

American Union Newsletter

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, REFORM MOVEMENT
International Missionary Society

VOLUME 34, No. 10

OCTOBER 2018

Lessons from a Rose Garden

Sandra Nelson, Western Field Family/Education Department Leader, Wilton, California

How long has it been since you examined a rose? What kind of rose was it? A cabbage rose, a Sweet-Brier, or a beach rose? Was it just a bud, full of tightly-wrapped yellow petals? Or was it a red rose in full bloom, as beautiful as any flower can be? Perhaps the rose you were examining had already begun to turn brown and lose some of its once beautiful petals. Or perhaps you gently touched your rose, and all the leaves fell, turning that once beautiful flower into only a memory.

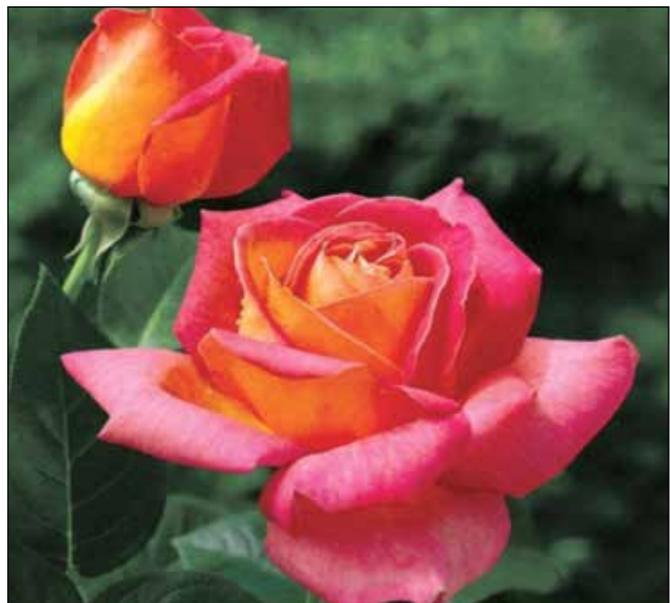
It was while examining my rose garden one day that I learned a precious lesson that God was showing me there. Each stage of the rose is like a stage of my life (and of the many lives around me). Babies and children are buds, full of potential, beautiful in their own little immature way. The opening buds are like the young people, who are at the pinnacles of their lives, displaying much outward beauty. Mature flowers are like those of middle age. They are starting to lose some of their external beauty, and this loss only increases as they age further. Finally, the once beautiful rose is like those incredible people who have touched our lives but are now only cherished memories.

As I thought of the stages of a rose, I realized that I have already been through a few. And as for the ones that hopefully lie ahead, I contemplated the promises God that has given me for them in

His eternal Word. How long will He be my God? Is there a time in my life when He is especially near?

What I found are the following verses about God's eternal care. I found them so encouraging that I wanted to share them. I pray that you, too, will be blessed by them. God has promised His care ALL through our lives, from the time we were formed in the womb to the moment we end our earthly existence!

“But Thou art He that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my moth-



er's breasts. I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art my God from my mother's belly." Psalm 22:9.

"He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young [those that have their young with them]." Isaiah 40:11.

"For Thou art my hope, O Lord God: Thou art my trust from my youth." Psalm 71:5.

"And even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar [grey] hairs will I carry you: I have made, and

I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." Isaiah 46:4.

"For this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14.

Remember that our earthly lives are only temporary, but God's word and His promises are eternal. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever." Isaiah 40:8. I pray that God's word will be our guide and hope throughout all the stages of our lives!

Challenges

Athai Finch, American Union Newsletter Editor, Valencia, California

Recently, I was invited to participate in a backpacking trip in Colorado. The trip consisted of a few young people, Elder Larry Watts, and a few others from the Denver, Colorado, church—twelve people in all. I traveled alone on this trip and was very nervous, because it was the first time I did not have my immediate family with me. However, I accepted the challenge, and what was to come was something far more than just camping.

Everyone carried his or her own backpack, which had to include all of the essential items needed to survive out in the wilderness for four days—a personal tent, a sleeping bag, two sets of clothing, a small travel stove, a can of propane, utensils for meals and meal preparation, a water bottle, four days' worth of freeze-dried food, a flashlight, a first aid kit, and other miscellaneous items.

The pack generally weighs at least 40 pounds per person. Climbing rocks and walking up and down hills with 40 pounds on one's back is not an easy thing to do. As a matter of fact, for someone who is considered physically fit, like me, this was really difficult to do. I remember having to ration my water, hoping not to run out before we could filter water. Some of us were not fully prepared with sufficient food and we would need to leave early due



to a lack of nutrition, which would be a challenge to survival. We thanked the Lord that after we prayed our food would miraculously be sufficient. God provided as everyone shared.

The twelve of us got a little bit closer as we helped one another through tough hiking areas and shared the loads on our back. I learned that one person is preparing for baptism. Her name is Lea Miller, who became a new friend who now keeps in touch with me via text.

The holy Sabbath day was very relaxing. I taught the Sabbath school lesson, something that is always challenging for me. However, the unity of the group was great, as we all got to comment and participate in the study about the armor of Christ, especially

the helmet of salvation. We closed the Sabbath school with the hymn “Day by Day,” which tells of the strength we get from God to keep moving forward through tough times.

Later in the day, we had another guided Bible study by Brother Henry Ramirez about the seven feasts and their relevance in the New Testament period up to the final days of this world’s history. After closing the Sabbath, we



gathered around a campfire and played a few games before going to bed.

The last night (Sunday) was the most challenging for me. The weather was very cold; and, to make things worse, it began to pour rain. The rain ran under my tent, and it was very difficult to sleep, for the wet ground made the bottom of my tent even colder. My sleeping bag was a thin lightweight one, which did not keep me warm at all on the last night; it was then that I realized that one’s sleeping bag is meant not just to keep you warm but to help you survive. I kept tossing and turning and hoping that morning would come quickly so we could pack up, walk back to the trail head, and go home.

I prayed to God and asked Him please to relieve me of the cold and to help me sleep. My feet were freezing cold, and my head ached. I began to consider that we are living in the last days and there is no room for complaining. After all, if we were being persecuted and had to flee to and survive in the mountains, this scenario is something that could really happen. And then the reality might be that I would not even have a blanket to keep me warm. “But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.” Matthew 24:20. This verse came to mind that very moment.

When I returned to the comforts of my home, I began to think about what a blessing this challenge was. It was a taste of what future events might be like. I also began to consider the burdens that we carry and how forty pounds on our backs was hard

to carry up steep rocks; but we kept moving slowly forward at our own pace. One can only imagine the unbelievable burden of this world that Jesus carried!

This made me think that, no matter what burdens we are responsible for, all the worry, anxiety, and stress we keep bottled up inside must be given to Jesus as we keep moving forward one day at a time, not constantly questioning what could or will happen. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Many times this seems hard to do, but there is a promise in these verses that Jesus gives: “For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28, 30.

I am faced with trials and temptations every day. And if I learned something on this challenging trip, it was to pace myself and rest whenever I needed a break. Likewise, every day, whenever necessary, I need to stop, think, and contemplate what God expects of me. After all, the psalmist says, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Psalm 55:22.

Those four days reminded me to let go of negativity, to not fight back with words when others want to fight with me, and—above all—to be meek, as was Jesus, and stay quiet when it seems that others want to be against me. There is no reason to question, “Are we there yet?” because although the road to a healthier spiritual life seems tough and difficult at times, the only thing we need to focus on is to keep moving forward through the challenges of life step by step and day by day.

Repent, and Be Baptized

Athai Finch, American Union Newsletter Editor, Valencia, California

On Sabbath, September 22, 2018, Elder David Romero visited the Riverside, California, church to re-baptize Sister Juliana Urioste. She has been part of the Riverside church in California for a number of years. Through trials and tribulations, she decided to give her soul once again to Jesus Christ in a renewal of her commitment to serve her Lord and Saviour.

There are times in our lives when we are left feeling unworthy to come to Jesus again and seek true repentance of sin. Despite our transgressions, let us remember that no sin is too great in the eyes of God. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23. However, a special invitation is given to everyone by God to come to Him and plead in faith for His mercy.

“No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary. Thus the cross, in earnest appeals, continually proffers to the sinner a thorough expiation.” –Manuscript 50, 1900. Let us always remember the truths that God’s word presents to every thirsting soul who asks for forgiveness and pleads for mercy. Jesus is in the most holy place pleading for every single soul who seeks His presence.

Sister Juliana has renewed her spirit and vows with Jesus, and we will support and encourage her as she continues to serve the Lord! “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.



2018 Calendar

- Early October – Orion Christian Academy Tour of Battle Creek, Michigan (contact www.ocaedu.org for information)

The *American Union Newsletter* is the official organ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Reform Movement, American Union. It is published monthly, is complimentary for members and friends, and carries items of interest submitted by believers. We reserve the right to make changes as necessary and to refuse to print certain items.

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