

quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2019

ELDER'S DIGEST

KEEPING YOUR
SPIRITUALITY ALIVE

ELDER'S DIGEST 25TH ANNIVERSARY



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DEACONESSES' ORDINATION



The Bible mentions three leadership offices—pastors, elders, and deacons—and the biblical qualifications for all are very similar. Elders, deacons, and deaconesses work closely with pastors, giving great support to the pastoral ministry and the local church. It is impossible to imagine the church working properly without them. Yet their incredibly valuable contributions to the church have not always received the deserved recognition and support from pastors and church leaders.

I salute the deacons and deaconesses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose deep spirits of service and love are so vital to the workings of our congregations. I am proud that the General Conference, during the Annual Council on October 16, 2013, voted that the Ministerial Association be responsible for empowering, training, and equipping deacons and deaconesses in the church all over the world. This vote was so well accepted that during the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, USA, the following was voted to be included in the *Church Manual*: The Ministerial Association, in connection with the departments, promotes the training and equipping of deacons/deaconesses. However, the pastor, in conjunction with the elder(s), has the primary responsibility for training them. I am happy to report that since these important votes, deacons and deaconesses have been better recognized, trained, and equipped for their service, and their ministries in local congregations have received much well-deserved appreciation.

I would like to recognize the ministries

“DO NOT SAY, ‘WHY WERE THE OLD DAYS BETTER THAN THESE?’ FOR IT IS NOT WISE TO ASK SUCH QUESTIONS” (ECCL 7:10).

of deaconesses in a special way: In the past, they were not ordained. But the world church, during the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, voted to ordain deaconesses as is already practiced for deacons. Some church members have since asked me if there are any writings from Ellen G. White to support that decision. Look at what she says:

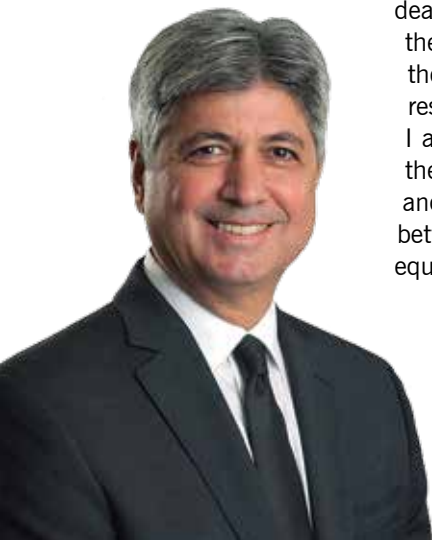
Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.¹

What wonderful counsel from her! After that inspired declaration, it was published that “a number of women were ordained as deaconesses during Ellen White’s Australian ministry.”²

Since ordination is not a biblical principle but rather a biblical teaching and practice, some pastors or churches, due to cultural concerns or religious traditions, may take longer to accept White’s counsel and implement the vote. However, one of the church’s priorities is to keep its unity in doctrine, mission, and organization. As church leaders, you should be committed to that. For this reason, move forward prayerfully and with careful consideration, good spirit, and confidence to comply with official decisions of the church. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*. 249.

² *Ibid.*





NONDAIRY BEVERAGES

Soy milk was first developed in the United States by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, the inventor of cornflakes and granola, and head of the Battle Creek Sanitarium for more than fifty years. A student of Kellogg's, Dr. Harry W. Miller, took Kellogg's knowledge of soy milk with him to China. Miller developed processes to make soy milk more palatable and began production on a factory scale in China in 1936.

In various developing countries, the scarce supply of cow's milk has made it desirable to invest in the development of plant protein beverages. Dietary constraints (avoidance of cholesterol and saturated fat), religious convictions, ethical philosophy (environmental concerns), and personal choice (dislike of dairy products, fear of milk-borne diseases) have led others to be interested in the use of alternatives to cow's milk. In addition, medical reasons (lactose intolerance, allergies) have prompted a growing interest in milk alternatives.

Today's replacements for dairy milk are variously referred to as milk substitutes, milk beverage alternatives, and nondairy beverages. Soy milk is just one example of such beverages available on the market today.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS

Nondairy beverages are usually based upon one of the following: soybeans, tofu, grains, vegetables, nuts, or seeds.

Whole soybeans are used as the main ingredient in most nondairy beverages. Many labels list the beans as organic whole soybeans to attract customers who prefer naturally grown products. Soy protein isolate, a concentrated protein derived from soybeans, is the second most common main ingredient. A few products use tofu as the main ingredient. Tofu is made from pureed soybeans, similar to how cottage cheese is made from cow's milk.

Other products use grains, vegetables, nuts, and seeds (such as rice, oats, green peas, potatoes, or almonds) as a major ingredient. Homemade recipes for nondairy beverages use soybeans, almonds, cashews, or sesame seeds.

ACCEPTABILITY

Nondairy beverages are often judged for acceptability first by sight and smell. If the product is a caramel or tan color, it may be rejected as a replacement for cow's milk before it has even been tasted. White

or cream-colored products are more readily accepted. Off-odors also bias the acceptability of a product.

Factors that negatively impact the acceptability of a nondairy beverage include taste (too sweet, too salty, or chalky), consistency (too thick, too watery, grainy, gritty, pasty, or oily), and aftertaste (bean flavor, bitter flavor, or medicinal flavor).

PRODUCT FORMULATION

The most common nutrients added to a nondairy beverage are those nutrients found abundantly in cow's milk. These nutrients include: protein, calcium, riboflavin (vitamin B2), cobalamin (vitamin B12), and vitamin A. Cow's milk and some commercial nondairy beverages are fortified with vitamin D.

There is a wide variation of philosophies on the ideal amount and kind of fortification for nondairy beverages. Some products have absolutely no fortification, while other products are heavily fortified to closely approximate the nutritional profile of cow's milk. Homemade nondairy beverages usually have no fortification, and therefore are not comparable to the nutrient content of dairy milks. They are lacking in calcium, vitamin B12, and vitamin D.

MILK'S POSITION IN THE FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID

Milk, yogurt, and cheese are found at the third level of the Food Guide Pyramid. The pyramid is a graphic depiction of the dietary guidelines for Americans. It was designed to depict variety, moderation, and proportion in the diet. Milk, yogurt, and cheese

are rich sources of calcium, protein, riboflavin (vitamin B2), vitamin B12, and vitamin A, and are fortified with vitamin D.

Teenagers, young adults under twenty-five years of age, and women should aim for a minimum of three servings per day of milk, yogurt, and cheese, or the dairy alternatives group. When making selections, look for low-fat and nonfat products. However, children under two years of age need the concentrated energy that comes from whole milk, and should not be given low-fat and skim milk to drink.

Nonfat milk, low-fat cheese, fat-free frozen dairy desserts, and nonfat frozen yogurt are all healthy choices for adults. Fat-free cottage cheese, while a good source of protein, is not abundant in calcium. If using cottage cheese as a calcium source, one would need to eat more, as the production process precipitates the calcium into the whey. One cup of cottage cheese is equal to the calcium in only half a cup of milk. Tofu prepared with calcium sulfate or other calcium products has acceptable calcium levels. However, if magnesium chloride or similar products were used, it does not contain adequate calcium. Read the labels carefully to determine calcium content of the tofu you are using, and consider switching to a calcium-rich tofu product if the one you currently use is low in this important nutrient.

COMPARABLE NUTRITIONAL VALUE

While acceptable taste is an important consideration in selecting a nondairy beverage, the nutritional value should be more important. One should select

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING A NONDAIRY BEVERAGE

In selecting a nondairy beverage, consider the following:

1. Choose a nondairy beverage fortified with at least thirty percent of the recommended daily allowance for calcium, riboflavin, vitamin B12, and vitamin D.
2. Depending upon your personal nutritional goals, choose a nondairy beverage that is either low-fat or regular fat.
3. Nondairy beverages, if chosen to replace dairy products,

are replacing an important food group supplying critical nutrients.

4. Label reading is important, as formulas may change over time.
5. The position of the General Conference Nutrition Council is that nondairy beverages are unsuitable for infants. Nondairy beverages are generally lacking sufficient protein and fat and have not been formulated for the immature digestive system

of an infant. Nondairy beverages are hazardous to babies' healthy growth. A specially designed soy-based commercial infant formula should be used for an infant up until at least twelve months of age. However, breast-feeding is recommended when possible.

6. Although a highly refined product, when properly fortified, plant beverages can be a suitable substitute for dairy milk.

a fortified brand that contains at least twenty to thirty percent of the recommended daily allowance for calcium, riboflavin, and vitamin B12 values—a proportion similar to the nutritional profile of dairy milk. For those who live in northern latitudes (in which winter sunlight is too weak for vitamin D synthesis), choose a nondairy beverage fortified with vitamin D.

Alternatives to dairy include a variety of tofu and nondairy beverages and cheeses. If using nondairy foods, it is important to choose a product fortified with calcium, vitamin B12, riboflavin, and vitamin D. While one glass of milk provides up to twenty-five percent of the calcium an adult needs per day, some nondairy beverages provide only one percent of the calcium in the same serving size. Choose nondairy beverages that provide at least twenty-five percent of the calcium needed each day. Look for products that have calcium listed as an added ingredient on the label. These nondairy beverages should also contain vitamin B12 and vitamin D in the ingredient list.

USES IN COOKING

A common misconception is that nondairy beverages can be substituted for dairy milk in any recipe. The biggest problems in cooking occur during the heating, cooking, or baking of the nondairy beverage. Nondairy beverages that are soy-based or highly forti-

WHEN IT COMES TO REPLACING DAIRY MILK WITH NONDAIRY BEVERAGES, EXPERIMENTATION IS OFTEN THE BEST TEACHER.

fied with calcium carbonate tend to curdle at high temperatures. This problem is intensified—even more so than cow's milk—if acidic foods (such as tomatoes or oranges) are also used. One advantage to cooking with nondairy beverages is that at high temperatures there is less scorching than occurs with dairy milk.

Consistency or texture changes may be unpredictable when substituting a nondairy beverage. For example, most instant puddings do not set when a nondairy beverage is substituted for dairy milk. When making gravies, a higher percentage of thickening agent (starch) needs to be used if using a soy-based beverage. Grain-based beverages, such as those containing oats, rice, or the starch in potatoes, will thicken well.

Flavor is another factor in using a nondairy beverage for cooking. A sweet or vanilla flavor is hardly suitable for soups or other savory recipes.

As a general rule, soy-based nondairy beverages have a thicker, richer, and creamier texture than grain- or nut-based nondairy beverages. Rice-based nondairy beverages have a lighter, sweeter flavor and, for many people, more closely imitate the flavor of dairy milk. Nut-based nondairy beverages are better for sweeter dishes like some curries and desserts of all kinds. When it comes to replacing dairy milk with nondairy beverages, experimentation is often the best teacher.



INTERPRETING LABELS

The following terms are commonly found on non-dairy beverage product labels:

“One percent fat”: This means one percent by weight of the product, not one percent of the kilocalories. Low-fat one-percent cow’s milk contains twenty-seven percent of the kilocalories from fat.

“Cholesterol-free”: This is a correct term, but remember that all nondairy beverage products are cholesterol-free because all are manufactured from plants. No plant contains cholesterol.

“Light/Lite/Fat-free”: Some low-fat products are high in kilocalories. One nondairy beverage product, while free from fat, contains 160 kilocalories per eight-ounce glass. By comparison, one eight-ounce serving of nonfat cow’s milk contains 90 kilocalories. The extra kilocalories in nondairy beverages come from carbohydrates—usually in the form of simple sugars.

“Tofu”: Some products claiming to be tofu nondairy beverages have sugar or sweetener as their first ingredient, oil as their second ingredient, calcium carbonate (a calcium supplement) as their third ingredi-

ent, and finally tofu as the fourth, fifth, or sixth ingredient. This may mean that tofu nondairy beverages are mainly carbohydrates and oils, not tofu. **ED**

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HYMNS AND STYLES OF PRAISE IN WORSHIP



The chief function of a hymn is to be the expression of the church's praise. In *Christian Worship*, K. L. Perry writes:

Both the impressive and expressive functions of worship reach their culmination in praise. For in praise we express with heart and mind and soul the excellence and glory of God. "Let all that is within me bless his holy name." In praise, too, we set forth the majesty and love of God. "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation." Praise is also the way of communion with God. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving." Moreover, the very act of praise . . . is the most characteristic act of worship.¹

Prayer and praise, the two elements in the worshipper's response to God's Word, are frequently mingled; each may find expression in the other's form, as in Charles Wesley's "Love Divine." A hymn may be the vehicle of prayer: praise is expressed in adoration and thanksgiving as well as in song, as in Joachim Neander's appeal ("Now to His temple draw near / Join ye in glad adoration") or Anne Steele's "My Maker and My King," where the phrase "Thy love demands a thankful heart" is repeated. But song is the more natural expression of collective praise, as with Fanny Crosby's exhortation in "The Lord in Zion Reigneth" to "come before His throne of grace with tuneful heart and voice," or Christian Bateman's "Come, Christians, Join to Sing." So, the primary purpose of the hymn as a liturgical form is to praise the Almighty God.

Besides the hymn, how else do we express our praise to God?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verbs most often used to describe the worshipper's approach to God are "to bow down" and "to serve." In addition, the following Hebrew "praise" verbs are expressive in three key ways.

First, praise involves the use of words audibly expressed. The verb *halal*, "to make a noise" (Ps 135:3), illustrates how God's mighty deeds are sung and acknowledged. Second, praise is also celebrated through body movements and gestures. For instance, the verbs *yadah*, "to praise," and *todah*, "to give thanks," are used when Miriam sings (Exod 15:20) and David dances (2 Sam 6:14) and where hands and voices are

raised (Ps 28:2; 134:2), demonstrating how this type of activity exalts God. The third expressive aspect of praise is musical activity, including the playing of instruments and singing to honor God. For instance, the verb *zamar*, "to make melody," is referenced in Psalm 150:3–5 in connection with a variety of musical instruments, from the trumpet blast and clashing cymbal to the sweet melody of the flute and harp. All unite to "praise the Lord" (v. 6).

In the New Testament, there emerge two main themes of praise. The first is God's excellencies, due to the fact that the church is God's mouthpiece of the "great deeds of God" (Rom 11:33–36 cf. Rom 8:28–39; 1 Pet 2:10). The second theme is God's universal gifts and providence. These gifts range from physical sustenance (food and drink) to marriage (1 Tim 4:3–5; Heb 13:4). It is eminently fitting that God should be praised and thanked as the giver of "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17).

The characteristic note of New Testament praise is centered in Christ and "his inexpressible gift" (2 Cor 9:15). This saving deed is epitomized in the doxology of Ephesians 1:3–14, arranged in the following trinitarian form:

- 1) Tracing the unfolding of God's eternal plan (vv. 3–5).
- 2) Historicized in Jesus Christ, the Son whom He loves (vv. 6–11).
- 3) Made real in human experience by the Holy Spirit, who applies that "plan of salvation" to those who are its beneficiaries (vv. 12–14).

Note how each section of this hymn ends with the refrain "to the praise of his glory" (vv. 6, 12, 14).

Therefore, the natural response of the Christian's life is to show forth the praises of the God who has called the redeemed to Himself (1 Pet 2:10). Such expressions of praise will be thoughtful, dignified, and worthy of the all-gracious God. ED

¹ K. L. Perry, *Christian Worship*, 239, 240.

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FOUR HYMNS ON GOD'S GUIDANCE

"GUIDE ME, O THOU GREAT JEHOVAH"

by William Williams (1717–1791)

This great hymn is the product of the revival movement that swept through Wales during the eighteenth century. Its leader, Howell Harris, combined preaching with congregational singing. In 1740, William Williams, the twenty-year-old son of a wealthy Welsh farmer, came under Harris' influence, abandoned his dreams of becoming a physician, and, for the next forty-three years, traveled one hundred thousand miles on horseback, preaching and singing the gospel in Welsh. He became known as the "sweet singer of Wales," rivaling in fame the great Isaac Watts. Williams was bilingual and is credited with writing more than four hundred hymns in Welsh and one hundred in English.

The composer of the tune was Peter Williams, a Welshman converted by George Whitfield. Williams trained for the ministry and became an itinerant preacher. He published a family edition of the Welsh Bible with a commentary and a concordance, and published a Welsh hymnbook in 1759 that included this hymn.

The vivid, symbolic imagery of this text likens the Christian life to the march of the Israelites through the wilderness of Sinai to the Promised Land of Canaan; its original title was "Strength to Pass Through the Wilderness." Although Israel's sin and unbelief extended their wilderness sojourn by forty years, God continued to guide and sustain them.

"HE LEADETH ME"

by Joseph H. Gilmore (1834–1918)

The words of this hymn are a paraphrase of Psalm 23 and were inspired by a sermon preached by Joseph Gilmore, a Baptist minister, in 1862. While visiting friends after the evening service, Gilmore scribbled down these lines and handed them to his wife. Unbeknownst to him, she sent the verse to a magazine, where it was published the following year. Three years later, Joseph Gilmore became pastor of the Baptist church in Rochester, New York, USA. Upon entering the chapel, he took up a hymnal to see what hymns were being sung. To his astonishment, the hymnal opened up to "He Leadeth Me." It was the first time he had seen these verses since hurriedly jotting them down after his sermon.

Gilmore, a graduate of Brown University and Newton Theological Seminary, had a varied professional career: he served as a church pastor, the private secretary for the Governor of New Hampshire (his father), and as Professor of Logic and Literature at the University of Rochester until his retirement in 1911.

The tune was composed by William Bradbury. He enlarged Gilmore's refrain, which originally was only two lines, and wrote his tune to fit the words.

"O GOD OUR HELP IN AGES PAST"

by Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

This hymn emerged from a complaint made by eighteen-year-old Isaac Watts to his father, a deacon in an Independent congregation, about the poor quality of psalm-singing in the churches of Southhampton, England. An inveterate versifier from childhood, Watts was told by his father to write something better. He rose to the challenge and, for two years, wrote hymns while waiting for a ministerial appointment. It came in 1699, when he was called to be the minister of a London congregation. However, due to his failing health, he retired to Stoke Newington, where he lived as a semi-invalid for the remaining thirty-six years of his life. Yet despite his infirmities, he wrote six hundred hymns and 150 paraphrases of the psalms of David. A memorial bust stands in his honor in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

"O God Our Help in Ages Past" is known as the second national anthem of the British Commonwealth. The hymn's five stanzas are a model of simplicity: 91 of its 140 syllables are comprised of one-syllable words. More than 250 years later, this hymn is a reminder of God's faithfulness and guidance in our lives. The tune's composer, William Croft, was the organist at Westminster Abbey and wrote thirty anthems, songs, and odes for the theater, as well as music for harpsichord and violin.

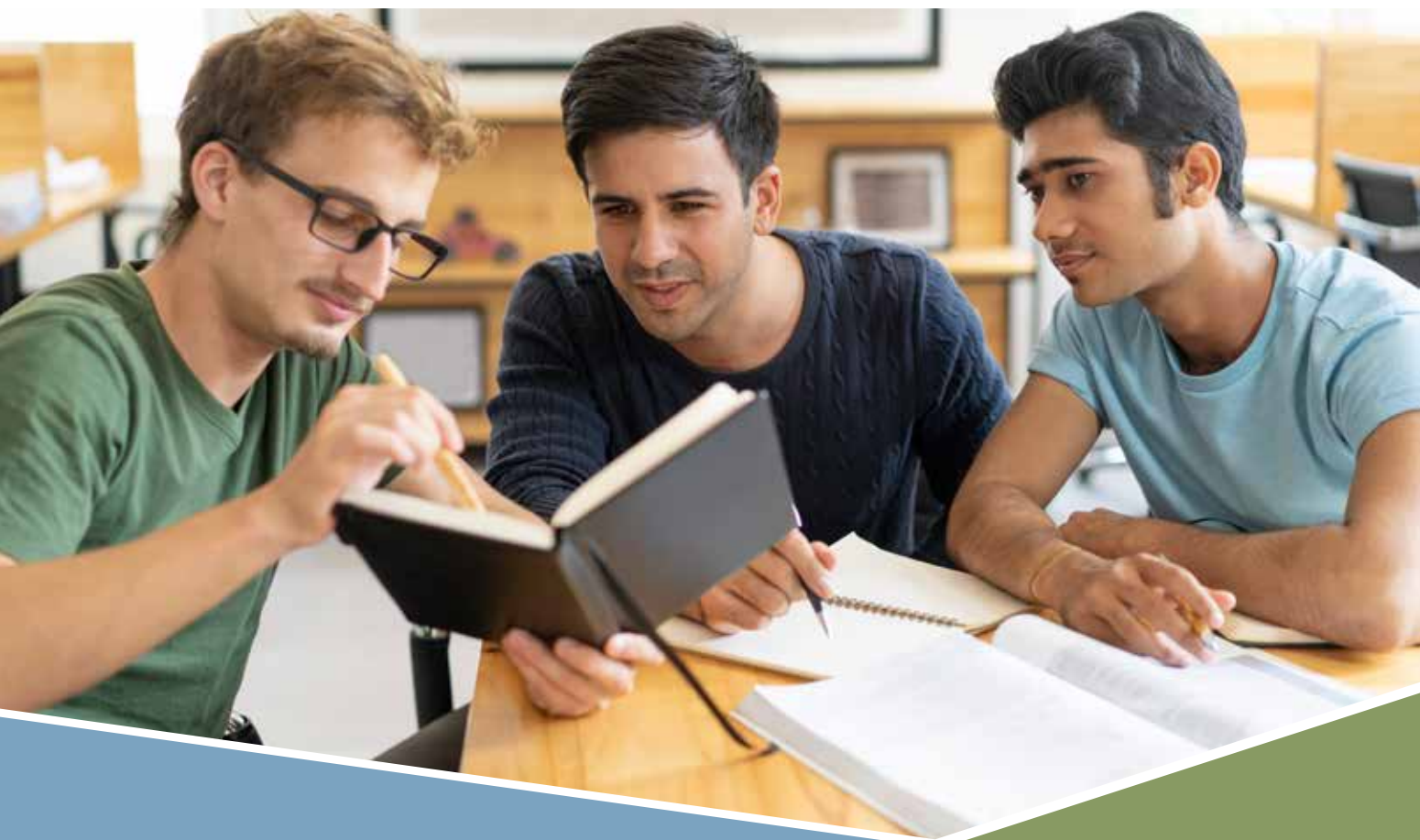
"LEAD ON O KING ETERNAL"

by Ernest W. Shurtleff (1862–1917)

This hymn was written as a graduation march. In 1887, Ernest Warburton Shurtleff was to receive his diploma from Andover Theological Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts. He had studied at Harvard and, because he had already published two volumes of poetry, his colleagues invited him to write their class poem. Shurtleff replied, "Let's make it a hymn we can sing. We've been spending days of preparation here at seminary. Now the day of march has come, and we must go out to follow the leadership of the King of kings, to conquer the world under His banner."

Shurtleff was ordained to the Congregational ministry in 1889 and occupied pastorates in California, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. In 1905, he organized the American Church in Frankfurt, Germany, worked among the American students in Paris, and did relief work during World War I until his death in Paris in 1917.

The words have a martial spirit, enhanced by the music composed by Henry Smart; the song became a fitting hymn to celebrate the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in England. Smart was trained as a lawyer but surrendered to his passion for music, particularly organs, which he designed and built. In the 1860s he became blind, but his remarkable memory enabled him to continue his employment, compositions, and improvisations. **ED**



ADDING MEMBERS THROUGH STUDIES: HOW YOU CAN ACHIEVE IT

>PART 5 OF 8

Part 4 of this series discussed the power of the Holy Spirit, the use of prayer as a convicting tool, the value of keeping a list of your studies and students, and the importance of praying for each student daily. Part 5 offers tips for your first or second contact with a potential candidate, and strategies to keep their interest.

Your primary objective should be discovering a new contact's interest in spiritual matters. It is best to get straight to the point with new contacts who are not believers in Adventism or God, or those who may have believed at one time but have since backslidden. Frivolous small talk decreases your potential to influence for good when it comes time to talk about spiritual things. This does not mean that a reasonable amount of smiles, laughter, and warm-up conversation should be avoided. Indeed, you should break the ice and develop a rapport and mutual appreciation and trust. But a person skilled in soul winning can usually discern a person's spiritual interests in the first or second contact, providing they have sufficient one-on-one time. Ten or fifteen minutes with a person is usually enough to get to the crucial questions.

First show that you like talking about spiritual things and would be delighted to pass some time with that person. Spend one or two sessions an-

swering his or her questions. The goal is not to answer everything but to spark curiosity. Then offer a regular study. At this point, avoid the phrase “Bible study” or—even worse for most beginners—“baptismal class.” Rather, call it “an overview of the message of the Bible.”

It is important to establish the frequency of your Bible studies early on—soon after your contact has agreed to have them. Experience has shown that two studies per week is the most practical for maintaining continuity. More than two studies will introduce too many new ideas and too much material for most students to retain without getting bored or tired. One study per week usually isn’t enough to maintain a continuity of thought, since some studies build upon another in order to reach a conclusion (such as the Law of God and the Sabbath—it is important to build the case for Sabbath keeping). Also keep in mind that it’s better to have shorter Bible studies more often, rather than long subjects studied in one sitting.

But if your student is nervous about committing to regular studies every week, try suggesting only one or two sessions to answer his or her questions or to explore the desire to know more about the Bible. Afterward, if you see sufficient interest, you could suggest a series with a frequency the student is comfortable with, according to his or her schedule and interest. The important thing, if at all possible, is to acquire from the student a firm commitment to take the studies. Be sure that the student takes a decision after each Bible study lesson. This helps you evaluate his or her interest along the way, and also avoids overwhelming him or her at the end.

Unless the student insists, it is best not to tell the student exactly how many studies or weeks/months are required to cover the full set of doctrines. The church has twenty-eight official doctrines, but for some students certain teachings are too heavy and complicated to understand immediately, such as the 2,300 days and the sanctuary. Use your judgment as to which studies to drop due to time constraints, but the testing truths

(Sabbath; unconscious state of death; abstinence from unclean meats, alcohol, and tobacco; second coming of Christ; Jesus our Savior; the Trinity; literal heaven; spirit of prophecy and Ellen G. White; and terminal hell fire) should not be left out.

Some Adventist beliefs are difficult for non-Adventists to accept, and therefore must be presented with great care. The ideas of the never dying soul and going to heaven when you die, for example, are very hard for most Christians to dismiss. Believing your dead loved one is in heaven, enjoying life to the fullest with Jesus and looking down at you, is very comforting. The idea that they are in the cold and lonely grave until Jesus comes can be extremely disappointing and upsetting. This is why a study about what happens after death should be reserved for after you have gained your student’s confidence with other less traumatic beliefs. Another sensitive topic is the idea of everlasting hellfire. Most Christians believe that if you are lost when you die, you go to hell and burn forever. As strange as it may appear, this idea seems to be cherished by most religious denominations. It seems hard for them to accept that a loving God would not cruelly punish someone unendingly, even though God says, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezek 33:11). Again, this is another subject that should be dealt with during later studies.

It is important to support the crucial points of your study with credible reference material. For example, during the study on the change of the Sabbath to Sunday, offer historical references: Constantine’s edict from AD 321 in which he said that the inhabitants and businessmen of Milan could rest on Sunday; material regarding the Council of Laodicea in AD 336 when the solemnity of the Sabbath was declared to be transferred to Sunday; and the Catechism of the Catholic Church that accepts the biblical veracity of Sabbath keeping but asserts that the Catholic Church had the authority to change it. These and other references are important to establish and maintain your credibility as a reliable student of the Bible and a purveyor of truth.

You should also show your student how to read the Bible for himself or herself, and encourage your student to do personal reading. You might take fifteen minutes or so before each study to answer the questions the student has gathered from his or her reading.

However, you may find that sometimes the traditional Bible study format is not the most engaging for certain students. For example, it may be most effective to simply show up as a visitor, without having made a prior arrangement for study. Then once in the house and having a peaceful visitation, suggest a quick study or take out your Bible to show the person some answers straight from the Word of God, thus entering into a study informally. If the student likes this, you could suggest something more formal. Or, for postmoderns or



those with a short attention span, you might try giving a ten- or fifteen-minute PowerPoint study on your laptop with appropriate pictures. Ensure that these presentations concentrate on the crucial points of the study.

You should, by the end of the studies, encourage your student to find two or three other persons who may be interested in similar studies. Start meeting with them too, with your student as co-pilot, trusting that through prayer and your encouragement, your trained students will be able to lead groups of their own. But occasionally a visitor will join your Bible study without knowing the context of why you are meeting, or without any knowledge of the subject. Sometimes they bring confusion to the study by asking questions that require repeating something already explained, or they may inject an argumentative spirit into the meeting. However, you must show them respect. They might join the group later, or become part of a new group, or be influenced to change some of their own behavior. The important thing is not to offend them. Be patient and try to integrate them into the study if possible, but do not let them take over or ruin your study.

Do not be intimidated or discouraged when students start to show disinterest. This can happen in various ways: They may call and say they are going out of town,

or are sick, or have some engagement that prevents them from participating in the study. Or they may stop answering the door, or simply tell you they don't want any more studies. Continue visiting and giving studies until the student makes it crystal clear that no more studies are desired. Express how much you enjoyed making his or her acquaintance and studying together. Wish them the very best and, if possible, have a parting prayer together. Never show disappointment or say anything disparaging. Remember, you can't win them all. If you have done your part, it is left to God to do whatever He sees best. If, over time, you discover that your contacts are only interested in small talk without making any decision or applying what they hear, you should consider moving on and using your time for more motivated people.

Pray that God will show you how to use each lesson study to share the good news which you have the privilege to proclaim, and guide you in reaching each student in the way most suited to touch their heart and spark in them the desire to know more about God's Word. The article in the next issue will address more about it. **ED**

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

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CAPTIVATING SERMON TITLES

Dr. Richard Dawkins, a leading spokesperson for evolution, once remarked on a radio show that most Christians are not very intelligent. He pointed out, for example, that most Christians cannot even name the four gospels of the New Testament. At this point, a listener called in and asked Dawkins whether he was familiar with Darwin's book *The Origin of Species*. When Dawkins replied that he was, the listener asked, "Can you tell me the full title of the book?" But Dawkins could not do it! Maybe he could have if the title hadn't been so long: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

Most people do not remember long titles of books or sermons. In fact, for the past forty years of my ministry, my sermon titles have not been longer than three words! The title is the first impression the congregation has of your message. And long titles usually bore the reader, so sermon titles should be short, snappy attention-getters. It has been said that "writing maketh an exact man," and, for that reason, summariz-

YOUR SERMON'S TITLE IS ITS IDENTITY. IF PEOPLE IDENTIFY WITH IT, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO WANT TO HEAR IT. BUT FOR PEOPLE TO BE ATTRACTED TO YOUR MESSAGE, THE TITLE MUST FIRST CAPTURE THEIR ATTENTION.

ing a budding sermon into a three-word title really helps pull it all together.

You may not adopt the "three word title" rule, but we all could use some suggestions on selecting titles. As a general rule, a title should be no more than seven words (though I consider even that a little too long). Be succinct. Use an economy of words. Do not try to summarize the entire sermon in the title.

John Newton, who penned "Amazing Grace," the most popular Christian song in the world, certainly needed help. He originally named his song "Faith's Review and Expectation." What a difference a title makes! Even a poet can blow it when it comes to finding an appealing title.

Your sermon's title is its identity. If people identify with it, they are more likely to want to hear it. But for people to be attracted to your message, the title must first capture their attention. Do not let yourself assume that a sermon title is unimportant. A good title is all it takes to make someone want to listen!

Here are some practical guidelines for developing a sermon title:

Provoke Interest: The sermon title advertises the message by grabbing attention and promoting the content of the sermon. It could be said that the title is the sermon concealed, and the sermon is the title revealed. Since the title and sermon are so closely linked, give careful thought to the name you give your message. Craft the title skillfully. Be original. Practice clarity. Use subtlety. Emphasize mystery. Spark curiosity. Choose a title that holds the congregation's interest until you reveal its connection to the sermon subject.

Emphasize Scripture: Sermon titles may come to you at any time during the preparation process, but remember: preach the Word, not your sermon title. The text and its message should have priority in all aspects of your sermon, including the title. I would recommend that you work from text to title, not the other way around. Avoid fitting the title around a quote or illustration in the sermon; it is much better to anchor it in Scripture.

Do not use technical jargon that only a seminary professor could understand.

Do Not Over-Sell: The sermon title should accurately represent the content; it should not “bear false witness.” In other words, the title should not make promises the sermon will not fulfill. It should not raise questions the sermon will not answer. It should not suggest problems the sermon will not solve. Be honest; make sure the sermon delivers what the title advertises.

Utilize Pop Culture: Connect your title and sermon to what people are talking about and watching. For example, play off the *Survivor* phenomenon with a series such as “Survive Your Work” or “How to Survive Parenting.” Or use titles like “Be a Millionaire” or “That’s Your Final Answer?”

Be Practical: Is the title clear? Does it relate to everyday life? Is it culturally relevant? Using sermon titles that appeal to needs is not shallow—it is strategic.

Highlight the Benefits: People sometimes think it is boring to obey God. Change their perception by highlighting the benefits. Titles that highlight the benefits of obedience are “Sex: Safe, Satisfying, and Sizzling,” “God’s Unfailing Promise,” or “Love is the Answer.” Focus on Jesus and the benefits of the gospel!

Emphasize the Positive: Understandably, people do not like to hear bad news. If your sermon identifies a problem, use the title to highlight the solution. For example, instead of naming your sermon “The Debt Trap,” call it “Escape the Debt Trap.” Other titles that reflect the positive are “It’s Party Time” and “Promises of Success.”

Make a Series: Sermons can be arranged to address a series of related questions, issues, or Bible texts. Consider these ideas for series themes:

1. Questions I’d Like to Ask God.
2. Three Minutes with Moses (and other Bible characters).
3. If Our Church Were a Football Team, Would We Make the Playoffs? (characteristics of a winning team).
4. What Do Atheists Believe?
5. Unsolved Mysteries (if the television show by that name were to go to the Bible, what mysteries could they use to make a great series of programs?).

Remember: use a wide variety of titles, questions, and Bible texts!

ED

Be User-Friendly: The title is not for you; it is for the listeners. So choose a title that is meaningful to the audience. Do not assume they will figure out obscure references. Do not be unnecessarily complex.

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THE FIFTH WORD FROM THE CROSS: A CRY OF SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION

The loss of blood, the unnatural position of the body, the extreme tension of the hands and feet, the outstretched muscles, the wounds exposed to air, the headache from the crown of thorns, the swelling of the blood vessels, the increasing inflammation—all would have produced a physical thirst. As Samson thirsted after his tremendous battle wherein he slew hundreds (Judg 15:18), so now our Lord thirsts after His struggle has deteriorated His physical condition.

He who threw stars into their orbits and spheres into space; He who shut up the sea with doors; He who made water come out of the rock smitten by Moses; He who made all the seas and rivers and fountains; He who said to the woman of Samaria, “But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst” (John 4:14), now lets fall from His lips the shortest of the seven cries from the Cross: “I thirst.”

What a marked contrast is His pathetic cry to other occasions where He offered to quench the thirst of others. While in Jerusalem He promised a great multitude, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.” At the well of Jacob with the Samaritan woman, He pointed to the springing fountain at His feet and said, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13–14). Is this the same Jesus who now, in mortal exhaustion, cries, “I thirst”?

He refused to take the first concoction offered Him; now He avidly asks for a drink. But there was considerable difference between the two drinks: The first was myrrh, a stupefying potion to ward off pain, which He refused in order that His senses might not be dulled. The drink now given Him is vinegar, or the sour bad wine of the soldiers (John 19:29).

He who had turned water into wine at Cana could use the same infinite resources to satisfy His own thirst, except for the fact that He never worked a miracle on His own behalf. But why does He ask for a drink?

I. THE REASON JESUS CRIED FOR A DRINK

It was not solely because of the need. The real reason for the request was the fulfillment of the prophecies: “Later, knowing that everything had now been

finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty’” All that the Old Testament had foretold of Him had to be fulfilled to the smallest iota. In the Scriptures, David had foretold Jesus’ thirst during His passion: “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth . . . They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst” (Pss 22:15; 69:21).

Thus, the soldiers, though they gave Him the vinegar in mockery, nevertheless fulfilled the Scriptures. The vinegar was given to Him on a bunch of hyssop, a plant that grew about eighteen inches high. It was hyssop, too, that was dipped in the blood of the Paschal Lamb; it was hyssop that was used to sprinkle the lintel posts of the Jews in Egypt to escape the avenging angel; it was hyssop that was dipped in the blood of the bird in cleansing the leper; it was David himself, after his sin, who said that he would be purged with hyssop and be made clean.

II. THE IDENTITY OF THE ONE WHO CRIED FOR A DRINK

Jesus came to suffer and die. But He would not give up His life until He had fulfilled details of the Scriptures that men might know that it was He, the Christ, the Son of God, who was dying on the cross. He was taking from Scripture the idea that the Messiah of the promise must not accept death as a fate but perform it as a deed. Exhaustion was not to put Him to death, as exhaustion accounted not for His thirst. It was the prophecies concerning Him as High Priest and Mediator that prompted the cry of thirst. Indeed, the Jewish rabbis had already applied that prophecy to Him; the Midrash states, “Come and dip thy morsel in the vinegar—this is spoken of the Messiah—of His Passion and torments, as it is written in the prophet Isaiah. ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.’”

Since the soldiers mockingly gave Jesus the vinegar at the end of hyssop, it is very likely that they intended to ridicule one of the Jewish sacred rites. When the blood of the lamb was sprinkled by the hyssop, the purification through a symbol was now fulfilled as the hyssop touched the blood of Christ (see Heb 9:12–14).

The bystanders at the cross, who knew well the Old Testament prophecies, were thus given another proof that He was the suffering Messiah. Jesus’ Fourth Word, which expressed His sufferings of soul, and

His Fifth Word, which expressed sufferings of body, were both foretold.

III. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE CRY FOR A DRINK

Thirst was the symbol of the unsatisfying character of sin; the pleasures of the flesh purchased at the cost of joy of the Spirit are like drinking salt water. In the parable, the rich man in hell thirsted and begged Father Abraham to ask Lazarus to wet his tongue with just a drop of water. Making complete atonement for sin demanded that the Redeemer feel the thirst of even the lost before they are lost. But for the saved, too, it was a thirst—a yearning for souls. Some people have a passion for money, others for fame; Jesus’ passion was for souls! “Give me a drink” meant “give Me thy heart.” The tragedy of Jesus’ love for mankind is that, in His thirst, men gave Him vinegar and gall.

CONCLUSION

The Savior is still saying, “I thirst,” but how and when? Jesus answers, “I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink” (Matt 25:35).

“Lord,” we ask, “when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?” (v. 37).

Jesus replies, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (v. 40).

Wherever followers of Jesus are suffering, sitting in lonely rooms and wishing somebody would come and visit them, or lying on beds of pain and needing somebody to ease the pillow or bring the cup to their dry lips, Christ is saying, “I thirst.” Will He ask in vain? But Christ sees to it that none who thus serve Him lose their reward, for “if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward” (Matt 10:42).

The words “I thirst” have a double meaning. Jesus thirsts for the love of His redeemer and for fellowship with them. He thirsts for love. He thirsts for prayer. He thirsts for service. He thirsts for holiness. Whenever the human heart turns to Him with penitence, affection, or consecration, the Savior sees the travail of His soul and is satisfied. AMEN. ED

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THE SIXTH WORD FROM THE CROSS: A CRY OF VICTORY

INTRODUCTION

At the foot of Mount McKinley, a skeleton was found seated on the root of a tree. Just above was a finger carved in the bark, pointing down to the skeleton. Beside the finger were these words: "The end of the trail." They told the tragic story of one who set out to climb the lofty mountain but whose strength had failed. The mountaineer died with his purpose unrealized.

Is this what Jesus was saying when He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30) and uttered the Sixth Word from the Cross? As He hung on the nails, was this the finish to a life whose holiest hopes ended in utter failure? Was He finally admitting that He had gone to the limit and won nothing but shame and death? Was this expression the last sign of an ebbing life, as if He were saying, "It is all over; this long agony of pain and suffering is done at last?"

No! It was not a cry of defeat, but a shout of victory. Jesus' suffering and His work were finishing at the same time. He had a great work to accomplish, and He suffered greatly in the process of accomplishing it. Now both have been brought to a successful close, and this is what the Sixth Word expresses. Therefore, it is first the worker's cry of achievement, and secondly the sufferer's cry of relief.

I. THE WORKER'S CRY OF ACHIEVEMENT

Two scenes converged when Jesus cried, "It is finished." Ellen G. White vividly describes the dramatic scene: "The priests were officiating in the temple. It was the hour of the evening sacrifice. The lamb representing Christ had been brought to be slain . . . the priest stood with lifted knife." Suddenly, "the earth trembles and quakes . . . With a rending noise the inner veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom by an unseen hand . . . The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God's Son. The great sacrifice has been made."¹ Jesus now uttered what in the original is one single word: "It is accomplished."

This was not an utterance of thanksgiving that His suffering was over and finished; rather, it was that His life from the time of His birth to the time of His death had faithfully achieved what He was sent to do.

Three times in history God uses that same word: once, in Genesis, to describe the achievement of completing creation on the sixth day; also in the Apocalypse, when all creation would be done away with and a new heaven and earth would be made. And between these two extremes of the beginning and the accomplished end is the link

of the Sixth Word from the Cross. Jesus, in the state of His greatest humiliation, seeing all prophecies fulfilled, all foreshadowings realized, and all things done which were needful for the Redemption of man, uttered a cry of joy: "It is achieved."

This dying word carries us back to the first word from His lips that has been preserved for us: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Even at the age of twelve, He already knew there was a special work entrusted to Him. In the types, shadows, rites, and institutions, in law and prophets of the Old Testament, He saw hints and foreshadowings of His life. He knew what He had to do when He said, "But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50). In a rapt moment, at the well of Sychar, after His interview with the Samaritan woman, when His disciples proffered Him food, He put it away from Him, saying, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about" (John 4:32). And He added, "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (v. 34).

What was this work of Jesus? It was a work for God, and it was a work for men with God. "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4), He would say; or, "Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I do always those things which please Him." This was His task, to glorify God on the earth—to make known the Father to men.

His was bringing men back to God, and He had to remove the obstacles that stood in the way. He had to roll away the stone from the sepulcher in which humanity was entombed. He had done so. And when He said, "It is finished," He was saying to all mankind, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut" (Rev 3:8).

II. THE SUFFERER'S CRY OF RELIEF

It is remarkable that not a single type, from the turtledove to the temple, was not fulfilled in Him. No historic foretelling—from Abraham who offered his son as a sacrifice, to Jonah in the belly of the whale for three days—was not in Him fulfilled: the prophecy of Zechariah that He should make entrance into Jerusalem on an ass in humility; the prophecy of David that He should be betrayed by one of His own companions; the prophecy of Zechariah that He should be sold for thirty pieces of silver, and that this price should afterwards be used to buy a field of blood. His sufferings were foretold—in astonishing detail. Isaiah prophesied that He would be barbarously treated, scourged, and put to death,

crucified between two thieves, and that He would pray for His enemies. David foretold that they would give Him vinegar to drink, divide His garments among them, and that He would be a Lamb to be slain. All these wonder hieroglyphics would have been left unexplained had not the Son of God on His Cross looked back on all the sheep and goats and bullocks that were offered in sacrifice and said, "It is achieved."

That Sixth Word from the cross was a cry of relief. As in Creation, on the seventh day, after the heavens and the earth were finished, God rested from all the work that He had done, so now, the Savior on the Cross, having taught as a Teacher, governed as a King, and sanctified as Priest, can enter His rest. There would be no second Savior, no new way of salvation, no other name under heaven by which men might be saved. Men had been bought and paid for. A new David arose to slay the Goliath of evil, not with five stones but with five wounds—hideous scars on hands, feet, and side, and the battle was fought not with armor glistening under a noonday sun but with flesh torn away so the bones could be numbered. It was with the relief of the strong that Jesus uttered the song of triumph that His work and suffering were complete.

CONCLUSION

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus had told His disciples that He would be delivered to the Gentiles, would be mocked and spat upon, and would be scourged and put to death. In the garden, when Peter lifted his sword, Christ asked if He should not drink the cup that the Father had given Him. Now the work that the Father had given Him was finished. The Father had sent the Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by the eternal Spirit He was conceived in Mary's womb. All this came to pass that He might suffer on the cross. Thus reparation involved the whole Trinity. What was achieved was redemption, as Peter later would say, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet 1:18–19).

So, believer, rejoice! Your redemption is achieved. All that was necessary to break down the barriers between you and God has been done. AMEN. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 756–757.

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THE SEVENTH WORD FROM THE CROSS: A CRY OF CONTENTMENT

INTRODUCTION

One of the penalties imposed on man as a result of sin was that he would die. After the exile from the garden, Adam stumbled upon the limp form of his son Abel. He spoke to him, but Abel did not answer. Adam lifted Abel's head, but it fell back limp; his eyes were cold and staring. Then Adam remembered that death was the penalty for sin. It was the first death in the world. Now the new Abel, Christ, slain by the race of Cain, prepared to go home. His Sixth Word was earthward; the Seventh Word was Godward. The sixth was the farewell to time; the seventh the beginning of His glory. He now prepared to return to the Father's house and, as He did so, He let fall from His lips the perfect prayer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Again we see Christ's respect for Scripture, for He was quoting Psalm 31:5. Here is Christ's view of death. He implied that He was giving His life away in the certain hope of finding it again. He was choosing to die, purposefully depositing His life in heaven's charge. The word "commit" meant to place something valuable in the charge of a friend. The Bible says that He "bowed his head," which suggests resting one's head on a pillow for sleep. The cross became God's pillow; hence, Bernard of Clairvaux asks, "Who is He who thus easily falls asleep when He wills?"

What evidence is there that Christ's death was voluntary or even intentional?

I. HIS DEATH WAS VOLUNTARY

In His baptism, Jesus identified Himself with sinners, and, in His temptation, He refused to be deflected from the way of the cross. He repeatedly predicted His sufferings and death and steadfastly set Himself to go to Jerusalem to die there. His constant use of the word "must" in relation to His death expressed not some external compulsion but His own internal resolve to fulfill what had been written of Him. "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep," He said. Then, dropping the metaphor, He said, "I lay down my life . . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:17-18).

Moreover, when the apostles took up in their letters the voluntary nature of Jesus' death, they used the very verb the evangelists used of His being "handed over" to death by others. Thus, Paul could write, "The Son of God . . . loved me and gave

"Suddenly the gloom lifted from the cross, and in clear, trumpetlike tones, that seemed to resound throughout creation, Jesus cried, 'It is finished.' 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.' A light encircled the cross, and the face of the Saviour shone with a glory like the sun. He then bowed His head upon His breast, and died.

Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father's acceptance heretofore given Him. He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love. By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was victor" (*The Desire of Ages*, page 756).

himself for me" (Gal 2:20). It was perhaps a conscious echo of Isaiah 53:12, which says, "He poured out his life unto death." Paul also used the same verb when he looked behind the voluntary self-surrender of the Son to the Father's surrender to Him. For example, Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all."

II. HIS DEATH WAS PLANNED

On a human level, Judas gave Jesus up to the priests, who gave Him up to Pilate, who gave Him up to the soldiers, who crucified Him. On the divine level, the Father gave Him up, and He gave Him up to die for us. As we face the cross, then, we can say to ourselves both, "I did it; my sins sent Him there" and "He did it; His love took Him there." The apostle Peter brought the two truths together when he said on the Day of Pentecost, "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23; see also 4:28). Peter thus attributed Jesus' death

simultaneously to the plan of God and to the wickedness of men.

III. HIS DEATH WAS ALTRUISTIC

The beneficial purpose of His death focuses on our reconciliation. The salvation He died to win for us is sometimes negatively portrayed as forgiveness or deliverance; at other times, it is positively portrayed as new or eternal life and peace. As a result of His death, He is able to confer upon us the blessing of salvation. But our guilt had to be removed before the gift of salvation could be bestowed. Christ's death and our sins are thus related. And what is the link? Christ died for our sins. Death, then, is related to sin as its just reward (see Rom 6:23). As Peter says, Christ died for sins once and for all (see 1 Pet 3:18). Paul follows with the confident pronouncement that Christ offered for all time one sacrifice for sins (see Heb 9:26). Death is the divine judgment on human disobedience. If death is the penalty of sin, and if Jesus had no sin, then could He not have gone straight to heaven and escaped death? No, He chose to come back to our world in order to go voluntarily to the cross. He insisted that no one would take His life away from Him; He would lay it down of His own accord. So when the moment of death came, it was His own self-determined act. "Father," He said, "into your hands I commit My spirit." This was affirming that Jesus Christ, who, being sinless, had no need to die, died our death, the death our sins deserved. As Horatius Bonar expressed it:

"'Twas I that shed the sacred blood; / I nailed him to the tree; / I crucified the Christ of God; / I joined the mockery."

CONCLUSION

The Seventh Word from Christ invites us to follow His example. Whenever anything alarms and distresses us, or even in the face of death, we can commit it to God in prayer, practicing the continual realization of His presence and sufficiency, and rest in Him. Why should we not be confident? Jesus has defeated all our foes, and now He lives to intercede for us! If Christ be for us, who can be against us?

"A debt of love I owe to Jesus, / He paid the debt I could never pay; / Now at His cross I bow in adoration, / And yield my all forever in His sway." ED

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A RANSOM: BUT TO WHOM WAS IT PAID?

INTRODUCTION

There is a French film from 1958 with the evocative title *L'ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, which translates to "Elevator to the Gallows." You feel the irony bite the more you think about the title. On your way to your own hanging? At least you will not have that tiring climb up the stairs! In fact, this elevator will get you to your destination quickly and conveniently.

There is the same acid irony in the Seven Last Words crucifixion scene painted for us by the evangelist Luke. What are we witnessing? His destination was not a scaffold but a cross—Golgotha, or the "Place of the Skull." Legend has it that Adam was buried here. Representations of the crucifixion often show a skull at the foot of the cross to indicate that the new Adam was dying for the old Adam. It was both a substitution and a ransom, as Jesus Himself said the Son of Man came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). To whom was the bill paid?

Scholars in the Christian church have been perplexed over the payment of our spiritual ransom. There was no confusion about for whom it was offered, or by whom it was given; this was obvious. But the difficulty arose in determining to whom it was paid. The apostle John says that Jesus "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The same problem arose over Christ's sacrifice. Whom did He propitiate? In what way was the offering of His blood, His life, said to be an atoning sacrifice?

OPTION ONE: THE DEVIL

In the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era, when many distorted views were disseminated, some taught that the sacrifice of Christ was paid to the devil. Through sin, the human family had sold themselves to Satan, making themselves his slaves. Thus Christ's death had delivered them from hell and had ransomed them from the power of the evil one. Far from being a sacrifice for Satan, Scripture teaches that Christ's death sealed the devil's doom (see Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

OPTION TWO: THE FATHER

An eighth-century monk, John of Damascus, refuted the theory of the ransom being paid to the devil when he wrote: "He who assumed death for us, died and offered Himself to the Father; for we had committed wrong towards Him, and it was

necessary for Him to receive our ransom, and we thus be delivered from condemnation. For God forbid that the blood of the Lord should be offered to the tyrant."¹

This writer refuted one error, only to fall into another. The heathen offered their sacrifices either to appease the anger, or to ensure the favor of their pagan deities; but why should God be conciliated or placated by any such means. God did not inflict retributive justice upon His Son! Neither was it to propitiate the Father that the Son laid down His life. One author has mistakenly versified this view:

"Jehovah lifted up His rod,
O Christ it fell on Thee,
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God,
There's not one stroke for me?"

This may appear to be a noble sentiment, but it is an attempt to exalt Christ's sacrifice to the disparagement of the Father. What an ignoble estimate of the Father's character! Was God the demanding judge requiring inexorable justice for sin? God never struck His Son! The prophet Isaiah clearly relates that our sins were the real cause of His death (see Isa 53:4–5). It was not God's stroke, but "for the transgression of my people he was punished" (v. 8). How incongruous then to suggest that God was propitiated in the death of His Son, when He Himself provided the propitiation (see 1 John 4:10). Let it be noted that the Savior's sacrifice was entirely a voluntary offering (see John 10:17). Thus the ransom was not in payment to the Father for a crime; neither was it paid to the devil for release. Jesus came not to appease, but to cancel guilt and cleanse sinners. This was not the bribery of God or to meet some personal demand; it was done at God's initiative (see Rom 3:25–26).

OPTION THREE: THE SON

Then if not God or the devil, to whom was the ransom paid? Jesus resolved that He Himself should provide the remedy. He proclaimed, "I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death" (Hos 13:14). He decided to make the consequences of our sins His own. He submitted to the law of righteousness, which demanded the death of the transgressor. In His innocence, Jesus' death was the ransom price for sin. His life was the homage He paid to the moral forces of the universe, to preserve the inviolate authority of His unchanging law (see

Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5). Now all may come in contrition and confession of sin and find cleansing and forgiveness, amnesty and peace. The ransom has been paid. The law has been vindicated. The transgressor has been pardoned. The guilty may go free and claim the Savior's promise, "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

"There is a place where Jesus sheds
The oil of gladness on our heads—
A place than all besides more sweet;
It is the blood-bought mercy-seat."

The sacrifice of the cross was an expression of love to His creatures that was stronger than death. In the words of one author, "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share. He suffered the death that was ours, that we might receive the life that was His. 'With His stripes we are healed.'"² It was over the broken law that the ransom was paid.

CONCLUSION

Aeschylus had been condemned to death by the Athenians, and was about to be led to the place of execution. His brother Amyntas had distinguished himself in the service of his country: on the day of an illustrious victory obtained through his bravery and skill, he lost his hand. He came into court just as his brother was condemned, and, without saying a word, held up the stump of his arm in the sight of all. The historian says that when the judges saw the mark of his sufferings and sacrifice, they remembered what he had done, and for his sake pardoned the guilty brother whose life was about to be forfeited. There is one who in infinite love and pity holds up His mutilated hands as the ransom price He paid to pardon you, and if you will let Him write His laws upon your heart, He will remember your sins no more (see Heb 10:16–17). ED

¹ *Shedd's History of Christian Doctrine*, 2:252.

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*. 25.

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TO COVER OR NOT?

PAUL WROTE THAT WOMEN SHOULD COVER THEIR HEADS IN CHURCH (1 COR 11:2–16). WHY DO WE NOT ENFORCE THAT MANDATE?



This passage is difficult to interpret, mainly because we are not as well informed about the topic as Paul's original readers were. Scholars have written much about this passage and its sociohistorical background, but still they disagree. A careful analysis of the verses requires much more space than I have here. The following information provides some context to the issue and a brief answer to your question. I encourage you to do your own research and analysis of the text.

Adventists have traditionally taken what the Bible says at face value, unless its context suggests otherwise. In some cases a biblical passage may be addressing a topic relevant only to the original readers—for instance, removing one's sandals when approaching God (Exod 3:5), a sign of reverence and respect. There are places in the world where you must remove your shoes before entering an Adventist church, but in the Western world we show reverence in different ways. We interpret Paul's counsel on female head covering as a cultural issue.

VARIETY OF VIEWS IN THE BIBLE

That the topic of wearing a veil is a cultural matter is suggested by the fact that during the biblical period the practice varied. In the time of the patriarchs, prostitutes covered their face with a veil (Gen 38:14–15). Interestingly, Middle Assyrian laws (twelfth century BC) did not allow prostitutes to wear a veil. Much later we find some women in Israel wearing a long veil during magical or divinatory rites (Ezek 13:17–21). A bride covered her face before her wedding as a sign of modesty. Some biblical passages suggest that the wedding veil was an ornamental diaphanous veil (Song of Sol 4:1, 3; 6:7). A veil that covered the whole face—as we find today in the Islamic world—was probably unknown in Israel. More common was a shawl placed on the head, which in some cases was a sign of humiliation and mourning, as suggested by the women depicted in the stone engravings of Sennacherib, wearing them while leaving the city of Lachish after its fall. David also covered his head in mourning (2 Sam 15:30). No Old Testament law re-

quired women or men to wear a head covering; the social practice was simply accepted as appropriate.

PURPOSE OF THE CULTURAL PRACTICE

Paul is not discussing the veil that covered a woman's face, but a shawl placed on the head during worship. The use of female head covering was common in Greek and Roman societies. Studies made about the Roman practice reveal that prostitutes were forbidden to wear one and that both women and men covered their heads during worship as a sign of reverence and piety. In fact, the shawl was part of the Greek robe, not a separate piece. Greek culture did not require men to cover their heads in worship. That was also the case among Jews. In Roman culture the female head covering was a symbol of high moral values, preservation of femininity, and commitment to the husband; wearing it brought honor to the husband and the family.

REASON FOR PAUL'S COUNSEL

Paul was promoting among Christians a social practice related to proper attire. The basic values represented by the head covering were compatible with the Christian message, and rejecting the practice could have brought discredit to the church. The wise approach was for Christian women to continue to do what they practiced before they became Christians in order to demonstrate that Christianity supported society's high values and not moral corruption. But not all Roman women covered their heads; wealthy women were somewhat socially liberated, and it is possible that some of them did not cover their heads in worship after becoming Christian. Paul would have been trying to correct that attitude to protect the cohesion within the community of believers.

The fact that covering the head was a cultural issue does not mean that what Paul wrote is meaningless for us. The values he was attempting to inculcate in believers are to be preserved by us and embodied in other ways. Values such as modesty, bringing honor to our families in the way we dress and act, and preserving sexual differences (gender specificity) in our appearance and demeanor are not culturally determined. **ED**

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

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OLD TESTAMENT FORERUNNERS TO NEW TESTAMENT DEACONS AND DEACONESSES¹

Several groups of dedicated workers were appointed to serve in the Old Testament tabernacle. According to 1 Chronicles 9, they were referred to as the sons of Korah, keepers of the gates, porters, and Levites. They were forerunners to the New Testament deacons and deaconesses.

Psalms 84 was written for the sons of Korah. Its superscription reads, "To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah." The word "Gittith" is derived from the Hebrew word *Gath*, which means "wine press." This indicates that this psalm was sung with a joyful spirit. It may even suggest the manner in which the sons of Korah carried out their responsibilities. They did it with joy. Commenting on this psalm, Charles Spurgeon said, "Sweeter than the joy of the wine press is the joy of the holy assemblies of the Lord's house."²

The sons of Korah were descendants of Korah who escaped God's punishment on their father for rebelling against Moses and Aaron (Num 16:1–35). They became leaders in the worship services. Their commitment to service is reflected in Psalm 84:10, which states, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Being servants in the house of God was the ultimate reason for their existence.

1 Chronicles 9:19 reveals that the sons of Korah became the keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: "And Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brethren, of the house of his father, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: and their fathers, being over the host of the Lord, were keepers of the entry." These men were chosen by David and Samuel because of their faithfulness (v. 22). The implication for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the twenty-first century is that it is important to select persons who are committed and faithful to serve in the office of deacon and deaconess.

The sons of Korah lived in close proximity to the tabernacle—on the north, south, east, and west sides—so that they could keep a vigilant watch over it and open the doors every morning for worship. 1 Chronicles 9:27 says, "And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them." The implications for deacons and deaconesses of the twenty-first century is that they should arrive at the church prior to the time for services so that they can open the doors and greet the worshippers as they enter. They should also make the church accessible to those members who have a need to enter at times other than the weekly worship service.

According to 1 Chronicles 9:25, the sons of Korah were to take turns and rotate their duties from Sabbath to Sabbath. "And their brethren, which were in their villages, were to come after seven days from time to time with them." The implications of this for today's deacons and deaconesses is that they should organize their work and divide their responsibilities so that the burden of the work is shared by all. This will prevent anyone from being overworked.

Some of these officers were over the treasuries (v. 26). Others were over the sacred vessels and instruments of the sanctuary, and others were in charge of the fine flour, wine, oil, frankincense, and spices

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(vv. 28–29). The implication of this for today's deacons and deaconesses is that their ministry is multifaceted. Their presence and influence are to be felt throughout the church. It is appropriate for some of them to work in the treasury department; others may keep an inventory of supplies and equipment; and others will use flour, oil, and wine in preparation for the ordinance of Holy Communion.

The sons of Korah were so committed to their charge that Psalm 84:2 suggests that when they were not present at the Tabernacle, they desired to be there. The psalmist states, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Primarily, this verse may be expressing David's longing to be present at the temple, since he wrote this psalm while in exile. However, it may also describe how the sons of Korah felt about carrying out their responsibilities. The implication of this for deacons and deaconesses of the twenty-first century is that they should love their work. It is not enough for them simply to be present in the flesh, doing their work mechanically. They must put their heart into their work if they are to be effective. David said, "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

David indicated that God would bless those committed to serve in His house. Psalm 84:4 says, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee." Like the sons of Korah, deacons and deaconesses are the ones who dwell in God's house today. They dwell there in the sense that they remain after everyone else has gone. They see to it that God's house is left in order and that the sacred vessels are accounted for and put in their proper place. They make sure that the hymnals, Bibles, and tithe/offering envelopes are placed in the pew racks. They pick up trash and secure the doors until the next service. They do it with an attitude of praise. Therefore, God promises to bless them. ED

¹ This article is excerpted from the book written by the author, entitled *The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting the Biblical Model* (Huntsville, AL: AVA's Book Publishers, 2011).

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 2:432.

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ANECDOTES AND HUMOR

>PART 1

Levity Inappropriate. The minister of God is not to speak words which will create levity. We have been bought with the price of a great sacrifice, even the sacrifice of God's only begotten Son.

No Light, Trifling Words. The minister of the gospel who is a laborer together with God, will learn daily in the school of Christ. . . . No light, trifling words will fall from his lips; for is he not an ambassador for Christ, bearing a divine message to perishing souls? All jesting and joking, all lightness and trifling, is painful to the cross-bearing disciple of Christ.

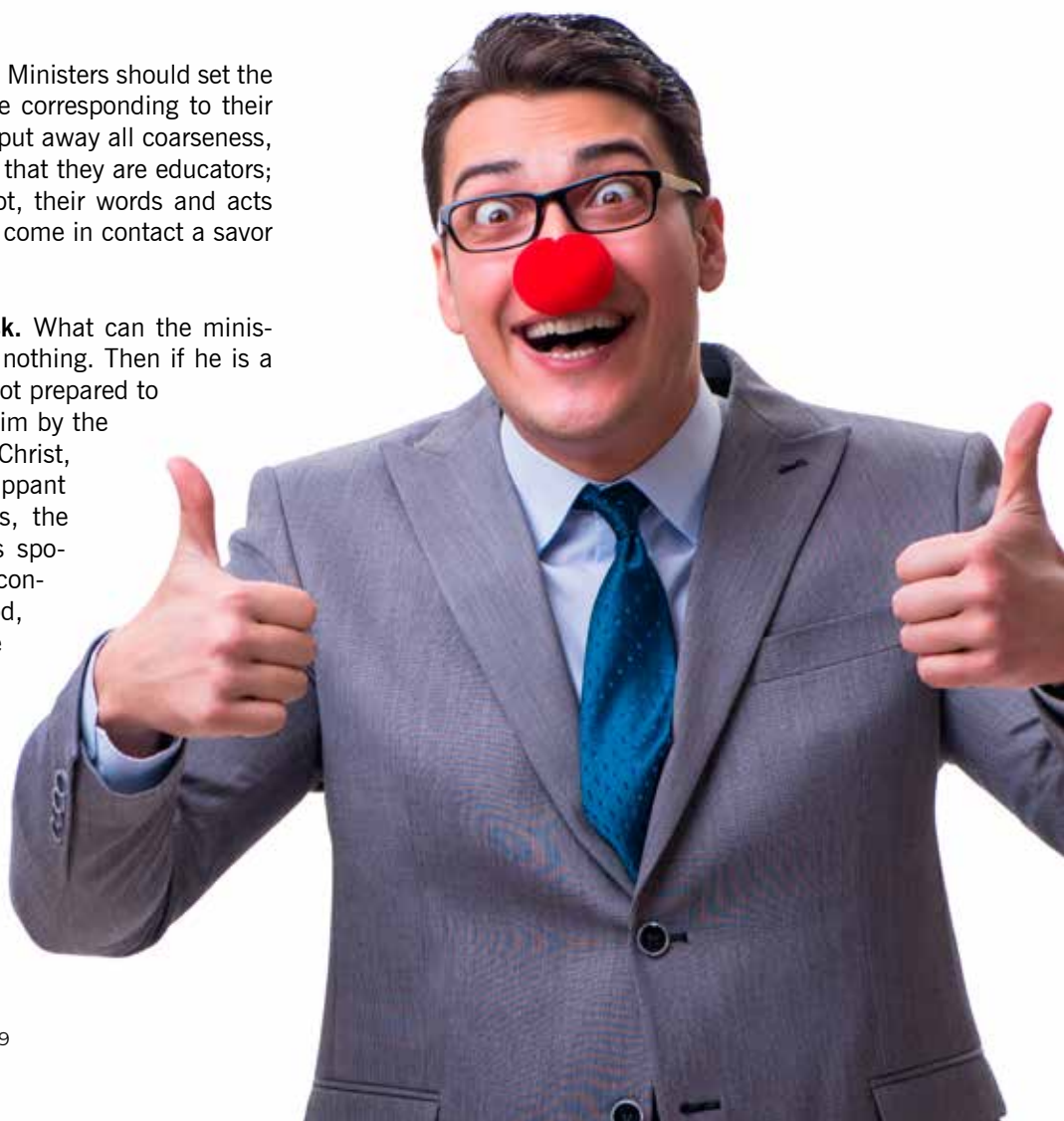
Conversation in Heaven. All lightness and trifling is positively forbidden in the Word of God. His conversation should be in heaven, his words seasoned with grace.

A Worthy Example for Youth. Ministers should set the youth a worthy example, one corresponding to their holy calling. . . . They are to put away all coarseness, all trifling, ever remembering that they are educators; that, whether they will or not, their words and acts are to those with whom they come in contact a savor of life or of death.

Decorum in the Sacred Desk. What can the minister do without Jesus? Verily, nothing. Then if he is a frivolous, joking man, he is not prepared to perform the duty laid upon him by the Lord. "Without Me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing." The flippant words that fall from his lips, the trifling anecdotes, the words spoken to create a laugh, are all condemned by the Word of God, and are entirely out of place in the sacred desk.

No Slang Phrases. The minister should be free from every unnecessary temporal perplexity, that he may give himself wholly to his sacred calling. He should be much in prayer, and should bring himself under discipline to God, that his life may reveal the fruits of true self-control. His language should be correct; no slang phrases, no cheap utterances, should fall from his lips.

In Christ's Stead. Ministers cannot be too guarded, especially before the young. They should use no lightness of speech, jesting or joking, but should remember that they are in Christ's stead, that they must illustrate by example the life of Christ.



No Jesting in the Pulpit. The minister who is ready to engage in frivolous conversation, ready to jest and laugh, does not realize the sacred obligations resting upon him, and if he goes from such an exercise to the pulpit, the Lord cannot stand by his side to bless him. . . . Flowery discourses will not be sufficient to feed the soul of the famishing child of God.

Speech Seasoned With Grace. Let trifling and joking be banished from the conversation of the minister, but let his speech be seasoned with grace; let the light and love of Jesus shine in his example and precept, that souls may be won for the Master.

Abuse of the Gospel. Some who stand in the pulpit make the heavenly messengers in the audience ashamed of them. The precious gospel, which it has cost so much to bring to the world, is abused. There is common, cheap talk; grotesque attitudes and workings of the features. There is, with some, rapid talking, with others a thick, indistinct utterance.

THE MINISTER SHOULD BE FREE FROM EVERY UNNECESSARY TEMPORAL PERPLEXITY, THAT HE MAY GIVE HIMSELF WHOLLY TO HIS SACRED CALLING.

Common Words of Human Devising. The messages of truth are to be kept entirely free from cheap, common words of human devising. Thus forcible impressions will be made upon hearts. Let not our ministers cherish the idea that they must bring forth something new and strange, or that cheap, common expressions will give them influence. Ministers are to be the mouthpiece of God, and they must eradicate from their speech every expression that is cheap or common. Let them be careful lest by attempting during their discourse to cause laughter, they dishonor God.

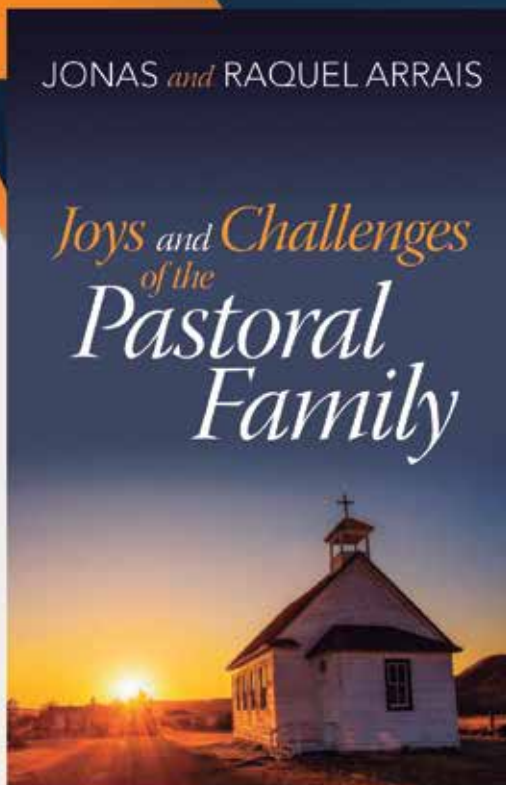
Our message is a solemn and sacred one, and we must watch unto prayer. The words uttered must be of such a character that through them God can make an impression on heart and mind. Let the ministers of the gospel be sanctified through the truth. ED

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 269—272, by Ellen G. White.

JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF THE PASTORAL FAMILY

This book shares the unique joys and challenges of families called to ministry. It encourages couples in ministry to continually strengthen their commitment to each other, their family, and their church. Whether you are a pastor, a theology student, or a local church leader, this book offers great insights to improve your family relationships and your partnership in ministry as a couple. Contact your conference or mission Ministerial Association secretary to get a copy of this valuable resource.

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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 care givers (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. ED

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





KEEPING YOUR SPIRITUALITY ALIVE



When we think of biblical spirituality, we often limit ourselves to the spiritual practices such as prayer, devotions, fasting, worship, etc. These are certainly all vital components of our spiritual life. But less often do we consider ministry for others as part of our own walk with Jesus. Sometimes we see ministry as an optional part of spirituality, often left to those we perceive as “really spiritual.” But the Word of God indicates that a very important part of our walk with Jesus is our service to His body, the church, and to the lost sheep outside the church.

In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30) Jesus says that God expects us to use our spiritual gifts in service of others. We are not to bury our gifts, depriving others of the service we are called to render. The master calls the servant who buried his talent “wicked” and “lazy” (v. 26). His talent is taken away and given to others (v. 28). And verse 30 indicates there are serious consequences for those who do not minister to others. The “worthless” servant is cast into “the outer darkness.” So Jesus takes seriously this issue of ministry; it is not something optional, reserved for the “most gifted” among us.

Ellen G. White tells us there is a strong link between our spiritual life and our service to others. She says that when we do not actively use our spiritual gifts in loving work for others, our intimate relationship with Jesus is weakened, and our devotional experience becomes dry.

God does not mean that any of us should become hermits or monks and retire from the world in order to devote ourselves to acts of worship. The life must be like Christ’s life—between the mountain and the multitude. He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work.¹

There seems to be a synergetic relationship between spiritual practices generally experienced in solitude, and the more public, active work for others using spiritual gifts. A healthy balance between these two types of spiritual activities prevents the believer from becoming self-centered and focused only on personal needs or desires. Addressing the needs of others

is part of the spiritual journey that allows the spirit of Jesus to be reflected in the life of the disciple.

ENDOWMENT OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Paul indicates that as members of the body of Christ, we are all connected together in a web of life and growth (1 Cor 12:12). The Holy Spirit gives every believer spiritual gifts so that the followers of Christ might be equipped to be a blessing in service to others. “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (v. 7). So the work of ministry is not dependent on the disciple’s abilities. Rather, effective service comes from the divine power and enabling of the Holy Spirit. This dependence on God is part of biblical spirituality.

In Romans 12, Paul states that our focus on ministry is defined by our gifts.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (vv. 6–8).

This could be called the “nominating committee” passage. Paul is saying that our spiritual gifts determine the position or role we have in the church. When a member’s gifts are known, it is rather simple to decide where he or she should be serving. One’s position or office in the church should be based on their gifting and passion, not their popularity or wealth.

But as well as using spiritual gifts, the disciple of Jesus should grow in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–24). The fruit of the Spirit has to do with character: how we behave toward others, and what kind of attitude we have toward them. Our spirituality is kept alive by the combination of a Christ-like character (fruit) and loving service to other people (gifts).

DISCOVERING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Every pastor has heard members say, “I don’t know what my spiritual gifts are” or “I don’t think I have any spiritual gifts.” But we believe that spiritual gifts are bestowed by God at the believer’s conversion. Just as the Spirit alighted on Jesus when He came up out of the Jordan, we believe the Spirit descends on the newly baptized and empowers them with gifts for ministry. Our role as leaders is to help them discover and use their gifts.

We developed and used in our churches the following process of gift discovery and mentoring to empower members to minister effectively:

1. Pray, asking the same Holy Spirit who gave you your gifts to reveal to you what they are.
2. Study what the Bible and Ellen G. White say about spiritual gifts, or read a book on the topic.
3. Take a spiritual gifts inventory, preferably under the guidance of someone knowledgeable about the process.
4. Determine if you have a sense of calling to a particular area of ministry or service. Is there a growing passion in your heart for a particular group of people, or for a certain type of spiritual work?
5. Ask friends who know you well if they see evidence of the potential gifts you identified so far.
6. Counsel with your pastor and church leaders to identify a particular area of ministry to try for a short period of time—maybe two or three months. It is best if you have a ministry leader who can mentor and guide you.
7. Evaluate your effectiveness in this area of ministry.
 - a. Self-evaluation: Do you feel a sense of fulfillment? Is there tangible spiritual fruit to your labor?
 - b. Evaluation from others: How do your ministry leader and partners feel? Do they see God working through you to the blessing of others? Depending on the type of ministry, a part or the entire church may be able to give you honest feedback, to either affirm your gifting or guide you in a different direction.
8. Continue in this area of ministry if the feedback indicates the Lord is working, and if there is evidence of the gift via good fruit. If there is strong evidence that you are not gifted in this area, then review the previous steps in the process and try a different area of service. Sometimes the feedback will indicate where your gifting might actually be.
9. Repeat these steps until you find your place in spiritual ministry.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT HAS TO DO WITH CHARACTER: HOW WE BEHAVE TOWARD OTHERS, AND WHAT KIND OF ATTITUDE WE HAVE TOWARD THEM. OUR SPIRITUALITY IS KEPT ALIVE BY THE COMBINATION OF A CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER (FRUIT) AND LOVING SERVICE TO OTHER PEOPLE (GIFTS).

When this process was applied, the number of members involved in ministry and witnessing increased dramatically—from thirty to fifty percent in one congregation. And the level of satisfaction in ministry also grew significantly. We saw members get involved in ministries such as Bible studies, community services, children’s ministry, evangelism, and more.

A wonderful example of newly discovered spiritual gifts helped develop a prayer ministry in one of our churches: Four or five people in the congregation found they had gifts of intercessory prayer, and other members confirmed the presence of their gifts. They formed a prayer team, and soon every activity and ministry in the church was bathed in prayer. We had weekends of fasting and prayer, spontaneous prayer at church, home, and work, and formed pray chains. We began to sense and experience God’s presence in our lives. Soon powerful testimonies of answered prayer and miracles in members’ lives were a weekly witness to what God was doing through these gifted believers.

AN INVITATION

You and your congregation can experience similar growth and energy by following God’s plan to develop biblical spirituality. With a balanced approach of nurturing the fruit of the Spirit in each member’s life through spiritual practices, and discovering their gifts and deploying them in active ministry, healthy disciples and healthy churches will be a reality.

God’s church is the court of holy life, filled with varied gifts, and endowed with the Holy Spirit. The members are to find their happiness in the happiness of those whom they help and bless. Wonderful is the work which the Lord designs to accomplish through His church, that His name may be glorified.²

Will you answer the call to be what Christ has designed you to be—a coworker with Him, to bring joy and happiness to others, as you grow in grace, reflecting His image to the world? ED

RESULTS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

We have observed that members who went through the process reported they spent more time in prayer and devotions, and were more committed to attend church and give faithfully in tithes and offerings. This demonstrates the vital relationship between personal spiritual practices and gift-based service to others.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*. 101.

² Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*. 14.

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THE CHRISTIAN AND ALCOHOL

In many societies the greatest problem with addiction is not the various illicit drugs that people obtain and use, but the consumption of alcohol, which is more easily available. Because of alcohol abuse, great damage is done not only to society and the economy but also to unborn life (fetal alcohol syndrome). Many children suffer from severe consequences because of their parents' lifestyle. Their physical growth and mental development are significantly hindered. The easiest and most logical approach to the problem of alcohol is complete abstinence. What would be our arguments in favor of such a lifestyle?

Firstly, Scripture has a negative attitude toward alcohol. For examples of the negative effects of alcohol, see the stories of Noah (Gen 9:20–27), Lot (Gen 19:30–38), and Belshazzar (Dan 5:1–6). There is even a clear and specific warning against the use of alcohol, which “bites like a snake and poisons like a viper” (Prov 23:29–35; Luke 1:15). Jesus also gave us an example of refusing to drink alcohol (Matt 27:33–34, 48).

However, it is important to note that the term “wine” in Scripture does not always refer to fermented wine, but can also mean grape juice.

Secondly, research has shown that alcohol is harmful, even in small doses. Here are some of the potential physical damages: destruction of liver cells (e.g., fatty liver or cirrhosis), destruction of cells of the heart muscle (cardiac insufficiency and heart failure), destruction of brain cells, and inflammation of the nerves (neuritis). However, harmful effects are not limited to physical problems. There may also be mental-emotional damages such as a decline of memory, decline of productivity and performance, depression, fear and disappointment with oneself, etc. Also, alcohol is linked to family violence, accidents, and other problematic behavior.

Ronny A. Bell, PhD, MS, et al., of the department of public health sciences at Wake Forest University School of Medicine, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, says: “Alcohol is by no means a safe drug, nor something that can in any way be recommended for health promotion. Suggesting that alcohol is somehow beneficial is so outweighed by its toxicity as to be criminal.” Dr. W. Feuerlein of the German Society of the Investigation and Therapy of Addiction has emphasized that even in small quantities alcohol is absolutely dangerous for certain groups of people, such as persons suffering from an illness of the liver or pancreas, diabetics, those with epileptic seizures,

and all those who are in danger of becoming alcohol dependents. Dr. F. Portheine of the Academy of Occupational Medicine in Berlin has pointed out that alcohol is a neurotoxic substance that is harmful in the smallest quantities. It reduces protective fear and stimulates daredevilry and primitive passions. The sense of responsibility suffers immensely.

A third argument in favor of complete abstinence from alcohol is the fact that alcohol may become addictive. No moderate drinker has a guarantee that he or she will not become addicted. When persons are used to drinking moderately, under severe circumstances they may drink more and the pathway to addiction is thus established.

In considering the choice to drink alcohol, we must consider the issue through the lens of biblical stewardship. Because everything belongs to God, our bodies are also God's property. God does not want this property to be destroyed, but to be preserved and cared for like a sanctuary (1 Cor 6:19–20; 10:31). Alcohol destroys God's temple, our bodies. Our financial means are also God's and should be used to His glory. To use our finances to destroy our bodies through the use of alcohol is to be irresponsible stewards of what God has entrusted to us (Hag 2:8).

We must also consider that Christians are called to be examples for others. Christians ought to help others, not imperil them. Those who drink moderately are a danger because they mislead others; the influence of an alcoholic is less stimulating than the influence of a moderate drinker. Those who drink moderately are also a temptation for currently sober alcoholics, for whom the smallest dose of alcohol may trigger a backslide into alcoholism. We are responsible for each other and should not live only for our own pleasure (1 Cor 8:13; Rom 14:19–21; 15:1–3). In order to be of real help we need to be completely abstinent.

It has been said that alcoholism is a thirst for God on a low level. Whether or not this is true, we have found Jesus and salvation in Him. The same biblical principles that apply to the use of alcohol are also applicable to the use of tobacco and illicit drugs. We do not need alcohol or other drugs to quench our spiritual thirst. ED

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BURIED ALIVE

As shovelfuls of dirt rained down around his head, Mr. B* knew he may not live through the night. His neighbors were intent on burying him alive.

Desperately clinging to the small bamboo pipe that was his only source of air, he began to pray.

Why was this happening now? It had been three years since his baptism. Why had his Muslim neighbors decided to attack him today?

More than ten years before, Mr. B had discovered AWR's shortwave radio programs. He was a vegetable farmer, and was in the habit of bringing his radio to work.

"Many people in my village cannot read," he says, "so we were happy to listen together as we worked."

Mr. B was a committed Muslim, and at first he rejected what he was hearing about Christianity, although he liked the health and family programs. But little by little, he also became interested in presentations about the Bible. He began to compare what he was learning about the Bible with what he knew from the Quran, and spent more and more time studying.

The AWR presenters in this country know how to present Christianity in the context of their listeners' culture and beliefs, so the messages won't be immediately rejected. For example, in Islam, Isa (Jesus) is understood to be the penultimate prophet of God, so Mr. B was willing to listen to stories about the Christian Isa.

"To win people to Christ in this country is very hard," says Pastor G, the local communication director. "You have to know the customs, the culture, the way people live and talk."

Eventually, it was the Bible's promise of salvation that changed Mr. B's mind about Christianity. He contacted the AWR studio and was given an audio Bible, which helped him in his studies. "But the radio was not just for me," he says. "Little by little, as my neighbors listened with me, some of them also came to believe."

Sadly, his successful witnessing led to severe problems with his community. After his baptism, many people followed Mr. B to the Adventist church. But among them was a spy.

The local government leaders ordered Mr. B to appear before them for a hearing. Facing a panel of twenty-five people, he was questioned for hours about the gospel, biblical law, comparisons between the Bible and the Quran, and more.



"It was like facing the judgment," he says. "But, like Paul, I told myself it was an opportunity to share the Bible."

That interrogation wasn't enough for the community, however. A group of neighbors—including Mr. B's own brother and sister—decided to implement a Muslim tradition of "testing." First, Mr. B was forced to fast for six days. Then came the burial. He was put in a box below ground, covered with dirt, and kept there from seven p.m. to five a.m., according to the schedule of Muslim calls to prayer. If he survived, his accusers would admit he was following the right way, and he would be allowed to attend church.

"That night, I fully surrendered to God," Mr. B says. "I made a promise: If I am wrong, take me now. If I am right, give me a chance to witness to these people."

God did indeed reward Mr. B's faithfulness. After this harrowing experience, the Holy Spirit worked on his community. All six of his children have been baptized, along with other family members and neighbors—even the spy who reported him to the government! Together, about one hundred people are now meeting regularly.

"When I hear testimonies like this, I am humbled and thankful that someone has heard and appreciated our messages," says Pastor J, the producer of the programs Mr. B heard. "We don't always know each contact, but we do know that people *are* listening." ED

* Names and location withheld for security.

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