

quarterly resource for local church elders † april/june 2010

ELDER'S

DIGEST



enditnow™

Adventists Say No to Violence Against Women



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WHAT IS YOUR CHURCH'S *attitude* TOWARD MONEY?

Different churches have different attitudes toward money. In that sense, the church usually reflects its leadership. Many times the quality of church leadership determines how financially healthy the church is. I personally do not believe in the theology of prosperity, but I'm happy when I see Christians who are financially blessed; however, I don't believe God promises riches to those who are faithful to Him. In the history of Christianity, we find many examples of faithful children of God who were deprived of any financial means, but that is a subject for another time.

Does your church have money? Is your church financially healthy? Does it have the necessary resources to finance projects? Traveling throughout the world divisions, I have observed churches and leaders with different attitudes toward money. Of course, every church has its own unique story, and each one has a certain personality regarding finances. What kind of attitude does your church have?

An attitude of economy. Being economical with church resources is good, but only to a point. The problem is that some churches try to save money by avoiding expenses for essential things. When economy is seen as a great virtue, we risk its overvaluation. In the spiritual context, an exaggerated sense of economy may be a symbol of miserliness or suggest a lack of trust in God. When the church does not have what it should have, a culture and mentality of poverty is created in the minds of the church members.

An attitude of poverty. If the treasurer always says "There is no money" whenever funds are requested, he or she creates an atmosphere of frustration and discouragement. A church may be small and its members humble; nevertheless, God gives the church the resources it needs for survival. When lack of money is an ongoing problem in a congregation, it reveals the frailty of its leadership in providing the needed resources for God's work.

An attitude of generosity. Generosity is a good attitude, although a generous church does not necessarily mean a rich church. The opposite may also be true. Generosity from its members is more than a duty; it is a lifestyle. Every Christian should be a generous person. In her book *Counsels on Stewardship*, Ellen G. White affirms

that "the spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven" (14). It is wonderful to see how God works with a church that possesses a generous spirit.

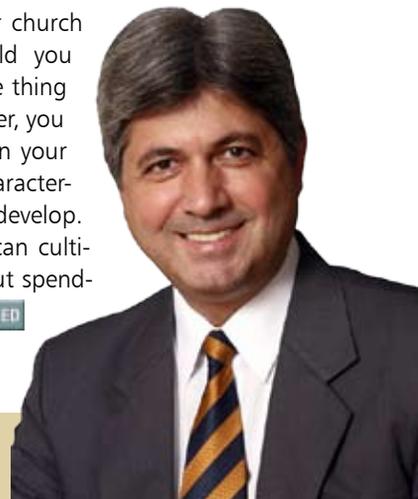
An attitude of fear. Some church members give their offering and return God's tithe because they fear being punished by God. We might even include here some leaders who administer church finances with fear and do not invest in remodeling and building because they think there won't be enough money. Do you know a church that was built with surplus money from the treasury?

An attitude of ill will. Everything we do for God should be done with goodwill. Some church members have not yet discovered the blessing and the joy of being faithful. Instead, they contribute financially but out of a sense of obligation. Ellen G. White says that "it were better not to give at all than to give grudgingly" (ibid., 199).

An attitude of faith. I'm inspired by churches with much faith. These churches are usually small and recently established. Sometimes they don't have enough money to do everything they dream of, but that does not stop them from progressing. Although they may not know where the money will come from, they often move forward with their missionary efforts and programs. Nothing stops them. They are always united and willing to do their best, and the Lord's work grows like a plant in fertile soil.

An attitude of gratitude. The members of this type of congregation recognize that the Lord is the giver of all good gifts. They always find reason to give their best to God. A church where members and leaders are distinguished by a spirit of gratitude and an attitude of faith and generosity is a spiritual congregation, happy and blessed.

Which attitude does your church have? Which attitude should you have as a church leader? One thing is certain: as the spiritual leader, you can have a great influence on your congregation and on the characteristics your church members develop. The good news is that you can cultivate a correct attitude without spending one penny.



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

AN ELDER WHO IS MAKING A *Difference*



Paul Chibuike Ananaba is an elder at the Maryland, Lagos SDA Church in Nigeria, in the West-Central Africa Division. This 1,200-member church is constantly growing and, due to its size, currently has 21 elders. The church's growth rate has been high since 1990; for many years, it had the largest growth rate in the division. Elder Ananaba is privileged to be a trained lawyer, and he is presently the president of the Nigeria Association of Adventist Lawyers. He is a member of the Babcock University board, and he also serves on his church board. Elder Ananaba is married to his beautiful wife, Amarachi Ananaba.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHURCH ELDER?

Paul Chibuike Ananaba: Working as an elder has given me a deep spiritual experience and a closer walk with God. It is a special privilege to serve and minister to the church members. My ordination as an elder has been a major boost to my spiritual growth. The Bible says that 'to whom much is given, much is expected'. As an elder, I need to meet the needs of the members. Members therefore develop the confidence in me to discuss their problems. I am responsible for nurturing and teaching the flock; therefore, I must depend on God.

DO YOU WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR PASTOR?

PCA: Yes, indeed! Today, right before this interview, the pastor visited me in the office with his children. My pastor allows me to preach quite often, and we organize seminars and revivals together. We are in constant communication and prayer.

HAVE THERE BEEN ANY RECENT SEMINARS OR REVIVALS?

Yes, there have been many, as well as a lot of ministry development in the past couple of years in my church and district. Many special projects have been carried out in the church. These include:

- Purchasing the land next to our church building (this is a choice area in Lagos).
- Laying the foundation for our pastor's house and children's church.
- Conducting evangelistic campaigns where souls have been won.
- Purchasing an evangelistic bus for our Women's Ministry group.
- Sending missionaries to other conferences.

CAN YOU SHARE YOUR CHURCH'S MISSION STATEMENT AND VISION?

Our mission is consistent with the global mission of the world church: to ensure that the everlasting gospel is preached to our members, our immediate environment, and beyond. Our vision is to empower our members spiritually, physically, and economically to share the everlasting gospel.

HOW HAS ELDER'S DIGEST BEEN HELPFUL IN YOUR MINISTRY?

The first time I ever picked up a copy of *Elder's Digest* was in 2005, at the General Conference Session in Toronto. Since then, my elders and I have cherished every issue. One of the specific things I have learned from it is the positive effect of ordination and

dedication of our elders.

WHAT ABOUT THE YOUTH OF YOUR CHURCH? HOW DO YOU HELP THEM?

The elders of my church have programs designed to prepare younger people in the church to grow so that they are equipped to replace us in the future. Many young people see us as role models, and we make every effort to reach them individually and in groups so that they may be of service to God and humanity. Many of the youth require just a little encouragement, and they will produce positive results that will stun you!

WHAT ELSE STUNS YOU AS YOU CARE FOR YOUR CHURCH FAMILY?

God's grace! He helps to resolve, conciliate, and mediate issues in the church family. I cannot do this without Him! God has also used me several times to meet challenges in the church, for families and for individuals. Also, the elders of my church hold counseling sessions after Sabbath and on Sunday mornings. Our visitation to members is incisive and eye-opening, and we ultimately discover that many members come to church with new clothes on the outside, but on the inside and at home, they face many challenges. That's where we, through God's strength, step in!





THE IDEAL ELDER

There is no greater privilege and no better opportunity to serve the church than to be chosen for the office of Elder. To understand that, we must first recognize that it is a great honor for us to work in the congregation of God's children. Let us compare the responsibilities of the elder and the pastor so that we can understand them better.

The pastor is the spiritual leader with the greatest responsibility and authority in the church. The church, through the Conference or Mission Conference, has sent him to provide spiritual guidance and to administer to the congregation under his leadership. Therefore, the pastor serves as a connection between the local church and the world church, for he represents the world church before the congregation. The length of his service to the congregation is subject to the decision of the local field which has sent him.

The elder, on the other hand, is not sent; he is elected by the congregation to assist the pastor in spiritual matters and in administering to the local congregation. He is the lay leader of the highest order because it is his office that requires the greatest humbleness to serve the people of God.

The ideal elder should be someone who is humble, no matter his place in society, how many assets he has, or his level of schooling. His greatest task will always be to serve, not to be served. He will recognize that he is not the church owner or someone who rules the members' lives.

With humbleness, the elder recognizes the pastor's authority and is committed, in harmony and in consultation with the pastor, to give the best service to the congregation.

The ideal elder loves the church members and treats them with respect, concern, and attentiveness. For the elder, the brother that drives the brand new car and the brother that comes to church barefoot have the same value in the Savior's eyes; therefore, he treats all individuals with the same kindness, without discrimination.

The greatest joy for the ideal elder is to see people finding salvation through his congregation. He is concerned with having good worship services in his church. He plans the services with the pastor in such a way that all members receive good spiritual nourishment. As a pastor's assistant, he participates in all church services and keeps the church in order and functioning properly.

As a spiritual leader, the elder enjoys seeing his church prepare for the Lord's coming. As a leader he will do everything possible so that the words of Isaiah will characterize his ministry: "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isa. 65:25). The ideal elder will delight in assisting members in being faithful in everything, to love Jesus, to keep the Sabbath, to respect civic and ecclesiastical authorities, to study the Bible, to follow the instructions of the Spirit of Prophecy, and to support the church with tithes and offerings. He will also encourage church members to get involved in mission and to bring others to Jesus. His greatest joy, besides genuine service to the church, will be to see sinners humbling themselves at the feet of the Divine Master.

The ideal elder will protect his flock from the influence of Satan, which surrounds the church with the sole purpose of disturbing its peace and salvation. The elder will be careful with the sermons he preaches so that his messages will not provoke division or harm the people of God.

The ideal elder is someone who knows Jesus, walks with Him, and is determined to submit himself to God's will. He will do everything possible so that God's principle is followed in the congregation of the saints, because that is what God desires: "I will rejoice over Jerusalem [my church] and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more" (Isa. 65:19).

May the Lord bless His faithful elders, who together with the Lord's faithful pastors minister day by day to God's people. Maranatha!



Israel Leito is the president of the Inter-American Division.

COUNSELS TO ELDERS

“ Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor ”

1 Tim. 5:17

Do not dispute with your pastor. The church recognizes the pastor as the spiritual leader. When the congregation perceives that there is rivalry between the elder and the pastor, church members will not get involved in the activities being promoted. Support one another.

Preach with authority. Remember Paul's counsel that you should preach well the word of truth. Your mission is to feed the flock. Prepare your sermons well. Write them out but do not read them to the congregation. Determine the purpose and objectives of the sermon by asking, "What do I want the congregation to learn from this sermon?"

Do not have an independent program. No one likes a loose wheel. Coordinate with the pastor, including during emergencies. He or she may delegate authority to lead a committee meeting. Share your good ideas so that you may receive support from other leaders.

Cooperate in developing a preaching schedule. Recommend names that could be included. Visit other congregations.

Do pastoral visitation. Prepare a weekly list of priorities for visitation (discouraged, ill, baptismal candidates, grieving, etc). Coordinate this task with other elders. Be careful not to turn your visit into a social call. Explain the reason for your visit when you arrive; it will help you to follow through with your plan.

Delegate responsibility. Most church members are ready to cooperate in some way. Try to involve as many people as possible. Remember, however, that not everyone is good at everything. Many complain about lack of cooperation, but the problem is that one person wants to do it all. A good elder is someone who puts others to work for the church.

Coordinate with other elders. Prepare a schedule for the elders, including: visitation, announcements, plat-

form assignments, offering count, ceremony participation, etc. Publish a copy of this schedule in the church bulletin.

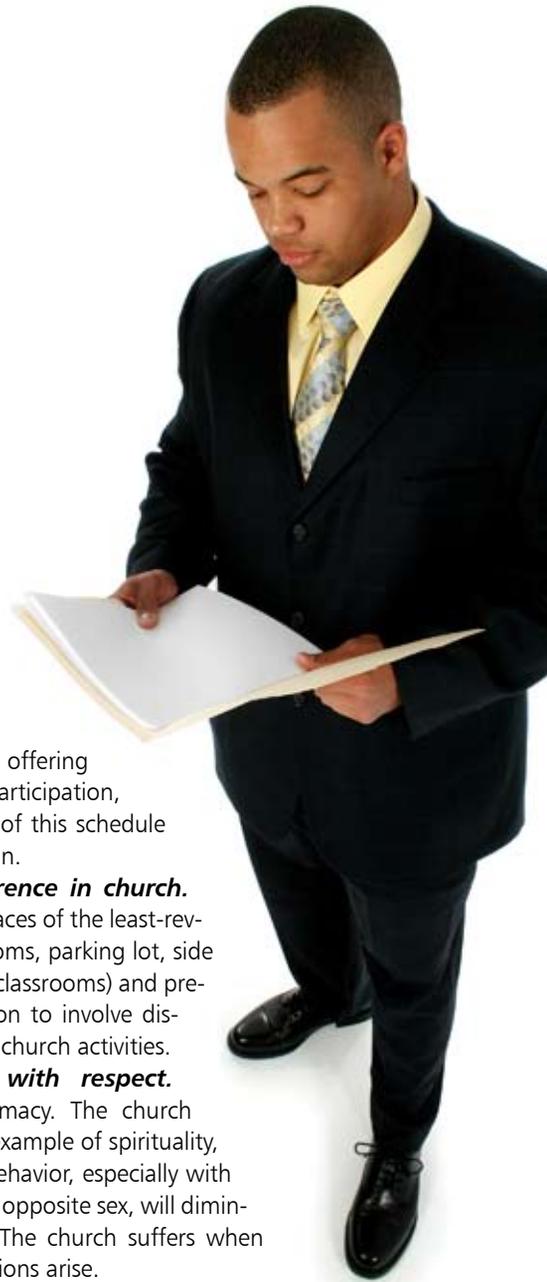
Promote reverence in church. Keep tabs on the places of the least-reverent places (restrooms, parking lot, side doors, main doors, classrooms) and prepare a plan of action to involve disruptive members in church activities.

Treat others with respect. Avoid extreme intimacy. The church looks to you as an example of spirituality, and your careless behavior, especially with the members of the opposite sex, will diminish your authority. The church suffers when inappropriate situations arise.

Your family is your ministerial support. Make an effort to consecrate your family to the Lord. Nothing hurts your leadership before the church more than when your spouse and children are indifferent to spiritual matters. Remember, family worship is your responsibility.

Be organized when leading committee meetings. Prepare an agenda. Put the most important subjects at the beginning and the most controversial at the end. Take votes on any changes. Do not mention subjects that are going to be discussed before formally beginning the meeting. Meetings that are too long are generally unproductive.

Dedicate time for study. The congregation will notice when you have not dedicated time to Bible study and sermon preparation. Support your subject with writings from the Spirit of Prophecy. Keep yourself informed about the latest events, but do not allow this research to replace Bible study.



Don't be afraid of technology. Even if you are not an expert, you may ask someone who handles technological resources to liven up your meetings. The church makes great investments, and you should use their material.

Be a missionary. Promote and participate in reaching people. An elder who never gives a Bible study will soon stop being an elder. Involve others in the job. The joy of leading someone to Jesus is incomparable.

Dedicate time to prayer. The congregation will rarely exceed the spirituality of its leader. The time you dedicate to personal prayer and communion with God will in many ways reveal your level of spirituality. Prayer is the breath of the elder's soul.

Be attentive to recommendations. Be firm, not inflexible. You exert authority in the church, but you are not infallible. Do not lock yourself in your convictions; listen and honestly evaluate other people's opinions. Criticism often helps us to improve.

Do not fear change. Allow those who wish to, to make a change in the regular program. A small change in the church liturgy does not mean we are in sin. Break the routine and the monotony without falling into secularism.

Be careful with your personal appearance. The garment does not make the monk, but it identifies him. The way you dress says a lot about you. Do not pretend to show humbleness by dressing in a careless way. Always come to church in appropriate attire. Avoid shirts in showy colors when sitting on the platform. Keep your shoes clean.

Be faithful in tithes and offerings. Your loyalty to the church will be seen through your monetary contributions. You are a congregational leader, and your financial support is fundamental. Faithfulness in this matter is taught by example.

Speak well of your leaders. Do not get involved in vain rumors and gossip. Do not feed people's unconformities, expressing doubts about other leaders. Do not instigate factions and parties within the congregation.

Be prudent when counseling. Before dealing with a problem, ask yourself if it is your responsibility. Deal with controversial subjects in tandem with the pastor. This will make the church members trust you. Avoid making decisions for the person you are counseling; instead, prepare a list of pros and cons of the various options and let the person make the final decision.

Ennoble your office. The best moment to show spiritual maturity is when facing trouble. The Lord has called you, through the church, to a responsibility; give it the credit it deserves. Consecrate yourself to the Lord and allow Him to work through you to benefit the people getting ready for the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 

Oscar E. Gonzalez is the Secretary of the Alto Magdalena Conference in Colombia, South America.



The Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists expresses our appreciation and gratitude for the ministry of Pastor James A. Cress, Ministerial Secretary at the world headquarters for the past 17 years. During his leadership he developed an extraordinary ministry of equipping, training, and inspiring pastors, their spouses, and families around the world.

He was a great leader, good friend, loving person, wise mentor, and faithful colleague. He was a pastor par excellence and a man of God!

We have lost our colleague in ministry—but only temporarily. We have the assurance and the great hope that very soon we will meet Jim again when Jesus Christ returns.

Until that wonderful resurrection day, we will continue to find great comfort and strength in Jesus and endeavor to build upon the legacy of James A. Cress.

Yours in the blessed hope,

The Ministerial Association
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

A TRIBUTE TO JAMES A. CRESS

JAMES CRESS MEMORIAL FUND FOR PASTORAL COUPLES IN TEAM MINISTRY

Jim's dream was that every clergy spouse who desired to be involved in team ministry would be given the opportunity. His passion for this choice was demonstrated throughout his life by his continued devotion to the cause. Funds have not been available for this to be implemented in most parts of the world.

Therefore, contributions to his dream should be sent to:

JAMES A. CRESS MEMORIAL FUND
c/o GC Ministerial Association/G.Massenburg
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904



“THE PERFECT CHURCH”

No one likes the Church the way it is. No one. Even its staunchest supporters know it's not perfect. So let's find out what's wrong and fix it. Then everyone will feel good; the critics will shut up; we'll finish the work; Jesus will come....

Good idea? Probably not. Unlikely, too, for every member of the Church is a sinner, living precariously on the threshold of sin. No, the prospects for a perfect church aren't good. Indeed, depending on the definition, a "perfect" Church could be a hazard to God's work.

Definition is the first problem. We must be in the world, not of the world. But trying to spell out what that means divides us. Some want more contact with the world; others less. An agreed definition of "perfect" eludes us.

In one sense a "perfect" Church may be possible. But first, let's ponder the hazards if we were to somehow agree on a definition of the "perfect" Church and see it become a reality:

1. Short-lived perfection. C. S. Lewis said, "As soon as good taste knows itself, it loses some of its goodness." Waking up some bright morning with the suspicion that I am perfect would be the clearest evidence that I am not.

The perfect Church is where imperfect people know a lot about forgiveness.

Among sinners, true goodness is an innocent goodness which cannot imagine how good it is. To be aware of our own goodness taints the goodness with pride and snatches it from our grasp. How could a Church ever know itself to be perfect without being arrogant?

2. The wistful sinners without. If I were a basket case out in the world, caught in a miserable web of habits and addictions, how could I ever turn to a "perfect" Church for help? How could I darken its doors and threaten its reputation by my miserable presence? I would want to clean up my act first. Imagining a "perfect" Church tempts me to think that I must earn God's favor, a deadly variant of that demonic impossibility, salvation by works.

3. The remorseful sinners within. If I were a member of a "perfect" Church, I would not know what to do with my sin. Even if I rein in my external behavior, how could I ever be honest with my crooked heart? Would I be brave enough to admit that because of me, the Church is no longer perfect? I fear that imagining the Church to be "perfect" simply invites Pharisees to thank God that they are not like other people. Remorseful believers could not confess their sin and their need to each other and before God.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus held up the tax collector and his prayer as a model for us: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus called him neither sinless nor perfect, but justified: "This man went down to his home justified."

For daily Christian living, that status of being "justified" (rather than perfect or sinless) is crucial, for we never have to calculate when we are bad enough to confess again. We are always sinners, and the prayer of confession is always right; and God's standing promise is that we may go home "justified."

Jesus' last word on the Pharisee and the publican was that "all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." Our dilemma is that when we have humbled ourselves, we have to fight the urge to be proud of our humility—thus standing in the need of humbling again. The only safe conclusion is that humbling is the sinner's work—always; exalting is God's work—always. Any definition of a "perfect" Church which tempts us to exalt ourselves cannot be right.

For good reason, the Church needs to attract solid citizens. And it's right to be concerned about reputation. Even Paul said elders should be "well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim. 3:7). But the best of the good news is that the Church is a place for sinners—a place where we may revel in God's grace and grow into His likeness.

A sinner is always a sinner, just as an alcoholic is always an alcoholic. And in at least one key respect, that organization which is such a help to alcoholics—Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)—models what the Church should be. Those who attend AA sessions never do so to justify or reinforce their alcoholic impulses; they go because they want to be free. Whether they have been dry for years or have just fallen again, all those alcoholics come together to help each other. That's what the Church should do and be.

And in that connection, we can speak of a "perfect" Church: if a "perfect" Bible contains "imperfect speech," to borrow lines from Ellen White *Selected Messages* 1:22, then a "perfect" Church consists of "imperfect" people who know about sin, grace, and forgiveness. As Henri Nouwen said, "Forgiveness is the name of love among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all of us love poorly. We do not even know what we are doing when we hurt others. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour—unceasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family" (*Weavings* vii. 2).

The perfect Church is where imperfect people know a lot about forgiveness. 

Alden Thompson serves as professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla University. This article comes from the *Gleaner*, the North Pacific Union magazine. Reprinted with permission.



WORLD CHURCH: 'PROCLAIMING GOD'S GRACE' IS NEXT GC SESSION THEME

By Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

We Have This Hope. Now is the Time. Almost Home. Transformed in Christ. When members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference (GC) Session Theme Committee reviewed past GC Session themes, they noticed not one mentioned grace.

"We said to ourselves, 'as a denomination, we believe in grace; why shouldn't it be our theme?'" says Pastor Gerry Karst, general vice president of the Adventist world church and chair of the committee. So, when Adventist delegates from across the globe gather in Atlanta, Georgia for the church's 59th GC Session in 2010, it will be under the theme *Proclaiming God's Grace*.

But is a GC theme anything more than a formality? Karst admits that traditionally, the answer to that question would have been "no." However, during the last GC Session in St. Louis, Missouri in 2005, he says the theme became "more of a force driving many of the devotions, worships and presentation topics."

For 2010, Karst expects that trend to continue. He says each speaker, worship director and even music coordinator will aim to "amplify" various aspects of grace. *Proclaiming God's Grace* will "give the delegates something around which to rally," he explains. "[The theme] will give the session spiritual direction and help presenters focus on a very important element of [Adventist] belief."

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This is the 2010 General Conference Session Theme Song.
 Please make it available in all possible ways. Our dream is that the World Church will know and use this hymn, long BEFORE the Session in Atlanta.

Proclaim His Grace Tu Gracia Cantaré

Words and Music: Bruce Ashton
 Versión en Español: Juan R. Salazar L.

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of six systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is common time (C). The score includes the following lyrics:

Sav - ing grace, sweet fa - vor from the Lord a - bove; win - ning grace that
 Gra - cia que me sal - va y vie - ne del Se - ñor; Gra - cia que en su a -

6
 draws us to His heart of love. Won - drous grace that He should care for
 mor me ha - ce ven - ce - dor; Gra - cia tan su bli - me, pro - tec -

11
 you and me; Bound - less grace so deep, so full, so rich and free. Re -
 ción to - tal; Gra - cia tan pro - fun - da, am - plia y e - ter - nal. Tu

17
 deem - ing grace His par - don frees us from our sin; Trans - form - ing grace His
 gra - cia me per do - na y li - bra de ca - er; Tu gra - cia me trans -

22
 Spir - it makes us new with - in; Tri - um - phant grace He comes! and we shall
 for - ma y ha - ce re - na - cer; Por gra - cia, oh Dios, triun - fan - te un dí - a

27
 see His face and ev - er more pro - claim God's match - less grace!
 te ve - ré; por siem - pre de tu gra - cia can - ta - ré.

AVAILABLE
JULY 2010



LEWIS C. SHEAFE

Apostle to Black America

DOUGLAS MORGAN

NEW

Lest We Forget ...

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."—ELLEN G. WHITE.

LEWIS C. SHEAFE

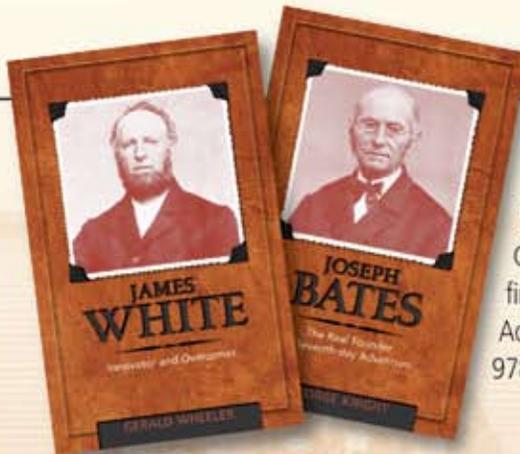
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This little-known leader sought to uplift his people both spiritually and socially during the turbulent early 1900s. Douglas Morgan analyzes this man whose story sheds light on the reason no lasting, separate Black Adventist denomination ever formed. Hardcover. 978-0-8280-2397-9. US\$22.99

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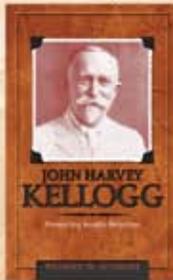
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From Physician of Good News to

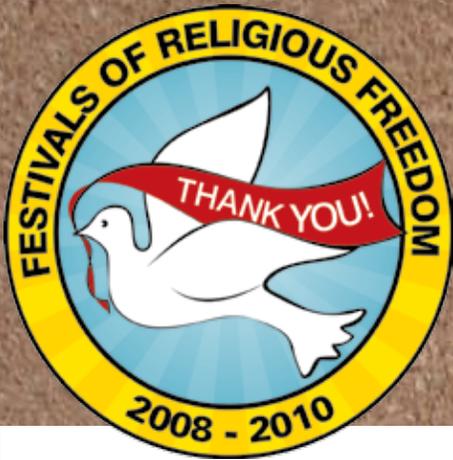


Agent of Division Woodrow Whidden traces the life and public ministry of one of Adventism's most controversial pioneers. Hardcover. 978-0-8280-1982-8. US\$22.99

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FESTIVALS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM THEY MADE HISTORY AND YOU CAN, TOO!



Yes, it's true: Adventists made history! Trinidad in 2005; Sao Paulo and Bucharest in 2006; Cape Town in 2007; Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, Lima, and Bogota in 2009. In these cities and in others, Adventists made history. How? They organized their first festival of religious freedom. You make history when you do something no one has ever done before. You make history when the event you organize makes a valuable contribution to the well-being of the community. You make history when you make a difference.

THE LORD WILL MAKE YOU THE HEAD

I will never forget my first visit to the indoor stadium in Sao Paulo, Brazil a few months before the 2006 event; I really thought it would be impossible to fill it. Williams Costa, South American Division Religious Liberty leader at the time, was the organizer. He worked with the Central Brazil Union Conference team. Williams had more experience with big events than I had, but he was a newcomer in the Religious Liberty department. He had not spent countless Saturday afternoons at church meetings attended by 25, 30, or 50 people. I had always thought we could and should do better than that, but I was realistic. I knew that most people were not interested in religious freedom as long as they themselves, were free. When difficulties arise, when people are in jail or out of work or business, they become more concerned. The problem is, when that happens, it is too late.

My dream was a world festival in 2009 with 10,000 people. I knew it was possible because God made a promise, and I wanted to take it seriously. In Deuteronomy 28, we read: "The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath" (verse 13). But there is a condition: "if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God . . ."

This promise had changed my mind. If we were faithful and work for the glory of God, we could make history! I thought having 10,000 people gathered to celebrate religious freedom in 2009 was the most we could ever dream about attending a festival. When I shared this idea with Williams Costa, he looked at me with surprise and replied, "Why wait

until 2009 to have 10,000 people?" I answered, "Because nobody is interested in religious freedom!" But he replied positively, "We can do that in three months!" Costa and the other wonderful church members responded with joy and conviction, "We can do it!" God's promise was for them! In listening to Williams, I knew we were going to make history. In June 2006, the stadium was filled with 12,000 people. More than 60 percent were young people. The program was fabulous. Many people stood outside the stadium, waiting to enter. Finally, the police closed the door, estimating that there were still 20,000 people waiting outside. For the first time in history, more than 10,000 people were gathered to celebrate religious freedom. That day, Williams Costa, his team, and the Central Brazilian Union made history. On the Thursday before the festival, we spent one hour with the governor of Sao Paulo and the president of the State Parliament. At the festival, several officials attended. For all churches in Sao Paulo, for the governor, for the elected officials, and for the religious leaders, it was a surprising event. They saw the Adventist Church in a different way. We did what they had never done: publicly celebrate religious liberty for all with more than 10,000 people.

WHY DO WE NEED A FESTIVAL OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

The idea of a mass meeting for religious freedom first had to face incredulity. People wondered why we wanted to do such a thing. What they thought was: "Your job is to meet government officials, to work with experts, to attend meetings, and to organize symposiums when needed. Organizing big meetings is not part of your job!" To organize an event like this, we needed strong support from the church leaders. Why should they give us this support? Because without religious freedom, it would be impossible to preach the gospel, open schools, build churches and hospitals, have radio and TV programs, etc. Can you name a country where the church is growing rapidly without religious freedom? Where do we have the largest number of members, schools, hospitals, television programs—in Brazil or in North Korea? What is the main difference between



SID President and leaders in Angola, with 45,000 attendees (2008).



John Graz speaks in Peru (left), translated by Sam del Pozo (right).



The Pathfinder Parade during the Dominican Republic event (May, 2009).

SAD and Peruvian leaders along with two ministers of Peruvian government (2009).



these two countries: the economy, the electricity, the army? Yes, there are these differences, but the main factor which affects our church is religious freedom. Approximately 300 million Christians are discriminated against or persecuted in the world today. Persecution is a reality. People who are persecuted dream of religious freedom, and they dream about living in a country that protects them.

Religious freedom is a gift from God and from their country. Most of the believers do nothing special to deserve religious freedom; they just receive it as a gift. But some people, believers and unbelievers, give their lives for the freedom we have today. Our freedom is their gift!

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU RECEIVE A GIFT?

In 2007 I went to Lima, Peru for the third time. We had had the first South American Congress there, and now my goal was to promote the first World Festival of Religious Freedom. Edson Rosa from the Division headquarters in Brasilia was with me. Williams had suggested the Lima site, but we had to get church administration and the church members involved. We received strong support from Union presidents Orlando Ramos and Samuel Sandoval. Without them, the World Festival would have been only a vision. Without having the South American Division and its president, Erton Carlos Kohler, backing this project, the first World Festival of Religious Freedom would have been just a dream.

We had several meetings prior to the event. Every time I asked, "Is religious freedom a gift?" the answer was a strong "Yes!" But when I asked "What do you do when you receive a nice gift?" no one had an answer. Then someone said with a weak voice, "Thank you!" After a few minutes, all said "Thank you!" The next question was: "Have you already said thank you to God, the heroes of freedom, and your country for your religious freedom?" People realized they had not said "Thank you" in a powerful way. They realized religious freedom deserved a big and public thanks! Can you imagine a gathering with only 100 people? It would mean that religious freedom is not important to us. What a terrible mes-

sage it would be for our legislators. But when thousands of people gather together to say "Thank you for religious freedom—we love it and want to keep it," people notice! In Lima they decided that the festival would be a big public event. They were enthusiastic about it. They wanted to make history for the glory of God.

They made it a fabulous week. Four successful forums were organized in regional capital cities. In Lima, a march of 10,000 people for religious equality was followed by a forum. All religions were represented. Two ministers of the government and the president of the Supreme Court participated. These officials came to the festival on Saturday evening, June 13, 2009. More than 40,000 people gathered in the national stadium to thank God and the country for the gift of religious freedom.

BEING THANKFUL FOR THE FREEDOM TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

When I look forward to future festivals, I am amazed: South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela—every country or region in the world where we can preach the gospel freely deserves a big and public thanks, not just an ordinary meeting, but an event! Imagine living in a country where you don't have religious freedom. To preach the good news, we need freedom. To equip our communities in building churches and schools, we need freedom. To share with power the three angels' message by radio, television, books, and magazines, we need freedom. Those who give us freedom and protect it deserve a big thanks!

The purpose of the festival of religious freedom is simple but powerful: to give thanks to God, to the heroes of freedom, and to the country for religious freedom!

Do you want your church to make history in your city? Do you want Adventists to make history in their countries? Do you want our church members to be leaders in thanking God and our country in a public way? If you answered "Yes!" organize a festival of religious freedom. 

John Graz is director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department at the General Conference.

Photo credit: Alfredo Garcia-Marenko and GC PARL Staff.

because
persecution has a face...



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HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

1 Corinthians 10:12-14

Salvation is not a barrier to temptation. On the contrary, Satan is more likely to attack Christians than unbelievers. He loves nothing better than causing one of God's children to fall into sin. But temptation, while unavoidable, can be overcome! Although it is hard to endure, temptation can be used to help us grow in Jesus. I believe every believer needs and wants to know how to turn temptation into triumph.

When temptations arise, people usually respond in one of three ways. The primary method is to simply give in. These individuals are not concerned with the result of their sin or with the moral consequences. Others struggle against temptation daily. They spend all their time fighting temptation in their own strength. They fight and fail over and over, because no one can overcome human nature alone. If we could defeat the power of sin on our own strength, then it would have been pointless for Jesus to die for us. Finally, there are those who overcome temptation through the power of Jesus Christ. They turn their temptations into triumphs. That may sound like wishful thinking, but I assure you that you can win over temptation. It is possible to live in victory. But you need to know a few things to be able to accomplish this.

THE SUBJECT OF TEMPTATION: WHO IS AFFECTED?

All humans are subject to temptation (for example, Jesus, Peter, David). Every day we are assaulted with a wide range of temptations. We all have one area where we are particularly vulnerable.

It is not a sin to be tempted (Heb. 4:15). Our greatest danger is to think we have arrived at a place where we are above sinning (Heb. 4:12; Prov. 16:18). When our pride tells us that we cannot fall, we are headed for a huge one.

THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION: WHERE

Many sins are "common" (Heb. 4:13). Do not think your temptations are so great; they are just like the ones we all face. They are just common, run-of-the-mill, garden-variety temptations. We all get the same ones from the same sources (1 John 2:16; Gen. 3). There are three primary sources of temptation: the

world, the flesh, and the devil. Let's look at these three sources and how they attack us.

The world. In the Bible, "world" means "system" or "order." The Bible speaks of this system called the world and says it is evil (1 John 2:15; James 4:4). Believers may become so worldly that they fail to stand out for the Lord. We are to be different and distinct. We are not to allow the world to force us into its mold (Rom. 12:1, 2; Matt. 5:13-16).

The flesh. Every one of us, from the most innocent child to the most spiritual adult, has an inclination toward sin. We inherited this from our first father, Adam. It is called the "old nature" (Galatians 5:17 says that there is a civil war in the heart of every saved person here today). When we fail, we try to blame our sin on the devil.

The devil. His main objective is to lead you into sin. He knows every weakness you have, and he exploits them trying to get you to sin.

THE SEAT OF TEMPTATION: HOW

Man is made in the image of the triune God. Man is a triune being, possessing body, soul, and spirit. When you are tempted, you will be tempted in one of these three areas. If we are going to overcome temptation, we need to understand this principle and pay attention to the areas that will be attacked.

The soul. "Soul" is the word used to describe your internal self. "Soul" is your mind, your will, and your emotions. The world is the primary tempter of the soul. The world says to the soul, "You need more. You can have more!" The world always appeals to the ego, to pride. A worldly person is one who indulges in the pleasures of the world (for example, Lot looked, lived, and lost in the world; see Gen. 13:10-12).

The body. Referring to the "old nature," the flesh always attacks the body. We are tempted by laziness, lust, over-indulgence, sexual sin, etc. These are temptations of the flesh (for example, David with Bathsheba; read 2 Sam. 11).

The spirit. The spirit is the primary arena for satanic attack. If the soul is our self-consciousness, then the spirit is our God-consciousness. Our spirit is what sets us apart from the animals. It is in

our spirit that we can know God. It is our spirit that worships and communicates with God. Satan hates this communion. He places doubts in our minds to distract us. He places false doctrine there to turn us away from the truth.

THE SUBDUING OF TEMPTATION: WHAT

There are three words to remember when facing temptation: flight, faith, and fight.

To overcome the flesh, we need flight. The key to defeating temptations of the flesh is to flee from them (1 Cor. 6:18, "flee fornication"; 1 Cor. 10:14, "flee idolatry"; 2 Tim. 2:22, "flee youthful lusts"). You cannot expose yourself to these temptations and expect to escape unscathed (read Prov. 6:27; read also the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Gen. 39:12).

To overcome the world, we need faith. Faith that Jesus will take care of us when we willingly give up our attachment to worldly things. If we love the world, we cannot love God (1 John 2:15; James 4:4). If you really want victory over the world, you must love Jesus more than you love the world (Heb. 12:2). It is our faith in Him that offers us the victory (1 John 5:4).

To overcome the devil, we must fight. If we stand up and fight, Satan will flee (James 4:7). You cannot run away from Satan, but you can drive him away from you. You must face him in the power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He doesn't fear you, but he trembles before the blood of the Lamb! Fight Satan and he will flee (Eph. 4:27; 1 Peter 5:8; Matt. 4).

CONCLUSION

I don't know what temptations you are dealing with in your life; however, I do know that if you are breathing, you are struggling to overcome sin! Our greatest resource against temptation is a close relationship with Jesus Christ. Bring your needs to Him. Whatever the need, trial, or temptation, lay it down before the Lord, and He will help you. He has promised us grace during temptation. Why not take Him up on His promise today?



General Conference Ministerial Association

TASTING THE JOY OF SALVATION

2 Kings 5:1-3; 5:15

We can only realize that we are saved and feel the joy salvation brings when we share salvation so that other lives may also be transformed.

The joy of salvation is a personal experience that can only be tasted by those who choose Christ as their Lord and Savior and begin a battle against "self."

I. TASTING THE JOY OF SALVATION

Read 2 Kings 5:1-3. This account calls our attention to four people:

1. *Naaman* was a powerful and important man who had everything and nothing. He had everything because he was a great man before the king, but he had nothing because he was a leper. He had everything because he had many worldly possessions, but he had nothing because he didn't have God. He didn't know God. He hadn't tasted the joy of salvation. When people looked at Naaman, they felt bad because they saw only his leprosy and suffering.

2. *The servant girl*. She was just a slave, far from her homeland. She didn't have any material possessions, but she had everything because she had in her heart the Savior, the true God. When people looked at her, they could see peace and hope in her countenance, her life, and her words.

3. *The king of Israel* (2 Kings 5:6, 7). Here is someone who had everything and had nothing; even as the leader of God's people, he didn't trust God. He had the knowledge of God's power but didn't trust enough in the wonderful God who brings the joy of salvation.

4. *God's prophet* (2 Kings 5:8). Elisha, God's prophet, was someone who was constantly with God, someone who belonged to God, and someone who could feel and share the joy of salvation.

II. SHARING THE JOY OF SALVATION

1. *The servant girl*. In this account, the servant girl lived the joy of salvation, was a blessing to the needy, and took salvation to the sinner. A person does not have to be an adult or be in favorable or advantageous conditions to share the joy of salvation. Everything was going wrong for the servant girl, but God's presence in her life was something that could not be hidden. Ellen G. White says, "Those who give their lives to Christlike



All heaven is interested in the salvation of man.



Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 220

ministry know the meaning of true happiness. Their interests and their prayers reach far beyond self. They themselves are growing as they try to help others" (Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 269).

This thought from the Spirit of Prophecy synthesizes the joy of salvation, the wonderful experience lived by the servant girl. As she observed Naaman's suffering, she felt compassion and revealed to him the wonderful power that could save and transform him.

Naaman was able to taste the joy of salvation; he got to know the wonderful power of a God who transforms completely:

- His flesh was restored (2 Kings 5:14).
 - "Now I know" (2 Kings 5:15).
- Naaman felt the joy of knowing God; he felt God's power in his own flesh.

There are many spiritual lepers around us, slaves of sin and sufferers who are eager to know God and who are willing to pay any price for peace, relief from pain, and the joy of salvation.

2. *The king of Israel*. In this account, we find a king who did not know the power of God. Many of us in the church today do not have the assurance of salvation. We are in the church, but we have not tasted the joy of salvation. We are in the church, but we do not know the wonderful love of Jesus.

If you have not yet tasted the joy of salvation, please wake up to the spiritual beauty of salvation offered by Jesus! There is no time for discouragement or selfishness; it's time to live an intense relationship with Christ.

The fearful attitude of Israel's king is a warning for us to wake up and seek the knowledge of God for salvation.

3. *God's prophet*. In this account we see that Elisha, a man of God and the instrument of salvation in Naaman's life, rejected any kind of payment or gift. He was demonstrating the gracious way God saves. He was showing what the joy of salvation does to the transformed sinner, giving everything without taking anything.

CONCLUSION

Taste today the joy of salvation. If you feel like the servant girl, a slave in a strange world who was surrounded by impure people in a secular society, shine! Witness for Jesus! Tell others that there is a power above all powers. Tell them that there is a power that restores and brings joy. Taste today the joy of being saved and restored by Jesus.

If you feel burdened by sin, if you feel humiliated and overcome by sin, problems, and uncertainties, remember Jesus, the Water of Life, who cures and restores.

Taste today the joy of salvation. If you are in church but don't feel you are a witness to the power of Jesus, if you still have not surrendered yourself to the Master's service, today is the day! Now is the time to change! God is calling you to be an instrument of salvation. It's time to taste the greatest joy—the joy of salvation!



Ramildo Bezerra is a pastor in Brazil.

Sermon Notes:

THE GREAT CONFLICT

Death, suffering, and anguish mingle with ephemeral human happiness. Trying to find an explanation for pain is like going into an endless labyrinth, rehearsing answers, analyzing possibilities, and finally giving up in discouragement.

The wise thing to do is to consult with the Word of God. In it, with all assurance, we can find not only the answers to our questions but also a satisfaction for our needs.

Human beings live on Planet Earth, the universe's stage. To understand the drama of cosmic dimensions of which we are a part of, we need to travel to a place in the past, to the "past eternity."

I. THE THRONE OF GOD

God's nature. God is a spiritual being (John 4:24), a unity of three co-eternal persons bonded by a mysterious and special relationship. There is no distance between the persons of the Godhead. They're all divine, and they all share the same qualities and powers. In the Godhead, the final authority rests upon its three members (Matt. 28:19). God is one in purpose, mind, and character (Deut. 6:4; 2 Cor. 13:14).

God's character. Human beings cannot comprehend God's nature, but they need to always remember that God is love (1 John 4:8). And precisely because God is love, two qualities are essential in His divine character: His unfailing mercy (Exod. 34:6) and His perfect justice (Isa. 45:22-24).

II. THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

The creation of celestial beings. In the Bible, heaven is a place as real as the world around us. Heaven is not like popular theology teaches or like medieval painters portray it. The angels are heaven's inhabitants, powerful and obedient to God's precepts and will (Ps. 103:19-21). They delight in praising and honoring the Creator of heaven and earth (Ps. 148:2, 5). God has commissioned them to assist His children here on earth, while the cosmic conflict unfolds itself (Heb. 1:14; Ps. 34:7).

The creation and fall of Satan. One of the angels, Lucifer, had the privilege of being next to the throne of God (Ezek. 28:14). He was a true example of perfection both in his exterior appearance as well as in his power and wisdom (Ezek.

“
The Christian life
is a battle and a
march. But the
victory to be gained
is not won by
human power. The
field of conflict is
the domain of the
heart.”



Ellen White

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings,
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28:12, 13, 15). But one day he began to admire himself and covet the throne of God (Exod. 28:15-17; Isa. 14:12-15). Heaven was no longer an appropriate place for Lucifer and his followers (Rev. 12:7, 8). A third of the angels decided to follow their new leader (verse 4). The enemy's methods are still the same—deceit, lies, and the distortion of truth—elements that sprout from the heart of those who are not completely surrendered to God.

III. THE ATTACK ON GOD'S GOVERNMENT

The origin of sin. How sin originated in the heart of a perfect being created by God continues to be an incomprehensible mystery to our limited human minds (2 Thes. 2:7). It is also hard to understand the steps God has taken to completely eradicate sin and its consequences from the universe (1 Tim. 3:16). Lucifer did not want to be governed by a just, loving, patient, and merciful God.

The consequences of sin. Lucifer's immediate destruction would confirm

the accusations made by him in heaven. Sin changed the universe: along with their leader, a third of the angels were expelled from heaven and cast down to earth. Now rebellion, deceit, lies, arrogance, and pride were included in the angels' vocabulary.

In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus explained that the tares appeared in the field because an enemy had planted them, but in the time of harvest, the tares will be gathered and burned. We may apply this teaching to the great controversy between Christ and Satan. The day will come when the consequences of sin will fall upon the one truly responsible for it, and the fire will destroy everything related to evil (Mal. 4:1).

God's character has not changed. Many things have changed as a consequence of sin, but God's character remains the same. God does not want those He created to die (Ezek. 33:11). He loves and blesses those who do not love Him (Matt. 5:44, 45). At the cross of Jesus, two focuses of the cosmic conflict stand out: the character of God's enemy was unmasked (John 12:31) and God's immense love for His creatures was manifested (John 12:32).

CONCLUSION

When Jesus was tempted in the desert, the devil tried everything he could think of to cause Jesus to doubt (Matt. 4:3). Then he attacked Jesus with presumption (Matt. 4:6). Christ was tempted, but He resisted and was victorious. Nothing could separate Jesus from His Father. But Satan is very successful in tempting the hearts of God's children.

We also have a part in this great conflict. We cannot escape it, remain neutral, or prevent it from affecting us. The enemy is fighting to conquer our hearts, using the same weapons he used in the past. He wants our veneration, and he wants to be enthroned in our hearts. He will try to persuade us to doubt God's Word. He will try to convince us to be independent from God, and if he cannot do that, he will pressure us to surrender only part of ourselves to God. The enemy wants to be in control.

Now is the time to surrender our lives and minds completely to Jesus!



Roberto Pinto is the Uruguay Union of Churches Secretary.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Communion is a time to worship the Lord Jesus and remember what He did for us. It gives us an opportunity to review the message of the gospel. It also allows us to reflect on our walk with Jesus as individuals.

We are going to partake of the Communion service once again. But before we do, I want to draw your attention to what the Bible teaches us about this special time known as the Lord's Supper.

I. IT IS A TIME TO REMEMBER (1 COR. 11:23-25)

A. These verses remind us that the Communion service is a time for "calling to mind" the great sacrifice and victorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. When we gather at the Lord's table for Communion, we are not offering a new sacrifice; we are remembering His "once for all" sacrifice (Heb. 10:10).

C. The idea of remembering is more than just recalling an event that took place. It serves to stir the mind to relive with Jesus Christ as much of His life, death, and resurrection as is humanly possible. It is a time to remember that:

1. He left heaven to be born in a human body (Phil. 2:5, 6).
2. He became poor that we might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9).
3. He bore our sins in His own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).
4. He willingly took our place on the cross (Isa. 53:4-6).
5. He shed His blood for our redemption (Rev. 1:5; 5:9, 1 Peter 1:18, 19).
6. He conquered death for us forever (Matt. 28:1-6; Rev. 1:18).
7. He returned to heaven to finish His redemptive work and to serve as our High Priest forever (Heb. 7:25).

II. IT IS A TIME OF CONTEMPLATION (1 COR. 11:23-25)

A. Not only are we to remember what Jesus has done for humanity, we are also to contemplate what His sacrifice means to us as individuals.

B. Jesus died on the cross to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), but what does that mean to you? Does His sacrifice move your heart toward Him in worship?

C. We should use the Communion service to reflect on what Christ's work means to us. We need to think about what His death and resurrection have accomplished in our lives. The Communion

service is a great time to consider your personal walk with the Lord!

III. IT IS A TIME OF IDENTIFICATION (1 COR. 11:23-25)

A. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we publicly identify ourselves with Jesus Christ. The event itself holds no saving power; rather, it is a time for us to declare publicly that we believe in His death, resurrection, and return.

B. The Bible reminds us that those who know Jesus are not to be ashamed of Him (Rom. 10:9-11). Let us take our stand with the redeemed and loudly proclaim our faith in Him and our dependence upon His sacrifice.

C. The Communion service is a perfect time to identify yourself with the Lord Jesus!

IV. IT IS A TIME OF DECLARATION (1 COR. 11:26)

A. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we proclaim His death and resurrection to new generations of people. This is a time of education as well as a time of worship. We must always take time to explain what we are doing when we eat the unleavened bread and drink the grape juice.

B. That is why we preach the gospel message! We proclaim it so that everyone will have the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

V. IT IS A TIME OF EXPECTATION (1 COR. 11:26)

A. We are also reminded that the Communion service is a time to think about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, rose again for us, and ascended into heaven for us. There, He intercedes on our behalf. But, we must remember that He has also promised to return someday for us (John 14:1-3; 1 Thes. 4:16-18).

B. The Communion service reminds us that Jesus is coming again! Therefore, when the bread and juice are passed around, remember that Jesus is coming back and that He is coming for a redeemed people.

VI. IT IS A TIME OF EXAMINATION (1 COR. 11:27-31)

A. The Communion service is a time of reflection and worship, but it is also a time for self-examination. We are

warned against partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. This can mean several things:

1. *It is a warning to the lost.* People who are not believers should not take part in the Lord's Supper.

2. *It is a warning to the backslider.* When we come to the Lord's table with sin in our hearts, we open up our lives to God's judgment (verse 29).

3. *We are warned against taking it lightly.* Too often people come to the Lord's table without taking time to search their hearts for sin, and they do not consider the great sacrifice Jesus made for their redemption. Others participate out of habit and not with their minds and hearts. Others trust the ceremony to save them and fail to trust the One to whom the ceremony points. All of these are dangerous and bring the chastisement of God into our lives.

B. When we partake of the Lord's Supper in a manner which degrades the truth behind the celebration, we are guilty of trampling underfoot Jesus' death and resurrection. Let us carefully examine our hearts, lives, and motives before we receive the elements of the Lord's Supper.

C. Paul's warning is serious. He reminds the Corinthians that some of their numbers are dead because they came to the Lord's table in an unworthy manner (verse 30). We must examine ourselves, confess our sins, and right every possible wrong before coming to the Lord's table (verse 31). But even when His chastisement comes upon us, it is for our own good and is a product of His love for us (verse 32).

CONCLUSION

Many of us can remember our mothers telling us to "wash up for supper." Well, that is what the Lord is telling you and me right now! Are you ready to receive the Lord's Supper today? 

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

COMMUNION

SHOULD COMMUNION BE "OPEN" OR "CLOSED"?

The Bible's teaching on Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is found in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. These verses promote "open" participation for believers. All those who are true believers in God through personal faith in Jesus Christ, His

Son, are worthy to partake of the Lord's Supper by virtue of the fact that they have accepted the death of Christ as payment for their sins (see also Eph. 1:6, 7).

The actual reason that some churches practice "closed" Communion seems to be that they want to make sure all partakers are believers. This is understandable; however, it places church leadership and/or church ushers in a position of determining who is worthy to partake, which is problematic at best. A church may assume that all of their official members are true believers, but even this is not necessarily true.

The practice of restricting Communion to church members seems to be an attempt to make sure someone doesn't partake in an unworthy manner, which some assume to mean that that person is not a true Christian. However, the word is not "unworthy" but "unworthily." This refers to the manner in which a person partakes of the bread and cup, not to his or her worthiness to participate in the first place. No one is really worthy to come into the presence of God for any reason, but by virtue of the shed blood of Christ on the cross, all who believe in Him have been made worthy. First Corinthians 11:27-32 is clearly addressed to believers, not unbelievers. Beginning with this passage in verse 23, it is obvious that Paul is talking about believers partaking of the Lord's Supper, and thus they "proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (verse 26). Also, Paul concludes the passage by calling the readers "brethren" (verse 33). Therefore, the passage is warning believers to avoid partaking in an unworthy manner. This unworthy manner is described as excluding others when you come to Communion and partaking of the elements to curb one's hunger (verse 34).

So, Communion should be "open" to all believers, but those believers should examine their motive for partaking. If believers are irreverent in their attitude toward Communion because of prejudice or appetite, they should voluntarily refuse to partake, or, in extreme cases, should be counseled by church leadership not to partake.

May the Lord bless you in understanding the biblical message and meaning of Communion, so that the practice can be a real blessing to you.



General Conference Ministerial Association



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

HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS

7 SECRETS FOR TRUE LONGEVITY

A HEALTHY WEIGHT <

There are many reasons for premature death around the world today, but research has linked one's weight as a major factor. In light of that, "maintaining a healthy weight" is another secret for longevity.

Now, what constitutes a healthy weight? For athletes, it is the weight at which they perform their best, but for most of us it is the weight at which we have the lowest rate of morbidity and mortality. In other words, a "healthy weight" is that weight which gives you the best chance for a long, healthy life.

It is so unfortunate and sad to see people's lives being cut short, especially when it comes to pastors, elders and faithful spiritual leaders. Sadder yet, is to realize that at times a preventable unhealthy weight is a factor. In an Adventist Health study, when compared to people of average weight, men who were overweight lost 1.5 years of life expectancy and women 1.9 years. This suggests that even a moderate excess weight can be a hazard.

In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) listed the world's top risks of death as high blood pressure, tobacco use, high blood glucose, physical inactivity, and *obesity or being overweight*.^a It is now public knowledge that obesity has become an epidemic. Here are some striking findings:

- 400 million people worldwide are classified by WHO as obese (BMI 30+), 20 million children under the age of 5.

- Researchers state that obesity and being overweight are as hazardous as smoking.^b

- The prevalence of obesity has increased by 74% since 1991 to 41.3 million U.S. adults. If this trend continues, obesity will soon be the number one cause of preventable mortality in the U.S.^c

This slow form of suicide is evidenced by recent weight studies which show the following associations between weight and life-expectancy/lifespan:

- In terms of life expectancy, being overweight during middle age is on a par with smoking.

- Overweight, non-smokers reduced their lifespan by an average of 3 years.

- Obese female non-smokers reduced their lifespan by an average 7.1 years.

- Obese male non-smokers reduced their lifespan by 5.8 years.

- Morbidly obese men - (BMI > 45) - reduced their lifespan by up to 13 years.^d

- Being underweight (BMI less than 18.5) is also a health hazard.

- Men and women with a BMI of 23-25 (healthy weight) live the longest.^{e f}

This reduced lifespan results from the fact that excess weight increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, certain cancers, and substantially reduced quality of life - even more than does smoking, alcohol addiction, or poverty.^g Isn't that appalling?

ENOUGH BAD NEWS, HERE IS SOME GOOD NEWS!

Even modest weight loss can result in significant risk reduction, not only for one risk factor but many. For example, an obese man who has a 5% weight loss will theoretically decrease his risk of dying by 12%.^h Isn't that good news?

Saying "I have to lose 50 pounds," sounds impossible, but one pound at a time is possible. The question is "how" to do it? What is the best diet to maintain healthy weight or to lose weight? Low carb? High protein? Low fat? There is much propaganda out there on what works. What is needed is a lifestyle change that you can live with for a lifetime.ⁱ

The gold standard for a weight loss program is a combination of diet, exercise, and behavior therapy. Remember longevity secret 1 and 2? They work synergistically. Evidence shows that exercise and foods high in fiber (veg-



etables, fruits, whole grains, legumes) are the best way to prevent weight gain.¹ The beauty is that we are privileged to have many lifestyle programs available in our church to help people change habits.

So here are some practical health tips to maintain a healthy weight:

1. Be active
2. Choose healthy foods
3. Limit ...
 - Fatty meats, whole milk, cheese, cream
 - Pastry, deep fried foods, snacks
 - Most desserts: ice cream, pie, cake, candy, and soda pop
 - Serving sizes
 - Eating out

Increase...

- Fresh fruits/vegetables
- Soy and other legumes
- Whole grain breads and unrefined cereals
- High fiber foods
- Lower calorie foods
- Water

Remember that for many faithful spiritual leaders, overeating often takes place when you are discouraged, overwhelmed, frustrated, or stressed out. So, an important part of a good weight control program is to plan ahead to keep stress loads manageable. Don't over commit or overextend yourself and pray for God's help to change what you need to change in your lifestyle.

Now, "May the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, He'll do it!"^k You can count on Him!



^a WHO Burden of Disease World Report 2004.

^b <http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSTRE51002620090225>

^c JAMA, Jan 1, 2003; 289:76-79

^d http://www.annecollins.com/lose_weight/weight-lifespan.htm

^e Walter C. Willett, M.D., Dr.P.H. et al, Guidelines for healthy weight, The New England Journal of Medicine, 341(6):427-434.

^f KR et al. Years of life lost due to obesity, JAMA Jan. 8, 2003; 289:187-93

^g JAMA, Jan 1, 2003; 289:229-30

^h Treating Obesity: A New Target for Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease. Louis J. Aronne, MD, FACP. Published: 07/01/2001. Cornell University Medical Center, New York, NY.

ⁱ Ludwig DS, et al. Dietary fiber, weight gain, and cardiovascular disease risk factors in young adults, JAMA Oct. 27, 1999; 282:1539-1546

^j NIH, NHLBI, Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults, 1998

^k I Thessalonians 5:23-24 (The Message).



Katia Reinert

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Elder's Digest is a quarterly resource for local church elders. It has been developed in response to a worldwide need for church elders, who often have to take the place of pastors in multi-church districts.

WHAT TYPES OF ARTICLES DOES *ELDER'S DIGEST* PUBLISH?

The best way to find the answer to this question is to read a recent issue of the magazine. In planning an article, remember to focus it toward church elders. To be accepted for publication, articles must speak to the *Elder's Digest* audience.

Our readers are on the move, always busy, and have little time for platitudes or articles that appear irrelevant. They enjoy being challenged by new ideas and methods. They enjoy digging into their Bibles and studying. They enjoy knowing how other elders deal with problems. They like to learn about principles or discover things that will help them minister more effectively.

Are you qualified to write for us? Yes! We like to think that anyone (even ministers) who has practical experience or knowledge that is valuable to elders is qualified to write for *Elder's Digest*. If your article is interesting and helpful, we are willing to do the necessary editing to prepare it for publication.

TYPES OF ARTICLES WE SEEK

- Articles dealing with the elder's personal, spiritual, mental, physical, and social needs
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- Bible expository articles
- Sample sermons and outlines
- Articles dealing with church administration
- Articles on family and time management
- Devotionals written especially for elders
- Articles on developing Christ-centered worships and how to plan all aspects of the worship service
- Articles on what makes a good church leader
- Interviews with lay leaders who are developing good programs in local churches
- Reprints of articles from other magazines that have been helpful to you as an elder

The main qualification for any article is that it must be relevant to our audience: church elders and lay leaders. We need articles that will encourage these special people and help them in their ministry. Thank you for writing.

ARTICLE LENGTH

An average printed page in *Elder's Digest* contains approximately 750 words; articles with fewer than 1,500 words are preferred. Seldom are articles with 2,500 words or more accepted. Sermons should have no more than 1,200 words. Remember that a good article for a training magazine should be short, practical, and objective.

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The art of speech

THE TRUE GIFT OF TONGUES: ADJUSTING THE LANGUAGE TO THE AUDIENCE

When Paul talks about making himself “a Jew to the Jews” and “weak to the weak” (1 Cor. 9:20, 22), he is talking about the need to adapt the message to fit the audience. The message itself does not need to be adapted; what changes is the mode or the instrument that delivers the message.

This reality is applied to language. I live in a Portuguese-speaking country. We have a very rich language, full of influences and innovations and constantly changing. There are many dialects spoken here, among them the standard dialect, or, as it is best known, the learned language. The fact is that this dialect—the standard—was chosen as the standard for social and economic reasons. That doesn’t mean it does not have prestige; on the contrary, it is the dialect spoken by the educated and higher social class. But it is really nothing more than a dialect in our language, just like any other language. The standard language is considered the best only for social and economic matters. Linguistically, there is nothing that makes it better than any other dialect. All our dialects are very rich and present their own equally rich grammar.

I clarify this situation to show that we often have preconceived ideas about people who speak “wrongly,” i.e., those who speak a different dialect than the standard, and we must be attentive to that. People usually feel diminished when confronted by someone who speaks in a refined and formal manner; they may think that they do not know how to speak and, unconsciously, create barriers to that speaker. How sad when such a speaker’s message does not reach the listener because the language creates a barrier that keeps the message from reaching the audience’s heart.

Paul said we need to become “weak to the weak,” and in this case, I understand that we need to be simple to the simple. It is easy to simplify our language when we speak to people who have no access to the standard lan-



guage. When I was doing field research and collecting speech data from different people, I always tried (before meeting the person being interviewed) to learn a little bit more about their interests, identifying with their social environment and the way they spoke. I tried to adapt myself to them and tried not to present myself as being superior to them. This breaks about 80 percent of the natural barriers that exist when we talk to someone we don’t

know. In the same way, when taking God’s message to a home or a rural community, we need to become familiar with the community and try to minimize as much as possible the differences that may create barriers. Try to speak like them, in simple and informal way. Speak the language of the people you want to reach, and they will understand your message.

The reverse is also true. When talking to a highly educated audience, the speaker needs to be attentive to language. This group will expect to hear the standard dialect, and any incorrect pronunciations may call more attention to the speaker’s ineptness than to the message itself.

So, we need to speak everyone’s language if we want our message to reach them. All possible methods should be employed, so that, as Paul said, “I might . . . save some.” Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who reaches the heart, but it is important to be careful not to obstruct His work. Language is just one instrument for spreading the Gospel, but it should be an efficient and adaptable instrument, sharpened for the Lord’s work. And if needed, speakers should ask God for the gift of tongues (Acts 2:4), so that, like the apostles, they are understood wherever they go. ED

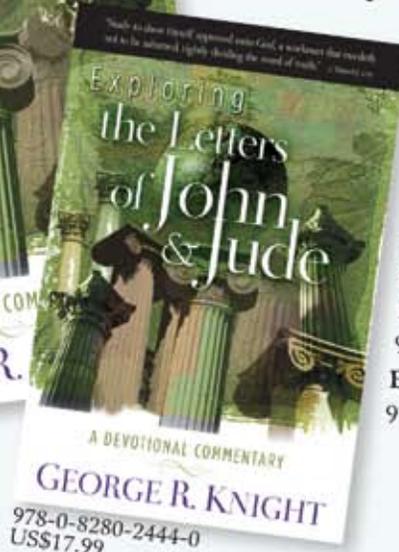
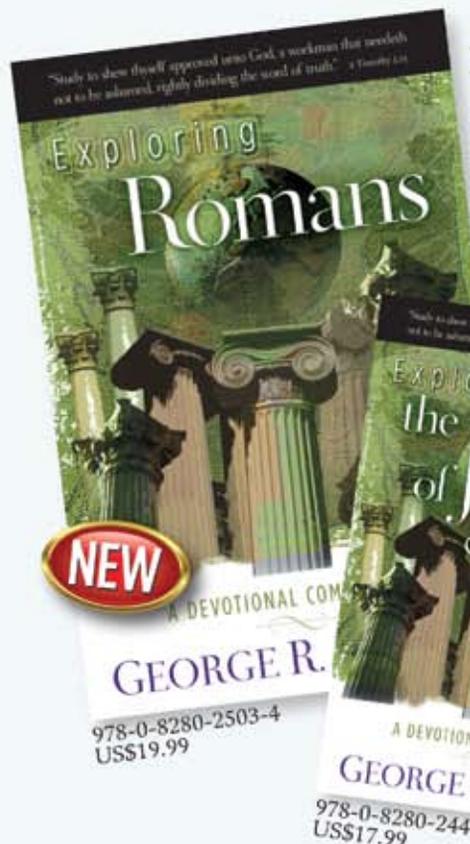
Danívia Mattozo Wolff, a doctor of linguistics, writes from Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

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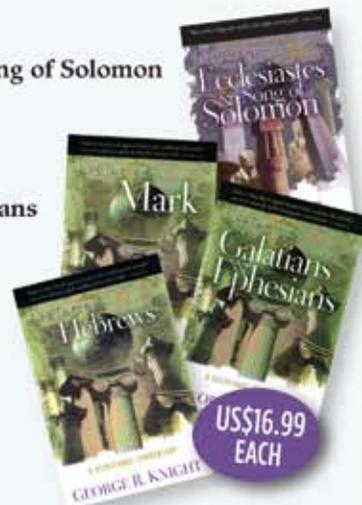
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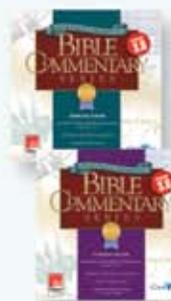


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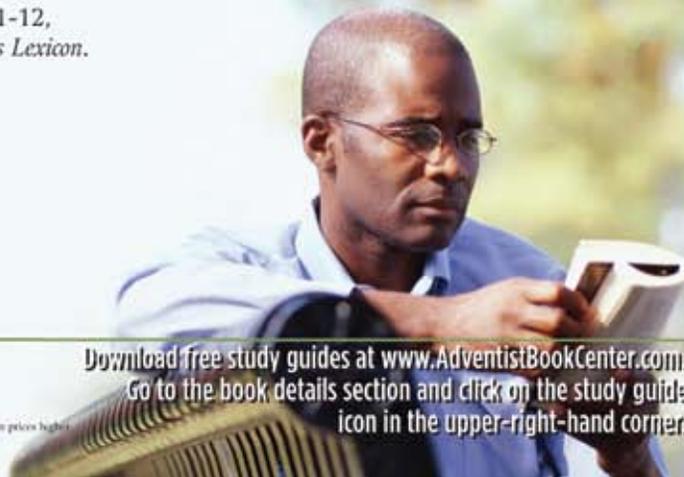
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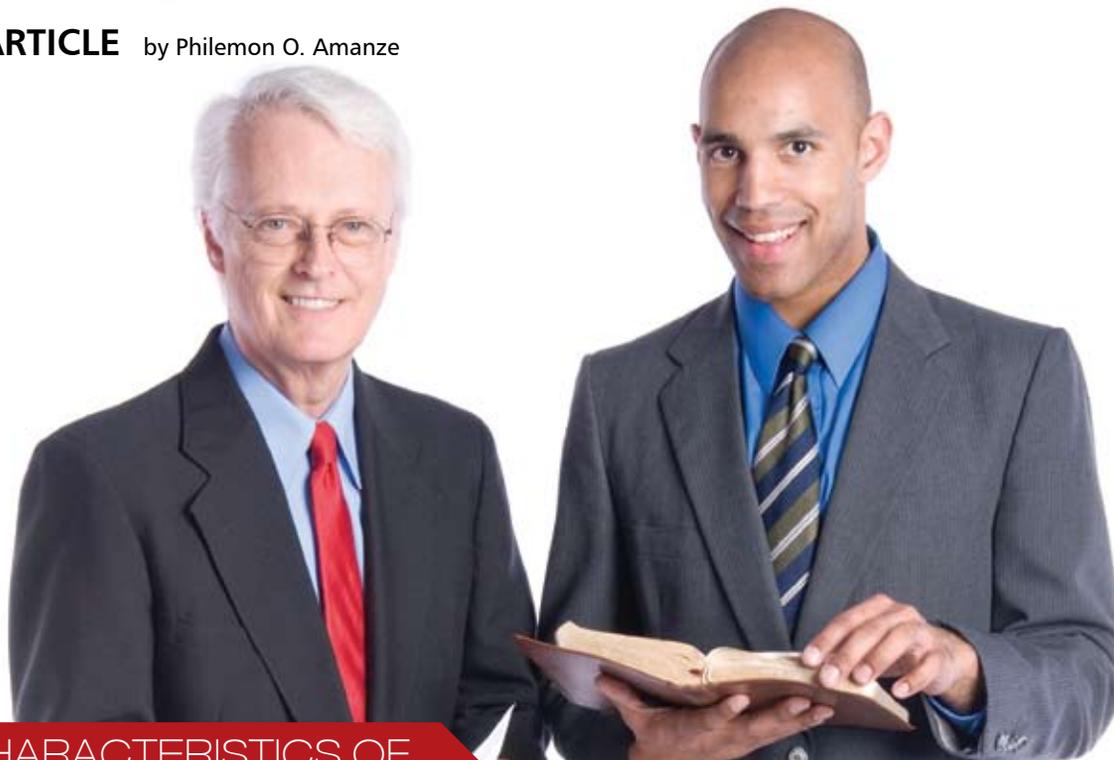
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CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY PREACHING

PART 1

Preaching the everlasting gospel is a task that must be done with passion, power, and persuasion. The mission of the preacher is to present the Savior to sin-sick contemporary people in such a way that Jesus will be accepted as the Redeemer. If this is to be achieved, certain unique characteristics must be part of this proclamation. Here are the first five features which should characterize the proclamation of the good news.

CHRIST-CENTERED

Since all communication between heaven and the fallen human race has been made possible through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:10, 11), contemporary preaching should be Christ-centered. The gospel minister is exhorted to study the science of redemption as it is espoused through Christ. Jesus Christ—crucified, ascended, and coming again—should gladden the preacher. This will lead him or her to prepare and preach Christ-centered sermons. Indeed, Christ-centered sermons come only from Christ-centered preachers, who in turn prepare Christ-centered congregations.

Closely connected to this is the fact that whenever Christ is mentioned as Lord, all other lords are thrown into disarray. Let us consider a few examples from the Bible. When the news of Christ's birth was made known to King Herod, the king was troubled. Think about it—the mere mention that Christ had been born threw people into

complete disarray. Matthew 2:1-3 says, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

The numerous atrocities which Herod committed troubled the city of Jerusalem. Apart from murdering the members of his immediate family (whom he suspected of plotting against him), he later ordered the killing of all children who were two years old and younger (read Matthew 2:16). In Acts 17:6, 7, the Bible tells again of the disarray caused by the Christ-centered message of the apostles: "And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus."

We read of a similar experience in Acts 26, where King Festus accused Paul of being mad, while King Agrippa confessed that Paul almost persuaded him to become a Christian. This is always the result of Christ-centered messages. They project the cross of Jesus Christ as the central theme of contemporary sermons.

If the preacher is not committed to presenting the centrality of the Cross to the congregation, then the preach-

ing, however brilliant or eloquent, is doomed to sterility and failure. We see ourselves preaching about the Christ of the Mount, Christ of the healing ministry, Christ of the sublime example, Christ of the Social Gospel, Christ who was crucified, and the Resurrected Christ; rarely, if ever, do we preach the Christ of the Cross.

Contemporary preachers seem to have evaded the very heart of the Christian message. In our preaching we tend to decry the human predicament, the turmoil of our lives, and the evil in our contemporary society. We wonder if there is a solution for all these problems. The Solution is staring us in the face. It is the way of Christ, the way of the Cross, which will ultimately lead us home. Contemporary preachers should try to put the cross of Christ in its proper perspective as Christ is lifted up in today's messages.

BIBLE-BASED

The Bible is the greatest storehouse for all preaching, and sound biblical sermons are usually Bible-based. "Thus said the Lord" and "The Bible tells us" should be on the lips of all contemporary preachers. The Bible gives the sermon authenticity. Ministers of the gospel should not read from Genesis and end up preaching from magazines or newspapers. Preachers today are challenged to preach messages from Genesis to Malachi and from Matthew to Revelation. Ellen G. White puts it this way: "When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. . . . Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, 'It is written.' Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, 'The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.'"^a

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Practical application of the message is another characteristic of contemporary preaching. Practical aspects of life and religion should be integrated into the sermon. "Sermons should fortify hearers for the daily battles of life. . . . Fanciful representation of truth may cause an ecstasy of feeling, but all too often truths presented in this way do not supply the food necessary to strengthen and fortify the believer for battles of life. The immediate needs, the present trials, of struggling souls—these must be met with sound, practical instruction in the fundamental principles of Christianity."^b

These days the economy is not as buoyant as it was before, and people should be encouraged to work with their hands in farms and gardens. Members should also be taught good health principles; if they get sick, pastoral visits and prayer would be appropriate. A young deacon, Stephen A. Solomon, suddenly became sick in the middle of the week and was rushed to the community medical center. After two days at the medical center, a social work-

er who visited him asked if his pastor should be notified of his illness. After thinking very deeply, Stephen said that his pastor should not be notified. The social worker wanted to know the reason for Stephen's refusal. The sick man replied that he wanted to know if his pastor would miss him and ask what had happened to him. Isn't this interesting? A sick member wanting to know if his pastor will discover that one of his "sheep" is missing? Yes, the proclamation of the gospel from the pulpit cannot be complete until its practical aspect is demonstrated in the life of the shepherd. For preaching to be practical, personal contact must be maintained with the members. Sermons are not addressed to a crowd but to specific individuals in the audience.

GOOD ILLUSTRATION

The importance of illustration in present-day preaching cannot be over-emphasized. Truth is bitter, and for it to be accepted, it must be well-illustrated during our proclamations. Jesus Christ is the master Illustrator, and we should follow His example. "Christ's figures and illustrations help make the truth plain: He presents before their minds figures and illustrations with which they are familiar, to make plain the truth He wishes them to communicate, and the Holy Spirit assists them in the use of these figures and illustrations."^c

BALANCED MESSAGES

A minister's message should have positive and negative dimensions. Every preacher is called upon to realize the sacredness of his or her calling and demonstrates the courage of Elijah and the humility of Moses in every proclamation. Preachers today should reprove and rebuke the disobedient as well as encourage the obedient. "Do not choose subjects that please people and offend none. . . . This is shunning the cross of Christ. You see one man selfish; another controlled by pride or passion; another robbing God in tithes and offerings; and another doubting and unbelieving. . . . For each of these there is a special message in the Word of God."^d

CONVICTION

Our message should be prepared and delivered in such a way that all who hear it will be compelled to admit the truth. The preacher should be able to persuade people to see and accept the reality of the message being presented. That was exactly what Christ did during His time. "Christ's message pierced the conscience and revealed the inmost thoughts. When Christ preached, His message was like a sharp, two-edged sword, piercing the consciences of men and revealing their inmost thoughts. The work that Christ did, His faithful messengers will have to do. In simplicity, purity, and the strictest integrity they are to preach the Word. Those who labor in word or doctrine are to be faithful to their charge."^e

DECISION

Decision in this context means what has been decided after due consideration. It also stands for accepting one view or teaching in the place of others. Sermons should be presented in such a way that the congregation, after due consideration, will decide to do what the preacher has presented through the influence of the Holy Spirit. Appeals should be made at the end of every sermon. Some who are trembling in the balance may have one last opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. "Win decisions by combining the theory of the truth and Christ's redeeming love—some ministers err in making their sermons wholly argumentative. There are those who listen to the theory of the truth, and are impressed with the evidences brought out But often the cross of Calvary is not presented before the people. Some may be listening to the last sermon they will ever hear, and the golden opportunity is lost forever. If in connection with the theory of the truth, Christ and His redeeming love had been proclaimed, these might have been won to His side."^f

SIMPLE WORDS

During Christ's earthly ministry, all groups of people heard Him gladly. One of the reasons Jesus was able to communicate effectively was His use of simple language. Preachers today should do the same. Simple and clear words are needed in presenting the good news. The minister who preaches the good news needs to cultivate sound speech and refined deportment at all times and in all circumstances.

A story is told of an elderly man, Chief Obinna Emmanuel, who, in the company of his two sons, was inspecting a new house he had just purchased. The first son, 20 years old, was an undergraduate studying microbiology at a university in Lagos, and he had just taken a course in ornithology. The second son, 12 years old, had just completed his primary education in the same city. When the trio went to the back of the building, the undergraduate saw an egret lying dead in a pit. He quickly went over and picked up the bird. Its offensive odor disgusted him. When the younger brother wanted to know what was wrong, his older brother responded by saying, "This egret is undergoing a process of decomposition and putrefaction as a result of avian microbial infection." The young boy wanted to know what that meant. His father replied, "The bird is dead and it smells." Indeed, simple words are needed in the pulpit and in all spheres of communication.

AVOID LENGTHY SERMONS

Another feature that should characterize our messages is brevity. The sermon with all its parts should be direct and to the point. Lengthy sermons tax the strength of the preacher and the patience of the listeners. Note also that

what is spoken about in the early part of the sermon is more valuable than what comes later, when the people are anxious to go home. "When the discourse is too long, the last part detracts from that which preceded it. Speak short. Your discourses are generally double the length they should be. It is possible to handle a good thing in such a manner that it loses its flavor. When a discourse is too long, the last part of the preaching detracts from the force and interest of that which has preceded it. Do not wander, but come right to the point."^g

TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE SERMONS ARE NEEDED

The message should also be relevant, timely, and appropriate. In these days of suicide bombings, attacks, plane crashes, landslides, and floods, men and women need comfort and consolation. When the king of Syria planned various attacks on Israel, the timely message of Elisha saved the king of Israel and his people from their enemies (2 Kings 6:8-23). When the community is in danger, without food, and surrounded by disease and death, a message of hope will be most appropriate.

To preach messages that will be relevant to the lives of the parishioners, the preacher must be aware of their needs. The preacher must be a good shepherd who is concerned with the daily welfare of the people. Let us consider the importance of placing before the congregation the right spiritual food at the right time through this important counsel: "There are men who stand in the pulpits as shepherds, professing to feed the flock, while the sheep are starving for the bread of life. There are long, drawn-out discourses, largely made up of . . . anecdotes; but the hearts of the hearers are not touched. The feelings of some may be moved, they may shed a few tears, but their hearts are not broken. The Lord Jesus has been present when they have been presenting that which was called sermons, but their words were destitute of the dew and rain of heaven. The Lord God of heaven cannot approve much that is brought into the pulpit by those who are professedly speaking the word of the Lord. They do not inculcate ideas that will be a blessing to those who hear. There is cheap, very cheap fodder placed before the people."^h

^a Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:416.

^b _____, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 251.

^c _____, *Pastoral Ministry*, 193.

^d _____, *Review and Herald*, June 17, 1884.

^e _____, *Selected Messages*, 2:159.

^f _____, *Gospel Workers*, 158.

^g _____, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 311.

^h *Ibid.*, 336, 337.

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How could her friends have not heard? Limping, arm in sling, dark, thick bruises on her face, a tooth missing, one cracked, Sophia must have been hit by a car.

Her friends got it right, *almost*. She was hit, but not by a car.

It was by her husband instead!

There were rumors, hints, nasty little gossip actually, about Sophia and her husband, but most folks just shrugged it off. It wasn't their concern; it was a personal family matter. Besides, her husband seemed like such a nice guy. Probably no truth to it. That's what they all, even her closest friends, thought . . . at least until they saw Sophia with their own eyes and, then, heard in pitiful detail her describe *what really happened*.

Many people know about violence against women but not until you meet the victims personally, up front and in-your-face, does the stark reality of this world-wide phenomenon come painfully home.

The numbers stagger you: an estimated one in three woman around the world will be beaten, raped, or abused (in some countries, the numbers are almost twice as high); more than 50 percent of women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Tanzania reported having experienced physical or sexual abuse by an "intimate partner" (i.e., husbands or boyfriends); in the United States, one third of women murdered are killed by "intimate partners." All over the world, hundreds of thousands of women, even children, are victims of human trafficking in which they are sexually exploited. More than 100 million women have been victimized by female genital mutilation, and thousands more every day are at risk. In some battle zones, rape is a common tool of war.

The numbers go on and on. The only problem? They aren't numbers: they are human beings made in the image of God, people for whom Christ died. Thus, this terrible crime against humanity must stop. But, given human nature, it won't, not by itself, anyway.

That's exactly why we—you, I, our church—must enditnow.

Hence the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has begun a world-wide campaign,



enditnowTM, not just to help bring awareness of this terrible scourge but to, well, enditnow. Working with the Women's Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, ADRA has launched the **enditnow**TM campaign in order to raise awareness of the problem and seek solutions to it.

It's easy for us, as Adventists, to shake our heads at this terrible fact about what's going on "in the world." Unfortunately, before we start shaking our self-righteous heads too hard, we need to be aware that violence against women is something that our own church isn't immune to, either. Some Adventist husbands emotionally or even physically abuse their wives. Imagine someone beating his wife during the week and then going to church on Sabbath!

Let's not fool ourselves: it happens.

"That is why," said Heather-Dawn Small, director of Women's Ministries for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, "we are choosing to launch a campaign that increases personal awareness, responsibility and involvement within our church, in order to effectively help end violence against women and girls in every family and community."



“ That is why, we are choosing to launch a campaign that increases personal awareness, responsibility and involvement within our church, in order to effectively help end violence against women and girls in every family and community. ”

Heather-Dawn Small

Closing our eyes to the problem won't make it go away, either. For that reason ADRA and Women's Ministries are urging church members to get involved. With 15 million Seventh-day Adventists around the world, we can make a difference. We can help **enditnow™**. As church elders, you can have a powerful role in helping your local church be part of this worthwhile venture.

As you have done it to one of the least of these . . . you have done it unto Me. If the “least of these” doesn't mean also women and girls abused, beaten, and sexually exploited, then what does it mean? In the parable of the Good Samaritan, if the person left on the side of the road, stripped of clothes, beaten, and abandoned for dead doesn't include abused women, what does it include?

Thus the burning question is—What can you, the church elder, do?

- Go to the campaign's official website, www.enditnow.org; there you will learn not only about the depth of the problem but how you can help get local church members invested in this campaign.
- You can sign a petition (it's on the above website) that states, in part: “Seventh-day Adventists and supporters from more than 200 countries and territories join to advocate the end of all forms of violence against women and girls.” Work through your local church to get as many supporters as possible to sign.

Once we reach one million, we are going to deliver it to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. If just one out of every 15 Adventists sign it, we'll have the million names.

- Seek to get the pastor's support. With his or her backing, the local church can play a big role, locally. The work has to start in the local church, the local community. If all the thousands of Seventh-day Adventist churches around the world took a lead role, the impact would be powerful.
- This campaign shouldn't be just the work of ADRA or the Women's Ministries department. Seek to get all other ministries as possible on board. This can heighten awareness of the problem and make our work more effective.
- To whatever degree possible, get the local community involved: police, school principals, community leaders, other churches, shelters for battered women. The problem in some places is so large that many people will be willing to help.
- Ask the pastor to preach on the subject or to get someone qualified to stand in the pulpit and talk about this issue.
- Please pray for the success of this initiative.

These are just a few of the many options. To get more information, go to our website and click on the “resour-



es,” and “events” and “make a change” tags. These pages are filled with information on how your church can be part of a worldwide movement to end this global problem.

We can talk about grace, about the Sabbath, and “present truth” all we want. But a woman being beaten, sexually abused, or genitally mutilated is going to have other things on her mind besides which is the right day to rest, or what is the true state of the dead (though she might be thinking about death). Jesus first ministered to people’s needs. Then He preached the gospel to them. A woman, any woman, being abused is a woman in need.

Meet those needs; the rest will follow in turn.

How can we call ourselves “human,” much less “Christian,” if we ignore this horrible crime?

The Sophias of the world want it to stop. That’s why your church has launched this program. But ADRA and Women’s Ministries can’t do it alone. They need you, the elder, to get the local church involved.

How else can we end it now?



Clifford Goldstein is director of the Adult Bible Study Guide at the General Conference;

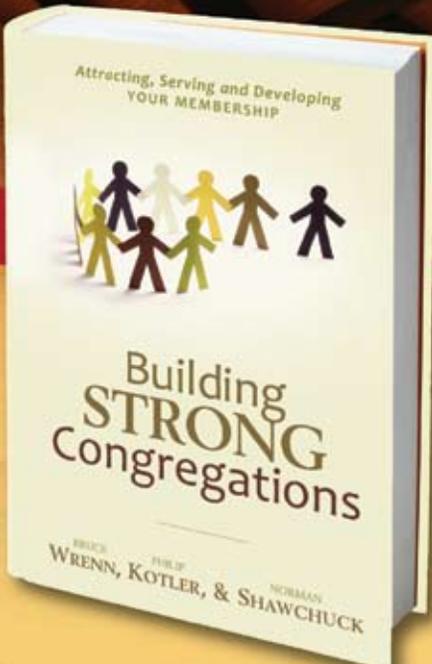
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“The keys to thriving religious institutions include a careful reading, evaluating, and understanding of the environment, a clear definition of the core values and beliefs, and positioning and presenting the institution in accessible, understandable, and inviting ways. Building Strong Congregations provides the tools to accomplish these essential tasks.”

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3

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Wisdom

from James Cress



Sometimes it is not how long we live on this earth that matters, but how we live and what we did during our sojourn on earth that makes the difference.

And there is no telling how much we have impacted the lives of others such that in death we are still greatly missed. But of all our good or bad deeds on this earth, it is the care, compassion, faithfulness, goodwill, understanding and concern we show toward our fellow human beings that count the most.

James A. Cress was such a person, and this is why with these words I have undertaken to remember and honor him. There is always time to express recognition and they

tribute to a person whose ministry blessed many.

Particularly, I had the privilege to learn important lessons from his books, sermons, articles and personal conversation. He was a visionary man, an example of generosity and faithful friend.

Pastors, local church elders and their families around the world were blessed with the ministry of this spirit-filled man. The General Conference Ministerial Association lost a great spiritual leader, *Elder's Digest* magazine lost its founder and I lost my best American friend.

I went back to some of his books and started reading them again and I selected some meaningful thoughts from my personal reading which I would like to share with you.

COMMON SENSE MINISTRY.

"This book is dedicated to my spouse Sharon M. Cress in appreciation for her partnership in marriage, in acknowledgment of her service to pastoral families, and in affirmation of her call to ministry."

1. "If you find yourself busier than Jesus, I encourage you to experimentally investigate your priorities." p. 6.
2. "Encourage your members to reach beyond what they think they can do." p. 8.
3. "Take time to listen to the message your family members give. They love you and want to see your ministry succeed." p. 9.
4. "A visit need not be everlasting in order to have eternal benefit." p. 51.
5. "Pastors will not always be perfect and may sometimes overlook a detail, but respect how much they do accomplish with the limited resources available." p. 61.
6. "For spiritual growth, doing is more important than watching." p. 80.

MORE COMMON SENSE MINISTRY.

1. "Death is an enemy, but rest is a gift." p. 26.
2. God calls you to preach Jesus and Jesus only. There is no need to preach anything else. If you think you have exhausted the supremacy of Jesus, begin again and retell the old, old story." p. 45.
3. "All discrimination is sinful; the only escape is a deeper experience of the Saviour's presence." p. 55.
4. "Leaders whose counsel is derived from experience will be trusted by those who follow their leadership." p. 59.
5. "Perhaps nothing builds trust more readily than leaders who listen carefully to the ideas and opinions of their followers." p. 61.
6. "Every itinerant evangelist must remember that harvest is only conserved to the extent that the local church assimilates and disciples new converts." p. 67.
7. "It is nothing else but spiritual child abuse to invite people to make a spiritual decision for Christ and then abandon them." p. 67.

YOU CAN KEEP THEM IF YOU CARE.

1. "The Adventist church has generally failed to understand the difference between the event of accession into the membership roll of the church and the process of assimilation into the body of believers." p. 11.
2. "We have placed much more emphasis on the word 'Go' than we have on the process of making disciples." p. 17.
3. "You cannot teach an egg to fly before it is hatched." p. 20.
4. "People must 'be' the church not just attend one." p. 22.
5. "If the church is interested in what interests Jesus, it will be interested in numbers." p. 63.
6. "A believer who is not ministering is, essentially, not a believer." p. 73.
7. "Witnessing is not something we 'do' as much as something we 'are'." p. 74.



Jonas Arrais
Elder's Digest Magazine Editor

THE WORD... FOR THESE TIMES

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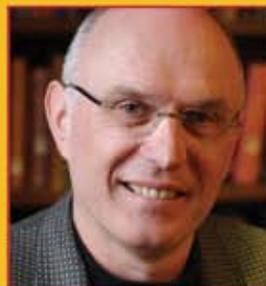
Lawrence Geraty is the President Emeritus of La Sierra University. He grew up as a citizen of the world in a Christian missionary family who ministered in China, Burma, Hong Kong, and Lebanon. Educated in seven different countries and various states across the USA set him on a lifelong course committed to the values of diversity. Lawrence Geraty earned a PhD with distinction from Harvard University in Hebrew Bible and biblical archaeology, taking examinations in 10 languages. In his notable scholarly career, Dr. Geraty has received numerous honors, including a Fulbright Fellowship and serving as advisor on archaeology to former Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan. As well as being president of several scholarly societies, he has also served as Professor of Archaeology and History of Antiquity at Andrews Theological Seminary, President of Atlantic Union College, and more recently President and Professor of Archaeology at La Sierra University.



Marguerite Shuster is the Harold John Ockenga Professor of Preaching and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. She joined the School of Theology faculty in 1992 after serving as an adjunct assistant professor. Her courses include Homiletics, Systematic Theology, Making Doctrine Live, and various preaching practica. Marguerite Shuster's published books include *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (2004), *Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett* (1991), and *Power, Pathology, Paradox: the Dynamics of Evil and Good* (1987). She also edited and completed Jewett's *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human* (1996) and has published many articles, sermons, chapters, and reviews. She is currently working on a long-term project on the doctrine of divine providence. Marguerite Shuster is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and served as an associate pastor for six years then a solo pastor for five years.



Roy Adams is the Associate Editor of the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World*, serving in this position since 1988. He was born in the Caribbean, and received his education at schools in Grenada, Trinidad, Canada, and the United States. The bulk of his pastoral work was in the Ontario and Quebec provinces of Canada. After obtaining a PhD in Theology from Andrews University, he lectured at what is now the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS) in the Philippines. From that base, Roy Adams' teaching and speaking appointments took him to many other Asian countries, and he continues to be a highly sought after international speaker at major clergy professional development meetings. Dr. Adams has also served as associate secretary of the Canadian Union. Roy Adams is a prolific writer and has authored several books over the years. His three latest: *Crossing Jordan* (2005); *From the Heart* (2007); and *The Wonder of Jesus* (2008).



Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School, and Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. A native of Croatia, Dr. Volf has forged a theology of forgiveness and non-violence in the face of the horrendous violence experienced in Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s. While he maintains active interest in many aspects of faith's relation to culture, his primary work has focused on theological understandings of work, the church, the Trinity, violence, reconciliation, and memory. Miroslav Volf has given many prestigious lectureships and is a highly awarded author. *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* was selected as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lenten Book for 2006. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* received the 2002 Grawemeyer Award. He has also been featured on National Public Radio's "Speaking of Faith" and Public Television's "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly."



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