

quarterly resource for local church leaders † october/december 2012

ELDER'S DIGEST



12 STEPS

FOR PREPARING
AND DELIVERING
POWERFUL BIBLICAL
SERMONS

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

SUBSCRIPTION AND ADDRESS CHANGES: One-year subscription, US\$18.00. Three-year subscription, US\$47.00. Please subscribe at www.eldersdigest.org or send check to *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA. Please send address changes to eldersdigest@gc.adventist.org.

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MAKING THE CHURCH RELEVANT

When Jesus returned to heaven, He left 11 disciples behind to continue the work He had begun. Through these men (and through the apostle Paul, who later joined them), the gospel was spread throughout the entire known world.

Today, we are Christ's followers, yet we find ourselves in a socially complex world. Multitudes are desperately searching for truth, purpose, and a better future. We are the ones whom Christ has charged to lead the way, but, how can we significantly impact our world for Him? For us to achieve this, we must be relevant to our culture. I'm not talking about changing the message of the gospel to fit the times; rather, I'm talking about carrying out the Lord's charge effectively while being sensitive to the culture in which we live.

Allow me to share some of my thoughts about what could be done. First and foremost, our message in the pulpit and in Sabbath School must provide answers for real problems. We can't do this unless we are attuned to the Bible's message. Any problem we face can be dealt with through the excellent counsel in the Word of God. The church must become the place where people of this generation can

come to find what they can't receive in any other place. Sensitivity to the biblical text not only develops genuine faith; it also causes us to re-interpret reality in the light of hope.

Secondly, the church must go outside its walls and learn from and minister to the community in which God has placed it. We must do more than place a welcome sign on our door; God has placed us to impact those around us. Our willingness to reach out will be a direct consequence of having a church committed to the Bible. The gospel

is about more than our vertical relationship with God; it is about developing a relationship with Him that makes us more like Him—a people devoted to serving others. Jesus said that when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and care for strangers, we have done the same to Him (see Matt. 25:34-40). The bottom line is that we will not be considered relevant if we fail to exercise the ministry of compassion in this hurting world.

Thirdly, the church must believe in, pray for, and depend on the work of the Holy Spirit. He wants to work supernaturally through God's people. Only the Holy Spirit can break the chains of this world and the spiritual shackles that hold humanity captive. Only He can draw people to the Father. Only He can change people from the inside out. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles that they were able to turn the world upside down. The Holy Spirit will do the same for us today—impart to us the same gifts He gave to the apostles—if we allow Him to.

These things cannot be legislated. It requires more than just telling church folks what the Bible says they need to do. Knowing what needs to be done and actually doing, it can be worlds apart. It all boils down to this: For us to be relevant in our socially complex world, we must fall in love with the Lord. When we do, we will love the things He loves. His will for us will become our consuming passion, so that as Christ gave His life to save a lost world, we will also give ours to reach the lost in today's society. 

ONLY THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN BREAK THE CHAINS OF THIS WORLD AND THE SPIRITUAL SHACKLES THAT HOLD HUMANITY CAPTIVE.



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



Anthony Kent (right) and Derek Morris (left), co-hosts.

Anthony Kent

has more than 25 years of experience as a pastor, church planter, evangelist, and teacher/trainer of pastors. Since 2005 he has been Associate Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference, coaching and offering continuing education and professional development for pastors and elders around the world.

Derek Morris

has 30 years of experience both as a local pastor and teacher of pastors. He currently serves as Editor of *Ministry*, an international journal for pastors, and a trainer and equiper of pastors worldwide.

JONAS ARRAIS (JA): TELL US ABOUT THE EXCITING TV PROGRAM CALLED *MINISTRYinMOTION*.

Anthony Kent (AK): *MINISTRYinMOTION* is new! It was launched this summer on the Hope Channel. It's a program sponsored by the General Conference Ministerial Association where we explore best practices for ministry in the 21st century. This program is of special interest to elders since we discuss issues that are very relevant for church leaders.

JA: WHAT IS THE FORMAT OF THIS NEW PROGRAM?

Derek Morris (DM): *MINISTRYinMOTION* is a 30-minute interview with one or two guests who have special expertise in a particular area of ministry. The programs are fresh and practical. Anthony and I have been blessed as we have met with our special guests. One of the really exciting aspects of the program is that it is not a monologue but more like a journey of discovery. In each program we explore with gifted practitioners critical issues like the "how" of ministry and "making a difference" in ministry.

JA: HOW CAN READERS OF *ELDER'S DIGEST* ACCESS THESE EXCITING PROGRAMS?

AK: *MINISTRYinMOTION* is broadcast four times per week in North America on DIRECTV 368 (Hope Channel):

Monday 8:30 a.m. Eastern Time
Monday 11:30 a.m. Eastern Time
Tuesday 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time
Friday 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time

You are also able to watch programs at any time and without charge on our website. Our web address is www.MINISTRYinMOTION.TV.

JA: WHAT ARE SOME TOPICS OF INTEREST TO OUR READERS THAT YOU'LL BE DISCUSSING WITH SPECIAL GUESTS ON *MINISTRYinMOTION*?

DM: We have programs by Mark Finley on Life-Changing Evangelistic Preaching, Willie and Elaine Oliver on how to protect your marriage and how to build healthy relationships

with your children, and Claudio and Pamela Consuegra who share some important insights about domestic abuse. The list goes on and on. All of these programs are freely available on our website.

JA: CAN OUR READERS MAKE SUGGESTIONS FOR UPCOMING PROGRAMS ON *MINISTRYinMOTION*?

AK: Absolutely! We want to deal with issues that are relevant to elders and their families. Participants can send us suggestions at feedback@MINISTRYinMOTION.TV. One extra and important thing: We are also seeking prayer support for *MINISTRYinMOTION*. Derek and I are both very aware that we are dependent upon God, and we are perpetually seeking God's direction for this exciting initiative. We encourage people to pray that this program will be significantly helpful to elders and their families.

JA: THANKS FOR SHARING WITH OUR READERS. I'M CERTAIN THAT GOD WILL BLESS ELDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH THIS NEW MEDIA INITIATIVE.



“ I am writing to let you know that I very much enjoy your new program, *MINISTRYinMOTION*. I just watched ‘How to Protect and Strengthen Your Marriage.’ It deeply touched my heart and made me realize that I have been neglecting my husband. I am going to take the advice given on the program and make sure that we spend more time together. Your ministry is a blessing to me. Hallelujah!”

Nina Freeman
From the United States

“ I watched the first program of *MINISTRYinMOTION* with Evangelist Mark Finley. It's amazing because we had electricity for the duration of the program alone. ‘The wonder of it all’ is that this was the only program I watched for the day because I didn't fuel the generator. What a divine appointment! You are a blessing to me. Thanks and God Bless.”

Kikshak Yilwada
From Nigeria

“ The TV program, *MINISTRYinMOTION*, sponsored by the General Conference Ministerial Association is a very important training resource for local church leaders around the world. Certainly, many people will be shaped and blessed for a more effective ministry. Thanks Anthony Kent and Derek Morris for supporting their ministry. I ask each church pastor/elder to promote this wonderful program at the local congregation level.”

Jonas Arrais
Editor of *Elder's Digest*

TESTIMONIES

THE MYSTERY OF THE GODHEAD - PART 3

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The subject of the Holy Spirit is extremely important. Many people today find it difficult to understand this mystery, and this has led to different views of the Holy Spirit, even among Christians. In some circles, the Holy Spirit is seen only as the character or mind of God.¹ Other denominations consider the Holy Spirit to be an “active force.”² Others teach what is known as the “Twinity” (two), as opposed to the “Trinity” (three).³ They all agree that the Holy Spirit is not co-equal to the Father and the Son. But, who is the Holy Spirit and what role does this member of the Trinity play in our salvation?

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. *Attributes:* The Bible is unequivocal about the nature of the Holy Spirit: He is eternal (Heb. 9:14); omnipotent/all powerful (Luke 1:35); omnipresent/able to be everywhere at all times (Ps. 139:7); and omniscient/all knowing (1 Cor. 2:10, 11). He is able to communicate (Acts 13:2); intercede (Rom. 8:26); testify (John 15:26); guide (John 16:13); command (Acts 16:6, 7); appoint (Acts 20:28); lead (Rom. 8:14), expose sin and foolishness (John 16:8); shape people’s lives for Christ (Rom. 8:1-17); and seal the promises of God in our hearts (Eph. 1:13, 14).

B. *Transcendence:* As such, the Holy Spirit is transcendent. He is Spirit and not matter (cf. John 4:24). And, consequently, He is completely distinct from what He created. Unlike human beings who rely on pre-existing materials to create and make things, the cosmological function of the Holy Spirit is self-existent. For the Spirit of God possesses the ability of *creatio ex nihilo*—to create out of nothing. Thus, in the beginning, the Holy Spirit moved upon the face of “nothingness” (the earth was “formless” and “empty”), and creation began to unfold (Gen. 1:2, 3-31).

C. *Imminence:* The Trinity also played a collaborative role in the creation of human life (Gen. 1:26). Adam was simply a pile of dust, empty and lifeless, until God “breathed” into his nostrils the “breath” of life (Gen. 2:7). Here, “breath,” from the Hebrew *Ruah* (also translated as “Spirit”), suggests the imminent operation of the Holy Spirit in human existence. The “Spirit” is the “active source of life.” Without it, man ceases to be a living soul. Only human beings on earth have the privilege of communicating with the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God, man has no hope of eternal life (compare Rom. 8:16, 26; John 14:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:18-20); he is dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3).



WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

Let us consider only three roles of the Holy Spirit:

A. In relation to sinful man:

1. Sin ushered severe consequences into the world. Man became evil before God (Gen. 6:12) and yielded to their evil passions (Gen. 6:2). But the Spirit “contends” with man (Gen. 6:3). And, a period of 120 years was extended to the people of Noah’s time before the flood (1 Peter 3:20).

2. The “Spirit” continues to strive with man today. He convicts man of sin (John 16:8), leads (Ps. 143:10), teaches (Luke 12:12), directs (Acts 13:2), inspires (2 Peter 1:21), and sanctifies (1 Peter 1:2).

3. While the “flesh” drives us toward acts of “immorality, impurity, selfish ambition, dissension, and the like” (Gal. 5:19-21), the “Spirit” leads to “faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (verse 22). As we see in the case of Saul, conviction turns more and more painful over time (Acts 26:14). And, eventually, persistent refusal to heed the promptings of the Holy Spirit leads to the unpardonable sin (Mark 3:29).

B. In relation to the righteous

1. The incalculable force of the Holy Spirit upon the righteous enables them to carry out the will of God. This is illustrated frequently in the Old Testament by such verbs as “came upon him” (Judges 3:10; compare 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19), “stir” (Judges 13:25), “lift” (Ezek. 3:12, 14; 11:1), “pour” (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28), and “fill” (Micah 3:8).

2. The Holy Spirit was also given for specific tasks—courage for Gideon to fight the Midianites (Judges 6:34), strength for Amasai to defend David (1 Chron. 12:18), boldness for Zechariah to challenge wayward Israel (2 Chron. 24:20), skills for the craftsman of Israel to build the tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-7)—and for justice and might (Micah 3:8).

3. The ultimate manifestation of God’s *ruah* in the Old Testament was through prophecy (1 Sam. 10:6; Ezek. 11:5, 24; Joel 2:28, 29). Through inspiration the prophets gave a sharper focus to God’s life-changing *ruah* and directed it to those who needed it (2 Sam. 23:2, 3; Acts 21:4; 28:25; 2 Peter 1:21).

4. The Spirit imparts life (Ezek. 37:9, 14; Rom. 8:11), hope (Rom. 15:13), joy (Rom. 14:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; Gal. 5:22), love (Rom. 5:5), physical strength (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14, 15), victory over the flesh (Rom. 8:4, 13; Gal. 5:16, 25), and inner strength (Eph. 3:16).

C. In relation to the finishing of the gospel work

1. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The day of Pentecost marked the fulfillment of this promise (Acts 2:23). And, a great spiritual revival was experienced by the early church. The gospel was preached with power (Acts 2:1-4, 5-41), miracles were performed (Acts 2:43), members of the church became more caring (Acts 2:44-46), and church membership exploded (Acts 2:47).

2. A marked manifestation of the presence and leadership of God was evident in the early church. The role of the apostles was subservient to the authority of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:26). The Holy Spirit influenced the rational decisions (on doctrine, policies, and organization) made by the church and the expansion from local church organization to the mission fields (i.e., to the Gentiles; see Acts 8:29, 40), and also in the ministry of the apostles (Acts 13:2f; 16:6f).

3. The Holy Spirit is associated with incomputable power (Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:13, 19) for the church, the same power which raised Christ from the dead (Eph. 1:19, 20). This power takes residence in the hearts of the believers (Eph. 2:19-22; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 1:22) to anoint each member of the body of Christ with wisdom, illuminate with understanding, guide the church (1 John 2:20, 27; Rom. 8:14), and build spiritual stamina against the attacks of Satan (Eph. 3:16).

4. The Holy Spirit equips the church with a variety of gifts: teaching, ministering, administration or leadership, evangelism, pastoring, exhortation, giving, showing mercy, helps, faith, apostleship, and prophecy (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 27-31; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Eph. 4:8-13). All these gifts were to contribute to building up the body of Christ (the church) to the measure of the fullness of Christ.

What more can a person ask of God? All of heaven’s resources have been given to us in the Holy Spirit. The greatest need of Adventists today is for an authentic revival of godliness.⁴ There is much talk and boasting among us, but a lack of spiritual power in our lives and in the Church! We all need to experience a “daily” and “fresh baptism” of the Holy Spirit,⁵ for God *Ruah* to “move to and fro” upon us just as He did in the beginning, and to recreate anew out of the “emptiness” of our hearts a triumphant body of believers, prepared and adorned for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in great measure and the completion of the Gospel Commission. What a solemn privilege! What excuse will we give if we neglect such an immense offer of salvation (Heb. 2:3, 4)?



¹ This view is held by the *Christadelphians*, otherwise known as *Brothers in Christ* from the Greek. See “The Christadelphian view of the Holy Spirit,” retrieved March 8, 2010, from: <http://www.carm.org>.

² Jehovah’s Witnesses subscribe to this view of the Holy Spirit. See “Is the Holy Spirit a Person?” retrieved March 8, 2010, from the official Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Web site: <http://www.watchtower.org>.

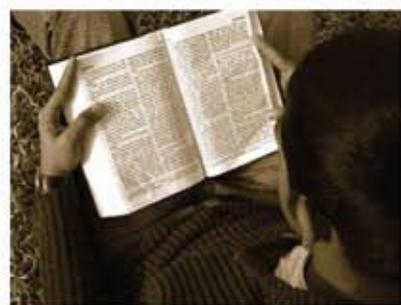
³ This was the teaching of the Worldwide Churches of God, under Armstrong. See “Worldwide Church of God: Christian or Cult?” retrieved March 8, 2010, from <http://www.rapidnet.com>.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887, cited in *Selected Messages*, vol. 1:121.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 139.

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

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CHURCH MANUAL

WHY DOES THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH HAVE A CHURCH MANUAL?

God is a God of order as evidenced in His works of creation and redemption. Consequently, order belongs to the essence of His church. Order is achieved through principles and regulations that guide the Church in its internal operations and in the fulfillment of its mission to the world. In order for it to be a successful ecclesiastical organization at the service of the Lord and humanity, it needs order, rule, and discipline. Scripture affirms that “all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

Ellen G. White pointed out such needs in 1875: “The church of Christ is in constant peril. Satan is seeking to destroy the people of God, and one man’s mind, one man’s judgment, is not sufficient to be trusted. Christ would have His followers brought together in church capacity, observing order, having rules and discipline, and all subject one to another, esteeming others better than themselves.”—3T 445.

But Church leaders did not quickly produce a book of rules for Church governance, even though the General Conference met annually in session during the Church’s early years and delegates voted on matters of church order and life. Finally, in 1882, the General Conference in session voted to have prepared “instructions to church officers, to be printed in the Review and Herald or in tract form.”—RH, Dec. 26, 1882. This revealed the growing realization that order was imperative if organization was to function effectively and that uniformity in order required its guiding principles to be put into printed form.

However, when the proposal to place the articles in permanent form as a church manual came before the 1883 General Conference session, delegates rejected the idea. They feared a manual might formalize the Church and take from its pastors their individual freedom to deal with matters of order, as they desired.

But this fear-doubtless reflecting the opposition that had existed 20 years before to any kind of organization—evidently soon lessened. The annual General Conference sessions continued to take actions on matters of order. Though the Church officially declined to adopt a manual, leaders from time to time gathered together in book or booklet form the



generally accepted rules of church life. Perhaps the most impressive was a 184-page book published in 1907 by pioneer J. N. Loughborough entitled *The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline*, which dealt with many of the topics now covered by the *Church Manual*.

As the Church worldwide grew rapidly in the early twentieth century, it increasingly recognized the need for a manual for worldwide use by its pastors and lay members. In 1931 the General Conference Committee voted to publish a church manual. J. L. McElhany, later president of the General Conference, prepared the manuscript, which was published in 1932.

The opening sentence of the preface of that first edition observed that “it has become increasingly evident that a manual on church government is needed to set forth and preserve our denominational practices and polity.” Note the word preserve. This was no attempt to suddenly create and impose upon the Church a whole pattern of church governance. Rather it was an endeavor first to preserve all the good actions taken through the years and then to add rules required by the Church’s increasing growth and complexity. ED

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.

NURTURE, EMPOWER, OUTREACH

FOCUS EQUIPS WOMEN FOR MINISTRY

Many times we are asked the question, “What is Women’s Ministries, and what does it do for the women of the church?” If I were to answer this question in three words, I would say, “Nurture, Empower, Outreach.” These three words express what Women’s Ministries is about and what we do.

Our aim is to *nurture* our sisters in the areas of spiritual and personal development. Having a daily relationship with Jesus is vital to our growth as daughters of God. To this end, we have created a number of Bible study lessons and seminars that emphasize the importance of prayer, Bible study, and personal devotions. The women’s devotional books are an important component of this as well.

We seek to *empower* women through training programs, such as the Leadership Certification Training seminars and health education seminars. Ellen White tells us that each woman “should develop and cultivate her powers, for God can employ them in the great work of saving souls from eternal ruin” (4 *Testimonies*, p. 642). We also help women through abuse prevention, economic and literacy empowerment, and health ministries.

Finally, we train, encourage, and motivate women to be involved in *outreach* through friendship evangelism, plant-a-seed ministry, public evangelism, small group ministry, and much more. We believe that our name, Women’s Ministries, indicates clearly what we are about: women involved in service to others. Each woman using the gifts that God has given her to draw others to Jesus by first experiencing the love of Jesus through us.

Our homes are the center of influence not only our families but also our neighborhoods. “Homes of Hope and Healing” is small group ministry focusing primarily on outreach. In these groups, we invite our neighbors to join us for a time of healing and hope. We begin with what we call “bridge” lessons that focus on areas of health and personal development, such as self-esteem. Then gradually we move on to non-doctrinal Bible lessons and finally into Bible doctrines. This is a process and takes time, but during this process friendships are built that will last a lifetime. This is one of the key approaches to reach people. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Jesus calls each man and each woman to serve God and others. Can we ignore this call? I pray your answer is “No!”

ED

Heather-Dawn Small, Director, General Conference Women’s Ministries.

GC Women’s Ministries provides guidelines, ideas and resources for each of these three areas of ministry. More information about Nurture, Empower and Outreach: www.womensministries.org



WHEN ATTITUDE SPOILS HEALTH

Many people believe that the health message is exclusively about the eight principles of health mentioned by Ellen G. White. And although nutrition, physical activity, and the other natural remedies are essential for a full, abundant life (John 10:10), zealous leaders sometimes forget that attitude is just as important—perhaps *more* important—in promoting health.

A MEAN REFORMER

Have you ever met a “mean” health reformer? You probably have—if not in church, perhaps in a secular health-food store. I recently read a study comparing “organic” food lovers/vegans to those who did not subscribe to that lifestyle. The researcher concluded that the food lovers/vegans seemed to be more judgmental and “mean” to others than the second group was. The author explained, “When people can pat themselves on the back for their moral behavior, they can become self-righteous.”¹

Of course, that is not true in our church, right? Our church has many loving, kind, Christ-like health reformers—my grandparents were among them! They motivate and encourage others, walking beside people as they journey together. But, if and when we find that “mean” exception, that person’s self-righteous attitude not only works against persuading others to follow God’s health plan for the last days, but their attitude also spoils health, bringing negative health consequences to themselves and those around them.

AN ALTRUISTIC EDUCATOR

We know that people were attracted to Jesus because of His love. Wherever He went, His message seemed to say, “I love you and care about you.” His love brought healing to those He encountered. Love heals, and today, science confirms that. Jesus’ “agape” love is studied in science as “altruism,” a virtue that is linked to better mental and physical health in adults and teenagers. In these studies,² when people kindly assisted others or when they received loving help from someone, these behaviors predicted better mental health, regardless of age, gender, income, health, stressful events, and whether or not they prayed for healing. Isn’t that amazing? More importantly, giving kind help was a stronger predictor of better mental health than receiving help. So, the kind, loving person seems to benefit most. On the other hand, those who felt overwhelmed by others’ demands (even if the demands were well-intentioned)—well, that negative, overwhelming feeling was also an independent predictor of poor mental health.

Paul says, “If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love [altruism]. . . . Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God” (Rom. 14:15, 19-20, ESV).

YOUR CALL!

As we read the scientific studies, we are reminded that as spiritual leaders, elders are called to model as well as to motivate other leaders in their walk with the Lord so that the fruits of the Holy Spirit may be seen first in the lives of every leader. Altruism, love, patience, kindness, and long-suffering affect our health as well as the health of others, and likely in a dose-dependent fashion.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit is impressing you to examine your heart. Are you a zealous, faithful elder (and a health advocate, too) who is loving and altruistic? Or, are you mean and judgmental? Interestingly enough, in one study,³ the predictors of being altruistic included:

- more prayer activities
- a higher satisfaction with prayer life
- engagement in positive religious coping
- being a woman
- *being a church elder*

As science points out, altruistic love starts with a personal prayer life. By beholding Him, we are changed to become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Then, “that heart through which He diffuses His peace and joy, and the blessed fruits of His love, becomes His temple and His throne.”⁴ That is my prayer for all of us!



¹ K. Eskine, “Wholesome Foods and Wholesome Morals? Organic Foods Reduce Prosocial Behavior and Harshen Moral Judgments,” in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2012. doi:10.1177/1948550612447114

² C. Schwartz, “Altruistic Social Interest Behaviors Are Associated with Better Mental Health,” in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 2003, vol. 65(5): 778-785; and “Helping Others Shows Differential Benefits on Health and Well-Being for Male and Female Teens,” in *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 2009, vol. 10(4): 431-448.

³ Schwartz, “Altruistic Social Interest Behaviors,” 778-785.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, 96.



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HOW TO KEEP THE SABBATH HOLY

THE SABBATH IS GOD'S GIFT TO US, AN OFFER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OUR LIFE. THEREFORE, GOD DOES NOT ONLY TELL US TO OBSERVE THE SABBATH DAY, BUT GIVES US INSTRUCTION ON HOW TO DO IT SO THAT THE DAY MAY BECOME A REAL BLESSING FOR US.

THE SABBATH AS A BENEFACTOR

- Mark 2:27 In his love God instituted the Sabbath to benefit humankind.
- Is. 58:13, 14 The Sabbath allows us to take delight in the Lord.
- 1 Cor. 13:1-3 We do not just keep the Sabbath because it is the day God wants us to observe, but because we love him.

TIPS FOR A HAPPY SABBATH

1. Beginning and End

The Sabbath lasts from sundown to sundown (Gen. 1:5; Lev. 23:32; Luke 4:31, 40).

2. Biblical Advice Preparation

Ex. 16:22-24 For the Sabbath to become an anti-stress day and a good experience it must be prepared for in advance (Luke 23:54).

Rest

Ex. 20:8-11 Humans and animals should enjoy rest on the Sabbath. Fellow humans do not need to work for us. Children and youth can participate in the joy and rest, as well as reflection on God by not attending school or college.

Ex. 34:21 Even when pressed by deadlines we may still enjoy the divinely given rest.

Activities

Matt. 12:9-12 Jesus set an example of Sabbath keeping by looking out for the needs of fellow human beings and doing

good. We too can serve God and do missionary work on Sabbath (Acts 17:2, 3).

Heb. 10:24, 25 We are called to attend the worship service to encounter our Lord.

Mark 1:29 Hospitality is important, allowing for fellowship with humans and with God.

Luke 14:1 Oftentimes in nature we feel closer to God. Jesus spent some time on Sabbath in nature.

Matt. 12:1 We turn away from selfishness and secular activities and do things that are pleasing to God. That includes avoiding things that rob the Sabbath of its distinctness and its blessing such as watching non-Christian programming, reading the newspaper, attending non-Christian meetings, undertaking long journeys (Matt. 24:20), buying and selling (Neh. 13:15-22), etc.

AN IDEAL SABBATH

1. Anticipation

During the week our thoughts are directed toward the Sabbath. Preparation and planning for it begins on Sunday.

2. The Day of Preparation

On Friday the cleaning of the house, preparation of food, and other preparations for the festive day are finished.

3. Beginning of the Sabbath

Fellowship with the family or believers is important. We may create a Sabbath atmosphere by having special

yet simple meals, flowers, candles, good music, etc. We try to be creative. Without rushing, we welcome the Sabbath on time with singing and a devotional, prayer, as well as making sure we take time for our children (telling a story, asking them questions and answering theirs, perhaps playing a Bible game). We may go to bed a little early so as to be fresh for the next morning.

4. Sabbath Morning

We try to create a loving and prayerful atmosphere, get dressed for church, have a good breakfast, and attend church. In church we take part in the worship service, show reverence, are friendly to others and show a readiness to fellowship with them. After finding a place in the sanctuary, a silent prayer can help us focus on worshipping God.

5. Following the Worship Service

We may participate in a fellowship meal, enjoy others' hospitality or invite people to our home. A good meal on a neatly set table can be wonderful.

6. Sabbath Afternoon

A walk in nature, reading good books and studying Scripture, listening to music or making our own, witnessing, visiting other people, reading stories to and

playing Bible games with children, having uplifting conversations are all good Sabbath afternoon activities.

7. Ending the Sabbath

Attending vespers or having sundown worship in one's home, thanking the Lord for the Sabbath, and looking forward to God's guidance in the new week is meaningful.

CONCLUSION

This description of an ideal Sabbath should not be interpreted as so many rules but rather as suggestions that may help us in creating a wonderful Sabbath experience. By mentally preparing for the Sabbath early in the week and, when Sabbath arrives, setting aside some activities and doing others, the day becomes special—the best day of the week. Let us remember: The Sabbath is a day of worship, a festive day, and a day of service—a foretaste of heaven and the new earth where we will have an even closer fellowship with God from one Sabbath to another. Let us thank the Lord for this extraordinary gift and do what is pleasing to him. It is also what is most beneficial for us!

ED

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

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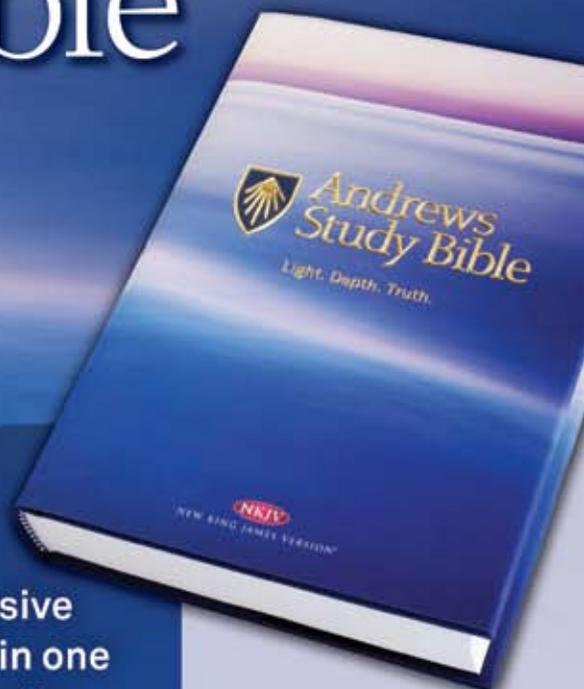
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A NAME ABOVE ALL

Matthew 1:18-25

“O How I Love Jesus”—one of my favorite hymns! It exalts the name that God said is “above every name.”

Names in our day do not mean much. Parents choose their children’s names for many reasons. Some names are different, some are weird, and some are chosen to honor a family member or someone the parents think of as their hero. But, most of the time, there is no special significance behind the choice of a name.

In Bible times, things were different. Names were given for a reason. Names meant something, and people often lived up to their names: Jacob (“trickster”), David (“beloved”), Abraham (“father of a multitude”), and Moses (“drawn out”).

In the Bible, Jesus is given many names and titles. He is called Alpha and Omega, bread, bridegroom, bright and morning star, captain, counselor, covenant, chosen of God, and Christ. He is the door, the desire of all nations, Father, and Emmanuel. He is God, High Priest, King of Israel, King of Kings, King of glory, and King everlasting. He is the life, light, love, lily, lion, lamb, lawgiver, living stone, and Lord of glory. Of all the names given to Him, however, none is as precious, as sweet, or as majestic as the name Jesus. Let’s look at the name that is above every other name.

Let’s consider the name mentioned in Matthew 1:21. The angel commanded Joseph to name the baby Mary would bear “Jesus.” Why? That name would describe in detail the entirety of all Jesus was coming to do.

I. THAT NAME DECLARES HIS IDENTITY

The name “Jesus” means, “Jehovah is salvation.” It was a very common name in biblical society. Jesus may have had a common name, but He was no ordinary baby. His birth was normal, but His conception was anything but the one “of the Most High” (Luke 1:26-38). Jesus was a real human baby, but He was also God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14).

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God came to earth to live among men (Phil. 2:5-8). Imagine! The Creator became dependent upon the created! When we speak of the Jesus of the Bible, we are referring to God in the flesh!

II. THAT NAME DECLARES HIS INTENTIONS

His name means “Jehovah is salvation.” The word “salvation” tells us what Jesus came to this world to accomplish: He came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

The word “save” means “to keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction.” How would Jesus accomplish this? In Mark 10:45, He tells us in His own words: Jesus came to this world for one purpose—to die on the cross for sinners (John 18:37; Phil. 2:8b, “even the death on the cross” [Isa. 53:4-6; Ps. 22:1; 12-18]). Even our Lord’s great mission statement in Luke 19:10 reveals His intentions.

Ellen G. White says, “The name of Jesus is all powerful to save. It is this magic name that dispels our darkness, and gives us light in the Lord. It cheers our hearts in the darkest seasons of our pilgrimage, and gives us peace with God.”¹

In spite of all He did while He was here, His primary purpose in coming into this world was to die for His people.

III. THAT NAME DECLARES HIS IMPOVISHMENT

The name “Jesus” is our Lord’s human name. He is given many names in the Bible, but the name “Jesus” is the name that identifies Him with the people He came to save (Phil. 2:5-8a). He was all God, and He was all man, too!

Imagine this: the Lord of glory came into this world. He came not as a king but as a humble servant. He was born in a manger, not in a palace. Jesus understood poverty (Matt. 8:20), weariness (John 4:6; Matt. 8:24), hunger (Matt. 4:2), rejection (John 1:11, 19:10), loneliness (John 6:15; Matt 26:29), temptation (Matt. 4:1-11), and the rest of the trials of the human condition. He endured these things so that He might identify Himself with us, understand us, and be able to comfort us in our trials (Heb. 4:15, 16).

Ellen G. White says, “Whatever spiritual blessing we need, it is our privilege to claim it through Jesus. We may tell the Lord, with the simplicity of a child, exactly what we need. We may state to Him our temporal matters, asking Him for bread and raiment as well as for the bread of life and the robe of Christ’s

righteousness. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things, and you are invited to ask Him concerning them. It is through the name of Jesus that every favor is received. God will honor that name, and will supply your necessities from the riches of His liberality.”²

IV. THAT NAME DECLARES HIS INDIVIDUALITY

As I stated earlier, there were many children in Jesus’ time who shared His name, but there was only one who could be called “Emmanuel” (verse 23). Thousands of babies were born into the world that same year, but only one would grow up to be the Savior of the world!

After all these years, Jesus still stands alone. He is the only One who can save a lost soul (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He is the only one who can save a sin-sick soul!

Humanity has fallen into a deep pit of sin. As we lie in it dying, many would-be saviors walk by with their advice. The legalist says, “You shouldn’t fall into pits.” The religionist says, “I can tell you how to get out of that pit and avoid other pits in the future.” The pessimist says, “You’re going to die in that pit!” The optimist says, “I have seen worse pits than that.” The realist says, “You need to accept your pit.” The spiritualist says, “There is no pit.” Jesus comes by, and He says, “I’ll get into the pit with you and lift you out!” That is exactly what Jesus did for you and me (Ps. 40:1-3).

CONCLUSION

Yes, there is something special about Jesus’ name. Do you know Him? Have you experienced the power behind His name? If you have, then you know why this name is above every other name. You know why Jesus is exalted and why just the mention of that precious name can speak peace to the troubled, comfort to the hurting, life to the dead, joy to the sad, hope for the hopeless, and glory to the saved soul. Do you need Him? He is as close as the mention of His name (Isa. 55:6). 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 5, 1909, par. 5.

² ———, *Prayer*, 221.

General Conference Ministerial Association

FROM A DREAM TO A NIGHTMARE

Matthew 1:18-25

Have you ever experienced a moment when your dream becomes a nightmare and you find yourself in the starring role? Have you ever asked, “Why?” We all have! Let me show you a better alternative than asking “Why?” I want to point out the witness of a man named Joseph. He saw his dreams fall into a million pieces at his feet. What happened in his life is worth studying, and his story may help you and me when our dreams are shattered.

I. A SHATTERING DISCOVERY (VERSE 18)

A. *It was a time of excitement.* Mary and Joseph were engaged to one another. The ancient Hebrew engagement period was as binding as marriage. Surely they were excited about their future together as husband and wife.

B. *It was a time of expectation.* The Bible tells us that the news from the angel took place before the engagement period was over. Surely they were both counting the days until they could be together and live together as husband and wife.

C. *It was a time of embarrassment.* It was during this time that Joseph learned that his bride-to-be was pregnant. This would have been a source of great embarrassment to Mary and to Joseph, as well as to their respective families. It seemed that all the dreams Joseph had for the future had been shattered by this devastating news.

II. A SOBERING DELIBERATION (VERSE 19)

A. *Joseph’s character is revealed.* In the midst of this very difficult situation, Joseph’s true self was revealed. We are told that he was a “just” man. This simply means that he was blameless under the Law and that he walked by faith in the Lord. He was a man of God before these events befell him, and what he was in his heart came to the surface in his trials.

B. *Joseph’s choices are revealed.* Joseph had three choices:

1. He could publicly humiliate Mary because of her perceived immorality. This choice could possibly lead to her death under the Law (Deut. 22:13-21).

2. He could divorce her quietly and walk away, leaving her to raise the child in shame and poverty.

3. He could marry her and raise her child as his own. A Jewish man would rarely have chosen this option.

C. *Joseph’s compassion is revealed.* Joseph decided to react to Mary with compassion. This was not an easy decision, but it was a decision that was in Mary’s best interests. Instead of making a public example out of her and perhaps even bringing about her death, Joseph decided to deal with her in a quiet manner.

III. A SATISFYING DECLARATION (VERSES 20-23)

I find it interesting that the Lord did not answer Joseph’s prayer for direction until after Joseph had reached a decision on his own. Sometimes the Lord allows us to exhaust all our human reasoning before He gives us divine insight into the situation we are facing.

A. *It was a declaration of divine providence.* As these thoughts troubled Joseph’s mind, the Lord sent an angel to speak to him in a dream. The angel brought Joseph words of explanation, exaltation, and exhilaration. Joseph was made to understand the origin of the child his bride carried. He was made to understand that his dream (the dream that, in his mind, had turned into a nightmare) was really a miraculous work of God.

B. *It was a declaration of divine provisions.* Joseph received details of a miracle that much of the world still hasn’t grasped: God entered this world through the womb of a Jewish virgin! Joseph was told that Mary would have a son and that this son was to be named Jesus. Surely Joseph didn’t know all the details about the miracle child his bride was carrying, but he knew enough to be sure that this child was a divine provision for the sins of the world.

C. *It was a declaration of divine presentations.* Joseph was shown that the child Mary carried in her womb was none other than the Deliverer for whom the world had waited since man sinned in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:15). This baby was to be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. Joseph was allowed to see that his hurt, anger, and confusion were necessary to bring about the greatest miracle the world has ever known: God becoming flesh and entering the world to die as a man (John 1:1; 14; Phil. 2:5-8).

When your dreams are shattered, when

your plans are derailed, and when your hopes are destroyed, remember that although it may look bleak from your perspective, God is working out His perfect will in your life. Just walk forward, one step at a time. You will arrive at the place where your questions are answered and your needs are met—in His time!

IV. A SHOCKING DECISION (VERSES 24, 25)

A. *Joseph’s quick reaction.* As soon as Joseph understood what was happening in his life, he reacted in faith. He took Mary into his home and into his heart as his wife. His was a response of pure faith. He still didn’t know how things would work out, but he knew that God was working. That was enough for Joseph.

B. *Joseph’s qualified restraint.* Joseph may have taken Mary into his home, but he refrained from having sexual relations with her. He respected God’s plan and knew that she was to be a virgin when Jesus was born. This, too, was a response of faith. Instead of demanding what was rightfully his as Mary’s husband, he willingly set aside his rights so that the will of God might be accomplished!

C. *Joseph’s quiet resolve.* Joseph waited patiently until Mary gave birth to her son. No doubt Joseph cared for the expectant mother as best he could. When the time came and the baby was born, Joseph did his job as a father and named the boy Jesus. Naming the child was the father’s responsibility (Luke 1:63). In naming the baby as God instructed, Joseph was saying that he was willing to embrace God’s plan for his life, even though he didn’t fully understand it. He was willing to raise this child as his own, even though he knew the baby was not his son.

CONCLUSION

When your dreams are shattered, your plans are derailed, and your hopes are destroyed, remember that while it may look bleak from your perspective, God is working out His perfect will in your life. We may not like it when the Lord allows our hopes and dreams to be crushed, but when all is said and done, we will see that His plan was perfect all along! Are you willing to commit your dreams and plans to the Lord?



General Conference Ministerial Association

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

Matthew 5:14-16

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses two powerful metaphors to describe His people: He calls them salt and light. Both of these substances are valuable, and both are useful; however, they are vastly different in how they approach their respective functions.

Salt is hidden; light is obvious. Salt works secretly; light works openly. Salt works from within; light works from without. Salt speaks of the indirect influence of the gospel; light pictures its direct communication.

Both salt and light have the ability to alter their world. So does the Christian! Perhaps that is why Jesus used these common, everyday images to describe His people and the influence they are to have in the world.

I. THE POWER OF THIS LIGHT

Let's look at a few ways light affects our world:

A. *Light conquers darkness.* Wherever there is the least bit of light, darkness is forced to flee. The same is true in the spiritual realm (Ps. 119:105, 130)—a godly Christian can bring rays of light into the darkest situation!

B. *Light changes deadness.* Trees burned in a forest fire sprout new leaves, and violets grow in the footprints of the flames. We know that the light of the gospel of grace brings life into our dead souls. Our hearts are warmed by the truth of the Word of God, and we are delivered from death and darkness by His light.

As we let our lights shine in a dark, dead world, the same phenomenon takes place. God uses the light of our witness and testimony to warm the dead sinner's heart and to draw him or her to Jesus for salvation. Our light, which is really His light being reflected by us, is a means of bringing the life of heaven to the dead souls here on earth.

C. *Light conditions dreariness.* How many times have you seen days of gloomy, dreary weather suddenly brightened by the gleaming rays of the sun? How often have we felt the cold, chilling fingers of autumn instantly lose their grip as the sun brightens the sky overhead? We have all seen dreary days immediately transformed by the appearance of light.

This world can be a dreary place. In saying this, I am referring not to weather but to spiritual climate. But, however dark, dank, and dreary my life may be, when it is exposed to

"THE CHURCH IS GOD'S APPOINTED AGENCY FOR THE SALVATION OF MEN. IT WAS ORGANIZED FOR SERVICE, AND ITS MISSION IS TO CARRY THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD"

Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 15

the light of the people of God, I am instantly brightened!

II. THE PLACES OF THIS LIGHT

Since this light is so precious and powerful, where and how are we to let it be seen?

A. *Through the light of an institution.* Jesus refers to "a city set on a hill." A city is not a single light but a collection of many lights. The cities in biblical times were often constructed of white limestone. The image of "a city on a hill" speaks of letting our lights shine as a community of faith. It refers to the influence of the church in the world around us. As a church, we let our light shine by our standards and our style of worship and by the things we represent.

You can know almost everything you need to know about a church by the preaching it has, the Bible it uses, the songs its members sing, and the activities they engage in. Like a city set on a hill, we cannot be hidden!

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be a city set on a hill. We are to be a vocal, visible, vibrant witness for the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the world's gathering darkness. God did not establish this church so that we could do our own thing and drift away from Him as many other churches have. He established this church to be a light for Him in the darkness of this place. Are we fulfilling our mission?

B. *Through the light of an individual.* Then, Jesus speaks of a candle. The word translated "candle" refers to ancient oil lamps. These were usually clay containers filled with olive oil in which was placed a piece of twisted flax to serve as a wick. Since most houses were windowless, an oil lamp was necessary for the occupants to be able to see. No one lit a

lamp and hid it under a basket. To do so would have been foolish! The lamp was lit so that the people in the house could receive the light and see other objects and people in the room.

This verse speaks to the power of the individual believer's witness. Just as a church has a testimony, so do you! Jesus saved us to be lights for Him.

This is our mandate (Mark 16:15). This is our mission (Acts 1:8). As an individual, are you fulfilling God's call to be a light for Him? Don't hide your light under a bushel!

In Luke 8:16, Jesus adds this phrase: "or, putteth it under a bed." The bushel refers to the world of labor; the bed refers to the world of leisure. Jesus seems to be saying that some people are too busy to let their lights shine, while others are too lazy.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THIS LIGHT

Jesus tells us of the two-fold purpose of the light He has placed in our hearts:

A. *It is a witness to the lost.* When lost people see the light of Jesus shining through the lives of the redeemed, they will take notice. Jesus Christ really does possess the power to transform a broken life into a thing of immense beauty (Eph. 2:1-10)!

B. *It is a witness to the Lord.* There is no greater witness than a born-again believer reflecting the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no more powerful testimony than a life which displays the proof of His presence through the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

Just as light exists not to call attention to itself but to draw attention to the things it illuminates, our witness does not magnify what we have done. Our testimony is about a great God who loved us and saved us when we deserved damnation instead! Our purpose is not to make people look at what we do and say, "Wow, what great Christians!" No! We want them to see us and say, "They must serve a great God! I'd like to know Him, too!"

CONCLUSION

Are you a light for Jesus? Could you do better? Are there people in your life that you want to bring to the Lord? Whatever the need, respond to Him and let Him have His perfect way in your life!

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General Conference Ministerial Association

THE BEST OF YOUR LIFE

Matthew 6:33

An old saying says, “You’re never too old to learn.” Here is one lesson you’re never too old to learn: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). What that means is this: “Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should.”

Whether you are young or old, 6 or 60, healthy and wealthy or puny and poor, you can make the rest of your life the best of your life.

I. SET PROPER PRIORITIES

If your priorities are out of order, your life will be out of order. If your priorities aren’t right, you won’t be right. You don’t have to pray about what the first priority in life should be; Jesus has already told us: to “seek ye first the kingdom of God.”

The word “seek” means to “actively pursue” or “to go after.” It’s in the present tense. It means continuously. Every day of your life, you should be seeking first the kingdom of God. To seek the kingdom, you must first seek the King. You cannot have a kingdom without a king. The first priority of your life must be to seek the King of the kingdom.

Did you know that the Christian life is more than just accepting the Lord? It is *seeking* the Lord. The Lord is not someone you passively accept; He is someone you actively seek.

God does not have favorites, but He does have intimates. James 4:8 says, “Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.” In His Word, God has promised, “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

But it is not enough to seek the Lord. You must seek Him *first*. Jesus wants pre-eminence in your life. Jesus wants the first moments of your day. He wants the first part of every paycheck. He wants to be first.

But not only are we to seek the King, we are to seek the kingdom. The kingdom of God ought to be the obsession of your life. The word “kingdom” literally means “rule” or “reign.” A kingdom is a place where a king rules. To seek the kingdom of God is to seek the rule and the reign of God over your entire life.

When you truly seek a king and his kingdom, you are automatically looking for three things:

A. *You are seeking the glory of the king.* Every part and parcel of your life, every minute and moment of your time, every ounce and pound of your strength, every muscle and fiber of your body ought to be given for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

B. *You are seeking the guidance of the king.* A loyal subject always wants to do whatever the king would have him or her to do. There is no higher calling in life than to find out what your King wants done and then to do it. Begin every morning of your life by asking the Lord Jesus what Paul asked on the Damascus road: “Lord, what would you have me to do?”

C. *You are seeking the government of the king.* A loyal subject desires to be controlled by the king, to be governed by the king, and to be ruled by the king.

II. SEEK PERSONAL PURITY

Not only are we to seek His kingdom, we are to seek His “righteousness.” That is, not only are we to be seeking God’s control over us, we are also to be seeking God’s character within us. The kingdom of God is to be experienced not just inwardly; it should also be expressed outwardly.

A true Christian makes it easier for others to believe in God. What does it mean to seek the righteousness of God?

A. *We must desire it.* We do what we really want to do, and we are what we really want to be (Matt. 5:6). You ought to desire to be right, do right, and live right.

B. *We must derive it.* We are to seek “His righteousness.” God is not interested in your righteousness; He is only interested in His righteousness. God is not interested in what you can do for Him; He is interested in what He can do through you.

It will be a great day when we learn the difference between self-righteousness and the Savior’s righteousness. After he was saved, Paul made this one of the goals of his life (Phil. 3:9).

Righteousness must be imputed before it can be imparted—before you can live it, God must give it (2 Cor. 5:21).

C. *We must depict it.* We should live like kingdom subjects. Will Rogers said, “We ought to live in such a way that we would not be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.”

III. SEE PROMISED PROSPERITY

The Lord says that if you seek His kingdom and His righteousness, “all these things shall be added unto you.” What “things” was the Lord referring to? He was talking about all the things people worry about.

- In verse 19, we are told that people worry about finances.
- In verse 25, we are told that people worry about food.
- In verse 27, we are told that people worry about fitness.
- In verse 28, we are told that people worry about fashion.

We need all these things. That’s why the Lord said, “For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (verse 32). The Lord has promised that if you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, you will have all the things you need (note that He didn’t say you would necessarily have all the things you *want!*).

There are four lessons parents ought to teach their children, and it would be good for some adults to re-learn the same lessons:

- You don’t need everything you want.
- You don’t want everything you need.
- God doesn’t give us everything we want.
- God always gives us what we need.

If you don’t have it, it’s because God knows you don’t need it at this point in your life.

CONCLUSION

It is our job to serve God, and it is His job to supply us. Most people have that backward—most people think that it is our job to supply us and that it is God’s job to serve us.

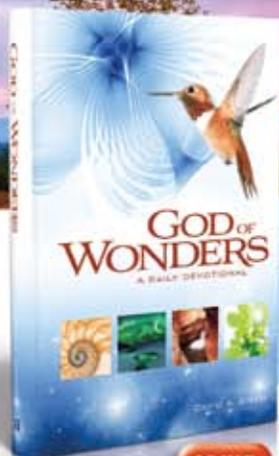
Do you want to make the rest of your life the best of your life? If so, allow Jesus Christ to be your Lord. Put Him first. Live every moment for Him, and He will take care of everything else.



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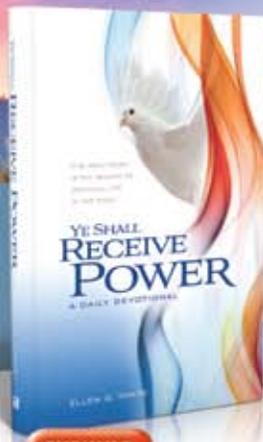
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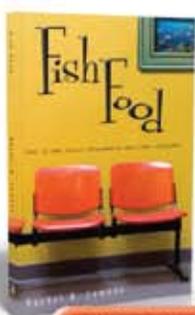
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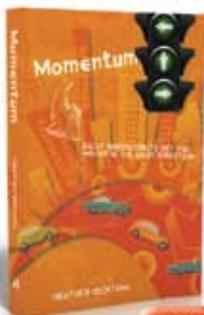
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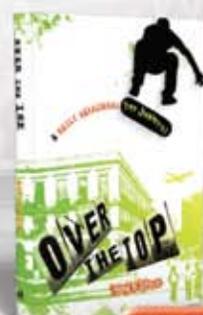
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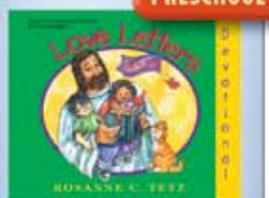
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Review & Herald

A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

STATEMENT ON GAMBLING

GAMBLING—DEFINED AS A PAID GAME OF CHANCE—INCREASINGLY IMPACTS MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD.

The concept of winning at the expense of others has become a modern curse. Society pays the escalating cost of associated crime, victim support, and family breakdown, which erodes the quality of life. Seventh-day Adventists have consistently opposed gambling as it is incompatible with Christian principles. It is not an appropriate form of entertainment or a legitimate means of raising funds.

Gambling violates Christian principles of stewardship. God identifies work as the appropriate method for gaining material benefit; not the playing of a game of chance while dreaming to gain at the expense of others. Gambling has a massive impact on society. Financial costs result from crime committed to pay for the gambling habit, increased policing, and legal expenses, as well as associated crimes involving drugs and prostitution. Gambling does not generate income; rather it takes from those who often can ill afford to lose and gives to a few winners, the greatest winner of course being the gambling operator. The idea that gambling operations can have a positive economic benefit is an illusion. In addition, gambling violates the Christian sense of responsibility for family, neighbors, the needy, and the Church.¹

THE IDEA THAT GAMBLING OPERATIONS CAN HAVE A POSITIVE ECONOMIC BENEFIT IS AN ILLUSION.

Gambling creates false hopes. The gambling dream of "winning big" replaces true hope with a false dream of a statistically-improbable chance of winning. Christians are not to put their hope in wealth. The Christian hope in a glorious future promised by God is "sure and certain"—unlike and opposite to the gambling dream. The great gain that the Bible points to is "godliness with contentment."²

Gambling is addictive. The addictive quality of gambling is clearly



incompatible with a Christian lifestyle. The Church seeks to help, not blame, those suffering from gambling or other addictions. Christians recognize that they are responsible before God for their resources and lifestyle.³

The Seventh-day Adventist Church organization does not condone raffles or lotteries to raise funds and it urges members not to participate in any such activities, however well-intentioned. Neither does the Church condone state-sponsored gambling. The Seventh-day Adventist Church calls on all authorities to prevent the ever-increasing availability of gambling with its damaging effects on individuals and society.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church rejects gambling as defined above and will not solicit nor accept funding that is clearly derived from gambling.

¹ 1 Thess 4:11; Gen 3:19; Matt 19:21; Acts 9:36; 2 Cor 9:8, 9

² 1 Tim 6:17; Heb 11:1; 1 Tim 6:6

³ 1 Cor 6:19, 20

This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.

WHY DO PEOPLE COME TO CHURCH?

In their latest research on worship, the Barna Group asked a random sample of churchgoers what they experienced at church. The highest experience, at 68%, was that they felt that they were cared for. Next, at 66%, was that attendees connected with God. Close on the heels was the experience of gaining new insight (61%). Only 26%, however, believed that their life had been changed by attending church.

What is the purpose of corporate worship and how is it best defined and measured? I'm not sure something as holy and supernatural as worship can be defined or measured. The Bible typically uses metaphors to describe great truths and the metaphor most often used for worship is journey. The typical narrative describes worshippers moving from their current location into the presence of God and then returning as transformed creatures.

Like most journeys the road can be treacherous and difficult to navigate without some kind of guidance. I believe that it is the responsibility of pastors and worship leaders to serve as guides on the journey of worship. With advance planning, prayer, and execution, every worship service can be designed to guide attendees from their community into the throne room of God and then return to their sphere of influence as transformed creatures.

As on any journey there are many methods of transport. Unfortunately in corporate worship we typically only rely on a few—preaching, music, and prayer. While these may be tried and true there are dozens of other powerful tools for worship. If we as pastors and worship teams would add elements such as scripture reading, silent meditation, drama, collections, recitation of mission and beliefs, communion, visual arts, testimonies and tactile experiences we might discover that more of our worshippers will have a successful journey.

Of course this all takes advance planning. In order to invigorate worship teams, pastors should have the theme and main point of their sermon message ready to go weeks in advance of the service. Pastors who use a sermonic calendar are able to plan months in advance. This allows the worship planners time to develop a well thought out and executed road map for worship.

Yet pastors and worship leaders are only guides on the journey. The attendees themselves must walk the journey—there are no vicarious worship experiences! We need to coach, guide, and instruct our parishioners in the personal journeys they make during the week in preparation for the corporate journey. And we must teach our congregants how they can take their transformational experience back into their worlds.

Why do people go to church? For many reasons, some of which may be appropriate and others may be totally unrealistic. It is my vision that at the top of the list of expectations is experiencing a corporate journey into the presence of God, and returning to transform their communities. 

Dave Gemmell is associate ministerial secretary for the North American Division. This article appeared in the March 2012, *Best Practice* issue.





12 STEPS

FOR PREPARING AND
DELIVERING POWERFUL
BIBLICAL SERMONS

God wants you to preach powerful biblical sermons. Whether you are preparing your first sermon or wanting to move your preaching to the next level of effectiveness, here is a 12-step process that can help you.

STEP #1: SELECT A PREACHING PASSAGE

Several factors may influence your selection of a preaching passage: personal impact when reading a particular Scripture text, pastoral concern, societal need, and seasonal setting. Each one of these factors will at times influence your selection of your preaching passage. The length of the preaching passage is determined by the amount of time allocated for the sermon and the depth of your study of the text.

STEP #2: STUDY THE PREACHING PASSAGE AND GATHER NOTES

When studying the passage, it is vital that you consider the context. Take for example John 5:39. It says, "Search the Scriptures" (KJV). A careless preacher might eisegete the text in order to preach a sermon on the importance of Bible study.¹ However, a careful study of the context will reveal John's intention in recording these words of Jesus. It may be helpful to read the entire Gospel of John, which will confirm your conclusions regarding this specific passage (see John 20:30-31).

Also examine key words in the passage. Use of a concordance like Young's or Strong's will be helpful. Examination of key words in your preaching passage will provide thoughtful insights for your powerful biblical sermon.

STEP #3: DISCOVER THE EXEGETICAL IDEA OF YOUR PREACHING PASSAGE

This is a crucial step. What is the big idea of your preaching passage? The exegetical idea is comprised of two components: the subject + the complement.

The subject is the complete answer to the question "What is the text talking about?" For example, if you are preaching a sermon on Deuteronomy 31:6, what is the context? Who is speaking? Who are the listeners? We discover from an examination of the context that Moses is exhorting the children of Israel: "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). The subject of this passage cannot simply be "courage" or "being strong." Six friends will help us find the subject: What, Why, When, How, Where, and Who. Is the passage telling us *when* to be courageous, *where* to be courageous, *how* to be courageous? No. The subject of this short preaching passage is *why* the children of Israel should be strong and courageous.

Next we need to find the complement of this preaching passage. The complement answers the question, "What is the text saying about the subject?" Why did Moses encourage the children of Israel to be strong and courageous? "For the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you; He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). Now put subject and complement together. Remember, subject + complement = exegetical idea. ***Moses encouraged the children of Israel to be strong and courageous because the LORD was with them and would not forsake them.***

Obviously, the challenge of identifying the exegetical idea of an entire chapter is greater, but the process is the same.

STEP #4: CRAFT YOUR PREACHING IDEA

The preaching idea is the simple memorable sentence that you want your hearers to remember from your powerful biblical sermon and apply to their everyday lives. It should be contemporary, personal, concise, and memorable. Occasionally, it can be identical to the exegetical idea if the preaching passage is dealing with a universal principle. For example, the

exegetical idea of Matthew 7:12 is, ***Treat others the way you would like to be treated.*** The preaching idea could be the same. The wording is contemporary, personal, concise, and memorable. However, consider the exegetical idea from Deuteronomy 31:6. What change needs to be made in order to craft a preaching idea? It needs to become personal. Moses is no longer speaking. You are the appointed spokesperson for God. You are not addressing the children of Israel but your local hearers. Craft your preaching idea with your hearers in mind: ***You can be strong and courageous because the LORD is with you.*** That single dominant thought is the heart of your message. It needs to be crystal clear in your mind before you continue with your 12-step process of sermon preparation.

STEP #5: DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE

Why are you preaching this sermon? What are you trying to accomplish? In order to answer this question you need not only to exegete your preaching passage but also exegete your audience. Who will listen to your sermon? Are they well acquainted with the Word of God? What are their greatest needs right now? What changes need to occur in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors?

Is your primary objective to explain a passage of Scripture, to prove its validity, to apply a well-known truth to the lives of your hearers? Occasionally, you will have all three objectives in mind, but frequently your sermon will have one primary objective. Knowing your purpose is crucially important when coming to step #7 and step #9.

STEP #6: SELECT YOUR SERMON FORM

Many preachers, both young and old, have questions about sermon forms. Using the same sermon form each week is boring and may also be inappropriate for the preaching passage you have selected.

Read Romans 12:2. What is the natural division of that text? Not this, but this. Do not be conformed, but be transformed. To use three points and a poem for this preaching passage makes no sense at all. There are two moves: not this, but this.

What about 1 John 1:9? Here we see an idea explained. What happens when we confess our sins to God? Search for a plural noun that will be appropriate based on the context. Is the passage speaking about problems? Challenges? Concerns? Consider the passage: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NKJV). What plural noun works for you? Results? Blessings? I prefer the plural noun "blessings." What blessings come when we confess our sins to God? The first blessing is forgiveness. The second blessing is cleansing. Don't add a third or fourth blessing or a few thoughts about faithful stewardship. The form of the sermon is clear—an idea explained with two main moves.

A popular sermon form in the 21st century is narrative. People enjoy listening to stories. But even a story needs

structure. What should be included in the story? What should be omitted? You can share the narrative in the third-person where you retell the story, or in the first-person where you relive the story.

Consider Romans 6:23. The preaching passage presents a problem and a solution—two main moves. To add a third move is confusing. You may add sub-moves under the problem. For example, you might speak about the problem of sin in our world and also focus in on the problem of sin in our own lives.

Once you have a powerful preaching idea, a definite purpose in mind, and a clear sermon form, you are well on your way in the development of a powerful biblical sermon.

STEP #7: GATHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Jesus always used illustrations when sharing the truth of God with others.² When sharing a story, make sure it is true and accurate or inform your hearers that this is a fictitious account. Only use illustrations that shed light on your preaching idea—anything else, however interesting, is a distraction. Use quotations sparingly, only when they come with a level of authority that adds strength to your message, or if they reinforce your preaching idea in a compelling and memorable way.

STEP #8: DEVELOP YOUR INTRODUCTION

Your introduction should capture the attention of your hearers, connect with a felt need in your hearers, and introduce the body of the sermon. It must be powerful and intentional. You only have a few seconds to connect with your hearers. If you lose them here, you may never get them back.

STEP #9: CRAFT YOUR CONCLUSION

In your conclusion, you have several important objectives: summarize, apply, and appeal. Taking time with step #5 will help you when it comes time to craft your conclusion. What are you trying to accomplish? What changes in thoughts, feelings, or behaviors would you like to see in your hearers? Summarize your main moves and apply the message to your hearers. Your appeal should be clear, concise, and specific.

STEP #10: BIRTH YOUR MANUSCRIPT

As you birth your manuscript, remember to write in an oral style. This is not an article or a dissertation. You are capturing an oral discourse with your future audience. Keep your hearers in mind as you select words and phrases. Remember you will need to repeat your preaching idea numerous times. You can also use restatement to reinforce that single dominant thought.

STEP #11: INTERNALIZE THE SERMON

Walk through the sermon like a tour guide. Remember the main moves of your sermon, making sure you clearly

emphasize your preaching idea. The goal is internalization, not memorization. Take note of lessons learned during your walk-through and edit your sermon manuscript. Think about *how* you will express your words, and not just *what* you will say. Walk through your sermon at least five times prior to preaching your sermon in public. During your walk-throughs, think of gestures and visual aids that will help you drive home your main idea.

Do a 60-second walk-through right before you preach. What is important here? The preaching idea, the main moves of your sermon, your appeal, and finally your opening sentence. You want to stand up with a clear starting point as you begin one more walk-through of your internalized message.

STEP #12: LISTEN WHILE YOU PREACH

Freedom from your manuscript will enable you to listen more attentively while you preach. First, listen to God. Recognize the Holy Spirit's presence while you preach. Perhaps He will bring new insights to your mind regarding the preaching passage or new applications. Second, listen to your hearers. They will communicate with you, both verbally and non-verbally. Effective eye contact is essential. Make it clear by your body language that each listener is important.

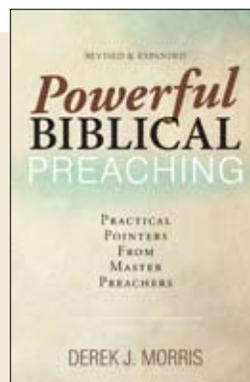
God wants you to be a powerful biblical preacher. He wants to anoint you by His Spirit to preach the Word with power. That won't happen by accident. You must choose to cooperate with God in a process where His Word first changes your own life and then flows through you to change the lives of those around you.³

¹ Eisegesis is the process of reading something into the text that you want it to say rather than doing exegesis where you allow the text to speak.

² Matt. 13:34

³ For more helpful resources on powerful biblical preaching, go to www.powerfulbiblicalpreaching.com.

Derek Morris is editor of *Ministry* magazine and author of *Powerful Biblical Preaching*.



Available at Adventist Book Centers (distributed by Review and Herald Publishing Association), Advent Source, and www.powerfulbiblicalpreaching.com.

USE WELL THE TALENT OF SPEECH

**“YOU ARE FAIRER
THAN THE SONS
OF MEN; GRACE IS
POURED UPON YOUR
LIPS; THEREFORE
GOD HAS BLESSED
YOU FOREVER.”**

PSALM 45:2, NKJV



By diligent effort all may acquire the power to read intelligibly, and to speak in a full, clear, round tone, in a distinct and impressive manner. By doing this we may greatly increase our efficiency as workers for Christ.

Every Christian is called to make known to others the unsearchable riches of Christ; therefore all should seek for perfection in speech. They should present the Word of God in a way that will commend it to the hearers. God does not design that His human channels shall be uncouth. It is not His will that human beings shall belittle or degrade the heavenly current that flows through Him to the world.

We should look to Jesus, the perfect pattern; we should pray for the aid of the Holy Spirit, and in His strength we should seek to train every organ for perfect work.

Especially is this true of those who are called to public service. Every minister and every teacher should bear in mind that they are giving to the people a message that involves eternal interests. The truth spoken will judge them in the great day of final reckoning. And with some souls the manner of the one delivering the message will determine its reception or rejection. Then let the Word be so spoken that it will appeal to the understanding and impress the heart. Slowly, distinctly, and solemnly should it be spoken, yet with all the earnestness which its importance demands.

The right culture and use of the power of speech has to do with every line of Christian work; it enters into the home life, and into all our relations with one another. We should accustom ourselves to speak in pleasant tones, to use pure and correct language, and words that are kind and courteous. Sweet, kind words are as dew and gentle showers to the soul. The Scripture says of Christ that grace was poured into His lips that He might “know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isaiah 50:4).

ED

This article is excerpted from the book *To Be Like Jesus*, p. 92, by Ellen G. White.

OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

FOUR MYSTERIES – Part 1 | THE MYSTERY OF GOD [1 Tim. 3:16]

I - GOD THE FATHER:

1st Person of the Godhead: Matt. 28:19

"God is more truly imagined than expressed, and He exists more truly than He is imagined."

—Augustine

1. His Nature:

He is Eternal - Ps. 90:2; Is. 40:28; Deut. 33:27

He is Spiritual - John 4:24

He is Perfect - Matt. 5:48; Ps. 90:9

"He whose treasure house is God; his earth is Paradise."—Angelus Silesius

2. His Attributes:

He is Omniscient - Rom. 6:20; Matt. 6:8

Nothing is too little in which to see His Hand

He is Omnipresent - Gen. 21:22; Prov. 15:3

Nothing which touches us is unnoticed by Him

He is Omnipotent - Job 36:26; Ps. 121:8

Nothing is too little to be done by Him.

3. His Characteristics:

He is Faithful - 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13

He is Merciful - Ps. 103:8-13

He is Impartial - Acts 10:34

He is Just - Rev. 15:3; Is. 45:21

He is Love - 1 John 4:15, 18

"God so loved the world that He gave His

Only begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not

Perish, but have

Everlasting

Life." - John 3:16 [Hence the "Gospel" = Good News]

4. His Activity:

His anticipating activity is seen in 3 ways –

(1) His Initiative in Creation: Gen. 1:1. He makes.

(2) His Initiative in Revelation: Heb. 1:1, 2. He Speaks.

(3) His Initiative in Salvation: Luke 1:68. He Acts.

"Christianity is a religion of salvation, and there is nothing in other religions of the world to compare with this message of God who loved, and came after, and died for lost sinners."—John R. W. Stott

II - GOD THE SON:

2nd Person of the Godhead: Matt. 28:19

"I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ accepted by reason, solves for thee all questions in the earth and out of it."

—Robert Browning

1. JESUS exercises all functions, which properly belong to God

He forgives sin - Mark 2:1-12; 1 John 1:9

He bestows life - John 17:2; 5:21

He teaches truth - Mark 6:3; John 7:15, 17, 18, 46

He judges the world - John 5:28, 29

2. JESUS pre-existed and is one with God the Father - John 10:30; 14:10, 11; Matt. 11:27

He is co-existent, co-eternal, and co-equal with the Father - John 1:1, 2; Col. 2:9

Thus: To know Him is to know God - John 8:19

To see Him is to see God - John 12:45; 14:9

To believe in Him is to believe in God - John 12:44

To receive Him is to receive God - Mark 9:37

To hate Him is to hate God - John 15:23

To honor Him is to honor God - John 5:23

He claimed eternity and divinity - John 8:51-58 *cf.* Ex. 3:14 (The divine title "I am" declares an eternal existence)

3. JESUS' ministry and activities were salvific

He is the Son of Man by Incarnation - Phil. 2:5-8; Matt. 1:21, 23

He is Savior - John 3:16, 17; Acts 4:12

He died a substitutionary death - Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24-26; 1

Tim. 2:6; *cf.* Is. 53:6; Heb. 9:28

The moral magnetism of the Cross

Sin caused an estrangement; the cross has accomplished an atonement.

Sin bred enmity; the cross has brought peace.

Sin created a gulf between man and God; the cross has bridged it.

Sin broke the fellowship; the cross has restored it.

He was raised and is alive - 1 Cor. 15:20-21; John. 1:25-26; Heb. 6:2; 1 Pet. 3:21

He ascended to heaven - Acts 3:21; 2:22-32; Eph. 4:8-10

He is now a mediator and advocate - 1 Tim. 2:5; Gal. 2:19, 20

He is the Coming King - John 14:1-3; Titus 2:13; Rev. 22:7

4. JESUS' character is the exemplar for His followers

He possessed a keen moral character - Heb. 4:12; John 2:25

He possessed a self-conscious purity - 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22;

1 John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26

JESUS had a "conscience unclouded by the memory of any sins."—D. Strauss

He invites His followers to follow "in his steps" - 1 Pet. 2:21

"All His glory and beauty come from within and there He delights to dwell. His visits there are frequent; His conversation sweet; His comfort refreshing; His peace passing all understanding."—Thomas à Kempis

III - GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT:

3rd Person of the Godhead: Matt. 28:19

The Holy Spirit is defined in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as one of the three persons of the Godhead "of one substance, power, and eternity" with the Father and Son. (A.D. 1648)

"The same Oneness that exists between the Son and the Father (Jn. 10:30) also exists between the Son and the Spirit. Oneness, however, should never be confused with *sameness*. As the Son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the Son."—Wilson Paroschi

1. The HOLY SPIRIT is a divine person; not an impersonal power

He hears and speaks - John 16:13; 1 Tim. 4:1

He feels - Is. 67:10

He prays - Rom. 8:26

He grieves over our sins - Eph. 4:30; *cf.* 1 Thess. 3:19

He has a mind and a will - Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 12:11

2. The HOLY SPIRIT possesses divine attributes

He is omnipresent - Ps. 139:7-12; John 14:18

He is omnipotent - Rom. 15:19; Zech. 4:6

He is omniscient - 1 Cor. 2:10

3. The HOLY SPIRIT functions supernaturally

His work can be traced in:

The revelation in Scripture - 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16

cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; Mic. 3:18

The writing of Scripture - Is. 59:21; Matt. 22:42, 43;

cf. Ps. 110:1; Mark 12:26

The origin of all prophecy - 2 Pet. 1:21

The agent [Paraclete] who comes to replace Jesus:

John 14:26; 10:30; 14:9, 18

"The Paraclete is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent."

—Raymond E. Brown

4. The HOLY SPIRIT ministers to man for salvation

The indwelling of the Spirit - Rom. 8:9; Jude 19; Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22

The baptism of the Spirit - Acts 1:5 *cf.* 11:15-17; 1 Cor. 12:13

Every soul that is saved is born of the Spirit - John 3:7

Every revival is the work of the Spirit - Zech. 4:6; *cf.* Hab. 3:2

Every spiritual truth is taught by the Spirit - John 16:13

Every holy character is sanctified by the Spirit - John 16:8, 10

The filling of the Spirit, (Gal. 5:16) for: sanctifying - Rom. 15:16

guiding - Rom. 8:14

giving assurance - Rom. 8:16

leading in prayer - Rom. 8:26

Empowering for service - John 7:27, 28

The fruit of the Spirit - Gal. 5:22, 23

It is the sacred vocation of all Christians to be the instruments

through which the Spirit advances Jesus' work in the world. -

John 14:12; 15:26, 27

"O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant, that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts."—Book of Common Prayer

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Aaron Burke, Ph.D., will talk about the archaeology of warfare in the ancient Near East at 7:30 p.m. in the Lynn Wood Hall chapel. Burke is associate professor of archaeology at UCLA.

Adventist Heritage Lecture, October 11

Merlin Burt, Ph.D., will speak on the role of E. G. White in Seventh-day Adventist heritage at 11 a.m. in the Collegedale Church. Burt is associate professor of church history at Andrews University.

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GOOD YEAR-END ADVICE FOR CHURCHES

In the first years of my ministry, there were two annual events that I dreaded all year long.

One was Harvest Ingathering, which started in the autumn and lasted until Christmas. It meant weeks of driving around to small towns in my rural district, begging businesses for contributions, then convincing my church members to tramp through the cold streets for a few bucks more.

The other was nominating committee.

Nominating committee was shorter than Harvest Ingathering, but more trying. I knew just how it would go. My first call would be to the brother who had been head elder for the past thirty years. He'd protest that he really didn't need to do it anymore. He wanted to pray about it. Could I call him back in several weeks? I also knew that if we selected anyone *other* than him, he would create so much trouble that my life would hardly be worth living. So we had to go through the fiction of his thinking it over so that he could pretend he really wasn't the power hungry old elder that, in point of fact, he was.

In contrast, the children's Sabbath School volunteers (who arguably performed more important tasks than the head elder) would resign each year, and mean it. We'd call back, beg and plead, and listen to whining about how busy they were, and "why can't Cheryl do it for once?" Sometimes we squeezed another year out of them, sometimes not.

Too few seemed to take on church tasks gladly.

We Seventh-day Adventists inherited the nominating committee from the denominations our pioneers came from, and we enshrined it in our church rule. We liked it, at least in part, because it seemed wonderfully democratic. But there are several areas where the nominating committee process falls short:

First, it supposes a power motivation for service: that people are in competition for leadership positions, which the nominating committee has to mediate. Power may be the motivation for some, such as the head eldership in the little church I mentioned. But it is not a good one. A system that implies others are fighting for positions doesn't give much incentive for the less-motivated person to give it a try.

Second, coming back every year to ask, "Will you serve again?" implies that even if you enjoy your volunteer job, it is intended to be temporary, and we are offering you a convenient opportunity to step down.

Third, the nominating committee is able to do relatively little processing about where people could serve best. They only have time to fill the openings. Nor does it encourage the volunteer to ask if this is a call to use one's gifts in Christian service, as opposed to one more thing to do in church. That it ends in a vote before the church body makes it seem less like service than like a popularity contest.

Finally, it takes an enormous amount of the church's time and energy, and introduces politics into the church service, where there's supposed to be only worship.

Happily, our volunteer selection process has been revisited, with an eye toward making it more consistent with biblical guidelines.¹

These difficulties were first addressed in the *Connections curriculum* [1] released back in the 1990s, updated and still available through AdventSource. Though there'd been a flurry of seminars and tests on spiritual gifts going all the way back to the 1970s, *Connections* was the first denominationally approved curriculum that opened the way for flexibility in the selection process. *Connections* had enough of an effect on enough churches that in 2005 some pages were added to the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* updating the nominating committee process.

Most Adventists (and even many pastors) are unaware of these *Church Manual* changes. Here are some key points:

1. **Volunteer ministry selection should be "gift based":** "Everyone is a minister performing some ministry for which he or she has been specially gifted . . . Every church member should be matched with an appropriate ministry as part of the congregation's overall mission strategy."²

2. **The new methods eschew a political process in favor of a human resources process:** "The nominating committee may need to function on a regular basis throughout the year, meeting monthly or weekly (depending on the size of the church) to accomplish this assignment. Some



churches may identify the nominating committee as the Ministry Development committee and make it clear that there are unusual expectations for the total involvement of all members.”

3. The length of the term of volunteer service is flexible. Although this isn't explicit in the *Church Manual*, it's implied by the standing Ministry Development Committee. Those churches that have been successful at this new process don't ask volunteers every year if they want to continue. They assume they will, unless a change is needed.

Churches have flexibility to go beyond the guidelines of the *Church Manual* for training and implementation: “A local church may adopt alternate ways of handling such items.” “Curriculum resources, based on a biblical understanding of spiritual gifts, are available to churches which seek to involve every member in ministry. These resources provide specific training and tools for the Ministry Development committee.” [2]

4. There must be approval from the congregation: “If the nominating committee/Ministry Development Committee is appointed as a standing committee, it must be with the endorsement of the congregation. . . .”

My congregation switched over to a standing Ministry Development Committee about ten years ago, after studying *Connections*, but before the updated *Church Manual* guide-

lines. The greatest benefit has been that we're creating a congregational culture where our volunteers think about their tasks as ongoing ministries for which they are gifted, rather than as defined terms of service. The result is less turnover and more satisfaction.

This surely isn't a cure-all for every congregation's volunteer staffing problems, but it helps. If your church is struggling with Nominating Committee, I recommend you look at the *Connections curriculum* [1], and study this topic in the 2010 version of the *Church Manual* [3].



Links:

- [1] http://www.adventsource.org/dvdvideo_2.aspx?ID=30299
- [2] http://www.adventsource.org/dvdvideo_2.aspx?ID=30299
- [3] http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/church_manual/index.html/church_manual

¹ Spiritual gifts are discussed in Ephesians 2 and 1 Corinthians 12, with a very simple point: that people should do in the church those tasks God has given them a talent for.

² All quotes are taken from the 2005 *Church Manual*, 67–68.

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CODE OF ETHICS FOR ELDERS

RESPONDING TO GOD'S SACRED CALL, AND
RECOGNIZING HIS CLAIMS UPON ME AND MY WORK
AS A CHURCH LEADER, I PLEDGE THAT:

1. I shall spend sufficient time in personal study of the Scriptures and in personal prayer and meditation to maintain a continually growing relationship with my God.
2. I shall avoid anything that will weaken me mentally, physically, or spiritually.
3. I shall not abuse the authority given me by the Word of God, but will ever remember the apostle Peter's warning against lording it over the flock.
4. I shall not cheapen my calling by seeking special privileges, gratuities, or ministerial discounts.
5. I shall keep in the strictest integrity all confidences that come to me as a church leader.
6. I shall refuse to prostitute myself by using information about or from members for personal advantage.
7. I shall not go into the pulpit unprepared, nor shall I use it as a platform to expound my personal views on society, politics, or matters unrelated to the gospel.
8. I shall not play favorites nor ally myself with factions within the church.
9. I shall give prompt aid to members or co-leaders in time of distress or need.
10. I shall consider seriously the counsel of colleagues.
11. I shall spurn to speak disparagingly of my predecessor and shall not advise members of former congregations regarding their relationship with their present minister.
12. I shall not encourage nor perform professional services in a former parish except upon invitation of the present minister.
13. I shall be alert to the physical and/or spiritual needs of a retired colleague who may be a member of my church or who may live in the community.

Paul H. Olm, writing in an issue of *The Christian Ministry*, suggests that just as attorneys (and other professionals) have a clearly defined code of ethics that governs their responsibilities, so church leaders could profit from similar standards of professional conduct. *Elder's Digest* has adapted this for the benefit of our readers.

THE MOLTEN MOMENT



Not long ago I was talking to some young people who asked me why there is little mention today of character development. In an era when behavioral psychology (which teaches us that character is the influence of our environment) is dominant, when moral relativism has settled across the land like a thick fog so that there are no absolutes of rights and wrongs, and when media laughs at the notion of character, it should not surprise us that there is no serious talk of its development. But we all need to grow in character, and that growth only happens intentionally. The opportunities for growth are constant; catch them, and character development is yours.

I once visited a rolling mill where they created an unparalleled seamless tube. I saw a great serpent of molten metal come slithering down; the machine would grab it by its ends and begin to spin it. By centrifugal force, that bar of molten metal would open from the inside out, forming a perfect tube of steel without seam or blemish.

The operator said, "The most important stage of the process is the temperature of the metal, the molten moment. If it is too hot, it will fly apart; if it is too cold, it will not open as it should. Unless you catch the molten moment, you can't make the perfect tube." Unless we catch the molten moments when character can develop, we will miss our opportunity, just as the disciples did in Gethsemane.

Jesus took three of His disciples into a special place in the Garden to pray with Him and encourage Him; instead, they feel asleep three times. In agony after finding them the first time, Jesus asked, "Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:40, 41, NKJV). The disciples had the opportunity to see how Jesus handled suffering and how He faced ugliness head-on, not running from it or denying it but confronting it and defeating it. In observing Him, they could have learned about courage, patience, hope, endurance, mercy, and boldness. All of these priceless lessons could have been theirs, but they slept and missed the opportunity to grow.

I don't know what constitutes a molten moment for you. Perhaps it is your own suffering or the death of someone you love. Maybe it is an inner urge you can't explain, the example of someone you admire, a bit of Scripture, a letter from a parent or a friend, or the words of a sermon. Whatever it is, it

suddenly causes within you the desire to expand your character beyond what it was. Claim that moment. Don't sleep through it. Jesus said to the disciples, "Watch and pray, lest you, yourselves, enter into temptation."

At a church function, I saw a man crying. He told me that the breakfast and worship that day reminded him of the things his recently-deceased wife had enjoyed but that he had been unwilling to do. She loved to get involved in church activities and social functions, but he didn't. She loved to go out to dinner; he wanted to save money. She wanted to go for walks; he wanted to stay home and watch TV. He said to me, "I wish I could go back in time and do the things she loved to do and be a better man for her. I missed my opportunity to grow and become more like Jesus; instead, I put my needs ahead of hers." Many priceless memories could have been his, but he slept and missed his opportunity to grow.

What happens when we stay awake, listen to God's voice, and earnestly follow His leading? Recently a woman told me about her brother and his struggle with God. He grew up knowing Him, but because of a crisis, he drifted away. A few months ago, she felt compelled to speak to her brother. For a while she resisted because she thought he wouldn't be interested, but she finally decided to do it anyway. She had a heart-to-heart talk with him and urged him to make things right with God. She implored him, "You never know what will happen to you. Leave your resentment, bitterness, and anger and start over." After a long talk, he broke down and gave his heart to God again. In the following weeks, he experienced a transformation of character. He started going to church, praying, reading his Bible, and becoming more like Jesus. One Sabbath after going for a walk, he said to her, "I have not had peace for a long time, but today I did. I had one of the best days of my life." On Sunday, he drove his car to work. Fifteen minutes from home, he was in a fatal car accident. Though his sister grieves, she rejoices that she had the opportunity to lead him again to Christ. She said to me, "What would have happened if I hadn't talked to him about Jesus that day and he had remained unchanged? I am so glad I did and glad he responded positively. It was a golden moment that would never be repeated." 

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NOVEMBER 10

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