FIRST SABBATH
**God’s Precious Book**

*“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation”  (1 Peter 2:2).*

We had just moved to a new area, and our new house was not ready yet. Since it would take us about three weeks to put the finishing touches on our new home, friends took us in. They had a 6-year-old girl who had a very pleasant personality and was very smart. One day when she returned from school, she walked in with two small flowerpots that held plants. One plant looked very healthy, and the other was shriveled and dying.

I could tell that she had some big news to share. She put her plants down and told me the plants she carried were her class project. She explained that before we moved in, her teacher gave them two plants to plant in flowerpots when they returned home. They were to put one pot where there was plenty of light and the other in a very dark place. The plant that would be in darkness would not be fertilized, but the one in the light would be. While the plant in the light would be watered lightly once or twice a week, the plant in the dark would be watered only when planted. They were told to bring the pots to school after two weeks.

The girl’s mom helped her with the planting, and at the end of the two weeks she collected both plants and took them to school. She discovered that her plant, and all her classmates’ plants, that were in darkness were dying. Her teacher explained the reason the plants were dying was that they lacked nutrients, which helped them grow. Without light, fertilizer, and proper food, a plant cannot grow, and for a plant to do really well it needs moisture, air, sunlight, and fertile soil. As this child walked away with her two pots, I could not help thinking that it is the same thing with our spiritual lives. If we don’t get the right spiritual nutrients, we will not grow.


SUNDAY
Throwing Stones

*“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NLT).\**

When I was in elementary school, my friends nicknamed me Shorty. But whenever somebody called me that, I threw stones at them. I was about 11 years old when the following incident happened. Some girls called me Shorty when I was walking home from school one day. I found a stone and threw it at them. It hit one of the girls above her right eye, and when I saw that, I quickly took off. Arriving home, I zoomed past my surprised parents and went straight to my room and thought about what might happen to me.

Suddenly I heard crying coming from outside. I looked through the window and I saw the girl and her parents. She looked as if somebody had poured blood on her. After talking with my parents, the girl and her parents left. My visibly angry father immediately came to my room and asked me to follow him. We walked for a long way into the woods and sat down under a tree. I sat far away from his arms’ reach.

My father looked at me and asked why I had thrown stones at the girls. “Because they called me Shorty,” I replied angrily.

“And how much have you grown after stoning them?” he asked.

I had no answer.

“Throwing stones at your friends will not make you any taller,” my father said. “You have to make a decision. Either you are going to live the rest of your life throwing stones at people, or you are going to accept yourself the way you are, because you will not grow much taller than this. But the truth is you just cannot go through life throwing stones at people.”

I was silent. “Look at it this way,” my dad said. “God is building a house, and He knows exactly where this short brick (pointing to me) will fit into the plans. In John 9:1-3 there is a story of a blind man. When people asked Jesus who had sinned, Jesus answered that neither the parents nor the blind man sinned but that the man was blind so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

“God allows certain things to happen to us for His glory,” he added. “Remember that when God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His image. You are also made in God’s image. And know this: God does not make junk.”

After Dad finished speaking, we prayed together and walked home.

That discussion with my father changed me completely. I accepted myself just the way I was. Though I am short, I know I am made in the image of God. Through my father, God re-created me, and I stopped throwing stones at people.

MONDAY

**How Peter Befriended Billy the Bully**

*“Don’t become totally absorbed in your own spiritual growth, but take an interest in other people and help them to grow too.” (Philippians 2:4, Clear Word).\**

Peter and his parents moved to a new town. On Peter’s first day on the school bus, he heard kids saying, “Billy, there’s the new kid.” He turned around and saw a boy built like a weight lifter coming toward him.

“Go for him, Billy,” the kids chanted. As Billy walked toward Peter, his biceps seemed to dance with every step. Peter, who was a good athlete, smiled as Billy approached, and watched as he took a seat across from him.

“I am Billy the Bully,” he said. Peter nodded his head. “Do you have breakfast for me?” Billy asked.

“I did not plan for you, but I can give you one of my sandwiches,” Peter replied. Peter opened his lunch box and gave Billy a sandwich. He took a bite, and the kids cheered and shouted. In between bites Billy looked at Peter and said, “Your sandwich is too dry. I need something to drink.” The kids laughed, but
Billy turned around and told the other kids to keep quiet or else.

When Peter returned home, he told his parents what had happened. “What you did was good,” they said.

“But what annoys me is that I know I am stronger than Billy,” Peter replied.

“Remember what the Bible says, son: ‘Love those who persecute you,’ ” his mother encouraged.

Billy continued doing this for about two weeks. One day after school, while all the other kids were already on the bus, Billy came running. And as he tried to board the bus, he missed the steps and smashed his face onto the steps of the bus. When he lifted his head, there was blood gushing out of his mouth and forehead. He staggered into the bus and found a seat. Some kids began to giggle, but Billy was in too much pain to do anything about it. As the bus driver called the school nurse, Peter walked over to him and put his hand on his shoulder. “Is there anything I can do for you?” he asked.

“I think I’ll be fine,” Billy replied through cut and swollen lips. Peter offered Billy some water to rinse out his mouth.

The following day on the bus Peter saw Billy in the back. His lips and forehead were still swollen. Soon Billy came over and apologized for the way he’d treated Peter, saying that he could not understand why Peter was kind to him. Peter told him that the Bible tells us to be nice to those who mistreat us. From that time onward, Billy and Peter became the best of friends, and Billy changed completely.

TUESDAY
Blindness

*“Finally, my brothers, fill your minds with things that are true, honest and just. Think about things that are noble, pure and lovely. Focus on good reports about others. If any good has happened or there’s any reason to praise man or God, think about those things” (Philippians 4:8, Clear Word).\**

We take our eyes for granted. Have you ever played the blindfolding game? The game is fun only because we know that after the game we will see again.

But can you imagine if you were blindfolded for the rest of your life? That would not be fun at all. I know a boy who was born blind. Though this boy has many talents, such as playing a guitar, and singing beautifully, and though he always wears a smile, he once told me that he wished he could see just like other boys and girls.

Blindness is not fun. And the devil knows it. He wants to blindfold you for the rest of your life so that you are not able to see the goodness of Jesus.

Unfortunately, there are some who have let him do that to them and they don’t see the good things God has for them.




WEDNESDAY
“Mr. iPhone” Makes Things Right

*“So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body” (Ephesians 4:25, NLT).\**

Jonathan was probably the coolest guy anyone had ever seen. The list of things he could do seemed endless. He was nicknamed “Mr. iPhone” because kids at his school believed that an iPhone could do almost everything. Jonathan actually had no mobile phone, though a number of children at the school did.

One winter morning Bill, Jonathan’s classmate, happily zoomed into class waving an iPhone that he had been given as a birthday present. The other classmates gathered around Bill as he demonstrated how this bundle of technology worked. Jonathan was filled with jealousy because Bill had the kids’ attention—and he even had an iPhone.

During recess, about a week later, Jonathan entered the bathroom just in time to see Bill walk out of a stall. When Jonathan walked in, he could not believe his eyes. Right in front of him, lying on the floor next to the seat, was Bill’s iPhone! He quickly picked up the phone, turned it off, and put it inside the pocket of his thick coat. As Jonathan walked out of the bathroom and into the hallway, he met Bill, who was running into the bathroom with a desperate look on his face.

Jonathan quickly walked into the classroom and took his seat. Then he saw Bill, sadness written all over his face, enter the classroom. With a tearful voice Bill asked the class if they had seen his phone. “No,” the kids responded. When the teacher and the principal quizzed the children, they all denied seeing Bill’s phone.

Jonathan was relieved when classes were over and he could board the bus for home. When he got home, he dashed to his bedroom, locked the door behind him, and turned on the phone, being careful to put it on vibration mode.

Soon it was suppertime. Jonathan left the phone under his pillow and went down to eat. His father excused himself from the table so that he could slip a surprise gift into Jonathan’s room. As his father put the gift on the bed, he heard a vibrating sound. When he lifted the pillow, he saw the phone. He put the pillow back and returned to continue eating with the family.

After the meal, Dad asked Jonathan if he had something he wanted to tell the family. Jonathan said no. His father told him that when he had gone to put a gift on Jonathan’s bed, he’d heard a vibrating noise coming from under the pillow. Jonathan looked at his parents, and tears began to roll down his cheeks.

He confessed to his parents that he had stolen Bill’s iPhone.

Jonathan told his parents that he would return the phone and confess to the class what he had done. His father went with him to school the following day, and Jonathan made things right. Though Jonathan does not have a mobile phone, he is now a happy boy.

**THURSDAY**
**Winning Others to Jesus**

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).*

In 1999, when I worked in Zimbabwe, I took a group of young people visiting from Sahm-yook University in South Korea from Harare to the Kariba hydroelectric dam, one of the largest human-made dams in the world.

The young people, along with their leader and my friend, Pastor Song, had come to tell others about Jesus. There is a large fishing community near the dam, which is where we were going. Pastor Song spoke some English. Most of the young people in the group hardly spoke any English, but this did not dampen their enthusiasm for influencing others for Jesus.

We arrived about 10:00 p.m. As we approached Kariba from a hill, I saw a big “city” down below. Then the road curved to the right, and we drove up another hill to the guest house. I told Pastor Song that I had no idea there was such a big city at the Kariba dam.

After breakfast we walked out to see the city. To our surprise, all we saw were water, three canoes, and a boat. There were a number of kids playing in the water, and some men mending their nets on the shores of the dam. Turning to one of the guest house workers, we asked him where the city was that we had seen the night before. He smiled and told us that we had seen people fishing. He explained that the best time to catch fish is at night, and lights are one of the techniques the fishers use. They take bright lamps with them onto the lake. Fish are attracted to the light, and they come around the boats. The fishers use their nets to catch them. The Korean pastor asked if they also catch fish during the day. The worker told us that they do, but not as much as during the night. He pointed and said that some of the people we saw were catching fish with hooks. He looked at us, smiled, and said, “Though you can fish at any time of the day, the best time to fish, and catch lots of them, is at night.” We thanked him and walked away. Pastor Song translated what the worker had said to the rest of the group.

Soon the local pastor joined us with a group of about 25 kids. He told us that since it was a school holiday, the kids had volunteered to help us distribute tracts and handbills to the people.

Later on, after organizing ourselves, we distributed tracts door to door and office to office. It was great to see young people from Korea, who could hardly speak English, and children from Kariba, who chose not to play with their friends in the Kariba dam, work side by side distributing tracts and inviting people to come and learn about Jesus. These young people knew that God gave His Son to die for us so that we could be saved. They also realized that many people don’t fully know this good news. And with such an eager group, it was just the right time to share God’s message.



**FRIDAY
A Trip to Masai Mara**

*“You can be sure that no one who . . . is greedy, or who values anything as more important than God can have a part in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:5, Clear Word).\**

NeeQua and Billy were not really bad children. The problem was that NeeQua liked watching TV all the time, and Billy liked fiddling with his mobile phone. It made Dad and Mom very sad that the children enjoyed playing with their gadgets more than attending family worship.

Their father, an auditor, traveled a lot and had received lots of frequent flyer miles. One day he told his family that they would use his frequent flyer miles and travel to Kenya to see animals at the Masai Mara game reserve.

Dad took his smartphone and satellite phone, and Mom carried her mobile phone. These phones could get a signal anywhere in the world. After many hours of flying, the family arrived in Nairobi, Kenya. They enjoyed a good night’s rest before departing in the morning for Masai Mara, which was about 170 miles west of Nairobi.

About four hours later they arrived at the game reserve. It was breathtaking. They saw animals as far as their eyes could see. But after a number of hours they began to get worried, because they hadn’t seen any lions. Then they saw a car flash its lights. Their driver told them that the flashing lights meant there were lions ahead.

Soon they were thrilled to see a pride of lions sleeping under an anthill. They joined the semicircle of cars, and Dad took lots of pictures. Since they were the last ones to arrive, all of the cars had gone by the time the family decided to start off for Nairobi. The driver turned the ignition key, and all they heard was a clicking sound. He tried again and again. Nothing happened.

Dad and Mom looked at their mobile phones. They had no signal. Even Dad’s satellite phone did not work. Everyone was horrified when they saw the lions stand up and walk toward the car. Dad suggested that they pray. NeeQua and Billy did not even complain. Dad’s prayer was short: “Lord, help our car to start. Amen.” He then told the driver to start the car. You could almost hear five hearts beating frantically.

The car responded with a roaring sound, and the fearful lions scampered away. After arriving in their hotel room, NeeQua and Billy looked at their parents and told them that they were sorry they valued their gadgets more than they valued prayer. They asked for forgiveness. Dad and Mom were thrilled and told their children that technology may fail them, but they could always depend upon prayer. This experience helped the children not only to love prayer but also to become very obedient in everything. And they learned to value God more than anything.



**LAST SABBATH
A New Creation**

“Anyone who is born again in Christ is a new creation. Old values have passed away and new values have taken over” (2 Corinthians 5:17, Clear Word).



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*Saustin Mfune is a native of Malawi. He is currently the associate director of the Children’s Ministries Department of the General Conference. Before this, Mfune served as president of the Malawi Union. Mfune has vast experience in children’s ministry, serving as director of children’s, youth, and chaplaincy ministries in the former Eastern Africa Division (1996-2002) and authoring several books for parents and children. He and his wife, Gertrude, have four children and one granddaughter. This article was published September 26, 2013.*