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The Great Controversy Over Me

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God's Battle to Win Back Occupied Territory

I'm here to tell you about the great controversy over me. I am a battlefield, and Christ and Satan are waging war over me. The war has gone on all my life for this little plot of ground, infinitely precious to both sides. You are a battlefield, too. We all are. But tonight I want to tell you about the great controversy over me, in hope that you will learn something about the great controversy over you and decide to do your part to make certain that Christ wins this war.

How did we each become a battlefield? We find the answer in Rev. 12:9 [NASB]: "And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."

But God has a plan, God has a strategy which He is using in the war against the evil one, as He reveals in Isaiah 14:26–28 [NASB]: God says, "This is *the plan devised against the whole earth*; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. For *the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate [it]*? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"

Picture it this way. When you are born you belong to God, but by the time you are old enough to make responsible decisions, the field belongs to Satan. He rules over you. But God sends in spies, drops propaganda from airplanes, broadcasts by underground radio stations, sends in paratroopers behind enemy lines, sends in saboteurs, trying to stymie the enemy plans, trying to maintain a presence in the occupied territory, trying to awaken dissatisfaction with the enemy

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occupation. If you respond, eventually God tries a full-scale assault, a Normandy invasion. If you are like most people, this happens many times, until Christ establishes a beachhead. Then His troops drive inland, fighting pitched battles at times over some cherished sin, at other times rolling through without contest. If you cooperate, God gains more and more ground until you finally surrender yourself to Him completely and He takes full possession of you and rebuilds you and uses you for His own ends, makes you a member of His resistance movement.

Although you now belong to God, although you are now “born again,” this is not the end of the battle. Satan too sends in saboteurs, trying to regain parts of your mind. He too has his propaganda machine, and he too mounts attacks. If your loyalty wavers, if you flirt with the enemy, Satan may even recapture large parts of your attention and allegiance. He may hold it for years. But you are still God’s territory now, even if reoccupied for a time, and Christ has paid too great a price to ever give you up for good unless you absolutely insist. However, whether or not you live in a state of constant enemy assault or in a state of victory or relative peace is up to you. God’s troops are ready and willing to protect you, but they need your permission.

The Enemy Takes Control

Let me tell you about me as battlefield. I’m a preacher’s kid, descended from five generations of Adventist pastors. I had wonderful parents, a happy home, and on the surface I was a pretty nice boy, sensitive and shy, a good student, and I never got into trouble.

On the surface. But below the surface two growing thunderclouds took up ever more of my thoughts: lust and rock music. When I was about ten, living near Pacific Union College in California, I found a *Playboy* magazine hidden under a big rock, and the photos were so breathlessly exciting that I nearly passed out. After that thoughts of sex consumed me. I was forbidden to listen to what my mother called “jazz,” but whenever possible I would sneak my family’s little transistor radio out of the house and go for long walks in the forest, memorizing the hit parade, from “All You Need Is Love” to “Let’s Spend the Night Together.” This may sound relatively harmless, but the enforced secrecy, the sense of shame that made me hide what I really was, separated me from my family, and because my family was tied together, in my mind, with God, it also separated me from God. By the time I was thirteen there was little room for anything else in my head—rock music and sex filled me up.

At fourteen I was living in Denver and attending Mile High Academy. I began riding my bicycle to the movie theater—the admission was only sixty cents. Because I felt I had to keep it secret, I became an accomplished liar. I checked out sexy James Bond novels from the city library and smuggled them into my bedroom, then read them late at night under the covers. The summer before I started ninth grade I earned my tuition money by mowing lawns with a man in his late

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twenties who had attended Mile High Academy. He regaled me with stories of his sexual escapades and bought me vodka and wine—my introduction to alcohol. Meanwhile, I became so contentious that I made my whole family miserable.

By sixteen I was attending X-rated movies—a newly legal phenomenon. A friend and I had started a rock band, and we practiced our electric guitars together one night a week—covers of “Sympathy for the Devil” and “Born to Be Wild.” Shortly after my birthday I began smoking marijuana—four of us would smoke one joint during lunch, then I would giggle all the way through world history class. A month later, though, I was kicked out of Mile High and sent to a boarding school, *Campion Academy*.

I loved *Campion* because I felt little need to be secretive. I had my first girlfriends there and experimented with things which were to me quite exciting, though Bill Clinton might consider them innocent. I also began studying Hinduism and Bah’ai. My dorm walls were covered with posters. I had no access to marijuana, but I once purchased some hashish and ate so much of it that I was unconscious for several hours.

The King’s Attack Rebuffed

But something else was happening. God wanted me. He was dropping propaganda leaflets from the airplanes, sending in the saboteurs. It was a need for God which led me to study other religions. But I also had a couple Bible teachers who raised thought-provoking questions. I was a junior in academy. God was preparing a major attack.

Someone had given me a paperback copy of *The Great Controversy*, and it had sat on my shelf unread for months. One afternoon something made me pick it up, and within minutes I was hooked. I skipped meals. I skipped school. I skipped work. I read *The Great Controversy*, cover to cover, in three days and three nights, barely stopping to sleep now and then. By the time I was done God had not won the war, but He had won the battle. I decided that God had called me. I know this sounds amazing, but now, at seventeen, I decided that God had called me to share the gospel with the hippies in Denver. After all, I was cool. I had smoked dope. I knew about rock’n’roll. I could reach them.

I called my dad and told him I had dropped out of school and asked him to come pick me up. I still can’t believe that he did.

But my plan to witness to the hippies and my new excitement over *The Great Controversy* fizzled in a day. I was too shy to tell even my parents about this, much less the hippies. God nearly captured me, but there was no one to disciple me, to help me grow in God by studying His Word, and I didn’t understand what it meant to surrender to God. The evil one’s power over me through my bad habits held God at bay. The day after I got home I went to see a couple movies, and that was the end of my religious experience. I decided I had made a mistake, gotten carried away by my emotions. Actually, I had fallen in love with

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an end-time scenario, not with my Savior. Jesus might say I was seed fallen in rocky soil, springing quickly from shallow roots and withering in the hot sun.

Instead of witnessing I got a job, and the next year I returned to Mile High Academy and graduated. As I worked as an operating room technician on the 3–11 shift during that time, I was always “too tired” to go to church. Sabbath afternoon, though, I usually borrowed my dad’s car to “go for a ride in the mountains.” Instead I went to a movie. I hated the lies, but they were a part of me. I didn’t want to hurt my parents, but I didn’t want to change. So I lied.

The Enemy Fortifies His Strongholds

I entered Union College in the fall of 1972, bringing with me my electric guitars, a couple hundred rock’n’roll records, and shelves of books on philosophy and psychology and eastern religions. In Christian Beliefs I had to read the Bible a little—something I’d never really done before. In the New Testament I discovered a handful of texts which, taken out of context, suggested that everyone will be saved, a teaching called “universalism.” I seized on this good news, wrote a paper about it (which my teacher did not refute), and shared it with my friends.

Of course, universalism leaves one with no incentive to moral action—being good or doing right doesn’t matter at all. It’s wrong, but it lets one live a jolly life. I had my first sexual experience that year, a dream come true, but I found that like the little scroll of Revelation, though sweet in the mouth, it was sour in the stomach. Still, I was addicted to lust, and it filled my mind. The legal drinking age in Nebraska was nineteen, so second semester my friends and I often went out drinking on Saturday nights.

My sophomore year I transferred to La Sierra to study photography. My teacher and I would shoot nudes together, willing college girls. I was his lab instructor, which meant that I had a key. I never went to church. Instead, I often spent all day Sabbath in the photo lab. Other weekends my girlfriend and I spent in a motel near the beach. My understanding was that this was quite common at La Sierra, though not universal. I kept two gallons of liquor in a box in my dorm room. I studied hard, but my life felt empty.

To fill my required religion credit that year, I took a course in Existentialism taught by my French professor. I read Camus and Sartre in French, and by the end of the quarter I considered myself an atheist. So much for religion class. If there was any concerted attempt to explain what was inadequate about the ideas of these writers, I don’t remember it. For me, atheism was like a solitary walk on a sunny winter day: cold, clear, and very lonely. I felt detached from humanity, but superior to it.

The next year I went to Rwanda to work in a hospital. There I saw death and poverty and suffering firsthand. I worked hard to save lives and heal the sick. What I saw should have brought me to my knees, should have brought me to God. But I didn’t know God. I witnessed to no one. I prayed for no one. I went to church because it was expected, but I didn’t worship.

D-day! The King Wins a Beachhead

Then one day, when my time in Africa was nearly over, I cut myself with a scalpel while taking a liver biopsy from a boy who had just died of hepatitis. I knew I was in trouble. A month later my own liver was being biopsied at Loma Linda Medical Center. The report was grim. Sixty percent of my liver was gone, but there was not yet any scarring. There was no treatment at that time. The doctor told me that if I hadn't begun to improve within four weeks, I probably wouldn't make it. He sent me back to the little apartment I had borrowed from friends who were on vacation.

For twenty-seven days there was no improvement. I lay around the apartment in pain, unable to eat, yellow as a banana. On the twenty-eighth day I prayed: "God, I don't know if you're there. I don't know if you care. But if you are there, do whatever you think best. There's nothing I can do."

It was D-day; God was beginning the Normandy invasion. The next morning I awoke feeling weak as a kitten, but my systems were working again, I didn't hurt, and I was famished. God had healed me. This led me to believe in God again. I no longer felt icy and detached inside, but as if I had a place in God's world, as if I belonged. I decided to return to Union College. But I still believed in universal salvation, I still didn't read the Bible, I still didn't go to church or have any Christian friends. My last two years of college were a whirl of serious study and Saturday night dates and drinking. I got out of taking Bible classes by taking courses in philosophy and contemporary Christian thought. In the battle over me, God had captured and held parts of me, but I still belonged to the evil one for the most part.

In 1976 my grandfather died, and God used this psychologically vulnerable time to launch a sortie. My grandfather left me his copy of many of Ellen White's books and a set of the SDA Bible Commentaries. Now God had a substantial foothold on my bookshelves, but He couldn't force me to read the books.

Enemy Propaganda Sows Doubt

Meanwhile, Satan counterattacked a few months later by leading me to Ron Numbers' book *Prophetess of Health*, which led me to doubt Ellen White's spiritual gifts. (Of course, I hadn't actually read her work in five years, and all I'd read was *The Great Controversy*, but I hadn't doubted her power.) Numbers' book led me to the then relatively new journal *Spectrum*, and I spent days in the library devouring back issues. *Spectrum* has published many useful articles over the years and provided a forum for the unofficial airing of church problems which needed to be corrected. For me, however, who believed in God but didn't know Him, who loved to criticize church problems but didn't care enough to get involved and correct them from within, *Spectrum* supplied valuable ammunition against God's attempts to liberate me and made me a thoroughgoing skeptic.

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In 1977 I returned to La Sierra to get an M.A. in English. I immersed myself in literature, eighty hours a week. It was my God; I thought it could provide the answer to the world's problems. One day I had lunch with my cousin Dwayne, a missionary on furlough from Africa. He asked me a question which was so offensive I never forgot it. He said, "How does your study of literature fit into a life of service to God?" I didn't have a good answer. I was insulted that Dwayne should even think service to God should be part of my plans. This question would someday help to change my life, though. Meanwhile, I enjoyed or suffered through a series of affairs and was drunk nearly every night for two years. In the daytime I studied and taught at La Sierra.

Enemy Troops Pushed Back; Major Cities Recaptured

I went on to the University of Nebraska to work on a Ph.D. in English. Again, I found my religion in my literature and spent my evenings drunk. (Why? I wonder. Was I covering over the emptiness inside or anesthetizing the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit?) After two years I was given a Fulbright Scholarship to study for a year at Oxford. There I was so lonely that God was able to lead my thoughts back to a sweet, beautiful Christian girl I had met in my first graduate class at La Sierra but hadn't dated long because she was so conservative that she didn't even go to movies. Now, though, I realized that she was what I really wanted and needed in a wife. More than that, she represented my loneliness for God's presence, a presence so rarely allowed in my life.

I didn't deserve her. I wasn't an appropriate match for her. I hadn't even seen her in two years. But I spent all my money on a plane ticket, flew to California at Christmas time, and proposed to her. What could she have been thinking of? She accepted. But God was using her to win an important battle. She agreed to marry me if I would go to church with her. She was worth it. Now God could place me where I could hear His Word preached.

But I didn't think I needed to go to church when we weren't together. That wasn't part of the deal. Back in Oxford in January, after I'd been up all night because of the jet lag, an audible voice awakened me at 7 a.m., commanding, "Get up—it's time for church." I ignored it. The voice came again. I looked around. The room was silent. I went back to sleep. The voice said, "I gave you Margaret. Now get up." Feeling rather like young Samuel, and rather dazed by the force and honor of this call, I walked the three miles to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and came home to a long lost church family. A month later I preached my first sermon, on the parable of the Prodigal Son and its application in my own life. But I still didn't read the Bible, and I continued to enjoy a pint of beer when I could afford it.

When I returned to Nebraska, my dissertation nearly finished, I taught at both the University of Nebraska and at Union College, and in December I got married. My gratitude for my lovely wife and our worships together made me spiritually vulnerable again. A few weeks later I began reading *Steps to Christ* in

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the bathtub every morning. In a major offensive, God's troops were pushing inland, capturing miles of countryside and major cities. This beautiful little book opened to me God's call for commitment and holiness, and I embraced it. One night I awoke impressed that I didn't need alcohol in my life, and if I got rid of what I had in the house, God would free me from my desire for it. My wife went into the kitchen the next morning to find half a dozen quart bottles upended in the sink.

A few weeks later, I awoke in the night feeling completely free from the desire for rock music, a freedom I hadn't felt in over fifteen years. I sensed that God was holding open a door for me, and if I walked through immediately I would be free. If I didn't, the door would slam shut. It was 3 a.m. before I finished boxing up over three hundred record albums, much loved classics, filled with memories. But I had no regrets. Now, another fifteen years later, I can say that except for a nostalgic period of a couple months a decade ago, I've had no interest in rock music and it has not filled my head, though I could still recall many of the songs if I were to try. The worst thing about rock'n'roll, for me, was not the beat, the music, the lyrics, problematic as those were. The worst thing was that they constituted a barrier, a wall of sound which kept me from hearing God's "still, small voice."

I still wasn't reading the Bible, though, and reading only Mrs. White's works left me unbalanced. My new witness to the goodness of God was seen by my students at Union College as trying to cram religion down their throats. This, combined with being a young teacher eager to require work of the highest possible caliber, led to terrible student evaluations. This was discouraging, and it made me question what God was doing in my life. It's strange and sad how easily good news becomes bad news. God calls us to bear witness for what He has done to us and to preach the Word, but that doesn't mean that many will be ready yet to hear it. Our witness and His Word are the principle ways in which He reveals Himself to the world, but He does not call us to legislate for Him. He wants to woo and win, not force. Forced love is rape, and God does not rape—He seduces us until we give ourselves willingly to our heavenly Bridegroom. College rules are necessary to maintain order, but they are not themselves Christianity, and keeping the rules does not make students Christians.

Lack of Partisan Support Aids Enemy Counter-attack

Union College invited my wife and I to spend a year in Beijing as exchange professors. We had a wonderful time. We attended the Chinese church nearly every Sabbath, even though we didn't understand the language, and we did some research and made some contacts with Chinese Adventists, but I was too shy in my faith to share the gospel. Successful testimony breeds confidence and zeal, but my attempts at testimony had led only to bad student evaluations, and now I feared being expelled from China if I spoke out openly about my faith, such as it was. Meanwhile, American friends of ours, an English teacher and a robotics

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engineer, brought forty Chinese people to Christ in two years, mostly students and teachers. Would that I had been as zealous.

I had expected that Adventist schools would be eager to hire a young Ph.D. with a year of mission service under his belt, but the best I could come up with was a part-time temporary position at La Sierra. We attended church at Loma Linda, and I was soon team-teaching a Sabbath School class with several theology professors. I know there are thousands of wonderful, faithful Adventists in Loma Linda, my relatives and in-laws among them, but when I use the pejorative terms “Loma Linda Adventists” or “*Spectrum* Adventists” I am thinking of that class (many members of which are listed among *Spectrum*’s contributors). I was one of them. These classes were invigorating, the high point of my week. We were highly educated, superior, snide. We had inside information about church problems and leaders. We knew all the arguments against Ellen White and a short earth chronology and in favor of Desmond Ford. The names of liberal theologians such as Niebuhr and Bultmann and Tillich were as often heard as the name of Jesus. We never opened a Bible except to criticize it. The class is still active. I last visited it a couple years ago. On that day an ex-Adventist pastor, now pastoring a liberal Sunday-keeping church, had been asked to speak on why he left Adventism and how he had found fulfillment in his new church. His audience nodded knowingly, perhaps longingly. It wasn’t God I was hearing in that Sabbath School class.

Meanwhile, La Sierra had no work for me during the spring quarter, and I responded by turning again to alcohol. My wife was pregnant and working on her doctorate, and I was writing scholarly articles and applying for teaching positions.

The best I could do to support my family was a part-time teaching position at the University of Nebraska. Fortunately, God eventually provided part-time teaching for my wife, as well, so we could make ends meet. Fellowship with church friends was very important during this year, but again the emphasis was on criticizing the church rather than on knowing God, and today many of these friends are divorced. God could have provided peace and comfort during this year when I applied to a hundred schools around the country for a permanent position, but instead I took to drowning my depression in a bar on the way home from work.

King Retakes Most of Country; Cities Under Siege

Finally, in 1986, God provided a good position at Kutztown University, a state school with 8,000 students in a beautiful rural Pennsylvania setting, and a couple years later my wife also got a good teaching job not far away. I attended church weekly, preached on occasion, taught Sabbath School, read the Bible a little now and then, loved God, and felt assured of heaven. We were part of a small group which met every other week and provided wonderful fellowship. It was during one of these group meetings that my two-year-old daughter took a

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bad fall and was paralyzed from the waist down. I held her in my arms and cried out to God in a silent prayer so loud it ripped a hole in the universe, and God healed her, striking deep into enemy territory and setting up camp. I still got tipsy several nights a week, but no longer actually drunk. Life was good. I believed myself to be where God wanted me to be, doing what God wanted me to do.

One problem which had never ceased to plague me since my childhood, though, was lust. Even when I was at my closest to God, sex was never far from my mind. Whenever I talked with a woman under fifty, I was thinking about what it would be like to have sex with her. Some of you are in this position right now. You're slaves to your lust. You can't help it. And while you are, God can't win or hold the battlefield. I wasn't committing adultery with these women in the flesh, but I was in my heart. It wasn't that I didn't love my wife. It was simply an addiction I had to a way of thinking, and I thought about it all the time. Indeed, I thought this was normal for most men. I'd never known anything different.

Do you know what the worst thing was about my actions? God had put me at Kutztown for a purpose, but because I was afraid of being shown up as a hypocrite, I kept my mouth shut. I frequently taught religious poems and talked about their meanings. I sometimes confessed to my students, in an embarrassed sort of way, that I was a Christian, but I hid what light I had under a bushel.

Fifth Column Surrenders All Cities to King; Victory!

Finally, after years of going to church and gradually coming closer to God, I decided that I really ought to do something for Him. Perhaps I could develop and teach a course in Bible stories for the English department. After all, I had grown up hearing my mother read Uncle Arthur's Bible stories every night, and I still remembered them. This would be an easy class to teach. I was an expert. So I wrote a proposal, and in about a year the course was accepted and added to the bulletin.

The first class was packed with eager students. To my surprise, some of them knew something about the Bible, and when my memory of details was wrong, they raised their hands and corrected me. This was embarrassing, and I decided I'd better start reading the stories in the Bible, and also reading the surrounding chapters so I'd know the context. My approach to the Scriptures was in accord with my liberal theological reading—it was generally skeptical, except of course that I defended the Sabbath. I was turning to historical-critical scholars for background information on the stories and soaking up their opinions as generally accepted truth. One day a girl raised her hand and said, "Who are you to say that some stories in the Bible are true and some are not? Where did you get that authority?" I didn't know what to say. The girl put into words the unspoken feeling of the class. I knew I was losing the class's interest and sympathy.

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My reading, though, was having an effect on me. For years I had read the Bible to criticize it and explain away the miracles. Now I was reading it to learn, reading three to five hours a day, and it was changing me. Too many of us judge God's Word, instead of letting the Word judge us. Now I was being judged, and I was being found wanting. I began reading through Paul's letters, and I was shocked. For years I had claimed "righteousness by faith" and avoided anything that might be considered "works." Now I found that nearly every time Paul mentioned "faith," it was in the context of a call to faithfulness (for example, Ephesians 4:17–5:12). I found that Christians aren't free to act as they please. They are children of God, strangers in a strange land, ambassadors. If they act as they please, they won't be believed. If we fail to walk with God, the worst effect may be that we keep others from seeing the image of God when they look at us, and in so doing we may thus keep them from ever accepting Christ as their Savior.

Now God's Word was transforming me, but it wasn't enough. God was pressing the battle hard, but the field still belonged to the evil one.

I signed up to attend a Men's Spiritual Retreat at Blue Mountain Academy, six years ago, not because I wanted to go but because I promised a student of mine that I'd go if he would go. The student never showed up, but I did. The speaker was Ron Clouzet, from Southern Adventist University. We began with forty-five minutes of prayer. I had never experienced such a thing before: one sentence prayers from all over the audience, men confessing their sins, other men lifting them up to God and supporting them, little hymns and choruses. It was wonderful. I had had a migraine headache that day, but in the course of the prayer it disappeared. Now I almost never get them.

Then Ron spoke, quietly, honestly, setting out the secret sins men don't talk about, calling us to give them up. It was as if he were reading my heart. I realized just how small and unimportant I was, that my own pretense at righteousness was like filthy rags. It was then that I surrendered completely, offering God both everything good and everything bad about me. I didn't ask God to take away my sins, my addictions. I gave God my sins—they became His sins, paid for on the cross—and I told Him to do whatever He wanted with them, and if they were left in my life, they would belong to Him, and if He wanted them gone, he would have to make it possible.

A peace and joy I had never known filled me. The battle was won. The battlefield belonged to the Lord. Another thing filled me: the knowledge that God was willing to give me victory over lust, that night. The door was open. I was so excited that I rushed home. I'm ashamed to say this, but I had several pornographic videos at home which I sometimes watched while my wife was asleep, and I sensed that this was the door I had to walk through. I marched into the house, found the tapes, and carried them out to the garbage can. I was free!

Facing the world without lust turned out to be a wonderful sensation. For the first time in over two decades I could see women as Jesus saw them instead of as body parts. I could see their suffering, their need of salvation. I realized

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how the lust in my heart had kept me from a completely honest relationship with my wife, and a new intimacy began between us. I wanted to praise God from the rooftops.

Instead, in class the next Monday I testified to my students what God had done with me. When I had surrendered all I had been born again, transformed. I apologized for my doubts and thanked them for their faithfulness in the face of my skepticism. My students were electrified, and the mood of the class shifted. It has been great ever since.

King's Troops Strengthen Fortifications, Train Civilians

I decided that I would believe the Bible alone, prove all things by the Word. I would test every Adventist belief by the Word and reject anything unbiblical. The more I studied, however, the better acquainted I got with the Bible, the more amazed I was by the soundness of Adventist doctrine. Somehow the pioneers had discovered the grains of truth among the mountains of church doctrines taught through the centuries, even when no other church interpreted the text correctly. Also, however, I realized that most of the Adventist theologians I knew seemed to doubt the Bible, approach it skeptically. They didn't seem to be on fire for God, either. They had been my friends, but they no longer had anything to offer me. My food and drink was now the Word.

Satan tried to attack by leading me into a study of charismatic ideas. I finally realized, however, that my thirst for God was being replaced by a thirst for spiritual "power," and again I turned back to the Word.

In my biblical studies, I was leaving prophecy for last. I'd read Daniel and Revelation through several times, and I was still confused. I'd read a number of different interpretations by scholars from various denominations, but none seemed entirely convincing.

I heard of a Bible conference in Philadelphia, sponsored by the Adventist Theological Society, on the book of Daniel. I had heard nothing but bad about the society from publications such as *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*. The Adventist Theological Society was that notorious group that made members sign a membership affirmation that they believed the whole Bible was the Word of God, that they believed in creation, in Ellen White's prophetic gift, and more. Ridiculous! But of course now I believed these things, too, and I no longer trusted these publications now that I had discovered the joy of living in Christ. What is more, I had a couple friends who would be speaking, so I decided to go.

What I heard amazed me. Here was a group of scholars who seemed to know and love God—gentle people, loving people. Furthermore, their scholarship on Daniel was excellent, the best I'd ever heard, convincing and enlightening. And like me they believed ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and they were willing to be judged by the Word rather than judging it. These were scholars I could respect. These were people I wanted as friends.

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The same semester I attended my first ATS conference I began the approval process for two new courses at my university: Old Testament Literature and New Testament Literature. These are both now approved and are offered alternate semesters. They are for more advanced students and study themes and ideas rather than stories. My Bible story class is offered every semester.

Every Bible class I've taught at my state university has been full. Essentially, I'm giving Bible studies to seventy students from many denominations for three hours a week. The students are so excited to have a teacher who really believes in the Word and teaches it as truth meant to change lives. And lives are changed. At the end of the semester many students write about what God has done for them during the class. As I read these papers I'm so grateful to God for His mercy, for not giving up on me, for using me to do His will.

Whole Country Joins King to Rebuff Enemy Sorties

Here's the thing: since I've surrendered to God I've been open to His guidance and teaching, which mostly occurs as He leads me through the Word. Since I've surrendered to God, He's been able to use me, and dozens of students come to my office for spiritual counseling and Bible study and prayer.

God has won the great controversy over me. This doesn't mean I'm beyond sin. The minute I take my eyes off of Jesus temptation grows strong, but as long as my eyes are on Him, I'm safe. I still sin. God is still teaching me. I gave up alcohol six years ago, but I gave up caffeine and unclean meats only three years ago, when I finally understood from the Bible why I should. I still find my thoughts turning to sin on occasion, but when I do God starts nudging and whispering, and soon I'm back on my knees.

Our strength is in the Word. Not in denominational publications, not in church, not even in prayer apart from the Word (because we can mistake our own desires as God's word to us, as I did for years). When we read chapters and books of the Bible with open hearts, God uses them to communicate with us, to change us, to use us for His purposes.

It's so exciting to be part of a cause bigger than yourself. It's so fulfilling to be a little soldier on a big battlefield, doing the King's will. If you want to see the raw power of God, let God use you to bring someone to Christ. Lead him through the sinner's prayer and watch his life change before your eyes. There's nothing like it. It's the best addiction of all.

Your Role In the War Effort: "I Want You!"

I've heard some experts say, "If we want to reach students with the gospel, we have to meet them where they are. We have to say what they want to hear. Just teach them about how to have Jesus as a friend who always accepts them, wherever they are, whatever they do. Just tell them to love. If we ask too much of them, they'll turn away. Give them something relevant. Tell them truth depends on the circumstances."

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I say *no!* We don't have to compromise the truth to reach students, we have to *stop compromising!* We don't have to smooth over the gospel to make it palatable to sensitive tastes, we have to present the Word of God as it is, "sharper than any two-edged sword" and "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

God isn't offering you a Sunday School picnic in 1911, He's offering you an important part in a cause much bigger than you are, a desperate cause, a matter of life and death. He's offering you a role in the last battle. He's offering you a place on His Search & Rescue team.

He's not offering you silk sheets and fast cars. He's offering you raw fear, life in the trenches, persecution, perhaps death at an early age. Thomas Gray wrote, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave," but this path of glory leads to eternal life, not only for you, but for everyone else you can recruit for God's service.

I'm not talking about demanding "a piece of the pie." I'm not talking about serving on some boring committee, or being elected to some church office, or getting to fold up the cloth covering the communion table, or getting ordained to receive a good salary and someday retire in California or Florida.

I'm talking about putting on "the whole armor of God" and going into battle. From where you are now! The few. The brave. The chosen. The *chosen!* That can be you! "Chosen" means ordained by God, set apart for a holy purpose. Chosen for *holy war!* War first against our own worldly flesh. As Paul writes, "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). Then war against the world, the flesh, and the devil. For a great cause! For a desperate battle! For the Lord of Hosts!

We can't do it with real swords, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

If you want to put on "the whole armor of God," you first have to be willing to take off your own filthy rags, your own pathetic attempts at righteousness. The only way you can be fully armed is in the armor of Christ's righteousness. Here's a paradox: the only way you can be a *victor* is to *surrender!* You yourself can't do it. If you want to be transformed into a child of God, if you want to be born again, you have to be willing to surrender everything you are to God, not only everything bad but everything good. You have to be willing to say, "God, I can't do this—you'll have to do it for me if you want me."

Then, when you hear a little voice telling you, "You don't need that habit anymore," and you feel inside you the possibility that you can be free, that God is giving you a brief window of opportunity, then say goodbye to that habit, right away, and you'll be free! God will lead you, whether step by step or by leaps and bounds, into the freedom you've longed for but have never managed to find. You'll experience the power He's been longing to give you. Then, when

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you're free, you'll have something to praise God about, you'll have something to share. By sharing, you will be able to draw others to Christ, and you'll know the excitement and fulfillment of witnessing. It's like gulping pure oxygen after you've been running. The power of God is so heady that you'll want to roar with joy.