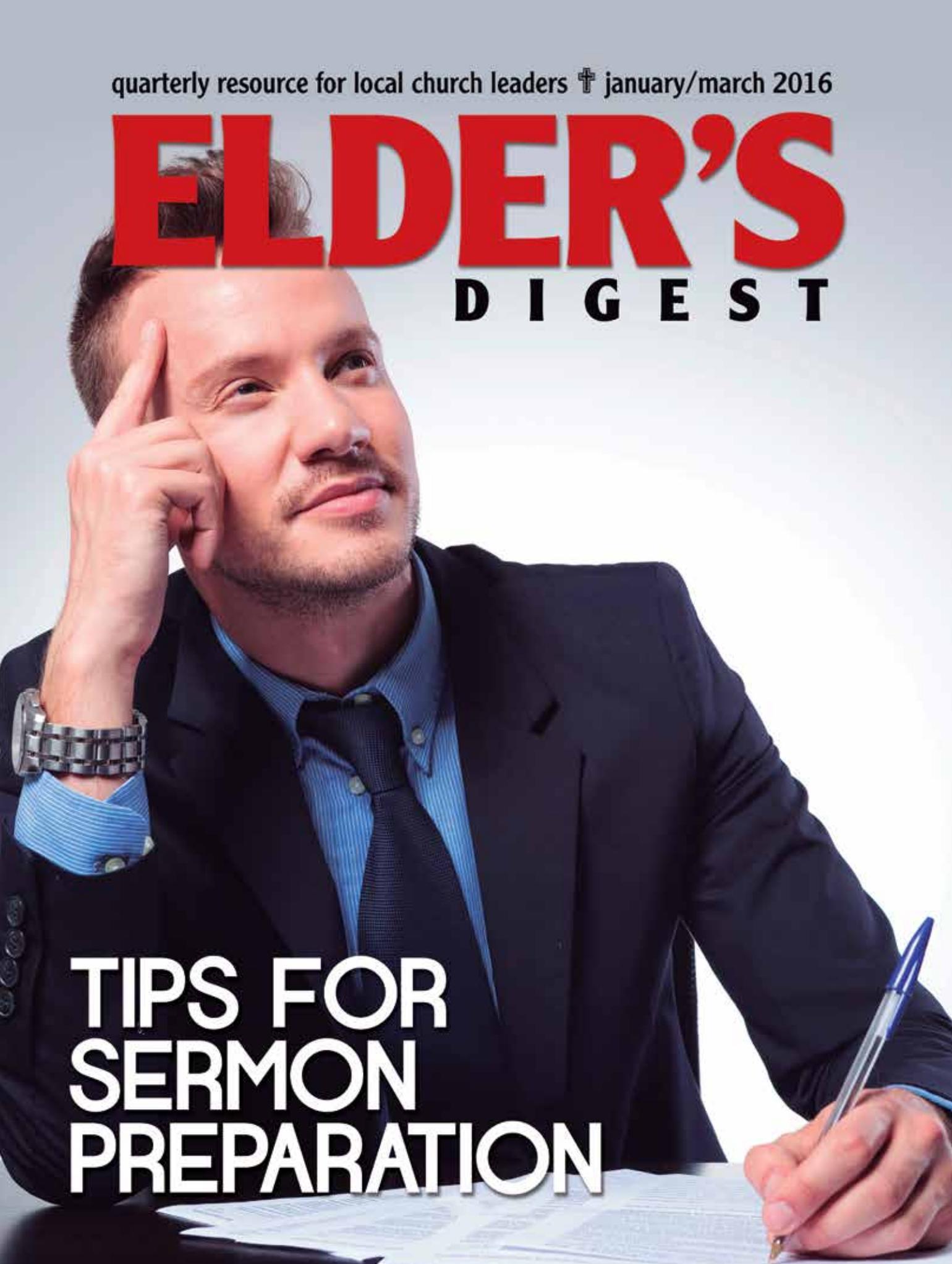


quarterly resource for local church leaders † january/march 2016

ELDER'S DIGEST



**TIPS FOR
SERMON
PREPARATION**

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PREACHING STYLES

If preaching is so important in the life of a church, we should set high standards for the preaching in our own church. I've heard some of my friends elevate certain sermon styles over others and criticize people for preaching in a way they do not like. Notice that this has nothing to do with faithful preaching; this involves preaching preferences.

The requirement of faithful preaching is expository, not stylistic. In fact, different styles of preaching are useful as well as expository; that is, they can explain the Bible using different methods of communication. Let's look at three styles of expository preaching: verse-by-verse, narrative, and topical.

1. *Verse-by-verse*. This type of preaching takes a macro-angle approach to the text, seeking to camp out on a single verse (or verses) and discover the meaning of the verse(s) before making an application. This type of preaching is easily identified because the preacher usually moves through a book of the Bible from start to finish in short increments—usually a verse or two at one time. The sermon is developed around the main point of that particular passage.

2. *Narrative*. This type of preaching takes a wide-angle approach to the text. Instead of developing a sermon around the main point of a verse, it is based on the main theme that runs through a collection of verses—sometimes whole paragraphs—like a

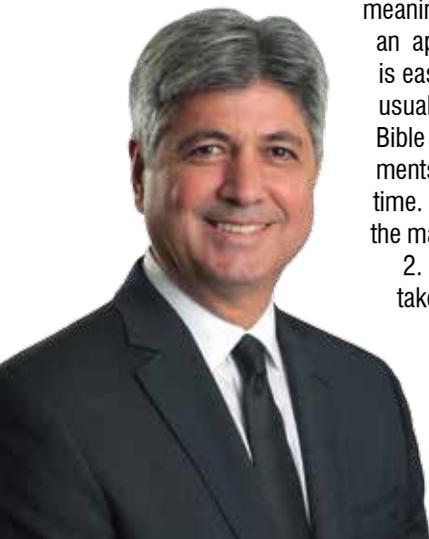
golden thread. Because of their narrative nature, some books of the Bible—John and Esther, for example—lend themselves more naturally to this style.

3. *Topical*. In this type of preaching, a topic is already determined, and the appropriate text is sought out for informing the topic and formulating the sermon. This type of preaching is like a prescription for a specific illness in that it is relevant to an issue at hand. Topical preaching allows us to address pressing issues in the moment of need.

Any of these styles can be useful in explaining the Scriptures well. I say this because sometimes there is push-back from people who call a sermon “unbiblical” simply because they did not like the style in which it was delivered. We all have preferences when it comes to style, and that's okay. But the standard we should hold up involves asking different questions about the preaching, such as:

- Am I getting a sense of what the text means?
- Am I getting a sense of the greatness of God?
- Am I learning more about Jesus and His redemptive plan?
- Does the sense of the text move me to respond to God in some way?
- Am I more in love with God and others because of this text?

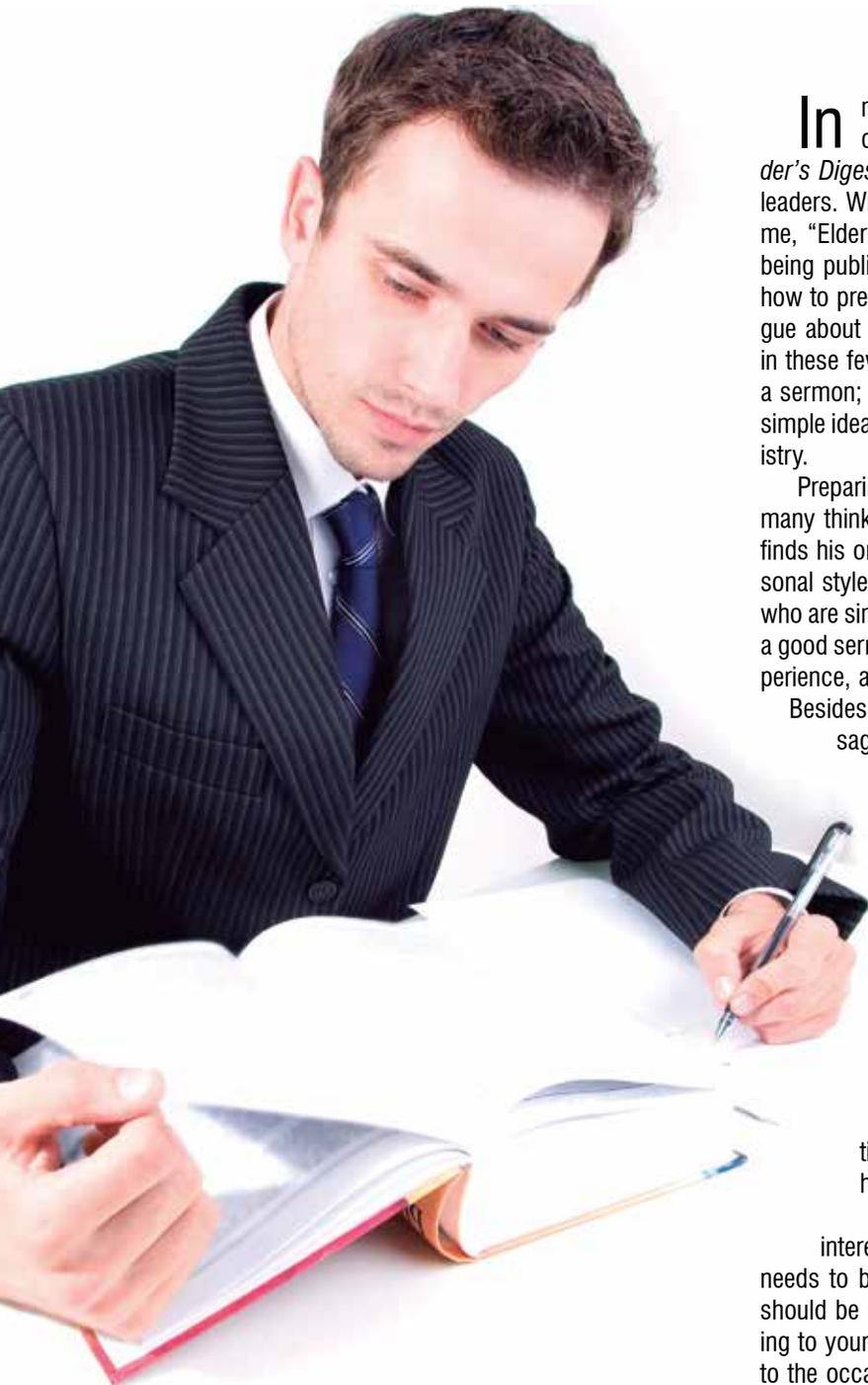
A preacher's primary job is to give a sense of the Scriptures' meaning and then exhort people to respond. For this reason, preaching is the emphasis in this issue. Certainly, you will find among many other topics good ideas on how to prepare a sermon and understand the different kinds of preaching types or styles. Enjoy your reading!



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

EO

TIPS FOR SERMON PREPARATION



In my role as associate Ministerial Secretary in charge of elders, deacons, deaconesses, and editor of *Elder's Digest*, I travel the globe visiting church members and leaders. Wherever I go, elders and company directors say to me, "Elder Arrais, thank you for the good sermons that are being published in *Elder's Digest*, but, please, help us learn how to prepare good sermons ourselves." I don't want to argue about the art of preparing a sermon, much less include in these few lines all the concepts involved in the creation of a sermon; however, I would like to share some practical and simple ideas that have helped me throughout my pastoral ministry.

Preparing a sermon is not as complicated or difficult as many think. It is very important, though, that each preacher finds his or her own style. If you still haven't found your personal style, try to learn from the example of good preachers who are similar to you in personality and style. The truth is that a good sermon comes from the heart, from the preacher's experience, and from his or her personal relationship with God.

Besides that, its effect will be completed when the message meets the listener's needs. However, there are certain principles that a preacher needs to know and consider when preparing a sermon.

IMPORTANT FEATURES

- *Know your listeners.* Who is going to hear the sermon? What are their needs? Some of your listeners may be unemployed or have physical, financial, spiritual, or health issues. You can't simply preach for preaching's sake. Your message has to reach these people with their varying needs. Your listeners are young, old, women, men, Christian, non-Christian—all hoping for something that touches their hearts. It is important to know your audience.

- *Choose the subject.* The subject needs to interest those listening to the sermon. The subject also needs to be one that motivates you to preach. The subject should be clear in your mind so that it won't sound confusing to your listeners. The message also needs to be adapted to the occasion and place. Is the subject proper for Sabbath

worship? For a Wednesday prayer meeting? Is it doctrinal, evangelistic, or pastoral?

- *Find a Bible text.* I have heard some sermons where the preacher does not open the Bible, not even once. This is a tragedy. A key text gives the proper biblical and spiritual basis for the message, and it will remind the preacher and the listeners that the message comes not from man but from God. Closeness with the Bible also contributes to our proper spiritual preparation, considering that we should always pray before reading it.

- *Gather information and research materials.* It is good when the preacher enjoys research and seeks something more to complement the message. The congregation knows the difference between a “canned” or improvised sermon and one that has been properly prepared. Use Bible commentaries or other appropriate resources, different Bible versions, older devotional books, and good magazines. These supplemental materials will enlighten your mind with concepts and ideas that will enrich your message.

- *Write the theme.* The sermon theme or title should be simple but interesting. Summarize in one word or a short phrase everything you want to say in the sermon. Many people will be drawn into the sermon simply because of the theme. What do you expect as a result of your sermon? Try to communicate that in the theme.

- *Make an outline.* An outline helps the preacher to schematize and systematize the message in the mind and gives balance to the body of the message. Every sermon should have a basic structure: introduction, body, conclusion. Each part should have a specific length: five minutes for the introduction, 20 minutes for the body, and five minutes for the conclusion is a good guide. All parts are important because one builds on the other.

- *Write the entire sermon.* To have a detailed view of the entire message and to register ideas that may be forgotten, it is important to literally write the entire sermon. This prevents the preacher from forgetting information when preaching and from going around in circles. Besides, the sermon may be saved and used again some other time.

- *Practice your sermon.* After writing the entire sermon, preach it out loud for an imaginary congregation. (This may seem like madness, but it is not.) This practice will help you articulate the words, memorize the concepts, strengthen your performance, eliminate parts that are not as important, and help you not to be captive to an outline when presenting the message. It will also help you to make the all-important eye contact with your listeners. Sometimes I ask my wife to listen to the main points of my message. Her opinion is important, because if she as my wife doesn't like my sermon, the church certainly will not like it either.

- *Pay attention to content and style.* Many sermons are like certain types of food—undigestible, bland, and nutritionally empty. If a sermon does not have the nutrients necessary to feed and challenge the listeners for a purpose, the

“HOW BEAUTIFUL UPON THE MOUNTAINS ARE THE FEET OF HIM WHO BRINGS GOOD NEWS, WHO PROCLAIMS PEACE, WHO BRINGS GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS, WHO PROCLAIMS SALVATION”

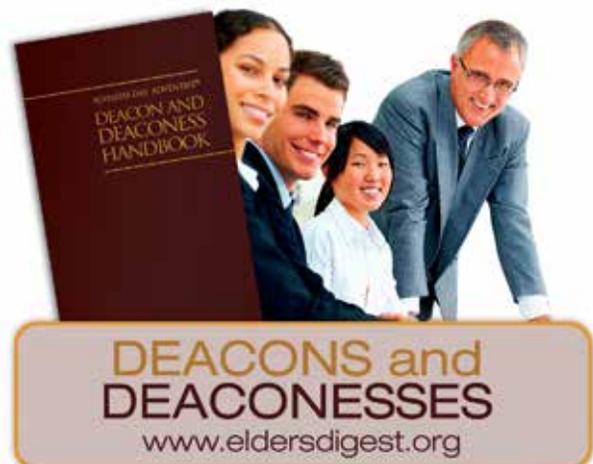
ISA. 52:7

power of the Holy Spirit.

Preaching is a science that may be developed and improved by those who make appropriate preparations. It is our privilege to be instruments of God's blessings when we open His Word before His people. The prophet Isaiah was correct when he said, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation” (Isa. 52:7). May God bless and guide you as you prepare your next sermon.

ED

Jonas Arrais is a General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary.



IS YOUR LOCAL CHURCH A TRULY SAFE ONE?

The blaring alarm only compounds your fear as you search from room to room. “Was it really just minutes ago that I dropped my children off for their Sabbath School classes,” you ask yourself. Other frantic parents are also calling for their children. Chaos swirls around everyone, threatening to swallow up any sense of peace.

Another father grabs your arm. “The children are safe outside,” he shouts above the clamor. “The Sabbath School teachers took them there.” As you emerge from the church, you are momentarily blinded by the brightness of the sun. Then you feel your children bury their faces in your smoky Sabbath clothing and cling to you.

As the reality of the church fire sets in, you are grateful for the Sabbath School teachers recently trained for such emergencies. The foresight of the church board to implement this type of leadership education prevented a greater tragedy from happening.

COULD THIS BE YOUR CHURCH?

Each Seventh-day Adventist church should be a place where members worship and fellowship together. It should be a place of peace and rest. Members cast off their burdens and kneel at the feet of Jesus. Unfortunately, the realities of this world bring stressful times. Churches are not exempt from emergencies, such as active shooters and fires. How can the church itself be a safe place if an emergency plan is not in place? When was the last time your congregation practiced a safety drill?

According to the National Fire Protection Association, 1,660 fires took place in religious settings in 2011. Although the number of fires continues to decrease, this is not the time to relax our preparedness. There are other emergencies that occur in our communities. Church leadership must acknowledge that these can happen in any congregation and prepare the congregation to react responsibly.

According to Church Law & Tax, “there were 135 incidents of shootings at places of worship in the U.S. in 2012” and the frequency of mass shootings appears to be increasing. Active shootings in church settings are receiving increasing attention, which prompts church leaders to create, implement, and practice a safety plan. When there is a plan in place

and leaders have been trained for these incidents, there is a better chance to save lives.

SAFETY SABBATH: SAFETY FOR ALL

North American Division church leadership has designated March 26, 2016 as Safety Sabbath. This provides an opportunity for churches and schools to participate in a variety of drills, training, and emergency planning sessions to prepare for any eventual crisis.

It will also serve to facilitate as a church and/or school emergency drill. Safety Sabbath is a benefit for those who may not conduct regular emergency drills. Safety Sabbath will remind everyone about the importance of safety, not only for the church but members and visitors as well.

Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM), the church’s risk manager, will provide free resource kits on a variety of emergency plans, including fire drills and active shooter drills. Churches can register for a Safety Sabbath Kit, with all the resources specific to a chosen drill. During the month of March, each church will focus on a chosen drill and emphasize its importance to the church members. Then on March 26, every church in North America will hold a safety drill of their choice on Safety Sabbath.

At ARM, we work to educate members and church leaders to ensure the safety of congregations and the church itself. The most effective way to do this is by implementing preventive measures and practicing what to do in a variety of crisis situations. It prepares everyone to know what to do when the alarm sounds.

We want every church and school to be a place of fellowship, peace, and rest. Planning and practicing for emergencies gives members and visitors confidence that their safety is important each time they step through the door.

Prepare your local church and be a part of the March 26 Safety Sabbath event. Visit SafetySabbath.com for more information.



Elizabeth Camps is a writer and public relations specialist for Adventist Risk Management, Inc. in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.



Adventist Risk
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There's no place like home.

Home can be many places. Grandma's house, the neighborhood playground, or your father's shoulders. As Seventh-day Adventists, we find spiritual comfort in our home church. But what happens when we can't go to church because of flooding, roof damage, or equipment failure?

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FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND DEFAMATION OF RELIGION

A distinguishing feature of humans is our God-given ability to communicate in the abstract through speech, symbols, and the written word. Nowhere is this capacity more uniquely expressed than in the domain of faith. Communication concerning religious beliefs is central to our ability to explore meaning and purpose in life, discuss the values that guide our actions, and to share experiences as we search for a closer knowledge of God.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly supports freedom of speech in general, and freedom of religious speech in particular. Although freedom of speech is guaranteed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, efforts continue to limit speech at both the national level and at the United Nations. In both settings, significant focus has been placed on limiting speech that offends the religious beliefs of the hearer.

Seventh-day Adventists affirm sensitivity and respect in all communication. We are thus concerned about speech designed to offend religious sensibilities. However, we believe that ceding the right to the state to control religious speech creates a far greater threat to the autonomy of people of faith than that posed by offensive speech. Indeed, there are numerous examples today of states citing a desire to protect religious feelings to justify the forceful silencing of peaceful religious speech.

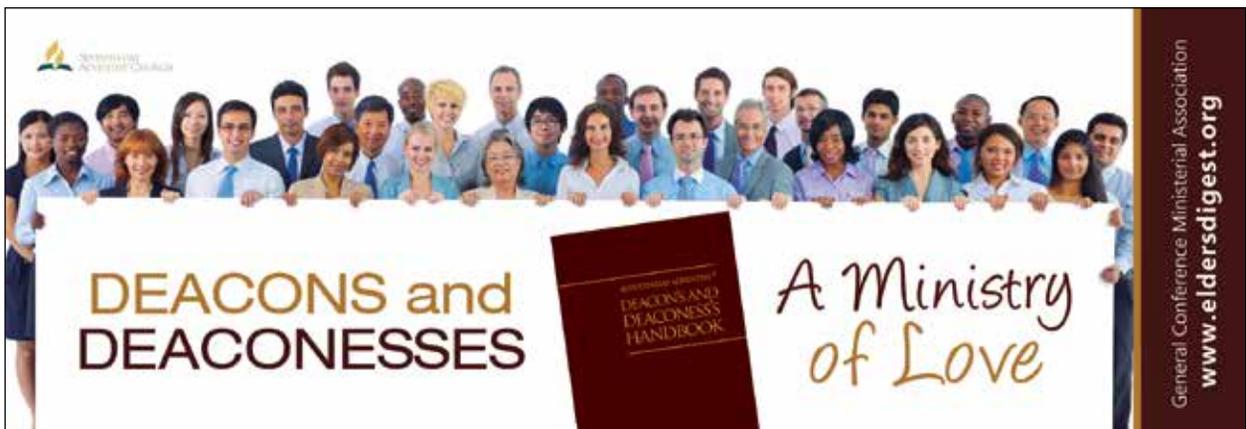
Our opposition to the restriction of speech is not without exceptions. The Church recognizes that in limited circumstances, speech can result in significant, tangible harm to the right to physical safety, the enjoyment of one's property and other similarly compelling rights. In such

very limited instances, we recognize the responsibility of the state to act to protect its population. When such limits are necessary, the Church expects governments to target restrictions narrowly to address only the dangerous speech in question.

The Church recognizes a special responsibility of those in power to communicate a message that supports fundamental human rights, including all the facets of religious freedom. This responsibility is particularly pertinent to governments, as they are generally in a unique position to encourage robust respect for the rights of their people, and particularly minorities.

While recognizing the right to freely express religious beliefs, Seventh-day Adventists accept the responsibility to self-regulate their speech to ensure it is consistent with biblical teachings. This includes the obligation to be both honest and loving. This is particularly important when discussing another faith as religious passions can prompt a one-dimensional view of others. Honesty does not mean merely stating facts accurately, but also placing information in an accurate context. Seventh-day Adventists will be constrained by Christ's law of love in all they say and do. When the God-given gift of speech is used to communicate in love, we will bless not only our fellow human beings; we will honor the God who made us all with the gift to express ourselves. ED

This statement was approved and voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on June 23, 2010, and released at the General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, June 24-July 3, 2010.



I'M NOT GOD: 10 THINGS PASTORS WISH THEY COULD SAY TO CERTAIN CHURCH MEMBERS

We pastors care deeply for our church members. We think about you during the week, pray for you, and want to do whatever we can to give you spiritual comfort. But one pastor serves many parishioners, and not all of you are equally sensitive to your pastor's feelings and needs.

What follows applies to only a small number of people in a congregation, but that small number can do a great deal of damage and may help to account for why only one out of 10 pastors will last to the end of his or her career.¹ Your pastor probably won't say these things to you—church relationships are too delicate—but, on occasion, they wish they could.

So here are 10 things, in no particular order, we pastors would sometimes like to say to a few of our church members:

- 1.** I have many parishioners, too many to call every day, so I may not know when you're sick, discouraged, or otherwise in need of pastoral care. If you want me to do something for you, perhaps you might tell me what's happening in your life rather than just complaining to others that I wasn't there for you.
- 2.** If you say hurtful, unkind things about me and my family, my feelings can be hurt, and I may even become a little angry. I'm not a punching bag. It is likely that I will minister to you less effectively—and certainly less cheerfully—after you've insulted me.
- 3.** Just because you have a strong theological opinion doesn't mean that my different one is wrong or that you have the right to judge me as unfaithful. Some of the topics we talk about in church have been under discussion for 2,000 years or more. It's unlikely that you're the only one who's ever thought clearly about them. And, by the way, attacking others on points of theology when your own family is a mess doesn't make you look better.
- 4.** It is entirely possible that I walked by you at church on Sabbath morning without acknowledging you. During those two or three hours, I teach a class, run the service, preach, and try to minister to those who are actually in crisis. If I neglected you, I'm sorry, but I can assure you, it wasn't intentional. So please don't go around telling people that I ignored you.
- 5.** I provide leadership, but I can't do miracles. When we're talking in a board meeting about where the

money is going to come from to keep the church school afloat (the school to which you won't send your own children) and you turn and look at me as if I have the answer, you may be disappointed.

6. My sermons might not be as good as the ones you hear on TV or radio. But when you send your tithes and offerings to them rather than to your local church, please remember that these celebrity preachers won't come to the hospital to anoint you or be there to do your marriages, baptisms, and burials. I will.

7. It doesn't help at all to tell everyone else you're upset with me if you don't tell me. Before you grumble to everyone in church, you might want to consult Matthew 18:15-17.

8. If you get stars in your crown for bringing people to the Lord, what will you get for chasing people away from the church with unrelenting criticism and continual controversy?

9. I suppose that calling me at the last minute on Sabbath morning to tell me you're not going to be there to do the task you're scheduled for is better than just not showing up, but couldn't you have called a replacement? I'm not relaxing on Sabbath morning just waiting for you to give me something to do. And, as hard as I've tried, I can't be in two places at once.

10. You say you want to be the pastor's friend. I should warn you that, for the reasons noted above, we pastors have become wary of friendships in the congregation. Please understand if I don't let my hair down with you. I care deeply about you, but I may prefer to keep our relationship professional. It's safer that way.

I don't mean to be scolding or accusing; I'm just reminding you that your pastor is not God. We're not omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or omnibenevolent. We do our best, but we can't be all things to all people all the time. Would you be so kind as to take this into account when you work with us or talk about us to others? 

Loren Seibold is a pastor in the Ohio Conference.

¹ This according to studies done by the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development.

PULPITS OF HOPE:

FULFILLING GOD'S MISSION

Pulpits of Hope is a simple, flexible, and effective initiative that every preacher may adopt in his or her church. It is part of a comprehensive evangelism plan and part of the five universal keys of successful soul-winning and evangelism found in the book of Acts.

THE FIVE KEYS OF SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM

Jesus surprised Nicodemus with the statement “You must be born again” (John 3:7). Churches are “born again” when they teach, follow, and implement the five keys:

1. The strategy of prayer, Bible study, and witnessing for *revival*.
2. *Training* and preparation of church members to reach out to the community through Bible-based ministries.
3. *Community outreach* programs.
4. *Harvest* through evangelistic meetings and Pulpits of Hope.
5. Events for *nurturing* new believers and transforming them into disciples.

PULPITS OF HOPE

Transform the pulpits of our churches into centers of evangelism on Sabbath morning. Here are the facts: (1) Every year, we spend millions of dollars to bring people to the doors of our churches. (2) Every year, millions of visitors and guests visit our churches, and many leave without having been invited to accept Jesus and His teachings. Every pastor and elder who is called to preach may use and follow this flexible, low-cost preaching plan that is doing amazing things in churches that are practicing it. This plan offers the following advantages:

- Exposes members and visitors alike to the whole biblical message, including the distinctive doctrines.
- Helps believers to establish their faith on a solid biblical foundation, avoiding apostasy.
- Helps each pastor prepare for and submit to the local church or district a preaching plan—quarterly, semiannually, or annually.
- Provides the opportunity for church leaders to present the entire biblical message within one calendar year.
- Allows members and visitors to know in advance the topics to be presented. This will encourage them to bring friends and family to Sabbath worship services.
- Develops and promotes a “culture of evangelism” and the rise of more pastors and lay evangelists.

- Is a highly flexible plan that can be adapted to churches of any size. It doesn't interfere with the plans of the higher organizations of the church and can be started on any Sabbath of the year and continue for long as needed.

- Can be used in a single church or simultaneously in districts with multiple churches since the pastor can assign the same sermon to all the elders.

- Is the most economical and effective method of evangelism.

- Helps many to decide for Jesus and the truths of the Bible. The direct result will be an increase in attendance every Sabbath and a greater number of baptisms throughout the year.

To support this concept, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference is developing a Christ-centered evangelistic series of sermons in PowerPoint and Keynote, fully editable in any language, with prophetic doctrinal topics professionally illustrated (www.gcevangelism.com).

“Evangelistic work, opening the Scriptures to others, warning men and women of what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God's servants.”¹

CONCLUSION

Evangelism and soul-winning puts you at the center of God's activities. As we near the end of time, God is preparing a final harvest from people around the world who have honest hearts. As we plan to reach our neighborhoods, towns, villages, and major metropolitan areas, God will bless our work. As we sow seeds, God will give us a harvest. What farmer would plant a crop and not expect a harvest? In the same way that farmers eagerly await a harvest, the soul-winner longs for a harvest. We should embrace God's promise: “. . . for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9).

The most glorious chapters of the book of Acts are soon to be written. The disciples did not have all the means available to us today, but one thing made the difference with them in the first century, and the same thing will make the difference for us today: to be baptized and possessed by the Holy Spirit. Very soon, the world will be illuminated by the glory of God (Rev. 18:1), and you and I are part of the fulfillment of this prophecy. 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Aug. 2, 1906.

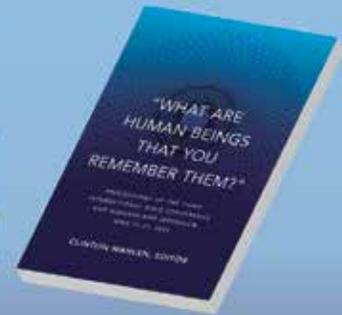
Robert Costa is the General Conference associate ministerial secretary for Evangelism and Church Growth.

“What Are Human Beings That You Remember Them?”

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- WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF DEATH AND HELL?
- ARE WE INDIVISIBLE OR IS THERE A SOUL THAT SURVIVES DEATH?

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This PA system powered all in one wireless battery with 20 watt amplifier multimedia that addresses an audience of up to 150 people and a wireless microphone in a small PA system package. Open the box and you're ready to talk to the rechargeable battery. The SW212 Mity-Vox can even be used outdoors with a protective case that is included. Product Dimensions: 9"W x 11.25"H x 6.5"D Product Weight: 7.5 lbs.



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LOVE AND KINDNESS

>PART 1

ELOQUENCE OF GOD'S LOVE

The most persuasive eloquence is the word that is spoken in love and sympathy. Such words will bring light to confused minds and hope to the discouraged, brightening the prospect before them. The time in which we live calls for vital, sanctified energy; for earnestness, zeal, and the tenderest sympathy and love; for words that will not increase misery, but will inspire faith and hope. We are homeward bound, seeking a better country, even a heavenly. Instead of speaking words which will rankle in the breasts of those that hear, shall we not speak of the love wherewith God hath loved us? Shall we not try to lighten the hearts of those around us by words of Christlike sympathy? Shall we not tell of the prospective rest in store for the people of God? "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."—RH Feb. 16, 1897.

BARRIERS OF PRIDE AND SELFISHNESS

The spirit of Jesus should pervade the soul of the worker; it is the pleasant, sympathetic words, the manifestation of disinterested love for their souls, that will break down the barriers of pride and selfishness, and show to unbelievers that we have the love of Christ.

DIVINE ENLIGHTENMENT AND WISDOM

Those who labor in word and doctrine have a great work before them to tear from the minds of those for whom they labor the fatal deceptions of Satan, and to impress them with the importance of aiming to reach God's great standard of righteousness. They should pray earnestly for divine enlightenment, and for wisdom to present the truth as it is in Jesus. Sympathy, tenderness, and love, woven into their discourses and manifested in their lives, would disarm opposition, weaken prejudice, and open the way to many hearts.

IMITATION OF CHRIST IN HIS LABORS

It is to be regretted that many do not realize that the manner in which Bible truth is presented has much to do with the impressions made upon minds, and with the Christian character afterward developed by those who receive the truth. Instead of imitating Christ in His manner of labor, many are severe, critical, and dictatorial. They repulse instead of winning souls. Such will never know how many weak ones their harsh words have wounded and discouraged.

TOO MANY SERMONS

The sermons should come, not from a mechanical heart, but from a heart that is filled with the love of God, and is

subdued and softened by His grace; that when you speak the angels of God are enlisted on your side, and Christ is on your side, and it is Christ that makes the impression. Now these things have been neglected at our camp meetings. We have lost two-thirds of all that the camp meetings were designed to accomplish. The idea seems to be woven into the minds of some that all they have to do is to sermonize, sermonize. While sermons are good in their place, there is sermon after sermon given to the people that they cannot retain in their minds—it is an impossibility for them to do it—and they are just wearied out with sermons.

MINISTERS SHOD WITH GOSPEL SHOES

Let every minister learn to wear the gospel shoes. He who is shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace will walk as Christ walked. He will be able to speak right words, and to speak them in love. He will not try to drive home God's message of truth. He will deal tenderly with every heart, realizing that the Spirit will impress the truth on those who are susceptible to divine impressions. Never will he be vehement in his manner. Every word spoken will have a softening, subduing influence. . . .

In speaking words of reproof, let us put all the Christlike tenderness and love possible into the voice. The higher a minister's position, the more circumspect should he be in word and act.

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 207-209 by Ellen G. White.



PREACHING STYLES:

THE BIOGRAPHICAL SERMON - PART 1

A note from the editor:

Preaching the Word of God is one of the greatest privileges entrusted to humanity. It is also one of the greatest responsibilities for pastors and elders. Choosing a preaching style is an essential aspect of sermon preparation. In this series, Dr. Rex D. Edwards presents and analyzes three types of sermons: the biographical sermon, the textual sermon, and the topical sermon.

In this issue, the author deals with the biographical sermon. A biography is a person's life story; therefore, this method involves studying the lives of the many characters we encounter in the Bible. Each biography recorded in the Bible holds important significance for us. Every life has something to teach us. I hope you enjoy this series!

God is the great narrator!

Once upon a time, there was Adam and Eve and a serpent with a glittering apple—and they did not live happily ever after. Once upon a time, there was Noah; the Lord God gave him a hammer and a cubic stick and said, “Go, and build an ark.” Once upon a time, there was Nimrod and Methuselah and Abraham and Ur. Once upon a time, there was the wily Delilah and the macho Samson. Once upon a time, there was Rahab of Jericho, and Jonah blubbering in the whale’s maw. Once upon a time, there was Herod and Zacchaeus. Once upon a time, there was Lazarus, who couldn’t stay dead in the presence of Jesus.

Why do these narratives enthrall us? It’s because the biblical stories are so germane to our own life narrative. Like these people, we need to know God. We want to relate to Him. This is the value of the biographical sermon.

DEFINITION

The biographical sermon pattern is concerned primarily with the written record or the events of a person’s life. It deals with what the person did—his or her life as it unfolded. It considers and relates the historic facts. Biographical sermons reveal people’s strengths and weaknesses, show how they met life’s situations, and thus reflect a working basis for life in general.

METHODOLOGY

The first step in preparing a biographical sermon is to familiarize yourself with all the details of the person’s life and to have a clear perspective of that person’s whole life. For instance, the Gospels refer to Nicodemus three times. Each instance shows him in a different light and reveals how he became a follower of Christ. As we examine these three references, the following outline emerges:

1. Nicodemus, the secret inquirer (John 3:1-21).
2. Nicodemus, the timid advocate (John 7:50-52).
3. Nicodemus, the open confessor (John 19:39-42).

Always remember that in a single sermon, you cannot include all the details of a person’s life, especially when there is a lot of material.

The second step is to create an outline. The main facts or events of the person’s life will furnish the chief divisions, with suitable details incorporated under these points which act as subdivisions. For example, the life of Moses covers three 40-year periods:

- I. The period of adoption in Egypt (Ex. 2:1-15)
 - A. A Hebrew birth.
 - B. An Egyptian adoption.
 - C. Foundational training.
- II. The period of preparation in the wilderness (Ex. 2:16-25)
 - A. His marriage.
 - B. His occupation.
 - C. His obscurity .
- III. The period of leadership over Israel (Ex. 3–Deut. 24)
 - A. The faithful leader.
 - B. The great prophet.
 - C. The first scriptural writer.

A word of caution: Do not degrade the sermon into a mere recital of biographical details. Use the facts as the basis for practical lessons that can impact the lives of your listeners. Have a purpose in mind and arrange the entire sermon with reference to its persuasive power. For instance, the above outline on Moses has a twofold purpose: (1) to show that, whatever the circumstances, we can all make our lives count for God, and (2) to show how a life becomes great and useful in proportion to its dedication to God.

Because the biographical pattern includes much material data, the content of the sermon should be practical. Significant lessons can be drawn from biblical biographies. Iliion T. Jones comments, “Characters of the Bible are a personal source of sermons. Repeatedly one will see in the man and woman of the Bible the virtue and vices, the personality problems, the emotional difficulties, and the possibilities for good and for evil circumstances of men and women in their own community.”¹

To illustrate, Jones suggests two sermon forms. In the first form, the first part of the sermon “tells the story of the character’s life” (which can be arranged in chronological order) and the second part of the sermon “draws the lessons.” He provides the story of Joseph as an example of this first form:

- I. The story of Joseph’s life
 - A. His early life.
 - B. His conflict with his brothers.

- C. His rise to power in Egypt.
- D. His reconciliation with his brothers.
- E. His last days.

II. Lessons from Joseph's life

- A. A man with a feeling of destiny.
- B. A man undaunted by misfortune.
- C. A man with a mystical sense of right and wrong.
- D. A man too big to hold a grudge.
- E. A man with a staunch belief in the providence of God.

Note that the lessons correspond to the five stages of his life.

By contrast, in the second form, each lesson constitutes the main point of the sermon, "utilizing the particular facts about his life that substantiate it; then the lesson would be drawn and enforced before passing on to the next point."² Jones prefers the first form because the whole story can be placed before the hearers without being interrupted each time to enforce the lesson. Now, following the first form, develop a biographical sermon utilizing the suggested outline about the story of Zacchaeus as recorded in Luke 19:1-10:

I. The story of Zacchaeus

- A. Zacchaeus climbing (verses 1-4).
- B. Zacchaeus entertaining (verses 5-7).
- C. Zacchaeus restoring (verse 8).
- D. Zacchaeus redeeming (verses 9, 10).

II. Lessons from Zacchaeus' life

- A. You can climb, but you are never beyond God's reach.
- B. You can entertain, but you cannot escape conviction.
- C. You can repent, but you cannot avoid restitution.
- D. No matter what you have done, you can be saved.

CONCLUSION

Present the person as the Bible describes him or her. Do not over-praise or over-criticize. Be true to the Bible record. Applications should connect the biography with the modern world.

Biographical preaching is a grand bridge with one pier in the distant holy "back then" and the other in the not-so-sacred "now." Bible stories interact with our own story. This type of preaching calls out the similarities of age-locked peoples who are not so different from us after all. But stories must not just interact; they must motivate us to produce. Stories are the life-changers. The product is conversion. They serve to confront, and they change our lives. They motivate us to holiness, to prayer, and to a continuing love affair with scripture. ED

Rex D. Edwards is a former vice president for religious studies at Griggs University.

¹ Ilion T. Jones, *Principles and Practice of Preaching: A Comprehensive Study of the Art of Sermon Construction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 226.

² *Ibid.*, 111, 112.

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THE STRONGEST OF WEAK MEN

Judges 14, 16, KJV

God wanted a man, and, by that unvarying law of supply and demand, a man must be forthcoming.

A man was needed, once upon a time, to contribute toward the solution for the problem of human rights; Stephen Langton appeared with the Magna Carta in hand. A man was needed again to vindicate the freedom of individual conscience; out of the monastery of Wittenberg came Martin Luther, unbinding his rosary and preparing to nail the thunderbolts of the Reformation to the chapel door. A man was needed to break the chains of Jewish isolationism and bring the gospel to the Gentile world; out of a lightning encounter on the Damascus Road emerged Paul, a persecutor who became a proclaimer of the “good news” available to all people of all nations. So, times and men come together by divine ordinance. The clock strikes, and someone answers, “Here am I!”

The children of Israel had taken possession of the Land of Promise. Sadly, the settling was quickly followed by apostasy. So now the glory had departed from Israel. On every hand were altar fires in honor of Baal. Up from the southern plains came the Philistines in their war chariots, devastating the fields and plundering the villages. The banners of God’s people were trailed in the dust. The Ark of the Covenant had been carried away into exile. Was there no man to save? If man’s extremity is God’s opportunity, surely the hour had come. Where was the man?

In the house of Manoah at Zorah, just then, a child was born of whom it was said, “He shall begin to deliver Israel of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg. 13:7). He was the child of prophecy. His name, Samson, meant “sunshine” and intimated a joyous parental welcome, a divine benediction, and a glorious outlook. If we follow Samson through the years, we shall learn the lessons of power: its secret, its loss, and its recovery.

I. THE SECRET OF POWER (JUDG. 14; 15)

Samson’s mission had been set forth in the annunciation of his birth; to wit, he should “begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines.” This was “the reason of his life.” There is no life without a reason, though many, failing to discover this, live and die un-

reasonably. Our power is measured by our loyalty to the divine purpose concerning us.

This lad was set apart from his birth as a Nazarite. The word means “separated.” The Nazarites were persons who regarded themselves as divinely called to special tasks and who shaped their lives accordingly. They were pledged to put down every personal feeling and ambition in the interest of their vow. The badge of this austere brotherhood was their unshorn hair, which hung over their shoulders in seven braided locks.

Samson’s physical strength was a supernatural gift for a definite end. His sturdy limbs, broad shoulders, and muscles like twisted cords were the special equipment for his appointed work. In his youth, he encountered a lion and tore its jaws asunder as if it had been a baby goat. And this was just a preview of larger deeds of prowess later on, as when he lifted the gates of Gaza from their hinges and carried them away in grim derision to a neighboring hilltop, laughing back, “See how your bolts and bars restrain me!” Later, when he met the enemy at Lehi, he singlehandedly smote them hip and thigh, rejoicing over the slaughter.

But his endowment was more than physical, as it is written that “the Spirit of the Lord strove with him” (Judg. 15:14). What does that mean? Why does God strive with any of us except to persuade us to address Him to our allotted task? Samson’s physical equipment was practically useless save as it should be used in fulfillment of his vow. His unshorn locks were a visible reminder of his remembered duty. Let him forget, and he would be as weak as other men.

Why are we living? Is it merely to eat and drink? Or is our life related in some way to God’s great plan? If we ignore the constraints of the Holy Spirit and lose sight of God’s plan for our lives, we will drift away from God and lose our power, just as Samson did.

II. THE LOSS OF POWER (JUDG. 16:1-20)

The fall of a soul into moral debility is usually a process of gradual decline. How does it happen? Ellen G. White portrays the process graphically: “A long preparatory process, unknown to the world, goes on in the heart before the Christian commits open sin.

The mind does not come down at once from purity and holiness to depravity, corruption, and crime.”¹

In Samson’s case, it began with a certain journey down to Timnath. He had seen there a woman of the daughters of the Philistines and was captivated by her fair face. His temptations came in at eye-gate. In vain did his parents remonstrate, “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren?” It was enough for Samson that he desired her. “Get her for me,” he cried. “She pleaseth me!”

Note the steps Samson took which led to his spiritual decline:

A. *The beginning of the descent from strength to weakness is in self-will.* The road to Timnath leads away from consecration, away from power, away from God. Once and again the strong man made that journey, always a little further from the serious business of his life. We have been warned that “there is no promise to those who are bent on self-pleasing.”²

B. *The snare of distractions from our mission.* The end of self-will is surrender. Our safety is in hewing the line. And yet, here we are, absorbed in the latest fashions and celebrity sightings, charmed by the music on iTunes, engrossed in our favorite TV shows, or maybe mingling with the self-seeking crowd and losing ourselves in sordid worldly cares. Meanwhile, what of the purpose of life and what of our message? The world is waiting in darkness, waiting for a message of hope. Ellen White asks, “Why are we so indifferent, so selfish, so engrossed to temporal interests. . . . Men and women are ready to do anything to indulge self, and how little are they willing to do for Jesus, and for their fellow men who are perishing for the want of the truth.”³

The story of Samson’s fall is full of warning. He laid his head in the lap of the temptress and rose up shorn of his manly strength. Not all at once, however. Read about his loss of power in verses 6-20. Observe how he played with the mystic symbol of his calling.

There is the sorrow of it: The most insidious diseases are those that give no pain. Their victims, in the midst of business or pleasure, swoon and are gone. This brings us to the last step that brought Samson down.

C. *The snare of a stifled conscience.* A

sin indulged creeps like an ambushing assassin, nearer and nearer to the center of life. Ellen White observes that, like Samson, “many have excellent gifts, good ability, splendid qualifications; but one defect, one secret sin indulged, will prove to the character what the worm-eaten plank does to a ship—utter disaster and ruin.”⁴ Would to God that some of us would look backward and see how one small thing led to a loss of influence and prevented God’s purpose for our lives from being realized!

In Moscow, inside the Kremlin, is the world’s largest bell. It is 18 feet high and weighs more than 200 tons. But its toll has never been heard. The czar who had it built never heard it ring. During its casting, as the hot metal was pouring into its mold, a fire broke out in the factory. In the process of extinguishing the fire, a small amount of water entered the mold. When the mold was removed, the metal was cracked, and the bell was ruined forever. One trickle of water was all it took to silence the bell’s powerful voice that was meant to sing. I ask you, Has the fine edge of our moral sense worn off? Is our conscience, once as sensitive as the palm of a child’s hand, now seared as with a hot iron? These are ominous signs of spiritual declension. We started out at the beginning of our Christian life with a determination to be strong, but when we play with sin, we become weak like other men.

III. THE RECOVERY OF POWER (JUDG. 16:21-31)

Blest be the name of God, all is not lost! The man who has forgotten his vow, ignored his duty, and denied his Lord shall yet have an opportunity of grace. “Return unto me, saith the Lord, and I will have mercy upon thee” (Mal. 3:7).

In the prison house of Gaza sits the champion of Israel, a captive, grinding like a woman at the mill. His eyes are gone. He sits in open view so that people may make sport of him. The fair women of Philistia pass by and deride him, but he cannot see them. Temptation enters no more at eye-gate. In his enforced solitude, he remembers.

But this is not the end of the story. There is still hope for this man who so carelessly abused his gifts and compromised his calling. Note three steps in Samson’s recovery of power:

A. *Remembrance and repentance.* He recalls the prophecy of his birth. “He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.” He bemoans his wasted strength, his

squandered privilege. He is alone in the surging crowd, alone with God. He repents, bitterly repents. His consecration vow is before his blind eyes in letters of fire. O, that he might prove himself a Nazarite again before he dies! But there is more to repentance than sorrow for sin. It is always accompanied by:

B. *A renewal of loyalty.* His enemies have not perceived that his locks are growing. They have grown with the renewal of his vow. His affliction is not in vain; he remembers the riddle he once gave to his enemies: “Out of the eater has come forth meat, and out of the strong is come forth sweetness.” Thus, in the secret place of penitent sorrow, he renews his fealty to God. But more than loyalty, there is:

C. *A revival of consecration.* The closing scene is pathetic beyond words. The festival of Dagon is at hand. The Philistines are gathering to offer a great sacrifice to their god. The blind giant of Israel is brought into the temple so that the assembling multitude may behold him. He bears their mockery in silence; the Spirit of God is again striving with him. His heart is no longer with the past; in this fierce hour, he renews his consecration. He will yet, with God’s help, “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.” He hears the footfall and murmur of thousands gathering in the temple. The galleries are full; his hour of triumph has come. He stretches forth his hands, feeling for the great pillars. The muscles of his iron frame are tense and swollen. He lifts his scarred face with its sightless sockets toward heaven. His lips move; he makes his last prayer, “O God, avenge me!” There is a trembling of the pillars, a momentary hush, then cries of the fear-stricken and the dying as with an explosive crash, the temple falls, burying in its ruins the blind captive and his persecutors. And in the silence of that ruin forevermore may be heard a voice, saying, “Return from thy backslidings, O Israel, and I will restore thee! Return and I will return unto thee” (Hos. 14:4).

CONCLUSION

In closing, turn to Hebrews 11 and see the name of Samson recorded in the inspired roll-call of those heroes who “by faith were made strong out of weakness.” By this, we are given to understand that faith is the measure of power. And what is faith but the vital touch of a soul with God?

It is faith that holds us fast to duty, brings us back from wandering, and makes all things possible for us. We are strong only when we are weak, because then the power of God rests upon us.

The beginning of power is when we find our mission, when, like Saul of Tarsus, we look into the face of Jesus and ask, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The loss of power occurs when we turn aside from the path of duty to go down to Timnath. He who walks by faith will shun that road. There is a world of wisdom in the poet’s words:

“An’ O be sure to fear the Lord always, / An’ mind your duty duly morn an’ night! / Lest in temptation’s path ye gang astray, / Implore His counsel an’ assisting might. / They never seek in vain who seek the Lord aright.”

Remember, no life is futile whose strength is spent in pursuance of a divine call.

FOR REFLECTION

“God’s providential care had been over Samson, that he might be prepared to accomplish the work which he was called to do. At the very outset of life he was surrounded with favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. But under the influence of wicked associates he let go that hold upon God which is man’s only safeguard, and he was swept away by the tide of evil. Those who in the way of duty are brought into trial may be sure that God will preserve them; but if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall sooner or later.” (*The Adventist Home*, 460)

¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 459.

² ———, *Prophets and Kings*, 363.

³ ———, *Christian Service*, 51.

⁴ ———, *Testimonies to the Church*, 4:90.

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Sermon Notes:

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF DANIEL

Daniel 1, NKJV

Daniel's life is an example of how we can live a life of integrity in a culture that is trying to squeeze us into its mold. These actions are not commanded; they are commended. Our task is to take the principles that Daniel lived and apply them to our own modern experiences. So let's get started in Daniel 1:1, 2 with some historical background.

Daniel opens with two succinct statements about the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The first describes the event in terms of secular history: "Nebuchadnezzar . . . came to Jerusalem and besieged it." The second is in terms of biblical theology: "And the Lord God gave Jehoiakim . . . into his hands."

Nebuchadnezzar was not content with controlling the leading cities of these lands. He also desired to control the thoughts and hearts of the people in these cities. Rather than forcing the ruling leaders to change, Nebuchadnezzar moved the best and brightest young people of the land to his palace. In so doing, he was taking a long-term view of his conquest. He knew that overcoming people by military force was not enough. If they continued to resist him, more and more of his resources would be demanded. He was not the last leader to realize that capturing the hearts and minds of the young people would eventually capture these nations!

I. DANIEL'S EXPERIENCE

The course of study is described in Daniel 1:3-7:

A. Isolation. These young men were isolated from the influences that would mold their thinking and character in the ways of the Lord. They were separated from the regular public worship of God, from the teaching of the Word of God, and from the fellowship and wisdom of God's people.

B. Indoctrination. Notice the emphasis on learning "the language and literature of the Babylonians." This seems harmless, and there is nothing inherently wrong with learning foreign literature or languages. But, in this case, the aim was not merely academic: Nebuchadnezzar wanted to retrain their minds to think as Babylonians rather than as Israelites. Within the language and literature of a culture are the seeds of its worldview.

C. Compromise. Culture does not scream at us to change. It entices us with those things to which our undisciplined appetites and desires are drawn. The food allotment was one such seduction. It was not Taco Bell but filet mignon. It was connecting the indoctrination with a different life-

style, one that promised a lot more than it could deliver.

D. Confusion. The fourth element in the process of weaning these young men from the truth was the changing of their names. These names would be used day after day in normal speech and would remind these young people of the direction in which they were headed.

The principle is simple: The way we think—about God, ourselves, others, and the world—determines how we live. If Nebuchadnezzar could get these young men to think like Babylonians, they would begin to live like Babylonians. The reverse was also true: The less they thought of themselves as the Lord's people and as His servants, the less they would live like one of them.

Few of us live in the kind of totalitarian state into which Daniel was brought. Yet we are still confronted by this strategy.

II. THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

So how did Daniel and his friends handle this cultural crunch? And how can we handle our own conflicts with our culture?

A. Develop firm convictions and resolutions (Dan. 1:8a). Apparently some of the food Daniel was to consume had been declared unclean under Jewish law. The law forbade eating the meat of animals that had been sacrificed to pagan deities. According to the culture of that day, "to share a meal was to commit oneself to friendship."

For a child of God, some things cannot be negotiated or compromised. From the outset, Daniel refused the delicacies of the court. In many ways, his usefulness in the kingdom of God throughout the rest of the book depended on this single decision. Daniel did not wait until he was in a position of strength; right from the beginning, he resolved to walk in the ways of God. Here's an important question that each person must ask himself or herself: "What are the non-negotiable aspects of my life?"

B. Determine a wise approach to the immediate dilemma (Dan. 1:9b-10). Daniel didn't stage a protest or participate in a hunger strike. Once he had developed his convictions, he sought permission to go on a different course. Notice that he also gave a reason: "that he might not defile himself." Conviction and resolve without action become mere stubbornness. Daniel was able to tell this polytheistic official the basis for his monotheistic beliefs! He acted with conviction but with respect for authority—even ungodly authority. Notice it was not Daniel's convictions or beliefs that caused

the initial refusal; it was the anxieties of this official.

C. Refuse to retreat at the first sign of resistance (Dan. 1:11-16). The self-serving commander of the officials was not moved by Daniel's request. But rather than responding with contempt, rebellion, or even resignation, Daniel stayed focused on his commitment with a creative and reasonable alternative. Daniel even allowed this overseer to be the judge of the outcome of this alternative. This was a humble confidence.

D. Rely on divine assistance (Dan. 1:17). There's that phrase to be pondered: "God gave them . . ." Passing this test allowed Daniel to continue to live in harmony with his convictions. His obedience brought another benefit: God allowed him to have knowledge and wisdom about every aspect of that culture—without being swallowed up by it!

E. Honor God with your life over the long haul (Dan. 1:18-21). This was not a one-time event. Daniel didn't think he had proved his point and so was free to live any old way. Let's look at three critical outcomes.

First, in verse 19, Daniel and his friends were seen as unique. They weren't odd or weird or even shunned. Living according to their convictions made them a source of conversation.

Second, in verse 20, they were seen as indispensable. Daniel and his friends had been trained in all the learning and arts of this culture. Yet, it was their distinctiveness that brought them to this level of influence.

Third, according to verse 21, they lived like this for more than 60 years! They endured. Their influence in this pagan government had a profound effect for years to come.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate victory in this cultural crunch will not be on some national or international stage; it will come one person at a time. As you develop rock-solid, non-negotiable biblical convictions, as you live out those convictions, you will never lack an opportunity to influence the surrounding culture for good.

We have no example in Scripture of a government becoming godly and changing the world, but today we have many examples of small-business owners, teachers, parents, retired people, couples, single adults, and students changing forever how their friends and family look at life.

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JONAH

Jonah is a disturbing book because, in its pages, we are brought face-to-face with some of our own personal struggles. In this sermon, we'll go behind the obvious, outward actions, and look at the deep inner struggles all of us deal with in our relationship with God.

The book of Jonah is different from other prophetic books because, instead of centering on a prophecy, it tells the story of the prophet. This book is different because it has a glaring oxymoron—a Hebrew prophet going to a Gentile city, Israel's first called and commissioned “foreign missionary.” This book is different because of its view of God; like the thrust of the New Testament, Jonah shows the theme of God's grace and compassion.

This book is written in a form called “historical narrative.” The book tells of the change God can make in both an unbelieving nation and a reluctant servant.

When we are inclined to run from God, let's remember the following truths:

I. FLIGHT IS STIMULATED BY SHIFTS IN OUR PERSPECTIVE (JONAH 1:1-3)

It doesn't matter the degree to which we run—hiding our head or hiding our presence—our perspective gets shifted by two gigantic forces: The first is emotional, and the second is theological in nature.

When we allow our emotions to drive us and decide for us, we lose theological perspective. Jonah apparently understood and appreciated God's wrath against Assyria; however, he was not nearly so compassionate.

Why did Jonah disobey God? The answer is in Jonah 4:2. Although God was sending him to pronounce words of doom, Jonah knew what kind of God he served. This compassionate God would spare these people if they repented. If that happened, Jonah believed he would look like a fool, so he rebelled.

II. GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU MEANS HE WILL COME AND GET YOU (JONAH 1:4-5)

Jonah deliberately ignored the repeated responses of God (verse 1/initial call; verse 4/repeated storm; verse 6/captain's response; verse 7/pagan ritual; verse 8/pagan rebuke). It was gracious of God to seek out His disobedient servant and prevent him from remaining long in sin (verse 4).

God didn't blast Jonah with divine judgment. He allowed Jonah to face the consequences of

his own choices while relentlessly pursuing him. God was like a shepherd after his sheep or a father waiting for his prodigal child (Luke 15).

When we ignore God, our ability to hear grows dull, and when that happens, it is difficult for us to respond correctly. We become insensitive to God's work (verse 5).

III. THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR BROKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (JONAH 1:6, 7)

Because Jonah avoided responsibility, others had to deal with the consequences of his broken relationship with God (verse 5). For the Phoenician sailors, their so-called gods had created order by defeating the powers of chaos, but this power of chaos had been tamed, not abolished, and so remained a constant threat. The embodiment of these lawless and chaotic forces was the sea, which men could not control or tame. These sailors recognized a primitive “cause-and-effect” relationship between what was happening and their own actions. Each sailor cried to his own god. In ancient cultures, the pantheon of gods was large, and each man had his favorite. The captain's response was consistent with the philosophy that the amount of prayer was important. In a polytheistic system, one could seldom be sure which god had been displeased, so all had to be appeased.

The truth is that our actions—any actions—affect those around us.

IV. YOU ARE CONFRONTED BY THE INCONSISTENCIES IN YOUR LIFE (JONAH 1:8-10)

The flood of questions came from the sailors' view of their gods. Their gods were basically non-moral, so their gods' anger might be directed against one who had accidentally or unknowingly sinned against them. The anger could also rage against someone to whom the gods had taken a general dislike on a whim.

These sailors chastised Jonah because they knew he was fleeing from God. The sailors asked, “What have you done?” Even these pagans knew that Jonah had run from God, not God from Jonah. Did God provoke you to run? Did He deal harshly and unkindly with you? Have you discovered Him no longer worthy of your trust? Was He unfaithful to His promise?

Jonah's proper response would have been confession. The problem belongs to Jonah, not

to God. This happens when we run away from God. Even those who have little knowledge of or interest in spiritual things know when our talk doesn't match our actions.

V. INEFFECTIVE WAYS TO AVOID DEALING WITH THE MAIN ISSUE (JONAH 1:11-16)

Jonah's complacency led to an atrophy of his spiritual discernment (verses 5a, 8, 11). Jonah didn't know what to do or which way to turn. Jonah confused the real issue (God's relationship with him) with a non-issue (the storm and its effect). Jonah tried to deal with this by means of a “religious method” (verse 12); casting into the sea was Jonah's idea, not the sailors, and was a “human method” (verse 13).

The only solution is to step back onto the “paths of righteousness” (Ps. 23:3). This is the only path where God will lead you. He will not lead you if you insist on following the paths of sin. At this point, you cannot barter with God. You can't say that you'll clean up some little area so that He will not confront the main issue. He insists that you confront the issues for His glory and for your benefit.

VI. IT IS ALWAYS FRUSTRATING WHEN WE RUN AWAY FROM GOD

Jonah had to pay for his ticket to get on the boat. It always costs us when we're separated from God. When you run from God, the devil is always going to take you farther than you want to go, make you stay longer than you want to stay, and make you pay more than you want to pay.

Jonah went down to the docks alone. He bought his ticket alone. He boarded the ship alone, and then he faced this storm all alone.

So let me ask you, how has running away from God worked for you? Has it produced the peace, joy, and hope that God has promised His people or has it continued to make life anxious and ever-churning?

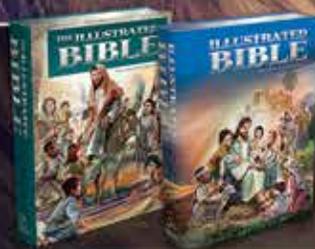
CONCLUSION

I've got good news for you today, news you can use. If you've finally realized that the anxiety of your life has come about because you chose to take the ship to Tarsus, you don't have to wait for a storm to come up. You certainly don't have to wait around for a big fish.



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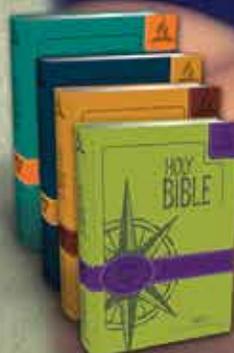
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A STEWARD'S WALK OF FAITH

Years ago I baptized a retired fighter pilot. His family faithfully attended and participated in church activities. But he thought no one would know that he secretly continued to smoke tobacco. A short time after he was baptized, his daughter started first grade. As he walked her to the school bus on the first day of school, she looked up at him and said, "Daddy, I'm sure glad you don't smoke anymore."

"Pastor," he later told me, with a serious look on his face, "I was holding a pack of cigarettes in my pocket to smoke one on the way home, but the voice of God spoke to me through my little girl." He relaxed and chuckled like he always did. "I threw them away and told God out loud, 'I will never smoke again.'" Years later that little girl, all grown up, introduced herself to me after church. I asked if she remembered what she said to her father that day. She smiled and said, "Yes, Pastor, and my dad never did smoke again."

My friend learned on his daughter's first day of school that Christ was the Keeper of his heart and would work in an unexpected way to help him in his journey of faith as a new Seventh-day Adventist. In the coming months he started sharing his story at stop smoking clinics to encourage others to stop smoking. As time went by, I saw his character of generosity. One day he came to me and said, "Pastor, I want to buy an organ for the church." When the congregation bought the adjacent vacant lot to build a larger church, he enthusiastically gave, taking the lead, so the project could become a reality.

A steward's walk of faith is never disconnected from Christ, the Keeper of our hearts. During the journey we develop and nurture our character. We manage what has

been assigned and entrusted to us, and our stewardship is a reflection of God's character. This is not done by human willpower or accomplished in a vacuum. It involves understanding the relationship between the Christ of the sanctuary and the steward. Simply say, "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand" (Ps. 121:5, NKJV). Christ keeps us "as the apple of" His eye, hides us "under the shadow" of His wings (Ps. 17:8), and "will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Is. 26:3, NKJV).

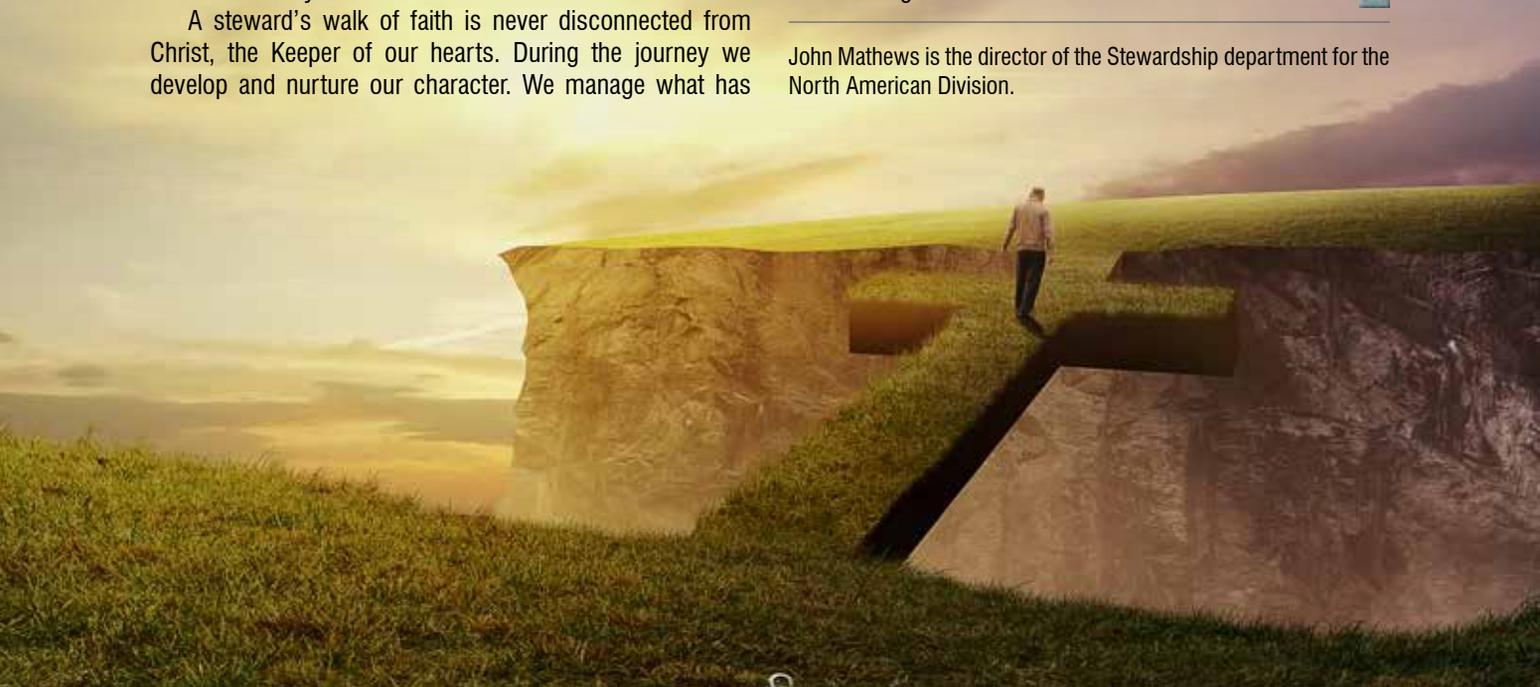
This all takes place as we live out the principles of Scripture, are obedient to God's directives, and manage the tangible and intangible possessions in our daily lives. In 1914 Ellen White said to Clarence Crisler, "I have had a great deal to contend with, but I thank the Lord with heart and soul and voice. I will praise Him, He is my keeper and my conqueror" (Arthur L. White, *The Later Elmshaven Years 1905–1915*, vol. 6, p. 409).

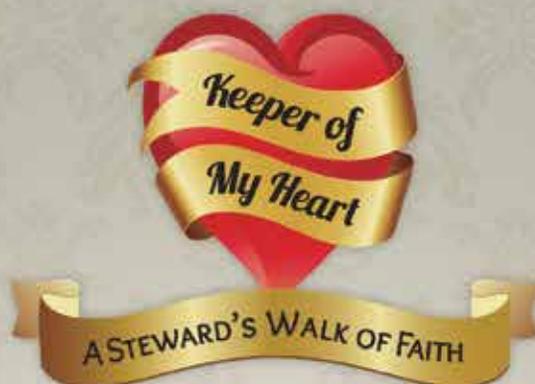
Stewardship is about regularly experiencing practical sanctification—recognizing how all the practical aspects of our daily lives are affected by our salvation in Christ. Being God's steward means accepting no failure in the Christian life. We understand what we are to do and succeed just as Christ did when He came to earth to save us.

Sometimes fear may grip our hearts when we look ahead to a walk of faith. How can we ever be successful stewards? Relief comes from the Keeper of our hearts. We can rest in Him as He guides our steward's walk of faith.

ED

John Mathews is the director of the Stewardship department for the North American Division.





John Mathews and Joelle Reuer are the hosts of *Keeper of My Heart*, a new resource from the North American Division, Stewardship Ministries. This interactive DVD is a great tool for teaching faithful Stewardship principles. In each of the six sessions, Adventist pioneers reenact responses to modern-day situations.

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Every congregation needs to learn about, and be reminded of, how vital stewardship is. Use this excellent teaching resource for a mid-week service, a special Sabbath School class, or an interactive Sabbath sermon. Let us not forget how God has led us in the past, and how He will continue to lead us in the future.

To view a sample of this DVD, visit www.iGive.SDA.org. To place an order, contact AdventSource.org or call 402.486.8800. Price \$19.95, plus shipping and handling.



ELDERS AND THE GENERATIONAL RELAY



Everyone in the congregation was waiting with great expectation. Sabbath School was over, and before the divine worship service began, the church was going to find out who would lead the leadership responsibilities during the upcoming year. As the nominating committee clerk stood facing the congregation, she began reading the list of proposed new officers, which started with the names of the elders. As the first five elders' names were read, the clerk surprised the entire church by reading the last nominated elder's name. A young adult had been selected to be part of the elders' circle.

Just as man stepping on the moon was a major event in history, having a young-adult elder was a huge accomplishment. After serving the church for many years as a youth leader and with the congregation asking for a generational relay in its senior leadership, I had been elected to serve as an elder despite my young age in comparison to the other five persons.

Nevertheless, as my first year of duty came to an end, I felt frustrated and disappointed. I had so many plans and innovative ideas to enhance our worship service, to improve our congregation's unity, and to carry the gospel. After my designation, I prayed and looked forward to inspiring my church as I had done with over 50 young people in past years. Instead, I felt awkward, as if I didn't fit in the elders' group. They were not just elders; they were older. They each had over 40 years of church service. When they spoke, they always referred to me as "the young elder," as if they were juniors in college and I was a freshman.

The main reason why so many churches today struggle and fail at establishing a generational relay in their leadership is because senior elders are unconsciously closed to the idea of letting go. Our church has created a group of so-called young adults who already study the adults' lesson; most are married, own a house, and have kids. They own successful businesses or have prominent professional careers in which they are encouraged to take risks, innovate, and make decisions that will positively impact the business. Despite being young in age, they still manage to have deep relationships with God through constant study and prayer.

But in spite of their grown-up characteristics, despite being accomplished adults, many are still viewed as young, which, in most cases, seems to come with an attached and incorrect

notion of being immature, inexperienced, and even spiritually lukewarm. Older elders will not stop looking at young adults as such until they do the following:

1. *Recognize that God chooses young people to lead.* He did it with Joshua. He did it with Joseph, Solomon, and Daniel. And He did it with Jesus, who, by our definition of young adult—ages 19-35—fits perfectly well. While we tend to limit our judgment to external appearance, qualities, and traits, Christ looks at the bigger picture. When He sees the capacity and potential in a young person to lead, elders need to embrace the opportunity, too.

2. *Leverage the new resource.* When Josiah inherited the kingdom of Judah, he was only eight years old. Through strict faithfulness and obedience to God's Word, he led—at age 16!—the nation into an amazing period of reformation (2 Chron. 34:3-7). Younger people bring new ideas that can always benefit the church growth and its purpose while staying connected to God, the main source of wisdom.

3. *The more young people you have in your congregation, the more a younger elder can contribute.* No matter how great the older elders are, the younger generation and millennial group of your church will better identify themselves with someone who is closer to their reality and speaks their language. They need someone who understands their way of thinking and can inspire them to service and daily surrender.

More than a hindrance, a young adult on your team of elders can be a great strategy as you make proper use of their energy and desire to serve God. Choose someone who can be a mentor for younger leaders, who can give them constant feedback and empower them to serve the church with the same love and humbleness as Jesus did.

Having senior and younger elders on the same team is the perfect combination of experience and innovation that, through the Holy Spirit, will lead your congregation into the heavenly kingdom.

EQ

Johann Dedier is an elder in the country of Panama. He is the author of the book *Fuerte y Valiente* and is a writer and editor for the CQ Lesson Study.

GLOBAL HEALTH ISSUES: CONTAGION OF VIOLENCE AND YOUR HEALTH

Every new year many stop to ponder a new beginning in life. This effort often includes resolutions to improve one's health and wellbeing, but often the focus is self-centered and may exclude resolutions that could impact the lives of family members, the community or the world. I would like to challenge each reader to consider how we may impact not only our own health, but also the wellbeing of those around us—near or far.

Recently, the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO), have renewed their commitment to improve the health of communities, countries, and the world by identifying 17 new health-related goals for the next 15 years, calling them *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG).¹

Many of these goals refer to key global health issues that, as elders and ministry leaders around the world, we should not only be aware of but help to achieve. If we understand Christ's methods we will see the importance of learning about people's needs but being relevant in our efforts to meet these needs. As it turns out, many of the SDG's impact each of us, but also our neighbors and communities.

In the next "Healthy Tips" we will discuss a few of these issues. Let's begin with SDG 16:

This goal aims to: "*Promote peaceful and inclusive societies. . . , provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*" One of two strategies is to: "*End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and the torture of children.*"²

Evidence shows that our relationships have much more to do with our health than we previously thought. We know now that while supportive social connections have a powerful influence on how long and how well we live, unhealthy relationships have the opposite effect. Overtime exposure to physical, sexual, or emotional violence, or the stress related to abuse is linked to many diseases.

In fact, violence in all its forms (domestic violence, youth violence, gender-based violence, elder abuse) has been linked to poor health and higher global mortality. The World Health Organization (WHO) notes the contagion of violence spreads much like a disease. For instance, a study² funded by WHO showed that at least 1 in 7 homicides globally and more than 1 in 3 female homicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner. In addition, we know that intimate partner violence (IPV) is associated with depressive symptoms in both men and women and also with suicide attempts in women.³

Child abuse is another factor. In a study conducted among Adventists in North America,⁴ those with exposure to child abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, neglect or witnesses parental abuse) had worse physical and mental health when compared with people who were never abused as a child—even when their education, income, levels of exercise and intake of fruits and vegetables were controlled for. More disconcerting yet was that the prevalence of types of child abuse among Adventists were higher than compared with rates among the general US population.⁴

This reality may be shocking to some, but if you or someone you know have been a survivor of abuse or violence understand how easy it is to keep our heads in the sand. The good news is that there is something each of us can do to change this picture. The church is renewing its commitment on raising awareness, providing resources, but also encouraging leaders and members to be part of the solution. The global *End It Now*⁵ initiative has expanded to include all forms of abuse—including child abuse, elder abuse—among both men and women.

I pray each of us will thoughtfully consider how we can make a difference in this area. We may start in our own families, then our church, work or school, and perhaps expand our influence further into the community.

In Isaiah 61 we are reminded that Christ came to "heal the brokenhearted" and to give people beauty for the ashes they received from violent or abusive relationships. That is good news! The prophet wrote that the Lord loves justice and hates wrongdoing (Is. 61:1, 3, 8). We are called to be His hands and feet, and follow His example.



¹ World Health Organization. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/media-centre/events/meetings/2015/un-sustainable-development-summit/en/>. Or <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.

² Stöckl, H., Devries, K., Rotstein, A., Abrahams, N., Campbell, J., Watts, J., Moreno, C. (2013). The global prevalence of intimate partner homicide: a systematic review. *The Lancet*, pii: S0140-6736(13)61030-2. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61030-2.

³ Devries, K., et al (May 2013). Intimate Partner Violence and Incident Depressive Symptoms and Suicide Attempts: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies. *PLoS Medicine*; 10:5, e1001439.

⁴ Reinert, K., Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Sharps, P., & Lee, J. (May 5, 2015). Gender and Race Variations of the Intersection between Religious Involvement, Early Trauma and Adult Health. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*. doi: 10.1111/jnu.12144.

⁵ www.EndItNow.org



Katia Reinert is associate director of the Health Ministries Department for the General Conference.

ADVENTISTS AND ALCOHOL: IT INVOLVES MORE THAN PERSONAL HEALTH

WHEN IS THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH GOING TO CHANGE ITS POSITION ON ALCOHOL USE?

This question was asked of me during one of my recent itineraries when I had the privilege of speaking at an alcohol symposium, following an Adventist health professionals conference. I was stunned!

Studies abound that tout numerous benefits of alcohol consumption on heart health, and many people now are questioning the church's position of total abstinence when it comes to drinking alcohol. But the simple answer is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot change its stance, because it's not merely an issue of physical health. So, how should practicing, health-conscious Adventists respond?

As a physician I understand the dilemma, and will seek to clarify the issue in order to help people make a well-informed, evidence-based, and, most important, spiritually sound decision.

We should avoid all things harmful, including—perhaps especially—those that cloud the mind and may impair our sensitivity to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, jeopardizing our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Although the consumption of alcohol has many significant health risks, the prime reason to abstain remains a spiritually moral one.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Alcohol consumption varies widely between countries, depending on cultural traditions. A disparity between developed and emerging economies also exists. Alcohol, like tobacco, is being exported to developing countries, adding huge burdens to already inadequate health systems. According to the "Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health" released by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, February 2011:¹

- Approximately 2.5 million people die from alcohol-related causes each year;
- Fifty-five percent of adults have consumed it;
- Four percent of all deaths are related to alcohol through injuries, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and liver cirrhosis;
- Globally, 6.2 percent of male deaths are related to alcohol, and 1.1 percent of female deaths;

- One in five men in the Russian Federation and neighboring countries dies from alcohol-related causes.

The pattern of alcohol consumption is changing, as mentioned previously. Figures for 2001-2005 released by the World Health Organization (WHO)² revealed that worldwide, 6.13 liters of pure alcohol were consumed per year, per person, aged 15 years or older. This amount appeared to be stable in the Americas and the European, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Pacific regions; however, market increases were noted in Africa and Southeast Asia. Health risk increases even more when binge drinking occurs; in other words, when people drink to get drunk. Binge drinking may



be defined differently according to the region of the world: in the United States more than five consecutive drinks for a male and more than four for a female; in Australia more than four drinks per night (previously, more than seven drinks per night for men and five for women). Binge drinking is increasing in many parts of the world, mainly among youth, but all age groups are affected.³

A recent book on research and public policy states that “alcohol is a risk factor for a wide range of health conditions and social problems. It accounts for approximately 4 percent of deaths worldwide and 6 percent of the global burden of disease, placing it alongside tobacco as one of the leading preventable causes of death and disability.”⁴

Alcohol is no ordinary commodity and is dangerous.

RISKS OF ADDICTION

Alcohol is a known addictive substance. The susceptibility (or likelihood) of becoming an alcoholic (euphemistically termed “problem drinker”) depends on numerous factors. The chance of alcoholism developing over a lifetime is 13 percent (13 people of every 100 who drink alcohol). If there is a first-degree relative (father, mother, uncle, aunt, grandparent) who suffered from alcohol dependence, this percentage doubles. If experimentation with alcohol begins under the age of 14 years, the percentage chance of dependence increases to 40 percent-plus.⁵ This demonstrates the importance of alcohol education from an early age and fostering relationships and connectedness with youth. This social support develops resilience, enabling youth to cope with difficult decisions and choices despite peer pressure. An additional and vital layer of protection for young and old is connection to a set of values, such as the principles of the Bible and walking with the risen Savior.

ALCOHOL AND CANCER

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death globally. An interesting example of the relationship between drinking alcohol and cancer comes from the European Union, where cancer is the second-most-common cause of death and 2.5 million people are diagnosed with cancer each year. It’s estimated that 10 percent of cancers in men and 3 percent in women can be directly attributed to alcohol use. It’s further estimated that 30 percent of cancers in this part of the world could be prevented through healthier lifestyle choices. The 2010 Eurobarometer Report, however, found that 1 in 5 European citizens do not believe that there’s a connection between alcohol and cancer; 1 in 10 is totally ignorant of the fact that alcohol consumption can cause cancer.⁶ Sadly, being ignorant does not spare us the consequences.

There is robust evidence linking alcohol as a cause of breast cancer in women and colon cancer in both men and women. These findings have been summarized and reported in the World Cancer Research Fund’s comprehensive reports in 2007 and 2011.⁷ The point strongly emphasized in these

and many other scientific reports is that there is no safe limit/dose of alcohol that may be recommended to avoid its carcinogenic effect. This places the perspective on any recommendation that alcohol be used for health benefits, even cardiac, because the associated side effects are real and dangerous.

ALCOHOL AND SOCIETY

It is well known that alcohol use is associated (often causally) with accidents of all kinds: road fatalities, domestic violence, murder, rape, and other criminal activities. In 2010 Professor David Nutt and coresearchers published an analysis in the prestigious *Lancet* medical journal showing that in the United Kingdom alcohol is more harmful than heroin and crack cocaine. This is because the researchers focused on the effect the drugs/toxins had on not only the user but others as well (family, community, and society). Heroin, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine were the most harmful drugs to individuals.⁸

Alcohol is also the leading cause of preventable mental retardation in the world. This is because alcohol readily crosses the placenta and damages the developing brain of the unborn baby. Again, there is no safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.⁹

ALCOHOL AND HEART HEALTH

For the past 30 years alcohol has been promoted as being “heart healthy” and protective against coronary artery disease. Much has been written in the popular and scientific literature on the subject. All the scientific studies have been retrospective analyses, which makes them subject to what are known as “confounders.” Confounders are factors that make interpretation of the results of the data being analyzed more difficult and also may result in erroneous conclusions. Naimi and others concluded in 2005 that some or all of the apparent cardiac protective effect of moderate drinking may be because of these confounders.¹⁰ Other studies have continued this caution and noted that the non drinkers included in many of the studies had more risk factors for heart disease, were less well-educated, had less access to health care and insurance, and were from poorer socioeconomic groups. Some included in the nondrinking group had been drinkers prior to the studies being done and had stopped drinking for health reasons.¹¹ A recent paper by Dr. Boris Hansel adds weight to the view that the real explanation of positive cardiac outcomes in moderate drinkers is not that alcohol is protective, but that the average health status and healthful lifestyle in other behaviors, such as exercise and diet, is better than that of nondrinkers.¹²

In summary, taking into account the significant health risks related to alcohol use, it does not make sense to promote its use for heart health, especially when there are proven and safe interventions for heart disease prevention, such as daily exercise and a healthful diet.

CONCLUSION

We sometimes persist in trawling the shark-infested waters of the definite evidence showing the dangers of alcohol in search of one sardine's worth of positive, healthful evidence in favor of alcohol use. Instead, we are blessed to have a blueprint that offers protection against the problems alcohol inevitably brings in its wake: informed choices, exercise, rest, healthful eating, fresh air and sunshine, pure water (within and without), trust in God, social support, a good dose of optimism, and, of course, temperance, which by definition encourages us to dispense entirely with all things harmful and to use wisely those things that are healthful and good. Temperance, lived through the enabling power of our gracious Lord Jesus Christ, serves as a foundation for a Spirit-filled experience that can celebrate life free from alcohol and its attendant ills.

So should people who don't drink start to drink alcohol? Based on the evidence, definitely not! Should those who currently drink alcohol quit? Based on the same evidence, unequivocally yes!

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, NIV).

To whom do we belong?



¹ www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/en.

² www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msb-gsruprofiles.pdf.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Thomas Babor, *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity*, second edition (New York: Oxford Press, 2010), p. 70.

⁵ Richard K. Ries, et al., *Principles of Addiction Medicine*, fourth edition (Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer, 2009).

⁶ www.eurocare.org/library/latest_news/alcohol_and_cancer_the_forgotten_link.

⁷ www.wcrf.org.

⁸ David Nutt, et al., "Drug Harms in the UK: A Multicriteria Analysis," *The Lancet*, Nov. 1, 2010.

⁹ *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity*, p. 1,393.

¹⁰ Timothy S. Naimi, et al., "Cardiovascular Risk Factors and Confounders Among Nondrinking and Moderate-Drinking U.S. Adults," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 28, no. 4 (2005) p. 369.

¹¹ Kaye Middleton Fillmore, et al., "Moderate Alcohol Use and Reduced Mortality Risk: Systematic Error in Prospective Studies and New Hypotheses," *Addiction Research and Theory*.

¹² Boris Hansel, et al., "Relationship Between Alcohol Intake, Health and Social Studies, and Cardiovascular Risk Factors in the Urban Paris-Ile-De-France Cohort," *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 64:561-568.

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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 garciamarenkoa@gc.adventist.org.

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SERVING DURING THE SERVICES OF THE CHURCH:

DEACONS AND DEACONESSES AT SABBATH SCHOOL, ADVENTIST YOUTH SOCIETY (AYS), AND MID-WEEK PRAYER MEETING

To render assistance at services and meetings, as stated in the *Church Manual*, deacons and deaconesses must be present at all services of the church, such as Sabbath School, AYS, and mid-week prayer meetings. Therefore, the deacon(s) assigned to open the doors should arrive at least an hour before Sabbath School begins. He is to also adjust the temperature so that the church is properly heated or cooled for the service. Other deacons and deaconesses, who will serve as greeters and ushers, should arrive at least 30 minutes before Sabbath School begins.

It is important that all deacons and deaconesses attend Sabbath School. They should study the lesson carefully and be prepared to teach a class if needed. Since their calling is a spiritual calling and they are equipped to teach the Word of God, it would be appropriate for those who are interested in teaching to inform the Sabbath School Council of their interest in serving as teachers or assistant teachers.

The presence of deacons and deaconesses at AYS speaks volumes to the youth of the church. It indicates that church leaders have an interest in their development. By attending these meetings, deacons and deaconesses have an opportunity to establish a rapport with the youth. AYS can also serve as a practicum for junior deacons and deaconesses. These junior officers can take the lead in carrying out the responsibilities in which the adult deacons and deaconesses have mentored them.

Although it is not necessary for junior deacons to dress in uniform at AYS, they should, however, dress appropriately—that is, they should not dress faddishly, their clothing should fit properly, and their hair should be appropriately cut and styled. They are to recognize that they are the spiritual leaders among the youth and should seek to set a godly example for them.

Some of the duties that junior deacons and deaconesses can assist with at AYS include collecting the offering and helping to maintain reverence. At the close of the meeting, they can put hymnals and Bibles back in the pew racks, pick

up trash, and take forgotten items to the lost-and-found area. It is important that at least one adult deacon and deaconess be present at AYS to give support to junior deacons and deaconesses and to address any emergencies that may arise.

Deacons and deaconesses should also make every effort to attend mid-week prayer meetings. Their presence is just as important as that of the pastor and elders. They, too, are spiritual leaders of the church; and they are to set an example for the membership. The pastor and first elder may choose to schedule them to participate in the program. They may lead the song service, take prayer requests and testimonies, or present a message from time to time. But even when they are not carrying out these responsibilities, the deacons should arrive early to open the church, make sure it is properly heated or cooled, maintain reverence, collect the offering, and be supportive of the pastor and elders who are leading out in the service.

When attending mid-week prayer meetings, deacons and deaconesses do not have to dress in uniform, but they should follow the principle of modesty and dress appropriately. For example, deacons could wear coats and ties; deaconesses could wear dresses, suits, or skirts and blouses. The misconception that deacons are janitors is only strengthened when they come to church inappropriately dressed. Deacons may consider keeping a set of work clothes in their cars or at the church for emergency situations.

The head deacon and head deaconess should assign deacons and deaconesses to each of the church services. Their presence will encourage many other members to participate.

ED

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LESSONS FROM DANIEL 4

WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH VARIOUS DISEASES, AMONG THEM MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLNESSES. DEPRESSION HAS BECOME A SPECIFIC PROBLEM IN OUR DAYS. IN DANIEL 4 WE READ ABOUT KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR FOR THE LAST TIME, AND HE IS SUFFERING FROM A MENTAL DISEASE.

I. DISCUSSION OF THE CHAPTER

A. The Frame

The Aramaic text begins in Daniel 3:31 while in English versions that Daniel 3:31 is Daniel 4:1. We will follow the English verse numbering.

1. **Verses 1–3**—The following report is Nebuchadnezzar’s autobiography. *What do these introductory words reveal about Nebuchadnezzar’s relationship to God?*
 - He respects God as the One who is the Most High.
 - He testifies to God’s work in him.
 - He acknowledges God’s universal and eternal rule.
2. **Verse 37**—Nebuchadnezzar’s report ends with a doxology.

B. The Dream and the Problem of Its Interpretation

1. **Verses 4, 5**—Having reached the climax of his power, Nebuchadnezzar receives a second dream from God. The dream is terrifying.
2. **Verses 6–9**—The wise men cannot interpret the dream, although this time the dream is related to them (compare with Dan. 2). Again Daniel is brought to solve the problem. The phrase “in whom is the spirit of the holy gods” underlines the high esteem Daniel enjoyed. It is strange that people do not rely on God immediately; instead they first try to solve problems themselves.
3. **Verse 8**—*What does “according to the name of my god” express?*
 - Nebuchadnezzar had somehow acknowledged the true God (Dan. 2 and 3) and yet adhered to his own god(s).
 - There was no true conversion.
 - Maybe for him the almighty God was one among many gods.

C. The Dream

1. **Verses 10–18**—The dream refers to a tree that is to be cut down. A heavenly being announces the judgment on the tree. The tree is a symbol, for we hear about a human heart that will be replaced by the heart of a beast. A time span is given for this “beastly” condition.
2. **Verse 17**—The main thought of the chapter is that God is the highest authority. He is the Lord of history and the Lord of humankind. This concept appears repeatedly in Daniel (2:21; 3:33; 4:17, 25, 26, 32, 34, 35, 37).

D. The Interpretation

1. **Verse 19**—*How does this verse describe Daniel?*
 - He does not rejoice over Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment. Instead he feels sorry about what is to happen to him.
 - He cares for the king.
2. **Verses 20–22**—Nebuchadnezzar and his empire are the golden head of chapter 2. He is also the tree of chapter 4. He provides protection and support for the nations.
3. **Verses 23–26**—The verdict will be executed. There is a Lord who surpasses the ruler of the Babylonian world empire. Nebuchadnezzar is accountable to this Lord. Consequently, he may be cast out of human society for seven years. But the judgment has a goal. Nebuchadnezzar is supposed to learn that God is the true Lord. His kingdom is to return to him. The judgment is mingled with grace.
4. **Verse 27**—*Daniel turns to the king with a call. What do we learn from this action?*
 - The disaster can be prevented, if the king commits his life to God.
 - The judgment is linked to conditions and does

not happen automatically. See Jonah and the judgment of Nineveh; see the principle in Jeremiah 18:6–10.

- Daniel can now address the king in a clearer way than ever before and call him to repentance.
- In addition to the call the text also contains a promise.
- Therefore, the dream should be understood as a warning.

E. The Dream is Being Fulfilled

1. **Verses 28–30**—*In spite of the warning, judgment finally comes upon the king. What are the mistakes that Nebuchadnezzar made?*
 - Pride and arrogance.
 - Self-glorification (see the stress on “I” and “my;” see, however, Daniel 2:20–23 as contrast).
 - The desire to be independent of God.
 - Bad stewardship.
2. **Verses 31–33**—The verdict is executed right away, and the prediction is fulfilled (compare with Acts 12:21–23). God does not always react immediately. In any case, whatever Nebuchadnezzar was unwilling to learn in good times he has to learn under difficult circumstances until he is willing to accept that God is the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity may be indirectly referred to in historical sources.

F. Nebuchadnezzar’s Conversion

1. **Verses 31–34**—*What does Nebuchadnezzar express with these verses?*
 - He does not blame God for his sickness.
 - He praises God and prays to Him.
 - He acknowledges God as the only sovereign Lord. We are dust, while God is eternal and omnipotent. God does all things right (see Rom. 8:28). God loves humility.
 - Nebuchadnezzar is converted to God. When the king looked up to God and entered into a relationship with Him, he was healed. In addition, he got back his kingly office. Let us “fix our eye on Jesus” (Heb. 12:2), not on humans. Nevertheless, people who love the Lord can be of great help on our journey to God. It is conceivable that without Daniel Nebuchadnezzar may not have found God.

II. CONNECTIONS TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

- The great tree with animals living in and under it is used by Jesus in a parable to describe the kingdom of God which surpasses Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom

by far (Matt. 13:32).

- The fall of Nebuchadnezzar resulting from his pride (Dan. 4:30, 31) points to the fall of symbolic, end-time Babylon (Rev.14:8; also chapters 17 and 18). The term “Babylon the Great” is found in both books.
- Compare Daniel 4:34 with Revelation 4:9. We should honor God “who lives forever.”

III. APPLICATION

- God is the true and highest Lord. He is the Lord over politics. He is also Lord over dictators who plague humanity. He carries out His plans behind the scenes. Soon He will establish His eternal kingdom from which everything negative will be banned.
- As God revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar, so He reveals Himself to us. He does this through answered prayers, experiences, and fellow humans—but especially through His Word, the Holy Scriptures. In some sense we are better off today than people were in the past: we have the full Word of God available to us.
- Just as God drew Nebuchadnezzar to Himself, God does not give up on us in His persevering love. Even when we go through bitter situations and experiences, God’s goal for us is our salvation.
- As Nebuchadnezzar made a decision for God, we too need to decide if God is our Lord.
- We must share our experience with others as Nebuchadnezzar did. Everyone should have the chance to experience the joy of belonging to God, our Savior and Lord.



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A LIFESTYLE OF COMPASSION IS TRUE EVANGELISM

People loved Jesus as He ministered on this earth. Men, women, and children of all walks of life, including some Pharisees, followed Him non-stop, forcing Him to find deserted places late at night to pray. He could not get away from people. Whenever Jesus was visible, crowds surrounded Him. People could not get enough of Him; they wanted to connect with Him, see Him, hear Him, and touch Him. On several occasions, the disciples had to ask, “What are we going to do with the crowd?”

What caused people to love Jesus? What made people follow Him so intensely? As I read the Gospels, I can see that:

- Jesus was not loved because of His dress. The Bible does not say much about Jesus and dress; it mentions His clothing during the crucifixion as the soldiers gambled at the foot of the cross for His garments, but little else is said.
- Jesus was not followed because of His diet. Jesus was not a vegetarian. I am vegan, and, by the way, this does not increase my odds for salvation. We are not saved by eating lettuce and tomatoes; we are only saved by Jesus. People did not follow Jesus because He was a vegetarian.
- Jesus was not loved or followed because of His taste in music. Scripture does not elaborate much at all on Jesus’ taste in music.
- Jesus was not even followed and loved because of His perfection. After all, when was the last time you told someone that you were better than him or her and they continued to like you and hang around with you?

People followed Jesus because Jesus loved them. People loved Jesus because Jesus loved people.

If people are not flocking to us, if our churches are not full and our ministries are not thriving, perhaps we have not been doing what Jesus did. Perhaps we need to learn more from Jesus. Let’s stop saying that our churches are empty because we preach an unpopular message; instead, let’s begin to love people. We have a very complete package of beliefs, so the problem is not our message. Our challenge is our lack of love and compassion for people.

The biggest revival and reformation the Adventist Church needs is to be filled with the love of God and the compassion of Jesus. As long as we continue to argue about dress, diet, music, and other things, we will never fulfill the mission Jesus gave us. There is no better evangelism than to freely share the love of God and the compassion of Jesus in practical ways in our homes, our churches, and our communities.

A compassionate lifestyle is real evangelism. Not everyone can preach or teach, but we all can love and serve, and that is evangelism. If you don’t agree, ask Jesus. 

Jose Cortes, Jr., is an Associate Ministerial Secretary who leads evangelism efforts for the Adventist Church in North America.

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LIFE-CHANGING STORIES:

THE MINISTRY OF SHARING JESUS - PART 3

We have looked at stories of elders who have reached out to their congregations through prayer and the ministry of presence. Now we turn our attention to elders who are intentional about evangelistic ministry and sharing Jesus in order “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). It is our desire that you will be as inspired as we were by these elders.

SHARING JESUS AT HOME

One pastor divided his church into groups of 10 families, with one elder assigned to each group. Randy and Janelle started a small group in their home for the families they were assigned. Weekly potluck dinners are followed by study groups for adults and children. These groups provide spiritual growth and strengthen relationships between members. The group engages in local or global outreach once a month and commits to praying for new people to join them. They also connect with former church members. Several former members have started coming to the small group, and some have returned to church. When asked about the amount of time he invests in the group—in addition to his work, Sabbath duties, and family responsibilities—Randy said that he wouldn't give it up as the group is his favorite part of the week and provides a much-needed spiritual lift.

Likewise, Dennis and Annie want to reach the professionals in their city. Once a week, they provide dinner for their small group, followed by a short Bible study. They understand the pressures of work and life and knew they could provide a way to help those pressed for time not to feel burdened by adding another activity to their schedules.

Both couples saw a connection between personal relationships and spiritual growth. They saw the human need for belonging and made their homes a welcoming place.

SHARING JESUS THROUGH MISSION TRIPS

Steve is an elder with a love for mission; he has coordinated almost 20 mission trips. Working with several area churches, he has been able to provide medical and dental care, Vacation Bible Schools, and evangelistic series while also building churches. It is easy for people, even non-members, to give money to these projects to cover expenses or to pay Bible workers to stay there. It is not just lives overseas that are changed; church members who go on these trips often feel a sense of rejuvenation in their spiritual lives, too. These mission trips keep Steve strong in his faith as he sees the changes God works in the lives of both the people they are reaching and those who go on the trips.

Steve has taken to heart Jesus' command to “go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). He feels called to leave the comforts of home to share the gospel and to help other Christians benefit from the same faith-building experience. But you don't need to travel the globe to find a mission field. There are plenty of opportunities close to home.

SHARING JESUS IN THE COMMUNITY

Elders all over the world have taken on the task of leading churches. Hundreds of elders in North America alone function as lay pastors and church planters. Tim is a successful businessman who works full-time, yet he was able to plant a church. That plant has grown to over 200 people in attendance. Tim coordinated leadership teams to help care for the congregation and plant another church.

Hannah loves to give Bible studies. After a personal revival, Hannah prayed that through the giving of Bible studies, she could help 2-3 people a year come to Christ. Over the last decade, she has brought 21 people to the Lord. Seeing how God is working energizes Hannah and strengthens her prayer life. With every Bible study she gives, she gets to know her Bible even better.

You don't have to be a pastor to reach the community; you only need to have a heart for people. Whether you are working with a group or just with one person, your impact on individuals will be felt for eternity.

CONCLUSION

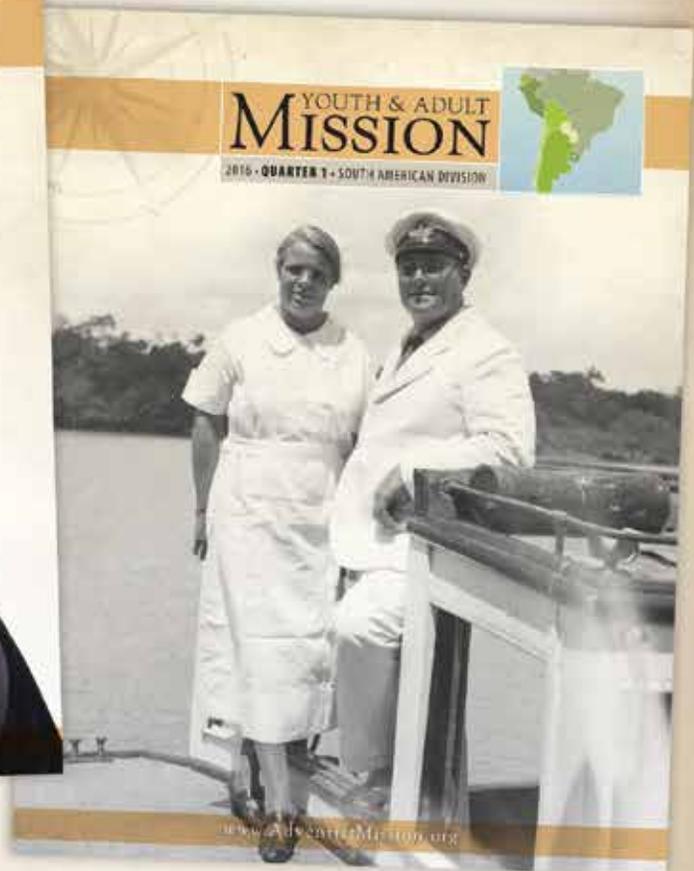
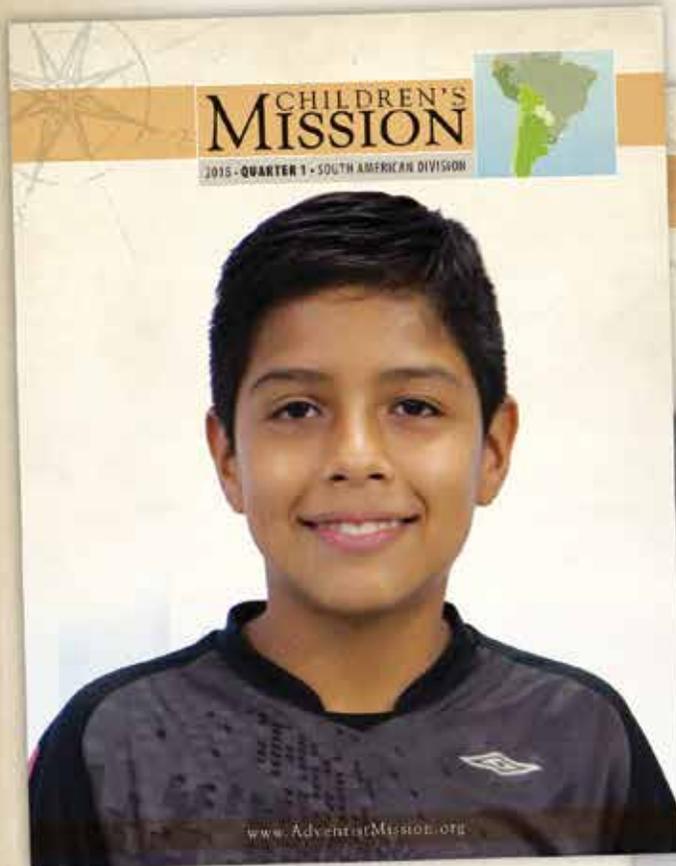
We encourage you to intentionally spend 3-4 hours a week, in addition to Sabbath services and committee meetings, in ministry to your church and community. Humbly allow yourself to be led by the Spirit. “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10). Our ministries may not be the same, but our hearts should have the same calling to serve people. This can only be done if you are connecting daily to Christ through prayer and the Word. Being an elder is not about rank or prestige; it is about taking up the banner of love in service to others.

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¹ To avoid confusion, in this series we will refer to S. Joseph Kidder with the pronoun “I” and reference Kristy by name.

TELL ME A STORY



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