our God, accept the fervent prayers of your people; in the multitude of your mercies look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help; for you are gracious, O lover of souls, and to you we give glory, now and forever. Amen.

God's Promises

Philippians 4:6-7

6 Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised.

Hebrews 10:35

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

Inspiring Quotations

"A pearl is a beautiful thing that is produced by an injured life. It is the tear [that results] from the injury of the oyster. The treasure of our being in this world is also produced by an injured life. If we had not been wounded, if we had not been injured, then we would not produce the pearl." [Stephan Hoeller](#)

"Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy." [Thich Nhat Hanh](#)

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved." [Helen Keller](#)

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The Testimony of Naomi's Life

Sabbath School Program

Scripture Reading: Ruth 2:12

Introduction

Christians may sometimes imagine that we should speak for the Lord only when we are experiencing success in our lives, and that it would be better to remain silent when we are struggling or suffering lest we give God a bad name. We worry that our faith is valuable to others only when it demonstrates our personal victory, and forget that it is Christ's sure and final victory that should always be our focus.

Naomi was not a prophetess, yet her life has a message that is both profound and practical for our day. She experienced extensive personal hardship and endured periods of depression, yet she continued to praise and trust God for his blessings wherever she found them. She was honest in expressing her true feelings, which were not always pleasant, but she never lost hope. She was sensitive, sincere, unselfish—an ideal mother-in-law. Her witness was winsome; Ruth her daughter-in-law, was drawn by her beautiful character to share first faith with Naomi, and then her future and her family.

Speaker 1

Why did Naomi go to Moab? What series of events made her decide to return to Bethlehem? What emotions might she have had that influenced her decision?

The book of Ruth, in which Naomi's story is found, opens with a famine in Judah, during the days when the judges ruled. The nation of Moab had already caused repeated difficulties for Israel (Num. 21-25, Judges 3). God had warned his people not to have any dealings with the Moabites, and not to marry foreign wives. Nevertheless, when the famine became severe, a man named Elimelech decided to take his wife Naomi and his two sons to Moab, expecting that he could better provide for them there. But he died, and his sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. About ten years later the sons also died, leaving Naomi "husbandless, childless, and penniless."

The opening verses of the Book of Ruth suggest that Naomi was not a woman to stir up controversy in her family. She would probably have obeyed quietly when her husband announced the move to Moab, and after his death remained quietly in the home of her sons and their pagan wives. She was not the type to preach at them concerning their disregard of God's directions, nor would she have tried to usurp their authority over their households. If the men had survived, Naomi probably would not have spoken at all. But while she was quiet, and later when she was alone, she kept her ears and heart open for the news of God's work.

When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there (Ruth 1:6).

Thus, two events put Naomi back on the road to her home in Bethlehem: the deaths of her husband and sons, and the report of God’s provision for his people in Judah. There was nothing to keep her in Moab any longer, and every reason for her return to Judah.

Speaker 2

How would you describe Naomi’s relationships with her two daughter-in-laws? Why did she urge them both to return to their homes, but later accept Ruth’s plea to remain with her? How would you differentiate urging from nagging?

For Orpah and Ruth the decision was much more difficult. They had spent more than ten years with Naomi, and they undoubtedly felt very close to her as well as obligated to continue caring for their mother-in-law. However, their own family and national ties were in Moab; they would not have been eager to live as widows and foreigners in Judah, no matter how much they loved Naomi. Naomi’s gentle sensitivity to these mixed emotions was manifest when she allowed Orpah and Ruth to start out on the journey with her.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s house. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband” (Ruth 1:8-9).

The younger women wept aloud and insisted on going with her, but Naomi overruled once again.

But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—would you wait until they grow up? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has gone out against me” (Ruth 1:11-13).

This time the two daughters-in-law responded differently from each other according to their contrasting temperaments. At first both women were prepared to go with Naomi out of a sense of duty and affection, but at Naomi’s urging, Orpah turned back. We presume she remained in Moab with her own family, and perhaps married again, as Naomi had prayed she would. The Bible tells us nothing more about her. But Ruth persisted. Consider what must have been the tremendous impact of Naomi’s life on Ruth during their years together, which moved Ruth to respond with a pledge of devotion said in these immortal words:

“Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

Naomi knew when to urge and when to stop urging. Three times she tried to persuade the women to stay in Moab. Orpah accepted the offer because it was reasonable, sensitive, and sincere. But Ruth was different. She said, “Don’t urge me to leave.” Naomi’s sensitivity is shown once again in verse 18: “When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.” Instead of selfishly pushing her own preferences onto her daughters-in-law, Naomi watched and listened for signs of their true inclinations.

Naomi was not trying to outmaneuver or overpower her daughters-in-law. She simply allowed God to work through her life to touch them. Orpah and Ruth each had the same opportunity to become acquainted with God through Naomi's deep faith displayed in her day-to-day activities. But the seed fell on different kinds of soil (Matt. 13). Orpah returned to her people and her gods; Ruth said, "Your people will be my people and your God my God."

If we sincerely ask God to use our lives to bear eternal fruit for him in the lives of others, we, too, must recognize the fact that some people will respond with open hearts while others will refuse the good news we want to share. We must be available, but also accepting of the time, methods, or people he chooses to relay his message (see 1 Cor. 3:5-9). Naomi could have become discouraged over her 50 percent failure in bringing her daughters-in-law to the Lord. Instead she accepted each of their decisions without judgment or remorse.

Speaker 3

How did Naomi testify to God's grace during both her good times and bad? What is your experience with God, and how is your life a witness to others?

When Naomi arrived in Bethlehem with Ruth, her former friends barely recognized her. "Can this be Naomi?" they wondered. Once again, Naomi's testimony was hardly triumphant, but it did express her deep awareness of God's activity in her life during her long absence from home.

"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" (Ruth 1:20-21).

What kind of winsome witness was this? It was honest. Through her trials in Moab—the deaths of her husband and sons, as well as their struggles to find food in a foreign land—Naomi had come to feel that the Lord's hand had gone out against her, which she had told Orpah and Ruth and repeated to her friends in Bethlehem. But she still felt that it was God's hand at work. There was real bitterness, to the point that Naomi requested that she be called Mara, which means "bitter," instead of her own name, which means "peasant."

But Naomi never denied God's existence nor rejected the possibility of his blessing for others or for herself at a later time. She saw no contradiction in her belief that God, who sometimes afflicted was also the one who provided and blessed. This truth had been verified by her experiences. Because Naomi was honest in sharing her sufferings, her friends were able to share all the more in her ultimate success, as we shall see.

Speaker 4

Was it true that the Lord's hand had gone out against Naomi? How did he also bless her? How do you reconcile God's power with the presence of evil in this world? Why does he allow his people to suffer?

Think for a moment about Naomi's statement that God's hand had gone out against her. Was this mere fantasy, proof that her temporary depression was becoming paranoia? Can God's

hand ever go against one of his people, or is it only Satan who brings misfortune and evil into the world? Do we not have one adversary and one advocate? How can our friend become our enemy?

The Bible has a great deal to teach on these crucial questions, more than we can explore in depth here. But we know that God is omnipotent, and that the domain of his power is not limited to working only in behalf of those who honor him. God sometimes does allow bad things to happen to his people today also, not for his own pleasure nor for our punishment, but always in perfect harmony with his character and purposes. We may feel the impact of these blows as a result of our deliberate choice to disregard or disobey God's authority over our lives, or we may simply become wounded in the crossfire as the battle rages around us in the world. None of us is immune. God knows that Satan desires to sift us like wheat (Luke 22:31-32), and God may give him limited permission to do so, as he did with Job, in order to bring us back into full commitment and service to himself. Romans 8:28 does not mean that our walk with God will necessarily always be in the sunshine.

Naomi was not accusing God of being mean to her; she was acknowledging that he was in control of her life and that she had suffered. This challenges us to honestly and realistically acknowledge the status of our walk with God, no matter how he may be dealing with us at the moment. Doing so is a more powerful testimony to his presence than any evangelistic formula we can recite. To have deep doubts and serious needs does not mean that our faith is weak. But faith does then become visible to ourselves as well as to others; for when we are most vulnerable we are also most transparent, and the often-painful process of God's tender dealing with his children is most readily observed. We must be willing to become small and to hurt in order to grow and be healed. Naomi's apparent weakness did not weaken her witness.

The connection between our pain and our praise does not mean that God wants us to rejoice over our sufferings *per se*, any more than we should rejoice over the sufferings of other people, which would be dishonest and cruel. But he does want us to rejoice in *him*. **Always** (Phil. 4:4-7). Amazingly, we find that we can endure any agony when we know God is with us in it, supplying his strength and love even when we do not comprehend his plan.

Speaker 5

What influence did Naomi have on Ruth? What influence did Ruth have on Naomi? How have you been blessed with a similar friendship?

Naomi's attitude was both honest and contagious, and Ruth caught it. She was determined to share Naomi's life and faith, as indeed she already had. Her vow, "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me," was proof of her conversion. Naomi had not promised Ruth a life of ease nor had she lived one. Ruth must have watched Naomi suffer and must have drawn on her strength through the years they had already shared. Naomi's sustaining faith in God had obviously impressed Ruth and brought her into fellowship with her Lord.

Naomi's faith in an active, present, real, personal God permeates the story of Ruth and reaches out to our hearts as well. Can we say that others have "come to take refuge" under the wings of the Lord because of the honest, vibrant messages of our lives?

When Ruth linked herself to Naomi by faith, she made a commitment to share the future with her, whatever happened. From that time, on they functioned as a harmonious team. Ruth offered to glean, and Naomi was ready with words of praise to God for his providence and with encouragement and advice for Ruth. The two women lived in this way for some time, with Ruth working in the fields and Naomi managing their home. They seemed content; Naomi's outbursts of bitterness disappeared as she began to rest in God's care and Ruth's companionship. When they settled down in Bethlehem, both of them expected to remain single.

But Naomi was still open to receive news of God's work. Just as she had once heard he had come to the aid of his people in providing food, she began to realize that he might be coming to her aid once again in providing a kinsman-redeemer for her family. Neither Ruth nor Naomi was a schemer who selfishly plotted to trap Boaz into marriage. But they were available to cooperate with God. The fact that Ruth "just happened" to work in Boaz's fields and to find favor in his eyes encouraged Naomi to suggest that God might have a greater purpose in mind. Similarly, when we trust in God, our eyes are opened to recognize his design in events that may appear to others to be mere coincidence. Naomi's life message had brought Ruth into God's family; Ruth in turn brought new life into Naomi's family. Now Naomi's friends could truly rejoice with her over her new son, a link in Christ's genealogy (see Matt. 1:5).

Conclusion

Even when she felt that God had dealt harshly with her, Naomi sought to know his will. Her discouragement never became disbelief. She kept her emotions in line with her sure knowledge of God. Because she did not hide her weakness, her strength strengthened others.

In our day, which stresses total openness in relationships, perhaps Christians have become too self-conscious and too fearful of being accused of hypocrisy. If we're not actually bubbling over with joy in the Lord at every moment, we may hesitate to recommend him to others, and fail to appreciate his activity in the world around us. "Our walk must reflect our talk," we say, so we keep silent. "We cannot lead where we have never traveled," we mutter, and remain motionless. Satan is having a field day tying our tongues and hobbling our feet. "Praise the Lord, anyhow," is a popular but sadly feeble effort at Christian encouragement. Dear friends, we are missing myriad opportunities to glorify our God for his everlasting greatness and goodness!

Perhaps you have gone away full and come back empty in some aspect of your life. As you honestly evaluate your present position, whatever the pain, can you trust that God is not yet finished? Do not close your heart or your ears to his voice, to news of the work he will yet do, to the fruit of his love and fulfillment of your life still ahead. Freely tell others how God is still working in your life right now. Draw them close to God through your truthful life testimony, as Naomi did.

Resource: Buswell, Sara. *The Challenge of Old Testament Women, 1*. Baker Publishing Group, MI. 1986.