



# AMERICAN UNION CONFERENCE

*“BEHOLD THE MAN” (John 19:5)*

Wednesday, December 20,  
to Sunday, December 24, 2023

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Norman Park, Georgia

“Behold the Man of Calvary; behold Him who is equal with the Father; behold the Majesty of heaven; behold the King of glory. God’s own dearly beloved Son—He gave Him, a freewill offering for us, and here we see the wonderful condescension of the Father. We dwell much upon the love of Christ, but we frequently lose sight of the love of the Father in giving His only beloved Son to die that we might live. We want to call your attention to the love of God for fallen man in that He did not withhold His only beloved Son, but gave Him as a freewill offering for us; and how much more will He not with Him freely give us all things?” —Manuscript 16, 1886.

# “BEHOLD THE MAN”

AMERICAN UNION CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 20-24, 2023

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*Ellen G. White*

**W**e have only glimmering light in regard to the exceeding breadth of the law of God. The law spoken from Sinai is a transcript of God's character. Many who claim to be teachers of the truth have no conception of what they are handling when they are presenting the law to the people, because they have not studied it; they have not put their mental powers to the task of understanding its significance. Their God-given powers are diverted and misapplied, and they come far short of apprehending what is truth. They have a smattering of knowledge, but they do not understand the relation of Christ to the law, and cannot present it in such a way as to unfold the plan of salvation to their hearers; for they do not let Christ into their hearts, or bring Him into their discourses. They do not feel in their souls that they must plow deeper in their search for truth, so that they may declare the whole counsel of God.

Christ's relation to the law is but faintly understood, but ignorance will not excuse any man for acting contrary to the principles of the law and the gospel. Many of those who claim to believe the testing truths for these last days, act as though God took no note of their disrespect of, and manifest disobedience to, the principles of His holy law. The law is the expression of His will, and it is through obedience to that law that God proposes to accept the children of men as His sons and daughters. The consequences of transgression reach into eternity, and none of us can afford to be novices in regard to the deep mysteries of salvation. We should understand the relation of Christ to the moral law.

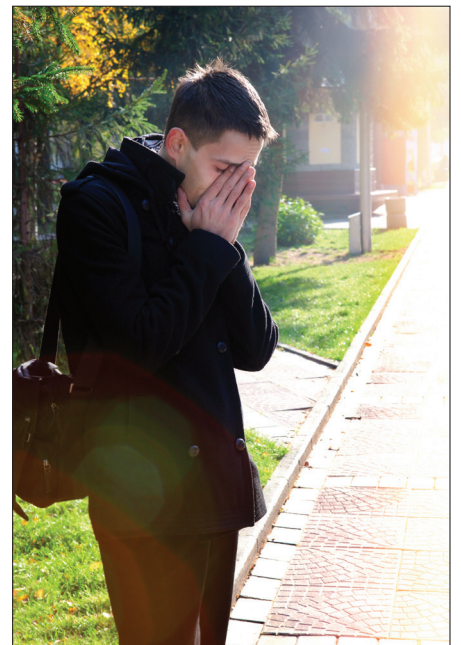
Our righteousness is found in obedience to God's law through the merits of Jesus

Christ. We cannot afford to offend in one point; for if we do, we are pronounced guilty of all; that is, we are recorded in heaven as transgressors, as disobedient children, unthankful, unholy, who choose the depravity of Satan rather than the purity of Christ. An infinite sacrifice has been made that the moral image of God may be restored to man, through willing obedience to all the commandments of God. Exceeding great is our salvation, for ample provision has been made through the righteousness of Christ, that we may be pure, entire, wanting nothing.

The plan of salvation opens before the repenting, believing sinner prospects for eternity which the greatest stretch of his imagination cannot compass. If man will keep God's law through faith in Christ, the treasures of heaven will be at his disposal; but the opposite of this will be the result if we refuse to obey God. Man cannot possibly meet the demands of the law of God in human strength alone. His offerings, his works, will all be tainted with sin. A remedy has been provided in the Saviour, who can give to man the virtue of His merit, and make him co-laborer in the great work of salvation. Christ is righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to those who believe in Him, and who follow in His steps. Jesus came to our world to make manifest in His life the character of God. He took upon Him our nature, combining humanity with divinity. He set before us a perfect example of holy obedience to God's law, and we are exhorted, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, [How this humbles hu-

man pride!] and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."

The disciple John declares from the Isle of Patmos, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and such as are on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." He who is worthy of all this honor is our Saviour, the One who only can save us from our sins. *-Review and Herald, February 4, 1890.*





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The title for this article originated with the words of Sister Ellen G. White. In many ways, her admonition can be looked upon as a template or prescription for sound mental health.

When she wrote about guarding the avenues of the soul, Sister White warned the believers about the corrupting influences of the world and association with evildoers; in other words, she was challenging the believers to maintain a healthy, wholesome mindset in the midst of a world that is increasingly at odds with Christian values.

Our senses need to be guarded on all fronts. In *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 51, she wrote the following admonition: “The apostle sought to teach the believers how important it is to keep the mind from wandering to forbidden themes or from spending its energies on trifling subjects.

“Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind must not be left to dwell at random upon every subject that the enemy of souls may suggest. The heart must be faithfully sentinelled, or evils without will awaken evils within, and the soul will wander in darkness.”

To avoid what is harmful, we must put that which is beneficial in its place. As we know, nature abhors a vacuum; if we pull out a weed, we must plant something beneficial in that same space, otherwise it will fill up with weeds once again. In place of vice, we must cultivate virtue in order to mature and maintain a state of sound mental health.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the term “mental health” refers to “our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act, and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.” As Christians we have the added concern of our spiritual well-being.

Yet, when compared to other areas of healthcare, mental health has historically been short changed not only in the secular world but also within Christian institutions.

An individual who is suffering from anxiety and depression will rarely receive the same level of sympathy and care from family and friends as does someone who has a physical illness, such as cancer or a heart problem. Only in recent decades have churches begun to offer the counseling and support groups that are necessary to help people overcome issues that often keep them alienated from Christian fellowship.

In today’s world, just how do we maintain a healthy mindset and protect ourselves from the infections of the world—being immunized against it? In other words, how can we be in the world, but not of it? How do we maintain a healthy mental stability in a world of increasing moral perversion, violence, and natural disasters?

Surely this is impossible without grace from our heavenly Father. However, there are many practical things that we can do to implement this grace, and not stop short of receiving it once we have asked for it.

The purpose of this article is to offer suggestions that can help us to cope with the stresses of everyday life and maintain a balanced, positive outlook and a sense of well-being:

- Things to avoid—guarding the avenues of the soul

- Things to do—contemplation and prayer
- Social engagement—fellowship with others
- Physical aspects of mental health—exercise, nutrition, and sleep
- Spending time in nature

With the 24/7 news cycle, social media platforms, and rapidly expanding technologies, guarding our souls and peace of mind is becoming ever more difficult. Several years before these avenues of communication were available, Dr. Andrew Weil, the father of integrative medicine, advised his patients and the readers of his books to do a news fast in order to lower stress and reduce anxiety:

“A news fast simply means opting out of watching the news on television, listening to it on the radio, reading newspapers, or following the news on the Internet for a few days or even a week at a time. I believe that taking periodic breaks from the news can promote mental calm and help renew your spirits. In this way, the anxiety and overstimulation catalyzed by the media may be minimized, and your body will function better.

“A number of studies have shown that images and reports of violence, death, and disaster can promote undesirable changes in mood and aggravate anxiety, sadness and depression, which in turn can have deleterious effects on physical health. Even frequent worrying can reduce immunity, making you more vulnerable to infection.”

Passages from Dr. Weil and Sister White both beg the question: How do we, then, protect our minds from outside negative influences? We may find the answer in two time-honored, interrelated traditions—prayer and contemplation. Prayer is communication with God, talking with God, and listening to Him as our Friend. We do this by praising Him, confessing to Him, thanking Him, and both expressing our needs and desires and interceding for others. In the gospels, Jesus is portrayed as a Man of prayer: He prayed in the hills above Capernaum, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and on the Mount of Olives every night during His final week in Jerusalem. He prayed not only for Himself but also for His disciples and for all who would believe in Him through their witness.

The word “contemplation” is derived from the Latin prefix *com*—meaning “together”—plus *templum*, “temple.” *Templum* was a place consecrated to taking of the auspices, or a building for worship. The Bible encourages praying in silence, pondering the Lord, seeking God in solitude, and praying without ceasing. In other words, we offer

our thoughts, words, deeds, and time to God every day.

The psalmist David often mentioned meditating on the word of God: “Within Your temple, O God, we meditate on Your unfailing love.” Psalm 48:9, *New International Version*. But remember that prayer is also listening in silence, not doing all the talking! “Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10. It is good to have a designated time and place at home where you go to pray.

In addition to spending quiet time with God, we are encouraged to be social and to nurture strong connections with family members and friends in order to support our mental health. Those who stay connected live longer. Spend time with people who inspire you and encourage healthful habits. Join a Bible study group or a walking or hiking club.

Practice altruism and serve others. The same brain circuits that are stimulated by cocaine or heroin are also stimulated by altruism, a healthful alternative. Volunteer; find ways to give back to the church and community. Practice acts of kindness. Remember: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.” Matthew 25:40, *New International Version*.



Each of us is well advised to remember that enhancing and preserving physical health require a balance of several different factors which have been discussed in previous articles—sound nutrition, adequate rest and sleep, and regular exercise. These very same things contribute to mental health. Studies on exercise indicate that the brain benefits from regular physical activity even more than does the musculoskeletal system. A brisk walk can lower blood pressure, decrease stress and anxiety, improve sleep, and elevate mood. The brain depends on adequate nutrition and a healthy digestive system for optimum function. More recent scientific research has revealed the importance of one’s microbiome for health in general, but more specifically for digestive and mental health.



The microbiome is a collection of all of the microbes (bacteria, fungi, viruses, and their genes) that naturally live on and in our bodies. They are so small that a microscope is required to see them, but they contribute in big ways to our health and wellness. The microbiome interacts with the central nervous system by regulating brain chemistry and influencing neuro-endocrine systems associated with memory and the response to stress and anxiety.

Things one can do to improve his or her gut health include:

- eat more probiotic foods
- take a probiotic supplement
- include prebiotic fiber in one’s diet
- reduce sugar consumption
- limit stress
- avoid taking antibiotics unnecessarily
- exercise regularly
- get quality sleep

Thus, improving digestive health will also improve mental health. Similarly, spending time in nature is beneficial to both physical and mental health.

Studies have also found that hiking in nature is a powerful health practice, benefiting heart health, cognitive acuity, mood, creativity, and relationships. One group of researchers concluded: “Benefits may be immediate, such as decreased blood pressure, decreased stress levels, enhanced immune system functioning and restored attention, or transpire over time, such as weight loss, decreased depression, and overall wellness.”

In the course of this study, we have seen that, like physical health, mental health depends on a combination of factors—guarding the avenues of the soul, prayer, contemplation, social interaction, diet, exercise, sleep, and spending time in nature.

In conclusion, let us remember the words of the apostle Paul—a sure formula for sound mental health: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Philippians 4:8.

This will take discipline. It will take dependence on the Holy Spirit. But the reward will be one of a sound mind increasingly more inclined to virtue than to vice, as we “guard the avenues of the soul.”

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**Disclaimer:** This article on mental health is intended to increase your knowledge of health-related lifestyle choices for the benefit of maintaining a positive outlook and a sense of well-being. It is not intended to offer solutions to serious mental disorders which require professional psychological or psychiatric intervention. It is not designed for use as a medical reference to diagnose, treat, or prevent medical illness. Neither the author, Emil Bainhardt, nor the publisher, International Missionary Society, is responsible for your use of this material or its consequences. If you have questions about diagnosis, treatment or prevention of a medical condition or illness, you should consult your physician.

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