

# ELDER'S

# DIGEST

Volume 4, Number 1

A Quarterly Resource for Local Church Elders

# First Things



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# Elder's Digest

NUMBER FIFTEEN

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*God has priorities for us.  
It's time for us to make  
first things first.*

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# Working Together

Joel Sarli



Some elders have written to the *Elder's Digest* office asking very pertinent questions: "Why should we support our pastor?" "Couldn't we develop a more independent way of doing our work?" "Aren't there risks involved in the present administrative system of the church in developing a team of politicians that will not respond to the real needs of the congregation?" "Wouldn't it be wiser to have a kind of 'opposition party' to have balance in the church?" "Don't some leaders want to control everything and concentrate too much power in their hands?" "Isn't it true that we are seeing pastors leading people out of a right relationship with our organization?" "As elders, what should be our attitude to protect our flock against these 'wolves' that are coming among us to attack and deceive the sheep?" (Acts 20:29). These are good questions, and they cannot be ignored. Understanding the purpose of our relationship with the local pastor, the administrators at different levels of our organizations, our fellow believers, along with the concept of loyalty, is fundamental in developing a healthy leadership team in the local congregation.

About the relationship of the local elder and the pastor being assigned by the conference we read in the *Church Manual*, page 47: "In a case where the conference committee assigns an ordained minister to labor as a pastor of a church, he should be considered as the ranking officer, and the local elder as his assistant. Their work is closely related; they should therefore work together harmoniously. The minister should not gather to himself all lines of responsibility, but should share these with the local elder and other officers."

The elder is not elected to become a blind follower of the pastor nor a member of any opposition party in the church. He is elected to use his brain to support the pastor and foster the best resources for the local congregation. Supporting and cooperating with the pastor are essential in developing an appropriate leadership style that will reflect Jesus' ideal for His church.

This editorial will be a little longer than usual because it will present some advantages in developing an attitude of team ministry in dealing with God's business.

Speaking about the mark of good leaders in the church, Ellen G. White states: "God has placed in the church, as His appointed helpers, men of varied talents, that through the combined wisdom of many the mind of the Spirit may be met. Men who move in accordance with their own strong traits of character, refusing to yoke up with others, who have had a long experience in the work of God, will become blinded by self-confidence, unable to discern between the false and the true. It is not safe for such ones to be chosen as leaders in the church; for they would follow their own judgment and plans, regardless of the judgment of



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A resource for the local church elder

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their brethren. It is easy for the enemy to work through those who, themselves needing counsel at every step, undertake the guardianship of souls in their own strength, without having learned the lowliness of Christ" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 279).

Here are some positive aspects of working together in team ministry as we serve as officers of the local congregation.

### 1. WORKING TOGETHER MAKES THE LEADERSHIP MORE EFFECTIVE

Today's churches are experiencing a critical shortage of strong leadership that supports ministry. To accomplish anything for God, many leaders feel that they have to be independent leaders of a church. However, God is calling for strong leaders who will blend together to make a team. Those who don't understand their calling to be supportive team members will always be frustrated. The question is not of being superior or inferior in the ministry, but to find God's-ordained function in the body of Christ. Multiplied effectiveness comes when multiple leaders work together as a team.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Solomon confirms the principle of team ministry: "Two are better than one. . . ." (v. 9). This passage lists four reasons why team ministry is more effective:

*a. Reward because of greater fruitfulness.* ". . . they have a good reward for their labor" (v. 9).

*b. Security in times of adversity.* "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (v. 10).

*c. Comfort in team companionship.* "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?" (v. 11).

*d. Protection through commitment.* "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (v. 12).

Thus leadership functions more effectively in team ministry by strengthening one another. Elders support the pastor and pastors make room for the work of the elders.

### 2. WORKING TOGETHER PROVIDES BETTER SAFETY AND BALANCE IN MINISTRY

"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

No one person has all the answers or possesses a perfect perspective on every issue. Team ministry provides a check and balance; one-man pastoral leadership does not have this. A leadership team must not be a gathering together of weak "yes" men who give a rubber stamp to the pastor's wishes. Otherwise there is

no constructive analysis to point out weak areas, challenge unwise decisions, and provide a steady equilibrium to prevent imbalance. The pastor, on the other hand, gives a check and balance to the elder.

God hates imbalance. It is an abomination to Him. "A false balance is abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 11:1a). Therefore, the Lord asks the rhetorical question, "Can I condone wrong balances . . . ?" (see Micah 6:11). The prophet Micah described the symptoms of a sickness that comes among God's people where imbalance is not corrected.

Imbalance is a contagious disease. It produces harmful effects and destroys the health of the church. The apostle Paul warned, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). According to Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 8, pp. 308-309, the Greek word for "sound" means "to be in a state of good health." Balanced teaching and practice bring good spiritual health to an assembly of believers. Imbalance eats away at the spiritual life of the church. So Paul described the imbalance of Hymenaeus and Philetus as a "canker" (in Greek this literally means "gangrene") that made the whole body diseased (2 Tim. 2:17-18). When the previously listed symptoms are found, it reveals imbalance in the local body of believers.

Imbalance in the local church causes negative results:

*a. In general, people lose confidence in denominational leadership.*

*b. People become unstable and try to justify the present state of affairs.*

*c. They criticize those who have a different perspective or practice toward the church's organization.*

*d. People feel wounded and soon become disillusioned. Some can be healed and will come back to a healthy relationship to the church. But others will leave the faith and eventually become skeptical of any religious conviction.*

*e. People get "burned" and are afraid to commit to anything again.*

*f. People become restless and discontent; this can lead to division.*

*g. The church eventually loses influence in the community.*

*h. A narrow-mindedness develops and distorts doctrinal and ethical judgment.*

*i. This starts the foundation of deception.*

Imbalance will eventually affect other areas. It increasingly takes truth out of focus and distorts it. Deception is truth taken out of balance, whether in doctrine or in practice. Thus imbalance automatically moves toward an independent deception.

*j. More pressure is put on the pastor or elder.*

Concluded on page 28

# Assured of God's Help

Leon Thomassian

**O**n the first day of April in 1997, New England was hit with the third largest snowstorm in its history. Just as the longer days, with their accompanying warmth, began to summon the birds from the south and signal to the daffodils and tulips that it was warm enough to emerge, New Englanders were struck by the howling wind and heavy snow downing power lines and trees.

Early the next morning, as the light emerged to announce daybreak, I heard outside my window a lone bird's chirp. It could be heard distinctly over the din of the storm as if to remind us all of the words of God's promise, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

Many years ago, there was another storm of a personal nature. Thomas A. Dorsey grew up in Georgia as a preacher's son. He had great musical talent and was a successful composer of Jazz and Blues. As he became popular, he drifted away from God, until one day when he was miraculously spared from death. He slowly began to turn his life around and started composing gospel songs for church services and evangelistic meetings.

While at a revival meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, he received the tragic news that both his wife and son had been killed. Out of his great heartache, disappointment, discouragement, and grief, Dorsey cried to the Lord to lead him through this pain. He called out to the Lord to help him through this mighty storm in his life which seemed like a night of darkness. He waited and pleaded with the Lord for help but experienced no help. And, as a

result, he became very angry and bitter and felt that he was in a big dark pit with no help in sight.

After a few weeks he started playing the piano at home and it was then that he composed the song, *Precious Lord*. The following week he introduced the new song to the choir, and they sang it at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in South Chicago, Illinois, while he played the accompaniment. At the end of the performance the church broke out in shouts of praise to the Lord.

Later Dorsey said, "My business is to bring people to Christ instead of leaving them where they are. My writings are for all of God's people, and I am happy that the Lord is using me in a mighty way to bring people to Him and to the knowledge of the cross." Dorsey was willing and eager to share God's love with all people, to help lift their spirits, and to let them know that God still loves them.

Our God is still in the soul-saving business, and He can still give each one of us the power to do His bidding. No matter what our situation may be or what problems we may face, we can take them to Him and leave them with Him. We do not have to fear the present or the future because we are assured that He is leading us into a path of righteousness.

May God help us today to enjoy His fellowship and His leading. May we feel Him holding our right hand and leading us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. He is always there to help, guide, lead, and understand.

May we feel His hand on our shoulder directing us, His hand on our head guiding our thinking process, and His hand showing us the right path in which to walk. **E**

**He called out to the Lord to help him through this mighty storm in his life which seemed like a night of darkness. He waited and pleaded with the Lord for help but experienced no help.**

*Leon Thomassian writes from South Lancaster, Massachusetts, where he works as the treasurer of the Atlantic Union Conference. Reprinted from Atlantic Union Gleaner, December 1997.*

# What Is Preaching?

Steven P. Vitrano

**W**hat is preaching all about anyway? The question has been asked again and again, and answered as often in one way or another. But when you have been ordained as a local elder and you realize that one of your responsibilities is to preach a sermon when the pastor is not present on Sabbath morning or Wednesday evening or on other occasions when preaching is called for, then quite suddenly the question is *your* question and it becomes critically relevant for *you*.

To begin, let us consider the “what” of preaching. It is imperative that we do this, because our attitude toward preaching is really more important than how we preach. The “what” should cause us to take more seriously and give better attention to the “how.” In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians he makes a significant statement as to what preaching is all about: “For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we *preached* to you the gospel of God . . . ; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it *not as the word of men* but as *what it really is, the word of God*, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:9-13, R.S.V.).

When Paul preached the gospel, he was not preaching the word of men but—the word of God.

This suggests that the preaching of the gospel is not only a communication of truth about God and the Christian way of life, but is a phenomenon, a holy event, in which the same word that is at work in the heart is now heard by the believer. There is here something living and vital, something dynamic and moving. In consideration of this some have asserted, as does Robert H. Mounce in his book, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, that in preaching God reveals Himself, so that it can be said, “Preaching is revelation”—the revelation of God.

We may consider that point in need of some modification because of its relationship to the whole doctrine of revelation, but we must not lose its force with

respect to the importance of preaching. Note what Ellen G. White has written in volume 5 of the *Testimonies*, pages 298, 300:

“Many do not look upon preaching as Christ’s appointed means of instructing His people and therefore always to be highly prized. They do not feel that the sermon is the word of the Lord to them and estimate it by the value of the truths spoken; but they judge it as they would the speech of a lawyer at the bar—by the argumentative skill displayed and the power and beauty of the language. The minister is not infallible, but God honored him by making him His messenger. If you listen to him as though he were not commissioned from above you will not respect his words nor receive them as the message of God. . . . We are never to forget that Christ teaches through His servants.”

Have we lost this concept of preaching? Do we still consider the sermon the “word of the Lord?” Do we believe that preaching Christ is teaching His people through His servants? Is the Holy Spirit present and active in the sermon—do God and man come together? Something wonderful can happen if preaching is God’s appointed means of saving souls. Should we approach the pulpit with the expectation that it will happen?

I miss the attitude of reverence for the pulpit that I was taught as a boy. I was never allowed to walk carelessly behind the pulpit, to stand in the pulpit for “the fun of it.” I was taught that it was dangerous to “fool” with sacred things, and that the pulpit was one of these. It is from the pulpit that God speaks to men. It is in the sermons that God and man come together.

In his book, *The Art of Illustrating Sermons*, Ian Macpherson tells the following story which has some bearing upon what we are considering:

Picture an old lady living in London about the middle of the last century. Her hero, we will suppose, is the Duke of Wellington, and when we first see her she is sitting in her drawing room, a copy of his biography open in her hands. She is reading the account of the Battle of Waterloo, and as she reflects on the role the duke played in that famous engagement, and on what the victory he won has meant for her as an Englishwoman,

*Concluded on page 11*

# Which Version of the Bible Should I Use?

Marvin Hunt

In the United States we have an abundance of Bible versions. We could easily list 100 versions that have been translated into English. To help you sort through what you may find on the shelf of your local bookstore, the following descriptions are offered.

## VERSIONS: FORMAL AND DYNAMIC

Versions of the Bible are basically divided into two groups, the formal and the dynamic. Whenever possible, the formal translation group tries to reflect the ancient manuscripts word for word. These attempt to be extremely accurate and leave any questionable words or passages for the reader to decide which is best. Unfortunately these versions are not always very readable. Some of these are: *The New American Standard Bible* (1960) and *The New Revised Standard Version* (1989). Some scholars feel that *The New American Standard Bible* (1971) is probably the most accurate translation yet produced. However its accuracy does not make it easy to read, especially from the pulpit.

The second group of versions are referred to as dynamic. These translations try to reflect the thought they think the Bible writers were expressing. In order to do this, difficult passages are smoothed over according to what seems best to the translator. However, if the translator believes the righteous dead are now alive in heaven and the unrighteous dead are now suffering in hell, that person's beliefs will obviously color how the text is presented. Dynamic versions are very useful, especially for devotional purposes, but the speaker should avoid their use for doctrinal study or pulpit use.

Dynamic versions vary from conservative to outright paraphrases (which can be a loose re-writing of the Bible). An example is *Psalms / Now* by Leslie F. Brandt, first published in 1973. The author's preface states, "These offerings are by no means an attempt to be scholarly or textual. I am expressing what the psalmist might be saying if he were living in the twentieth

century." Brandt's paraphrase has a modern, up-to-date sound in its use of words. His version of the 23rd Psalm begins:

*The Lord is my companion. There is no need that He cannot fulfill. Whether His course for me points to the mountaintops of glorious ecstasy or to the valleys of human suffering He is by my side; He is ever present with me.*

Other dynamic versions and paraphrases include the *Good News Bible* (also called *Today's English Version*: 1966, 1976), *The Living Bible* (1971), *The New Century Version* (1987), *The Clear Word* (1994) and *God's Word* (1995), to name only a few. The preface should tell you if you are reading a translation or a paraphrase.

Other versions of note include *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966), a Catholic Bible in common English with explanatory notes, the *New World Translation* (1961), a Jehovah's Witness Bible, the *New Jewish Bible* (1962); and the *New American Bible* (1970), an American Catholic Bible translated from the original languages. Prominent Adventist theologian Frank Holbrook notes, "It ought to be noted that all the basic truths of Scripture—including the Sabbath, Ten Commandments, and Second Coming can be taught from Catholic Bibles. But there will be a contradiction on the state of the dead because the Catholic Old Testament contains a group of writings known as the Apocrypha, which supports the belief in the immortality of the soul."

Sakae Kubo, retired professor and eminent Seventh-day Adventist authority on Bible translations, offers the following summaries:

*The New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) (1989)

The NRSV is a revision of the *Revised Standard Version* (1952), which is a revision of *The American Standard Version* (1901), which was a revision of the *King James Version*. This is a version that has had input from a wide group of scholars representing all the leading churches and is the most reliable of versions.

*The New International Version (NIV) (1978)*

This translation is the product of a wide group of international evangelical scholars representing many denominations from the English-speaking world. It has had general acceptance among evangelical groups. It has been carefully translated and is generally reliable. Its English has been checked by experts and reads well.

*Revised English Bible (REB)*

This is a revision of the *New English Bible* (1970), which was the work of the leading church groups of Great Britain. Using modern British English, their translation is fresh and spicy. However, they probably erred in some cases on the side of being a bit too down-to-earth. One of the criticisms the REB has sought to meet was that in some of its readings, it was not dignified enough for pulpit purposes. The REB has improved in several areas and can be used for pulpit reading, but it needs to be remembered that it is British English, which in some cases may not be understood by an American audience. Questionable verses can be checked with the NRSV or the NIV.

*The New American Bible (NAB) and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)*

The NAB and the NJB are both translated by and for Catholics. They are both good translations and are similar to their Protestant counterparts. The NAB is for American Catholics, and the NJB is for British Catholics. Catholic Bibles today have removed most of their objectional features such as the Catholic interpretations in the notes.

*The King James Version (KJV)*

The KJV is still widely used among Adventist lay persons, and for this reason, you may be required to use it. It has excellent literary qualities and may be familiar to many. However, you should be careful to use a modern version with it so that it may be clearly understood by younger members and by new members who have no Bible background. You should compare the KJV with one of the newer formal translations because the KJV translators did not have many of the early manuscripts available today. More recently discovered manuscripts provide additional information that the KJV translators did not know about.

*The New King James Version (NKJV)*

While the NKJV has modernized the language of the KJV, it has kept the text of the old KJV. Therefore, if you use this version, you should always check a new version to make sure you are not reading something that is not

found in modern versions.

The language of *The King James Version* is getting more and more outdated. Over time, words change their meanings. For instance, the word “prevent” in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 has an entirely different meaning today. Now, we would use the word “precede.” Another example comes from Ephesians 4:22, which uses the word “conversation,” which meant “way of life, conduct or behavior.” Never once does the word “conversation” in the KJV mean the word we use today—speech. To update problem words such as this, a *New King James Version* (1979) was introduced. This version has become a respected member of the formal translation group and can be a big help for bridging the gap from the old to the new.

In 1995, the American Bible Society released the *Contemporary English Version*, which they refer to as “. . . [having] diligently sought to capture the spirit of *The King James Version* by following certain principles set forth by its translators in the document.”

**WHICH VERSION?**

Which version is best? There is no simple answer. If only the *King James Version* is used, the younger generation will not understand much of the language and may think the Bible belongs to another age. Children, new Christians, non-Christians, and non-English speaking peoples may find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand. Committed Christians will miss the KJV’s beauty of words and expression if newer, more modern versions are used exclusively. However, there is nothing to prevent the speaker from pausing and explaining and updating the KJV as he speaks.

Perhaps, in these days when an abundance of very good translations abound, there is a translation of the Word of God for everyone. Regardless, the rule is—don’t run ahead of your congregation. If the majority is using *The King James Version* and you quote from a newer version, it will be very difficult for them to follow along. The pulpit is not the place to try to introduce new versions. Break new ground in prayer meetings and Sabbath School where the people have time to get accustomed to a more modern reading and the reason for using it.

Finally, it should be understood that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has never produced a denominational Bible. Our Church uses translations that the general Christian world accepts. In the final analysis, the truth does not rest on an English translation but on the original Hebrew and Greek. ■

*Marvin Hunt writes from Georgia, where he serves as pastor.*

Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .

*“The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness” (Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . ., Chapter 12, p. 152).*



# A Wise Youth Ministry

June Loor

**T**here is a special work to be done for our young people by those bearing responsibilities in local churches throughout the conferences" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, p. 77). What a tremendous challenge this presents before us all. The devil bids high for the souls of young people because if he can steal them away from the church, he has destroyed a lifetime of service for Christ. Often comments are made such as: "I don't understand them," "I can't communicate with them," "The generation gap is too wide," "I can't stand their long hair, their weird approach to religion," "They don't dress according to Christian standards."

Some of these comments may have some validity, but usually they are an exaggeration and an excuse to remove us from this all-important responsibility. Jesus died for the sinner. He came to minister to the weak and to lift up the fallen. It is for the youth He died, as well as for the old.

## TRUTH ON HIGH LEVEL

As a minister's wife and having been involved with youth for more than 20 years, I have increasingly felt a desire to convey to others some of my observations. My heart has been saddened by some of the concepts we use in attempting to reach our young people. How difficult it is to open the Word of God to young people after one-half hour of "hepped-up gospel music," with clapping of hands and all the rest.

"Do not divest the truth of its dignity and impressiveness by preliminaries that are more after the order of the world than after the order of heaven" (*Evangelism*, p. 148).

Why do we feel we have to put entertain in order to convey truth and the beautiful gospel Christ has to offer?

"In their efforts to reach the people, the Lord's messengers are not to follow the ways of the world. In the meetings that are held, they are not to depend on worldly singers and theatrical display to awaken an interest." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, p. 143).

"In my very first labors the message was given that all theatrical performances in connection with the preaching of present truth were to be discouraged and forbidden" (*Evangelism*, p. 137).

Why do we feel we have to talk their language in

order to communicate with them?

"Never bring the truth down to a low level in order to obtain converts, but seek to bring the sinful and corrupted up to the high standard of the law of God" (*Ibid.*).

## SERMONS

Prepare short sermons meeting needs of young people filled with the love and gospel of Christ.

Make the sermon Biblical in presentation. Let them bring their Bibles and give them an opportunity to use them during the discourse. The source of power is in the Word of God. The use of the Bible gives them something to do and holds their attention. They love to use their Bibles.

In any series always have some preaching of the Word, coupled with instruction and a witnessing program whenever the time or series may permit.

Don't be afraid to hold high ideals. Lift the youth up. They want a better way.

In planning for a speaker, check him out first. Don't allow any Tom, Dick, or Harry who is supposed to "set the youth on fire" to come into your meetings. You may really end up with a "hot time." Remember, standing in the sacred desk is an important responsibility, and even though some dear brother may have had a tremendous conversion experience, he may still not be qualified to take an entire service in any series, including a camp meeting series, where this often seems to happen.

Choose a committee of young people before the meeting begins. Lay down some guidelines such as the kind of music to be used. Instruct the pianist to play the right kind of music. Instruct them regarding proper dress. Even if they come in from work to meetings at camp meeting or Week of Prayer, tell those who are leading out they must dress appropriately. I have seen young people lead out in dirty jeans, young men sing or play instruments with open shirts and tanned chests exposed—girls with hip-huggers and short waisted tops with bare midriff. Our young people need guidance. If told ahead of time, they usually will be glad to cooperate. However, if after the meetings have begun someone has to "lower the boom," it could hurt feelings and destroy enthusiasm. An ounce of planning is worth a pound of corrections.

**ATMOSPHERE**

Set a spiritual atmosphere. Have every part of the program directed to setting the stage for preaching the Word.

Choose a spiritual, soft-toned theme song to also create a reverent atmosphere.

Do not condescend to reach them. Let them know you mean business and will not tolerate total irreverence. In your discipline let them know you love them and have a burden for their souls, but a few rebellious intruders cannot be allowed to remain and disrupt the meeting. They will respect you in the long run.

Be consistent! Set the right example.

If using a tent, make it first class, not just a few sloppy pieces of board and canvas thrown together. Make it look special. A little paint and a few flowers and an exciting backdrop—all tend to create an impression that somebody really cares. This is true wherever the meeting is being held. I remember that for one of my husband's meetings, one of our ministers painted a backdrop of two young people playing a game with the devil standing over them. My husband called this series "The Game of Life." How impressive this backdrop was. Have a theme and tie it all together with a backdrop.

Utilize youth participation, interviews, testimonies, ushers, usherettes, and music.

Incorporate a discussion group in a camp meeting series. Divide into small groups—attempting a discussion in a large group defies the concepts of group dynamics.

Be careful not to be too casual, attempting to give a very informal attitude to meetings. If you do allow a casual approach, you will have a difficult time playing sergeant-at-arms. A lack of reverence for spiritual things will be created. On the other hand, don't saturate the meeting with adult formalizing. Find the God-given balance. There is one!

Steer away from a long dialog of someone's experience with drugs or their wicked way of life before they were converted. Use these people to give a testimony, but be very careful it doesn't glamorize that side of life.

Have a little time together after the meeting for those who would like to stay for prayer bands. Many of you refer to this period as "afterglow." Sing choruses and then divide into groups of three or four for prayer.

Pray for the meetings, for other youth, and for themselves. Many precious experiences and victories have been won in just such a time.

**PRAYER AND COUNSEL**

Spend time with them. Listen to them when they want to talk. Give godly, prayerful counsel.

Most of all, pray and pray and pray—ask others not directly connected with the meetings to pray for the Holy Spirit to be poured out and everything done to the honor of Christ.

"God will do a great work for the youth, if they will by the aid of the Holy Spirit receive His word into the heart and obey it in the life. He is constantly seeking to attract them to Himself, the Source of all wisdom" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 66). **E**

*June Loor lived in Michigan when she wrote this article. Ministry, July 1975.*

**What Is Preaching?**

*Concluded from page 6*

she is overwhelmed with gratitude and devotion to him. Every now and again she lifts her eyes from the page and looks up at an etching hanging on a wall of the apartment. It is a pen-and-ink drawing of Apsley House, Wellington's London residence; and as she gazes at it, she says to herself: "How wonderful to think that the great duke lives there!" Then, all at once, her reverie is broken into by a sharp rap on the door. She rises to respond to it and, when the door is opened, there confronting her in living presence is the duke himself! In a flash, book and building—fascinating though they are—are alike forgotten, for she meets the conqueror face to face!

Something far more marvelous than that frequently happens in a Christian church. People go there to listen to the reading and exposition of a Book, which tells of a triumph immeasurably surpassing Waterloo, or to gaze with rapture on the stately fabric of some glorious cathedral. And, all at once, there comes a knock on the door of their hearts. There before them is none other than the risen Christ himself!

Will something like that happen when you preach next Sabbath? It can. How does that possibility strike you as you prepare the sermon? Are you motivated to do your best? Do you begin your preparation on your knees?

We are not sufficient for all this. But God is able. He has called you, and He wants to use you. It is a high honor to be called to preach the gospel. **E**

*At the time this article was written, Steven P. Vitrano was a teacher of preaching in the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Reprinted from Ministry, August 1973.*



Priorities



## Some Tyrannies of Earth

Adlai Albert Esteb

Amid earth's press and stress and strife,  
What is it really rules your life?

Four terrible tyrannies, I find.

Now mold the human heart and mind:

The *TV*, the *Telephone*, the *Tongue*.

The *Press* (that robs the old and young

Of many precious hours of time,

By reading scandal sheets of crime).

A person's souls is not his own,

While he still has a *Telephone!*

Your *TV* soon becomes a curse,

Or maybe it is something worse,

If it has mesmerized your mind,

Until the fatal day you find

That it controls your ears and eyes,

It has such a power to hypnotize,

Manipulates our minds and hearts;

With paralyzing power imparts

Some subtle sensitizing sin

Within the soul—deep, deep, within!

The color of the soul is dyed

By what we've seen and heard and tried.

Two other tyrannies I find,

That now manipulates man's mind:

The *Press*—its daily dose of news

Is what corrupted minds now choose.

Before their eyes they see unfurled

The crimes of all the *underworld!*

(It leaves no time to get in touch

With Heaven, which they need so much!)

The other "fire-brand" called the tongue,

From which so many wars have sprung;

Which makes so many hearts to break;

(In Eden 'twas a snake that spake),

And ever since, the tongue has been

The cause of sorrow, strife, and sin!

The tongue that gossips, woe is man;

The Chinese proverb states their plain:

(Who gossips and who listens—

*each should be hung,*

The *one* by the *ear*, the *other* by the *tongue*).

*Press, TV, Tongue, and Telephone*

Could bring the greatest blessings known,

If dedicated to God's cause,

And help the world to love God's laws!

But who can live a life serene,

Through peasant, preacher, king, or queen,

While *pressures force us in a squeeze*

*And rule is through earth's tyrannies?*

*This earthly rat race takes its toll—*

O "*Watch and Pray*" or *Lose your soul!* **E**

*Adlai Albert Esteb was poet Laureate of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*



# God's Priorities

Robert H. Pierson

**A** question frequently asked me, especially when I am with young people, is, "What is your work? What is involved in it?" In replying to this question I usually explain about the committees and boards, the personnel problems, the financial problems, the approving and adopting of building plans, the study of administrative policies for the various fields, the days we spend on occasions studying the wage scale, and our dealings with government agencies. I mention the many hours we must spend on institutional problems and prospects, on departmental problems and planning. The list is endless.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

But there is something more important than any of these things. And it's time for us to make first things first. God has priorities for us. Matthew 6:33 plainly counsels: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

For many months I have been analyzing my own leadership and administration, and I have come to some agonizing conclusions that I want to share with you. I have asked myself some soul-searching questions, and the answers I was able to give didn't satisfy me. I want to ask you the same questions.

We deal with many items pertaining to the mechanics of the church, but how many items on your committee and board agendas deal strictly with the *spiritual* needs of the church?

How much time have you spent in studying ways and means of changing the sad picture in many of our Seventh-day Adventist homes? Too many homes are in trouble because communications have broken down. The love of Christ somehow has slipped out. How much time have you spent on your knees and on your committees in studying this vital problem?

How long has it been since you have truly evaluated

the spiritual impact of your life and leadership upon the members of your congregation?

Do you really know the heart struggles of your fellow brothers and sisters? I know from personal experience—from letters I receive, from my contacts on campgrounds, in meetings, and in churches—that some of our people are really passing through some traumatic heart struggles. How much do you know about them, how much do you pray with them, encourage and try to help them?

Have you devoted as much time to your apostasies as you have to your baptisms? Today I received an advance copy of the statistical report. My heart was heavy when I noted in it the too large number of apostasies. During the course of the past few years these apostasies would equal the membership of some of our larger divisions.

Can you freely preach the old Advent message in your church and expect to receive approval from the members? In a few churches, this kind of message is not too welcome these days. Do some of your brothers and sisters think they have outgrown such sermons? That they are not relevant today? If so, are you really concerned about it?

What are the Sabbath School teachers doing? Where is their emphasis? Being an elder in a Seventh-day Adventist church today is no small assignment. Many elders are leaders in their own right. But, brethren, how much time do you spend urging the members of your congregation to study, to take time for prayer? Do you spend some time to prepare messages that will reach the hearts of the members? Do you visit the members in their homes? If you don't have time to shepherd the flock, what are you doing to try to change the situation?

## BAPTISMAL STANDARDS

Are we bringing new people into the kingdom or just getting them into the church? Are we making Seventh-

day Adventists out of them, or are we selective in our work and just preaching about love, acceptance, and forgiveness, and dipping them in the water and hoping that someday someone else will teach them the message, and somehow they will become true Seventh-day Adventists? This is a most important question for everyone who is leading God's people today!

Where is the money of today's church going, and how do we divide up our budgets? How much is directed to soul-winning endeavors? I am sure you have checked and know how the pie is divided—how much goes for social programs, how much for education, for building maintenance, but how much is your church spending for public evangelism? And if it is like too many of the pies that I see, only a small piece is left for direct preaching of the Word.

### GOD'S FIRST THINGS

Is the spiritual experience of our members our very first concern? I feel that some of us need to make some changes in our priorities. We need a revival and reformation in our leadership and administration and among the leaders in the local congregation. This late hour demands different priorities than in any other period of this world's history. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." I believe the Savior is directing these words to every leader in God's church at this time more than at any previous time. We need to make room in our activities for *God's first things*.

What do I mean? I must make it clear. The business items that we must care for are certainly not wrong. They are not to be considered unnecessary, not to be avoided. They are important. Inspiration admonishes us to be efficient and honest leaders. Ellen White wrote much on this subject. I thank God for the capable Christian business people God has placed in this church.

We can't turn all our committee and board meetings into prayer meetings; although in a good many instances, it would be better if we did. There have been times when we have turned committee and board meetings into prayer meetings, and the Lord came near and brought solutions to our problems. Speaking of the strictly business items on our agendas (as Jesus said in Matthew 23:23, last part), I say "these ought ye to have done, and

not to leave the other undone." What I am appealing for is that *we make room on our program of activity to consider items that will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:17). *This is our first work!*

What does this mean? What is God's plan and His desire for His people?

### A VICTORIOUS PEOPLE

God is waiting for a happy, healthy, holy people who will vindicate His justice and wisdom in dealing with sin and sinners. Through the centuries and millenniums, Satan has said it couldn't be done—man could never keep the commandments, man could never develop a character like Christ's. But when the character

development has taken place in His church, Jesus will say, "Here they are—a victorious people, a people who amid the tests and trials and temptations of the last days have overcome the sins that so easily beset them, a people who are right with God and with those about them, prepared for translation. Hating and evil surmising have no place in them. They are vibrant, pure, honest, upright, winsome, loving, kind, courteous, self-controlled." This can never be accomplished in our own strength, but His victory will be ours. Where we failed, He conquered.

Only such a people can God use in ushering in the loud cry, and only such a people will be prepared for the Advent. As leaders, if we "seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness," such a people, under the blessing of Christ, will be prepared—in our day.

*But we are still here in a world of sin, waiting.*

Brethren, our present programs, plans, and priorities are not good enough. All of our great speaking, our great music, our great teaching, even our great healing, and our great worldwide welfare program have not brought a finished work and a returned Lord! *Something is wrong.*

### TO MAKE READY A PEOPLE

A revival and reformation in our congregations must come. Not until we let go of all these handfuls of earthly sand that we are clawing for and clinging to for dear life and begin to cling to the Rock of Ages and seek His Spirit can we ever hope to succeed in the assignment God has

**This late hour demands different priorities than in any other period of this world's history. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." We need to make room in our activities for God's first things.**

given His remnant church. Only as we seek the Holy Spirit as the source of power for our leadership, the energy for all our assignments, will we ever rise above the miserable limitations of our own abilities and break out into that glorious experience that God speaks of as the loud cry.

I appeal first to my own heart and then to yours to place at the top of church board agendas the spiritual needs of the church. When elders and other leaders of the church meet in committees, and consider each item on the agenda, I plead with you to ask: *Will this plan help "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord?"*

I would like to make some practical suggestions. I believe that elders, other leaders of the church, as well as pastors, need to be released more and more for *spiritual leadership*.

It is my conviction that we all give great lip service to the high regard in which we hold our pastor, but do we truly treat him as if he is the key man in our church program? Do we as elders enable him to do the work God really intends a shepherd of the flock to do?

#### LAY ADMINISTRATORS

Perhaps we should think of having some lay administrators to look after the business of the church, especially in our larger churches. I believe the pastor ought to spend many hours every week preparing to feed his flock. *If there ever was a time when the sheep needed to be fed, it is now, and the pastor and elders are the ones who should do most of this work. Somehow we must give our pastors more time to study and pray and visit the members.*

Some folks tell me they have not had a pastoral visit for months, even years. Shame! Our pastors and elder's first work is to get into the homes of the members, to study and pray with them, to encourage them, and to help them with their missionary work. That is where their help is needed. Can we not find laymen with business expertise who would gladly carry much of this work for our burdened pastors and elders? I wish we could study this possibility carefully.

#### ETERNAL INTERESTS FIRST

"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). This is a good text by which to test our activity in the church. What will it profit us if we fill the church with fine material things and neglect the spiritual phase, which will result in the erosion of faith and the eternal loss of souls? Notice this statement: "The work of saving souls is the highest and noblest ever entrusted to mortal man; and you should

allow nothing to come in between you and this sacred work to absorb your mind and confuse your judgment. One standing in the responsible position that you occupy should make eternal interests first, and temporal matters of secondary importance" (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 371).

Are we measuring up? Are we giving example leadership? Are *our* homes little heavens here on earth in which we are preparing to go to heaven? Are we kind and tenderhearted, patient and courteous?

Are we following all of God's counsel? Do we preach enough sermons on healthful living? We leaders ought to be in the lead when it comes to habits of healthful living. What about our dress, our recreation, our socials, what we read, what we watch? Are we prepared to meet the Lord? We can't expect our people to measure up unless there has been repentance and revival and reformation in us as their leaders. I appeal to you as I appealed to my own heart as I have searched my soul many times in recent months. There need to be some changes. You and I are the ones to make these changes. By God's grace I want to make the needed changes in my own life. I want to "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." I don't want to delay the time any longer when God can point to His people and say, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus"—a whole church of them.

A number of years ago, in Yosemite National Park, there was held what was known as the "fire fall." Beneath a high rocky face, people would meet at night for a program. As the program ended, someone would look up and in a mighty voice call out, "Let the fire fall." Shortly after the sound of his voice had died away, another voice at the top of the cliff would shout back, "The fire falls." Then the people would watch a sight they could never forget—the fire in the darkness cascading down that mighty cliff. Brethren, God wants to let the fire fall. Do we respond, "Lord, let the fire fall on me?" The fire will fall only when the Spirit of God has done His work in our hearts. I want to be the first to make a new commitment of my life and my leadership and place them both on the altar. Do you join me in this commitment to "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness?" **E**

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*Robert H. Pierson was president of the General Conference when he wrote this article. The editor of Elder's Digest has gleaned thoughts from it to share with you (see Ministry, December 1978).*



# First Things First

Louis F. Cunningham

**T**he call to the church of today is to advance on all fronts. It is a new and vigorous appeal with a militant ring and an air of hopeful expectancy. What if this should be the hour of destiny, our day of Pentecost? Surely the times call for a power and a purpose in the hearts of God's people to meet the tragic need of a world's end.

We need to plan wisely and well. At a time like this, our best methods might easily fall short of the goal. For that reason the steps we now take must be in the right order. And what we do must be equal to the divine task.

But where shall we begin? And how shall we accomplish the work? We remember the victories of Israel—the deliverance at the Red Sea, the fall of Jericho, the triumph of Gideon's band. We never tire of reading these exploits of the past. In each experience we see how divine strategy and power may combine with human effort to bring about the seemingly impossible.

But there were also times of signal defeat. As great a leader as Joshua was defeated at—of all places—Ai. Compared to Jericho it was an easy prey; one that would take, as they supposed, little time, less effort, and no prayer. The defeat was a stinging one.

## SIN IN THE CAMP

Joshua was deeply humiliated. Such a setback was both unexpected and unacceptable. In dismay and bewilderment he fell on his face and sought the Lord for the reason. In His reply, God revealed to Joshua that there was sin in the camp. He said to him, "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies ... because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you" (Joshua 7:12).

This great leader, as mighty and resourceful as he was, knew that he could not hope to succeed without God's presence to guide and keep him. Except the Lord go with

him, the conquest of Canaan could never be carried out. Even little Ai could be won only on God's terms. Sin must be dealt with first. After that—Ai.

The people of God today must go up against more than Jericho and Ai. Theirs is a world to reach for Christ. And unless the Lord goes with them, they too may fail and beg for help in bitterness of soul as did the man of God of that day.

But suppose that somehow, without His presence, God should allow the battle to go well for a time. What then? Would He be pleased because the results were so favorable? At the height of his power King Saul succeeded in destroying the great army of the Amalekites. It was a remarkable military victory. But when the prophet Samuel appeared, he had nothing but rebuke for the victor, saying, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" (1 Samuel 15:22).

## APPARENT SUCCESS

A comparable success in the work of God today would be a natural cause for rejoicing. But what a pity if, while we joy in our apparent progress, the Lord should be more impressed by the prevalence of our sins. May such a thing not be true of the people of God in a day like this?

God has not forsaken His own. He intends for them to witness to His power today as truly as He ever did His chosen nation then. Did not Joshua finally take Ai? In God's plan and by His grace the victory was assured. The way was thus opened for the conquest of the Promised Land. This is the lesson God has for our day and our people.

## OUR GREATEST NEED

Our first goal, then, is not toward external gains. It is not meeting our over all budget, nor the manning of our

mission stations, nor the widening of our evangelistic outreach. Even these extremely vital issues must yield to a prior need. "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121).

What has delayed our taking hold of this first of all our tasks? For one thing, it is never easy to be honest about our own serious faults. Neither do we readily admit to the shortcomings of the church as fully and as frankly as we ought. Yet, if this be the church of prophecy which John the revelator saw, it has a decided work of heart-searching to do. It must freely confess to a materialism and self-satisfaction which say, "How rich I am! And how well I have done! I have everything I want in the world" (Revelation 3:17, NEB).\*

This divinely foretold condition calls for prompt action: (1) to protect the church against the inroads of worldliness from without, and (2) to remedy what spiritual laxity already exists among the believers. The second is more difficult, for it is easier to prevent the problem than it is to remedy it—after it has become firmly established.

We know that evangelism is the lifeblood of the church. All of us long for a Pentecostal harvest of souls through the mighty agency of the Holy Spirit. But this poignant desire must not blind us to reality. We must be keenly aware that the enemy would not hesitate to use the most sacred means to his own ends. Notice how he has succeeded in the past. "By bringing into the church those who bear Christ's name while they deny His character, the wicked one causes that God shall be dishonored, the work of salvation misrepresented, and souls imperiled" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 71).

### PREPARATION FOR FELLOWSHIP

Think of that! What a solemn responsibility rests upon every worker to prevent Satan from perpetrating such a subtle deception upon the remnant church! Of course, it is true that the minister is not to legislate in matters of doctrine and organization. But it is equally true that he is bound before God to carefully discriminate in the choice of each candidate for church fellowship. Woe to the man who does not, for the decisions involved are eternal in their consequences.

Without this carefulness there is the risk of early apostasy. The other danger is that if such additions do remain, but only as nominal Adventists, they will most surely contaminate the spiritual life of others, so that the latter evil will be worse than the first.

The fervent preaching of the cross of Christ is needed now, as always, to bring about a great spiritual revival.

But for this quickening of the Spirit to be accompanied by a genuine reformation, backsliders must hear again the thunders of Sinai. Of necessity also, sinners will be instructed in righteousness and temperance, and warned of the judgment. And they will sense anew the timeliness of the truths that separate us from the world, identify us as a people, and prepare us for the kingdom.

Some may say that there is no new sin in our day. No, there is only more of it. How well the devil knows that. We know it too. But it is far easier to do other good and necessary things than it is to deal with popular and resolute sin. However, sin does not solve itself. We may gloss over it. We may even ignore it for a time. But it is still there. Not only does it not "go away" but it continues to worsen.

The truancy of Jonah from his divine assignment shows how unwelcome the task is. And there was Jeremiah, who was "naturally of a timid and shrinking disposition" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 419). Called to a work of reform within the church, he lamented his misfortune by saying, "I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. . . . Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I would not stay" (Jeremiah 20:7-9).

### FACING THE PROBLEMS

With these examples in mind, we today must face squarely the spiritual problems of the church, for the salvation of Seventh-day Adventists. Willful sin, brought on by material prosperity and the love of the world, separates the soul from God. It thereby unfits us to bear the gospel to the world at a time when human probation is about to close and the Spirit of God departs from the hearts of men.

Our heavenly Father has ordained that this people shall complete an arrested reformation. Others may substitute activity, generosity, and formality for the work of reform, but we may not. Before all else, we are to seek such a quickening of our spiritual senses as will make sin repulsive and a genuine reform mandatory. Then, instead of the words "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you," we shall hear the call "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (Isaiah 59:2; 60:1, 2).

The fruit of our revival will be graciously abundant. As the prophet says further, "Then thou shalt see, and

*Concluded on page 23*



# Your Church—Where Is The Emphasis?

Orley M. Berg

**A**ccording to the *Church Manual*, “In the absence of a pastor, the local elder is a spiritual leader of the church, and is responsible for fostering all branches and departments of the work. The Sabbath School work, the Missionary Volunteer work, the missionary activities of the church, the interests of the church school, and every other line of activity should receive attention, advice, and encouragement.” —Page 58.

In fostering the various lines of church activity it is very important to keep in mind what the ultimate objective of each of these activities is, lest it be little more than keeping the wheels of machinery going.

## THE SUPREME BUSINESS OF EVERY CHURCH

The supreme business of every church and every Christian is the saving of souls. The apostle Paul declares, “And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:1 1, 12). Weymouth’s translation reads, “In order fully to equip His people for the work of serving.” Moffat renders it, “For the equipment of the saints, for the business of the ministry.” \*

This makes it clear that persons who are won to the church should at once become active in working for others. They are saved to serve. Ellen G. White declares, “Just as soon as a church is organized, let the minister set the members at work.” — *Evangelism*, pp. 353, 354. She continues, “Personal responsibility, personal activity in seeking the salvation of others, must be the education given to all newly come to the faith.” — *Ibid.*, p. 354.

The apostolic church was first organized as a missionary agency for the carrying out of the Savior’s commission. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was

likewise first organized for the work of evangelism. It was born in the evangelistic mold, and when it ceases to be evangelistic in its concepts and mission, it might just as well cease to exist. “The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes.” — *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 29.

It is this concept alone that will keep the church alive as a Spirit-filled movement. It may survive without evangelistic outreach; it may even be an organization with endless activities; but activity alone is no assurance that the true goals of the church are being met. Unless the members of the church are being trained, equipped, and engaged in the work of soul-winning, the purpose of the church is not being realized.

## LOVE OF SOULS LOST

There are, unfortunately, some churches that have lost all their missionary zeal and desire to have it so. A pastor of such a church remarked, “My members want to hear a good comforting sermon on Sabbath and then be left alone the rest of the week.” And in a large city where there were a number of churches, one pastor said of his congregation, “They are not interested in adding new members. The church is just the size they like. They don’t want it to get larger.”

During the summer of 1968 some members of a congregation in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, generated a movement to remove their pastor. The pastor was young Peter Marshall, son of the late pastor of the large New York Avenue Presbyterian church in Washington, D.C., and chaplain of the U.S. Senate. After the young pastor had been there only a few months there were those who wished him removed. Why? Because he was apparently too successful. As one member put it, “This is a little church and we want to keep it that way.”

Obviously there are but few that see growth in this light. The great majority of our members welcome it. But how many are really doing something about it?

The pastors, elders, and other church officers have a solemn responsibility in this area. We are counseled:

“The elders and those who have leading places in the church should give more thought to their plans for conducting the work. They should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act, that none may lead an aimless life, but that all may accomplish what they can according to their several ability. . . . It is very essential that such an education should be given to the members of the church, that they will become unselfish, devoted, efficient workers for God; and it is only through such a course that the church can be prevented from becoming fruitless and dead.”—*Christian Service*, p. 62.

That too many of our churches are even now “fruitless and dead” is all too evident. How can they be kept alive?

Let him seek to keep the church alive by teaching its members how to labor with him for the conversion of sinners. This is good generalship; and the result will be found far better than if he should seek to perform the work alone.”—*Evangelism*, p. 357.

If the church is to fulfill its mission, it is vital that the total membership assume personal responsibility for reaching those that have not yet heard the message that is to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord. The negative attitude that many members have toward personal soul-winning places a definite limit upon evangelistic possibilities by the congregation. Where such attitudes persist they must be changed. This calls for positive spiritual leadership.

On page 24 of his excellent book, *Evangelism That Evangelizes*, Dr. Carl M. Zweasy puts it this way:

“We must see that evangelism or reaching the lost for Christ and the church is the primary program of the whole church. Today in many churches this program is playing second fiddle to other programs within the church, many of which are totally unrelated and irrelevant to the command of Christ to preach the gospel to every creature. We need to restudy and reevaluate each committee and organization of the

church in the light of the great commission. Is the winning of lost souls to Christ still pertinent, still paramount? Have we who determine the total program of the church any very profound conviction that the supreme mission of the whole church is to reach the last person, old and young, for Christ? If so, then it is our responsibility to see that every organization participates in the attainment of that end. Not a single group of whatever size, age or importance should be overlooked or bypassed in

this matter. Only when this program has been successfully promoted in each organization within the church, may that church be properly said to be evangelistic.”

To produce an evangelistic consciousness throughout the church, within every department and function, is one of the greatest challenges confronting pastors and church leaders today. As a local elder, let this be your great burden, the subject of earnest prayer and personal endeavor. The accomplishment of this grand objective may depend largely upon your personal influence and labors.

#### MY PRAYER

Dear Lord, Thou hast awakened me to a new sense of responsibility. I have failed, and we as a church have failed in doing what is expected of us in reaching those about us for Christ. But, Lord, forgive and grant that new life and zeal may come into our labors. Give me a new burden for souls and wisdom to know how I can best be used of Thee to help arouse our total membership to greater evangelistic endeavor. Amen. **E**

**If the church is to fulfill its mission, it is vital that the total membership assume personal responsibility for reaching those that have not yet heard the message that is to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord.**

\* From *The Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt. Copyright by James Moffatt 1954. Used by permission of Harper & Row Publishers, Incorporated.

*Orley M. Berg was managing editor of Ministry when he wrote this article.*

# We Can Trust in the Lord's Promises

Marco A. Valenca

In 1975 my wife and I went to work on the beautiful island of Puerto Rico. The district in which we were assigned to work had two churches: Aguada and Mamey. We arrived in April, and within a few months my wife became ill and had to be admitted to Bella Vista Hospital with an unidentified intestinal problem.

Her health deteriorated so much that I was afraid she was not going to live. Several of our members donated blood for her—transfusions she received while in the hospital. Thanks to our good and faithful church members we never lacked moral and spiritual support.

After more than a month of medical and hospital care she was diagnosed as having a case of ameba, which, if it had been known earlier, could have been easily treated. Unfortunately, the long and expensive hospital and medical treatment took its toll on us, and her health deteriorated further. She developed ulcerative colitis, which affected her health for several years. And, for a minister who had been in the ministry for only three years, this situation placed us in a financial crisis.

As a young minister I could not see myself opening up to my members and sharing the seriousness of our financial situation. My wife and I knew that our income was not enough to pay for rent, food, gasoline, insurance, as well as the medical bills that had accumulated.

We discussed the possibility of a bank loan, but upon investigating it we found out that the only way we could get a loan was to have someone sign the application as a collateral. I just could not ask a church member to do it.

It was not long until we found ourselves counting the days until the next paycheck. Getting advances from the conference just was not an option for us. In fact, we felt

that because we were in the conference for such a short time, it was not advisable to request an advance. So we brought our dilemma to the Lord. We really didn't know what to do. We prayed, and in our prayers we repeated many promises including, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (Psalms 27:14, NIV).

Our financial situation was going from bad to worse, to the point that on the Friday after Thanksgiving Day, while welcoming the Sabbath, we realized that by Sunday we would have nothing to eat. My mother-in-law was visiting with us to help my wife as she recuperated, and I felt that we had a challenge that weekend. I had to face the fact that there was no money to buy food and that what was in the house would last only one more day. I didn't even have money for gasoline.

I could not share any of that with the members in the church. I didn't feel it was proper for me to do so, especially when I preached on so many occasions that God takes care of us. So I prayed like I never did before. I said to the Lord, "Lord, you have never failed me in the past. You have always provided food, clothing, and housing for my family and me, but now I don't know what is in store for us. Lord, we are depending totally on your intervention. We are claiming your promises, and we have been faithful in returning our tithes and offerings. Please, Lord, help us and teach us to trust in you at all times."

We closed our sunset service that Friday evening wondering how the Lord was going to resolve our problem. We couldn't see a solution, especially when we were aware that nobody else knew what was happening.

Sabbath was spent as usual. I preached in one of the churches, went for missionary activities and visitation in

**Our financial situation was going from bad to worse, to the point that on the Friday after Thanksgiving Day, while welcoming the Sabbath, we realized that by Sunday we would have nothing to eat.**

the afternoon, and by sunset time was back at home to thank the Lord for another Sabbath day. My wife, my mother-in-law, and I sang a few songs and repeated together the promise, "This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (Psalms 34:6, 9-10, NIV). Then we knelt down to pray.

Again I prayed, and prayed, and prayed. I said, "Lord, we have come to a point where we don't know what to do. My next paycheck is still two weeks away. I have no money in the bank to draw from, and I have no cash. There is no food in the house and only some gasoline in the car. What are we going to do, Lord? Please come to our rescue. Please fulfill your promise Lord."

Knock! Knock! Knock! I had to quickly conclude my prayer, for there was no doubt that somebody was knocking at our door. I wished my wife and mother-in-law a happy week and proceeded to open the door.

What a surprise!

There in front of me I saw a small delegation from the largest church in our district: the head elder, his wife, the community services director, and the secretary. They brought with them several bags of groceries. I stood there wondering what was going on. Brother Noboa, the head elder, turned to me and said, "Pastor Valenca, we hope you will not be offended. We decided to bring to you and your family the groceries that we give to the poor during the Thanksgiving season. We really don't know why we should give it to you, but it seems to us that this is the will of the Lord. We were going through our list of possible families and we just couldn't agree on anyone. Our sister (the Community Services secretary) said that she felt impressed that the groceries should be given to you and your family. We argued with her in opposition, for we felt that you didn't need it. She said, 'I don't know why but I feel strongly that we should take it to Pastor Valenca!' We prayed and the Community Services director said, 'I believe our sister is right. Let's take the groceries for the poor to Pastor Valenca.' This discussion went on for a while, but little by little we all came to the same conclusion. Here we are and we still feel that we are doing it because it is the will of the Lord. Please accept this gift from your church family."

My wife and I stood there with tears in our eyes. There was more food in those bags than we had bought for a long time. It was enough to last us for more than two weeks, and it had come to us by the will of God. We were more than thankful to these brethren for following the impression of the Lord. We had no doubts that the Lord had provided for us according to His promises. We

rejoiced together that night because we had seen how He was so good and merciful to us.

We spent Sunday rejoicing that the Lord heard our prayer and provided so quickly for our material needs. However, the story wasn't finished. On Monday I went to the church post office box to get the church mail. I noticed that one envelope was specifically addressed to me. I opened it to see what it contained. There was a little note and a check for \$25.00. The note said, "Pastor Valenca, the Lord has been good to us. This Thanksgiving the Lord impressed us that we should send you a gift. This is just a token of our appreciation to Him. He impressed us to tell you to use it for any need you may have now. God bless." The note had the signatures of the church treasurer and his wife. The money was enough to buy gasoline and help with transportation for the rest of the month.

Several years have passed already, and my wife and I realize that we are not free from challenges as we continue to serve the Lord in this world. However, He has never failed us in the past and we are confident He will not forget us in the present or the future. We know we can trust in His promises. **E**

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*Marco A. Valenca writes from New England where he works as the stewardship director of the Southern New England Conference. Reprinted from the Atlantic Union Gleaner, December 1997.*

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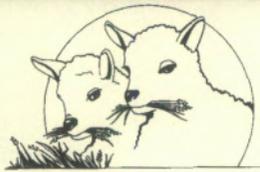
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# The Successful Mentor

Virginia L. Smith

**E**very young person in the church needs interested attention from adults other than parents in order to feel an integral part of the church family. In addition, young members need to be involved in the ministry of their church. If they are not involved, they lose interest. They want a mission, not entertainment. An ideal way to make this happen is to pair them up with leaders in actually doing the work of the church. School age and teenage members are prime candidates.

Two terms being used today for this type of practical work experience are discipling and mentoring. Jesus showed what discipling means. Webster says a mentor is a friend who is also a counselor, teacher, or instructor. The friendship and the education are equally important. Why should we mentor young members?

1. Future leaders are trained and equipped by present participation rather than bench warming.
2. Young members identify and develop their unique spiritual gifts as they join you in using yours.
3. Mentorship programs socialize the young to feel like church members instead of future members. They take ownership in the congregation and its programs, bonding with both their mentors and the church itself.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE APPROPRIATE?

When Moses began his spiritual leadership experience, God asked him, "What do you have in your hand?" God used the resources Moses already had available to help him in activities he was already familiar with. As you start your mentorship program, evaluate what is in your hand. Don't start something new. Take your young disciples with you in the ministries you are already active in.

In New Market, Virginia, a group of brand-new mentors were assigned young disciples for a nine week period. Almost all of the mentors were ordained elders.

Here is what five of the pairs did:

- Pair No. 1 was Tim and Jonathan. Tim included Jonathan in Bible studies with several academy students as they were preparing for baptism. They also visited and prayed with hospitalized members and learned a lot about how the church and school ran by sitting in on church board and school board meetings.
- Pair No. 2 was Gloria and Kathryn. They made craft items for the homebound, then visited them with their gifts and had worship with them. Kathryn made several new adult friends and visited them again later, without Gloria. She learned to be comfortable presenting simple worship talks and praying in front of others.
- Pair No. 3 was Edith and Andrea. They visited patients receiving nursing care at home, presenting short worships and praying with them. While by themselves, Edith shared her testimony with Andrea and coached Andrea in presenting hers.
- Pair No. 4 was Helen and Alice, who visited members in local nursing homes. They scheduled regular visits for talking, singing, and praying with each one. Helen coached Alice on public speaking and gave her tips for an effective music ministry. Helen also taught Alice to present health tips in fun and interesting ways.
- Pair No. 5 was Sally and Becca. Becca observed and later taught a weekly Sabbath school class for shut-ins on CompuServe. In addition to the disabled regular members, participants who logged on included GIs who weren't able to attend a local church in Germany and Saudi Arabia, insomniacs in Australia and New Zealand, and anesthesiologists on-call in

hospitals across the United States. Becca learned to practice “Barnabas” ministry, encouraging members with notes of affirmation and appreciation. She and Sally also practiced “HUR” ministry, praying for and affirming pastoral staff. Becca learned to write and submit articles for publication in denominational journals and has had several published.

### WHAT DOES A MENTOR DO?

In the process of being friends and working together, a mentor follows these four steps:

1. Tell your young disciple what activity you are going to do and how you are going to do it.
2. Show them how it is done. They need to watch you a few times before they are ready to jump in.
3. Give them an opportunity to lead the activity.
4. Debrief after the activity with evaluation and encouragement. Be gentle and positive in your evaluation of their performance; be gracious and humble as they offer evaluation of your performance.

NEVER throw your disciple headfirst into a situation without going through steps 1 and 2 above.

### HOW DO I START?

1. Pray, asking God to help you choose a young disciple who will work well with you.
2. Evaluate your spiritual gifts and activities.
3. Invite your chosen disciple to participate with you.
4. Set a regular time to meet.
5. Help your young disciple evaluate his/her spiritual gifts.
6. Together set goals for your mentoring experience.

So what are you waiting for? Pray, choose your disciple, get busy, and don't be afraid to have fun.

### BUT I MIGHT NOT BE A SUCCESS MENTOR!

In the New Market experience, the only unsuccessful mentoring experiences were those that did not happen. Actually, several of the mentors included their disciples in Sabbath activities and family time unrelated to the program. All of the young participants gave high marks in every category to the mentors who had spent time with them, regardless of the activity. Better yet, all the young disciples have remained good friends with their mentors and have continued developing their gifts after the nine-week program ended. The ripples are still spreading.

NOTE: This same strategy is an ideal method for integrating newly baptized members of any age, and it would prevent the revolving door syndrome and the cracks between the floor boards. **E**

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## First Things First

*Concluded from page 17*

flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee” (Isaiah 60:5).

### WHAT AN OPPORTUNITY

To that end we should be aware not only of our relation to prophecy but also of a new opportunity and a new challenge awaiting us. The condition of the popular churches has reached a point where thousands of men and women are disappointed and dissatisfied. Soon the plight of the honest in heart will become unbearable to them. More and more, they will search the Word and pray for guidance. Rewarded in that, they will look for a people whose life and doctrine conform to their own God-given ideals.

Shall we not prepare now for the waiting providence of God? Shall we not do that which His wisdom has put first on our denominational agenda? Then, as the prophet foresaw, we, as God's people, revived and purified, shall lighten the world with the witness of our lives and the preaching of the everlasting gospel. What a privilege—and what a prospect! **E**

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# Touch the Hem of His Garment

Luke 8:43-48

**Scripture Reading: Luke 8:43-48**

**Hymns: Day by Day**

**I Know Whom I Have Believed**

**Moment by Moment**

**Hymn 532**

**Hymn 511**

**Hymn 507**

## I. Introduction

“To talk of religious things in a casual way, to pray for spiritual blessings without real soul hunger and living faith, avails little. The wondering crowd that pressed close about Christ realized no vital power from the contact. But when the poor, suffering woman, in her great need, put forth her hand and touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, she felt the healing virtue. Hers was the touch of faith. Christ recognized that touch, and He determined there to give a lesson for all His followers to the close of time. He knew that virtue had gone out of Him, and turning about in the throng He said, “Who touched My clothes?” Surprised at such a question, His disciples answered, “Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?”” (*My Life Today*, p. 13).

### A. The Hem of His Garment

1. A line that has caught the attention of the world
2. Songs, poems, multiplied sermons
3. This is the story behind that statement.

### B. The Story of a Woman in Trouble

1. Her desperation, her determination, her deliverance
2. How her experience relates to us today

## II. A Woman’s Desperation (Luke 8:43)

### A. Her Problem is Revealed in One Verse

1. She had an incurable sickness.
2. She had spent all her money on physicians.
3. She was ceremonially unclean.

### B. Physically Desperate: Her Health was Gone

### C. Financially Desperate: Her Money was Gone

### D. Spiritually Desperate: She Couldn’t Enter the Temple

### E. She Pictures all People Apart From Christ

1. Physically: we are ever moving toward death.
2. Financially: money cannot buy what we need.
3. Spiritually: our sin separates us from God.

## III. A Woman’s Determination (Luke 8:44)

### A. “Came From Behind Him, and Touched the Border of His Garment”

Conditions to discourage her from coming to Jesus

1. The great crowd surrounding Him
2. The attitude of His disciples
3. The importance of His mission
4. Her own appearance: pale, poor, pitiful

### B. Still, She Pressed Through to Jesus

### C. “If I Can but Touch His Clothes” (Mark 5:28)

## IV. A Woman’s Deliverance (Luke 8:45-46)

### A. Her Deliverance Came from Contact with Jesus

### B. This was a Touch of Faith

### C. She Exercised Greater Faith than Healthy Ones Around Her

### D. Our Lord’s Response to Her Faith

1. “Who touched me?” Sensitive to her touch
2. “Virtue is gone out of me.”

### E. Many Surround Christ Who Do Not Touch Him

## V. A Woman’s Declaration (Luke 8:47)

### A. Her Trembling . . . Then Her Testimony

1. She told Him why she had touched Him.
2. She declared to the crowd what had happened.

### B. How Her Words Have Endured

1. Only one in the crowd whose words are known today.
2. In touching Jesus, she was able to touch others.

## VI. Conclusion

### A. Press Through to Jesus

1. Come as you are with all your needs.
2. Pay no heed to doubters or critics in the crowd.

### B. This Woman Received More Than She Anticipated

1. She was healed from her illness.
2. She became a child of God: “Daughter . . .” (Luke 8:48).

### C. Jesus Gives More Than We Ask or Think (Ephesians 3:20)

—EG, 1998

# I Will Build My Church

Matthew 16:13-20

**Hymns: Built on the Rock**

**The Church Has One Foundation**

**Bringing in the Sheaves**

**Hymn 347**

**Hymn 348**

**Hymn 369**

## I. Introduction

“The servants of God should become workmen that need not to be ashamed, that they may build up the church of God in the earth. This work cannot possibly be done without much meditation, prayer, and humility.... If it is properly done, it will be as much more valuable and successful than temporal work, as the heavenly is more important than the earthly. Jesus has said of his followers, “Ye are the light of the world.” A living, working church will be a power in the world, but there must be well-defined plans carried out with all faithfulness. If those who are elders and deacons in the church devote their God-given powers to money making, they will not be serving the Lord or the church; but they will be serving themselves, and the high task committed to their hands will suffer for the lack of patient, intelligent, well-directed effort.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 6, 1888.

## II. Who Is Building the Church? (v. 18)

- A. Christ is Building the Church
- B. He Calls It His church
- C. The Church is Built Upon Christ
- D. He is the Rock of all Scripture
  - 1. The Psalmist’s Rock (Psalms 18:31, 46; 62:2; 95:1)
  - 2. Paul’s Rock (Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 10:4; Ephesians 2:19-22)
  - 3. Peter’s Rock (1 Peter 2:7-8)
- E. The Church Is on a Solid Foundation
 

“ ‘Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ’ (1 Corinthians 3:11). ‘Upon this rock,’ said Jesus, ‘I will build My church.’ In the presence of God, and all the heavenly intelligences, in the presence of the unseen army of hell, Christ founded His church upon the living Rock. That Rock is Himself,— His own body, for us broken and bruised. Against the church built upon this foundation, the gates of hell shall not prevail” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 413).

## III. What Is the Church? (v. 18)

- A. The Retreat with Jesus in Caesarea Philippi
  - 1. Jesus reveals His coming death and resurrection.
  - 2. Peter’s confession (v. 16)
- B. Christ Promises to Build His Church (v. 18)
  - 1. A statement that has caused confusion
  - 2. Questions that clear up the mysteries.
- C. The Church is Made up of All the Saved (Hebrews 12:23)
- D. The Church is the Body of Christ (Colossians 1:18-24)
- E. The Church is to Bring Glory to Christ (Ephesians 3: 21)
- F. The Church is the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-32)
- G. The Church is Built Out of Living Stones (1 Peter 2:5)
  - 1. Peter was a stone: Christ the Rock.
  - 2. Stones speak of the individuality of believers.
  - 3. No two stones are exactly alike.
  - 4. Each believer is unique (1 Corinthians 12:12-23).

## IV. How Secure Is the Church? (v. 18)

- A. The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against It
- B. What is Meant by the Gates of Hell?
  - 1. A familiar figure of speech in those days
  - 2. The elders of the city sat at the gates.
  - 3. Armies were sent to battle from the gates
  - 4. The gates of hell symbolize sending the forces of evil.
  - 5. These evil forces sent against the church (Ephesians 6:12).
- C. Jesus Foresaw the Attacks of the Enemy Upon the Church
  - 1. The martyrs of the first century
  - 2. Persecutions through the centuries
- D. But the Church Will Stand Until Jesus Comes

## V. Conclusion

- A. Are You a Part of the Church?
  - 1. Have you received Christ as your Savior?
  - 2. Are you building your life on Him?
- B. Are You Doing Your Part in the Church?
  - 1. Do you stand against the forces of evil?
  - 2. Do you live for the glory of God?

—EG, 1998

# You Are in Good Hands With God

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Allstate Insurance Company has a captivating slogan. In their advertisements they claim, "You're in good hands with Allstate." This statement attracts people, for there is within every human being the need and desire for security. People want their houses, cars, and especially their lives to be protected.

Jesus made a security claim for believers: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28). The Lord gave a graphic picture of security. He pictured the believer as resting in the hands of the heavenly Father. Think of the amazing security one has by being in the Father's hands. Yet Jesus did not speak these words for security's sake alone. The words of our Lord suggest other truths. A person is "in the hands of God" for more reasons than just security. Let us notice the implications of being in God's hands.

## II. GOD MAKES A PERSON

- A. There was a time when one was not in God's hands.
  1. Those who refuse to submit to the Good Shepherd stand outside the fold of safety.
    - a. Human beings want to take over their own lives and live as they please, rather than as God wants them to live.
    - b. Every person on earth has gone astray like a rebellious sheep. Human beings have looked to the mirage of greener pastures and strayed like sheep only to find that they are alienated from God, abandoned to the wrong cause, and have abused every gift God gave.
- B. When a person responds in faith to Jesus Christ, God begins a great work within him or her.
  1. "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (v. 9 RSV). Two words in the verse help to describe God's work in a believer.
    - a. First, there is the word saved. It means a rescue operation.
    - b. Second, there is the expression "find pasture." This describes God's daily care. Not only is there a rescue operation, but there is nourishment and growth.
  2. Paul said, "For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6 ASV). When a person trusts the Lord, God begins a good work. The Lord will continue this work until the day of Jesus Christ.

## III. GOD USES A PERSON

- A. God does not put a person in His hands just to save; He intends to use that person.
  1. Human beings do not enter into a relationship with God to sit and wait for the Judgment Day. No, God desires that the saved work in His service.
    - a. Out of Elisha's ministry there comes an illustration of service. Elisha told a young man to put out his hand and "take . . . up" the lost axe head. It was not just to be rescued from a watery grave; it was to be restored to useful service again.
- B. We may be weak instruments, but in God's hands we may be used to do much.
  1. God has the amazing power of choosing ordinary human

- beings and using them in His service. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27).
2. A golf club in my hands may mean a high score. But that same golf club in the hands of a professional golfer may mean a low score. The difference is in the one who uses the club. When we put our lives into the hands of God, He uses us for His service.

## IV. GOD KEEPS A PERSON

- A. The security of the believer depends upon the nature and character of God.
  1. After we open our lives to God in faith, our security depends upon God. It does not depend on our power to hold on to God. Rather, it depends upon God's power to hold on to us. "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).
- B. The security of the believer does not mean a license to sin.
  1. If one uses the concept of the security of the believer to practice sinful ways, then one does not really comprehend the idea of being in God's hand.
    - a. In God's hand a person gradually experiences change. The Lord changes a person, and his or her life moves away from practicing sin.
  2. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was asked, "Do you believe in the perseverance of the saints?" He replied, "No, but I believe in the perseverance of the Savior."

## V. CONCLUSION

- A. Are you willing to put yourself in God's hand?
  1. A party of inexperienced mountain climbers were facing a yawning crevasse which had to be crossed if they would reach the top. Their guide went over nimbly. Reaching back he asked each member of the climbing party to give him his hand. One man came repeatedly to the edge, and each time he retreated. Finally, the guide reached for the man's hand once more and said, "For thirty years I've been helping men and women across that gap, and I've never let one go yet."
  2. Will you reach out to the Lord? He has not let one go yet!

## VI. ILLUSTRATION

Grace of God—J. Wilbur Chapman often told of the testimony given by a certain man in one of his meetings:

"I got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year I begged on the streets for a living. One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said, "Hey, mister, can you give me a dime?" As soon as I saw his face I was shocked to see that it was my own father. I said, "Father, Father, do you know me?" Throwing his arms around me and with tears in his eyes, he said, "Oh my son, at last I've found you! I've found you. You want a dime? Everything I have is yours." Think of it. I was a tramp. I stood begging my own father for ten cents, when for 18 years he had been looking for me to give me all that he had."

What a wonderful illustration of the way God longs to treat us, if we will only let Him.

# The Great Need of the Holy Spirit

Ellen G. White

**G**od has not appointed any man guide, nor made any man conscience for another; therefore let human hands be withheld from restraining His servants who feel the burden to enter His vineyard to labor. Let God work with His own chosen agents by His Holy Spirit. No human being is to sit in judgment upon his brother. Neither are any to feel that they can handle roughly the precious pearls for which Christ gave His life.

The pearl, the precious human pearl, was found by Christ. Let man be warned; be careful how you treat the Lord's "peculiar treasure." All discourtesy, all pain, all neglect, which these souls suffer at your hands, is charged against you as inflicted upon Jesus Christ. They are not to be treated in a lordly, commanding manner.

Laws and rules are being made at the centers of the work that will soon be broken into atoms. Men are not to dictate. It is not for those in places of authority to employ all their powers to sustain some, while others are cast down, ignored, forsaken, and left to perish. But it is the duty of the leaders to lend a helping hand to all who are in need. Let each work in the line which God may indicate to him by His Holy Spirit. The soul is accountable to God alone. Who can say how many avenues of light have been closed by arrangements which the Lord has not advised nor instituted?

The Lord does not ask permission of those in responsible positions when He wishes to use certain ones as His agents for the promulgation of truth. But He will use whom He will use. He will pass by men who have not followed His counsel, men who feel capable and sufficient to work in their own wisdom; and He will use others who are thought by these supposedly wise ones to be wholly incompetent. Many who have some talent think that they are necessary to the cause of God. Let

  
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them beware lest they stretch themselves beyond their measure, and the Lord shall leave them in their own ways, to be filled with their own doings. None are to exercise their human authority to bind the minds and souls of their fellowmen. They are not to devise and put in practice methods and plans to bring every individual under their jurisdiction.

Those who know the truth are to be worked by the Holy Spirit, and not themselves to try to work the Spirit. If the cords are drawn much tighter, if the rules are made much finer, if men continue to bind their fellow-laborers closer and closer to the commandments of men, many will be stirred by the Spirit of God to break every shackle, and assert their liberty in Christ Jesus. If men would act toward their fellowmen as to those whom Christ loves, if they would obey the commandment to

"love thy neighbor as thyself," there would be sweet harmony among the brethren.

How much better it would be if those who claim to be Christians would behave like Christians. How much better it would be if all would cease speaking of their own good works and ways, indulging their self-esteem; refrain from the putting forth of the finger, imagining evil, and using their influence to weaken, oppress, and destroy. If men will not come to the terms made by the leading workers, they will not entertain them, they do not care what results may follow their injustice. With them it is rule or ruin. God has not appointed any man to do such work. "And no human being shall be permitted to prescribe my liberty or intrench upon the perfect freedom of my brethren, without hearing my voice lifted in protest against it."

God will move upon men of humble position in society, men who have not become insensible to the bright rays of light through so long contemplating the

light of truth, and refusing to make any improvement or advancement therein. Many such will be seen hurrying hither and thither, constrained by the Spirit of God to bring the light to others. The truth, the word of God, is as a fire in their bones, filling them with a burning desire to enlighten those who sit in darkness. Many, even among the uneducated, now proclaim the words of the Lord. Children are impelled by the Spirit to go forth and declare the message from Heaven. The Spirit is poured out upon all who will yield to its prompts, and, casting off all man's machinery, his binding rules and cautious methods, they will declare the truth with the might of the Spirit's power. Multitudes will receive the faith and join the armies of the Lord.

Many of those who are professedly followers of the Lord at the present time do not submit themselves to the guidance of His Spirit, but try to harness up the Holy Spirit and drive it in their way. All such must abandon their self-sufficiency, and yield themselves unreservedly to the Lord, that He may work out His good pleasure in and through them.

The seven last plagues are about to descend upon the disobedient. Many have let the gospel invitation go unheeded; they have been tested and tried; but mountainous obstacles have seemed to loom up before their faces, blocking their onward march. Through faith, perseverance, and courage, many will surmount these obstructions and walk out into the glorious light. Almost unconsciously barriers have been erected in the strait and narrow way; stones of stumbling have been placed in the path; these will all be rolled away. The safeguards which false shepherds have thrown around their flocks will become as naught; thousands will step out into the light, and work to spread the light. Heavenly intelligence will combine with the human agencies. Thus encouraged, the church will indeed arise and shine, throwing all her sanctified energies into the contest; thus the design of God is accomplished; the lost pearls are recovered. Prophets have discerned this grand work afar off and have caught the inspiration of the hour and traced the wonderful descriptions of things yet to be.

Our people have had great light, and yet much of our ministerial force is exhausted on the churches, in teaching those who should be teachers; enlightening those who should be "the light of the world;" watering those from whom should flow springs of living water; enriching those who might be veritable mines of precious truth; repeating the gospel invitation to such as

should be scattered to the uttermost parts of the earth communicating the message of Heaven to many who have not had the privileges which they have enjoyed; feeding those who should be in the byways and highways heralding the invitation, "Come; for all things are now ready." Come to the gospel feast; come to the supper of the Lamb; "for all things are now ready."

Now is the time for earnest wrestling with God. Our voices should join with the Savior's in that wonderful prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Many may ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The responsibility rests upon every individual.

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." The scheme of salvation is not to be worked out under the laws and rules specified by men. There must be no fixed rules; our work is a progressive work, and there must be room left for methods to be improved upon. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, unity must and will be preserved.

All the revelations of the past bring added responsibilities upon the workers in these last days. The past, present, and future are linked together. We must learn lessons from the experiences of other ages. If there are any of our brethren who think that they have devised plans by which they can secure a monopoly of any line of God's work, they are released from all such burdens. Individually we form a part of the great whole, fulfilling our part in the scenes foreseen long ages ago. In the counsels of God a place was assigned to every person, and each one is to devote his entire ability, his influence, the energy of his whole being, in an earnest endeavor to discharge the responsibility laid upon him. It is the duty of every human intelligence to put into daily practice the instructions of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John by living a practical, Christian life.

We are to be united to one another in the bonds of Christlike love. This is the path marked out for all. By following in it, without boasting, without self-exaltation we may satisfy the high claims of God upon us. If any are inclined to boast of their superior talents, let them bear in mind that these talents are another's, only lent to them for a season, and that if they are not employed in the Lord's work, they will be taken from them. Make no boasts of your extensive knowledge and influence. The great plan of redemption connects every man with his fellow-laborer. The influence of the past helps to



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mold the work of the present, and that in its turn enables us to lay hold of the work line after line, upon which we may carry on the future work. All these agencies have a close relation, not only to time, but to the endless ages of the future, reaching into eternity.

Let man now cease to trust in man. While they should respect God's plan for unity of action, let all remember that the Holy Spirit is molding and fashioning the human agent in the divine similitude. The life that is hid with Christ in God is revealed through men. We are now living in the closing scenes of this world's history. Let men tremble with the sense of the responsibility of knowing the truth. The ends of the world are come. Proper consideration of these things will lead all to make an entire consecration of all that they have and are to their God.

There should be no boasting, no seeking for the highest places; but all should be ambitious to do with fidelity, with an eye single to the glory of God, the sacred work which it is our exalted privilege to engage in. The eye should not be so constantly looking to man, studying the plans which men devise; but rather seeking for a knowledge of the plans which are determined by the Source of all wisdom. Then there will be no danger of having plans for the work contaminated by flowing through impure human channels.

Look to God; pray to God; wait and watch and pray to God; work for God. The weighty obligation of warning a world of its coming doom is upon us. From every direction, far and near, calls are coming to us for help. The church, devotedly consecrated to the work, is to carry the message to the world: Come to the gospel feast; the supper is prepared, come. The weak must not now trust in finite men if they would be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. If we have ever importuned God, wrestling for His blessing as did Jacob, let it be now.

God calls to the church to arise and clothe herself with the garments of Christ's righteousness. Crowns, immortal crowns, are to be won. The kingdom of heaven is to be gained. A world, perishing in sin, is to be enlightened. The lost pearl is to be found. The lost sheep is to be brought back in safety to the fold. Who will join in the search? Who will bear the light to those who are wandering in the darkness of error? **E**

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*Ellen G. White was one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A prolific writer, she produced more than 100,000 pages by the time she died in 1915. Her works continue as a prophetic voice within the Adventist church.*

*This article first appeared in the Review and Herald, July 23, 1895.*

## Working Together

*Concluded from page 4*

A ministry of one person bears the pressure alone and shoulders the responsibility for all areas of the church. There is danger that each ministry or department of a local church competes for resources and attention. Department heads often consider their area of labor as the most important ministry in the church. They will follow the leader's model. Pressure is put on the leader to balance these various ministries of the local church. However, teamwork diversifies this pressure and relieves the leader from bearing it all alone.

### 3. WORKING TOGETHER DEMONSTRATES THE PRINCIPLES OF LOYALTY

A leadership team is a miniature of church body life. Leaders in the body of Christ are called to be examples to the flock, as Peter stated in 1 Peter 5:3. Paul exhorted the churches, to be followers of him (1 Corinthians 4:16), and said, "Ye have us for an example" (Philippians 3:17). If the leadership team cannot unitedly and harmoniously work together, how can they expect the church to do it?

### 4. WORKING TOGETHER HELPS TO SUCCESSFULLY SHEPHERD THE FLOCK OF GOD

One man is limited in abilities, gifts, and ministries. He is not able to single-handedly meet all the needs of the entire church. In a team ministry, multiple shepherds provide greater strength in times of danger, as the prophet Isaiah stated: "For thus hath the Lord spoken unto me, like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him . . . so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion" (Isaiah 31:4).

A leader without a team ministry can break under the pressure, be it physical, mental, oral, or spiritual.

### 5. WORKING TOGETHER HANDLES THE LOAD OF THE END-TIME MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Fragmentation of the body of Christ will not help the church fulfill its mission. As further growth comes, there must be a multiplicity of mature leaders harmoniously working together to handle new situations. Without a broad leadership vision, the church's mission will be cycled in one door and out the other. The sheep's needs will not be adequately met, the world will not receive the message of salvation, and consequently, Jesus will not come to take His people to their heavenly home. So let's stick together as we face the last events and fulfill God's plan for His people. **E**



**THE MOST POPULAR TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE**

What's the most popular translation or version of the Bible? According to Zondervan Publishing, the percentage of total Bible sales is:

New International: .....	40
King James: .....	20
New King James: .....	10
Living Bible: .....	7
New American Standard: .....	5
International Children's: .....	4
The Message: .....	3.5
New Revised Standard: .....	3
Others: .....	7.5

**NIV PUBLICATION OF AN INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE EDITION**

Controversy surrounds the publication of an inclusive language edition of the *New International Version*. Here is what a number of persons have to say about it:

"Everybody wants it." (Catherine Clark Kroeger, founder, Christians for Biblical Equality).

"We're pleading for it to be taken off the market." (Timothy Bayly, Executive Director, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood).

"This needs to be dealt with among scholars and linguists who can intelligently debate it and not have it tried in the court of public opinion." Steve Johnson, Communications Director, International Bible Society).

**JEHOVAH WITNESSES ARE SUPER SELLERS**

Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) are super sellers, according to *My Business* magazine, which listed them with people like former Demtel man, Tim Shaw. "But wait, there's more. When it comes to head-against-a-brick-wall, high-level-rejection selling, nobody beats the JWs. Sure, it's not your conventional product they're pushing, but it's a product nonetheless, and it has to be sold. And in business, you must be as passionate about your product as they are about their religion."

**UNITING CHURCH SAYS "NO" TO HOMOSEXUALS IN AUSTRALIA**

A major storm is raging in the Uniting Church.

Reverend Dr. Gordon Moyes, head of Sydney's Wesley Mission, is trying to reverse a trend to accept gays and lesbians into ministry and leadership positions.

Dr. Moyes says over ten years there has been a push by gay lobby groups to recognize homosexual rights, leadership, and to get "marriage" services conducted within the church.

During this time, leaders have taken ascendancy in places of authority within the church. The Victorian Synod only narrowly rejected a self-confessed lesbian as the Victorian Moderator for 1997.

The struggle recently became public at the church's National Assembly, in Perth, when Dorothy McRae-Machon, Director of the National Commission on Mission, publicly confessed to being a lesbian. The confession coincided with the presentation of the church's "Interim Report on Sexuality."

Some 8,600 people responded to the report; 84 percent did not agree with its recommendations. But they were virtually ignored. Why? Because the assembly is mostly made up of church employees and representatives of special interest groups.

Strong protest from evangelical leaders within the assembly were not effective because "they were beaten in the strategies of organization by very sophisticated gay lobby groups and accused of being biased and out of touch."

Views in letters to *Insight*, the monthly journal of the Uniting Church, were divided. Opponents called for the church to recognize the biblical condemnation of homosexual practices; supporters appealed for understanding and the need to temper the biblical position with "modern-day-experience."

Dr. Moyes, in a written appeal, called on the church's president to lead the church back to a commitment to its constitution and to a position under the authority of Scripture.

The frustration of the leaders of Wesley Mission, the most influential and wealthiest parish of any denomination in Australia, resulted in the Elders Council withholding all funding to the Uniting Church Assembly and channelling it into the Uniting Church Mission. This decision quickly attracted the approval and action of other parishes and has made the assembly "a financial cot case," says Dr. Moyes.

Ms. McRae-McMahon resigned in late August as the assembly distanced itself from her, fearing financial collapse.

Dr. Moyes says the resignation does not solve the crisis within the church. "The issue isn't just about several church leaders practicing homosexuality; it's about the question, 'Does the Uniting Church in Australia place itself under the authority and standards of the Scriptures?'" — *Record*, October 18, 1997

## CONCERN ABOUT FREEDOM PERSECUTION BILL IN THE UNITED STATES

Adventists added their voice to those expressing concern over the "Freedom of Persecution Bill" currently under debate in the United States Congress.

A statement issued on September 18 by the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department supports imposing sanctions against foreign regimes that tolerate religious persecution.

But the statement makes clear the church believes the legislation is flawed.

"Sanction, though possibly helpful, could backfire and hurt the very people we want to help, if the persecuted group becomes the scapegoat within its community."—ANN

## THE ADVENTISTS AND THE RUSSIAN FREEDOM BILL

The International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) is calling a reworked religious freedom bill in Russia "unconstitutional, discriminative and a denial of human rights."

The lower house of the Russian Parliament approved the new bill in a 357 to 6 vote on September 19.

Approval by the upper house of the Russian parliament is expected to be a formality, after which President Boris Yeltsin will sign it into law.

While the "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations Bill" now recognizes other denominations apart from the Russian Orthodox Church, the requirements for registration and the curbs on freedom of religious expression are discriminatory, according to a statement released on September 23.

To have full legal rights, a religious organization would have to be in existence for a minimum of 15 years and be organized by Russian citizens.

Foreigners cannot register a religious body under the new legislation.

"Adventists haven't endorsed this bill. Rather, we're adding our voice in protest at what we see as a backward step in religious affairs in Russia," says Michael Kaminsky, the Euro-Asia Division Secretary.

But the Adventist Church will not be affected by the proposed law since it has a 110-year history in Russia.

Victor Krushenitsky, Euro-Asia Division Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Director, talked with high officials from the Russian government on September 29. They assured him the church will not have any problems.

"The government will try to do everything possible to soften the proposed law," said one official. "Don't be worried."

IRLA-Russia and the church have been mentioned several times by the international media for their opposition to the bill.—ANN.

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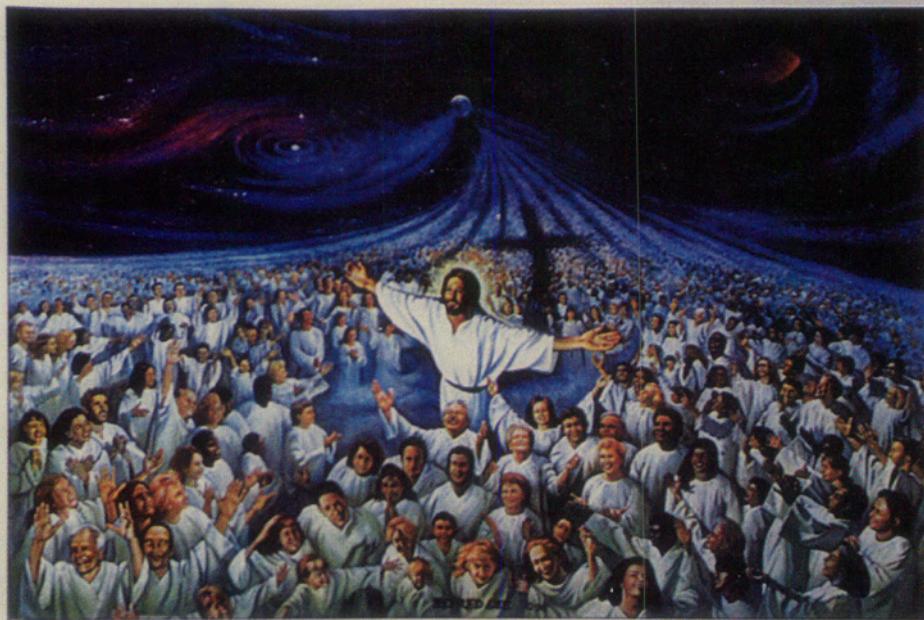
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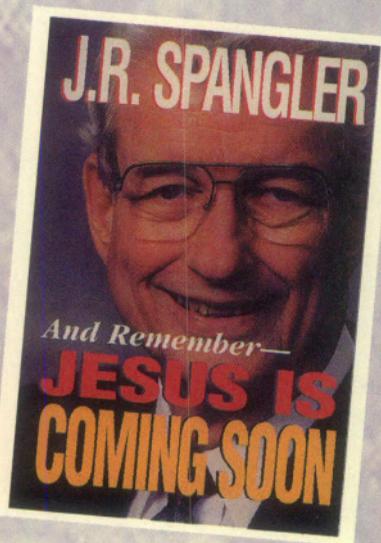
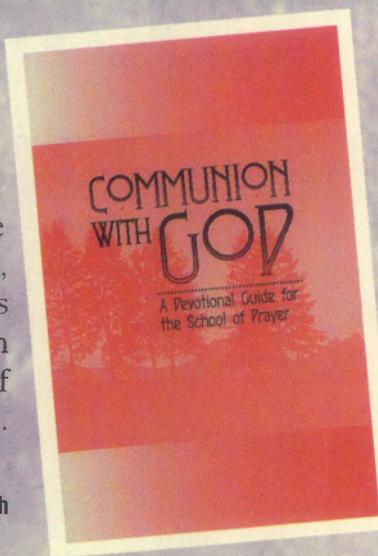
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