

quarterly resource for local church leaders † january/march 2012

ELDER'S DIGEST

Join us in

10
days

of **PRAYER**



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REDEEM THE TIME

A BRIGHT NEW YEAR IS BEFORE US. SURELY NOW IS AN EXCELLENT TIME TO PUSH THE “RESET BUTTON” AND GET A FRESH START.

We are challenged by the Word of the Lord to “redeem . . . the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Col. 4:5). I encourage every elder and every church to do so. Let me share a few suggestions with you.

Dedicate yourself afresh to a daily walk with the Lord. Pray, read the Bible, live by biblical concepts and principles, and keep your heart open and attuned to the Lord. Ask the Lord to guide your every step. Determine that you will stay in fellowship with the Lord every day.

Give yourself to soul-winning. Become a part of the team of soul-winners who will be actively working in 2012. You’ll be amazed at how God can use you—and you’ll be even more amazed at what blessings come to you as a soul-winner. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” (Prov. 11:30).

Stop rehearsing past hurts and failures. If you are nursing an old wound, let it go. The past is past. You have today, and with God’s help, you can make it beautiful. Don’t let some ugly thing from yesterday steal your joys for today and your hopes for tomorrow. As you enter this new year, look up and look forward.


Share the vision of your pastor. You’ll do well to discover your pastor’s dreams for your church and for reaching your area for Christ. Let yourself in on that vision and dream with your pastor. Invest yourself in bringing that dream to reality. Walk side-by-side with your pastor. Work with and stand beside him or her.

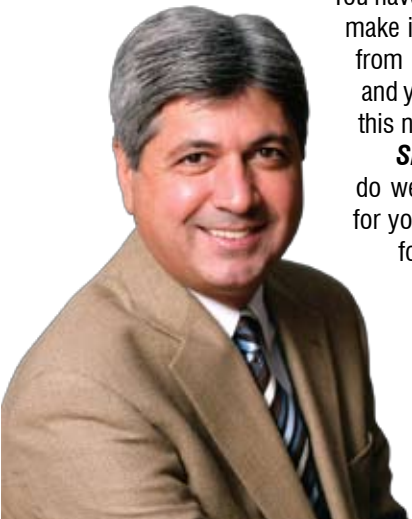
Trust the Lord. You can’t foresee every shadow that will fall across your path. No matter what, though, you can trust Him. Jesus never leaves you or forsakes you. When darkness surrounds you, trust Him. When your burdens grow heavy, trust Him. When you don’t know the answers and can’t explain the circumstances, trust Him. Just keep trusting!

Set goals, make plans, and dream again! Goals are important! If you have a great cause, then you ought to have worthy goals. As we begin this new year, let’s set goals for attendance, souls saved, baptisms, and so on. Make your goals reasonable and achievable, but do get them in place. Let everybody know what you intend to do. Be excited about your goals and make plans that will assure you of reaching your goals. Don’t be afraid to dream again. Get up, set goals, make plans, and let your dreams become reality in this new year.

Develop a 52-week plan. Make sure something is happening in all seasons. Plan a variety of activities and a balanced program for your church. Make programs for winter, spring, summer, and fall. Make December a month of Christmas-related activities. Make folks want to stay in church and get involved! Keep things happening every week of the year!

Start something new. Organize a new Bible class in your church, or establish a new ministry that meets a need. Find a way to make it happen. Now is the time! When there is time, there is opportunity—and we must not waste time or opportunity (Matt. 10:27).

We know what to do. We cannot be silent. A new year—366 days—is before us! Let’s not lose it in lethargy! Let’s run the race excitedly and fervently. In the new year, let’s redeem the time! 



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

OPERATION GLOBAL RAIN

LEAD YOUR CONGREGATION INTO A DEEPER EXPERIENCE BY JOINING THIS GRASSROOTS PRAYER INITIATIVE.

Pastor Ivor Myers had no idea that calling his California church members to ten days of united prayer would birth a global prayer movement.

During those ten days of prayer in 2006, Myers and his church members prayed and agonized with God for the blessing of His Spirit. Each night the church's elders joined Myers in leading up to 70 members through a specific prayer topic such as repentance, forgiveness, witnessing, and family. They prayed short sentence prayers to make the time pass quickly and keep everyone focused.

The communion service on the final Friday night led to reconciliation and healing among members. The sanctuary was packed the next day as people walked in off the streets or returned to church after many years away. Members glowed

as they reported striking answers to prayer. Truly, revival was happening!

The experience changed the lives of Myers and his lay leaders and started them dreaming of a much larger ten days of prayer—one that encircled the globe. The idea spread rapidly, and more than 1,800 churches in 80 countries participated in the first annual worldwide Operation Global Rain (OGR), held in January 2007. Testimonies flooded in afterward telling of revived churches, converted lives, renewed passion for evangelism, and healed relationships.

OGR MELTS WITH REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

Every year since then, many lay members, church elders, and local pastors around the world have led their congrega-

OPERATION GLOBAL RAIN LEADER GUIDELINES

- Register your church or group at www.revivalandreformation.org.
- Set aside one hour at a convenient time each day to pray together.
- Download the daily prayer topic sheets from www.revivalandreformation.org and use them to guide your prayer times.
- Get a copy of Mark Finley's *10 Days in the Upper Room* from the Adventist Book Center and use the resources in it.
- Begin and end your group prayer time with praise and thanksgiving. Choose an applicable psalm to pray through.
- Pray short sentence prayers so each person can pray more than once; keep the prayer time interesting, and allow for the Holy Spirit to impress you how to pray.
- Instead of discussing prayer requests, encourage individuals to pray their requests. Others can then join them in praying for that particular need. This will make your prayer time more powerful as people unite in presenting their needs directly to God.

- Have a special prayer focus and share testimonies of answered prayer during both Sabbaths of OGR.

TIPS FOR A SPIRIT-FILLED 10 DAYS OF PRAYER

- Ask God to prepare your heart to lead out in OGR.
- Set aside personal, private time with God in addition to the group prayer times.
- Pray much for the Holy Spirit, claiming Jesus' words in Acts 1:8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witness to Me."
- Consider some type of fasting, such as from TV, secular music, movies, the Internet, or desserts. Use the extra time to pray and read your Bible. Ask God to reveal Himself to you.
- Pray God's Bible promises back to Him to build your faith and ensure you are praying His will.
- Ask God to show you five people to pray for during the 10 days.
- For more ideas visit www.revivalandreformation.org.

tions in seeking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during ten days of united prayer. Many have participated during OGR's January dates, others at times that work best for them.

As part of the General Conference Revival and Reformation initiative, the world church's Executive Committee at the 2010 Annual Council held in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, voted to make OGR's ten days of prayer an annual global event. The next worldwide OGR is scheduled for January 4-14, 2012, with daily prayer meetings and a special celebration on the final Sabbath. Churches unable to participate in January are encouraged to use OGR resources at a time that works for them.

LAY LEADERSHIP KEY TO ENCOURAGING PRAYER

Local elders and lay leaders are key to making OGR's ten days of prayer a success. Says Pastor Myers, "The elders of our church have participated in every Operation Global Rain since its inception. The influence of OGR on them, and in turn their influence upon the church membership, has strengthened the church dramatically in the area of prayer. Our elders' strong support of prayer has led to several small prayer meetings each week and every evangelistic meeting having a dedicated prayer team."

EVERY PRAYER MATTERS

"We are praying that every church, church plant, small group, and individual will join in a united effort to pray for the

Holy Spirit," says Jerry Page, GC Ministerial Association secretary. "We know that only through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit's presence and power will we be empowered to reach this world with Jesus' love so He can come very soon."

Ellen White emphasized the same need: "A chain of earnest, praying believers should encircle the world. Let all pray in humility. A few neighbors may meet together to pray for the Holy Spirit. Let those who can not leave home, gather in their children, and unite in learning to pray together. They may claim the promise of the Savior: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'"¹

World church president Ted N. C. Wilson, leading the worldwide Revival and Reformation initiative, describes heaven as "anxiously waiting for God's people to awake and seek the blessing of God's Spirit. God's promise, 'Ask and you shall receive,' is sure. He will answer prayers for the outpouring of His Spirit so that we can effectively share His Good News and Jesus can return."

Each and every member's prayers are needed in this important work. Plan now to join us in earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit during Operation Global Rain, whether January 4-14, 2012, or at another time that works for your local members.

ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Jan. 3, 1907.

Janet Page is an associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association for prayer, pastoral spouses, and families.

Join us in
10
days
of **PRAYER**

OPERATION
GLOBAL RAIN

Jan. 4-14, 2012

777

www.RevivalAndReformation.org

SHORT AND TO THE SERMON'S POINT

LET THE HOLY SPIRIT MOLD AND FASHION YOUR SPEECH, CLEANSING IT FROM ALL DROSS. SPEAK AS TO LITTLE CHILDREN, REMEMBERING THAT THERE ARE MANY WELL ADVANCED IN YEARS WHO ARE BUT LITTLE CHILDREN IN UNDERSTANDING.

Attention to sermon preparation. The discourses given upon present truth are full of important matter, and if these discourses are carefully considered before being presented to the people, if they are condensed and do not cover too much ground, if the spirit of the Master goes with the utterances, no one will be left in darkness, no one will have cause to complain of being uned. The preparation, both in preacher and hearer, has very much to do with the result.

I will here quote a few words that have come under my notice just now: "I always know by the length of Cannon's sermon whether he has been much from home during the week," said one of his flock. "When carefully studied, his discourses are of a moderate length, but it is almost impossible for his hearers to forget the teachings conveyed in them. When he has had no time for preparation, his sermons are unreasonably long, and it is equally impossible to get anything out of them which will stick to the memory."


Another able minister was asked how long he was accustomed to preach. "When I prepare thoroughly, half an hour; when only partially, an hour; but when I enter the pulpit without previous preparation, I go on for any length of time you like; in fact, I never know when to stop."

Guard spiritual digestion. "I do not like to go much beyond the half hour," said a faithful and earnest preacher, who certainly never gave to his hearers that which cost him nothing in the preparation. "I know that the spiritual digestion of some is but weak, and I should be sorry for my hearers to spend the second half hour in forgetting what I had said in

the first, or in wishing that I would cease when I had given them as much as they could carry away."

Cut down your lengthy discourses. Some of your lengthy discourses would have far better effect upon the people if cut up into three. The people cannot digest so much; their minds cannot even grasp it, and they become wearied and confused by having so much matter brought before them in one discourse. Two thirds of such long discourses are lost, and the preacher is exhausted. There are many of our ministers who err in this respect. The result upon them is not good; for they become brain weary and feel that they are carrying heavy loads for the Lord and having a hard time. . . .

Reputation of being an interesting speaker. Put into your work all the enthusiasm that you can. Let your discourses be short. There are two reasons why you should do this. One is that you may gain the reputation of being an interesting speaker. Another is that you may preserve your health.

Sermons with fresh ideas. Never weary the hearers by long discourses. This is not wise. For many years I have been laboring on this point, seeking to have our brethren sermonize less, and devote their time and strength to making important points of truth plain, for every point will be assailed by our opponents. Everyone connected with the work should keep fresh ideas; . . . and by tact and foresight bring all that is possible into your work to interest your hearers. 

This article is excerpted from the book *Evangelism*, pages 175-178, by Ellen G. White.

LEADERSHIP

THE 5 WORST TRAITS OF POOR LEADERS

AS A LEADER YOU ARE TASKED WITH DELIVERING RESULTS. THE BEST LEADERS KNOW THAT CONSISTENTLY DELIVERING GREAT RESULTS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT THEY CAN DO IN ISOLATION. TO GET OTHERS TO SUPPORT THEM IN CONSISTENTLY DELIVERING RESULTS THEY NEED TO AVOID THE 5 WORST TRAITS OF POOR LEADERS. IN MY EXPERIENCE THESE INCLUDE:

TRAIT 1: BEING ARROGANT

Without doubt you want a leader to be self assured and confident. At the same time you want them to be self aware and understand the impact that they have on others. If you are someone who is arrogant you will do a great job at turning people off and disengaging them.

TRAIT 2: UNWILLING TO LISTEN

You are the leader, you are in charge, you take the decisions and you make things happen. You don't need the views and opinions of others, right? Well, yes if you want to completely de-motivate people and isolate them. On the other hand, if you want to work with your people to deliver great service and performance, make time to listen to them.

TRAIT 3: BULLYING

No one likes or respects a bully. A bully is not only bad news for those that they lead, but is costly too. An article in *Personnel Today* in December 2007 suggests that it hits the bottom line. At that time it was suggested that workplace bullying was costing more than £2bn a year in sick pay, staff turnover and productivity.

In the long run, leaders who rely on bullying or heavy handed tactics will more than likely find themselves in the middle of an ocean in a sinking ship without a life jacket at some point. How appealing does that sound?

TRAIT 4: FAVOURITISM

Tough as it may be, your job as a leader is to try and aim to treat everyone the same and avoid favouritism. It can be



tempting to have favourites but can be extremely dangerous in the long run. The reason is that you will create divisions in teams that can lead to 'in fighting' instead of time and energies being focused on results.

TRAIT 5: DISORGANISED

If you have ever worked for someone who consistently turns up late for meetings, does not have all of their papers available and fails to keep on track, you will know just how troublesome this can be. With more and more demands on leaders' time, being organised is no longer an optional extra.

If you want to prosper as a leader you need to maximise good traits and minimise bad traits. So what action do you need to take to achieve this?



Ducan Brodie is director of the Goals and Achievements Ltd. This article is used with permission from www.goalsandachievements.co.uk

BEAUTIFYING BAPTISMAL SERVICES

HAVE YOU EVER CONDUCTED A WEDDING BETWEEN SABBATH SCHOOL AND THE CHURCH SERVICE? WHY, THEN SHOULD AN EVENT AS SIGNIFICANT AS BAPTISM BE MADE SO UNOBTRUSIVE? ISN'T IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A BEAUTIFUL CEREMONY WHEN UNITING AN INDIVIDUAL TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH?

Many baptismal services seem to be conducted with little forethought or planning. Disorganized, unattractive, and squeezed between Sabbath school and the worship service, they appear designed to get the ceremony over and out of the way quickly. On the other hand, most weddings seem carefully—even meticulously—planned to be as beautiful and significant as possible. Have you ever seen the bridegroom wearing ragged, wrinkled clothing? But how often we attire baptismal candidates in robes that are frayed, faded, and unpressed! Have you ever conducted a wedding between Sabbath school and church service or immediately following the announcements? Why, then should an event as significant as baptism be made so unobtrusive. Why is it so important to have a beautiful, carefully planned ceremony when joining two individuals in marriage, yet not equally important to do so when uniting an individual to Christ and to His church?

The baptism, whenever it is conducted, should be made the chief focal point of the whole service. Surely such an important event should not be tacked on at the end of the sermon or slipped in where it will be the least disruptive. The songs, the prayers, the sermon, and everything in the worship should lead up to the climax of the actual baptism.

THE SURROUNDINGS

Of all locations, the outdoor baptism is probably the most beautiful. Great care must be taken, however, in selecting the site when such a baptism is planned. Safety, beauty, and accessibility need to be considered. Before the baptism, explore every step of the water area and take out any rocks or harmful objects that might cause accidents. If the bottom

is slippery it may be possible to put down canvas or spread sand over the area to give sure footing. Small posts, painted white and placed into the water, will identify the baptismal area, especially if a rope or cord is stretched between them.

Often an outdoor baptism is not feasible, and an appropriate indoor baptistry must be used. For visibility the best location is high above the platform, directly behind the pulpit. A tasteful nature or religious scene behind the baptistry adds beauty, as do flowers artistically placed around the baptistry.

Each church should have its own supply of robes without having to depend on borrowing them from the conference or another church. These robes should be of opaque material, somewhat water repellent, and weighted at the bottom. Keep them pressed, mended, and attractive. And provide enough different sizes for each candidate to have a proper fit.

THE CANDIDATES' ROLE

The candidates need to understand thoroughly the meaning of baptism. They ought to know what is expected of them during and following the service. Before the baptism it would be well to demonstrate step by step just what will take place during the actual ceremony. Instruct the women to wear washable dresses, and the men slacks, under the robes and to bring towels and changes of underclothing.

On the day of the service, present each candidate to the church and introduce him or her to the congregation by name. Then, instead of having the candidates stand before the church while being quizzed regarding their acceptance of all the thirteen questions in the *Church Manual*, consider an alternative. Actually, what does the traditional examina-

tion prove? Will a person be rejected if he raises his hand at the wrong time or if he fails to put it up in response to a key question? Should a person be accepted for baptism simply because he knows enough to put up his hand when everyone else does? It seems to me that besides proving little, this exercise gives the impression of being a trial in which the church members are the jury. It makes an unnecessary spectacle of the baptismal candidates.

As an alternative, have the candidates organized into a baptismal class, either in the Sabbath school or in connection with evangelistic meetings. At a special predetermined class, review with them all the principles of faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Have these principles printed on cards and distribute them to each person considering baptism. Appeal to the candidates to commit themselves to these principles and to the church that teaches them, and to unite by baptism with that church. (They have already made a commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, so this further response should be only a natural outgrowth of that.) Then ask each one who wants to make such a commitment to sign the card and return it to you. When possible, invite church members to be present so they can witness these commitments.

Individuals who may not be in a baptismal class can make their commitment in their own homes and sign the card there. Such a process is a much stronger decision than the mere raising of hands in front of a church. In addition, all these candidates are presented, by name, to the church board for discussion and approval before appearing before the church. Why, then, must they be “put on trial” again before the church?

When the baptismal ceremony is to take place, have the candidates sit on the first row or rows of the church and in-

**“BROTHER,
SISTER, THIS
IS A HAND OF
WELCOME, BUT
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ENCOURAGEMENT
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NEEDED.”**

troduce them one by one. Then inform the church that these individuals have been thoroughly instructed and have declared their total agreement with, and acceptance of, the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (If the congregation still wants some sort of specific commitment from the individual candidates, you may ask them to indicate their acceptance of these teachings and principles and their desire to unite with the Seventh-day Adventist Church by raising their hands.)

The standard method of voting candidates into church membership usually goes like this: There is an awkward moment while a timid church member summons the courage to say, “I move that we accept these candidates as members of our church, subject to baptism.” While he hesitates the candidates wonder, “What if they don’t want us?” The second to the motion comes quite easily. There never is any discussion, although it must be asked for. Then, in response to “Question,” the pastor asks, “All in favor say Aye.” A weak response follows, for most people are rather afraid to speak out in our services (as shown by the almost nonexistent amens). The candidates are definitely wondering now whether the church really wants them. Then the pastor really scares them when he asks, “All opposed say No!” Why put these poor people through all this? Let them know they are welcome and that we are thrilled to have them as new brothers and sisters!





Rather than going through a cold, formal vote, ask, “How many want to welcome these new members to our church? If so, raise your hand. In doing so you are saying, ‘Brother, sister, this is a hand of welcome, but it is also a hand of love, a helping hand, a hand of encouragement whenever it is needed.’” As the hands are raised in a warm, loving welcome, ask the candidates to turn around and look at the welcome they are being given into the “family” by their new brothers and sisters.

PHYSICAL PREPARATIONS

To avoid last-minute delay and confusion, have the candidates robed before the preaching service begins. (This is another good reason to be sure that the robes are modest, attractive, and in good repair.)

One imperative that is often overlooked is the necessity of private places for the candidates to dress and undress. So often we just herd the women into one large room and the men into another and tell them to get dressed. Surely the baptismal ceremony should not be remembered as an assault on their human dignity! If you are building a church, provide some permanent dressing booths for this purpose. If you already have a building with no such provision, at least stretch wires across the room and hang sheets to make private dressing cubicles.

ADMINISTERING BAPTISM

The sermon should not be long on baptism Sabbath. (Twenty minutes is ample.) Instead of a regular sermon, why not sometimes have testimonies regarding the conversion experiences of the baptismal candidates? The minister or the candidates themselves could present the testimonies. But be certain that you have the candidates’ permission before relating anything that might be of a personal nature. Keep the testimonies spiritually uplifting; avoid recounting lives of gross sinfulness.

While the candidates are going into and out of the baptistry, something more than the splash of water is needed to contribute to the spirituality of the service. Soft music either by a choir or an organ, or even congregational singing, would be appropriate. An interesting innovation is to have individuals or a speech choir recite suitable Scripture passages as the candidates come into the water and as they leave.

Usually the candidates enter the baptistry one at a time, but when a whole family or very close friends are to be baptized, it is impressive to have them come into the water together. In the case of a family, have the father enter first, and he can assist the others.

For the actual baptismal formula, don’t simply give a regular, memorized set of words, but try to say something that would be appropriate for each individual. Remember, too, the baptismal formula as it is usually given is not a prayer but a reminder to the candidate of his own commitment. Thus there is no need to lift your head toward heaven and close your eyes as you say the formula. Look into the person’s face and encourage him to look at you, because, after all, you are speaking to him. Since it is not a prayer, you do not need to close with Amen.

When you immerse the candidate there is no need to plunge him in as rapidly as possible, causing him to lose his breath and creating a stir comparable to Niagara. Take a single step in the direction the person will be lowered and then let him down slowly and calmly. As his head reaches the water, pause for an instant to cover his nose and mouth with the cloth and gently immerse him. There is really no reason for the immersion to resemble a life-and-death struggle. As the person is raised from the water a hymn of commitment begins.

At the close of the baptism extend an appeal to unbaptized persons in the congregation to consider this step. A prayer of consecration can then be given right from the baptistry.

At the close of the service have the candidates return to the front of the church, where they can be welcomed as new members of the church, first by the minister and the elders, then by those in the congregation who want to take part. The baptismal certificates can be prepared in advance and presented to the new members at this time as well.

Like weddings, baptismal ceremonies need not all be identical in order to be beautiful and well planned. Each pastor will have his own special way of carrying out certain items. Beauty, not uniformity, is the goal. Let’s invest this significant event with the dignity and attractiveness its importance deserves.



Herman Bauman is a retired president of the Arizona Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC

IS IT HONORING TO GOD?
SHOULD IT BE USED IN
CHURCH SERVICES?



Some fifty or so years ago, dairy farmers discovered the playing of soothing music encouraged cows to produce more milk. Since more milk meant greater profits, farmers began installing sound systems inside their dairy barns. One major dairy producer capitalized on this innovation by advertising “Milk from contented cows.”

Oddly enough, the sweet strains of music very often produce an entirely opposite reaction among Christians. Instead of contentment, hostile disagreements over selections in worship music have become a leading cause of congregational infighting and even church splits! To our shame, there are believers who sulk and fume from their pews if their particular brand of musical tastes is not satisfied. Studies and surveys in churches are showing that music ministers are among the most stressed in Christian ministry.

Musical tastes are as varied as church members themselves. There are those who love the old hymns while others much prefer a more contemporary flavor. Some music ministers have attempted to appease everyone by blending the old with the new. Other churches offer two separate worship services each Sabbath—one being traditional and the other a contemporary service. Still, there are churches that tenaciously cling to old-fashion tradition. I know of a local pastor who is fond of bragging, “You won’t hear any contemporary music in our church! We remain true to the old hymns!” What he fails to realize is that even the old hymns were “contemporary” when they were first written! In contrast, I once attended a church in which the music was played at an ear-splitting volume resembling that of an armored vehicle crossing a minefield.

There are those who argue the old hymns are a tangible link to our past. This is certainly true, for these hymns have

surely withstood the test of time. Many of the old hymns, too, are rich in Christian doctrine. The lyrics of Charles Wesley or Martin Luther, as examples, give magnificent instruction in sound Christian theology.

But can we not make similar statements favoring contemporary Christian music? Yes, we certainly can, for there are some wonderful Christian artists glorifying the name of Christ Jesus with their talents. Should we deny their musical contributions based solely upon the fact that their songs are fresh and new? To do so sounds rather legalistic and since when has unbending legalism brought honor to God? Far too often we allow our own personal taste in music to become the standard for what music is glorifying to God. Instead, we should allow, even promote, Christian freedom and grace in musical preferences.

People are always asking if drums or keyboards or, yes, if electric guitars belong in the church. All musical instruments are, in themselves, neither good nor bad—they are amoral. So the question is this: Does a style of music edify believers while bringing honor and glory to Christ Jesus? If so, then what difference does it make if the accompaniment is provided by a piano or a guitar? Perhaps Ephesians 5:19 is the answer to this issue in that it promotes worshipping the Lord and encouraging other believers in three different “styles” of music, “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”



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

GRACE FOR “STONING SINNERS”

The familiar and commonly-used phrase “caught in the act” bring to mind the story of Jesus in John 8:1-11. While Jesus sat in the Jerusalem temple, teaching the people on the morning of a new day (John 8:1, 2), the elders of the church brought a case to Him for church discipline. A woman had been “caught in the very act” of adultery (John 8:3, 4). In order to trap Jesus, the elders made Him judge over the case (John 8:5, 6a). How would He deal with this sinner who was “caught in the act”? A closer study reveals that this passage has a few things to teach elders about dealing with sin and sinners, especially in the church.

“CASE CLOSED”

Jesus tackles the case by dealing first with the accusers. His first response to the question of the accusing elders is non-verbal; He writes on the temple floor. Interestingly, this is the only record of Jesus writing in the whole New Testament. But what was He writing? The Greek word used in John 8:6b can be translated “to write against,” suggesting that what Jesus wrote on the ground was against the accusers. Ellen G. White presents the following account: “. . . but as their eyes, following those of Jesus, fell on the pavement before His feet, their countenances changed. . . . There before their eyes were the guilty secrets of their own lives. . . . They trembled lest the hidden iniquity of their own lives should be laid open to the multitude.”¹ Using a common practice of that time, Jesus writes in the dirt the secret sins of the church elders.

Jesus’ second response is verbal; He asks for a sinless witness to begin the execution (John 8:7). With troubled consciences, the elders drop their stones and leave one by one (John 8:9). There are no accusers left, no stones for execution, and no more case against the sinner. However, Jesus is left as the only One qualified to judge the case because He has no sin (John 8:9, 46).

Jesus turns to the sinner and asks where her accusers are (John 8:10), to which she replies that there are none (John 8:11a). Then Jesus speaks some of the sweetest words in all Scripture: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” (John 8:11b, NKJV). Case closed!

OUR CASE UP CLOSE

What can church elders learn from this story about how God wants us to deal with sin and sinners, especially in the church? Jesus’ words and actions in the story contain some clues:

“NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU”

The context of John 8:1-11 implies that the scribes and Pharisees had stones in their hands and were ready to execute the woman (verses 3-5, 7). They had already condemned her. This is a normal human reaction when a sinner is “caught in the act.” We are usually judgmental and express “superior surprise” because we have not done such a thing. We believe we are not like that sinner (Luke 18:11); therefore, we indirectly emphasize our moral superiority by counting the charges. We are right, and the sinner is wrong and worthy of punishment. Indeed, the human reaction is to stone the sinner.

However, Jesus’ example teaches us otherwise. Unlike the judgmental treatment of sinful humans, the divine Jesus did not even ask if the woman was guilty or not. He understood the circumstances and the heart of this sinner—just as He does all sinners. He did not investigate the case.

We should not condemn the sinner. Why not? In the first place, it is God’s business to judge, not ours. We are not in the best position to decide the eternal destiny of a person based on his or her sin. In most cases, we do not understand the circumstances or know what led a person to sin. We do not really know the sinner or the motives of his or her heart. Consequently, we cannot judge correctly. God is the only One who knows the sinner’s heart, and He is the only One qualified to give a verdict.

Another reason why we are not to condemn the sinner is because we are guilty of sin, too. Like the religious leaders in John 8, church leaders sometimes forget that they also have secret sins that have not been publicly exposed. Most of the time, we are guilty of the sinner’s sin: “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?” (Rom. 2:1-3). We hate the sinner but love the sin.² Therefore, Jesus’ statement in John 8:7 still applies to us: “If there is any one here without sin, throw the first stone.” Whether it is a secret sin confessed in private or an open sin exposed in scandalous publicity, we are to remember the words of Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you” (John 8:11b).

“GO AND SIN NO MORE”

What did Jesus mean here? Was He being soft on sin—



“THE LAW WAS BROUGHT IN SO THAT THE TRESPASS MIGHT INCREASE. BUT WHERE SIN INCREASED, GRACE INCREASED ALL THE MORE.”

ROM. 5:20, NIV

letting it go without punishment or consequences? Was Jesus taking lightly the sin of adultery, thus creating a license to sin? The verse ends with the words “Sin no more.” If Jesus had been soft on sin, He would have said, “Go in peace.” *He was not condemning the woman, but He was not condoning her sin either.* In essence, Jesus said to the woman, “You have a new beginning now—a new lease on life. But if you continue in sin, it will destroy you. So go and stop sinning.” Jesus did not play with sin or permit it. If anyone in the world really understood the deadly cost of sin, that person was Jesus. He knew no sin and had no sin, but He took our sins on Himself and paid the penalty for them (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Isa. 53:6).

We should not condone sin. Yes, Jesus forgave the sinner, but forgiveness does not excuse or permit sin. Public sin should be disciplined with grace and love. Church discipline should be redemptive and positive, not destructive and negative. The spirit of Christ, of Christian compassion for the sinner while being firm in loving discipline, should be seen.³ Like Jesus, there is a need to try to understand the sinner’s circumstances and provide forgiveness and support even in the midst of church discipline.

We usually neglect our fallen brothers and sisters who are under church discipline. Dwight Nelson gives a hint of this: “But is there rest for a fallen brother or fallen sister in our community, our church? What do we do with our fallen brothers? Strip them of their credentials? Burn their vestments or at least revoke their ordination? Imprison them in their guilt by collective or at least administrative silence, banishing their memory and ministry forever from our midst? These fallen ones—do they remain our brothers and sisters in the meantime—during their fallenness? . . . Does there ever come a time when I am no longer my brother’s keeper?”⁴

Like Jesus, we should love the sinner but hate the sin and be “slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness and to stay his feet therein.”⁵

“HE WROTE ON THE GROUND”

As stated earlier, Jesus could have publicly announced the

sins of each religious leader to all the bystanders; however, He simply wrote their sins in the sandy dust of the temple floor. It is humbling to know that the same finger that wrote on stone at Sinai and Babylon wrote sins on the sandy floor. Those embarrassing secret sins of the elders were covered within minutes as if they had never been there. The divine writing of sins on the ground remains an object lesson on God’s forgiveness.

When we as church elders are tempted to place ourselves as judges over an exposed sinner, we must always remember that we have secret sins, too—sins repented of and divinely forgiven but not exposed like that of the sinner under discipline. Remembering this will cause us to humbly discipline with love and to extend the forgiveness we have received from God to sinners in need (Matt. 6:14, 15; Luke 7:37-50; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32). When we forgive others, we write their sins not in stone but on the sandy ground, just as Jesus did. When we do this, we experience and demonstrate the miracle of grace.

This grace for secret and scandalous sinners in the church will restore our walk with God and reconcile us to one another. It will resurrect a brother, restore a sister, and revive a community.⁶ This grace transforms church leaders who are “stoning sinners,” ready to accuse and judge those who are caught in the act. It reminds us that we are all sinners—sinners who deserve to be stoned but are spared. From this story, Jesus calls us to drop our stones and celebrate God’s amazing grace for all sin and sinners (Rom. 5:20).



Michael Oluikpe is a Nigerian student studying at AIIAS in the Philippines.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1940), 461.

² *Ibid.*, 462.

³ Tim Crosby, “Church Discipline the Redemptive Way,” in *Ministry*, October 2002, 27.

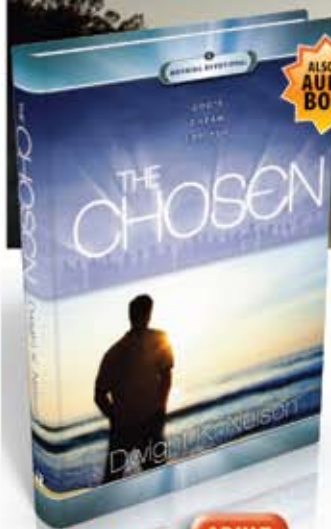
⁴ Dwight K. Nelson, “Requiem and Resurrection for a Fallen Brother,” in *Ministry*, May 2004, 6, 7.

⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 462.

⁶ Nelson, 8.

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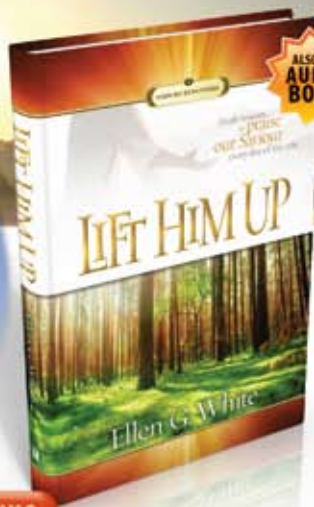
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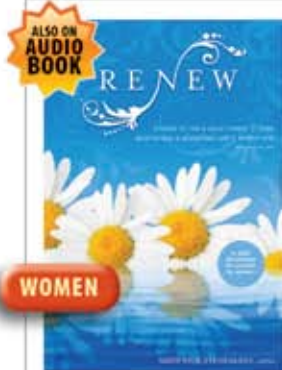
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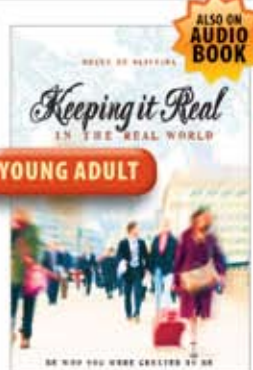


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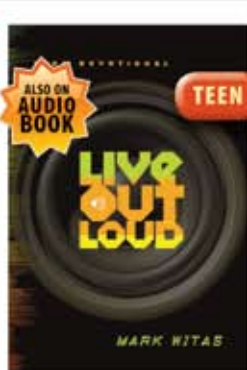


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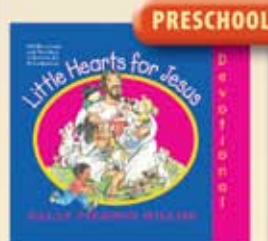


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Review & Herald

PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Acts 2:42

When you think about the year ahead, what spiritual priorities will you place before yourself during this time? In order to understand what our priorities should be, let's look carefully at the things to which the early church devoted itself. These priorities are clearly listed in Acts 2:42. (1) the apostles' teaching; (2) fellowship; (3) the breaking of bread; and (4) prayer.

First, I encourage you to be "continually devoted" to the "apostles' teaching." I encourage you to read your Bible all the way through this year. Do you think you're too busy? By reading it aloud for only 15 minutes per day, you can get through it by the end of the year. I would strongly encourage you to make reading the Bible your top priority this year.

Second, I encourage you to be "continually devoted" to "fellowship." As you recall, "fellowship" means sharing. Do not think that you can experience true fellowship in your church by simply attending services every Saturday morning and then quickly leaving. In order to share our lives together, we need to be with one another during the week.

Third, I encourage you to be "continually devoted" to "the breaking of bread." The phrase "breaking of bread" is most likely an allusion to celebrating the Lord's Supper. The key to any celebration of the Lord's Supper is a focus upon the death of Jesus Christ for our sins. This year, I encourage you to remember often Christ's work on the cross. Reflect upon Jesus and remember Him. He alone is the One who can forgive all of your sins. He alone is the One who can strengthen you when temptations come. A look to the cross is what contains the solutions to all your problems. I would strongly encourage you to reflect upon the life of Jesus Christ and the promise of His return.

Finally, just as the early church members were "continually devoting themselves . . . to prayer," prayer should be a priority for your life in 2012!

Do you think prayer is important for your life? Is prayer a priority for you? The essence of being a Christian is knowing God. When Christ transforms a heart, He also places in it the desire to know Him and to commune with Him!

The early church members were continually devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42). Some translations point out that the

word used here in verse 42 is not "prayer" but "prayers." The early church was "continually devoting themselves . . . to prayers."

Let me give you three simple ways to pray. These are not mind-boggling; they are simple and straightforward. But I trust that they will be good for your soul to hear as you evaluate your priorities for 2012.

I. PRAY WITH THE CHURCH

After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples gathered together, unsure about what the future would hold for them. They were depending upon the Lord in every way (Acts 1:14). They were united in their purpose of prayer, praying with one voice to God. The church was praying together.

We see the same thing in Acts 4:23-24; 12:2-5. The church was laboring in their prayers. The church was passionate in their prayers. These are but a few of the examples we have of the early church praying together. We could look at many others. For example, the leaders of the church at Antioch were praying together (Acts 13:1-3). The elders of the church at Ephesus were praying together (Acts 20:36). The church at Tyre prayed with Paul, and the Bible specifically states that wives and children were included (Acts 21:5). The point of our text is obvious: As a church, we ought to pray together!

Will 2012 be a year when you commit yourself to praying with the church?

II. PRAY BY YOURSELF

Let us examine Acts 9:11. This is the story of Saul of Tarsus. While on his way to Damascus to pillage the church, he was wondrously converted. You remember how "a light from heaven flashed around him" (verse 3) and blinded him (verse 8). You remember how Jesus appeared to him and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (verse 4). Saul was led by the hand into Damascus, where he neither ate nor drank (verses 8-9). Then, the Lord appeared to Ananias and said, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11).

Saul was now a converted man who was praying to the Lord. The Lord told Ananias to go see Saul, precisely *because* he was pray-

ing. We can only guess that Saul was praying alone. Though he was in the house of Judas, we hear nothing of Saul praying with the household. Saul was praying alone, trying to figure out why he had become blind.

Acts 9:40 give us another example. Here we see Peter in Joppa attending to a disciple named Tabitha (verse 36), whose name in Greek was Dorcas. Dorcas had died (verse 37). Peter went to her home and found many widows weeping over her death (verse 39). Then verse 40 says, "But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up."

Perhaps it is an obvious point that you should pray by yourself. But I feel that it is necessary to mention because private prayer is the foundation to public prayer. Unless you pray by yourself, your prayers with the church will be fruitless. Praying in public without praying in private is like running a marathon without training.

III. PRAY WITH YOUR FAMILY

Do not think that when you have prayed by yourself and with the church, your task of prayer is done. It does not stop there! Our families need to be prayer centers. I tell you this for your own good. The happiest family is the family that prays together. The most secure family is the family that honors God. The Bible tells us that "those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:30).

This year will be successful only if you "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" (Deut. 6:5). Trust daily in His goodness and grace. Look to Christ for your strength. The early church was "continually devoted" to these things. Can we not do the same?

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

LESSONS TO LEARN FOR THE SECOND COMING

Matthew 24:32-44

In our text for today, Jesus is preparing His disciples for the Second Coming. In Matthew 24:42, 43, Jesus says, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.” Before Jesus gave us these words, He first taught some lessons.

I. LEARN FROM THE FIG TREE (Matt. 24:32-34)

The parable of the fig tree is simple. Jesus is talking about the change in season, using the fig tree as an example. In Jesus’ day, the fig tree was very common in Israel, much as it is now. In that part of the world, fig trees put forth their fruit for nine months of the year. They are dormant during a few winter months but are covered in blossoms during the early spring. When the tree blooms, you know that summer is near.

The illustration and its explanation are easy, but its application is difficult. What is Jesus referring to when He speaks of “changes”? Jesus said that when you look at “these things,” you will know that the time is near. What are “these things”?

Jesus spent much of His discourse describing the things that would take place before He comes. Have “these things” taken place? Since the days of Jesus, there have always been deceivers, wars, disasters, earthquakes, persecutions, and defections, and the gospel has continued to spread.

“These things” took place in the days just after Jesus. Jesus said that they would: “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (verse 34). Many of “these things” have continued to take place since the generation that was alive in the days of Jesus. Since the ascension of Jesus (as recorded in Acts 1), I believe that the days have been primed for Jesus to return again.

The lesson of the fig tree is this: “Know that summer is near!” The lesson for us today is this: “Know that the Lord is near!” This is the language of the New Testament writers (Phil. 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:8, 9).

James uses almost the same terminology as his divine brother. Jesus said, “The Lord is near, right at the door” (verse 33). We need

to learn this lesson. When we think of Jesus’ Second Coming, we ought not think it is a long way off. We ought to think of the coming of Jesus as soon and near.

From the fig tree, learn that the coming of Jesus is soon!

II. LEARN FROM JESUS (Matt. 24:35, 36)

Verse 35 indicates a certainty in the words of Jesus, but verse 36 indicates an uncertainty in the words of Jesus. He is uncertain regarding the timing of these things. From these two verses, I want to pull out two lessons for us to learn, one lesson from each verse.

From verse 35, we learn that these things are certain. Admittedly, Jesus’ words in this chapter are difficult to believe, especially regarding the parable of the fig tree. Jesus said that when you see these things happen, you know that His coming is near. You know that His return is soon! But He spoke these words more than 2,000 years ago! This very observation has led many to renounce the faith. In 2 Peter 3, Peter anticipated this problem to Christianity.

When we hear the word “soon,” we think that it will be the next thing we do. In some circumstances, “soon” could be next week or next month. But certainly in our minds, “soon” doesn’t mean 2,000 years!

That is where God is different than we are. For us, eternity is 70 years! “Soon” means this year, this month, tomorrow, or even right now! But, for God, eternity is eternity! And so, for Him, “soon” can be 10,000 years. All eternity will make any delay—however long—seem as if it were but a day. “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

How long has the Lord delayed His coming? Two days! The days of delay have a purpose; they are for repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Any delay in His coming is an expression of His kindness toward the unrepentant. Perhaps the Lord is being kind to you! Perhaps today is a day when you need to repent of your sin and bow to the Savior!

Every person who has ever set a date for the return of Christ has always been wrong! In fact, you must realize that if anyone sets a day for the return of Christ, you can be assured that He will not return on that day.

From the fig tree, learn that the coming of Jesus is soon! From Jesus, learn that the return of Christ is certain!

III. LEARN FROM NOAH (Matt. 24:37-41)

Jesus goes back to Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, to illustrate His coming. He tells the story of Noah. You remember that Noah was a man who lived on earth when the corruption of men had spread far and deep.

While Noah was building the ark, life went on as usual. Jesus said that before the flood, “they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage” (Matt. 24:38). Jesus describes a typical life. None of the things mentioned by Jesus was particularly sinful. The people’s sin was to ignore the words of Noah.

The eight people in the ark were the only ones saved from the flood. Those who weren’t in the ark perished. The point of the story is clear. Most people didn’t understand that a flood was coming (Matt. 24:39). They made no preparations for that day. They heard Noah’s warnings, but they certainly didn’t believe that the flood was coming. In verse 39, Jesus said, “So shall the coming of the Son of Man be.”

I believe Jesus was trying to make a point here that His return will be sudden! In Noah’s day, life went on as usual. Though the warning was sounded, the people ignored it. When Jesus returns to this earth, His coming will be just as sudden. When the Lord comes back, there isn’t going to be any time to repent. The game will be over. It will all be decided!

From the fig tree, learn that the coming of Jesus is soon! From Jesus, learn that the return of Christ is certain! From Noah, learn that the return of Christ will be sudden. All of these lessons are different variations on the same point: Be ready. This is where we began this morning. Jesus said, “You be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (verse 44).



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

REMEMBER THE SECOND COMING

This message has three points, because Peter emphasizes three things as he tells us to remember the second coming of Christ.

I. DON'T FORGET THAT MOCKERS ARE COMING (VERSES 3, 4)

Peter seems to say, "Don't be surprised when people come up and mock you for believing in the second coming of Christ." They will come; there is no doubt about it. It's not that Peter is brilliant here, nor is it that he needed an extra-special revelation from God to make his point. Rather, it's that there have always been those who deny the coming of God—and there will always be people who deny His coming.

In the book of Psalms, David explains how his enemies have said to him all day long, "Where is your God?" (Ps. 42:3). In Psalm 115:2, the nations are saying, "Where, now, is their God?" In Malachi's day, the cry was, "Where is the God of justice?" And if people have always denied God's coming, won't there always be people who will deny Christ's return? Of course they will! And this is Peter's point.

The epistles of the New Testament are flooded with references to the return of Christ. Consider the following verses: 1 Corinthians 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; James 5:7; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1:7 and 22:20.

The message of Christianity couldn't be clearer. Our Messiah has come. He was crucified for our sins. And God raised Him from the dead, exalted His name above all names, and seated Him at His right hand.

Let's move on to the second point.

II. DON'T FORGET THAT ALL IS NOT THE SAME (VERSES 5-7)

Peter does a masterful job in this text of diffusing the argument of these scoffers, who deny the return of Christ. Verses 5-7 are a direct response to these mockers who deny the second coming of Christ. The first phrase in verse 5 sets it up: "For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice." In other words, these mockers are maintaining that all has been the same since the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and right up to Peter's day.

For those living in Peter's day, that was a long time. Abraham lived about 2,000 years

"NO HUMAN LANGUAGE CAN PORTRAY THE SCENES OF THE SECOND COMING OF THE SON OF MAN IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN. . . HE WILL COME CLAD IN THE ROBE OF LIGHT, WHICH HE HAS WORN FROM THE DAYS OF ETERNITY."

REVIEW AND HERALD
SEPT. 5, 1899.

before Christ, and for the next 2,000 years, the world remained essentially the same. In fact, their argument would be even stronger today, because we are some 2,000 years *after* Peter wrote. But Peter points out that all has *not* been the same; the flood destroyed the earth long ago (verse 6). And then Peter brings up the final judgment, which awaits all who deny Christ's second coming (verse 7).

Peter's point is this: "Don't forget that all is not the same" (verses 5-7). It wasn't the same in the past—God destroyed the world with a flood. It won't be the same in the future—God will destroy the world with a fire. So don't rest upon the fact that things have been the same for thousands of years. Go back a bit further, and you will remember how the world was once destroyed with a flood. Think about the future, and you will know that the world will be destroyed with fire.

Christ is returning again. As verse 10 says, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief." It's going to be sudden. It's going to be quick. It's going to be unexpected.

III. DON'T FORGET THAT GOD IS PATIENT (VERSES 8, 9)

The first thing that you notice in verse 8 is that it sounds a bit like verse 5. In verse 5, Peter wrote that the changes the earth has experienced "escaped the notice" of the mockers. Here in verse 8, Peter urges us not

to let one fact "escape your notice." The same Greek word—*lanthano*—is used in verse 5. It means "to forget, neglect, be hidden." Peter says, "Don't forget that God is patient." This is the point of verses 8 and 9. Don't neglect this fact.

In verse 8, Peter quotes from Psalm 90:4, in which Moses wrote, "A thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night." Isn't this the essence of patience? Patience takes little regard for the passing of time. Two people agree to meet at a certain time. One person arrives on time, but the other person is 10 minutes late. A patient person won't be rattled by the passing of time; he or she is okay with it.

Look at verse 9: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." The Lord has made a promise that He will return. Any delay in His return isn't a sign of weakness or inability. It's not that God has forgotten His promise. It's not that God is incapable of fulfilling His promise; rather, it's a sign of His patience. He will fulfill His promise someday!

How ironic that the reason God delays His coming judgment—because He is waiting for repentance—becomes the very reason people refuse to believe! Take note here of the heart of God. His heart is for people to repent!

Obviously, there are questions that abound in this verse. How is it that God doesn't wish for any to perish, but people actually do perish? Is God not in control? Are there things that He really wants but can't accomplish? No. God is fully in control. The God who can destroy the world with a flood can certainly change a human heart. The God who will destroy the world with a burning fire can do as He pleases.

Romans 2:4 says, "The kindness of God leads you to repentance." Is this the case with you? Has God's kindness in delaying His return led you to repentance, or are you still holding strongly to your sin, unwilling to repent and cry out to the Lord? May today find you repenting of your sins and crying to the Lord for mercy before it's too late.

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

PICTURES OF THE CROSS

Galatians 6:14

In today's sermon, we are going to look at four different metaphors, or pictures, God has used to tell us what was accomplished at the cross. This sermon will expand your view of the cross so that you don't look at just one dimension of it.

I. JUSTIFICATION

Many passages in the Bible speak of justification (1 Cor. 6:11). Furthermore, the Bible writers foresaw that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith" (Gal. 3:8). We are "justified by His grace" (Titus 3:7). We could go to any of these passages and learn something about justification.

Romans 4:1-8 put forth the example of Abraham being justified by faith. And then it puts forth the blessing pronounced by David upon those who are justified.

Regarding Abraham, the question that Paul deals with here is the question of how Abraham was justified. Was he made righteous before God based upon his own righteousness or was there another way? Based on the Old Testament, Paul makes it clear that Abraham was not justified by the works of the law; he was justified by faith (verse 3).

How can God justify the ungodly? How can God justify sinners and still be righteous Himself? The answer to these questions comes through the cross of Christ. The answer comes in our next picture.

II. REDEMPTION

Galatians 3:13 speaks of our redemption. This verse tells us how Christ redeemed us. He redeemed us by hanging on the cross. His death upon the cross became the payment for our sins. And in this way, God is just in forgiving us by faith, because He paid the price for our redemption. He gave His life for our lives.

Let's read Romans 3:19-26. Verse 24 speaks of how we have redemption in Christ Jesus. We see the role of the law in verses 19, 20. The law tells us of our sin. It tells us of our failure to please the Lord. It tells us that no flesh will ever be justified in God's sight through the law. But in verse 21, we see Christ breaking in. He came in apart from the law. He came in to do for us what the law could never do, weak as it was (Rom. 8:3). We are all sinners, and as such, we have all fallen short of the glory of God (verse 23). But according to verse 24, we are now, through Christ, "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Justification is a gift, a gift of God's grace, but it comes through the redemption of Christ. Though it is free for us, it isn't free for God. It cost Him infinitely. It cost Him the blood of His Son. Though we are justified by faith, it's not as if God is unjust, overlooking our transgressions which must be punished. Instead, He paid for our redemption through His blood.

III. PROPITIATION

"Propitiation" may not be the most common word in your vocabulary, but it ought to be. Every religion deals with the question of our standing before God. Many of the world religions see their god as being angry with them because of their sinful behavior. They believe they need to do something to appease this god. Often, an animal is sacrificed on an altar. This is called propitiation—turning God's wrath away from you. God is no longer angry with you; rather, He is happy with you and ready to bless you.

Yet for the biblical mind, propitiation is often understood as the "mercy-seat" of the sanctuary where God deals with humanity. Where once there was anger toward you because of your wrongdoing, now there is happiness and delight and joy in your relationship. In many religions, God is an angry God, but in Scripture, God dwells with man and, through His actions, allows humanity to have peace and forgiveness. This is a new picture of the cross—the God who dwelt with man in the wilderness "tabernacle" and died so that His anger might be taken away from our sin and poured into Christ the sacrifice (Isa. 53:10). At the cross, God's anger at sin is no longer focused toward the sinner but toward Christ, and it is this realization of what God has done through Christ that will stir your soul to live for Him in great happiness (2 Cor. 5:15).

All of us are born "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1). By nature we are objects of God's anger (Eph. 2:1). God's anger is toward those who reject Him and His ways (Col. 3:6; Rom. 1:18). And yet, the good news of the gospel is this: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9, NIV). We obtain our salvation through Jesus Christ, who appeased the wrath of God by becoming a propitiation in His blood (Rom. 3:25).

Christ Jesus has satisfied the wrath of God. That is what propitiation means—but

it means more than that! Not only has God been satisfied by Christ's sacrifice for us; He is happy with us, and His favor is disposed toward us. Propitiation transforms God's disposition toward us.

IV. RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation brings us into the family. Like propitiation, reconciliation depicts a transformation. It speaks about the transformation from enemies to friends.

Romans 5:6-11 (read). God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life? And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Paul moves through a progression. In verse 6, he identifies us as "helpless." This merely means that we are weak and impotent. In verse 8, we are identified as "sinners." This means that we are rebelling against the Lord. In verse 10, Paul describes us as being enemies of God. This means that our rebellion turned hostile against Him. And yet, the great reality of reconciliation is that we are now "reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (verse 10). This means that there is no more hostility between God and us. Through the cross of Christ, we are now at peace with God (5:1).

But the imagery of reconciliation used in the Bible goes beyond merely being at peace with God. It's not only that we are no longer fighting with each other; rather, there is a genuine relationship with God that is built upon love.

Part of our reconciliation to God is adoption. Reconciliation brings us close, into God's family (Gal. 4:4-7). God not only redeems us and declares us righteous, but He also brings us into His family.

There are four pictures to describe the work of Jesus upon the cross: justification, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. May we rejoice in all that God has accomplished for us in the cross of Christ.

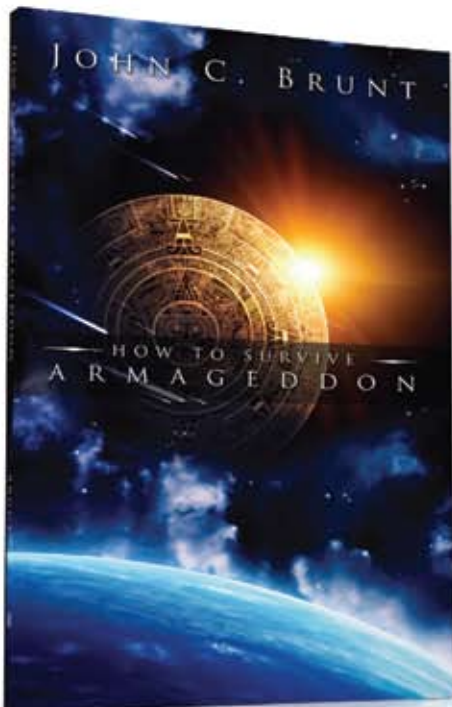


General Conference Ministerial Association

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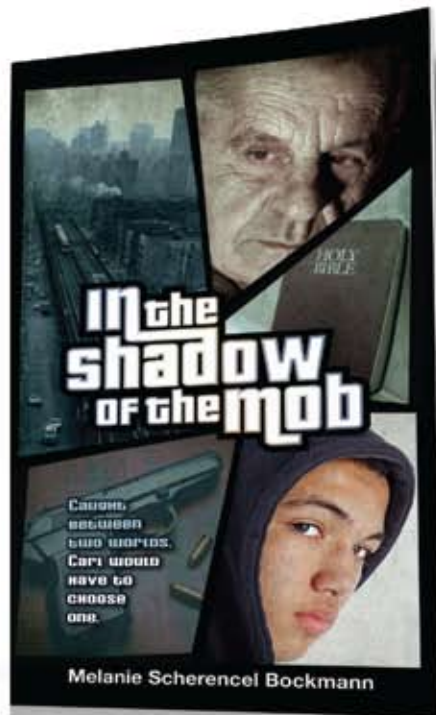
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STATEMENT ON CREATION:

THE BIBLE'S WORLDVIEW

OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON CREATION

An official statement on creation was released by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in June, 2010.

The statement notes the public interest in the topic, and reaffirms its confidence in the biblical record of a historical, recent creation. Specific points included: the special creation of humans; the literal nature of the seven days of creation, forming a literal week; and the global nature of the Flood. The complete text of this statement on creation is available online at <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/bible-worldview.html>.



The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms its belief in the biblical account of creation in contrast to an evolutionary explanation for the origin of living organisms and the relationship of humans to other life forms. Seventh-day Adventists note with great interest the increasing discussion of intelligent design in nature and the evidence that supports this view. In the light of considerable public interest in this topic the Church takes this opportunity to express its confidence in the biblical record.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is the Creator of all life and that the Bible reveals a reliable account of His creative activity. Further, we believe that the biblical events recorded in Genesis 1-11, including the special creation of human beings, are historical and recent, that the seven days of creation were literal 24 hour days forming a literal week, and that the Flood was global in nature.

Belief in creation is foundational for Seventh-day Adventist understanding concerning much more than the question of origins. The purposes and mission of God described in the Bible, human responsibility for stewardship of the environment, the institution of marriage and the sacred meaning of the Sabbath all find their meaning in the doctrine of creation.

Seventh-day Adventists recognize that the biblical record of creation does not answer all questions that can be asked concerning origins. Our comprehension of such mysteries is limited. We anticipate that continued study of both the Bible and nature will deepen our understanding of God's power and strengthen our faith in His Word and the creation account it contains.

(This statement is supported by numerous Bible passages including: Psalm 19:1; Colossians 1:16-17; Genesis 1-11; Psalm 139:14; Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:27; Romans 8:20, 21.)



This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the President, Ted N. C. Wilson, at the General Conference session in Atlanta, Georgia, June 23-July 3, 2010.

THE TYRANNY OF TECHNOLOGICAL EXPECTATIONS



Last week I attended a wedding in a beautiful outdoor setting. The Pastor who performed the ceremony did an excellent job. I did notice that instead of a leather bound Bible, he held an iPad in his hand, although an “iPad boy” did not carry it down the center isle and hand it to him!

It reminded me of a recent clergy conference I attended. I looked down my row of seats at one of the general sessions and there were countless “blue faces” in the darkened room, basking in the glow of our high tech age.

When I was at seminary in 1982 I wrote a paper on “The Positive Use of Television”. The premise of the paper was the power of the screen and the need to train ourselves and our children how to best use it. I didn’t realize how much of a prophet I was. Almost 30 years later screens are a dominate part of our culture. Ever wonder how much texting and email-checking is going on during your sermon? We look down at our “smart phones” and up at the countdowns, video clips and projected song words in church. Our sermons are visually enhanced by POWER Point. I am waiting for the day we hand out 3-D glasses.

When does the medium cross the line from enhancing to surpassing the message? When does the use of technology create unrealistic expectations?

Anyone who uses computers, projectors, screens, enhanced audio and theatrical lighting knows that it’s a myth that technology makes things easier. The fact is the more you use these current communication tools the higher you raise the level of audience expectation.

I must confess to what I call “tech temptation.” I love browsing *sermonspice.com* or *faithvisuals.com* for the latest countdown or funny video clip. There is nothing more satisfying than a graphically enhanced well-designed PowerPoint slide, or the amazing movement of the ocean waves on a lyric background slide.

The screen has great power. A video clip I used last week positioned scripture using the word “amazing” against scenes of Christ with an updated version of *Amazing Grace*. People were visibly moved and commented on how much they were impacted by a six-minute visual.

The challenge for all of us who love and use these wonderful tools, is knowing when our worshipers are so overpowered by TECHnique that they miss the teaching.

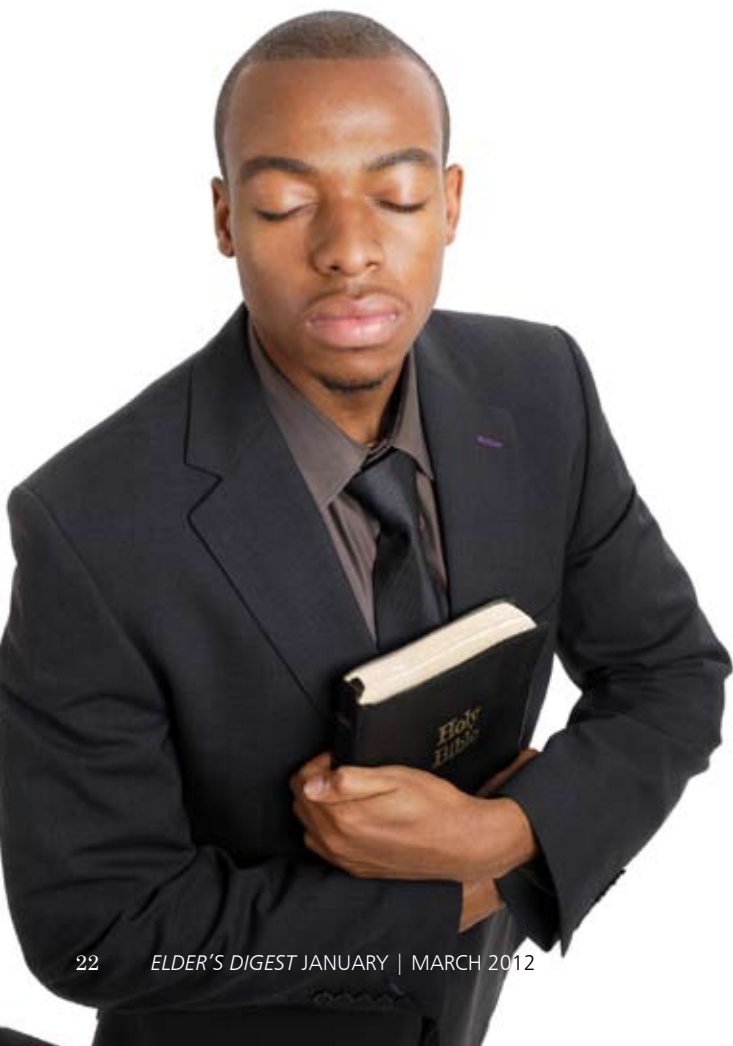


Tim Garrison is a pastor in the Southern California Conference

This was originally published in “*Best Practices*,” a free email newsletter from the North American Division Resource Center.

WHEN CAN ELDERS SAY, “IT SEEMS GOOD TO US”?

The book of Acts gives information about the appointment and function of church elders in the early church. Acts 14:23 says, “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (NIV). Elders were appointed by the apostles, and they took care of the church. This brief article does not seek to find parallels between the function of *presbyteros* in the church of the first century A.D. and the functions of church elders today. Rather, it serves to highlight how elders dealt with problems in the church and made decisions to solve these issues. This is demonstrated in Acts 15, the central section of the book of Acts.



Acts 15 tells us that about 300 miles of traveling from Antioch Syria to Jerusalem was done as an effort to keep the unity of the church. And later, after that meeting in Jerusalem, a return journey of the same distance was taken only to bring a letter from the leaders—apostles and elders (Acts 15:2, 4, 6). A letter that consisted of only 100 words was delivered after being hand-carried for at least 15 days.

Below is the outline of what happened at the Jerusalem Council in 49 or 50 A.D., as recorded in Acts 15:

- Verse 4: Paul, Barnabas, and some believers reported to the leaders “everything God had done through them.”
- Verse 5: A case was presented: “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”
- Verse 7: Peter spoke.
- Verse 12: Barnabas and Paul spoke.
- Verse 13: James spoke.
- Verses 16-18: The manual (in this case, the Old Testament) was opened and referred to.
- Verse 19: James gave direction, saying, “It is my judgment . . .”
- Verse 22: “*It seemed good* to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church . . .” (NASB).
- Verse 25: The letter reads: “*It seemed good to us, having become of one mind*” (NASB).
- Verse 28: “*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us*” (NASB).
- Verse 30: The decision letter was written and delivered.
- Verse 31: “The people read it and were glad . . .”

The outline presents to us a logical sequence of what was taking place: It began with a presentation of some reports, followed by an agenda for discussion. Then council members spoke; the manual was opened and referred to; the committee chairman gave some directions; the whole body made a decision; the decision was written and delivered to the church; and the church read it and was happy with it.

The word “elders” is mentioned five times in Acts 15, and it always appears together with the word “apostles” (verses 2, 4, 6, 22, 23). Paul and Barnabas and the delegates from Antioch came to Jerusalem to see the apostles and the elders

(verse 2); the apostles and the elders welcomed the delegates and received their reports (verse 4); then “the apostles and elders met to consider this question” (verse 6). Next, the apostles and the elders led the church in making a decision (verse 22). Finally, the apostles and the elders wrote the letter to the Christians in Antioch (verse 23).

After a long discussion, a decision was made. The author of Acts describes the process of decision-making by repeating three times the phrase “It seemed good” (NASB).

- It seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church (verse 22).
- It seemed good to us (verse 25).
- It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (verse 28).

Interestingly, in the New Testament, Luke is the only author that uses this expression. He uses it four times: three times in describing the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and once at the introduction to his Gospel. Here, in Luke 1:3, he says: “Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you . . .”

Luke could say “it seemed good to me” only after he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning.” In the case of the Jerusalem Council, the apostles could say “it seemed good to us” only after they called for a meeting, listened to reports, considered the opinions of the committee members, checked and followed the manual, received direction from the chairman of the committee, and made a decision.

They could say “it seemed good to us” because the preparation for the meeting involved days and hours of traveling, pure motives of the committee members, and respect for one another. However, these are not the only prerequisites for saying “it seems good for me.” One prerequisite is lacking, and it is perhaps the most important condition.

Above all, the apostles and the elders could say “it seemed good to us” because the Holy Spirit was present in that meeting. In the decision letter they sent to Antioch, they wrote, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (verse 28). This was a way of telling the church that the Holy Spirit was present at the meeting. This was a way of telling the church that the Holy Spirit not only was present but was involved in the decision-making. This was a way of telling the church that the Holy Spirit was a member of that committee.

In fact, the role of the Holy Spirit was not merely as a member of the committee; He was the divine Chairman of the council. This is evident in the way Luke arranges the sequence of the parties involved in the decision-making. In verse 22, Luke says: “It seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church.” This arrangement puts the apostles and elders first and the whole church later. The leader comes first, and then the members follow. In verse 25, these two groups of people are represented by one personal


pronoun: “us.” However, in verse 28, when the Holy Spirit is mentioned, He is mentioned first, followed by the personal pronoun “us”: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

This arrangement puts the Holy Spirit as the leader, followed by the apostles, elders, and members. The Holy Spirit is the Guide. He is the leader. This arrangement does not suggest that the decision of the committee becomes the decision of the Holy Spirit. Instead, this arrangement suggests that the decision of the Holy Spirit becomes the decision of the committee. Therefore, the decision that was made in that meeting was not a man-made decision but a God-made decision.

Elders are involved in making decisions on the matters of the church, at least for their local churches. Careful investigation, reports, opinions, manuals, directions from the chairman, and votes are critical, crucial, and essential in the process of decision-making. But they do not give adequate reason for a committee, council, or board to say, “It seemed good to us.” It is after the Holy Spirit is invited, acknowledged, and given His right role in a meeting that the elders and the committee may say, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

ED

Richard A. Sabuin is an assistant professor of New Testament Interpretation and Exegesis at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) in the Philippines. He is also an elder in the AIAS Church.



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COUNTERFEIT WORSHIP:

TO WORSHIP IS TO DISCERN

**“BUT SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE, WHO
BECAUSE OF PRACTICE HAVE THEIR SENSES
TRAINED TO DISCERN GOOD AND EVIL.”**

HEBREWS 5:14

If I had to sum up the structure of what worship is, I would say that to worship is to acknowledge the reality of God. This simple definition highlights a subjective element in worship, namely, the individual who acknowledges this reality through different ways (music, prayer, thanksgiving, etc.), as well as an objective element, namely, the reality of God.

If that which I seek as a worshipper of the true God is to worship Him in Spirit and truth, then, I must go to the Bible not only looking for what was done right, but to reflect on that which was also done wrong. But to understand the theological foundations of counterfeit worship, I must begin with a brief introduction into the biblical portrayal of “discernment.”

At the center of Hebrew faith and religion is the ability of the human being to “understand” (the Hebrew word *binah*). Proverbs 9:10 and Daniel 1:20, for example, use the word “understanding” interchangeably with “wisdom.” In other words, to be wise is to understand. Interestingly, *binah* (“to understand”) comes from the Hebrew word *bein* or “between.” The idea behind “understanding” in the Bible is that the one who is wise, the one who understands, is the one who has ability to discern “between” good and evil, between real and unreal, between original and fake.

This ability to “understand” or to “be wise” by discernment is a crucial element of worship. If we are, as worshippers, to acknowledge the reality of God, part of this task is to have the ability to discern His real presence in our midst. We might fall into a common temptation in worship and spirituality today which ends up worshipping an “idea of God” rather than the “reality of God” Himself. For this reason, to worship is, in many ways, to discern.

The first time the idea of discernment appears in Scripture is in Genesis 3:5, “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” From the mouth of the Serpent comes the idea that to discern good from evil is something to be achieved. It is a Divine prerogative concealed from creation and only available to God Himself. Genesis 3:22 apparently testifies that the Serpent was telling the truth since God declares: “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” Was the Serpent telling the truth? According to modern translations—yes. Yet a close look at the simple Hebrew grammar of the text indicates a completely different reading. A faithful portrayal of the Hebrew text reads: “man




was like one of Us, knowing good and evil.” The idea of “becoming like God by eating” is nowhere to be found in the Hebrew text, and the idea that remains is that man “was” like God, and had the ability to discern, before he ate. This Divine prerogative of discernment was always available to mankind for only before eating they could tell the difference between what was good and evil. After eating the fruit the text does not support a new birth of insight and wisdom in connection to man, but confusion and despair. Instead of achieving discernment, man blames woman, woman blames serpent, and sin entered into the world.

It is the lost ability to discern that creates the need for Divine revelation. Throughout Scripture Divine revelation is commonly seen prototypically embodied in Jesus Christ—the living Word in both Old and New Testaments. Today, He is at our disposal through the presence of His Spirit and the written Word. How crucial is the written Word, then, in worship! To worship Christ apart from Scripture is to worship a silent Christ, and a silent Christ is not the Christ of Scripture. That which was true in the past remains true today—man cannot know good from evil unless God reveals Himself to man, and gives Him the orientation needed to “understand.” So in the past God began this revelatory initiative by giving

Torah to man, which means “instruction” or “teaching,” or even “the way.” Notice how God attempts to develop discernment in the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 12:8 – “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes.”

Deuteronomy 30:20 – “by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

To think according to “our own eyes,” or to love, hear, and hold fast to God, is the tension presented in Deuteronomy concerning man’s need for revelation in order to be able to discern. It is the lack of discernment, and disregard toward Divine revelation, that provide the foundation for counterfeit worship as presented by Scripture. To worship, first and foremost, is to develop the ability to discern between good and evil, and this ability, comes from nowhere else except Divine revelation. 

Tiago Arrais is a Ph.D. student in Old Testament and Christian Philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (Andrews University), in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

GOD'S GRIEF

PREACHING THE STATE OF THE DEAD

by John McClarty


The state of the dead is one of Seventh-day Adventists’ most important contributions to Christian theology, but it can be a dark theme. I used to approach it from the direction of correcting the erroneous doctrine held by others. The way I preach it now gives it a sweeter and more encouraging face.

The common view of death as the doorway to heaven is correct from the point of view of the person who dies. In the experience of the person dying, death is trivial. Blink your eyes closed in this world and blink them open in the next. An instant. A twinkling of an eye. No big deal—for the person who dies. But for those who are left alive, death is a devastating loss, a sometimes decades-long grief.

The Adventist doctrine of death addresses this reality, the pain of those who live.

In the conventional view of death as the doorway to heaven, when someone dies, God delightedly welcomes his child home. Meanwhile, back on earth, humans grieve. In this view, human grief is the cost of divine pleasure. But Adventists see a deeper truth, one that brings God close to those

facing life in a world touched by death. Our grief is, in fact, a reflection of the grief of our Maker. God participates fully with us in the pain of separation. God, too, is grieved. Just as our communion with our beloved has been interrupted, so, too, with God. God no longer hears their voices in prayer and worship. He no longer experiences the joy of cooperating in ministry, of sharing together in the beauty and wonder of Creation. Human grief is a mirror of divine grief. Grief is the cost of love. So God, the greatest Lover, bears the sharpest grief. He genuinely keeps company with us in our loss.

When we understand God’s grief, our own grief becomes a severe mercy, a piercing testimony to the love of God. Like a mother whose grief is undiminished by time, so God’s grief never goes away. It remains a perpetual longing for the reunion of resurrection, God’s own reason to hasten the day when love again will be awake and alive. The day when God’s grief over the sleep of his children is swallowed up in the joy of eternal morning. 

This was originally published in “Best Practices,” a free email newsletter from the North American Division Resource Center.

“HOW TO BE A GOOD FARMER—EVEN IN A CITY: CREATING A COMMUNITY-BASED MINISTRY” APPEARED IN THE JANUARY – MARCH 2011 *ELDER’S DIGEST*. THIS ARTICLE PROPOSED “TEN FARMING COMMANDMENTS” WHICH SYSTEMATIZED JESUS’ MINISTRY METHOD INTO 10 INTENTIONAL ACTION STEPS FOR OUR TIME,¹ AND SERVED AS AN INTRODUCTION TO A SERIES OF *ELDER’S DIGEST* ARTICLES IN THE COMING MONTHS THAT WILL UNPACK THESE 10 COMMANDMENTS IN MORE DETAIL. THE FIRST FOLLOW-UP ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2011 *ELDER’S DIGEST*.² BELOW IS THE SECOND IN THE SERIES. THIS ARTICLE WILL FOCUS ON THE SECOND AND THIRD “FARMING COMMANDMENTS”:

“OUR COMMUNITY DOES NOT KNOW US . . .”

Once upon a time there was a little church³ where church attendance nearly doubled in two years. Some new attendees were former members who returned; some were friends or co-workers of the members; others were interests from *It Is Written* satellite programs that the church hosted; and a couple was attending because they were restless in their own church because of biblical truth they had learned from members of this church. The pastor of this church said, “I believe the Spirit of God was leading people to the church because it had become a safe place to worship and learn about God.”

But they had a big problem, which they described like this: “Our community does not know us. They do not trust us. Our church has no credibility in our community.” As local church leaders and elders, can you identify with that?

A number of the members were excited about winning the lost and misguided in their community to Christ. But how could they connect with a community that did not trust them?

It was time for action to change their image in their community. It was time to really start farming—in a more intentional way.

The members in this church imple-

mented the first “Farming Commandment”⁴ by studying Jesus’ ministry method and praying earnestly that the Holy Spirit would fill them and show them how to make His approach to ministry a reality in their church and community. They resolved they would use a systematic and intentional process to make this happen.

“Farming Commandments” two and three are important steps in this process:

2. Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church;

3. Thou shalt establish a **Social Action Leadership Team (SALT)**.

2. THOU SHALT ASSESS THE RESOURCES IN THY CHURCH.

Christ needs *people* to do His ministry. The leaders in His local churches need to know what are the skills, strengths, and availability of their fellow church members before they begin to “farm” their community. Prior to beginning any ministry undertaking it’s obviously wise to assess what we have to offer those who we will serve. Knowing who we really are as a church will help us find our unique niche to serve our community, reflecting our church’s personality and God-given abilities. One thing is for

sure—the Divine part of our resources is without limit!⁵ He will combine with what we have and multiply and bless it “above all that we ask or think.”⁶

Before proceeding any further in the process, the little church made an assessment of the abilities, interests, resources, and availability among their members. In the next page is a sample form to give you ideas for doing this in your church.

Also, it’s important to know what is in your church budget for implementing a community-based ministry. Mission is a priority and the budget must reflect your mission, which will become clearer as you proceed with your Gospel Farming process. Assessing human and financial resources compares to checking farming equipment/supplies/workers/budget at the beginning of each growing season.

3. THOU SHALT ESTABLISH A SOCIAL ACTION LEADERSHIP TEAM (SALT).

The Social Action Leadership Team (SALT) is crucial to your church’s community farming. It’s like your farm management team. The team need not be a large group. Four to six members is enough. They are entrusted by the church board to be custodians of the process of

CHURCH RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

Name: _____ Date completed: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Email: _____

Experience/interests:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handyman | <input type="checkbox"/> Elder care | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child care | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sewing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical/skilled trade | <input type="checkbox"/> Quilting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Driver | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/Tutor _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical professional |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |

Time availability:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thursday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saturday | <input type="checkbox"/> morning | <input type="checkbox"/> afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> evening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am available occasionally, please call me when you have a need. | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am available if daycare is provided. Number of children: _____ Ages: _____ | | | |

assessing the community and leading in the production of a church strategic plan for inreach and outreach.

The SALT group must like working together and be willing and able to interview leaders in the community to discover real needs to which your church can respond. However, they don't need to do all the interviewing. They can invite their fellow church members to interview community leaders they know who would be able to provide valuable information. (A future article will provide interview questions and other details of the community assessment/interview process.)

The SALT should meet at least once a month for prayer, Bible and Spirit of Prophecy study, fellowship (which may include food), and reporting and planning. Maybe they may want to have a retreat once a year.

Ideally, SALT members should be already participating in community organizations so that they can better inform the congregation about real needs and issues in the community and opportunities for volunteer service.⁷ I represent my church at the local Rotary club.⁸ I don't just go to their meetings, but support and participate in their community services

activities/projects as I am able.⁹ Thus I have become friends with several leaders in the church's community and have been able to make connections with several organizations in the community on behalf of my church. This has opened the door to various service opportunities and projects for our church which we may not have had otherwise. In your church you may not have anyone yet who is directly involved in community organizations. However, members who are passionately willing to learn and get involved in the community would likely serve well as SALT members.

SALT is another example of the small group model in church life. This small group can be used mightily by God as a catalyst for transformation in and outside the church. "You are the SALT of the earth."¹⁰ "The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err."¹¹

If your church is willing to position itself in the process we are beginning to describe, you may find yourself saying, "Our community *does* know us. They *do* trust us. Our church *has* credibility in our community!"

The next article in this series will discuss the fourth and fifth "Farming Commandments."

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

² The title of the article is "Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand. . ."

³ This church really exists.

⁴ See footnote 1.

⁵Philippians 4:13

⁶ Ephesians 3:20

⁷ Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*, Version 2, (Lincoln, Nebraska: Center for Creative Ministry, 2004), 105.

⁸ Rotary is an international service organization with 1.2 members worldwide. Its motto is "Service Above Self," and volunteers from its 34,000 clubs have had significant impact in meeting community needs all over the globe. For more info go to www.Rotary.org.

⁹ We must not rest content with only attending community meetings. One pastor served on the Mayor's Advisory Council, and considered that the core of his church's community involvement. One woman who knew him from the Mayor's Advisory Council made this remark: "We always see him at meetings, but we don't see his church doing anything in the community." (Sahlin, p. 105). The role of the SALT group is to lead the church into investing in and implementing community projects, sponsoring actual services and programs for people in need.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:13

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 115.

“THIS TRUTH IS FOR ME AS WELL”



▲ Rajesh with his wife, Nilu, and their children

For many years, Nepal was the only officially-Hindu country in the world. All religions other than Hinduism were outlawed, and the growth of Christianity was extremely slow and difficult.

In the late 1990s, Adventist World Radio (AWR) made various attempts to produce some radio programs on health in conjunction with the work of ADRA Nepal, and a few programs were finally recorded in secret. However, the government soon discovered the location and confiscated the equipment, bringing the recording to a halt. Production was later restarted, with the help of a young Hindu man who had a tiny studio in his home where AWR’s producer, Pastor Naseeb Basnet, could tape the programs. And thus an amazing personal journey began.

In 2004, Nepal became a secular country, and AWR had the freedom to not only produce programs, but also begin airing them on local FM stations. Rajesh Hada, the studio owner, became the official technician for the production of *Ashako Bani* (*Voice of Hope* in the Nepali language).

Rajesh comes from a very devout Hindu family. While visiting the studio, I noticed a temple shrine at the very entrance to the house where he lives with his extended family. Hindus have anywhere from hundreds of millions to billions of deities or gods. I was told that each newborn is assigned any number of gods to whom he or she will be devoted over his or her lifetime. It was in this kind of environment that Rajesh grew up.

Over the months and years, Rajesh listened attentively to all of the Bible studies and radio talks produced by Pastor Basnet and his wife, Rama. He began to identify so much with the programs and like them so well that he said his desire was to work for the Lord and AWR for the rest of his

“I FEEL I HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD TO WORK FOR HIM.”

life. Later, he attended an AWR training series in Singapore, where he met other AWR producers from neighboring countries. His vision of the Seventh-day Adventist Church grew enormously as he became more aware of its worldwide mission. Rajesh is also an accomplished keyboard player and composer, and he gave me a CD with beautiful Nepali Christian music

that he had prepared for our radio programs.

Rajesh says, “It has been 13 years since I started working with the Basnets. The stories from the Bible, their sermon presentations, talking with them and seeing their own life witness won my heart to turn to Christianity. As I listened more, I found more joy and happiness, and I thought, ‘This truth is for me as well.’ I feel I have been chosen by God to work for Him.”

When I visited several FM stations in Nepal that air our programs, in every instance the managers repeatedly stated that AWR’s program is the best program they broadcast. These are community-based stations, owned and operated by private entrepreneurs who have no connection to the church. Thanks to the cordial relationship Rajesh developed with these people over the years, they gladly agreed to air *Ashako Bani* in their communities. AWR now broadcasts programs on 20 stations in Nepal, and the same programs can be heard worldwide as podcasts or on demand at AWR’s website.

During this visit, as we spent many hours traveling over the rugged mountains of central Nepal, I had much time to get to know Rajesh better. He meshed so well with us



▲ *Rajesh's baptism*

that one could not tell he was not a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Just a couple of months later, we received the wonderful message that Rajesh had decided to be baptized! Knowing his background, his family, and the magnitude of this step, we counseled the Basnets to go slowly with Rajesh; he had a lot to work on with his Hindu ancestry and traditions, and a sudden break away from those relationships could be very difficult for him.

When asked how his conversion came about, Rajesh says that after hearing for so long the Bible truths from the Basnets, he could no longer resist the Holy Spirit. He says, "I felt this was my path. I felt the 10 commandments could make a person totally happy and at peace with himself and with his fellow beings. Even though I was not showing it publicly, I was obeying all those commandments in my heart."

A few months later, Rajesh was baptized by Pastor Basnet in a nearby river, watched by his wife, brother, and others close to him. He says, "I have found new life in Jesus and am really blessed. My family supports me; I have a blessed wife, and she supports me in my recording. She is very talented and has learned to record, edit, and even mix the programs. I know one of these days, with God's calling, my wife and my whole family will come to Christianity. We need to pray together."

Rajesh's conversion is just a harbinger of many who will step out with deep conviction and accept the message of salvation if we can get it out to them. Please pray for Rajesh and his family, and for the millions of Nepalese who are now within reach of the gospel.



Dowell Chow is the president of AWR.



▲ *Rajesh in his studio*

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HEALTH, DROPS AT A TIME



Often a pastor, elder, or church leader asks, “How can I get my congregation more interested in healthy living? Where do I start?” There are many things one can do to promote health and wholeness, but one of the most successful ways to raise the congregation’s level of interest is to spend a few minutes every Sabbath morning teaching health principles, a few drops at a time.

Why do that? After all, some say, the Sabbath service is for worshipping God, and there are more important things to do than talk about health principles during worship. But I can think of at least two reasons why it should be done.

First, the Bible says that when we care for our bodies, the “temple” where God can abide, we are also doing an act of worship (Rom. 12:1), and we should glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20). In fact, “our mental and spiritual vigor are dependent on our physical strength and activity.”¹ By learning about healthful habits and putting those habits into practice, we are collaborating with God in strengthening our minds to better differentiate between right and wrong. In fact, inspiration says that “anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong. We become less capable of choosing the good and have less strength of will to do that which we know to be right.”²

So why not spend at least 1-10 minutes during Sabbath School or worship sharing quick and simple evidence-based health information that may bring physical, mental, and spiritual benefits not only to members but also to visitors who might never have heard these health principles before? Since we are to preach the gospel and the three angels’ messages, doesn’t it make sense that we would make room for this right arm of the gospel to be used during Sabbath worship?

The second reason is that changes in health behavior happen in stages. To be effective in health ministry, we must present information that will help people move from one stage to the next. Some common stages, proposed by researchers Prochaska and DiClemente,³ are:

1. *Pre-contemplation*: People are not aware of their risks or are not interested in making health behavior changes or attending health programs.

2. *Contemplation*: People become more interested in learning about health and attending health programs as they

become aware of their health risks and the need to make more healthful choices. In this stage, they plan and envision how to begin a new behavior.

3. *Action*: People make the decision and act on it as they finally begin to incorporate and adopt a new behavior.

4. *Maintenance*: If repeated regularly and for a long enough period of time, this action will turn into a new habit. In this phase, the new behavior becomes part of a person’s personal routine.

By setting aside a few minutes every Sabbath for a “health nugget,” “health minute,” or “health drops,” we can help motivate those who are in the pre-contemplative or contemplative stages to move to the next stage, thereby advancing in their journey to more healthful living. The Holy Spirit can use that time to impress and motivate people to decide to change and incorporate more healthful habits into their lives. By God’s grace, regular and consist “health minutes” can awaken a church that has been indifferent about health.

Content for these “health minutes” can be drawn from numerous sources; some are listed below:

1. Abundant Living Health Nugget Series from Health Education Resource, http://www.healthexpobanners.com/engl_healthtalksabundantliving.php
2. Positive Choices, www.positivechoices.com
3. Facts With Hope, www.NADHealthMinistries.org

God gives us the choice for life or death and lovingly says, “Choose life so that you and your children might live” (Deut. 30:19). Isn’t it time to “choose life and tell the world” by incorporating “health minutes” in our worship services? As an elder and spiritual leader, you can make this a priority in your own life as well as in the ministry of your church. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Education*, 195.

² ———, *Christ Object Lessons*, 346.

³ Prochaska, J. O. and C. C. DiClemente (1983). “Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change.” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 51(3): 390-395.



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MAXIMIZING YOUR EFFECTIVENESS

THE LIFE
OF JESUS
REVEALS
TO US THE
ULTIMATE
MODEL OF
LEADERSHIP
BUILDING.

I am frequently asked the question about the best way to train people in the church. My answer is always, "On the job." The pastors and church leaders of thriving churches create a culture of equipping and training members to do ministry and evangelism.

My research in church growth has shown that it's the key leader who leads the way in training. These five trends also surfaced in our study:

- They constantly pray and search for new leaders.
- They provide resources for success.
- They have a win-win attitude.
- They view people as partners to share ministries with, instead of competitors.
- They understand the need for change and timing in leadership development.

The life of Jesus reveals to us the ultimate model of leadership building. His method was more than what people do; it was about what people can become through His transforming power. Often in our attempt to get quick results, we focus on techniques and strategies. Jesus always focused on the *being*, thus He spent considerable time developing His followers in spiritual growth. Jesus knew that if He would sculpt a better person, who is filled with His presence, grace, and attractiveness, He would have someone who is willing to be molded to do great things for God. Through His example of spending time with His disciples, we are inspired to invest our lives in others, building relationships with them, loving them, encouraging them, and challenging them.

Through instruction and modeling Jesus showed His disciples how ministry is done, then He said, go out and do likewise (See Mark 6:6-13, 30). Jesus trained and equipped the twelve disciples and the seventy, who were to develop the next generation of leaders. The next generation will develop the next generation and so on, until Jesus comes. Every leader should pray that God will raise up another leader to do their ministry. Paul, commenting on the legacy of modeling, says, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2 NKJV).

Ellen G. White also stressed the concept of training and equipping in numerous places in her writings. "Ministers should not do the work which belongs to the church, thus wearying themselves and preventing others from performing their duty. They should teach the members how to labor in the church and in the community."¹ If you want to define the role of the pastor as White saw it, it might well be someone who preaches the gospel and trains others to share their faith. "Every church should be a training school for Christian workers... One example is worth more than many precepts."² White views every church as a mini seminary for the training of its members.

When it comes to equipping and training, the most important rule is that no one should do ministry alone. It's a lot more convenient to go to the hospital, teach Sabbath school, or give a Bible study alone, but it's not biblical. It's a lot more effective to take someone with you to do ministry.

The simplest model to train people is to show them on the job. Pour your heart and passion into them. Show them what you are doing and explain to them why. Then turn the ministry over to them as you become a prayer partner and mentor. Training should always lead to a chain of events that trains someone else. Here is one way of doing it:

I teach you	you learn
I do	you watch
I do	you help
You do	I help
You do	I watch
You teach	someone else learns

When I learned about these methods, I started to create a system of raising new leaders. Every one of our church leaders was supposed to train, mentor, and motivate another one to carry on their ministry.

To lead through modeling, I prayed that God would send me someone whom I could train. The Lord put a particular name on my heart, so I approached John and cast the vision that God had given me. He told me that he had been praying for someone to mentor him in giving Bible studies. We agreed to go out on Mondays and spend a few hours giving Bible studies and sharing our spiritual journeys. I took the time to inspire him to mentor others as I had been mentoring him.

About three months later, I felt that he was ready to carry the torch, so I told him to take Ted and duplicate the model. I began the cycle again with Glen, who was more interested in visitation, so every Tuesday we went out ministering in the hospitals, nursing homes, and to shut-ins. Three or four months later we continually multiplied ourselves by finding new people to train.

Seven years later there was ministry happening every night of the week by a total of 57 teams, something that is impossible for one person to do alone. Build that system everywhere in your church. Your members will grow in love and ministry. Your church will grow in grace and numbers. ED

¹ *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Basle: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 291.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 149.

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