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**Editorial Office:** 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600

Come visit us at our Web site: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>

**Printing and Circulation Office:** Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193

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## Introduction



## The Book of Matthew

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**W**hen Rick Hoyt was born, the umbilical cord around his neck almost choked him to death. This left him brain damaged and unable to control his arms and legs. Months later, doctors told the Hoyt family that Rick would need to be placed on life support machines in order to live. The doctors also told Rick’s parents that he should be put in government-run, medical care for the rest of his life.

“But the Hoyts did not accept it,” wrote Rick Reilly in an article about the Hoyts for *Sports Illustrated* magazine (June 20, 2005). “They noticed the way Rick’s eyes followed them around the room. When Rick was 11, they took him to the engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate.

“‘No way,’ the scientists told Rick’s parents. ‘There is nothing going on in his brain.’”

“‘Tell him a joke,’ Rick’s father challenged them. They did. Rick laughed. Turns out a lot was going on in his brain.”

Then they hooked Rick up to “a computer that let him control the cursor by touching a switch with the side of his head. Rick was finally able to communicate” with others. This technology enabled Rick to begin a new life. That new life included “running” with the help of his father. Soon after, Rick’s father, Dick, pushed him in a wheelchair in a charity marathon.<sup>1</sup> After the race, Rick typed out, “‘Dad, when we were running, it felt like I wasn’t [was not] disabled anymore!’”

Dick decided to give Rick that feeling as often as he could. Four years later, they ran the Boston Marathon together. Then someone suggested a triathlon.<sup>2</sup> Since then the two have done hundreds of athletic events, with Rick’s father pushing or pulling his son along.

“‘No question about it,’” Rick has typed out, “‘my dad is the Father of the Century.’”

We have many things in common with Rick Hoyt. But even more than Dick Hoyt loves

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1. marathon—a running race that is about 26 miles (42 kilometers) long.

2. triathlon—a long-distance race that has three parts (such as swimming, bicycling, and running).

his son Rick, we have a Father who loves us, cares for us, and was willing to sacrifice His only Son for us.

Like Rick, the results of sin have weakened and paralyzed us all. By our own strength, the life we live is not any closer to the life we were supposed to live. As hard as we might try, we will never improve ourselves enough to be saved. “Our condition through sin is not natural. And the power that restores [makes new] us must be from God. If not, it has no value.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*, page 428. We must be saved from outside ourselves, because, clearly, we cannot save ourselves.

It was for this reason that people, at times, have looked up into the night sky for help outside of themselves: to look for a sign that would announce the coming of a Deliverer (Savior). Our spiritual forefathers, the Israelites, had a name for this hoped-for Deliverer. It was the Son of David, whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus’ story is given in the Gospel (the Book) of Matthew, our topic for this quarter. Matthew was a Jewish believer in Jesus and one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He tells the story of Jesus from his own Spirit-inspired (God-given) viewpoint. Much like Mark, Luke, and John do, Matthew tells the story of Jesus’ life as a

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selves.**

human: His death, His return to life, and His return to heaven. But Matthew also focuses strongly on the fact that Jesus is the Promised Messiah (Chosen Leader) sent from heaven. Matthew wanted his readers to know that Israel’s salvation depended on Jesus. Jesus was the One of whom the prophets (special messengers) spoke and to whom all the Old Testament types (symbols) pointed.

Jesus’ hearers were mostly Jews. But His message of hope and salvation speaks to us, too. We are a people who, like Rick Hoyt, need Someone to do for us what we never can do for ourselves.

And Matthew tells the story of Jesus doing just that.

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