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ELDER'S

DIGEST



FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

SPECIAL FEATURE: "POPE FRANCIS, 666, AND TIME SETTING" BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIVING



Giving is an important aspect of the Christian life. Money represents both your life and where your heart is. If you earn 10 dollars an hour, a 10-dollar bill represents one hour of your life. When you give that same 10 dollars to God, you have, in fact, given God one hour of your life. This is why, for the Christian, giving is so important.

In addition, wherever you put your money, your heart follows. If you invest in the things of God, your heart will be in the things of God. God knows this. The Bible says, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34).

The Bible speaks of three types of monetary giving: tithes, offerings, and charities. Let’s take a closer look at each of them.

Tithes: Tithing is literally one-tenth. The prophet Malachi speaks of robbing God by withholding tithes (Mal. 3:8). God asks for 10 percent of our earnings. This 10 percent is meant to fund the work of God (Num. 18:24). It is returned by Christians as something that already belongs to God (Lev. 27:30, 32). Giving less than 10 percent is not tithing. Giving more than 10 percent is more than a tithe; only 10 percent can be considered a tithe.

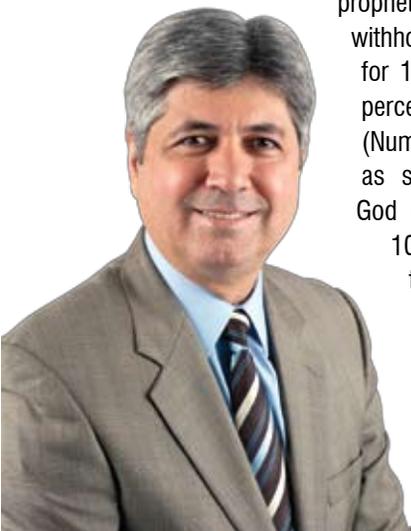
Offerings: Offerings are exactly what the word implies. There is no

set amount to an offering; rather, it is anything more than the 10 percent God requires. The amount is not set; you decide how much to give, and you give because you love God and are thankful for what He has done for you (Deut. 16:10). Your offering is given according to the blessings you believe God has given you. It is a way to say, “Thank you, Jesus!”

Charities: Charitable donations are monetary gifts or things you have purchased that you give to someone in need. It is your decision to help the poor, to meet the needs of the needy, and to love your neighbor (Acts 3:2). Again, this is something you determine to do. There is no set amount and no determining factor except your own heart. The Bible affirms, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Prov. 19:17).

In addition to the topics we address regularly in *Elder’s Digest*, special emphasis is given this quarter to the topics of giving and the election of the new Pope. We hope to provide local church leaders with broader information on these relevant subjects. Regular giving is a key element for revival and reformation, faithfulness among members, and a church that is financially healthy. The abdication of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis have created many speculations among our church members. The article “Pope Francis, 666, and Time Setting” written by Ekkehardt Mueller will help you to understand better this important topic.

Enjoy your reading!



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

STEWARDSHIP AND MONEY

Giving is a heavenly principle (Acts 20:35). It is God's will that we give: time, talents, and money/material possessions (Matt 22:15–22). Satan replaced the Sabbath with another day of worship in order to eliminate our understanding of God as creator. He destroyed the principle of giving the tithe in order to extinguish the knowledge of God as the owner of all things.

I. TITHE

1. In the Old Testament

- Genesis 14:18–20 Abraham gave the tenth of his income, the tithe. He is the father of all believers (Rom 4:10–12; Gal 3:28, 29).
- Genesis 28:20–22 Jacob knew and practiced this principle.
- Leviticus 27:30, 32 Israel was asked to give the tithe. The tithe was designated to provide a livelihood for the priests and Levites. Nevertheless, the tithe was given to God who in turn took care of His servants (Num 18:20–32). Under Nehemiah the people promised to tithe again (Neh 10:28, 29, 37, 38). On the other hand, God promised rich blessings for those who would be obedient to this command (Mal 3:7–12).



2. In the New Testament

- Matthew 23:23 Jesus affirmed the tithing.
- 1 Corinthians 9:11–14 Paul knew the principle of tithing (see also Heb 7:1–10) and supported it.

The tithing principle already existed before Israel came into being as a people. It is not just a Jewish institution. Those who gave the tithe dedicated their entire property to God.

II. OFFERINGS

In addition to tithing, believers at all times gave voluntary offerings. We are also called to do that. In this case, the amount is not prescribed. The individual believer can decide under prayer how much to give, allowing himself or herself to be influenced by the Lord (Ex 36:3; Deut 16:16, 17; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 9:5–7).

III. QUESTIONS

1. How Much Should We Give?

Sometimes questions arise whether to give from the salary without deductions or the salary minus deductions. We give tithe and offerings from our full salary or, if we are self-employed, from our income.

2. Why Do We Give?

- Jesus gave Himself for us (Gal 1:4).
- God gives us inner peace, a fulfilled life on earth, and whatever we need (Matt 6:31–33; John 10:10).
- Even more than that, He gives us eternal life (1 John 5:11–12).
- It is God's will that we give. Our giving testifies to our faithfulness as stewards of God's gifts.

God does not need "our" money but He allows us to be fellow workers with Him. This has advantages for us. We are being freed from our egotism and our worries. Giving brings blessings (Mal 3:10–11).

3. How Should We Give?

We give happily and not grudgingly or under compulsion, rather we give because Jesus gave Himself for us (2 Cor 9:7). In giving we respond gratefully to God's love (Mark 12:41–44; 2 Cor 8:3–5). It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving. We do not give with a rebellious heart like Cain (Gen 4:3–6), and like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–4).

4. When Should We Give?

God comes first (Matt 6:33). Therefore we set aside the tithe and offerings before we use the remaining money for our own needs, even if the budget is very tight. By giving to God first, we exercise faith and trust in the Lord. A person who gives only after his/her own needs have been met may indicate a lack of trust. Also nothing that belongs to God should be retained since this would not only rob God of His property, but would also prevent the giver from having wonderful experiences with the Lord.

5. For What Purposes Do We Give?

The tithe is used for the gospel ministry. It should not be used for other purposes. Freewill offerings, however, can be given for the local church budget, mission programs, building funds, ADRA, and many other purposes.

6. Is It Really Possible to Give When You Cannot Make Ends Meet?

- God keeps His promises, even if His command appears to be illogical (Mal 3:10).
- This is supported by biblical examples. Remember that through God Gideon's three hundred men conquered an entire army (Judg 7:7–25). Consider the widow of Zarephath

(1 Kings 17:8–16) and Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:13–21) when God multiplied the little they had.

- This is supported by experiences of believers throughout the centuries, including our own. The Protestant pastor E. Modersohn writes about giving tithe during the difficult times right after World War II: "The miracle happened. The income reached farther than before. I do not know how it came about. Did the shoe soles last longer? Did we need less new clothes? I do not know. . . . But I can testify: We never experienced shortage."

- Tithe returners do not necessarily give because they have; they have because they give. It is possible to give because "with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

CONCLUSION

When we return tithe and offerings to God, we recognize Him as the true owner and as our Lord. We express that we are determined to be faithful stewards. We document that we will use the money remaining in our hands according to His will. It is His; we are His (Matt 6:19–21, 24).

ED

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

iFOLLOW RESOURCES FOR NEW MEMBERS

Beginning Your Spiritual Journey is designed to support the entire discipleship process, and is primarily for those just starting out on the path to discipleship. It highlights six important possibilities for a new believer's life with Christ.

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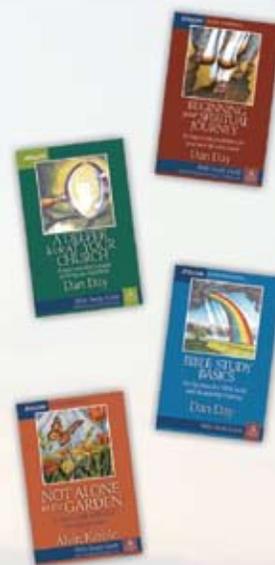
Bible Study Basics is aimed at helping new members grow in Christ through daily study of the Bible. It features six innovative approaches that will help new members make their Bible study more effective.

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STEWARDSHIP:

FIVE ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS FOR CHRISTIANS

Stewardship, as presented in this article, refers to managing of talents God placed in our trust. A steward is a manager. Stewardship is about management. Read Luke 19:12-27 with this definition in mind and notice the following insights.

1. GOD OWNS EVERYTHING

In this parable, the master owned the money that was given to the servants. In like manner, God owns all that we have. Our jobs, businesses, money, investments, houses, relationships, bodies, and even our time belong to God. We are not the owners; we are simply stewards or managers of what God has placed in our trust.

2. GOD HAS GIVEN US WHAT HE BELIEVES WE CAN MANAGE

Notice that the master gave the servants what he believed they could handle. Whatever God has given us, He believes we can handle.

Also our financial gifts—our jobs, our income, our business, and even our bills and creditors—are allowed to be in our lives because God believes and knows we can handle them. We may not believe we can handle them, but God knows we can!

Sometimes, we believe we can handle even more. This may be true; however, we must learn to trust God's timing. God will have more wealth for some of us after more time has passed. And when we receive more, God expects more from us. Therefore, we should be careful about what we ask God to give us.

3. GOD EXPECTS PROFIT

The master in the text gave talents to the servants with the expectation that when he comes back, they would have more than what he had given them. So it is with God and us: God expects us to take what He has given us and make a profit.

Notice that neither the master nor Jesus gave detailed instructions about how to make a profit. God instructs us to make a profit and leaves the details to our wise judgment. Some people will do well in stocks, others in real estate, others with business, others with precious metals, and others with precious souls. But all believers should understand the divine instruction to be profitable with the money God has placed in our trust. Spending money on items that decrease in value will not produce a profit. We must spend money on assets that increase in value. Clothes, cars, fine dining, entertainment, vacations, and the like are consumer items that don't

produce profit. Stocks, bonds, real estate, and businesses are examples of assets that can produce profit. Although we may need a certain amount of consumer items, we must work diligently to keep consumer spending low so we can invest in things that hold value to the sight of God.

4. GOD WILL BLESS US BASED ON OUR PROFITABILITY

Notice that the master blessed the profitable servants at their levels of profitability: the most profitable was most blessed, and the moderately profitable was moderately blessed. In similar fashion, God will bless us in proportion to our profits.

If we live on less than we make so we can invest in profitable assets, then we can look forward to a dignified retirement and a rewarding experience in heaven.

5. GOD WILL ALSO PUNISH LACK OF PROFIT

Notice that the master had no patience for the unprofitable servant. Not only was the money taken away from him; he was severely punished. God is a merciful God, but at some point, justice requires dealing with sin.

It is sin to take what God has given us for His glory and profit and use it for our comforts. We should learn and apply the principles of financial stewardship so we can be profitable and blessed instead of unprofitable and punished.

In summary, God owns everything, and we are simply His stewards. God has given us what He knows we can manage. He expects us to be profitable. He will bless us at our level of profitable financial stewardship, and He will punish a lack of profitability.

Ellen G. White says, "The parable of the talents should be a matter of the most careful and prayerful study; for it has a personal and individual application to every man, woman, and child possessed of the powers of reason. Your obligation and responsibility are in proportion to the talents God has bestowed upon you. . . . Every individual, from the lowliest and most obscure to the greatest and most exalted, is a moral agent endowed with abilities for which he is accountable to God. To a greater or less degree, all are placed in charge of the talents of their Lord. The spiritual, mental, and physical ability, the influence, station, possessions, affections, sympathies, all are precious talents to be used in the cause of the Master for the salvation of souls for whom Christ died" (*Review and Herald*, May 1, 1888 par. 1).



General Conference Ministerial Association



MAKING THE CASE FOR GIVING

Giving is basic to life. All nature was made with the innate inability to hold back and not give. Only human beings were created with the ability to give—or refuse to give. When we give, we go against our pre-programmed nature. This makes our gifts more meaningful, because giving brings with it emotions and feelings that inanimate objects cannot convey. And giving becomes even more dear and cherished when it comes from the heart.

When Jesus was in the temple in Jerusalem, He “saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury” (Luke 21:1). He also noticed “a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites” (verse 2). To this He said, “Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43, 44).

How was it possible for this woman to give more “than all they which have cast into the treasury”? Let’s suppose that Mary works at a store and earns \$100 per week. John makes \$100 per hour. In church Mary puts \$50 in the offering plate, and John also gives \$50. Who gave more? Technically, they gave the same amount, but when comparing the time spent to earn it, Mary’s gift represented half a week’s wages, while John’s represented only 30 minutes of labor. Mary invested more of her life to earn what she gave.

**GIVING
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Our earned wages are a representation of an exchange made for a portion of our life, time, and talents. When we go to work, our employer is paying us what he or she thinks our time and talents are worth. Consequently, when we give, we are giving a portion of our life to benefit another. The value of a penny or dollar is measured by heaven—not by the value of the instrument itself but by the amount of life expended to earn it.

God so loved that He gave. He did not redeem us “with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). God redeemed us through His Son. God asks us to give, not because He needs our metal, paper, or plastic but rather because of what those things represent: returning to Him a portion of the life He has given us, and, by so doing, demonstrating our belief that He is our Life-giver and that we are in tune with His value of life. Thus we lay treasure—saved lives—in store in the kingdom.

How do you explain the reasons for giving? 

Louis R. Torres is president of the Guam-Micronesia Mission. This article first appeared in *Best Practice*, August 12, 2012.

STEWARDSHIP, TITHE, AND OFFERINGS

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

The starting point of stewardship is to recognize that God initiates stewardship. He gives us life and invites us into intimate partnership. This partnership begins with accepting Jesus Christ as Savior—experiencing the joy of Salvation. This then leads us to trust Him enough to accept Him as Lord or Owner of our lives.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP?

The Bible tells us that only a person who has a relationship with God can truly partner with Him and worship Him with their whole life. Stewardship is acknowledgement of God's ownership and sovereignty and also of Jesus Christ's claim of lordship in our lives.

IS MONEY PART OF STEWARDSHIP?

Yes. Yet, stewardship also includes every area of life: our bodies, skills, time, environment, and work. In loving God with all of our heart, mind and soul, all of our affairs reflect who we are in relationship to who God is. Therefore, with this all-inclusive view of stewardship, Jesus is also Lord of our financial resources.

WHAT IS TITHE?

Tithe is one tenth of your increase from either money or product that is returned to God. It is holy and belongs to Him, the Owner of all of our material possessions and lives (Lev. 27:30). The returning of tithes is an expression of our faithfulness to God.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TITHES AND OFFERINGS?

Yes. Tithes are returned while offerings are given. Offerings are our response of love and gratitude to God's blessings and goodness. In giving tithes and offerings we worship God and advance His mission to make disciples in the world.

HOW IS THE TITHE DISTRIBUTED?

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church tithe is received by the local congregation and sent on to the local conference/mission/field office. This is the central "storehouse" for distribution in keeping with Church Policy.

HOW IS THE TITHE USED?

While the distribution percentages vary somewhat in different conferences, the largest portion of the tithe is used to support the ministry of local churches through pastoral salaries, as well as evangelism and additional services provided to the local church.

WHY SHOULD WE TITHE?

By returning one tenth of our increase to Him, we remember God is the owner of everything He has entrusted into our hands. Tithing incorporates our worship to partnership with God, support of His mission, ministry, and church. Tithing is also an expression of loyalty that connects us with God's promises and blessings, giving us a sense of fellowship in the divine-human partnership.

WHAT ARE OFFERINGS?

Offerings are our response of love responding to God's blessings and goodness. They serve as a means of helping to further integrate God into the financial side of our lives. Recognizing God as Owner, we follow the convicting of the Holy Spirit—managing what He has placed in our hands and worshiping God by returning some of what He has placed in our hands. We give where and how the Holy Spirit convicts and empowers us to do so. We give to worship God—and we do so by supporting His Church, by advancing His mission, by helping others—but most of all by listening to Him, following where He leads, and doing what He convicts.

HOW SHOULD I GIVE OFFERINGS?

Two principles should guide our offerings—as God blesses and as He guides us through His Spirit. "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7, NIV). The Macedonian churches give us an example of the way to give. "For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (2 Cor. 8:3-5, NIV). 

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.

These questions and answers have been taken from the General Conference Stewardship Ministries Department website.

CHOICES FOR LIFE:

SAYING “NO” TO ALCOHOL AND OTHER HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

It is not unusual to see Adventists—even some elders or pastors—question whether abstinence from alcohol and other harmful substances is still relevant for the Christian lifestyle. Some claim that abstinence is too radical, citing studies which state that a little wine is good for the heart. Some people say that the Bible is not clear. Others say, “Didn’t Jesus turn water into wine in His first miracle?” Should this be a personal matter?

Alcohol consumption is still considered a major public health problem in today’s world; in many countries, it is among the top-three major risk factors for chronic disease.¹ It is connected to crime, car accidents, violence (inside and outside the home), broken families, other addictions, mental disorders (e.g., depression), and other health problems. As a result, health advocates have passed laws in some states to increase alcohol taxes and decrease consumption. A small drink can lead to devastating effects in the lives of those who become addicted.

Here are some facts with hope:²

FACT: Physical health is impacted. Hypertension rates double, as does the risk of cardiovascular disease. Sudden cardiac deaths occur much more frequently, especially in heavy drinkers. Alcohol use can also lead to liver disease; high blood fats (triglycerides); heart failure; stroke; fetal alcohol syndrome in babies born to women who drink; certain cancers; injury, obesity, and diabetes from too many calories; violence; and even death.

FACT: A recent study suggests that alcohol is to blame for one in every 30 cancer deaths each year in the United States. The study also found that drinking even small amounts of alcohol was harmful—30 percent of all alcohol-related cancer deaths are linked to drinking 1.5 or fewer drinks per day. Researchers concluded that although moderate drinking has been associated with heart benefits, in the broader context of all the issues and problems connected to it, alcohol causes 10 times as many deaths as it prevents.³

HOPE: The above studies validate God’s counsel in Proverbs 20:1: “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (NIV). Following this biblical counsel is the key to prevention. In Christ we can find true recovery for alcoholism or any other addiction.



HOW CAN ELDERS HELP?

In our church, *Adventist Recovery Ministries* brings Christ-centered help to anyone struggling with unhealthy compulsive behaviors. Elders can start a 12-step, Christ-centered support group or encourage someone else in the church to do so. Learn more at AdventistRecovery.org.

When connected to the church, we set aside excuses for why abstinence is unnecessary and understand how abstaining from harmful substances impacts not only our physical and mental health but also our spiritual life. We take to heart that “anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong” and that “we become less capable of choosing the good and have less strength of will to do that which we know to be right.”⁴ God has shown to us the path of life (Ps. 16:1). Elders and spiritual leaders can choose to walk that path and to lead others along the way. 

¹ 2011 *Health at a Glance* report, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance

² “Health Unlimited,” from *Facts with Hope*, April 2013 (www.nad-healthministries.org), 4.

³ D. E. Nelson, et al., “Alcohol-Attributable Cancer Deaths and Years of Potential Life Lost in the United States,” from *American Journal of Public Health* 103 (4), 642-649.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 346.



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

“OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”

This year the Seventh-day Adventist Church celebrates the 160th anniversary of Sabbath School. In 1853, James and Ellen White established the first Sabbath School class in their home in Rochester, New York.

The first Sabbath School publication appeared a year earlier—in 1852—in the very first issue of *Youth’s Instructor*. Those very first lessons were for children and youth. And since its earliest years, Sabbath School has been a time for Bible study, fellowship, and outreach, with emphasis on world mission. The highest objective of Sabbath School is to open the hearts of its members to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. When their hearts are open, Christ “will open their understanding, that they may comprehend the things of God.”¹

For Sabbath School’s purpose to be fulfilled, it must begin with a concentrated focus on children. “The early years of childhood are the most impressionable period to impress on the young minds the idea that Jesus loves us,” says Linda Mei Lin Koh, General Conference Children’s Ministries Director.

Currently, eight Sabbath School publications serve the world church. Four of these comprise GraceLink®, the official curriculum of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for children from birth to age 14. At last count, it was translated into 17 languages.

“Since GraceLink’s original launch in 2000, thousands of Sabbath Schools have embraced it enthusiastically worldwide, representing a broad range of cultures,” says Gary B. Swanson, associate director of the Department of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries at the General Conference. “A curriculum, however, is a living resource, and, as such, it must be subject to regular assessment and evaluation. This is the reason for a recent focus on GraceLink’s revision and augmentation, initiated in published form in 2013.”

PowerPoints®, the Bible study guide for the junior level of Sabbath School, launched these revisions and aug-

“WE ARE INTERESTED IN SHARING WITH CHILDREN STORIES THAT ARE AGE-APPROPRIATE, APPLICABLE, AND BIBLICALLY ACCURATE”¹

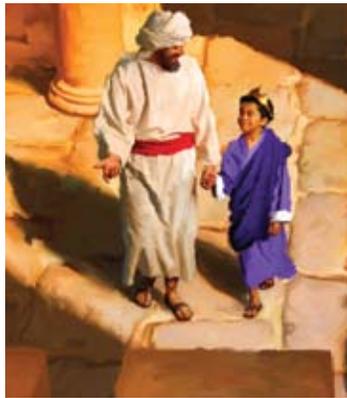
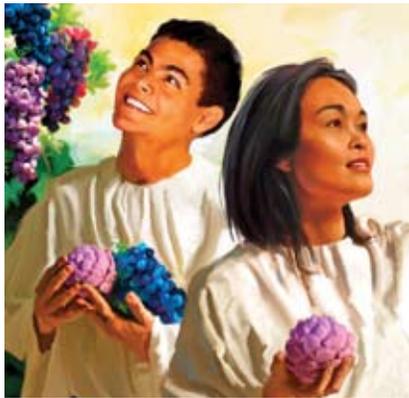
mentations in the first quarter of 2013. The Primary level will be released mid-2014; Kindergarten and Beginner levels will be available in 2015.

GraceLink’s purpose is to teach children about God and His grace, thus enabling them to build a saving relationship with Him. Research by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1990, 2000, and 2010 indicated four vital areas to the development of a relationship with Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. V. Bailey

Gillespie, lead investigator in this research, points out that “young people mature spiritually by relying on strengthening the areas of service, worship, grace, and community.” He explains further that when children learn Bible stories without applying them to their lives, they know facts but don’t necessarily have a relationship with Jesus. This is why GraceLink’s emphasis is on four dynamics: grace, service, worship, and community.

Gillespie says that the key to GraceLink is its concern for making an application of the Bible stories. Each lesson begins with something relevant to the everyday experiences in childhood:

- *Grace* is a demonstration of God’s love for us—Jesus loves me. GraceLink teaches children that we serve a God who sent His Son to die in our place, to redeem us, and to accept us unto Himself that we might live with Him forever.
- *Worship* is our response to God’s love. As 1 John 4:19 puts it, “We love Him because He first loved us.”² GraceLink emphasizes that worship is not something Christians do only once a week; worship is how we live our lives. Children learn that



they worship their Creator through praise, lifestyle, and stewardship. In a child’s words, worship shows that “I love Jesus.”

- **Community**—loving others—involves our relationship with those around us. When children understand what grace is and respond in worship, they will also understand that their love for God impacts their relationships with their families and friends—and even with people they don’t know.
- **Service** is the last—but not least—of the dynamics. GraceLink encourages children to reach out to people who may not know Jesus; through their service, children may share the message of hope for a future and say, “Jesus loves you too.”

“Children learn in different ways,” adds Bonita Joyner Shields, editor of *PowerPoints*, “so each child may experience the Bible from a unique perspective. This curriculum gives children the opportunity to grow individually in their knowledge of the Lord and to enjoy the assurance of their relationship with Christ.”

Further, GraceLink presents a thorough study of the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs. It is solidly based on Scripture and the gift of prophecy and has been approved by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

“We are interested in sharing with children stories that are age-appropriate, applicable, and biblically accurate,” says Falvo Fowler, editor of the Bible study guides for the Beginner, Kindergarten, and Primary levels.

The revised curriculum takes into account that children learn in different ways. “GraceLink guides each child through a learning cycle by helping them experience, reflect, think, and do an activity related to the stories in Scripture,” says Shields.

Editors have worked closely with leaders in children’s ministries around the world so that the lessons will be relevant to a worldwide audience with content that is sensitive to varying cultures.

These Sabbath School resources are readily available for people with mobile devices. Two Sabbath School apps are available: Sabbath School App and GraceLink App. A third, GraceLink Games, will be available later this year. “Supplemental material, including content for tablets and smartphones, is available online for different types of churches and cultures,” says Fowler. “We want to provide tools for parents and teachers to make it easy for their kids to understand Scripture.”

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). We know that God loves children, and His priority is that they must be a significant part of His kingdom. Children “are to be educated, disciplined, and patiently instructed. They require more than casual notice, more than a word of encouragement. They need painstaking, prayerful, careful labor.”³

The GraceLink curriculum calls for parents and teachers to be actively involved in children’s learning experience. Being part of children’s spiritual journey may seem insignificant, but the value of the influence an adult can have on a child cannot be estimated. The learning in Sabbath School must be more than informational—it must be transformational.

If ever Adventists needed to nurture the lambs of the church and shepherd them through a biblical experience that leads to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, the time is now. The Great Shepherd came to save the world. Let us assist in His work and teach even our youngest lambs about their loving Savior and His grace. ED

¹ *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 61.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are from *The New King James Version* of the Bible.

³ *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 77.

Laura Sámano is an assistant editor at the Review & Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, USA.

CHANGING THE FUTURE FOR RWANDAN WIDOWS

“I used to spend all day in my house alone. I was very lonely and talked to no one, and no one talked to me,” says Siforo. “Now because of ADRA, I am part of a community. Everything is different now.”

Through a project that ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) began in the western mountains of Karongi, widows, who were the victims of the Rwandan genocide, have been given a brighter future. The genocide brought widowhood to 500,000 women, many of whom moved to remote rural areas. ADRA was the only organization to answer the pleas of the Rwandan government to work in this nearly impossible-to-reach mountaintop village.

The first step ADRA took was to empower women in the village by teaching them how to read and write. At the end of the training, women were asked to identify the widows in their communities and then visited the widows to see which of them may be interested in starting their own businesses.

“I have been a widow for 17 years raising my four children. There was no one to help me,” says Siforo. “First, ADRA taught me to read and write. Now I am teaching other women to learn too!” With local ADRA workers, these communities of widows formed cooperatives (co-ops) to work together—planting vegetables and herding goats.

In farming communities, not only are crops valuable, but livestock as well. Goats, sheep, and cattle often provide milk, meat, and skin for household use and, if there is excess, the families can take them to the market for additional income.

“ADRA also helped us to build a goat house! And because of this, our cooperative really began to see hope and a future,” adds Siforo, who was selected by her peers to be the local co-op president. Through the assistance from ADRA, the co-ops were taken to the market where, together, the women selected those goats they wished to be part of their livestock.



Photo credit: ADRA International

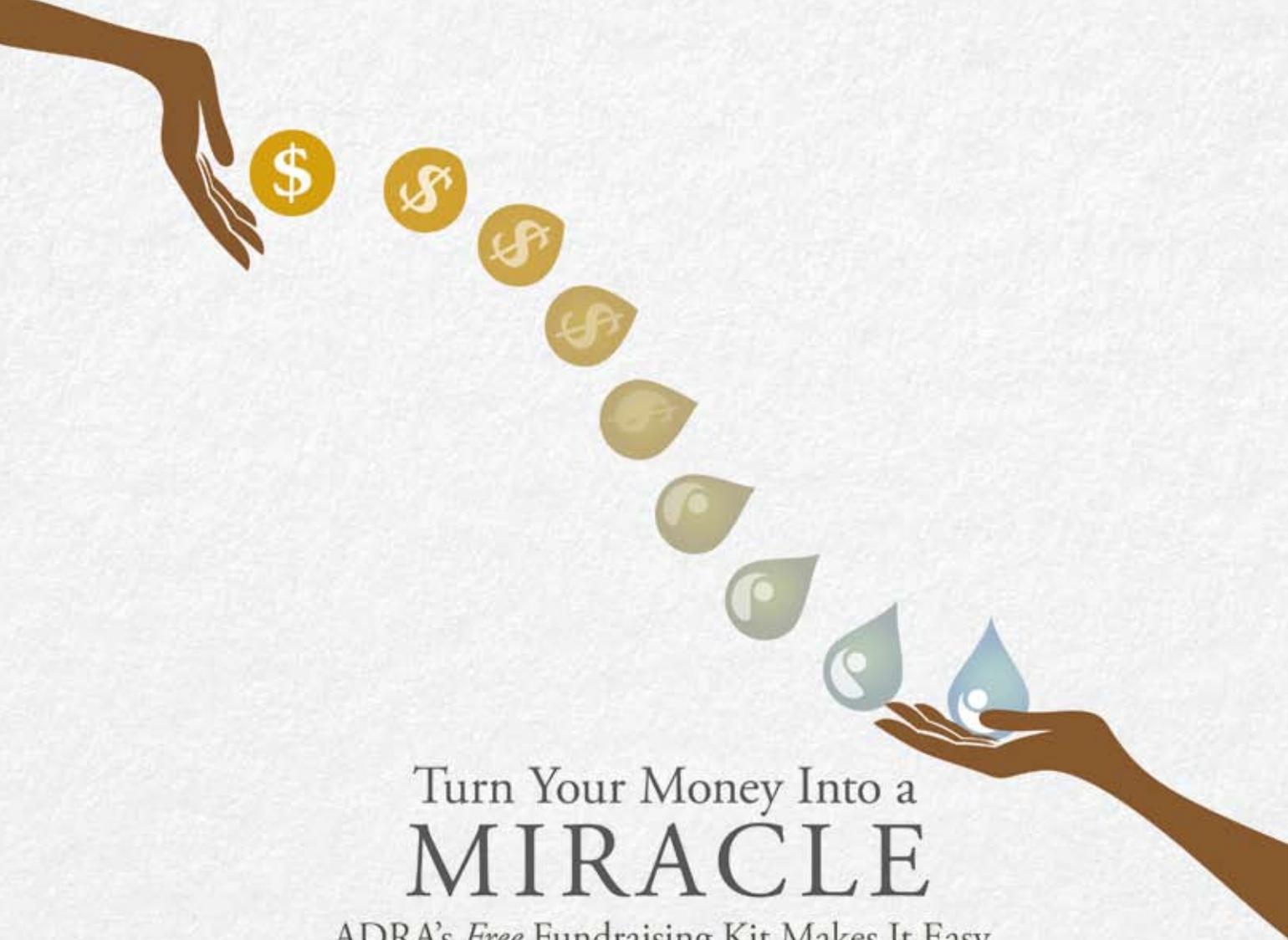
“We are one of 15 widow cooperatives in this area,” says Rachel. “ADRA taught us how to read and write, they helped us buy our goats,

they taught us how to make our own organic compost for our vegetable gardens, and they taught us the right way to sell our produce and goat milk so we have money for our families.”

The co-ops have repaid their goat loans and have continued to add to their goat farm. “We have decided to improve our stock and, when it is time to sell the older goats, we will have money for our families and communities.” Because of this project, the widows are able to obtain health care for their families and education for their children. The women also continue to pass on the blessings to other women by serving as teachers and helping to set up other co-ops in the surrounding communities.

“This is our way to repay our thanks to ADRA—We show our gratitude to our fellow widows,” says Siforo. “We believe that ADRA was our miracle sent by God, and it is the reason our lives are better.”

To learn more about the many ways ADRA is positively affecting lives and communities around the world, visit www.adra.org.



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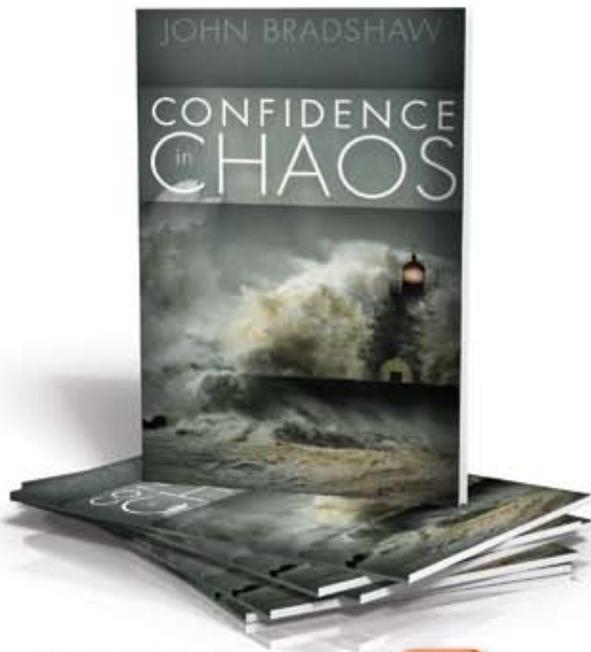
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Review & Herald

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew 28:18-20 makes the duty of the church so simple. Many people make it so difficult. Scores of books have been written about the mission of the church, and seminars are offered to teach others the mission of the church, but Jesus reduced it all down to one command (verse 19): make disciples.

The other actions in these verses (going, baptizing, teaching) are all subordinate to Jesus' main command to make disciples. The other actions tell us how to make disciples.

Making disciples is our *plan*. Going, baptizing, and teaching are our *process*. All of this is our *mission*.

I. OUR MISSION

Jesus said that the disciples were to “go . . . and make disciples.” This is certainly what the disciples understood to be their mission. They were to gather followers. They were to gather learners from all the nations of the earth. They were to teach them. They were to go into the world and seek to gather followers and instruct them, teach them, and train them.

Christ's disciples were to “make followers of Jesus Christ”—following Him as their Master Teacher. They weren't to make followers after themselves. They were to make disciples of Jesus Christ. That was their mission. That is our mission.

The disciples understood that to be a disciple would cost them their lives. Everything they had was to be given up (Matt. 10:37, 38).

Making disciples doesn't just happen in the four walls of a church, nor does it happen only in Bible study groups. It happens when we rub shoulders with the world and speak with them of the marvelous richness of grace that is found in Christ Jesus.

Making disciples is “heart work,” and God is the one who changes hearts. Ultimately, for the work of making disciples, we are utterly helpless. Yet, look carefully again at Matthew 28, where we receive our sufficiency for the mission God has placed before us.

II. OUR SUFFICIENCY

As we come to the world with the message of the gospel of grace, we realize that we aren't our own authority in this process. We alone can't convince people to forsake the world and follow Christ. Only Jesus—through the Holy Spirit—has the authority and power to do this

(Matt. 28:18; John 10:27, 28; 17:2). “But without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner be won to Christ.”¹

Jesus has promised His involvement in this process. He seems to say, “I am with you always! I have the authority. I will get the job done.” You remember that Jesus promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). Our task is to make disciples. Jesus is the guarantee of our work. Jesus has guaranteed the work by His authority (verse 18) and His presence among us (verse 20).

III. OUR PRACTICE

Let's consider the following question: How did the disciples understand Christ's command to make disciples? To understand how the disciples interpreted Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations and baptize them, we can study the practice of the early church to determine the same question in our context. We will discover that they preached the gospel and planted churches. They were proclamation-focused, and the church was central.

Remember the history of the early church? For the first three or four years, the church was concentrated in Jerusalem. “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7). Then, after Stephen was stoned to death, the church scattered. Philip went to Samaria and Caesarea. Paul was called to Damascus. Peter went to Joppa. Let's look at Acts to see what happened:

- The good news of Jesus Christ spread north, and a large number believed (Acts 11:19-21).

- When the church at Jerusalem heard of this, Barnabas was sent to shepherd the church. But he quickly discovered that Paul was the man needed in Antioch. Paul was able to teach the church and lead them into maturity (Acts 11:22-24).

- The church was scattered. The gospel was preached. Many in Antioch believed. For a year, Paul disciplined those in the church, grounding them in the truth of God. The church was maturing. The disciples were growing (Acts 11:25, 26).

- Now watch what God did through this church in Antioch. Turn to Acts 13, where the story of Antioch continues. They sent some of them away to repeat what God had done in

Antioch! God had drawn believers to Himself in Antioch and had matured them. Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were chosen and sent away by direct intervention of the Holy Spirit (see verses 2 and 3). They came to Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis, Paphos, Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They preached the gospel and strengthened the souls of the believers (Acts 13:1-3).

- This is “missions.” Preaching the gospel. Gathering believers into churches. Discipling them in the faith. Sending them out to do it all over again (Acts 14:21-23). This happened during Paul's first missionary journey. On his second missionary journey, Paul sought to strengthen the churches he had established and to establish others.

- Now look at Acts 15. Paul was strengthening these churches by further discipling the people in these churches (Acts 15:40-16:1). The summary is given in Acts 16:5: “So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”

- Then Paul went on to duplicate his efforts. He planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Luke records for us that Paul “settled there [in Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). In other words, Paul did in Corinth exactly what he did in Antioch before he was sent out—he disciplined believers in the city.

CONCLUSION

We are called to do the same. As we do this, we will have to make several choices. Shall we go? What will we send people to do? We need to go and send people to make disciples! That is what our Lord commissioned us to do.

There are many different opportunities for people to go and do things locally and abroad. Many people go to do many different things—good things! But when the church sends people, our priority must be to make disciples!

I believe this is the most appropriate biblical model for personal and church growth. Therefore, let's “go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ Object Lessons*, 328.

THE LAMB OF GOD

Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:29

Joseph was engaged to a young Jewish maiden named Mary. They were betrothed, which means they were legally married but not yet living together. During that time, word came to Joseph that Mary was pregnant. Joseph knew he wasn't the father, but he knew that someone was! He believed that Mary had been unfaithful to him, and he decided to get a divorce (Matt. 18, 19). Yet, because he loved Mary, he wanted to divorce her quietly because the penalty for committing Mary's crime was death by stoning.

However, before he could put his plan into action, God sent an angel to tell Joseph that things were not what he thought they were. He told this Jewish husband that Mary was carrying a child that was miraculously fathered by the Holy Spirit of God. Joseph learned that this child would be a special child with a special mission.

Joseph's reaction was to take Mary into his home and wait with her until the day the baby is born. Neither of them realized that the baby growing in Mary's body was the Lamb of God who would one day die for the sins of all men. Verse 25 tells us that Mary eventually delivered her child. When she did, the Lamb of God was born. Subsequently, the Bible says that John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Today, I would like to share with you three characteristics of the Lamb of God.

I. THE LAMB OF GOD WAS A SPECIAL LAMB (VERSE 20)

A. His conception was special. Jesus Christ had no human father! His Father was one of the three members of the Godhead—God Himself! What makes the conception of Jesus so wonderful is the fact that He was born to a virgin. We all know the traditional method by which babies are conceived and brought into this world; however, the Jesus' conception was different! His mother was a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:34, 35).

B. His conduct was special. From the day Jesus came into this world until the day He returned to heaven, He was a person of very special characteristics.

1. *Miracles.* Jesus could feed multitudes, open blind eyes, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. Everything He did marked Him as special. However, these activities were merely proof

that He was indeed who He claimed to be (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1).

2. *Messages.* When Jesus opened His mouth, people marveled at the things He said. When He was only 12, He astonished the doctors of the Law (Luke 2:47). When He began His ministry, He continued to amaze the crowds that heard Him speak (John 7:46; Luke 4:22).

C. His claim was special. Jesus was never shy about telling people who He was. In fact, His claims were what caused the Jews to seek His death. What claim did Jesus make that was so offensive to people? The answer to that question is two-fold.

1. *Jesus claimed to be the Son of God* (John 10:36). Jesus claimed that He was the Son of God in heaven. People supposed Him to be the son of Joseph (Mark 6:3); however, Jesus claimed a special relationship with the Father in heaven.

2. *Jesus claimed to be God* (John 14:9; 8:58; 10:30). This claim was even more offensive to the Jews than the other one! By making this claim, Jesus was telling them that He was eternal, that He was their God, and that they needed to bow before Him and acknowledge Him as one of the three members of the Godhead.

II. THE LAMB OF GOD WAS A SACRIFICIAL LAMB (VERSE 21)

Jesus came to earth to be the sacrificial Lamb (John 18:37). He came to die for the sins of humanity. Luke tells us that Jesus' mission in this world was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

A. He was a spotless Lamb. Before any lamb could be offered as a sacrifice, it had to be examined thoroughly and be declared spotless (Num. 28:9). An animal that was impure or deformed could not be offered. For Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins demanded that He be a human without spot or blemish. Jesus filled this bill perfectly. Not only was He the Son of God, He was also the sinless Son of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).

B. He was a submissive Lamb. Jesus wasn't forced into His role as a sacrifice. He willingly submitted to all that He endured. He did it all out of a heart of love for you and me. He submitted to the Father's will and paid the price for our sins. He was a submissive Lamb (Isa. 53:7).

C. He was a sacrificed lamb. All the rest meant nothing unless the sacrifice was fulfilled. It wasn't enough for Jesus to be sinless and surrendered; He had to suffer and die before sin could ever be destroyed (Heb. 9:22).

III. THE LAMB OF GOD IS A SAVING LAMB (VERSE 21)

If the story ended here, with Jesus dead on a cross, this would be a sad story to tell. There would be no reason to celebrate Christmas and no need to come to church. There would be no salvation and no hope for our souls. But—thank God—the story doesn't end there! Three days after Jesus died on the Cross, He came forth—alive—from the tomb (Matt. 28:1-6). He is still alive today (Heb. 7:25). Since this is true, I want to show you what the Lamb of God can do today.

A. He has the power to save sinners. Those who are lost in sin have hope today! They can turn to the Lord Jesus, and He will save their souls! There are three basic things that He will do in the heart and life of every sinner who comes to Him by faith.

1. *He can cleanse sin.* His blood has the power to wash away sins forever (Ps. 103:12; 1 John 1:7).

2. *He can convert souls.* The human soul is a wicked thing (Jer. 17:9). It is lost and undone and cannot have fellowship with God. However, when a sinner trusts Jesus for salvation, Jesus takes that life that was so far away from God and brings it near to Him (Eph. 2:12, 13).

3. *He can change sinners.* When Jesus saves someone, He also changes that person (2 Cor. 5:17).

CONCLUSION

When you think about Christmas this year, try to keep things in perspective. Today is the appropriate time to remember the special day when God sent His Son into the world to be the sacrifice for our sins. I invite you to come to Jesus right now. He can fix what is broken in your life. How many of you would like to accept the Lord Jesus and His eternal salvation? Would you like to re-consecrate your life to honor and serve Him?

Jesus is the Lamb of God! Let's honor Him by saying with John the Baptist: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" 

General Conference Ministerial Association

A PASSION FOR SOULS

The Bible is a book filled with meaning and blessing. However, some passages are very disturbing. For instance, in Psalm 142:4, the Bible says that “no man cared for my soul.” This passage should bother us.

I believe there are literally billions of people in our world about whom no one cares. It is safe to say that millions live in this world with no one to pray for them or tell them about Jesus.

Sadly, many Christians know Jesus but do not care about the souls of the lost. What a contrast to the Lord Jesus Christ! His passion for souls brought Him from heaven to earth and motivated His every waking activity (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45). It was this passion for souls that propelled Him to an old rugged cross where He gave His life to save lost sinners (Rom. 5:8).

In Matthew 9:36-38, Jesus looked upon the multitudes that had gathered around Him because of His miracles. As He looked at these helpless, hopeless, hurting people, Jesus saw four elements that caused Him to be moved with compassion for these lost ones. These same four elements ought to cause those of us who claim the name of Jesus to have the same heart for sinners that motivated our Saviour! Let’s look into this passage as we consider the thought, “A Passion for Souls.”

I. JESUS SAW THEIR DEPARTURE FROM GOD AND THEIR DEPRAVITY IN SIN (MATT. 9:36)

They were “scattered abroad” (verse 36).

A. Outside the fold (no company or fellowship)

B. Away from the Shepherd (no guidance or protection)

C. Away from home (no comfort or rest)

D. Apart from where they should have been (Eph. 2:12)

Christians need to understand that this world is away from God! Not everyone is in a right relationship with Him, but all need a witness! The Good Shepherd seeks sheep like these (Luke 15:3-7).

In Matthew 9:36, Jesus wasn’t referring to physical fainting; His words had a deeper meaning! He was moved with compassion because these people were lost under a burdensome load of sin.

Notice the sins of the world. We are surrounded by men and women who are capable

of doing absolutely anything you can imagine. These depraved people need to be reached by a compassionate Christian soul-winner!

II. JESUS SAW THEIR DESTINY

A. Jesus knew that apart from Him, these people would be lost. No wonder He was moved with compassion! Jesus doesn’t want anyone to be lost!

Ellen G. White says, “In the apostasy, man alienated himself from God; earth was cut off from heaven. Across the gulf that lay between, there could be no communion. But through Christ, earth is again linked with heaven. With His own merits, Christ bridged the gulf which sin had made, so that ministering angels can hold communion with man. Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with the Source of infinite power. But in vain are men’s dreams of progress, in vain all efforts for the uplifting of humanity, if they neglect the one Source of hope and help for the fallen race.”¹

B. Christians need the same vision!

C. Look around, church! There are people all around who will die without the knowledge of Jesus (Ezek. 33:8). We must share with them the vision from heaven and act accordingly.

III. JESUS SAW THEIR DESPAIR WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

A. They were without a shepherd!

B. The blessings of the church and of the saved—prayer, companionship, peace, joy, rest, satisfaction, etc.—are things the lost world knows almost nothing about.

C. Our duty as believers is to tell people about Jesus. Our hearts ought to be broken because the world doesn’t know our Saviour!

IV. JESUS SENT HIS DISCIPLES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE (MATT. 9:37, 38)

Jesus places three responsibilities on the shoulders of His people:

A. *Visualize.* See the harvest! Recognize that not everyone is saved; millions are poised on the edge of everlasting destruction! We also need to see that the harvest is ready and waiting to be gathered! We will never reap until we first enter the field (Mark 16:15).

B. *Agonize.* “Pray ye therefore” (Matt. 9:38). This is a call to be broken and burdened over the plight of the lost. There are few broken hearts over the lost in our day! We need to attack the

devil on their behalf, praying for them constantly and seeking the Lord for the souls of sinners.

C. *Evangelize.* It isn’t enough to see the need, nor is it enough to pray for the lost and be concerned for their souls. Jesus desires that each of us does the work of an evangelist (Acts 1:8). Andrew portrays the role of a burdened Christian (John 1:40-42; 6:8, 9; 12:20-22); he fulfilled the call to be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:18, 19).

Ellen G. White says, “God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry.”²

She also affirms, “The church of Christ is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. And the obligation rests upon all Christians. Everyone, to the extent of his talent and opportunity, is to fulfill the Saviour’s commission. The love of Christ, revealed to us, makes us debtors to all who know Him not. God has given us light, not for ourselves alone, but to shed upon them.”³

CONCLUSION

What are you doing? Are you having any success (Prov. 11:30)? God’s plan is that His people share the good news with a dying planet. Our job is the greatest the world has ever known (Ps. 126:5, 6).

Perhaps we need to come before the Lord and confess to Him that we haven’t witnessed as we should have. Time is short, the laborers are few, and the harvest is plentiful and ready. Are you doing your part?

Ellen G. White declares, “Those who are watching for souls, those who devote themselves most fully to labor for the salvation of the erring, are most surely working out their own salvation.”⁴

May God help you to understand what a responsibility and privilege it is to have a passion for souls and to be a disciple in His family. 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 21.

² *Ibid.*, 79.

³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

YOU HAVE A COMFORTER!

The Holy Spirit is often called Paraclete, Advocate, or Intercessor. Christians don't have to completely understand the person of the Holy Spirit; in fact, it's impossible because He doesn't tell us everything about Himself. All we need to know is that He is one of the Godhead and that He has an important mission. He is always working to make Christ known in our hearts, and He delights when we seek knowledge about why He has come (John 16:13, 14).

I. THE COMFORTER (JOHN 14:18)

Jesus stood before His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. He had gathered His chosen ones for a last moment of communion before He was translated into heaven. Jesus was their guide, teacher, joy, peace, hope, and love. Now He was physically leaving them, and they must have wondered, "Now who will guide us?"

Jesus knew what His disciples were going to face: hardships, destitution, persecution, the loss of all things, the spoiling of their earthly goods, being dragged before magistrates, even being tortured for His name. Although the disciples may not have understood Jesus's immortal words, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you," He seemed to be saying to them, "I will never let you fight your battles alone. I know what you're going to face, but I know the Father's wonderful plan for you. If you knew and understood it, your hearts would rejoice!" He promised His disciples, "I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever . . . he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16, 17).

The Holy Spirit is sent to the world, to the sinner, for one purpose: to be a convicter and convincer of sin, righteousness, and judgment. "And when he is come, he will reprove [convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8).

First, *He convicts of sin*: "Of sin, because they believe not on me" (verse 9). The Spirit reveals that all sin is based on one foundation: unbelief. This refers to an unbelief in the power and blood of Jesus Christ to save and deliver from sin.

Second, *He convicts of righteousness*: "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more" (verse 10). As

Jesus looked at His disciples, He seemed to say, "You who see me ascending to heaven bear witness to my righteousness—for God would not translate an unholy man. The Holy Spirit will say through you to the world, 'You called Him a devil, a glutton, a winebibber, an imposter. But how do you answer His being taken into glory by the Father?'"

Third, *He convicts of judgment*: "Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (verse 11). The Holy Spirit testifies to the world that there is now freedom for all men because Jesus Christ judged and destroyed Satan's power at the cross.

Many Christians picture the Holy Spirit as a sweet, innocent mist sprayed over the earth. Some believe all they have to do is simply "breathe Him in"! But the Holy Spirit was not sent to us as a passive, weak influence; He is a divine Person with a personality! He has a mind, eyes, ears, and feelings.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDER

The Holy Spirit has a way of simplifying our relationship with God the Father and Jesus. He is the One who teaches us to say, "Abba, Father." This phrase refers to a custom from Bible times regarding the adoption of a child. Until the adoption papers were signed and sealed by the adopting father, the child saw this man only as a father. He had no right to call Him *Abba*, meaning "my Father." Yet as soon as the papers were signed, registered, and sealed, the child's tutor presented him to the adopting father, and for the first time the child could say, "Abba, Father!" As the father embraced the child, the young one cried, "My father! He's not just a father anymore. He's mine!"

This is the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. He teaches you about Christ. He presents you to the Father. And He keeps reminding you, "I have sealed the papers. You are no longer an orphan; you are legally a child of God! Now you have a loving, wealthy, powerful Father. Embrace Him; call Him 'my Father.' I have come to show you how much you're loved by Him! He wouldn't have adopted you when you were wild, sinful, and rebellious unless He loved and wanted you!"

III. HIS LOVING MISSION

The Holy Spirit's mission is to comfort

Christ's bride in the absence of the Bridegroom, Christ. "He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

"Comforter" means one who soothes in times of pain and grief, eases pain and sorrow, brings relief, consoles, and encourages. By calling the Holy Spirit "the Comforter," Jesus made an infallible prediction: He predicted that His people would suffer discomfort and would be in need of comfort—that there would be lots of pain and suffering among His people in the last days.

The Holy Spirit brings comfort by reminding us that He lives in us with all the power of God inherent in His being. And that's why we can say, "Greater is He that is in me than all world powers combined!" God sent the Spirit to use all His power to keep us out of Satan's clutches—to lift our spirits, give us hope, and flood our lives with the love of our Lord (Rom. 5:3, 5).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit wants you to know what God has done for you. He seems to say, "You once said you gave your all to Jesus. You gave Him your love, and He still loves you. And now, neither will I let you go. I've been sent by Him to do a work—and I will keep doing it!"

There is no true comfort for anyone on this earth except that of the Holy Spirit. People run to counselors, psychologists, friends, priest, books, tapes, lectures, seminars, and group sessions, but how much comfort do they get? Not enough to last them the trip home! It's all in vain; the pain keeps coming back. No, the world has nothing to offer a hurting spirit: "The world knew Him not" (John 1:10).

This is why we need the Holy Spirit to live in us. He alone can lay you down at night, as in a warm bed, and fill your heart with perfect peace. He alone can truly comfort you in times of pain and sorrow. He is the one who will assure you, "This comfort is not just temporary—it is eternal!"

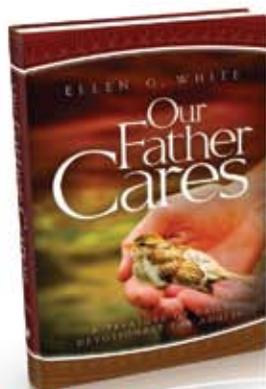
Do you want to ask for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit?



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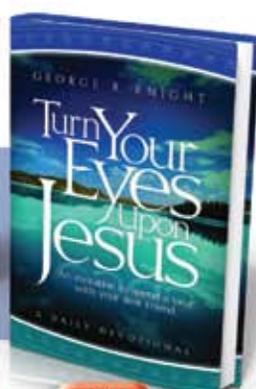
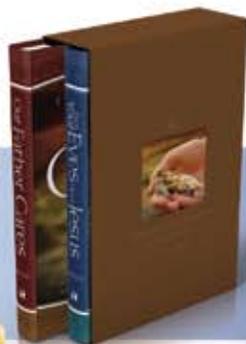
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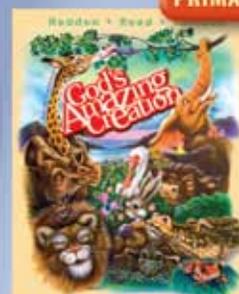
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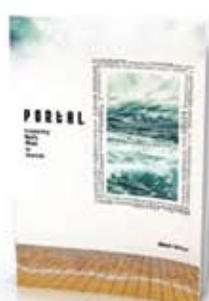


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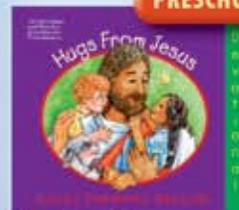
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Review & Herald

POPE FRANCIS, 666, AND TIME SETTING



With the abdication of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis speculations abound not only among various Christian denominations but also among a number of Adventist church members. When elected, pope Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio adopted a new papal name that has not been used in the past. The last time this happened was with John Paul I, and even this was an exception after more than a millennium in which no new papal names had been taken on. The new pope will be called Francis, not Francis I. Only if a later pope would choose the same name, would he be renamed Francis I. The internet is full of articles and discussions about papal names. In addition, the new pope is the first Jesuit on the papal throne. Jesuits were instrumental in launching the counter-reformation and developed both preterism and futurism. Their relation to the papacy was of such a nature that at times they were the pope's most faithful followers and elite army and at times they were suppressed. All this contributes to extensive speculations, fears, and certain expectations, including the claim that Christ's second coming must happen during the reign of the present pope.

THEORIES ABOUT POPES AND THE NUMBER 666

Theories of individuals such as F. S. Fowler, Jr. and Ralph Myers have caused discomfort among Adventists in the past. They may continue to raise a number of questions.

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., a medical doctor who publishes the journal *EndTime Issues* . . . and maintains his own ministry, called "Prophecy Research Initiative," suggested in 1999 that the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 17, on which the harlot Babylon sits, are not major political or religious-political powers from the past to the present but popes that have ruled since 1929. He proposed that the five heads that are fallen are Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul I.¹ In his opinion, the "one who is" represents John Paul II. The eighth is the papacy, but so is the beast.² "The woman (the Catholic Church), the beast (the papacy, the Holy See, the Vatican state) and the heads (the popes, leaders of the Holy See) are all next

to each other."³ But Fowler suggests also that the eighth is Satan. Protestantism supposedly represents the ten horns consisting of "orthodox churches [!], Evangelicals (including Assemblies, Pentecostals, Four-Square), Episcopal/Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Christian Reform, Jehovah's Witnesses [!], Church of the Nazarene [!]."⁴

Ralph Myers went further. He developed a specific interpretation of 666, while Pope John Paul II was still alive. For him the heads of the scarlet beast were names of popes. The number 666 is related to the seven heads of Revelation 17. Since 1798 seven papal names have been used, namely Pius, Leo, Gregory, Benedict, John, Paul, and John Paul. During the history of the church these papal names occurred as follows: Pius twelve times, Leo thirteen times, Gregory sixteen times, Benedict supposedly fourteen times,⁵ John supposedly twenty-one times,⁶ Paul six times, and John Paul twice. Myers had to make some adjustments and occasionally deviated from the official counting of the Catholic Church because at times more than one pope was reigning. The one who was not considered legitimately elected, even if he had a considerable following of cardinals, was an antipope. By adding the numbers he came up with the number 665. Therefore, he insisted that one more pope would come, the eighth, taking a completely new name so that 666 would be reached. Then the end would come. In case the new pope would choose a previously taken name, he would be an antipope that would be disposed soon. After Joseph Ratzinger chose the name Benedict and Myers' initial fulfillment of his prophecy failed, the exception provided by him kicked in. So later he wrote: "Joseph Ratzinger, AKA Benedict XVI (XV) will be deposed, and attacked by an angry mob in the Vatican courtyard and trampled to death. I have no idea when this will happen. It was in the vision."⁷

This part of his prediction has not yet been fulfilled, and its fulfillment is more or less irrelevant because Benedict XVI has retired as reigning pope. However, interestingly enough the new pope, following Benedict XVI took on a new name, and people may believe that basically Myers is

right, or they may develop their own system, similar to his. One website contains the following chart:

Head Name	Number	Count
1 Pius XII	(12)	78
2 Leo XIII	(13)	91
3 Gregory XVI	(16)	136
4 Benedict XIV	(14)	105
5 John XXI	(21)	231
6 Paul VI	(6)	21
7 John Paul II	(2)	3
Antipope	Benedict XVI	0
8 Antichrist	New Name..(1)	1
Total		666 ⁸

Other websites already claim that with Pope Francis the number 666 has been fulfilled, following the same or a similar system of counting papal names.

ASSUMPTIONS AND THEIR EVALUATION

However, such a method of calculation rests on the following assumptions that have not been proven or even discussed in a reasonable way:

First Assumption: *The sea beast and the scarlet beast are the same beast.* R. Myers' and his followers' entire argument collapses if it cannot be shown that the two beasts are identical. That the two beasts are identical may be so or not. But at this point it is enough to point out that it is a mere assumption—far from being proven—that sea beast and scarlet beast describe the same power. Other proposals by Adventist scholars exist that would not equate the two beasts.⁹ In any case, Seventh-day Adventists have maintained that the sea beast of Revelation 13:1 is the same entity as the little horn power of Daniel 7 and represents papal Rome. It has been suggested that the scarlet beast, which does not come out of the sea but out of the abyss, may represent Satan, using political powers to support end time Babylon. When the Church has not made a definite decision and Scripture is being interpreted differently within Adventism, we have to be tentative with our conclusions.

Second Assumption: *The interpretation of the number 666 depends on the understanding of the heads of the scarlet beast in Revelation 17 of which “five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (Rev 17:10), and then there is an eighth.* The number 666 (Rev 13:18) needs to be interpreted in its immediate context of Revelation 13. Connecting it with the heads of the scarlet beast is not suggested by the text of Revelation. However, it is evident that the number 666 is the number of the sea beast (Rev 15:2).¹⁰ Beale states: “The discussion so far points to understanding the number of the beast collectively rather

than as a reference to an individual Antichrist figure.”¹¹ This is what Adventists have held and still maintain. From this perspective, the excitement about an individual pope is not very productive.

Third Assumption: *The seven heads of Revelation 17 are related to popes and papal names.* The seven heads should be found in history and not only in the end time because the beast does not only exist in the last time of earth's history. Interestingly, the heads are not involved in the defeat of harlot Babylon. Those that have been in alliance with Babylon and will turn against her are the scarlet beast and its horns (Rev 17:12–14). The heads are also called mountains and kings (Rev 17:9, 10). In biblical prophecy, especially apocalyptic prophecy, mountains stand for kingdoms not for individual rulers or ecclesiastical leaders. The mountain in Daniel 2:35 represents the everlasting kingdom of God (Dan 2:44, 45). According to Jeremiah 51:25, the Neo-Babylon Empire of the 6th century B.C. was a “destroying mountain.” Likewise the kings have to be understood as kingdoms. The four kings mentioned in Daniel 7:17 are not individual rulers but kingdoms (Dan 7:23). Although in Daniel 2:37, 38 king Nebuchadnezzar is identified with the golden head, the next metal of the image is identified with a kingdom (Dan 2:39) which suggests that verses 37–39 do not refer to Nebuchadnezzar's kingship only but to the Babylonian kingdom. Nothing indicates that the heads have to be understood as individual popes or even papal names. They rather stand for empires such as Egypt, Medo-Persia, Greece, etc.¹² Even the description of 666 as a number of “man” in Revelation 13:18 does not necessarily refer to an individual. “An important parallel is Rev 21:17, . . . where ἄνθρωπου [a human person, humanity] is clearly used generically.”¹³

Fourth Assumption: *The seven papal names have to be counted from 1798 onward.* Although we find a reference to the activity of the sea beast until 1798¹⁴ and in conjunction with the healing of the deadly wound (Rev 13:3),¹⁵ there is no indication that the number 666 will be fulfilled only during the last pope and does not already point to the beast during its existence over the centuries (Rev 13:18). The time period is neither mentioned in chapter 17 nor does it seem to be implied there.

Fifth Assumption: *Although only those papal names are important that were used since 1798, nevertheless their usage has to be traced back through the centuries of church history to the first popes.* This assumption sounds strange and lacks any rationale. If one would start counting papal names from A.D. 1798, why would one include the centuries before while eliminating other papal names used in these centuries? Such a method is not derived from Scripture but seems to be superimposed on it.

Sixth Assumption: *The number of the usage of respective papal names through history has to be determined by addition (for Pius 1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+10+11+12=78 because so far there were 12 popes with the name Pius in church history¹⁶), and the numbers of all papal names have to be added again in order to reach 666.* Nothing in the biblical text warrants such an approach. It seems completely arbitrary. There is not even a biblical precedent in Scripture for using such a method. To employ it would introduce a method that is foreign to Scripture and rests on pure speculation. If one would think—against what we have already spelled out above—that the twelve times that the name Pius appears are important, why not count just the number twelve without using such a strange way of addition? And why choose addition at all? Why not decide, for instance, to multiply the numbers?

Seventh Assumption: *The completion of the number 666 points to the imminent return of Jesus. That would mean: Jesus will return during the lifetime of the present pope.* Revelation 13:18 is not directly associated with Christ's coming and not at all with date setting. Although individual church members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have set dates for the second advent, the Church itself has not accepted either hard, fixed dates or even soft (i.e. less precise) dates for Jesus' second coming. While Adventists count on Jesus to come soon and hope that this generation will be the final generation, we avoid time setting in any form. Scripture is clearly opposed to time setting with regard to Christ's second coming. (Matt 24:36, 42, 44). Some would argue that the Gospels are only opposed to calculating the day and hour but not larger periods but even this is mistaken. Blomberg states well: "Day' and 'hour' are regularly used throughout Scripture for 'time' in general, not just twenty-four-hour or sixty-minute periods (Matt 10:19). 'Day' especially reflects the Old Testament 'Day of the Lord' (cf. esp. throughout Zephaniah) as a stock phrase for the end of the age (cf. Matthew's 'day of judgment' in 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; and cf. also Rom 10:21; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 3:14; Eph 6:13). Matthew 24:42–44 will use 'day,' 'time of night' (watch), and 'hour' interchangeably. 'Day' and 'hour' appear in synonymous parallelism in v. 50. Hence, Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ's return to a generation or a year or even a few days' period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed."¹⁷ Christians/Adventists need to know that the time of the Second Coming is near and they need to watch. This is enough.

Eighth Assumption: *Antipopes should not be counted.* This last point has to do with logic and definition. Myers leaves out certain popes that are considered to be antipopes. That may be acceptable. But if antipopes are understood as popes that have not been duly elected and at-

tempted to reign when there was another pope in office, then this is not true for Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. He was not a rival to another pope but is considered a legitimate pope. Thus already here the system collapses.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The approach used by R. Myers and others is exegetically not justifiable because it introduces elements not found in the biblical text and uses a methodology that is not acceptable because it is not derived from Scripture itself.¹⁸ Even if features of his prediction, such as a pope taking on a new papal name, look like an intriguing fulfillment, they have nothing to do with the tenor and interpretation of Revelation. We do not deny that we may have to face interesting and surprising developments with the new pope. We do not deny that the Lord may come during his lifetime. What we question is that Jesus' second coming can be directly linked to Pope Francis or another pope.

When in 1948 the modern State of Israel was established, a number of Christians considered this a fulfillment of certain Old Testament prophecies. Although the events were impressive, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not seen light in such a suggestion, nor in the suggestion that Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled in modern Israel. Many of the Old Testament prophecies are conditional and, as the New Testament indicates, will only be fulfilled on a larger and universal scale. In a similar vein, surprising events should not be used to legitimize an otherwise unsubstantiated interpretation of biblical texts.

When it comes to cryptic Bible texts as the one referring to 666, which still awaits its complete fulfillment in connection with the mark of the beast, we should avoid dogmatic or fanciful claims and remain considerate, trusting the Lord that He will guide His church to greater insight when it is needed and not merely to satisfy our curiosity about future events.

While we desire and pray for the Lord to come soon and as we prepare ourselves and others for His coming, we must not in any way set a date for His Coming. This may not only be disastrous but, if not fulfilled, turn secular people away from the most important message for our time, the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14. 

Ekkehardt Mueller is deputy director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute.

Note: The use of the emblem shown on page 20 represents the coat of arms and motto of Pope Francis. It is not authorized by, endorsed by, sponsored by, or associated with the *Elder's Digest* magazine.

¹ Franklin S. Fowler Jr., *The Final Years of the Papacy: Revelation 17* (Granite Falls, WA: Christian Heritage Foundation, 1999), 9.

² Fowler, 12.

³ Fowler, 13.

⁴ Fowler, 13–15.

⁵ The Catholic Church counted fifteen up to John Paul II but Benedict X was an antipope.

⁶ The Catholic Church has twenty-three popes with the name “John.” Two were antipopes.

⁷ <http://english.sdaglobal.org/research/666beast.htm>, accessed October 25, 2009.

⁸ <http://www.666beast.net>, accessed March 15, 2013.

⁹ See Edwin Reynolds, “The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 103; Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion,” *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter* January, (2005): 2–8. Here is a more extensive and scholarly version: Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion (Part 1),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10/1 (2007): 27–50; and *ibid.*, “The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion (Part 2),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10/2 (2007): 153–176.

¹⁰ See also G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 718.

¹¹ Beale, 723.

¹² Cf. Beale, 875; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 619; and Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 317. Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 471, holds that “the seven hills point to world powers that have their place in history.”

¹³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 769.

¹⁴ See the 42 months of Rev 13:5 that should be understood according to the year-day-principle. On the year-day-principle see Gerhard Pfandl, “The Year-Day Principle,” *Reflections—A BRI Newsletter*, Number 18, April 2007, 1–3.

¹⁵ Rev 13:1–4 and Rev 13:5–8 must be understood as parallel passages.

¹⁶ According to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Pius_I, saint, Pope 140/142 to 155, Pope Pius II, Pope 1458 to 1474, Pope Pius III, Pope in 1503, Pope Pius IV, Pope 1559 to 1565, Pope Pius V, saint, Pope 1566 to 1572, Pope Pius VI, Pope 1775 to 1799, Pope Pius VII, Pope 1800 to 1823, Pope Pius VIII, Pope 1829 to 1830, Pope Pius IX, Pope 1846 to 1878, Pope Pius X, saint, Pope 1903 to 1914, Pope Pius XI, Pope 1922 to 1939, Pope Pius XII, Pope 1939 to 1958 (accessed March 14, 2013).

¹⁷ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 365.

¹⁸ Adventists maintain the Reformation principles of *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone) and *scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Scripture is its own interpreter) without falling into proof-texting that does not consider the context and analyze carefully the text/passage under investigation. Further, see Frank Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Understanding Scripture* (ed. George W. Reid; Biblical Research Institute Studies 1; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 27–46 and, in the same volume, Ekkehardt Müller, “Guidelines for the Interpretation of Scripture,” 111–134.

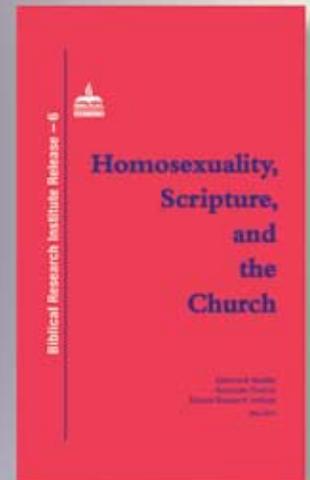


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The businessman from Carnegie stood in front of the town council, which was expected to vote down granting the Adventists an occupancy permit to move into a building on Main Street in his town. “We can’t afford not to have someone like this in our community!” he emphatically explains to the members of the council. A local bank manager moves to the podium. She adds, “I work very closely with the Adventists, and they are a wonderful group. They need your support. Please give them their occupancy permit. This town needs them.”

Adventists who responded to a devastating flood in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, USA, had gained the confidence of this hurricane-battered town. What’s the story behind the council chamber story?

On September 17, 2004, Hurricane Ivan caused a devastating flood in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area. The Adventist Church, through Adventist Community Services (ACS), was called in to help the people in this region rebuild their lives. The ACS team worked with the community to develop a system of local volunteers from various organizations as well as from churches of different denominations to clean up and restore the damaged homes, businesses, and churches in the region.

After three months, ACS began to make plans to leave the area, in accordance with usual disaster response policy. Local residents pleaded that ACS remain in the region for the well-being of its communities. The challenge was to find a building in which ACS could settle for a long-term presence. At last, Adventist Church leaders found an appropriate building in Carnegie, a suburb of Pittsburgh. But the local town council members were indicating that they would vote “No” to the proposal that Adventists occupy this building. The council scheduled a hearing and a vote on this matter. An unusually large crowd from the community showed up at the hearing.

The members of the council listened as, one-by-one, community leaders and residents testified of the difference that this

group of Adventists had made in their lives during their time of extreme need. “Adventist Community Services came through and helped my children and me to rebuild our lives. We had nothing, and they helped us with everything.” “We are standing up thanks to these men and women who gave so unselfishly of themselves to help their brethren. . . .” At the end of the three-and-one-half-hour-meeting the council voted unanimously to grant the Adventists their occupancy permit to settle into Carnegie’s Main Street.

Why did Adventist Community Services receive such a positive reaction from the community of Carnegie? They were living Farming Commandment #8: “*Thou shalt earn “Social Capital.”*”

What is Social Capital? “Social capital consists of positive, productive relationships which are just as valuable as money in the bank.”³

Money capital grows when you make investments in your money account. Your social capital grows when you make investments in relationships around you. Indeed, there were many investments in relationships as ACS teams demonstrated the love of Jesus when they mingled with and served the devastated community in Carnegie. ACS steadily gained social capital, preparing the way for God’s Church to have an on-going presence in the community so that it could build up His Kingdom there.

A church and a community are rich when they have a network of positive relationships among themselves—even if they are materially poor. Together, they can do much for the betterment of their community through their assets of creativity, energy, and caring for each other. As social capital grows, the community benefits the church, and the church benefits the community (the community sees the church as valuable to them).

Farmers in many countries have an old tradition of helping each other to harvest their crops, build their barns, etc. This

united cooperation among them is a demonstration of social capital in action, which helps each family to conserve their strength and get the work done more efficiently and quickly than they could ever do alone.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* urges all church members to “be recognized as outstanding citizens in . . . working for the common good of all.” And to “support by our service and our means, as far as possible and consistent, all proper efforts for social order and betterment.” Adventists are expected to “stand apart from all political and social strife” and “maintain an uncompromising stand for justice and right in civic affairs, along with strict adherence to our religious convictions.”⁴

When we build up social capital in our communities we are helping to fulfill the Adventist mission. The Adventist Community Services organization in each church is the usual organizational unit through which this goal is accomplished.

Since ACS usually operates on limited financial resources, and is a volunteer group, social capital is a very helpful asset. The Adventist group in Carnegie made an impact because they didn’t do their compassionate work by themselves. They partnered with other churches and organizations for the common good of the community. Financial and supportive human resources became available which they wouldn’t have had otherwise to reach their goals.

As a church leader, you can go a long way to build your church’s social capital by representing your church at civic organizations, ministerial associations, and town councils and boards. This helps you with networking and with planting Gospel seeds. From these relationships you may discover opportunities to partner with some of them and enable your church to make a greater impact in your community.

You may wonder how much social capital you really have. James Krile suggests making a “social capital map.” Make a chart with four columns. Write the following at the top of the columns: “Organizations/Individuals” (first column); “Strength of Tie” (second column); “Resources” (third column); and “Next Steps” (fourth column).⁵

List the organizations/individuals with which your church has a relationship in column one. In the second column, list whether the tie is strong or weak between you and that organization. (Strong or weak ties are based on the degree of trust, mutual benefit from the relationship, and how long-lasting the relationship has been.) In the third column list what resources that organization has to offer, and in column four list your next steps. As you analyze your list you will now have a better idea of the level of your social capital “account.”

While organizations that have strong relationships with you are easier to ask for resources, community projects that have very large goals may create a need to partner with organizations with whom you have weak as well as strong relationships.

Dear church leader, God calls you and your church to invest in relationships inside *and* outside your church. The group in Carnegie did that. When they needed community support to get their occupancy permit for their building, the community was with them. Why? Because the church was *with* the community, the community was *with* the church. Great things can happen

when your church has social capital. Such social capital opens the way for your church to share more of Jesus and His Gospel in your community.

Is your church rich in social capital? If you are “poor,” how will you change that?

ED

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¹ The 10 Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus’ ministry method and pray for...; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a Social Action Leadership Team (SALT); (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them; (8) Thou shalt earn “Social Capital;” (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the resources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate.... AND an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to Reap where thou hast farmed and keep what thou doest reap (disciple –preserve the harvest)!

² So far, these follow-up articles have appeared in *Elder’s Digest*: (1) “Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand...” (Oct.-Dec. 2011); (2) “Our Community Does Not Know Us...” (Jan.-March 2012); (3) “Help, Lord! I’ve Been Asked to Plant a Church!” (July-Sept. 2012); (4) “As I Walked Around and Looked Carefully...” (Jan.-March 2013); and “You’re the First Church That Ever Asked...” (July-Sept. 2013). To access these articles online, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi. Click on “Articles & Media.” To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on “Resources” and “IICM Community Services & Urban Ministry Certification Program Curriculum.” For a direct link, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acs_iicm.

³ International Institute of Christian Ministries (IICM) Community Services & Urban Ministry Certification Program, CS 02 “Community Assessment and Social Capital,” by Monte Sahlin. This article incorporates some of the main points from this CS 02 module.

⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Chapter 12, “Standards of Christian Living.”

⁵ James Krile, *The Community Leadership Handbook*, (Fieldstone Alliance, 2006), pp. 123-129.

The next article in this series will discuss the ninth “Farming Commandment.”



OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

FOUR FACTS ABOUT THE FUTURE – Part 1 of 2

I - THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

"God will not permit Satan to exercise his power in human history forever [The] glorious destiny for man will be achieved only by the personal, visible, glorious return of Christ The second coming of Christ is thus both the Blessed Hope of the Church and the hope of human history."—George Eldon Ladd

1. The Reality of Christ's Return

- (1) His first coming accomplished man's salvation. His second coming secures it (Heb. 9:28).
- (2) Its importance is reflected in its frequent mention in Scripture—2,500 references to the Second Coming in the Bible. In the New Testament it is mentioned 318 times in its 250 chapters.

2. The Certainty of Christ's Return

- (1) An Old Testament promise (Ps. 50:3-6; cf. Jude 14; Hab. 3:3-13).
- (2) A New Testament promise (Titus 2:11-13).
- (3) Jesus' own promise (John 14:1-3).
 - (a) It promises a new relationship: *"I will receive you unto myself"*
 - (b) It promises a happy reunion: *"there you may be also"*
 - (c) It promises a secure residence: *"I go to prepare a place for you"*

3. The Manner of Christ's Return

- (1) He will come literally (Acts 1:9-11).
- (2) He will come personally (1 John 2:28).
- (3) He will come visibly (Rev. 1:7; cf. Luke 24:36-45, 50-51).

- (4) He will come audibly (Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16).
- (5) He will come gloriously (Luke 9:25. cf. Rev. 5:11; Heb. 12:22).
- (6) He will come brilliantly (Matt. 24:27; Rev. 6:14-17; 2 Pet. 3:10).
- (7) He will come suddenly (Luke 21:35; 1 Thess. 5:2).

4. The Purpose of Christ's Return (Rev. 22:12).

- (1) It will be a time of separation (Matt. 23: 32-34, 41).
- (2) It brings the promise of life after death for the saved (1 Thess. 4:16).
- (3) It will promise eternal reunion for the saved (1 Thess. 4:17).
- (4) It will confer immortality—an unending existence (1 Cor. 15:52-54).
- (5) It will mean an end to sin, death, and suffering (Rev. 21:1-4).

5. The Preparation for Christ's Return

- (1) To be patient (James 5:7, 8).
- (2) To live temperately (Luke 21:34-36).
- (3) To endure difficulties (Matt. 24:13; cf. Luke 18:1).
- (4) To warn others of His coming (Matt. 24:14; Jude 23).
- (5) To rejoice at the fulfillment of the prophetic Word (Luke 21:28).

"I ardently hope that, amidst these internal dissensions on the earth, Jesus Christ will hasten the day of His coming."—Martin Luther

"We must hunger after Christ till the dawning of that great day."—John Calvin

"We know that He will return, and that with expedition."—John Knox

II - THE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S RETURN

"The signs that show His coming near are fast fulfilling, year by year."—F. E. Belden

1. Jesus promised signs of the nearness of His return (Luke 21:25 .cf. Mt. 24:3).

- (1) We are counseled to understand these signs (Matt. 16:3).
- (2) We cannot pinpoint the exact time (Matt. 24:36 cf. Matt. 24:33).
- (3) We know that God gives advanced warnings to His people (Matt. 24:37-39; cf. Heb. 12:18-29).

2. Jesus announced international events would announce His coming (Matt. 24:6, 7).

- (1) This is the only generation in history which has seen world wars.
- (2) Simultaneously has come a population explosion and crop crisis resulting famines in over-populated areas.
- (3) Pestilences have increased in the plant and animal world, and among mankind.
- (4) Multiplying earthquakes suggest the world is stumbling towards its fall
- (5) The reaction of those who analyze world conditions (Luke 21:25; cf. Rev. 11:18).

3. Jesus forecasted signs in the economic world

- (1) The exploitation of the working classes (James 5:4).
- (2) The impermanence and devaluation of wealth (James 1:5-3 cf. Isa. 2:2-7).
- (3) What follows this distress and bewilderment? (Luke 21:27).

4. Jesus prophesied specific conditions in the religious world

Negatively:

- (1) The absence of true faith (Luke 18:8).
- (2) Profession rather than a possession of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5).
- (3) Apostasy from the Christian faith (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).
- (4) Many false religious teachers and teachings (Matt. 24:4, 5, 24).
- (5) The spread of spiritism (Rev. 16:13, 14; 13:13, 14).
- (6) Eschatological ridicule (2 Pet. 3:3-7).

Positively:

- (1) Increase of Bible knowledge among the faithful (Dan. 12:4, 10).
- (2) Worldwide proclamation of the gospel (Matt. 24:14).
- (3) Revival in the studies of Daniel and Revelation (Dan. 12:3, 4; Rev. 14:6-12).

5. Jesus encouraged those who diligently seek to understand the meaning of these signs (Luke 12:37).

- (1) God's invitation to those who witness these signs (Luke 21:28-31).
 - (2) God will protect His people (Mark 13:27).
- Note:* The successive fulfillment of these signs impose the need for constant preparedness and serve to confirm our confidence in events is yet unfulfilled. eg. Jesus (John 14:1-3).

"The end is very near. We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise."—Ellen G. White (8T, 28)

IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING WELL >PART 1

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 he should seek for perfection in speech. He 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 man shall belittle or degrade the heavenly current that flows through him to the world.

Soft, Musical Cadence—The one who gives Bible readings in the congregation or in the family should be able to read with a soft, musical cadence which will charm the hearers.

A Great Power—Let those who labor in word and doctrine strive to perfect themselves in the use of language. The voice is a great power, and yet many have not trained their voices in such a way that they may be used to their highest capacity.

Clear Understanding for Everyone—He who has bestowed upon us all the gifts that enable us to be workers together with God, expects His servants to cultivate their voices so that they can speak and sing in a way that all can understand.

Imperfect Utterance, a Dishonor to God—Let all make the most of the talent of speech. God calls for a higher, more perfect ministry. He is dishonored by the imperfect utterance of the one who by painstaking effort could become an acceptable mouthpiece for Him. The truth is too often marred by the channel through which it passes.

The Lord calls upon all who are connected with His service to give attention to the cultivation of the voice, that they may utter in an acceptable manner the great and solemn truths He has entrusted to them. Let none mar the truth by defective utterance. Let not those who have neglected to cultivate the



talent of speech suppose that they are qualified to minister, for they have yet to obtain the power to communicate.

Defective Voices of Ministers—Ministers of the gospel should know how to speak with power and expression, making the words of eternal life so expressive and impressive that the hearers cannot but feel their weight. I am pained as I hear the defective voices of many of our ministers. Such ministers rob God of the glory He might have if they had trained themselves to speak the word with power.

No man should regard himself as qualified to enter the ministry until by persevering effort he has overcome every defect in his utterance. If he attempts to speak to the people without knowing how to use the talent of speech, half his influence is lost, for he has little power to hold the attention of a congregation.

Abuse of the Gift of Speech—The gift of speech has been greatly abused and widely perverted from its intended purpose; but let those who claim to be children of the heavenly King awake to their responsibility, and make the most of this talent. Let no one say, "It is of no use for me to try to pray; for others do not hear me." Rather let him say, "I will make earnest effort to overcome this God-dishonoring habit of speaking in a low, indistinct tone. I will put myself under discipline until my voice shall be audible even to those who are dull of hearing." ED

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 173-177, by Ellen G. White.

CHEMICAL USE, ABUSE, AND DEPENDENCY

**THE CHURCH
CREATED A
“STOP-SMOKING
PROGRAM” IN
THE EARLY 1960’S
WHICH HAS HAD
A WORLDWIDE
OUTREACH AND
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QUIT.**



The Seventh-day Adventist Church, officially organized in 1863, early in its history addressed the use of beverage alcohol and tobacco. The Church condemned the use of both as destructive to life, family, and spirituality. She adopted, in practice, a definition of temperance which urged “total abstinence from that which is injurious, and the careful and judicious use of that which is good.”

The position of the Church with respect to the use of alcohol and tobacco has not changed. In recent decades the Church has actively promoted anti-alcohol and anti-drug education within the Church, and united with other agencies to educate the wider community in the prevention of alcoholism and drug dependency. The Church created a “Stop-smoking Program” in the early 1960’s which has had a worldwide outreach and helped tens of thousands of smokers to quit. Originally known as the “Five-Day Plan” to stop smoking, it may well be the most successful of all cessation programs.

The creation of hundreds of new drugs in laboratories, and the rediscovery and popularization of age-old natural chemicals, such as marijuana and cocaine, have now gravely complicated a once comparatively simple problem and pose an ever-increasing challenge to both the Church and society. In a society which tolerates and even promotes drug use, addiction is a growing menace.

Redoubling its efforts in the field of the prevention of dependency, the Church is developing new curricula for its schools and support programs to assist youth to remain abstinent.

The Church is also seeking to be an influential voice in calling the attention of the media, public officials, and legislators to the damage society is suffering through continued promotion and distribution of alcohol and tobacco.

The church continues to believe that Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 6:19,20 is applicable today, that “Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Ghost” and we “should glorify God” in our bodies. We belong to God, we are witnesses to His Grace. We must endeavor to be at our best, physically and mentally, in order that we may enjoy His fellowship and glorify His name. ED

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

CHILD DEDICATION:

A SUGGESTED CEREMONY

Invite parents and children to come to the platform and have them face the congregation. After introducing each parent and child, the minister or elder reads the text under each of the following headings.

CHARGE TO THE PARENTS

Let us hear the Word of the Lord as it comes to us in Deuteronomy 6:6, 7: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (NIV).

It is the command of God that we should diligently seek to raise our children in such a way as to lead them to trust Christ as Savior and serve Him as Lord. In response to this command, these parents bring their children today to present them to the Lord and dedicate themselves to this task.

The precedent for child dedication may be found in Scripture, as in the presentation of Samuel to God by Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:28 and the presentation of Jesus to God by Joseph and Mary in Luke 2:22. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul reminded Timothy "how from infancy [he had] known the Holy Scriptures" (NIV). Jesus considered children to be infinitely precious, and in Mark 10:14 (NIV) He said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

The purpose of child dedication is really to be found in the purpose of the parents. Rightly understood, the ceremony is one of parental dedication. The parents are pledging themselves to obey the command of Paul, who, in Ephesians 6:4 (NIV), tells parents to "bring them [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

COVENANT OF THE PARENTS

Minister/elder: If it is your intention as parents to present your children to the Lord today, and pledge to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord," then please



answer "We do" to each of the following promises:

Promise #1: Do you here this day recognize your children as a gift from God and give heartfelt thanks for God's blessing?

Answer: We do.

Promise #2: Do you here this day dedicate your children to the Lord who gave them to you?

Answer: We do.

Promise #3: Do you here this day pledge as parents that you will bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

Answer: We do.

Promise #4: Do you here this day promise to give your children every possible benefit of home, of school, and of church?

Answer: We do.

Promise #5: Do you here this day pledge to pray for God to prosper and bless your children as they grow and develop?

Answer: We do.

Promise #6: Do you here this day promise to set a Christian example before your children as they grow up?

Answer: We do.

Promise #7: Do you here this day pledge to do all you can to direct your children toward a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior?

Answer: We do.

COMMITMENT OF THE CONGREGATION

Congregation, will you please stand as a demonstration of your commitment to support these families and join me in prayer for them?

"Father of all life, we thank you for the lives now dedicated to your love and care. We pray that your mercies will follow these children all the days of their lives. Bless these parents and help them to remain faithful to the commitments and promises made this day to you on behalf of their children as witnessed by this congregation. Help each of us in this congregation to fulfill our responsibility."



General Conference Ministerial Association

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP:

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

Christian discipleship is our response to the call of God, and it focuses on actively following in the footsteps of Jesus. As Christian disciples, we are not passive spectators but energetic participants in God's activity in the world. Because of what God has done for us, we offer our lives back to God. We order our lives in ways that embody Christ's footprint in our families, workplaces, communities, and the world.

According to Scripture, being a Christian disciple involves personal growth, which is demonstrated in the following ways.

PUTTING JESUS FIRST IN ALL THINGS (MARK 8:34-38)

Christ's disciples need to be set apart from the world. Our focus should be on our Lord and pleasing Him in everything. We must put off self-centeredness and put on Christ-centeredness.

Jesus was quite explicit about the cost of following Him. Discipleship requires a life that is fully committed: "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Sacrifice is expected: "Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'" (Matt. 16:24).

FOLLOWING JESUS' TEACHINGS (JOHN 8:31, 32)

We must be obedient children and doers of the Word. Obedience is the supreme test of faith in God (1 Sam. 28:18), and Jesus is the perfect example of obedience because He lived a life of complete submission to the Father even to the point of death (Phil. 3:6-8).

FRUITFULNESS (JOHN 15:5-8)

Our job is to abide in Christ; if we do, the Holy Spirit will produce His fruits in us. As we become more obedient to the Lord and learn to walk in His ways, our lives will change. The biggest change will take place in our hearts, as evidenced through new conduct in thoughts, words, and actions. The change we seek comes from the inside out, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It isn't something we can accomplish on our own.

LOVE FOR OTHER DISCIPLES (JOHN 13:34, 35)

John tells us that our love for other believers proves that we are members of God's family (1 John 3:10). Love is defined and discussed in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. These verses show us that love is not an emotion; it is action. We must be doing something and be involved in the process. Furthermore, we are told to think more highly of others than of ourselves and to look out for their interests (Phil. 2:3-4). Verse 5 really sums up what we are to do when it comes to everything in life: "Our attitude should be the same as that

of Christ Jesus." He is our perfect example for everything we are to do in our Christian walk.

EVANGELISM: MAKING DISCIPLES OF OTHERS (MATT. 28:18-20)

We are to share our faith and tell nonbelievers about His salvation and the wonderful changes Jesus Christ has made in our lives. No matter what our maturity level in the Christian life, we all have something to offer. Too often, we convince ourselves that we don't really know enough or haven't been a Christian long enough to make a difference. Yet, some of the most enthusiastic representatives of Christ are new believers who have just discovered the awesome love of God. They may not know many Bible verses or be familiar with the "accepted" way of saying things, but they have experienced the love of the living God, and that is exactly what we are to share.

MODELING

The true disciple of Jesus becomes a role model to new believers. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." How would you respond if your pastor stood up on Sabbath morning and said, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ"? Would that seem arrogant and out of place? During my years as a pastor, I don't think I ever said, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ," but I tried to live out this reality. I sought to embody what I preached, to be a living example of the truth, and to help others do the same.

Making disciples is more than a transfer of biblical knowledge; it is a commitment to spiritual parenting. It is investing our lives in others and helping them to be like Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Biblically speaking, a disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who has placed his or her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:1-12) and been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit (3:3). This disciple "belongs to Christ" and is daily being transformed into Christ's likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Also, a true disciple is someone who has counted the cost of following the Lord and has totally committed his or her life to Jesus. He or she accepts the call to sacrifice and follows wherever the Lord leads. This disciple adheres completely to the teachings of Jesus, makes Christ the number-one priority and lives accordingly, and is actively involved in making other disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20).



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