

quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2020

ELDER'S DIGEST

Jesus is Coming!
GET INVOLVED!



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JESUS IS COMING! GET INVOLVED!

The most important question any Christian can ask is this: “Am I ready for Jesus to come?”

What does *ready* mean in terms of God’s message to believers? What is required to make someone ready for Jesus’ coming?

To be ready, of course, requires initial salvation. Do I know Jesus Christ as my personal Savior? “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). Salvation is an ongoing process, and the final result of salvation is redemption. Jesus promises to come again and lead us to heaven (1 Thess 4:16–17). But between these two great events—salvation and redemption—there is also a need for sanctification and a life of service.

God’s plan for our lives is that—while we are waiting and getting prepared for His return—we should live a life of sanctification and service. We are reminded of this truth in Jesus’ prophetic sermon (Matt 24–25), where He teaches us not only about the signs that will take place before His return, but also about what comprises a real spiritual life in preparation for His second coming.

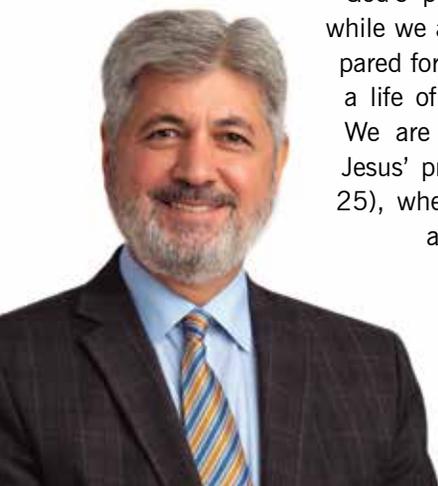
We are familiar with the spiritual lessons of the parables of the ten virgins and the talents. One teaches us about the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and the other teaches what the Holy Spirit would like to do through us. In other words, one is about a life of sanctification and the other one a life of service.

The reality is that many Christians today are looking for sanctification, yet are not living a life of service. They are not using their spiritual gifts. Maybe this is why many Christians are paralyzed in their spiritual life. Perhaps this is one of the reasons some churches are not growing. Some church members are stuck in their comfort zone—only searching for their own nurturing or sanctification, but not practicing a life of service. Unfortunately, they are missing a very important element in their spiritual preparation for heaven.

Jesus is Coming! Get Involved! is the theme for the 2020 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, IN, USA. It is an invitation for every Seventh-day Adventist member to get involved in mission (TMI, Total Member Involvement). It is a call to each one of us to use our spiritual gifts to help others know Jesus as their personal Savior.

Remember that your talent is your mission. Wherever you live, work, and study, you can be a blessing in someone’s life. May the messages presented during this global church gathering inspire and challenge each one of us to be more motivated in leading someone to the foot of the cross. And may we see Jesus coming again very soon!

ED



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



Ted N. C. Wilson began his church career as a pastor in 1974 in the Greater New York Conference. He married Nancy Louise Vollmer Wilson, a physical therapist, in 1975. The couple have three daughters: Emilie Louise, married to Pastor Kameron DeVasher; Elizabeth Esther, married to Pastor David Wright; and Catherine Anne, married to Dr. Robert Renck. The Wilsons have eleven grandchildren. Born in Takoma Park, Maryland on May 10, 1950, the son of former Seventh-day Adventist Church president Neal C. Wilson and Elinor E. Wilson, Wilson spent part of his childhood in Egypt.

Wilson served as an assistant director and then director of Metropolitan Ministries in New York from 1976 to 1981. He also served the Africa-Indian Ocean Division (now known as West-Central Africa Division), based in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, until 1990, as a departmental director and later as executive secretary.

Following his post in West Africa, he served for two years at the General Conference World Headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, as an associate secretary. He went on to accept the position of president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Euro-Asia Division in Moscow, Russia, which he held from 1992 to 1996.

Pastor Wilson returned to the United States to serve as president of the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland, until his election as a vice president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2000. In 2010 he was elected president, the position he currently holds.

An ordained minister, Pastor Wilson holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religious Education from New York University, a Master of Divinity degree from Andrews University, and a Master of Science in Public Health degree from the Loma Linda University School of Public Health. In addition to English, he speaks French and some Russian.

1. As president of the General Conference, what is your perception about the Seventh-day Adventist Church as we come to the end of this quinquennium?

What a privilege to be involved in God's last-day Advent movement. It is a worldwide movement that is led by the Holy Spirit. It has a specific role to lift up Christ; His Word; His righteousness; His sanctuary service; His saving power in the great controversy; His three angels' messages of Revelation 14 and the fourth angel of Revelation 18; His health message; His last-day prophetic mission to the world, including the need to plead for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit; and Christ's soon second coming. We are seeing a dramatic increase in lay people taking control of the evangelistic destiny of this movement as we enlist and encourage them in Total Member Involvement. God is raising up dedicated lay people and young people to

do a great work of evangelization. We are to claim Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV): "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." We need to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit and pray for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit to finish the work on earth so Jesus can come soon. We are to understand our special mission as indicated in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 19: "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."

2. Many initiatives were launched in recent years. In your opinion, which have created the most impact for the Adventist Church?

God has blessed the initiatives that have been launched because they are based on instruction from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. The Lord has greatly blessed Revival and Reformation, Mission to the Cities, Comprehensive Health Ministry, Centers of Influence (centers to reach out to people especially in the large cities), One Year in Mission (soul winning and service by young people), massive publishing distribution programs, Total Member Involvement, various programs and activities of departments, etc. Many of these programs have experienced strong support and results, for which we praise God. He is the One who has blessed us enormously. Revival and Reformation has been very well received by the local churches, and has laid a foundation for many outreach programs. The program that appears to have been received with enormous welcome and reception has been Total Member Involvement. Lay people have rallied to the call to be involved in the mission of the church. It has been so gratifying. This is God's biblical and Spirit of Prophecy plan. We are to understand our role as part of an urgent message, following Christ's admonition in His own words in John 9:4: "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." Everyone is to be involved in this final work, as is indicated in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 116: "The leaders in God's cause, as wise generals, are to lay plans for advance moves all along the line. In their planning they are to give special study to the work that can be done by the laity for their friends and neighbors. The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."

3. What blessings experienced by the Adventist Church would you like to highlight?

The awakening of the lay people around the world in understanding the Total Member Involvement concept has been a great blessing. The Holy Spirit has inspired many people to become very focused on the mission of the church to God's glory! Another great development is that many more people are aware of the urgent times in which we live just before Christ's soon coming. People have been drawn to the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy as they humble themselves in prayer to the Lord. We have seen the world church accept the need of humility before God and ask for the outpouring of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. We have seen young people become so pas-

sionate about the mission of the church. Much of the church in many parts of the world is made up of young people who are on fire for the Lord! This tells me that the coming of the Lord is soon!

4. Will Reach the World, the Adventist Church's strategic plan, continue during the new quinquennium?

Yes, this will be the overall strategic plan and has been strongly adjusted to be shorter, more focused, and personal in its emphasis on the grand mission entrusted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as outlined in Revelation 14:6–12 and Revelation 12:17. There are very specific "key performance indicators" that are focused on strong mission points needed for the church in its outreach activities. God will guide His church as we work together around the world to "reach the world" through the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. In that case, what is the purpose of launching the new slogan, "I Will Go"?

Although the overall strategic plan will continue with the theme of Reach the World, the personal appeal for this coming quinquennium is the wonderful, individual commitment to the Lord to be part of the last proclamation of prophetic truth to the world and say to the Lord, in the spirit of Total Member Involvement, "I will go!" It is so important to see that God has called everyone to be part of His mission for the last days of earth's history. "I Will Go" gives a personal opportunity to everyone to join God's prophetic proclamation to the world. It provides everyone to personally commit themselves to this task in connection with their relationship with the Lord, and then to join with others in a local and global outreach under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are not saved in groups, nor can we witness through someone else doing it for us. Yes, we will certainly work together and carry out God's commission as a church and in groups, but it must start with each of us personally in our commitment to the Lord, saying to Him, "I will go." This is to be our response to what Christ has done for us on the cross and what He is doing for us in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. It is our response to His appeal to join Him in this great commission in Matthew 28:19–20 and Mark 16:15.

6. In your opinion, what is the best contribution pastors and local church leaders can give to fulfill the mission of the Adventist Church in these end times?

Each of us, whether pastors, local church leaders, or church members, are to focus on the mission of the church and realize that we need to be revived and reformed through God's power in Bible study, study of

the Spirit of Prophecy, and earnest prayer. We need every day to be connected to the “Vine,” Jesus Christ. We need to plead with the Lord for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. We need to humble ourselves before the Lord and realize we are the Laodicean church of Revelation 3:14–22. We need to accept Christ’s offer in Revelation 3:18, accepting God’s precious truth or “gold” tried in the fire, putting on His pure white robe of righteousness, and placing spiritual eye salve on our eyes so we can see clearly according to God’s will and perspective. What a beautiful text that is: “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” We need to help our church members realize that we are a distinctive movement that fulfills the definition of God’s last-day people in Revelation 12:17. God is calling us to be a prophetic people with a prophetic message on a prophetic mission. We must sound the alarm that Jesus is coming soon and there must be an urgency to our work, life, attitude, and perspective. The Holy Spirit must be in control of our lives as we submit to the righteousness of Christ that justifies us and then sanctifies us in becoming more and more like Jesus.

7. As you see the horizon from your perspective, how do you visualize the opportunities for the Adventist Church in the next years?

To begin with, I don’t think we have many years ahead of us; I truly believe that Jesus is coming soon. No one should predict when His coming will be, but it will be soon. Everything around us speaks to the nearness of His coming, reminding us of what Romans 1:16–32 says regarding unrighteousness, which is on the increase everywhere. When you are separated from Christ, you are open to distraction and control by the devil. God wants us to live by His Holy Word, relying completely on Him. I see believers worldwide hum-

bling themselves and being filled by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the last proclamation of the three angels’ messages. I see church members humbling their hearts and working for the Lord and others in increasing selflessness, allowing God to speak through them. I see church members around the world following in Christ’s footsteps, helping people physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. I see our church members focusing on Revival and Reformation, Mission to the Cities, Comprehensive Health Ministry, literature distribution, and so many other outreach activities combined in Total Member Involvement—everyone being in Christ and doing something for Jesus. Pray earnestly for the Lord to lead you into many avenues of service that will lead to Bible studies on the part of many. There are so many ways in which to point people to Christ and His saving power. Those opportunities are all around you. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your service for Him. God will lead local churches to be united in their love for Christ and service to others as they share the wonderful news of a soon-coming Savior. May every member and every church worldwide in word and in actions point others to Christ, His precious Holy Word—the Bible, His all-encompassing righteousness of justification and sanctification, His marvelous sanctuary service sharing His plan of salvation, His saving power for each of us as we find ourselves in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, His powerful three angels’ messages with Christ’s righteousness at the core, His life-changing health message, His last-day message and mission to the people of this globe, our need to plead for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit in these last days of earth’s history, and the Savior’s second coming that brings us the blessed hope! As our upcoming General Conference Session theme says, “Jesus is coming! Get involved!” May this be our experience as we prepare, through the Holy Spirit’s leading, for an eternity with Christ—all through His love, blood, grace, and saving power!

ED

WEEKLY TITHES & OFFERINGS **VIDEOS**

**EVERY SABBATH, A NEW STORY
INSPIRING YOUR CHURCH
TO ALWAYS PUT GOD FIRST.**

BEGAN JANUARY 4, 2020.

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GOD FIRST
A NEW STRATEGY OF MISSIONS

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

The idea of the end of the world or the invasion of planet earth by extraterrestrial beings has been the topic of many popular films. In 1974, a film about the second coming of Christ in the form of a documentary frightened hundreds of Canadians. Obviously, many viewers regarded the broadcast as reality. In the film, which took place in a TV station, reports about earthquakes, floods, and other disasters followed each other. The TV station received numerous calls from terrified viewers who, in spite of the announcement that the film was pure fiction, wanted to know whether or not the portrayed events were true.

Scripture tells us that indeed there will be an invasion, but it will be the second coming of Jesus Christ (John 14:1–3). It is important to know about it and be prepared.

I. HOW WILL JESUS COME AGAIN?

In Matthew 24:30–31 Jesus points us to five characteristics of His second coming:

1. He will come personally and visibly for all those who live (Rev 1:7).
2. He will come on the clouds.
3. He will come with power and great glory.
4. He will come audibly.
5. He will come with His angels.

Furthermore, at Jesus' second coming the first resurrection will take place (1 Cor 15:22–23). These characteristics are given so that we may not be deceived by an imitation (Matt 24:23–26; 2 Thess 2:8–9).

II. WHY WILL JESUS COME AGAIN?

Many people may not want Jesus to come back again. They are doing well, enjoying life. Others can hardly wait for Christ's return.

1. Jesus will come again because He promised He would (John 14:1–3).
2. He will come again to complete the plan of salvation, which includes our resurrection, our being with God, and eternal life on a new earth (John 5:25–29; Rev 21:1–5). This will bring earth's history to an end and mark the transition to eternity.
3. He will come again to bring His reward (Rev 22:12) and to judge the nations (1 Tim 4:1, 8; Matt 25:31–46). The "reward" cannot be earned, but has two dimensions:

- final salvation (1 Thess 4:15–17)
- destruction (1 Thess 5:1–3; Luke 17:26–30; Rev 6:15–17)

This will result in a separation between people, including the Christian community, families, and marriages (Matt 24:40–41; 25:31–33).

III. WHEN WILL JESUS COME AGAIN?

1. Only God knows the time (Matt 24:36, 44).
2. Nevertheless, people have set various dates:
 - Among Catholic Christians were Apollinaris the Younger, suggesting AD 490; Hippolyt AD 500; and others who suggested the years 1000, 1010, 1260, 1651, etc.
 - Among Protestants were M. Luther (but for a short period only), A. Bengel, and M. Stiefel. The latter suggested October 10, 1533, 8:00 a.m. as the time of Christ's second coming.
 - The Millerite movement came up with October 22, 1844.
 - Christians of other denominations have suggested various dates in (e.g., 1914, 1975).
3. The other extreme is not to count on Jesus' second coming at all, or to postpone it in one's mind indefinitely (Matt 24:48).

IV. BEING READY

1. It is important to be ready all the time (Matt 24:42–44). We are ready when our life belongs to Jesus and we live with Him constantly. Martin Luther talks about expecting the day of the second coming with joy: "Whoever is not ready and does not desire the day, does not understand the Lord's prayer nor can he wholeheartedly pray it."

2. God's children are looking forward to Jesus' return, because only then is salvation complete (Rev 22:20). Are you looking forward to it?

The teaching of Christ's second coming is one of the doctrines most frequently expressed in the New Testament. It ought to shape the way we live our lives today. ED

Ekkehardt Mueller is Associate Director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI newsletter.



THE THEOLOGY OF LIFE >PART 4

A BIBLICAL THOUGHT—1

“So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.”—Galatians 3:5–7

In the previous biblical thought, part 3, the text focused on the two religions of the Bible: the religion of human works (seen in the legalism of the Pharisees, in paganism, and in idolatry) and the religion of God (it is God who acts for humanity, and not the other way around). Once we receive the Spirit we grow in love and freedom. We do not grow in legalistic rituals and sacrifices that undo the validity of the sacrifice of Christ for us. Because at the end of the day, our recurrent temptation to “sacrifice ourselves” for God could

be a symptom of our lack of trust and confidence in what Jesus did for us.

In this text we find Paul asking even more questions to the church of Galatia and using Abraham as an example of those who trust in God and live by faith. The miracles God works for us and through us are not done because of our good works! They are accomplished by God’s own initiative, and perfected in the heart of those who open themselves for His action. Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. Why? Because he believed the word of God concerning his future. Any actions Abraham performed after this were not to guarantee some added favor from God, but were acts of love that took place in the context of a faith that trusts without sight!

Faith is a present reality which has a double orientation. It looks to the past, and to the future. In his

walk, Abraham looked to the past and remembered God's words and promise, but he also looked forward and lived as if the promise were true. Faith looks back and forward. And as it was with Abraham, so it is with us! Jesus sacrificed Himself for us at the cross. We look back to the past by faith, and we believe that this is a reality. But faith does not leave us in the past. Faith casts us into a future shaped by our trust in what happened in the past. So if it is true that Jesus sacrificed Himself for us and that in this sacrifice He fulfilled everything the law demanded of Israel, then let us live by this faith! Let us live knowing that there remains no more sacrifices. Let us live in the freedom of the Spirit and in the trust that God acts for and through us because of what Jesus has done, and not because of our own good works. Let us live knowing that God works for us not because we are good but because *He* is good.

One final and important observation: legalism also has a double orientation. It looks to the past and does not trust that Jesus sacrificed Himself for us, and it shapes the future around this false truth. Why do you think even today, just like in the times of the Galatians, some religious people believe they need to please God through works? Because their future is shaped by a distorted vision of the past. For these, Jesus did not accomplish everything at the cross, so they feel they need to contribute to their salvation through their own works.

But, friends, Paul reminds us that only those who live by the true faith—by the faith that looks to the past and to the future of what Christ did—are the true children of Abraham. It is not by blood, it is not by lineage, it is not by how long we have been in church, and it is not by how faithful we are to Adventism, but only and exclusively by faith in the completed sacrifice of Jesus that we are counted as children of Abraham. May you embrace this faith, the true faith, a faith that looks to the past and shapes the future around it, a faith that allows us to live by what Christ has accomplished, in freedom, joy, and love.

A BIBLICAL THOUGHT—2

“Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”—Galatians 3:8–9

In this text Paul continues to use the example of Abraham in order to give the church in Galatia a clear vision of what Christ had done. What Paul is teaching the church is not a new teaching. If the new converts from Judaism had noticed what was already written in the Torah, if they paid close attention to what God had done in the past, they would have seen glimpses of

the gospel there. Abraham was a Gentile! God called this Gentile so that *all* nations—everyone on the face of the earth—would be blessed through him! This was the plan all along; this was the gospel, all along.

There are two things to focus on in this text: what does blessing and election mean?

When Abraham was called by God, he was promised blessings. In human religion, everything revolves around and ends in us humans. So when we read that God blessed Abraham, we may be tempted to think that this “blessing” was nothing more than a favor God bestowed on Abraham just because Abraham was good, or obedient. In human religion, blessings are an end. We ask for them, and when we receive them, we thank God. The end. But notice what God says to Abraham and what Paul repeats here: “In you all nations will be blessed.” In other words, any and every blessing Abraham received from God was not an end, but a means to bless people! Blessings are never about us; they are always about others. The blessing we receive, we share. And if this was understood by all who believe, every single person on the face of the earth would experience the blessing of interacting with the true children of Abraham: those who did not turn blessings into ends for themselves.

This leads to the next point: Knowing that being blessed is not an end but a means to bless others, now we can have a better grasp of the nature of the “elect.” The elect, in human religion, would be some favored person, some good person, some obedient person. We will always look for a reason as to why God elects particular individuals, and the reason is always some inherent goodness in those people. But Abraham was a Gentile. Right after his call in Genesis 12, we find him lying and offering his own wife to others to save his own life! But here lies the power of God's calling: God may call many, but only chooses those who respond. Even with their brokenness and problems, the elect respond to God. So it was with Abraham, David, and every single follower of God in every age. The elect are elect not for anything great in themselves, but for their willingness to respond, and for their willingness to be elect for others, and to serve others and not themselves.

My dear reader, has your life and religion been a continuation of the life of Abraham? Has your life been a blessing to others, or has your religion been an end in yourself? May we be willing to respond, may we be willing to be chosen, may we be willing to serve and bless, and in this movement, may we become true children of Abraham. ED

Tiago Arrais, PhD, is a district pastor in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

THE ONE-SERMON WONDER:

GROW WITH OUR HOPE-LIVES365 ONLINE UNIVERSITY



I was a young pastor, just beginning my ministry, when I invited a conference official to preach in my church. His musty sermon notes revealed their age. It was a message he had preached on numerous occasions before. Unfortunately, on that Sabbath he served stale spiritual leftovers to my congregation. My members were gracious, but disappointed in the lack of spiritual depth in the message.

His sermon reminded me of a story I had read about the “one-sermon wonder”—the type of preacher who has only one sermon, so he gets appointments at different churches in order to preach the same sermon every week. The problem with “one-sermon wonder” preachers is that their thoughts become stale. They lack the excitement of new discovery. They present worn-out, tired ideas with little freshness, vitality, and creativity. They fail to bring from the storehouse of truth “things old and new,” as Jesus says. What we share with others is the overflow of our own experience in the Word. It is the result of the Holy Spirit’s moving upon our own hearts in the quietness of our devotional lives.

Growth in the Christian life necessitates constant study. It requires a disciplined mind saturated with the Word of God. Before the Holy Spirit speaks through us, He must speak to us. Before we speak for God, we must speak to God. Before other hearts are moved by our witness, our heart must be moved by the Spirit’s witness. All genuine, authentic witness is the result of a genuine, authentic experience with Jesus.

Although I have been in the gospel ministry for over fifty years, I constantly ask God to expand my thinking to give me new, fresh, deeply spiritual thoughts to present to His people. I am reminded of the apostle Paul’s words to his young protégé Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved” (2 Tim 2:15).

Let me share with you one of the resources we have developed recently to help pastors, elders, and lay leaders broaden their horizons and become more effective spiritual leaders in the cause of Christ. I am

excited about our new HopeLives365 Online University. We now have over seventy-five courses designed especially for them to enhance their knowledge of God’s Word and their ability to serve their congregations successfully. We have nearly one thousand regular students, with 2,500 total enrollments. While some courses require a moderate fee, many of our courses are completely free of charge.

Here are just a few examples of courses designed for busy leaders like you: Our preaching course is one of our most popular. In it you will discover how to prepare a biblical sermon; how to see the biblical text with Holy Spirit-anointed eyes; how to use powerful illustrations to make your key points; and how to make life-changing appeals. Hundreds have taken our preaching course and testify to the difference it makes in their preaching. You will also enjoy our course on principles of godly leadership. In this course we share how effective leaders cast vision and motivate their congregations to look beyond what is to what can be. We present basic principles of how to transform your church board into a dynamic, mission-centered body of leaders passionate about developing evangelistic strategies in each department and ministry of the church. Our health courses will benefit your personal health as well as equip your team to reach out in redemptive ways to your community.

Along with other Adventist leaders, I have shared in the HopeLives365 Online University courses what God has taught me about ministry, leadership, and evangelism over more than fifty years. I can’t wait to share these eternal principles with you. You can begin this journey of discovery today by visiting HopeLives365BibleStudy.com. You will be thrilled at how quickly you learn in this online environment, and we will be there to assist you in becoming everything heaven desires you to be as you keep growing for the glory of God. **ED**

Mark Finley is the Assistant to the President of the General Conference.

HOPELIVES365 ONLINE UNIVERSITY



PREPARES YOU
TO BE EFFECTIVE
IN MINISTRY

One of the greatest needs of our church is for local leadership that is biblically informed, fully devoted to Christ, and prepared to lead. HopeLives365 Online University provides online courses developed to train and further equip elders and lay leaders to be effective in ministry, in leadership, and in sharing the love of Christ within their congregations and communities.

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I invite you to visit HopeLives365 Online University at www.HopeLives365BibleStudy.com. Experience inspiration. Expect transformation. 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 73.

Chris Sealey is an ordained elder and a published author on the topic of Christian stewardship. He is the Director of HopeLives365 Online University, and also serves as Dean of Academics for the online programs.

DISCIPLES KEEPING DISCIPLES:

KNOW AND CALL
EVERYONE BY NAME

>PART 2



For the past four years, a small group has met in our home every Tuesday evening from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. Between fifteen and twenty people come regularly. With the exception of three or four people, the group is always the same. I recently asked them a question: “How many of you know the names of everyone else in the group?” I knew everyone’s name, but—to my surprise—not all of them did! This is true in most of our churches: members come week after week and worship together, but do not know one another’s names.

In my previews article, I wrote about how to help church members get to know one another. In this article, I will show how we can learn and use one another’s names.

THE VALUE OF A NAME

At a recent community fair, I was given the responsibility of hosting the raffles and two giveaways. When I did the first one, a boy came running. I knew his name and addressed him by his name. When I did the second, another boy came running to receive his prize, but I was not able to congratulate him by name. I was embarrassed to find that I knew his face, but not his name.

On Sabbath, the greeters, perhaps the elders, stand at the door and greet people. They pass a bulletin or shake hands and say, “Happy Sabbath” as people walk in. They rarely greet people by name. This is partly because they are not used to greeting people by name, and partly because they simply do not know the names

of the majority of the members. While a greeting is good, greeting with a name is great, and I believe it adds value. It is one of the ways to make people feel included and accepted.

During the greeting portion of the church service, the pastor in charge provides an opportunity for the congregation to meet and greet one another. Most people stand up and shake hands with one or two people before returning to their seats. I interviewed a dozen of our members about whether they knew the names of the people they greeted almost on a regular basis (for people usually sit in the same seats every week). Three-fourths of them said they knew them by face, but not by name. They admitted they did not really know the people sitting and worshipping beside them.

PERSPECTIVE

Mike Figliuolo points out that people lose their identities when we refer to them by title alone (e.g., sir, boss, etc.); the titles are interchangeable, one-dimensional, and replaceable. People want to be recognized for who they are, not for the roles they fill.¹ He suggests that next time you see a waitress, bellman, or anyone else in the service industry who wears a name tag, call that person by name as you speak with him or her. Watch that person’s reaction. The instant you say a person’s name, you have humanized that person. Figliuolo assures us that person will be much more interested in fulfilling your request, simply because you called him or her by name.²

“God knows each individual by name.”³ He called Abraham by his name (Gen 22:1). He called Moses by

his name (Exod 3:4). He called Samuel by his name (1 Sam 3:4). Jesus called Ananias by his name (Acts 9:11). Because He valued people by calling them by name, I believe He desires that we address one another by name.

PROPOSAL

I propose that church leaders be invested in helping their members get to know everyone's name and address one another by name. One effective method is to supply everyone with a name tag: members, visitors, guests, and even pastors. The argument in favor of such a proposal is simple: how can we not know the name of our own?

The use of name tags can start small—in Sabbath School, choir, and small group ministry. Then when people begin to accept the idea, introduce it to the whole church. Providing name tags is especially helpful to newcomers. Members can address them by name the first day and the newcomer can address others by name and get connected. Knowing everyone's name by memory is, indeed, great.

CONCLUSION

In a discussion related to this particular subject,

a pastor described to me a recent interaction he had. The pastor had noticed a newcomer in the church. He reached out, greeted her, and asked her name. She offered her name and said she was glad to be at church for the first time. When she came back the next week, the pastor happened to see her and greeted her by name. She was pleasantly surprised and asked how he could remember her name in such a large church after just one meeting. She not only began attending regularly, but also became a strong contributing member of the church.

Now we're all acquainted. And we know one another's names, and the importance of using them. But we still do not truly know one another until we share our stories—topic to be covered in the next article of this series. ED

¹ Mike Figliuolo, *One Piece of Paper: The Simple Approach to Powerful, Personal Leadership*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 148.

² *Ibid.*, 149.

³ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, 229.

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BUILDING RESILIENCE IN YOUTH



According to the United Nations, there are 1.8 billion young people between the ages of ten and twenty-four in the world. They estimate this is the largest youth population that ever existed. Sadly, many of these young people live in risky environments and are often led to engage in at-risk behaviors that may ruin their health and shorten their lives. About one in ten of the world's youth live in conflict zones, and twenty-four million of them are out of school. Political instability, broken homes, poverty, and limited leadership opportunities have led to an increasing isolation of youth in societies and faith communities worldwide.

We can make a difference in building resilience among youth and young adults and preventing them from engaging in at-risk behaviors by collaborating together through health, youth, family ministries, and education. Good health and quality education are two of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals identified by the United Nations.¹ Both are important as we reach in to equip Adventist youth and young adults, and also as we build partnerships by reaching out to at-risk youth in our communities.

One of the ways Seventh-day Adventist churches and schools can impact the lives of young people is through the Youth Alive program. It focuses on building resilience among youth through intergenerational relationships that foster empowerment and disciple youth. Young people can lead Youth Alive clubs and friendship groups, impacting the lives of their peers in a positive way. Through Youth Alive, youth can build strong relationships with adult mentors and peers, grow spiritually, and find their purpose through service opportunities. Youth Alive focuses on educating youth about healthy living and empowering them to sign a pledge saying yes to God and no to at-risk behaviors such as substance or behavioral addictions, violence, suicide, and early sex. This discipleship program is built on scientific evidence, and is a wholistic learning experience that can make teens and young adults resilient in settings where they live, learn, and worship.

YOUTH ALIVE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Leader's training: Youth Alive promotes training for adults and youth to co-facilitate and coordinate Youth

Church elders make wonderful mentors and adult facilitators for the Youth Alive program. To learn how you can get involved in bringing Youth Alive to your congregation, visit www.YouthAlivePortal.org or email YouthAlive@GC.adventist.org.

Alive clubs and/or friendship groups (small groups for youth discipleship).

Conferences and retreats: At a Youth Alive conference or retreat, youth come to learn, make friends, have fun, engage in service, and grow spiritually through friendship small groups, workshops, and outreach activities.

Youth Alive clubs/friendship groups: These groups are formed in churches, schools, and/or centers of

influence, and involve youth in activities that focus on learning about healthy living, playing cooperative games, engaging in service, and growing spiritually.

Online platform and app: Youth Alive offers an online portal with free courses, books, articles, and media resources on topics relevant to the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of young people. A leader's site is also available through the portal for young people or adults wishing to become facilitators to start a Youth Alive Club or friendship group in their church and school.

The Bible reminds us, "Start children off on the way they should go [teaching them to seek God's wisdom and will for their abilities and talents], and even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Prov 22:6). Inspiration tells us that "ministers of the gospel should form a happy acquaintance with the youth of their congregations. Many are reluctant to do this, but their neglect is a sin in the sight of Heaven. . . . Why should not labor for the youth in our borders be regarded as missionary work of the highest kind? . . . The youth are the objects of Satan's special attacks; but kindness, courtesy, and the sympathy which flows from a heart filled with love to Jesus, will gain their confidence, and save them from many a snare of the enemy."²

Let's do more as we commit to this missionary work of the highest kind. ED

¹ "About the Sustainable Development Goals," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>.

² Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 207.

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CALVARY: THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION

“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.”—1 Peter 2:24

Here is Simon Peter’s theology of the cross. Here the apostle is reliving these last tremendous hours of his Master’s passion. In the preceding chapters he has been urging his congregation to fulfill the law of Christ. He has been beseeching them to live “as strangers and pilgrims.” He summons them to prove the reality of their life in Christ by the quality of their love for God and men. And then he undergirds his appeal in precious words as he recalls the suffering and submission of his Lord (1 Pet 2:21–25). It is at the cross that Peter rests his case. The inspiration of a holy life is found only in the Savior’s death. And the glory of the cross is there seen in a life that is “crucified with Christ.”

All this is Peter’s theme. To him, Christ is all in all. And as he recalls so vividly the road from Gethsemane to Golgotha, he stresses three elemental things.

I. THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

First, Peter recalls the suffering of Christ, and then goes on to describe the suffering. “When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.” And as he sums up the work of his Lord upon the cross he says, “And by his stripes [by the wounds he suffered] ye were healed.”

When Jesus died upon the cross, He died as a common criminal. The Romans considered death by the cross as *teterrimum crudelissimum*—that is, the cruellest death possible, and the most terrible and terrifying of all departures from life. And in the hours immediately preceding crucifixion, we can see something of the nature and extent of His suffering.

Think of them for a moment: “They bound him.” Three of the evangelists refer to this fact. They bound the hands that had blessed the little children. They bound the hands of Him who carved furniture in His father’s shop. They bound those healing hands. They bound the hands that broke and distributed the bread at the Last Supper, with the words, “Take, eat: this is my body, broken for you.” But that is not all. “They spat at Him.” This most degrading insult was offered to the majestic person of Christ. Out of the darkened hearts of Jewish priests and Roman soldiery, the poison of their hate smattered His face. And this they also did: “They blindfolded him.” Could they not bear those eyes of holiness? Could they not stand the flashing light that smote their conscience like a flame of fire?

Who can tell? The awesome record reads that they blindfolded him, and thus, without those eyes continually upon them, they were able to continue their cruel and vulgar jesting around Him. He was bound. He was spat upon. He was blindfolded.

But there is more. In the Praetorium, they clothed Him with “purple” and plaited a crown of thorns, put it about His head, and “they mocked him.” Can anything go beyond this sin? Man must have his sport even though it be with his God. Here is worship in the reverse. The hard steel-like spikes were crushed down upon His forehead; He was smitten with a reed and mocked. All the indignity that perverse and diabolical minds can conjure up was heaped upon Him. Truly we can say, “We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains he had to bear.”

II. THE SUBMISSION OF CHRIST

Peter also recalls the submission of Christ. It is in Gethsemane that Christ’s yieldedness, submissiveness, and final sacrifice of surrender are best seen. He was scarcely in the garden, when something unheard of happened. “He felled dying to the ground.” Mark depicts more graphically the Savior’s distress when he writes, “He began to be sorely amazed.” This word implies a sudden and horrifying alarm in the face of a terrible object. Ellen G. White observes, “He had borne that which no human being could ever bear; for He had tasted the sufferings of death for every man.”¹ He reeled before the threat, and sweat drops of blood as he “wrestled with death.” It was then He prayed, “Take this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.” This is an impenetrable mystery! But this much is clear. He accepted the cup that was given Him. He submitted Himself. He did not draw back. He came to the cross not as victim, but victor.

And here we begin to see the glory of the work of Christ. He suffered. But he did so actively. It was much more than suffering; it was “atoning action.”

After all, it was for this cause that He was born. And now, at last, the prince of the world finds Him as he had ever been—delighting to do the will of his Father. Thus He endured the cross and despised the shame.

III. THE SUBSTITUTION OF CHRIST

But here is a third emphasis of the apostle. He declares the substitution of the Sinless One in the place of sinners. “[He] did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” And then he writes, “Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree.”

In writing thus, Peter is at one with the whole New Testament that the death of Christ was vicarious. He, the Sinless One, presses past all obstacles on the road in order that he might stand in the place of sinners. In the words of the hymn:

“Bearing shame, and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood
Hallelujah!”—P. P. Bliss

In a way that is beyond human understanding, the sin of the world was laid upon Him. All the darkness and depravity of the ages, all the pride of Nineveh, all the scarlet sin of Babylon and Egypt, all the horror of Hiroshima and the beastliness of Belsen, all the betrayals of Judas, and the denials of Peter, the pride, anger, greed, envy, impurity, and gluttony of mankind, all the rebellion of Israel and the Gentiles, all the sins of mankind, past, present, and future, were laid on Him. For our sins He died.

If this is not substitution, I know not what it is. Without it there is no redemption, and because of this there is forgiveness, full and free and everlasting.

CONCLUSION

One final word Peter would say to us. He would point us to the Good Shepherd of all who have found salvation. “Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Good Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

And here Peter finds the ultimate insurance that the redemption of the cross will issue in holy living. The Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep, but He rose again, triumphant and glorious. And He leads His people in the ways in which He delights.

This is the glory of the Cross. It is the story that will never grow old. It is the hope of the world. And still at the cross the Savior meets the sinner. Come then and let us worship Him and Him alone. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 694.

Rex D. Edwards is a former vice president for religious studies at Griggs University.

SERMON NOTES

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CALVARY: THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION

"I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will become a seat of honor for the house of his father."—Isaiah 22:23

It was a terrible night in the Capitol in Rome. Swords clashed in hand-to-hand combat. Led by General Manlius, the Gauls were repelled and the city was saved even when all seemed lost. Then, in a strange twist, Manlius was accused of sedition. The trial convened in the Forum under the shadow of the towering Capitol. As he was about to be sentenced, he stretched out his hand and, weeping, pointed to the arena of his triumph. The vast audience burst into tears, and the judges were silenced. But the trial continued, and his accusers were defeated. Not until the court was moved to a lower spot from which the Capitol was obscured were his enemies able to secure a conviction, and Manlius's execution quickly followed. What the Capitol was to Manlius, the cross of Christ is to the Christian.

The battle of Golgotha was a victory, though it seemed to be a defeat. The Savior died, but in His death He triumphed over Satan. In the sense of victory, the cross is even greater than the resurrection. The cross is the victory, the resurrection, the triumph. Christ's victory was complete when on the cross He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

In what way, you may ask, can we say that the cross was a victory? I suggest there are three reasons.

I. IT WAS THE SUPREME EVIDENCE OF GOD'S LOVE

The Lord God gave up His Beloved Son, knowing He was destined to die a shameful death. As Moses says, "Anyone hanging on a tree is cursed of God" (Deut 21:23, TLB). But Jesus willingly submitted to the shame and violence of the cross. He whose voice spoke the world into existence was the Prince of life, yet He bowed before the death, which was our just reward for sin. No wonder the apostle proclaims, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

"Our sins have hurt God. They outrage His holiness. If He was to remain the moral arbiter of the universe, He could not ignore them. But if He acted in judgment on them, as He fittingly might, there would be no hope for any of us. So He became one of us and in our place bore the alienation, the judgment, which was due. That is how much He cares. There is nothing like it in all the world."¹ What greater proof of God's love could be offered than this?

The crude concept that Christ sacrificed Himself to appease an angry God cannot be found in the Bible. A picture hanging in an Italian church illustrates the truth. At first sight it seems like any other painting of

the crucifixion. Looking carefully, however, the viewer sees a difference. There's a vast and shadowy Figure behind the figure of Jesus. The nail that pierces the hand of Jesus goes through to the hand of God. The spear thrust into the side of Jesus goes through into God's.

This is the uniqueness of Christianity. No founder of any other religion came into the world to die. Yet "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), knowing fully the consequences.

II. THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS IS THE GREATEST EVIDENCE OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

It was on the cross that the supreme Judge of the world did not spare even His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all (Rom 8:32). God's law is righteous, and the righteous law demanded the death of the sinner. God did not change His law; neither did He remove the sentence of death. Not only was God's love revealed on Calvary, but His righteousness was shown also, thereby justifying the repentant sinner. There, all his debt was paid. God's patience in past ages was made possible only in view of the cross, for Jesus was "the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev 13:8). Forgiveness now and in the future is possible only by looking back to the cross (Rom 3:20; 1 John 1:9). God's patience in the past (Rom 3:25), His present judgment (John 2:31), and the future grace (Rom 5:8–9) all meet at the cross, for the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. As Paul affirms, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1:17). In the words of a French cynic, "The good God will forgive me; that's His specialty."

III. THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS IS DEMONSTRATED IN CHANGED LIVES

As we stand before the sinless Golgotha sufferer, we see ourselves as we really are, for our sins put Him there. Which one of us has reason to boast of our position, power, wealth, race, or intellect? We can only join with Isaac Watts in saying, "My richest gain I count but loss, and poor contempt on all my pride."

At the foot of the cross, new life begins for the Christian. Not that we will never sin again, but as Ellen G. White says, "we shall have no relish for sin. . . . We may make mistakes, but we will hate the sin that caused the sufferings of the Son of God."²

The Moravian count Zinzendorf stumbled one day upon a picture of Christ dying on the cross. Underneath were the words "I did this for thee; what wilt thou do for

Me?" There was only one answer, and that answer changed the rest of his life. "I have but one passion," he said. "It is He and He alone."

We have forgiveness, a new life in Christ, and eternal hope through the cross of Christ. "Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' [John 1:29]; and by beholding, he becomes changed," writes White. "His fear is turned to joy, his doubts to hope. Gratitude springs up. The stony heart is broken."³

CONCLUSION

Some time ago, six lives were snuffed out when a small plane crashed into a mountain in Pennsylvania near a sixty-eight-foot high stainless steel cross, which served as a marker for a Christian training center. The Associated Press dispatch reporting the tragedy says, "The cross has electric lights, but they were not turned on at the time." We would infer from this reference to the unlit cross that perhaps the terrible tragedy might have been averted had the cross been lit.

So the message of the cross, the only hope of eternal life, must be given to all people for their salvation. Christ crucified is still "the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

"There was One who was willing to die in my stead,

That a soul, so unworthy, might live.

And the path to the cross He was willing to tread,

All the sins of my life to forgive."—

Carrie Ellis Breck

So to you who are troubled, sorrowful, dissatisfied with life, or in despair, let me say, Christ's victory at Golgotha was for you. Believe it and accept it, and you will have found a power in your life to face any situation. You are not alone. Jesus is still Immanuel, God with us!

The victory of the cross, then, is that it becomes for us a tree of life, a living corridor of infinite hope, a bridge to heaven, a seal of salvation, a destroyer of sin, a stimulus to kind and holy deeds, a bond of union to all who love God, and a fountain of justice and mercy—immeasurably deep, yet ever accessible. ED

¹ Michael Green, *Running from Reality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 3.

² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages Book 1*, 360.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 439.

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CALVARY: BLOOD ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE

INTRODUCTION

"And the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."—1 John 1:7

"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."—1 Peter 1:18–19

We have a vivid recollection of an emergency call to save a man, the victim of a ghastly accident. One minute he was the picture of health; two minutes later he was dead, completely exsanguinated by a laceration of his aorta. A massive hemorrhage always presents a problem of the first magnitude for a physician. And where such a hemorrhage continues, death invariably ensues, showing so clearly the scriptural truth that "the life is in the blood" (Gen 9:4, GNT).

But to some, even the suggestion of our Lord's shed blood being necessary brings the retort, "This is a slaughter-house religion, a concept of God which the modern mind cannot countenance." Such a belief, it is argued, is "sadistic," "revolting," "outrageous," "masochistic," an "atonement of retaliation," and other vigorous terms. After all, blood atonement was practiced in the ancient world. For instance, when a plague struck the city of Athens, a man of poorer class offered himself as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. So the notion of blood atonement being associated with the Christian religion is understandably abhorrent.

What, then, is the relationship of the blood of the Son of God shed on Calvary to God's plan of redemption, and how is it different from the blood atonement practiced by the ancients? Could it be a mysterious evidence of God's love?

Let us then examine two aspects of blood atonement from the Bible: its importance and its significance.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF BLOOD ATONEMENT

The Bible tells us that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were types and symbols of the death of Christ on the cross, and the New Testament affirmations about the blood shed on Calvary require us to take them in their rightful context and accept them as the inspired explanation of the central event of all history. Where we fail to understand all that is implied is our fault and not the fault of God's plan.

In Hebrews the apostle Paul speaks of the tabernacle service as symbolic of Christ's atoning work. Read Hebrews 9:12–14 and 10:28–29. This is clear evidence of the overwhelming importance of God's holy provision for our sins and also the awfulness of sin,

which made such provision necessary.

The blood that flowed at Calvary was *real* blood. The implication and effect of that blood is for all ages, and becomes real and precious to us through faith. Jesus, in instituting the sacrament of remembrance, says: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Further, when Paul met with the Ephesian elders, he spoke of "the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28); while to the church in Rome he writes: "All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith (Rom 3:24). "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Rom 5:9).

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOOD ATONEMENT

What is the significance of this blood that runs like a red line through the story of redemption?

Noah was warned against eating "flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof." Equating blood with life is fully compatible with the concept of Jesus giving His life for the redemption of mankind.

In our own scientific age, there are thousands living today who owe their lives to blood transfusions. By analogy, it can be reverently said that, in a mystical sense, the Son of God is the great universal Donor, giving new life to the sinner who trusts in His shed blood for cleansing.

That there is a symbolic or prophetic note in the shedding of Jesus' blood is self-evident. Man stands in judgment before God and in the midst of judgment God offers mercy and forgiveness. By faith the blood of the murdered Son of God stands between us and the righteous judgment of a holy God. The blood of bulls and goats could not fulfill that outcome.

The implications of His blood are inexhaustible in their effect on those who accept new life in Christ. Paul reminds us that there is a duality in the blood of Christ, which not only brings us redemption, but also brings us near to God. Read Colossians 1:19–20. To the Christians in Colossae, he tells of God's good pleasure that in Christ "all his fullness dwell[s]" and immediately speaks of the work of Christ: "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." And Peter is equally emphatic with reference to the blood of Christ in telling us that our redemption was

not purchased by silver or gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ." John speaks of Christians walking in fellowship with Christ, a relationship made possible by "the blood of Jesus Christ." Read the same theme in Revelation 5:9.

CONCLUSION

In all this we are confronted by a great mystery. This side of eternity, none of us can know the full implication of God's great act of redemption in Christ. To rationalize either the nature of sin or the cost and means of our salvation will result in our eternal undoing, for "justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Rom 5:9). A bloodless religion may appeal to the aesthetic sense, but it is as dead as an exsanguinated corpse. Why question that which God has done for us?

In 1822, a Swiss preacher and evangelist from Geneva, Henri Abraham Cesar Malan, was addressing an audience of distinguished guests. A noted musician and soloist named Charlotte Elliott played and sang. Impressed with her performance, Malan approached her, saying, "As I listened to you, I thought how tremendously the cause of Christ would benefit if your talent were dedicated to the cause of Christ. You know young lady, you are as much a sinner in the sight of God as a drunkard in a ditch or a harlot on Scarlet Street, but I am glad to tell you that the blood of Christ can cleanse." Before he could complete the sentence, Charlotte snapped out a rebuke for his presumption. Malan replied, "Lady, I mean no offence. I pray God's Spirit will convict you." The meeting adjourned. Deeply troubled, Charlotte returned to her home but could not sleep. The face of the preacher appeared before her with his words still ringing in her ears. In the early hours of the morning, she sprang from her bed, took a pen and paper, and with tears coursing down her cheeks, Charlotte Elliott wrote out of an impassioned conviction of surrender the words of a poem that subsequently became a famous hymn "Just as I am, without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me."

It is not easy to humble our hearts, minds, and wills and submit them to God, but there is a great reward to those who say from a yearning heart, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

"What can wash away my sins?"

Nothing but the blood of Jesus."—Robert Lowry

Let's pray!

ED

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CALVARY: GOLGOTHA AND A MORTGAGE

INTRODUCTION

“They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means ‘the place of the skull’).”—Mark 15:22

The four Gospels are not like ordinary biographies. Strangely, they have often been likened to tadpoles with large heads and long, thin tails. That is to say that the Passion Narrative is the great emphasis of the Gospels. Of the rest of our Lord’s life, only one day out of 350 is even referred to in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But His last seven days, the days of His Passion—the days of atonement—take up almost one-third of the Gospel record.

Why is the cross made so prominent? Because it is the clearest depiction of all the realities of the universe; the heart and the mind of God; and of the facts of holiness, law, and righteousness, of mercy, forgiveness, peace, and love. It is the cross that tells us about humanity and God, about earth and heaven. It interprets the past, present, and future. It is at Calvary that we learn what true religion is all about.

Consider these three facts about Calvary.

I. THE PLACE OF CALVARY

Let’s look at the “where” of Calvary. According to Ezekiel, what we call modern Israel was, for ancient Palestine, the center of the world (5:5). It is a land bridge between the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. In the center was Jerusalem, and in the heart of Jerusalem was the temple. Our Lord was crucified just outside the temple.

Golgotha is a word that in Hebrew and Aramaic means “cranium” or “skull.” (*Calvary* is the Latin term for the same thing.) It occurs twice in the Old Testament—once when Jael pierced the head of Sisera with a nail.

At Calvary the handwriting that was against us—the record of our sins—was pierced through by the nails that crucified our Lord. Our Sisera, our great enemy—Satan—was overcome by the nails of the cross.

The cross is an inverted sword. God’s hand is on the hilt. The sword pierces not only the Lamb of God, but the Great Serpent, the accuser of the brethren. When we know the meaning of the cross, he can accuse us no longer. The handwriting of our indebtedness has been pierced through, and with it the skull of the great accuser.

II. THE TIME OF CALVARY

Now, let us consider the “when.” “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the

law” (Gal 4:4). “When the set time had fully come”—when was that time? Humanity had come to an end sociologically, philosophically, and religiously when Christ came.

It was the midnight of the world when our Lord died—the darkest hour. Pliny the philosopher writes, “There is nothing certain save that nothing is certain. There is no more wretched yet more arrogant being than man. The best thing that has been given to man amid the many torments of this life is that he can take his own life.” The world of the first century was very much like our own world. It was an age of hopelessness, despair, cruelty, and licentiousness.

Here are more epitaphs from that century:

“Child be not overly distressed. No man is immortal.”

“I was not. I lived. I am not. That’s all.”

“All we are kept for death, fed like a herd of swine that are butchered without rhyme or reason.”

“Here lie I, Dionysius of Tarsus, sixty years old, unwed. Would that my father had been the same.”

It was spring time when our Lord died. Emily Bronte writes in her diary, “When I woke this morning the whole world was singing, ‘Spring time.’ ‘Springtime.’” Springtime, representing new life, resurrection, hope, and joy! And that springtime in Israel was Passover. For fifteen centuries, on the fourteenth day of the first month, at about 3:00 p.m., Israel had slain her Passover lambs. The Passover lamb had saved the firstborn. Now the Firstborn of heaven had become the Passover Lamb. The lamb had first been slain when the Israelites had still been in Egypt. Christ died for our sins while we were yet sinners, without strength, yet still God’s enemies.

III. THE MEANING OF CALVARY

Finally, let’s ponder the meaning of Christ’s death—the manner, and its symbolism.

The cross is a symbol of contradiction, and thus a symbol of life, for in life we know contradiction. There is light and darkness, good and evil, pleasure and pain, health and sickness. The cross represents the limitations of life, the pain of life, the difficulties of life. God wants us to be honest about the realities of existence. Have you noticed that it is both joyful and painful to live?

Isn’t it strange that in matters of education and science we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors? We inherit knowledge. But we don’t like that emotionally. We can

accept the rules of arithmetic, the logarithm tables, the principles of business, and how to make a house. But the lessons about pride and passion and temper—these we learn by our own pain.

Isn’t it strange that when we look at other people, we envy the good things they have, without realizing the bad things that go with them? “I wish I were the boss,” people say, without knowing the burden of that position. The king of Samaria had sackcloth under his royal garb, and many a man and woman we see on the silver screen or television also wears sackcloth. There is no crown without thorns, no Eden with a serpent, no family without cares, no child without problems, no heart without sin and sadness.

So the cross (and the mini-cross of the crown of thorns) tells us how to deal with pain. Yet it seems so passive. Jesus just hung there. He was not wielding a sword, not climbing a hill, not scaling the heights; He was just passive. So how did He handle His pain? Passivity!

CONCLUSION

In 1519, two years after Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to a church door, Charles V of Spain became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1550, bankrupt after the wars against France and the Ottoman Empire, he was loaned a vast sum of money by a merchant in Antwerp. The note was due but the king was unable to pay. The merchant gave a great banquet for the king. When all the guests were seated and before the food was brought in, the merchant had a large platter placed on the table and a fire lit under it. Then, taking the note out of his pocket, he held it in the flames until it was burned to ashes. The king’s debt was voided.

We were all mortgaged to God. The debt was due but we were unable to pay. At Golgotha God invited the world to the gospel feast, and on Calvary God held our sins in the fires of His insufferable pain until every last vestige of our guilt was consumed. Will you trust Him to incinerate the thorns of your debt of sin? ED

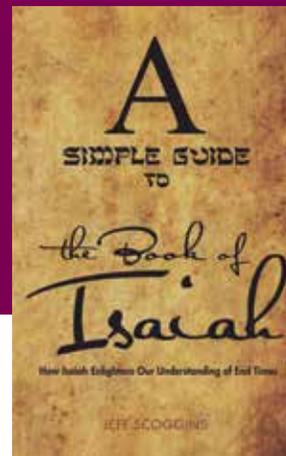
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SERMON NOTES

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A SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

HOW ISAIAH INFORMS OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF END TIMES



If I mention to anyone the numbers “9-11,” they will understand me. I don’t need to retell the story of airplanes crashing into New York’s Twin Towers. With just two numbers, the entire context of that day leaps to mind. Stories from our childhood function the same way. For example, in the United States of America I can say, “The wolf huffed and he puffed,” and everyone will instantly recognize the children’s story of the three little pigs. This phenomenon is *allusion*, in which a word or phrase calls to mind an entire context.

In the same way, the book of Revelation uses allusions hundreds—even thousands—of times. With just a word or phrase, Revelation assumes that readers will understand a larger context. But the stories that Revelation alludes to are not children’s fairytales. Revelation uses the Old Testament as the background for its allusions. Therefore, the better you know your Bible, the more you will recognize what Revelation is trying to communicate.

The fact is that you cannot study Revelation deeply without recognizing how often Revelation alludes to Old Testament stories. Indeed, Revelation cannot be interpreted accurately at all unless the Old Testament does the interpreting. Therefore, anyone who wants to understand Revelation for himself or herself—not to mention teach it to others—must possess a strong knowledge of the Bible, and especially of the Old Testament.

This is why I have been studying Old Testament books with Revelation specifically in view. One such book is Isaiah, which Revelation often alludes to. I set myself the task of working carefully through every phrase of Isaiah in order to identify instances where Revelation alludes to the Old Testament prophet’s writing. The result is chronicled in my book, *A Simple Guide to the Book of Isaiah: How Isaiah Informs Our Understanding of End Times*.

Here are some examples of what I discovered:

The first chapter of Isaiah describes Jerusalem becoming a prostitute, which parallels Revelation 11:2–

8 and also informs our understanding of Revelation 12 and 17. If a person is interested in understanding the symbols found in those chapters of Revelation, the first chapter of Isaiah is a great place to start interpreting these symbols.

Another example, among hundreds, is found in Isaiah 2. If you want to understand more of Revelation’s imagery about the second coming, some of the language of Isaiah 2 will help.

Nearly every chapter of Isaiah can help inform us about some detail of Revelation. To help organize the information, a lengthy index at the end of *A Simple Guide to Isaiah* lists in detail all the connections I was able to find for how Isaiah interfaces with other Bible prophecies, and Revelation in particular.

A Simple Guide to the Book of Isaiah is best used alongside two Bibles—one open to Isaiah and the other open to Revelation. At the end of each of the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah that are explored in this book, study questions will guide your search of the text to identify key points of the chapter and direct your attention to connections to Revelation. Not every part of Isaiah provides specific insight into Revelation, so as a bonus, those chapters without allusions in Revelation are discussed to shed more light on the world and times of the prophet and the thinking of the Jewish people.

This book builds heavily on its companion book, *A Simple Guide to the Book of Revelation*, and I recommend studying that book first before this book on Isaiah. You will find that background helpful.

A Simple Guide to the Book of Isaiah is available at the lowest price from Skapto.org or by calling (240) 381-4513 to order, but the book is also available at many Adventist Book Centers around the United States and online from Amazon.com. Internationally, the book is available in English in digital format from Skapto.org or through Amazon.com and Apple Books. 

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SEVEN THINGS PRAISE TEAMS SHOULD NOT DO

I love hymns and, believe me, I've heard them all. From dark suited deacons droning through devotional songs on Sunday morning, to gifted choristers at eleven o'clock on Sabbath, to "Father Abraham" at Adventist Youth Society—they all take me to a happy place. But for me, there's nothing like a good praise team and band. As a pastor, professor, worshipper, and shameless self-proclaimed authority on every known genre of church music and worship, here are seven things that praise teams should *not* do.

DON'T NEGLECT YOUR PERSONAL WORSHIP

Excellent corporate worship is an extension of consistent personal worship. If you wait until you arrive at church to begin to worship, it's already too late.

DON'T MISS REHEARSAL

We can tell if rehearsal began only that morning. Read in the Old Testament about the importance of the Levites, psalmists, and musicians and you'll be a better steward of your gifts and opportunities.

DON'T PUT TOO MANY SONGS IN THE SET

Praise and worship might be a *favorite* part of the service but it's not the *only* part of the service. Be considerate. And if you tell me the Spirit is leading you to go longer, I'll remind you that the person who prayed too long just said the same thing!

DON'T WALK BY THE MIRROR

Your appearance can either be an attraction to the excellence of your God and worship, or a distraction that squanders a God moment. Modesty—in context—is the order of the day. Here's a simple suggestion: when in doubt, don't!

DON'T TALK TOO MUCH

Enough said.

DON'T MANIPULATE

As a person who has led praise and worship for statue-like congregants, I feel your pain. There is nothing worse than trying to engage a lifeless church. At times, everything is working against you: their religious background, the band, the lighting, the sound tech, the placement of the set, the length of the service, and on and on.

And we've inadvertently trained members to see corporate worship like a trip to Burger King: they can have it their way. Not so! One of the distinctions between personal worship and corporate worship is that corporate worship is designed to be done *corporately*. That means together.

But manipulation doesn't work. Or at least it doesn't work for long. Folks get sick of the clichés. Church members have heard it all: "If we were at a Knicks game, we'd be on our feet." Well, I'm not at a Knicks game. And if I were at a Knicks game I'd be eating a hot dog and drinking soda—not listening to you. You get the picture.

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONAL; MAKE IT PERSONAL!

It's hard to share a praise and worship set with a congregation that seems disconnected and uninterested. Ask any preacher who has made a passionate appeal, only for no one to move a muscle. It's tempting to take it personally, but don't.





There are a thousand and one reasons why people respond to certain sets or songs. This doesn't eliminate the need to pursue best practices for praise and worship, but it's rarely just about you. If we could pull back the curtain, we'd see the issues of life that preoccupy the best of us.

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 both remind us that the congregation is a very important audience. But they are the secondary audience. God is our primary audience. Our worship begins and ends with Him. Our primary goal is to worship Him.

Praise and worship at its best is overflow. It's sharing with the congregation what has already impacted you. Nothing gets folks involved quite like that. It says, "We want to do this together, but He's so

good, I'll thank Him alone." It's a contagious attitude. It's personal gratitude shared with a corporate group. When God and the congregation are placed in their proper order, something happens! Don't *take* it personal; *make* it personal.

So, what do you think? What are some of your favorite praise and worship songs? Who are some of your favorite praise and worship leaders and singers? **ED**

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General Conference Ministerial Association

Serving the global church through its ministry to pastors,
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CHRIST'S PLACE IN THE GODHEAD >PART 2

A COLLECTION OF STATEMENTS ON THE TRINITY

II. ETERNAL PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

1. Distinct Existence from Eternity. “The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by him as his right. This was no robbery of God” (*Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906).

2. Always with Eternal God. “In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him” (*Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1900).

3. Unmeasured Pre-existence. “Here Christ shows them that, although they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures” (*Signs of the Times*, May 3, 1899).

4. United from All Eternity. “From all eternity Christ was united with the Father, and when He took upon Himself human nature, He was still one with God” (*Signs of the Times*, August 2, 1905, 10).

5. Glory from All Eternity. “When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 38).

6. Mediator from Everlasting. “But while God’s Word speaks of the humanity of Christ when upon this earth, it also speaks decidedly regarding his pre-existence. The Word existed as a divine being, even as

the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with his Father. From everlasting he was the Mediator of the covenant, the one in whom all nations of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, if they accepted him, were to be blessed. ‘The Word was with God, and the Word was God’” (*Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906).

7. Never-Ending and Ever-Existing. “A human being lives, but his is a given life, a life that will be quenched. ‘What is your life? It is even vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.’ But Christ’s life is not a vapor; it is never-ending, a life existing before the worlds were made” (*Signs of the Times*, June 17, 1897).

8. From the Days of Eternity. “From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory’” (*The Desire of Ages*, 19).

9. Before Angels were Created. “He was one with the Father before the angels were created” (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, 17).

10. Was from All Eternity. “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore” (*Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906).

11. Christ the Eternal Presence. “The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, ‘whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity’ [Micah 5:2, margin]” (*The Desire of Ages*, 469).

12. Equal from the Beginning. “In it [God’s Word] we may learn what our redemption has cost Him who from the beginning was equal with the Father” (*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 13). ED

GIFT OF HEALING

DO ADVENTISTS BELIEVE IN THE GIFT OF HEALING?



We certainly do. According to Scripture, God can answer our prayers and heal those for whom we pray (Jas 5:13–15). Some have difficulty understanding the nature of this gift for at least two reasons: First, it would appear that the manifestation of the gift today is not as common as it was during the apostolic period; and second, our perception of it has been tainted by what we see among charismatic Christian churches. Some believe that the gift should manifest itself among us in the same way it does among those Christian communities.

1. *God's gift in biblical times.* An interesting phenomenon in Scripture with respect to miracles and healings is that there are very few of them! The history recorded in the Bible covers a period of several thousand years. Examine it as a whole, and you'll soon realize that miracles and healings were not as common as one may think. If you count them, you will realize not only that their number was limited, but also that they tended to occur in clusters at particular historical junctures. For instance, a significant amount of them took place during the exodus from Egypt. This was a moment of crisis when God had to manifest His power to demonstrate that He was the true God. Miracles were performed in unusual numbers during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. This was another time of great apostasy in Israel, and God was demonstrating that He was the true God of Israel.

We witness a major manifestation of healing miracles in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Such unique displays of divine power had several purposes. A central one was to validate the divine mission and authenticity of the work of Jesus. But throughout Bible history, we also find sporadic manifestations of the gift of healing. In other words, the gift was permanent among God's people, but God chose when to manifest it in a powerful or more intense way. It happened in moments of crisis, when God was revealing that He

was active in the ministry of His people to validate their work and assist those who were in doubt.

2. *Present and future experience of the gift.* The gift is still in His church, but the Lord chooses when and how to manifest it. Healing miracles happen among God's remnant people all over the world in response to the fervent prayers of pastors and members. These occur sporadically, in isolation from each other, through the silent presence of the Spirit among us. The Lord has probably chosen to do it this way because at the close of the cosmic conflict, the forces of evil will use miracles to validate their claims as being from God (Rev 13:13; 16:14). Our safety is not in miracles and healings, but in the teachings of Scripture.

As we get closer to the end of the cosmic conflict, apostasy and confusion will reach global dimensions, and God will manifest the power of the Spirit in a most glorious way. He will intensify the manifestation of the Spirit among us, and the prophecy of Joel will find its ultimate fulfillment (Joel 2:28–32). God will validate the message and mission of His remnant people through Scripture and through the magnificent display of the power of the Spirit.

3. *Healing and medicine.* Today we experience the gift of healing through medical services—yes, medical services. Jesus defeated evil powers through His healings, and today He can do it through those who find ways to prevent, treat, and heal diseases. Those involved in medical missionary work and research are participating in the cosmic conflict at the cellular level, and the Lord gives them wisdom to assist Him in bringing healing to a world in distress and suffering. The wisdom given to them by the Lord is His gift to His church for the benefit of humanity. Therefore, medical missionary work, performed by people consecrated to the Lord who seek only to give Him glory, is a valid manifestation of the gift of healing that transcends the boundaries of the church and is from our sovereign Lord. 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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THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word *diákonos*, which is often used in the New Testament to describe the work of a servant, helper, and attendant. As a word that refers to an office with the young church, Paul was perhaps the first to use it as such in Philippians (1:1) and 1 Timothy (3:8, 10–11). But where and how does the work of the deacon first appear in the New Testament church?

The answer may be traced to a peculiar situation that emerged in the early church as a result of the post-Pentecostal rapid expansion of believers, as recorded in Acts 6. Some scholars estimate that around the time described in Acts 6, the church in Jerusalem had grown to some twenty thousand believers. These believers constituted a cultural milieu, with Hebrew-speaking Jews and Greek-speaking Hellenists comprising two major groups. A sizable section of these believers were poor, and the church had set up a ministry of caring for their needs, including distribution of food.

Along with the staggering growth of the church and the introduction of a system of caring for the

poor, a peculiar problem confronted the apostles. The Greek widows in the church felt that they were neglected in their care as compared with the help extended to Jewish widows. The problem was not confined to physical needs alone, but slowly began to erode the spiritual function of the church. Ellen G. White describes the situation: “The enemy [Satan] succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders.”¹

The apostles recognized the seriousness of the situation and suggested that the church set aside a special team of spiritually mature members to attend to this important need in the young church. Doing so would free the apostles to concentrate on their primary mission: “prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). The proposal pleased the church and with much prayer they chose seven men full of faith and spirit. The apostles prayed and set them apart by the laying on of hands. Stephen was one of those: “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5), mighty

in preaching the Word, and the first martyr to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 7). Philip was another (Acts 8:5) whom the Lord used later to take the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8:4–6), to the Ethiopian official, and to Caesarea (Acts 8:26–40).

Faithful in church membership and responsibilities, known for their upright characters, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, the deacons were chosen and set apart to meet the growing needs of an ever-expanding body of God's people. Part of this setting-apart service, Acts 6:3–6 tells us, is prayer and the laying on of hands by the apostles. This action derives from an ancient Hebrew custom where they indicated publicly that the faith community had chosen certain leaders to perform specific functions of leadership and service within that community.

The election and ordination of church deacons and deaconesses continues today in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*² states, "Newly elected deacons cannot fill their office until they have been ordained by an ordained pastor currently credentialed by the conference" (p. 77). The *Church Manual* also states, "The sacred rite of ordination should be characterized by simplicity and performed in the presence of the church. The pastor . . . assisted by an elder where appropriate, ordains the deacons by prayer and the laying on of hands" (p. 77).

FROM SERVANT TO DEACON

In Acts 6:2 the Greek word used for "servant" is *diákonos*. This has also been translated as "table waiter." This inference has led to some controversy regarding the kinds of service intended by the term. However, the Greek words for "to be ministered unto" and "to minister" used in the New Testament also come from the same root word *diakoneo*, indicating that the word is used for varied kinds of service. Therefore the word "deacon" refers to different kinds of service related to the church.

In Greek usage, *diakonia* suggests many kinds of service, just as the English word *service* does. The words *diákonos*, *diakoneo*, and *diakonia* have just as wide a variety of meanings, but in general they refer to any kind of service that supplies the needs of another person. The words are used at least one hundred times in the New Testament, and they are usually translated with variants of the English words "serve" or "minister." In a few places in the King James Version they are translated differently—*diakonia* is "administration" in 1 Corinthians 12:5 and 2 Corinthians 9:12, and "relief" in Acts 11:29. But in these verses and in other New Testament usage the primary meaning has to do with service and ministry.

DEACONESSES

Men were not the only ones serving the church. In his letters, Paul speaks of several women who served the church. Romans 16:1–2 refers to Phoebe as a *diaconon*, the same word used to describe the first seven deacons in Acts.

In Philippians 4:2–3, Paul requests believers to help two women who have worked with him—Euodia and Syntyche—and accept them as "co-workers" even as he requests other Christians to help them in their work.

Scripture supports women deaconesses with an active, serving role in the church. Paul describes that their character should be as lofty as their service: "In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything" (1 Tim 3:11). Paul is emphasizing here the woman's role in the church as not simply being a reflection of her husband, but being a "servant" in the church.

While the record of women as deaconesses in the Bible is sparse, scriptural evidence and extra-biblical sources indicate that deaconesses were part of the history and growth of the Christian church. They ministered to other women, especially those who were poor and sick, and their ministry is recorded in the history of the church through centuries.

The Adventist Church also owes a great deal to the ministry of women for its growth. This is particularly so with Ellen G. White, through whom God chose to manifest the gift of prophecy, which guided, counseled, and led the church from its earliest days. Other women who helped in the early beginnings of the Adventist church include Sarepta Myrenda Irish Henry, Anna Smith, and others who also followed the biblical teaching of servanthood. Truly, our Adventist faith has been blessed by God and His guidance to these women to be both shepherds and servants in the early years.

LEADERSHIP OF DEACONS: EXAMPLE OF STEPHEN

Stephen was among the first to be chosen by the early church as a deacon. His life illustrates the kind of person who should be chosen to serve in this important ministry. He is described as a person "full of faith and power" who "did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8, NKJV). Being "full" of the Spirit (Acts 6:5) implies that Stephen experienced what the apostle would later explain as the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22–23, NKJV).

Although Stephen was a person of great faith and spirituality, he did not see his role as one to exercise power and authority over other leaders. He had the support of the congregation but did not use this to dom-

inate the church or promote himself. He just allowed God to work in and through him. Of him White says:

Stephen, the foremost of the seven deacons, was a man of deep piety and broad faith. Though a Jew by birth, he spoke the Greek language and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks. He therefore found opportunity to preach the gospel in the synagogues of the Greek Jews. He was very active in the cause of Christ and boldly proclaimed his faith. Learned rabbis and doctors of the law engaged in public discussion with him, confidently expecting an easy victory. But “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” Not only did he speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, but it was plain that he was a student of the prophecies and learned in all matters of the law. He ably defended the truths that he advocated and utterly defeated his opponents.³

Stephen’s full understanding of the biblical narrative of salvation history, as his speech in Acts 7 reveals, and his total commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ shows to Christians of all times what it truly means to be a deacon of Jesus: to believe in Him, to trust Him, to serve Him, to preach His word without any hesitation, to proclaim Him as the Savior of the world, and then finally be ready to give himself if necessary in dying for Him. Therefore, a deacon is a person in full commitment to his Lord.

CHRIST, THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF SERVICE

Who set the example and taught these early believers to be servants to others? How were the first apostles and disciples, first deacons and deaconesses, trained? The story goes farther back to its roots in history, back to the Old Testament. There the prophet Isaiah, foretelling the coming of Christ as the Savior, predicted His first advent ministry in terms of a servant. Isaiah 61:1–2 has the Savior describe His ministry as one of service: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*; . . . to comfort all who mourn” (NKJV). In Isaiah 53:11 God calls Jesus “My righteous Servant [who] shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities” (NKJV). Jesus Himself was fully self-conscious of His mission on earth as one of a suffering servant. On one occasion, He said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28, NKJV). Throughout His life on earth, Jesus taught, healed,

preached, and ministered to others that they may have a taste of God’s love and be drawn to Him. His life was a source of every blessing human beings needed: emotional health, spiritual healing, physical well-being, training for God’s service, and above all a guidance that all may become like Him—children of God.

Therefore, the concept of service so crucial to the ministry and authenticity of deacons and deaconesses links the church with Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church and the Servant of God. Christ Himself points to His own life of service as the model for Christians to follow: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:43–45).

The service of Jesus embraced many facets. He fed the hungry, He cared for the poor, He healed the sick, He loved the children, He had compassion on the widows, and He sought to fill every type of human need—spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical. In doing so, He fulfilled the essence of pure religion: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (Jas 1:27). He is the model for all Christians, particularly for deacons and deaconesses. In word and deed Jesus showed His followers the true meaning of service: it is not power and control; it is not position and authority; it is service in the truest sense to God and humanity.

Such service-oriented ministry of deacons and deaconesses, elders and pastors is mutually supportive and cooperative. Such service is essential for the sustaining, strengthening, and growth of the church. **ED**

¹ Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 88.

² All references to and quotations from the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual are from the 18th edition (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010).

³ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 97.

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ESSENTIAL GUIDANCE FOR SURVIVING THE END TIME

As Adventists, we too often skip over the early chapters of Daniel and Revelation¹ in order to get to the “more important parts.” But in fact these early chapters are foundational in understanding how to be ready for the final events, which seem closer now than ever before, with governments toppling down, earthquakes increasing in power and frequency, tsunamis, nuclear worries, uncertainty, and fear.

Jesus warns of such things with remarkable clarity and precision: “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:25–28).

In the early chapters of the book of Daniel, we see faith being tested and people occupying strategic positions as witnesses to the true God. In chapter 1, Daniel and his three friends are tested but refuse to defile themselves with the food and wine of Babylon, and God rewards their faith (Dan 1:8–17). They had purposed in their hearts to remain faithful in “little” things. Next, Daniel and his friends together and separately face larger tests of faith, demonstrating the indispensable role of prayer (Dan 2:17–18; 6:10–11) and the importance of true worship (Dan 3:16–18; 5:22–23). In the first three chapters of Revelation, God’s

people, represented by the seven churches, face similar tests in connection with food (Rev 2:14, 20), worship (Rev 2:4; 3:8), and their relationship to truth (Rev 2:24–25; 3:8–9; cf. Dan 12:9–10). These words provide indispensable counsel from Jesus about how our faith can survive the tests ahead.

Like Daniel and Revelation, the early chapters of *The Great Controversy* have a similar purpose. Church history becomes a guide for surviving the end time. Here are just a few vital lessons drawn from the opening chapters of these three important end-time books:

1. Our resolve must be developed before the test comes. While prophecy is sometimes predictive, the predictive element is given not to satisfy our curiosity about the future, but because we need to know the tests that will come in order to prepare for them. Like Daniel and his friends, we should anticipate them and resolve in advance how we will respond (Dan 1:8).

2. Deception may arise even from within the church. Jesus warns the seven churches about those who claim to be something they are not (Rev 2:9; 3:9), and others who try to deceive those in the church through false doctrine and false prophecy (Rev 2:14–15; 3:20). We need to be able to distinguish truth from error.

3. We must study the Bible for ourselves. We can learn our present duty only through prayerful searching of the Bible for ourselves.² “The Holy Scriptures have treasures of truth that are revealed only to the earnest, humble, prayerful seeker.”³ “It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment.”⁴

God has shown us how to survive the end time through the lives of His people in past ages. We can find no better guide for these times than the opening chapters of Daniel, Revelation, and *The Great Controversy*. ED

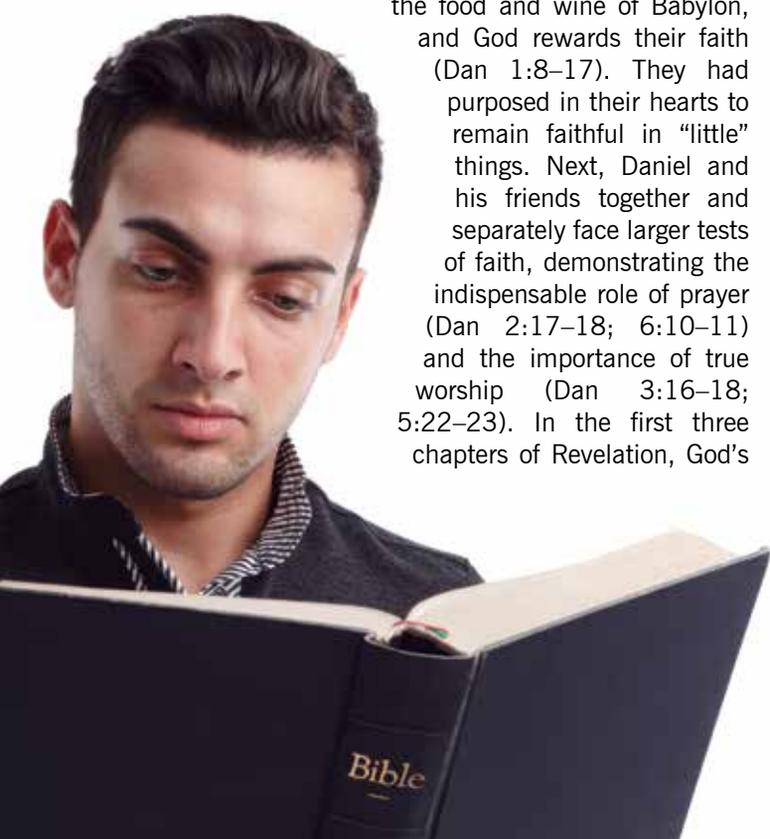
¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 112–15, urges study of these books as especially pertinent to our time.

² See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 93.

³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

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HOW TO ENCOURAGE VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHURCH

In the previous two articles, we dealt with how to recruit and train volunteers. The success of your church's mission depends on people who follow Jesus and are passionate about His mission in the church and in the world.

Now that you've recruited leaders for your ministry, the best part begins: encouraging them and building relationships with them to help them grow in their faith and spiritual gifts.

Here are a few ways to keep your volunteers and make them feel needed and fulfilled:

Give them encouragement. Disciples of Jesus serve willingly, but a "Well done, good and faithful servant" goes a long way toward encouraging workers. Send personal notes thanking them. Make a phone call simply to ask, "How's the ministry going? Thank you for what you do." Recognize workers publicly. Sponsor a yearly banquet to say "thank you." Appreciated workers can be great recruiters for the next crop of workers. As a pastor, I spend much of every Monday making phone calls or writing encouraging notes to volunteers who did something to bless the lives of others. Say "thank you" often. Whether it's face-to-face, in a text message, on social media, or in a handwritten note, thank your volunteer team.

After finishing a very successful Vacation Bible School program, the church I pastored decided to give an all-expenses-paid weekend to Linda, the program leader. The church offered to take care of the children so Linda and her husband Mark could enjoy themselves. On the Monday after the weekend, Mark, who was not an Adventist, came to my office to thank the church for the wonderful time they had. With tears in his eyes, he told me that this was the kind of church he wanted to join. After some Bible studies, Mark was baptized. That is the power of appreciation and love.

Connect them with others. Help them meet other volunteers and develop relationships. Provide an opportunity for volunteers to get together before or after service, host volunteer events during the week, or provide a way for them to connect electronically. In my research, I have noticed that effective and growing Adventist churches offer opportunities for their ministry teams to meet together at least once a

month. This gives them time to pray with each other, share ideas, and come up with new ministries to help the church be better at fulfilling its mission.

Pray for them. Give your team an opportunity to submit prayer requests weekly, and gather your staff and other leaders to pray for them. Although Paul was a traveling church planter—not a "settled pastor"—we see him constantly praying for local church leaders and members by name, asking God to work mightily through them. It appears that Paul prayed for the churches as much as he preached and planted them.

Amid the business of life and ministry today, praying for your church is one of the best uses of an elder's time. Though it may feel counter-productive at times, the pastor and elders who neglect this function, together with their church, will pay the high price of an unhealthy and spiritually lethargic congregation.

I found about forty instances of the apostle Paul praying for the church. He often uplifted the churches by saying, "I thank the Lord in every remembrance of you" as he prayed for their salvation, for victory over sin and to be filled with grace and the presence of Jesus, and that they would experience continual growth in knowledge and grace. He prayed night and day that God's purposes would be fulfilled in them by their faithfulness in advancing His kingdom. The heart of the apostle Paul is revealed in his prayers for the church. We pray about the things that are near and dear to our hearts. Paul was bonded to the people and to his work as he prayed often for the salvation of others and for God's kingdom to grow and expand.

See more in them than they see in themselves. Lead them to do more than they ever thought possible. Speak truth into their lives and encourage them to tackle something that scares them. As they continue to grow in their leadership, empower them to do more. Stephen was elected to be a deacon in charge of distributing food. He ended up preaching one of the most powerful sermons in the book of Acts.

Resolve team conflicts quickly. As your volunteer team grows, there will be friction and misunderstandings. You may be tempted to let things go in the interest of maintaining harmony, but that's not what's best for your team culture. Ad-

dress issues directly but lovingly. Deal with friction in God's way: through love, understanding, and forgiveness.

One of the quickest ways to discourage someone from serving is neglecting to foster a sense of comradeship. Seek to quickly resolve conflicts among volunteers. This not only keeps your team healthy, but also makes recruiting easier. A bad team reputation makes recruiting much harder, and leads to high volunteer turnover.

Show the eternal value of serving. We often do not show clearly that serving is about changing lives for eternity. Teaching children at Sabbath school is about leading kids to the throne of grace. Being an elder is really like being a pastor who shepherds the flock. Every ministry should be viewed with eyes of eternal value and significance.

Record a behind-the-scenes video. Show people what it's really like to serve at your church. You don't need expensive camera gear. Chances are you can find a volunteer with a knack for video production who would love to spearhead this project. Use the completed video during service, on your volunteering page, and on social media to help recruit new volunteers.

Set volunteers up for success. No one likes jumping through hoops. If someone has to wait for months until the next volunteer training meeting, they're likely to lose interest. Successful churches give many training events throughout the year. One church I know offers training every month for two hours. The first hour is devoted to spiritual growth and testimony, and the second hour is devoted to specific training

geared for almost every ministry the church has. If you make the onboarding process easy, they'll be excited and equipped to serve.

An untrained volunteer won't do you any good. In fact, they probably won't last very long. By taking the time to equip your volunteers, they'll be much more confident in their ability to do what you ask of them.

Honor all volunteers during service annually. Setting aside time to honor all your volunteers during a church service once a year not only helps reduce volunteer turnover by making your current volunteers feel appreciated, but will also give everyone else a glimpse into who is serving. People are more likely to serve if they know someone else who is currently serving.

Highlight current volunteer stories once per month. Highlighting the story of one of your current volunteers is a great way to encourage new volunteers to get involved. This story can be shared from the platform on Sabbath, in a pre-recorded video, or could be a blog or social media post. This emphasizes the power of testimony. Having a family tell about their ministry is very effective in inspiring others to do the same.

God bless you and your ministry as you endeavor to recruit and keep new volunteers at your church. ED

Joseph Kidder is professor of Christian Ministry and Discipleship at the SDA Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

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ADVENTIST WORLD RADIO MISSION STORIES:

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Looking for a great mission or children's story to share during your worship service or Bible study? Adventist World Radio mission stories are the perfect way to encourage and inspire your church members. Here are just a few of the ways you can use them:

- Play the miracle videos featured on awr.org and on AWR's YouTube Channel.
- Read stories like the one below, or request the four new *MIRACLES* booklets from Adventist World Radio.
- Encourage church members to follow Adventist World Radio on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for the very latest news and videos.
- Get stories delivered to your email inbox every Friday by signing up at awr.org/email.

We hope you will enjoy the following story about Abraham and his faithful stewardship as he continues to pay his "cow tithe."

ABRAHAM'S STORY

During a recent visit to Tanzania, the Adventist World Radio team met Abraham, a wealthy Maasai cattle owner. About a year earlier, he had attended a series of evangelistic meetings and decided to be baptized. He had never learned to read or write, so when he discovered AWR's new station in Tanzania, he was overjoyed and regularly listened to the programs on his radio.

As he listened, he learned many new things about being a faithful Adventist—from how to live a more healthful life to the importance of returning an honest tithe. Since Abraham owned more than 1,000 head of cattle and large herds of sheep and goats scattered across Tanzania and Kenya, he decided that he would strive to be faithful with all of his holdings.

So he placed his cattle in large pens and counted them as they walked through a chute. Every 10th cow, Abraham dedicated as tithe for God.

His friends and acquaintances were amazed. In their culture, wealth is measured in cattle. No one gives away their cows! As Abraham's friends watched him repeatedly go through the numbering process, they began to mock him.

But the laughter abruptly stopped nine months later when 40 of Abraham's cows gave birth to twins! In addition, many of his goats and sheep birthed triplets!

Recently, the president of the Tanzanian Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Dr. Godwin Lekundayo, said that many of those who had mocked and laughed at Abraham now "want in" on the same blessings he has been receiving. They told the Adventist pastors, "We want to tithe, too, just like Abraham is doing."

"But you're not members of the Adventist Church," the pastors replied in surprise.

"We don't care! We want God's blessings, so we want to pay tithe with our cows, goats and sheep as well!" they insisted.

BUT THE STORY DOESN'T END THERE!

In a neighboring village, a local chief built a pond. During the dry seasons he charges other Maasai cattle owners to water their stock there. One day Abraham had an inspired idea. He decided to build a larger pond and let the cattle owners water their cattle there for free. He also hired a Bible worker to preach to them about Jesus while they water their animals. The cattle owners are so grateful for the free water that they gladly listen to the messages!

So far, thanks to Abraham's testimony, 35 Maasai have accepted Jesus and been baptized—and they all listen to Adventist World Radio! Please continue to pray for the Maasai as they hear these truth-filled messages and make decisions for baptism. **ED**

Duane McKey is the Presidente and Michele Stotz is the Communication Director of Adventist World Radio at the General Conference World Headquarters.



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