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ELDER'S DIGEST

MAKING
YOUR
CHURCH
**A SAFE
PLACE**



CONTENTS

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FOLLOW US ON TWITTER AND LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

3 Editorial

4 Making Your Church a Safe Place | Part 1

7 Hospitality: The Model of Jesus and Other Biblical Examples | Part 1

9 Barandillas: A Case Study for Total Member Involvement and Retention

12 The Heart of the Seventh-day Adventist Message

15 Sermons

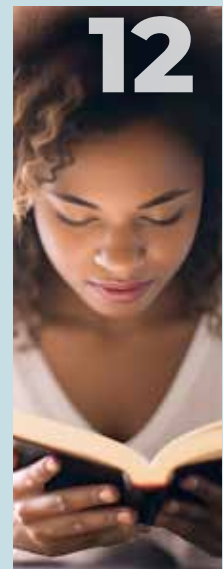
19 Special Offer *Elder's Digest* Readers

20 Sermon Preparation | Part 2

24 Obituary: Rex Daniel Edwards

26 The Ministry of Deacons and Deaconesses: The First Christian Martyr | Part 2

29 Kidder's Column





YOU ARE FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE



ANTHONY R. KENT
General Conference
Associate Ministerial Secretary

Your heart beats about seventy times per minute. In that minute, your heart propels five liters of blood.¹ Elite athletes can pump up to forty liters per minute. An average person's heart pushes through the body 7,600 liters per day. In seventy years, your heart will beat about 2.5 billion times.

The average heart weight for adult males is around 300–350 grams, while for adult females it is 250–300 grams.² Three hundred grams of muscle working in your body is the difference between the joy of living and a coffin.

Heart is more than just an occasional word in Scripture, appearing 919 times in the ESV translation, making it a perpetual theme. If you explore the electronic library of Ellen G. White, you will find her work references *heart* 32,149 times.

The heart being so significant within your body and Bible, . . . may I politely inquire about the condition of your heart?

I'm no cardiologist, but are you exercising appropriately for your age and physical capability? For most people, the number one thing we can do to increase our lifespan is exercise. Our heart loves to work and with the appropriate amount of exertion, it gets better and stronger.

Are you eating the right foods for your heart health? Nutritious wholesome food, that tastes good? And occasionally, in moderation, are you eating foods that bring a cheer to your heart? Eating with people you treasure is good for your heart too.

The human heart is a multidimensional, multifaceted organ. More than just a pump of de-oxygenated blood to the lungs and

oxygenated blood to the brain and extremities of the body, it is regarded as the seat of our emotions, where our true beliefs and most intimate thoughts are said to reside.

The routine and rigors of life can take a toll on a person's heart. Broken, crushed, desensitized, scarred—are verbs that can be tragically applied to the human heart.

A heart can be empty. Conversely, it can be filled with the wrong stuff. Instead of being filled with love, grace, and the Holy Spirit, jealousy, bitterness, cynicism, resentment, anger, and a hundred other soul-destroying things can overflow from the heart.

But a heart can just become dull, sluggish, and slow to respond to the beckoning of the Holy Spirit. Miraculously and thankfully, your heart can be renewed.

Who or what do you allow to live in your heart?

There are people who deserve a special place in your heart—the true God, Creator, and Savior especially. Your spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, siblings, and relatives all deserve a special place in your heart too.

However, addictions evict every other love and treasure of our heart, ensuring sole occupancy. Unchecked, addictions destroy genuine joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As transformative as a pacemaker or donated human heart can be, we need more than just a mechanical device or a donated heart from another mortal to get a dysfunctional heart to beat for a little extra finite time.

One of the most wondrous teachings of your Bible is that our Creator wants to give each person a new heart now and for eternity. A new spiritual heart now and a new physical heart upon the return of Jesus, when “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet . . . and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:52, ESV).

Here's the offer and the promise from the One who can really be trusted:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ezek 36:26, ESV).

ED

¹ One liter is approximately one-quarter of a US liquid gallon.

² Three hundred grams is approximately two-thirds of a US pound.

MAKING YOUR CHURCH A SAFE PLACE PART 1



THE BIBLICAL IMPERATIVE TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

One in five children will experience child sexual abuse or exploitation.¹ One in six women and one in sixteen men have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of fifteen.² These are shocking statistics. Perhaps you have heard of them before? Maybe they feel so overwhelming that it's hard to know where to begin? These Australian figures are, unfortunately, consistent with global estimates—particularly when it comes to child sexual abuse.

But we must begin, because this is happening inside the church too. In the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 59% of disclosures related to abuse occurred in a faith-based setting.

This is the first in a series of five articles developed for *Elder's Digest* by Adsafe, the child and vulnerable adult protection agency of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific Division. Adsafe was established to help protect children and vulnerable adults from sexual and physical abuse in church settings by equipping leaders and members with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to prevent abuse, respond appropriately when concerns arise, and uphold a culture of care and accountability.

As church leaders, we hold a sacred trust to care for those we serve. Many of us have witnessed firsthand the impact of abuse—how it can shatter a child's sense of safety, fracture families, and disrupt entire congregations.

Elders are called to be shepherds of the flock, a role that includes protecting the most vulnerable among us. While legal and regulatory obligations guide us in many countries, our deepest calling is biblical and moral.

Survivors of abuse are often voiceless and marginalized, unable to advocate for themselves. They need us—followers of Jesus Christ—to act on their behalf. The Royal Commission found that over 90% of allegations are true. As believers, we must approach disclosures with a posture of listening and believing.





Failing to protect the vulnerable is not just a moral lapse; it is disobedience to God's clear commands.

Scripture calls us not only to proclaim truth, but to create environments that are safe, respectful, and nurturing—especially for children and vulnerable adults. This is the essence of disciple-making.

What guidance does Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White offer to help us respond well?

How do we move from good intentions to a strong, biblically grounded framework that prevents abuse and responds faithfully when it occurs?

THE IMAGE OF GOD AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Genesis 1:27 teaches that every human is made in God's image. This foundational truth confers inherent worth and dignity on every person—child, elderly, disabled, or dependent. Abuse, then, is not only a personal violation; it is an assault on the image of God in another. Every person, and especially children and vulnerable adults, is precious in God's sight.

JESUS' SPECIAL CONCERN FOR CHILDREN

Jesus demonstrated love and protection for children. In Matthew 18:5–6, He issued one of His strongest warnings: "If anyone causes one of these little ones . . . to stumble, it would be better . . . to be drowned in the depths of the sea."³

These are not casual words. Jesus makes clear that harming a child is a grave offence. The care and protection of children is not optional; it is a divine imperative.

In Mark 10:14 Jesus insisted, "Let the little children come to me . . . for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Jesus didn't see children as marginal, but as central to His Kingdom. Ellen G. White echoes this care when she writes, "He knows the burdens of every mother's heart. . . . He sympathizes with every Christian mother in her cares."⁴ As church leaders, we are called to mirror this compassion and protectiveness.

GOD'S HEART FOR THE VULNERABLE

God's concern for the vulnerable runs throughout Scripture—not only for children, but for all who are weak, dependent, or oppressed. Psalm 82:3–4 commands, "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy."

Isaiah 1:17 echoes this: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's people are consistently called to act on behalf of those who cannot stand for themselves. Failing to protect the vulnerable is not just a moral lapse; it is disobedience to God's clear commands.

LOVE AND JUSTICE: CORE TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS

At the heart of Christian life is love. Romans 13:10 reminds us, "Love

does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

Abuse is the opposite of love. It is an act of betrayal of trust and distortion of God's intent for human relationships. As Micah 6:8 puts it so simply and profoundly, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

To protect the vulnerable is not a peripheral task; it is a central expression of our faithfulness to God. When we fail to do so, we betray the very character we are called to reflect.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is not just a legal or organizational responsibility. It is a core expression of biblical discipleship.

In John 13:34–35, Jesus gives us this command: "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (NLT).

What this tells us is that Jesus cares deeply about how we treat one another—our conduct, our attitude, our behavior. This is echoed in the well-known passage from Galatians 5:22–23, which describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (NET).



To protect children and vulnerable adults is to reflect the very heart of God.

OFFICIAL CHURCH STATEMENTS

“Statement on Abuse and Family Violence” (1995), <https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/statement-on-abuse-and-family-violence/>.

“Child Sexual Abuse” (1997), <https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/child-sexual-abuse/>.

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MORAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Abuse is sin.** It violates the command to love, exploits power, and shatters trust. It is not just a personal failing; it is against God’s will for human relationships.
- **Silence is complicity.** Ignoring, minimizing, or failing to address abuse is a moral failure. It contradicts the biblical call to justice, mercy, and truth.
- **Protection is discipleship.** To follow Jesus is to stand against harm, defend the vulnerable, and create communities marked by safety, compassion, and accountability.

A CALL TO ACTION

Our conduct, vigilance, and willingness to act reveal the depth of our integrity and our obedience to Christ. It is not enough to preach righteousness from the pulpit while remaining silent about abuse in the pews or classrooms.

We are called to foster a culture where abuse is not tolerated; where survivors are heard, believed, and supported; and where strong systems are in place to prevent harm. This is not merely about policies or legal obligations. It is about living out the Gospel in courageous and compassionate ways. It is about reflecting the character of Christ in how we lead and serve.

Protecting children and vulnerable adults, and responding faithfully to allegations of abuse is not just an administrative task; it is a spiritual mandate.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR LEADERS

1. **Educate yourself and your team.** Learn what abuse looks like, how grooming occurs, and what red flags to watch for. Knowledge empowers action.

2. **Establish clear safeguarding policies.** Every church should have practical protocols in place covering background checks, mandatory reporting, appropriate boundaries, and safe practices for all who work with children and vulnerable adults.
3. **Create a culture of openness.** Make it safe for children and adults to speak up. Remove the stigma around reporting, and support those who come forward.
4. **Respond quickly and justly.** Never conceal abuse. Follow the law and your policies. Respond with compassion to victims and take swift action to ensure safety.
5. **Pray and lead spiritually.** Seek God’s wisdom, courage, and protection. Teach your congregation about God’s heart for justice, mercy, and care for the vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

To protect children and vulnerable adults is to reflect the very heart of God. As leaders, we cannot claim to follow Christ while ignoring or enabling abuse. We are called to be shepherds, not only in word, but in action—defenders of the vulnerable, champions of justice, and safe harbors for the wounded.

This is more than a legal obligation. It is a sacred trust, a moral and spiritual mandate grounded in Scripture and embodied in the life of Christ Himself.

I dream of a church where every person is treated with dignity and respect, recognized as bearing the image of God. I dream of a thriving church where abuse has no place and healing begins. **ED**

¹ <https://bravehearts.org.au/double-your-impact-bravehearts-urges-australians-to-donate-to-help-protect-children-against-child-sexual-abuse>.

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/summary>.

³ All Scripture references are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952), 204.

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HOSPITALITY: THE MODEL OF JESUS AND OTHER BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

PART 1



Jesus knew that time was running out. His ministry on earth was counting down to its final hours. When planning His last instructions to His disciples, Jesus wanted their full attention so that His teaching would have maximum impact. He wanted them to be prepared for what lay ahead. He needed to connect with them in a very significant way. He practiced hospitality at a crucial time to convey essential teachings and information.

Jesus could have sat His disciples down to lecture them when they were tired and hungry, on an uncomfortable hillside as they traveled to Jerusalem. Instead, He prepared in advance to provide hospitality when giving His last messages. Through instructions to Peter and John, Jesus provided a room large enough for Himself and His twelve disciples to rest, relax, and recline. This upper room was furnished to allow them to all eat at one table and interact together as a group in privacy, away from the crowds. Jesus had Passover food provided for them. He broke bread with them and served them by washing the dust of travel off their feet. When His disciples were tired, hungry, and dirty from travel, He cared for their needs. His hospitality in caring for the physical, emotional, and relational needs of His disciples made them more receptive to the important spiritual teachings He wanted them to learn.

In Old Testament times, when God wanted to train and prepare the Israelites to be His chosen model nation, a light to the Gentiles, demonstrating His grace, power, and righteousness, He used a similar method. By taking the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert,



People may not always remember what is taught or preached, but they will remember the care and kindness.

He removed outside influences and distractions. While He was teaching them in the spacious, private desert, they were totally dependent on Him to meet their physical needs. He provided their food, water, shelter, guidance, and protection from their enemies. Every time they ate a piece of manna or felt the warmth at night of the pillar of fire or the cooling shelter of the cloud by day, they were reminded of God's great care for them. This hospitality reminded the Israelites of His love and made them more ready to learn all that God wanted to teach them spiritually.

Christian hospitality was an integral part of the early Christian church also. Fellowship, meeting in homes, eating together, and giving sacrificially to care for the physical needs of others are listed in the important ministries of the early church alongside teaching, prayer, praise, and miracles in Acts 2:42–47. Notice the effectiveness of this combined model of ministry: “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NIV).

In the history of the Christian church, growth has been rapid when believers have fellowshiped and worshipped in highly nurturing small group or home environments. This biblical model of showing hospitality when sharing the Gospel in the presence of the Holy Spirit was very successful! Can we learn from these biblical examples? Is hospitality still relevant and important in our church today?

In many areas of the world where the Seventh-day Adventist Church serves, the physical needs of people are still great. In other countries where physical needs may be less, social isolation and loneliness are at record highs, with many not having the emotional support, community, and connectedness that they crave and need to be mentally healthy. If we truly want our church to grow spiritually, we need to combine preaching, teaching, worshipping, and praying with biblical hospitality to be most effective. While our needs for nurture continue to be great, I believe our need for the biblical model of hospitality is also great. Christian hospitality is about helping people feel accepted, welcomed, connected, and cared for. It includes striving to minister to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others. Christian hospitality creates a community where spiritual life can flourish.

This week I was talking to a very young couple who had invited a group of people from their church to their home for a meal for the first time. Their guests were people whom they did not know more than superficially. They were unexpectedly surprised by how long their guests stayed after the simple meal and how much their guests talked and shared private problems with them. They realized that their guests needed friendship and the opportunity to talk. The couple were pleased to be able to care for the needs of others in this way. Sharing your home and a meal is a powerful way to build bonds, minister to needs, and nurture spiritual growth.

In Romans 12:13 Paul includes caring for the needs of others and showing hospitality in his list of attributes of a true Christian. This is expected of all Christians, not just those with the spiritual gift of

hospitality. Because we have been the recipients of God's abundant love and salvation, we are motivated out of gratitude to God to manifest His love to others through our acts of caring hospitality to others. We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our community (Matt 25:42–46).

Notice in 1 Peter 4:9 we are to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (NIV). Christian hospitality is not just for those in need or strangers we meet, but also for “one another”—those who are part of our community that we know well. It is useful for leadership training also, as Jesus modeled with His disciples.

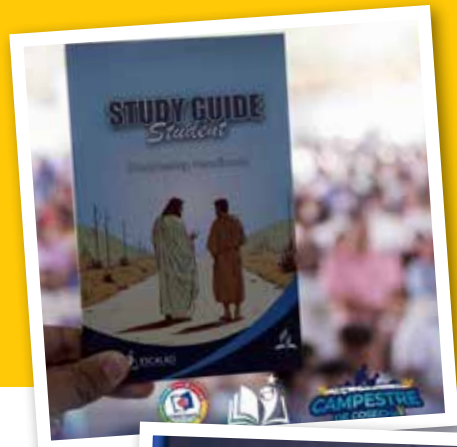
Christian hospitality can be shown in many ways: being warm and welcoming, compassionate, and accepting; providing practical support when needed like food, clothing, or childcare; praying for others; and serving others. People may not always remember what is taught or preached, but they will remember the care and kindness they have been shown.

The most obvious and frequently mentioned biblical way to show Christian hospitality is by opening your home to others to share in food, fellowship, and worship. Welcoming others to your home is seen as an act of love and a Christian virtue. Even in our society today, offering hospitality communicates love and caring across all cultural and religious boundaries.

Christian hospitality is more than a tradition—it is a powerful expression of God's love. Just as Jesus prepared a place for His disciples and God cared for Israel in the desert, we are called to create spaces where others feel seen, valued, and nurtured. In a world full of need and loneliness, simple acts of hospitality can become moments that reflect Christ's character and foster genuine spiritual growth. ED

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BARANDILLAS: A CASE STUDY FOR TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT AND RETENTION



“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”—John 15:16, NKJV

With these words, Jesus affirms that discipleship is not a casual encounter, but a divine appointment. He calls us not only to gather fruit, but to cultivate fruit that endures. Evangelism, then, is not complete at conversion. “The gospel commission, as modeled by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, must seek the lost and keep the found.”¹

As Ellen G. White wisely counseled, “The new converts will need to be instructed by faithful teachers of God’s Word, that they may increase in a knowledge and love of the truth.”² Discipleship is not optional; it is central to the life of the church. This principle is vividly demonstrated in the vibrant ministry of the Barandillas Seventh-day Adventist Church in San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

A LIVING EXAMPLE OF CHRIST’S COMMISSION AND TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

Located in one of the most dynamic cities of Central America, Barandillas Church—under the leadership of Pastor Elkin Almendares—is a compelling demonstration of what Total Member Involvement (TMI) looks like when rooted in biblical principles and Spirit-led intentionality. As part of the Honduras Union within the Inter-American Division, this church has embraced the vision that every believer is both a disciple and a disciple-maker.

During an evangelistic campaign I conducted there in April 2024, I witnessed a remarkable outpouring of spiritual commitment. Among the new believers was a couple from the upper class of San Pedro Sula—a rare and striking testament to the gospel’s power to reach all people, as prophesied in Isaiah 55:5: “Nations you do not know will



come running to you, because of the LORD your God" (TNIV). Their baptism marked not a finish line, but a spiritual launchpad. Today, they serve faithfully in the church's evangelism and retention ministries, already bearing their own fruit.

The Barandillas model is not merely a collection of programs; it is a culture of *care, accountability, and empowerment*, echoing the divine shepherding principles found in Ezekiel 34:16: "I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak" (NIV). There are five important aspects involved in this model:



1. Personalized Spiritual Care: Everyone Accountable for Someone

True pastoral care must go beyond pulpit ministry. At Barandillas, an elegant yet Spirit-filled system ensures every member is known, valued, and supported through a triple-layered visitation and mentorship approach:

- **Delegated care through elders.** The four elders each shepherd a portion of the church family, as modeled in Acts 20:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock. . . . Be shepherds of the church of God" (NIV). In this case, the entire membership is divided among the four elders.
- **Mentorship through board members.** The members of the church are distributed to each of the twenty church board members for mentoring. These mentors offer regular contact and spiritual support to the members assigned to them. This is in addition to the role carried out by the elders.
- **Attendance monitoring with purpose.** Persons appointed by the board under the direction of the church clerk do weekly monitoring

that identifies absentees. Their mentorship groups conduct follow-up, which is done in love and is not punitive.

- **Personalized follow-up.** Absences trigger visits, reflecting the compassion of the Good Shepherd in Luke 15:4, who seeks the one lost sheep.
- **Ministry-based support.** The needs of members are met through relevant ministry groups—Dorcas, Family Life, deacons, and deaconesses—ensuring that spiritual and practical care walk hand-in-hand.
- **Pastoral visitation.** This is done regularly and complements the visits of the elders and board members.

This Christ-centered accountability fosters unity and spiritual maturity, in harmony with Hebrews 10:24–25, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another" (NIV).



2. Intercessory Prayer and the Family Altar

Recognizing that the home is the first church,

Barandillas strengthens families through intentional weekly intercession: One family is highlighted each Sabbath for focused prayer at the altar in the church service. They share their family's specific prayer needs, for which the person that is designated prays, and they are encouraged publicly to commit to family worship. Each week, a beautifully adorned Bible is ceremonially passed from the highlighted family of the previous week to the current family, symbolizing continuity and shared spiritual responsibility.

This practice echoes Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we

will serve the LORD," (NKJV), and it is revitalizing family altars across the church community.



3. Fellowship and Community Bonding

Doctrine builds the structure, but fellowship cements the heart of

the church. They are both important. The Barandillas congregation nurtures spiritual intimacy and joy through:

- **Weekly Sabbath lunches,** fostering relaxed, intergenerational fellowship.
- **Thursday evening soccer,** drawing in youth and friends in a setting of joy and witness—reminding us of Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (NIV).
- **Monthly food distribution,** a ministry of compassion that mirrors Matthew 25:35, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat" (NIV). Those who have are able to share and those who do not have, receive.

These practices root evangelism in relationships and make the church a spiritual home, not just a worship place.



4. Intentional Discipleship for New Members

Baptism is not the end; it is a spiritual birth. Barandillas ensures each new

believer is nurtured as a spiritual infant into maturity:

- **Gifts upon baptism.** Each member receives a Bible, baptismal certificate, discipleship manual, *Faith of Jesus* Bible lessons booklet, and a neckerchief or scarf. The neckerchief is not a decoration; it is a declaration: "Today I am born as a missionary."

- **Mentorship journey.** New believers are paired with mentors who guide them step-by-step through personal growth and ministry training, utilizing the discipleship manual.
- **Missional empowerment.** Each new member is trained to give Bible studies themselves, utilizing the lesson series that they have received. This enables them to become evangelists in their own right, echoing 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things you have heard . . . entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (NIV).



5. Measuring What Matters: Healthy Church Indicators

Barandillas doesn't guess about its growth.

It assesses growth monthly with biblical integrity, guided by seven health indicators:

1. **Communion.** Members' engagement in Bible and Sabbath School study (Col 3:16).
2. **Attendance.** The faithfulness of members in corporate worship (Heb 10:25).
3. **Witnessing.** The participation of members in evangelism (Matt 28:19–20).
4. **Training.** Members participation in ongoing discipleship development (Eph 4:12).
5. **Base groups.** The active involvement of members in small groups (Acts 2:46).
6. **Faithfulness.** The stewardship of members in tithes and offerings (Mal 3:10).
7. **Ministries.** The number of members involved in service through spiritual gifts (1 Pet 4:10).

These metrics are not legalistic checkboxes. They are spiritual thermometers measuring the vitality of the body of Christ.

Wherever Christ is lifted up, and His people are committed to caring, connecting, and commissioning, churches can thrive.

CONCLUSION: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE WORLD CHURCH

The Barandillas Seventh-day Adventist Church is a local congregation with a global vision. What they've built is more than a system: it is a spiritual ecosystem rooted in the teachings of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It retains the harvest and multiplies the mission. As Galatians 6:9 reminds us, “Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (NKJV).

As vice president, with responsibility for evangelism and church growth in the Inter-American Division, I can personally attest to the transforming power of this model.

The recent conversion and active ministry of a formerly unreached couple is a vivid example of what happens when every member

becomes a missionary and when discipleship is intentional, structured, and Spirit-led.

The Barandillas approach is scalable. It works in small congregations or large, rural or urban. Wherever Christ is lifted up, and His people are committed to caring, connecting, and commissioning, churches can thrive.

For pastors, elders, deacons, deaconesses, and ministry leaders worldwide, Barandillas is more than a church. It is a blueprint of faith in action—one that invites every church to become a center of discipleship, retention, and revival. ED

1 Balvin Braham, *A Practical Guide to Evangelism: How to Win and Keep Members*, 2nd ed. (Miami, FL: PBP, 2021), 308.

2 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 337.

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THE HEART OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MESSAGE¹



What is the heart of the Seventh-day Adventist message? Probably most Adventists will have no problem with pointing to Jesus Christ as the heart of the message.

The Biblical Witness is clearly pointing in this direction. Luke quotes the words of Peter referring to Jesus as the cornerstone: “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11–12).²

John summarizes his Gospel in the following words: “but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

The Apostle Paul points out that Jesus holds all things together: “All things have been created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. . . . In . . . [Him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 1:16–17; 2:3, NASB).

ROOTED IN THE BIBLE

Since the Seventh-day Adventist message is rooted in the Bible, it seems unquestionable to conclude that the heart of the message is Jesus Christ Himself. Well-respected Bible scholar, Dr. Gerhard Hasel wrote, “The quest for the center of the New Testament (and the Old Testament) as based on the inner Biblical witnesses themselves is fully justified. It seems undeniable that the New Testament is from beginning to end Christocentric. Jesus Christ is the dynamic, unifying center of the New Testament . . . Jesus Christ is the beginning, center, and end of the New Testament.”³





It is undeniable that the writings of Ellen G. White follow the Biblical witness in pointing to Christ as the heart and center of the message.

Of course, when we speak of Jesus as the heart of the Seventh-day Adventist message we are not speaking of a hermeneutical principle that would lead to a “canon within a canon,” but we point to the fact that Jesus must be the heart, the center of all our fundamental beliefs. Without Jesus as the center, all beliefs lose their significance and relevance.

In her writings, Ellen G. White underlined this thought beautifully when stating “of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world.”⁴

In referring to the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, she refers to Jesus Christ as “the great center of attraction.” She writes, “The proclamation of the third angel’s message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out.”⁵

She also emphasized that as we search the Word of God one subject should “swallow up every other.” She writes “As Christ’s ambassadors, they are to search the Scriptures, to seek for the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other,—Christ our righteousness.”⁶

“THE TRUTH AS IT IS IN JESUS”

Ellen White invited Seventh-day Adventist preachers to make Christ the center of their sermons: “Many of our ministers have merely sermonized, presenting subjects in an argumentative way, and scarcely mentioning the saving power of the Redeemer. Their testimony was destitute of the saving blood of Christ. Their offering resembled the offering of Cain. He brought to the Lord the fruit of the ground, which in itself was acceptable in God’s sight. Very good indeed was the fruit; but the virtue of the offering—the blood of the slain lamb, representing the blood of Christ—was lacking. So it is with Christless sermons.”⁷ She continued, “When the law is presented as it should be, it reveals the love of God. But it is no wonder that hearts are not melted even by truth when it is presented in a cold, lifeless manner; no wonder that faith staggers at the promises of God, when ministers and workers fail to present Jesus in His relation to the law.”⁸

In providing counsel for Seventh-day Adventist witnessing, preaching, and teaching, she often uses the famous phrase, “the truth as it is in Jesus,” which clearly points to the fact that Jesus is the heart and the center of the Biblical message.

“We should earnestly seek to know and appreciate the truth,” Ellen White wrote, “that we may present it to others as it is in Jesus.”⁹ In another instance she refers to Christ as the

foundation of the gospel: “Theoretical discourses are essential, that people may see the chain of truth, link after link, uniting in a perfect whole; but no discourse should ever be preached without presenting Christ and Him crucified as the foundation of the gospel.”¹⁰

It is undeniable that the writings of Ellen G. White follow the Biblical witness in pointing to Christ as the heart and center of the message. In fact, this is the main reason why we call her writings the Spirit of Prophecy, because they bear, contain, and hold to the testimony of Jesus! “For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

IN 28 DIFFERENT COLORS

If indeed the heart of the Seventh-day Adventist message is Jesus Christ, then a question is in order: Are not all Christians doing the same—preaching Christ? What makes us unique?

I would like to suggest that the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are best presented as 28 different colors. You see, you can paint the portrait of Christ in just two colors—black and white. However, by doing that we will not do justice to the beautiful portrait of Christ that we are invited to present to the world. And so, if we use 28 different colors in presenting Christ to the world, His portrait will be much closer to the actual reality, to His actual beauty.

It is obvious that we cannot separate Christ from the Truth. Christ the person and Christ the Truth are the same.

Our assignment as Seventh-day Adventists is to present Christ as the center of all our Fundamental Beliefs. Christ is the center of the Sabbath, He is our Creator and Sustainer, He is our Judge, He is our Mediator, He is our Savior, He is our soon coming King.

CHRIST AND THE TRUTH

In our world today you will find many who try to present Christ as separate from His teachings, from the Word of God. One, however, should ask the question, is it possible to separate Christ from His teachings, from Biblical Truth? If it were not for the Biblical message, if it were not for the Gospels, what would we know about Jesus Christ?

If one tries to separate Christ from His teachings, then he or she is creating a Christ based on their own image and understanding. In this case everyone will have a different Christ, a private Christ.

“What happens when Jesus is separated from the Gospel? He becomes an abstraction, free to be molded into any image or idea we want Him to take. No longer is He the

God who loves us through concrete, verifiable ways in history. No longer is He the God who came down from heaven to die on a cross for our sins. No longer is He the God who rose to new life to bring us into eternity with Him. Jesus becomes a directionless divinity, an idle idolatry.”¹¹

It is apparent that separating Jesus from His teachings presented in the Holy Scriptures leaves us with our own imagination creating a divinity according to our own desires, our own image. This leads us to the fact that each generation and each society would have their own subjective and directionless Christ.

Carl F.H. Henry, the founder and first editor-in-chief of the magazine *Christianity Today* once described his generation with the following words: “a generation that is intellectually uncapped, morally unzipped, and volitionally uncurbed.”¹² He continued describing it in alarming vocabulary: “Affirming sexual pleasure to be the supreme good of a life of unending revelry, they waste away into ethical ghosts and skeletons.”¹³

One can only imagine what kind of divinity this generation will create following their own understandings and desires.

It is obvious that we cannot separate Christ from the Truth. Christ the person and Christ the Truth are the same. He Himself stated: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

The Gospel of John underlines this point: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14, NASB).

The Incarnate Christ and the Incarnate Word are ONE. Christ is the Incarnate Word.

Ellen G. White invites us to connect “the theory of the truth” with “Christ and His redeeming love.”¹⁴ She also emphasized, “we must cleave to that which God pronounces to be truth, though the whole world may be arrayed against it.”¹⁵

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” (John 8:31–32).

There is no Christ outside of Truth and there is no Truth outside of Christ. **ED**

¹ This article is chapter 1 of *Committed to Our Identity: Message, Mission, Unity*, 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute and Review and Herald, 2024), 19–23. It is being reproduced with permission.

² Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

³ Gerhard F. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 164.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 156.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 259.

⁷ White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 156.

⁸ Ibid., 157.

⁹ White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 259.

¹⁰ White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 158.

¹¹ <https://www.1517.org/articles/what-happens-when-jesus-is-separated-from-the-gospel> (accessed Oct. 22, 2023).

¹² <https://wisdomfish.tumblr.com/post/111288174694/an-indispensable-message-for-contemporary-culture> (accessed Oct. 22, 2023).

¹³ <https://wisdomfish.tumblr.com/post/111288174694/an-indispensable-message-for-contemporary-culture> (accessed Oct. 22, 2023).

¹⁴ White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 158.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol, rev. ed., vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 1179 (Manuscript 140, 1901).

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WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT HIMSELF

INTRODUCTION

We are constantly being distracted by false ideas about Jesus. Some suggest that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child. Others say that Judas was the real hero in the Gospel story. You might easily be misled if you haven't studied the story of Jesus for yourself. So today, I want us to examine what Jesus taught about Himself and then consider whether the radical claims of Jesus are true.

I. THE RADICAL CLAIMS OF JESUS

Jesus was certainly bold in His declarations about Himself. The apostle John records these words of Jesus: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).¹ "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life" (John 8:12). "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25–26).

Radical claims indeed! C. S. Lewis was right when he said that Jesus didn't give us the option to just recognize Him as a great moral teacher. He is either a lunatic, totally out of touch with reality, a malicious deceiver who was intent on leading others astray, or He is who He claimed to be—the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God! Jesus left us with no doubt about who He believed Himself to be: "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).

But I can hear someone saying, "Anyone can make outrageous claims like that! There is probably someone in this city right now who is claiming to be the Messiah, the Savior of the world! How do we know that those radical claims of Jesus are true?"

II. THE TESTIMONY OF MANY WITNESSES

Is Jesus all He claimed to be? To find an answer to that question, we must begin with the testimony of the early followers of Jesus. Here is the testimony of the apostle John. (Read 1 John 1:1–3.)

When John wrote his gospel account, he gave this testimony: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30–31).

John the Baptist was one of the first to testify about Jesus. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to the river Jordan to be baptized, he cried out, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! . . . And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29, 34).

Listen to the testimony of Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus, who were also followers of Jesus. When Martha met Jesus after the death of her brother, she gave this testimony: "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

Then there are the testimonies of two skeptics, whose hearts and minds were transformed by their encounters with Jesus. Nathanael, friend of Philip, wasn't convinced that any good thing could come out of Nazareth, the insignificant town where Jesus grew up. But when Nathanael met Jesus, he gave this testimony: "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). Thomas, who struggled to believe in the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, gave this testimony after he had seen Jesus with his own eyes and touched Him with his own hands: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Saul of Tarsus was a fierce and ruthless enemy of Jesus and His followers. He testified to King Agrippa. (Read Acts 26:9–11.) But one day, Saul of Tarsus witnessed the death of one of the followers of Jesus, and Saul never recovered. The convictions generated by Stephen's death would be with Saul of Tarsus forever.

Not long after this encounter, Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus with papers from the high priest in Jerusalem. His intention was to arrest any followers of Jesus and bring them back in chains. But God had other plans. (Read Acts 9:3–6.)

That encounter with the Risen Christ changed Saul's life forever. Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher. He began to boldly declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Like the other apostles, Paul healed the sick in Jesus' name. He cast out demons in Jesus' name. And he joyfully looked forward to "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

The book of Acts records many remarkable stories that confirm the truth about Jesus. On one occasion, Peter and John were on their way to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray.

When they came to the city gate called Beautiful they saw a crippled man begging. Peter boldly declared, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). And immediately, the crippled man stood to his feet and started walking, leaping, and praising God!

There are other remarkable stories of people being set free from the evil spirits by the power of Jesus' name. Luke records a story of deliverance in the book of Acts. A young girl who was controlled by an evil spirit was following Paul and Barnabas crying out, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). Luke records that she kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour" (Acts 16:18).

But all those testimonies are from long ago. The most powerful evidence that Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be, that He is the Living Christ, risen from the dead, and the soon coming King, is the testimony of lives that are still being changed today. No life will be transformed by fictitious fabrications that seek to undermine the truth about Jesus. But when you meet Jesus Christ personally, even today, your life will be transformed. Let the scoffers mock. Let the critics ridicule. But they cannot save you. They cannot heal you. They cannot set you free. Only Jesus can do that.

(Share a contemporary story about a transformed life and your personal testimony.)

CONCLUSION

Jesus is all He claimed to be—the Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Resurrection and the Life, the Saviour of the world. He is no ordinary man. He isn't just a great moral teacher. And He certainly isn't a deluded lunatic or malicious deceiver. Jesus is all He claimed to be—the Christ, the Son of the Living God—and if you surrender your life to Him, He will bless your life today and for eternity. If that is the desire of your heart today, I invite you to stand with me as we pray.

Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for revealing to us the truth that Jesus is all He claimed to be. Thank You that You loved the world so much that You sent Your only begotten Son to save us. See the commitment of each person here today and bless each one according to Your great love and mercy. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen. ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE SCRIPTURES

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the most published book of all time, but today both skeptics and even some professed followers of Jesus are losing confidence in the Scriptures. They are abandoning the creation account as unscientific. Miracle accounts are being discarded or explained away based on what seems reasonable to some. The Bible is regarded as human words about God rather than the reliable Word of God to the human family.

So, what is the truth about the Scriptures? Today I would like to explore with you three important truths Jesus taught about the Scriptures.

I. THE SCRIPTURES ARE THE WORD OF GOD

The Scriptures are more than a helpful collection of religious ideas. The Scriptures are more than words of human beings about God. The Scriptures are the Word of God. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus responded to Satan's temptation by quoting from the Scriptures. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matt 4:4).¹ And how do we receive that Word which proceeds from the mouth of God? Through the oral and written testimony of the prophets. Consider the testimony of the apostle Peter. (Read 2 Pet 1:19–21.) For Jesus, the testimony of the prophets was the Word of God, transmitted through human instruments.

Jesus accepted the early chapters of the book of Genesis as inspired, reliable history, and the Word of God. Jesus said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female'" (Matt 19:4). Jesus spoke of the blood of righteous Abel (Matt 23:35), and the days of Noah when "Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:27).

Why did Jesus believe those events really happened? He couldn't prove their historicity based on human logic or reason. Rather, Jesus accepted the Scriptures by faith as the reliable Word of God.

Jesus believed and taught that the Scriptures were more than just human words about God. The Scriptures were and are the Word of God, filled with the wisdom of God and the power of God. That's one important truth that Jesus taught about the Scriptures.

II. THE SCRIPTURES ARE A DEFENSE AGAINST THE ENEMY

A second important truth that Jesus taught about the Scriptures is: the Scriptures are a defense against the enemy. Let's look at Matthew 4 where Jesus is attacked by the enemy. We will notice that to every temptation Jesus responds with the Word of God. When Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matt 4:4). When Jesus was tempted to presume upon the mercy of God, He replied, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'" (Matt 4:7). And when Jesus was tempted to bow down and worship Satan with the deceptive promise that the whole world will be given to Him, Jesus replied, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Matt 4:10).

How was Jesus able to respond to each temptation with the Word of God? Did He have a scroll or two under His arm? No. Jesus believed that the Scriptures are the Word of God and so He took time to memorize the Word of God. Then, when the enemy attacked, Jesus had a defense against the enemy.

The Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated in this encounter with Satan the truth of the Word of God recorded in Ephesians 6:17 that "the sword of the Spirit . . . is the word of God." When Jesus was attacked by Satan, Jesus didn't just hold up the Bible, or a Bible scroll like some kind of lucky charm and say, "The Bible, the Bible, the Bible." No, Jesus responded to the attacks of Satan with specific words from the Word of God.

Why are the Scriptures a defense against the enemy? Because Satan is a liar and a deceiver, but the Word of God is truth. We have proved that to be true in our own lives, haven't we? (Share a testimony of a time when the Holy Spirit brought the Word of God to your remembrance as a defense against the enemy.)

The Word of God is still a defense against the enemy today. We need the Word of God as a defense against the enemy more now than at any other time in the history of our world. We are living in troubled times. We are seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy of John in the book of Revelation that "the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Rev 12:12).

III. THE SCRIPTURES ARE A TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

There's a third truth that Jesus taught about the Scriptures. Not only are the Scriptures the Word of God, and a defense against

the enemy, but the Scriptures are a testimony about Jesus Christ. There were religious leaders in Jesus' day who thought they could find life by knowing the Scriptures. Tragically, in their lifelong quest for biblical knowledge, they were missing the whole purpose of the Scriptures. (Read John 5:39–40.)

When the Risen Jesus gave a Bible study to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke records that "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). What a Bible study that must have been!

The purpose for reading the Scriptures is not just to gain more information. It is not even to gain more information about Jesus. Satan and those angels who followed him in his rebellion have lots of Bible knowledge, and lots of information about Jesus. Many of those who will be lost have lots of information about Jesus Christ. Jesus says that the reason we should come to Scripture is that we might come to Him and have life.

The apostle John tells us that he wrote his Gospel record for that very reason. Listen to his words near the conclusion of his Gospel record. (Read John 20:30–31.) We see in the Scriptures a picture of Jesus. And we read the Scriptures that we might do more than know about Jesus. We want to know Him, whom to know is life eternal. We read the Scriptures in order that we might draw closer to Jesus. (Share your personal experience of finding a more intimate relationship with Jesus through a study of the Scriptures, particularly the Gospels.)

CONCLUSION

We have discovered three important truths about the Scriptures today from the teachings of Jesus. First, the Scriptures are the Word of God. Secondly, the Scriptures are a defense against the enemy. And thirdly, the Scriptures are a testimony about Jesus Christ. They point to Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Savior. When we read the Scriptures, we should read with the prayerful desire to draw closer to Jesus Christ. We want to know Him, to have an intimate relationship with Him, whom to know is life eternal.

I want to challenge you today to make a commitment to spend time with the Word of God so you can experience an intimate relationship with Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord. Is that your commitment today? Spend time with the Word of God so you can experience an intimate relationship with Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord. ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

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WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

Why did the Holy Spirit inspire the prophets and apostles to include so many stories in the Scriptures? The Apostle Paul provides one answer for us in his letter to Christians in Rome. (Read Rom 15:4.) Today, as we study what Jesus taught about salvation, we will encounter a significant story from the Hebrew Scriptures. Unless we are acquainted with that story, we will not be able to fully grasp the important truth about salvation Jesus wanted to convey. (Read John 3:14–17.)

I. SALVATION IN THE WILDERNESS

How many of you are familiar with the Old Testament story Jesus was referring to in His conversation with Nicodemus? It happened more than 1,400 years earlier, during the time when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. We can read the story in Numbers 21. (Read Num 21:4–5.)

The children of Israel were complaining against God. Even His blessings to them were a cause for complaint: “Our soul loathes this worthless bread.” Then comes Numbers 21:6 and the picture that it presents is a troubling one to many. (Read Num 21:6.) A person could create a horrible picture of God from that one verse: a mean-spirited vindictive Deity who strikes people down when they step out of line. Is that an accurate description of the character of God? Not if you believe the words of Jesus, who said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9),¹ and “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). So, what’s happening here in Numbers 21:6? The Scriptures can give us the answer we need. Moses reminds the children of Israel that the Lord had led them “through that great and terrible wilderness, *in which were* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water” (Deut 8:15). The dangers and the difficulties were all around them, but the Lord had provided for them. The Lord had provided food in the form of manna. He had provided water from the rock, and the Lord had protected them from the fiery serpents and scorpions. But now they are complaining against God and against Moses. “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?” (Num 21:5). The unspoken message is clear: “We wish that we weren’t your people. We wish that you would just leave us alone.” And the Lord honored their request. He allowed them to face life and death without Him if that was their desire.

What was the result of this willful separation from God? The people were bitten by fiery serpents. Perhaps they were called fiery serpents because their venom burned like fire. And the Bible tells us that many people died. (Describe the panic in the camp.)

We don’t know how long it took, but finally the children of Israel came to their senses and sent representatives to talk with Moses. (Read Num 21:7.) What was the answer Moses received from the Lord? (Read Num 21:8.) Does that make any sense to you? How could looking at a bronze replica of the problem provide a solution? That doesn’t make any sense at all. It’s a simple act of obedience. The Lord was asking the children of Israel to reaffirm their commitment to Him as their God. They were invited to just do what the Lord asked them to do so they could be saved.

What happened next? (Read Num 21:9.) We are not talking here about a skeptical glance with an angry scowl on your face. We are talking about a look of faith, a look of dependence, trusting that the Lord will be faithful to His promise. And the Word of God tells us, “If a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Num 21:9). I imagine another cry now going up in the camp. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. “The Lord has told us to look at the bronze serpent and we will live. Look and live! Look and live!” (Describe different responses in the camp.)

II. SALVATION THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS

And Jesus says to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14). What did Jesus mean when He said, “Even so must the Son of Man be *lifted up*?” Obviously, this “lifting up” is very important. Listen to these words of Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel. (Read John 8:28–29.)

But again, I ask, what is this lifting up of the Son of Man that must happen? Let’s listen again to the words of Jesus, found in John 12:32. (Read John 12:32.) And the apostle John comments, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in John 12:33, “This He said, signifying by what death He would die.”

Notice again the words of Jesus recorded in John 3:14. “Even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up.” Why? The death of Jesus on the cross is not a peripheral addendum to the gospel story. It is, rather, at the very center of God’s saving activity. That’s why the apostle Paul declares, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14) and “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him

crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18).

(Read John 3:14–17.) When a person looks in faith to Jesus, when a person realizes and accepts that God does not desire to condemn us but to save us through faith in Jesus as our Savior, then, and only then, a person finds life. Abundant life. Life in all its fullness. Everlasting life. And the cry needs to go out, just as a cry went out in the camp of Israel. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. Look to the provision that God has made. Look in faith to Jesus, and live!

Unfortunately, there will be some who reject this gracious offer. It was so during this crisis in the desert, and it was so during the ministry of Jesus. Tragically, a rich young ruler refused to look to God’s provision and find life. And we never hear from him again. (Give some other examples during the ministry of Jesus of individuals who refused to look to Jesus in faith and live.)

In contrast, we read the stories of individuals like Zacchaeus who chose to look to Jesus in faith and live. (Read Luke 19:1–10.) Zacchaeus chose to look to Jesus in faith and live. (Share other examples from the Gospels of individuals who chose to look to Jesus in faith and live.)

(Share a contemporary story of someone who chose to look to Jesus and live.)

CONCLUSION

The teaching of Jesus about salvation is unmistakably clear. (Read John 3:14–15.) So let the cry go out throughout the camp. Let the cry go out throughout the church. Let the cry go out throughout this city. Let the cry go out throughout the world. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. Today salvation has come to this house. Jesus, the Son of Man, has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Look in faith to Jesus and live!

If you sense the invitation of Jesus to look in faith to Him today and live, if you want to receive Jesus joyfully, just like Zacchaeus, if you want to hear Jesus say to you, “Today salvation has come to this house,” I invite you to come forward while we sing the closing hymn and meet me here at the front of the church. Look in faith to Jesus and live! And for those who have already made that decision, for those who have already looked in faith to Jesus and found life, I invite you to thank Jesus for being your Savior and earnestly pray as you see God work miracles in our midst! ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

Derek J. Morris, DMin, is the former president of Hope Channel International, Inc., Silver Spring, MD, USA.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT HIS RETURN

INTRODUCTION

The return of Jesus in glory is one of the most precious truths of the whole Bible, and there are more prophecies related to the Second Coming of Jesus than any other event. I want to share with you today what Jesus taught about His return. I have divided our study into three parts: the good news, the bad news, and the most important news.

I. THE GOOD NEWS

First, the good news Jesus taught about His return. The return of Jesus in glory is certain. Speaking to His disciples in the upper room, Jesus gave a prophecy regarding His return in glory. (Read John 14:1-3.) Did you hear the promise of Jesus, "I will come again"? (John 14:3).¹ The return of Jesus is certain. Someone ought to shout Hallelujah!

That is not the only passage of Scripture where Jesus teaches about the certainty of His return in glory. In Matthew 24:27, we read these words of Jesus: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." The glorious return of Jesus, like lightning flashing from the east to the west, is certain.

Look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:30. "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Notice that this certain return of Jesus is visible and dramatic.

According to Jesus, there are signs that show us His coming is drawing near. We can read about those signs in Matthew 24. (Read Matthew 24:4-13.) And the final sign that Jesus mentions that points to His return is already being fulfilled right before our eyes. Notice the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." We are seeing that sign come to pass right now!

According to Jesus, while no one knows that day or the hour of His return (Matt 24:36), we can know that the day is approaching. And we can know for sure that the return of Jesus in glory is certain. That, my friends, is good news!

II. THE BAD NEWS

But there's some bad news that Jesus taught about His return in glory. The bad news is found in a parable about a wedding. (Read Matt 25:1-4.)

Tell me, what does this wedding represent? The return of Jesus in glory. And who do the ten virgins represent? The professed followers of Jesus. How many of these professed followers of Jesus are looking forward to the coming of the bridegroom? All of them. How many of them have lamps? All of them. How many of them have oil in their lamps? All of them. All of them, at some point, have experienced the blessings of God. All of them have received the anointing of God's Spirit. But not all of them will be ready for the bridegroom's arrival. And not all the professed followers of Jesus will be ready for His return in glory.

Let's read on. (Read Matt 25:5-13.) What percentage of the professed followers of Jesus in this parable were not ready for His return in glory? Fifty percent. That, my friends, is bad news. Now I realize that it is not wise to build our understanding about last-day events on a single parable. I'm praying that every man, woman, and child here today will be ready when Jesus returns in glory. Isn't that your prayer too? But while we don't want to read too much into this parable, one lesson is very clear. Not all of those who profess to be followers of Jesus will be ready for His return in glory.

What have we learned so far from the teaching of Jesus about His return? First, the good news: the return of Jesus in glory is certain. And I'm so thankful for that good news, aren't you? But then comes the bad news. Many of those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ will not be ready for His return in glory. That's the bad news. Now if we ended our study here, we would all be depressed!

But we're not going to end here. If you remember at the beginning of our study, I told you that I've divided the teaching of Jesus regarding His return into three parts: the good news, the bad news, and the most important news. We've heard the good news that Jesus taught about His return: the return of Jesus in glory is certain. We've heard the bad news: many of those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ will not be ready for His return in glory. What is the most important news Jesus taught about His return?

III. THE MOST IMPORTANT NEWS

The most important news Jesus taught about His return in glory is also recorded in Matthew 24. (Read Matt 24:36-44.) What is the most important news that Jesus teaches about His return in glory? (Read Matt 24:44 again.) Jesus wants you to be ready for His return in glory.

Perhaps you are thinking, "I want to be ready. I believe the return of Jesus in glory is certain. And the signs tell us His coming is near. I want to be ready. But how can I be

ready?" That's a vitally important question, isn't it? In the parable of the wedding feast, to those who were not ready, the bridegroom said, "I do not know you" (Matt 25:12). "You don't have a personal relationship with Me." Remember the words of Jesus in His great prayer of John 17: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). The way to be ready when Jesus returns in glory is to have a personal saving relationship with Him today. Those who have a genuine saving relationship with Jesus as their personal Savior are ready for His return in glory. And how can I know that my relationship with Jesus is genuine, and not just empty words like the foolish virgins? The evidence of a genuine saving relationship with Jesus is loving obedience. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus taught, "but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt 7:21). He also said, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). The evidence of a genuine saving relationship with Jesus is loving obedience.

CONCLUSION

What have we learned today from our study of what Jesus taught about His return? The return of Jesus in glory is certain. And while it's a sad reality that many of His professed followers will not be ready for His return in glory, Jesus wants you to be ready. Will you trust Him fully today as your Savior and Lord? You may have walked with Jesus for fifty years, or this may be your first day in church. But will you trust Him fully today as your Savior and Lord? Jesus wants you to be ready for His return in glory.

I believe that many, if not all, of the people here today want to be ready when Jesus returns in glory. Am I right? I have a very specific appeal today in response to this message.² (Review the decision card either passed out by the deacons or inserted in the bulletin. Allow time for people to complete their decision card.) Angels are singing over decisions made here today. Never forget this precious truth, my friends: Jesus wants you to be ready for His return in glory. I invite you to stand with me now and hold your decision card toward heaven. Let's pray together.³

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

² Prepare a simple call card that includes the following: I want to be ready when Jesus returns in glory, I want to accept Jesus as my personal Saviour, and I desire to be baptized as a public confession of faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

³ Collect decision cards as people are leaving the service.

Derek J. Morris, DMin, is the former president of Hope Channel International, Inc., Silver Spring, MD, USA.

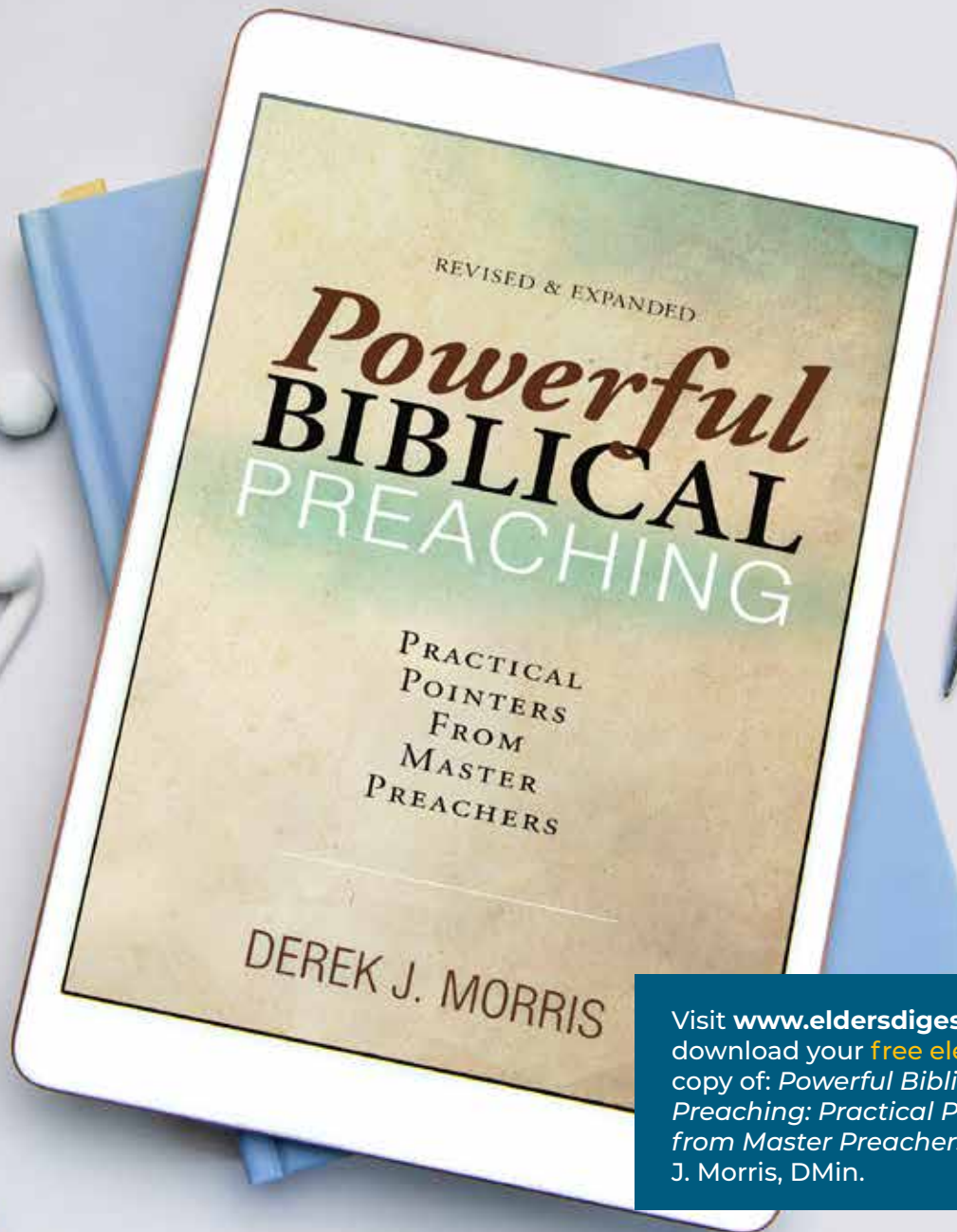
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SERMON PREPARATION PART 2

CONTEXT INFORMS CONTENT

As a rule, **the context** informs the content. Read the room. Knowing your audience helps **shape the sermon content.**

People love stories. Allow me to explain. I once had a job working in a bookstore—not just any bookstore, but Barnes & Noble at its flagship store in New York City, situated on 46th Street and 5th Avenue. Imagine walking to work and looking up at the Empire State Building every day. As you can imagine, we had people from all over the world coming to purchase books. One thing I noticed was the rush to purchase new releases, especially if they were by a famous author like J.K. Rowling. Upon the release of a new Harry Potter book, people would queue outside the store before it opened to get their copy. Fictional books sell extremely well, surpassing every other genre. Incidentally, Amazon, the largest retailer on the planet, was founded as an online bookstore in 1994; today, it sells practically everything.

Fictional books take people's imaginations hostage, taking them to other worlds and thus subverting the Kingdom of God. Escapism has become a multi-billion-dollar industry worldwide; books, Netflix movies, and computer games have become the twenty-first century's solution for coping with life's problems. Reading to escape has become the norm for millions. When asked why customers read certain books, they say, "Well, my job is so stressful, I simply want to escape. And reading a novel helps me do that." Or "I just want to switch off from all the bad news in the world." Or "Reading a book helps me enter another world." These people read primarily to escape from the reality of day-to-day living. Reading helps people cope in a world that offers increasing uncertainty, threat, panic, and fear that leads to despondency. In most of the world, anxiety, depression, and suicide rates are skyrocketing. This is nothing new; the Roman Empire was built on



“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

ruthlessness and brutality. Persecution of the Christians was the hallmark of Rome. Despite persecution in the early church, the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, turned the Roman Empire upside down sufficiently for the rulers to take notice. Fueled by the Holy Spirit and the good news of the risen Christ, Christianity ran rampant throughout the Roman Empire. The twenty-first century church needs to impact the world once again, just as it did in the book of Acts.

As a rule, the context informs the content. Read the room. Knowing your audience helps shape the sermon content. (An exception may be if you have been invited to speak on a certain subject.) The apostle Paul was fully aware of the importance of understanding his listeners. On one specific occasion, the apostle Paul went to Athens. In Athens, Paul observed and identified the Athenian culture and its worship practices, then built a bridge to make a connection. Paul proclaims, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22–23).¹ Paul had intentionally wandered around Athens to see what was important to the Athenians of his day. Paul simply read the room and took notice; this gave him the content

of the message. Paul specifically sought to make a connection with the people of Athens.

Whenever one is preaching, it is helpful to know the composition of the congregation. Unclear about what to preach on, Paul wrote this to Timothy as he awaited his impending death. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). Paul, who once persecuted followers of Christ, suggests, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1, NIV). Paul helped shape and establish the early church, and visited cities and seaports around the Mediterranean.

Ellen G. White, one of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s founding pioneers, agrees with Paul. Writing in the March 20, 1894, *Review and Herald* under the heading “Christ, the Center of the Message,” she gives guidance on what content to preach. She writes, “The third angel’s message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and this truth must be brought before the world; but the great Center of attraction, Jesus Christ, must not be left out of the third angel’s message.”² So many sermons fail to center on Christ.

When visiting Martha and Mary, Jesus gave Martha a gentle reminder

of what is important. “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41–42). It is so important to keep the focus on Christ. Jesus’ own advice is, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). The strategy is easy: follow Christ and lift Him up. What could be simpler?

In John, we learn about Nicodemus, a well-read and scholarly Pharisee who was a member of the elite Sanhedrin. We know that Nicodemus had an inquisitive and perceptive mind because he visited Jesus one night. Recognizing Jesus’ divine qualities, he stated, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Nicodemus knew Jesus was more than just an ordinary man. The Bible does not mention whether Nicodemus crossed the line to faith at that time; all we know is that he showed up at two pivotal moments in Jesus’ later life. Defending Jesus before the Sanhedrin, he pointed out that the law requires the right to a fair hearing. “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:51). At Jesus’ burial, Nicodemus, along with Joseph of Arimathea, sought to give him a proper burial. “Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight” (John 19:39). Nicodemus had head knowledge, but he needed to meet Jesus on a dark night in Jerusalem to impact his heart. If you preach to the head, you will only reach the head by simply offering information. If you preach to the heart, you will reach only the heart by simply producing emotion. The preacher’s task is to reach both the head and heart simultaneously, wherein the

information and the emotion produces transformation. Preaching is all about transformation.

Transformation is the goal of preaching. We are called to impact people's lives for eternity. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, thought he would just get a glimpse of Jesus by climbing a tree. Instead, he gave his heart to Jesus. "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham'" (Luke 19:8-9, NIV). What an honor to be called the son of Abraham by Jesus! It could not have gotten better; imagine the pure joy on Zacchaeus' face when Jesus said that. When you preach to transform people's lives, you are not only bringing joy to their lives; you are also bringing heaven down to earth, ushering in the Kingdom of God, fulfilling Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Transformation offers men and women a spiritual rebirth. There is power in the name of Jesus, which is why it needs to be preached so passionately without any hesitation.


She was merely going to get some water from a well at an odd hour in the day, but what happened next is the stuff of fairytales. When Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, He first caught her interest by having a casual conversation and then introduced a spiritual component to the conversation. Jesus transitioned from the head to the woman's heart, and then the transformation occurred. "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'" (John 4:7, NIV). Obviously, she was puzzled that a Jew would hold a conversation with her. Furthermore, He wanted a favor by asking for a drink. What cheek! "The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?'" (John 4:9, NIV). After realizing that she herself was the thirsty one, "the woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to

keep coming here to draw water'" (John 4:15, NIV). Still operating on the information level, Jesus then introduced the spiritual component which the woman gladly accepted, realizing her life of sin could be removed forever. Jesus offered her a new start to a pure, transformed life. Her newfound faith became a witness to her community. We read, "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers" (John 4:39-41, NIV). When you preach to transform lives, it results in witness. That's the power of preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the ESV, unless otherwise indicated.

² Ellen G. White, "Christ the Center of the Message," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 20, 1894.

Malcolm Perry, DMin, is a retired pastor and teacher, residing in Crieff, Scotland.



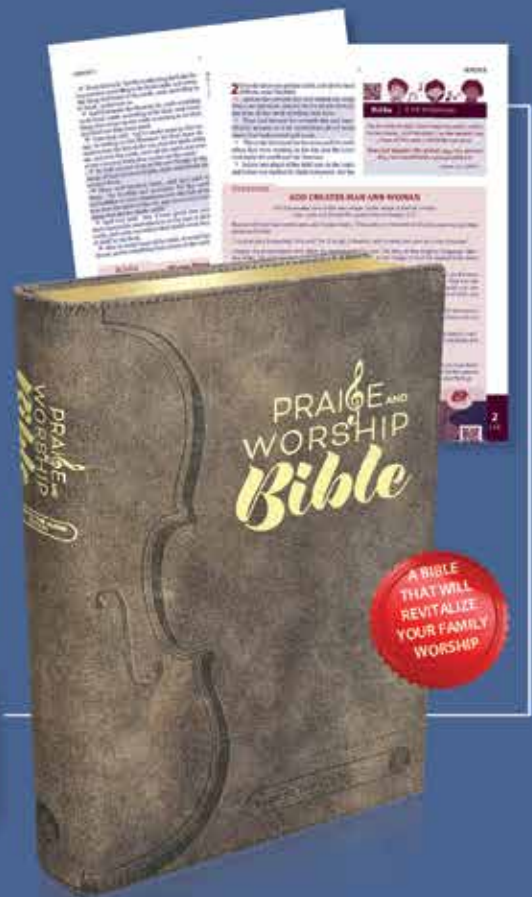
Jesus transitioned from the head to the woman's heart, and then the transformation occurred.

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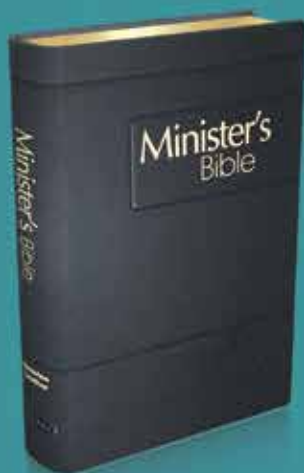


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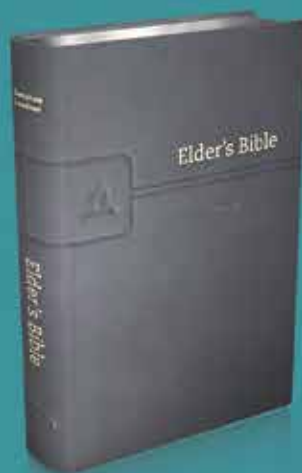


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REX DANIEL EDWARDS

November 14, 1934–January 29, 2025



The editorial team of *Elder's Digest* pay special tribute to Pastor Rex D. Edwards, DMin, for his remarkable contribution to this journal. Pastor Edwards authored an unprecedented sixty-two high-quality sermons and articles for *Elder's Digest*. His literary work remains treasured and greatly appreciated by pastors, elders, deacons, and deaconesses around the world. It reflects his wider ministry, which was characterized by innovation, dedication, and excellence.



**“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’”
(Rev 14:13, NKJV).**

Following is a summary of the life and ministry of Pastor Rex D. Edwards:

Rex Daniel Edwards was born on November 14, 1934, in Christchurch, New Zealand, the second son of Leslie and Daphne Edwards’ seven children.

During his teen years, Rex’s life was profoundly shaped by the premature death of his father, at just thirty-eight years of age. As a result, Rex became more self-dependent, resilient, and determined. His religious journey also began at his father’s graveside when on a cold, rainy, winter’s day, with his brothers standing each side of his bereft mother cradling his sister in her arms, he pondered the universe and the meaning of life. Though he wanted to be a surgeon, he pursued a course of theological studies in his search for answers, earning a degree from Avondale College, now Avondale University, in Australia.

Graduating in 1956, Rex married Zelma Harris and the following year his ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church began. It was a ministry that spanned sixty-two years and covered three international regions: Australia, the United Kingdom, and North America.

In Australia, Rex served as a pastor-evangelist in Queensland, Western Australia, and New South Wales. His ministry was thoroughly supported by Zelma and their union was blessed with three children, Janelle, Paul, and Shane.

In January 1969, the British Union Conference invited Rex to serve as a pastor-evangelist. As well as conducting a successful series of evangelistic meetings, he also completed a master’s degree in religion at the University of Wales extension program from Newbold College.

In October 1970, Rex and his family moved to North America, for him to serve as a pastor-evangelist in Georgia, South Dakota, and Pennsylvania. He also completed a Master of Divinity degree at Andrews University and a Doctor of Ministry at Vanderbilt University.

In 1975, Rex was asked to lead the Department of Practical Theology at Columbia Union College, now Washington Adventist University. In August of 1981, he was invited to serve at the General Conference as assistant ministerial secretary. After eighteen years of service in the Ministerial Association, Rex was appointed vice president of religious studies for Griggs University.

During his retirement, Rex gave seven years of voluntary service as research assistant for the General Conference Biblical Research Institute.



THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSSES

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR PART 2



EDITORIAL NOTE

The ministry of deacons and deaconesses had its beginning in apostolic times and was related to service of different kinds among the early believers. It is a commonly accepted belief that the work of the deacons began with the selection of seven men, including Stephen and Philip, by the apostles to care for the charitable work of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5-7). Later, the New Testament also mentions the service of female deaconesses such as Phoebe (Rom 16:1). Thus, the ministry of deacons and deaconesses is biblical in origin. The dedication and faithfulness of Stephen teaches us timeless principles for today's diaconate. A totally converted life of godliness, moral and spiritual uprightness, identity with God's people and His cause, and wisdom and discernment are some of the essential qualities of those called to church leadership. The following is an invaluable perspective on the ministry of deacons and deaconesses for the service of the church. This selection is from *Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen G. White.¹

As Stephen stood face to face with his judges to answer to the charge of blasphemy, a holy radiance shone upon his countenance, and “all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” Many who beheld this light trembled and veiled their faces, but the stubborn unbelief and prejudice of the rulers did not waver.

When Stephen was questioned as to the truth of the charges against him, he began his defense in a clear, thrilling voice, which rang through the council hall. In words that held the assembly spellbound, he proceeded to rehearse the history of the chosen people of God. He showed a thorough knowledge of the Jewish economy and the spiritual interpretation of it now made manifest through Christ. He repeated the words of Moses that foretold of the Messiah: “A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear.” He made plain his own loyalty to God and to the Jewish faith, while he showed that the law in which the Jews trusted for salvation had not been able to save Israel from idolatry. He connected Jesus Christ with all the Jewish history. He referred to the building of the temple by Solomon, and to the words of both Solomon and Isaiah: “Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?”

When Stephen reached this point, there was a tumult among the people. When he connected Christ with the prophecies and spoke as he did of the temple, the priest, pretending to be horror-stricken, rent his robe. To Stephen this act was a signal that his voice would soon be silenced forever. He saw the resistance that

met his words and knew that he was giving his last testimony. Although in the midst of his sermon, he abruptly concluded it.

Suddenly breaking away from the train of history that he was following, and turning upon his infuriated judges, he cried: “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

At this, priests and rulers were beside themselves with anger. Acting more like beasts of prey than human beings, they rushed upon Stephen, gnashing their teeth. In the cruel faces about him the prisoner read his fate; but he did not waver. For him the fear of death was gone. For him the enraged priests and the excited mob had no terror. The scene before him faded from his vision. To him the gates of heaven were ajar, and, looking in, he saw the glory of the courts of God, and Christ, as if just risen from His throne, standing ready to sustain His servant. In words of triumph Stephen exclaimed, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

As he described the glorious scene upon which his eyes were gazing, it was more than his persecutors could endure. Stopping their ears, that they might not hear his words, and uttering loud cries, they ran furiously upon him with one accord “and cast him out of the city.” “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

He repeated the words of Moses that foretold of the Messiah: “A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear.”

He made plain **his own loyalty to God and to the Jewish faith, while he showed that the law in which the Jews trusted for salvation had not been able to save Israel from idolatry.**

No legal sentence had been passed upon Stephen, but the Roman authorities were bribed by large sums of money to make no investigation into the case.

The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. The memory of the signet of God upon his face; his words, which touched the very souls of those who heard them, remained in the minds of the beholders, and testified to the truth of that which he had proclaimed. His death was a sore trial to the church, but it resulted in the conviction of Saul, who could not efface from his memory

the faith and constancy of the martyr, and the glory that had rested on his countenance.

At the scene of Stephen's trial and death, Saul had seemed to be imbued with a frenzied zeal. Afterward he was angered by his own secret conviction that Stephen had been honored by God at the very time when he was dishonored by men. Saul continued to persecute the church of God, hunting them down, seizing them in their houses, and delivering them up to the priests and rulers for imprisonment and death. His zeal in carrying forward this persecution brought terror to the

Christians at Jerusalem. The Roman authorities made no special effort to stay the cruel work and secretly aided the Jews in order to conciliate them and to secure their favor.

After the death of Stephen, Saul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. For a time he was a mighty instrument in the hands of Satan to carry out his rebellion against the Son of God. But soon this relentless persecutor was to be employed in building up the church that he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had chosen Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for His name, and to spread far and wide the tidings of salvation through His blood. ED

¹ The entire portion that follows is from Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 99–102, and is based on Acts 6:5–15; 7. All scriptural quotations are from the KJV and scriptural references are placed in parentheses.



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK WITH GOD?

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF ENOCH PART 1

“I say then:
Walk
in the Spirit,
and you shall
not fulfill the
lust of the
flesh.”

—Galatians 5:16¹

Throughout the Bible, the imagery of walking with God shows us the lives of people who habitually lived in communion and relationship with God, and thus pleased God. In this article and a subsequent article, we will look at two Bible characters and the lessons we learn from their stories of walking with God. Before we look at the stories of those who walked with God, let us first look at what walking meant in the Old and New Testaments.

WALKING WITH GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Hebrew language, walking is characterized as agreement with the one you walk with or in accordance with his command. Walking is also seen as a habitual or repetitive manner throughout one's lifetime. In the Old Testament, people walked in the way of the Lord. In Deuteronomy, God tells the Israelites that He will establish Himself as their God if they walk in His ways (Deut 28:9). In Psalm 1, the author compares the walk of a righteous man to the walk of a man who walks with the ungodly. In Psalm 15, David describes the man who can abide in the tabernacle as one who walks in God's ways. The prophet Micah uses the word *walk* to describe what God requires from His people: “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8).



“If we live in
the Spirit, let
us also walk
in the Spirit.”

—Galatians 5:25



WALKING WITH GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the Greek word for walking is *peripatéō*, which means “to walk around” (Mark 2:9; John 5:8; Acts 3:6). Paul, however, uses the same meaning in the New Testament for the word *walking* as the Old Testament. Believers are to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), to walk worthy of God (1 Thess 2:12), or the Lord (Col 1:10), or their calling (Eph 4:1), and to walk as children of light (Eph 5:8). Paul urges believers to walk in such a way as to please God (1 Thess 4:1). Those who do not walk as directed are to be avoided (2 Thess 3:6, 11). Believers still walk in the flesh (2 Cor 10:3), but the flesh is no longer lord. They may now walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).²

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF ENOCH

In the Bible, Enoch is the first who was said to have walked with God. Here are four lessons from the life of Enoch.

1 Enoch walked with God as His Father.

Genesis 5:24 says, “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” From the context of Genesis 5, Ellen G. White shows that Enoch did not understand God’s love until He fathered Methusaleh. Enoch began to understand that fatherhood meant sacrifice, selflessness, care, and love. From then on, understanding and experiencing fatherly love, Enoch walked with God his Father.³ To Enoch, walking with God as his Father meant that he walked confidently, knowing God was a father of compassion (Ps 103:13).

When we know God as our Father, we start to understand the Father’s love starts with Him, not with us. Therefore, when we experience God’s love, we choose to love Him back. As 1 John 3:1 says,

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” When we see God’s compassionate love for us, we eagerly want to start a relationship with Him.

2 Enoch was in vibrant connection with God for three hundred years.

For three hundred years, Enoch enjoyed the company of the Lord. We all know it is hard to walk with God faithfully for even a week. We easily lose our focus on Him, and get distracted by our work, our families, and even our church activities. Enoch must have had intentionality to keep a three-hundred-year relationship with God. All distractions must have been removed to focus on the importance of the relationship.

In a marriage, many will learn that a long-lasting relationship must be built on the intentionality of love and acceptance. My (Joe’s) own marriage advice is to love the other person no matter what, find ways to please them, and even if there are any negatives, focus on the positives instead. This is the same advice we can take when we are in a relationship with God. In our relationship with God, we can love and focus on Him despite the many distractions. The more our love for Him grows, the more we are willing to do things that are pleasing in His sight: commitment to walk in His ways; serving God with our whole hearts; and loving the people around us. Sometimes, we choose to focus on the negatives of our relationship with God, like when God does not answer our prayers or when we don’t know what He is doing in our lives. Yet, we can choose to focus on the positives of our relationship with God: His salvation, His love, and His steadfast grace towards us.

Enoch’s intentional walk with God allowed him to be in total agreement

with God. Ellen White states,

“[Enoch’s] heart was in harmony with God’s will; for ‘can two walk together, except they be agreed?’ Amos 3:3. And this holy walk was continued for three hundred years. There are few Christians who would not be far more earnest and devoted if they knew that they had but a short time to live, or that the coming of Christ was about to take place. But Enoch’s faith waxed the stronger, his love became more ardent, with the lapse of centuries.”⁴

The life of Enoch is an inspiration for us to fix our eyes on Jesus and walk faithfully with Him. Despite the distractions that the world brings, we can walk in faithful harmony and agreement with God until the end. “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt 24:13).

3 Enoch walked in faith and purity with God.

In Genesis 3:8, Adam and Eve hid from God walking in the garden. Genesis 2:25 tells us that Adam and Eve did not have shame of their nakedness in the presence of God prior to their sin, but under sin’s grasp, they understood their nakedness in front of an Almighty God. God habitually walked in the garden of Eden, but now in unfaithfulness and impurity Adam and Eve hid themselves from their Creator. Compared to the story of Adam and Eve, Enoch’s life serves as a testament to walking in faithfulness and purity. Enoch did not hide from God’s presence, but walked right beside Him for three hundred years.

Enoch’s intimate and pure walk with God shows us what a healthy relationship with God looks like. His faith and walk were so strong that he pleased God (Heb 11:5–6). His walk with God restored what Adam and Eve had lost in the garden of Eden. In commenting on the life of Enoch, Ellen White says, “Enoch had been

The life of Enoch is an inspiration for us to fix our eyes on Jesus and walk faithfully with Him. Despite the distractions that the world brings, we can walk in faithful harmony and agreement with God until the end.

seeking purity of soul, that he might be in harmony with Heaven. For three centuries he had walked with God. Day by day he had longed for a closer union; nearer and nearer had grown the communion, until God took him to Himself.”⁵ Enoch’s walk illustrates the intimacy someone has when they walk faithfully and purely with God. What an inspiration for us today to walk faithfully and intimately with God!

4 Enoch’s walk influenced the people around him.

As Enoch walked faithfully with God, he did not remain isolated from the world. In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White says, “He did not become a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had a work to do for God in the world. In the family and in his intercourse with men, as a husband and father, a friend, a citizen, he was the steadfast, unwavering servant of the Lord.”⁶ In

our walk with God, we should not only serve the Lord, but also have compassion and care for others. Our everyday activities should showcase who God is to the people around us.

Enoch influenced the people around him not only in his behavior, but also with his words. He taught the people to forsake their sins and walk with God. Jude 14–15 says, “Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.’” Enoch’s love for God made him sensitive for sin and made him zealous for others to overcome the weight of sin. While living in the present world, Enoch recognized the value of living in the context of eternity and helping others do the same.

Enoch’s message of repentance and judgment demonstrates his desire for others to have a committed and vibrant relationship with God. Ellen White says, “[Enoch] was a fearless reprove of sin. While he preached the love of God in Christ to the people of his time, and pleaded with them to forsake their evil ways, he rebuked the prevailing iniquity and warned the men of his generation that judgment would surely be visited upon the transgressor.”⁷ Our walk with God, both in deed and word, should convict us to plead with others to forsake sin and walk faithfully in God’s love.

SUMMARY

1 John 2:6 says, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” Enoch shows us by his example how to abide and walk with God. Our walk begins by us understanding God as our loving Father. As we walk, we should be in vibrant and long-lasting connection with God. We should walk with faithfulness and purity. We should walk in a way that influences others in their relationships with God. Each of these four lessons help us understand how to walk with God, but Enoch’s life can teach us one more thing about how God responds to our faithful walk with Him.

Because Enoch gave his life over to God, God was pleased with him (Heb 11:5–6). Enoch was a faithful servant who was blessed by God and his walk pleased God. Just like Enoch, we can please God by walking confidently, habitually, and in total agreement with Him. “Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). May God help us walk worthy of God, fully pleasing Him. **ED**

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

² Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 804–805.

³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

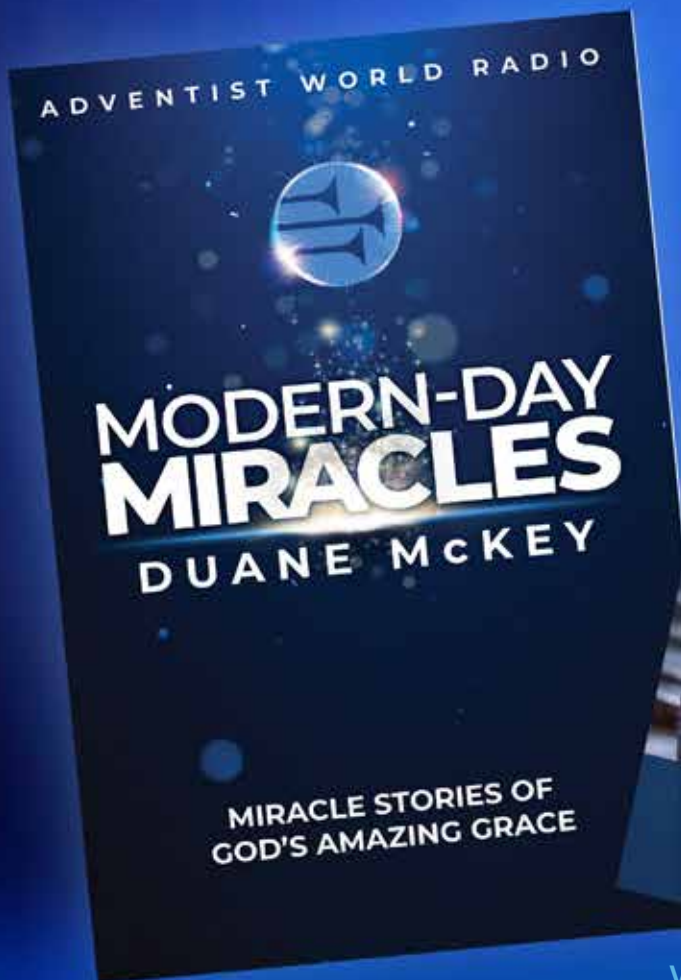
⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

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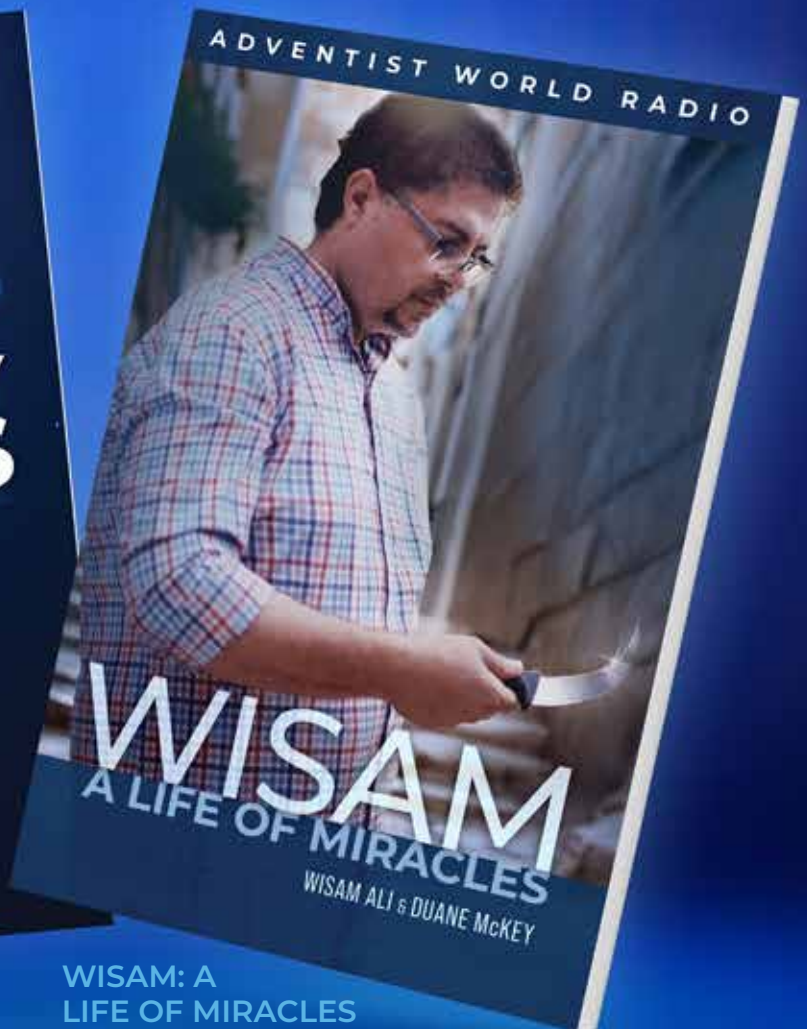
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