

Elder's Digest

A Quarterly Resource for Local Church Elders

Number Eight

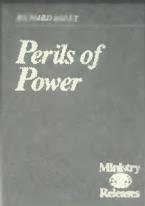
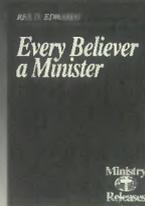
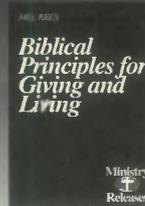
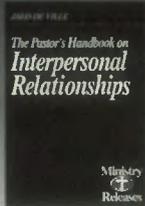
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Matt.
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SMALL GROUPS

"For where two or three
are gathered together in
my name, there am I in
the midst of them."





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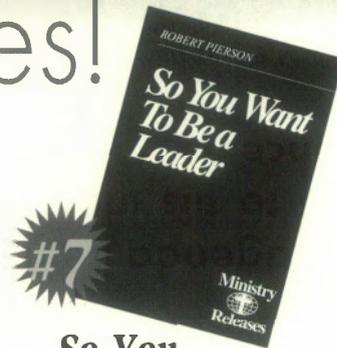
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Elder's Digest

NUMBER EIGHT

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Special Section
Small Groups



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Building disciples through the means of small groups is something very central to the mission of the church.



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The work of an elder is not just for those who are old, just for men, or just for super saintly types.

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Small Groups Can Make the Difference in Your Congregation

Joel Sarli



The church is God's agent of reconciliation in our world but this ideal can be reached only when we bring people together in true relationship with God and with each other. A small group is one of the best vehicles for enabling people to be what God intends them to be. The church grows when people are sharing Christ's life together, meeting each other's needs, and reaching out in love to the world. Throughout the ages God keeps drawing His people together so they can experience His presence, receive His gifts, reach out to others and reaffirm their commitments.

Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, puts it this way: "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25, RSV).

In this issue of the *Elder's Digest* the focus is on small groups. They can be a very helpful and effective tool in bringing a spiritually healthy environment in a variety of areas of church life, like nurture and outreach.

Our intent is to help, you, the reader, understand that the concept of small groups is rooted firmly in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, and to encourage you to help motivate your congregation to develop a strategy for integrating small groups into the total mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Whether the small group is a Sabbath School class or other fellowship group, it can be instrumental in promoting spiritual growth and encouraging dedication to our Lord Jesus Christ and His church on earth. We pray that God may grant His people the joy of participating in a dynamic small group.

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God's Gifts

Paul G. Smith

To our inquisitive minds come such questions as, Who is God? What is God? Why is God? In this article we will discover that He is Creator, Lover, Owner, and that it will take us eternity to comprehend and appreciate Him fully. But perhaps most of all, God is Giver.

God is the universe's greatest Giver. He does not restrict to Himself what He owns. God gives! He who existed before all things, created and owns all things, also shares all things.

Just suppose God had decided to create no one to share His bounties. He had the power to limit to Himself the universe with its unbelievable treasures. But He didn't. God demonstrates in His own life the attributes He seeks to develop in man.

God, the Creator-Giver, also finds great pleasure in receiving. What do you have to give to Him who literally owns all things? Through the power of choice, you have your love and allegiance. In the beginning God presented man with something of Himself—life and love. Today God seeks love that He may offer men life.

Let us consider the greatest of all of God's gifts. To Eden and its bounties God periodically added His own presence. A personal relationship is what God has always sought to share with man. Too often man has limited his sharing to possessions, thereby losing out on the personal relationship. Sharing one's self is always the grandest gift anyone can give. The Godhead shared themselves from the beginning—the prime example of stewardship in its highest form. When a person receives God as the supreme gift, he returns self to God in gratitude.

GIFT AT BETHLEHEM

The greatest of all God's gifts was Himself. Through the shepherds, the angel of the Lord announced to the world the arrival of the majestic present from God. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11, KJV). He came, not wrapped in tinsel

and sparkle to catch the attention of the receivers, but in the swaddling clothes of a newborn baby. It seems impossible to believe God could care so much for man. It demonstrates in an irrefutable manner the depth of God's love.

God the Son became a baby. He permitted Himself to be a child under the influence of earthly parents, progressing through the various stages of youth. Later, when His disciples childishly contended among themselves, Jesus urged them to be converted, to "turn around," begin anew, and become children of God. Jesus had literally become a child in order to redeem mankind. "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3, KJV).

God humbled Himself when He came to earth. He took our humanity that we might share His divinity. "In stooping to take upon Himself humanity, Christ revealed a character the opposite of the character of Satan. . . . In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25). How can man possibly appreciate the extent of God's gift?

Often He had to remind man of the need to humble himself. "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4, KJV). He could speak from experience on the subject of childlike humility. It is a terribly hard struggle to give up your own will and your own way. Pride, selfishness, and ambition must vanish. Your will must be swallowed up in that of Christ. Jesus learned such lessons as a little child. He wants to help each of us to surrender ourselves to Him and follow His example.

GIFT AT THE CROSS

Consider the kind of love required to motivate one to die for a good person. How many would be willing to do so? The gift of God at the cross was such a gift and more. Not only did Jesus die for good men, He died for evil men.

“Now it is an extraordinary thing for one to give his life even for an upright man, though perhaps for a noble and lovable and generous benefactor someone might even dare to die. But God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, died for us” (Romans 5:7, 8, Amplified).

Can you think of anyone you would willingly die for? Perhaps an extremely close loved one. Now consider someone who has slandered your name, has cursed, lied, cheated, stolen, and even refused to talk to you for years. Would you accept death in order that such a person might live? Not only the people of the world, but many people in the church have treated Jesus in exactly that manner. Why then did He choose to die? Why does He continue to care? What makes the difference between Him and us?

GOD CALLS IT LOVE

What does our love stimulate us to do for Him? Today, God is simply asking us to make a gift of ourselves to Him. He is not asking us to die to anything except sin. He urges us to give up sin, and be living examples of Christlike love.

GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

The most intimate relationship possible between God and man is for Him to dwell within. Through the Holy Spirit, God promised you would “know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17, KJV).

Not only did God give Jesus that we might escape death, but now He gives the Holy Spirit to help us learn how to live. “The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God, and to open to the convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52).

Consider the effect the Spirit has upon those who allow His holy presence within them. Bitter opponents of the church become its champions, sinners unite with believers to herald the gospel, former Adventists become reconverted, new converts flock to the church, hearts yield to the power of the divine message, and it spreads to the entire world.

The influence of the Holy Spirit will affect both you and those who observe your life. “Every Christian saw in his brother a revelation of divine love and benevolence. . . . The ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ’s character, and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom” (*Ibid.*, p. 48).

Still another aspect of the Holy Spirit’s presence is

one that those whom He seeks to dwell within rarely appreciate. “Having brought conviction of sin, and presented before the mind the standard of righteousness, the Holy Spirit withdraws the affections from the things of this earth, and fills the soul with a desire for holiness” (*Ibid.*, pp. 52, 53).

GIFT OF FAITH

Faith, like all other gifts from God, we must accept and then use if it is to accomplish the purpose for which God bestows it. It requires faith to believe and accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our behalf, and then make it a reality in the life. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4, KJV).

We must be careful to understand what faith is. “Faith and feeling are as distinct as the east is from the west. Faith is not dependent on feeling. We must earnestly cry to God in faith, feeling or no feeling, and then live our prayers. Our assurance and evidence is God’s word, and after we have asked we must believe without doubting” (Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1073).

It enables us to go into the unknown with confidence and assurance. If we knew exactly how God was going to help us in a particular situation, we probably would not need faith. Faith is going from the known into the unknown with God. Presumption is venturing from the known into the unknown by yourself. Self-trust, or presumption, is Satan’s counterfeit of faith.

The gift of faith calls us out of ourselves and makes us depend on God. He endeavors to develop within us the trust which we need to forsake everything else and follow Him. He came to the world not only to atone for our sins, but to instill faith within us.

Faith permits God to work His miracles in our lives, to continually be advancing with Him. God led Abraham to an unknown country. The patriarch had to take those first steps into the unknown by faith. Occasionally he faltered, but he never stopped moving with God. God attempts to keep us pressing forward as fast as our faith will take us.

GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

There is a difference between life and existence. Adam and Eve had life before the entrance of sin. Afterward, man began an existence which still continues. “God is the fountain of life, and we can have life only as we are in communion with Him. Separated from God, existence may be ours for a

little time, but we do not possess life" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 61). One who is living apart from Christ is spiritually dead and only physically alive.

Through Christ and the Holy Spirit we learn how to live. "Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 388).

God, who is eternal, gave us eternity when He bestowed Himself. When we even remotely appreciate the gift of eternal life, the course of our present daily existence will change remarkably. The joys of Jesus will flood us as we link up with His divinity. Unending life will not be long enough to praise God for His indescribable gifts.

GRATITUDE

As constant recipients of God's gifts, our gratitude should flow back to Him in a constant stream. It is not possible to fully appreciate what He has done for us, but the gifts of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are enough to cause our grateful praise to continually ascend. The tide of God's love is always cascading into our lives. How much are you responding to it?

Cheerfulness, gratitude, and unselfishness have a life giving effect upon the body and the mind. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine" (Proverbs 17:22, KJV).

Gratitude must be cultivated. Our expressions of love to God should be as systematic as His acts of charity to us. "He watches for some return of gratitude from us, as the mother watches for the smile of recognition from her beloved child" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 84).

How are we to show our thankfulness to God? He says we do it by faithfulness in tithes and offerings, giving money to aid the suffering, helping the poor, and by self-sacrificing efforts to tell others of Him. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 75; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 50, 132; *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 18, 19)

Jesus appreciated the tokens of thanks bestowed on Him during His earthly ministry. From the expensive ointment given by Mary, to the flower presented by a little child, He accepted them as gifts of love which expressed pure affection, and as "giving thanks to the Father, Who has qualified and made us fit to share the portion which is the inheritance of the saints (God's holy people) in the Light" (Colossians 1:12, Amplified). A heart opened in gratitude to God yields to Him the entire, unreserved, and unrestricted life for eternity.

Open your life to God. Enter into the full joy of a wise steward managing God's goods. **E**

Paul G. Smith writes from Cleburne, Texas. His main concern in writing is to help readers understand the blessings of a life totally consecrated to God.

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Little Things That Make the Church Attractive

David W. Miller

It doesn't always take major changes to make a church attractive to guests. A few small changes can make a big difference. Consider the following:

ROOM TEMPERATURE

Better a little too cool than a little too warm.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon walked around his building one snowy night in disguise throwing rocks through the windows in his church to allow fresh, cool air inside. Even he could not keep people awake in a warm and stuffy auditorium. Johnny Carson reportedly kept his studio at 66 degrees so the audience would not fall asleep. Theaters are all cool. People who don't like it that way bring an extra sweater. A church, too, is more conducive to attentive worship when it is slightly cool.

LIGHTING

Better a little too bright than a little too dim.

A bright room sets a bright atmosphere. A guest speaker at my former church told me my preaching would be twice as effective if I painted the ceiling and added more lighting. After making the changes, what a difference! The room was alive with expectation. Always make it brighter where you want the people's attention—in our case, the platform.

SOUND

Better a little too loud than a little too soft.

Again, we learn from public theaters. They keep it loud enough for even the elderly. Watch out for "dead spots" in the auditorium. It's a mistake to skimp on the sound system when building or remodeling. A quality sound system helps attract quality musicians (and a poor system drives them away).

SEATING

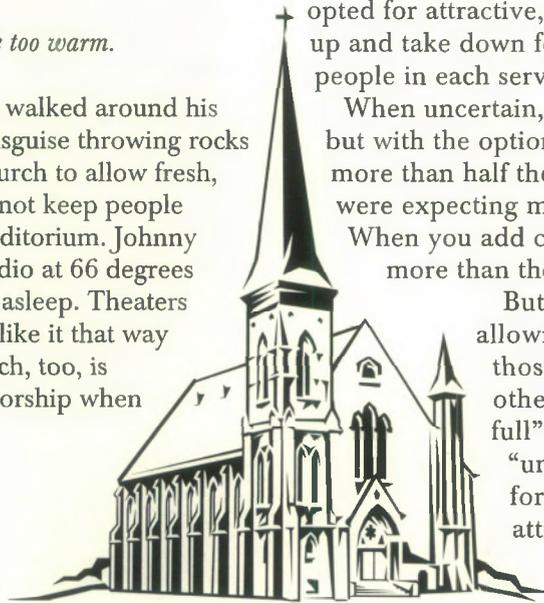
Better a little too full than a little too empty.

Fit the seating for the size of the crowd. We opted for attractive, padded chairs, which we set up and take down for the anticipated number of people in each service.

When uncertain, we set up with too few seats, but with the option to add chairs. A room with more than half the chairs empty says, "They were expecting more, and only a few came."

When you add chairs, it says, "They have more than they were expecting!"

But be careful. Full means allowing for some space between those who don't know each other—85 percent is "comfortably full" but 95 percent full is "uncomfortably full." (Uncomfortably full is still more attractive to visitors than only 50 percent full.)



STYLE

Better a little too contemporary than a little too traditional.

Teach the people to "gather to celebrate; be alone to meditate." Do what the Bible says and "sing a new song" to the Lord. Relate more to today's generation than to those of the past. What must the unchurched wonder when we sing of raising our Ebenezers? We started a "Good Old-Fashioned Gospel Hour" on Sunday nights for those who wish to use hymnals and sing the great old hymns.

SERMON LENGTH

Better a little too short than a little too long.

Have them leave wishing there were more. More illustrations and application make any sermon seem

shorter. Yes, it does take more preparation to deliver a shorter sermon! Less than twenty minutes may not allow time to develop the topic, text, and application, but only exceptional communicators can hold an audience for over thirty-five minutes.

GOAL

Better a little too healing than a little too cutting.

Most auditoriums contain more broken hearts than hard hearts. One wise old pastor told me his ministry began its rapid growth the day he stopped his "Get On the Ball for Jesus" sermons and started preaching "Jesus Can Put Your Life Back Together Again" sermons.

ATMOSPHERE

Better a little too informal than a little too formal.

Informal means warm and relaxed, not sloppy and poorly planned. Aim for excellence without being stuffy.

Platform dress makes a loud statement. In our case, the dress is casual contemporary.

We do things differently each week. We interview real people in ministry. We use a short drama presentation as either appetizer or dessert to the message. We laugh a lot!

TREATMENT OF GUESTS

Better a little too uninvolved than too threatened.

Welcome guests but don't embarrass them. Many will prefer to remain anonymous. Expect the guests to "spectate" and the members to participate.

Early in the service we give a general welcome to guests and invite them to relax, enjoy the service, and get involved only as much as they feel comfortable. "You may not know the songs, but sit back and enjoy listening to the congregation sing."

We never ask for money from the platform. We teach biblical principles on giving in the membership classes and small groups. We communicate critical financial needs by letter or at the close of a service after dismissing the guests early.

We always give guests permission not to give when taking the offering. Instead we offer them a gift: a cassette tape on love for our first-timers, a paperback NIV Bible for our second-time guests. **E**

David W. Miller writes from the Church at Rocky Peak, Chatsworth, California.

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Fulfilling Your Mission

Alfonso Valenzuela

When we accept Jesus as our Lord, we receive so many things that our life is completely turned around. The gifts of the Spirit are among the things that we receive from God; however, many Christians have not yet discovered their particular gifts.

The gifts of the Spirit are specific abilities and skills given by the Holy Spirit “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph. 4:12, NIV). Every Christian is a member of the body of Jesus, His church (1 Cor. 12), and as members of His body we have different functions or ministries, just as the members and organs of the human body do. And when every member puts his or her ministry into action, it is then, and only then, that the body of Christ is built up, grows, and fulfills its mission.

Have you ever wondered what God’s will is for you? In Romans 12, as an introduction to the theme of the spiritual gifts, Paul speaks about the renewing of our minds and being able “to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2, NIV). What function or ministry are you, as a member of the body of Jesus, supposed to perform? When you find your spiritual gift(s), you discover your ministry.

Let us consider some guidelines that can help us in discovering our gifts:

Believe—It is important to believe in the gifts of the Spirit and that God has given you, a newborn Christian, a particular ministry to build up His church (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:7).

Pray—Since God is very interested in our discovering and using our spiritual gifts, we can go to Him in prayer and He will reveal them to us.

Study—We also need to study all we can about the gifts of the Spirit. Read the writings of Ellen White about

the subject and study Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. An excellent book on the subject is *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, by Peter Wagner.

Attention—Pay particular attention to each one of the gifts mentioned in the Scriptures. Know what they are all about: their function, their purpose, etc.

Inclination—Is there a gift in particular that you like? Is there one in particular that really catches your attention? List five spiritual gifts that you like the most and that you think you may have. Study more about them. Think about them. How do you see yourself functioning in that capacity? Pray about it.

Ministry—How about trying one of those gifts you are inclined to? Give it a chance.

Satisfaction—How do you like it? How do you feel? Are you satisfied and comfortable when you minister with that gift?

Capability—Is it easy for you to minister with that gift? Do you feel capable?

Confirmation—What do the other members of the body say? How are the others affected by your ministry? Do they feel that you are contributing in the building up of the body of Jesus?

Blessing—Do you feel blessed and happy? Are others being blessed by your ministry? Then keep on going; you’ve found your gift.

Your ministry matters. It matters so much that without it the church will not grow and prosper. The church needs you. Jesus, the head of the church, needs you. You have been empowered by the Holy Spirit with certain gifts. Find all the gifts you have; use and develop them with all your capacities. **E**

Alfonso Valenzuela writes from Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he is an assistant professor in the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

**Your ministry matters.
It matters so much that
without it the church will
not grow and prosper.**



It was in small group settings that the early church flourished during its first two centuries, and the need for and effectiveness of these small gatherings continues today.

TO LEARN WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT SMALL GROUPS, WE REALLY must explore what it says about the church. When we talk about building disciples through the means of small groups, we are talking about something very central to the mission of the church.

In speaking of small groups within the church, I am referring to gatherings in which people meet and form close relationships with one another, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in order to minister to each other's needs, to the praise and glory of God. Because of this, we will also study what the Bible has to say about relationships.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God's Word is the source of all true theology. It is the beginning place for our knowledge of God and of His truth. And all truth is determined by God—not by His created subjects.

The fact that God created us reminds us constantly of just who we are. It protects us from the trap of playing God. Our challenge is to remember just who—and whose—we are. We cannot find identity in self. When we try to, we end up in the "far country" without resources or meaning. Like the prodigal son in Jesus' story, our identity is found and preserved in the mind and love of the Father.

Nowhere is this demonstrated more fully than in the incarnation

THE BIBLE BASIS FOR SMALL GROUPS

W.
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of Jesus. The self-emptying attitude of Jesus (Phil. 2) is a model for us in seeking to know our own true identity. Jesus, as man, found His entire identity only through His relationship to His Father. Chapters 5 through 7 of John's Gospel indicate repeatedly that Jesus' life, words, and actions all flowed from His Father's impulse and direction. This means that the primary focus of Jesus' ministry was toward the Father.

"Christ's primary ministry is to the Father for the sake of the world, not to the world for the sake of the Father. This means that the world does not set the agenda for ministry, but the Father, who loves the world and seeks its good, sets this agenda."¹

The implications for us are obvious. Just as Christ received His agenda from the Father, we receive our agenda for ministry from Christ. We learn and receive God's agenda through the concrete words and deeds of Jesus. Jesus lived on this earth for the sake of the world; the church also exists on earth primarily on the world's behalf rather than its own.

The church is the ongoing presence of God's revealing, reconciling word, through Christ, in the world. "And God placed all things under his feet and

The church is people getting next to people, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of ministering and being ministered unto.



appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph. 1:22, 23, NIV). "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:22, NIV).

What we see emphasized in the Bible is a living, growing love relationship between Christ and the church that is akin to the relationship Christ had with His Father (see John 17). This enables the church, in a very real and substantial sense, to be God's presence in and for the world, in both word and deed.

Therefore, as we consider the church as a community, we are looking at more than simply a group of people who respond obediently to God's Word through Christ. We are, in fact, reflecting on the continuing presence of God in the world and through the church.

BUILDING FELLOWSHIP

Something has happened to the church that

threatens it at the very core. The church has drifted from Christ-centered fellowship to individualistic Christianity. It happened first in society and then infected the church.

Almost by default, the church has become largely a group of isolated individuals living out their Christianity in very private and independent ways. Their involvement with each other takes place on a very superficial level.

This condition is absolutely contrary to the biblical portrayal of what the church should be. It is also a contradiction of what Jesus had in mind when He first established the church.

At its heart, the church is called to build relationships. The church is people getting next to people, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of ministering and being ministered unto, "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6, NIV). This means that the saints will come together in ways that directly challenge individualism and independence.

Yet many attempts at building fellowship have failed because the basis for such interaction was primarily humanistic in one way or another.

Christians do not gather primarily for warmth, openness, self-actualization, et cetera. Christians gather because of Jesus Christ! The basis of our coming together is what Christ has done to and for us.

Those who gather around their own egos will not find Christian community.

There may be some positive results (usually short-lived), but Christ-centered fellowship will not be one of those.

It is easy to assume superficially that as Christians, all we do is done in and through Christ. However, this can be a false assumption. For Christian community to evolve, there needs to be an intentional focus around Scripture and prayer. Without this center, things rather quickly deteriorate into the limitations of groupie life, and true spiritual community is cheated.

As the church focuses together on Scripture and prayer, it will be led to respond to Jesus' call to live out the new commandment (John 13:34, 35). Jesus indicated very explicitly that His own credibility (John 17:21, 23) and the credibility of the very idea of discipleship (John 13:34, 35) depend on the love and unity manifested by the church.

We must guard against the temptation to define the new commandment simply as "warm fuzzies." It is much more than warmth and good feelings for each other. The Bible's challenge is to care actively

for each other, attending to the interests of others (1 Cor. 12:25; Phil. 2:4); to forbear and forgive (Eph. 4:2, 32); to submit to each other (Eph. 5:22-29); to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2); to teach and admonish each other (Col. 3:16, 17); to encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11); to confess and pray together (James 5:16); and above all, to love each other (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:11).

There is an indissoluble bond between unity and mission (John 17:18, 21, 23). Superficial treatment of the new commandment too frequently has us thinking and working on the "inward" life of the church. The context of Jesus' call is an "outward" focus toward and for the world. Jesus is saying that a central part of unity is mission. A community of disciples that comes together because of and through Christ is a sent community through which the new commandment is fulfilled.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The church gathers because of and through Jesus Christ, and this can happen only because of the Holy Spirit's role and work. Jesus said that the Spirit would call attention to Christ and make Him real to and through us. The divine entity that reincarnates the Word in the church is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we speak of a community of believers, we mean a body that has been formed and enabled because of the Spirit's work.

As the church remains open to the creativity of the Holy Spirit, it will more and more experience itself first as a spiritual fellowship rather than an institution. So the reformed community that Christ is creating becomes visible in groups that have a quality of life that reflects the mind of Christ. Small groups are very effective in providing a climate for the Spirit to give this quality of life.

GROWING SPIRITUALLY

Since the church comes together because of and through Jesus Christ, it will address, both in understanding and practice, that which the Bible calls "the mind" of Christ. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, RSV).

The most common word for "mind" in the New Testament is *nous*. The word is found 24 times—of which 21 occurrences are in Paul's writings. Without going into a detailed study of this word, we can safely say that it includes the whole of man as a rational, moral, emotional, and spiritual being. In a true sense,

when we talk of having the mind of Christ, we are speaking of the image of God in us.

The second chapter of Philippians is a plea for the fulfillment of God's image in us. The mind of Christ is to be incarnate in the church. It doesn't take long to learn from Paul's writings that the end result will be a love community with Him and with others. Thus the church will work to build relationships between God and man—and between man and man.

The image of God does not develop at all effectively in individual isolation or in large corporate settings. People need to come together where they can truly learn to relate. It was in small group settings that the early church flourished during its first two centuries, and the need for and effectiveness of these small gatherings continues today. "Today the church needs to rediscover what the early Christians found: that small group meetings are something essential to Christian experience and growth."²

Witnessing needs to be reclaimed as an activity that takes place as much within the church fellowship as outside it. The members of the body will not be free and winsome in their witnessing to unbelievers if



Gathering together with a few other Christians is one of the most helpful settings in which to grow in faithful commitment and obedience to God's will.

they haven't learned the skills and experienced the joys of witnessing to fellow believers.

Furthermore, witnessing needs to have a very personal element to it. This does not mean that our personal witness will draw more attention to self than to Jesus. It simply means that when we witness, we tell those we are in very personal terms. When this happens, evangelism in its richest sense is happening. Scripture has much to say about the subject of commitment for the Christian. In fact, it says more on this subject than on the topic of doctrinal purity. Faith is primarily the integrity of commitment, not completely correct propositions. This suggestion should not be construed as undermining the importance of doctrine. Rather, it should be understood as saying that commitment comes first and that doctrinal understanding arises best within integrity of commitment. It seems that theological purity is too often more important to believers than faithful obedience to the will of God. Gathering

together with a few other Christians is one of the most helpful settings in which to grow in faithful commitment and obedience to God's will.

An aspect of commitment that is not discussed much is discipline. Possibly the least understood of the Beatitudes is "Blessed are the meek" (Matt. 5:5). The Greek word is *praus*. "Meek" does not refer to the weak and spiritless, but rather describes energy that has become channeled and directed through discipline and training. It is a word that was used to describe the taming of wild animals.

It is fascinating to notice how often military metaphors are used in the Bible to refer to Christians and their experience. We read of "Epaphroditus my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier" (Phil. 2:25, NIV); of "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" with his share of suffering (2 Tim. 2:3); of "Archippus our fellow soldier." (Philemon 2); of the "whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:11).

If there is one characteristic of the military, it is discipline. "There is no real chance of victory in a campaign if 90 percent of the soldiers are untrained and uninvolved, but that is exactly where we stand now."³

The benefits of discipline and involvement are necessary to spiritual growth. An excellent setting for this to happen is through the commitment, shared life, and accountability that small groups provide.

SERVING IN MINISTRY

As the Holy Spirit reforms us more fully into the mind of Christ, our perspective will increasingly grow toward serving others. Receiving this others-centered attitude from the Spirit may be our greatest challenge. Particularly so in a narcissistic society bent on self serving, "finding oneself," etc. It is surprising how the church has taken the gift of the Holy Spirit and reversed the role that the Bible gives Him. "The doctrine of the Holy Spirit does not invite introspection, the self-contemplation of the creaturely. Instead, it directs attention away from the self."⁴

Jesus told us that the Spirit Himself would model an attitude focused away from self. "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14, RSV).

The church has too often seen the Holy Spirit's work as focused primarily on the interior experience. The emphasis is very self-centered. A study of Luke's and Paul's writings quickly reveals that the purpose of being filled with the Spirit is not primarily to produce an exalted interior experience. Rather, this infilling has to do with the external consequences it produces—the building up of the body of Christ.

Admittedly, this cuts across the grain of much superficial understanding of the Spirit. It also challenges the creeping influence of secularism in the church that leads us to become too self-preoccupied.

We must deepen our study, understanding, and experience of the Holy Spirit in order to stay open to His gifts. This will direct us toward the discovery of the Spirit's gifts within Christ's body for the purpose of equipping us to serve the church and the world. This will make an enormous difference in both attitude and behavior.

If the church, possessing the Holy Spirit's gifts, is primarily a serving community, then it must at every turn resist the temptation to dominate and control. In Scripture the understanding of power and authority are in contradiction to how worldly society understands them. Power and authority are the result of self-sacrificing love and service. "Power in the church is not a question of position or hierarchy or authority: it is a question of function and of service."⁵ The church must renounce the world's definition and practice of power.

When people spoke with awe about the authority of Jesus' words and deeds, they were referring to His love and service—which was all He had to offer. Jesus firmly rejected all attempts to place Him in positions of power.

Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to a wind blowing wherever it pleases (John 3:8). As we allow the Spirit to blow on us, the coals of our hearts will warm into flames of living fire, and we will experience the power that comes through sharing the self-sacrificing love of Jesus with others.

The New Testament model for this process is for it to happen in small, face-to-face gatherings—what the early Adventists called "social meetings," "small companies," or "bands," and later "cottage meetings." That continues to be an important tool in the church today—the ministry of small groups. **E**

NOTES

¹ Ray S. Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. Ray S. Anderson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), p. 8.

² Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1975), p. 140.

³ Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 38.

⁴ Helmut Thielicke, "The Evangelical Faith," in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, p. 62.

⁵ Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 111.

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The first agenda item of the small group leader is to become a friend to his individual group members and to win their confidence.

THE SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY FELLOWSHIP APPROACH HAS SOME differences from the classroom style of study. Some of these differences are:

1. The meeting is in a home rather than the church or public building.
2. The seating arrangement is with chairs in a circle rather than in rows.
3. Group meetings are usually one night per week, one and a half to two hours long.
4. Rather than a prepared lecture by a teacher, there is a leader-guided Bible study and discussion.
5. The lesson focuses on interpersonal relationships, biblical understanding, and application of biblical knowledge.
6. Care is taken to not give heavy doctrinal material before the group members are ready. Follow-up groups and classes are usually needed to present all doctrines and instruction.
7. Decisions are called for throughout the lessons, but not to the point of producing pressure that would cause some to stop attending.
8. The maximum number of participants in a small group should be approximately 12, in contrast to a class lecture style accommodating any number.

**A
SMALL
GROUP**

IS | Kurt
Johnson

DIFFERENT

The premise of the small group approach is that it is only the first step for many individuals in their walk with God. Hopefully this initiates a chain of continued contacts with the group members as they progress toward a fulfilling relationship with God and the church.

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2 stated: “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it” (NIV).

Paul recognized that spiritual material needs to be given step-by-step as a person understands the basics. He compared it in this passage to the progression of a baby from mother’s milk to solid food. Ellen White reminds us of this principle when she states, “You need not feel that all the truth is to be spoken to unbelievers on any and every occasion. You should plan carefully what to say and what to leave unsaid. This is not practicing deception; it is to work as Paul worked.”¹

Based upon these divinely inspired principles, this statement in *The Ministry of Healing* summarizes the evangelistic strategy of the small group fellowship: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”²

What was Christ’s method of approaching people? He did not spend most of His time in public meetings. Instead, He met them on their own turf. If they had a need, He met it. If they needed empathy, He empathized. If they needed sympathy, He sympathized. Only when He had established a relationship of confidence based upon a genuine love and friendship did He invite them to accept Him as Lord and Saviour of their life.

Wherever you find Jesus you find Him talking to people, getting acquainted, desiring to relieve their problems and give them salvation. There was Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4), Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3), and Jesus and Simon (John 12). Jesus came together with literally thousands of people because He genuinely cared.

Keep these principles in mind:

The *first* agenda item of the small group leader is to become a friend to his individual group members and to win their confidence. If an individual is a stranger to you, you may have only one opportunity to present Christ and His teaching. If you have the person’s confidence, then you can approach the subject several times without offending him.

Second, as you study the biblical material, be aware of the personal needs of your members. If, for example, an individual is having marital difficulties, the problems will many times be uppermost in his mind rather than the biblical material. As you empathize with him you should direct his attention to prayer and strength in God. A listening friend will provide healing power by giving support and not necessarily advice. Remember, God uses friendship and love to prepare the receptivity of the heart and mind for spiritual realities.

Third, remember that it is not imperative for members of your group to understand all the details of the biblical material at the same time. The spiritual backgrounds of your members will be diverse. In ministering to others, Jesus realized that fruit ripens at different times.

As a youth I picked citrus fruit in Arizona. When I first began, the foreman took me out to the orchard and gave me a large wire ring that clipped to my gloved finger. The ring was a gauge to judge whether the fruit was large enough to be picked. I was also informed concerning the proper coloration of the fruit. The foreman didn’t expect the crew to pick all the fruit at the same time. We knew we would be returning later to the same tree to pick the fruit that wasn’t ready the first time.

The above illustration leads into the *fourth* major observation. The small group meeting is only a beginning point. After you complete the biblical study guides, you can provide various options for your members to continue growing. These options would include continuing group studies on another Bible book, a pastor’s class (group) at Sabbath school, a baptismal/doctrinal group, individual Bible studies on doctrinal subjects, etc.

In some cases the group member may choose not to be involved with further studies. If this is the case, they are still a friend. Continue the relationship through visiting and social settings. The individual may desire to participate further in the future. Genuine love and friendship, however, does not dictate that an individual must accept Christ or Seventh-day Adventism in order for a relationship to be maintained. ■

NOTES

¹ White, *Evangelism*, p. 125.

² ———, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), p. 143.

Kurt Johnson, writes from Oregon where he works as Church Ministries director for the Oregon Conference.



The public preaching of the Word of God, coupled with the small groups and the specific ministries in small groups come together to provide a genuine ministry to the people.

EXUBERANCE AND JOY EXUDED FROM THE VOICE OF BRIAN EFFINGTON WHO had just been baptized in a 1993 evangelistic series in Nashville, Tennessee. "This evangelistic series gave me a new life! For the first time in my life I have found real meaning and purpose. And I found something more: a group of people that genuinely care about me. The acceptance and support I found in the small group ministries helped me overcome a debilitating sense of worthlessness. And believe it or not, these new friends helped me to kick a enslaving addiction to alcohol. I know that God led me to the Adventist church!"

Frank Cordona, a chaplain at Tennessee Christian Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, broke new ground when he developed a strategy for small group ministries in preparation for a city-wide evangelistic program in Nashville. I had felt the need of small group ministries in public evangelism for some time, and now with the help of TCMC's chaplains I felt it could become a reality. Frank suggested the strategy and the second night of the evangelistic meeting we offered the small group ministries to those attending.

One hundred fifty people indicated in writing their needs and desire to participate in the small group program. The responses were divided into six categories. They were: depression, addiction, family problems, youth problems, health problems, and spiritual

THE USE OF SMALL GROUPS IN John W. Fowler EVANGELISM

needs. When we asked the people to join a group in one of those six categories they failed to respond. We decided that fear was the culprit. Consequently, we decided to have general groups ministries without labels. That worked! Ninety percent of those that attended the small group ministries were baptized and joined the church.

Ellen White underscores this needs approach to evangelism, "Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied Servant of man's necessity."¹ Varied

The second night of the evangelistic meeting we offered the small group ministries to those attending. One hundred fifty people indicated in writing their desire to participate. . . .

were the circumstances and needs of those who sought Christ's aid. "None who came to Him went away unhelped. From Him flowed a stream of healing power and in body and mind and soul men were made whole."² As Jesus journeyed from city to city, from village to village, His ministry was a vital current bringing joy, peace, and life to all who would come to Him. It was a ministry of love, as ours must be.

MINISTRY MORE THAN PREACHING

Our ministry is primarily the ministry of God's Word, and we must preach the doctrinal and prophetic truths of Adventism. However, we, like Christ, must present the truths of Scripture in a practical way so as to meet the varied needs of our hearers.

Not only are we to bring the people hope and courage, we must help them understand how to cope with discouragement and doubt, fear and anxiety, anger and hatred, depression and hopelessness. Also, people need help dealing with the power of temptation and addiction to habits that destroy their physical and spiritual well being.

While we may not have time in the public meeting to deal with these problems in their entirety, help in these practical areas can be addressed in all of the doctrinal and prophetic teachings.

However, the preaching of the Word in the public meeting is only a beginning. We have not always understood this even though Ellen White hammered home the importance of working with people privately in many of her books.³ Herein lies a great problem. What is meant by the above

statement by Ellen White?

Could it be that preaching has a broader definition than simply our work in the pulpit? Preaching involves the public proclamation of the word, the teaching of God's Word, and the practice of the Word of God as well. We must not obscure the importance of our work in the pulpit; however, neither do we want to obscure the work of teaching and practicing of the Word of God. Ellen White tells us that the kingdom of heaven is established through the "teaching and practicing of the Word of God."⁴

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

In our early history, we possibly understood this a little better than we do now. Prior to A. G. Daniels, we always presented more in our evangelistic meetings than just the preaching of the Word. We employed Bible workers who taught various courses on health, Daniel and Revelation, etc. each evening. They, as well, went into the homes and taught the people the practical aspects of Christianity, much more than we do today. I believe that Christ's method is still the model we should follow.

We understand that Christ sought people out in their homes, at various social gatherings, individually and in small groups. In this way He shared with them the practical aspects of Christianity thus enabling them to make application of those principles to their own lives. Jesus' work with His disciples is a graphic illustration of this. Surely Jesus had taught the nature and purpose of the gospel in His public ministry; however, working quietly in a smaller setting, Jesus was able to be more direct and practical in presenting His teaching to the disciples.

LEARNING FROM JOHN WESLEY

So it can be with us in our worship services or even in the context of our public evangelistic meetings. How do we do this? I believe that John Wesley's approach can guide us in this most important endeavor. After Wesley preached and an interest was awakened, he placed them in small groups where pastors could deal with the individual questions and problems of those who had been spiritually awakened by his preaching. Wesley's use of small groups was very simple. The classes normally met once every week for an hour or so and:

1. Each person reported on his or her spiritual experience.

2. They shared any particular needs or problems they had.
3. Help was given as needed.
4. Advice or reproof was given.
5. Doctrinal instruction was given.
6. Evangelistic activities were encouraged and coordinated.
7. Prayer was made for all expressing needs.

The application of Wesley's method that I have endeavored to use in my public meetings is a simple one that involves a number of small group ministries. When used in public meetings, we tell the audience that we want to minister to them and their varied needs. Consequently, starting the second night of the meeting we invite those who have specific needs to join with others in an informal, small group setting, right in the auditorium or church where they can find fellowship, a listening ear, encouragement, practical help, and prayer. The number of areas of ministry that the public evangelistic meeting can address will depend on the talent in the particular church or churches.

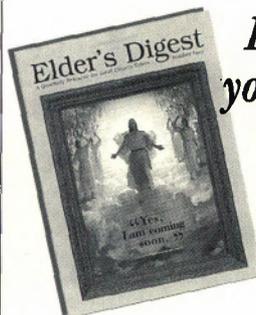
A SPIRITUAL PROBLEM

Adventists believe that the cause of most problems experienced by individuals, or groups of individuals, are of a spiritual nature. Consequently, the ministry of the Word, the teaching and application of the principles of the Word of God are the best remedy. Bringing people into a relationship with other Christians and with Jesus Christ is our goal. We work to help people claim Christ's victory, Christ's wisdom, Christ's peace, Christ's joy, as their own. This is the best help the small groups can provide.

Naturally, there are some situations where a person needs professional help. If they are totally out of control, then those in charge of the small groups must be quick to recognize this and guide them to professional help where they can receive special treatment. Often in a church there are professionals in these areas who can provide the help needed. If they are not available, then those in need should be guided to a Christian professional outside the church. The small group discussions may address a wide variety of problems found among the members of the small groups: addiction, depression, discouragement, family problems, anxiety and loneliness. However, the purpose should be to provide fellowship, encouragement, and support for the individuals in the group.

Depression is a major problem in North America today. At least 25 percent or more of the population

suffer from some degree of depression. Also, many are dependent on some form of chemical to cope with their circumstances. Even medical science teaches us that the best treatment for depression is cognitive therapy. We know, as well, that most depression is caused by negative habits of thought. Science today is talking more about chemical imbalances, etc.; however, the best research shows that the problem can be traced to negative habits of



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thought. There may be some chemical imbalance, but often negative thinking is the root cause. In an article entitled, "Think Your Way Out Of Depression," Edward Ziegler references research that has been done quite recently in this area by the National Institute of Mental Health. Books are being written and extensive research done that underscores the validity of an approach that seeks to heal by building positive thought patterns in the mind. It is possible that the pharmaceutical companies will obscure this work by the promotion of drugs; however, we know, not only from research in the medical community, but from inspiration as well, that developing healthy habits of thought is the best approach to overcoming the debilitating habits that enslave millions today.⁵

SMALL GROUPS REINFORCE RIGHT THINKING

Small group support systems can be a potent agency in developing thought patterns of courage and faith, hope and joy. These attitudes are best learned in small groups and will enable a sincere person to

The groups become a pathway into church membership for those who need more time to get their lives in order and make a full surrender to Christ.

conquer almost any problem including depression and chemical dependency, which are common problems to those attending evangelistic meetings. Also the small groups can reinforce the spiritual truths learned in the sermon each evening. And the small group provides the counterculture needed to enable the individual to break with their past, keep all of God's commandments and unite with the church.

If problems surface that are too serious to be dealt with in the small group, individuals with these problems are referred to a professional for help; however, these individuals should still continue to be a part of a small group during the evangelistic meetings. This group contact can provide just the additional help needed to free individuals from their addiction. An area that needs special and separate attention and care is that of physical diseases. Where it is possible, we should run a medical health-screening program in conjunction with the evangelistic meeting. This can be done for a very minimal cost. Consultation should be provided for each of those who have the screening done. A full blood workup is done, with blood

pressure checks, etc. Large numbers respond to this, especially when consultation is provided when the report is returned. A form is sent out with scheduling so that there is minimum time spent waiting for their turn to see the doctor. This is a ministry that is much appreciated and leads to a view of Adventists that is most positive.

The last is a ministry to the poor. In some areas this is more effective than others. However, Christ constantly focused on ministry to the poor just as we should. Many churches have Community Service organizations that can provide help during the meetings. Those who have needs in this area are invited to meet with the community service leaders who provide the help needed. Also, the announcement can be made in the public meeting to invite other needy individuals to the meetings where help will be provided in this very practical area.

The result of this approach is that evangelism becomes a genuine ministry to those who attend the meetings and join in the small groups. Also meaningful relationships are established, practical help is received, and the people come to have a sense of belonging and loyalty to the group and ultimately to the church. Both the preaching and the small group ministries work together to lead the respondents to a full surrender of their lives to Christ and ultimately to baptism and union with the church.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF SMALL GROUPS

A second and equally valuable asset is that the small groups continue after the meeting. Consequently they become an integral part of the ongoing life of the church which provides support for those who are baptized and for those not quite ready to be baptized. The groups also become a pathway into church membership for those who need more time to get their lives in order and make a full surrender to Christ. The public preaching of the Word of God, coupled with the small groups and the specific ministries in small groups come together to provide a genuine ministry to the people. Following this plan will result in greater numbers being baptized, more converts being loyal and faithful to the church and more involvement of the members in the church's ministry as well. Finally this approach builds a much needed positive image for evangelism both in the church and in the community.

A few suggestions follow that can help in developing small group ministries in a local church.

HOW TO USE SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

1 Determine the purpose of small group ministries in your evangelistic series. In a public evangelistic series the purpose of ministry of small groups is to provide fellowship, encouragement, and support for those who are struggling with specific problems. The primary purpose is not usually to provide in-depth counseling or therapy.

2 Select and train small group leaders. If the local churches have functioning small groups, the leaders of those groups can, with additional training, be used in the public evangelistic meetings. An abundance of materials is available for the training of small groups.

3 Determine the needs of the evangelistic audience. This can be done early in the evangelistic series, preferably the second night. A simple form can be used to encourage the audience to share the specific needs they have. The forms should allow them to do this anonymously. The form should list possible needs, such as: discouragement, doubt, depression, addiction to alcohol or drugs, family problems, financial problems, etc. The night the form is used, share with the audience the plan to provide ongoing encouragement and support to those who are struggling with difficult problems.

4 Determine how many of the audience have an interest in participating in small group ministries. The form will indicate approximately how many will be interested.

5 The next meeting after the form is used, an announcement should be made as to the time and place the small groups will meet. The time of the year will dictate whether the meetings are conducted before or after the evangelistic meetings. The small groups can meet in the main auditorium or, if available, individual rooms can be used.

6 Begin the small group ministries immediately. The earlier the small groups begin, the more quickly help can be provided, meaningful relationships can be established and the confidence of the audience won.

7 The goal of the small group ministries is to provide a support system that assures acceptance, understanding, encouragement, and prayer. Coupled with this can be practical suggestions as to how to

cope with difficult situations that the group members face. Brief presentations can be made by the leader to accomplish this.

8 Encouragement should be given to the members of the small group to continue attending the evangelistic series; however, the purpose of the small groups is not to discuss or to rehash the evangelistic sermon. Any in-depth questions regarding materials presented by the evangelist should be referred to the evangelist and those assisting him in the meeting. Encouragement should be given, however, to the group members to accept Christ, recognizing that Christ alone can help us resolve our problems.

9 The group leaders should make every effort to make the small groups a genuine ministry to those attending the small groups, and at the same time, make the small group meetings a means of assisting the evangelist in his/her work to bring souls to Christ and His church. The group leader should be aware of the response of the members of his/her group to the evangelistic messages.

10 Regular meetings of the group leaders with the evangelist should be conducted to ensure careful coordination and cooperation so that an integration of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs can take place during the evangelistic series.

11 The small group ministries should be continued after the evangelistic series is completed to ensure continuing support and encouragement for the new members and for those who have not yet made decisions to join the church. Also, the small groups can provide on-going training and coordination for some form of ministry by each of the group members. **E**

NOTES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 41.

² Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 41.

³ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp 352, 441.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 510.

⁵ David B. Burns, *Feeling Good; The New Mood Therapy*, Wm. Murrill Co. Inc., New York, NY, 1980; Aaron Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders*, International University Press, Inc., New York NY, 1976; *Readers Digest*, Dec. 1980, p. 123. E. G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., Washington D.C. 1942.

John W. Fowler, pastor, evangelist and administrator currently is the secretary of Kentucky-Tennessee Conference. He is the author of several books on evangelism and practical theology in the church.



SMALL GROUPS PLANT CHURCHES

James H. Zachary

"I have some free time, can you help me secure more persons interested in Bible study." This was the request of Lenna, a Global Mission pioneer, working with a small group in the city of Glasov in the Ural region of Russia.

A few weeks before the four young people arrived in this manufacturing city. Their goal was to prepare the way for a *Quiet Hour* harvest meeting.

Theirs was a large challenge. Many of the citizens, former communists still clung to their atheistic philosophy. The fall of the communist system has sent ripples economic disaster rushing through the community. Many persons were out of work.

It was beautiful to join the little team in the apartment that the conference had rented for them. They were all new believers. The oldest Christian had been baptized only four years before. A discharged soldier met with the group each day. His military experience drew him to the Word of God.

Most of each day had been spent in preparing for the day when an evangelistic service would be used by the Holy Spirit to bring decisions to their Bible students. It was hard work. Knocking on doors, using a survey sheet to discover anyone interested in the Bible.

The conference assigned a pastor who arrived at the beginning of the evangelistic series. The pastor helped prepare interested persons for baptism. Early in 1996, 24 persons were baptized. The team of young people stayed on to help establish the new congregation.

Each day they searched for new people to study the Bible with. Lenna seemed to have no end in her supply of energy. She put in long hours to share her faith.

When asked how many new persons she had discovered in her door-to-door ministry, she replied, "I have 21 students now." Through her ministry as a part of the small group the church will soon double in size.

Global Mission and the *Quiet Hour* have started a joint program. During seminars in Russia and the Ukraine, 21 small groups were formed and the members trained. They are currently beginning their



Small group in prayer season during the training seminar.

work in 21 unentered cities. Each group has the same objective, to plant a new congregation before 1996 is over.

Valery Ivanov, Global Mission director for the EuroAsia Division, and Mike Ryan, Global Mission Director for the world, are laying plans to reach out to all of Russia.

"These small groups of pioneers are the most effective method of establishing small groups of believers in unentered areas." stated Mike Ryan. **E**

When this article was written James H. Zachary was Associate Ministerial Secretary in the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He is now retired and working with the Quite Hour.



A few small groups in prayer



Meeting of one small group during the seminar



Small group in prayer season during the training seminar



The world is hungry for the community the church can offer, and it will look for it elsewhere if the church fails to provide it.

GOD MAKES THE CHURCH, WE DON'T. JUST AS WE DID NOT DECIDE WHO would be a member in our family and who would not, so it is with the church. We can choose not to use our gifts or we can pull out of some committee, but once we are God's children we are in the church and that's that.

We are the body of Christ. There really is no such thing as lone-ranger Christianity. Paul Tournier makes this point when he says there are two things we cannot do alone: one is be married and the other is be a Christian.

The real truth about the church is that we are a chosen people. We have not chosen God or each other so much as He has chosen us. Peter explains it in his letter to the church at Rome: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10, RSV).

Peter wants us to remember where we have come from—nowhere! Once we were "no people." Oh, we tried to be a community; but it was based on beauty, intelligence, a choosing of one another based on personality, your meeting my needs, a choosing of one another because of . . .

**I AM THE
CHURCH,
YOU
ARE THE
CHURCH**

Written by a small
group coordinated
by Ron Nicholas

The good news is that now we have received mercy. God has chosen us just as He chose people in the past. Our potential as a community is not based on our work but on God's. And our forgiveness in Christ is the cornerstone on which we build. He chose a kingdom of priests so that the world might know of His wonderful deeds.

God's choosing us and our experience of this community are, however, often quite distinct experiences. We may agree intellectually and theologically that we are God's people, but how do we experience this truth in our churches? One thing is clear: both the Scriptures and our lives tell us that we don't experience the fullness of Christian community in large group worship or at church banquets. We do find it in small groups. If the church is serious about fellowship, it must break down into smaller units.

SMALL GROUPS IN SCRIPTURE

Jesus poured his life into twelve disciples, expecting that they would change the world. That was some small group. Imagine Matthew, a tax collector detested by Jews with Simon the Zealot, sworn to hate all that Rome stood for. Or Peter, headstrong and bold, dining with James and John, while they jockey for positions of power. This group went through some tough times!

Yet Jesus chose these twelve and promised that their love for one another would make an impact, causing others to believe in Him (John 17:21-26). In Acts Jesus turns his work over to them; they were to declare His kingdom in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, RSV). God chose his people that the whole world might be blessed.

Paul tells us in Philippians what will happen in the world when people observe Christian unity—they will be drawn in. But often, rather than going into the world, the church stays put. We expect others to come to us and visit our buildings to experience the love of God. We need to design a strategy for penetrating the world so that our community can be seen by the world and make an impact on it.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

Dan Hendricks came to Harvard University looking for what he called true friendship. His parents were atheistic psychiatrists, but as a child he had read the *Namia Chronicles* by C. S. Lewis and had developed from them an entire world view, his ideal of true friendship. At Harvard, as he met with a small

group of Christians, for the first time in his life he came to know people who lived by his standard of friendship. He saw the gospel lived out in a group of believers that were experiencing the fellowship of the Spirit, Christian community. About eight weeks later, after studying the Gospel of Mark, Dan became a Christian.

The world is hungry for the community the church can offer, and it will look for it elsewhere if the church fails to provide it. Several years ago my father died. As I returned home to be with my mother, I found myself with several people who had been regular customers at the tavern my father owned for eight years. They too had come to honor my father and comfort my Mother. I was struck with the kind of friendship they had developed which Christians so often fail to have. My experience at church has at times left me disappointed. I know of others who came because they needed community, but who did not find it in the regular worship service. Every church must deal with this problem if it is to demonstrate that Christian community is better than what the world has to offer. True friendship can happen in the church, but it takes small groups. Christian fellowship is having every member of your small group call you when your mother dies or you lose a baby during pregnancy. It's being able to share about failures in parenting and marriage, being cared for when the job becomes too much for you, being encouraged in developing gifts of leadership and hospitality.

Greg and Marsha, a young Christian couple, were both committed to Christ, but the Word of God had become for them more and more just words, less and less an experience of God. A young associate pastor of their church invited them to be a part of a small group. It changed their lives.

They developed relationships with other Christians who held them accountable in their personal growth with God and with whom they could share personal problems. When Greg and Marsha moved to California they began another small group, and when they moved to Boston they began yet another. For them, Christian community as lived out in a small group became a must for Christian living.

ADVANTAGES OF A SMALL GROUP

In his book *The Problem of Wineskins*, Howard Snyder points to a number of advantages of a small group within the church.

It is flexible. The group can change its procedure readily and meet the needs of its members. My own group changes every three months.

It is mobile. You can meet in a home or even an office. It is not bound by a building. Think of the three thousand people in Acts 2 meeting in homes!

It is inclusive. You are missed if you don't come. The small group is open to all types of people.

It is personal. The small group creates a place where my needs and the needs of those others who commit themselves to it can be met. I remember our small group studying Psalm 46 after my son's bike was stolen right out from under him. What a great help it was for Julie and me to have around us friends who could not only affirm with us the truth of the psalm, that God is our refuge and our strength, but who could also be Christ's body to us in a personal way through their listening and praying.

It is risky. A small group puts us at the edge of adventure in our Christian life. As we discover ourselves and others through conflict, care and confrontation, we grow. God works in our lives through others.

It is an excellent way to evangelize. The true friendship of a small group will be noticed by the world, if the church is actually in the world.

It is not easy to begin a small group strategy in the church. For some it is too much of a change. But I've seen it work. In my church in California a small group of about twelve became convinced that what was happening in their group was important enough to share with others in the church. So each member learned how to lead another small group. They risked themselves and changed our church. Now almost half of the congregation is involved in small groups. This was particularly helpful when for over a year the church was without a pastor. It grew even without professional leadership.

God is calling us to a great task as a church. The church is not a holy place, but it is a holy people called by God to declare His mighty deeds to the world. Annie Dillard says that "we are itty bitsy people living itty bitsy lives raising tomatoes when we could be raising Lazarus" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creed*). The practical nature of small groups can be key in penetrating our world. They can help us raise Lazarus. **E**

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Seven Facts About JESUS CHRIST

"Christ built no church, wrote no book, left no money, and erected no monument; yet show me ten square miles in the whole earth without Christianity where the life of man and the purity of women are respected, and I will give up Christianity." — Henry Drummond.

Of all men CHRIST stands unique because:

1. CHRIST IS GOD—DIVINE. John 1:1-3.
 - Claimed equality with God. John 10:30.
 - Divine titles ascribed to Him. Colossians 2:9.
 - Pre-existed with the Father. John 17:5; 5:18.
 - The active agent in creation. Ephesians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 8:6.
2. CHRIST CAME—HUMAN. Philippians 2:6, 7.
 - Was born into the human family. Matthew 1:22, 23; Micah 5:2; Romans 8:3.
 - The reason. Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15.
 - He experienced the normal instincts of humanity. Slept (Matthew 8:24), wept (John 11:35), thirsted (John 4:7), became weary (John 4:6).
3. CHRIST LIVED—SINLESS. Hebrews 4:15; 7:26.
 - "Knew no sin." 2 Corinthians 5:21.
 - "Did no sin." 1 Peter 2:22.
 - "In Him was no sin." 1 John 3:5.
 - The devil was unable to overcome Him. Matthew 4:1-11; John 14:30.
 - Man's example. John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21.
 - "The genius of Christianity demands that its converts follow exactly in the path of its Founder, Christ. Only as they do so are they Christians."—Foakes-Jackson.
4. CHRIST DIED—REDEEMER. Titus 2:14.
 - Supreme manifestation of God's love. 1 John 4:10; Romans 5:6-8.
 - A voluntary sacrifice. John 10:11, 15.
 - An atoning sacrifice. Hebrews 9:26; Ephesians 5:2.
 - A substitutionary sacrifice. 1 Peter 3:18; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6.
5. CHRIST AROSE—CONQUEROR. Revelation 1:18
 - He foretold He would. Matthew 16:21.
 - He did. Luke 24:1-12.
 - Assured men victory over sin and death. 1 Corinthians 15:14, 16-20.
6. CHRIST ASCENDED—MEDIATOR. 1 Peter 3:22.
 - The time and place. Luke 24:50, 51.
 - Our High Priest. Hebrews 8:1, 2; 4:14-16.
 - Man's Advocate. 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1.
7. CHRIST WILL RETURN—COMING KING. Hebrews 9:28.
 - He promised He would. John 14:1-3.

"Living He loved Me, dying He saved me, Buried, He carried my sins far away. Rising, He justified, freely for ever, One day He's coming, O glorious day." — Dr. Wilbur Chapman.

Rex D. Edwards, D. Min., is the director for continuing education of the General Conference Ministerial Association, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Study to Show Thyself Approved

by ELLEN G. WHITE

The cause of God needs efficient men; it needs men who are trained to do service as teachers and preachers. Men have labored with a measure of success who have had little training in school or college; but these might have attained a greater measure of success, and might have been more efficient laborers, if at the very start they had acquired mental discipline.

To Timothy, a youthful minister, the apostle Paul wrote, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The work of winning souls to Christ demands careful preparation. Men cannot enter the Lord's service without the needed training, and expect the highest success. Mechanics, lawyers, merchants, men of all trades and professions, are educated for the line of business they hope to enter. It is their policy to make themselves as efficient as possible. Go to the milliner or the dressmaker, and she will tell you how long she toiled before she had a thorough knowledge of her business. The architect will tell you how long it took him to understand how to plan a tasteful, commodious building. And so it is in all the callings that men follow.

Should the servants of Christ show less diligence in preparing for a work infinitely more important? Should they be ignorant of the ways and means to be employed in winning souls? It requires a knowledge of human nature, close study, careful thought, and earnest prayer, to know how to approach men and women on the great subjects that concern their eternal welfare.

Not a few of those called to be co-laborers with the Master have failed to learn their trade. They have


*"The saving
of souls
is a vast work,
which calls
for the
employment
of every talent,
every gift
of grace."*


dishonored their Redeemer by entering His work without the needed preparation. There are some who, becoming wearied by the superficial gloss that the world calls refinement, have gone to the other extreme, and one fully as harmful. They refuse to receive the polish and refinement that Christ desires His children to possess. The minister should remember that he is an educator, and that if in manner and speech he is coarse and unrefined, those who have less knowledge and experience will follow in his steps.

SUPERFICIAL KNOWLEDGE

Never should a young minister rest satisfied with a superficial knowledge of the truth, for he knows not where he may be required to bear witness for God. Many will have to stand before kings and before the learned of the earth, to answer for their faith. Those

who have only a superficial understanding of the truth have failed to become workmen that need not be ashamed. They will be confused, and will not be able clearly to expound the Scriptures.

It is a lamentable fact that the advancement of the cause is hindered by the dearth of educated laborers. Many are wanting in moral and intellectual qualifications. They do not tax the mind, they do not dig for the hidden treasure. Because they only skim the surface, they gain only that knowledge which is to be found upon the surface.

Do men think that they will be able, under pressure of circumstances, to step into an important position, when they have neglected to train and discipline themselves for the work? Do they imagine that they can be polished instruments in the hands of God for the salvation of souls, if they have not used the opportunities placed at their command for

obtaining a fitness for the work? The cause of God calls for all-round men, who can devise, plan, build up, and organize. And those who appreciate the probabilities and possibilities of the work for this time, will seek by earnest study to obtain all the knowledge they can from the Word, to use in ministering to needy, sin-sick souls.

A minister should never think that he has learned enough, and may now relax his efforts. His education should continue throughout his lifetime; every day he should be learning, and putting to use the knowledge gained.

Let those who are in training for the ministry never forget that the preparation of the heart is of all the most important. No amount of mental culture or theological training can take the place of this. The bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness must shine into the heart of the worker and purify his life, before light from the throne of God can shine through him to those in darkness.

During the night many scenes passed before me, and many points in reference to the work that we are to do for our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, were made plain and clear. Words were spoken by One of authority, and I will try to repeat in finite words the instruction given regarding the work to be done. The heavenly Messenger said:

The ministry is becoming enfeebled because men are assuming the responsibility of preaching without gaining the needed preparation for this work. Many have made a mistake in receiving credentials. They will have to take up work to which they are better adapted than the preaching of the word. They are

being paid from the tithe, but their efforts are feeble, and they should not continue to be paid from this fund. In many ways the ministry is losing its sacred character.

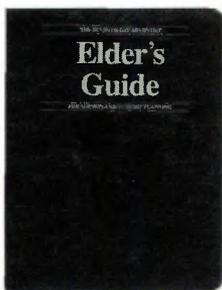
Those who are called to the ministry of the word are to be true, self-sacrificing laborers. God calls for men who realize that they must put forth earnest effort, men who bring thought, zeal, prudence, capability, and the attributes of Christ's character into their labors. The saving of souls is a vast work, which calls for the employment of every talent, every gift of grace. Those engaged in it should constantly increase in efficiency. They should have an earnest desire to strengthen their powers, knowing that

they will be weak without a constantly increasing supply of grace. They should seek to attain larger and still larger results in their work. When this is the experience of our workers, fruit will be seen. Many souls will be won to the truth.

“Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness—Godlikeness—is the goal to be reached. Before the student here is opened a path of continual progress. He has an object to achieve, a standard to attain, that includes everything good, and pure, and noble. He will advance as fast and as far as possible in every branch of true knowledge” (*Education*, page 18). **E**

Ellen G. White was one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A prolific writer, she produced more than 100,000 pages by the time she died in 1915. Her work continues as a prophetic voice within the Adventist church. This article was taken from Gospel Workers, pp. 92-95.

*The greatest men
of the earth
are not beyond
the power of a
wonder-working
God.*



The new Elder's Guide is designed expressly for elders and others who are involved in the planning and leading of worship services and other church programs.

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Ministry

There is a key to spiritual survival available to you.

for the

It's called taking the next step.

Young



It means recognizing that God has not only called you

Elder

to be a Christian, but to be a minister.

Being an elder
is not just for
those who are
old, just for men,
or just for super
saintly types.

You have made the most important decision of your life. You have accepted Christ as your Savior. You have decided to make Jesus Lord of your life. It changed your life. In fact, Christ has given you a whole new life.

Now you want to keep that new life from heading towards the morgue. You see other Christians around you rapidly becoming spiritually comatose. Some might as well be hauled off in spiritual body bags. The life is gone. You don't want that to happen to you.

There is a key to spiritual survival available to you. It's called taking the next step. It means recognizing that God has not only called you to be a Christian but to be a minister. Calls to ministry aren't reserved for those who plan to go to the seminary and study theology. They aren't reserved for those who study Greek or Hebrew. They come to all Christians.

Christians who accept this call and act on it are the ones who don't

stagnate. The ministering Christian becomes a living, functional member of the body of Christ. Those who do not accept and act on the call to ministry soon begin to spiritually die.

You have expressed an interest in living out this call by participating in the elder's work within the church. It may be a new thought to you. Perhaps you have thought of elders as old, austere men who sit in meetings, ask for money, and pray long prayers. You hardly feel as if you fit.

Actually, all types of people serve as elders. Elders do sit in meetings. They offer public prayers and ask for offerings. But their work embraces far more than that. And it is not just for those who are old, just for men, or just for super saintly types. It is for a variety of real people.

The elders in your church probably do lots of different things during the week. They might run a business, practice medicine, build houses, fix cars, type letters, care for children, operate a computer—you name it. But

all of them are people who have a conviction that God has called them to a special ministry. They have been specially consecrated for that ministry through the ceremony of ordination.

The Bible makes it clear that the tasks of leading God's people must be shared. When Moses found himself overworked, overstressed, and unable to lead effectively, God impressed his father in law to encourage him to share the load. When Jesus was on earth He called 12 men to be with Him and to extend His work. He also called 70 other people for a similar work on a larger scale. When the Apostle Paul established churches in different cities, he set apart elders to minister to those churches.

An elder does a lot of the same things a pastor does. A pastor cannot be everywhere and do everything that is needed in the church. The elders bring a variety of spiritual gifts and ministries to the pastoral team. Let us look at some things that elders do and ways they might apply to you:

An elder visits other people.

For you this might mean:

- ☞ Taking homework assignments and textbooks to a sick friend.
- ☞ Spending some time after school talking to a classmate who is discouraged.
- ☞ Going by to see that new kid who came to your youth group last Sabbath and saying you were glad he or she was there.
- ☞ Going by to see an old person in a rest home.

An elder is active in outreach.

That means the elder is committed to evangelism and making contact with people not already active church members. That could mean such activities as:

- ☞ Helping with a stop-smoking clinic or stress control workshop.
- ☞ Explaining the plan of salvation to

somebody an inviting him or her to accept Christ as Savior.

- ☞ Helping the pastor or a guest evangelist visit people who came to a series of meetings.
- ☞ Participating in a Revelation Seminar.
- ☞ Putting in volunteer time at the local shelter for the homeless or Adventist Community Services Center.
- ☞ Becoming involved in a youth witness team that shares faith with other kids.

An elder assists in worship.

This could include:

- ☞ Reading Scripture or praying for the congregation.
- ☞ Assisting with music.
- ☞ Planning a special worship event.
- ☞ Suggesting some innovations that would make the worship service more Spirit-filled and alive.
- ☞ Preaching a sermon (in whole or part) or working with a youth team that presents the message and illustrates an aspect of the gospel.

An elder helps other people develop a more meaningful spiritual life.

This could include:

- ☞ Sharing with other people some of the ways God is helping you grow. Your spiritual growth can be a catalyst for others.
- ☞ Joining or leading a Bible discussion group.
- ☞ Teaching a Sabbath School class.

An elder is a leader and administrator within the church.

This could include:

- ☞ Planning an activity or ministry event.
- ☞ Sharing ideas at a Youth planning meeting or a church board meeting.
- ☞ Helping make important decisions at a board or committee meeting. **E**

The elders bring a variety of spiritual gifts and ministries to the pastoral team.

This article was taken from the Pacific Union Youth Elder Apprenticeship Program's newsletter, *Taking the Lead*. Reprinted with permission.

Life in the Son

Scripture: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life" (1 John 5:11-12, RSV).

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 John 5:9-12

Introduction

1. The words of the well known hymn confidently express the basis of our Christian hope:

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because He lives.*

2. After the spiritual high of Resurrection Sunday some might ask, "Where do we go from here?" Because Christ lives, we can be sure of some certainties which change our lives into a daily experience worth living. Paul indicated his confidence when he wrote, "I know whom I have believed." Today we will examine a gift every Christian possesses as a result of the living Christ.

This gift is described in the Epistle of 1 John. The key word in this brief document is *know*—the word is found thirty times in 105 verses. John was certain of the gifts that came with Christ. The first gift of which we can be certain is life in the Son. — "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

I. God gives life.

A. Life in the Son:

1. It is not God's will for anyone to perish; He wants each person to live. We will find fulfillment in Jesus, who said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).
2. The resurrection of Jesus assures us of life. No "resurrection spirit" can give us victory over death. Paul asked, "O death, where is thy victory? . . . thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55, 57).

B. New quality of life:

1. The life God gives in Jesus is more than living forever. He imparts a new quality of life. The words eternal life refer to the life of the new age, the very life of God at work within us now. Jesus said, "I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness" (John 10:10 NEB).
2. An extraordinary quality of life is available in Jesus. It is possible to be dead while alive for all who are without Jesus Christ are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).
3. Jesus promised, "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; . . . has passed from death to life."—John 5:24. Life in the Son is more than just living—it is life with quality.

C. Jesus has made provision:

"Jesus has loved men, and has made every provision that the blood-bought soul shall have a new birth, a new life derived from His own life...." He that hath the Son hath life;

and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.' Those who believe in Christ derive their motive power and the texture of their characters from Him in whom they believe" (Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 299).

II. Do you have life?

A. Received through faith:

1. The gift of life comes to one who "has the Son," and the Son must be received through faith. "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, RSV).
2. Faith was the essential element to which Jesus responded. Four men lowered a paralytic through the roof into the house where Jesus was teaching. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'"—Mark 2:5.

B. Faith is a common ingredient of daily existence, yet many claim they cannot have faith in Christ:

1. Huxley once wrote: "Theology claims the just shall live by faith. Science says the just shall live by verification." Yet the scientist believes in a logical universe. He believes in principles used to verify presumptions.
2. What is a theory? It is something believed to be right but unproven. We believe in education, democracy, ourselves. Belief is common; why not believe the best and have life in the Son?

C. Lost because of unbelief:

1. If this uncommon life comes to those who believe in Jesus, those who refuse to believe are lost—"he who has not the Son of God has not life."
2. Can the good man be lost? Yes.
3. Can the church-going person be lost? Yes.
4. Can the lovable, generous neighbor who has simply delayed her commitment to Christ be lost? Yes.
5. Faith in Christ is the crucial test—"he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18).

*"Brethren, see poor sinners round you
Slumbering on the brink of woe,
Death is coming, hell is moving,
Can you bear to let them go?"*

*Tell them all about the Saviour,
Tell them that He will be found."
— George Arkins*

Realizing life is only in the Son should motivate us to "rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave."

III. Life — for Keeps!

A. Trust God's testimony:

1. Remember how as a child you responded to a person's gift by saying, "Is this mine, for keeps?"
2. Life in the Son is a present and permanent possession. God is the basis of this security.
3. A personal testimony about new life is great but "the testimony of God is greater. . . . He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself" (1 John 5:9-10 RSV).
4. To doubt the certainty of life on the basis of the requirements set forth by God is to make God a liar. If you have done what God said to do, then trust His word and rejoice!

B. *He keeps us:*

1. Paul's confident word to Timothy included a testimony of God's keeping power. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).
2. The word keep means "guard" and includes the image of a garrison of heavenly troops protecting the individual.
3. Alexander Whyte, the Scottish preacher, once asked a friend, "How are you keeping?" The friend answered, "Doctor, I'm not keeping; I'm being kept."
4. Christ is able to keep us and present us one day at the throne of glory. Because He was able to defeat death, I know He is adequate for everything in this life and the next.

IV. CONCLUSION

I share the sense of mystery about which Daniel Whittle wrote:

*I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.*

I do know I believe Christ. Life in the Son is real. Life is worth the living because He lives.

Texts are taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.



Put this information in your file. It may be useful to you in the future.

Church Growth

Charles Horton reported the results of a study in Lincoln, Nebraska, in which a lady attended 18 different churches on successive Sundays to rate their friendliness. She sat near the front of the sanctuary each time and walked slowly to the rear, then returned to the front using another aisle. On each occasion she was dressed neatly, and with a smile asked at least one person to direct her to the fellowship hall or church office.

She used the following scale to rate her reception:

- 10 – for a smile from a worshiper
- 10 – for a greeting from someone nearby
- 100 – for an exchange of names
- 200 – for an invitation to the fellowship hour
- 1000 – for an introduction to another worshiper
- 2000 – for an invitation to meet the pastor

Each of the eighteen churches earned less than 100 points. The researcher concluded: "The preaching may be biblical, the singing inspirational and the sermon uplifting, but when a visitor finds no one who cares whether or not he/she is there, he/she is not likely to come back."

How would your church rate?—Charles Horton, pastor of the College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Florida.

Church Order

Golden Rules:

1. If you open it, close it.
2. If you turn it on, turn it off.
3. If you unlock it, lock it.
4. If you break it, fix it.
5. If you can't fix it, call in someone who can.
6. If you borrow it, return it.
7. If you use it, take care of it.
8. If you make a mess, clean it up.
9. If you move it, put it back.
10. If it belongs to somebody else and you want to use it, get permission.
11. If you don't know how to operate it, leave it alone.
12. If it doesn't concern you, don't mess with it!

Church Progress

"Live churches are constantly changing.

Dead churches don't have to.

Live churches have lots of noisy kids.

Dead church are fairly quiet.

Live churches' expenses always exceed their income.

Dead churches take in more than they ever dreamed of spending.

Live churches are constantly improving for the future.

Dead churches worship their past.

Live churches move out in faith.

Dead churches operate totally by human sight.

Live churches focus on people.

Dead churches focus on programs.

Live churches are filled with tithers.

Dead churches are filled with tippers.

Live churches dream great dreams of God.

Dead churches relive nightmares.

Live churches don't have "can't" in their dictionary.

Dead churches have nothing but.

Live churches evangelize.

Dead churches fossilize."

Church Workers

If God wrote a want ad perhaps it would read like this:

Kingdom workers needed immediately. Urgency of task and shortage of workers make it mandatory that we expand our labor pool immediately. Recent resignations have left many openings.

Frequent absenteeism will force us to make unwanted cutbacks in services unless we expand work force immediately. Ability not as essential as availability plus an excellent training manual is available. Training manual has been tried and proven over the past two thousand years.

We hire regardless of sex, race or age. Diverse backgrounds welcome and even helpful. In the past we have used peasants and poets, kings and fig pickers, fishermen and doctors, harlots and queens, young lads and wise old men.

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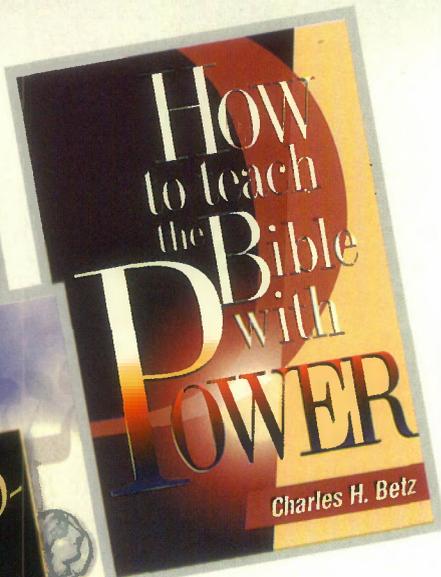
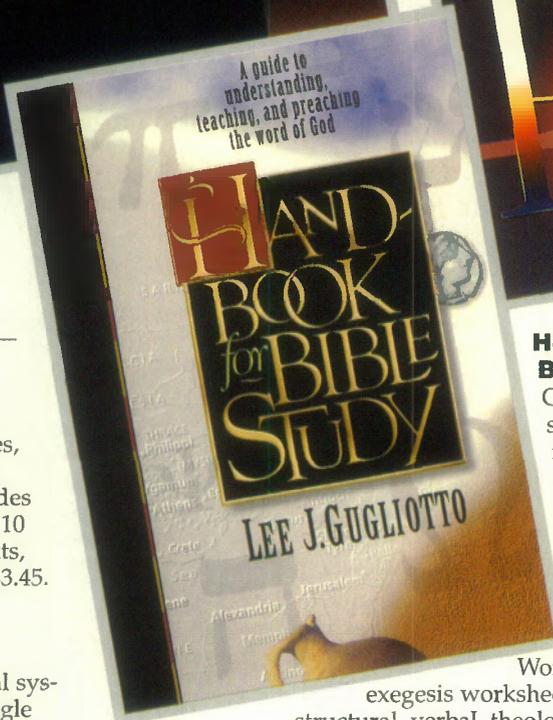
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