

quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2014

ELDER'S

DIGEST

**NINE B.L.E.S.S.I.N.G.S.
OF PASTORAL VISITATION**

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WELCOME, DEACONS AND DEACONESSES!

I am delighted to announce that during the 2013 General Conference Annual Council, it was voted to assign to the Ministerial Association the responsibility of caring for deacons and deaconesses worldwide.

The plan is that the Ministerial Association, in cooperation with administration and other church departments, be responsible for fostering the training and equipping of deacons and deaconesses. However, the district pastor, in partnership with the local conference/mission, elders, or other people he or she designates, will still be responsible for the actual training of deacons and deaconesses.

It is good to remember that Jesus' mission on this earth was to serve others rather than to be served. This was His model for ministry. The Greek words for "serve" or "served" come from the root word *diakoneo*, which is derived from the word "deacon"—a gender-inclusive term.

So, it is evident that Jesus' ministry as a servant provides the theological foundation for the ministry of deacons and deaconesses. As they follow Jesus' example, they are to enlist the members of the church into a life of service.

We need to recognize that even though we have many people serving in the church, deacons and deaconesses are the ones who should have a deep spirit of service.

Let me share with you a few numbers to highlight the importance of this select group of spiritual leaders.

- Our worldwide Church today has approximately 18 million members attending more than 140,000 congregations (organized churches and companies)—and is still growing! Certainly, we need more people who are well-trained to serve our growing Church in a variety of ministries.

- We have almost 30,000 pastors to care for all our congregations and church members. If every pastor preaches in a specific church each Sabbath, we still have more than 100,000 churches without a

pastor. Fortunately, we have approximately 250,000 local church elders and company directors to step in and serve.

- These leaders are the right hands of our pastors. It is impossible to imagine how our Church would work without their volunteer participation. They are recognized as co-pastors, and they are doing a great work.

- While we have a great number of elders and company directors helping our pastors, by God's grace we also have about 700,000 deacons and deaconesses who are called to serve their churches and congregations as a team with pastors and other local church leaders. They are making a *great* difference!

The work of deacons and deaconesses is multi-faceted. Here are a few examples of the main roles they perform in the local church or congregation:

- Visiting church members in their homes
- Reclaiming missing members and backsliders
- Supporting and helping the sick, the elderly, the disabled, and the bereaved
- Caring for and relieving the poor and aiding the unfortunate
- Caring for and maintaining the church property
- Serving the church in a variety of areas: the worship service, Sabbath School, the communion service, baptismal ceremonies, and funerals
- Teaching God's Word when situations demand it

The talent of service is a gift from God. It would be impossible for our churches to work properly without the participation of this gifted group of leaders.

The impact the deacons had on the early church was astounding: "The word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:7). Today is no different. Deacons and deaconesses are invited to be soul-winners, witnesses for Jesus, and to bring others into a saving relationship with the Lord.

For these and many other reasons, we salute and welcome them! As a ministerial team committed to God and to His mission, we will do our part to work together to see Jesus coming very soon!



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

MARCHING ORDERS: DEACONS AND DEACONESSES NOW UNDER THE CARE OF THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION!

ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2013, THE GENERAL CONFERENCE (GC) ANNUAL COUNCIL TOOK A HISTORIC ACTION. IT VOTED TO ASSIGN TO THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CARING FOR THE GLOBAL FAMILY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES.



In the following interview, Jonas Arrais, editor of *Elder's Digest*, answers a few questions about the importance of this action. Dr. Arrais, D.Min., serves as an Associate Secretary for the General Conference Ministerial Association and is responsible for developing resources for pastors and lay leaders, as well as serving as editor of *Elder's Digest*. He has pastored for 30 years, serving the largest churches in Brazil and the Ministerial Association of the South American Division. His spouse, Raquel, serves as Associate Director of the GC Women's Ministries department. They have two married adult children who are also pastors. Dr. Arrais is now in charge of the ministry for deacons and deaconesses.

WHAT INSPIRED THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION TO ADDRESS THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES?

We were inspired as we learned about the great need, and we tracked the following rationale:

- The Bible mentions three leadership offices—pastors, elders, and deacons—and the biblical qualifications for each office are very similar.
- Pastors work closely with elders, deacons, and deaconesses—as a team—and they give great support to the pastoral ministry and to the local church.
- Pastors and elders are already under the care of the Ministerial Association.
- Elders, deacons, and deaconesses are ordained to accomplish an important and specific ministry in the church.
- There was no specific department or entity in our church assigned to care for, train, equip, motivate, and mentor deacons and deaconesses.
- In some divisions, deacons and deaconesses are already receiving some support from the Ministerial Association.

I believe these reasons were more than sufficient to bring them under the care of the worldwide Ministerial Association.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, COMPARED TO THEIR ROLE AND FUNCTION IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

Their responsibilities have not changed in principle, but they have been amplified to meet the challenges and needs of the church today. For example, in the beginning, the service the first seven deacons performed for the ancient Christian church was essentially one of problem-solving and resource management. We also have examples of service performed by deacons in early Adventist churches, such as caring for church property.

Deacons and deaconesses still perform these basic services for their churches today, but other roles and responsibilities have been added as indicated in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. Today, in the twenty-first century, their role is more demanding and complete. They hold many responsibilities while serving the church in this ministry. Here is a short list of activities where they are expected to assist:

- Worship service
- Sabbath School
- Communion service
- Baptism
- Teaching God's Word

- Visitation
- Caring for the sick and the poor
- Other activities as requested by the pastor, elders, and department directors

The biblical requirements for deacons are similar to those of the elders, but there is a clear distinction in office. Elders are spiritual leaders or shepherds of the church; they serve as co-pastors and teachers and also provide general oversight on financial, organizational, and spiritual matters. Deacons have a more practical ministry that gives pastors and elders the freedom to focus on prayer, studying and teaching God's Word, and pastoral care.

As in the early church, the role of a deacon today may encompass a variety of services and differs from church to church. In general, however, deacons function as servants, ministering to the body in practical ways. Scripture makes it clear that no matter how they serve, their ministry is a rewarding and honorable calling in the church.

NOW THAT DEACONS AND DEACONESSES ARE UNDER THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION, WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THEM?

We would like to appreciate, recognize, train, and equip this group of servant-leaders in the church. We would like to see the biblical and spiritual qualifications and skills exemplified in the lives of those selected to serve this office. We envision to see these individuals in love with Jesus and committed to the church's mission.

WHAT ACTION STEPS WILL THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION TAKE TO MAKE THIS VISION A REALITY?

This assignment calls for ministerial teamwork. The Ministerial Association, in cooperation with other church departments, will train and equip deacons and deaconesses. However, the support of the church pastor will be essential, because he or she has the primary responsibility for training them. Networking will make this vision a reality.

WHAT PLANS DO YOU HAVE TO PROVIDE TRAINING AND RESOURCES FOR THESE LEADERS?

As I mentioned earlier, it will require ministerial teamwork. We need to understand that for many years, deacons and deaconesses have been forgotten, and they need specific help and support. The GC Ministerial Association is preparing a CD with leadership resources that includes handouts, basic PowerPoint presentations, and didactic notes to train deacons and deaconesses. We are also preparing a *Handbook for Deacons and Deaconesses*. It will be the first official guide of its kind printed in English in our church. I would like to challenge all segments of the church to help us to prepare other materials and offer training opportunities for our deacons and deaconesses.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO EDUCATE LOCAL PASTORS AND CHURCH MEMBERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES SO THAT THE STEREOTYPICAL PERCEPTION OF THEM IS CHANGED?

Everybody agrees that deacons and deaconesses are doing a great ministry in the local church, but there is room for growth. The challenge is to convince church leaders, especially pastors, of the importance of taking time to train and equip those who are working as volunteers for the church. When there is no training, there will be few people working for the church. Due to lack of training, those who serve will not reach their full potential, and we will fall into the trap of working with the same small group of people, year after year.

As training progresses and service improves, church members should honor this group of leaders by valuing, supporting, and respecting their ministry. Serving is a wonderful spiritual gift, and we should appreciate and acknowledge it more in our congregations.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU ANTICIPATE IN YOUR QUEST TO RESTORE DEACONS AND DEACONESSES TO THEIR BIBLICAL ROLES AS SPIRITUAL LEADERS AND SERVANTS OF THE CHURCH?

Most deacons and deaconesses that I've been in contact with want to be involved in a meaningful ministry; however, many of them do not seem to have the spiritual maturity to allow this to happen; consequently, they feel discouraged, unmotivated, and frustrated, and sometimes they even withdraw from service. This is a tragedy for many people and congregations.

WHY DOES SUCH SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY EXIST AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

Far too often, deacons' meetings are focused on maintenance issues rather than on mission or ministry issues; even more rarely do they talk about how to improve their spiritual lives. I think deacons' meetings can become a spiritual experience if we are intentional about creating community—a safe place to share hurts and struggles and to pray about life changes, families, careers, parenting challenges, community challenges, and more.

It is also good to remember that working for the church is not a function of status, especially when our activities require a spirit of service. We need to help church members to discover their gifts and challenge them to use these gifts in the various ministries of the body of Christ.

I strongly believe that as we inspire, recruit, train, and work with deacons and deaconesses in the mission of the church, our church will have a worldwide army of servant-leaders totally committed to God and His cause to hasten Jesus' second coming.



NINE B.L.E.S.S.I.N.G.S. OF PASTORAL VISITATION

“AMAZING GRACE! HOW SWEET THE SOUND . . .”

I sang with Nancy, a senior member of our church, to a 95-year-old church member in a nursing home one Sabbath afternoon. The next day, I was told that Walter,* whom we had visited, had died peacefully a few hours after our visit. How blessed Nancy and I were to usher a faithful member who had devoted a lifetime of service for God and community to the arms of Jesus, resting until the second coming of our Lord. That encounter sparked in me a desire to analyze the importance of visitation as an elder.

I am a church elder who prayerfully supports my pastor by utilizing my past experiences as a pastor and my current role as a clinical pastoral educator. All elders can use their skills in their professions to assist the pastor. My role as

an elder enables my pastor—who has many tasks in this complex society—to do what he needs to do. As a church elder, I believe that the benefits outlined below are blessings to me, the board of elders, the pastors, and the laypeople in churches, too.

THE B-L-E-S-S-I-N-G-S OF VISITATION

B—Be like Christ. For elders and ministers to be like Jesus, they must participate in visitation as their Master did. Christ visited from house to house, from street to street, and culminated His visitation at Calvary as He was crucified for our sins. From the light of Calvary, visitations evoke in us a desire to know each other better; thus, visits enhance



both elders and members and impart to both an even better knowledge of God.

Several years ago, a church elder who was a medical doctor witnessed effectively in his clinic. He won many souls—most of whom were his patients—to Christ. Later, as he was dying, he asked his wife to witness the baptism of one of his Bible interests. This physician was a soul-winner who inspired many to grow spiritually, and he introduced many people to Jesus to become “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17). There will be many jewels in his heavenly crown.

L—Loving relationships. Pastoral visits enhance relationships. Since relationships are vital in Christian ministry, visits help church leaders to know the members better. Elders can answer questions regarding church programs and can also bring encouragement to members. Elders can help pastors organize visitation teams. As a result of frequent contact from church leadership, the congregation can become more united. Visitation fosters a warm and caring congregation. A pastoral visitation program with effective visits is certain to improve relationships among members. It is where each of us draws closer to Jesus in His presence (Matt. 18:20). Often we use the expression “our church family.” Visitation modeled by the elders ensures family togetherness and harmony. Providing opportunities to listen to each other is vital. One leader said, “Listening to each other shows respect and builds relationships.”

E—Education. Both preaching and teaching are in the educational realm. Pastoral visits give elders insights into their members’ lives and enables them to preach relevant sermons when assigned. Moreover, inspired thoughts come to mind during visitation which can be integrated into heart-warming preaching. Decisions for Christ are often made in homes, complementing appeals with the pastor or evangelist. Having a systematic visitation program demonstrates that care for new members and support for members of all ages are basic factors for a growing church.

S—Saving souls. Pastoral visits teach ministers the reality of life; therefore, the felt needs of the people in the community receive support. Arthur L. Teikmanis, a Christian author, wrote, “Pastoral calling [visitation] is evangelism in reality.”¹ Should we prioritize pastoral visitation and training to reach members? Most often, visitation and follow-up programs are the weakest links in evangelism. What can elders do to motivate members to be more active in these areas? H.M.S. Richards said, “It is not enough to bring to life a strong faith in Jesus as the world’s Redeemer. That faith must be nourished, it must be sustained, it must be fed.”²

S—Stewardship. Pastoral visitation is essential in communicating the relevance of stewardship. During the global economic crises of the last few years, our church members

suffered great losses. The impact of their losses—financially or in employment—were so great that worries and illnesses were and are commonly experienced. Home visits help elders and pastors to understand the spiritual and economic condition of members’ homes or workplaces. There is no better motivation for giving than for the elders and pastors to provide members with effective pastoral care through visitation and other congregational supports (2 Cor. 8:1).

I—Identity. “What am I and what is a visiting elder/pastor?” This question can be clarified by the *Church Manual*, an experienced pastor, a pastoral supervisor, and those who have learned to analyze the dynamics of visitation. Elders can clarify the following questions by asking questions that provide obvious answers:

- What am I? Do I reflect the love and humility of Christ?³
- What have I done? Have I given myself heartily to Christ?
- What principles do I undertake? Have I been called to ministry with the passion to win precious souls?

These questions, asked by H.M.S. Richards, Sr., our most respected radio evangelist and church educator, deserve thoughtful answers evoked by pastoral visitations. Last year, in my seminar on visitation to dedicated elders of the Potomac Conference, these reflective thoughts emerged. These questions, asked by elders to rediscover themselves, apply to pastors who are searching to know that their identity is relevant to them, too.

N—Nurture. Pastoral visitation is an integral part of church ministry. Jesus’ parting words to Peter urged him to feed His lambs and sheep (John 21:15-19). Coming close to people is essential in nurturing them. Each day people are bombarded with unwelcome ideas from news, the Internet, and various media. Attaining nurture through shepherding is crucial, and it includes healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.⁴ Today, when most church members constantly experience stress and hurt, prioritizing shepherding in pastoral responsibility is essential. This calls for increased training in pastoral care and pastoral education, both in the seminary and in continuing education programs.⁵

Recently, I visited with a young seminarian. Humbly, I asked her to pray for me. She prayed that the Lord would give me words to speak and calmness in my presentation. Her prayer blessed me. Often during my visitations, I have been the object of such blessings. Visitation provides nurture to both the visited and the visitors.

G—Growing in wisdom and personal growth. Visiting others often reveals inadequacies in the visitor’s life, whether it pertains to elders or pastors. One psychiatrist confided to me that “many ministers need repentance that leads to ref-

ormation of character.” Could this be applicable to lay ministers and elders, too? Absolutely! Some elders are ordained pastors who need revitalization. One can attain personal growth by asking, “Am I fulfilling Christ’s mission?”

Recently, I visited a young man in his fifties; he was dying of lung cancer. He had stopped smoking a little too late. On his deathbed, he confessed his ignorance about tobacco. In spite of his unbearable pain, he grew spiritually. We encouraged each other. Upon reflection, I realized that he had blessed me through his lesson on temperance in all things, including a consistent and healthy lifestyle, and I have been able to share his blessing with others in my ministry.

S—Strengthened in faith. In Joshua 1:7, we read, “Be strong and be courageous, be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. . . .” Today, how much greater is our need for strength as we prepare for the Lord’s return! What is our response to revival and reformation? How can we enter the cities to share the gospel? Pastoral visitation can play a vital role.

To recap, there are many life lessons which elders can learn through visitation:

- B—Be like Christ
- L—Loving relationships
- E—Education
- S—Saving souls
- S—Stewardship
- I—Identity
- N—Nurture
- G—Growing in wisdom and personal growth
- S—Strengthened in faith

There is nothing more rewarding than preaching the gospel, healing the sick, comforting the grieving, and delivering captives from sin through visitation. Listen to the praise of one who fulfilled such a call: “Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing the Father there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Spirit, there is balsam for every sore.”⁶

The one who visits is blessed. Our Lord has many ways to reach hearts through us in various environments and circumstances. Each time we visit, “we may find precious lessons if our hearts are but open to discern them.”⁷

The blessings received through visitation are ours to cherish. Let us as elders and ministers make pastoral visitation a priority in our church program, and we will receive Christ’s richest B-L-E-S-S-I-N-G-S.

ED

*a pseudonym

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Illustration I: Example of a Monthly Elders’ Roster that Includes Pastoral Visitation

Task	Weekend 1	Weekend 2	Weekend 3	Weekend 4
Sermon	TBA by Pastor	TBA by Pastor	TBA by Pastor	TBA by Pastor
Presiding	Elder B	Elder C	Elder D	Elder A
Prayer	Elder C	Elder D	Elder B	Pastor
Visitation	Elder A/D	Pastor/ Elder B	Pastor/ Elder C	Elder D/A

See next issue of *Elder’s Digest* for more practical keys for success.

¹ Arthur L. Teikmanis, *Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 24.

² H.M.S. Richards, Sr., *Feed My Sheep* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 207.

³ Richards, 83.

⁴ Steward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 14.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1977), 60.

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OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

FOUR THINGS YOU OUGHT TO KNOW – Part 1 of 2

I - ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

*“Better to hunt in fields for health unbought
Than fee the doctor for a nauseous draught.
The wise, the cure, on exercise depend;
God never made his work for man to mend.”*—John Dryden

1. Health is God’s will for man (3 John 2).

- (1) The sixth commandment forbids shortening life (Ex. 20:13).
- (2) Our physical strength is a gift from God (Deut. 7:15; Ps. 103:2; John 10:10).
- (3) Our health is a sacred trust (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).
- (4) Ignorance of the natural laws of health/hygiene cause sickness (Hos. 4:6).
“Obedience to the laws of health is to be made a matter of personal duty We must individually answer to God for our health and practices.”—Ellen G. White (MH 310)

2. Health is compromised by intemperate behavior

- (1) Immoral behavior defiles (1 Cor. 6:9-11).
- (2) Impure thinking defiles (Matt. 15:18, 19).
- (3) God’s judgment on those who defile His temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 17).
- (4) The Bible condemns injurious habits (Rev. 21:27).
- (5) The true Christian will be temperate in all things (1 Cor. 9:25).
- (6) The essentials recommended by Ellen G. White:
“Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—these are the true remedies.”

3. Health includes following dietary laws (1 Cor. 10:31).

- (1) Wrong eating defiles (Lev. 11:1-8).

- (a) Man’s original diet (Gen. 1:29; 3:18).
- (b) A diet change (Gen. 9:3, 4; cf. Gen. 7:1-3).
- (c) The post-Exodus diet (Ex. 16:35; Josh. 5:12).
- (d) Prohibited meats (Deut. 14:8; Is. 66:15-17; Lev. 11:4-8).
- (e) Permitted meats (Lev. 11:2-3, 9-10; Deut. 14).
- (f) Eating is to be enjoyed (Eccl. 3:13).

“It is a sin to place poorly prepared food on the table, because the matter of eating concerns the well-being of the entire system.”—Ellen G. White (CDF 25)

- (2) Wrong drinking defiles (Deut. 29:18).
 - (a) Warning against alcohol consumption (Prov. 20:1; 23:31, 34).
 - (b) The disastrous effects of alcohol (Hos. 7:5; Prov. 23:7, 8, 32, 35).
 - (c) Alcohol affects spirituality (Is. 28:7).
 - (d) Causes shame and immorality (Hab. 2:5, 16; Prov. 23:33; Gen. 9:20-26; 19:30-38; Hos. 3:1; 4:11; Joel 3:3; Amos 2:12; 4:1).
 - (e) Affects judgment (Gen. 27:25; Prov. 31:4, 5; Dan. 5:5-9, 25-28).
 - (f) Results in multiplied sorrows (Esth. 1:5-22; Prov. 26:29-32; 23:29, 30).
- (3) The Bible enjoins total abstinence (Deut. 29:2-6).
 - (a) Drunkards are denied heaven (1 Cor. 6:10).
 - (b) Sobriety characterizes the last-day people (1 Thess. 5:7).

4. Health involves glorifying God in everything (1 Cor. 10:31).

“Look to your health; and if you have it, praise God, and value it next to a good conscience; for health is the second blessing that we mortals are capable of; a blessing that money cannot buy.”—Izaak Walton

II – ABOUT YOUR MONEY

“Man is safe from the subtlety of gold only when this sacred relationship of God, man, and money, as implied in stewardship, has full possession of the life.”—L. E. Froom

1. God is the rightful owner of this world and everything in it (Ps. 24:1, 2).

- “This is my Father’s world, O Let me ne’er forget.”*—Maltbie D. Babcock
- God’s ownership is twofold:
- (1) By creation (Is. 45:18).
 - (a) The Earth (Ps. 95:5).
 - (b) Living things (Ps. 50:10; 100:3).
 - (c) Material possessions (Hag. 2:8; Deut. 8:18).*“All the abilities which men possess belong to God.”*—Ellen G. White (5T 277)
 - (2) By redemption (1 Peter 1:18).

2. God has entrusted man as His steward (Matt. 25:14; 1 Cor. 4:1, 2).

- (1) The custodian of God’s property (Luke 19:12-17).
- (2) This management is temporary (1 Tim. 6:7).
- (3) God sustains man in his stewardship (1 Chr. 29:12, 14).
Man’s stewardship of God’s property includes:
 - (a) THE TITHE (Lev. 27:30, 32; Mal. 3:8).

- The way it is calculated (Deut. 14:22; Heb 7:2; cf. Prov. 3:9).
- The non-Jewish origin (Gen. 14:20; 28:22).
- OT: For the support of the priests (Num. 18:20, 21).
- Christ’s attitude towards (Matt. 23:23).
- NT: For the Ministry of the Church (1 Cor. 9:13, 14).
- (b) THE OFFERINGS (Deut. 16:16, 17).
 - Given as a part of acceptable worship (Ps. 96:8; Ex. 23:14, 15).
 - The attitude of the giver (2 Cor. 8:12).
 - An example (Mark 12:41-44).

3. God wants the following qualities in Stewards

- (a) Faithfulness (Mal. 3:8-10; Luke 6:38).
- (b) Generosity (Prov. 3:9; 2 Cor. 9:7).
- (c) Sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:1-5).
- (d) The right incentives (2 Cor. 8:9).
- (e) A promise is also assured to the faithful steward (Ps. 37:25).

The commitment of David Livingstone:

“I will place no value on anything that I have or possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything that I have will advance that kingdom, it shall be given or kept, as by giving or keeping it shall best promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes, both for time and eternity.”

DRESS CODE

IS IT NECESSARY TO DRESS UP TO GO TO CHURCH? WHERE DOES OUR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING OF DRESS CODES COME FROM?

There is no clear answer regarding what we are to do concerning dress codes in church. Naturally, some church members wish for a Bible text that clearly states whether they should or should not dress up to go to church. But unfortunately, we need to accept the fact that some issues/problems facing the church today were of no concern to the writers of Scripture. Ellen G. White would agree since, for her, “the dress question is not to be our present truth.”¹

That being the case, let’s try to understand where our dress code tradition came from. But first, let’s at least partially deconstruct each assumption we might bring to the issue. Where do we get the idea that we need to dress up to go to church? There are many possibilities, but I want to focus on at least two that I believe are quite influential:

1. *The Ellen G. White writings argument.* We must remember that the writings of Ellen G. White are not exempt from interpretation since, at one point, she advises people not to purchase bicycles.² Think about her words on the need for common sense: “My mind has been greatly stirred with the idea, ‘Why, Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so; and therefore we are going right up to it.’ God wants us all to have common sense, and he wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relations of things.”³

The contextual background and circumstances of her writings are crucial! For some, part of the “formal-dress-code-in-church” mindset does not come primarily from a conception of the sacredness of the church space but from some of Mrs. White’s writings. In her day, people commonly worked on farms and did heavy manual labor during the week. To differentiate their time/dress in church from the

time/dress of these common and secular activities, people would dress up to show that the seventh day was different from the other days of regular labor. This idea is found in quotations such as this:

“All who meet upon the Sabbath to worship God should, if possible, have neat, well-fitting, comely garments to wear in the house of worship. It is a dishonor to the Sabbath, to God, and to his house, for those who profess to believe that the Sabbath is the holy of the Lord, and honorable, to wear upon that day the soiled clothing which they have worn through the labors of the week, if they can obtain anything more suitable.”⁴



Interestingly, this practice has some Jewish roots. The weekly *kabalat* Shabbat (the receiving of the Sabbath) is ideally marked in each Jewish household as family members dress up to receive the Sabbath. So there is an element of respect for the day that leads people to dress formally. And this conception is not bad. But it must be counterbalanced with texts such as this:

“On Sunday many popular churches appear more like a theater than like a place for the worship of God. Every fashionable dress is displayed there. Many of the poor have not courage to enter such houses of worship. Their plain dress, though it may be neat, is in marked contrast with that of their more wealthy sisters, and this difference causes them to feel embarrassed.”⁵

So, based on these preliminary thoughts, it is safe to say that part of the formal dress-code mindset stems from a narrow view of some of Ellen G. White’s writings. If we take time to read her insights on this issue, the key word that surfaces again and again is *simplicity*.

2. *The church/sanctuary argument.* Along with the issue of formal dress codes, many other practical issues that the church struggles with also stem from a misconception of what the church is. Why is this so? Because the assumption in many churches is that today’s church is the modern-day equivalent of the Old Testament sanctuary. Even the architecture of most churches around the world reflects this idea. Whether we realize it or not, the architecture of our churches expresses a way of thinking; that is, a church building says a lot about our conception of what ministry and mission are by the way it is set up. Think about this! The majority of our churches have a common area (pews), a holy place (pulpit/platform), and a most holy place (pulpit/baptismal tank). This sanctuary structure is also seen with some variation in Protestant and Catholic churches and especially in Greek-Orthodox churches.

The church/sanctuary mindset not only impacts the architecture of our church but also informs part of how many church actions occur: church discipline (the sinner is excluded/cut off from the courts of the temple/church); music (we use texts that talk about temple music in the Old Testament to support what music is appropriate for the church); and other activities I could mention that reflect this idea.

Although church discipline and appropriate music are important ecclesiological elements, our mindset in going about these activities can be affected by thinking that the church is a sanctuary. For example, instead of viewing church discipline as a brutal/divisive practice (which follows the church/sanctuary mindset of cutting off and sending away), we should view it as the redemptive activity the Bible intends it to be.

The formal dress-code mindset could fall under the same misconception of church/sanctuary. The rationale is: We are going to church/sanctuary, and our “external” appearance must conform to the fact that we are going to God’s house.

This church/sanctuary mindset is problematic on many levels. We need to understand that today’s church is not equivalent to the Old Testament sanctuary. The church is not a modification of the synagogue. The church today is not even a proper reflection of the New Testament *ekklesia* (where the church was tied to the reality of its members and not to a particular place). Jesus Himself shifted His attention from sacred space to a sacred attitude when He spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus said that the day would come when common geographical markers would be irrelevant! What matters is our attitude, and true worship is marked in spirit and in truth. A new attitude, a new geography. This does not mean we should not gather in a building, but it highlights an important question: Is there a difference between how we meet God in church and how we meet Him during the week? If there is no difference, then the argument that we dress because we are meeting the Almighty God in His house collapses. Once we think of divine presence being tied to a particular building, we are thinking within the lines of what the Samaritan woman was thinking: that worship and God were tied to a place (the basis of Catholic ecclesiology and mission). We must not go back to a form of worship that Jesus Himself undid.

So why do we have formal dress codes in church worship today? I’ve explored two possibilities, but there are many more. This response was not written as an answer to this question; it was written to further clarify the complexity of the question itself and to provide talking points for dialogue in your local church.



¹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 167*, 1897.

² ———, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 398.

³ ———, *Selected Messages*, 215, 217.

⁴ ———, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

This question was answered by Tiago Arrais. He is a PhD candidate at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

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

BIRTH CONTROL:

A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST STATEMENT OF CONSENSUS

Scientific technologies today permit greater control of human fertility and reproduction than was formerly possible. These technologies make possible sexual intercourse with the expectation of pregnancy and childbirth greatly reduced. Christian married couples have a potential for fertility control that has created many questions with wide-ranging religious, medical, social, and political implications. Opportunities and benefits exist as a result of the new capabilities, as do challenges and drawbacks. A number of moral issues must be considered. Christians who ultimately must make their own personal choices on these issues must be informed in order to make sound decisions based on biblical principles.

Among the issues to be considered is the question of the appropriateness of human intervention in the natural biological processes of human reproduction. If any intervention is appropriate, then additional questions regarding what, when, and how must be addressed. Other related concerns include:

- likelihood of increased sexual immorality which the availability and use of birth control methods may promote;
- gender dominance issues related to the sexual privileges and prerogatives of both women and men;
- social issues, including the right of a society to encroach upon personal freedom in the interest of the society at large and the burden of economic and educational support for the disadvantaged; and
- stewardship issues related to population growth and the use of natural resources.

A statement of moral considerations regarding birth control must be set in the broader context of biblical teachings about sexuality, marriage, parenthood, and the value of children—and an understanding of the interconnectedness between these issues. With an awareness of the diversity of opinion within the Church, the following biblically based principles are set forth to educate and to guide in decision making.

1. Responsible stewardship. God created human beings in His own image, male and female, with capacities to think and to make decisions (Isa 1:18; Josh 24:15; Deut 30:15-20). God gave human beings dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26, 28). This dominion requires overseeing and caring for nature. Christian stewardship also requires taking responsibility for human procreation. Sexuality, as



one of the aspects of human nature over which the individual has stewardship, is to be expressed in harmony with God's will (Exod 20:14; Gen 39:9; Lev 20:10-21; 1 Cor 6:12-20).

2. Procreative purpose. The perpetuation of the human family is one of God's purposes for human sexuality (Gen 1:28). Though it may be inferred that marriages are generally intended to yield offspring, Scripture never presents procreation as an obligation of every couple in order to please God. However, divine revelation places a high value on children and expresses the joy to be found in parenting (Matt 19:14; Ps 127:3). Bearing and rearing children help parents to understand God and to develop compassion, caring, humility, and unselfishness (Ps 103:13; Luke 11:13).

3. Unifying purpose. Sexuality serves a unifying purpose in marriage that is God-ordained and distinguishable from the procreative purpose (Gen 2:24). Sexuality in marriage is intended to include joy, pleasure, and delight (Eccl 9:9; Prov 5:18, 19; Song of Sol 4:16-5:1). God intends that couples may have ongoing sexual communion apart from procreation (1 Cor 7:3-5), a communion that forges strong bonds and protects a marriage partner from an inappropriate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse (Prov 5:15-20; Song of Sol 8:6, 7). In God's design, sexual intimacy is not only for the purpose of conception. Scripture does not prohibit married couples from enjoying the delights of conjugal relations while taking measures to prevent pregnancy.

4. Freedom to choose. In creation—and again through the redemption of Christ—God has given human beings

freedom of choice, and He asks them to use their freedom responsibly (Gal 5:1, 13). In the divine plan, husband and wife constitute a distinct family unit, having both the freedom and the responsibility to share in making determinations about their family (Gen 2:24). Married partners should be considerate of each other in making decisions about birth control, being willing to consider the needs of the other as well as one's own (Phil 2:4). For those who choose to bear children, the procreative choice is not without limits. Several factors must inform their choice, including the ability to provide for the needs of children (1 Tim 5:8); the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the mother and other caregivers (3 John 2; 1 Cor 6:19; Phil 2:4; Eph 5:25); the social and political circumstances into which children will be born (Matt 24:19); and the quality of life and the global resources available. We are stewards of God's creation and therefore must look beyond our own happiness and desires to consider the needs of others (Phil 2:4).

5. Appropriate methods of birth control. Moral decision making about the choice and use of the various birth control agents must stem from an understanding of their probable effects on physical and emotional health, the manner in which the various agents operate, and the financial expenditure involved. A variety of methods of birth control—including barrier methods, spermicides, and sterilization—prevent conception and are morally acceptable. Some other birth-control methods may prevent the release of the egg (ovulation), may prevent the union of egg and sperm (fertilization), or may prevent attachment of the already fertilized egg (implantation). Because of uncertainty about how they will function in any given instance, they may be morally suspect for people who believe that protectable human life begins at fertilization. However, since the majority of fertilized ova naturally fail to implant or are lost after implantation, even when birth control methods are not being used, hormonal methods of birth control and IUDs, which represent a similar process, may be viewed as morally acceptable. Abortion, the intentional termination of an established pregnancy, is not morally acceptable for purposes of birth control.

6. Misuse of birth control. Though the increased ability to manage fertility and protect against sexually transmitted disease may be useful to many married couples, birth control can be misused. For example, those who would engage in premarital and extramarital sexual relations may more readily indulge in such behaviors because of the availability of birth control methods. The use of such methods to protect sex outside of marriage may reduce the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and/or pregnancy. Sex outside of marriage, however, is both harmful and immoral, whether or not these risks have been diminished.

7. A redemptive approach. The availability of birth-control methods makes education about sexuality and morality even more imperative. Less effort should be put

forth in condemnation and more in education and redemptive approaches that seek to allow each individual to be persuaded by the deep movings of the Holy Spirit.

Some current examples of these methods include intrauterine devices (IUDs), hormone pills (including the “morning-after pill”), injections, or implants. Questions about these methods should be referred to a medical professional.



This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Wednesday, September 29, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

RECOMMENDATIONS: USE OF MIFEPRISTONE (RU486)

1. In the treatment of medical conditions, such as cancer, for which RU486 may provide effective therapy, the drug should be used in keeping with relevant laws and established medical science.
2. RU486 is also used for contraception. When the effect of the drug is to prevent fertilization, its use is ethically permissible. Like other oral contraceptives, however, RU486 may sometimes prevent implantation of a fertilized ovum. This is ethically problematic to those who consider this effect to be abortion.
3. When RU486 is used in legally permissible and medically appropriate ways for the purpose of causing abortion, the previously adopted Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion should guide the practice.

This recommendation was voted by the Christian View of Human Life Committee at Pine Springs Ranch, California, April 10-12, 1994, and was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), Silver Spring, Maryland, July 26, 1994.

COMMUNICATION

PUBLIC RELATIONS RESOURCES

FROM THE GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT



Adventist News Network is a great way to keep your congregation up to date on stories and trends within the Adventist Church. We hope that learning about the world church will inspire you to also keep members informed of ministries and financial matters within your own congregation. Your method might range from a group of people publishing stories on your church's website to something as simple as posting minutes from board meetings and appropriate financial information on a bulletin board in the church lobby.

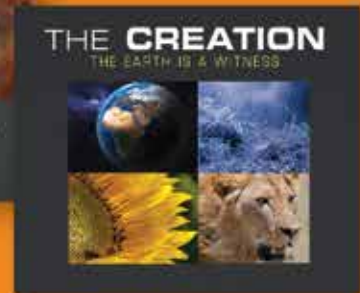
News.Adventist.org



THE CREATION

The movie "The Creation: The Earth Is a Witness" debuted with a splash last year. The half hour film shows a day-by-day account of the Earth's beginnings, filmed and edited with the cinematic quality of a major motion picture. Church leaders urge pastors and elders to make the film a meaningful part of ministry. "This is going to be a magnificent tool to bring thousands of people to the foot of the cross," said Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson. See the film at

CreationSabbath.net



"The Record Keeper" Web series is a professionally produced evangelism tool based on the themes of Ellen White's book "The Great Controversy." You can use this film to start conversations about faith, especially with those who might not be open to traditional evangelism methods.

Facebook.com/TheRecordKeeper



Adventist.org

The Adventist world church last year unveiled a redesigned website that offers a compelling case for God with a simple and elegant design. "One pastor wrote to us saying, "Thank you for making it human-focused, and not just a bunch of facts and figures." The site also includes comprehensive articles on the church's beliefs, as well as the Church Manual and other resources. See it at

Adventist.org



NOAH'S ARK: A PICTURE OF SALVATION (PART 1)

Genesis 6:9-22

The story of Noah and the ark is more popular than ever. Even people who don't know the Bible and never come to church know about Noah, his big boat, and all those animals coming in two by two. And most people know about the great flood. But as we read these verses, we need to learn the right lessons.

There are basically two ways to approach this very familiar story. The first is to focus on the controversial issues: What was the extent of the flood? Did it really cover the entire earth? How large was the ark? How did Noah get those animals into the ark?

But if we concentrate only on the controversial elements, we risk missing the real message. Even though it is important to ask, "How did a flood cover the entire earth?" if we stop there, we will miss the main spiritual lessons the Lord intends for us to learn. It is worthwhile to inquire about the civilization that perished, but the emphasis of the text is not on those who died but on the one family that survived.

I. THE MAN WHO BUILT THE ARK

Our text reveals a number of important facts about Noah. If we consider these things, we will understand why he and his family survived the flood while the rest of the human race perished.

A. *Noah was a godly man* (Gen. 6:9). Noah believed in God and took His Word seriously. He was not a doubter or a skeptic. Noah believed God, and his faith was counted as righteousness. His faith produced in him a lifestyle that was so categorically different from his contemporaries that he seemed blameless by comparison.

Noah was a man who walked with God and knew Him intimately. Noah didn't merely know about God; he knew God and walked with Him on a daily basis. This is a high honor since Noah and Enoch (Gen. 5:24) are the only two men in the Bible who are specifically said to have walked with God.

B. *Noah was a family man* (Gen. 6:10). We know that Noah was married, that he and his wife had three sons, and that each son was also married. Noah was the head of his household and the spiritual leader to his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law.

C. *Noah was a unique man* (Gen. 6:11, 12). These verses are placed here to emphasize the contrast between Noah and his generation. The word "corrupt" means rotten, putrid, or utterly foul. It describes a world in the final stages of moral decomposition. Having rejected the Lord, the men and women of the world had fallen into a deep pit of violence, hatred, abuse, murder, dishonesty, and every ugly expression of the depravity of the human heart. And in the darkness of those days, one man stood out from the crowd. Noah was a bright, shining light in the prevailing moral darkness. In an impure world, he was pure. In an unrighteous world, he was righteous. In a world that dismissed God, he walked with God. He stood alone, believing God, building the ark (no doubt receiving much abuse from his peers), always confident that God could be trusted and that the flood would someday come to the world.

D. *Noah was an obedient man* (Gen. 6:22). This verse comes immediately after God's specific instructions for building the ark. Note the two things said in this verse:

1. Noah's obedience was complete: He did everything the Lord commanded.
2. Noah's obedience was absolute: He did everything just as the Lord commanded.

In other words, Noah didn't do anything halfway.

E. *Noah was a bold man* (2 Peter 2:5). This fact is implied in Genesis 6 and stated explicitly in 2 Peter 2:5, where Noah is called a "preacher of righteousness." He wasn't just a builder who knew how to construct an enormous boat. And he wasn't just a godly man who let his life speak for him. During the 120 years before the flood, Noah built the ark and preached righteousness to his own generation. I'm sure he warned them of the judgment to come and invited them to join him in the ark. But no one seemed to listen. Perhaps they were too busy to pay attention. After all, no one had ever seen rain before. Certainly no one had ever seen a worldwide flood before. Why should they take Noah seriously? To his contemporaries, he was like those people who preach on the street corners; it's always easier just to walk on by than to stop and listen.

Jesus compared the days of Noah to the days preceding His return to the earth (Matt. 24:37-39). As it was then, so it shall be again. The past is the key to the future.

F. *Noah saved his own family*. How did Noah manage to save himself and his family from such a negative environment? We are not left to wonder about the answer because it is spelled out for us in Hebrews 11:7. This is a powerful verse that I recommend you read, memorize, and teach to your own family. We can break this verse down into four smaller statements that help us see what Noah did:

1. He believed what God said.
2. He built an ark to save his family.
3. He rejected the corruption of the world.
4. He and his family were delivered from destruction.

Here is a message for all of us. Noah was a righteous man who had great faith in God. His faith saved his entire family. But note this: Not one word is ever said about Noah's wife's faith or the faith of Noah's sons and daughters-in-law. But they must have had some faith. Why? Because when Noah entered the ark, his wife went with him. Their sons followed them. And their sons' wives followed them. I don't know how much faith they had, but they had enough to follow the head of their family. And Noah had enough faith to inspire all of them to follow his example. That's the power of a godly leader.

CONCLUSION

Noah was a godly man in an ungodly age, a bright light shining in the darkness. Because he had character and obeyed God when the world thought he was crazy, he ended up leading his own family to salvation. God blessed him, just as God blesses all who follow in His steps. Let there be no complaining about how hard things are and no excuses about how evil the world has become. Be a person of character. Be someone with conviction. Take a stand for the Word of God and don't worry about what the world thinks. You'll save yourself, and by God's grace, you may save your family and many others, too.



General Conference Ministerial Association

NOAH'S ARK: A PICTURE OF SALVATION (PART 2)

Genesis 6:9-22

The story of Noah portrays a sure salvation through Jesus and His church. Regarding the ark itself, there was a specific design given in Genesis 6:14-16, a specific reason stated in verse 17, a specific promise given in verse 18, and some specific passengers listed in verses 19-20, along with some specific cargo in verse 21. Rather than go into detail, I will simply point out that there is nothing mystical here at all. The text reads like a sober historical account of what actually happened. This is not a fantasy story made up simply to teach a moral.

I. THE ARK NOAH BUILT

If we take Genesis 6 seriously, then we must conclude that God really did speak to Noah and tell him to build the ark because a great flood was coming. And God really did tell him to bring the land animals into the ark to keep them alive until the flood was over.

The Hebrew word translated "ark" is used in only two places in the Old Testament. In both places, the word basically means "box" or "container." This is significant when you consider that the other occurrence of this particular Hebrew word is found in Exodus 2, where it refers to the basket in which the infant Moses was placed when his mother hid him in the bulrushes. It is not a coincidence that the "basket" of Exodus 2 is coated with "pitch," the same resinous material used on the ark Noah built.

The point here is that Noah's ark was not like a motorboat. It was essentially an enormous container designed to keep Noah, his family, and the animals afloat during the flood. The ark had no rudder because Noah didn't need to steer it. He just needed a boat that would float, which is exactly what God told him to build.

II. JESUS CHRIST, THE ARK OF OUR SALVATION

After considering the nature of the ark itself, we must also recall the spiritual lessons in this story. Three obvious lessons come to mind:

A. *God judges sin.* From the standpoint of those who perished, this is the central message. Although God is patient even in the face of outright rebellion and repeated blasphemy, His patience must eventually come to an end.

God will not always strive with men (Gen. 6:3).

B. *Even in judgment, God displays grace.* Though the world perished, one man and his family were saved. God never leaves Himself without a witness in the world. This truth saves us from despair when we see evil people rising to power and sin being praised openly; instead, it gives us great hope as we spread the gospel. Until the day the flood came, the ark's door was open. Anyone could have entered.

C. *Judgment will come when Jesus returns to the earth.* This is the point Jesus makes in Matthew 24 when He compares the "days of Noah" to the days before His return to the earth. As Noah was building the ark, the people were totally unconcerned about even the remote possibility of divine judgment. In the last days, the world will have little concern about Jesus' soon return and His judgment on the earth. People will be too busy eating, drinking, playing, navigating the Internet, sending e-mail, buying, selling, building, dreaming, singing—doing anything but getting ready for the Lord's return. But make no mistake: that day is coming. Just as certainly as the flood came to Noah's generation, the Day of Judgment will come to the entire earth. And it may come sooner than anyone thinks.

D. *The ark points to Jesus.* Ellen G. White says, "It was Christ who kept the ark safe amid the roaring, seething billows, because its inmates had faith in His power to preserve them" (RH March 12, 1901 as quoted in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, volume 1, page 1091). That leads me to the all-important final point. He is the "ark of salvation" to everyone who believes in Him. Consider these points of comparison:

1. Just as the ark was provided by God, Christ was sent from heaven as a gracious provision for our salvation.

2. There was only one ark, and it had only one door. God never said, "Make four or five arks and let the people make their choice." He never offered more than one door to the ark. Only one ark! Only one door! Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6) See also John 10:7-9.

3. The ark saved everyone who entered. And everyone who comes to Christ is saved.

No one who comes to Him in faith will be turned away (John 6:37).

4. Once God shut the door, no one else could enter. This is a sad and solemn thought. When the door was open, anyone could enter and be saved from the coming flood; once the door was shut, it would not be opened again until the flood was over. Today is the day of grace. The door of salvation is open to all who care to enter.

Consider this final thought. When the flood finally arrived, everyone inside the ark was saved while everyone outside perished in the rising waters. Perhaps some people banged on the door and cried, "Let us in!" When the floodwaters rose, the skeptics at last knew that Noah wasn't so crazy after all. But it was too late. The same thing will happen when Christ returns to the earth. There will be a final separation between the saved and the lost.

CONCLUSION

Only one question remains: Are you in the ark of safety? I am not asking about your religion or your tithing or your good works or your religious background. I am not inquiring about your baptism or your church membership or even about your Sabbath School attendance. Those things are of small value when it comes to the issue of eternal destiny. If Christ is the Ark, are you "in" Christ by faith? Or are you "outside" Christ because you have never trusted in Him?

Run to the ark! Run to the ark of salvation! Put your trust in Jesus Christ. May you and your family be found safe in the ark of salvation.



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

THE BLESSING NO ONE WANTS

Matthew 5:4

“Blessed are those who mourn,” said Jesus. This is one of the strangest statements in the Bible. It is a paradox and a mystery. Happy are the sad! What do these strange words mean? Who are the mourners, why are they sad, and how are they comforted?

I. THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN SUFFERING

No matter how long we ponder this idea, the questions we may ask cannot easily be answered because “the secret things belong to the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:29). God has His reasons, but He’s not obligated to share them with us. The “secret things” describe the deep purposes of God that we simply are not capable of understanding. What sort of explanation would suffice to explain to us why one person lives while another dies?

II. THE MINISTRY OF DIVINE COMFORT

But to leave the matter there would not be fair, for the Bible has a great deal to say about the ministry of divine comfort.

A. *God Himself draws near to those who hurt.* Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Here is a promise of God’s special presence in the midst of our pain. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord Himself draws near to us in times of great suffering. We sense His presence in a way that goes beyond the natural. We hear His voice even though there is no sound in the room. Many Christians can testify to feeling this special sense of God’s nearness during times of great suffering.

B. *God uses suffering to draw us to Himself.* In the same psalm, David declared, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” (verse 4). Suffering turns us to the Lord as nothing else can. Perhaps you’ve heard someone say, “You never know if Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. And when Jesus is all you have, then—and only then—will you discover that Jesus really is all you need.”

C. *We grow faster in hard times than in good times.* Romans 5:2-5 describes the process God uses to develop godly character in our lives. In fact, Paul says, “We also rejoice in our sufferings” (verse 3). That may look like a misprint, but it isn’t. Paul isn’t suggesting that we should become masochists who rejoice in hard times as if we enjoyed the pain. That wouldn’t

even be a Christian idea. He doesn’t say, “We rejoice because of our sufferings” but rather “we rejoice in our sufferings.”

Even in the most difficult moments, God’s people can rejoice because He is at work doing something important in them. Verses 3-5 explain the process. What starts with suffering ends with the love of God. This is a wonderful progression, but you cannot get to the love of God without starting in the place of suffering.

D. *Our sufferings qualify us to minister to others.* In 2 Corinthians 1:4, we read that God “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” The Greek word translated “comfort” in this verse is the same word Jesus used in Matthew 5:4. God uses our sufferings to comfort us so that we can minister to others in His name.

No one understands cancer like someone who has been through it. No one understands divorce like a person who’s experienced it. No one understands the pain of a miscarriage like a mother who has lost a child that way. No one knows the pain of losing a job like someone who has been told, “You’re fired.”

Many Christians are superbly qualified to minister to others, but they don’t realize it. They are the ones who have been deeply hurt by the troubles of life, and through it all, they have discovered that God is faithful. Those people have an important message to share. They can say with conviction, “God will take care of you. I know, because He took care of me.”

III. THE MAJESTY OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

What do these things teach us about the character of God?

A. *Because God is sovereign and we are not, most of our questions will never be answered in this life.* Some people can’t live with that truth, so they devise human answers to explain suffering and death. Those answers almost never work, and sometimes they hurt more than they help. When I am called to the hospital, I never try to answer these hard questions. They are beyond me. Better to say less and be silent before the Lord than to try to explain the mysterious ways of God.

B. *Because God is good, we know that He has our best interests at heart.* That sentence gets to the heart of Romans 8:28. I am con-

vinced that the goodness of God is the central issue of life. If you believe God is good, you can endure things that would break most people. As long as you believe in the goodness of God, you can live with unanswered questions. But once you doubt His goodness, you must become either a secret atheist or an angry Christian.

God’s goodness doesn’t depend on our happiness.

C. *Because God is wise, nothing in our experience is ever wasted.* God’s purpose for His children is reached through suffering, but nothing is wasted. Romans 8:29 tells us that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Ellen G. White explains this concept as follows: “Though the moral image of God was almost obliterated by the sin of Adam, through the merits and power of Jesus it may be renewed. Man may stand with the moral image of God in his character for Jesus will give it to him . . .”¹ If you feel the heavy weight of God hammering down on you, rest assured that nothing is being wasted. He is shaping you into “the image of His Son.”

D. *Because God is love, He will not leave you alone in your pain.* This is the promise of the second Beatitude: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). God will come to you. You may not feel it or believe it, but it is true—He has promised it! If necessary, I could produce a long line of witnesses who could testify to God’s comfort in the midst of great suffering.

After Calvary, God had nothing to prove to anyone. How can you doubt His love after you have looked at the bleeding form of Jesus hanging on the cross?

CONCLUSION

I realize that this may not answer every question, but it does answer the most important question: Does God care for me in the midst of my suffering? The answer is Yes. God cares for you, and if you doubt His love, fix your gaze on the Cross and be comforted.



¹ Ellen G. White’s comments on Romans 8:29, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1078, quoted in *The Review and Herald*, June 10, 1890.

General Conference Ministerial Association

“IN JESUS’ NAME, AMEN”

John 14:13, 14

“In Jesus’ name, Amen.” These words of Jesus contain a remarkable promise. They tell us that whatever we ask—anything at all—if we ask it in the name of Jesus, He will do it for us. It would be hard to find a promise broader than that. “Whatever you ask . . . in my name . . . I will do it.”

Our problem is not with the promise but with the condition. What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name?” Praying in Jesus’ name refers to a certain formula we add at the end of our prayers. So there is a sense in which every prayer we pray should always be offered in the name of Jesus.

But that still doesn’t tell us what it means to pray “in Jesus’ name.” Perhaps the best way to attack that question is to consider first what it doesn’t mean.

I. WHAT IT DOESN’T MEAN

Praying in Jesus’ name means more than simply adding a phrase to the end of a prayer. Here’s a bit of Bible trivia that may surprise you. Go back and read all the prayers in the New Testament. Not a single one ends with the phrase “in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Yet surely those prayers were being offered according to the promise of this text. That tells us that this promise deals with much more than saying a few words and then saying Amen.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMES IN THE BIBLE

Let’s spend a few moments thinking about the meaning of names in the Bible. In our day, names don’t have an intrinsic meaning. You might be Joe or Jack or Mary or Susan, but those names don’t automatically convey any particular message about who you are. But it was different in Bible times.

First, names in the Bible often represent the character, personality, origin, or destiny of different people. Jacob means cheater, Nabal means fool, and Peter means rock. What about the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? Lord means Master, Jesus means Savior, and Christ means the Anointed One sent from God. When you call out to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are declaring that He is your Master, your Savior, and the Anointed One sent from God.

Second, names also represent authority. We see this principle at work in the great confrontation between David and Goliath. Just

before the battle begins, David boldly tells Goliath where his power is coming from (1 Sam. 17:45).

Third, names represent a person’s reputation. We see this clearly in reference to the name of the Lord. The very first petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “Hallowed be your name.” To “hallow” something is to treat it as being of great worth. You hallow God’s name when you treat it with the respect it deserves.

To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray based on who He is, with His authority, in order that His reputation might be enhanced in the world.

III. PRAYING “IN JESUS’ NAME”

What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”? Here are six answers to that question.

A. *When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are confessing your faith that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.* Hebrews 10:19-20 tells us that we now have confidence (the Greek word means “boldness” or “freedom”) to come into the very presence of God by virtue of the blood of Jesus. The only One who can bring you into God’s presence is the Lord Jesus Christ. “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). If you do not come to God through Him, you cannot come at all.

B. *When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are acknowledging that His name is the supreme name in the universe* (Phil. 2:9-11). By virtue of His victorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, God has exalted Jesus to the very highest place in the universe. He has the greatest name in the universe.

C. *When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are admitting that there is no power to answer your prayers in any other name, including your own.* The whole point of prayer is to admit our total dependence on God. And we come to God in Jesus’ name because “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

D. *When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are asking that God’s reputation be enhanced through the answer to your prayer* (John 14:13). The purpose of our prayers should be to bring glory to the Father. After all, this is why Jesus came to the earth (John 17:1). Jesus came to glorify God through His obedi-

ent life, His sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection. To glorify God means many things, not the least of which is to enhance God’s reputation in the world. When our requests will glorify God, we may be sure that they will be answered.

E. *When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are asking that everything you ask for be consistent with God’s character, will, and Word* (Rom. 10:13). Calling on the name of the Lord means asking for that which is consistent with all that Jesus is, all that He says, and all that He wants to accomplish in the world. Think of it this way: You cannot lie or steal in Jesus’ name. You cannot ask God to bless adultery in Jesus’ name. You cannot ask God to bless your sin in Jesus’ name. You cannot swear in Jesus’ name. You cannot ask God to bless your anger in Jesus’ name.

CONCLUSION

What difference should it make to pray in Jesus’ name? It should deepen our sense of total dependence on Christ. We pray in Jesus’ name precisely because our own name carries no weight with the Almighty. On our own, we stand before God wrapped in the filthy rags of our own self-righteousness.

Finally, there is a clear gospel call that should be made. If you need to be saved, I know the name of the One who can save you. If you want to be forgiven, I know a name that can wash away your sins. If you want a new life, I know a name that can give you new life here and now.

There is no name like the name of Jesus. It is the only name “by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). It is the name that is above every other name. One day all creation will bow down before that great name. And in that name we may bring our requests to God, knowing that whatever we ask in His name, He will do for us. This is the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

REVIVAL IN THE LOCAL CHURCH



When we think of spiritual revival, we need to understand what revival means. Revival is an experience that produces adjustments and changes in people's lives and in the life of the church. In the following quotation, Ellen G. White defined revival in a simple manner:

"Revival and Reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits, and practices."¹

If revival generates reorganization in ideas, habits, and practices, are you, as a leader in your local church, interested in a revival experience? Revival requires prayer, Bible study, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Members of the church and people in the community around the church are waiting for this experience. Why?

1. *Because secularism has not been the answer.* Many who have academic degrees, good professional jobs, and elevated social positions nevertheless feel emptiness in their lives. Material possessions have not satisfied all of their needs.

2. *Because people are spiritually thirsty and wish to have answers for their spiritual questions.* This is not the time for entertaining programs on spiritual and religious issues; it is time for solid bread—the Word of God. People are looking for a church where they can find God.

3. *Because people's spiritual interest is not in Christianity as a religion or in any particular church or its mission.* Their spiritual interest lies in their desire to know God and get answers to their questions—Who is God? Who am I? Why am I here?—questions related to a sense of identity and a meaningful relationship with God.

Here is an easy and strategic five-step process for revival:

1. Know what is your role as a church officer.

2. Identify the spiritual needs and priorities of your church.

3. Choose strategies to meet those needs.

4. Define action plans for your annual church program, keeping revival and mission as the top priorities.

5. Go through a quarterly process of implementation and evaluation. This process should include a week of spiritual revival to explore the following: Who is God? (the Creator); the problem that arose in God's kingdom (the Fall and sin); God's solution to sin (redemption); and the invitation of God (restoration).

This will be a new spiritual experience that will help you to recognize God's principles, values, instructions, plan, and methods. Sometimes these are different than human principles, values, plans, or methods.

When we walk in this world doing what we think is God's will and using what we believe to be God's criteria, using values that we think are God's values and using methods that we think are God's methods, we are on the wrong path. Let's explore God's Word to hear His voice saying, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isa. 30:21).

If you allow God to be your God, you will have gained a greater knowledge of Him and developed a new interest in the study of His Word and in your prayer life. Your participation in evangelism will reflect your personal relationship with God because, in the end, stewardship is a relationship. Your faithfulness in tithes and offerings will not be questionable because God comes first, and you do as He said.

EQ

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:128.

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THE ART OF LISTENING TO A SERMON

Every pastor wants to preach inspiring and biblical sermons. Nonetheless, I will never forget a professor who told one of my fellow classmates in homiletics class that if he was a member in his church, he would just stop going. My friend, traumatized, almost gave up his “call” to serve in pastoral ministry. Now, almost fifteen years later, he is one of the more successful pastors from our ministerial class. While he would no doubt tell you himself that he still does not consider his preaching finesse as his greatest strength, at his ordination I heard church members testify to the effectiveness of his simple yet biblical sermons. His preaching had made an impact.

Now, after five years of pastoral ministry, my role has been reversed from preacher to listener. Although I still preach, most of the time I find myself in the pew. Sometimes the quality of sermons varies dramatically. In addition, we serve in an Asian context, and I furthermore observe how different cultures think and therefore construct sermons in different ways.¹ Yet regardless of cultural circumstances, all cultures recognize the essential need of *listening* to the sermon. Whereas many articles tell pastors how to improve their preaching, this article focuses on the even more essential art of how to *listen*.²

LISTENING

Communication is a two-way process. At its most basic sense it requires a minimum of two people: a person who sends a message and then a recipient. James Borg argues that human communication consists of only 7 percent words. All the rest is from body language and paralinguistic clues such as tone and inflection.³ Another researcher, Albert Mehrabian, argues that 35 percent of communication occurs face-to-face whereas the rest comes from non-verbal communication.⁴ Both studies point to the fact that words are merely just a small portion of the communication process.

I once thought that I was a good listener—until I began to practice what I thought were my skills in a college class on interpersonal communications. I was quickly disabused of such a notion. On another occasion I gave a series of sermons about marriage and the family in which I made a similar point by asking: “how many of you have a perfect marriage?” Incredulously, one naïve man raised his hand. “Get that arm down,” his wife exclaimed as she yanked his arm back down. Everyone in the audience chuckled. The re-

TRULY EFFECTIVE PREACHING IS THEREFORE ABOUT A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH PREACHER AND LISTENER.

ality is that it is human nature to think that we are better listeners than we actually are. I therefore propose four steps to becoming a better listener, which should benefit not only our relationships in general, but also your ability to listen more effectively on Sabbath morning.

(1) **Intentionality.** Good listeners are deliberate about the listening process beginning with a positive mental attitude.

Such a person is a learner and begins with an attitude of humility to ask God, what does He have for him or her to learn today?

(2) **Body Language.** Sit up straight and be ready to listen. I find that just my very posture says a lot about how I feel about the worship experience. It furthermore allows me to concentrate when I am poised in a position ready to listen.

(3) **Use Lag Time Effectively.** Various people have different levels of comprehension. Some speakers are faster than others. Generally I find that my mind can race faster than the speaker so I choose to take notes during the sermon. This helps me to concentrate on the main point of the message.

(4) **Minimize Distractions.** When my wife and I go on a date, we turn our cell phones off so we can focus on each other. The same thing is true when we worship. While some people I realize—such as physicians who need to remain “on call”—generally I find that more often than not most people begin to text or surf the web. Just like on a date—it takes a choice. Choose to turn technology off unless it is being intentionally used to facilitate Bible study or sermon notes. For me, since I find it easy to let my mind wander, I prefer the primitive method of bringing just my Bible and a pad of paper to church.

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

A fascinating “testimony” by Ellen G. White concerns a group of church members who dissected and criticized their pastor’s sermons.⁵ Mrs. White, on the one hand, could be very direct in telling would-be ministers that they did not have the basic abil-

ity to communicate in the pulpit and should therefore refrain from the ministry.⁶ On the other hand, she was abundantly clear that it was not the finesse or polish of the minister that made preaching effective. She rebuked church members because of their critical attitude. It was such an attitude that prevented them from gaining a spiritual blessing each week in church.

In today's consumer culture, with media so readily available, this ability to criticize ministers has led to a type of homiletical pornography. As I visited homes, I remember several church members who asked me why I couldn't preach like their particular favorite minister on television. While I frequently enjoyed sermons from the same ministers, I think that such an attitude belies a troubling problem: a tendency to evaluate the effectiveness of a pastor by how a particular person or style of preaching makes them feel. "If the preaching is of an emotional character," observed Ellen G. White, "it will affect the feelings, but not the heart and conscience."⁷

Truly effective preaching is therefore about a transformative experience for both preacher and listener. Whereas there is plenty of advice to encourage pastors to improve their sermons (as they should), I believe that as church members we have a sacred responsibility to *listen*. No matter how flawed the messenger, there must be a spiritual discernment to recognize God's leading through the spoken Word. Even the most flawed messenger, if he or she expresses their convictions from the Word of God, has an

important message. As listeners we have a sacred responsibility to open our hearts and minds. Spiritual conviction must transcend a consumer culture. After all, "spiritual realities . . . are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13-14).

ED

¹ Richard Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why* (Free Press, 2004).

² I am indebted to Derek Morris who focused in his D.Min. dissertation on the value of incorporating sermon feedback from listeners for ministers to improve their preaching effectiveness. Whereas he focuses on the value to ministers, this article focuses on the perspective for those who remain in the pew. See Derek Morris, "Listening to the Listener: Audience Feedback as a Resource for Relevant Biblical Preaching," D.Min. diss., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1998.

³ James Borg, *Body Language: 7 Easy Lessons to Master the Silent Language* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press, 2010), pg. 16-18.

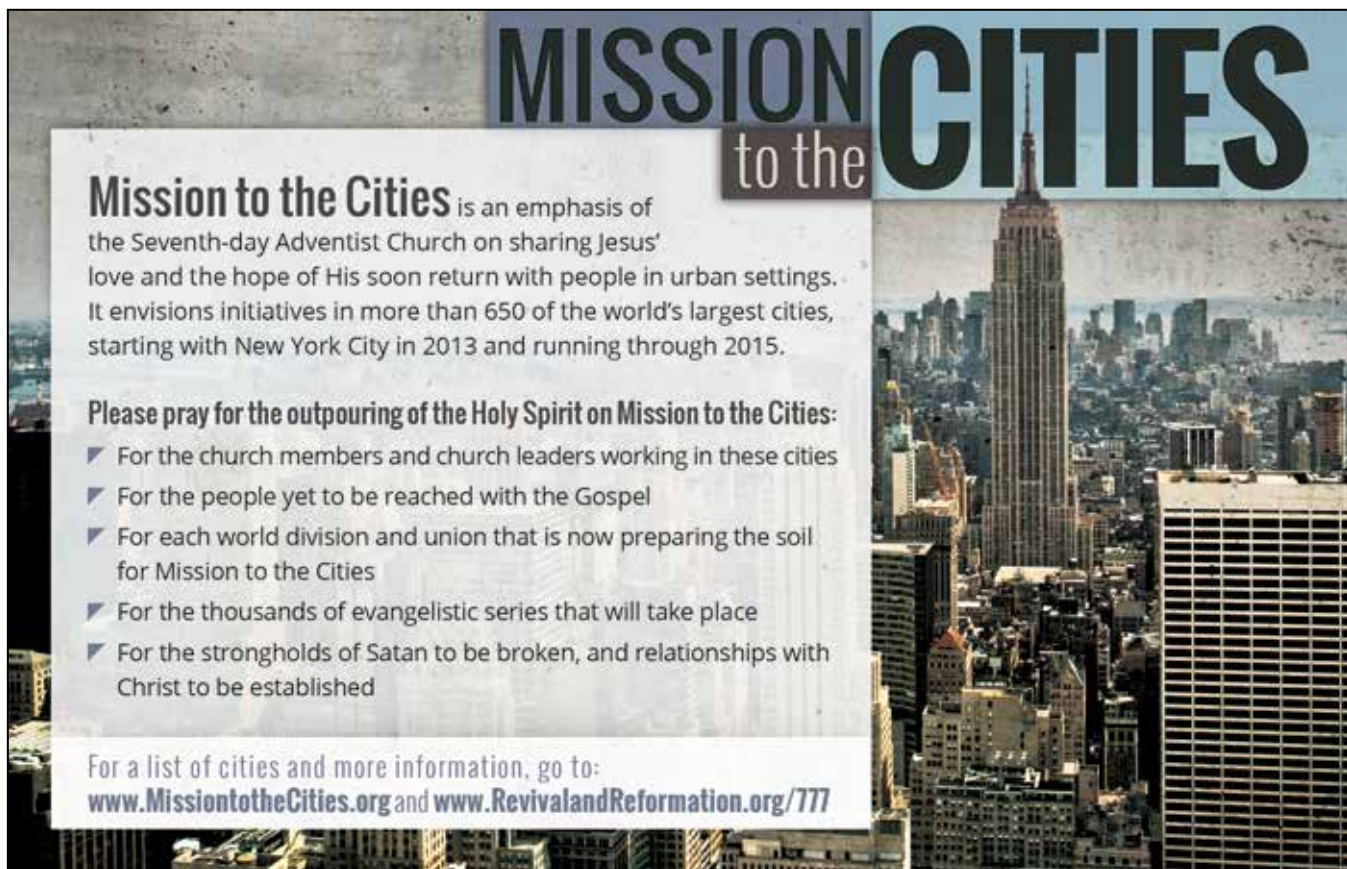
⁴ Albert Mehrabian, *Nonverbal Communication* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Transaction, 2007), pg. 185.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 5, pg. 298-302.

⁶ "You will never be called to preach," she wrote to one such aspiring minister. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 4, pg. 131.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pg. 301.

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MISSION to the CITIES

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- For the strongholds of Satan to be broken, and relationships with Christ to be established

For a list of cities and more information, go to:
www.MissiontotheCities.org and www.RevivalandReformation.org/777

CLARITY AND PURITY OF UTTERANCE

>PART 1 OF 3



By earnest prayer and diligent effort we are to obtain a fitness for speaking. This fitness includes uttering every syllable clearly, placing the force and emphasis where it belongs. Speak slowly. Many speak rapidly, hurrying one word after another so fast that the effect of what they say is lost. Into what you say put the spirit and life of Christ.

Cultivation of the Voice: He who has bestowed upon us all the gifts that enable us to be workers together with God, expects His servants to cultivate their voices so that they can speak and sing in a way that all can understand.

A Mouthpiece for God: The man who accepts the position of being mouthpiece for God should consider it highly essential that he present the truth with all the grace and intelligence he can, that the truth may lose nothing in his presentation of it to the people. Those who consider it a little thing to speak with an imperfect utterance dishonor God.

Overcome Indistinct Speech: In reading or in recitation the pronunciation should be clear. A nasal tone or an ungainly attitude should be at once corrected. Any lack of distinctness should be marked as defective. Many have allowed themselves to form the habit of speaking in a thick, indistinct way, as if their tongue were too large for their mouth. This habit has greatly hindered their usefulness.

If those who have defects in their manner of utterance will submit to criticism and correction, they may overcome these defects. They should perseveringly practice speaking in a low, distinct tone, exercising the abdominal muscles in deep breathing, and making the throat the channel of communication. Many speak in a rapid way and in a high, unnatural key. Such a practice will injure the throat and lungs. As a result of continual abuse, the weak, inflamed organs will become diseased, and consumption may result.

Soft, Persuasive Tones: Be pure in speech. Cultivate a soft and persuasive, not a harsh and dictatorial, tone of voice. Give the children lessons in voice culture. Train their habits of speech, until no coarse or rough words will come

THE TONES OF THE VOICE HAVE MUCH TO DO IN AFFECTING THE HEARTS OF THOSE THAT HEAR.

spontaneously from their lips when any trial comes to them.

Controlled Volume: They [ministers] should speak with reverence. Some destroy the solemn impression they may have made upon the people, by raising their voices to a very high pitch and hallooing and screaming out the truth. When presented in this manner, truth loses much of its sweetness, its force and solemnity. But if the voice is toned right, if it has

solemnity, and is so modulated as to be even pathetic, it will produce a much better impression.

This was the tone in which Christ taught His disciples. He impressed them with solemnity; He spoke in a pathetic manner. But this loud hallooing—what does it do? It does not give the people any more exalted views of the truth, and does not impress them any more deeply. It only causes a disagreeable sensation to the hearers, and wears out the vocal organs of the speaker. The tones of the voice have much to do in affecting the hearts of those that hear.

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

EO

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 181-183, by Ellen G. White.

IS A CHURCH BUILDING NECESSARY?

I have a congregation that is reduced to just a handful of active members, none of them young. They're housed in a broken-down, maintenance-long-deferred church over 100 years old. Bricks are falling off, a whole section of the building is separating so that squirrels and raccoons squeeze in, the stained-glass windows are falling out, we have damage from termites and black mold, and leaking roofs have left rusty spots on the old tin ceilings. It stinks—literally.

The church members know they can't continue to worship there, although thus far, we've not been successful in finding a buyer. But if we do sell, what then?

There is almost a desperation in the congregation to not be without a building of their own. I've suggested a house church or renting a room from another church or organization. But even with such a weak congregation, having their own building seems to be their absolute minimum requirement. They'd rather continue in that horrible building, with two short pews occupied on the best Sabbath, than to be without a building of their own. One of our church members discovered a little church building far, far out in the country (one that's been for sale for a long time, for the good reason that a congregation can't survive there), and they've decided to spend their capital there (provided they're able to sell) rather than be without a church home for even a short period of time.

I've pastored in every sort of church building—from the embarrassingly horrible to the brand-new, multi-million-dollar, envy-of-the-community building. In most of them, I believe we've spent more board meeting time talking about church buildings and the money to buy and maintain them than we have talking about ministry. Large or small, buildings dominate church life. Planning, constructing, and paying for a \$6 million church took countless hours of planning and work. On the other hand, we recently had a lengthy discussion in one church board meeting about fixing the flush handle on the men's urinal, to which an elder responded with a lecture on how it uses too much water anyway and that he had placed a Styrofoam cup next to the sink for men to pour



a bit of water into the urinal after each use. And, he scolded, whoever's throwing away the cup needs to stop!

That's an hour of my life I'll never get back.

It's in those moments that I realize how easily we forget about the world "out there." We exist for our building, not for our ministry. We say we'd like other people to join us in our building, yet the church isn't designed to be especially hospitable to new people. For example, what if they don't know the correct usage of the urinal cup?

After all these years of being a pastor, I confess that I've become heartily sick of spending so much time and money on church structures—building new ones or maintaining old ones. These are structures we use only a few hours per week. Congregations seem to define themselves by their buildings, not by their people. Take away the building and who are we? Even start-up congregations that begin in rented spaces dream of having their own building. Yet I think it could be argued that buildings encourage our tendency to be a private club. They create a territory that's hard for strangers to enter. They gather us together rather than pushing us out in the world where we should be.

How important are church buildings to the work of Jesus? Vital or a necessary evil? I don't know the answer, but I'd welcome some discussion.

ED

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“BE THE MISSION”

PRAYER AND BLESSING INITIATIVE


In Luke 9:2, Jesus sent His disciples to “preach the kingdom of God.” In other verses of the Bible, we find that He sends us to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13, 14). We often read these verses and toss them aside simply because we don’t know how to put these commands into practice. However, Hope for Humanity has come up with an initiative to help us become that ray of light in our communities. Here’s how it works:

The principle of the “Be the Mission” prayer and blessing initiative is to be blessed as you bless. Businesses in America and around the world are hurting because of the economic downturn. Ideally, your church wants to help its community by affirming local businesses for their importance to the community. To begin, your church can agree to pray for local businesses and their owners. Start by hosting a Commitment Service so that the church family as a whole can pray for and support those who are making contacts in the community in their name. Church members can also be encouraged to make use of their local businesses.

After the commitment and prayers, a group of willing participants from your church or group gets together to discuss possible places they can contact and also to create a visitation schedule that works for everyone. This group, whom we refer to as the ambassadors, gathers and commits to visit local businesses. In these visits, church members express their concern for the businesses in these tough economic times and let the owners know that the church is praying for their specific business. Additionally, members request permission to pray with business owners and include any personal prayer requests that they may have. These visits should be kept

short—10 minutes at the most—because they are taking place during business hours. Sample instructions and scripts are provided in “initiative kits,” along with “blessing cards” to leave as a reminder. Along with prayer, the group tells store personnel where the church is located. Many times we pass by landmarks without realizing what they are; perhaps these business owners had never noticed the Seventh-day Adventist church, even one that has been in the same spot for years. Now, however, they have something to connect them to your particular church. They may tell their friends, “Oh, the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Lakeland Avenue? Yeah, a few people from there came to my business to pray with me, and they pray for me and my business weekly.” What a great way to make a subtle but huge impact!

The aim of this initiative is to develop friendships through these visits with those working in the business community. As the initiative progresses, we encourage church members to invite business friends to a Service of Recognition at the church (a service can be held at least once a year). In this way, our churches can become a true blessing in our communities, and we can invite others to share in the blessing that the Lord has for all who desire it.

You want to be blessed in your own life, and this blessing happens as you bless others. In the very act of blessing, you yourself are blessed. That’s how it works! Tell yourself this truth: “Live to bless others and you will be blessed.”¹ 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, Jan. 1, 1871.

Kati Britton works as a communication assistant with Hope for Humanity in the North American Division.



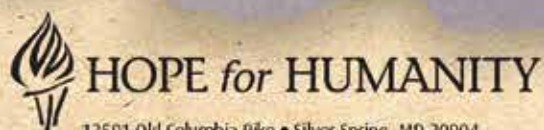
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THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

We would not know about God, if He had not revealed himself to us. But God in his mercy chose to make Himself known. He did this to some extent through nature (general revelation) but specifically through the Bible, Jesus Christ, appearances of angels, prophets, etc. and also through personal experiences. God’s adversary tries to imitate and distort these forms of divine revelation.

We will focus on one way in which God decided to reveal Himself through the gift of prophecy. However, even within Christianity there are questions about this gift. While today some Christians think that this gift has disappeared at the close of the first century A.D., others see it in many phenomena today, while still others redefine prophecy to such an extent that it describes basically any Christian ministry.

I. THE PROPHET

1. What Is a Genuine Prophet?

Ezekiel 33:7 The prophet Ezekiel was speaking for God. Prophets were called in a supernatural way (Isa 6:1-8) and had to communicate the message and will of God faithfully, without adding their own ideas or deleting what they did not like (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19). God then acknowledged the message of the prophets as His own message.

2. Since When Did God Use Prophets?

Acts 3:21 God spoke through holy prophets from ancient time onward, after the earth was created.

Jude 1:14 Already Enoch, who belonged to the seventh generation after Adam, spoke prophetically.

3. How Did God Communicate with the Prophets?

1 Samuel 3:4, 10 He let them hear His voice or the voice of heavenly beings (Rev 5:5). This is called an “audition.”

Ezekiel 1:1	He revealed Himself, revealing supernatural realities, and messages in visions (Rev 6:1).
Numbers 12:6	He spoke to them through visions and dreams. In the case of visions, it could happen that astonishing phenomena occurred such as the following:
Numbers 24:3-4, 16	Seeing another reality
Daniel 9:21	Appearance of an angel (Rev 10:8-9)
Daniel 10:8, 9	Loss of strength
Daniel 10:17	No breath
Daniel 10:18-19	Divine strengthening

4. What Did Prophets See?

Prophets saw and recognized:

- Events of the past (Eze 16—the origin of God’s people; Rev 12:1-5—the birth of the Messiah)
- Events of the present (Isa 36-39—the Assyrian threat and Hezekiah’s illness; Rev 2:1-7—the condition of the church)
- Events of the future (Isa 9 and 11—the coming Messiah; Rev 21-22—the new earth)

Sometimes prophets did not understand their own prophecy, however, they passed it on faithfully (Dan 8:27; 12:4). The main task of prophets was spiritual instruction, teaching, bringing about reformation, being advisors, and among other tasks also predicting the future. In case the people of God did not obey the voice of God through the prophets, they faced God’s judgment.

5. How Did Prophets Communicate Their Messages?

The prophets communicated the messages entrusted to them orally (2 Sam 12:1-7), in written form (Jer 36:2, 4), and through actions (Eze 24). Expressions such as “Thus says the Lord,” or “I saw” show that they were convinced they were talking in the name of God. Their messages were true and trustworthy (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16). God recognized their words as His own —Jeremiah 25:1-4, 7-8.

6. Genuine or Not?

There were not only genuine prophets throughout history but also false prophets. So God provided criteria for us to be able to distinguish between true and false prophets. In case, one of the following points is not met, the respective prophet is a false prophet. Here are the distinguishing marks:

- Full agreement with the Holy Scriptures—Isaiah 8:19-20; Deuteronomy 13:1-4
- Recognition of Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior who had become fully human—1 John 4:1-3
- Good fruit, that is, an exemplary conduct of life and an effective ministry—Matthew 7:15-21
- Fulfillment of predictions—Deuteronomy 18:22
- No materialistic attitude—Micah 3:9-12
- Proclamation of God's messages, not what people like to hear—1 Kings 22:4-8

II. PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TODAY

1. Prophets in the New Testament

The first prophet to appear in the New Testament was John the Baptist (Luke 1:76) and the greatest was Jesus (Deut 18:15; Matt 21:11). The gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts in the early church and played a special role—1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:1; 12:11; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21.

2. How Long Should the Gift of Prophecy Remain in the Church?

Joel 2:28-31

Joel's prediction was partially fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:14-21, 32-33). However, the great day of the Lord, mentioned in Joel, is in a special way connected to Christ's Second Coming. So there should be another fulfillment of Joel's prophecy prior to Christ's return.

Matthew 24:11, 24

Jesus predicted the coming of false prophets prior to His Second Coming, indicating there would also be true prophets, otherwise he would have warned of prophets in general. Obviously the problem would be to distinguish false from true prophets.

3. What Would Be the Relation between a True Prophet in Our Days and the Bible?

Holy Scripture surpasses the ministry of true prophets


in so far that it is the yardstick by which prophecy is being evaluated. However, both the message of Scripture as well as the message of genuine prophets come from the same source, the Holy Spirit, and call for obedience—2 Chronicles 20:20.

III. CATEGORIES OF PROPHETS IN SCRIPTURE

True prophets of biblical times can be classified in four groups. This classification has nothing to do with their authority or scope of ministry. However, it shows that God has different tasks for different prophets, that prophets can be male or female, and that all of them spoke in the name of God to humans. Here is the list:

1. There are prophets who have written down their messages, and these were incorporated into Scripture, for instance, Isaiah, Daniel, John, and Paul. These prophets are also called canonical prophets.
2. There are prophets who left no written records either to their generation or to us, but whose ministry is extensively described in Scripture. For instance, Elijah (1 Kings 17-19, 21; 2 Kings 1-2; Mal 4:5; John 1:21; James 5:17) and Elisha (2 Kings 2-9, 13; Luke 4:27). They are not less important than the first category of prophets.
3. There are true prophets who wrote down their messages, but these documents were not incorporated into Scripture. About ten such persons are known (for instance, Nathan and Gad—1 Chron 29:29). There are also letters of Paul that were not added to the New Testament canon, for instance, a letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16).
4. There were genuine prophets, mentioned briefly, that had oral messages only. About thirty such people are known from Scripture, for instance the prophetess Deborah (Judg 4:4), Agabus (Acts 11:27-28), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8-9), and others.

CONCLUSION

God is interested in us and loves us. He wants us to enjoy eternal life in His presence. Therefore, He reveals Himself and His plan of salvation among other things through the gift of prophecy. All Scripture came about through the gift of prophecy. We are extremely grateful and follow God's revelation through Scripture as well as through genuine prophecy that is given to us in addition to Scripture, but reflects what Scripture teaches. 

Ekkehardt Mueller is deputy director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference World Headquarters. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI Newsletter, edited by Elias Brasil de Souza.

THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF THE LEADER:

LEADING FROM WITHIN

Leaders lead more from who they are than any other leadership qualities or skills they may possess. Who leaders truly are influences others and, if leadership is to be authentic, all leaders who function in the Christian context need to lead spiritually. Spirituality is not measured in number of hours spent in meditation or meetings attended. Spirituality is much more complex than just activities—it is indeed a pilgrimage; a walk with God who forms us and gradually transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Spirituality is dynamic, relationship-based, experiential, and unique to each individual. The process of becoming is the heart of the leader's spirituality. Given the importance of this aspect of leadership, it is vital to understand that spirituality interacts with a number of aspects of our growth into what God has in mind for us as His leaders.

SPIRITUALITY AND IDENTITY

Our identity is in Jesus Christ and out of that secure identity can flow humble yet powerful leadership that makes a difference. We are created into God's image, we are in Christ—saved, redeemed, destined for greatness and assured of eternal life. Only leaders who are secure in Christ can lead others in a way that is God-honouring. Our treatment, our strengths and weaknesses, our gifts, all determine our unique identity which can only be appreciated in a close relationship with the One who made us.

When we have this sense of security in Jesus Christ our Creator and are in the constant process of discovering who He created us to be, we can lead with freedom and assurance; no need for pretending, impressing or hiding. We lead as an expression of our identity in Jesus.

SPIRITUALITY AND INTEGRITY

The second aspect of our journey as leaders has to do with integrity. We live on a planet infected by sin—and sin is impacting and challenging our sense of identity. The enemy is actively pursuing people to destroy God's image in them. Everyone has inconsistencies between who God wants them to be and who they actually are—thus our integrity is

“AND WE ALL, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES CONTEMPLATE THE LORD'S GLORY, ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO HIS IMAGE WITH EVER-INCREASING GLORY, WHICH COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO IS THE SPIRIT.”

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18



challenged. The moment we start covering up the gap we become less than transparent and our influence becomes tainted with dishonesty. Who we are inside is not what people see on the outside, and the greater the gap the more destructive our influence. Spirituality is therefore an awareness of that gap and an openness to God and others to correct us, encourage us, and help us grow to become spiritually whole.

SPIRITUALITY AND INTIMACY

Leadership is inevitably expressed in relationships—and relationships require appropriate levels of intimacy with those we lead. The degree to which we allow people to come close to us is determined by how secure we feel in Jesus Christ. If our identity is strong and our integrity is transparent and authentic, people will feel invited—and when they engage with us they will not feel betrayed or disillusioned. Thus our spirituality affects the degree of authentic closeness and ultimately this will determine our ability to influence others positively.

SPIRITUALITY AND INTENSITY (PASSION)

Leaders who are deeply aware of who they are and who extend that awareness to those whom they have been given the privilege of leading will develop an intensity—a pas-

sion—to be instrumental in assisting others to be spiritually mature and to increase their own awareness of God's plan for them. More than that, they will also passionately pursue the bigger picture, the vision of what God has in mind not just for individuals, but for entire groups, congregations, and communities. This is the beginning of a vision for the preferred future God is preparing for those who are in close relationship with Him. A leader can sense that future, can articulate it with passion and can invite others to engage in that journey towards the future.

LEADING WELL

The core of leadership is spiritual. Only leaders with a spiritual heart are qualified to lead God's church. It is the quality of the leader's on-going relationship with God which gives life and direction to all the elements of his/her leadership. ED


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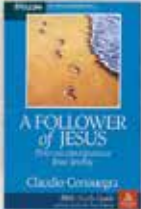
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CHOICES FOR LIFE:

REST FOR BODY AND SOUL

“Early to bed, early to rise.” Many have heard this quote by Benjamin Franklin; however, Franklin probably didn’t know as much as we know today about how sleep impacts health. Today we have plenty of evidence that proves that sleep impacts not only our body’s energy levels but also our physical and mental well-being. Here are some examples:¹

- Lack of sleep is associated with many physical illnesses: cardiovascular disease, stroke, coronary heart disease, metabolic syndrome, and decreased immune function.
- Lack of sleep affects hormone levels, increasing the risk for diabetes and obesity, particularly in children and adolescents.
- Lack of sleep is associated with mental disorders such as depression and memory loss.

In our fast-paced, agenda-driven society, it is very easy for us to stay up late getting things done. Sometimes we may do chores around the house or study for exams. Other times we may watch television or surf the Internet. And sometimes we as elders and church leaders may stay up late to prepare for a church committee meeting or to work on a sermon, not realizing that, as a result, our actions may negatively impact on our health.

When we develop this habit of staying up late, we change our natural circadian rhythm to one that is less than optimal. Some people think they work better at night than in the morning, not realizing that this is unnatural. The truth is that most people can reset their circadian rhythm to a healthy function. While it is true that some people may have difficulty sleeping 7-8 hours a night, these people are the exception, not the rule. Most people can learn good sleep habits that will help to reset their circadian rhythms.

Here are five tips to promote restful sleep:

1. Go to bed early before 10:00 p.m. and lie still with your eyes closed—even if you don’t fall asleep right away.
2. Keep your sleeping room cool and completely dark.
3. Avoid caffeinated foods or drinks during the day.
4. Avoid exercising late at night; exercise in the sunlight is preferable.
5. Allow at least three hours between your evening meal and bedtime.



The more connected we are to God, the clearer He speaks to us, showing us “the path of life” (Ps. 16:11). He says, “Walk here.” Why should we keep late hours working on projects or participating in evening meetings? It may be acceptable once in a while, but it should not be the norm. Ellen G. White says, “By keeping late hours . . . we lay the foundation for feebleness. . . . By overworking mind or body, we unbalance the nervous system. . . . The opportunity of blessing others, the very work for which God sent them into the world, has by their own course of action been cut short . . .”²

How intentional are you in practicing “early to bed, early to rise” in your own life? As a church elder, you are an example to others. Are you doing all you can to ensure that church programs, meetings, rehearsals, and committees do not keep people out late on a regular basis unnecessarily?

Getting to bed early is choice—a choice for a full life. If anxieties fill your mind and racing thoughts keep you awake at night due to stress or worry, perhaps you can repeat the verse that my dear grandmother taught me to recite every night at bedtime: “In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Ps. 4:8). This same God says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11).



¹ A. Shankar, S. Syamala, and S. Kalidindi. “Insufficient Rest or Sleep and Its Relation to Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes, and Obesity in a National, Multiethnic Sample,” in *PLoS One*, 30 Nov. 2010; 5(11):e14189. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0014189. (Cited in *Health Unlimited*, August 2012.)



² Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 346:4.

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5 WAYS TO RATE YOUR CHURCH

What makes a church desirable? Is it new carpet, the sound system, its location, or potlucks? As a church growth consultant, I have often brought in “outsiders” to evaluate churches. Usually the leadership of the church rates their church higher than visitors do. Programs are only as good as the congregation’s attitude. Is your church a five-star church or a half-star church? Here are a few ways to evaluate your church.

EXPERIENCING GOD

When a person goes to church, he or she is looking for God. People are searching for something bigger than themselves to give them hope in their lives. When people walk into a church, they know within minutes whether or not God is present. If you were to hire a reporter to come into your church today and rate his or her experience, what do you think the outcome would be? People sense God’s presence in a praying church. The more you and your congregation pray, the more you feel God’s presence and grace. Is your church saturated with prayer and the presence of God?

FOCUS ON PEOPLE

Some churches are self-centered, and some are others-centered. It’s not hard to tell the difference. A friend recently entered a church lobby on a Sabbath morning. The people were talking and laughing and having a good time. They liked their church, but they never noticed the visitor. After a few minutes of uncomfortable invisibility, she proceeded to the worship center, where she sat alone in a pew for 10 minutes. Finally, an older lady sat and talked with her. The older lady also was new. By contrast, an others-centered church is immediately interested in new people, what they need, and how the church can help. Such churches have a customized approach that changes for every person.

What is the focus of your church? Is it self-centered or does it love others? How intentional are you about meeting people’s spiritual, emotional, and physical needs? If your church were taken out of your community today, would anyone notice?

UNDERSTANDABLE LANGUAGE

How often in your worship service or Sabbath school do you use churchy or denominational terminologies that confuse new people? What does this say about your church and its ability to communicate to your community? What do people hear when you speak? Church vocabulary may mean something different outside the church walls and may confuse guests.

One day I decided to take an unchurched friend to church with me. Because I was visiting in town, we chose a church I had never attended. During the entire service, my friend was asking questions like “What does ‘investment’ mean?” “Why would I want to fall on ‘the rock’?” “How does a lamb’s blood cleanse me?” “What is revival?” He had never been to church, and it was eye-opening to

realize how disconnected this church was from the visitor. Healthy churches tend to speak in terms that everyone can understand.

INCLUSIVE CONGREGATION

Does your congregation look the same? If a young person walked into your church today, would he or she feel welcome or out of place? How diverse is your congregation? Is there diversity or will people find uniformity in race, age, and attire?

Recently I was talking to my assistant about her experiences with church. She is a seminary student, and her parents are known in the denomination; however, her appearance is not that of a typical pastor. She shared with me that when she first walks into a church, she can tell that the members are silently judging her. As soon as they find out what she is studying or who her parents are, everything changes, and suddenly she has lunch invitations and friends.

How do you treat people who look different? How intentional are you about reaching out to all ages, races, and types of people?

The church that wants to be integrated may have a challenge getting started; however, it is amazing how even the smallest symbols can make an impact. Seeing one person who looks and dresses “like me” can communicate an open and inviting atmosphere.

HARMONIOUS COMMUNITY

Harmony does not mean that everyone agrees with everything. Rather, it is about how your church feels. When a new person or even a regular attendee walks into the building, does it feel like a healthy and safe place to be or is there tension in the air? How does your church handle problems? A healthy church is not problem-free, but it knows how to handle its problems. Are questions asked and answers given with defensiveness or love?

One day a man told me that he and his family had decided to join my church; he said he wanted to join because he felt “love in the air” and “safe” in the church. He also said that he was so glad to have finally found a home where he could communicate with people on an honest level without feeling judged or condemned.

CONCLUSION

How accessible are you physically and emotionally to your community? Most people who come to church feel beaten up Sunday through Friday; they are not looking for another beating on Sabbath. They come to church for healing and hope. They want to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. They want to be told that God is there, that God has not forgotten them, and that God will bless them. The church that truly believes and lives that message is the church that breathes spiritually healthy air.



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