

## ACHING HEART, OPEN ARMS

### A Dad's Plea

"Will you please pray for my children?" asked the quietly spoken father. Tearfully he shared the ache in his heart for his three teenagers who, one by one, had stopped attending church.

### A Mum's Thoughts

When my child is not in church with me it is as though there is a hole in my heart. I am incomplete. A vital part of me is missing because the baby I carried to church within my womb, the baby I dedicated to the Lord, the child who loved the Bible stories, the young person who was excited at getting baptised has just stopped coming to church.



### A Family's Question

Different questions have come to our minds, as a family, as to why they stopped coming. Are we a poor example of what it means to be a Christian, have we failed God, did something or someone at church hurt them by word or action, or did they just see church attendance as irrelevant? In searching for the answer we have read books, watched videos, attended seminars and still the pain has not abated. Will it ever go away? We do not think so.

### Finding Hope

It is the realisation that Jesus died for all those who do not attend church that fills hearts with

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hope. Jesus did not just die for those who go to church; most of his ministry was spent with those who did not see church, synagogue, as relevant. He did not die in church; he died on the town garbage heap between two thieves. Praise God one of them was brought up to respect God and could not face death without knowing their eternity would be with Jesus.

### The Father's Love

Just because someone stops going to church does not give us the right to say the non-attender is not a good-hearted person. In fact we should admire them for their honesty for not being willing to be a hypocrite. Like the prodigal son's Father, as hard as it might be, we have to give our loved ones permission to try out life for themselves. The challenge comes when their lifestyle differs to ours and we find it hard to open out our arms and hug their smoke-smelly clothes and give their beery tasting lips a kiss.

When the Heavenly Father loves your child it is not their outward appearance that really matters. All He wants is for them to experience His great love for themselves, personally. To know that if they were the only person on earth, He would have come looking just for them. To Him they are more precious than all the gems and valuable metals that have ever been found. They are unique. To Jesus they are worth more than His own life and in dying for them He wants to enable them to live life to the full.

### The Churches' Love

At long last the church is waking up and recognising how much they are missing those no

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longer attending. Where the HeartCall, Prayer & Love Saves, and Praying Home programmes have been presented,\* the aching hearted are opening their arms with words of forgiveness, and apologies are being given to those who have stopped coming to church because they have been hurt, ignored and misunderstood. The mid-week small groups are also becoming a haven where those still uncomfortable with "church" find fellowship and nurture for their soul.

### Your Prayer

Pray that those taking a break from church might recognise how much they are loved and join us once again on Sabbath morning to praise and give thanks to the God who sent His son into the world not to condemn any of us but to declare the good news that He wants to spend eternity with us all (John 3:16,17).

\* For details about these programmes please contact your Union, Conference or Mission Women's Ministries leaders.



Just as a Father has compassion for his children so does God, for he does not treat us as we deserve but loves us in spite of our human frailties. Psalm 103.

## Why someone is missing.

- ❖ Most people leave a church because of personal pain from life's events and a lack of friendship and support from other members, not doctrines.
- ❖ Some missing members want to share their story about what happened and why they left. You may not agree with their perspective but be patient and listen.
- ❖ Most hurting people need time to heal, time to know that the church wants them back, time to rebuild relationships, and time to grow again in their relationship with Christ's church.
- ❖ Some former members still love God and would be happy to meet with another church member, not always with the pastor or on church property.
- ❖ Most who have left need one visit, by a caring praying member, for every year they have been out of the church before they will darken the door of the church.
- ❖ Most people respond to personal care shown by someone toward them more than to the 'ideas' someone uses to 'convince them' they should be back in church again.
- ❖ Most people find the easiest way to cope with spiritual criticism, fanaticism, and other forms of abuse – emotional, sexual and physical – is to stop attending church.
- ❖ Some people lapse in their spiritual growth and participation in church activities. They come to view church attendance as irrelevant.

## Listening & responding to our children and young people.

Research shows most people give their life to Jesus between the ages of 5-13 and will continue attending a church that:

- ❖ empowers, and includes, them in leadership
- ❖ recognises and uses their giftedness
- ❖ has a passionate spirituality, living out what it believes
- ❖ develops a practical organisation that is not legalistic
- ❖ runs small groups with Bible study and worship geared for their age level
- ❖ reaches out to the community through a need-oriented evangelism
- ❖ lovingly mentors and builds up caring relationships with their children and teens



Reconnecting with those taking a break from church is an evangelism initiative by the Women's Ministries department within the Seventh-day Adventist church of the BUC.

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