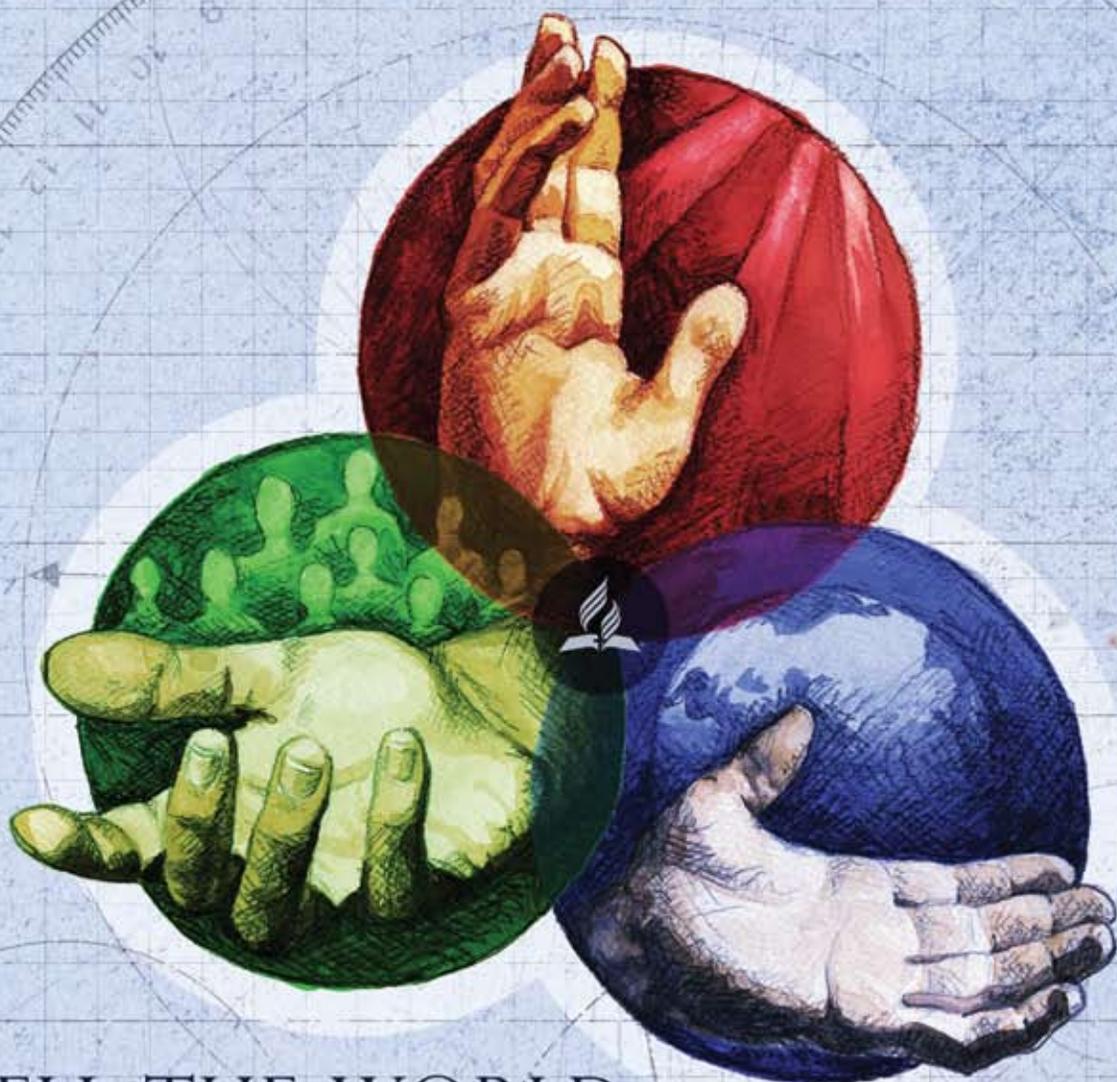


quarterly resource for local church elders † july/september 2010

ELDER'S DIGEST



TELL THE WORLD

✦ Reach Up, Reach Out, Reach Across

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EDITOR'S NOTES: The articles in this publication have been revised slightly or updated to conform to the intended audience and nature of *Elder's Digest*.

SUBSCRIPTION AND ADDRESS CHANGES: Please send all subscriptions and address changes to eldersdigest@gc.adventist.org or *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6516.

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PROCLAIMING HIS GRACE

The central theme of the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta is “Proclaiming God’s Grace.” It is always good to contemplate the wonder of God’s grace; God’s grace is the foundation of Christian life.

The fullness of God’s grace is beyond human appreciation or comprehension. The riches of His goodness cannot be expressed by mortal tongues. We can make a feeble attempt, but our best efforts will be puny approximations. We can admire the beauty of divine grace, but we cannot fully explore its depths. At best we can only stand in awe and exclaim with the apostle Paul: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

Anyone who attempts to talk about God’s grace must begin by confessing personal inadequacy for the task. At best we are clay pots entrusted with a priceless treasure. Yet God can enable even weak mortals to speak His Word and glorify His name. “Our competence comes from God” (2 Cor. 3:5). “For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). The “all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

His grace is unfathomable and matchless and our finite minds cannot grasp the depths of it. But I invite you to consider three aspects of God’s grace.

God’s grace is unmerited favor. We never deserve it. For example, when we believe in God, we believe that we are saved by grace. In reality, however, we are saved because of what God did for us, not because of anything we did. We deserve punishment,

but God shows mercy to us. Ellen G. White affirms, “Grace is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God.”¹

God’s grace is for all sinners. God knows you from eternity and intends good for you. He knows your sinfulness and your need for grace. It is your privilege to receive and embrace God’s grace. “The angels, who know nothing of sin, do not understand what it is to have grace exercised toward them; but our sinfulness calls for the exercise of grace from a merciful God.”²

God’s grace is abundant. If you feel discouraged about your Christian life, know that God’s grace is sufficient for you. “We are to be the recipients of the treasures of God’s grace, we are to drink of the living waters and be refreshed, and then we are to become the channel of the grace of God to others.”³

As you ponder God’s matchless grace, how do you find it expressed in your life? How do you respond to this incredible gift? How do you share this abundant gift with those around you? ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:398.

² *Ibid.*, 332.

³ White, *Review and Herald*, January 28, 1890, par. 2.

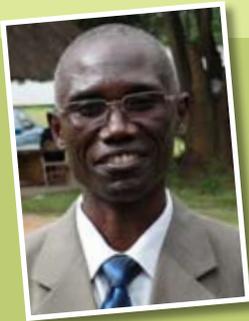


Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

PASTOR AND ELDER

A Team Effort

In this issue, we interviewed a district pastor and a local church elder within the same district. Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success. Copperbelt Zambia Field is growing rapidly and a big reason is due to the team effort between pastors and elders. In their opinion, team stands for "T-ogether E-veryone A-chieves M-ore!"



Pastor Gilbert Poso, 58, is currently serving as a district pastor for the Luanshya East Mission District in the Copperbelt Zambia Field of the Zambia Union Conference (Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division). He has served the church for 36 years in various positions—pastor, departmental director, conference secretary and conference president. He has been married to Agness for 30 years and they have 8 children. He enjoys teaching the scripture, psychosocial and marriage counseling, health education, and writing. His district has 8 organized churches, 6 organized companies, over 2,000 baptized members, and a team of 25 elected church elders.



Elder Geoffrey Mukuma, 64, was ordained as an elder in 1986 and has served for 7 years at the Mpatamatu Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is a retired accountant and currently engaged in public service transport as an operator. He is married to Edith, a retired primary school teacher, and they have 8 children. His church has 350 members and 5 elders, making the ratio 1:70.

1. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL CHURCH ELDERS?

Gilbert Poso (GP): The work of local church elders is very vital. In my church, they are my undershepherds; my right-hand men in ministry. I depend on them for mentoring, nurturing older and newly baptized members, chairing the church board meetings, conducting communion, administering funerals, and reclaiming backsliders. I have embarked on leadership training workshops in all the local churches for the purpose of reaching our intended goal of one elder per twenty-five members.

Geoffrey Mukuma (GM): I find it very important to provide local spiritual leadership to my local congregation under the pastor's

guidance. This sharing of the burden provides my pastor enough time to attend effectively to those issues requiring his professional ministerial services. I share the responsibility with my pastor who is looking after 20 organized congregations and close to 3,000 members in the district.

2. WHAT IS A PASTOR'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE ELDERS?

GP: I have set aside every Thursday to meet, discuss, plan and counsel my elders. I try to equip them with authentic spiritual material and personally pray with them every chance I get. I avoid discussing their weaknesses in public and thank them for their personal commitment to the church. Quar-

terly, I conduct a district elder's meeting for fellowship, training, counseling, and harmonious programming.

GM: I need the pastor's prayers and encouragement to help me offer effective and dedicated service to local church members. I need ongoing professional advice on matters of church administration, as well as counsel to conduct annual workshops to train and equip new church officers.

3. WHAT ARE SOME QUALITIES YOUR ELDERS POSSESS?

GP: I enjoy working with elders who love the Lord, are committed to church organization, are apt to teach the word, and are faithful stewards of money, body and

time-keeping. These characteristics describe my elders. All the newly elected elders at my church go through a well-planned orientation seminar in all phases of the church. This cannot be understated enough.

GM: The qualities the elders in my church possess are the ability to be friendly and available to all members, young and old, both in the local church and in the community. The capacity to listen to problems and complaints, analyze and offer solutions. The competence to plan, organize and implement local church programs. The skill to motivate our workers and recognize their contributions and efforts that have been put in for achieved goals. Above all, they strive to live Christ-like in word and deed.

4. HOW DOES YOUR DISTRICT REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY?

GP: In 2008, we embarked on a

program that reached out to the local community through the *Voice of Prophecy* Bible study lessons. We enrolled and trained over 3,000 bible instructors. We currently have a continued program of witnessing through the Bible correspondence school where each instructor studies with at least two people in their vicinity. We have also installed a satellite dish in our state prison which broadcasts the *Hope Channel*. Many prisoners have been converted and baptized.

5. DOES YOUR CHURCH IMPLEMENT A VISITATION PROGRAM?

GM: Yes, it is a ministry I very much enjoy! Our visitation program includes building relationships, assessing their needs and offering spiritual support. This gives me an opportunity to fellowship with them on a personal level. Other programs we implement are evan-

gelistic crusades, baptisms and spiritual and social events for our members and the community.

6. ANY FURTHER ADVICE FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH ELDERS?

GP: Study the Bible in order to understand the will of God for your life. Fear the Lord and depart from evil. Be loyal to God who has appointed you as His servant. Be loyal to your organization and ministers. Let there be no division between you and your pastor. Finally, preach logically, positively, and relevantly.

7. WHAT IS THE MINISTRY THAT RESONATES DEEPEST IN YOUR HEART?

GM: The ministry I relish most is planning and inspiring members to get involved in praise and worship and personal testimony. Elders, minister wherever the Lord leads you and always seek His will.

ED

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TELL THE WORLD

MISSION STATEMENT

THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IS TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL PEOPLE, COMMUNICATING THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES OF REVELATION 14:6-12, LEADING THEM TO ACCEPT JESUS AS PERSONAL SAVIOR AND UNITE WITH HIS REMNANT CHURCH, DISCIPLING THEM TO SERVE HIM AS LORD, AND PREPARING THEM FOR HIS SOON RETURN.

Over the past five years, Tell the World has been a broad vision, a bold challenge undertaken by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The ultimate goal is to provide every person on earth with the chance to know Jesus Christ.

More than a program, and more than a slogan, Tell the World is our acceptance of Christ's commission to spread the gospel to every corner of the world, to each living person.

Of course, the goals and challenges of Tell the World are not new to us—they are part of the very fabric of our identity and heritage. They are fundamental to our mission.

GLOBAL MISSION PRIORITIES:

REACH OUT TO THE 10/40 WINDOW

181:1
Adventist
Ratio outside
the 10/40
Window

1,736:1
Adventist
Ratio inside
the 10/40
Window



From its very beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a missionary movement. We have committed ourselves to not only make our world a better place in the here and now, but also to prepare people for the world to come. This is our first priority—the very reason our church exists.

Now the Church is re-emphasizing the challenge, extending an invitation for each Seventh-day Adventist to be part of this task. Now more than ever, it is time for each of us to become personally involved.

The strategic plan for the Seventh-day Adventist Church from 2010 to 2015 focuses on three important values:

QUALITY OF LIFE is a multi-faceted concept that goes to the heart of what it means to be an Adventist believer. For an Adventist, quality of life means first and foremost being sure of belonging to the Lord, finding the rest and assurance of forgiveness, and finding contentment on our life's journey.



REACH OUT TO THE BIG CITIES



953:1

Ratio of
Adventists
in World's
Largest Cities

- BEIJING
- ISTANBUL
- TOKYO
- MEXICO CITY
- NEW YORK
- MUMBAI
- SÃO PAULO
- DELHI
- OSAKA-KOBE
- DHAKA
- SHANGHAI
- MANILA
- LOS ANGELES
- KOLKATA
- KARACHI
- MOSCOW
- CAIRO
- BUENOS AIRES
- RIO DE JANEIRO



423:1

Ratio of
Adventists
Outside
World's
Largest Cities



UNITY reflects the nature of the church as one family around the world, constantly communicating with one another, constantly sharing, and in that process learning to defer to one another for the good of the One Body of Christ.

GROWTH is expressed through evangelism, public witness, and nurturing the personal spiritual growth of believers.

Within the strategic plan, one priority will continue to reach out to an area called the 10/40 Window. This term refers to a region in the eastern hemisphere located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. This general area of the world is home to the largest populations who also live in deep poverty and experience the lowest quality of life. This is also the hub of the world's major non-Christian religions. A natural consequence is that this area has the least access to Christian resources.

Another important area of emphasis will be reaching out to the big cities of the world. They include huge populations where millions of people

are still waiting to hear about Jesus. Take a look at the list of the world's largest cities, and the ratio of Adventists to population.

These daunting tasks will need the prayers, witness, and support of every church member. Tell the World is not simply the responsibility of church administrators. It requires the prayerful consideration of each individual—elders, pastors, and members. Tell the World should inspire each one of us to reach up, reach out, and reach across. We can take the following steps:

REACH UP to God through Bible study, prayer, and reading the Spirit of Prophecy, resulting in revival and faithfulness.

REACH OUT to others as a friendly church that puts Christ's mission first, invites all people to fellowship, and makes a difference daily in the community.

REACH ACROSS the barriers that threaten to divide us as a family, endeavoring to disciple, nurture, and involve every individual in the life and mission of the church.

REACH UP

to God through Bible study, Adventist Bible study guides, prayer and the Spirit of Prophecy, resulting in revival and faithfulness.

REACH OUT

to others as a friendly church that puts Christ's mission peoples to fellowship, and makes a difference daily in



Calling Seventh-day Adventists to:

- increase Bible study, prayer and reading the Spirit of Prophecy
- increase the number of members who return a faithful title and support local and mission offerings
- increase involvement in the witness of the church
- increase the use of Adventist produced Bible study materials

Calling Seventh-day Adventists to:

- become involved in the mission of the church
- become involved in community projects
- increase the number of non-Seventh-day Adventists attending church each week
- increase the number of members
- support 600,000 evangelism events
- establish 25,000 new worship groups
- reach a goal of seven million church members winning one person to Christ
- increase the ratio of membership to population in urban areas
- provide resources for the 10/40 Window (money, people, time)
- increase membership and church plants in the 10/40 Window
- increase the number of listeners, viewers, and readers reached by Adventist electronic media
- support a large global strategy for literature distribution
- see that every church adopts a program for growth

Church administrators and pastors can create synergy and facilitate effective networking among church infrastructure, institutions, and lay organizations. They can help to integrate local, regional, and global priorities in mission.

Pastors and elders can enable members to understand and celebrate both the local and global identity of the Seventh-day Adventist church. They can help the congregation see themselves as a vital part of their global church community.

Individual members can demonstrate their commitment to mission by understanding, living, and communicating the gospel. They can participate in local church fellowship, worship, and service. They can be part of all aspects of mission priorities.

Each one of us can do our part by prayerfully considering how we can be involved. We shouldn't constrain ourselves by worrying about what we can or cannot do. Perhaps we can start by making a personal commitment to join our church family in whatever capacity we can to Tell the World that Jesus loves them.

MY COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE THE LEGACY

I join my brothers and sisters in a commitment to *Tell the World*:

- By reaching up and renewing my own faith
- By reaching out and communicating hope to all within my sphere of influence
- By reaching across to embrace and protect the unity of the family of faith

SIGNATURE _____

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...first, invites all
the community.



REACH ACROSS

the barriers that threaten to divide us as a family, endeavoring to disciple, nurture, and involve every individual in the life and mission of the church.

Calling Seventh-day Adventists to:

- improve retention of members
- nurture members
- increase the percentage of young people involved in the work of the church
- increase the percentage of young people retained within the church

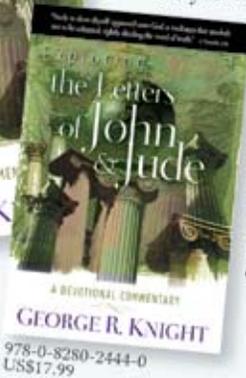


Enhance Your Bible Study

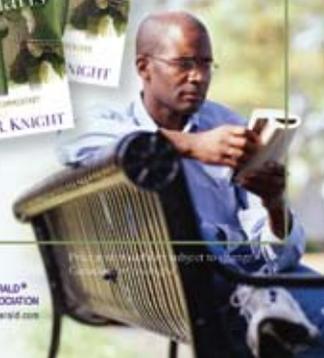
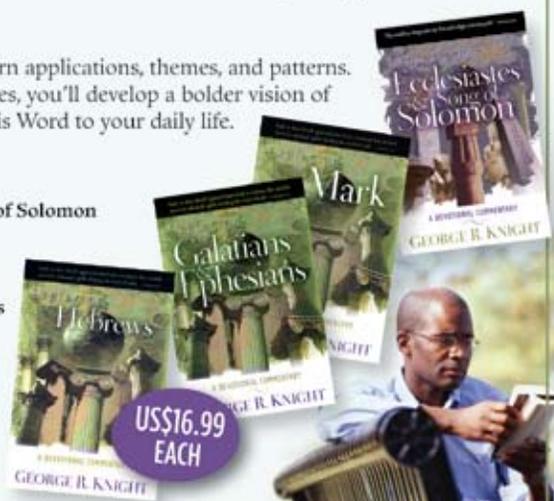
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PROCLAIMING GOD'S GRACE

The principle of grace is as fundamental to Christianity as justice is to law or love is to marriage. Christianity cannot be understood apart from an adequate grasp of grace. The doctrine of grace distinguishes the Christian faith from every other religion in the world.

GRACE IS PART OF GOD'S CHARACTER

Grace is most frequently defined as unmerited favor. But first and foremost, grace is a description of God's character, which is displayed by His gifts to humanity. God is a God of grace, and He desires to make this known not only to humanity but also to the angelic hosts.

Because God is immutable and changeless, grace has always been part of His character (cf., James 1:17). Some have supposed that the God of the Old Testament is someone other than the God of the New Testament. But we know that the grace of God is frequently evidenced in the Old Testament. God is, was, and will always be a God of grace.

GRACE IS EPITOMIZED ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY

Grace is not merely a part of the plan of redemption; it is the silver cord that runs through every facet of the work of redemption. According to the apostle Paul, the entire work of Christ in coming to earth, dying for sinners, and being crowned with glory is said to be "by the grace of God" (Heb. 2:9). In no way was this prompted by man (cf., Rom. 10:6-8). Our redemption is "according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). Justification—that judicial pronouncement that we are innocent of any guilt—is a gift of His grace (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:7). When all is said and done, every element of the work of salvation is the work of God through grace, not something of our own making.

GRACE IS EXPRESSED IN MANY WAYS

Grace takes many forms in the Bible, and it is good to define it so the diversity of these forms is taken into account. Let me briefly enumerate some of the forms of grace.

Common grace. It is that benevolence which is poured out upon all men, regardless of their spiritual condition. God is gracious in providing for the salvation of all men and in commanding its universal proclamation. He is also gracious in delaying judgment, thereby giving men ample time to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

Saving grace. It is that generous provision of salvation on the cross of Calvary and the securing of it by divine intervention. "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus we are saved, just as they are" (Acts 15:11).

Securing grace. It is that manifestation of God's benevolence by which Christians are kept secure. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

Just as lost souls cannot obtain salvation through any good works of their own, neither can Christians maintain their salvation by doing good works. Salvation is obtained and maintained by grace alone.

Sanctifying grace. It is that grace which works within the true believer in such a way as to bring growth, maturity, and progress in the process of becoming Christlike: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Sustaining grace. It is grace given at special times of need, especially during adversity or suffering. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Perhaps some of these distinctions are a bit arbitrary, but the point remains that grace is manifested in many ways. Grace seeks us and saves us; grace keeps us secure and enables us to endure the tests and trials of life. Grace will bring about our sanctification in this life and will ultimately bring us to glory. From beginning to end, we are objects of divine grace.

GRACE IS PURE

If we were to describe grace to a chemist, we would say that grace is an element, not a compound. In more biblical terms, grace is never a mixture of divine benevolence and human effort (Rom. 4:4-5; 11:6); grace is entirely the work of God, unprompted by man, undeserved by man, and without regard to anything that the object of grace will later accomplish.

GRACE IS GIVEN ONLY TO THE HUMBLE

Grace is the goodness of God on behalf of sinners who humbly acknowledge their own deficiency and thus their dependence upon God's grace for forgiveness and salvation. But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says, "God opposed the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

WHILE SIN IS AN OCCASION FOR GRACE, GRACE IS NEVER AN OCCASION FOR SIN

Many objections to the biblical doctrine of grace originate from abuses of this doctrine in the lives of Christians. Any biblical doctrine can be misapplied in such a way as to justify sin in our lives. In Romans 5, Paul taught that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (verse 20), but he quickly added that this is no incentive to careless living: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Rom. 6:1, 2). We who have died to sin cannot casually and carelessly persist in sin, for it is inconsistent with new life in Christ. Grace must never be used as an excuse for sin (1 Peter 2:16).

CONCLUSION

Is that how you and I view God most of the time? Pray that it is not so with us! Sometimes we may find ourselves thinking of God in less complimentary ways. We are surprised when good things come into our lives, and we know they are from God. When suffering or trials enter our lives, we may think God is punishing us or giving us what we deserve rather than dealing with us according to grace.

Meditating on God's grace reminds us of the goodness of God in His dealings with mankind in general and with you and me in particular. God is gracious. His grace is for sinners like you and me. He offers His grace to us. How will we respond to His unfathomable love?



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BIOGRAPHY



ELDER ISAAC MARQUES

Since 1986, Isaac Marques has been a local church elder at the Lehigh Valley Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, USA. For nearly 25 years, he has stayed faithful to his ministry and passion. "I am grateful to the Lord for giving me the opportunity to work as a preacher and leader of my church and for letting me serve in my community for all these many years."



LET THE POOR GIVE, TOO

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Acts 20:35, NIV

Early one morning, a little lady in her late 50s stood outside the front door of a church. Gray hair jutted out from beneath her knit cap. She clasped a large shopping bag-type purse with one hand and pounded on the church door with the other. The church pastor and another church leader could see her through the Plexiglas window as they walked down the hall after a lively meeting about homelessness.

“The clothes closet opens at 10:00 a.m. You can come back and get some clothes then,” the busy urban pastor insensitively informed her as he rushed to his next meeting.

“No, no!” she reacted, her countenance fallen. “I’m here to help sort clothes.”

The damage was done. Her spirit was wounded and her self-esteem was lost. She had come to help clothe others and was not allowed to carry out Jesus’ words, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35, NIV). Her face reflected the hurt of a blessing lost—the blessing of rising early to help others in need—a blessing marred by being stereotyped as a recipient of charity rather than a giver.¹

Your church probably has some type of helping ministry, an outreach to meet the needs in your community or around the world. Maybe you have donated to a food pantry, put money in the offering plate for the less fortunate, gone on a mission trip to a poor country, or volunteered at a soup kitchen. You have felt that you must do something; after all, helping the needy is the church’s responsibility, an important part of the job description of Jesus’ followers, and a major issue in the final judgment (Matt. 25:31-46).

Most of the programs churches develop to help people are *relief* projects. This is easy to understand. If someone is hungry, feed him. If someone needs clothes, give her clothes. Matthew 25 and Isaiah 58 instruct God’s people to do that. Case closed. But wait! Is there something else to consider about *how* to follow God’s mandate?

The little lady at the church door shows us that there are dangers in one-sided charity. One-way giving erodes the dignity of the recipient. True, it often helps *givers* feel good about themselves. John Perkins, a renowned Christian champion of biblical justice, has committed his life to bringing reconciliation and development to broken communities in America. He believes that “somehow we have to disconnect what and how we give from our need to feel good about ourselves.”²

In our giving, we must focus on meeting the real needs of charity’s recipients. One of their deepest needs is to be empowered to give, too. Allow them that privilege.

Giving relief to the needy is appropriate, of course. The story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 is an appropriate application of the relief mode, as is earthquake relief in Haiti. But one of the biggest mistakes many churches make is applying relief in situations where rehabilitation or development is the more appropriate intervention.³

“Rehabilitation” means working *with* the needy woman at the church door as she participates in her own self-improvement and recovery. “Development” is a process of *ongoing change* as the materially poor learn to work and support themselves and their families with the fruits of their work.

Our ministry to people in need should not focus on doing something *to* them or *for* them but *with* them.⁴

(For an example of how one small church helped develop and restore a whole community, see the story of Sandtown in Mark Gornik's book *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City*).⁵

Several years ago, a church was mobilized to volunteer at a Christian homeless shelter for men. Once a month church members happily brought food, prepared and served meals, and cleaned up afterward. They came close to spoon-feeding the shelter residents, never asking them to lift a finger. A more empowering, developmental approach would be to allow the men to participate in their own rehabilitation: inviting them to plan the meal, help shop for food, prepare and serve food, and clean up. The church volunteers could have done supper *with* the shelter residents

rather than giving supper *to* them. The provider-recipient relationship confirms the giver's feeling of superiority and the recipient's feeling of inferiority. It strengthens the giver's "God complex" (the "I-am-here-to-save-you" attitude).⁶

Sure, it is easier and more efficient to give hand-outs and spoon-feed. But is it effective in the long run? Do the same people keep coming back, as helpless as ever? Churches involved in rehabilitation and development will, of course, need to be more deeply involved in people's lives. It will take more planning and personal involvement. But the joy of seeing people restored to God's ideal for them is worth it all.

Robert Lupton, a Christian community developer, coordinated an Adopt-a-Family program at Christmas. Urban families who could not afford to buy presents for their children were matched up with suburban families with compassionate hearts and plenty of material things. On Christmas Day, the suburban givers would deliver gifts to their adopted city families. This annual tradition enriched the lives of both the poor and affluent families.

A few years later, Lupton happened to be in the living room of one of his needy neighbors when the suburban gift-giving family arrived. He noticed something he had never seen before. The children, of course, were excited and overjoyed to see the colorfully-wrapped gifts, but the mothers, although gracious to their generous benefactors, were a bit reserved. If there was a dad in the home, he vanished. When he saw the gift-givers coming, he disappeared out the back door. While the children



When recipients remain content to remain givers, good has become the enemy of best. Perhaps the best giving is the kind that enables the poor to know the blessedness of being givers.



Robert D. Lupton

were thrilled, the recipient parents suffered from a loss of dignity and pride. Their failure as providers was laid bare before their children—right in their own home!

It became clear to Lupton that this charity system needed to change. The following Christmas, when caring people called his urban-ministries organization to adopt a city family, he asked if they would be willing to give an extra gift this year—the gift of dignity. Instead of delivering wrapped gifts directly to the adopted city families, givers were asked to bring unwrapped items to the organization's store, where a Christmas toy shop would be set up. A small price—somewhere between a garage-sale price and a wholesale price—would be placed on each toy or piece of clothing. Parents

from the community would be invited to come and shop for their family's Christmas gifts. Since a cash flow would be generated from the sale of the donated items, parents who had no money could work at the store to earn what they needed to buy gifts for their families. Imagine what it was like on Christmas morning as children opened gifts that their parents had obtained with their own efforts! Robert's organization renamed the Adopt-a-Family program "Pride for Parents." Thus a system for exchange was created that promoted interdependency rather than dependency.⁷

When your church considers service to its community, plan to let the poor give, too.



¹ Adapted from Robert D. Lupton, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 21.

² John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 28.

³ See Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 104, 105.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For a summarized story of Sandtown, see *Elder's Digest*, July/September 2009, 7.

⁶ Corbett and Fikkert, 110-113.

⁷ Lupton, 48-51.

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HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS

7 SECRETS FOR TRUE LONGEVITY

NATURE'S FAST FOOD <

For those who think longevity is all about hard work and deprivation, I have good news for you! There is something easy you can do to add two or three years to your life, and it involves eating fast food. Yes, one kind of fast food actually offers health benefits! I am talking about nature's best "fast food"—nuts. According to researchers at Loma Linda University Medical Center, eating nuts regularly may in fact lengthen your life.¹

Many of us grew up hearing that eating nuts was good for us. This advice has been passed down through generations of Adventists. However, in the last 20 years, researchers at Loma Linda University Medical Center have discovered scientific evidence for the nutritional benefits of treating yourself to these handy little packages of protein. Here are some of the benefits of eating nuts.

1. *Improves health for nearly everyone.*² People who benefit from eating nuts include men, women, vegetarians, meat-eaters, the obese, thin, young, old, athletic and unfit. Everyone benefits!

2. *Lowers the risk of heart disease and heart attacks.* The Adventist Health Study reported that when comparing people who ate nuts every day with people who ate nuts less than once a month, nut-eaters experienced up to 60 percent fewer heart attacks than their counterparts.³ Recent epidemiologic studies have consistently shown an association between nut consumption and a reduced risk of coronary heart disease.⁴

3. *Lowers the risk of stroke.*⁵ This is not surprising since many strokes follow a process similar to that of heart attacks.

4. *Lowers the risk of developing diabetes and metabolic syndrome.* In a large study, the regular intake of nuts was associated with reduced risk of diabetes mellitus among women.⁶ Another study showed that adding 30 grams of nuts per day to a Mediterranean diet resulted in a significant reversal of metabolic syndrome.⁷

5. *Lowers cholesterol levels.*⁸ Nuts contain healthy fatty acids as well as plant sterols, which are often added to margarine to reduce cholesterol absorption from food. Walnuts were especially beneficial in lowering LDL cholesterol.

6. *Lowers the risk of obesity and weight gain.* Although some may be afraid of gaining weight from eating nuts, this fear is unfounded. Nuts contain low levels of saturated fats and high levels of unsaturated fats. In studies, those who ate nuts often were actually thinner on average than those who rarely consumed nuts. In fact, long-term nut consumption is linked with lower body weight and lower risk of obesity and weight gain.

As a result of these benefits, calculations suggest that those who eat nuts daily gain an extra five or six years of life free of heart disease⁹ and that eating nuts regularly—though not

daily—appears to increase longevity by two or three years.¹⁰

Isn't it amazing how beneficial nuts are? But how many should we eat? Studies suggest that 30-60 grams (1-2 ounces) of nuts should be consumed daily to gain the maximum benefit.

You may wonder how nuts can be so beneficial. Here is what we know: Nuts have plenty of unsaturated fatty acids, antioxidants, and phytochemicals which are essential in protecting us against cardiovascular disease and even cancer. Walnuts, pecans, and chestnuts have the highest levels of antioxidants; almonds are high in phytochemicals, calcium, and magnesium. Other healthful elements in nuts are folate, carotene, vitamin K, phosphorus, copper, selenium, potassium, and zinc.¹¹ Eating a wide variety of nuts ensures that you will receive the most health benefits.¹²

Isn't it amazing how God prepared this treat of densely-packaged nutrients with wide-ranging cardiovascular and metabolic benefits? Nuts can be readily incorporated into a healthful diet. They are nature's best fast food, easily accessible for most of us, easily transported, and easily stored with no need for refrigeration. Nuts require no cooking and very little preparation; they come with a natural wrapper and are environmentally friendly. Grab a handful each day and live longer. It's that easy!



¹ Sabaté, J., CHIP Summit 2009, Loma Linda, CA.

² Fraser, G. E., *Clinical Cardiology* 22 (Suppl. III), 11-15 (1999).

³ Fraser, G. E., Sabaté, J., et al. "The Adventist Health Study," in *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 151:1416-4 (1992).

⁴ Sabaté, J., and Ang, Y., *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2009, 89:1643S-1648S.

⁵ Yochum, L. A., et al. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 72:476-483 (2000).

⁶ Jiang, R., et al., *JAMA*, 288:2554-2560 (2002).

⁷ Salas-Salvadó, H., et al., *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 168:2449-2458 (2008).

⁸ Rose, E., *CAB Reviews*, 3, Jan. 12, 2008.

⁹ Hu, F. B., and Stamfer, M. J., *Current Atherosclerosis Reports*, 1:204-209 (1999).

¹⁰ Fraser, G. E., and Shavik, D. J., "Ten Years of Life: Is It a Matter of Choice?" in *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 161:1645-1652 (2001).

¹¹ King, J. C., Blumberg, J., Ingwersen, L., Jenab, M., and Tucker, K. L., "Tree Nuts and Peanuts as Components of a Healthy Diet," in *Journal of Nutrition*, 2008, 138:1736S-1740S.

¹² Just one note of caution: Some people—generally no more than 1 in 100—may be allergic to one or more kinds of nuts. If you don't already know, find out through your doctor whether you are one of them.



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THE GIFT OF GRACE

Matthew 20:1-16

The Bible tells the story of workers in a vineyard. Although some of the laborers started working early in the morning and some started late in the afternoon, at the end of the day the overseer paid them all the same wage. Those who started work in the evening were each paid a denarius, the same amount paid to those who started early in the morning. Needless to say, those who had worked all day grumbled and complained, saying that this was unfair.

In this parable, Jesus described a scene that would be familiar to His listeners. By telling this story, Jesus was trying to help His followers understand something important about grace in the kingdom of God. We must understand this parable not as a lesson in economics but rather with an eye to its spiritual lesson. Jesus was not encouraging an unjust pay scale or discrimination; He was illustrating the nature of God's grace in terms in which His followers could relate. The first thing to notice is that all of the laborers were unemployed before the landowner hired them. The fact that they were hired was due to the employer's goodwill, not because of anything the workers brought to the situation.

GRACE IS A GIFT

This story illustrates what God's grace means to us. It doesn't make any difference whether or not we have a talent or whether or not we have worked for a long time. Grace depends totally on the gracious and loving nature of God Himself.

In the kingdom of God, grace is given because of the nature of the Giver, not the worthiness of the recipient. Receiving God's grace is a privilege for sinners who, after all, deserve nothing but condemnation. Furthermore, the landowner promised the first group fair wages (a denarius) for a day's work; to the rest, he promised an undetermined amount, that is, whatever he determined was right. When evening came, the landowner paid everyone an entire day's wage.

Some workers grumbled that it was not fair for the owner to distribute wages equally to each worker; however, the owner did not pay less than he had promised, he simply offered a premium to some. It was not unfair. No one was underpaid; some were just treated



For it is by grace
you have been
saved, through
faith . . . it is the
gift of God.



Ephesians 2:8

with "unreasonable" generosity. And more importantly, everyone received the owner's kindness and attention. This is God's grace—a free gift, an undeserved favor—given by God's own will.

THE PARABLE'S LESSONS

In this parable, Jesus gave a clear warning to the Jews. They knew that they were the chosen people. As a result, they looked down on the Gentiles; they hated and despised them and hoped for nothing but their destruction. This attitude could well have been carried forward into the Christian Church. If Gentiles were to be allowed into the fellowship of the Church at all, the early Christians might have felt that they must come in as inferiors. But in God's kingdom, there is no such thing as a most-favored nation. It is as if Jesus said to the Jews, "You have received the great privilege of coming into the Church fellowship very early, right at the beginning. Later, others will come in. You must not claim a special honor or a special place because you were Christians before they were. All people, no matter when they come, are equally precious to God."

This is the original lesson of this parable, but it has much more to say to us today. This parable speaks especially to those who feel superior because of heritage or favored position and to those who feel superior because they have spent much time in the church, and this parable speaks especially to new believers, assuring them of God's grace.

It doesn't matter when a person enters the kingdom of heaven—late or

early; in the first flush of youth, in the strength of the midday, or when the shadows are lengthening. Each person is equally dear to God.

THIS PARABLE IS NOT ABOUT REWARDS BUT ABOUT SALVATION

This parable is a strong lesson about grace, God's generosity. We shouldn't begrudge those who turn to God in the last moments of life because, in reality, no one deserves eternal life. Many people we don't expect to see in heaven will be there. Like the thief on the cross, a criminal who repented as he was dying, along with people who have walked with God for many years.

Here is the incredible generosity of God. These workers in the parable did not do the same amount of work, but they all received the same pay. "All service ranks the same with God." It is not the amount of service given but the love with which it is given that matters.

ALL THAT GOD GIVES IS BECAUSE OF GRACE

We cannot earn what God gives us; we will never deserve it. What God gives us comes from the goodness of His heart. What God gives is a gift, not pay; it is grace, not a reward. When the great Puritan preacher Thomas Hooker was on his deathbed, a friend tried to console him by saying, "Brother Hooker, you are going to receive your reward." "No, no!" he breathed, "I go to receive grace!"

As the apostle Paul reviewed his more than 30 years of sacrificial service, he saw himself as the "chief of sinners," totally dependent on God's grace. Although he undoubtedly anticipated the rewards he would receive, he gloried only in the cross (Gal. 6:14).

CONCLUSION

Remember this: Salvation does not come from position, career, eligibility, or work; salvation comes totally from God's grace. God's economy is different from ours. Even though you may be good at math, you will never fully understand God's economy until you get to heaven. His grace is far beyond our idea of fairness. Jesus paid the price for sin so that everyone who trusts in Him will receive grace. What an amazing grace!



General Conference Ministerial Association

GRACE AND THE CHRISTIAN

“Grace” is a special word that conveys hope and comfort to the Christian. Paul loved to use the word “grace”; every epistle that he wrote (with the possible exception of Hebrews) begins and ends with the mention of this word.

But let’s consider what “grace” actually means. How is it used in the New Testament? What can we learn as we study the depths of the concept of grace?

In this message, we shall spend a few moments focusing our attention on the sublime concept of God’s grace and its relationship to the Christian life. Let’s begin with general definitions of the word “grace.”

DEFINITIONS OF “GRACE”

Grace is that which gives joy, pleasure, and delight. This is the original idea of the Greek word *charis*. It is used in this way in the New Testament in reference to speech. The words of Jesus were spoken with grace (Luke 4:22). The words of the Christian are to impart grace to the hearers (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6).

Grace is defined as goodwill, loving-kindness, and favor. Used in this way, it means the kindness of a master toward his inferiors or servants, and especially of God toward men. *Charis* contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon a person what he or she does not deserve. New Testament writers use *charis* primarily to speak of that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the undeserving and grants sinners pardon for their offenses, bidding them to accept eternal salvation through Christ (Eph. 2:5). It is this particular definition of grace that prompts us to think of it as “unmerited favor.”

Grace is also the spiritual state or condition in which one enjoys God’s favor. When one accepts God’s grace, he or she is described as being in a “state of grace” (Rom. 5:1-2; 1 Peter 5:12).

Grace is an expression of gratitude for favor bestowed. Read 1 Timothy 1:12. The word here is “thank.” This is what is meant when people “say grace” before a meal.

Such are the main ways the word “grace” is used in the New Testament. As Christians, we study God’s grace, seeking to catch at least a glimpse of the depths of His gracious kindness to us. Let us explore together some important aspects of grace.



The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden.



Ellen G. White,
The Desire of Ages, 348.

GRACE AND THE CHRISTIAN

We are saved by grace. Salvation is first, foremost, and always a matter of grace (Eph. 2:5-8). God doesn’t owe us anything. Because we are sinners, we deserve damnation (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Salvation is a gift which God in His loving-kindness offers to man (Titus 3:3-7). When we respond to God’s loving invitation, when we follow certain steps—believe, repent, confess Jesus, and are baptized—we do not do this to earn or merit salvation. We are still “unworthy servants” (Luke 17:10). We must forever remember that salvation is possible only by God’s grace!

God’s grace requires holy living. Some people reason that since we are saved by grace, we are free to do whatever we wish. Yet Paul wrote that the “grace of God . . . teaches us” to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; to live soberly, righteously, and in godliness; and to look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

Paul explains that Jesus in grace gave Himself for us so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and that He might purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:14). The unmerited favor of God is no excuse to go on sinning!

Holy living requires God’s grace. To live soberly, righteously, and in godliness requires the grace of God. We cannot do it on our own, but with God’s help, victory is ours! He works in us to do His will (Phil. 2:12-13). By His strength we can do all the things He desires of us (Phil. 4:13).

We must grow in grace. This is especially true if we are going to live holy

lives. Peter reminds us that we are to grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). It is not enough just to experience God’s grace in forgiving our sins. God has so much more to share with us, both in this life and in the life to come (Eph. 2:7). This explains Paul’s salutations and benedictions (1 Thes. 1:1; 5:28). We can grow in grace by heeding the Word of God (Acts 20:32) and by drawing near to God in prayer (Heb. 4:16).

It is possible to receive God’s grace in vain. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians that they might not receive God’s grace in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). Receiving God’s grace may be in vain if one seeks justification for sin elsewhere (Gal. 5:4). In this context, Paul makes reference to the Law of Moses. But if we seek to be justified by any system of salvation by works alone, we will fall from grace!

By using God’s grace as an excuse for immorality (Jude 4), some were using grace as an excuse for shameless behavior. And yet we have seen that God’s grace requires holy living. By willful and impenitent sinning, some were despising the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:26-31). For such persons there no longer remains a sacrifice, an abandonment of sin; only a fearful expectation of judgment remains. Why? Because through such willful and impenitent sin, one tramples the Son of God underfoot; counts Jesus’ blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified a common thing; and insults the Spirit of grace.

CONCLUSION

What a terrible thing it would be to receive God’s grace in vain, to have received God’s grace at one time but then to have thrown it away. But it is just as terrible not to receive His gift of grace at all! Or, having received it, to fail to grow in His grace! So I encourage you, in the words of the writer of Hebrews, “look[ing] diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God . . . let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:15, 28). “For it is good that the heart be established by grace” (Heb. 13:9). “Grace be with you all. Amen” (Heb. 13:25).

Have you received God’s wonderful grace in your life?



General Conference Ministerial Association

SABBATH AT SINAI

Regarding the giving of God’s law at Sinai, we are told, “The law was not spoken at this time exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellow man; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love.”¹

REMEMBERING THE INSTITUTION OF SABBATH

“See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (Exod. 16:29).

“Sabbath was not instituted, as many claim, when the law was given at Sinai. Before the Israelites came to Sinai they understood the Sabbath to be obligatory upon them.”²

The institution of Sabbath is proclaimed basically in Genesis 2 with the episode of divine rest. On their way to the desert, some Israelites resisted keeping the Sabbath properly. The Lord exhorted them, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?” (Exod. 16:28).

Exodus 16:30, where we read that “the people rested on the seventh day,” is probably an allusion to Genesis 2:2, where we find the account of God resting on the seventh day.

The fact that God provided a special day of rest illustrates His concern for the well-being of His people and how, in a special way, He provides an opportunity for their spiritual growth.

PROVISIONS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF SABBATH

One of the great teachings of Exodus 16 is that both the gift of manna and the Sabbath day are seen as manifestations of God’s providence in supplying the needs of His people.

In their pilgrimage through the desert, the Israelites witnessed a triple miracle that served to impress upon their minds the holiness of Sabbath. Each Friday a

double portion of manna was sent; on the seventh day, however, nothing was sent, and the portion reserved for Sabbath remained healthy and wholesome.

Believers should follow the divine counsel regarding the observance of Sabbath. Exodus 16:30 tells us that the Israelites rested on the seventh day. We should recognize that we also have a Sabbath appointment with God. We should set aside all common affairs of life and have full communion with Him. This is explicitly declared in Exodus 20:10: “In it you shall do no work.”

We should be aware of the holiness of the Sabbath day and observe it with devotion. We should carefully observe the Sabbath’s limits. Remember that each minute of the day is sacred time.

Ellen G. White reminds us, “In no case should our own business be allowed to encroach upon holy time. . . . Many carelessly put off till the beginning of the Sabbath little things that might have been done on the day of preparation.”³

SABBATH IN THE WRITTEN LAW

The delivery of the Ten Commandments is preceded by the presentation of the giver of the law: “I am the Lord your God” (Exod. 20:2). Thus, God approaches His children once more.

God reminds the Israelites that He is the one who gave them new life: “I . . . who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (verse 2). Obedience to God’s law, including the observance of Sabbath, proclaims our dependency on God and our freedom from other powers.

In Exodus 20:8, the words “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” clarify that this is not the establishment of a new institution. With the words “remember” and “keep it holy,” it becomes evident that the Sabbath is a memorial for God’s people, a reminder of that which God has been doing to keep a holy community.

The commandment underscores the need for Sabbath rest—for human beings and for animals. On Sabbath, hierarchical relations also cease, and everyone shares equally the freedom offered by God.

“The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” (verse 10, emphasis supplied). That means God not only designates Sabbath as a day of rest for

humanity but also places His seal of authority on it and sanctions it as His day, making it one of the characteristics of His people.

When God says “In it you shall do no work” (verse 10), He does not imply that Sabbath is a day of inactivity but that it is different from the rest of the week. It is a day of service to God, a time to be with Him, and a day to worship Him and remember His redeeming acts. Thus, His believers should be recognized as His people.

In Exodus 20 and in the parallel text of Deuteronomy 5, Sabbath combines two aspects of worship to God: He is both Creator and Redeemer.

The Sabbath motivation in Exodus 20:11 is Christ-centered: God is presented as Creator and Keeper of the world. Because Sabbath is anchored in the creative work of the God of heaven and earth, the commandment to keep the Sabbath takes on a universal character. In turn, the emphasis in Deuteronomy 5:15 relates to the salvation of human beings. Sabbath bears the seal of God as the Deliverer.

CONCLUSION

The Sabbath was established by God to be observed by humanity. At Sinai, He provided a means for the people to learn in a practical way the meaning of the Sabbath as they crossed the desert.

The Sabbath was established as a memorial of God’s creative work. As we keep the seventh day of the week holy, we recognize God as our Creator and Keeper. The observance of the Sabbath also reminds us of His redeeming work.

Observing the Sabbath doesn’t just mean receiving the distinctive sign of those who belong to God’s people on Earth; it also demonstrates that He will keep the promise He made to the faithful: “I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob” (Isa. 58:14). May the Lord bless each of us with the blessing He longs to give on His holy day. 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 305.

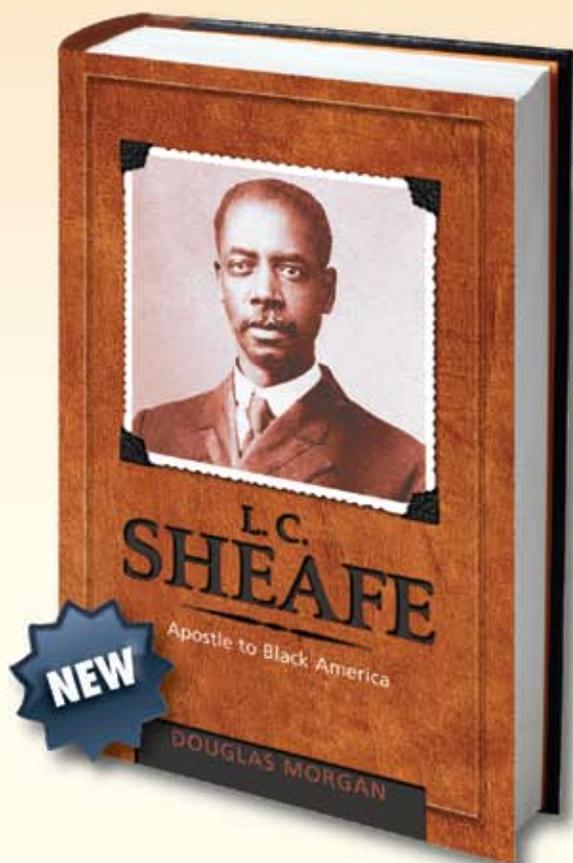
² *Ibid.*, 296.

³ *Ibid.*

Segundo Teófilo Correia is the head of the Theology Department at the Peruvian Union University.

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

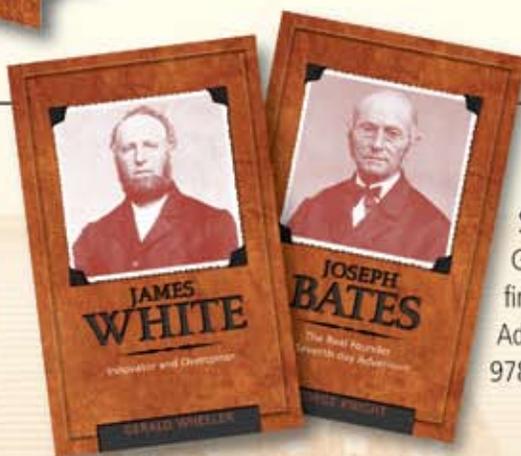
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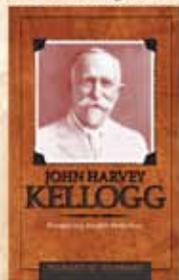
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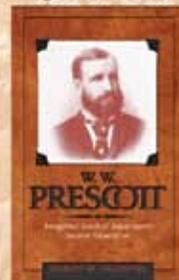
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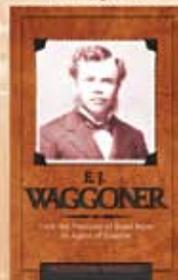
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A MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH HAD NOT PAID TITHE FOR SOME TIME, BUT AS ELECTION OF OFFICERS WAS NEARING, THE MEMBER BEGAN TITHING AGAIN. SHOULD THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE ACCEPT THIS DISHONEST ATTITUDE AND CONSIDER SUCH PEOPLE FOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS?



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.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that faithfulness in tithes and offerings should be a characteristic of all church workers and officers: “Conference/Mission/Field workers and church elders, other officers, and institutional leaders are to recognize that as a principle of leadership in God’s work, a good example is to be set in the matter of returning tithe. No one shall be continued as either a church officer or conference/mission/field worker who does not conform to this standard of leadership.”¹

Here are some considerations that will help you act in a balanced way in this situation:

1. Only God can identify who is being totally faithful. Faithfulness involves more than regular tithing. Even some who return their tithe regularly may not be totally faithful, and yet we consider them qualified for leadership in the church.

2. Faithfulness involves not only the act of giving money to the church but also the motivation for the act. We have no way to evaluate motive. Maybe some who are considered “faithful” givers are not faithful in God’s eyes because their motivation is selfish or for show.

3. Regarding a church member who restarts the practice of returning tithes and offerings, we do not have the right to judge his or her intentions, although we may be tempted to do so. Perhaps the approach of church elections causes one to reflect upon the fact that unfaithfulness limits service to God and to the church, leading to a sincere resolve to better serve the Lord. On the other hand, the person may be motivated simply by a selfish interest in becoming a church leader. But because we do not have access to the heart, I believe the healthiest attitude is to assume the member is being honest in again returning God’s tithes. Time will reveal whether or not the change was sincere.

4. The above suggestion should be balanced by common sense. If this pattern is imitated by other members or leaders every time church elections are near, the matter should be addressed and opportunities for leadership be limited. 

¹ *Church Manual*, 154.

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SABBATH SCHOOL AND PERSONAL MINISTRIES IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Traditionally, Sabbath School has been the organization that reached out to the community, made friends for Jesus, and connected these friends to the church. In fact, in years past, Sabbath Schools became so active in the community that the position of Personal Ministries director (also known as home missionary leader or lay activities leader) was added to the list of church officers. The Personal Ministries director's role was to assist in coordinating Sabbath School outreach projects and to ensure proper follow-up of new members.

The Sabbath School and Personal Ministries departments worked hand in hand; in many cases, attendance at Sabbath School was greater than at the worship service! Outreach through Sabbath School and general church programs made for a strong soul-winning program that involved the entire church family.

Reflecting on the purpose and function of the Sabbath School, Ellen G. White shares this insight: "The Sabbath school should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ."¹

In *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, we read that Sabbath School should be a hub of activity for the local church. Through the Sabbath School, members should find the following:

1. Training or preparation for service.
2. Established service within the local church and community.
3. Encouragement for and activity in Bible study.
4. An emphasis on world mission.
5. Friendships and support of one another for issues faced in daily life.

The following Personal Ministries objectives parallel the work of the Sabbath School department:

1. Training and preparation for service.
2. Coordination of service or outreach to the local community.

3. Guidance for the overall outreach of the local congregation.

Here are some suggestions for developing a Sabbath School/Personal Ministries team ministry:

* Have planning sessions together.

* Make Sabbath School classes the application centers for the principles previously mentioned. The classes can provide Bible study, prayer ministry for members, fellowship events outside of class, and community outreach or service projects. The class could even meet periodically during the week as a small group, a prayer meeting for members, or a Bible study outreach to non-members.

* Include a sharing time in the program for class members to talk about their activities and have a prayer session for the church family.

* Develop projects to involve Sabbath School members. Project ideas include providing class members with Discover Bible School enrollment cards for distribution; forming groups each week to visit non-attending and former members; developing a prayer ministry; organizing groups to process Discover Bible School lessons; assisting in community events (hand out free water at running/walking events or at concerts in the park, give free car washes, feed the homeless). What else can you add to this list?

In Acts 4:31, we read, "When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (NKJV).

God is calling church members to prepare people for Jesus' return. Let Sabbath School and Personal Ministries volunteers join hands and boldly share the story of Jesus as freely and as widely as possible.



¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 10.

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THE CHURCH ELDER'S PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The office and responsibility of an elder are recurrent topics in both the Old and New Testaments. When the Israelites left Egypt, elders assisted Moses in leading Israel as they advanced through the desert. The elders acted as judges, sitting at the city gates to solve individual or collective cases. The office of leaders and judges has perpetuated in the New Testament with some small variations, especially due to the political loss at the hands of the Romans, which limited the absolute power they had.

In the New Testament, Paul and Peter write about the significant participation of the elders in church leadership. Elders are the local church leaders. They represent an important element in the church organization and structure. They are the main leaders in a local church and in a community of believers.

In the New Testament, two words are used to describe those who serve in this way: "elders" and "bishops." Both words are used as synonyms to refer to the office of elder. We find an example of this in Titus 1. In verse 5, the word "elders" appears; in verse 7, the word "bishop" refers to the same person: the elder.

WHAT MEANING DO THE WORDS "ELDERS" AND "BISHOPS" HAVE?

When the word "elder" is used, it means "watchman." According to God's Word, the responsibility of this watchman is to carefully observe the well-being of others. He is a guardian or keeper. He is like a superintendent who is charged with seeing that things are done correctly.

The second word is "bishop." This term doesn't just mean a person who is superior to others; a bishop is an honorable official who, in past times, belonged to the local council, the Sanhedrin. In the New Testament, the word "bishop" refers to a church leader.

We can understand from the meaning of these words that the elder has an important function in caring for church members. Paul exhorted the brothers in Ephesus, saying: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28, emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit has placed over the elder the task of caring for the Lord's church. In many parts of the Bible, the elder's task is amplified and defined as a metaphor for shepherding. As a person responsible for God's flock, the elder is charged with shepherding or pastoring the church. In this sense the elder should develop abilities to efficiently care for and lead God's church.

HOW DO WE PASTOR A CHURCH?

There are four ways the elder should pastor God's church:

1. *Prayer and preaching.* When the apostle Peter was pressured to deviate from his spiritual obligations of pasturing the church, he affirmed: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the *ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:4, emphasis added). Praying and preaching are the main tasks of an elder. The elder should work to deepen his relationship with God, expand his knowledge of God's Word, and improve his preaching abilities. To fulfill this task, the elder should focus on the following goals:

- Plan a daily schedule, answering the following questions: How much time do I want to dedicate to intercessory prayer? Do I know the needs of my church members enough to present them to the Lord? As we read Paul's writings, we can observe the importance of intercessory prayer. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome: "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9). When addressing himself to his disciples in faith, Paul exclaimed: "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day" (2 Tim. 1:3).

Effective pastoral ministry begins in the secret chamber with God, when in reverence the soul cries for God's intervention for those for whom Christ died. It would be fatal and destructive for a church leader to forget that pastoral ministry begins with prayer.

- The second aspect that follows prayer ministry is preaching. To fulfill this ministry, the elder should ask: How much time do I dedicate to Bible study? What will my special study be? Which books of the Spirit of Prophecy should I study? What sermons will I preach? Which Bible version will I use? Where am I going to preach? A preaching ministry is powerless without prayer, but a prayer ministry without preaching would be useless.

2. *Visitation.* Some people feel very confident about the importance of preaching and prayer, but they underestimate the task of visitation. Why? Perhaps they have been influenced by the technological and virtual world we live in and have forgotten about the human and the real. Many people assume that technological advances are enough, but they are wrong. All too often a machine comes between human beings with hearts full of dreams and sorrows. These individuals remain isolated from what is around them.



Another aspect of visitation is people as individuals. People love multitudes; their vision for the masses prevents them from realizing that masses are formed by individual people. Jesus is an example of a valuable individual. He was as willing to help an individual as He was to help the multitudes.

People who stop visiting miss out on the following benefits:

- A person may be just “one” member, but he or she is part of the multitude.
- Getting to know an individual’s private needs allows the elder to focus more effectively on the ministries of prayer and preaching.
- A personal visit can strengthen an elder’s relationship with a church member.
- A visit from an elder can affirm the bond that unites people with the church.
- Personal visits affirm an individual’s faith by clarifying doubts.
- Praying with an elder can strengthen a member’s faith.
- Talking with an elder can help a church member reach important decisions.

“As the shepherd of the flock he [the minister] should care for the sheep and the lambs, searching out the lost and straying, and bringing them back to the fold. He should visit every family, not merely as a guest to enjoy their hospitality, but to inquire into the spiritual condition of every member of the household. His own soul must be imbued with the love of God; then by kindly courtesy he may win his way to the hearts of all, and labor successfully for parents and children, entreating, warning, encouraging, as the case demands” (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 347, 348).

3. *Teaching*. One of the most important tasks of a leader is to make disciples. When Christ gathered His 12 disciples, He dedicated time to teach them and organize them and share His teachings with them. Teaching is a very important task in the spectrum of pastoral responsibilities. Teaching is considered an important quality of a leader:

- “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, *able to teach*” (1 Tim. 3:2, emphasis added).
- “Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he *may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict*” (Titus 1:9, emphasis added).

Teaching was a practice of the leaders:

- “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

• “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).

- “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

According to the apostle Paul, leaders should practice their teaching skills as part of their leadership.

4. *Leadership*. Every leader should answer the following questions before the church: What are we going to do and how are we going to do it? It was through inspired leadership that God blessed and brought His people out of Egypt. Joshua’s leadership led the people to conquer the land. Paul allowed the gospel to expand through his leadership. Ellen G. White was used by God to give a message to lead the church. James White led the church into organization.

How do we lead? Through organization and planning. Nehemiah organized and planned to build the walls of Jerusalem. The elder and the pastor help the church to become organized with a plan to fulfill the mission of Christ.

The leader should remember that “it is essential to *labor with order, following an organized plan and a definite object*. No one can properly instruct another unless he sees to it that the work to be done shall be taken hold of systematically and in order, so that it may be done at the proper time” (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 94, emphasis added).

“Well-defined plans should be freely presented to all whom they may concern, and it should be ascertained that they are understood. Then require of all those who are at the head of the various departments to cooperate in the execution of these plans. If this sure and radical method is properly adopted and followed up with interest and good will, it will avoid much work being done without any definite object, much useless friction” (ibid. 94).

After observing these four important aspects of the elder’s task, the question is: How is the elder fulfilling the four aspects of his or her mission? Are preaching and prayer, visitation, teaching, and leadership present and basic in the elder’s ministerial work? As in ancient times, the elder—the congregational shepherd—has a great responsibility before God. Faithful fulfillment of the elder’s tasks results in a successful church; negligence results in an irreparable spiritual deterioration of the church’s condition. Leaders hold the key in their hands.



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HEART AND MONEY MATTERS

Do you remember how old and where you were when you received your first paycheck? What a stirring moment to see your name written out at the end of the first line, stating, “pay to!” Next, you noticed the amount. What? You then directed your eyes to the deductions. The awareness of “Caesar” was immediate. If you were blessed to have been reared in a home that observed tithing and also shared with offerings, then perhaps after the distribution of your first paycheck between Caesar, God and your planned spending, you might have agreed with American poet Ogden Nash, “O money, money, money, I’m not necessarily one of those who thinks thee holy, but I often stop to wonder how thou canst go out so fast when thou comest in so slowly.”

As fully devoted, committed followers of Jesus Christ (disciples), we know that we are to grow disciples, and equip “the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:11-12). This mission is also to be taken to and lived in the marketplace of everyday life and transactions. Expressed in a different way, our spirituality that is made up of what we believe and practice will be carried out in the activities and experiences that constitute Christian living.

You may find it an unexpected fact that Jesus referred to the subject of money in connection to the heart, spiritual attitudes and everyday actions than almost any other topic. With this in view, Greg Ogden observes, “Jesus was quite skeptical about the ability of humans to handle the allure of money. We tend to view money as simply a neutral means of exchange. It is the currency we use to transact business. Conversely, Jesus viewed money as having the power to secure devotion. The pursuit of ‘mammon,’ the money god, can lead to idolatry.”¹ Therefore, it is of high value to take note of this risk, and take a spiritual inventory of what we are convinced about in our hearts and how we handle our money. Let us look carefully at two subjects that are necessary as spiritual shields.

GOD’S HOLINESS

Darrell Johnson comments that there are two laws of the soul that “militate against knowing God as he really is.”² First, “All too often we create a god who is simply the projection of the God we wish existed. We tend to create God in our own image.”³ The second tendency of our hearts is that “we often suppress God’s revelation of himself.”⁴

Encountering the living God and his holiness can be a frightening experience. Before the holiness of God, we are made aware of the separateness between God and ourselves. Johnson observes, “Meeting the holy, living God smashes the myths of autonomy, the myth that human beings are the final authority, our own lords. In the presence

of God we are but dust and ashes. Every breath we breathe is a gift of his grace. When a person refuses to bow in humility before the holy Creator, he or she represses the truth about God in order to function (Romans 1:18-23).”⁵

A deeper and closer view of God reveals that this tension is resolved by grace. “Because of Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ we dare to approach the Holy Creator of the universe and address him as ‘Abba, Father.’”⁶

GOD OWNS EVERYTHING

The second spiritual safeguard is to keep in mind that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1) and while sovereignty was extended to humankind, ownership of His creation never was. Therefore, if we concede to God’s ownership of ALL things, decisions of how we handle and spend our resources including money are also inclusive of our spiritual practice. The question posed will not be “Lord, what do You want me to do with my money?” rather, “Lord, what do You want me to do with Your money?”⁷ It is not difficult to accept this intellectually; the challenge lies in living with this truism.

Scripture contains over 2,350 verses dealing with money and possessions. Currently, there are good basic courses on money management from a Christian perspectives available, such as those from Crown Financial and the new resource *Faith and Finance: Financial Planning with a Faith Factor*.⁸ Becoming familiar with the basic skills of a family spending plan (budget) pertain to matters of faithfulness, generosity, and to the tithes and offerings that we return and give in worship before our Creator and Maker.

Finally, be encouraged to live in the marketplace, with hearts devoted to a holy God, Creator of all things, motivated by gratitude of undeserved grace.



¹ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, expanded edition (InterVarsity Press, 2007), 222.

² Darrell Johnson, “Handling the Trauma of Holiness: The Key to Authentic Worship of the Living God,” in *Discipleship Essentials*, 57.

³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid., 58. ⁵ Ibid., 59. ⁶ Ibid., 60.

⁷ Howard L. Dayton, “Teaching Financial Principles in the Church,” in *Revolution of Generosity: Transforming Stewards to Be Rich Toward God* (Moody Publishers, 2008), 165.

⁸ A newly-released resource from the North American Division Stewardship Department, with small-group *Leader’s Guide*, available in English and Spanish from AdventSource.org



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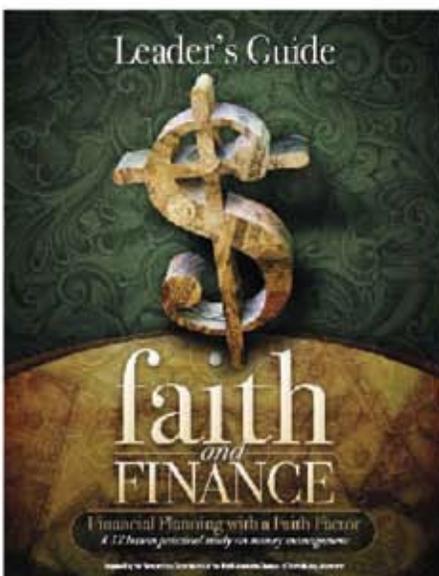
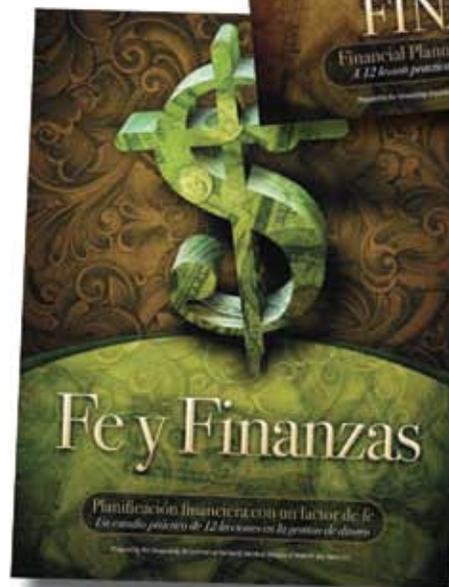
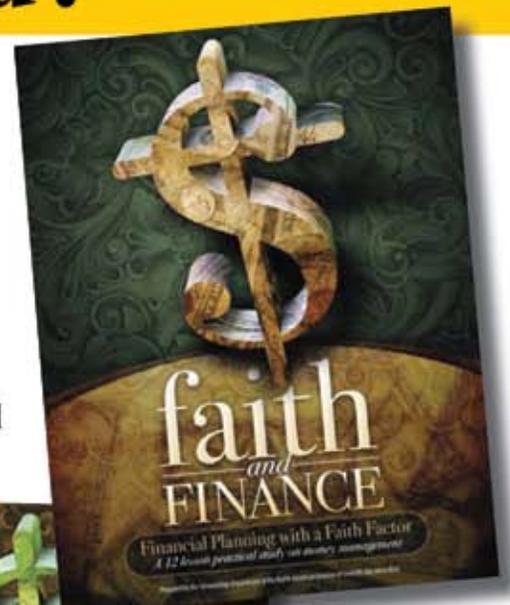
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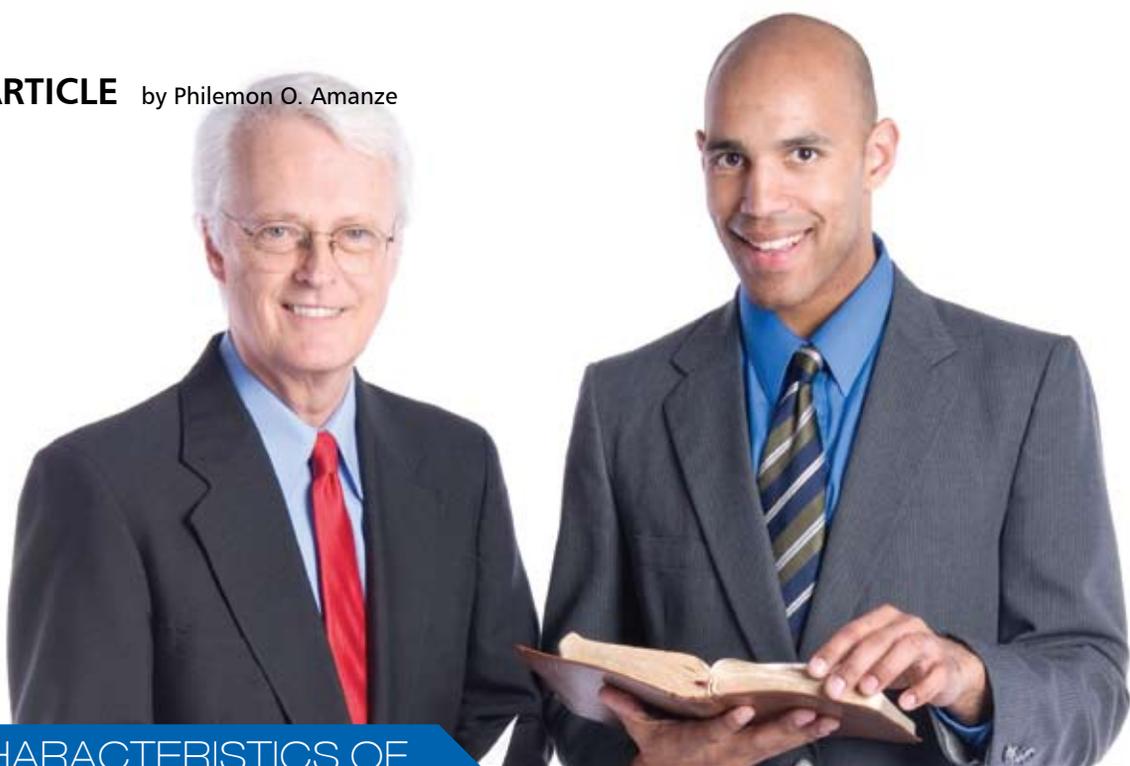
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CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY PREACHING

PART 2

Preachers of the everlasting gospel should be fearless and courageous. The message they present should be universal, holistic, cosmic, and celebratory. In this article, part two of “Characteristics of Contemporary Preaching,” we will also see preaching as an event that meets all life’s situations. Apart from being situational, it is also incarnational, Pentecostal, and personal. These last features, which should be part and parcel of the everlasting gospel, will be discussed below.

COURAGEOUS AND FEARLESS

Courage and fearlessness characterized the messages of biblical preachers such as Moses, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Paul. Courage should be demonstrated not only in pointing out the sins of humanity; it should also be evident in the face of danger. For instance, two missionaries—Reverend and Mrs. R. W. Porteous—were taken prisoner in the spring of 1931 by bandits in the Communist Republic of China. After leading the husband and wife through a winding, lonely trail to a secluded spot on top of a hill, the commanding officer announced, “This is the place of execution.” All movement stopped as the executioner took a sword from its holder. He examined the knife carefully from its handle to the sharpened, glittering blade and finally raised it above the necks of the courageous couple. With no mortals to intervene on their behalf, certain death seemed imminent; however, instead of cringing, crying, and begging for mercy, the husband and wife began to

sing that famous song, “Face to Face with Christ My Savior,” composed by Mrs. Frank A. Break.

As they sang, it seemed that the whole hilltop was filled with an unseen choir made up of thousands and thousands of angels. Suddenly the commanding officer instructed, “Untie them!” No order was given for their deaths; on the contrary, the executioner returned the sword to its sheath, and Rev. Porteous and his wife were released.¹

UNIVERSAL

The gospel, which every preacher has been invited to proclaim, is not only everlasting but universal. Revelation 14:6 says the gospel should be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people on earth. In line with the Great Commission, this proclamation is to be made to all nations (Matt. 28:19). So the universality of the message must be recognized by each preacher and should influence what, how, and when he or she preaches.²

HOLISTIC

Messages that see man as a whole and not as distinctive parts are needed for our contemporary time. Every preacher is looked upon to preach messages that will benefit the whole man. Messages should address the mental, physical, social, and spiritual well-being of the parishioners. The sanctity of marriage and the stewardship of time, talents, temple, and treasure should be addressed in our sermons. Love and the brotherhood of all men should also characterize our messages. Sermons should prepare

people for joy and happiness in this world and in the world to come.

COSMIC

In this case, “cosmic” means the proclamation of a message that is characterized by extra-terrestrial beings, extra-terrestrial journeys, and extra-terrestrial (heavenly) judgments. Today’s preachers are called upon to proclaim the cosmic Christ to cosmic Christians. The prophetic messages of Daniel and John the Revelator are cosmic in nature. In an era of growing cosmic consciousness, the cosmic gospel must be preached. Some doctrines which are closely attached to the cosmic gospel include:

- The creation of the cosmic order in six literal days.
- The existence of the cosmic, unfallen world from which the sons of God sang at the creation of the earth.
- The announcement by cosmic angels of the birth of Jesus Christ.
- The visit of cosmic beings at the Mount of Transfiguration.
- The ascension of Christ after His resurrection.
- The second advent of Christ.
- The translation of the righteous at the *parousia*.

CELEBRATIONAL

C. Raymond Holmes suggests that the greatest act of celebration is the worship of God. To make such worship possible, God ordained the weekly Sabbath. The day itself celebrates creation, recreation, communion, and redemption and provides a sacred opportunity for worship and a glorious opportunity to proclaim the good news of salvation. Today our preaching and worship are celebrated when the Word of God is taken seriously by ministers and members.³

SOLUTIONAL

Contemporary preaching should be concerned not only with problems; it should also offer solutions to the many challenges facing humanity. At the end of the sermon, people should not go home empty; their hearts should be filled with hope. What must we do to be saved? Acts 16:30 tells us to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (KJV). This is the solution which every sermon must provide in every setting. *What will prevent me from being baptized?* The full story of how Phillip interacted with the Ethiopian eunuch, as well as how the question raised by the eunuch was handled (as recorded in Acts 8:27-39), is an important object lesson for all contemporary preachers.

SITUATIONAL

The term “situational” means that good news comes to men and women in any situation in which they find themselves. This takes into account people’s challenges in life as well as their interests, concerns, hopes, fears, disappoint-

ments, successes, frustrations, unfulfilled dreams, and everything else about them. The purpose of the gospel, then, is not to leave people in those situations but to offer them something better. To be effective, the preacher must apply intentional contextualization to achieve great success while presenting the message anywhere in the world. How we communicate the gospel—in principle and in practice—must be biblical and legitimate. Without intentional contextualization, the preacher might face the danger of misunderstanding or miscommunicating the gospel. We may also lose our unique identity and may even risk blending religious truth with error. Therefore, the situation must not prevent the preacher from sharing the complete gospel; the good news is applicable to all situations!

INCARNATIONAL

Another feature that must characterize our message is the humanity of our Savior. Jesus Christ the Son of man must be presented as a hero who overcame through His complete dependence on God. He was tempted in all respects but did not sin. In Hebrews 1:1, 2, we read that the God who reveals Himself, *Deus Revelatus*, has spoken to us through Jesus Christ in these last days. God did not just speak; He became a man as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 7:14). Matthew reported that when the virgin gave birth to a Son, His name was called Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Preaching is an incarnational event because a human being prepares and delivers a message to a congregation of fellow human beings. The focus of the message is about a Man who calls God “My Father which is in heaven,” thereby reminding every preacher that God is linked with humanity in their trials and sufferings. According to John Scott, the sermon should be a revelation of God’s message to His erring children, not just a showcase for the preacher’s own ideas.

It was Karl Barth who opined that every sermon must have a thrust. This thrust does not come from the preacher’s energy, conviction, earnestness, eloquence, or preparation (although these virtues are important). The thrust is in the fact that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” He is therefore our perfect example in daily living. Our preaching will equally be tested with this statement: “Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:1, 2).

PENTECOSTAL

We use the term “Pentecostal” simply to emphasize the immediate presence of God through the Holy Spirit during the proclamation of the Good News. The Spirit of the Lord works on the minister and through the message to the hearts of the members. Ellen G. White made it clear that it

is the efficiency of the Holy Spirit that makes the ministry of the Word effective.⁴ The Holy Spirit was also manifested in the life of the Messiah in the following ways:

- The conception and birth of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus' boyhood and youth.
- His baptism and temptation.
- Christ's teaching, healing, and preaching.
- His death and resurrection.
- His ascension.
- The fulfillment of the promised Comforter to the disciples.

If contemporary preachers must proclaim Christ-centered and Bible-based messages, then the power, presence, and personality of the Holy Spirit as manifested in the ministry of Jesus Christ must characterize what we preach today. In any gathering where the words of Jesus Christ are taken seriously, God is prepared to do what He did for His people so long ago—so long as the requirements are met. "The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the church is looked forward to as in the future; but it is the privilege of the church to have it now. Seek for it, pray for it, believe for it. We must have it, and Heaven is waiting to bestow it."⁵

Preachers and listeners need the Pentecostal power. Over and over in the book of Acts, we are told of preachers "being filled with the Holy Spirit." They proclaimed their message as the Holy Spirit enabled them. Their message and deliverance were under the control of the Spirit of the Lord. The Holy Spirit had baptized them when they first believed, and they had been filled on many occasions since then. One baptism/many fillings is still a biblical truth for every preacher to experience anew on a daily basis.

How do we know when we have the anointing? The apostle Paul said, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). Who gives the assurance and the power? Only the Holy Spirit can do that. But it is not just the preacher who needs to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. His desire is to fill ordinary people with extraordinary power. Every anointed preacher of the Word longs to have anointed listeners.⁶

PERSONAL

Another characteristic of the everlasting gospel is that it must be personal. The message must be Person-oriented and person-centered. In this context, the first individual to be made *personal* is the cynosure of the good news: Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind. The second person is the sinner whose sins have led to the death of the Savior. The second person here includes all people, irrespective of gender, educational status, age, nationality, socio-economic position, and other demographic particulars. The good news being presented should also be manifested in the life of the person who is preaching. Ellen G. White said: "The preaching the world needs is not only that which comes from the

pulpit, but that which is seen in the everyday life; not only Bible precepts, but Christlike characters and heaven-born practices; the living, loving disciples of Jesus who have felt that it was more precious to commune with Jesus than to have the most exalted positions and praise of men. . . . In our ministry we must reveal Christ to the people, for they have heard Christless sermons all their lives."⁷

The good news we preach must scratch where the personal-spiritual life of the congregation is itching. Until all hearts in the audience are touched, people might not wake up from their spiritual slumber. We must note that preaching at its best is Person/person-oriented rather than doctrine-oriented. People will either be saved or lost as individuals. The personal nature of preaching confronts each individual with the question, "Why have I chosen to be destroyed when I have the opportunity to choose everlasting life?" This special feature of preaching reminds every child of God that as far as heaven is concerned, he or she is a *persona grata*. Until every person in the congregation is confronted with this truth—that he or she is personally welcomed and accepted to the throne of God through Jesus Christ—then the preacher still has a long way to go.

ED

¹ Elizabeth George, *Experiencing God's Peace* (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2000), 49.

² Raymond Holmes, *The Last Word* (Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1987), 13.

³ *Ibid.*, 58, 59.

⁴ White, *Gospel Workers*, 155.

⁵ White, *Evangelism*, 701.

⁶ <http://www.abideinchrist.com/selah/sep25.html>

⁷ White, *Manuscript Releases*, 17:73.

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The art of speech

GENTLE ASSISTANCE

“ Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man’s growth without destroying his roots. ”

Frank Howard Clark

In Mark 7:31-35, we read about Jesus healing a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. The man didn’t approach Jesus on his own; although the man could walk, the Bible says “they” took him to Jesus. Perhaps the man didn’t realize his limitations or lacked the courage to go to Jesus. What is interesting is the fact that someone made an effort to help him. Someone cared about his limitations.

Perhaps you have known a selfless, good-hearted minister whose effectiveness is limited by some type of speech problem. It is easy for us to criticize a pastor with a speech problem. The pastor’s message may be wonderful and the content of the sermon of singular importance, but we may find it difficult to focus on the lesson because we are distracted by the pastor’s hoarseness, incorrect pronunciation, or inability to form certain sounds.

Let us consider not the importance of correct speech but rather our responsibility to help our colleagues grow and improve their talents. We need to talk to them about the importance of speaking well. If needed, we may gently guide them to a source of help, perhaps to a speech therapist. We can be like the friends who led the man with a speech impediment to Jesus. We need to do this lovingly. It is good for pastors to learn ways to improve, for they are presenting God’s message. We are each to offer the Lord our very best, including our way of speaking. Ellen G. White emphasizes that “unless we know how to use the voice correctly, our work will be a failure.”

Often the church elder is the person who can best guide the preacher, helping to prevent criticism and suggesting resources that are available.

POLISHING YOUR APPROACH

Before approaching the preacher about this matter, do your research and look for local resources. What is available? Pray about this. Dedicate time to guiding the preacher who has difficulty with speech. Be patient and

tactful when you bring up the subject. Cultivate a humble spirit and do not speak as if you are an authority. Try to be specific. Write down a few sample mistakes and seek ways to resolve specific issues. Do not hesitate because of fear. Start by giving an honest commendation and approach this task with love and a sincere desire to help.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY

There are many ways to initiate this kind of conversation. Here are three suggestions:

- “Brother X, I enjoy hearing you preach. Your messages are always enriching to me. I know you desire to serve God in the best way possible. That is why I wrote down some of the words that pronunciation seems difficult for you, so that you may practice them.”
- “Your sermons are always full of vitality and fervor, but I’ve noticed that you have difficulty pronouncing certain sounds. Here is the phone number of someone who specializes in the area of communication. Perhaps he/she will be able to help you.”
- “Your sermons are always a blessing—well-prepared and with real spiritual depth. I know you are dedicated to serving God. I have also noticed that speaking is sometimes difficult for you, and your voice is often hoarse. I know a speech therapist who may be able to help you.”

THINK ABOUT THIS

When we see someone who is in pain, we run to help them. We should also take speech problems seriously. Remember that Jesus took time to cure one who had difficulty speaking.

Do your part—gently. Jesus will help you know the words to speak. 

Alexandra Sampaio is a speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

PREVENTING DOCTRINAL DIVISIVENESS WITHIN THE CHURCH

The ease with which ideas can be expressed and distributed through various means of communication has contributed to a proliferation of independent ministries within the church. Some of these ministries support the message and mission of the church (supportive independent ministries), while others seek to undermine both (non-supportive independent ministries). We find materials in electronic or printed form prepared by the most liberal Adventists (promoting, for instance, homosexual behavior and evolutionism) and by extreme-right groups (charging the church, for instance, with apostasy or with intentionally withholding the true message of salvation). Although many groups claim to represent pure Adventism, their voices contradict each other. When these divergent and controversial voices coexist within one congregation, they result in doctrinal division, conflicting loyalties, and a nightmare for pastors and church elders. This should immediately alert us to the fact that we are dealing with extreme views that do not contribute to the building up of the church.

Materials produced by non-supportive independent ministries have three main purposes. First, they are vehicles through which the personal views of their leaders are promoted and disseminated. These individuals neither represent the church nor speak for it. We should remember that God has given a particular message and mission to the *world church* and that groups at the fringes of the church do not deserve a hearing. Second, the materials produced by these groups aim to obtain financial support from church members. Such ministries become financial enterprises. We know very little about how their money is used. In some cases church members desecrate the holiness of tithe by giving it to these groups. God has an end-time church on this planet, and it is our privilege to align ourselves with Him in building it up with our tithes and offerings. Third, the materials produced by these independent ministries are usually sensationalist, critical of the church, or calling the church to become relevant in our society through liberalism. As we approach the coming of our Lord, such ministries distract church members from what is important: the proclamation of our message to the world.

There are several things we can do to help our church members. First, we should

motivate members to have daily fellowship with our Lord and to obtain a deep knowledge of our message. These two should always be together. Such fellowship will assist us, through the Spirit, to gain a deeper understanding of our biblical message. A superficial or incomplete knowledge of it could easily result in our being deceived by false, self-appointed teachers who may describe themselves as reformers. Second, we must preach our distinctive doctrines from the pulpit and give seminars to church members on Adventist doctrines. As a leader, you should have a superior understanding of our message and be persuaded that it is biblically grounded. Third, inform church members about internal attacks against the church's message and mission. (Materials about controversial topics may be found on various church Websites; refer to the list below.) Third, encourage church members to read the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the doctrinal studies produced by the church. This will strengthen their faith and help them to develop the gift of discernment—the capacity to distinguish between truth and error. Finally, encourage them to give their full support to the church's global program as it seeks to fulfill the mission the Lord has entrusted to each one of us.

ED

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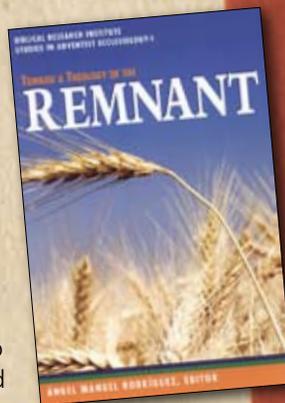
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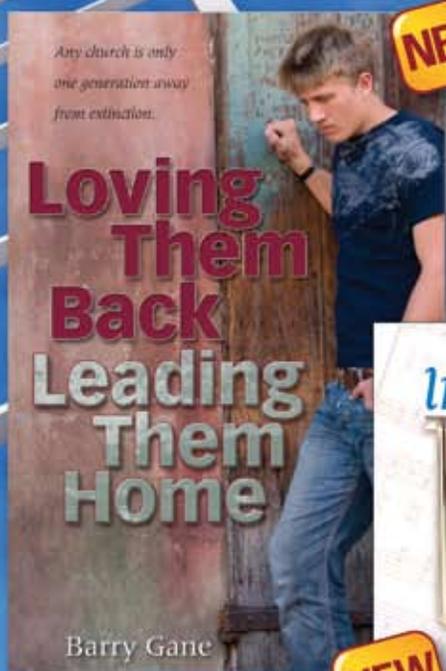
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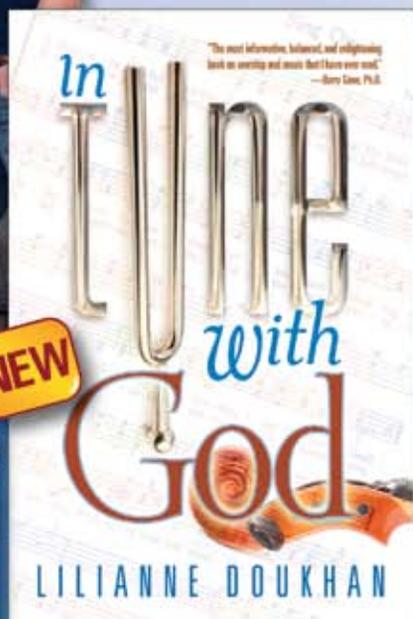


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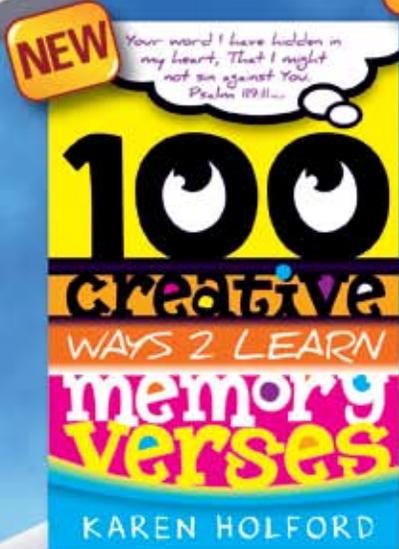
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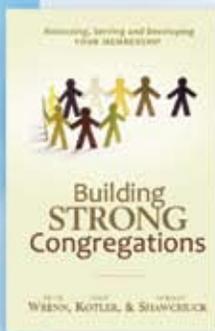
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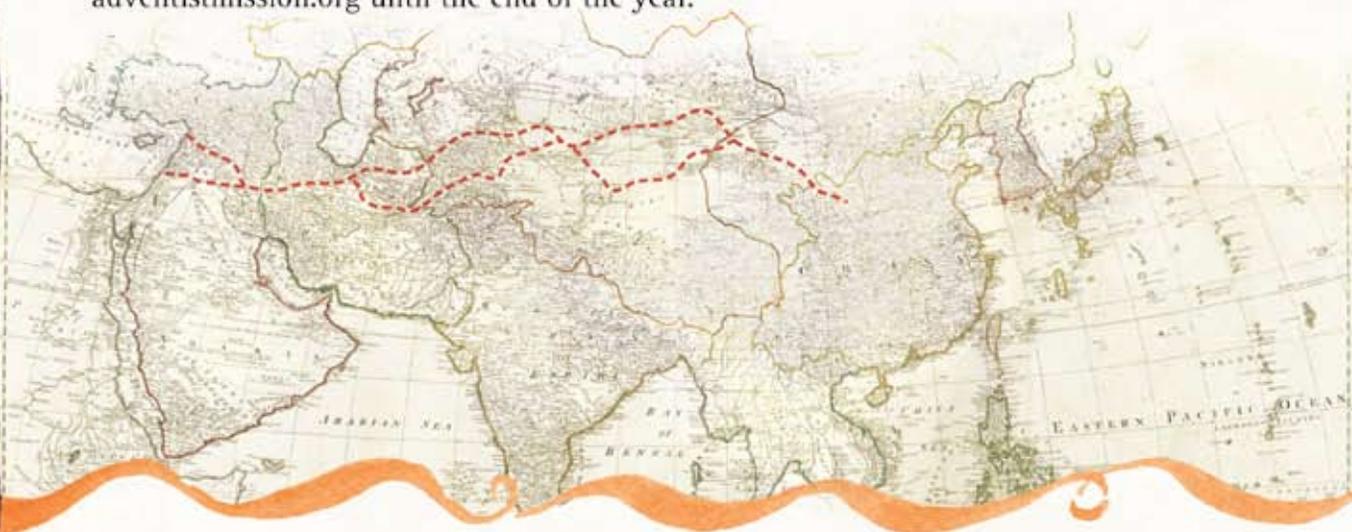
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