

quarterly resource for local church leaders † january/march 2019

ELDER'S DIGEST



Making **Disciples**



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DISCIPLESHIP

As church leaders, we like to talk about discipleship. We say we need to make disciples, and we quote Matthew 28:18-20. But, what does that really mean? What is a disciple? In Greek, the word “disciple” literally means “a learner.” Learning always has a practical component. Faith itself may come by hearing, but learning and being a disciple come from hearing and doing the Word of God. Living out what we hear and study is essential for the truth to become real in our lives.

Another way to define a disciple is to look at his or her relationships. “A disciple has a dependent relationship with Jesus, an interdependent relationship with other believers, and a redemptive relationship with the world.”¹

Perhaps Jesus gave the best definition: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31).

So, being a disciple or a Christian isn’t something you do one time and then only give half-hearted allegiance to afterward. Being a Christian is a journey. It is a lifestyle. And we must remember that Jesus established some

principles of discipleship to help us on that journey. It is important to know those principles well.

When Jesus walked this earth, He expected every person who followed Him to take discipleship seriously. He made it clear that He wasn’t interested in attracting a big crowd. Jesus wanted to transform individuals into radically-committed disciples.

The blessings of discipleship are readily available to all who are willing to pay the price. Discipleship brings purpose to our lives so that, rather than wandering aimlessly, we walk steadily on the straight and narrow way that leads us back to our heavenly Father. Discipleship brings us comfort in sorrow, peace and joy in service, all of which help us to be more like Jesus.

In this issue, a special emphasis is given to discipleship. It is our desire that you will become more familiar with this topic and with the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s plans to help your congregation fulfill its mission. As John Page says, “Missions and discipleship are two sides of the same spiritual coin, to be invested and spent in the economy of God’s Kingdom.”²

Enjoy the reading!

ED



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference associate Ministerial Secretary

¹ Michael C. Mack, “What Is a Disciple?” <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/1997/what-is-disciple.html>, accessed July 12, 2018.

² John Page, “Discipleship and Mission: Two Sides of the Same Coin,” <https://www.seedbed.com/discipleship-and-mission-2/>, accessed July 13, 2018.



DISCOVER THE POWER OF DISCIPLESHIP AND LEAVE THE BACK DOOR OPEN!

I was on my way to speak at a conference on “Church Member Retention” when I started contemplating that word—*retention*. Until a few years ago, I think the only time I had used the word was when I worked as an accountant. “Record Retention” referred to how long we were to hold on to boxes of financial records—3 years, 7 years, 15 years, etc. When the “destroy date” on a box had past, we would shred the items in the box and make room for more boxes.

As I thought about record retention, I couldn’t help but wonder if *retention* was the right bar to set for church members. Are we content to have our members sit on a pew and collect dust like those old boxes of financial records? Is our ultimate goal nothing more than making sure church members don’t leave the church?

LEAVE THE BACK DOOR OPEN

We often see people baptized into the church and after a few years, or sometimes only a few months, they’re gone. Over the past 50 years an average of 4 out of every 10 new members have left the church. So for years now, there has been a steady emphasis on the importance of closing the proverbial back door of the church.

But again I wonder, should this be our goal? To bolt the door shut so that no one can leave?

As I prepared to speak on the topic of retention, I asked myself, “What has the church done to retain me?” I couldn’t really come up with much. And yet I’ve never seriously considered leaving the church. Through the years, especially as I’ve sought to share my faith with others, I’ve had to wrestle to know what is truth and to answer many objections against Ellen White and the church’s beliefs. In every case, the weight of evidence has made me even more confident in the Adventist faith. My own studies and labors have convinced me that this is the remnant church, which

the Lord raised up, and that its message is powerfully true. So why would I leave?

To focus merely on retention, or closing the back door, falls short of addressing the real problem. We don’t want members to stay merely because of the attention we’re giving them or the environment we create for them—as important as these things may be—because these may be only temporary. We want them to stay because of their love for Christ and their commitment to the biblical mission and message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Here’s something that will keep them in the church even when the back door is left wide open!

FROM CONSUMERS TO PRODUCERS

So how do we help new members gain that settled conviction that will keep them in the church? For starters, we need to shift our focus from *retention* to *discipleship*. Jesus once said, “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Luke 17:33). Similarly, the only way to ensure that someone holds on to the truth is to train them to give it away:

“The more one tries to explain the Word of God to others, with a love for souls, the plainer it becomes to himself” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 354).

Ellen White encourages new members to begin sharing their faith immediately:

“When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger” (*Evangelism*, p. 355).

“Let all be taught how to work. Especially should those who are newly come to the faith be educated

to become laborers together with God” (*Christian Service*, p. 69).

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver (*Christian Service*, p. 9).

The key to successful discipleship is for the receiver to become a giver and the consumer to become a producer:

“Not a few, but thousands of human beings exist only to consume the benefits which God in His mercy bestows upon them. . . . They forget that by trading wisely on the talents lent them they are to be producers as well as consumers” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 353).

MAKING DISCIPLES

For far too long, the ultimate goal of many churches has been baptisms. Once someone is baptized, the attention is shifted elsewhere. While we should never diminish the significance of baptism, we must remember that this is not our *ultimate* goal. The Great Commission is not to make members, but disciples (see Matthew 28:19)! After someone is baptized, there is still much work to be done in developing these new converts into active Seventh-day Adventist disciples.

A disciple is a follower of Jesus, and Jesus had this to say about those who follow Him:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’” (Matt. 16:24).

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” (Mark 1:17).

From these two short verses, we learn that Christ’s disciples become self-denying (“let him deny himself”) workers for God (“fishers of men”). Now notice what Ellen White had to say about self-denying workers:

“It is evident that all the sermons that have been preached have not developed a large class of self-denying workers. This subject is to be considered as involving the most serious results. Our future for eternity is at stake. The churches are withering up because they have failed to use their talents in diffusing light” (*Christian Service*, p. 58).

The Great Commission is about more than making members through baptism—it’s about making workers. Members may fill the pew, but workers shed a positive influence, bless others, win souls, and ultimately stay in the church. Our job is not complete until the consumer becomes a producer—until the one caught by the gospel becomes a fisher of men. To make a disciple is to make a self-denying worker for Christ.

COMMUNION WITH GOD

So where do we begin our efforts to ensure that new members become active disciples? It starts with knowing the source of our spiritual life and power. New members should be encouraged to build a habit of communion with God through personal prayer and Bible study. They can only give what has first been received through their own relationship with Christ as a personal Savior.

Many newly baptized members have recently come through an evangelistic series or have been given a series of Bible studies. It is easy in such cases for new members to get in the habit of looking for someone of greater experience to “feed them” spiritually. These must be taught that the only way to maintain spiritual life is through personal communion with God.

When members leave the church they cite reasons such as problems in the church, interpersonal conflicts, or doctrinal disagreements. Yet if the truth be told, the underlying cause was often a neglect of personal time with God. Many new members do not realize that a strong spiritual life is not ours naturally. Worldly thoughts and desires will return in force if we neglect to feed our souls with prayer and Bible study. Notice the emphasis Ellen White places on the importance of personal prayer for spiritual life:

“Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God” (*Prayer*, p. 13).

“Prayer is a necessity; for it is the life of the soul. Family prayer, public prayer, have their place; but it is secret communion with God that sustains the soul life” (*Education*, p. 258).

Not only prayer, but the creative power of God’s Word is needed. We don’t read the Bible merely for knowledge, but for spiritual life itself! Consider the following texts:

“Having been born again . . . through the word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23).

“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

“For the word of God is living and powerful” (Heb. 4:12).

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Developing vital habits of daily prayer and Bible study must be foremost in any discipleship plan. Without the establishment of these habits, new members will become easy targets for the enemy:

“Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 519).

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

Another important building block of new member discipleship is fellowship. This can be incorporated into a discipleship plan in at least two ways—(1) emphasizing the importance of attending the meetings of the church; and (2) making intentional efforts to befriend and mentor new members.

Discipleship should include helping new members to develop the important habit of attending Sabbath School, church, and prayer meeting or small group Bible study. The relationships they build, especially through the fellowship of Sabbath School and other small groups, will form strong bonds that will be hard to break.

New members should be taught that attending church services and events is not only a personal blessing, but a *ministry* that strengthens the church. Notice how the apostle Paul emphasizes this point:

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24, 25).

Paul counsels us to “consider one another” by coming together for Christian fellowship. We are not an island to ourselves. Our attendance not only increases our own faith, but it helps to encourage and promote faithfulness in other members of the church.

Aside from the fellowship experienced in the meetings and functions of the church, new members will need personal attention:

“After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. . . . These newly converted ones need nursing—watchful attention, help, and encouragement. These should not be left alone, a prey to Satan’s most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties, to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, and to be visited and prayed with” (*Evangelism*, p. 351).

To be sure that this important counsel is followed, churches should adopt a discipleship plan that pairs more experienced members with those newly baptized. These mentors become close friends to those new members, providing helpful instruction, integrating them into the life and mission of the church, training them to labor for souls, and helping them to develop strong spiritual habits.

INTENTIONAL AND SYSTEMATIC TRAINING

Discipleship doesn’t happen by chance. New members do not become self-denying workers by accident. They must be taught the importance of communion with God and fellowship with the church, and then they must be trained for service. Mentors should take new members with them as they serve the community, distribute literature, give Bible studies, and more. They should arrange for new members to participate in church services and department ministries. Just as an intentional and systematic process prepares candidates for baptism, an equally intentional discipleship plan should be carried out *after* baptism.

Without such a plan to mentor and train new members, churches will continue to lose newly baptized members out the proverbial back door. We can block the door, shut the door, or lock the door—but they will still find a way out.

On the other hand, if we help new members develop vital spiritual habits and train them to be active soul-winners, they will become stronger in their faith and grow closer to Christ. They will bless the church and grow the kingdom of God for years to come. And we won’t need to close the back door to keep them from leaving—because they’ll be right where they want to be.

[A simple and effective plan for local church discipleship ministry can be found in the Discipleship Handbook. You can learn more, in the pages that follow, about this valuable resource, which incorporates all of the key principles shared in this article.] **ED**

Jim Howard is associate director of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Making Disciples



General Conference Sabbath School
and Personal Ministries Department



Sabbath School is the heart of the church! It is a common thread that helps bind together Seventh-day Adventists from every part of the world. The Sabbath School Alive! initiative highlights three vital components of thriving Sabbath Schools:

- ✓ **BIBLE STUDY & PRAYER**—discover the power of Bible study and prayer in Sabbath School
- ✓ **FELLOWSHIP**—experience the joy of fellowship through study and service in Sabbath School
- ✓ **MISSION**—gain world mission education and community outreach training in Sabbath School

The power of Sabbath School is that it follows the divine model for true discipleship—Bible study and prayer, fellowship, and mission. Sabbath School Alive! provides training and resources to help every local church:

- Teach inspiring and practical Sabbath School classes
- Effectively incorporate mission into Sabbath School
- Reclaim inactive members through Sabbath School
- And much more!

For more information including helpful resources to revitalize your Sabbath School, go to:

alive.adventist.org



GROW Your Church is a **Personal Ministries** initiative highlighting five essential phases of making disciples:

- **PREPARE** the soil of the heart with friendship and service.
- **PLANT** the Word with spiritual conversations or literature/media.
- **CULTIVATE** spiritual interest with ongoing Bible studies.
- **HARVEST** decisions with appeals to follow Christ and be baptized.
- **PRESERVE** the harvest with ongoing discipleship training.

The GROW initiative provides training and resources for every local church to achieve the following 5 goals:

- 1) Church-wide Community Need-Based Ministries
- 2) Active Literature and Media Ministry
- 3) Vibrant Bible Study Ministry
- 4) Regular Public Evangelism
- 5) Systematic Discipleship Ministry

For more information including helpful resources to GROW Your Church, go to:

grow.adventist.org

DISCIPLESHIP HANDBOOK

A GREAT NEED. A SIMPLE PLAN.



Most church leaders know they need a discipleship plan for new members, but it's not easy to come up with a comprehensive plan from scratch. That's where a tool like the *Discipleship Handbook* can help. Each of the following keys to a successful discipleship ministry have been incorporated into the *Discipleship Handbook*:

1) Establish a mentor—Discipleship cannot be accomplished by merely handing a book to a new member. The *Discipleship Handbook* contains an appendix called “The Discipleship Plan,” which outlines a process that begins with pairing a mentor with each new member. Simple one-page weekly outlines guide mentors through the important process of integrating new members into the church.

2) Invest personal time—One of Jesus' keys to successful discipleship was the time He invested in His disciples. This critical key is built into the *Discipleship Handbook*. The heart of the plan is a weekly meeting between mentors and new members to review one chapter of the book together. New members could read it by themselves, but the regular meeting provides the personal elements of friendship and guidance so important to their growth. In addition, simple activities are incorporated into the plan to engage new members in worship, ministry, and fellowship with other members of the church family.

3) Develop spiritual habits—One of the special features of the *Discipleship Handbook* is an appendix containing a correlated Bible and Spirit of Prophecy reading plan. Most of the daily 15-20 minute reading assignments include a Bible passage and a passage in the writings of Ellen G. White on the same topic. The books *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *The Great Controversy*, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, and *Steps to Christ* are included in their entirety in the correlated reading plan. In each weekly meeting, time is given for both mentors and new members to share one insight each from their previous week's devotional reading. Thus daily prayer and Bible study is encouraged. In addition, faithful attendance at Sabbath School, church, and prayer meeting or small group Bible study, as well as regular involvement in personal witnessing and church ministries, are also emphasized.

4) Provide ongoing instruction—Each chapter provides new members with practical and Bible-based instruction to help them in their Christian journey. They will learn the ultimate aim of discipleship, the importance of reading the Bible for spiritual life, the biblical basis for Ellen White's prophetic authority in the remnant church, and practical guidance on how to have personal prayer and family worship. They will learn about the prophetic rise and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and discover that every disciple is called to be a witness for Christ. They will receive helpful instruction about the important services, ordinances, organization, history, and mission focus of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And they will read chapters about biblical lifestyle in areas such as Sabbath observance, reverence, stewardship, health, modesty, entertainment, and marriage and family.

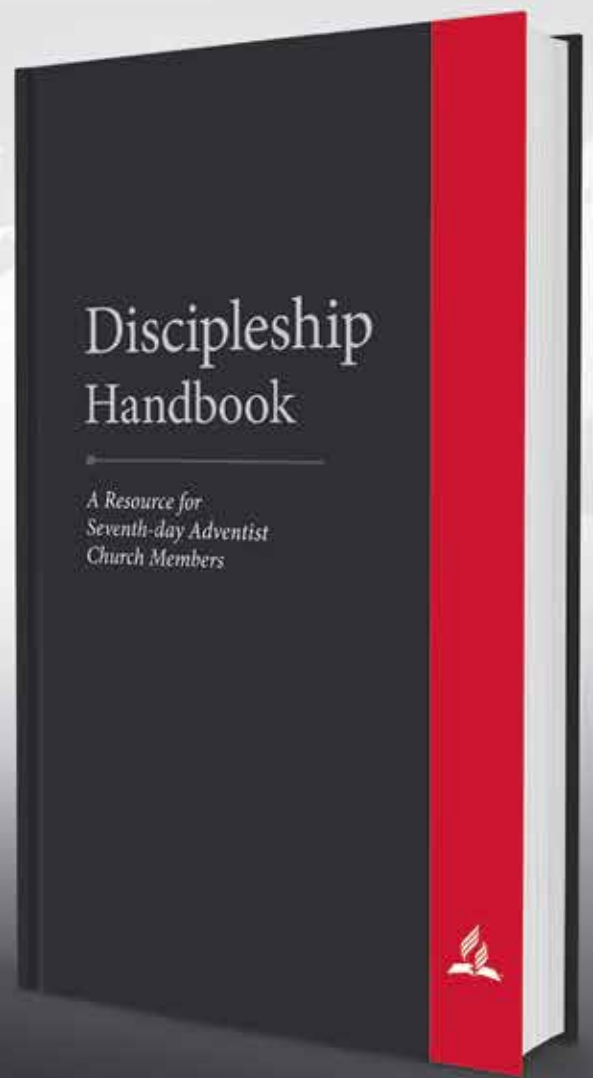
5) Train for soul-winning service—The last five chapters of the *Discipleship Handbook* provide practical training in the cycle of evangelism. They share how to prepare the soil of the heart with friendship and service, how to plant the seed of God's Word with spiritual conversations and literature, how to cultivate spiritual interest by giving Bible studies, how to lead people to make the decisions to follow Christ and be baptized, and how to preserve and equip new members with discipleship training. In each area, practical ideas are given and the mentor is encouraged to involve the new member in a hands-on experience.

The *Discipleship Handbook* is a comprehensive, easy to use, six-month discipleship plan. No need to come up with weekly content for discipleship instruction. No need to download files from the Internet. No need to go through hours of training. And because the plan outlined in the *Discipleship Handbook* can be implemented immediately, there's no need for even one more newly baptized member to be left alone after baptism with no clear guidance or discipleship training.

So let's heed the voice of Jesus, and go make disciples! ED

This article is provided by the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The *Discipleship Handbook* is your local church discipleship ministry...
IN A BOOK!



PRESERVE the harvest!

- 1) Give one *Discipleship Handbook* to a mentor and one to a newly baptized member
- 2) The mentor and new member meet weekly to read and discuss a new chapter from the *Discipleship Handbook*
- 3) Mentors follow the activities in the one-page weekly outlines to integrate new members into the church and build spiritual habits of prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and mission

The *Discipleship Handbook* can also be used for personal study, small groups, Sabbath Schools, prayer meetings, preaching series, and more!

Here's what's inside:

- ✓ 26 chapters covering discipleship, devotional life, personal witnessing, church life, Christian lifestyle, and the cycle of evangelism
- ✓ Daily correlated Bible and Spirit of Prophecy reading plan
- ✓ 26 one-page weekly meeting outlines for mentors to disciple new members



The *Discipleship Handbook* is part of the GROW Your Church series of resources. GROW Your Church is an initiative of the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department.

ORDER your copies today by calling toll-free 1-800-765-6955 or by visiting www.adventistbookcenter.com

Quantity pricing available!

MAKING DISCIPLES

THROUGH SABBATH SCHOOL AND PERSONAL MINISTRIES



The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 calls on every believer to make disciples of Jesus Christ: “The Saviour’s commission is given to all who believe in His name” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110).

The power of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries is that they are designed to involve every church member in the great work of making disciples. Sabbath School aims to include every member in study, service, and fellowship and Personal Ministries aims to involve every member in active labor for souls.

The General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department has developed two initiatives to help local churches experience new life in these vital ministries:

SABBATH SCHOOL ALIVE!

The Sabbath School Alive! initiative emphasizes three primary elements to make disciples through Sabbath School: (1) Bible study and prayer, (2) fellowship, and (3) mission—both world mission and local community outreach.

1. **Bible Study and Prayer**—The *foundation* of Sabbath School is the study of God’s Word. This is what gives power to Sabbath School. Members of Sabbath School classes should be encouraged to dig deep to understand the Bible for themselves, and teachers should base their teaching and example on the Bible. And “Never should the Bible be studied without prayer” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 91).

2. **Fellowship**—The *format* of Sabbath School should promote fellowship. Sabbath School is for teaching, not preaching. Small group classes should be formed whenever possible and discussion encouraged. Classes form special bonds of fellowship when they meet together outside of class for social interaction and to engage in group outreach. The spirit of care and concern fostered in Sabbath School also results in classes that minister, through visitation and reclamation ministries, to those who are inactive or going through difficulties.

3. **Mission**—The *focus* of Sabbath School is the mission of making disciples of all people. Sabbath Schools around the world have always shown their sacrificial nature by giving both time and money to mission projects. Sabbath School Alive! recommends that churches conduct a vibrant 15-20 minute Mission Program, separate from the class study, for education and training. This brief program isn’t for a devotional talk or another sermon, but

should include a world mission update, local outreach testimony or report, and personal ministries training. Each class is then encouraged to adopt a quarterly local mission project and to spend approximately 10-15 minutes of class time planning and organizing for service.

Resources are currently under development to give local churches ideas and training for teaching and leading Sabbath Schools, incorporating mission projects into Sabbath School, and more. For the latest updates, go to alive.adventist.org.

GROW YOUR CHURCH

GROW Your Church is a personal ministries initiative that follows the agricultural model of making disciples taught by Jesus. It emphasizes the fact that evangelism is not an *event*, but a *process*. When local churches discover the secret of developing active ministries in every phase of the process, they reach their God-given purpose and potential for growth.

1. **Prepare** – If we run strong health and other community need-based ministries, we will prepare hearts in the community who might be made open to the truth by seeing someone who cares.

2. **Plant** – If we spread the truth through mass literature and media—like the “leaves of autumn” (see *Christian Service*, p. 147)—we will discover many people who are seeking for truth.

3. **Cultivate** – If we involve most or all of our members in offering, giving, or hosting Bible studies, multitudes of people will be rescued and changed by the power of our message.

4. **Harvest** – If we regularly make appeals through public evangelistic meetings, we will seize one of the best opportunities to lead those in the valley of decision to follow Christ in baptism.

5. **Preserve** – If we have an intentional plan to disciple and train new members into active workers for Christ, member retention will improve and our growth rates will multiply!

Resources are under development to aid local churches in every phase of the disciple-making process. For the latest updates or to create a customized GROW logo for your church, go to grow.adventist.org. ED

This article is provided by the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

SPEED AND TONE

>PART 3



FALSE INSPIRATION

Some seem to think they must race right straight along or else they will lose the inspiration and the people will lose the inspiration. If that is inspiration, let them lose it, and the sooner the better.

DISTRACTION BY PHYSICAL ANTICS

There are also fanatical ministers, who, in attempting to preach Christ, storm, halloo, jump up and down, and pound the desk before them, as if this bodily exercise profited anything. Such antics lend no force to the truths uttered, but, on the contrary, disgust men and women of calm judgment and elevated views. It is the duty of men who give themselves to the ministry to leave all coarseness and boisterous conduct outside the desk at least.

WHINING TONE NOT PROOF OF HUMILITY

There is another class that address the people in a whining tone. Their hearts are not softened by the Spirit of God, and they think they must make an impression by the appearance of humility. Such a course does not exalt the gospel ministry, but brings it down and degrades it. Ministers should present the truth warm from glory. They should speak in such a manner as rightly to represent Christ and preserve the dignity becoming His ministers.

INAUDIBLE PRAYERS A JOY TO SATAN

In the social meeting there is special need of clear, distinct utterance, that all may hear the testimonies borne and be benefited by them. Difficulties are removed and help is given as in social meeting God's people relate their experiences. But too often the testimonies are borne with faulty, indistinct utterance, and it is impossible to gain a correct idea of what is said. Thus the blessing is often lost.

Let those who pray and those who speak pronounce their words properly and speak in clear, distinct, even tones. Prayer, if properly offered, is a power for good. It is one of the means used by the Lord to communicate to the people the precious treasures of truth. But prayer is not what it should be, because of the defective voices of those who utter it. Satan rejoices when the prayers offered to God are almost inaudible. Let God's people learn how to speak and pray in a way that will properly represent the great truths they possess. Let the testimonies borne and the prayers offered be clear and distinct. Thus God will be glorified.

CLARITY IN PUBLIC READING

It is essential that students be trained to read in a clear, distinct tone. We have been pained as we have attended conference meetings, tract society meetings, and meetings of various kinds, where reports were read in an almost inaudible voice or in a hesitating manner or a muffled tone. One-half the interest in a meeting is killed when the participants do their part in an indifferent, spiritless fashion. They should learn to speak in such a way that they can edify those who listen. Let everyone connected with missionary work qualify himself to speak in a clear, attractive way, enunciating his words perfectly.

MOUTHPIECE FOR GOD

He who accepts the position of being a mouthpiece for God should consider it highly essential that he presents the truth with all the grace and intelligence that he can acquire through discipline of the mind and in such a manner that the truth shall lose nothing by his presentation. Let no one consider it a little thing to speak in a thick voice and clumsy manner, or to pitch the voice in a high, unnatural key, and talk loud and long and thus abuse the organs of speech given of God, and make himself unacceptable to the people.

DEFECTIVE UTTERANCE OF TRUTH

The ability to speak plainly and clearly, in full, round tones, is invaluable in any line of work. This qualification is indispensable in those who desire to become ministers, evangelists, Bible workers, or canvassers. Those who are planning to enter these lines of work should be taught to use the voice in such a way that when they speak to people about the truth, a decided impression for good will be made. The truth must not be marred by being communicated through defective utterance.

MANNER OF SPEAKING FOR ALL WORKERS

All the workers, whether they speak from the pulpit or give Bible readings, are to be taught to speak in a clear, expressive manner.

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 264-268, by Ellen G. White.

THE TESTS OF HYMNS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

In his book *On Hymns*, Norman P. Goldhawk says that a good hymn is one in which the words, theme, meter, and music instinctively appeal to us. He then offers 10 standards by which we may measure an effective hymn:

"It's faith-building character; it's doctrinal soundness; it's faithfulness to Scripture. It expresses what is true in experience and doing so with an opening line or couplet that fastens the truth on the mind; the criterion of clarity coupled with a 'singability' and a unity of theme. Finally, the hymn will have a timelessness unrelated to passing fads or fashions in theology and churchly concerns, and it will raise our thoughts to God."¹

There are four criteria that can be used to evaluate whether or not hymns are worthy of a place in public worship:

1. The hymn will articulate the praise of God the Father in whom His creation lives. Example: Walter Smith's "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise."

2. The hymn will celebrate God's activity in history, in past deed and in Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended, and as a continuing reality in every age, including our own. Examples: S. J. Stone's "The Church's One Foundation" or Fanny Crosby's "Tell Me the Story of Jesus."

3. The hymn will register its sensitivity to personal experience of God's saving and renewing grace in Christ and in the Spirit, encouraging God's people to rise to their full stature in Christ. Examples: A. M. Toplady's "Rock of Ages" or Frances Havergal's "Live Out Thy Life Within Me."

4. The language of the hymn should be readily understandable and express some aspect of Christian truth that may be applied at the social level where human life is spent in relationships. Examples: James Montgomery's "God Is My Strong Salvation" or Albert Bayly's "What Doth the Lord Require."

Consider the extraordinary span of songs and hymns that have met the above criteria and endured through the ages:

- From the Red Sea celebration in song (Ex. 15:1, 21) to a cradle in Bethlehem (Luke 2:10-14): hymns with these themes include "From Jordan's Stormy Banks" and "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

- From the recital of the "events of salvation" by the early church (Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20) to the third-century Latin Ambrosian hymnod.

- From the medieval hymnod of Bernard of Clairvaux ("Jesus the Very Thought of Thee") to John Calvin's Reformation ("Old Hundreth").

- From the nineteenth century, Charlotte Elliott's "Just As I Am" to the early-Advent hymns of Franklin Belden ("We Know Not the Hour").

- From contemporary compositions such as Wayne Hooper's "We Have This Hope" to new songs that usher in the triumph of God at the end of the age, one of which could be "Star of Our Hope," the author of which is unknown.

Perhaps the most convincing criteria to validate a worshipful hymn is the effect on the participant described by Martin Luther as "the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us." Ellen G. White affirms that music can "subdue the rude and uncultured . . . impart gladness and courage . . . [it] brings heaven's gladness to the disheartened and carries the mind from earth to heaven."²

ED

¹ Norman P. Goldhawk, *On Hymns*, October 1, 1979.

² Ellen G. White, *Education*, 168.

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FOUR HYMNS ON PRAYER

“TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE”

by Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879)

How do a prayer meeting, a statement by Mephibosheth, and a Swiss Reformed preacher relate to the hymn “Take My Life and Let It Be”?

It all began in 1874, when Frances Ridley Havergal visited a home for young women. All of them were unhappy. Frances prayed for them, and all but two gave their lives to Jesus. She spent time visiting one-on-one with the remaining two women, and finally, after midnight, they surrendered to the Lord. Frances was so overcome by this answer to her prayers that she remained awake, re-consecrated her life to Christ, and wrote down the 11 couplets that form this hymn. She named it “Self-Consecration to Christ.” Interestingly, the words came from Mephibosheth’s self-sacrificing statement to King David: “Yea, let him [Ziba] take all” (2 Sam. 19:30). Havergal sold numerous heirlooms and more than 50 pieces of her jewelry to raise money to evangelize the lost. The hymn is reminiscent of Jesus’ words to the rich young ruler: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Matt. 22:37).

In Havergal’s family, this song was always sung to her father’s tune. However, the tune HENDON in our hymnal was composed by Henri Abraham Cesar Malan, a Geneva-born preacher who composed more than 1,000 hymns tunes and texts.

“NEAR TO THE HEART OF GOD”

by Cleland B. McFee (1866–1944)

Listeners to the *Voice of Prophecy* will recognize this hymn as the theme of its radio broadcast that began in 1930, but they may not realize that the story behind the hymn is set in tragedy.

Dr. Cleland Boyd McFee was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago when he was informed that his brother’s two daughters had died of diphtheria. Dr. McFee was known to write special hymns, both words and music, for the quarterly Communion service of his church. On this sad occasion, it was natural for him to let the solace of the Scriptures inform his hymn-writing to comfort the bereaved family. On the day of the double funeral of his nieces, he stood outside the quarantined home of his brother Howard, choking back tears and singing this hymn which he titled “The Heart of God.” The hymn first appeared in print in 1903.

McFee had a distinguished career as pastor and teacher in Chicago and Brooklyn. In 1901, when his nieces died, he was professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Chicago. Later, in 1912, he was a professor at McCormack Theological Seminary in Brooklyn. From 1930–1936, he served as secretary for the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions.

“I NEED THEE EVERY HOUR”

by Annie S. Hawks (1835–1918)

Annie S. Hawks, who wrote this deeply personal hymn in 1872, leaves this account of its composition:

“One day, as a young wife and mother of 37 years of age, I was busy with my regular household tasks. Suddenly, I became filled with the sense of the nearness to the Master, and I began to wonder how anyone could ever live without Him, either in joy or pain. Then the words were ushered into my mind, and these thoughts took full possession of me.”

Sixteen years later, when her husband died, she was comforted by the power of the words “I Need Thee Every Hour,” which she was permitted to bring to others in the shadow of their great losses.

Annie, a member of a Baptist church in Brooklyn, was encouraged by her pastor, Robert Lowry, to write hymns. Lowry added the words of the refrain and composed the tune. “I Need Thee Every Hour” was sung at the National Convention of Sunday Schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, the same year it was written, and is one of 400 hymns by Hawks. Lowry amassed one of the finest musical libraries in the country and, in collaboration with W. H. Doane, published over 12 books of gospel song, of which *Pure Gold* sold 1 million copies.

“SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER”

by William Watford (1772–1854)

William Watford was born in Bath, England, in 1772. Even when he was five years old, he wanted to be a clergyman. He trained as an Anglican minister but later joined the Congregational Church and was ordained in 1800, though he later repudiated his ordination and, before his illness, tutored in the classics (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew).

Written in 1842, this hymn reflects his personal struggles with failing eyesight and the death of his 17-year-old daughter in an accident when it speaks of “in seasons of distress and grief,” being called from “a world of care,” and “making all my wants and wishes known.” The final stanza anticipates the day when we will no longer need to pray, when from “Mount Pisgah’s lofty height” we will view our eternal home.

William Bradbury composed the music for Watford’s words in 1859. He was born in York, Maine, to parents who were musical. By the age of 14, Bradbury was playing a variety of instruments. He studied music methods in England and Germany, organized music conventions in the United States, manufactured pianos in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and published 60 songbooks. ED



MINISTRY TO THE DEPRESSED

Over the past year, I've done a ton of speaking, preaching, teaching, and writing about grief, suffering, and hardship. I did not choose this; it chose me. One of my church members committed suicide in September 2010. Then, in January 2011, my father committed suicide. One year later, I traveled back to visit the family and celebrate our survival and recovery, only to learn that my dad's brother had committed suicide. So in January 2012, we held the funeral almost exactly a year to the day after my father's funeral. I started speaking out about suicide and depression, and every time I did, people would come to me and tell me their stories.

People are hurting, broken, wounded, and grasping for help and hope. Their pain can truly be overwhelming. Shepherding is difficult enough when the sheep are healthy; it's nearly impossible when the sheep aren't well. It's terribly difficult to lead the flock to green pastures when many of them are crippled by depression and despair. Thus, I have learned that it's very important that the minister does not become consumed with sickness and despondency.

I'll assume that as a minister, you sincerely care for those who hurt and that you seek God in prayer for their prosperity. Here are three simple keys for effective ministry to the depressed: (1) provide specific life-work assignments; (2) urge them to seek professional help, and (3) do not enable.

Now that you have the general idea of the keys, let's take a closer look at them.

1. *Provide specific life-work assignments.* Depressed people are blinded by circumstance and drained of energy. They need encouragement and direction. Litter your counsel with Bible promises and encouragement, but be specific and intentional about coaching your listeners toward specific projects and goals. Pain, loss, grief, and suffering are part of the

transition time, and the transition time is the perfect time to start a ministry, write a book, go back to school, and just do something new and different. Without specific goals and objectives, things continue to fester and spoil. People have to get up, get out, and do something.

2. *Urge them to seek professional help.* Oftentimes the depression and hardship are so severe that not even the most charismatic person can encourage those suffering from depression. These people need a professional to help them deal with these types of issues—and you are *not* it. Look for warning signs (i.e., suicide-speak, excessive drinking or drug use, etc.) that they need professional therapeutic care, and do not hesitate to refer them. You are not God. Don't try to play the hero with people's fragile lives.

3. *Do not enable.* I recently heard an Adventist chaplain say that God is extremely co-dependent. (I wondered what made him say that; I'll ask him later.) If God is co-dependent, I'm sure it's because He can handle it. We can't. We cannot enable others because of our own insecurities and weakness. If people refuse to pursue their goals and refuse to seek help, I certainly cannot help them. I must move on to those sheep who relish the leading of the shepherd.

There it is. Do these three things, and you will pour new life into the broken bodies of many ailing souls. There is no shortage of depressed people, but there is also no shortage of divine grace and power that can lift the weakest believer out of the doldrums of depression, despondency, and despair. That's what God does: "He heals the brokenhearted and he binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). ED

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THE FIRST WORD OF JESUS ON THE CROSS: A PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS

There was never a preacher like the dying Christ. There was never a congregation like the one gathered about the pulpit of the cross. And there was never a sermon like the Seven Last Words. As to their structure, these seven words may be divided into two groups. In the first three, Jesus was dealing with the interests of others; in the last four, He was absorbed in His own concerns.

Jesus' Seven Last Words will be individually developed into a seven-part sermon series which, like a mirror, will enable us to see the crucifixion in the mind of Jesus Himself and reveal its true meaning. In the words of the poet George Herbert:

"O, all ye who pass by, behold and see: Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree — / The tree of life to all but only Me: / Was ever grief like Mine?"

INTRODUCTION

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus used many pulpits during His public life, such as Peter's boat pushed into the sea, the mountaintop of Tabor, the streets of Tyre and Sidon, the temple in Jerusalem, the country road near a cemetery, and a banquet hall. But all faded into insignificance compared to the pulpit which He mounted on the cross. It was lifted slowly off the ground and wavered in midair for a moment, tearing and lacerating His flesh. Suddenly, with a deep thud that seemed to shake the earth, it sank into the pit prepared for it. Jesus had mounted His pulpit for the last time.

Jesus spoke seven times from the cross; these are called His Seven Last Words. In the Scriptures, the dying words of only three other people are recorded: Israel (Jacob), Moses, and Stephen. The reason, perhaps, is that no others are found so significant and representative as these three.

In His goodness, Jesus left His thoughts on dying, for He—more than Moses, more than Stephen—was representative of all humanity. In this sublime hour, He called all His children to the pulpit of the cross, and every word He said to them was set down for the purpose of an eternal publication and an undying consolation. "These," writes James Stalker, "are like windows through which we can see what was passing in His mind."¹

In analyzing the structure of this First Word from the cross, three things are noticeable: the invocation, the petition, and the argument.

I. THE INVOCATION

Seneca, a fourth-century Roman mor-

alist, wrote that those who were crucified cursed the day of their birth, their executioners, and their mothers, and they even spat on those who looked at them. Cicero recorded that it was sometimes necessary to cut out the tongues of those who were crucified to stop their terrible blasphemies. Hence, at Jesus' crucifixion, the executioners expected a word but not the kind of word that they heard from Him.

When Jesus had recovered from the swooning shock occasioned by the driving of the nails into His hands and feet, and before His senses were stifled by the mists of death, His first word was "Father." Inasmuch as Jesus' natural language was prayer, even at this moment it leapt to His lips. When wrong is triumphant and prosperity is suddenly turned into adversity, even devout Christians have been driven by the pressure of pain and disappointment to question God. But this invocation proved that Jesus' faith was unshaken even when He was sinking into the abysses of pain and desertion.

II. THE PETITION

The word "Father" was followed by an utterance of pardon. The Scribes and Pharisees were quite sure that He who had preached to "love your enemies" and "do good to them that hate you" would now forget that message with the piercing of His hands and feet. They felt that the excruciating and agonizing pains would scatter to the winds His ethical teachings. But, what He had preached on the sunny hills of the Sermon on the Mount, He practiced on the grim hill of Calvary. No observer of that horrific scene expected a prayer of pardon. People who are dying either proclaim their own innocence, condemn the judge who sentenced them to death, or ask forgiveness for their sins. But Jesus, who was perfect innocence, asked no pardon; as Mediator between God and man, He extended pardon. As High Priest who offered Himself in sacrifice, He pleaded for sinners. In a certain sense, the words of forgiveness were spoken twice: once in Eden, as God promised redemption through the "seed of the woman" who would crush the serpent of evil; now as God in the form of the suffering servant who fulfilled the promise. So great was Jesus' love manifested in this word of pardon that echoes were caught later when Stephen asked the Lord not to punish those who stoned him. It echoed again when Paul wrote: "At my defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be

charged against them" (2 Tim. 4:16). But the prayers of Stephen and Paul were not like the prayer of Jesus, in which forgiveness was identified with His sacrifice, prostrate as a victim. Thus He interceded and offered Himself for the guilty. By His sacrifice, "Jesus was earning the right to become the advocate of men in the Father's presence."²

III. THE ARGUMENT

But, forgive whom? Forgive the soldier in the courtroom of Caiaphas who struck Him with a mailed fist? Forgive Pilate, who condemned God to retain the friendship of Caesar? Forgive Herod, who robbed wisdom in the garment of a fool? Forgive the soldiers who swung the King of kings on a tree between heaven and earth? Forgive them? Why? Because they know what they do? No, because they know *not* what they do. If they had known what a terrible crime they were committing by sentencing Jesus to death; if they had known what a perversion of justice it was to prefer Barabbas to Christ; if they had known what cruelty it was to take the feet that trod the everlasting hills and nail them to the limbs of a tree; if they had known what they were doing and had kept on doing it, unmindful of the fact that the very blood which they had shed was capable of redeeming them, they would never be saved. It was only the ignorance of their great sin that brought them within the pale of the hearing of that cry from the cross. So, Jesus was saying that, in this instance, their ignorance was their salvation.

CONCLUSION

What lessons, then, emerge from this First Word? First, "upon all rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God. To all, forgiveness is freely offered."³ There is no limit to divine mercy. Secondly, ignorance does not remove guilt; only true repentance can bring the consolation of pardon. Paul was comforted with it when he said, "God had mercy on me, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13). Lastly, like Jesus, who practiced what He preached, we must "walk the talk" and be an example of those in whom "sentiment and act completely coincide." ED

¹ James M. Stalker, *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1984), 112.

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 745.

³ *Ibid.*

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THE SECOND WORD FROM THE CROSS: A PROMISE OF REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION

“Assuredly, I say unto you today, you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42).

The First Word that Jesus uttered from His cross was a prayer for His enemies. The Second Word was an answer to prayer. It was an answer addressed to a single individual. Jesus spoke to this man as if he was the *only* being in the world. What comfort this word must have brought! What a “balm of Gilead” it has brought to many even to this day!

To unpack this Second Word, we will answer three questions which relate to the one to whom the promise was made, the One who made the promise, and the nature of the prayer’s answer.

I. THE THIEF

Who offered the prayer that brought this remarkable answer? A thief! On Calvary, Goodness is crucified between two thieves. That is Jesus’ true position: among the worthless and the rejects. He is the right Man in the right place. He who said He would come as a thief in the night is among the thieves; the Physician is among the lepers; the Redeemer is among the unredeemed.

The two thieves crucified on either side of Him at first blasphemed and cursed. Suffering does not necessarily make us better; it can scar and burn the soul unless it is purified by seeing its redemptive value. Unspiritualized suffering may cause us to degenerate. The thief on the left asked to be taken down. But the thief on the right, evidently moved by Jesus’ priestly prayer of intercession, asked to be taken up. Reprimanding his fellow thief for his blasphemy, he said: “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40, 41). Then, throwing himself on divine mercy, he asked for forgiveness: “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

A dying man asked a dying Man for eternal life. A man without possessions asked a poor Man for a kingdom. A thief at death’s door asked to die like a thief and steal Paradise. If Jesus had come merely as a teacher, the thief would never have asked for forgiveness. But since the thief’s request touched the reason Jesus came to earth, namely, to save souls, the thief heard the immediate answer: “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

“When shame and darkness covered Him and thee, / What didst thou see, / O thou great penitent of Calvary, / That thou couldst beg this boon as thy reward / For suffering? — When Thou comest to Thy Kingdom, Lord, Remember me!

“In that most darkest hour, / Of hatred born, / When Satan’s power / Showed Love held up to scorn, / What way / To thee came strength to pray? / Lord, when Thy Kingdom cometh unto Thee, / Remember me!”

It was the thief’s last prayer, perhaps even his first. He knocked once, sought once, asked once, dared everything, and found everything. When even the disciples were doubting and only one was present at the cross, the thief owned and acknowledged Jesus as Savior. If Barabbas had come to the execution, how he must have wished that he had never been released and that he could have heard the words of the compassionate High Priest.

II. THE SAVIOR

Who offered forgiveness? Practically every part of Christ’s body had been fastened by nails or tortured by whips and thorns, except His heart and His tongue, and these declared forgiveness that very day. Who but God can forgive sins? And who can promise Paradise except Him who by nature is eternal to Paradise?

The arrangement that Jesus would hang between the two thieves fulfilled the Scripture that “He would be numbered with the transgressors” (Is. 53:12). But it was His right position. His enemies had long called Him “a friend of publicans and sinners,” and now, by crucifying Him between the thieves, they put the same idea into action. Jesus came to the world to identify Himself with sinners; their cause was His, and He wrapped up His fate with theirs. He lived among them, and it was meant that He should die among them. In a beautiful way, that position on the cross was a prefigurement of what has been happening every day since: some sinners have believed on Him and been saved, while others have not believed. Stalker observes that “the parable of the Prodigal Son is an epitome of the whole teaching of Christ, so is the salvation of the thief on the cross the life of Christ in miniature.”¹

The final Judgment was prefigured on Calvary: the Judge was in the center, with the two divisions of humanity—the saved and the lost, the sheep and the goats—on either side. When Christ would come in

glory to judge all humanity, the cross would be with Him then, too, but as a badge of honor, not a mark of shame.

III. THE PROMISE

The promise made to the thief was the only word spoken on the cross that received an answer, and it was the promise of Paradise. But “when” would the thief receive the promise and be with Jesus? Since Jesus did not go to Paradise that day, certainly the thief would not precede Him. The answer emerges from the grammatical structure of the sentence. Change the punctuation, and the meaning changes. If the comma precedes “today,” one might conclude that the thief did go to Paradise that same day. However, if the comma follows “today,” the promise will be fulfilled when the “dead in Christ,” including the thief, will be raised at the last day (1 Thess. 4:16).

The promise made to the thief was a twofold assurance. First, Jesus gave assurance of an abiding fellowship with Himself. To be forgiven is more than a removal of a penalty; it is the restoration of a fellowship. They would be together in eternity. Second, Jesus gave assurance that those who turn to Him are saved instantly. Paul sums up Christianity in two things: repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Both of these are fulfilled in this penitent’s words. As one scholar asks, “Did ever the new birth take place in so strange a cradle?” The thief’s conversion is a wonderful testimony that God would not allow His own to be destitute of subjects.

CONCLUSION

The thief’s deathbed conversion will always be an encouragement to the worst of sinners when they repent. Though it is common for penitents to be afraid to come to God because they believe their sins are too great to be forgiven, the story of the thief on the cross should assure them that the mercy which sufficed for him is sufficient for all: “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We should set no limits on the invitation of the Savior, for “him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37, KJV). AMEN. ED

¹ James M. Stalker, *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1984), 120.

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THE THIRD WORD FROM THE CROSS: A PROVISION FOR MARY

INTRODUCTION

Today's Bible text is found in John 19:25-27. Let's read it.

In Jesus' life, from His birth to His death, there is a strange blending of the majestic and the lowly. At His birth, He is laid in a manger, but out in the fields of Bethlehem, angels sang His praise. Years later, He was asleep in the back of a boat when a storm lashed the Sea of Galilee, and when He rebuked the winds, there was a "great calm." When He saw the grief of Martha and Mary, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) and a few moments later cried, "Lazarus come forth" (verse 43). And here at the cross, the Third Word shows Jesus as the Son of a woman, concerned in His dying hour about her future care.

Were any woman's sufferings equal to that of Mary? Jesus, her Son, was dying the death of a criminal. He hung naked before her eyes, but she was helpless. His wounds bled, and she could not staunch them. His mouth was parched, but she could not moisten it. Those outstretched arms that once clasped her in a warm embrace were now beyond her reach. The nails in His hands and feet pierced her; the thorns imbedded in His brow were a circle of flame about her heart; the taunts flung at Him wounded her, too.

But the distresses of her extraordinary and brief motherhood predated the cross. Note the following puzzling unrealized expectations with which she wrestled.

I. THE HEARTACHE OF PREDICTED ADVERSITY

When Mary carried her infant into the temple in the pride of young motherhood, the venerable Simeon foretold that a sword would pierce through her own soul. She must have wondered what this mysterious prediction meant. At the foot of the cross, she knew, for the sword was smiting her, stab after stab.

But the sword would cut deeper. Had not the angel told her before Jesus' birth that "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32, 33)? But, during His life, where was this greatness, this throne, this crown, this kingdom? The angel had told her she was to be the most blessed of women, but look at what followed: 30 years of obscurity in Nazareth. A ministry that looked promising

with news of miraculous healings and great crowds. Perhaps it's all coming now? But then news reaches her of His arrest, trial, and death sentence, and she finds herself standing at the foot of the cross. And He is dying. Where is greatness and glory now? The sword had pierced very deep.

But there were other perplexities that dogged her steps before this shattering disappointment.

II. THE HEARTACHE OF DOMESTIC PERPLEXITIES

The first of a series of perplexities began when, as a lad, Jesus went up to Jerusalem with His parents, Joseph and Mary. They lost Him. After a day's journey, they realized He was missing, and with great anxiety returned to find Him. Their reunion, accompanied by a gentle reproof from the distraught parents, drew a perplexing reply from the boy: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business. . . . my first loyalty is not to you, but to God?" (Luke 2:49). Insolence? No. They failed "to comprehend His mission."¹

Then, while teaching in Galilee, His disciples informed Him that His mother and His brothers wanted to see Him. His answer was perplexing. He said, "Who is My mother? And who are My brethren? For whosoever shall do the will of My Father . . . the same is My brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:48-50, KJV). He was saying that those who receive Him "were united to Him by a tie closer than that of human kinship."² The sad reality was that Jesus received no support from His earthly relatives, and it "cast a shadow" over His earthly life and "made His path a thorny one to travel." But, what comfort this brings to those who endure misapprehension and distrust, even in their own homes, knowing that Jesus endured the same.

There is more to come. As the black shadows began to gather, Mary left her other sons, who, as John tells us, did not believe in their brother, and hurried to stand by her first-born. Many things He did grieved and perplexed her, but she loved Him with a love stronger than death and "stood by the cross . . ." (John 19:25). Then came the astonishing phrase, "Behold thy son!" (verse 26). What was Jesus saying? He told His mother to adopt another son when she already had four sons of her own and at least two daughters. Jesus completely ignored them. He passed them by as if they were dead and entrusted His

mother to a friend, John the Apostle. The sword pierced again!

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay: but rather division" (Luke 12:51). The Master is here speaking out of His own experience. He created division among His own people and in His own family. But I love to remember that division is not His final word. He is the great uniter. He divided His family only to bring them into a closer fellowship. When we see Mary after the resurrection on her way to Pentecost, she has with her not just one son, but five. Her adopted son is with her; so are James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude (Acts 1:14). They have come to accept Jesus not only as a brother but also as Savior and Lord. What hope those whose families are divided have in the promise that "Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord . . . he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:5, 6).

CONCLUSION

"In His dying hour, Christ remembered His mother."³ From the pulpit of the cross, Jesus preaches to all ages a sermon on the fifth commandment (see 1 Tim. 5:6, 8). Jesus, suffering the extremity of pain which might have made Him insensible to everything beyond Himself attends to a domestic detail—the future care of His mother! With great pain, this was His last will and testament. To His mother He said, "Woman, behold thy son" (meaning proleptically, "Thou hast no son now"). And John accepted the charge as a gift, and thereafter, they lived together in his home.

Does not this sermon, delivered from the pulpit of the cross, inform us that our Savior has a concern for our temporal interests *and* our eternal interests? Let those of us who are needy and deserted take courage from this and cast our care upon Him, for He cares for us. God will fulfill His promise to be a Father to the fatherless, and a Husband to the widow, and that they have not been forgotten by Him who, in the hour of His absorbing agony, remembered Mary. AMEN. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 82.

² *Ibid.*, 325.

³ *Ibid.*, 752.

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THE FOURTH WORD FROM THE CROSS: A CRY OF ABANDONMENT

INTRODUCTION

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matt. 27:46).

For three insufferable hours, Jesus was on the cross. With every minute, His agony was increasing. The wounds in His hands and feet, exposed to the atmosphere and the sun, grew barked and hardened. The blood, impeded in its circulation, swelled in His heart and brain until these organs were ready to burst. The slightest attempt to move His body from one intolerable posture to another caused pains to shoot along His quivering nerves. But all the while, He remained silent.

Then an unearthly darkness fell over the land, for nature, in sympathy with its Creator, refused to shed its light upon the crime of deicide. Mankind, having condemned the Light of the World, now lost the cosmic symbol of that Light, the sun. At Bethlehem, where He was born at midnight, the heavens were suddenly filled with light; at Calvary, when He entered into the ignominy of His crucifixion at midday, the heavens were bereaved of light. Centuries before, the prophet Amos had said: “‘And it shall come to pass in that day’, says the Lord God, ‘That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight’” (Amos 8:9).

During this part of the crucifixion, Jesus was repeating the psalm of David, which prophetically referred to Him, where the signal feature was His desolation and solitude (see Ps. 21:13-19). Then “Jesus cried out with a loud voice . . . ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’”

What did this anguished cry of the Fourth Word from the cross mean? I suggest it was a cry of abandonment, a cry of substitution, and a cry of victory.

I. IT WAS A CRY OF ABANDONMENT

Jesus was accustomed to finding Himself forsaken. Early on, the members of His own household rejected Him. So did His fellow-townsmen in Nazareth. Ultimately, the nation at large followed the same course. The multitudes that at one time followed Him wherever He went and hung on His words eventually took offense and went away. At last, in the crisis of His fate, one of His closest followers betrayed Him, and the rest forsook Him and fled. But, in these disappointments, though He felt them keenly, He had always had one resource: He was always able, when rejected of men, to

turn away from them and cast Himself with confidence on the breast of God. Even at the Last Supper, with reference to the impending desertion of the Twelve, He said, “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32). Now, however, the hour had come; and was this expectation fulfilled? The disciples were scattered as He had predicted, and He was left alone; but He was not alone. Was the Father still with Him? His own words supply the answer: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Earth had already abandoned Him by lifting His cross above it, and Heaven had already abandoned Him by veiling itself in darkness; yet, suspended between both, He united both. As He entered the extreme penalty for sin, which is separation from God, it was fitting that His eyes be filled with darkness and His soul with loneliness. The records of time and eternity do not contain a sentence more full of anguish than this Fourth Word from the cross.

II. IT WAS A CRY OF SUBSTITUTION

The notion of substitution is that one person takes the place of another, especially in order to bear his pain and thus save him from it. We admire the altruism of Moses to have his name blotted out of God’s book if only thereby Israel might be forgiven (Exod. 32:32). We also respect an almost identical wish expressed by Paul (Rom. 9:1-4). Likewise, the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament prefigured the ultimate substitution when Jesus, “the Lamb of God” as man’s substitute, would be slain, have laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and be counted as a transgressor. The guilt of every descendent of Adam was placed on Him and, like the scapegoat on whose head the sins of the whole community were laid, He went out into the land of forsakenness, thinking He would be eternally separated from God. “It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that . . . broke the heart of the Son of God.”¹ No wonder He cried!

This Fourth Word of the cross epitomizes the heart of the atonement: Christ in our stead being treated as we deserve and regarded as sin itself!

III. IT WAS A CRY OF VICTORY

We stand beside the dying Savior and say, “This is what we ought to have suffered; our life was forfeited by our guilt;

thus, our blood deserves to flow; we might justly have been banished forever into the desert of forsakenness.” But as we make confession, our forfeited life is given back to us for Christ’s sake, the peace of God is shed abroad in our hearts, and the new life of love and service begins. “This is my blood of the new testament . . . shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28, KJV). So, in the profoundest sense, the Fourth Word of the dying Savior was a cry of victory. The cry itself, though an utterance of despair, yet involved the strongest faith. See how He lays hold of His Father with both hands; “My God, My God!” It is a prayer. A thousand times He turned to this resource in days of trial, and He does so in this supreme trouble. Feeling forsaken of God, He rushed into the arms of His Father; and those arms closed around Him in loving protection. “By faith He rested in Him whom it had been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of the Father’s favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was the victor.”² Never forget: No one is forsaken who can pray, “My God.” He was forsaken that we might never be. Therefore, however overwhelming our grief and bewilderment, let us, like Christ, hold on, crying, “My God, my God.”

CONCLUSION

In each of the other three words, Jesus acted as the divine mediator. Now, in the Fourth Word, He acted as mediator for sinful humanity. The Old Testament had prophesied that He who hangs upon a tree is cursed. He would remove the curse by bearing it and triumphing in the resurrection (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal.3:13). “As the flower, by being crushed, yields up its fragrant essence, so He by taking into His heart the sin of the world, brought salvation to the world.” Now, Jesus, as our Mediator, comes to stand by our side when we cry “My God, My God” and encounter pain, misfortune, bereavement, and death. Should we not hate sin that brought such agony to Him who loved us so and love Him more and more? Do you want to accept Jesus as your Saviour, our substitute and victory? May God bless you! Let’s pray. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 753.

² *Ibid.*, 756.

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH? SOME PEOPLE USE 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34, 35 TO SAY THAT WOMEN SHOULD NOT HAVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS. WHAT WAS PAUL SAYING IN THAT PASSAGE?

In this passage Paul clearly stated that women are to keep silent in church. If that prohibition is interpreted absolutely, as some do, women would basically disappear from church. It would mean they could proclaim the gospel to friends and relatives, but whenever they went to church their freedom to proclaim God's goodness would end. Such an understanding of the role of women in church is not supported by the Bible.

Throughout history God has used women in different roles. Particularly important is the fact that prophetesses proclaimed their messages to God's people in public (Ex. 15:20; Judges 4:4-16; 2 Kings 22:14-20; Acts 2:17; 21:9). Paul himself acknowledged that a woman can pray and prophesy in church; that women are not strictly forbidden to speak in church. God, through the gifts of the Spirit, granted them that right and privilege (1 Cor. 11:5). The question is, What did Paul mean when he stated that women should be silent in church? We should keep several things in mind.

1. Tensions during worship: One of the problems Paul had to meet in the church at Corinth was deciding proper behavior in church. Different groups with different ideas created confusion and tensions (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10, 11; 14:26). This suggests that the speech of women that Paul prohibited was in some way contributing to that state of confusion. That is supported by the fact that the speech of women Paul referred to was related to questions they were asking and possibly comments they made that did not contribute to proper order in the church. This is indicated by the fact that Paul told them that if they had questions they should ask them to their husbands at home.

2. Preaching is not the subject: The discussion was not whether women should preach or occupy important leadership positions in church, but about the proper attitude in church when instruction was being given. To forbid women to preach or teach in church or to hold lead-

ership positions is to misuse this text. Paul was dealing with a very specific situation and was advising church leaders how to deal with it. He was regulating the only kind of speech directly mentioned in the text, namely, asking questions.

3. Women should be instructed: Paul's advice didn't deny women the right to learn, but regulated the form the learning should take. He stated that in church they are to learn in silence, without speaking, subjecting themselves to the instruction being given. In the ancient world it was impolite for students to interrupt teachers with questions that in some cases showed their ignorance of the subject and disrupted the learning experience. In this case Paul proposed that women should not interrupt the teacher by asking disruptive questions; their education could also take place at home. In that more private setting they could ask their husbands questions and be properly instructed. The fact that husbands were expected to share their knowledge with their wives indicates that it was not their exclusive possession. In principle, Paul was affirming women's right to learn. This right to learn about the gospel did not simply have the result of increasing their knowledge for personal self-fulfillment. It implies that they were being trained to teach others.

This text simply suggests that in some of the churches there were tensions between women and their instructors. Paul tried to control that situation by controlling an abuse but not removing the privileges of praying, learning, and prophesying in public (1 Cor. 11:5). In fact the Greek verb *sigao*, "to keep silent," could be also translated "to be still," in the sense of not being too outspoken. We should not read Paul's statement to mean that women are permanently forbidden to speak in church. The reason Paul gave for his counsel is that such conduct is unbecoming to Christian women in church. The church is not the place for a person—man or woman—to enter into verbal controversies with those in charge of instructing the congregation. Christian harmony is the rule. ED

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

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ADDING MEMBERS THROUGH STUDIES: HOW YOU CAN ACHIEVE IT

>PART 4 OF 8

Part 3 of this series gave 10 steps the Bible study teacher must deal with once he or she is in the students' home and has opened the Bible and started the study. Announce your topic, start the reading of the verses with the person in the group who is probably the most important, don't force anyone to read who doesn't want to, explain the verse, ask if there are any questions, don't argue, and don't be afraid to admit you don't know the answer. Part 4 deals with how to complete a study, emphasizing the importance of the Holy Spirit, along with the final prayer, as the principal power to bring conviction.

This is the most important part of the study. The Holy Spirit is present and doing the work of conviction. Thus, it behooves the teacher to be aware of this phenomenon so that the conviction can do its intended work.

COMPLETING THE STUDY

1. When you have finished the study, ask how the students feel about the topic. A good question is, "How does the discovery you made today from the Word of God change your life?" "Which steps do you plan to take?" The most important move to make here is to try to bring the students to an acceptance of the message of the topic. As you go along in the study as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, you want to do it in such a way that the Holy Spirit can bring conviction to their hearts. You shouldn't leave the study without a decision having been made. However, this doesn't mean that you should go on and on, focusing on acceptance, if they haven't accepted the message of the study. If they haven't accepted

the message, then you can say something like, "We'll be looking at this again later on from a different view, and that may be helpful to you." The important thing is to continue the studies, because sometimes further studies will deepen their conviction toward God/Jesus, which will soften them on subjects that were more difficult for them to accept in the beginning.

2. When you have finished the study and asked the final questions, have a final prayer. It should be short. In your prayer, say something like this: "Dear Almighty God [for Muslims, not Father or Jesus, since Muslims don't see God as their Father or believe in the divinity of Jesus], thank you for this lovely family [or dear person] and this important study we've had together. Thank you for enlightening our minds. Thank you for planting in Jim's/Ibrahim's [or whomever's] heart the desire to know truth, because we know that it is truth which keeps us on the right path to your kingdom. Take care of us in our absence, and bring us back together next week [or next time]. In God's name we pray, Amen."

3. Prayer can be a mighty tool for bringing about conviction or deepening it. With experience, you can use prayer to let the students learn new concepts, come closer to the Lord, feel affirmed, be inspired, be thankful, be comforted, and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Don't be afraid to be creative with your prayers.

4. After you have prayed, don't linger. This is a very crucial moment. To linger can provoke premature questions and situations which may undo the accomplishments which were achieved during the study.

5. Usually, you shouldn't announce the topic of the next study, unless during the conversation someone has asked for a precise study, but then do it only if you know it won't be premature for their current doctrinal understandings. If this isn't the case and you share the topic, you are running the risk that your students may go to their pastor or priest or imam and get feedback, which will likely be stacked with misconstrued theological twists and could thus prejudice your students' attitudes, making your next study to no affect, or at least making it very difficult to bring them to conviction on the true message of the topic. However, having said this, if you know your students well and don't see any risk, you could announce the next topic so that those who wish to can study the topic for the next time. Sometimes this makes the study more interesting.

6. Don't call on the phone to visit your students before the next study unless it is necessary to rearrange the time of the study or pray for them because something negative has happened to them in the meantime. Calling without a good reason could lead to premature questions and situations which could be detrimental to your next study. However, you might call ahead to confirm their attendance if there is reason to believe they may not attend the next time or if the meeting needs to be cancelled.

Having a set time for the meetings, obviously implies regularity, but if the meeting needs to be cancelled, everyone should be informed in advance.

7. When you arrive home, while your mind is still fresh, make notes about how the study went—the students' reaction and anything special that you need to deal with next time. Have a season of prayer for the students, asking God to send His Holy Spirit to work on their hearts while you are absent from one another and until the next study.


8. If you have many Bible studies going on, keep a written schedule of those events so you won't get confused about when and where to study next.

9. Put your students on your prayer list and set time aside each day to pray for them. Mention each one by name, one after the other, in your prayers, pleading with the Holy Spirit to move on their hearts, to open their minds to truth, to accept what the Holy Spirit convicts them of, and also that God will give you wisdom to know how to deal with each situation, so that on every occasion, the right words may be used to sink home God's truths to their hearts. ED

Lamar Phillips is a retired minister and church administrator who served for 39 years in six world divisions.

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THE CREATION

Although various confessions of faith used by different Christian churches still mention God as the Creator of all things, many Christians have chosen to accept evolution as the concept to understand origins. A multitude of approaches are available today such as creationism, intelligent design, evolution, theistic evolution, and progressive creation. What does Scripture teach, and what was Jesus' approach to the question of origins?

I. CREATION IN THE BIBLE

Throughout Scripture God as Creator of all things is confirmed. He was not dependent on preexisting matter but created material things and life through His Word (Heb. 11:3; Ps. 33:6). The Creator must always be distinguished from creation. It is only He who can create (Heb. *bara'*; Gen. 1:1, 16, 27; 2:3, 4), while humans can reshape matter.

1. *Creation in the Old Testament*

This comprehensive report of creation teaches that God created life on earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. Chronological statements in Genesis and elsewhere in Scripture make it clear that creation took place only some thousands of years ago (Gen. 1:1-2:4a).

This passage focuses on creation from a slightly different angle but is complementary to what goes before it, filling in details about the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:4a-25). The issue of choice and the pos-

sibility of death are introduced through the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Death is a reality only after the Fall (Gen. 3, 4).

The Sabbath and the seven-day week are rooted in creation (Ex. 20:8-11).

The wisdom books confirm God as the Creator of heaven and earth and all life (Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, see also Job 38-41; Ps. 8:4-10; 104:5-30; 136:4-9).

The prophetic books give a similar testimony (Is. 40:26, see also Jer. 10:11-13; 27:5; Amos 4:13; 5:8).

- How can light exist if the sun, moon, and stars do not appear until the fourth day? It is possible that the light on day one came from God Himself, who is light (see a similar description of the new creation in Rev. 21:23). The point is that God should be worshipped and not the heavenly bodies as was and is done in pagan religions.

- How long are the days in Genesis 1? Some have suggested that the days consisted of thousands or millions of years. Thousands or even millions of years are not sufficient for macroevolution to work; 2 Peter 3:8 is not about creation but asserts that God is not limited to our concepts of time. Genesis is a historical narrative. It should not be understood metaphorically. The statements that each day of creation consisted of a dark period and a light period, the numbering of the days, the term "day" itself which in Genesis points to a literal day (2:17; 3:5, 8 etc.), and the connection

of the creation days to the origin of the week and the weekly Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11) show that the author of Genesis had in mind normal days.

2. *Jesus and Creation*

Jesus not only pointed back to Genesis 1 and 2 but also referred to Abel (Matt. 23:35), Noah (Matt. 24:37-39), and the Flood (Matt. 24:39), showing that He understood these persons and events literally—including the creation account.

The universe and all life were created by God. God's activity was the starting point for human history (Mark 13:19).

Jesus refers to the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 where the Sabbath, understood as a 24-hour day, is made for human beings (Mark 2:27, 28).

While discussing divorce (Matt. 19:4, 5) Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, affirming that humanity was directly created by God.

The contribution of the New Testament to the creation debate, among other things, is that Jesus is the Creator (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2, 10). It provides a cosmic perspective which includes more than the creation of life on earth. It also makes clear that the One who created all things is able to reconcile all things through His blood shed on the cross. It is inconsistent to claim that Jesus provided salvation through His death and yet maintain that He created us through an evolutionary process of millions of years. Because of the Fall, we need to be recreated spiritually (Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:17).

3. *Other New Testament Writers and Creation*

Paul, like Jesus (1 Tim. 2:13), based his theology on a literal reading of the Genesis accounts of Creation (Heb. 4:4) and the Fall (2 Cor. 11:3). Adam and Eve are real historical personages (1 Cor. 15:22).

John indicates not only that God created all things (Rev. 4:11; 10:6) but that the message of creation is part of God's last message to this world (Rev. 14:7). The tree of life (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 19) and the springs of the water of life (21:6) as well as the serpent (Rev. 12:9, 17; 20:2) remind us of the original paradise (Gen. 2:9-10; 3:1, 3, 14, 22, 24). Revelation 21-22 pictures paradise restored in a new heaven and a new earth with the new Jerusalem.

II. POINTS ABOUT EVOLUTION

1. Although the theory of evolution is widely assumed to be part of the scientific enterprise, the question of origins deals more with history and not with present circumstances replicable in a laboratory.

2. The theory of evolution is also dependent on philosophical presuppositions. Often it is based on naturalism which excludes supernatural activity. Theistic evolution allows God's involvement in the evolutionary process but sets limits on what He can do.

3. Serious questions have been raised in relation to chemical evolution, irreducibly complex systems, missing links and, when working on a macro level, the mechanisms of mutation and natural selection.

4. The theory of evolution has also influenced the study of the humanities, including theology (e.g., the evolution of biblical books as a natural process apart from inspiration).

5. Ethical questions arise out of the concept of the survival of the fittest as it seems to allow for genocide, exploitation of the underprivileged and absolute materialism.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF EVOLUTION FOR THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

1. The theory of evolution postulates death, not as an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26) nor as the result of sin, but as bringing about better adaptations for life's challenges. However, according to Scripture, death is the result of sin. If sin is not biblically defined as the transgression of divine law, no savior is needed. Also, resurrection and a new earth without evil or death becomes merely a pious but unrealistic dream and human life is essentially meaningless.

2. The theory of evolution can easily lead to nihilism. Its acceptance also leads to the denial or drastic modification of major biblical doctrines.

3. The theory of theistic evolution also paints a strange picture of God, not as almighty but subject to natural law; not as loving but cruel because He has used a process for creating life that requires extreme suffering and death.

4. If the theory of evolution is correct, the biblical Sabbath becomes a human invention and can be easily discarded.

5. Also, the acceptance of evolution leaves us no future except through the unbiblical concept of an immortal soul, but such deification of humanity is even more questionable.

CONCLUSION

Neither evolution nor creation can be proven scientifically. Even though we do not have all the evidence to support divine creation, we do not need to postulate blind faith. The doctrine of creation is clear from the Word of God and remains the best explanation for the origin of life. It also provides a satisfying and harmonious biblical worldview. ED

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DEACONESSES: PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL AND WINNING SOULS >PART 5

The Scriptures clearly record the soul-winning ministry of Philip and Stephen, two deacons who served the early church. However, by taking a critical look, one will discover that deaconesses were also instrumental in instructing others and winning converts to the church. Philip Schaff proposed that Priscilla, whom Paul mentioned along with Phoebe, was also a deaconess.¹ Christopher Wordworth agrees with Schaff, saying, “From the position of her name immediately after Phoebe the Deaconess, and before her husband and all the other Roman Christians [Rom. 16], it may be inferred that Priscilla also was appointed by St. Paul to do some special work, like that of a Deaconess, in the Church.”² Cecilia Robinson, on the side of caution due to the lack of definitive evidence, says, “It was women such as Phoebe and Priscilla who created the ideal of the female diaconate. Whether or not they received the name as an official title matters but little; they certainly ‘executed the office’ of a Deaconess, and bore splendid testimony to the value of a ministry of women.”³ Therefore, based upon the Scriptures, Priscilla was a powerful example of one who instructed others in the truth.

Priscilla and her husband Aquila instructed Apollos, a prominent leader of the early church, in the Word of God. Sensing that Apollos’ understanding was limited to the teachings of John the Baptist, Priscilla and Aquila “took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). According to the *SDA Bible Commentary*, the teaching

that Apollos received from Priscilla and Aquila “would include the doctrine of salvation by grace, justification by faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit after conversion and baptism, and the meaning and necessity of the Lord’s Supper.”⁴ This proves that Priscilla was knowledgeable of the Scriptures and able to teach.

To further describe how involved she was in instructing others in the truth, the Commentary states, “It would doubtless follow, as in the case of the twelve men discussed in [Acts] ch. 19:1-7, that Apollos, who formerly knew only John’s baptism, would be rebaptized into ‘the name of the Lord Jesus.’ She evidently took an active part in instructing Apollos, indicating that she was a woman of great power and zeal among the Christians.”⁵

Edmond Cullinan indicates that Phoebe may have also engaged in proclaiming the gospel and winning souls. He states that “her ministry may not have corresponded exactly to that of later deaconesses; indeed, it may have been more extensive, particularly in terms of preaching and teaching which were particular concerns of St. Paul.”⁶

Regarding those deaconesses who were not in the forefront as were Priscilla and Phoebe but worked in a more subtle way, Schaff noted the tactful manner in which they used their humanitarian role as an opportunity to teach others the truth and win converts to the church. Concerning the office of deaconess, he said, “It opened to pious women and virgins, and chiefly to widows, a suitable field for the regular official exercise

of their peculiar gifts of self-denying charity and devotion to the welfare of the church. Through it [the office of deaconess] they could carry the light and comfort of the gospel into the most private and delicate relations of domestic life, without at all overstepping their natural sphere.”⁷

Citing Clement of Alexandria, Nancy Vyhmeister writes of another subtle way in which these women ministered: “But the apostles in conformity with their ministry concentrated on undistracted preaching, and took their wives around as Christian sisters rather than spouses, to be their fellow-ministers [fellow deacons] in relation to housewives, through whom the Lord’s teaching penetrated into the women’s quarters without scandal.”⁸

The deaconesses ministered by using the gifts God gave them within the context of their own unique personalities and circumstances. Some were in the forefront in instructing others in the truth, while others worked subtly behind the scenes. Both were effective in their ministry.

As deaconesses and deacons of the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopt the mindset of soul-winners, focus on their mission to spread the gospel, and ear-

nestly pray for opportunities to witness, “the Word of God [will increase]; and the number of . . . disciples [will multiply]” (Acts 6:7). ED

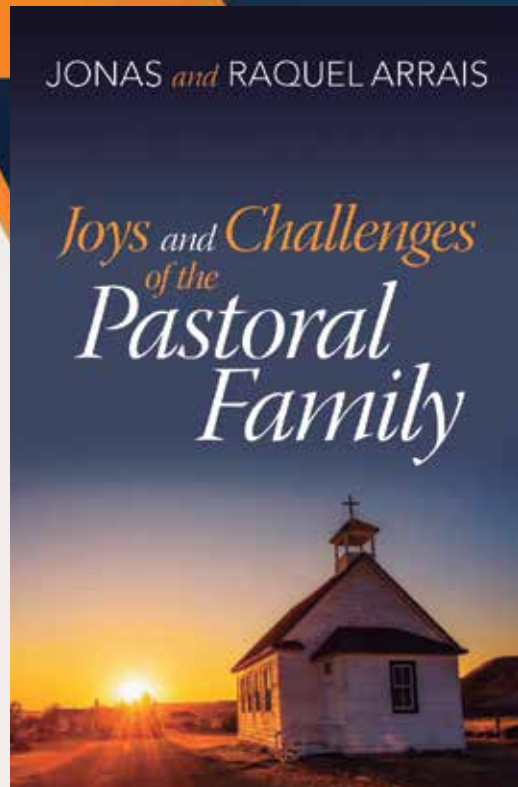
- ¹ Philip Schaff, *Apostolic Christianity (A.D. 1-100)*, vol. 1 of *History of the Christian Church*, 500, 501.
- ² Christopher Wordsworth, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (1923; repr., Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, LLC, 2009), 130.
- ³ Cecilia Robinson, *The Ministry of Deaconesses* (1898; repr., Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2008), 12.
- ⁴ “Way of God,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:369.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Edmond Cullinan, “Women and the Diaconate,” *Worship* 70, no. 3 (May 1996): 261.
- ⁷ Schaff, 500.
- ⁸ Nancy Vyhmeister, “The Ministry of the Deaconess Through History,” in *Ministry*, July 2008, 18.

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CARE FOR THE DYING



For people whose lives are guided by the Bible, the reality of death is acknowledged as part of the current human condition, affected by sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5; Hebrews 9:27). There is “a time to be born, and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Although eternal life is a gift that is granted to all who accept salvation through Jesus Christ, faithful Christians await the second coming of Jesus for complete realization of their immortality (John 3:36; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). While waiting for Jesus to come again, Christians may be called upon to care for the dying and to face personally their own death.

Pain and suffering afflict every human life. Physical, mental, and emotional traumas are universal. However, human suffering has no expiatory or meritorious value. The Bible teaches that no amount or intensity of human suffering can atone for sin. The suffering of Jesus Christ alone is sufficient. Scripture calls Christians not to despair in afflictions, urging them to learn obedience (Hebrews 5:7, 8), patience (James 1:2-4), and endurance in tribulations (Romans 5:3). The Bible also testifies to the overcoming power of Jesus Christ (John 16:33) and teaches that ministry to human suffering is an important Christian duty (Matthew 25:34-40). This was the example and teaching of Jesus (Matthew 9:35; Luke 10:34-36), and this is His will for us (Luke 10:37). Christians look in anticipation to a new day when God will end suffering forever (Revelation 21:4).

Developments in modern medicine have added to the complexity of decisions about care for the dying. In times past, little could be done to extend human life. But the power of today’s medicine to forestall death has generated difficult moral and ethical questions. What constraints does Christian faith place upon the use of such power? When should the goal of postponing the moment of death give way to the goal of alleviating pain at the end of life? Who may appropriately make these decisions? What limits, if any, should Christian love place on actions designed to end human suffering?

It has become common to discuss such questions under the heading of euthanasia. Much confusion exists with regard to this expression. The original and literal meaning of this term was “good death.” Now the term is used in two significantly different ways. Often euthanasia refers to “mercy killing,” or intentionally taking the life of a patient in order to avoid painful dying or in order to alleviate burdens for a patient’s family or society. (This is so called active euthanasia.) However, euthanasia is also used, inappropriately in the Seventh-day Adventist view, to refer to the withholding or withdrawal of medical interventions that artificially extend human life, thus allowing a person to die naturally. (This is so called passive euthanasia.) Seventh-day Adventists believe that allowing a patient to die by foregoing medical interventions that only prolong suffering and postpone the moment of death is morally different from actions that have as their primary intention the direct taking of a life.

Seventh-day Adventists seek to address the ethical issues at the end of life in ways that demonstrate their faith in God as the Creator and Redeemer of life and that reveal how God’s grace has empowered them for acts of neighbor love. Seventh-day Adventists affirm God’s creation of human life, a wonderful gift worthy of being protected and sustained (Genesis 1-2). They also affirm God’s wonderful gift of redemption that provides eternal life for those who believe (John 3:15; 17:3). Thus they support the use of modern medicine to extend human life in this world. However, this power should be used in compassionate ways that reveal God’s grace by minimizing suffering. Since we have God’s promise of eternal life in the earth made new, Christians need not cling anxiously to the last vestiges of life on this earth. Nor is it necessary to accept or offer all possible medical treatments that merely prolong the process of dying.

Because of their commitment to care for the whole person, Seventh-day Adventists are concerned about the physical, emotional, and spiritual care of the dying. To this end, they offer the following biblically based principles:

1) A person who is approaching the end of life, and is capable of understanding, deserves to know the truth about his or her condition, the treatment choices and the possible outcomes. The truth should not be withheld but shared with Christian love and with sensitivity to the patient's personal and cultural circumstances (Ephesians 4:15).

2) God has given human beings freedom of choice and asks them to use their freedom responsibly. Seventh-day Adventists believe that this freedom extends to decisions about medical care. After seeking divine guidance and considering the interests of those affected by the decision (Romans 14:7) as well as medical advice, a person who is capable of deciding should determine whether to accept or reject life-extending medical interventions. Such persons should not be forced to submit to medical treatment that they find unacceptable.

3) God's plan is for people to be nourished within a family and a faith community. Decisions about human life are best made within the context of healthy family relationships after considering medical advice (Genesis 2:18; Mark 10:6-9; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5-6). When a dying person is unable to give consent or express preferences regarding medical intervention, such decisions should be made by someone chosen by the dying person. If no one has been chosen, someone close to the dying person should make the determination. Except in extraordinary circumstances, medical or legal professionals should defer decisions about medical interventions for a dying person to those closest to that individual. Wishes or decisions of the individual are best made in writing and should be in agreement with existing legal requirements.

4) Christian love is practical and responsible (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13; James 1:27; 2:14-17). Such love does not deny faith nor obligate us to offer or to accept medical interventions whose burdens outweigh the probable benefits. For example, when medical care merely preserves bodily functions, without hope of returning a patient to mental awareness, it is futile and may, in good conscience, be withheld or withdrawn. Similarly, life-extending medical treatments may be omitted or stopped if they only add to the patient's suffering or needlessly prolong the process of dying. Any action taken should be in harmony with legal mandates.

5) While Christian love may lead to the withholding or withdrawing of medical interventions that only increase suffering or prolong dying, Seventh-day Adventists do not practice "mercy killing" or assist in suicide (Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13; 23:7). They are opposed to active euthanasia, the intentional taking of the life of a suffering or dying person.

6) Christian compassion calls for the alleviation of suffering (Matthew 25:34-40; Luke 10:29-37). In caring for the dying, it is a Christian responsibility to relieve pain and suffering, to the fullest extent possible, not to include active euthanasia. When it is clear that medical intervention will not cure a patient, the primary goal of care should shift to relief from suffering.

7) The biblical principle of justice prescribes that added care be given the needs of those who are defenseless and dependent (Psalm 82:3, 4; Proverbs 24:11, 12; Isaiah 1:1-18; Micah 6:8; Luke 1:52-54). Because of their vulnerable condition, special care should be taken to ensure that dying persons are treated with respect for their dignity and without unfair discrimination. Care for the dying should be based on their spiritual and medical needs and their expressed choices rather than on perceptions of their social worthiness (James 2:1-9).

As Seventh-day Adventists seek to apply these principles, they take hope and courage from the fact that God answers the prayers of His children and is able to work miraculously for their well-being (Psalm 103:1-5; James 5:13-16). Following Jesus' example, they also pray to accept the will of God in all things (Matthew 26:39). They are confident that they can call on God's power to aid them in caring for the physical and spiritual needs of suffering and dying individuals. They know that the grace of God is sufficient to enable them to endure adversity (Psalm 50:14, 15). They believe that eternal life for all who have faith in Jesus is secure in the triumph of God's love. ED

This consensus statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 9, 1992.



CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH GIVING



When we came to the seminary for my pastoral studies, my wife and I were very poor as we paid full tuition and undergraduate loans. Of the three years we were there, we went out to eat once because my mother-in-law sent us a check to do so for our anniversary. Despite living in poverty, we decided to put God first and honor Him by being faithful in our tithe and offerings.

In the third year of seminary, at the end of one month, after paying many bills, there was nothing left over except money for tithe and offering. We struggled with the thought about taking the money to buy food, but we decided to give it as tithe.

We trusted in God and prayed about it. A few days later, we opened the mail and there was a check for \$200 from a friend as a gift for our wedding. The irony was that our wedding happened two and a half years earlier. He said in the letter, "I was thinking about you today, and I remembered I did not attend your wedding. I am very sorry. I was on a business trip, but I wanted to send you a gift." The date on the envelope matched the same day we prayed and decided to pay our tithe.

God is always faithful in taking care of our needs. He uses a variety of ways to care for us. At that time, God had made an impression upon our friend's heart precisely when we needed help most. "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).¹

In this article, I will lay out what the Bible teaches us about giving.

GIVING IS A SIGN OF OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

When I visited the University of Chicago Museum a few years ago, I noticed that tithing was a common

practice in biblical times. It was a sign of lordship and allegiance. Abraham demonstrated his worship in returning his tithe to God (Gen. 14:17-21). This simple yet significant act of worship was a public acknowledgment of God's sovereign claim and ownership as well as His Lordship. Love and gratitude are expressed in a tangible way through tithe and offering. When Abraham gave out of the abundance God provided for him, God blessed him with fullness of life, prosperity, strength, and hope (Heb. 7:1-4).

GIVING IS ASSOCIATED WITH GOD'S BLESSING

The Bible instructs us to give out of a joyful heart. "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). When we give gladly, willingly, and cheerfully, we demonstrate an unselfish attitude. This attitude comes out of appreciation for what God has done for us by giving us new life and hope through Jesus Christ. God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving is the result of our obedience to God and our wholehearted trust in Him. It shows our willingness to share what we possess. "Jesus Christ must be Lord of all or not Lord at all; including, of course, our purse or wallet."²

Givers can be divided into three types: the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. Some givers are like a piece of flint--to get anything out of it you must hammer it, and even then you only get chips and sparks. No matter what the need is, or the appeal in church, nothing comes out of them. Others are like a sponge--to get anything out of a sponge, you must squeeze it and squeeze it hard, because the more you squeeze a sponge, the more you get. Therefore, the more skilled

the one who asks for the offering, or the more guilt he has woven into it, the more money he can get out of them. But others are like a honeycomb. They have experienced God's blessings, acceptance, and love. Thus, they overflow with generous giving. God is generous to us and that is how we should live. When we give in that kind of spirit, we are indeed showing our love for God.³

GIVING IS A CLEAR INDICATOR OF THE PRIORITIES OF OUR LIVES

Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21, ESV). What is our focus? Do we focus on earthly possessions or heavenly possessions?

Jesus is not against savings accounts. He is against our preoccupation with money and material things. Greed can cause us to be so preoccupied with secular pursuits that we forget why we are here. The more we give to God of our money and service, the more we show we are preoccupied with God and service to people.

Billy Graham once said, "Tell me what you think about money, and I can tell you what you think about God, for these two are closely related. A man's heart is closer to his wallet than almost anything else."⁴ Martin Luther also saw a connection between a man's heart and his wallet when he said, "There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook."⁵

GIVING IS AN INDICATOR OF OUR LEVEL OF TRUST IN GOD

Money is important to us. Giving it demonstrates a level of trust and obedience to God. The Psalmist declares, "Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord" (Ps. 4:5).

One day, Tim, a member of a church I pastored, confided in me about his trouble with the concept of tithing and giving. He revealed his doubts to me by saying, "Pastor, I just don't see how I can give 10 percent of my income to the Lord when I can't even keep on top of my bills." I said to him, "If I promise to make up the difference in your bills if you should fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?" After a moment thinking about it, he responded, "Sure, if you promise to make up any shortage, I guess I could try tithing for one month." "Now,

what do you think of that," I said. "You say you'd be willing to put your trust in a mere man like yourself, who possesses little materially, but you couldn't trust your Heavenly Father who owns the whole universe!" The next Sabbath, Tim gave his first tithe, and has been doing so faithfully ever since. Within two years after he paid that tithe, he was able to pay off all his debt and the Lord blessed him in his small business to the point where he was able to expand his business at least 2-3 times what it was originally. When we trust God and give Him everything, God will bless us (See Mal. 3:10)⁶.

Tim learned to live by the promise found in Matthew 6:31-33, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

A PERSONAL APPEAL

In 1815, the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon in the battle of Waterloo. The duke's most recent biographer claims to have an advantage over all the other previous biographers. His advantage was that he had found an old account ledger that showed how the duke had spent his money. That, says the biographer, was a far better clue to what the duke thought was really important than reading his letters or his speeches.

Can you imagine that? If someone wrote your biography on the basis of your checkbook, your income-tax return, your work, or your time, what might it say about you? What about your loyalties, focus, and whom you serve? What is more important to you, trusting God or your possessions? ED

¹ All Scripture is taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

² Riggs, Charlie. *Learning to Walk with God: Twelve Steps to Christian Growth*. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990, 155.

³ Brooks, Ronald K. *A Flint, A Sponge or A Honeycomb: Discovering the Life of Faith*. Lima: Coss Publishing Company, 1995. P. 154.

⁴ Ibid. 154.

⁵ Crosswalk, *Money and Motives*. [https://www.crosswalk.com/fai-
th/spiritual-life/money-and-motives-11581312.html](https://www.crosswalk.com/fai-
th/spiritual-life/money-and-motives-11581312.html), accessed December 3, 2017.

⁶ Malachi 3:10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

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MAKE YOUR CHURCH A SAFE PLACE



There are many things pastors and elders do at the start of the year to set up their churches and leaders for success. Some set church New Year's resolutions, while others schedule events for the year. In any case, the first month of the year is a great time to perform those tasks that will help you, your leaders, and your ministry stay on the right path throughout the year.

An essential task to complete during the first month with your church leaders is to conduct a safety committee meeting. Meeting with your safety committee at the very start of the year will demonstrate to your leaders that safety is important to you as a pastor and to the church. It will also allow you to create a culture of safety and risk management, encouraging your leaders to make safety a priority in all areas of your church.

To help you start the year on the right foot, Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) has put together a few items for you to discuss in your first 2019 Church Committee meeting.

INCLUDE THESE 5 ITEMS IN YOUR NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

1. Conduct a Church Inspection: If you haven't completed one yet, it is a good idea to start the year with a full church inspection. Conducting an inspection allows your safety committee to be aware of any potential risks, items in need of repair or replacement, and equipment that is in good standing for use. The important thing to remember is that the job is not done once the inspection is complete. Address items needing attention with your safety committee and assign dates for completing the necessary tasks. Then follow up with your safety committee to make sure those tasks are completed.

2. Update Your Emergency Plan: It's also important to update your church emergency plan at the start of the year. Review the risks and emergencies your church faced in the last year. Did your current emergency plan work well? Update and adjust your emergency plan to make the response to emergencies a smoother process. Then think of potential emergencies your church may face in the coming year, and create a response plan for those potential risks.

3. Choose a Safety Officer/Check in with Safety Officer: Your safety officer should be part of your safety committee and be part of all committee meetings. This is a

great way to regularly check in with your safety officer and allow your safety officer to voice concerns, recommend areas for improvement, and confirm where safety measures are working well. If you don't have a safety officer, choose a safety officer this month to ensure that safety and risk management are a priority throughout the year. For more information on the duties of a Safety Officer, see ARM's Safety Officer Description.

4. Schedule Your Next Emergency Drill: As the year continues, your church calendar may quickly fill up with Bible study meetings, youth group events, and special services. But it is important to make time in your calendar to conduct an emergency drill. Practicing drills with your church will provide a necessary refresher on what to do in the case of an emergency, as well as inform visitors and new members how to respond if an emergency occurs. Schedule at least two emergency drills for your church during the year. ARM invites you to join churches around the world and conduct an emergency drill for the annual Safety Sabbath event. For free resources and more information, register at SafetySabbath.com.

5. Keep Your Congregation Safe During Programs and Activities: Whether it's a church social on a Saturday night, a special Easter play, or a Christmas concert, your church is sure to have special programs scheduled throughout the year. While these large events can be exciting and a great way to minister to your local community, it's important to be aware of and prepare for the potential risks that come with those large-scale events. Discuss with your safety committee different ways to ensure the protection and safety of both members and visitors, and find ways to prevent and minimize accidents from occurring. Find church safety resources on ARM's website.

IT'S A TEAM EFFORT

As you meet with your Safety Committee for these items, it's important to remember that safety and risk management is a team effort. The only way to accomplish these tasks is if each committee member makes risk management a priority in each area of your church. Together, you can be sure to accomplish your risk management goals and have a safer 2019. ED

Elizabeth Camps is a writer and public relations specialist for Adventist Risk Management. This article is excerpted from *Best Practices*, January 25, 2018. Used by permission.

Start the year right—light their fire for mission!

“Dear Lord, we want to be good stewards. Help us to be faithful in our giving to the world mission offerings to help send missionaries and support the work of hospitals, clinics, schools, and churches. Amen.”

“...for the prosperity of the home work depends largely, under God, upon the reflex influence of the evangelical work done in countries afar off.”

—*Gospel Workers*, 465, 466.

Here are three ways to let your members know how their offerings are making an impact around the world and how they can become more deeply involved with the Gospel commission:

- ▶ Share mission stories from AdventistMission.org
- ▶ Show mission videos from MissionSpotlight.org
- ▶ Watch M360.tv



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EXCHANGING AN AK-47 FOR A BIBLE?

NO WALLS. NO BORDERS. NO LIMITS.

Yes, 65 communist rebels in the Philippines started new lives in Christ last year ... directly from the hope and courage they found in AWR's broadcasts. Your offering will send the gospel to more hard-to-reach listeners around the world.