

When God Sent the Money

Have you ever promised to do something, and then not known how you would be able to do it? That happened to an Adventist leader in 1905, more than 100 years ago. His name was John Burden, and he was determined to follow God's instructions. For many years, God had given Ellen G. White visions that helped the church and its leaders know what they should do. In some of those visions, He showed her that the church should have places called sanitariums. These were something like hospitals, where they could help sick people get well and learn how to stay well. God would help them find good places they could buy for much less than it had cost to build them.

In southern California, the church had already found and bought two places like that, and Elder Burden was managing one of them, the Glendale Sanitarium. But Mrs. White said that we should have another sanitarium, in Redlands, which was also in southern California. Elder Burden began looking around, and he found a place near there, at a location called Loma Linda. Some investors had built a hotel there and furnished it, investing more than US\$ 150,000 in it. That was a very big amount of money in those days. But people didn't come to their hotel, and their business failed. Our church leaders looked at the property, and they knew it would be just right for a sanitarium. The owners, though, were asking \$85,000 for it, and we could not afford it. But they were desperate to sell it, and so eventually they offered it for just \$40,000!

The problem was, we didn't have very many church members in the area at that time (fewer than 1,400 in the whole Conference), and we already owed a lot of money for the other sanitariums. Most of the leaders didn't think we could take on more debt. But Elder Burden wrote to Ellen White, who was thousands of miles (kilometers) away on the other side of the country. He described the property and buildings to her, asking what they should do. She recognized this as being just what God had shown her we should have. She sent him a telegram, which was the fastest way to reach someone far away at that time, telling him to "secure the property at once." That meant to make an agreement to buy it, and give the owners some money so they would hold it for us. The church had only a few weeks to do this, or the owners would sell to someone else. By May 26 the church must have a deposit of \$1,000, and that would only hold the property until June 15, when it would need the rest of the first payment of \$5,000. Elder Burden struggled over what to do. The Conference leaders said not to move ahead, but God's prophet had told him to do it, so Elder Burden set out to make it happen.

But where would he find that first \$1,000? He and another man took the train to see a farmer some distance away. They thought he might have money he could give or lend. When they saw him and told him what they wanted, the man said, "Praise the Lord!" He had been trying to sell his farm, and it had just sold a few days before. He offered \$2,400 for the project! This was enough—and more—to let them make that first deposit in May!

But where would the rest of the \$5,000 June payment come from? They had some money left over from the farmer, but they had only about three weeks to raise the rest of the amount, or they would lose what they had already paid!

Meanwhile, Ellen White had returned to California, and she went with some others to see the property at Loma Linda. When she got there, she said to her son, "I have been here before."

"No, Mother," he said. "You have never been here."

"Then this is the very place the Lord has shown me," she replied, "for it is all familiar." She turned to one of the ministers and said, "We must have this place." As they looked together at the property, over and over she repeated, "This is the very place the Lord has shown me." In one of the buildings she said to Elder Burden, "This building will be of great value to us. A school will be established here."

But they still had to find the rest of the money to buy the property! No one knew how they could raise that much money. Elder Burden especially felt responsible, because he had started this process by obeying the prophet's instructions to arrange the purchase. He asked a number of people for money. One woman decided to lend \$1,000 for the project, even if she might lose it. Another man borrowed \$1,000 to help, and Elder Burden must have been very relieved that they were able to make the June 15 payment on schedule!

The leaders called the members together to meet at the larger churches. As Ellen White and other prominent leaders spoke in favor of moving ahead, the people agreed that this was what they should do. Some promised money for it, but not enough of it would be available in time. The next \$5,000 was due July 26. Ellen White wrote letters across the country to people she knew who might be able to help. (In those days, people didn't have telephones that let them talk over long distances.) Some of the leaders suggested that they could sell part of the Loma Linda land to help make the payments, but Ellen White told them clearly that they should not do that. Elder Burden hoped to get the money from a certain church member, but sudden problems made that brother go back on his promise. Other money problems were pressing in, as well.

The due date arrived, and they still didn't have the money. They must pay by 2 p.m., or the deal would be canceled and they would lose the first \$5,000 they had already paid! The Conference Committee met that morning, and no one knew what to do. But some of those leaders remembered that the prophet had told them to move ahead, and they believed that something would happen. Then someone reminded them that the morning mail had not yet come. Maybe their deliverance would be in it. When the mailman came, among the letters was one from way across the country. A woman there had gotten Ellen White's appeal and sent \$5,000, exactly what they needed! God had put it into that woman's heart to respond at precisely the right time. The leaders in that room were sure now that God was in this project, and they thanked Him for providing.

Elder Burden told what it was like to take that money to the bank:
“Soon we were at the bank window to pay in the \$5,000. As the receipt was taken from the counter, a voice seemed to say to us, ‘See how nearly you missed that payment. How are you going to meet the next one, within a month?’ In heart we answered, ‘It will surely come, even though we do not now know the source.’ We thanked God and took new courage in believing that the Lord was going before us.”

At a camp meeting a few weeks later, the people were told about the plans for health work in Loma Linda and other places, and of how God had already been leading. They responded eagerly. Some had money in the bank that they would put toward the project. Others had land to sell that would give them money to invest. Some gave money as gifts, and some lent money to be used. Soon the \$5,000 for the August payment had come in, and after that they made the December payment—early! Then, instead of taking three years to pay the other \$20,000, as the contract said they could, they paid it all off in six months! God led people to provide the money they needed.

A sanitarium was started there at Loma Linda, and then a medical school. Today, there is a big hospital there, and a school to train doctors, nurses, dentists, and other medical people. And it all began when God gave His prophet a vision, and one man, Elder John Burden, decided to believe the prophet and obey the vision.

We should follow God’s instructions by His prophets, too—in the Bible, and also in the writings of Ellen G. White. God will bless us as we do.

Based on Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years 1905-1915*, pp. 11-32.