

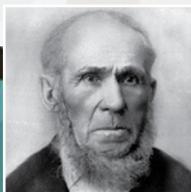
quarterly resource for local church leaders † january/march 2013

ELDER'S DIGEST

150
1863 - 2013



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A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION TO KEEP

At this time of year, after the overindulgence of the holidays, we often make resolutions to change our habits and our way of life. A new year gives us an opportunity to start fresh and better ourselves. But come the middle of January, we somehow forget our resolutions and go back to our old ways.

It is so easy to forget the commitments and resolutions we make at New Year's. There is, however, one resolution we need to make and keep: to share Jesus Christ with people.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Jesus wants us to share our faith and go into the world and teach people about Him.

To fulfill this resolution, we need to develop some convincing ways to persuade the people we are in contact with—friends, co-workers, family members, and others—of their need for Jesus.

Let me share with you some character traits that we can develop as Christians to share our faith tactfully with those around us.

First, people must see in us a *noticeable sincerity*. There is nothing that turns people off to the gospel more than phony Christians. A major temptation for us is to try to cover up, to be deceptive, to act pious and religious, to pretend we are holy. If we are going to influence our community for Christ, we need to be honest with ourselves and honest with the world and openly

admit we are no better than anybody else. Our church is made up of imperfect people.

Second, we must have a *passionate conviction*. Someone once said that "one man with conviction is worth more than 99 with opinions." Dictionary.com defines conviction as "a strong belief." I would add that conviction is a strong belief that elicits a deep emotion. Your belief in Jesus has to be passionate to be contagious. It has to be something that comes from deep in your soul. Enthusiasm goes a long way in convincing someone about Jesus.

Third, we need to have a *spiritual reliance*. If we are going to share Jesus with people, we must not do it by human effort alone. We need spiritual assistance to help us win people to Jesus Christ. That is why each of us must value prayer if we desire to speak to our friends about our faith. Before we speak to people about Jesus, we need God to work in their hearts.

Often the most effective way to bring people to Christ is to pray for them. Don't try to share the gospel in words; just pray deeply and passionately for them and allow God to work in their hearts.

Finally, we also need an *appealing urgency*. Often we are too passive about sharing our faith. There's a level of aggressiveness that repels people, but I don't think that is our problem. We have such a casual, nonchalant spirit about sharing Christ that people don't even know we are Christians.

Paul said, "We implore you on Christ's behalf, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 5:20). "We implore you" sounds urgent, doesn't it?

In 2013, let's resolve afresh to share Jesus with people. The preacher George Whitfield once said, "O Lord, give me souls, or take my soul!" I hope we also can say that.



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

150 YEARS OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION

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1863 - 2013
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WHY DID SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ORGANIZE THEMSELVES INTO A FORMAL DENOMINATION?

After the October 1844 Great Disappointment, there were just a few Sabbath-keeping Adventists. But in 1860, groups of believers were scattered throughout New England and as far West as Iowa and Wisconsin, USA. The numerical growth and geographical expansion of the movement brought about the need of an organizational structure. In *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 26 we read: "As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protect-

ing both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable."

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS HAPPEN?

Three major steps were taken in the original organizing process. First, in the 1850s, congregations organized themselves, electing their own leadership. Then, in the early 1860s, state conferences were established to integrate the congregations within their respective territories. Finally, in May 1863, the General Conference was organized with John Byington, as president; Uriah Smith,



as secretary; and E. S. Walker, as treasurer. Under a representative ecclesiastic model, delegates from various churches elected their state conference officers, and delegates from the various state conferences elected the General Conference officers.

Four decades of significant growth and expansion led to a reorganization in the 1900s and 1910s. With the establishment of union conferences and union missions (1901) and divisions (1913, revised in 1918), the organizational structure ended up consisting of (1) local churches/companies, (2) local conferences/missions, (3) union conferences and union missions, (4) divisions, and (5) the General Conference. The current officers of the General Conference are Ted N. C. Wilson, president; G. T. Ng, secretary; and Robert E. Lemon, treasurer.

WHAT IS CONGREGATIONALISM AND WHY WOULD IT NOT BE A GOOD ALTERNATIVE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY?

Congregationalism grants local congregations a freedom of action similar to a member that functions independent of its body (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27). It is highly utopic, and promises in theory a spontaneous Christ-centered unity that does not always happen in practice. By accepting congregationalism, the church would open itself to pluralism, which erodes the doctrinal uniqueness of any denomination, and would jeopardize its unity and mission.

The organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists with the double purpose of keeping its doctrinal unity (message) and facilitating its mission (outreach strategies). If the church would ever lose sight of its unique message to the world (as summarized by the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12), then there would be no more reason to keep such a well-integrated organizational structure. After all, other denominations with a popular/pluralistic message have prevailed with a much more simple organizational structure, while sacrificing what we highly value—the concept encompassed by our historic maxim, “United for Mission.”

SOME PEOPLE CLAIM THAT EVENTUALLY THERE WILL BE NO CHURCH ORGANIZATION TO HOLD US TOGETHER. WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT?

In *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 257-258 we read, “Oh, how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to refute claims not endorsed by the word of God! We want to hold the lines evenly, that there shall be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor. License must not be given to disorderly elements that desire to control the work at this time.

“Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. And, in order that the Lord's work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together.”

Undoubtedly, the time will eventually come when, through opposition and persecution, our denominational institutions and formal organizational structure will be dismantled. But this should not be used as an excuse to dismantle our church organization before that time actually comes.



RECOMMITTING TO MISSION AFTER 150 YEARS

The Millerites had firmly believed that Jesus Christ would return to earth on October 22, 1844. When the Second Coming did not take place, many Millerites were not just disappointed: they were disillusioned, and gave up belief in a literal second advent. Others, however, went back to studying the scriptures with renewed determination.

Over the next 19 years, former Millerites identified a series of Bible truths forgotten since the days of the early Church. Yet there was still no Seventh-day Adventist Church—only small groups scattered across the northern United States, who did not yet even have a name for themselves, though some, like James White, identified themselves as belonging to “the Great Second Advent Movement.”

Gradually, however, inspired by Christ’s great commission to “Go and make disciples,” the seventh-day sabbatarian adventists recognized the need to organize, so they could more effectively and more widely proclaim the third angel’s message. Eventually, in 1863, the “General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists” was founded—an organized church, focused on mission and on proclaiming the good news of a God who created us, lived among us, died for us, and redeems us.

Because our image of the founders of our church is shaped by photographs of middle-aged men, we often do not realize how diverse they were.

They were young. At the time of the Great Disappointment of 1844, James White was 23; Ellen White and Annie Smith were 16; John Andrews 15; Minerva Loughborough was 14, while John, her brother, and Uriah Smith were only 13; and George Butler was just 10. Yet it was these young men and women, aided by elder statesmen like Joseph Bates (aged 52 in 1844), who led in the key steps that resulted in establishing the General Conference in 1863.

Among the first members of the newly created church, women were prominent. In addition to Ellen White, there were Minerva Chapman (née Loughborough), a key figure in the early publishing work and later treasurer of the General Conference; Maud Sisley Boyd, later a pioneer missionary to Europe, South Africa, and Australia; and Nellie Druillard (née Rankin), later a pioneer missionary to Africa and an influential



Eugene Hardy



Minerva Jane Chapman



Maud Sisley Boyd



Nellie Druillard

educator and health reformer. Also among those first members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the Hardy Family, of African-Americans.

As we mark 150 years of Seventh-day Adventists being united for mission, there is more need than ever for Adventist men and women of *all* ages, young and old as well as middle-aged, and of *all* ethnic and social backgrounds, to follow the example of our founders. Founded in love for our Savior and His love for sinners, we need to proclaim Christ and Him crucified, and His desire that we “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Our 150th anniversary is not a time for celebration—those who founded the GC in 1863 would not have expected Adventists to still be on earth in 2013! The worldwide church has designated Sabbath May 18, 2013, as a day of prayer, remembrance, and recommitment to mission. Each local congregation is encouraged to find appropriate ways to mark the “sesquicentennial” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including a focus on their local church history. Church elders have a vital role to play in the call to remembrance and recommitment.

Now is the time for individual Adventists and congregations to remember how God has led His remnant church “and His teaching in our past history” (*Life Sketches*, p. 196). Now is the time to reflect on what we have done, and *not* done, that grieves our God—and to repent. Now is the time to commit ourselves, both individually and corporately, not just to “a revival but [to] a reformation,” as Ellen White urged (*R&H*, July 15, 1902, p. 7). Now is the time to pledge ourselves anew to preaching “the everlasting gospel ... to every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Rev. 14:6).

As we reflect on 150 years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church being united for mission, now is the time for us to honor the memory of our pioneers and to honor our God by recommitting ourselves, regardless of age, gender, color or race, to the prophetic destiny of the Great Second Advent Movement.



David Trim is the director of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY

Worldwide more people die by suicide than by homicide and war. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults (ages 10-24). It is also one of the leading causes of death for adults (ages 25-44). Many people think about suicide at some point in their lives. In 2004 the estimated number of attempted suicides in the U.S. was 800,000. On average in the U.S. someone attempts suicide every 40 seconds and 88 people die by suicide each day. We are not to judge these people. Yet Scripture is clear by telling us not to kill (Ex. 20:13) which includes ourselves.

On the other hand, people try to enjoy life to the fullest without caring about God and the future, abusing their bodies in various ways (Luke 17:26-30). There seems to be a problem with the stewardship of our bodies. Good stewardship of our body is not only beneficial for us but is a form of worship (Rom. 12:1).

I. GOD'S WILL

- What role does physical health play in the plan of God?
Gen. 1:31 God wanted humans to be healthy forever.
Ex. 15:26 After the fall God became the Great Physician.
Luke 4:38-40; 7:22; Mark 3:10 Jesus healed people and preached the gospel.
Rev. 21:4 On the new earth, suffering and death will be no more.
- Why does God care for our bodies and our physical health?
There is a connection between physical well-being and mental and emotional well-being. Physical problems can lead to psychological problems and even to problems with believing in God. Today psychosomatic illnesses are well-known. However, God wants us to live fulfilled lives and be good representatives of Him. He is opposed to sin and suffering.
3 John 2 God wants us to enjoy health in all respects.

II. OUR RESPONSIBILITY

- Why are we responsible for our bodies?
John 1:3, 11 As our Creator, God is interested in our health. He owns us, including our body. He also wants us to be fit for ministry.
1 Cor. 6:19-20 God also has a right to us because of salvation. Our body is to be God's dwelling place.
- What is our goal when we take care of our bodies?

Rom. 12:1-3 We want to serve God and please him.
1 Thess. 5:23 We want to grow in all respects and be "complete, without blame" at Christ's Second Coming.
1 Cor. 10:31 We want to glorify God and become like Him.

- How can I keep my body healthy and be a good steward?
Healthy habits include, for example, eating good food, exercise, getting sufficient sleep, having a moderate amount of work, and attending to personal hygiene.
Because of psychosomatic effects, other activities also contribute to good stewardship of our bodies. These include singing, listening to or performing good music, reading uplifting and thought-provoking books, studying Scripture, praying, loving our neighbor, spending time in nature, having a helpful hobby. Refraining from healthy habits may be a form of gradual suicide. The sixth commandment may address this issue indirectly.

III. HEALTH TIPS

God cares for our health. Therefore, He has given us tips to preserve it. As the Creator He knows what is harmful and what is beneficial to us. Therefore, Scripture mentions various health principles which will be explained in a later study. Basic health tips can be summarized in eight points:

- Air** - We need sufficient pure air and we need to breathe right.
- Sunlight** - We need to go outside regularly and enjoy sunlight.
- Rest** - It is not good to work only. We need enough rest.
- Exercise** - We need to walk or jog and do sports.
- Food** - Well-balanced and adequate nutrition is important.
- Water** - We need to drink enough pure water.
- Self-control** - We need self-control in eating, drinking, and all things.
- Trust in God** - Trust in God creates stability and resilience.

IV. PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- What am I going to do if God gives me new insights with regard to the stewardship of my body?
- How will I be able to put into practice what I have discovered and will still discover?

ED

Ekkehardt Mueller is associate director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI Newsletter, edited by Clinton Wahlen.

THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN GOD

>PART 1

The title for this series of outlines has been taken from Titus 3: “This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that *those who have trusted in God* may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (verse 8, emphasis added).¹ This text captures the essence of Paul’s message to Titus.

The book of Titus is succinct and focused. Titus 1 has 16 verses, while chapters 2 and 3 have 15 verses each. In this study of Titus 1, we will consider (a) the letter from Paul to Titus (verses 1-4); (b) the appointing of an elder in the Church (verses 5-9); and (c) the role of an elder in the church (verses 10-16).

Included in Titus 1–3 are specific instructions from Paul regarding the qualities of a dynamic elder and leader who is called to a tremendous spiritual responsibility—to watch the flock of God and the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. LETTER FROM PAUL TO TITUS (TITUS 1:1-4)

A. *Paul a servant and apostle.* Verses 1-3—“(1) Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness (2) in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, (3) and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.”

B. *To Titus my true son.* Verse 4—“To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

II. THE APPOINTING OF AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH (TITUS 1:5-9)

A. *Why Titus was left in Crete.* Verse 5—“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”

B. *The qualifications of an elder.* Verses 6-9—“(6) An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. (7) Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. (8) Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. (9) He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been

taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

III. THE ROLE OF AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH (TITUS 1:10-16)

A. *Being on guard against rebellion.* Verse 10—“For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.”

B. *Responding to disruptions and heresy by rebellious people.* Verses 11-16—“(11) They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. (12) One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’ (13) This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith (14) and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. (15) To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. (16) They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.”

CONCLUSION

Elders who truly trust and believe in God are careful and devoted to doing what is good, excellent, and profitable for the spiritual welfare of the church (cf. Titus 3:8). Like Paul, their vision and purpose is to strengthen the people’s faith in God’s leadership in the remnant church. Elders lead by example. They “walk the talk” of Christian life and practice. They build an environment that is conducive to spiritual growth and maturity by transforming people’s lives to godliness of character and Christlikeness. For them, the Bible alone is the ultimate test for truth, and they are relentless in defending the truths of God’s Word against the heresies taught by rebellious people in the church.

Just imagine what the church—now militant, soon triumphant—will be like when it is led by elders who have been called, inspired, and chosen by God to shepherd His flock! 

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Bible texts cited in this article are taken from the NIV. The word “trusted” in Titus 3:8 has been translated as “believed” in other versions of the Bible.

Limoni Manu O’Uiha, Ph.D., writes from Palmerston North, New Zealand.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

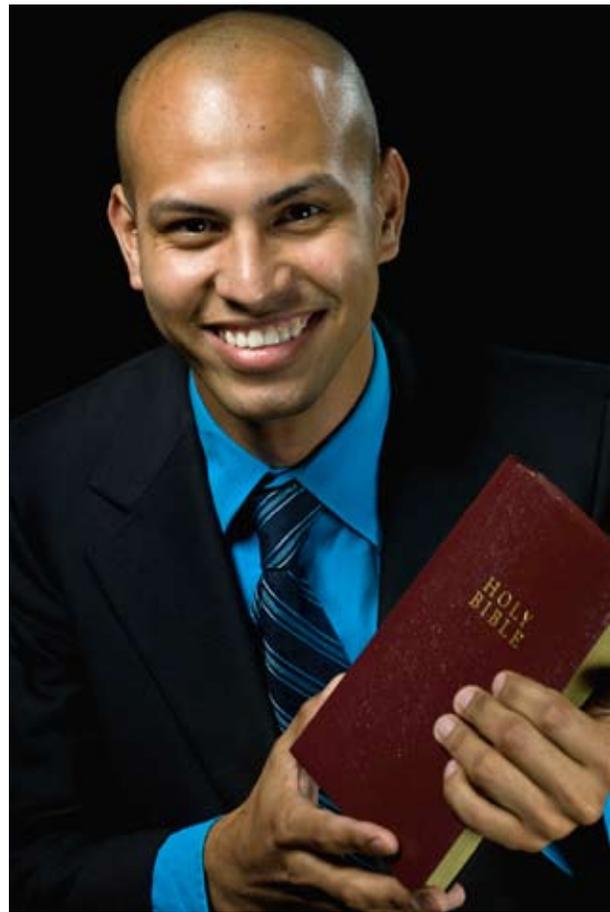
WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTING A PERSON AS A CHURCH MEMBER BY PROFESSION OF FAITH?

According to the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, individuals who have accepted the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and who desire membership in the Church on profession of faith may be accepted under any of the following four circumstances:

1. A committed Christian coming from another Christian communion who has already been baptized by immersion as practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (See p. 45.)
2. A member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who, because of world conditions, is unable to secure a letter of transfer from his/her home church. (See p. 53.)
3. A member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church whose request for membership transfer has received no response from the church where he/she is a member. In such a case the church shall seek assistance of the conference or conferences involved.
4. An individual who has been a member, but whose membership has been misplaced or has been withdrawn because he/she was a missing member, yet who has remained faithful to his/her Christian commitment.

Great care should be exercised in receiving members if they have formerly been members of another congregation. When a person applies for membership on profession of faith, inquiries should be made concerning the applicant's former experience. Church officers should seek the advice and help of the conference president. Sufficient time should be taken to investigate the facts.

When a person applies for membership on profession of faith and it is found that he/she still is a member of another



congregation, no steps should be taken to receive that person into membership until the church holding the membership grants a letter of transfer. If, after the process of transfer is followed (see p. 52), a church refuses to grant a letter of transfer and the member feels the letter has been unjustly denied, the member may appeal to the conference committee. Following this procedure will result in a higher appreciation of the sacredness of Church membership and in wrongs being made right. No church has the right to withhold transfer unless the person is under discipline.

When an individual whose membership has been removed seeks readmission to church membership, readmission is normally preceded by rebaptism. (See pp. 66, 67.)



If you have a question about church policy or procedure, let us know! Every quarter we address these issues in our "Question and Answer" column, and we would love to hear from you! E-mail us at eldersdigest@gc.adventist.org.

OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

FOUR MYSTERIES – Part 2 | THE MYSTERIES OF MAN, SIN, AND DEATH

II - THE MYSTERY OF MAN

"Let each man think of himself as an act of God."—Philip J. Bailey
"We are the miracles; the great inscrutable mystery of God."
 —Thomas Carlyle

1. Man is a creation of God (Gen. 1:26, 27; John 1:4; Ps.139:14; 8:5).

His ancestry is anchored in God, of which Genesis 1 is both a declaration of truth and a repudiation of the following errors:

- "In the beginning God" denies atheism with its doctrine of no God.
- "In the beginning God" denies polytheism with its doctrine of many gods.
- "In the beginning God" denies fatalism with its doctrine of chance.
- "God created" denies evolution with its doctrine of infinite becoming.
- "Heaven and earth" denies pantheism, which makes God and material identical.
- "Let us make man" denies spontaneous generation.

2. Man's creation marks the origin of the human race (Gen. 3:20).

- The whole human race descended from a single pair (Gen. 2:28).
- The marriage of Adam and Eve started pro-creation (Gen. 2:18; Mark 10:6; Matt. 19:4-6).
- The descent of humanity from a single pair constitutes the natural brotherhood of every member of the human race (Acts 17:26; Heb. 2:11).

3. Man was created with self-determination and intelligence (Gen. 1:28).

- Dominion invested him with supremacy over all created works (Gen.1:26; Ps. 8:6-8).
- He had freedom of choice, with a conscience—"the judiciary of the soul"—to judge between right and wrong (Rom. 2:15).
- He has three faculties: intellect (soul knowing), sensibility (soul feeling), and will (soul choosing) (Rom. 7:18).

4. Man was created with a threefold nature (Gen. 2:7):

- (1) Natural—a body with an appetite and emotions: "the dust of the ground"
- (2) Immaterial—life that proceeds from God, not creation: "breath of life"
- (3) Conscious—reason, conscience, faculties, capabilities: "a living soul"

This tri-fold distinction is corroborated in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12.

5. Man was created a moral being with a spiritual nature (Gen. 1:26).

- He possessed childlike innocence, not confirmed holiness (Eccl. 7:29).
- He was fitted for communion with God (Gen. 3:8).
- He enjoyed God's divine presence and teaching (Gen. 2:16).

6. Man was created with conditional immortality (Job 4:17).

- His body was created mortal to avoid immortalizing sin (1 Cor. 15:45). The "tree of life" was the means of preserving the body's youth, but he made a contrary choice and brought sin and death on all men (Gen. 3:6, 24; Rom. 5:17, 19).

7. Man's redemption was secured by God's initiative (Gen. 3:9, 15).

- The gift of life is available through Jesus Christ (John 3:36; 11:25; 1 Cor.15:22).

"In these two things the greatness of man consists, to have God so dwelling in us as to impart His character to us, and to have Him so dwelling in us that we recognize his presence, and know that we are His, and He is ours. The one is salvation: the other, the assurance of it."—Frederick W. Robertson

III - THE MYSTERY OF SIN

"There is but one thing more dangerous than sin—the murder of man's sense of sin."—Pope John Paul II

1. Sin is a universal fact (1 Kings 8:46).

- Old Testament writers confirm (Ps.14:1-3; 130:3; 143:2; Eccl. 7:20).
- New Testament writers affirm (Rom. 3:22, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10).

2. Sin is defined (Rom. 7:7, 8, 18; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

- Negative aspect: an ideal which we fail to reach (James 4:17).
- Positive aspect: a law which we break (1 John 3:4; Rom. 3:20; 4:15).

There are seven categories of sin:

- (1) Choosing intentionally or deliberately to sin (1 John 5:17).
- (2) A mental assent to temptation (Rom. 7:7-11; Matt. 5:27, 28; Prov. 24:9).
- (3) Neglect of known duties or opportunities (James 2:14; 4:17; Matt. 23:23; 25:43-46).
- (4) Doing the wrong things out of ignorance (Lev. 5:17-19; Luke 12:48; 1 Tim. 1:13).
- (5) Doing the right things (good works) for the wrong reasons (Matt. 22:23; Isa. 64:6; Phil. 3:3-9).
- (6) Our inherited sinful natures (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Rom. 5:19-20; Phil. 3:20-21; Eph. 2:3).
- (7) A law, principle, or constant force making us slaves to sin (Rom. 3:19, 20; 7:14-24).

"Sin has four characteristics: self-sufficiency instead of faith; self-will instead of submission; self-seeking instead of benevolence; self-righteousness instead of humility."—E. Paul Hovey

3. Sin originated with the devil (John 8:44).

- He led an insurrection against God in heaven (Rev. 12:7-9; cf. Eze.28:14-18; Isa. 14:12-14).
- Satan gained access to earth (Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 3:4; Matt. 13:25, 29).
- He deceived the whole world (Rev. 12:9).
- He led all men into sin (Rom. 3:23).

4. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1, 2).

- Spiritual death: severance of the soul from God (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1).
- Physical death: irrevocable banishment from God (Matt. 25:30; Rev. 22:14, 15; Luke 16:19).

5. Sin not only estranges; it also enslaves (John 8:31-34; Rom. 6:17; Eph. 2:3; Titus 3:3).

- It is twofold:
 - Outward acts and habits (Gal. 5:19-21).
 - Inward deep-seated corruption (Matt. 12:33-35; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-23).

6. Sin can be overcome (1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 21:7; Eph. 3:17).

- Avoid contamination by irreligious elements (James 1:27; 1 John.5:21).
- There is one unredeemable, unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:32; cf. Eph. 4:30; Ps. 51:11).

"The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation."—Martin Luther

7. Sin convinces us of our need for a Savior (Acts 2:21; Mark 2:17; Isa. 1:18; Matt. 28:20).

Christianity is a rescue religion. *"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul, / As the swift seasons roll! / Leave thy low-vaulted past! / Let each new temple, nobler than the last, / Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast, / Till thou at length art free, / Leaving thine overgrown shell by life's unresting sea."*—Oliver Wendell Holmes

IV - THE MYSTERY OF DEATH

"A few more years shall roll, / A few more seasons come, / And we shall be with those that rest, / Asleep within the tomb."—Horatius Bonar

1. Death is a reality (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23).

Man is doomed to die twice:

- (1) The result of Adam's sin (1 Cor. 15:22).
- (2) The result of our sin (Rom. 6:23).

2. Death is defined as (Eccl. 9:5, 6):

- The equation of life (Gen. 2:7).
- The termination of life (Eccl. 12:7).

3. Death has a location (Eccl. 9:10).

- Job affirmed that he would wait in the "grave" (Job 17:13).
- Peter argued that even King David was not in heaven (Acts 2:29, 34).
- Lazarus was in the grave for four days (John 11:17).

4. Death is described as follows (John 11:11-14, 43, 44):

- Death is the absence of consciousness (Eccl. 9:5).
- The mind ceases to function (Ps. 6:5; 146:3, 4).
- In death, God cannot be worshiped (Ps. 115:17; Isa. 38:19).
- There is an unawareness of what happens on earth (Eccl. 9:10).
- All human emotion ceases at death (Eccl. 9:6).
- There is no second chance in death (Isa. 38:18).
- Death is described as a "sleep" (Ps. 13:3; Job 7:21; 1 King 2:10; Acts 13:36). "Sleep" is an appropriate metaphor for death because:
 - (1) It is a state of total unconsciousness.
 - (2) It is a temporary state.
 - (3) It implies an awakening.

5. Death is not final (Isa. 26:19). There will be a resurrection (Matt. 27:52, 53). Note four facts:

- (1) They had been in the graves.
 - (2) They had been sleeping there.
 - (3) Now their graves were opened.
 - (4) They came out of their graves.
- The dead remain inactive until the resurrection (Dan. 12:2).
 - All receive their reward at the resurrection (John 5:28, 29; cf. Rev. 20:12, 13).
 - The general resurrection of the righteous takes place at Christ's Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 20:6).
 - The wicked will be raised at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5).
 - Then immortality will be awarded (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

6. Death will have an end (Rev. 20:14).

- Paul promised victory over it (1 Cor. 15:55).
- Christ's promise (1 Cor. 15:22; John 6:40).

"Every parting gives a foretaste of death; every coming together again a foretaste of the Resurrection."—Arthur Schopenhauer

CHOICES FOR LIFE:

THE FAITH/HEALTH LINK

As we begin a new year and start writing on the blank pages of this new “book” God has given us, we must consider whether the “words” we write by our actions will lead to life. Scripture tells us that God has shown to us the “path of life” (Ps. 16:11, NKJV), but it is up to us to choose to walk on it.

As elders, you likely wear many hats—at church, at work, at home, and in the community—and it may often be difficult to find the balance to make choices for *life*. God invites you today to be intentional about “choosing a *full* life” by making the healthiest choices possible for physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being.

We will cover some choices for life in future articles, but here is Choice #1: Before trying on your own to live healthfully, you must choose to connect with the source of life Himself. When you choose to “spend more time alone with God in prayer and Bible study,” you are making a choice not only for spiritual health but also for mental and physical health.

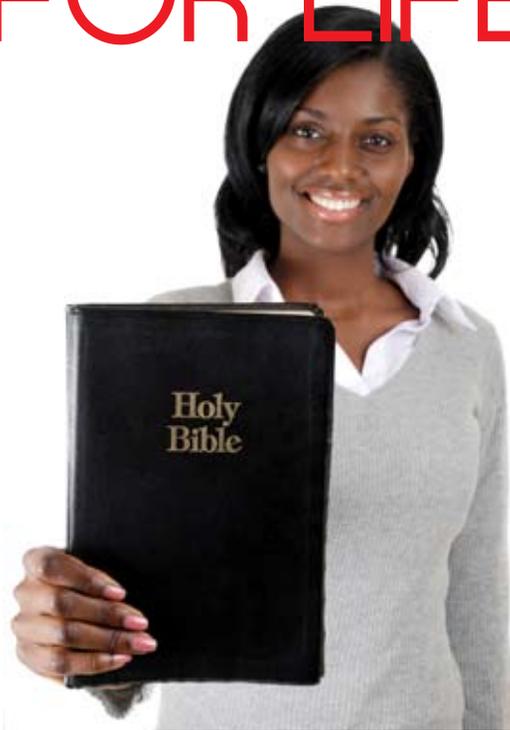
How do we know? First, the Bible tells us, “He is your life and the length of your days” (Deut. 30:20, NKJV). Second, the majority of studies on religion and health suggest that people with high levels of religious/spiritual involvement tend to enjoy the following health benefits:¹

Mental health—Less depression, less suicide, and less negative attitudes toward suicide; less cognitive impairment or slower progression of dementia; less alcohol use/abuse/dependence and less drug use/abuse/dependence; greater well-being and happiness; greater meaning and purpose in life; more positive attitudes such as forgiveness; significantly higher rates of volunteering/altruism; and more gratitude, compassion, and kindness.

Social health—Greater social support and social capital; greater marital stability (fewer divorces, greater marital satisfaction, and less spousal abuse).

Physical health—Lower rates of coronary artery disease, more positive cardiovascular functions; lower blood pressure or lower rates of hypertension; lower rates of stroke; better immune function and better endocrine function; lower rates of cancer or better prognosis after a cancer diagnosis; lower mortality and longer survival rate.

Health behaviors and disease prevention—More physical activity; safer sexual practices; less cigarette smoking (especially among the young); better diet; lower cholesterol; greater likelihood of participating in disease-screening behaviors such as mammography, blood pressure checks, glucose, or prostate screening and a greater likelihood of complying with treatment.



While the above associations are true for the specific people studied, they are overwhelmingly on the positive side, and from them we can draw two conclusions:

1. By putting God first and strengthening our relationship with Him through prayer and Bible study, we will not only renew our spiritual vitality; we may also increase our chances of experiencing improved mental and physical well-being.
2. Through the Holy Spirit, we can have the will and the self-control to make healthier choices on a daily basis.

These conclusions are biblically sound and evidence-based. No matter how intentional we are in improving our health, if we don't have a daily measure of God's Spirit, we will not achieve our optimal whole-person health. But if we intentionally choose to spend more time with God, experiencing the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, and self control (Gal. 5:22, 23, NKJV), the result can be a full and abundant life as we've never experienced before. This vibrant life will enable you to lead others to health and well-being by example with a compassionate and discerning spirit, allowing you to extend to the world God's love and His restorative power. ED

¹ H. Koenig, D. King, and V. Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).



Katia Reinert is director of the Health Ministries Department for the North American Division

“AS I WALKED AROUND AND LOOKED CAREFULLY . . .”

Editor’s Note: “How to Be a Good Farmer—Even in a City: Creating a Community-Based Ministry” appeared in the January–March 2011 edition of Elder’s Digest. The article proposed 10 “farming commandments” which systematized Jesus’ ministry method into 10 intentional action steps for our time¹ and served as an introduction to a series of Elder’s Digest articles that, in the coming months, will unpack these commandments in more detail.² This article is the fourth in the series and will focus on the sixth “farming commandment.”

Paul couldn’t sit still. He had recently arrived in Athens and was waiting for his colleagues, Silas and Timothy, to join him in this great metropolis of the ancient world. He decided to walk around and check out the city. What he saw distressed him—the city was full of idols! This motivated him to have lively discussions with the local intelligentsia and anyone else who happened to be at the marketplace. As he listened to the local chatter and dialogued with the city folk, he got a better grasp of their issues and needs. Curious to hear more about Paul’s strange out-of-the-box-ideas, some probing philosophers brought him to a town meeting on Mars Hill (also called “the Areopagus”). There Paul told them what he saw on his walk: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. *For as I walked around and looked carefully* at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To an Unknown God.’ Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23, NIV, emphasis added).

When he looked around their community, Paul discovered that they had a nagging need—to find the answer to an unanswered question in their lives. As they strove to know all there was to know, they came to a dead-end. There was an unknown-God-shaped hole in their lives.

“As I walked around and looked carefully.” Paul’s urban evangelism included walking around and looking carefully at the communities where he would be sharing the gospel. He

sought to know their needs, local situations, and issues. Paul modeled Farming Commandment #6: “Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the types of homes, stores, churches, people, etc.”

Paul did a walking survey in preparation for his outreach in the city of Athens. A basic step in studying a community is simply to get a visual survey of the targeted area. In our day and age, depending on how our territory is laid out, we can walk or drive. If the territory is rural and sparsely populated, driving would likely work best. Drive through designated random samples of your entire rural territory. If your territory is urban or densely populated, you will likely prefer to walk. It’s ideal to cover every street of your territory, but if that is not possible, you can walk or drive a grid pattern, doing a random sample of every third or fifth street. Don’t pick streets informally. Have an intentional pattern so that you will get a more balanced view of the community.

The Walking/Windshield Survey Form (included here) is convenient for taking notes. It’s better to do the survey in teams of two, especially when driving, so you won’t be distracted while taking notes and cause an accident! Even if the streets you are walking or driving are very familiar, look at them through the eyes of ministry. As you see people, homes, businesses, churches, schools, and agencies, dream of possible ways to serve the community. The survey may help raise questions and spark ministry ideas that could be asked about and verified in interviews³



with community leaders. Also, you can turn this activity into a prayer walk for the people, homes, and buildings that you see.

After your teams have been out for a couple of hours, reconvene and share what you saw and what your findings mean for your ministry goals. Place a big street map of your territory on the wall and attach notes to it from the observers. Indicate on the map the industrial areas, residential areas (expensive homes, poor homes), businesses, churches, etc. You might also want to attach to the map some notes that tell what needs you noticed and what ministry ideas came to mind as you walked or drove around. For example: “Start a tutoring and mentoring project at the school on King Street,” “Provide volunteers at the home for disabled adults on Main Street,” or “Start after-school supervision, activities, and homework help at the community center on River Street.”

If we only consider numbers (demographics) without being able to visualize the people and their environment, we get an incomplete image of the community we desire to serve. If we

go with what we think we already know, we will likely pre-judge or have a prejudiced image of the community.⁴

In one part of the world, I sent out teams two by two to do a walking survey. Before they left, they weren’t convinced they really needed to do this; it was familiar territory and they already knew the community. Before I sent them out, I had a brief prayer with them that God would open their eyes to see what Jesus would want them to see. When they returned and we had our debriefing session, they couldn’t stop talking about their exciting experience. They were bubbling over with ministry ideas and dreams for various locations in the community. This was a transforming experience for the group.

Organizing a Walking/Windshield Survey is yet another opportunity for you as an elder to help lead your church into a deeper experience with incarnational ministry. In so doing, you are going among the people in your community and experiencing the environment where they live and work, looking at them through the caring eyes of Jesus!



WALKING SURVEY/WINDSHIELD SURVEY

Area covered	
Geography	
Characteristics	
Street layout	
Physical boundaries	
Identity markers	
Traffic flow	
Homes	
Kinds of housing	
Clusters of homes	
Appearance	
Residents	
Age group	
Impressions	
Relationships	

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¹ The Ten Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus’ ministry method and pray for . . . ; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a Social Action Leadership Team (SALT); (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them; (8) Thou shalt earn “Social Capital”; (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the re-

sources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate. . . . AND an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore Commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to *reap* where thou hast farmed and *keep* what thou dost reap (disciple—preserve the harvest)!

² So far in this series, the following articles have appeared in *Elder’s Digest*: “Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand . . .” (October–December 2011); “Our Community Does Not Know Us . . .” (January–March 2012); “Help, Lord! I’ve Been Asked to Plant a Church!” (July–September 2012). To access these articles online, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi and click

on “Articles and Media.” To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on “Resources” and “ICM Community Services Certification Program Curriculum.”

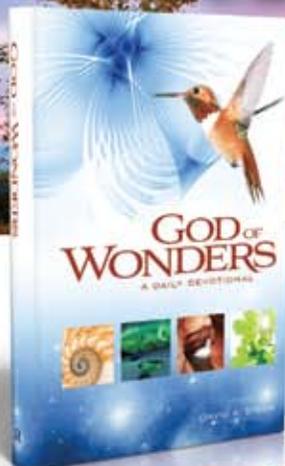
³ Interviewing community leaders is an important step in properly creating a community-based ministry through your church. This will be the subject of the next article in this series.

⁴ Main concepts are adapted from Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*.

May-Ellen Colón is assistant director of the General Conference Sabbath School & Personal Ministries Department and director of Adventist Community Services International.

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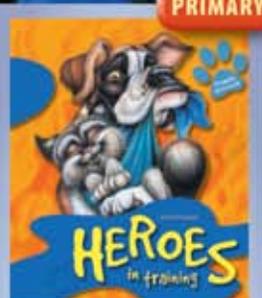
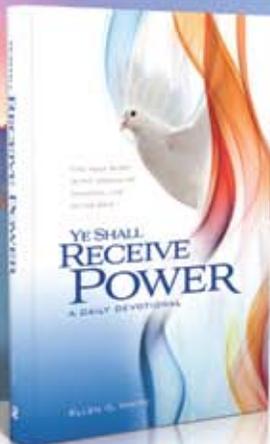


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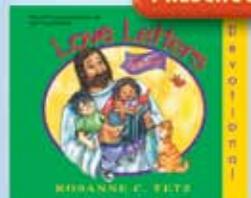


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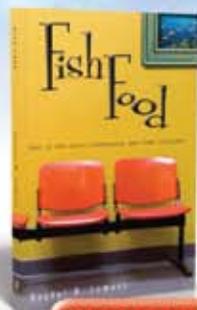
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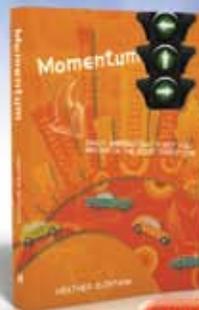
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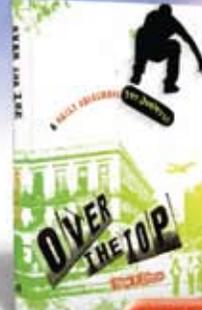
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Review & Herald

FINDING SUCCESS IN 2013

Joshua 1:1-16

Through long years of preparation and a burning-bush experience, God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. In Deuteronomy 34, we read that at the conclusion of Moses' life and calling, God had finished preparing Joshua, Moses' greatest general, to become the leader of Israel. Joshua had been faithful to God and to Moses' leadership; in Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1, we see the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Israel.

For 40 years, Moses had led the children of Israel. He led them through the plagues of Egypt. He led them to safety at the first Passover. He led them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. He led them to water in the desert. He led them to food: manna and quail. He led them to Mount Sinai and to the law of God. For 40 years, he did his best to follow God and lead his flock to God's promises. For Moses, his time on earth was complete.

Right now we stand before a new year, 2013. I want you to think about how you spent 2012 and how you plan to spend this new year.

Moses led Israel for 40 years, and then he died. Now God was ready to use Joshua to lead the children of Israel to the next steps in filling the covenant that He had made with Abraham decades earlier: a land of their own, descendants in numbers that could not be counted, a future in which the whole world would be blessed. God promised success to Joshua, and in this section of Scripture, God tells him how to obtain success.

One definition of success is "a favorable course of termination of anything attempted. The gaining of position, wealth, fame, etc." For the Christian, success means being obedient to God's will. (The Christian's definition and the world's definition differ.) We all want to enjoy success in 2013. As we prepare for a new year—a happy new year—let us look closely at five principles for success contained in Joshua 1.

I. UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Moses had been faithful in leading Israel. He had been a good steward of the task God had given him to complete. Now God told Joshua exactly what to do: "You and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them"

(verses 1, 2). Joshua did not argue with God as Moses had done more than 40 years earlier, nor did the thousands of Jews that he was to lead. Forty years in the desert had taught them to obey God. God said, "Joshua is the boss. Now let's move forward." Joshua knew God's purpose for his life.

In what areas does God want you to find success in 2013? What has He done for you in 2012 to prepare you for His purpose in 2013? What does He want for our church? The songwriter wrote, "Where He leads me I will follow . . . I'll go with Him all the way."

II. HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES

Look at Joshua 1:2-4 to see how God tells Israel and Joshua exactly what He is going to give them: a map, a global positioning system (GPS). Many people today refuse to acknowledge God's promise of the land He had pledged, but God keeps His promises.

We are taught that "without faith, it is impossible to please God." As we begin 2013, how is your faith in God's promises?

III. BE ASSURED OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God promised Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you" (verse 5). Jesus makes the same promises to us Christians. Wow! God the Holy Spirit will live in us and move in us and give us reason for being (Acts 17:29). Remember, we are to live by faith and not by feeling.

You may be saying, "Preacher, you don't know what I have to go through! You don't understand." No, I do not, but God does, and He will be with you forever. So stay strong and let God's presence encourage you in 2013.

IV. HAVE COURAGE AND ACCEPT GOD'S POWER AND STRENGTH

I believe that after Moses and Joshua had died, much of the courage granted to God's leaders came from being taught that God had blessed the obedience, commitment, and devotion of these two men and other Bible patriarchs. They knew the great things that God could accomplish through total commitment to and reliance upon God for strength.

Do you remember that over 40 years before, while serving as spies with 10 other men,

only Joshua and Caleb had faith to believe that God could fulfill His promise? The other spies were afraid of the giants in the Promised Land. What giants are you anticipating in 2013? The God who was faithful to Joshua will be faithful to you in this new year. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (verse 9).

V. PAY ATTENTION AND DO EXACTLY WHAT GOD COMMANDS

"Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go" (verse 7). In 1 John, we are reminded that if we walk in the light, we will have fellowship with Jesus and our sins will be cleansed. Do you remember these song lyrics: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." To be happy we must walk with the Lord. Not behind or ahead of Him. Not to the right or left, but in the narrow way that leads to life. The majority of our world is on the broad way that leads to destruction. Some want to escape hell with the smell of its smoke on their clothes. We must live lives of holiness and carefully walk the highway of holiness. We must worship and follow God enough to pay attention to His commands.

CONCLUSION

In verses 16 and 17, we read that Joshua delivered God's message to Israel. They submitted to God's will by following Joshua's leadership, and Joshua and his people were successful. God gave them the Promised Land. To prosper and have success in 2013, we must submit our all to God. God wants total commitment. When we give Him that, He will fill us with His Spirit (see Deut. 33:9), and we will have joy as He gives us success and prosperity. May God bless you and give you a successful New Year!



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As we study God's promises in the Bible, we can see His plans for bringing His people back to Him. The Messiah was promised right after the fall of Adam and Eve. As soon as they were expelled from Eden, they were promised victory and an eventual return to Paradise (Gen. 3:15). Jesus came down and fulfilled this promise! While writing to the Philippians, Paul describes it in a wonderful way (Phil. 2:5-11).

The promise of the Holy Spirit was given by Jesus Himself (Acts 1:8). The fulfillment was a rapid one, as recorded in Acts 2:1-4.

All through the ages, God's people were praying for the Messiah to come and for the power of the Spirit. These two promises were finally fulfilled. Jesus came down and died for us. The early Church was empowered by the Spirit to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Christians today are fervently praying for Jesus' return and for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in these end times. The Bible calls it the Latter Rain (Joel 2:23). In verses 28 and 29, there is a prophecy of a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God—upon all flesh!

PRAYER—THE KEY ELEMENT

1. When Jesus died, the disciples were disheartened, discouraged, and sad; however, we must reflect on what happened after Jesus' ascension. As the disciples watched their risen Savior go up to heaven, there was peace in their hearts!

From despair they turned to the blessed hope, found inner peace, were immersed in joy, and lifted their voices in prayer.

2. The disciples came down from the Mount of Olives and spent time in prayer (Acts 1:14).

3. Prayer had an important role in the coming of the Spirit. Prayer should be the number-one business in the agenda of the church.

4. God said, "Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3, NKJV).

LIFE UNDER THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. It is important to examine and reflect on the life of the believers under the power of the Spirit. Luke the apostle gave us a tremendous insight into what happened when the Spirit came down for the first time: The believers were on fire for the Lord and left Jerusalem, boldly preaching a message of repentance and salvation. What an awesome power!

2. As recorded in the book of Acts, here are some of the key elements of this great power in the lives of the early Christians:

- The Spirit gave them power to tackle some tremendous obstacles (2:47).
- The Spirit enabled them to break the barriers of foreign languages (2:6).
- The Spirit gave them courage to witness (2:36).
- Thousands of people were baptized (2:41).
- They were immersed in the Word of God (2:42).
- They studied the doctrines of the Church (2:42).
- They were fellowshiping together (2:42).
- They were eating and breaking bread (2:42).
- They spent time in prayer (2:42).
- The Spirit changed their daily lives (2:43-47).
- They took time to praise God and witness for Him (2:46, 47).
- The apostles did wonders and signs (4:30).
- The Holy Spirit transformed unlearned men into scholars for Christ (4:13).
- The Holy Spirit gave them conviction and boldness (4:20).
- Their prayers shook the foundations of jails and filled the people with the Holy Spirit (4:31).
- Prison doors were opened and chains were broken as the apostles prayed (5:19).
- Miracles were performed by the apostles (3:6).

PRAYING FOR A REVIVAL IN THE CHURCH

1. We hear a lot of preaching and talking about the need for revival and reformation in the Church. Seventh-day Adventists believe that prayer is the key, the *sine qua non*, without which nothing will happen. Ellen G. White confirms this thought by saying that a "revival needs to be expected only in answer to prayer."¹ She goes on to explain: "A revival of true Godliness is the greatest and most urgent of our needs. . . . Our heavenly father is more willing to give His Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the condition by which God has promised to grant us His blessings."²

2. To make this a reality, Mrs. White tells us that there are some conditions: pray more, forgive more, and criticize less!

3. Another great obstacle for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is criticism, which is really a lack of love for those whom God created. We are not to judge; God is the Judge!

4. Again, Mrs. White gives us some insights into what will happen in the church when we commit ourselves to the Lord and pray earnestly for the coming of the Spirit: "When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God."³

5. Again, prayer will be the key to revive the church and help its members witness for Christ. Thousands will be converted, and this message will touch even those "who have strayed from the fold."⁴

CONCLUSION

Humbly, we ask the Lord, "What should we be praying to bring the power of the Spirit in our lives and empower the church to finish the task that is before us?" The book *Last Day Events*, by Ellen G. White, gives us some major points to pray and look for:

- A revival of true godliness (189).
- Obtain victory over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and every wrong word and action (192).
- Yield our souls to Christ (193).
- "By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character" (183).
- "By prayer and faith we are to continually seek more of the Spirit" (187).
- "We must put away all envy, all strife for the supremacy" (187).

Paul tells us what we need to do to make the outpouring of the Holy Spirit a reality: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

So our prayer should be, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Come, Holy Spirit!"



¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, v. 1, p. 121.

² *Ibid.*

³ White, *Evangelism*, p. 699.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 693.

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Many couples have little knowledge of how to have a successful marriage. After all, being married and having a successful marriage are two different things!

What defines a “successful” marriage? From a Christian viewpoint, a successful marriage is a marriage that pleases God. A marriage that pleases God is one that is built on biblical principles.

I. THE FIRST KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE IS BEING COMMITTED TO A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP.

God’s plan is for marriages to last a lifetime. Jesus speaks to this in Luke 16:18, where He rebukes those who give way to easy divorce. (The Bible does allow divorce in cases of unfaithfulness). These are very uncompromising standards, but they are God’s standards, so it is important that we take them seriously and understand that when we decide to marry someone, we are committing to a permanent relationship.

Our society doesn’t think divorce is a big deal, but what does God think? (Read Malachi 2:13-16 and Mark 10:2-12). Again, I do not think you can miss the intent of Jesus’ words. Marriage is a permanent relationship. Divorce is not an option except in cases of unfaithfulness. A commitment to a lifelong relationship helps build a successful marriage.

The only way a couple will get beyond the struggles and difficulties of marriage is to be committed to a permanent relationship; otherwise, they will take the easy way out of a troubled marriage: divorce. A strong marriage is not built on compatibility; it is built on a commitment to a lasting relationship.

II. THE SECOND KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE IS BEING COMMITTED TO A FAITHFUL RELATIONSHIP.

This means that you will not cheat on your spouse. You will have no intimate relationships with anyone else—ever. No exceptions and no excuses! In God’s eyes, any intimate relationship with someone other than your spouse is adultery. The Bible has a lot to say about adultery, and it certainly is different than how the world portrays adultery.

The seventh of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:16). In Old Testament times, the punish-

ment for adultery was the same as for intentional murder: being stoned to death. Adultery is a serious offense in God’s eyes. Of course, the New Testament has a lot to say about adultery, too. Let’s read one of those passages now (Heb. 13:4).

Commitment to faithfulness in a marriage is successful not only in that it pleases God; it is also vital to a lasting and fulfilling marriage.

Remember that intimacy is more than just a physical act. Intimate physical relations outside of marriage break the bonds that hold a marriage together. Although not impossible, very few marriages recover fully from infidelity.

III. THE THIRD KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE IS BEING COMMITTED TO A CO-OPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP.

This means being a team player. Both of them—husband and wife—must do their part. Cooperation means that each person is willing and committed to fulfilling their God-given role and responsibilities within the marriage. No marriage will be fully successful unless both husband and wife cooperate by listening to their leader and coach, Jesus Christ, and fulfilling the role He has given them.

Husbands, you are to “love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). This means husbands must be willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to meet the needs of their wives. Second, husbands are to be “considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect . . .” (1 Peter 3:7). In other words, do not be a self-seeking dictator, making demands of your wife. Respect her as a gift from God, made in His image and a co-heir with Christ.

Wives, you have a part to play also in this cooperative relationship, too. First, you need to be supportive of your husbands. Genesis 2:20 tells us that God created Eve to be a helper for Adam. She was there to support him. A husband needs to know that his wife will support him no matter what, not criticizing him or undermining his plans. Second, wives are to be submissive to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1; Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22). Being submissive means to willingly let your husband take a leadership role in the marriage.

IV. THE FOURTH KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE IS BEING COMMITTED TO A CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIP.

Jesus compared building a life to people building houses. Some build on a foundation of sand, which means that Jesus Christ is not the center of their lives; their house cannot stand when the storms come. Other people build their house on a rock, meaning that Jesus Christ is the center of their lives; when the storms come, their house will stand. It is the same with marriage. If you build your marriage with Christ as the focal point, it will endure the storms of life.

Without a real, sincere relationship with Christ, your marriage will not be fully successful and may not even last. Without Christ, we are blind to our own faults, unable to change our behavior, and unwilling to forgive others. How could a marriage endure and prosper in such circumstances? The answer is that it cannot, so make sure that you stay close to Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Ellen G. White says, “Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides. The warmth of true friendship and the love that binds the hearts of husband and wife are a foretaste of heaven. God has ordained that there should be perfect love and perfect harmony between those who enter into the marriage relation. Let bride and bridegroom in the presence of the heavenly universe pledge themselves to love one another as God has ordained they should. . . . All who enter into matrimonial relations with a holy purpose—the husband to obtain the pure affections of a woman’s heart, the wife to soften and improve her husband’s character and give it completeness—fulfill God’s purpose for them.”¹

¹ Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 202.

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

REACHING THE LOST

Luke 15:1-10

In Luke 15, we read two parables about something valuable that was lost. In both stories, the lost item—whether a sheep or a coin—has monetary value. Nobody, including the religious leaders who valued material things, would ignore such a loss; rather, they would make every effort to find it, and they would rejoice when they found it.

If this is true about things that are lost, shouldn't it also be true for people who are spiritually lost? The term "lost" refers to those who are not Christians, those who are outside of the household of God but whom God desires to come home. You can see this in the story of the prodigal son, where the father says about the son who has repented and returned home that "he was lost and is found" (verse 31). Clearly, the lost things in these parables represent people who are spiritually lost.

Shouldn't we respond to people who are lost in the same way or an even greater way than we would to lost things? Shouldn't we exhibit the same efforts and perseverance in searching for them? Shouldn't we be filled with joy when they are found? I believe that this passage exists primarily to remind Christians of how they should respond to the lost. You could also interpret these parables as illustrating how God responds to and searches for the lost. Even if that is the case, the message remains essentially the same because if God responds in a certain way to those who are lost, then it is obvious that Christians should follow His example.

I. THE FIRST THING NEEDED FOR REACHING THE LOST IS COMPASSION (LUKE 15:1, 2)

Tax collectors and sinners gathered around Jesus. These lost people were not running from Him; they were running to Him. They were not avoiding Him, ignoring Him, or even hostile toward Him. Why were sinners so willing and even eager to listen to Jesus? It certainly wasn't because Jesus had an easy message that tickled their ears. It wasn't because Jesus compromised on sin and said that everything they were doing was acceptable. They weren't gathering around Jesus because He was putting on a sensational show of signs and wonders. At this point in Luke's narrative, the emphasis is

on Jesus' teaching; miracles are hardly even mentioned.

Why did the "lost" seek out Jesus rather than run from Him? I believe the answer is His compassion. Jesus loved them and showed His love to them in a compassionate way rather than through condemnation. In verse 2, the Bible says that Jesus "welcomes sinners and eats with them." The Greek word translated "welcomes" in this verse can be defined as "to receive as a friend." This was Jesus' attitude toward those who were lost in sin. Jesus welcomed them; He was compassionate and accepting of them despite their sins and faults. He was a friend, not a foe. Jesus had an attitude that attracted lost people. What about us? If we as individuals and as a church are going to reach people, we will have to show that same love and acceptance.

II. THE SECOND THING NEEDED FOR REACHING THE LOST IS EFFORT (LUKE 15:3-5)

In these two parables, Jesus emphasizes the effort that went into finding the lost. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus said that the shepherd would "leave the ninety-nine sheep in the open country and go after the lost sheep. . . ." In the parable of the lost coin, the woman lights a lamp, sweeps the whole house, and searches carefully for the lost coin (verse 8).

In both cases, the lost thing had to be sought after with great effort. The shepherd did not wait for the lost sheep to wander home, and the woman did not wait for the lost coin to turn up. In our Christian lives and in the church, it sometimes seems that we do the opposite. We tend to wait for the lost to come to us. We're passive rather than active. We're waiting for people to come to Christ instead of putting effort into bringing them to Christ! I know that I have been guilty of this. I want people to be saved, but I haven't made a great effort to search for the lost. This has to change if we're to reach the lost as Jesus did.

In reality, how do we practice this principle? There are several things we can do. First, a significant part of our prayers should be for the lost. Second, we must make every effort to reach the lost. While it is important that the church as a corporate entity make every effort to reach the lost, the most important thing you

and I can do in reaching the lost is to do our best to share Jesus with everyone with whom we come in contact.

III. THE THIRD THING NEEDED TO REACH THE LOST IS PERSISTENCE (LUKE 15:4-8)

In both parables, Jesus notes specifically that the person continued seeking after the lost item until it was found. In other words, Jesus seems to be pointing out that persistence was necessary for success. After all, lost sheep among spacious fields and hills and lost coins on the dirt floor of the Jewish home would not have been quickly or easily found.

It's the same with reaching the lost. It is not easy to reach people's hearts so that they receive Jesus. Usually, our first efforts do not meet with success. Sometimes it takes years and years of persistence, but we should not be discouraged or give up. If a sheep or coin was valuable enough to persistently search for, then people who are spiritually lost are too valuable to give up on. Even when our efforts do not pay off quickly, we must remember how valuable these souls are to Christ, and we must keep trying to reach them.

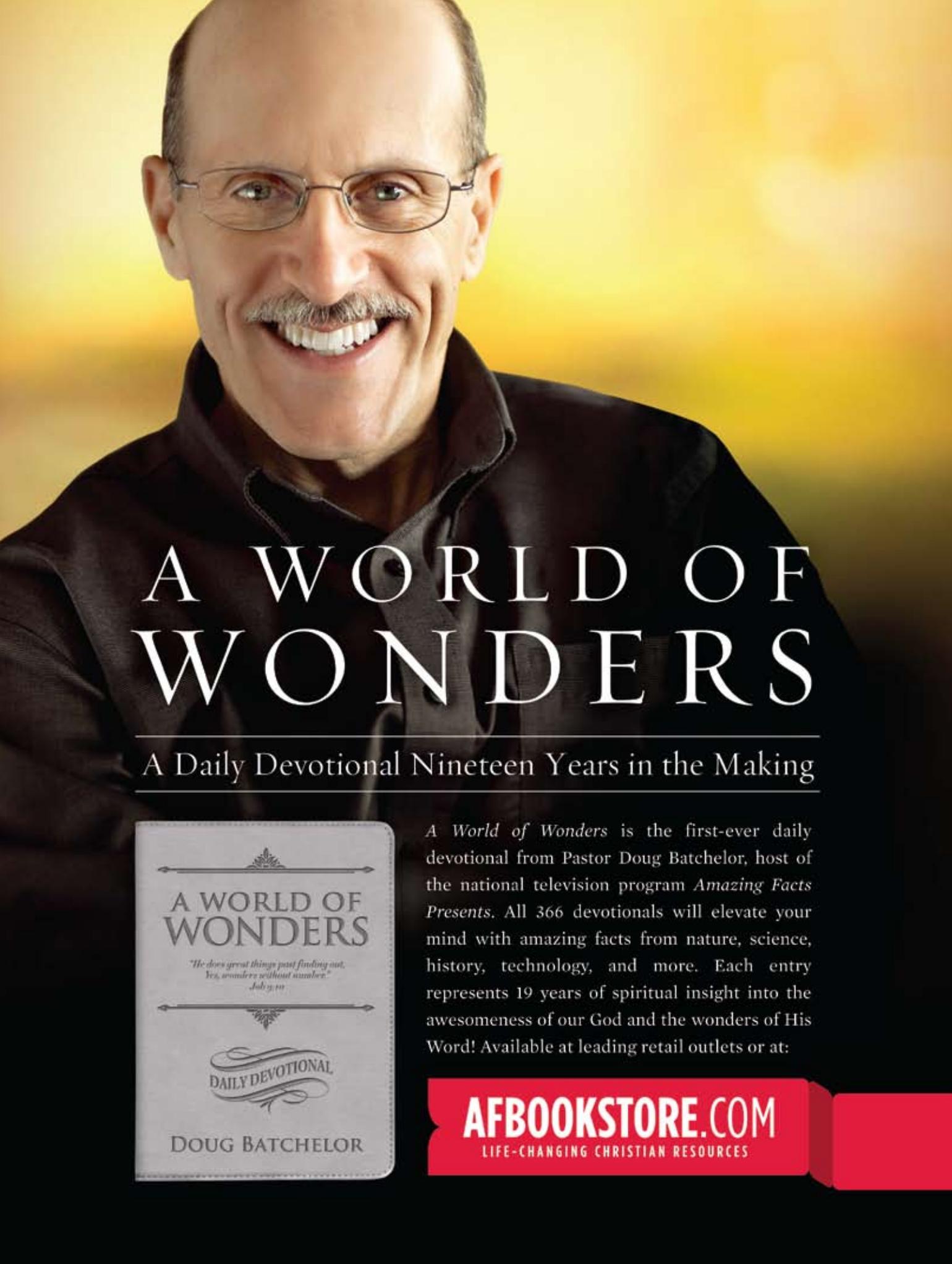
CONCLUSION (LUKE 15:5-7, 9, 10)

The religious leaders of the day had been indifferent toward the lost and even antagonistic to their coming to Jesus. Jesus used these two parables to illustrate how wrong their response was, especially when compared to how they would have responded to recovering something far less valuable. Jesus pointed out how joyful they would have been at the recovery of a lost sheep or a lost coin; certainly then, they should be joyous instead of angered when lost souls returned to Jesus.

Jesus pointed out that what matters most to God is the lost. They matter so much to Him that when the lost are found—even one of them—all heaven rejoices and throws a party! There is more joy over one sinner coming to Jesus than over 99 people being right where they're supposed to be with God. If lost people matter this much to God, shouldn't they matter as much to us? Shouldn't we be willing to give everything needed in order to reach the lost? My answer is "Yes," and I hope yours is also.

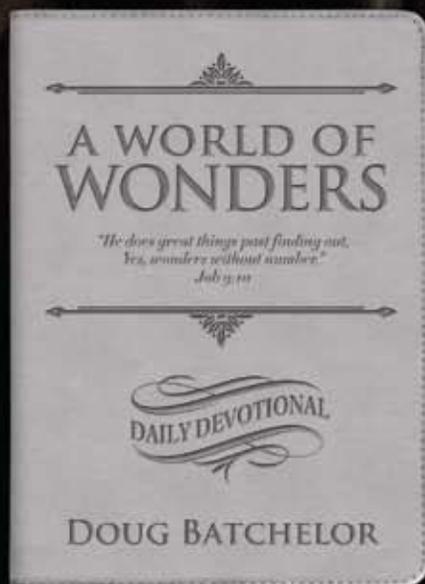


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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

STATEMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God’s grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God’s Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev. 18:5-23, 26; Lev. 20:7-21; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?” So they are no longer two, but one” (Matt. 19:4-6, NIV). For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Jesus affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices. As His disciples, Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the Lord’s instruction and example, living a life of Christ-like compassion and faithfulness. 

**“FOR THIS
REASON A MAN
WILL LEAVE HIS
FATHER AND
MOTHER AND BE
UNITED TO HIS
WIFE, AND THEY
WILL BECOME
ONE FLESH”**



This statement was voted during the 1999 Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee and amended during the 2012 Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

THE FOOT-WASHING DILEMMA

In the churches that I pastor, the Lord's Supper is reserved for the last month of each quarter. As I've been conducting it this month, I noticed again the number of people who choose not to participate in the foot-washing service. Even in a church that I'd describe as fairly traditional, there were more people in the sanctuary than in the rooms set aside for the service—and looking at the pews after the foot-washing, it was clear that quite a few had used the “break” to slip away from church.

So I did an informal survey, asking “Why didn't you go to the foot-washing service today?” Here are some of the responses I received:

- “I didn't know this was communion day, so I wasn't prepared for it.”
- “I can't get down on the floor to do it.”
- “It just disrupts everything for me to get up and walk to another place, and I lose the mood of the Lord's Supper.”
- “I'd have to take off my hose.”
- “I've got really gross toenails, and that embarrasses me.”
- “I just don't like it—I feel very uncomfortable having to talk with and touch someone I don't know well.”
- “We're visitors here. We don't know anyone.”
- “I hate looking for a partner.”

How should we approach the foot-washing service? One of my church leaders said, “We need to push people to do it.” (Not easy to do; in my way of thinking, it's a very personal thing.) Someone in the foot-washing room said, “Maybe people don't understand what it means.” (If they don't, it's not for lack of explanations.) Someone asked, “If a person doesn't do foot-washing, are they allowed to partake in the Lord's Supper?” (I couldn't find an official answer, but I've never stopped anyone.) As for finding a partner, I'm not inclined to blame unfriendliness; those in the men's foot-washing service, at least, tried to make sure everyone was served.

The foot-washing service is explained in our Fundamental Beliefs as a “renewed cleansing,” a “willingness to serve one another,” and the “unit[ing of] our hearts in love”—all areas where every Christian and congregation could use help. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* explains the preparation for and importance of the ordinance, but it doesn't talk about what we should do when people don't participate in it.



Loren Seibold is editor of *Best Practices* for Adventist Ministry. This article appeared in the December 14, 2011, issue.



DEACONS: SERVANTS OF THE CHURCH ACTS 6:1-6

God has given some offices to His church on earth: two of them are the office of elder and the office of deacon. This office of elder is actually associated with multiple titles in the Bible; sometimes elders are called overseers, bishops, pastors, or shepherds. Each of these titles refers to the same person, and there are two key verses in the Bible that demonstrate this very clearly. Notice that in each verse, these titles are used interchangeably:

1. "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (i.e., pastor) the flock of God among you, [by] exercising oversight" (1 Peter 5:1, 2).

2. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (i.e., pastor) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he acknowledged the offices of elder and deacon when he wrote, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

In this article we will focus our attention on the office of deacon.

THE DUTIES OF A DEACON (ACTS 6:1-6)

The duties of a deacon are described in Acts 6. Here we find the early church in its infancy. In terms of leadership, the church had no elders or deacons; the only leaders of the church were the 12 apostles. Yet, we see here the office of deacon beginning to develop. It did not develop fully in Acts 6; it simply began to take shape. The narrative begins in verse 1: "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number . . ." This is a huge understatement! Peter had preached a sermon at Pentecost, after which 3,000 souls "received [Peter's] word and were baptized" (Acts 2:41). A short time later, the church numbered more than 5,000 men in Jerusalem (Acts 4:4), plus women and children. This was the first "mega-church."

The influx of so many members created a problem. In verse 1, we find a description of that problem. It says, "A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native He-

brews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." In those days, there were two types of Jewish people: the Hellenists and the Hebrews. The Hellenists were Jewish people who had adopted many of the cultural norms of the day. They spoke Greek, the common language of that culture. They dressed like the Greek people. They participated in the Greek culture. On the other hand, the Hebrews were Jewish people who had rejected the Greek culture and chose to remain culturally unmixed. They spoke Aramaic or Hebrew. They also dressed differently than the Greeks. There was tension between these two groups because the Hebrews thought the Hellenists were being unfaithful to their families by neglecting their culture.

At this time of growth in the church, the church was doing a good job of caring for its widows by feeding them. The problem arose because those involved in the distribution of food were playing favorites. They neglected the Hellenists in favor of the native Hebrews. Imagine someone with an armful of groceries



for the widows of your church. Rather than giving half to the Hellenistic widows and half to the Hebrew widows, this person gives all the groceries to the Hebrew widows. This was not a chance occurrence; it took place day after day after day. Verse 6 said that this was taking place “daily.” We do not know why the Hellenistic widows were being neglected. Perhaps it was because the church had only enough to support the Hebrew widows. Perhaps it was because of prejudice against those who had “sold out” to the culture of the day and had not remained pure. Whatever the reason, some widows were being overlooked, and a complaint arose.

TEAMWORK: APOSTLES AND DEACONS

The apostles heard about this complaint and, in verse 2, “summoned the congregation of the disciples” to discuss how they were going to solve the problem. They agreed that something wrong was happening. They knew it was not good that these widows were being neglected. They understood that all widows needed food. Listen to what they said:

“It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4).

I am sure that as they evaluated the situation, the apostles thought about solving the problem themselves. After all, if any-

body had the spiritual maturity to ensure that all believing widows received proper help without favoritism, the apostles did. I’m sure they would have done a fine job. But, in doing so, they would have neglected their own God-given priorities to do this good thing. In other words, the apostles refused to let the good take the place of the best. They had been called to be devoted “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (verse 4). Quite frankly, serving tables would interfere with this priority. So, they said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” Yes, there was negligence in the church; however, the apostles refused to solve one problem by creating another.

THE APOSTLES’ PRIORITY

Imagine with me a heart surgeon. He has scrubbed for surgery. He has taken his scalpel, cut through his patient’s sternum, and pulled it back to get to the heart. He has begun the process of repairing the blockages in the heart. And then the phone rings at the receptionist’s desk. For some reason or another, no one is available to answer the phone. The phone rings again and again. Now, imagine, the heart surgeon saying, “Excuse me, I cannot neglect the phone.” He then backs away from the operating table, takes off his surgical gloves, walks over to the phone, picks it up, and says, “Hello?” Answering the phone is a good thing. Perhaps one of the patient’s relatives. Perhaps it is another patient who is experiencing chest pain. There is nobody better equipped to answer these people’s inquiries than the surgeon. But answering the phone is not the best thing for the heart surgeon to do. It is a good thing but not the best thing.

Likewise, for the apostles, the best thing for them to do wasn’t delivering food to neglected widows. The widows had genuine need and needed to be helped, but the apostles were not to neglect their priority to make sure the widows were not neglected. This is the point of verses 2 and 4.

John Piper has said, “Without extended and consecrated prayer, the ministry of the Word withers up and bears no fruit. . . . And what opposes the pastor’s life of prayer more than anything? The ministry. It is not shopping or car repairs or sickness or yard work that squeezes our prayers into hurried corners of the day. It is budget development and staff meetings and visitation and counseling and answering mail and writing reports and reading journals and answering the phone and preparing messages.”¹

And the apostles might easily add, “and serving food to widows.”

THE MEANING OF THE WORD “DEACON”

Now, we have reached the point where we can see the role that deacons play in the life of the church. They help in the work of the ministry so that elders can focus on the priority of prayer and the ministry of the Word. Deacons are servants in the church. The word we translate “deacon” is the Greek word *διακονος* (*diakonos*), which is most often translated as “servant.” In John 2:5, 9, this word is used to describe those who were serving the tables at the wedding feast in Cana. In Matthew 22:13, it refers to the servants of the king who gave a wedding feast for his son.



Epaphras is called a “servant of Christ” (Col. 1:7). Paul considered himself as a “servant of [the] new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:6). Jesus Himself was a “servant to the circumcision” (Rom. 15:8). Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Other related words, διακονια (diakonia) and διακονεω (diakoneo), are used several times in Acts 6:1-2:

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily *servicing* (διακονια) of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to *serve* (διακονεω) tables’” (Acts 6:1, 2, emphasis added).

There are only two instances in the Bible where the word διακονος (diakonos) is not translated “servant” (or to something equivalent). In Phillipians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8, the word διακονος (diakonos) is used to describe an office in the church. It could just as easily be translated “servants.” All Christians are called to be servants. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The deacons, however, are called to be model-servants. They are servants who lead. As the early church matured, the apostles were multiplied into pastors and elders. The model of the apostles seeking help in the ministry matured into the office of deacon.

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS

The apostles needed help if they were going to keep their commitment to prayer and to the Word of God. This is the point of verse 3: “But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task” (Acts 6:3). The apostles surveyed the extent of the problem and determined that it would take seven men to adequately serve food to the neglected widows. The apostles wanted this great need to be met. Finding seven faithful men would accomplish two things: the widows’ need for food would be met, and the apostles would maintain their priorities. So, a cry went out to the congregation to find seven men with three characteristics:

1. Of good reputation
2. Full of the Spirit
3. Full of wisdom

Notice that the apostles did not solve this problem by asking for volunteers as if any person could take care of the task. They were not looking for *any* men; they were looking for spiritual people of integrity who would do this job well. It would have been no help at all to the apostles to delegate this task and see it not done well; in fact, that would have caused further problems. ED

¹ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, pp. 60, 61.

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USE RESPONSIBLY THE GIFTS OF SPEECH AND INFLUENCE

**“MEANWHILE
PRAYING ALSO
FOR US, THAT GOD
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WORD, TO SPEAK
THE MYSTERY OF
CHRIST, FOR WHICH I
AM ALSO IN CHAINS,
THAT I MAY MAKE
IT MANIFEST, AS I
OUGHT TO SPEAK”**

COLOSSIANS 4:3, 4, NKJV

God has not given talents capriciously. He who knows all things, who is acquainted with each one, has given to every person his or her work. Those to whom He has entrusted much are not to boast, for what they possess is not their own; it is lent them on trial; and the greater the endowment, the greater the returns required. Day by day God is testing men and women, to see whether they will acknowledge Him as the giver of all that they have. He watches to see whether they will prove themselves worthy of eternal riches. The use they make of their precious endowments decides their destiny for eternity.

Of all the gifts that God has bestowed upon His children, none is capable of being a greater blessing than the gift of speech. With the tongue we convince and persuade; with it we offer prayer and praise to God; and with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. God would have us consecrate this gift to His service, speaking only such words as will help those around us. And if Christ rules in our hearts, our words will reveal the purity, beauty, and fragrance of a character molded and fashioned by Him. But if we are under the guidance of the enemy of all good, our words will echo his sentiments. Watch well your words. Consecrate your gift of speech to the Lord's service; for He will one day require it at your hands.

Every one of us exerts an influence on those with whom we come in contact. This influence we have from God, and we are responsible for the way it is used. God designs that it shall tell on the side of right; but it rests with each one of us to decide whether our influence shall be pure and elevating, or whether it shall act as a poisonous malaria. Those who are partakers of the divine nature exert an influence that is Christlike. Holy angels attend them on their way, and all with whom they come in contact are helped and blessed. But those who do not receive Christ as their personal Savior cannot influence others for good. . . . Such lose all hope of eternal life themselves, and by their example lead others astray. Guard well your influence; it is “your reasonable service” to place it on the Lord's side.

ED

This article is excerpted from the book *To Be Like Jesus*, p. 94, by Ellen G. White.

THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Although in one sense the first day of the new year is no more to God than any other day, yet He often puts into the hearts of His children at that time a desire to begin the new year with new resolves—perhaps with plans to carry out some worthy enterprise—and with purposes to depart from the wrongs of the old year and to live the new year with new determinations.

In God's plan for His ancient people, He gave the command, "On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle." We have no tabernacle to set up as had the children of Israel, but we have a work of building to do, the importance of which all need to understand. Let us remember that character is not the result of accident, but day by day it is forming for good or for evil. Great importance attaches to this work of character building; for it is far-reaching in its results. We are builders for time and for eternity. Few realize the power of habit. Examine your own heart and life in the light of God's Word, and ask yourself, "What has my record been for the year that is just closing? What advancement have I made in the Christian life? What victories have I gained? And what have I done to help others, and to lead them to Christ?"

God has not placed you in the world to lead an aimless life. He designs that you should be useful, and reach a high standard of moral excellence. To each one some work is given. During the old year have you performed your appointed tasks with cheerfulness and fidelity, having an eye single to the glory of God? Opportunities and privileges have been granted you; what use have you made of these gifts entrusted to you by our Heavenly Father? Have you made yourself a blessing to those around you? Have you done what you could to make them happy and win them to Christ?

All this is a part of your appointed work. God also requires each of us to subdue self, not giving the rein to self-indulgence or appetite, and to form characters that will stand the test of the judgment and go with us into the future life.

Shall the close of the year find you further advanced than you are today? Will you put away evil habits? Will you be considerate of others, faithful to do the work of a Christian? If you will carry the principles of right-doing into all the affairs of life, you will find that it will promote health of body, peace of mind, and prosperity of soul. You will have a strength, dignity, and sweetness of character that will have a transforming influence upon others.



OPPORTUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES HAVE BEEN GRANTED YOU; WHAT USE HAVE YOU MADE OF THESE GIFTS ENTRUSTED TO YOU BY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER?

We are now entering upon a new year, and may it prove a beginning of years to us. If in the old year we have made failures, let us commence the new by rectifying these errors as far as we can. If the old year has borne into eternity a spotted record of opportunities neglected and privileges slighted, let us see that that of the new year is free from these blemishes. Its days are all before us; let us begin now to make the history of each as it passes, such as we shall not tremble to meet in the judgment. Let us fill each one full of loving, helpful work for others. Let us develop all our powers, and make of ourselves all that God designed that we should.

In the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward. A reward awaits the overcomer in the great day, when he shall hear from the lips of our Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant"; and there is also a present reward in the peace and happiness that flow from the conscience at rest, from the sweet assurance that we enjoy the favour of God. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." To all who walk in His ways the new year will be crowded with goodness and blessing. 

Ellen G. White, Australian Union Conference Record (AUCR), January 5, 1914.

LEADING WITH HEART



Leading with heart focuses on the followers as much as on the task or goal at hand. Where the treasure is there will the heart be also. If the heart is with the people then the leader will:

LOVE THE PEOPLE AS CHRIST LOVED

To lead with heart you must really care about the people you lead. Come close to them and seek their good. Pastoral visitation is key. As you get into the homes and lives of those you lead they become real people and not just names on a list. Show your care for them and they will most often return loyalty. As you know them they will know you and trust will be built over time. This is the self denial love seen in the Gospels, and especially at Calvary.

KNOW AND RECOGNIZE PEOPLE'S GIFTEDNESS

Whether it is through Spiritual Gifts Seminars or home visits and personal conversation, seek to know what gifts your people have. Recognize those gifts and empower them to use them. Too often we encourage people to discover their talents and then disallow them the free exercise of those gifts. Guidance and monitoring is needed but in an encouraging role, not as an inspector looking for faults.

SHARE YOUR HEART

Most people come to church for basic needs, but as those are met they seek higher levels of satisfaction that only come from involvement. Cold hard facts never motivated anyone. It is when the people see passion

for ministry in the leader that they become passionate themselves. We ministers became involved in ministry because of passion. Let that passion show and see if it is not contagious. People follow leaders with vision!

Leading from the heart requires sacrifice. It takes time and energy. It requires mental and spiritual stamina. We can only develop these as we take time with God and the Word in personal times of worship and devotion. Empowered by this time go out and lead with heart so the church can be the people of God set on a hill that no one can ignore!



This was originally published in *Best Practices*, a free email newsletter from the North American Division Resource Center.

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DOES YOUR CHURCH HAVE A PURPOSE?

What is the purpose of the church? This is the question I was asked recently at a lay training seminar. So in my next presentation, I decided to ask the same question, and here are some of the answers I received: The church exists to preach the truth, to fulfill my needs and my families' needs, and to teach about Jesus. There was no clear conclusion on the purpose of the church. How would you have answered?

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The church is in the world for three reasons. One reason is *to worship and glorify God's name*, and this continues throughout time and eternity (Luke 4:8; John 4:23; Acts 2:42; Rev. 4:10). To glorify the name of God in word and deed means nothing less than a total identification with and dedication to the purposes of the Creator. Above all else, He calls us to love Him with our whole being and our neighbors as ourselves.

A second duty is *to edify the body of Christ* (John 13:35; Phil. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 19; Gal. 6:2). This happens in many different ways—encouraging each other, praying for each other, loving each other, and training each other for the work of evangelism and ministry. The endowments and gifts unique to each person are to be used for the enrichment of all. In heaven all believers will be sinlessly conformed to Christ's image. Here on earth, we have opportunity for mutual "edification" (Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11). Our calling as believers includes the upbuilding of the community of which Christ Jesus is the foundation. We are to contribute to the spiritual and evangelical growth of fellow believers and thus be builders of a heavenly fellowship, bringing to this task whatever spiritual, intellectual, moral, and evangelistic possibilities are available to the biblically disciplined believer.

Extension of the kingdom is the third prong, and this is most effectively fulfilled by those whose lives are God-glorifying and church-edifying (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:12; Acts 2:47; 5:12; 9:31). The gathered church aims to equip all believers to function effectively as the church influences and impacts the world for Jesus Christ. The risen Christ gathers with His followers, renewing and invigorating them for Christ

to witness and serve in the world. The church can hardly glorify God's name or be truly edifying if she neglects her ambassadorial role of beseeching the lost to be reconciled to God. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21).

Inspired Scripture governs the church's sense of urgency of local and global evangelism; this affirms the impossibility of salvation through alien ideologies and religions. The Bible

is clear: no name but Jesus Christ's is given whereby sinners must be and can be saved (Acts 4:12).

Evangelism is directly related to God's will. God wants His church to reach out and offer His gift of salvation to everyone who will listen. Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have com-

ONE REASON IS TO WORSHIP AND GLORIFY GOD'S NAME, AND THIS CONTINUES THROUGHOUT TIME AND ETERNITY.



manded you” (Matt. 28:18-20, NIV). It’s as plain as that. Any church that is concerned with evangelism and discipleship is really obeying God and doing what is pleasing to Him. His expressed will is that the good news of the gospel be communicated to all people, all classes, all races, and all languages—near and far, geographically and culturally.

The goal is that there will be a living church community of believers in Jesus Christ that fills every segment of society. Every segment of society should be throbbing with Christian life, full of groups of committed Christians who are loving, serving, praying, growing in the Word, and reaching out. When the church is functioning well, it provides hope for the world and is a source of change, leading others to new life and the gateway to heaven. Each local church is called to do its part in fulfilling the Great Commission! Each local church is to bring love, hope, change, and joy to this sin-ridden and dying world.

The “church” is made up of local churches. In obeying the Great Commission more intelligently, more effectively, and more fervently, the church will grow. As Christians refine their methods, cultivate church growth, communicate the gospel, and edify the believers, the church as a whole will receive the abundant blessing of God.

Evangelizing the lost is not just a matter of media ministry, gospel tracts, and street ministry; rather, it is a connection with an individual. No person is truly evangelized

GOD WANTS HIS CHURCH TO REACH OUT AND OFFER HIS GIFT OF SALVATION TO EVERYONE WHO WILL LISTEN.

until they are confronted with claims of Jesus and make a decision on a personal level.

Diverse methods of evangelism are used by the church today to spread the gospel. Yet the fact remains that a one-to-one approach initiated by every believer still holds the best promise of evangelizing the masses. If every

Christian would win one individual for Christ in a single calendar year, the multiplication of believers would far surpass any harvest of souls yet reported in the modern missionary era. Evangelizing the lost in one’s own sphere of influence is the most natural place to begin.

We cannot accomplish any of these purposes without the power of the Holy Spirit. The message of the Bible is addressed to all mankind, for God’s revelation in Christ still speaks today; He illumines the minds of God’s people in every place and culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes.

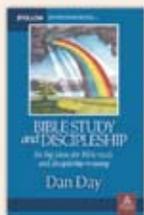
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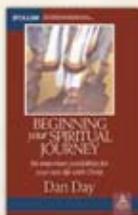
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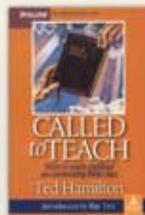
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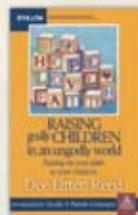
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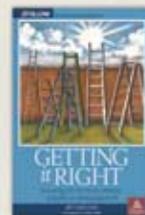
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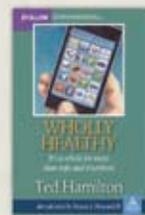
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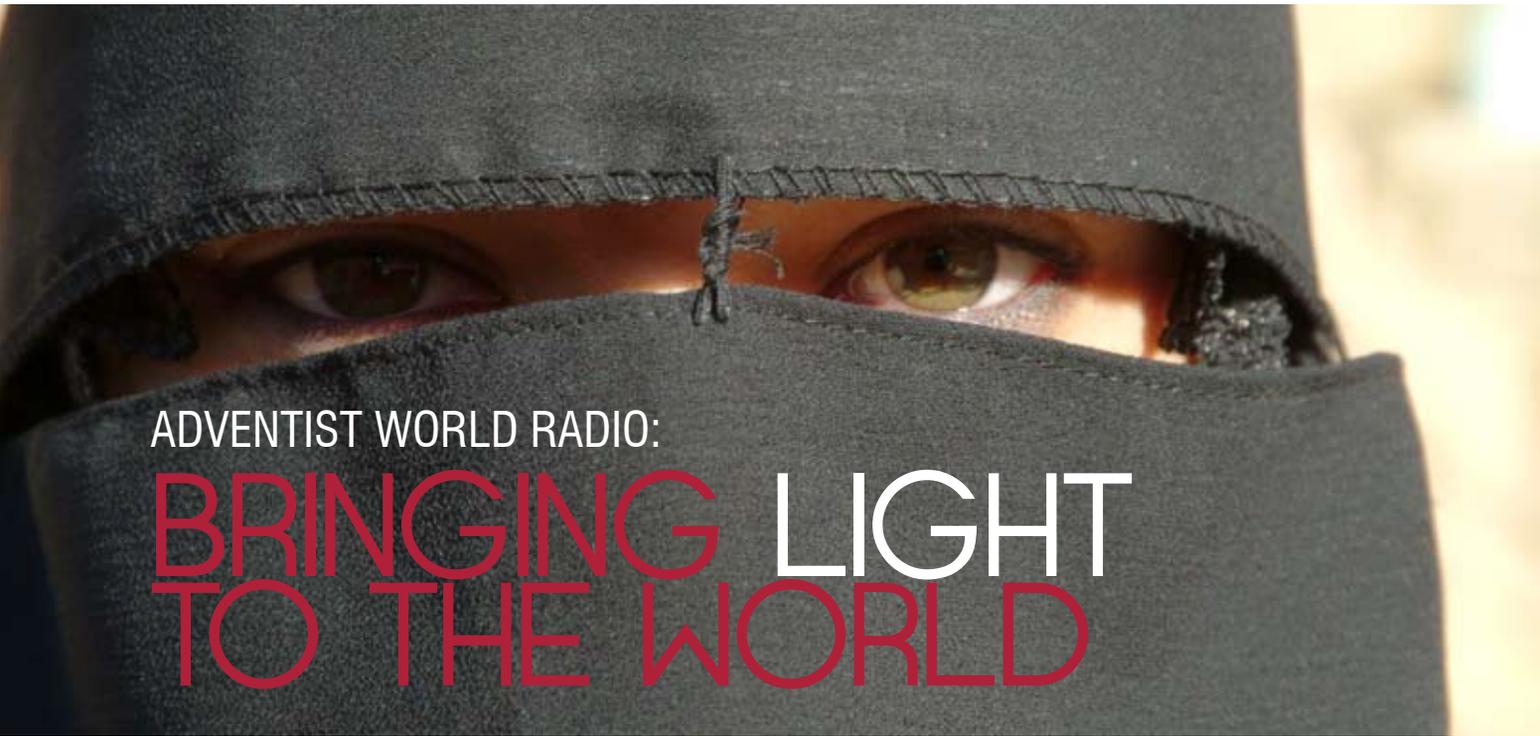
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ADVENTIST WORLD RADIO:

BRINGING LIGHT TO THE WORLD

The Middle East is one of the most challenging areas of the world for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Why? “In these countries can be found the most stringent limitations on religious liberty and an absolute stronghold by Muslim believers,” says Dowell Chow, president of Adventist World Radio. “Persecution certainly takes place in other parts of the world, but in some countries in the Middle East, people can easily be killed if they aren’t extremely careful of every single thing they do and say.”

At the same time, there are very, very few Adventists in this region. In fact, in some places there is not one known Adventist in the entire region.

How can we effectively bring the light of Jesus to the enormous populations of the Middle East? The handful of local church members cannot spread the gospel message on their own, but AWR’s shortwave broadcasts and podcasts are able to reach millions of listeners in the privacy of their homes. Through AWR, Muslims are hearing and responding to the love of Jesus. One listener wrote: “Your station has been a first ‘window’ for me to be introduced to Christianity in the right way.”

AWR’s program producers come from the same cultures as their listeners; they are able to find common ground and present the path to salvation in a way that those listening can understand. Their programs are bringing hope and comfort in Christ to those who need it most.

A listener in Afghanistan sent a letter to AWR that read: “For a few months now, my family and I have been listening to each one of your programs. They make our hearts come alive again. In our city and country that has been torn apart by war, where there is no peace or trust among the people, where everyone is worried if they can keep themselves alive for one more day, the message of Jesus Christ is our only light. I have sincerely trusted in His Word, and I am following Him.”

Arabic is one of AWR’s highest-priority mission languages. It has been difficult to maintain program production, but at a new studio at the Al Waad Media Center in Beirut, Lebanon, staff and volunteers are now creating programs in Arabic, Farsi, Kabyle, and Tachelit. Elsewhere, AWR is producing programs in Turkish and Farsi, and is currently working to set up production in Pashto and Sindhi.

Recently, there have been exciting developments in North Africa, where AWR is partnering with the Spanish Union of Churches Conference. From Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands, the signal from a small FM radio station is reaching millions of people on the coastline of Morocco . . . 125 miles away! This kind of reach is unheard of, but we know that God’s hand is at work.

From the small Spanish enclave of Ceuta, on the African side of the Strait of Gibraltar, a station is broadcasting 24/7 in five languages: Spanish, English, Arabic, French, and Berber. The potential audience is tremendous, not only in Morocco, but also for the hundreds of ships that pass through the strait every day. The Adventists in Spain have such a passion to help the people in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and more, that they are going the third mile to set up still more stations in additional locations.

AWR is *your* mission radio, and we invite you to partner with us in reaching the world for Christ.



Adventist World Radio is the official global radio ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its mission is to broadcast the Adventist hope in Christ to the unreached people groups of the world in their own languages. AWR’s programs can be heard in nearly 100 languages through AM/FM and shortwave radio, on demand, and podcasts at awr.org and iTunes.

Shelley Nolan Freesland is AWR communication director at the General Conference world headquarters.



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An aerial photograph of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, at sunset. The Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, stands prominently in the center. The city's skyline is filled with other skyscrapers and modern architecture. In the foreground, the Dubai Fountain is in full operation, with multiple jets of water spraying upwards and outwards, illuminated with warm lights. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the horizon. The overall scene conveys a sense of modernity and achievement.

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