

ELDER'S DIGEST

A Quarterly Resource for local Church Elders

Vol. 6 No. 2

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Elder's Digest

Publisher Ministerial Association
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Ministerial Association Secretary James A. Cress
Editor Joel Sarli
Production/Marketing Manager Cathy Payne

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| | |
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| Carl Johnston | Nikolaus Satelmajer |

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Subscription rates and address changes:

US\$9.95 for one year (four issues) and US\$ 25.00 for three years; US\$3.00 single issue.

Please send all subscriptions and address changes to *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6516.

To Writers: Articles about the work of the local elder are welcome and may be submitted to *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6516. A stamped, self-addressed envelope should accompany unsolicited manuscripts.

Elder's Digest is published quarterly by the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association © 1999, which retains full editorial control. It is printed by the Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Editor's Note: The articles in this publication have been revised slightly or updated to conform to the intended audience and nature of *Elder's Digest*.

Issue 24 Vol. 6 Number 2

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Dealing with Members in your Congregation

Joel Sarli



How to deal with people cannot be fully learned from a textbook or in the seminary classroom. These skills must be hammered out on the anvil of experience. Here are a few basic guidelines to help elders with those all-important people skills.

Love and Trust

Love and trust must be intentionally cultivated. Commit yourself as an elder to approach your people, even the difficult ones, in this manner. Even though your attitude of love and trust may not always be returned in kind, your risk will be worthwhile. But how do you love the unlovely and trust those who are not always trustworthy?

Develop a healthy appreciation for others. — Perceive them as persons of worth. An attitude of suspicion is the only alternative, and suspicion is a waste.

Develop a healthy concept of God. — This will give you a proper perspective on your concept of self and others. If you, as an elder, view God as primarily a God of wrath and judgment, this will be reflected in your concept of God. If the elder recognizes God's attributes of love and forgiveness, the elder's own love and forgiveness will be more apparent.

Develop a healthy concept of authority. It is much easier for an elder to love and trust if he isn't obsessed with a need to control and manipulate.

LOVE AND TRUST MUST BE INTENTIONALLY CULTIVATED

Honesty and Openness

An honest elder is a man of integrity. The word *integrity*

comes from the mathematical term *integer*, which means "whole or undivided." An honest elder does not have many sides; he is a man of integrity.

Openness takes the elder one step beyond honesty. Openness implies vulnerability.

Honesty and openness may sometimes carry risk in the church. The open, honest elder may encounter people in his church who are disappointed when the elder shows his humanity. These persons may be devoted to the elder and love him until he shows his human side. Nevertheless, vulnerability is worth the effort for elders who want to relate to members as team members.

The Futility of Withdrawal and Avoidance

An elder can learn to love and trust if he realizes the futility of withdrawal and avoidance. Some elders practice this by moving to another position or other congregation every time a difficulty arises. Others simply withdraw emotionally with almost the same result.

Here are some negative and positive suggestions for improving relationships with church members.

Things to Avoid ⁽¹⁾

- * Avoid being judgmental.
- * Avoid hypercriticism.
- * Avoid unrealistic expectations.
- * Avoid ambiguity or inconsistency.

Steps to Take

- * Cultivate a genuine desire to help people.
- * Develop a willingness to forgive people.
- * Adopt an attitude of forgiveness toward people.
- * Learn to trust people.
- * Develop sensitivity toward people.
- * Maintain flexibility in dealing with people.
- * Deal with frustrations that come from relating to people.
- * Acknowledge your personal limitations in dealing with people.
- * Seek opportunities to develop close relationships with people

Give some quality attention to getting along with people in the church. Through exhibiting love, trust, honesty, and openness, the elder can create an environment in his congregation where close interpersonal relationships can develop. ■

⁽¹⁾ Adapted from Books Faulkner, *Getting on Top of Your Work* (Nashville: Convention Press 1973).

God's people at the end of time

Wilma Zalabak

I saw a church. It was not a code of beliefs, nor the property of preachers. There were many ministers.

It was a church on a restless earth. The time was the end, and the Sabbath was outlawed. Money and property holdings by Sabbathkeeping organizations were illegal and therefore either confiscated by government or bought out by conforming entities. No Sabbathkeeping leader had legal authority.

Still, I saw a church. Kneeling members proclaimed their total inadequacy for their work of reaching all the world, yet they eagerly anticipated the realization of those dreams. Perhaps because of this individual and corporate admission of powerlessness, I saw great energy spent toward accepting and affirming one another. No one seemed bent on controlling or changing another.

Honesty and affirmation

I saw honesty in that church, each member striving to understand the underlying life laws of his or her own experience. Not having to diagnose the motives of others

freed immense energy toward personal growth and group life.

On the local level, this church worked together after the spiritual gifts model of church life with affirmation of each other, room for mistakes, and communication through the obstacles.

Although I saw leaders go out and start other groups, they quickly transferred the decision power from themselves to the people they served. Leadership roles took the appearance of facilitator, communicator, servant.

Evangelism planning focused more on training and support network for lay preachers in the process of going. Of course, when a newcomer preached in his or her former church enough to be disclaimed there, growth did happen, along with those who had no previous church affiliation.

I heard members urging newcomers to choose mentors. A mentor could be anyone who had something in his or her spiritual journey that another could respect and with whom he or she could build rapport for ease in sharing. Service as a mentor included listening nonjudgmentally, telling one's own story, encouraging, but never seeking to control another's life. The continual admission of each person's powerlessness appeared to be crucial to the success.

Group participation

I saw the worship service, easily recognized as Adventist by its order and atmosphere. Yet there were definite windows within that structure where I felt special openness and real presence with one another. I saw many different people serve during the worship service, some reading Scripture, some praying, some singing, some opening doors, and many shaking hands. There seemed little distinction between audience and leaders; apparently even newcomers could help almost anywhere.

The worship service fit well with what the members understood as the group's mission. It was stated quite clearly that the mission of the group was to make the Adventist Christian message relevant to the needs and emptiness of the surrounding culture and people. Visitors who came in contact with the need-oriented programs of the church felt powerfully attracted. They returned again and again.

In studying official structure, I found a lean officer's list but a large base for involvement and decision making. Even people who couldn't qualify as officers or as members felt they were making a contribution. In fact, membership itself apparently operated on two separate levels. A simple desire

to belong easily got one in and accepted, but to hold official membership and any office, one was expected to be making certain lifestyle choices that define Adventism.

Humble discipline

I watched the local group work through a painful situation in which trusted leaders had chosen behaviors out of line with the voted definition of Adventism. I saw the meeting where other leaders led the way in tears and prostration before the Lord over their own deficiencies and stumblings, the meeting where the decision was made, haltingly and prayerfully, to ask the unfaithful to relinquish their official membership. It was clearly stated that this was not a punishment or judgment, but merely a clarification of behaviors that do not fit the official stance of the group.

I did my best to follow all interactions in this case, and in every instance saw only acceptance and respect for the choices that had been made. I did see many individuals visiting personally with those asked to separate. Some found opportune moments to share their own story, their own choices and reasons, in relation to the behaviors in question. Those who could hurdle the emotional pain maintained ongoing friendship.

Although the group recognized the presence of certain absolutes, they also recognized that a specific behavior is sinful to an individual only after conviction occurs from the Holy Spirit.

Each person felt his or her impurity on coming closer and closer to Christ. Group purity, they believed, rested in the hands of God and the mediation of Jesus Christ, probably to be recognized only by Him and the universe in the end. Never claiming absolute purity, they were content to think continually of Christ.

Powerful helplessness

Yes, I saw a church. I have tried to report accurately what I saw on the local level. I did investigate the broader, world affiliation, also. That was more hidden, given the illegal status of any organization keeping the Sabbath.

Most obvious of what I saw in my survey of the world church was the surrender, the admission of powerlessness for any of the goals or functions desired. This seemed paradoxical, however, since the church's confessed helplessness seemed to be the foundation and stimulus of its great successes. Despite

legal suppression, this church added new members and congregations even in inaccessible places at a rate hardly believable.

Several other observations stand out. Each congregation developed its own mission. The mission related to which spiritual gifts were present among the people of the group as well as to where they could find their niche in the needs of the local community. This meant great differences between congregations in terms of programs and projects and even worship atmosphere. These differences received affirmation and support from world leaders.

In fact, the facilitator model of leadership prevailed even at the world level of this church. The leaders considered themselves but servants, always acting in awareness of their accountability to the members and the local groups. Because of their responsible approach, an atmosphere of trust flourished, allowing them enough authority to carry out the necessary decisions for support of world activities.

Although most activities of this church proceeded with little movement of moneys, still the flow of funding, beyond what was used locally, went from the local groups to the world organization. Funds passed on in this way maintained broad support services, on too large a scale for a local group to surround.

At this level, as on the local level, decisions were accepted when a majority consensus could be reached as individual members voted their consciences. I saw that minority desires and dissenting views did mold, the majority vote as the Holy Spirit clarified the issues. Certain parameters were accepted as defining Adventist lifestyle throughout the world. These were respected, welcomed, and adopted by the local groups in the spirit of trust that prevailed.

Triumph out of tragedy

In one way, things progressed from bad to worse for this church. It went from illegal to search warrant to death decree. But in another way, triumph is the only word to describe the events. Although some frightened ones abandoned fellowship, innumerable others linked up every day.

One day God declared His affirmation, the universe agreed, and the church went home to live happily every after. **E**

Wilma Zalabak is a personal growth consultant living in Berrien Springs, Michigan

How Much Is He Worth?

C. Mervyn Maxwell

[“Worship” is the way we respond to what we think someone is worth.]

A young man stepped into a florist shop to get his girl a corsage for the high school banquet. His eyes roamed between the affordable daisies and the lavish orchids in the display case. He weighed his affections against his poverty. He was hoping to have some money left for his bike.

The florist helped him decide. “Well, son,” he asked after a while, “how much is she worth to you?”

As the lad walked out with an orchid, he could only wonder what had happened.

How Much Is God Worth?

How much is God worth to you? The question is relevant, because in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12 the final issue in the countdown of the great controversy is one of worship, whether we worship God and the Lamb or worship the beast. And “worship” is our response to what we think someone is worth.

In Revelation 4 and 5 we look through an open door at Cosmic Control, God’s throne in the heavenly sanctuary. And what do we hear? We hear songs, marvelous songs, happy songs. Angels by the thousand million join the elders and living creatures and sing another song, “Worthy is the Lamb

who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (ch. 5:12).

Worship Is Joyful Praise.

So how are we to worship God and the Lamb? First, by joyfully praising Them, giving Them thanks for who They are and what They’ve done—for what They’re worth.

God knows that when we praise Him for what He’s worth, wonderful things happen to us. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10).

In the last days of time we’ll need all the strength we can find to resist the pressures of the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the beast worshipers. Remembering joyfully that God made us and Jesus died for us will give us the faith we’ll need to go through anything.

“In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Praising God, joyfully giving thanks, is a custom, a way of life, a habit if you please that we ought to be observing now. Now, today, every day, when confronted with life’s ordinary tribulations we ought to be in training for the last days.

When the bills are too high, the boss too demanding, our spouse or parents seemingly unbearable, should we not remember that the God who made everything is still alive and that Jesus, who lives for us (Heb 7:25), once died for us? Shouldn’t we enjoy the privilege of remembering that God cares about us (1 Peter 5:7)? Shouldn’t we enjoy the happiness of applying Heaven’s power and love to this very moment and need?

Worship Is More than Praise.

This is worship, responding with joyful praise to what we think about God and the Lamb. And it’s good for us to do it; for the “joy of the Lord is your strength.”

So worship is joyful praise. But it is also something else; much else.

According to a well-known story, a Christian missionary, walking beside the Ganges one morning years ago, passed a Hindu mother sitting crosslegged near the river bank, cradling a baby girl in her arms and rocking back and forth. A handsome little boy played nearby.

As the missionary drew close, he noticed that the woman was in distress. Her baby was dying. Hinduism teaches that we live many lifetimes on earth, one lifetime after another. The woman feared that some sin, committed either in her own previous existence or in that of the child’s, had angered the gods and brought on the disease.

The missionary tried to comfort her, but she didn't know the Christian's God and couldn't understand.

Toward evening the missionary returned along the same path, the mother of the morning momentarily forgotten. He was startled to see her in the same place, in the same posture, still holding the baby girl and rocking back and forth. She was more weary now—and there was another difference. The little boy was gone.

In his mind the missionary guessed what had taken place. Unwilling to believe it, he greeted the woman and asked about her son.

"I offered him to the Ganges as a sacrifice to my gods," she replied without looking up.

So it was true! The missionary gasped and in his horror blurted out, "But mother, your baby girl is about to die and girls don't count for much in India. If you felt you had to sacrifice a child, why didn't you give her to the Ganges instead?"

For a moment the anguished woman fixed her eyes on the Christian. "Sir," she said scornfully, "my gods are worthy of my best."

Surely the Christian God is worthy of our best.

Surely the Lamb is worth everything to us. Far from expecting us to offer our children in human sacrifice, He sacrificed Himself in their behalf!

To know Him is to love him. To love Him is to devote our all to Him.

Worship Is Loving Obedience.

Said Jesus, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). When we love someone with all our hearts, we want to please him or her, make any sacrifice requested, do anything we're asked.

Jesus asks us to keep His commandments. The God-worshippers in Revelation keep the commandments.

What do the commandments say to us? They say to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39). Not to "bear false witness" (Ex 20:16). Not to lie to people or gossip about them. Not to mislead them in any way that might do them harm. To remember that God created everyone and Jesus died for everyone, and so we ought to treat everyone honestly.

Not to "commit adultery" (Ex 20:14). That is, not to engage in sexual activity with anyone outside of marriage—or even to think about doing so (see Matt 6:28). To remember that God made our spouses and died for them and wants us to be true to them and care for them genuinely.

Not to "covet" (Ex 20:17). This means that in an age of crass materialism we are not to be greedy but should make sure we always have something to share with the less fortunate; for God created and Jesus died for people who live in slums just as much as for the wealthiest of us.

The commandments also say to "love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Matt 22:37), and not to "take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex 20:7). How unfitting it is when we're irritated to demand that the God of love "damn" someone!

But not to take God's name in vain also means not to claim to be one of His followers without acting like one. How often Christians, by the way they behave, lead people to dislike our God!

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Ex 20:8).

This is what the heavenly choirs praise God for. "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God . . . for thou didst create all things" (Rev 4:11).

This is what the first angel's message urges us to do: "Worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water" (ch. 14:7). The first angel, who has himself sung the song a million times in the heavenly choirs, invites us to join in the happy song with the other angels and the elders and the living creatures.

The words of the first angel's invitation come right out of the Sabbath commandment, adapted a bit, like most of Revelation's quotations of the Old Testament.

God's Sabbath "according to the commandment" is the seventh day (see Luke 23:56) and is to be kept "holy."

The seventh-day Sabbath is a day of joyful remembrance of God's creative love and of Christ's redeeming love. It is a day for singing with the angels of Revelation 4 and 5. It is a day to renew our strength for the week ahead and for the time of trouble that lies ahead.

"If you love me, keep my commandments."

The great issue in the countdown of the great controversy is worship. Will we worship the beast, or will we worship God and the Lamb?

Worship is more than praise; it is also obedience to God's loving will. Worship is our response to what we think someone is worth.

Isn't our God worth our very best?

Daisies are pretty; but how much is God worth to you? **E**

Adapted from God Cares, 2:394-399 by the author.



Sermons from the Life and Teachings of Christ

Orley M. Berg

Next to the Bible itself as a source for sermons we have the Spirit of Prophecy books that help to illuminate the Bible. One called to preach cannot afford to be without these valuable volumes. Several of the books by Mrs White can be especially helpful in the preparation of sermons. Since our preaching should center above all else on Jesus our Saviour, *The Desire of Ages* is indispensable and should become a familiar book. The most important lessons we draw on to illustrate our sermons will be from His life and teachings.

Life of Jesus

Preaching directly from the life of Jesus can be a most enriching experience. A wide variety of approaches may be used. Consider for example a few of the characteristics of His life on earth.

1. His supreme dedication to His mission.

- The mission defined—to seek and to save.
- What He was willing to give up.
- What He was willing to endure.
- The ultimate price—the cross.

2. His amazing condescension, compassion, and utter selfless ministry.
3. His complete dependence upon the Father.

- Nights in prayer.
- “Not my will, but thine be done.”

4. His knowledge and use of the Word.

- Studied Scriptures from earliest youth.
- It was by the Word that He overcame temptation.
- He pointed to Himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies as the evidence of His Messiahship.
- He was the Word made flesh.
- The impartation of the Word is the impartation of the life of Christ.

5. Christ among the people.

- His attitude toward the most sinful.
- His attitude toward His enemies—those seeking His life, Judas, those who hanged Him on the cross.
- His attitude toward the Samaritans, heathen, lower class, publicans, and sinners.
- His attitude toward His disciples—so “slow of heart to believe,” so full of prejudice, so self-seeking, even in the shadow of the cross.

6. Christ’s concern for the church.

- Last months of ministry spent primarily in training disciples as the future leaders.
- His prayer for unity (John 17).
- No other plan than that the cause for which He laid down His life be carried on by those that would believe on His name. No other plan.

7. The supreme measure of His love.

- Gethsemane.
- Calvary.

These are only a few suggestions designed to stimulate the mind to the wide variety of experiences from which to draw in presenting Christ.

Each of the points above could be illustrated with numerous incidents from His life. The Gospels would be the principle source. *The Desire of Ages* gives the added insights of divine inspiration.

Parables of Jesus

Along with *The Desire of Ages* you will find *Christ’s Object Lessons* exceptionally useful in preparing sermons from the life and teachings of Christ. Here the great spiritual

lessons are drawn forth from the many parables that He gave.

Each of these parables could be developed into a good sermon. You may wish to choose three or four as a series to be presented on Sabbath mornings. With prayer meetings to plan for, such a series could be considerably longer.

Equally helpful as a supplement to *The Desire of Ages* is the little volume *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*. The Sermon on the Mount was the greatest sermon ever preached. Its lessons on practical Christianity are greatly needed today, and this volume is packed with practical sermon material drawn from the master Teacher.

In preaching from the life of Christ, or in drawing upon His life and ministry for illustrations, there are many further suggestions that come to mind. Take, for example, the miracles of Jesus.

These are also fine material for a prayer meeting series. Or consider the personal interviews of Jesus—with Nicodemus, or with the woman at Jacob's well.

There are also His public discourses. Mention has already been made of the Sermon on the Mount. With the enrichment of *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* and other helps, this too could develop into a prayer-meeting series.

The second most important public discourse of Christ was the one preached in Capernaum on the bread of life. Recorded in John 6, this sermon created the crisis in Galilee that brought His public ministry virtually to an end. (See *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 41).

It is easy to see that one could preach for many months on Jesus alone, using the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy as the major sources of information.

For still further suggestions simply check the Spirit of Prophecy *Index*. Pages 447 and 448 of volume 1 outline the events of Christ's earthly life. On page 458 the many characteristics of His life and ministry are listed, fifty in all.

Few are fully aware of the tremendous library of information that God has blessed us with in the writings of Ellen G. White, and what remarkable insight this divine commentary gives to the Scripture. ■

Orley M. Berg, former Associate Editor of Ministry Magazine, is presently living in North Fork, CA.

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Needs of New Members

Daniel E. Caslow

New members like life and action!

The newborn child brings life and activity into the household. The early apostolic church understood the needs of those new in the household of faith. Note the apostle Paul's interest in new converts: "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory." I Thessalonians 2:11, 12, NIV.

New believers need special care and help in the early stages of their experience if they are to grow and mature into serviceable Christians. Certain basic needs of a new Christian must be considered. This new life, this new love and this new spiritual energy will seek avenues of expression.

New Avenues of Spiritual Expression and Growth

New members are ruled from the heart by Jesus Christ. You will observe that these new members share in common at least five spiritual impulses:

1. The impulse to pray.
2. The impulse to worship.
3. The impulse to serve.
4. The impulse to share the new life in Christ with others.
5. The impulse to enjoy social fellowship.

Those in whose hearts Jesus Christ dwells by the Holy Spirit will want to follow the example of their Lord by giving expression to the same customs and desires:

1. An example of desire to pray: "He went up into the hills by himself to pray." Matthew 14:23, NIV.
2. An example of desire for Bible study and worship: "He went into the synagogue, ... and he stood up to read." Luke 4:16, NIV.
3. An example of desire to serve: "For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve." Mark 10:45, NIV.
4. An example of the desire to teach and witness about the new life "Then Jesus went around teaching." Mark 6:6, NIV.
5. This invitation is an example of the desire to enjoy social fellowship "Jesus and his disciples had also been invited." John 2:1, NIV.

No new member can live, grow, and develop without these avenues of spiritual expression and life. The pastor and older church members have a responsibility to provide these opportunities. In some areas of special need the local church will find it imperative to develop some new ministries for these new members. Keep your new disciples busy working and looking ahead. Help them to grow and mature into strong Christians!

What the Church Should Provide for New Members

Counsel is given that new believers in the early stages of their new experience will need special attention and help:

"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, and may grow to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. They must now be surrounded by the influences most favorable to spiritual growth."—*Evangelism*, p. 337.

"Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy in instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth's sake, and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to



which they have been accustomed. The church has a special responsibility laid upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the church neglect this duty, they will be unfaithful to the trust that God has given them.”—*Evangelism*, p.351.

“After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. The zeal of many ministers seems to fail as soon as a measure of success attends their efforts. They do not realize that these newly converted ones need nursing—watchful attention, help, and encouragement. These should not be left alone, a prey to Satan’s most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties, to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, to be visited and prayed with. These souls need the meat apportioned to every man in due season.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 68.

We have already noted the five basic spiritual needs of new members: *prayer, worship, service, witnessing, and fellowship*. In these quotations we see again how these five basic needs are to be recognized and supplied. Ten areas are identified as necessary components of an adequate nurturing and discipling program:

1. Nurturing
2. Watchful care
3. Guidance
4. Instruction
5. Knowledge
6. Encouragement
7. Education to duties
8. Visitation
9. Prayer
10. Spiritual food

Because this early period of New Member Ministry is so important, much more needs to be done in the future than has been done in the past to provide the proper spiritual care.

Discipling to a New Way of Life

In this early period of discipling, new patterns of living are to be established. During this time many adjustments will be made as one changes from the old life-style to the new life in Jesus Christ.

Just imagine the change! Put yourself for a moment in the place of a new member. So much is new! Old places, old friends, old amusements, and old habits are being exchanged for new and different experiences for the one who is a new creature in Christ.

The new member faces new situations, new concepts, and many new people. New ways of living, new ways of

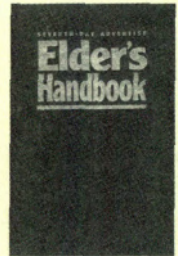
worship, and new friendships are being formed. Surely, the new member needs understanding, watchful caring, and love!

While trying to develop meaningful relationships with new people this new believer will appreciate helpful and caring attention. For the new believer, the road to enduring discipleship has begun.

Elders and church members will find that the planning, organizing, and conducting of a New Member Ministry will take time, but the compensation is measured in more permanent results. **E**

Adapted from the book *Discipling*, Daniel E. Caslow, Pacific Press Publishing Association,

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Good Listening: Indispensable Quality of a Good Elder

Cecil Coffey

Carefully cultivating the practice of good listening—really paying attention to what is being said, no matter who is saying it—is one of the best short cuts for a church leader who seeks to accumulate current information that is pertinent. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that persons in leadership positions often are poor listeners, largely for these reasons:

1. The person speaking to them is a subordinate.
2. They think of other thing while a person is talking.
3. They talk too much themselves.
4. They don't hear a person out.

Listening—hard work

Listening is hard physical work and it requires a great deal of mental effort. You don't sit back and listen to something important; you sit up and pay attention to what is being said.

Good listening must be cultivated

Many men stop their climb halfway up the ladder because somewhere along the way, they ceased to pay close attention to what they were hearing.

Leaders constantly come in contact with a great variety of intelligent, well-educated and experienced men and women in the professions. These are capable people, and a little time taken to draw them out and listen, will help the good listener to acquire pertinent information in capsule form. When you associate with people who are moving ahead, experimenting, brainstorming new ideas, you are helping yourself to move

ahead—if you listen to and absorb what they tell you. And likewise, your work responsibility will benefit. Incidentally, it has been demonstrated that a subordinate usually does his job much better when he has a superior who takes the time to really listen to his ideas and suggestions, and who encourages him to speak up any time he has something constructive to say.

Good listening is enhanced by the ability to ask leading questions

The answers we really want to hear come more often when we phrase questions indicating the direction we want the answer to take. But this is not wise. In some matters people don't like to be pinned down. A carefully phrased question gives them freedom of movement and usually will result in a helpful reply. "How do you feel about . . .?" is a good way to begin.

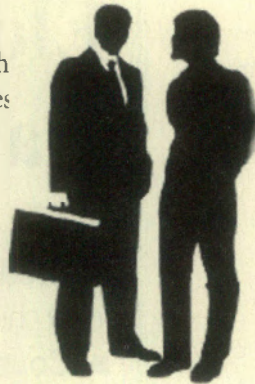
When a person is answering a question, particularly if he is giving a technical answer, you can encourage him by nodding occasionally to show that you are getting what he is saying, and by interrupting him at appropriate times when something is not quite clear. Don't let him continue on without interruption when he is completely above you, nor should you let him waste your time with long-winded talk that elementary is obvious. A bit of tactful interruption in either case may save the day.

There is no such thing as a professional listener

But some people must be expert listeners; their very work depends on it. Reporters and writers, psychologists and psychiatrists, and certainly ministers—those who must be adept at interviewing—all must be good listeners. Not only that, they must be able to gather and absorb a large amount of information in a comparatively short period of time.

This ability in a leader, developed and refined, no matter what rung of the ladder he is on, is not merely good business, it is good public relations. Many problems could be solved early if there were a bit more *listening* and a little less *telling*. A wag has put it this way: "You'll find plenty of profit in letting your ears do a lot of work before your mouth takes over." ■

Cecil Coffey formerly served in the Public Relations Department of the North Pacific Union.



10 ways to BUILD a Personal Relationship with God Through Bible Study

Whitford A. Shaw

Thirty-five years ago I began receiving love letters. I kept each of those love letters and have read and reread them again and again. Thirty years ago I married the writer of those letters. They have become my "treasured notes." Why is this so? Because those notes reveal the journey of our love relationship. For me, the Bible is God's love letter to help me develop and enhance a meaningful relationship with Him. As I read these letters daily, it should reaffirm my love for God in the same way as the letters from my wife help reaffirm my love for her. I have chosen to share with you ten ways to build a personal relationship with God through Bible Study.

1) Bible Study as Love for God

In the Bible, the book Song of Solomon passionately describes the love between a bride and bridegroom; "Thy love is better than wine" (1:2); "I am sick of love" (2:5); "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2:16). We need to love God with a passion, a love even stronger than the love between lovers. This love is unconditional. No matter what problems or trials we may have to endure in life, nothing will affect this genuine love we have for God. The entire Bible should become a treasured love letter from God upon which to build a personal relationship with Him.

2) Bible Study as Food or Bread

Without food, no one can survive. The Bible uses many metaphors to describe God's Word as "food." Jesus declares Himself to be the "Bread of life" (John 3:35). "As our physical life is sustained by food, so our spiritual life is sustained by the word of God.... We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of [comprehending] the thought which God has put in that verse for us" — *Desire Of Ages*, p.390, 391.

3) Bible Study as Water

The metaphor of water is used in the Bible for cleansing. Jesus says that we are "clean through the word" (John 15:3). Paul suggests that the word of God will "sanctify and cleanse His church" (Eph. 5:26).

4) Bible Study as Seed

In the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:18-33; Luke 8:5-8), Jesus explains that, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11).

The type and grade of soil each follower of Christ grows will determine the kind of relationship he or she will have with Christ. If our spiritual soil is fertile, then the seed of God's word will produce fruit in the life.

5) Bible Study as a Lamp or Light

Let no one doubt that this world is dark, not only with pollution and crime, but also with the darkness of sin. The word of God is the only lamp and light. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). That can dispel the darkness in our world and lead us into the bright light of God's world (Psalm 119:105).

6) Bible Study as a Mirror

James shows us how to build a personal relationship with Jesus by using the word of God as a mirror to show us our true selves and the need to model the perfect image of Christ (James 1:23-25).

7) Bible Study as a Hammer

Some of us have hardened hearts because of our pride and therefore only the word of God as a hammer can break our hearts of rock (Jer 23:29).

8) Bible Study as Fire

This shows one of the beneficial effects of Bible study. It is "as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer 20:9; Jer. 23:29). As this "fire" burns sin out of our lives, our experience with Christ will become purified.

9) Bible Study as a Sword

The word of God is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb.4:12), that cuts away the impurities of sin from our conscience.

10) Bible Study as Buried Treasure

There is a story from ancient Greece of the rich farmer who on his deathbed told his sons that his treasure was buried in the field and that to be rich, they should dig for it. When the father died, the sons carefully and thoroughly dug up the field, yet they found no buried treasure. In the spring they abandoned their search. With the fields so thoroughly plowed, the sons decided to plant corn. Ah! The father's plan worked. Because of the rich harvest of corn the sons became wealthy.

Conclusion

As followers of Christ we, too, are encouraged to search for buried treasure in the word of God (Matt. 13:44). You may ask, "How do I start?" Start with the book of Mark, which deals with the earliest record of the inspiring life of Jesus Christ.

Matthew is ideal for the parables of Jesus. Luke is known as the church historian and therefore his two books, Luke and Acts are helpful to understand the development of the early church. The book of John shares insight on the divinity of Christ.

Other treasures can be found by reading Bible biographies, themes, promises, events and prophecies or systematically digging for treasures in each book of the Bible. **E**

Whitford A. Shaw is pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lincoln, RI.



Prayers of the Psalmist

I. INTRODUCTION

"Amen and Amen" is the theme for this study of Psalm 119, as we look at one of the great prayers uttered by the psalmist. "Let each one who sits in council and in committee meetings write in his heart the words: I am working for time and for eternity. I must give an account to God for all the motives which prompt me to action. Let this be his motto. Let the prayer of the psalmist go up to God, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.'" – EGW., *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 418.

II. PRAYER AND POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

The RSV of the Bible says, "The Lord is my portion," while the KJV says, "Thou art my portion." Today's English Version translates it, "You are all I want, Lord." As the psalmist talked to God, recognizing that he belonged to God and that God was committed to him, he was spiritually enriched and felt better about himself.

III. PRAYER AND SINCERITY

"I entreated thy favour with my whole heart (v. 58a). Today's English Version translates it, "I ask you with all my heart; have mercy on me." Faith and sincerity are essential if we would pray effectively.

IV. PRAYER AND GOD'S PROMISES

"Be merciful unto me according to thy word" (v. 58b). The RSV translates it, "Be gracious to me according to thy promise." The psalmist was in the habit of claiming the promises of God when he prayed. This is a habit that we should form.

V. PRAYER AND REPENTANCE (v. 59).

Repentance is not just the beginning point of the life of faith. The life of faith is to be characterized by continuous repentance. The psalmist says: "I thought on my ways, and

turned my feet unto thy testimonies" (KJV). The NIV translates this, "I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes." A French translator puts it this way: "I have pondered over my ways and returned to your will."

When we pray, we are to search our hearts and let God help us so that we might turn from evil.

VI. PRAYER AND PRAISE TO GOD (v. 62).

Most of us think of thanking God and praising Him when prosperity comes. Some of us think of praising and thanking Him when we go to church. In this verse the psalmist tells us that midnight is a good time to arise and give thanks to the Lord because of all of His righteous judgments.

The psalmist suggests that when we have difficulty getting to sleep, it might be wise to thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us and praise Him for His goodness to us. This might help us to relax and get a better night's sleep.

VII. PRAYER AND THE RECOGNITION OF GOD'S LOVE

The psalmist was rejoicing over the fact that God's love was a never-failing, never-ending love. This is a truth that all of us need to recognize and respond to positively.

The closing line in this stanza of this poem closes with words of petition: "Teach me thy statutes."

To these prayers of the psalmist, let each of us say, "Amen and Amen."

VIII. ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever watched a bird sleeping on its perch and never falling off? How does it manage to do this?

The secret is the tendons of the bird's legs. They are so constructed that when the leg is bent at the knee, the claws contract and grip like a steel trap.

The claws refuse to let go until the knees are unbent again. The bended knee gives the bird the ability to hold on to his perch tightly.

From sleeping birds we can learn the secret of holding things which are most precious to us - honest, purity, thoughtfulness, honor, character. That secret is the knee bent in prayer, seeking to get a firmer grip on those values which make life worth living. When we hold firmly to God in prayer, we can rest assured He will hold tightly to us. **E**

Samuel Petrora from Madagascar.



Proclaiming Our Lord's Death

Sermon for Communion Service

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26 RSV).

I. INTRODUCTION

To properly observe the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, we need a spirit of solemnity and at the same time an attitude of joyful celebration. To memorialize an event as significant as the death of Jesus Christ should fill us with a spirit of awe and deepest reverence. To respond to the redemptive purpose in that crisis in the life of Christ should cause us to celebrate the greatness of God’s love for us.

Let us consider why we ought to proclaim the death of our Lord as a great redemptive act which has significance for all people.

II. THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST REVEALS THE AWFULNESS OF SIN (1 Cor. 15:3).

A. The Scriptures declare that our sins were involved in the death of Jesus Christ.. This may seem strange to a person of the twenty first century who hears this for the first time.

B. John the Baptist announced at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 RSV).

C. Peter, who had first resisted the thought that Jesus must die, later interpreted that death in terms of its substitutionary significance for us. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Peter 2:24-25 RSV).

III. THE DEATH OF JESUS REVEALS THE GREATNESS OF THE LOVE OF GOD FOR SINNERS (John 3:16).

Paul declared to the Roman believers, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8 RSV).

Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can we even begin to comprehend with all of the saints what is the breadth the length the height and depth of the love of God, which was revealed in Jesus Christ when He died upon the cross for our sins.

It was divine love that conceived the plan by which we could be saved.

It was divine love that brought it down to humanity.

It was divine love that wrought this salvation for us upon the cross.

As we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are proclaiming the greatness of God’s love for our own hearts and for the hearts of others.

IV. THE DEATH OF JESUS REVEALS THE VALUE OF A LOST SOUL

In the marketplace of the world the value of a person is oftentimes revealed by the price which an employer is willing to pay for his services. If you would really know the value of a soul in the eyes of God, you need to tarry at Calvary and see the great price that was paid for our redemption. Jesus came and gave His life as a ransom to redeem us from the slavery and the thralldom of sin. It is here that God placed a price tag upon the worth of the individual.

Do you have difficulty keeping a sense of personal value? Do you suffer from a sense of low self-esteem? Then go to Calvary and see the price that God placed upon you.

As we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim in the death of Jesus Christ the value of a lost soul.

V. IN PROCLAIMING THE DEATH OF JESUS, WE ANNOUNCE THE ONLY WAY OF SALVATION (Acts 4:12).

There was no other, good enough, to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the door of Heaven and let us in. Our Lord died because the wages of sin is death. Either we must die for our own sins or we must accept the perfect substitute that God has offered to us in Jesus Christ.

VI. CONCLUSION

As we partake of the Lord’s Supper, let us realize that in this proclamation of the death of Christ, we see the only way by which a lost and needy world can come to know the love of God and the way of salvation.

Let us determine out of love for our Lord and out of concern for those about us, that we will go forth to communicate that fact of God’s love, for those who have not yet come to experience it in Jesus Christ. **E**

Terry de la Costa from Paraguay.

Dealing with Children in the Congregation

Archa O. Dart

The other day an elder came to me and asked, "What can I do with the children in my church? They are so hard to control we cannot keep Sabbath school teachers very long. Yesterday one of the division leaders told me that she did not have one helper when it was time to open Sabbath school. The song director, the pianist, her assistant, and all the teachers were absent. She went next door to 'borrow' someone, but found to her dismay that the children in that division were entirely alone. They didn't have even a leader. The adults just refuse to have anything to do with the children's divisions because of the way the children act. What can a pastor do in a situation like this?"

Our Responsibility

First of all it is the responsibility of the church to see that the best leaders available are chosen for this important field of labor. Occasionally the nominating committee seemingly selects all the first-rate leaders to work for the seniors and then recommends what is left for the children. The ones who might "feel hurt if left out entirely" are asked to mold and train the very ones who are the most susceptible to influences good and bad. In some of our institutions the juniors are turned over entirely to college students. Good as many of these students are, dealing with some situations satisfactorily becomes an awkward problem when faculty members' children are involved. In the majority of places it would be best to have some senior person in charge of the junior division.

True, all first-rate workers are not necessarily ideal children's leaders. Each has his own talents. Some have a talent for music, some for writing, some for preaching, but those who can and will give their best for the children should not be encumbered with so many other duties that they must neglect the children.

The leader in the children's divisions must first of all love God and know Him as a personal Friend. He must enjoy

sweet communion with his Father in prayer and Bible study. Second, he must love children. Children know a hireling. They can detect when a man or a woman would rather be in the senior division than working for them, and they resent such people. They may not understand their own emotions, but their actions say very plainly to all such, "I don't like you either." The more the hireling resents the children the worse they behave. The worse they are the more he resents them, until a breaking point is reached. But one who loves the children can usually find a responsive chord somewhere. Third, the good leader will devote time to his work. He will be constantly improving. He will use the books, magazine articles, and other helps available and make his teaching interesting and instructive.

The good leader is there on time to greet the children as they arrive and to give them a hearty welcome. His program is full of interest and delight. There are no dull moments or long intervals between parts. The songs, stories, exercises, and drills are purposeful. The children must have a leader who will feed them the bread of heaven in an appetizing manner.

No matter how good a leader may be, he cannot do his best without proper equipment. He may talk long and earnestly about being quiet in church, but if the floor is built out of thunder board and the chair legs have brass cymbals under them, the lesson on quietness is soon forgotten. The children's room should be attractive. The decoration and furnishing should help to inspire awe and reverence. When the teacher tells the class that someday they will walk on the streets of gold with the canopy of heaven above them and wondrous beauties to behold in every direction, and they look down at the hard cement floor and glance at the torn wallpaper hanging from the ceiling, their concept of heaven may be distorted.

The Children's Responsibility

But in spite of all these necessary precautions, the children themselves must learn to take the responsibility of being reverent in the house of God. It is inexcusable to allow a child to imagine that if the program isn't to his liking he is at liberty to misbehave.

Some misinformed persons would lead us to believe that the conduct of the children is the full responsibility of the leaders, that if the children become restless, inattentive, or even downright rude the leaders are always to blame. The children do not go to church to be entertained, but to meet with their Lord.

Each child has a responsibility of his own. Suppose the leader is disorganized, the speaker dull, and the music poor, does that give the child the right to turn into a hoodlum? Whether it is Sabbath morning or Tuesday afternoon, whether adults are present or not, the church is a sacred place and must be so regarded.

A child, regardless of his age, who will not behave, will not listen to his teacher, or heed the counsel of his leader is "too little" to be alone. He should be taken to his mother (or father) and left with her until he is "old enough" to control himself. As a rule it is not advisable for the mother to leave her class and accompany the child to his class.

The child should sit with her in her division. He will get far more good out of the senior class than he will in his own if he is bent on mischief. Two or three Sabbaths ought to be long enough for the average child to understand that wickedness will not be tolerated in the house of God, but if it takes longer for some, the time should be extended until complete victory is won.

This extreme measure will not be necessary in the great majority of cases. All children are likely to forget at times where they are and just what is proper behavior. But a knowing look or a touch on the hand is all that is needed to remind them.

Some may need a private visit with the teacher in order to get at the root of the problem. It may be that sitting next to Henry is too great a temptation. After he sees the point, he may suggest himself that he would like to sit next to the teacher.

At first someone might answer quickly, "Yes, by all means. Let him wear anything he likes; just keep him coming to church." Another may take a little more time to think things through and declare, "Sport clothes should not be worn in church."

We go over the problem with the mother and determine whether the desire to wear jeans to church is his major ambition or whether to be a man is what he most desire.

Reverence Is the Answer

In our eagerness to have children attend church with us we should never give the impression that the child is free to act in any way he desires. God is dishonored, angels are grieved, and the saints are robbed of their blessing when divine worship is disturbed by babies crying, small children running up and down the aisles, and teenagers whispering and laughing.

The church is no place for uncontrolled children. The

way some children misbehave makes the whole church service nothing short of burlesque. This is a sin. Visitors will remember the rude acts of these children but will retain nothing of the sermon. Hungry souls came to be fed, but the bread of life was snatched away from them.

A spiritual leader cannot permit children or anyone to desecrate the house of God. What should he do? Should he interrupt his sermon and reprimand the offender? Should he say nothing until after the service and have a personal talk with the ones concerned? Should the church board delegate the deacons to keep order? These and other methods have been used with more or less success, but one thing is certain—if these children and their parents are to be saved they will have to learn to be reverent.

One preacher's soul was stirred within him when he moved to a new parish and found many rude children and indifferent parents in it. He preached a sermon on reverence. That did a great deal of good, but as can be expected some of those who needed the sermon the most were not there to hear it. He ordered a good supply of the Christian pamphlet about that issue and gave it to the parents who needed it. Within a few weeks an entire reformation had taken place in that church, and the children as well as the parents and other members were enjoying the services and were receiving the spiritual blessing God desired them to have.

Reverence is the highest form of courtesy known to man. Only intelligent human beings are capable of expressing their love in such a sublime manner.

Reverence enables one to do his best—
his movements will be the most graceful
his manner will be the most charming
his speech will be the most courteous
his singing will be the most melodious
his listening will be the most attentive
his thoughts will be the clearest
his prayer will be the most fervent
his meditations will be the most profound
his desires will be the loftiest
his faith will be the strongest
his devotion will be the sweetest
his love will be the most sublime.

Reverence opens the door into the sanctum, and prepares one to enter into the presence of God. **E**

Archa O. Dart, former Assistant Secretary of Home and Parent Education at the General Conference.

How To Conduct a Pleasant Prayer Meeting

Marvin Hunt

Successful prayer meetings are discussion groups where everyone feels important and wants to participate. They are very similar to small group discussions.

Detailed below is one way that works, but it is not the only way to conduct a meeting. Preparing to lead a group discussion for 30 minutes where you originate the material can be a very big task. But there are ways to be very successful without a lot of effort. Lively discussions come from topics that touch people's everyday lives. If you don't make it something that can be used personally, it will most likely be dry and boring.

Using Ellen G. White Devotionals

I am a big fan of collecting and using old devotionals, especially those compiled from the writings of Ellen G. White. They have a beauty and authority about them that make them a natural source of uplifting discussion. As an example I have printed a sample from a 1988 devotional along with my study notes for the discussion. You'll see that Mrs. White's writings lead to an easy to follow, natural flow of topics that make for a spirited and uplifting prayer meeting discussion, all of which is done without endless hours of preparation.

Elements for a one-hour Prayer Meeting:

1. Song service

2. Sharing time
 - a. Start with positive things
 - b. Religious and secular
 - c. Conclude with concerns
3. Prayer Circle
4. Study topic of the evening
5. Closing prayer

The Greatest Object

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"Union is strength, and the Lord desires that this truth should be ever revealed in all the members of the body of Christ. All are to be united in love, in meekness, in lowliness of mind.

"The church is a Christian society formed for the members composing it, that each member may enjoy the assistance of all the graces and talents of the other members, and the working of God upon them, according to their several gifts and abilities. The church is united in the holy bonds of fellowship in order that each member may be benefited by the influence of the other. All are to bind themselves to the covenant of love and harmony. The Christian principles and graces of the whole society of believers are to gather strength and force in harmonious action

"The covenant of agreement in church membership is that each member would walk in the footsteps of Christ, that all will take His yoke upon them, and learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart. Doing this, 'Ye shall,' saith the dear Saviour, 'find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:29,30).

"Those who wear Christ's yoke will draw together. They will cultivate sympathy and forbearance, and in holy emulation will strive to show to others the tender sympathy and love of which they feel such great need themselves. He who is weak and inexperienced, although he is weak, may be strengthened by the more hopeful and by those of mature experience. Although the least of all, he is a stone that must shine in the building. He is a vital member of the organized body, united to Christ, the living head, and through Christ identified with all the excellencies of Christ's character so that the Saviour is not ashamed to call him brother.... A church, separate and distinct from the world, is in the estimation of heaven the greatest object in all the earth The church is to be as God designed it should be, a representative of God's family in another world."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p.1517.

The Study Outline: Based on the Reading of *Lift Him Up* by Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 1988, p. 295

Note: I put a number in a circle beside the main points in the text to coordinate with my notes. If you prefer not to write in the devotional book, make an enlarged copy and mark it up. However, I've found it to be helpful to make a permanent note in the book. For future reference I write in the date and place where I presented the material along with notes in the margins.

(Point #1) What is Union?

- A. Does this mean we all have to be in lock-step?
 - 1. Is there no room for individuals?
 - 2. What about 1 Corinthians 12:12-27: "For the body is not one member but many"?

(Point #2) United in love?

- A. Discuss and try to understand united in love
 - 1. Expand on what meekness may mean
 - 2. Try to define lowliness of mind
 - a. Is this a term that is out of date?
 - b. To think in low terms today is not a compliment. When we say that was a low blow we aren't praising the person.

(Point #3) Organized for the Purpose of:

- A. Discuss what it means to combine and diffuse influence.
 - 1. Does this mean only going door to door in groups?
 - 2. Are there ways that the elderly and infirm can participate?
 - 3. Does this include prayer, offerings and donations of a person's valuable time?

(Point #4) The Church is a Christian society

- A. Begin by defining what a "society" may be in the opinion of those present.
- B. Move on and let the following text define what Mrs. White meant.
 - 1. It is something pleasant that
 - a. "each member may-enjoy"
 - 2. It has a useful purpose in sharing:
 - a. "all graces"
 - b. "and talents"

(Point #5) "...the holy bonds of fellowship..."

- A. Point out that the church is made up of volunteers
- B. The volunteers are to be a "spectacle" to the world.

- 1. What did "spectacle" mean to the writer?
- 2. What does it mean today?
- 3. How would we say it today?

(Point #6) Instructions on how the church is to work together

- A. Define the following words and phrases from the final paragraph.
 - 1. Cultivate sympathy
 - 2. Cultivate forbearance
 - 3. He who is weak...

(Point #7) The Conclusion

- A. "The Church is to be as God designed it should be, a representative of God's family in another world."
- B. Final closing thoughts, rereading of the Scripture text and summation by the presenter.

Devotional Sources

Some of the Ellen G. White devotionals used are: *My Life Today*, 1952; *Sons and Daughters of God*, 1955; *That I May Know Him*, 1964; *In Heavenly Places*, 1967; *This Day With God*, 1979; *Reflecting Christ*, 1985; *Lift Him Up*, 1988. **E**

Martin Hunt, pastor and writer, lives in Georgia.

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REVITALIZING LETHARGIC LITURGY

Even within the confines of a traditional service, and without adjusting the rubrics at all, we can introduce changes that can revitalize the tone and tenor of the service.

John Killinger

London theater audiences have been entranced for some time by Peter Shaffer's *Lettice and Lovage*, a comedy starring Maggie Smith. Smith plays the part of a guide in a rather unexciting National Trust home. Bored with the job, she begins spicing up her presentations with highly imaginative concoctions about the families that lived there and the royalty who visited them. One fanciful story involves Queen Elizabeth I, who is said to have tripped on the stairway and been caught in midair by her host, who was subsequently knighted for his deft act!

I couldn't help thinking, the day after seeing the play, what the woman played by Maggie Smith could do for some of the unimaginative worship services I've sat through or even led. She'd spark a one-woman liturgical renaissance.

Having only recently moved back to an academic setting after several years in the pastorate, I'm quite aware that we ministers are not that free to invent our material out of whole cloth or to introduce it without general consent among our congregations. There is, nevertheless, a great deal we can do to enliven the worship offered up on most Saturdays by our members.

For big changes, such as placing the offering after the sermon (where by both theology and tradition it properly ought to be, if I may say so), it is undoubtedly best to work through a worship committee and perhaps even obtain a mandate of the congregation. I've known pastors who shortened their tenure by acting presumptuously in shaping or reordering the liturgy, even though the congregation appeared to be largely apathetic about it before the "tampering" took place.

But even within the confines of a traditional service, and without adjusting the rubrics at all, we can introduce changes that can revitalize the tone and tenor of the service. To do so

doesn't require taking the liberties assumed by the guide in *Lettice and Lovage*. It merely requires our thoughtful devotion to the details of the liturgy.

Prayers that Evidence Thought

Consider the prayers, which interlace the service, set a mood for the worshippers, and help move everything along from the time the congregation gathers until it is ready to be dispersed again into the world.

It's a temptation to regard prayers as mere conversational interludes during which we can voice whatever we happen to be feeling at the moment. It's not uncommon to stand and offer prayers that, genuine as they are, are filled with rather mindless phrases and impressions spoken in the language of cliché.

I once heard a man comment of his minister's casual attitude toward praying. He said, "My wife even makes a list before she goes to the grocery store. You'd think anyone would have the decency to think through what he wanted to say to God!"

George A. Buttrick, the great New York preacher and chaplain to Harvard University, said on many occasions that if he had time before a service to prepare only the prayers or his sermon, he would choose every time to spend it on the prayers. He knew that accuracy of thought and phrasing, together with a prayerful spirit, brings a sense of reality to worship and helps bind worshippers to the Spirit of God.

Stanley Mooneyham, the former president of World Vision, called me once to say that he and his wife, Nancy, would like to visit our early worship service on a particular Saturday. Delighted to hear that, I asked Stan if he would offer the morning prayer for us. When he consented, I said, "Now, Stan, the early service is rather small. We have it in the chapel, and there won't be many people." I didn't want him to expect too much. But the size of the crowd mattered not at all to Stan.

When he got up to pray, he spoke one of the most beautifully composed prayers I have ever heard. It was in several parts, each part concerned with a separate area of our praying, and one part flowed to another with the grace of a sonnet by Shakespeare or a composition by Mozart.

Afterward, people wanted copies of the prayer because

**A WORSHIP
EXPERIENCE THAT
DOES NOT LEAD TO
SERVICE HAS LOST
ITS REAL OBJECTIVE.**

J.S. Stuart

it expressed so well what they wanted to say to God.

I'm convinced that if we considered more carefully what to say in our public prayers, the prayers alone would raise the spiritual temperature of our congregations by fifteen degrees. Whatever is worth saying publicly to God is worth preparation and careful meditation.

Affirmations that Reflect Current Faith

Affirmations of faith? Deadly, most people think.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty..." Good theology, but heavy. And dull, when you repeat it meeting after meeting.

But suppose I rewrite the affirmation occasionally, substituting for the traditional language some thoughts for our times. Here's one from my book *Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise: Prayers and Affirmations for Christian Worship*. I composed it for a worship service in the springtime:

I believe in the beauty of spring that is known in windy skies, blossoming fruit trees, waving jonquils, and sweet-smelling grass.

I believe in the warmth of a friendship that is communicated in gentle eyes, a loving smile, a fond touch of the hand, and an arm laid on the shoulder.

I believe in the power of Christ, whose presence is felt in every season of the year but especially now, when life wells up everywhere and folks feel a quickening in their souls because it is spring and summer is on the way.

I believe Christ is responsible for both spring and friendship, and that the excitement I feel today is related to the fact that he was dead but is alive forevermore, not only in our memories but in the truest kind of actuality.

I worship him by coming here, and say, "Hallelujah! Christ is alive and in this very place!"

Affirmations need to affirm a faith that is current. While the ancient affirmations link us with the sound theology of the past, our new creations can tie that theology to the thought and concerns of the people in our pews. When our people can say, *Yes! That's what I believe!* we have helped enliven their worship.

Scripture Readings that Live

The reading of Scripture takes place in every church on Sabbath morning. It's a cut-and-dried event, too brief to worry much about in the overall planning of the service.

Or so goes the conventional wisdom.

I still haven't forgotten the confession of a layman in a

church I attended years ago. "I get along very well in the worship service," he said, "until the preacher gets up to read the Bible. Then something happens to me. It's like a curtain drops in my mind, and I shut off. I guess I'm just a contemporary man, and it's an ancient book, and I have a hard time listening to it."

There may not be a lot of those "contemporary" people out there in my congregation, but I always worry about them. What if they shut off and miss the Word of the Lord? How can we help people to listen to the Scripture reading? One way is by being sure it is read as clearly and winsomely as possible, so that the power of the words breaks through.

A few months ago, the actor Arthur Petersen was presenting his one-man show about Robert Frost, *Fire and Ice*, in the Commonwealth Theater. Impressed by Petersen's personal piety as well as his dramatic skills, I invited him to read from the Old and New Testaments at a morning worship service. It was a treat beyond anything I had imagined.

Familiar texts leapt to life, danced, turned, twisted, revealed aspects of themselves I had never seen, and then concluded like a graceful ballerina finishing her act and bowing low before the audience. No one breathed. We were torn between worship and applause. We had heard the Word!

As one untrained in drama, I probably shouldn't attempt to give dramatic readings of the Scriptures; that would be posturing, and it would call attention to the wrong things. But I can be better prepared to read than I sometimes am. One trick is to print the texts in orator type so I can see them easily; another is to familiarize myself with those texts so completely that I'm able to communicate them without excessive strain or fumbling.

I worshiped for several years with a church that used lay people to read the lections each Saturday, rotating them so that each person on a team of a dozen readers read only a few times a year. The readers were given simple instructions by a local speech professor and were coached individually when they sought assistance. The variety kept the readings interesting, and, perhaps more important, reminded us Saturday by Saturday that the Bible belongs to the people and is not the exclusive domain of the clergy.

In the desiderata department, I have always wished for a choral reading group in my church that frequently would read

THE CHOIR LEADER IS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE PASTOR OR ELDERS OF THE CHURCH, AND DOES NOT WORK INDEPENDENTLY OF THEM

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the Scriptures on Sabbath morning. I have heard such groups occasionally at conferences and in college or university chapels and found them extraordinarily powerful. By alternating parts between soloists, small groups, and the entire choir, they are able to move almost instantly from a whisper to a shout, from music to cacophony, from thunder to moonlight, and the effect is spine-tingling.

No one yawns when the Scriptures are read with the skill they deserve.

Preaching that Captivates

The sermon is probably more exclusively the business of the preacher than any other part of the liturgy, and, because it normally requires more time than almost anything else, it offers us the greatest opportunity to invest the service with power and vitality. Granted that not many of us are stem-winders, what can we do to improve the contribution of the sermon to the worship as a whole?

I suggest we begin by thinking in terms of renewal. No, not renewal but renewal: getting the news back into preaching.

As I visit churches and ministers, I find some preachers tend, because of their great familiarity with the message of Christianity, to assume everybody in their congregations has heard the message. Therefore they bring little evangelistic fervor to their preaching and fall into the rut of what I call "footnote preaching," dealing with secondary concerns such as managing personal loneliness, coping with grief, and leading a moral life in an immoral society.

The latter are important, but they are important only after people have met Christ and decided to make him the center of their lives. If Christ is not exalted regularly in our sermons, they soon become moralistic homilies, not words to raise the dead.

Worse, congregations begin to think of themselves as sophisticated or uptown and actually start to deplore too much emphasis on Christ and the Spirit at work among them. They may even sneer at a new minister who talks too much about Jesus and not enough about the cultural trends or sociological musings they have been accustomed to hearing.

When this happens, churches die from a lack of spiritual oxygen. The only thing to save them is a renewal in preaching. We have to remember Who it is we preach about.

Delivery is also important. Even sermons focusing on Jesus can be dull and routine unless I take care to make them otherwise. My experience of Christ must be continually fresh, and my expression of that experience faithful and effervescent, if my preaching is to be effective.

"Seeing" truth — perceiving it with the right side of the brain — is especially important. And, when we've learned to do this, we'll soon be seeing Christ everywhere — in books, plays, art galleries, newspapers, and all our personal encounters. Most good stewards of the mysteries of life keep a notebook or journal of their sightings, so that they can recollect them months and years afterward and then distill their essence into usable form — in the minister's case, into sermons.

Everywhere I go, I urge preachers to develop the habit of writing thoughts, observations, anecdotes, and experiences in notebooks; and, just as faithfully, I hear later from these preachers, "I'm so glad I began keeping a notebook. Now I never run out of preaching material. My sermons are fresher than they've been in years!"

Some ministers find that even varying the form of the sermon improves their communications skills. They cast their thoughts into dialogue sermons, dramatic monologues, sermon epistles to particular persons or biblical characters, imaginary newscasts, story sermons, and even musical presentations.

The important thing, I've found, is to see the sermon in its true perspective. It is not a twenty-minute space in the liturgy merely to be filled with my talk. It is an opportunity within the orchestration of the divine service to speak for Christ in the most imaginative, communicative way possible, so that the Holy Spirit finds the situation combustible and can truly ignite the hearts of the congregation.

Music that Motivates

To this point, I've said nothing about music, although it doubtless plays one of the most critical roles in helping the congregation worship with enthusiasm. The reason I've waited is that in most instances it is the part of the service least under our control. Many musical directors or ministers of music have rather independent feelings about the choice and disposition of church music and tend to be somewhat jealous of their prerogatives.

But even in situations in which we have no direct control over the music, we often hold considerable power of

FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS AND THE FOUR BEASTS FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPPED GOD THAT SAT ON THE THRONE, SAYING, AMEN; ALLELUIA."

Rev. 19:4

negotiation within the framework of relationships and can make suggestions regarding the kind of musical selections that will best serve the purposes we envision.

I've served all kinds of churches, from small, country churches where the pianist couldn't play hymns with more than one flat or sharp, to large, city churches with fabulous organs and paid choir personnel. What I have learned about church music is that the majority of people in any congregation, whether in the country or the city, prefer music that is (1) singable by even the untalented people, (2) simply and memorably worded, (3) in English, and (4) charged with deep and true emotion.

I have two personal beefs about the music in most of the worship services I attend (including my own).

One is that it is too heavily weighted by old hymns and classical anthems, giving the liturgy an air of mustiness and antiquity.

The other is that the contemporary hymns and anthems are often poorly written and scored, so that they amount to what conductor Roger Shaw calls "holy slush."

The solution? Work. We have to dig out the best of contemporary music and retain the classic works of old. We have to plan the musical fare with the care we do our sermons or prayers.

If it is true that more doctrine is learned from hymns than from sermons, and that Christianity sings, not speaks, its way in the world, then we should spare no effort to insure that the music with which we worship God is the finest music of our time.

A Tone that Invites

Finally, there is the matter of the tone of the service — its temper and personality — which is largely in our hands.

Is the service positive in its outlook? Then it is probably because we exude these characteristics. Is it predictable and plodding? Again, it is probably an extension of the worship leader's attitude.

Take a simple item like the announcements. They can be regarded as a necessary evil to be dispatched with as swift a nod as possible. Or, one may evidence no particular attitude toward them and merely muddle through them.

I prefer to look brightly upon announcements as an expression of the theology of Incarnation, and deliver them

with a kind of lightness and happiness that reproduces such an atmosphere in the congregation. I suspect my people prefer to receive the announcements in such a way. Even the lowly benediction is significant for the way it continues and climaxes the mood of a good service. The easy way out is to intone a few words that I memorized years ago when I began ministry: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. . ." It can become mindless for both the benedictor and the benedictes. I like the story of the young minister who spent so much time talking baby talk to the recent addition to his family that he

lapsed one worship morning service and said, "Now may gracey, mercy, and peacey..."

But, rather than some vapid verbalization, wouldn't it be richer and more meaningful for the congregation to be dismissed with a blessing that thoughtfully draws to a conclusion of the service they have been offering to God that particular day, something that forms a natural bridge between the themes they actually have dealt with and the life they are going out to live in the world? If the service has centered on the seasons of life, for example, why not a benediction that concludes:

Now may God, who has ordained the seasons of the year and the seasons of life as well, grant you serenity and joy in this season of your soul, and life everlasting in the world to come, through Jesus who died

and lives forevermore. Amen.

Or if the service was a Communion service, why not words of parting that say: Now may God, who has fed us at His table with the gift of His own Son, continue to feed us through this week on His Holy Spirit, that we may be led into every pathway intended for us and possess the joy that has been promised us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

These aren't major changes of the structure of worship; they're minor alterations with major significance. If worshiping God is the greatest joy and privilege we have, and I believe it is, then we'll want to craft every service of worship like a great artist's masterpiece: grand and beautiful in conception, and faithful in the execution of even the smallest details. **E**

John Killinger writes from Alabama.

LEADERS SHOULD WORK IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH MINISTERS OR CHURCH ELDERS IN ORDER THAT THE SPECIAL MUSICAL SELECTIONS HARMONIZE WITH THE THEME OF THE SERMON.

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THE PLACE AND IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL WORK

Itanel Ferraz

GOD expects personal service from every one to whom He has entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time.—*Testimonies* vol. 9, p. 50. (Italics supplied.)

In view of this statement, it is well to seek an understanding of what is meant by the term “personal service.” Is it possible to possess the qualifications that tend to success as a Bible instructor and yet fail to be a successful personal worker? What is the meaning of “personal service”? Is not all Christian endeavor personal work?

Personal work may be defined as the art of reaching the heart. The Bible instructor may possess a pleasing personality; his teaching may be gripping, clear, and logical; he may find ready access to homes and be cordially welcomed; but has he mastered the art of dealing with the soul in a personal, heart-to-heart manner?

“The Lord desires that His word of grace shall be brought home to every soul. To a great degree this must be accomplished by personal labor. This was Christ’s method. His work was largely made up of personal interviews. He had a faithful regard for the one-soul audience. Through that one soul the message was often extended to thousands.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 229.

There is no substitute for the personal touch. This was Christ’s preferred method. He spent much time in personal interviews with the people with whom He mingled day by day.

Take, for example, that interview with the one lone Samaritan woman, who in the pursuance of her daily tasks came with her pitcher to the well for water in the heat of the day. The Master, weary and thirsty, was resting by the well that noontide hour. He had made no appointment for a sermon or an interview; He was not “on duty” in the sense of preaching or teaching; but every moment of His life was the spontaneous expression of personal appeal to the soul. How simple the approach to the prejudiced heart of this sinful Samaritan woman—the common request of a wayworn traveler for a drink. Her impertinent reply was met by such words as she had never heard before, revealing her great need as a sinner, and the gracious offer of the water of life that would forever quench spiritual thirst. The words of the Master touched the innermost recesses of a storm-tossed soul and led to discovery of personal need. Then followed a yielding obedience and an immediate search for those nearest of kin, that they might share in the wonderful experience of salvation. That is personal work. That is the personal service God expects from everyone who has a knowledge of truth.

The apostle Paul was a personal worker. In the presence of King Agrippa, as recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts, he testifies to his own conversion in a very convincing way and makes this the point of contact for a personal appeal to the king. Paul knew something of the life of King Agrippa and the great need of his soul, and he watched for the opportunity to bring truth home to the heart—not as mere words to the ears. We find Paul, under the Holy Spirit’s direction, appealing to the king at the psychological moment—“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?” Without waiting for a reply, he said, “I know that thou believest.” Conviction fastened itself upon Agrippa’s soul, and he replied, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). That is an example of personal work in a public way. Usually this method of service applies to the one-soul audience; but the essential point is for the individual to be so entirely under the control of the Holy Spirit that the heart,

rather than the mind is convicted.

Personal work should begin in the home, in behalf of any member of the family who has not found Christ. Husband, wife, father, mother, son or daughter, neighbor, friend, employer, employee—all are candidates for personal work. We are told: “There are many who need the ministrations of loving

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Christian hearts. Many have gone down to ruin who might have been saved if their neighbors, common men and women, had put forth personal effort for them. Many are waiting to be personally addressed. In the very family, the neighborhood, the town, where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ. If we are Christians, this work will be our delight. No sooner is one converted than there is born within him a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus. The saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 141.

We must find the needy just where they are—in the church, at the family altar, in the field, the barn, the shop, or in the office. We must pray that God will help us to know when and where to begin. Jesus personally called His disciples while they were about their daily work. Four of the disciples left their fishing nets in response to His personal appeal. Matthew was called from a lucrative business profession. John the Evangelist was a diligent observer of Christ’s preferred method of winning souls, and records the experience in which Jesus made direct personal contacts with individuals in eighteen to twenty cases.

Jesus never lost sight of the individual. We think of that unsurpassed personal appeal to Nicodemus, as found in John 3:16. The proud Pharisee never forgot the conversation with the Master that night, but he did not fully surrender until about three years later. Although Nicodemus procrastinated so long, Jesus never abandoned hope for him. Just so the personal worker for souls must never give up but must hold on by the cords of faith and love. To the vacillating Peter, Christ said, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:32). It was this steadfast personal interest and love for Peter that held him and led him into genuine conversion. So the personal worker must ever manifest firm unyielding faith, and prevail in prayer. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Let your prospects know that you are praying for them. Help them to find God in prayer. If he does not know how to pray, explain that even two or three sentences expressing the deep desire of their heart will be heard and answered. Prayer is the key to unlock Heaven’s storehouse for every time of need.

While engaged in Ingathering early one morning, a

solicitor came to the rear door of a grocery store through which customers were coming and going. Stepping inside the store, he approached the proprietor at a moment when he was not engaged, and explained his mission. The response was unexpected, for the grocer flew into a rage, declaring that he would have nothing to do with such work or with the churches in general. He referred to his wife, who, he said, had been a wonderful Christian but was now dead. The solicitor appealed to the man to be ready to meet his wife when Jesus comes. As a quiet personal appeal was made for him to

surrender to Christ, tears began to stream down the man’s face, and his entire attitude changed. A silent prayer at the moment brought the assistance needed. God is ready to help in every emergency.

The enemy of truth and righteousness ever stands ready to hinder the worker for God, and one of his principal weapons is the excuse, “I am not qualified.” Just so long as he can bind the child of God by the cords of procrastination or excuse, his purpose to thwart God’s plans will be met. Let all be on guard, and through prayer and consecration break the fetters of hesitancy and doubt. God is counting on His children. Dare any disappoint Him? “God will not complete His work without human agencies.”—*Christian Service*, p. 9. A sense of our unworthiness to be a colaborer with God in the plan of salvation may almost overwhelm us, and our first reaction to the call to service may be like that of the prophet Isaiah, who exclaimed, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I

dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). It is true that Isaiah was called to do a very great and difficult work, in comparison to which the call to laymen to engage in house-to-house personal Bible evangelism may seem small; but the call is from the same source, and the response must be made in the same way. It was when Isaiah’s lips were touched with a living coal from off the altar that he had the courage to say, “Here am I; send me.” **E**

Itanel Ferraz is the former Personal Ministry director of South American Division living presently in Sao Paulo, Brazil.



Leading the Silent Sheep

A. W. Griffith

Among the special classes of people who are difficult to reach by ordinary methods are the deaf who use sign language. We are not here concerned with those who are hard-of-hearing, persons who are able with hearing aids and by lip reading to lead a more or less normal life, but with those whose hearing loss has been such as to confine them to the sign language as their normal means of conversation.

Sign language offers them the security of understanding and being understood. But naturally, since the hearing world knows nothing of that language, it tends to draw them together and isolate them. They seem to live in a different world.

To many elders, the problem of getting inside that world seems to require too much effort, so little is done to give them God's message for the hour. They are wandering, silent sheep. Among them are many truehearted children of God, earnestly desiring to know His will, yet unable to comprehend His Word, for most of them have a very limited vocabulary.

I have found that the first step in winning these people is to gain their confidence. That is why most Adventist deaf trace their conversion to some friend or relative. The next step is to interest them in one of our free Bible correspondence courses.

This should be done at the first convenient opportunity, when the conversation comes to Bible themes. Even if you are not well acquainted with the deaf person you may find a way to sign him or her up for a course. For example, let us

say you are a *colporteur* or lay worker distributing handbills and literature. The person at the door indicates by word or gesture that he or she is deaf. You do not waste time mouthing simple words so that the person may read your lips. You take out your pen and write on paper something like this: "This year, all churches are putting on a drive to get people to read the Holy Bible more. I am one of many workers who are bringing information regarding a wonderful *free* Bible study course by mail to all who wish it. We want the deaf to have the same chance as those who hear. Just fill out this card. There is no cost whatever, and you will get a beautiful certificate when you finish, and best of all, you will know your Bible much better."

If an enrollment is obtained, the caller should suggest that perhaps there are friends who would like to take the course too. Put these names and addresses in a special address book. The enrollment card should not be left but should be mailed by the worker himself, after copying the name and address in his book.

The Sabbath is the great test with the deaf as with other people, so as soon as the enrollee has sent in the sheet on this subject, a qualified Bible instructor should make a visit. Unless the worker has learned the manual (hand) alphabet well, and knows some signs, the talk will have to be on a pad. Notice the language and words used. Do not use words that you are not sure will be understood. Never refer to the deaf as the "deaf and dumb." To many deaf that means "deaf and stupid." It is important to understand the attitudes that prevail among the deaf and thus avoid mistakes that might offend.

1. They have an intense desire to be looked upon as capable persons, and do not appreciate expressions of pity.
2. They deeply resent any suggestion that it is unsafe for them to drive cars, or that they should not marry or have families. The question regularly asked of deaf parents: "Can your children hear?" nettles them because it implies that the questioner thinks children of deaf parents are usually deaf. (Only a small percentage of deaf children are born of deaf parents.)
3. Realizing that they might misunderstand, or be misled by someone better educated than they are, who may have designs on them, many deaf are suspicious and distrustful at first, and this attitude may prevail for some time, so patience is needed. **E**

A. W. Griffith wrote this article when pastoring the church of Battle Ground.



Christ Our Only Hope

Ellen G. White

Before the foundations of the world were laid, Christ, the Only Begotten of God, pledged Himself to become the Redeemer of the human race, should Adam sin. Adam fell, and He who was partaker of the Father's glory before the world was, laid aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and stepped down from His high authority to become a Babe in Bethlehem, that by passing over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell, He might redeem fallen human beings. He subjected Himself to all the temptations that the enemy brings against men and women; and all the assaults of Satan could not make Him swerve from His loyalty to the Father. By living a sinless life He testified that every son and daughter of Adam can resist the temptations of the one who first brought sin into the world.

Christ brought men and women power to overcome. He came to this world in human form, to live a man amongst men. He assumed the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried. In His humanity He was a partaker of the divine nature. In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world—the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race.

Christ came in human form to show the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds and of the fallen world that ample provision has been made to enable human beings to live in loyalty to their Creator. He endured the temptations that Satan was permitted to bring against Him, and resisted all his assaults. He was sorely afflicted, and hard beset, but God did not leave Him without recognition. When He was baptized of John in Jordan, as He came up out of the water, the Spirit of God, like a dove of burnished gold, descended upon Him, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). It was directly after this announcement that Christ was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Mark says: "Immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts" (Mark 1:12, 13). "And in those days he did not eat" (Luke 4:2).

Meeting Temptation

When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted, He was led by the Spirit of God. He did not invite temptation. He went to the wilderness to be alone, to contemplate His mission and work. By fasting and prayer He was to brace Himself for the bloodstained path He was to travel. How should He begin His work of freeing the captives held in torment by the destroyer? During His long fast, the whole plan of His work as man's deliverer was laid out before Him.

When Jesus entered the wilderness He was shut in by the Father's glory. Absorbed in communion with God, He was lifted above human weakness. But the glory departed, and He was left to battle with temptation. It was pressing upon Him every moment. His human nature shrank from the conflict that awaited Him. For forty days He fasted and prayed. Weak and emaciated from hunger, worn and haggard with mental agony, "his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14). Now was Satan's opportunity. Now he supposed that he could overcome Christ.

There came to the Saviour, as if in answer to His prayers, one in the guise of an angel of light, and this was the message that he bore: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Matt. 4:3).

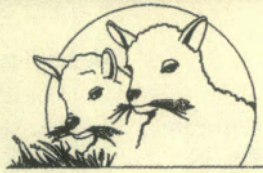
Jesus met Satan with the words, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). In every temptation the weapon of His warfare was the Word of God. Satan demanded of Christ a miracle as a sign of His divinity. But that which is greater than all miracles, a firm reliance upon a "Thus saith the Lord" was a sign that could not be controverted. So long as Christ held to this position, the tempter could gain no advantage.

A familiarity with the Word of God is our only hope. Those who diligently search the Scriptures will not accept Satan's delusions as the truth of God. No one need be overcome by the speculations presented by the enemy of God and of Christ. We are not to speculate regarding points upon which the Word of God is silent. All that is necessary for our salvation is given in the Word of God. Day by day we are to make the Bible the man of our counsel.

From all eternity Christ was united with the Father, and when He took upon Himself human nature, He was still one with God. He is the link that unites God with humanity. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. 2:14). Only through Him can we become children of God. To all who believe on Him, He gives power to become the sons of God. Thus the heart becomes the temple of the living God. It is because Christ took human nature that men and women become partakers of the divine nature. He brings life and immortality to light through the gospel. **E**

Ellen G. White, the Lord's Messenger and one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Child Dedication



Margarida F. Sarli

“And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.” Mark 10: 13-16.

This incident is recorded in the Scriptures by three of the evangelists. This is evidence of the great impression that it must have made upon the early Christians and of the importance that they attached to it.

To many persons children are “only children.” They are often “in the way.” They are “out of place.” They are to be “out of the way.

But our Lord when on earth had no greater favorites than children. He set them in the midst; He laid His hands on them; He blessed them; He invited them to His presence; He welcomed them to His person; He folded them lovingly in His arms.

To Him they are the “lambs of the flock.” He said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not. . .

In those days it was customary to bring young children into the synagogue to be blessed by the elders. How eagerly the parents must have brought them to Jesus! And how lovingly Jesus must have received them!

Notice that these little ones at times were infants, just babes. Luke recording the story says, “And they brought unto Him also infants, that He would touch them” (Luke 18:15).

From Mark we have already read, “He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.” Moffatt’s translation reads, “He put His arms around them and blessed them.”

“Let mothers now lead their children to Christ. Let ministers of the gospel take the little children in their arms, and bless them in the name of Jesus. Let words of tenderest love

be spoken to the little ones; for Jesus took the lambs of the flock in His arms, and blessed them.” —EGW., *Evangelism*, pp. 349, 350.

We should bring our little ones to Christ, dedicating them to His tender care and guidance. Christians must not keep them back, nor rebuke those who bring them, as did the disciples of old. The little ones are very dear to Christ. He cares for them all; the Father cares for them; for it is said, “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

It is important that we bring our children to Christ in their infancy, or childhood, dedicating them to Him, asking Him to embrace them with the arms of His mercy, and put His hands upon them and bless them.

Jesus’ Dedication

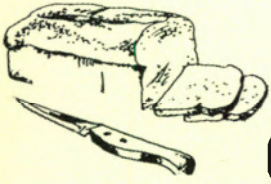
When Jesus was just a baby, about forty days old, His parents took Him to the temple at Jerusalem to be dedicated, according to the custom of the times.

Of that experience we read from *Desire of Ages*, page 52, “The priest went through the ceremony of his official work. He took the child in his arms, and held it up before the altar.

After handing it back to its mother, he inscribed the name ‘Jesus’ on the roll of the firstborn. Little did he think, as the babe lay in his arms, that it was the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory. . . . He did not think that this babe was He whose glory Moses had asked to see. But One greater than Moses lay in the priest’s arms; and when he enrolled the child’s name he was enrolling the name of One who was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy.”

So with us, we cannot read the future. We cannot know what awaits these little ones. But we can know that by dedicating them to the Lord, asking of Him special blessing for them, and by cooperating as parents with the work of the Holy Spirit in their behalf, their possibilities before God are measureless. So let us thus give them to God; and as parents, let us renew our consecration to faithfully fulfilling the trust placed upon us in rearing them for Him. **E**

Margarida F. Sarli is a researcher for the Ministerial Association and an assistant to Shepherdess International at the General Conference.



SLICES OF LIFE

Henry R. Feyerabend

The Master Artist

Tucked away in a Scottish highland stands a famous shooting lodge, which was owned by a woman who delighted to gather around her friends prominent in art and literature. One day a guest, carelessly pressing hard on a siphon containing acid, squirted the fluid all over a part of a beautiful wall. The hostess graciously tried to hide the dismay she felt, for the panel was of rare and historic beauty; and she valued it highly. One of the guests who had witnessed the accident knew something of its worth, and of what its loss must mean to his friend, quietly remained behind while the rest of the party went picnicking. Left alone he set to work at once. Hour after hour he patiently and carefully laboured. At length the party returned. The hostess, thinking sadly of her wall, was about to cross the threshold into the room, when looking up, she suddenly stopped in sheer amazement. Facing her, where the marred scene had once been, was a picture of matchless beauty such as she had never seen. Tall, stately trees, deep-blue skies, fleecy clouds, long green grass shimmering in the summer breeze, curling brooks and wild flowers, tangled shrub and vines were there, and stepping boldly forth from the forest glades stood a magnificent stag.

It was Lanseer the artist who had been at work. His master touch had entirely transformed the disfigured and mined wall. His labour of love had made it into a thing of rare beauty. No money could ever purchase the rare old masterpiece. It was beyond money and beyond price.

The acid of sin has utterly and hopelessly mined the beauty of every human life. There is nothing we can do about it. The great Master Artist, the one who whispered to the peerless Landseer the secrets of colour in the green of the grass, the gold of the sunset, and the blue of the sky, waits. He waits anxiously, watchfully, hopefully for an opportunity to blot out every dark, disfiguring stain, for a chance to paint over the worthless canvas of our past a beautiful, rare and priceless masterpiece.

“He Knew I’d Come!”

During the first World War a boy in the Allied Army on the Western Front discovered, when he came back to the lines, that his dearest friend, with whom he had fought side by side, was missing. At

once he asked permission to go out into no man’s land to look for him. His commanding officer advised against it and said, “It will not be worthwhile. But if you insist, I warn you, you go at your own risk. It will cost you your life.”

The soldier went out to seek his friend. He found him badly hurt, and carried him back almost to the safety of the trenches, but there the wounded soldier died. In a moment the rescuer himself was mortally wounded and was barely able to crawl back within the lines.

As the officer leaned over the brave lad he said, “I told you you would risk your life in going out there. Was it worthwhile?” “Yes, sir,” replied the dying soldier, “He said he knew I’d come.”

A \$5,000 Violin

One of America’s great preachers lived as a little boy in Atlantic City. He loved music, and one day he read in the newspaper that the renowned Italian violinist Viotti was coming to give a concert and would play on a \$5,000 violin. (That was a huge sum in those days). This little boy, twelve or thirteen years old, saved his nickels. He ran errands, sold newspapers, begged money from his father and his mother, until finally he had five dollars, the cost of a ticket to hear Viotti play. When the long-awaited night came, his mother helped him get dressed in his best clothes to go to the concert. The lad sat there spellbound as the great violinist came out, put his violin to his chin, and began to play. Wonderful! Every note seemed to melt into every other, and the audience sat enthralled.

Then, after a while, something seemed to go wrong. Viotti appeared to be in a nervous state, and jerked the strings of his violin. Finally he became violent and angry at the violin; he threw it down and smashed it into splinters. The audience gasped in amazement \$5,000 violin ruined because of a man’s passion! Finally the artist said: “Sit down, folks. Sit down! That was not a \$5,000.00 violin. I found it right here in your own town and bought it for \$1.69. You came here to see a \$5,000 violin. But that wasn’t it. I wanted you to come here to hear a man play. I played on a violin that cost less than two dollars and you sat entranced with my music. I just wanted to show you that it is not the violin, it’s the man. Now I will play on the \$5,000 violin.”

It may seem that your violin, your talent, your life isn’t worth much. But that isn’t the bottom line. If you will put the violin of your life into the hands of the heavenly Artist, He will bring from it the very music of angels, the harmonies of heaven.

Saved Twice by the Same Man

One day a wealthy family was invited to spend a weekend at the estate of another titled family. That afternoon a near-tragedy occurred. One of the boys almost drowned in the river.

The other children stood on the bank wringing their hands and screaming. Alex Fleming, the son of the gardener, heard the screams. Diving into the river, he dragged the boy safely to shore.

That night the gentleman said to Mr. Fleming, "Your boy, Alex, saved my boy's life today. What can I do for you?"

Mr. Fleming replied, "Nothing, sir. My boy did what any boy should do when someone is in trouble."

"Ah," said the gentleman, "but I must do something for that boy. Tell me, what would he really like?"

"Well, sir, ever since that boy could talk he has wanted to be a doctor and help people."

That man grabbed Mr. Fleming's hand and said, "It's a deal!" Alex received the best medical training the British Empire could provide. Years later it was this Dr. Alexander Fleming, along with Dr. Florey that received the Nobel prize for the discovery of the miracle of penicillin.

Near the close of World War II, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin met in conference in Teheran. At that meeting Churchill became ill with pneumonia.

The King of England sent Dr. Alexander Fleming to try to save the Prime Minister. And it was Dr. Fleming's knowledge of antibiotics that helped him save the life of Sir Winston Churchill.

Later Churchill electrified the world with this statement: "It isn't often in the life of a man that he has the priceless privilege of thanking the same man twice for saving his life."

Alex had saved little Winnie from drowning. A thankful father had provided the best medical education available for the young hero. Dr. Alexander Fleming who helped to save the life of the great leader, Winston Churchill.

The Power of Example

Adlai Esteb used to tell the story of a member of one of our churches whose husband was a drunkard. Every night he would be found down with his cronies drinking. The Christian wife prayed on and hoped on, day after day, week after week, year after year. Yet, her husband continued going from bad to worse.

One night at midnight he was in a bar with his cronies. They started an argument as men often do. Of all things to be arguing about, they were arguing as to who had the best wife. Each man said he had the best, and finally this man spoke up and said, "You fellows don't know what you are talking about. I have the best wife in the world."

They looked at him. "What do you mean?" they asked. I mean what I say. If you don't believe me come over to the house and I will show you."

"But it's after midnight," they objected, "We would't dare to go to your house at this hour!"

"It doesn't matter what time it is. Come over right now and I will show you."

Those old drunk fellows staggered down the street, got up the steps and went into the house. The man called up with an oath to his

wife to come downstairs. She awoke and said, "Just a moment, dear, I will be right down."

While she was getting dressed he called again with another oath. "I told you to come down right away. Now hurry."

"It's all right, dear. I am coming right down," she said. As she came down those men were amazed at the difference from what they had seen in their homes.

The husband said, "We are hungry. We want something to eat now. These are my friends and they are hungry."

She said, "All right. I will be glad to get them something to eat. Just sit down in the living room and I will be right in."

She rushed into the kitchen and in a few moments the aroma of food came wafting through. Just as she was bringing in the food she heard the front door close. As she entered, the men had all left. Only her husband was there.

"Why," she said, "I thought your friends were hungry. Where did they go?"

"Oh, that isn't why we came here," he replied.

"Well, maybe I misunderstood, dear. I'm sorry. I thought they wanted something to eat."

"That's what I said, but it isn't what I meant. I wanted to show them something."

"Show them what? I don't understand."

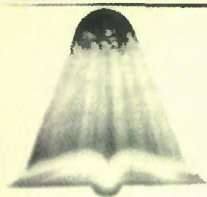
So he had to come out with it. "We were arguing about who had the best wife, and I told them that I had the best wife in the world. They would not believe me, but after they came over here they said they didn't need any more evidence, and they have gone." Then he looked at her and said, "Dear, how is it that you can be so kind to me when I am so mean to you?"

Now she had her chance. She said, "My dear, Jesus is coming soon and my happiness will begin then. I will never have another headache or another heartache. You are not planning to go to heaven at all, so I know your happiness will not last very long. What little you ever will have will be during your few years here; and anything I can do to give you a little bit of happiness I will do now, for I know yours won't last long, but mine will begin and never end."

That man heard those sobering words. He looked full into her face and said, "If you are going to heaven, I am going there too. I'm going to stop drinking. I will never take another drink"

That man has kept his word. He began studying the Bible and has been baptized. Now he and his wife have a home that is a little bit of heaven on earth instead of the living hell that it was for so many years. ■

Henry Feyerabend is the producer and speaker for It's Written in Canada.



Understanding Your Bible

(Elders from different places have written asking clarification for some texts of the Bible. Elder's Digest will present in this section some suggestions to help our readers in understanding the Bible. The Editor)

Matthew 5:19

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

This text does not mean that men who break God's commandments will get to Heaven, even though in a minor position. Jesus was clearly stating the attitude that the kingdom will take toward those who break the least commandment, or teach others to do so. They will be counted totally unworthy of salvation. They are considered the very lowest of the low by heavenly beings. Verse 20 enlarges on the fate of such people in the most emphatic terms: They "shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 10:28

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Jesus clearly teaches in this text that the soul is not naturally immortal. It can and will be destroyed in hell. But what does He mean about killing the body, but not the soul? Is it possible for the soul to exist apart from the body? Some say it is, but the Bible indicates otherwise.

The Hebrew word "psuche" has been translated "soul" in this text, but in forty other texts it has been translated "life." For example, Jesus said, "Whosoever will lose his life (psuche) for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25).

But what of Matthew 10:28? Put in the word "life" instead of "soul" and the text makes perfect sense in its consistency with the rest of the Bible. The contrast is between one who can take the physical life, and He who can take away eternal life. Here is proof in the words of Jesus: "And I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell..." (Luke 12:4,5).

In other words, the word "soul" here means not only life, but

eternal life. Notice that Luke says everything just like Matthew except that he does not say "kills the soul." Instead he says "cast into hell." They mean the same thing. Men can only kill the body and take away the physical life. God will cast into hell and take away eternal life. Not only will their bodies be destroyed in that fire, but their lives will be snuffed out for all eternity.

1 Peter 3:18-20

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."

There has been considerable misunderstanding of these verses of Scripture. It has been preached that Christ actually descended into the lower regions of the earth and preached to lost souls that were in prison in some purgatory or limbo. This is very far from what the text actually says. Let's look at it closely now and get the real message of these verses. It says, "Christ hath once suffered for sin that He might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh. But quickened by the Spirit by which also He went and preached..."

First of all notice how Christ preached to those spirits in prison. He did it by the Spirit, and that word is capitalized in your Bible. It actually refers to the Holy Spirit. So whatsoever Christ did in preaching during this period of time, He did it through or by the Holy Spirit.

With that in view, let's ask this, "When was the preaching done?" The answer is plainly given in verse 20: "When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." So the preaching was actually done while the ark was being built—during the preaching of Noah to that antediluvian world. Now, one more question: "To whom was the preaching done?" The text says here "to the spirits in prison..." Throughout the Bible we find this terminology used in describing those who are bound in the prison house of sin. David prayed "Bring my soul out of prison" (Psalm 142:7). Paul spoke of his experience in these words, "bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." What Peter is telling us here is simply that Christ through the Holy Spirit was present while Noah preached; Christ was there through the Holy Spirit to speak conviction to their hearts and appeal to them to come into the ark.

There is absolutely nothing here which indicates that Jesus departed from the body during the time He was dead to go to any subterranean place to minister to wicked spirits. The three questions are clearly answered in the text itself: that He preached by the Holy Spirit, He did it while the ark was preparing, and He did it to the spirits in prison or to those individuals whose sinful lives were bound in the prison house of sin. **E**

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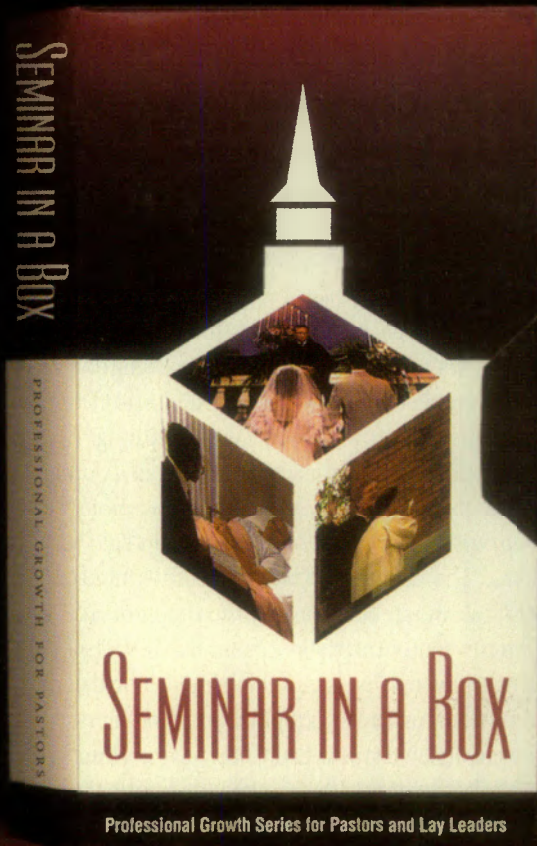
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