

quarterly resource for local church leaders † july/september 2014

# ELDER'S DIGEST



BASIC  
ELEMENTS  
OF THE  
WORSHIP  
SERVICE

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**DESIGNER:** Erika Miike - [erika@emiike.com.br](mailto:erika@emiike.com.br)

# WORSHIP:

## PURPOSES AND PARTS

**Christian** worship happens when we express admiration for and allegiance to God; it is a key element of Christian growth. But, in some places, there are a lot of people-focused entertainment and performance during what we call the worship service. The following are insights about the purposes and parts of corporate expressions of admiration to God.

### PURPOSES

There are three purposes in Christian worship. The first is to glorify God; that is, we strive to express to God that we have a sense of His greatness and that we are committed to living according to His will. We do this by saying things that make biblical sense and by trying to live what we say to God.

A second purpose of worship is to edify believers. What I say and do should help you to be a stronger Christian; at the very least, what I say and do should not offend you. And what you say and do should help me be a stronger Christian—at the very least, it should not offend me! First Corinthians 14 is a marvelous chapter that addresses this subject. Attitudes are contagious. When we leave worship, we should feel as if we had just left a pep rally for Jesus.

A third purpose of worship is to evangelize non-believers. Non-believers may not understand and surely will not agree with all that is said; however, the energy of the worshipers should be contagious, and the gospel should prick the hearts of non-believers who are sensitive to the call of God.

Notice that performing and showing off for one's own ego is not one of the purposes. Notice further that entertaining the congregation is not a purpose. Those who make no effort to obey God's Word should feel more conviction than joy from Christian worship.

### PARTS

Starting with the first-century church, prayer, singing, preaching, giving, and interacting have always been key components of Christian worship.

*In prayer*, we praise God for His greatness and thank Him for using His greatness for our benefit. We confess our sins. We ask God to bless others and bless us. Prayer is a believer-initiated communication with God.

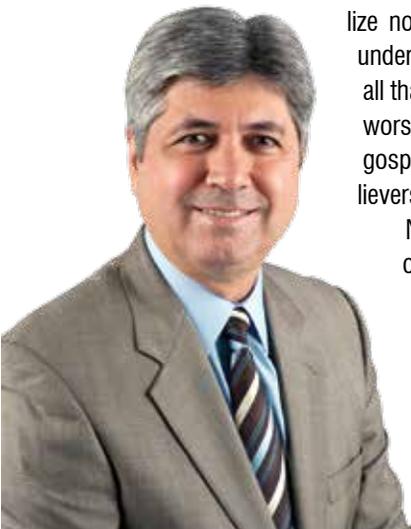
*In singing*, the lyrics may be directed toward God, which would make it a singing prayer. Sometimes the lyrics are focused on the listeners; the song may focus on Christian living, hope, or the remembrance of how God has kept His people. As important as music is, the lyrics are more important. They communicate the message. Sound without substance misses the aim of communicating admiration and allegiance to God. That is why choir rehearsals should always include instruction on how to sing the song and a review of the song's message.

*In preaching*, the Word of God is explained and applied to the lives of the listeners. The aim of Christian preaching is to persuade listeners, including the preacher, to obey the Word of God. That's why it is so important to pay attention and take notes.

*In giving*, we show that our hearts believe what we are singing, praying, and preaching. Matthew 6:21 says that our hearts will be where our treasure is. In other words, if you sing, pray, and preach but keep God's money (tithes and offerings) in your pocket, the genuineness of your worship is suspect.

*In interacting* with one another, we demonstrate that we are really striving to obey God's will. Jesus taught that the greatest evidence of being in tune with Him is to love one another (see John 13:34, 35). When we sing, pray, preach, and give but do not demonstrate love toward one another—or, even worse, act ugly toward one another—our worship will have no meaning.

In summary, every believer should be aware of the three purposes and five parts of Christian worship. Such awareness will keep us from wasting our time with vain religious entertainment or boring routine.



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

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# LAST RITES FOR A DYING CHURCH

I have a friend who refuses to make a will or set up a trust because he's afraid that these documents will actually hasten his death. Talk about denial! If the world lasts long enough, we are all going to die.

Believe it or not, churches can also die. Like all living organisms, local congregations go through a life cycle; they are born, grow, mature, begin to decline, and may ultimately die—some faster than others. While it is easy to observe this life cycle among human beings, it is much harder to see it in the life of the local church.

## DYING CHURCHES

A recent study by LifeWay Research showed that approximately 22 percent of the more than 1,000 pastors surveyed agree strongly or somewhat that their congregations are dying. Some experts estimate that one in four American churches—around 100,000—fit the description of a “dying church.” But what exactly is a dying church?

Author and church consultant Thomas Rainer defines a dying church as “a congregation that will close its doors within 20 years if it continues its current trajectory.” He goes on to clarify that a church's trajectory takes into account many factors, including attendance, financial giving, demographic

trends, and the ages of the church members.

In his book, *Waking the Dead: Returning Plateaued and Declining Churches to Vibrancy*, Russell Burrill estimates that 80 to 85 percent of all Adventist churches in the North American Division are either plateaued or declining, based on the same set of factors. This means it is possible that a large majority of Adventist congregations in North America could be considered to be dying.

While much has been written in recent years about the resuscitation of dying churches, too many churches hold little hope of revival. Thus, we must ask a few basic questions: When is it appropriate to close a church? What factors indicate that a local congregation is near death? And what should be done once a church has closed its doors?

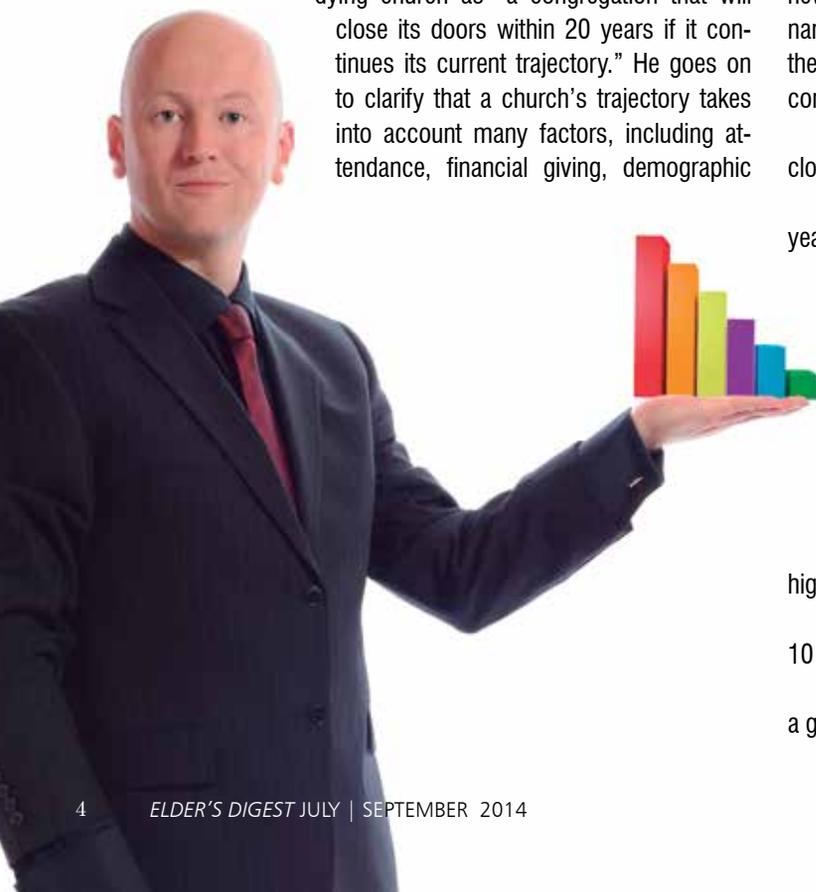
## THE RIGHT TIME

Knowing when to close a church can be difficult. One respected Adventist leader believes that a congregation is headed for certain death the moment it refuses to create a new vision for itself. As mentioned earlier, attendance, finance, demographics, and membership trends can indicate the dying pulse of a church. I would add to these factors a congregation's lost sense of mission and purpose.

Here are some additional indicators that it may be time to close a church:

- Worship attendance has declined seven of the past 10 years.
- Overall financial giving has declined in at least seven of the past 10 years.
  - The church looks less like its surrounding community than it did 10 years ago.
  - There are significantly more church conflicts than in past years.
  - The church's budget has decreased its focus on outreach and evangelism.
- The average age of the congregation has been much higher than the national average for seven of the last 10 years.
- There have been few new members added in the past 10 years.

While this is not an exhaustive list of indicators, it provides a good starting point for further discovery and assessment.



One Adventist conference has a systematic process for determining a church's future viability. Congregations may be subject to review when a certain set of factors is demonstrated, such as when weekly worship attendance falls or when tithes falls drastically in the last year. When any of these factors occurs, the conference establishes a specially selected committee to review and assess that church's future potential. This review—which can take up to one year—helps determine whether or not the church should cease to exist.

### SAYING GOODBYE

When a friend or family member dies, that person's loved ones need to have an opportunity to say goodbye. That is why we have funeral and memorial services. I believe that congregations need the same opportunity when their church dies. This is a time to celebrate the life the church once enjoyed. Conference officials, current and former pastors, current and former members, and local church and community leaders can be invited to attend a special time of remembrance. Such a celebration can include a reading of the church's history, personal testimonies by church members, a prayer of thanksgiving, and a documentation of the church's many accomplishments through the years.

### WHY?

While a church death can be painful—just as any loss would be—the death of a church can actually have some benefits. The death of a congregation in one place may bring life to a congregation in another place. Those who have said goodbye to their former church may find a new sense of purpose in a different congregation. Perhaps a new, more vibrant ministry can be established in another place where its presence will have a greater impact.

Some churches die because financial and human resources are no longer available to sustain them. Rather than stretching to cover a few struggling ministries, those same resources can be added to an existing, growing congregation and make a difference.

One more thing: please remember that the death of a church is not always an admission of failure. While unpreventable circumstances and unique challenges may lead to a church's demise, the closure of church may very well bring new opportunities to expand the kingdom of God and bring glory to His name.

ED

Marc Woodson is executive secretary for the Northern California Conference. This article first appeared in *Best Practice*, December 22, 2013.

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# DEACONS AND DEACONESSES:

## SPIRITUAL SERVANTS

**When** the church was founded in the Book of Acts, the first church officers were not elders or pastors (the apostles were serving in both capacities at that time); the first church officers were deacons.

A complaint arose from the Greek-cultured Jewish Christians that their widows were not being included in the communal meals being provided by the church for the Hebrew-cultured Jewish Christian widows. The apostles were so busy teaching new believers and praying for the new church that they told the Jerusalem Church to select seven men to oversee the area of “waiting on tables” (*diakonos*) for the Greek widows. This area of service was so special that qualifications were given for the selection of those men. Those qualifications required men with a “good reputation, and full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

Today, the process a local church uses to select its deacons and deaconesses is one of its most important responsibilities. All other church administrative decisions (when, where, and how long to hold church services) pale in comparison to the decision as to who will serve as deacons and deaconesses. That decision will affect every single ministry of the church. There is an inseparable link between the character of a church and the quality of its deacon Board. Deacons and deaconesses set a godly example for the church to follow.

The qualifications for deacons and deaconesses do not include the following areas:

- Physical attractiveness (height, weight, hair color)
- Ethnic identity
- Educational diplomas
- Charismatic personality
- Tone and quality of the voice
- Musical talent
- Speaking ability
- Material wealth
- Who they are related to
- Their personal connections

Unfortunately, some churches select their deacons and deaconesses based partially, if not exclusively, on the above criteria.

In the New Testament, the office of deacon and deaconess was closely associated with the office of elder (Phil. 1:1;

1 Tim. 3:1-13). Though there are some similarities between the two, there are clear differences as well. As stated earlier, *diakonos* in secular Greek described someone who “waited on tables.” Basically, the word means “to serve.” In the eyes of the Greeks, “serving” was not very dignified. Their attitude was: “How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?” Jesus changed that view completely. In Luke 22:25-27, Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant [*diakonos*]. For who is greater, the one who reclines at table, or the one who serves?”

The Greek would have had no difficulty answering that question. It was obvious to them that the one who was served was greater. But Christ reversed the roles and claimed that the servant was greater than the one being served.

Jesus Christ shared an entirely new dictionary of definitions. He defined leaders as the greatest servants, and it is within this context that the office of deacon and deaconess must be defined. Those who filled the office of deacon and deaconess were the “servants,” the “waiters,” and the “helpers” for the rest of the church. Since the demands of a deacon and deaconess were higher than the demands of a local church member, the qualifications of the deacons and deaconesses were more specific and demanding. The qualifications for deacons and deaconesses will be covered separately.

### OFFICE OF DEACON

A deacon must be “a man of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these first be tested; then let them serve as Deacons if they are beyond reproach. . . . Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households” (1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12).

Not all Christians who choose to be church members will commit to the servanthood of being a deacon. Paul states that the measuring rod for a deacon includes time and practice. He said, “And let these first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach” (1 Tim. 3:9). Time was needed to observe their practice (lifestyle) in order to

determine that the following criteria were truly reflective of a Christian's lifestyle.

1. *Dignity* (1 Tim. 3:8). The word "dignity" is defined as "a man who is worthy of respect or honor; noble; dignified." Most often, the Greek word refers to outward appearance. A deacon dresses and acts appropriately.

2. *Not double-tongued* (1 Tim. 3:8). This literally means that the man does not say one thing to one person and another thing to another person. A deacon doesn't lie, stretch the truth, gossip, or appear insincere.

3. *Not addicted to much wine* (1 Tim. 3:8). Literally, this means to "linger long over wine." The point of this qualification is that a deacon must not be one who gets intoxicated with wine or alcohol.

4. *Not fond of sordid gain* (1 Tim. 3:8). A deacon is not known for being greedy or for having an unbalanced desire for financial gain.

5. *Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience* (1 Tim. 3:9). A deacon must be known as a man who is settled in his commitment to the doctrines of God's Word.

6. *Tested* (1 Tim. 3:10). A deacon is a man who, after having been tested in his faith over a period of time, has been found to be faithful.

7. *Beyond reproach* (1 Tim. 3:10). This means that there is absolutely no reason to disqualify this man from becoming a deacon. God's leaders are always under attack. That is why they must make sure they are "squeaky-clean" in regards to the areas of qualification. They are not perfect; they are "clean."

8. *Husband of one wife* (1 Tim. 3:12). Literally, he is "a one-woman man." This does not mean that a deacon has never been divorced. It means that a man who is so loyal to his wife (if he is married) that he doesn't flirt with other

women or have a reputation for having a "wandering eye."

9. *Good manager of his children and his household* (1 Tim. 3:12). He must be able to discipline and control his minor-aged children while maintaining his dignity as the leader of his home, and his dignity as a church deacon.

## OFFICE OF DEACONESS

Paul also listed the qualifications for a deaconess in 1 Timothy 3:11: "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." It is clear that the "Office of Deaconess" existed in the early Church. Notice that Paul addresses "women" rather than a deacon's wife. It should also be noted that after 1 Timothy 3:1-7, nothing is said about an elder's wife. If there were qualifications to be a deacon's wife, there certainly would have been qualifications to be an elder's wife. In Romans 16:1, Paul "commends" Phoebe to the church in Rome (she delivered Paul's Roman letter) by describing her as "a servant of the church." The word "servant" is the Greek word *diakonos*. Phoebe was evidently a deaconess in the church of Cenchrea, an area near Corinth.

1. *Dignified*. A woman worthy of respect and honor; she is noble and dignified. Most often, the Greek word refers to outward appearance. A deaconess dresses and acts appropriately.

2. *Not malicious gossips*. Literally, a malicious gossip is "a slanderer." The Greek word is *diabolos*, a title frequently given to Satan (Matt. 4:5, 8, 11). Deaconesses must not be "gossips." Deaconesses often serve women who are dealing with very sensitive issues, so confidentiality is a necessity.

3. *Temperate*. The Greek word literally means "wineless," but here it is used metaphorically to mean alert, watchful, vigilant, or clear-headed. Deaconesses must be able to think clearly.

4. *Faithful in all things*. This is similar to the deacon's requirement to be "above reproach," but for deaconesses, it refers to the positive aspect of it. Instead of having no hint of impropriety in their lives, deaconesses faithfully fulfill their multi-faceted ministries to the women in the church. Faithful people have always been hard to find. One of the most important aspects of being a deaconess (or a deacon) is being faithful.

## CONCLUSION

In 1 Timothy 3, we have seen the criteria God wants all local churches to use in selecting their servants. First Timothy 3:15 tells us why it is so important that the local church pick its "spiritual servants" using the criteria described above: "I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). God has eternally mandated that the local church be "the pillar and support of the truth." 

General Conference Ministerial Association



# BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE



**Throughout** Scripture, God calls His people to worship.

This worship experience should be both an individual and corporate act. Worship is not a tradition, nor is it a passive spectator event. Worship comprises a personal interaction between the Creator and the creature—an encounter with God.<sup>1</sup>

According to the *Church Manual*, the Sabbath worship service is the most important church meeting. Reverence, simplicity, and promptness should characterize this service.<sup>2</sup> There is no set form or order for public worship. A short order of service is usually better suited to the real spirit of worship; long preliminaries should be avoided. The format for the church service may vary from country to country and from culture to culture; however, I have listed the major elements of most worship services in our churches. That way, you will know what we do and why we do it, even if you've never come to church before.

## **A CALL TO WORSHIP**

The call to worship brings us together as a worshipping community. The call can be a few sentences, a scripture verse, or a song. As busy people, we need something that helps us focus on what we have gathered for—to worship God. It should remind us that our worship centers in God and not in ourselves. Thus, adoration is central at the beginning of worship, specifically in the call to worship: We acknowledge God's holiness and offer our love and devotion. We praise God and affirm the good news of His divine saving activity among us. We worship precisely in response to what God has done for us through Christ.

## **PRAISE AND WORSHIP**

Most worship services begin with a time of praise and worship. Some churches open with one or two songs. This would also be the best time for a choral arrangement or a

special song from a solo artist or guest musician. The purpose of this time is to lift God up in praise and to express love, gratitude, and thankfulness to Him for all He has done for us. When we focus on the Lord, we stop focusing on our own problems and are encouraged in the process. This portion of the service is part of worship and should not be turned into an entertainment session while platform participants are getting ready to begin the service.

### **FELLOWSHIP TIME**

Fellowship time is a moment when worshipers are invited to meet and greet one another. Some churches have an extended time of greeting, when members walk around and chat with one another. This practice of greeting everybody should be done before or after service. Sometimes, it seems unnatural when someone tells the congregation that it is time to greet everybody in the church. A warm and friendly church does not need a strong emphasis on that; church members greet people spontaneously and naturally. An extended greeting time also takes precious time away from the worship service. Ideally, the greeting period should be brief, and church members should greet people in their immediately vicinity. Oftentimes, visitors are welcomed during the fellowship time.

At the beginning of the service, it is proper for the pastor, local elder, or worship leader to extend a welcome to the congregation and to make special mention of visitors.

### **CONGREGATIONAL SINGING**

Since the purpose of public worship is to glorify God, prayer and praise should predominate in congregational singing. Every member of the church ought to participate in this element of worship. Singing should be done not merely with the lips but with the spirit and the heart. Great care must be taken to insure that the songs are in complete accord with the teaching of the Holy Scripture.

### **THE OFFERING TIME**

Giving has great potential for teaching basic Christian concepts of self-denial, sacrifice, and trust. The offering appeal should emphasize a spiritual motivation and should also explain corporate financial needs and how giving supports the work of the church. An offertory prayer follows the collection of tithes and offerings, in which people of the church bring an “offering” of thanksgiving to God out of the financial blessings they have received. A “tithe” (which means “one-tenth”) refers to the practice of giving 10 percent of one’s income. Returning a tithe is an expression of gratitude and faithfulness to God by His people and an acknowledgment of God’s ownership of everything on the earth.

## **TO ENGAGE CHILDREN IN A PROCESS THAT INCREASES THEIR SENSE OF OWNERSHIP IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CONGREGATION BY PROGRESSIVELY INTEGRATING THEM INTO ALL ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH’S LIFE.**

The receiving of tithes and offerings is another practice that can differ widely from church to church. Some churches pass around an offering plate or offering basket; others ask members to bring their offerings forward to the altar as an act of worship.

### **PRAYERS**

*Invocation.* The service is usually opened with a brief prayer of invocation that acknowledges God’s holiness and invites His presence. The congregation is asked to stand during

the invocation.

*Pastoral prayer.* The pastor, elder, or worship leader leads the congregation in a special moment of prayer. Each worshiper is invited to kneel, as far as possible, in submission to God. Kneeling to pray is not absolutely necessary; however, it is an outward expression of an inward attitude.

The pastoral prayer is offered on behalf of the worshipers; it asks God’s blessing in their lives and in the lives of others. This prayer might include requests for healing, comfort, guidance, strength, courage, forgiveness, salvation, justice, and peace. Those who have special requests or prayers of thanksgiving may be invited to come forward for this prayer moment. This prayer is usually longer than the prayer of invocation, but it should not be endless!

### **CHILDREN IN WORSHIP**

Children should be kept in mind throughout the worship service. By making worship a great experience for children, we can make the whole church experience more appealing for young families. The goal is twofold: to help families become more cohesive by giving them a common experience in the faith (which carries over into their weekday world) and to engage children in a process that increases their sense of ownership in the ministry of the congregation by progressively integrating them into all aspects of the church’s life. That sense of ownership can help keep children active in their faith communities as young adults.

Only individuals who have a love for children and who have the ability to tell stories effectively should be chosen for

## READING THE BIBLE AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP GOES BACK TO JEWISH TRADITION WHEN THE SCROLLS WOULD BE BROUGHT OUT AND READ TO THE PEOPLE.

this portion of the worship service. This part of the service can also be used for baby/child dedications. This time must be carefully guarded to keep it within a time frame of five minutes or less.

### SCRIPTURE READING

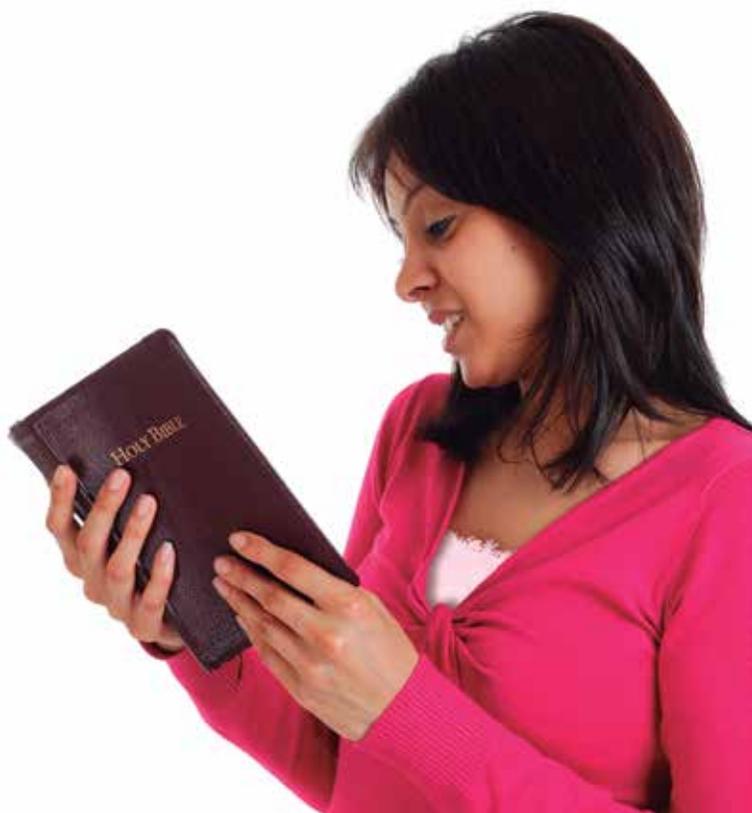
Reading the Bible as an act of worship goes back to Jewish tradition when the scrolls would be brought out and read to the people. The preacher can use the reading as the text for his or her sermon. The Bible is

central to Seventh-day Adventist worship and faith.

### SERMON

This portion of the service is dedicated to the pronouncement of the Word of God. Some churches call it the “sermon” or the “teaching.” Some pastors teach from the Scriptures, while others preach. Some ministers follow very structured outlines without variance while others feel more comfortable speaking from a free-flowing outline. This time is for instruction in the Word of God with the goal of making it applicable to the listeners’ daily lives. The time frame for the message varies, depending on the church and the speaker—20 minutes on the short side to 60 minutes on the long side.

The sermon, grounded in God’s Word, is the centerpiece of the worship service. We believe that the Bible is “God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). During the sermon, the Holy Spirit moves among the congregation to speak in many ways to address a variety of needs. In the sermon, God addresses the congregation through the words of His servant, the pastor. It is a matter of supreme importance that preachers preach only the Word of God, not the wisdom of man. To fulfill this goal, the sermon must be prepared with the utmost care. A text may not be used merely to introduce a sermon; the text must be painstakingly explained. In the sermon, the preacher should explain the Word of God to the congregation and then apply it for their exhortation. Care should be taken in preaching that Christian duty not be divorced from Christian truth. It is critical that the gospel of salvation by grace be proclaimed without any adulteration or compromise, so that the unsaved may rely for salvation only



on the grace of God, to the exclusion of their own works or character.

### CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is present in your church during every worship service, and He is ready to change the lives of the people who encounter Him there. You can either cooperate with the Spirit by prayerfully creating an excellent worship service, or you can hinder His work by pulling together something uninspired just to meet your weekly deadlines. Choose to work with the Holy Spirit by seeking His guidance well in advance of every worship service you plan. Make it your goal to do much more than just present information; aim instead to help people encounter God in ways that change their lives.

Consider how you do things now. Why do you do what you do when you organize your worship services? Don’t make decisions simply because of tradition; instead, be open to receiving new insights and fresh guidance from God. Keep in mind that your worship philosophy will drive the way you plan your worship services and will help you measure how successful they are.



<sup>1</sup> *Seventh-Day Adventist Minister’s Handbook*.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual*, 117.

# CHURCH ISSUES

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SELLING IN CHURCH?

The first Scriptures that come to mind regarding selling in church are Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; and Luke 19:45-46. These three passages describe the two times when Jesus “cleansed” the Temple. When He saw the activities that were being carried on in His Father’s house, He became very angry. Clearly, this was not what the temple was built for.

Jesus regarded merchants and customers as guilty of desecrating the temple. Items being bought and sold included doves and other animals for sacrifice (John 2:14). Also present were those who exchanged one currency for another. This money-changing service was needed because Roman coins and other forms of currency were deemed unacceptable for temple offerings. Evidently, both merchants and money changers were charging such excessive rates that the temple marketplace took on the atmosphere of a thieves’ den (verse 13).

Obviously, selling books, hosting a raffle, doing fundraising, etc., are different than what was going on in the temple. Jesus was not necessarily angry that people were selling in the temple; He was angry because people were focused on selling, not on God. Jesus was also angry that the money-changers were taking advantage of people, many of whom were poor and needed these services. Doves and other animals were required for offerings, and tithes in acceptable currency was also a requirement.

Such is not the case in today’s churches. Purchases in a church bookstore, for example, are entirely voluntary. No purchase is necessary to attend worship. If a church does decide to sell something inside the church building, it should make sure that the selling does not receive undue attention; does not distract people from worship and the teaching of God’s Word; and does not break the sacredness of the Sabbath hours. Selling should never be a high-pressure activity.



## WHY IS CHURCH ATTENDANCE IMPORTANT?

The Bible tells us that we need to attend church so we can worship God with other believers and be taught His Word for our spiritual growth (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25). Church is the place where believers can love one another (1 John 4:12), encourage one another (Heb. 3:13), consider one another (Heb. 10:24), serve one another (Gal. 5:13), instruct one another (Rom. 15:14), honor one another (Rom. 12:10), and be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32).

When a person trusts Jesus Christ for salvation, he or she is made a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). For a church body to function properly, all of its “parts” need to be present (1 Cor. 12:14-20). Likewise, a believer will never reach full spiritual maturity without the assistance and encouragement of other believers (1 Cor. 12:21-26). For these reasons, church attendance, participation, and fellowship should be regular aspects of a believer’s life. Weekly church attendance is not required for believers, but someone who trusts Christ should have a desire to worship God, learn from His Word, and fellowship with other believers. ED

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

# HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

In a world ravaged by sin, the bitter fruits of greed, war, and ignorance are multiplying. Even in so called “affluent societies” the homelessness and the poor are growing populations. More than 10,000 people starve to death every day. Two billion more are malnourished, and thousands more go blind annually because of dietary deficiency. Approximately two-thirds of the world’s population remains caught in a cycle of hunger-sickness-death.

There are some who bear liability for their condition, but the majority of these individuals and families are destituted by political, economic, cultural, or social events largely beyond their control.

Historically, those in such circumstances have found succor and advocacy in the hearts of the followers of Jesus Christ. Caring institutions are in many cases begun by the church and later assumed by government agencies, or vice versa. These agencies, aside from any ideological altruism, reflect society’s recognition that it is in its own best interest to deal compassionately with the less fortunate.

Social scientists tell us that a number of ills find fertile ground in the conditions of poverty. Feelings of hopelessness, alienation, envy and resentment often lead to antisocial attitudes and behavior. Then society is left to pay for the

after-effects of such ills through its courts, prisons, and welfare systems. Poverty and misfortune as such do not cause crime and provide no excuse for it. But when the claims of compassion are denied, discouragement, and even resentment are likely to follow.

The claims upon the Christian’s compassion are not ill-founded. They do not spring from any legal or even social contract theory, but from the clear teaching of scripture: “He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 7:8 RSV)

The fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah is precious to Seventh-day Adventists. We see our responsibility in this chapter as those raised up to be “The repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in” (verse 12).

The call is to restore and “to loose the bands of wickedness ... to deal thy bread to the hungry ... bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ... when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him” (verses 6, 7). So as repairers of the breach, we are to restore and care for the poor. If we carry out the principles of the law of God in acts of mercy and love, we will represent the character of God to the world.

In effecting Christ’s ministry today, we must do as He did, and not only preach the gospel to the poor, but heal the sick, feed the hungry, and raise the downcast (see Luke 4:18, 19; Matt. 14:14). But verse 16 explains that it was so that “they need not go away.” Christ’s own example is determinative for His followers.

In Christ’s response to Judas’ feigned concern for the poor: “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me” (Matt.26:11 RSV), we are reminded that it is the “Living Bread” that people most desperately need. However, we also recognize the inseparables between the physical and the spiritual. By supporting those church and public policies that relieve suffering, and by individual and united efforts of compassion, we augment that very spiritual endeavor.



This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.



# WHAT LOVE CAN DO

**Sandy** grew up in a secular home and had no religious upbringing of any kind. She did not like Christians because she felt that Christians did not practice what they preached. Later, when she was middle-aged, one of her friends became terminally ill. Sandy visited her friend often, and during many of these visits, a married couple, Larry and Carol, were also visiting this friend when Sandy was there. They often brought food and helped out with whatever was needed. They did this on a regular basis.

Sandy was impressed. She had never met such loving and caring people like Larry and Carol. As Sandy became more acquainted with them, she learned that they were Seventh-day Adventists. They were the first Christians Sandy had encountered who practiced what they preached. Soon, Larry and Carol started giving Sandy Bible studies, and she became a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Yes, a loving example, friendly behavior, and Christlike attitude can and will win souls for the kingdom of God.

## **DIVINE HELP IS NEEDED**

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35, KJV).

Is it possible for us to keep this new commandment? Can we really love others like Jesus loves us? The answer is yes! We can keep this commandment but only with help from God. "And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27, KJV).

## **LOVE IN THE CHURCH**

We know that we cannot legislate love and that we cannot force anyone to be a loving person. But there are certain things we can do that will help our church to be a more loving congregation. There are both spiritual and practical methods that can be utilized in the church.

## **SOME SPIRITUAL METHODS**

Elders leading out should:

- Pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon the congregation.
- Preach the full gospel with an emphasis on brotherly love.
- Teach what the Scriptures say about brotherly love.
- Treat others as if they are better than we are. Let's not be respecters of select persons; let's befriend all church members, regardless of their status.
- Involve as many church members as possible in worship service, not just a select few.

- Be a good example, living out the fruit of the spirit in your life. See Galatians 5:22-26.

## **SOME PRACTICAL METHODS**

- Promote church programs that stimulate fellowship and friendship.
  - Host a church fellowship meal (every Sabbath if possible).
  - Organize a home fellowship meal. Established church members should take turns inviting lonely members, new members, or recently-transferred members to their homes for dinner. This should be done frequently. It would be helpful if lonely and new members were invited to the homes of church members twice monthly.
  - Visit church members who are shut-in, lonely, elderly, or sick, as well as new members and members who do not attend church often. As many members as possible should be involved in visitation.
  - Establish a Help/Service program, where members can register as helpers/volunteers and be put on a list so that when help is needed, members know who to contact. Members who need help of some kind can contact those on the list.
  - Organize church socials and outings. Be friendly and sociable and avoid cliques.
  - Establish a Friendship Ministry.
  - Befriend lonely members, new members, or recently-transferred members. Connect these people with other members and with various church ministries and activities. Most important, befriend these individuals.
- These are just a few ideas, and I am sure you can come up with many more. Be creative!

## **HOW TO MAKE IT WORK**

Elders need to promote and lead out in love and friendship programs in the church. As members become involved in this type of ministry, they will grow in grace and become more caring and loving. It's a kind of the you-are-what-you-do method.

Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you." Would Jesus command us to do something that is impossible for us to do? If He commanded us to do this, then it is possible for us to succeed and to love one another.

Let's put our trust in Jesus and believe that He can and will do this much-needed work of brotherly love in His church.

Lord Jesus, help us to love one another, even as You have loved us.



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Michael Stango works in the General Conference Telecommunications Department. He is an ordained elder and a Minister of Evangelism for the North American Division.

# The **IMPORTANCE** of **BRANDING**

## STRENGTHEN

Making sure we all use the official logo without variation on church signage, stationary, outreach materials and websites will help the denomination strengthen its brand, and hopefully, help people feel a sense of familiarity of what our brand offers.

Beverage maker Coca-Cola and fast food restaurant chain McDonald's each have logos that are instantly recognizable around the world. No matter what country you visit, these iconic brands have a feeling of familiarity because of their consistency.

## TRADEMARK

The denomination's first official logo was developed in 1996 by a committee that received input from each region of the world church. The logo and name "Seventh-day Adventist" is legally protected and trademarked worldwide.

## RECOGNIZABLE

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is increasing its efforts to market its brand as one that is also instantly recognizable worldwide. If each of us used the Seventh-day Adventist logo consistently, just imagine how much stronger our worldwide family could market and brand itself to those seeking Jesus and his assurance.

## CONSISTENT



The logo reflects the core values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its foundation is the Bible, the Word of God, shown open because its message should be read and put into practice. Central to that biblical message is the cross, which is also a central feature of the logo. Above the cross and the open Bible is a burning flame that represents the Holy Spirit, the messenger of truth.

# JESUS: THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER

John 7:37-39

According to John 7:2, the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. During this seven-day feast, the Jews lived in booths made of tree branches to commemorate their forefathers' pilgrimage through the wilderness. On each of these seven days, the High Priest would go to the Pool of Siloam and draw out water in a golden vessel. This water would then be poured onto the altar where the parts of the sacrifice were arranged. As the water was poured out, the people sang to the Lord and shouted for joy.

These seven days were a time of great celebration and worship. The eighth day was called the Great Day of the Feast. On this day, sacrifices were again offered, but there was no singing and no shouting. This was known as a solemn day of repentance before the Lord. Another element was missing on this day—no water was poured out on the eighth day. It was against this backdrop of silence and symbolism that Jesus stood up and proclaimed Himself to be the Fountain of Living Water. When He spoke, thousands were present to hear Him, and everyone who heard Him instantly understood what He meant.

## I. RECOGNIZING THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER (VERSES 37, 38)

In these two verses, Jesus proclaims Himself to be the fountain where the living water is found. Ellen G. White says that "Christ's words were the water of life."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the New Testament, water for drinking is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God comes to sinners and shows them their need of salvation (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit applies the Word of God in conviction (John 6:44). The Spirit baptizes new believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit seals the believers (Eph. 4:30). The Spirit of God fills believers and uses them for the glory of God (Eph. 5:18).

## II. THE REWARDS OF THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER (VERSE 38)

A. *Salvation*. The primary benefit of coming to Jesus by faith is being saved by God's grace. Sinners are condemned and doomed before the Lord (John 3:36; Ps. 9:17); however, when sinners come to Jesus

and receive Him by faith, they are saved, delivered from death, and protected from God's wrath (Rom. 5:9; John 5:24; 10:28).

B. *Satisfaction*. Notice that it is from the "belly" that these "rivers of living waters" flow (see King James Version). The belly is that part of us that is never satisfied. We feed it and soon after, it cries out for more. Yet, Jesus says that if we come to Him, He will give us satisfaction for our most pressing needs. In this verse, the word "belly" is "used metaphorically for the inner being."<sup>2</sup>

C. *Strength*. The water never abates. It is always there, and it is constantly refreshing the lives of the believers. This living water gives us power, gives us joy, and gives us hope in this world.

D. *Service*. The Bible makes it clear that the water of life that is placed within us forms a mighty river that flows out from us and touches everyone around us. The Lord is saying that we will be sufficiently satisfied and that He will use us to reach others for His glory! When we are saved and willing in the hand of God, He will allow us to pour forth the living water into the dry desert of this world (Mark 1:17).

## III. RECEIVING THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER (VERSE 37)

John 7:37-39 tells us all about the benefits of coming to Jesus, but it also tells us *how* to come. Notice how you can receive the fountain of living water.

A. *Appetite and thirst*. This means to have a conscious desire for something that is not in your possession. Before a person can be saved, he or she must sense a need of salvation. This involves the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44). When this awareness comes, the sinner can turn to Jesus for salvation.

If you are full of the world and sense no need for God, you will not come to Him (Prov. 27:7). But, when your soul is empty and your heart is hungry, even the bitterness of conviction feels sweet and the path to Jesus seems a blessed thing. What a difference a thirsty heart makes in your life!

Is your heart thirsty today? Do you long for true peace in your heart? Have you been searching everywhere for things that simply

do not and cannot satisfy your soul? Why not come to Jesus today? He makes all the difference in your life. He says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me . . ." (verse 37).

B. *Approach. Come*. Jesus invites all who are thirsty to come to Him. Notice several aspects of Christ's cry that great day.

1. *An invitation*: "Come" (Isa. 55:1; Rev. 22:17)

2. *Availability*: "Any man" (John 6:37; 1 John 5:1; Rom. 10:13)

3. *Access*: The way is open to Jesus! His well is never dry. If you will only come to Him, He will demonstrate His great saving power in your life. He loves you more than you could ever know (Jer. 31:3; Rom. 8:38, 39). All He requires is that you come to Him (Matt. 11:28).

C. *Appropriation; drink*. If I am thirsty, I can satisfy my thirst with water, but water will quench my thirst only if I drink it. I can pour water into a glass, but the water does me no good if it stays in the glass. It is only when I place the glass to my lips, tilt the glass, and allow the water to enter my body that I receive its benefits.

It's the same with Jesus. He is available to save you if you see the need. He longs to help you and wants to redeem you from sin. But no one is ever saved until Jesus is received into his or her heart and life (Rev. 3:20; John 3:16; 6:47; Rom. 10:9, 10). Remember, believing is not an attitude of the mind; it is an exercise of the heart.

## CONCLUSION

Where do you stand in regards to salvation? You may be a church member, faithful in attendance. You may be a visitor today. You may be someone who is considered by others to be wicked and beyond hope. Whatever your situation, rest assured that if you will leave your place and come to Jesus Christ, He will save you by His power and give you everlasting life. All that is required of you is that you come and believe on Him (John 7:38).

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 454.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:982.

# JESUS: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 9:1-11

Jesus came into this world and accomplished many great and miraculous things, yet His primary purpose was to dispel the spiritual darkness that shrouded the earth. He came to be the Light of the world.

Notice three great truths from John 9:1-11 that reveal Jesus as the Light of the world.

## I. THE MISERY OF THE SIGHTLESS MAN

**A. His blindness** (verse 1). According to the Scriptures, this man was born blind. In my way of thinking, blindness would be one of the most horrible of physical handicaps. To never see a sunset, the face of a child, or the face of a loved one would be a terrible thing. Yet, this man had lived his entire life in a state of darkness.

But there is a blindness that is far worse than having sightless eyes. It is far worse to be in spiritual darkness, and that is where the entire world, apart from Jesus, finds itself (2 Cor. 4:4). If you have never received Jesus as your Savior, you are in deep spiritual darkness, but there is hope for you!

**B. His birth** (verses 2, 3). The Scriptures seem to indicate that not only was this man born blind, he was also in poverty. Many would say that this man would have been better off if he had never been born; however, Jesus felt otherwise. He told the disciples that God allowed this man's handicap so that the man could glorify God through his life.

What a wonderful truth! People need to realize that God can take any life—regardless of how that life has been ruined by sin—and save it by His grace and turn it into a thing of endless blessing and joy. After all, our purpose is to fellowship with and give glory to God (Isa. 43:7). Jesus specializes in salvaging old, wasted lives (2 Cor. 5:17).

**C. His begging** (verse 8). Because of his blindness, this man was unable to find employment. As a result, he was reduced to begging for food and money. How sad! This man was not rich, and it appears that even his parents were not interested in his well-being (verses 20-22). This is a picture of absolute poverty.

Jesus endured spiritual and physical poverty so that we might enjoy God's richest spiritual blessings.

## II. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

**A. He was exposed to the light.** When Jesus came along, this man's life was forever

changed. First, Jesus healed him of his physical handicap. When the man went to Siloam and washed his eyes, he was healed of his blindness. Notice that when the people asked him what had happened, he never mentioned the spittle (verse 11). Why not? Because he had not seen what Jesus had done! The man was blind! There is a lesson here for us. There are times when God is working in our lives, trying to bring us to Him. Often, we cannot see the Lord's work, and even after we are saved, we may never realize all the little things God did to bring us to the place of salvation.

Now notice the progression this man went through as the light began to dawn in his life.

**1. A man who is called Jesus** (verses 10-12). When the people asked this man who had healed him, all he knew was that it was a fellow named Jesus. It could have been any of a thousand men, but all he knew was that it was some guy named Jesus.

**2. He is a prophet** (verses 13-17). When the Pharisees heard of the miracle, they called the blind man to them and tried to figure out what had happened. Some of them were upset that Jesus had performed this miracle on the Sabbath. They concluded that if He had done something on the Sabbath that they considered to be work, He must be a sinner. They quizzed the man who had been blind, and he said that Jesus was "a Prophet." In other words, "He is a man to be listened to." This man had listened to Jesus once, and that obedience had resulted in his healing. Therefore, he concluded that Jesus was worthy of being listened to.

**3. He is a man of God** (verses 18-33). Through a series of questions from the Pharisees and some pretty good preaching on the part of the man who had been blind, the man concluded that Jesus was a man of God. That is, He was a man to be followed. The man even asked the Pharisees if they wanted to follow Jesus, too.

**4. He is the Son of God** (verses 34-38). Finally, Jesus came to the man personally. When He did, He revealed His true identity to him. At this point, the man confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, and he was gloriously saved. This man had progressed from seeing Jesus as one among many, one to be listened to, or one to be followed. He now saw Jesus as Someone who was worthy of faith and worship. He saw Jesus for who He truly was!

**B. He was expelled by the leaders** (verse 34). When this man refused to bow to the pressure from the religious leaders, he was cast out of their synagogue.

**C. He was excited about his new life** (verse 25). This man was not a theologian, but he knew what had happened to him personally! He couldn't explain what had happened, but he knew that he had met someone who had the power to make an eternal difference in his life. When he looked at where he had been and saw what Jesus had done in his life, he was more than a little excited!

## III. THE MESSAGE OF A SUPERNATURAL MIRACLE

**A. Jesus is a shining light** (verse 5). When He walked upon this earth, Jesus was in the business of delivering men from darkness. May I say that He is still doing that today? He is still a shining light and Savior for all who will come to Him (Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17).

**B. Jesus is a seeking light** (verse 35). After this man had been cast out by the Jews, Jesus went looking for him. This is why He came (Luke 19:10). He is still seeking souls to save!

**C. Jesus is a saving light** (verse 38). When this man bowed and received Jesus, I am sure he forgot about his days of blindness and the pain of being removed from the synagogue. When he called on the name of Jesus, he was received into a family from which he would never be removed!

## CONCLUSION

When this man had gotten up that morning, he never expected that he would be healed and saved that day. I am sure he planned to live that day like every day before—in the blackness of darkness. He did not realize that there was a man named Jesus who would drive the darkness from his life forever.

Many are in the same condition today. They are lost and in the depths of great spiritual darkness, and they do not even realize that Jesus can set them free. The question is: Which do you prefer, darkness or light? If you are tired of the darkness, come to Jesus and step into the light of His glorious salvation. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

# JESUS: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1-16

Of the many images painted by John in his wonderful gospel, the most descriptive is probably that of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Like a shepherd, Jesus is concerned with the welfare and care of His sheep. Jesus delivered this sermon right after He healed the blind man at the temple, and He clearly declared His identity and plainly stated His purposes and plans. He revealed His great love for sinners and His plan for dealing with their sins.

## I. HE POSSESSED THE RIGHT CREDENTIALS

A. *He came properly* (verses 1-3a). Jesus used the imagery of the sheepfold to illustrate His message. A sheepfold is a circular wall about 10 feet tall with a single opening that served as a door. Jesus told His audience that only thieves and robbers would seek to enter the sheepfold by a means other than the door. The shepherd, however, always comes in the right way!

Jesus proved that He was and is the shepherd of the sheep because He came into the world in the right manner. He entered according to plan. He presented His credentials to His people. Notice the proof that He came in the right way:

1. He was born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:21-23)
2. He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:4-6)
3. He came in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4)
4. He had been brought out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:14, 15)
5. His arrival had provoked the rage of the enemy (Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:16-18)

He was the right person, born in the right place, arriving at the right time, summoned from the right country, and attended by the right sign. He possessed all the credentials necessary to prove that He was the Good Shepherd (Luke 4:18, 19; Isa. 61:1, 2). When Jesus came with the right credentials, John the Baptist openly introduced Him to the nation and declared His identity (John 1:29).

B. *He calls properly*. Several flocks can share the same sheepfold; however, when the shepherd of the sheep walks up to the door and calls his sheep, they instantly recognize his voice and respond to him. They know his call.

So it is with lost souls. There are many

voices that compete for our attention in this world, but there is a special note to the voice of the Lord. When He calls, everything changes (John 6:44). Lost sinners are dead until they are awakened by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:1). He is the only one that can give us hope.

C. *He commands properly* (verses 4, 5). When the shepherd calls forth his sheep, he goes before them, and they instinctively follow. He doesn't have to drive them—that is for goats! He just leads them out, and they follow close behind.

What a truth! When souls are saved by the grace of God, they have a desire to follow the Good Shepherd. They have been called out by the Shepherd and have a burning desire to worship Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

## II. HE POSSESSES THE RIGHT CHARACTER

A. *His personality* (verses 6-18). In these verses, Jesus reveals His identity as “the door.” Remember, there was only one opening going into or out of the sheepfold. It was in this opening that the shepherd slept. Therefore, the shepherd himself became the door of the sheepfold. Nothing could enter or exit the fold without going through the shepherd himself.

If anyone desires entrance into the fold of God, there is only one door. That door is Jesus! He is the only way to God (Eph. 2:18; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Jesus is the only way to the Father. Any other way leads to death and damnation (Matt. 7:13, 14).

B. *His performance* (verse 9a). Jesus plainly tells His listeners that He alone is the door to God's eternal salvation. His promise to those who enter is that they will be saved. That is, they will be rescued from the strongholds of the enemy and will experience the fullness of God's perfect salvation.

C. *His promise* (verses 9b-10). The thief is a threat to the sheep. When a thief enters the fold, his primary purpose is to use the sheep for his own personal gain. He doesn't care about their welfare. The Good Shepherd, on the other hand, comes so that the sheep might experience a life that is immeasurably better. He cares about the sheep and promises them a new and better life.

## III. HE POSSESSES THE RIGHT CONCERN

A. *His concern is proven by His sacrifice*

(verses 11-13). Jesus explains the difference between the concerned shepherd and the hireling. The hireling is there only for a paycheck. When trouble comes, he runs away and leaves the sheep to be devoured by wolves. The shepherd, on the other hand, owns the sheep and has a vested interest in their welfare. He is willing to pay any price to protect his sheep, even if it means he has to give his life for them.

Jesus endured a terrible death on behalf of sinners. Through this sacrifice for His sheep, He deserves the title Good Shepherd!

B. *His concern is proven by His sheep* (verse 14). Jesus speaks of the bond that exists between the shepherd and his sheep. They know him and will not follow another, and the shepherd knows his sheep. May I remind you that the Good Shepherd also knows His sheep? He knows everything there is to know about you (Matt. 6:8; 10:29-31). He knows every strength and every weakness. He knows every joy and every burden. He knows every mountain and every valley. He knows every victory and every battle, and He stands ready to help you in your time of need (Heb. 4:15, 16).

C. *He proves His concern by His salvation* (verses 15, 16). Jesus makes it plain that other sheep will come along later. These sheep can be assured of being saved just like those who were there to hear Jesus speak. Therefore, anyone who needs salvation can rest assured that Jesus will provide that salvation when faith is placed in Him (John 1:12).

When faith is placed in Jesus Christ, salvation is always the result. This salvation is complete (Heb. 7:25). All who respond to Him in faith will be brought into the flock and will be saved (Acts 16:31).

## CONCLUSION

There is no question that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. But one question remains: *Do you know the Shepherd?* How you answer that question determines where you can expect to spend eternity. If you know the Shepherd and follow Him, you can rejoice in the fact that He will always be with you and will always watch over you. If you do not know Him, I invite you to come to Him right now. He will give you a new life and a new birth.



General Conference Ministerial Association

# JESUS: THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-35

In John 6:22-35, we are presented with a new portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this passage, Jesus is presented as the Bread of Life.

This is an interesting portrayal, since bread is a substance known and used by every society on earth. Bread is one of the few foods that most digestive systems can tolerate. Also, bread has a satisfying quality that few other food products have. When all this is taken into consideration, it is obvious why Jesus is portrayed as the Bread of Life.

I want you to see that Jesus is still the Bread of Life. He is what the whole world needs. He satisfies all those who partake of Him. There isn't a person in the world who can't tolerate Him, and there isn't anyone anywhere who won't like Him when they meet Him. Therefore, let's spend a few minutes with these verses and look together at Jesus, the Bread of Life.

## I. THE PERSONALITY OF HEAVEN'S BREAD

A. *Heaven's Bread is a person* (verses 34, 35). According to these verses, the Bread of heaven is not a system or a denomination but a Person. This truth reminds us that we can never be saved by some religious system or method; salvation comes through Jesus and Jesus alone (Acts 4:12).

B. *Heaven's Bread has power* (verse 35b). This heavenly Bread has the power to save, secure, and satisfy every sinner who comes to Him by faith.

C. *Heaven's Bread has a great promise* (verses 47-51). These verses tell us that heaven's Bread will give life to humanity. Physical bread can sustain human life for long periods of time; however, after a time, the body will die even though it has been well-fed. On the other hand, Jesus is Bread that gives everlasting life.

D. *Heaven's Bread has a price* (verse 53). Before heaven's Bread can be enjoyed by the sinner, it must be received by the sinner. This sounds simple enough, but many seem to stumble here. They believe that Jesus was real, that He died on the cross, and even that He arose from the dead, but it is difficult for them to accept His sacrifice and the salvation He offers. But to be born again, they must come to Him by faith and accept His sacrifice!

## II. THE PRESENTATION OF HEAVEN'S BREAD

A. *Illustrated by the miracle* (verses 1-13). In feeding the 5,000, Jesus presented a type of Himself. He cared for the multitude, provided for the multitude, and satisfied the multitude. The implication is that Jesus, like the physical loaves and fishes, is sufficient for the needs of mankind. Jesus is the all-sufficient Savior. Notice that everyone took "as much as they would" (verse 11), and after they had filled themselves, there was still an abundance left over (verse 13).

Jesus is sufficient for the needs of the entire world! All the multitude had to do was take what the disciples passed their way. It works the same way for sinners! Lost souls need only receive Jesus by faith, and they are assured of salvation (Eph. 2:8, 9).

B. *Illustrated by the manna* (verses 30-33). The Jews came to Jesus and requested a miracle (apparently the feeding of the 5,000 didn't count!). They reminded Jesus of the Old-Testament miracle of the manna. They told Jesus that Moses gave manna to the children of Israel, and they wanted to know what He was going to do for them. Christ's response was to remind them that Moses was not responsible for the manna—the manna was provided by God. He went on to tell them that the true Bread from heaven was a person. In fact, Jesus Himself is the Bread of life (verse 33). Jesus was saying that the manna was a type of Himself.

1. *Manna was misunderstood by those who found it* (Exod. 16:15). They called it "manna," which means "What is it?" Jesus was misunderstood by the very people He came to save (John 1:11; 10:20).

2. *It was sufficient for every man's need* (Exod. 16:17, 18). This reminds us that Jesus is the all-sufficient Savior. He meets the need of each person's soul. Some go deep in the Christian life while others get in but choose to play around the edges, but wherever you find yourself, as long as you are in Jesus, you will find that He is sufficient to save your soul.

3. *It was sweet to the taste* (Exod. 16:31). Those who partook of the manna found it sweet and satisfying. In the same way, all those who receive Jesus as their Savior find Him to be sweet to the soul and satisfying to the life. That is why David encouraged us to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

4. *It was to be kept and passed on to others* (Exod. 16:32). It is the same with Jesus; He is to be shared with those we encounter. We are to share Him with those who don't know Him (2 Tim. 2:2).

C. *Illustrated by the Master* (verses 52-58). Jesus says that He is the ultimate bread. The Israelites ate manna in the wilderness, but they eventually died. The crowd partook of the loaves and fishes, yet eventually, they too died! Jesus is the antitype of the manna. All that it was, He exceeds. Jesus is greater than the bread distributed on the mountainside. All who partake of Him will live forever. He guarantees that they will never die! He guarantees eternal life to all who come to Him (John 10:28).

## III. THE PERFORMANCE OF HEAVEN'S BREAD

A. *It grants salvation* (verse 51). One of the great privileges of being human is that we can try any method of salvation we choose. God created us with free will. We have the ability to choose how we will live our lives. But regardless of how we live or what path we choose, salvation will never be produced in our lives unless we come to Jesus Christ by faith (Acts 16:31; 4:12; John 3:16).

B. *It gives satisfaction* (verse 35). Those who come to the Lord Jesus Christ are eternally satisfied. They no longer have to drink from the broken cisterns of this world. Instead, they find themselves tapped into a Source of life and blessing that never runs dry. There is abundant satisfaction in the Person of Jesus.

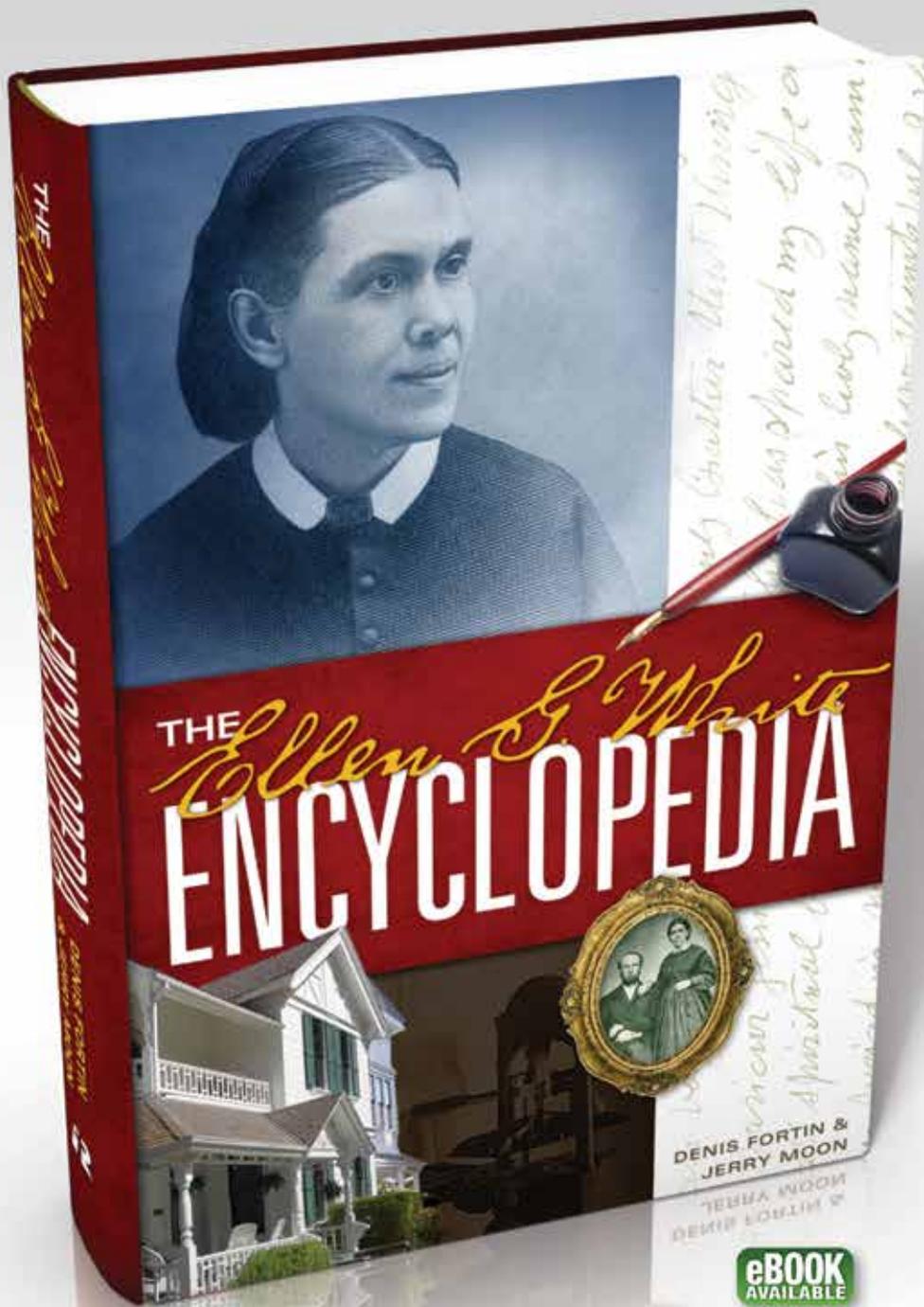
C. *It guarantees our security* (verses 37-40). These verses tell us beyond a shadow of a doubt that those who place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ don't need to worry about being cast away or forgotten—along the way or in the end. Faith in Jesus guarantees us perfect and absolute security in our salvation.

## CONCLUSION

From these verses, we can see that Jesus is the only hope for this world. He is what our souls need before we can experience eternal life. What have you done with Jesus? Have you received Him into your heart and life? Do you know Jesus the Bread of Life in a personal way?



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# NINE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL VISITATION

**The** Holy Spirit's guidance is the key to our success. The following experience demonstrates His leading.

After my preaching service one day, our church secretary said, "Pastor, can you sign these birthday cards?" With excitement in her voice, Helen,\* the church secretary, handed me a pile of birthday cards for the month. She was enthusiastic about this plan to reach and contact members on an ongoing basis.

Besides scheduling my weekly visitation, she initiated innovative ideas for nurturing members through these visits.

The Holy Spirit inspired Helen's work. She was a newly-baptized member, full of enthusiasm and love for the Lord. Her favorite Bible text was John 16:14, which says that the Holy Spirit will glorify Christ and take whatever belongs to the Lord to affect disciples and all believers. Helen had a heart for people, reflecting her love for others. She has been blessed with creativity in bringing enthusiasm to my pastoral efforts.

Our lives are measured by what we give and how we serve. There are many keys to success in visitation. The following nine keys may be discussed in elders' meetings in order to improve our leadership.



## 1. ORGANIZATION

A well-planned pastoral visitation program is invaluable. Putting pastoral visitation front and center on the elders' agenda and even in church board meetings will help to make pastoral visitation a priority. Many churches that have incorporated visitation in their congregational nurture and stewardship programs have been re-energized. At least once a year, plan to review communication with church members; this review can take place during a church business meeting. Up-to-date membership data, discipleship, stewardship, and worship are some of the vital areas to consider.

## 2. TRAINING

Good listening skills are vital to successful visitation. Most seminaries and conferences teach students and elders how to preach, exegete, and manage a church, and these tasks are important. But we should not minimize or omit training in *how* to listen and *how* to visit. Some ministers and elders are tempted to neglect visitation. Ellen G. White said, "You must educate and train yourselves to visit every family that you can possibly get access to. The results of this work will testify that it is the most profitable work a gospel minister can do."<sup>1</sup> She also says, "Here Jesus could meet all nations and all ranks, the rich and great, as well as the poor and lowly; and His lessons would be carried to other countries and into many households. . . . The Saviour and His mission would be brought before the world."<sup>2</sup> May I add that patience, compassion, and genuine diligence are needed to assist pastors in this important work? It is necessary that training on these items be provided to enable elders to be efficient. Together with the pastor, elders can organize one or more teams each week to do God's work.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. TIME

Using time wisely is essential in all church work. Some elders and pastors may neglect visitation because they do not take time to plan visits effectively. Setting aside hours and energy for visitation takes heartfelt planning. Perhaps they do not commit themselves to visiting because they are afraid it will reveal too much or make them vulnerable. One way to manage time is to delegate elders' duties in an annual calendar. This facilitates adequate preparation.

## 4. FAITH

Our faith is increased at home. The faith of our members is strengthened when the leaders visit them and meet their spiritual needs, and when their material needs are presented to God in prayer. In some churches, elders are responsible for visitation in addition to preaching and platform duties. I first saw this implemented at Oakwood University, and I applaud them for this practical innovation.<sup>4</sup>

## 5. HOLY SPIRIT

We must trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, the source of strength for elders and members. Some ministers are satisfied with a superficial relationship with their parishioners. When they lack a deep knowledge of God and self, their relationships with others can remain distant and shallow. Many members in the congregations would gain confidence if they witness in their pastors and elders the infilling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

## 6. COMMITMENT

Accepting Jesus' command to feed the sheep motivates those who visit members. As elders and pastors, our hearts need to overflow with love, commitment, and amazement as we read great chapters on shepherding such as Psalm 23 and John 10. After reading Psalm 23, one commentator observed: "Do I sit up on my pedestal of self-pride and look with contempt upon my contemporaries, or do I get down and identify myself with them in their dilemma and there extend a small measure of the goodness and mercy given to me by my Master?"<sup>6</sup> Some churches observe an annual Week of Prayer, and elders can make it a practice to visit those who are hosting this event.

## 7. EDUCATION

It is important to explore pastoral education programs in Seventh-day Adventist educational and health care institutions. Many Adventist colleges and universities have courses in pastoral care and spiritual nurture. Similarly, hospitals have Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) centers. Adventist hospitals in the United States that offer CPE include Florida Hospital, Kettering Medical Center, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, and Washington Adventist Hospital. They have trained chaplains and supervisors or teachers who can mentor elders in pastoral care and advance spiritual support competencies. Ask supervisors of these centers for resources and training that may activate or rejuvenate pastoral care programs in your church.

## 8. BACK TO BASICS

The Bible is a rich fundamental resource and reference for learning to care, and there are countless statements from God's messenger, Ellen G. White, in the Spirit of Prophecy. Some of these statements are included in the book *Pastoral Ministry*, printed by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference.<sup>7</sup> Study these resources and apply their message to pastors and elders *passionately* for loving and leading church members to heaven. Sermons on feeding God's flock can be found in Ezekiel 34:15-16; Matthew 25:36; and John 21:15-17. Our divine Teacher taught us well.

## 9. ADEQUATE SUPPORT

Any successful program requires personnel, strategies, and money. Nurturing the strong and visiting the sick and aging are necessary. Reaching out to new interests and neighbors in the church community requires funds. A budget should be provided for a church secretary. In some cases, visitation materials and transportation may be needed. Print name badges for elders and distribute them with the monthly supply of birthday cards that will be sent to every member. Perhaps a yearly church-activity calendar and a devotional/prayer book can be given to church members during visitation.<sup>8</sup>

Pastoral visitation is not an option but a way of life for elders and pastors. How grateful I am to Christ and my mentors, who guided me for several years in visitation! My mentors included the late D. E. Venden, an evangelist who believed in visitation and coached me on how to care for members and evangelistic interests. Many church professionals, including my secretary, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit, assisted me. I was motivated to include in my schedule weekly pastoral visits, often with my elders, to train them. In those days, we were very much occupied, but the most memorable period in my pastoral ministry was seeing elders take leadership and watching church members grow and mature in stewardship, understanding, and observance.

As elders and ministers, let us make pastoral visitation a priority in our church program, and we will receive Christ's richest blessings. 

\*A pseudonym

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 442.

<sup>2</sup> White, *Christian Service* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 127.

<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 45.

<sup>4</sup> See *Elder's Digest* April/June 2014 issue.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 63).

<sup>6</sup> Philip Keller, *The Inspiration Writings* (New York: Inspiration Press, 1993), 115.

<sup>7</sup> White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference Ministerial Association, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Chor-Kiat Sim, *Purposeful Prayers* (Silver Spring, MD: amazon.com, 2013). This companion book for *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* is available at the Potomac Adventist Book Center; email [pglenn@potomacabc.com](mailto:pglenn@potomacabc.com).

Chor-Kiat Sim, D. Min., BCC, is a CPE Supervisor/Diplomate at Washington Adventist Hospital and an elder at the Capital Chinese SDA Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

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# CLARITY AND PURITY OF UTTERANCE >PART 2 OF 3

**Home Instruction in Voice Culture:** Instruction in vocal culture should be given in the home. Parents should teach their children to speak so plainly that the listeners can understand every word. They should teach them to read the Bible with clear, distinct utterance in a way that will honor God. And let not those who kneel around the family altar put their faces in their hands close down to the chair when they address God. Let them lift up their heads and with holy awe speak to their heavenly Father, uttering their words in tones that can be heard.

Parents, train yourselves to speak in a way that will be a blessing to your children. Women need to be educated in this respect. Even the busy mothers, if they will, can cultivate the talent of speech and can teach their children to read and speak correctly. They can do this while they go about their work. It is never too late for us to improve. God calls upon parents to bring all the perfection possible into the home circle.

**Musical Voices:** Those who open the oracles of God to the people should improve in their manner of communicating the truth, that it may be presented to the world in an acceptable way. Place proper emphasis upon the words that should be made impressive. Speak slowly. Let the voice be as musical as possible.

God desires His ministers to seek for perfection, that they may be vessels unto honor. They are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit; and when they speak, they are to show an energy proportionate to the importance of the subject they are presenting. They are to show that the power about which they speak has made a change in their lives. When they are truly united with Christ, they will give the heavenly invitation with an earnestness that will impress hearts. As they manifest zeal in proclaiming the gospel message, a corresponding earnestness will be produced in the hearers, and lasting impressions for good will be made.

**Truth as Manna From Heaven:** The truth should be spoken clearly, slowly, forcibly, that it may impress the hearer. When the truth in any line is presented it is essential for it to be understood, that all its precious food, the bread of life, the manna from heaven, may be received.

**Destruction of Body Organs:** Many who might be useful men are using up their vital force and destroying their lungs

and vocal organs by their manner of speaking. Some ministers have acquired a habit of hurriedly rattling off what they have to say, as though they had a lesson to repeat, and were hastening through it as fast as possible. This is not the best manner of speaking. By using proper care, every minister can educate himself to speak distinctly and impressively, not to hurriedly crowd the words together without taking time to breathe. He should speak in a moderate manner, that the people may get the ideas fixed in their minds as he passes along. But when the matter is rushed through so rapidly, the people cannot get the points in their minds, and they do not have time to receive the impression that it is important for them to have; nor is there time for the truth to affect them as it otherwise would.

**Danger of Excitable Speech:** When some attempt to speak calmly, without excitement and excessive gesticulation, they become embarrassed, and feel a lack of freedom, because they are restraining themselves from following their old habits. But let all such feelings, which are mere excitement, go to the four winds. That freedom of feeling that would result in your committing suicide is not sanctified.

**Passion of Delivery No Evidence of God's Power:** The voice should be cultivated so as to promote its musical quality, that it may fall pleasantly upon the ear and impress the heart. . . .

The Lord requires the human agent not to move by impulse in speaking, but to move calmly, speak slowly, and let the Holy Spirit give efficiency to the truth. Never think that in working yourselves up to a passion of delivery, speaking by impulse, and suffering your feelings to raise your voice to an unnaturally high key, that you are giving evidence of the great power of God upon you. . . .

Your influence is to be far reaching, and your powers of speech should be under the control of reason. When you strain the organs of speech, the modulations of the voice are lost. The tendency to rapid speaking should be decidedly overcome. God claims of the human instrumentality all the service that man can give. 

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This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 183-186, by Ellen G. White.

# SEVEN MISTAKES IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

**As** a teacher, consultant, and preacher, I talk to groups for a living. In fact, I've been a student of public speaking for more than 30 years. I've learned by studying in the classroom and simply by listening to others. Too often, I've learned the hard way by making my own mistakes.

On a positive note, I've seen that it's possible to exercise leadership from the public platform. A well-timed, well-delivered address can rally the troops, strengthen the team, and compel people toward excellence. On the other hand, I've seen (and exhibited at times, I'm sure) some mistakes in public speaking. Here are a few.



## 1. NOT KNOWING THE AUDIENCE

Speaking to teens is not the same as speaking to senior adults. Communicating with a gathering of relationship-oriented non-Westerners is different than speaking to a group of Western businessmen. Most speakers have some sense of the importance of audience analysis, but understanding analysis and acting on it are two different matters. I'm amazed by the number of speakers I invite to different venues who never ask about the intended audience.

## 2. INVITING INDIFFERENCE

Maybe you've heard speakers do it:

- "This point isn't exciting, but it's important."
- "I really haven't had much time to prepare, so please bear with me."
- "This really isn't my area of expertise; I'm sure there are others who are more qualified."

Although humility may be the driving force behind these kinds of statements, don't be surprised if the audience is uninterested after you've told them you're unexciting, unprepared, and/or unqualified. Let your hearers make that assessment without your help. They just may find you engaging and enlightening!

## 3. BORING THE AUDIENCE

Here's the difficulty with this mistake: Only once have I ever met a boring speaker who knew he was boring (he was forced to admit it after he fell asleep during one of his own lectures!). It would not hurt us to have friends who evaluate our speaking and critique us honestly. Good training and increased passion can help overcome a boring style, but not if we fail to recognize the problem in the first place.

## 4. USING IRRELEVANT STORIES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Much of the world learns best through stories and illustrations, so using stories is a significant communication strategy. Watch an audience when you begin to tell a story or use an illustration; often, they will lean forward, almost as if they are closing the space to hear better. This speaking strategy opens the door to effective communica-

tion. However, if the story lacks relevance (for example, using automobile illustrations when speaking to city dwellers who have never owned cars), the technique loses its force. Again, knowing the audience matters.

### 5. ASSUMING AUDIENCE APPLICATION

Public speeches have different purposes. Some inform, others convince, and some simply address a special occasion. Many public speeches, though, are intended to lead the hearer to action—support a candidate, give to a cause, adopt a belief, accept a decision, join the team, celebrate a victory, change a lifestyle. The problem is that speakers often fail to state clearly what they want the audience to do. Instead, they assume the hearers will listen intently, naturally connect the dots, and respond appropriately. But a lack of specific instructions from the speaker results in a lack of intentional application among the hearers.

### 6. IGNORING TIME PARAMETERS

Seldom are speakers given open-ended time slots for speaking. Usually they have an established time period that fits neatly into the organization's overall plans and goals. To ignore those parameters is not just disruptive to the sched-

ule; it is inconsiderate at best and arrogant at worst. Finishing within the allotted time shows respect, and it might even strengthen the speech by demanding brevity.

### 7. NEGLECTING CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

I suspect that the more we speak, the less we see a need to improve. Perhaps we subconsciously convince ourselves that practice really does make perfect. There is little question that speaking regularly can make us more comfortable with the task, but actual improvement is not always the result. Growing as a public speaker requires an intentional strategy for improvement.

Unfortunately, this list of mistakes is not all-inclusive. What other mistakes have you seen in public speaking? On the flip side, what characterizes strong public speaking? Think about them as well.

ED

Chuck Lawless currently serves as professor of evangelism and missions and dean of graduate studies at Southeastern Seminary. This article first appeared in *Best Practices*, April 22, 2013.

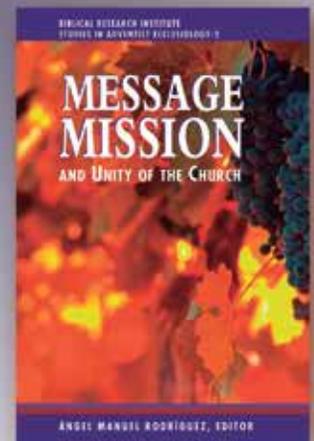


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# STEWARDSHIP OF GIFTS AND TALENTS

**Newspapers** and magazines are filled with reports about sports “heroes,” especially during world championships and the Olympic Games. We admire their skills, strength, and tenacity. The same is true for top musicians, artists, and writers. There are the actors with their incredible ability to play quite different roles, imitating real life. We admire CEOs who lead huge companies and make a lot of money. We think highly of scientists that unlock natural mysteries. All these people have specific talents. Sometimes we wish we would have the same or similar gifts and be more than just “ordinary” people. But we have also received talents and gifts. Although they may not appear to be important, these gifts may sometimes be more crucial than the spectacular ones.

## I. TALENTS AND GIFTS ARE GIVEN BY GOD

All gifts and talents are entrusted to us by God. He has not only given us time, material possessions, and our body, but also talents and gifts—James 1:17. They are not our own but should be used according to the principles of stewardship that we have discussed previously.

## 1. Natural Gifts

People have received natural gifts. They possess these gifts whether they are believers or unbelievers. The Bible mentions, for instance, craftsmen, musicians (Rev 18:22), and poets (Acts 17:28).

## 2. Spiritual Gifts

There are spiritual gifts (*charismata*) given to those who have received the gift (*dōrea*) of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), that is to believers in Jesus Christ.

Spiritual gifts come from God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4–6, 11; Eph 4:8, 11). However, it seems that at least in some cases natural gifts can be enhanced and can also become spiritual gifts. See the craftsmen that were responsible for building the tabernacle—Exodus 31:1–6.

## II. SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### 1. Lists of Spiritual Gifts

The New Testament contains three major lists of spiritual gifts:



1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 28–30 This is the most comprehensive list, mentioning many gifts and explaining issues related to these gifts.

Romans 12:6–8 About seven gifts are mentioned in this passage such as prophecy and teaching.

Ephesians 4:11 Here we find apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.

Apart from these lists other spiritual gifts occur here and there in Scripture. That means that not even the three lists combined are exhaustive or comprehensive, not even the three lists together.

## 2. Differences Between the Spiritual Gifts

Some of these spiritual gifts are more spectacular (healing, working miracles, tongues, prophecy) than others (speaking wisdom or knowledge, teaching, having discernment, service, exhortation, helping, charity, and performing acts of mercy). Some look similar to natural gifts while others are clearly supernatural. Yet all come directly from God. Some gifts are related to leadership (apostles, teachers, pastors), while others are not. However all gifts are needed—1 Corinthians 12:14–22.

## 3. Calling and Gifts

In addition, there is a distinction between gift and commission. For example, all believers are called to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19), however only some have the specific gift of evangelism. All believers are called to be hospitable (Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2), but some have a specific gift of hospitality (1 Pet 4:9–10). The ministry of persons with specific gifts can be especially fruitful in the area in which they have received such a gift.

## 4. Permanence of Gifts

The lists do not indicate that certain spiritual gifts are limited with regard to time. While none of the spiritual gifts had ceased at the end of the first century, but they seem to be needed till Christ's second coming (1Cor 13:9–10; Eph 4:13), the Holy Spirit may determine to use some gifts more abundantly in certain eras.

## III. THE DISTRIBUTION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:7 Each true Christian has received at least one spiritual gift in addition to

natural faculties and talents.

Acts 2:38 Prerequisites for receiving spiritual gifts are repentance, receiving the Holy Spirit and baptism.

Matthews 7:21–23 Even miracles may not be evidence that divine power has been in operation. They may be counterfeits. It is important to do the will of God.

1 Corinthians 12:31 One can desire specific spiritual gifts, but the Holy Spirit decides which gift(s) to grant (1 Cor 12:11).

## IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

- The gifts are given for the “common good,” for the benefit of various individuals as well as for the entire church and the completion of its mission—1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10.
- Gifts can be directed toward serving the church in order to maintain a functioning body—1 Corinthians 12:12–26, furthering love, service, unity, and knowledge as well as admonition and building up the church—Ephesians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 14:3.
- Gifts can be directed outwardly in the sense of mission outreach. This is true for the gift of tongues (see Acts 2), the gift of evangelism, and others.
- With the gift comes a task and responsibility. We must use our gifts for the benefit of others, and yet we will personally be blessed too—Matthew 25:14–30.
- Spiritual gifts are given so that God may be glorified—1 Peter 4:10–11.

## V. PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- Which gifts have I received from the Lord?
- How can I find out?
- How can I use my natural talents and spiritual gifts for God's cause?

May the Lord abundantly bless us as we personally explore these questions in order to better serve Him.



Ekkehardt Mueller is deputy director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference World Headquarters. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI Newsletter, edited by Elias Brasil de Souza.

# OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

## ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

### FOUR THINGS YOU OUGHT TO KNOW – Part 2 of 2

#### III - PRAYER

*“Prayer is the most powerful force of energy one man can generate; it’s a force as real as terrestrial gravity. When we pray we link ourselves with the inexhaustible power that swings the universe.”—Alexis Carell*

##### 1. The Certainty of Prayer

- (1) God answers prayer (Ps. 65:2).
- (2) Jesus promised, “Ask, and you will receive” (John 16:24).
- (3) We can pray with confidence (Ps. 84:11; Heb. 4:16; Matt. 7:7-11).
- (4) The Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26; Matt. 10:20).  
*“Grant us grace, Almighty Father, so to pray as to deserve to be heard.”—Jane Austen*

##### 2. The Model Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> century African Church father, Tertullian said of this prayer:  
*“How many doctrines are at once discharged in the use of the Lord’s Prayer!  
The honoring of God, in the Father; the testimony of faith, in the name;  
the offering of obedience, in the will;  
the remembrance of hope, in the kingdom;  
the petition for life, in the bread;  
the confession of debts, in the prayer;  
the anxious care about temptation, in the call for defence.”*

#### IV - THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

*“To communicate his thoughts to men, God uses men of different culture, character, and status to order that his word might be accessible to all men. Inspiration safeguards individuality.”—G. F. Hawthorne*

##### 1. God gave spiritual guidance through the Gift of Prophecy (Amos 3:7).

- (1) The prophetic gift necessitated by sin (Is. 59:2).
- (2) The prophets were under the control of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).  
*“The true prophet is one who is lifted up by the Spirit of God into communion with Him, so that he is enabled to interpret the divine will, and to act as a medium between God and men.”—James Hastings*

##### 2. God employed various methods to communicate His will

- (1) God used angels (Heb. 1:14).
- (2) His created works (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1).
- (3) The Urim and Thummin (Num. 27:21).
- (4) The Voice of God (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).
- (5) The Holy Spirit (Matt. 10:19, 20).
- (6) Christ in Person (Heb. 1:1, 2).
- (7) Dreams (Num. 12:6; 1 Sam. 28:6; Gen. 37, 40-41; Dan. 2:1; 4:5).

##### 3. God provided man with principles to test the integrity of prophets

- (1) The principle of fulfilled predictions (Jer. 28:9).
- (2) The principle of testimony of life and works (Matt. 7:20).
- (3) The principle of consistency (Is. 8:20).
- (4) The principle of relationship to Jesus (1 John 4:1, 2).

##### 4. God placed no time limit on the operation of the Gift of Prophecy

- (1) The gift was still operational in N.T. times (Acts 11:27, 28; 13:1; 15:32; 1 Cor. 12:28).
- (2) The gift did not cease at the close of the Scriptural Canon (Acts 2:17, 18; cf. Matt. 7:15).

##### 3. The Method of Prayer (Matt. 6:6).

- (1) The period: “when you pray” (Ps. 55:17).
- (2) The place: “go to your room”
- (3) The need for privacy: “when you have shut the door”
- (4) The person to whom we pray: “pray to your Father”
- (5) The promise: “will reward you openly”
- (6) Pray in the name of Jesus (John 14:15).
- (7) Pray without interruption (1 Thess. 5:17; Luke 18:1; 1 Chr. 16:11).  
*“Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back from God.”—Ellen G. White (SC 94)*

##### 4. The Conditions for Answered Prayer

- (1) Exercise faith (Heb. 11:6; Matt. 11:22, 24).
- (2) Submit to the will of God (1 John 5:14, 15).
- (3) Pray for right things (James 4:3).
- (4) Pray honestly (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; John 9:31).  
*“It is good for us to keep some account of our prayers, that we may not unsay them in our practice.”—Matthew Henry*
- (5) Pray in the spirit of forgiveness (Mark 11:25).  
*“Prayer does not consist in battering the walls of heaven for personal benefits or the success of our plans. Rather it is committing of ourselves for the carrying out of His purpose. . . . It is not bending God’s will to ours, but our wills to God’s. In prayer, we tap vast reservoirs of spiritual power whereby God can find fuller entrance into the hearts of men.”—G. Ashton Oldham*

- (3) The gift was to be manifest in the Remnant Church (Rev. 12:17; 19:10).

##### 5. God used both men and women in the prophetic office

- (1) Old Testament: Deborah (Judg. 4:4); Huldah (2 Chr. 34:22).
- (2) New Testament: Anna (Luke 2:36); Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21:8, 9).

##### 6. God gave this gift to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the person of Ellen G. White

- (1) Birth: Ellen Gould Harmon, at Gorham, Maine, November 26, 1827 (died July 16, 1915).
- (2) Religion: Converted from Methodism and baptized in Portland, March 1840.
- (3) Marriage: James White, August 30, 1846 (died: Aug. 6, 1881).
- (4) Family: 4 boys—Henry, Edson, William, John Herbert.
- (5) Visions: First one, December 1844 (cf. EW, 13); Last vision, March 3, 1915.
- (6) Literary Work: 23,900 pages in books; 4,500 articles.
- (7) Tribute:  
*“This remarkable woman, though almost entirely self-educated, has written and published more books and in more languages, which circulate to a greater extent than the written works of any other woman in history.”—George W. James*

##### 7. God invites respect for the manifestation of this gift (1 Thess. 5:21, 22; 2 Chr. 20:20).

*“The prophet is a speaker of and for God. His words are not the production of his own spirit, but come from a higher source. For he is at the same time a seer, who sees things that do not lie in the domain of natural sight, or hears things which human ears do not ordinarily receive.”—Gene Taylor (ISBE, IV, 2459)*

# CHOICES FOR LIFE:

## CULTIVATE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



**Did** you know that our relationships have much to do with our health? Supportive social connections have a powerful influence on how long and how well we live. Unhealthy relationships have the opposite effect. Over time, exposure to chronic stress in a relationship may have a negative effect on the body and can be associated with many chronic diseases. Thus, a positive choice for health is to cultivate healthy relationships. They can be a healing balm and a protective factor, helping us deal with disease and difficult situations we face in life.

For instance, supportive and caring relationships have a positive impact on one's immune system and may contribute to fewer illnesses,<sup>1</sup> but negative social interactions and unhealthy relationships may weaken one's immune system and bring about disease. One study showed that when a person was in conflict with his or her spouse or companion, his or her immune system was less effective.<sup>2</sup> However, the immune system is not the only health factor at risk. A recent study has shown that people can be at increased risk for a heart attack soon after an outburst of anger.<sup>3</sup>

In essence, violence in all its forms (intimate partner violence, child abuse, elder abuse, witnessing abuse) has been linked to poor health and increased mortality. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have documented abuse as a major public health problem around the world. Unfortunately, it is just as common among church members and church leaders as it is in the homes of those who do not know Christ and His love. But it does not have to be that way.

Cultivating healthy relationships is a choice that requires the investment of time, energy, conscious decisions, and the will to intentionally set priorities. Controlling our minds and emotions requires the constant presence of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some tips for cultivating healthy relationships:

1. *Make time for face-to-face interactions.* Sometimes in their busy lives, people choose to relate to others on social media or through a phone screen. But to invest in healthy

relationships, we must make time for quality one-on-one, in-person interactions with those we love.

2. *Respect people's individuality and become a good listener.* If you want to make friends, be friendly and do not push your ideas onto other people. Allow others to share their thoughts without judgment. Avoid giving advice without being asked and without demanding a change of behavior. Be positive and supportive as you listen to others' concerns. Be patient. Share an encouraging word with patience.

3. *Devote time to shared meals and family worship.* Studies have shown how beneficial family meals can be for children and youth. This family time can protect kids from at-risk behaviors. When the TV is turned off and family members can speak and listen to each other, real connections are formed. Additionally, family worship connects family members as they grow together in their relationships with God.

4. *Forgive one another.* Forgiveness brings healing not only to the person who is forgiven, but especially to the one who forgives. Carrying bitterness toward someone for years will affect one's health in a negative way. Sometimes forgiveness may mean setting limits for interactions with a "toxic" or abusive person and seeking guidance from God and from a professional. No matter the circumstances, we must always pray for the ones who hurt us and sincerely wish them well.

We will not always have everyone's approval, love, or respect, but we are asked to do everything we can to live in peace with all people (Rom. 12:18) and to forgive those who have hurt us in any way. With God's help, we can develop healthy relationships. 

<sup>1</sup> S. Cohen (1997), "Social Ties and Susceptibility to the Common Cold," in *JAMA*, 77(24):1940-1944.

<sup>2</sup> J. Kiecolt-Glaser, R. Glaser, et al. (1987), "Marital Quality, Marital Disruption, and Immune Function" in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 49(1), 13-34.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Steinbaum, MD, news release, *European Heart Journal*, March 3, 2014.



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

# TRAINING TOOLS FOR THE MAASAI

**Adventist** World Radio's broadcasts carry the gospel to places where missionaries cannot go or where people cannot access Adventist printed materials. But there are still people who are unable to hear AWR's voice of hope—perhaps because they are too poor to afford their own radios or batteries, or because they cannot receive an AWR signal in their location.

To fill this gap, AWR turns to special solar audio players—called MegaVoice Ambassadors—which are preloaded with AWR's recordings in selected languages and distributed to local church workers or members in target areas. These workers have devised ways of using the players that best fit their local needs, and are reporting great success. One such testimony came recently from László Szabó, of Friedensau Adventist University, who has been working in an unentered Maasai area in Tanzania:

"The people in these villages are illiterate and very poor. We struggled with reaching the Maasai men, but this year God blessed our efforts. We invited the elders from most of the vil-

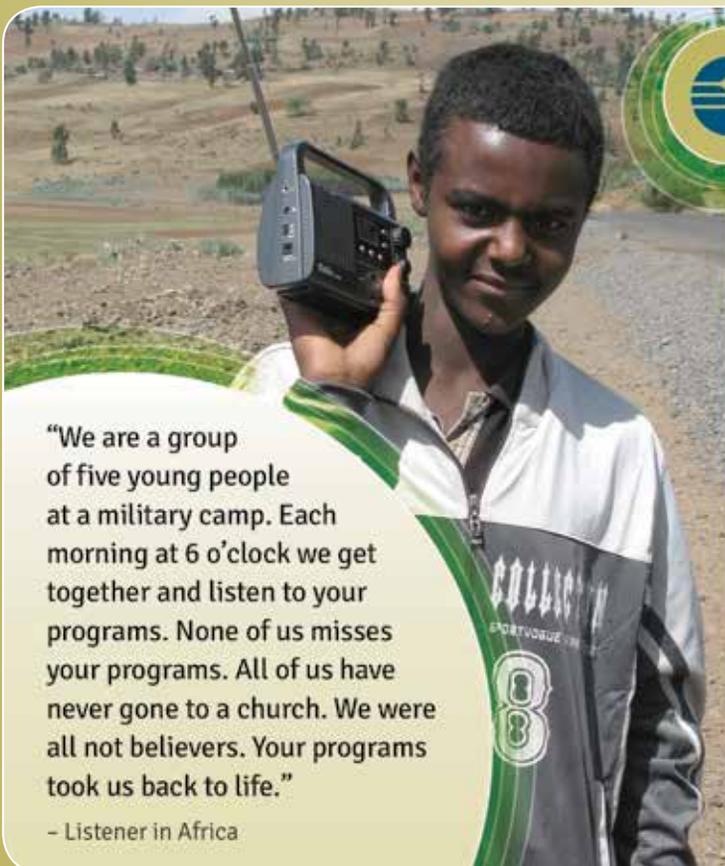
lages to eat with us and discuss the issues and needs in their villages. We developed a very good friendship with these people.

"Usually, we gave the MegaVoice Ambassadors to baptismal candidates because there is limited opportunity for Bible studies and follow-up. They were very happy because this is the only way for them to listen to the Bible. No books, no pastor can help them after we leave, but the MegaVoice Ambassadors are preaching and caring for these people.

"We have focused our ministry more on men because, if we reach them, we will also reach the women and children. I challenged specially men to become leaders of the church. So, whatever they hear on the MegaVoice Ambassadors, they should teach to the congregation. God wants them to become elders of the church, but for that ministry they need to be educated in Bible knowledge."

ED

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



"We are a group of five young people at a military camp. Each morning at 6 o'clock we get together and listen to your programs. None of us misses your programs. All of us have never gone to a church. We were all not believers. Your programs took us back to life."

— Listener in Africa



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# GREAT LOVERS

**One** Friday night, the small group I lead was studying about giving. I presented some biblical materials on the subject and then opened the floor for discussion and testimonies. After a few comments, one man shared sincerely, “I know that God has put an obligation in the Bible for us to give. In return, He has an obligation to bless us. I have been giving faithfully to God for a while now because I know that if I do, He will bless me and make me win the lottery.”

Just as I was about to correct him for his poor theological reasoning, I had to reflect on my own motivation for giving. Had I been giving to God out of obligation or with selfish expectations?

## WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR GIVING?

I once met with a group of pastors and was asked to summarize the work of stewardship. A grand total of three minutes was allotted for the presentation! In an attempt to say as much as possible in such a brief time, my opening remark was, “The task of stewardship is to turn ordinary disciples into great lovers.” This seemed to catch their attention, and it allowed me to suggest that when need, duty, or expectations are used as motivators, they are weak and in need of constant repetition. On the other hand, when a person acts from the basis of love, motivation builds and reinforces itself with the passages of time.

Stewardship is responsive; it acts on the basis of what has already been done. Love responds to love and provides a deep reservoir from which wonderful actions and gracious motivations flow. This is the heart of 2 Corinthians 9:7: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Christian growth flourishes in such a climate.

It is axiomatic to repeat that one can give without loving but cannot love without giving. Stewards find vital truth in the “love chapter”—1 Corinthians 13. “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3). Givers also do not parade their generosity in prideful ways. They do not claim an advantage—no matter the size of their gift—nor do they expect it to cover their shortcomings. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs” (verses 4, 5).

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Giving with love is not always easy. Here are some questions

for you to wrestle with as you seek to grow in your love for and generosity to God:

1. Does how much I give accurately convey how much I love God (Ex. 35:4-9, 29; Matt. 26:7-13)?
2. How often do I reflect on what God has already given to me at the cross (John 3:16; 15:13; 1 Cor. 2:2)?
3. How do I express my love for God compared to how I express my love for the world (John 15:19; 1 John 2:15)?
4. Do I get more excited about spending money on temporal things than I do about giving money for eternal things (Matt. 6:19-21)?
5. Whose agenda is at the top of my priorities: God’s or mine (Matt. 19:16-22)?
6. How often do I do something for someone in need without expecting anything in return (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 9:36)?
7. What are some creative things my family and I can do to show our love through giving, i.e., forgo Christmas/birthday gifts, eliminate a nonessential expense, fast for a period of time to free up money to share with those in need, use personal allowance or have a garage sale to fund mission projects, etc. (Matt. 25:34-40; James 1:27)?

When God’s love is at work in us, we can break the cycle of selfishness and do the Christlike thing we call giving. God’s love reminds us: “Everything that we are, everything that we have, every talent, all our time, all our treasures are all gifts from a loving Creator who made us and gave us management responsibilities.”<sup>1</sup>

Billy Graham once said, “Tell me what you think about money, and I can tell you what you think about God, for these two are closely related. A man’s heart is closer to his wallet than almost anything else.”

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The nickel-and-dime giving of our younger days can ripen into Christian generosity as we mature as disciples and grow in our love for God. Even our highest generosity, motivated by Christ’s love within us, pales in significance when compared with the supreme gift of love—the gift of God’s Son for us!

Let’s strive to live every day in the certainty that our lives are controlled by the loving generosity of Christ!



<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9:245.

S. Joseph Kidder is a professor of church growth and leadership at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

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