

quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2021

ELDER'S DIGEST



**INSPIRE MISSION
IN YOUR CHURCH**



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Pet kangaroos are rare, even in Australia, but my friend Barry had one he called Skippy—a joey, a juvenile kangaroo. A wild kangaroo normally rejects any human contact, but this was destined to be a different story.

While driving on a forest road, Barry and his family noticed that a doe kangaroo had been struck by a vehicle and died beside the road. They checked the mother kangaroo’s pouch and found Skippy inside—a confused, vulnerable infant, too young to survive alone in the wild. Barry’s family decided to pick up the marsupial, who seemed to be all legs and tail, and take him home. They figured he had a better chance of survival in their backyard than in a forest full of predators.

Skippy blended into Barry’s family and was an instant hit with all the neighborhood kids. Barry’s family, although novices in caring for a kangaroo, soon proved themselves expert nurturers of Skippy. They offered Skippy milk, which he gratefully received. They constructed an artificial pouch, where Skippy would sleep safely inside, and hung it on their back veranda. Whenever he was startled or intimidated, he would bound for that pouch on the veranda and burrow into its depths. He would stay there, perfectly motionless, for a few minutes and when all was calm, he would cautiously peer from the opening of the pouch to check if everything was safe.

Skippy spent most of his time under Barry’s sprawling mango trees, feasting on the plentiful grass that grew in the shade. Kangaroos aren’t usually renowned for intelligence, but Skippy was smart enough to know that he was in a good place. In this nurturing and safe environment, the once-fragile joey grew to be a formidable fence-jumper and eventually outgrew the pouch on the veranda.

Barry realized that Skippy needed a world bigger than a backyard. It was time.

He coaxed Skippy into the car to make the journey to where he really belonged, back to the eucalypt forest where he had been conceived. Noticing a mob of kangaroos in a grassy opening of that forest, the slowing car stopped, and Barry opened the door. That was the only invitation Skippy needed—he was free!

Why the story of my high school friend who cared for a vulnerable kangaroo?

Many lives around us have tragically collided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Killing innumerable thousands, the pandemic has left many more vulnerable and physically, financially, socially, psychologically, and spiritually compromised. Many in our communities need care, even more than a motherless kangaroo did.

You may have suffered as a result of COVID-19 and need some nurturing care. For those who have been called to be spiritual leaders, seeking and accepting care can be as foreign as a kangaroo accepting care from humans. But if you’re in need of help, I encourage you to seek it and accept it. No elder, deacon or deaconess is immune to suffering.

Alternatively, you may be coping relatively well during this ongoing crisis and are able to provide care to other hurting people. Jack, a member of my Sabbath School class, is currently providing a “pouch” by caring for a homeless person in his Baltimore neighborhood. The Emmanuel Brinklow Seventh-day Adventist Church near where I live recently provided 1,800 meals, spanning two recent occasions, for the needy in their community.



“TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, AS YOU DID IT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS, YOU DID IT TO ME.”

There are many more extraordinary examples, and most are being provided by novices—people who have never previously encountered a pandemic. While taking all appropriate cautions for health and safety, we can still provide care and help to the needy in our churches and our communities. This isn’t a time for passivity—for hoping someone else will step up to do what’s needed. Jesus’ teaching comes to mind: “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matt 25:40, ESV).

ED



ANTHONY KENT | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

HOW YOU CAN INSPIRE MISSION IN YOUR CHURCH

Mr. Alec Holden, from Surrey, England, turned one hundred years old on April 24, 2007. When questioned about the secret to his longevity, he testified to the health benefits of eating porridge every morning. But then he added this extremely helpful tip: “I keep breathing. If you stop breathing, you’re in real trouble.”

I smiled when I read Mr. Holden’s story in the *Washington Post*, but then thought about how his words apply not just to our physical lives, but also to our spiritual lives and to our churches. As elders, we need to help keep our churches breathing spiritually—to make sure we grow in spiritual energy and enthusiasm, and to keep us focused on and involved in mission.

THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Bible study, prayer, and worship are vital for spiritual health. But just as important are mission and service, which help pump life-giving spiritual oxygen through our churches. If Bible study, prayer, and worship are like good nutrition, then mission and service are like exercise. Together, they’re a recipe for good spiritual health.

As our churches become involved in mission, they come alive spiritually. Rather than focusing only inward on church members’ needs and concerns, healthy churches reach out to the needs of their local communities and the world beyond. And in doing so, their own spiritual health is strengthened. As the wise man says, “he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Prov 11:25, NIV).



Here are a few suggestions for building a greater vision for mission in our churches:

1. Refocus the church's resources.

Take some time to analyze your church budget. Take a piece of paper and make two columns with two headings: "Caring for Church Members" and "Reaching the Community." Look closely at each line item in the church budget and place them in one of the two columns. You'll quickly get a picture of the church's priorities. How much is spent on caring for church members, and how much is spent on direct ministry to the community?

2. Inspire a sense of mission among our children.

In Bangladesh, a country where many people barely survive on less than a dollar a day, a mother of five accepted Jesus and became a Seventh-day Adventist. Despite her family's tiny income, she never fails to give from what she has and inspire her children to do the same. Every Sabbath, she makes sure they have something to give to the offering. When times are good, they drop a few coins in the offering bag. When they have no money, she places a spoon of uncooked rice on the palm of each of her five children. Each, in turn, drops their meager rice portions into the offering bag as it comes around.¹

We know that habits, attitudes, and priorities begin to be established at a young age. As leaders we must find creative ways to inspire and encourage our children to become personally involved in mission, and to support mission with their tithe and mission offerings. Many missionaries have told me that their interest was first sparked listening to mission stories in Sabbath School.

The Grandview Seventh-day Adventist Church in Texas, United States, is a small church (some thirty members) in a small town (some 1,500 residents). But Grandview focuses on building a big mission vision in its children.

Primary class teacher Luly Wicklund and other leaders constructed a mission airplane in the Sabbath School room. Each child received a "Grandview Sabbath School Passport" that they presented at the Missionary Airlines registration desk to receive a home-printed sticker "visa" for their destination country. Luly developed the Missionary Airlines concept more than a decade ago at the suggestion of her eleven-year-old son. She believes it's important to make stories real for children. "They see that these are normal people who go to these places," she says. "It's not just a missionary or some other person out there that nobody knows."²



Picture supplied by Gary Krause

On the other side of the world, leaders of the primary/junior Sabbath School class in Perth, Australia, have worked hard to make the concept of mission real to their children. One quarter, when the Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings were destined for projects in Southern Asia, they immersed the children in Indian culture. They colored Indian flags, cooked Indian food, wore Indian clothes, and prayed for the church's mission in India. They also wrote letters to people featured in the *Mission Quarterly*. Teachers scanned the children's handwritten stories and emailed them to the Southern Asia Division. They focused on Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects that would benefit from a portion of the mission offerings.

**AS LEADERS WE MUST
FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO
INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE
OUR CHILDREN TO BECOME
PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN
MISSION.**



3. Remember mission in Sabbath School.

We need to focus on mission for other age groups, too, and one of the best ways to do this is through Sabbath School. The four key pillars of Sabbath School are Bible study, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission. Sadly, many Sabbath Schools have started to ignore community outreach and world mission. They've become places to talk, but not act.

Imagine if each Sabbath School group adopted projects in their local community where they could help. Imagine if each Sabbath their eyes were turned for at least a few minutes to mission challenges around the world. An easy way to do this is to play Mission Spotlight videos that show how mission offerings are being used. New videos are produced every quarter and are available for download at: adventistmission.org/mission-spotlight. Past stories can be searched by country or topic, and videos are available in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

And don't forget stories from the *Mission Quarterly*. Visit AdventistMission.org, click on "Resources," and select a *Mission Quarterly*. Rather than just reading the story aloud, encourage people to tell the story, or ask younger members to dramatize it. Even church families in a part of the world on the Combined Offering Plan can be encouraged by videos and stories of how their tithes and offerings are helping mission around the world.

4. Include mission stories in the worship service.

Why not use one or two M360.tv mission stories to illustrate your next sermon? Or play some of these videos before the worship service begins? Simply visit M360.tv and click on "Stories" to view or download, or search for stories by country or topic. And again, they're available in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

And if you're looking for a good sermon illustration to tell, you can find mission stories going back more than one hundred years. Visit adventistarchives.org, go to "Online Archives," select "Periodicals," and click on one of the *Mission Quarterly* options.

5. Make mission central.

Simple things can make a big difference. Here are a few ideas to keep mission central in your church:

- Use your church foyer to focus on mission. Offer free magazines such as *Mission 360*, which is full of stories of all aspects of the church's mission. Show posters that focus on mission. Showcase mission posters produced by children in Sabbath School.
- Use the church bulletin each week as a place to include information about mission not only

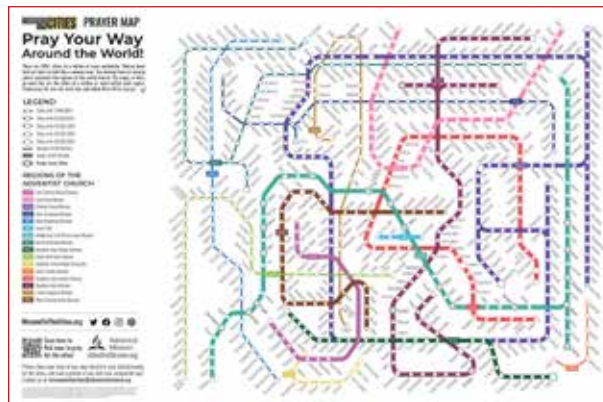
locally, but globally. A rich source of information is adventistmission.org.

- Download the free "Mission to the Cities" prayer map and have your church pray for cities around the world. Use it as a poster in your church foyer or include it as an insert in your church bulletin. Have the church pray for different cities every week. <https://missiontothecities.org/prayer-map-download>
- Invite a missionary, church planter, or someone involved in community service activities to share a short story in your worship service.
- Include mission story books in your church library.
- Utilize mission promotion resources at am.adventistmission.org/resources.

Elders play a key role in helping strengthen their church's mission vision for the local community and wider world. As that vision grows, so do prayer, funds, and personal involvement. And that's when our churches become healthy. As the theologian Emil Brunner writes, "the church exists by mission just as fire exists by burning."³ ED

- This story was shared by Orathai Chureson, Children's Ministries director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.
- For the full story, see Andrew McChesney, "Texan Children Fly to Mission Field Every Sabbath," *Adventist Mission*, accessed January 31, 2021, www.adventistmission.org/texan-children-fly-to-mission-field-every-sabbath.
- H. Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: SCM Press, 1931), 108

Gary Krause, PhD, is the Director of Adventist Mission for the General Conference.



DOWNLOAD THE FREE "MISSION TO THE CITIES" PRAYER MAP AT:

<https://missiontothecities.org/prayer-map-download>

MENTORING IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

ENCOUNTERING THE OUTDOORS

I believe that elders have a very strong influence on our youth. When I got baptized at the age of sixteen, an elder took me under his wings. My family had gone through several very traumatic experiences in New York City, USA. We were living in a financial, emotional, and spiritual crisis. Elder Omar was a very introverted person, yet was full of love for young people. He invested time in teaching me about the Bible and how to give Bible studies. But the one thing that really impacted my life was when he took me for the first time to explore God in nature at a camp meeting in upstate New York.

I was born in the city of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, lived in Miami, Florida, USA, and met God in New York City. I love living in the urban environment. However, a whole week in nature rocked my world. In nature I experienced God's greatness and love. The early morning activities, prayer walks, personal devotionals, and scavenger hunts continue to impact my life even now.

JESUS, AN OUTDOOR MENTOR

As I reflect on how Jesus mentored His disciples, I notice that most of Jesus' teachings occurred in an outdoor setting (Matt 5:14, 17). He intentional-





ly wanted His mentees to learn experientially in an outdoor environment because it is a powerful teaching tool for all, especially young people. According to Denton Ashley, more than 50% of Jesus' teaching occurred in the outdoors; 16% was indoors and the other 33% in an unspecified location.¹ He states, "Experiential learning aims to achieve transformational outcomes that make a long-term difference in one's life."² Ellen G. White says "nature testifies of God," "beholds the image and superscription of God," and "molds the character."³ The Bible mentions that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1). Experiencing God in the outdoors is a game-changer.

THE NECESSITY OF OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

It is imperative that we mentor our young people in the outdoors. If there is one thing the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, it's that while isolation at home has helped contain the spreading of the virus, it has also created some mental health issues. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) states, "Good mental health is absolutely fundamental to overall health and well-being."⁴ One study found that people are facing increased levels of alcohol, drug use, insomnia, anxiety, delirium, agitation, and stroke.⁵ Dr. John La Puma suggests that we can't stay inside all the time because our vitamin D level will go down. Spending time in the sunlight is important for our health. He strongly suggests going out intentionally to the forest or under a canopy of trees, or to the park or garden, because nature enhances immune function.⁶ Four times a week I take my wife and two daughters for a nature walk and outdoor activities. Seeing my daughters running and loving nature is my joy. Experiences in the outdoors

have created a bond among us and has decreased our stress level immensely.

THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

In youth ministry, the Pathfinder club is one of the strongholds of the church. Young people in these clubs can develop leadership skills, experience spiritual growth, discover or enhance spiritual gifts, and develop a sense of empathy to serve the community. Most of these things are experienced in the outdoors. When I asked Pathfinders how they learn best, they all expressed that outdoor activities have been the greatest blessing and lesson in their lives. The Pathfinder outdoor fairs, camporees, and honors make a big difference in our young people's lives.

In this technological era, teens spend six to nine hours a day in front of screens.⁷ Outdoor activities help mitigate this problem. I concur with Richard Louv, who says, "The future will belong to the nature-smart—those individuals, families, businesses, and political leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the transformative power of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real. The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need."⁸

My first camporee was at the age of sixteen. It was an incredible and amazing experience. I was exposed to God's presence in nature through prayer walks and devotionals that made a lasting impact in my life. The leaders and elders used the whole scenery as a teaching tool. The elders took part in the camping, cooking, and worship experience. They were supporting our Pathfinders.

Elders, please know that you can impress our young people by mentoring and supporting them—especially through outdoor activities. Even if your church doesn't have a club, you can still help the young peo-

ple experience life outdoors. Young people are longing for elders who care for them. Chap Clark claims that teenagers are growing up with an increasing sense of abandonment and hurt. He suggests that leaders should concentrate on three main areas: (1) developing nurturing environments for young people, (2) providing stable and secure relationships where young people truly feel loved, and (3) helping young people experience authentic and intimate relationships with loving adults.⁹ This can be accomplished not only inside of the church building, but in the outdoors. But unfortunately, many of us take experiences in nature for granted. According to Harvard Medical School, “spending time outside might have some health benefits—and the ‘greening’ of exercise might have some more.”¹⁰ They suggest five major benefits: (1) your vitamin D levels will go up, (2) you’ll get more exercise, (3) you will be happier, (4) your concentration will improve, and (5) you may heal faster.

I highly recommend taking your young people outdoors. Do activities such as sharing nature stories, prayer walks, exercise, tree planting, hiking, biking, swimming, picnic, games, etc. Most of my activities are in the outdoors, and I can testify that it can change your life. I have seen the benefits in my own family and in thousands of young people. I was influenced by an elder and I, in turn, have influenced many others. Let’s keep the trend going. Take Jesus’ example of how to do ministry in the outdoors seriously. ED

¹ Ashley Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership: Theology, Theory, and Practice* (Fort Collins, CO: Smooth Stone Publishing, 2011), 21, Kindle.
² Ibid., 24–25.
³ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press), 99.

⁴ World Health Organization, “COVID-19 Disrupting Mental Health Services in Most Countries, WHO Survey,” news release, October 5, 2020, accessed January 31, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-10-2020-covid-19-disrupting-mental-health-services-in-most-countries-who-survey>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “How to Build Your Immunity against the Coronavirus, Naturally,” Doctor John La Puma, accessed January 31, 2021, <https://www.drjohnlapuma.com/vitamins-and-supplements/how-to-build-your-immunity-against-the-coronavirus-naturally>.

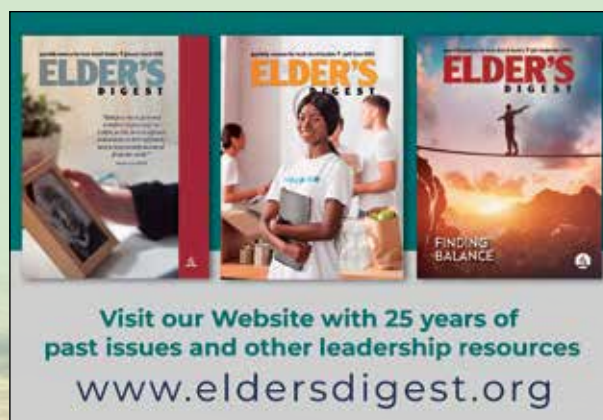
⁷ Maggie Fox and Erika Edwards, “Teens Spend ‘Astounding’ Nine Hours a Day in Front of Screens: Researchers,” West Virginia Education Association, accessed January 31, 2021, www.wvea.org/content/teens-spend-astounding-nine-hours-day-front-screens-researchers.

⁸ “The Nature Principle,” Richard Louv, accessed January 31, 2021, <http://richardlouv.com/books/nature-principle>.

⁹ Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 171.

¹⁰ “A Prescription for Better Health: Go Alfresco,” Harvard Health Letter, Harvard Health Publishing, July 2010, accessed January 31, 2021, https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/a-prescription-for-better-health-go-alfresco.

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EIGHT TIPS FOR TEACHING YOUR SABBATH SCHOOL CLASS

Ok, among your responsibilities as a church elder, you end up as a Sabbath School teacher. Teaching is a gift of the Spirit. “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If your gift . . . is teaching, let him teach” (Rom 12:6–7, NIV). Let’s hope and pray that you have that gift. If not, you shouldn’t be there. That’s not me saying it, but the Bible: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (Jas 3:1, NIV).

Be that as it may, if you are a Sabbath School teacher, then you need to do it as well as you can. From the time I started editing the *Adult Bible Study Guide*, I realized how crucial the teacher was for a successful Sabbath School class. We could produce in our office the greatest *Adult Bible Study Guide* possible, but a lousy teacher will ruin the class. In contrast, we could produce a horrible product (Lord willing, we won’t), but a good teacher will make for a good class.

Of course, tons of material have been produced over the years on teaching technique, teaching style, and teaching formulas, as well as learning techniques, learning styles, and learning methods. No doubt in most cases some valuable things can be picked up by learning some of these things, and there’s plenty out there.

However, what follows is what I have learned and picked up over the long years that I have been editing the *Adult Bible Study Guide* (since 1999). Teachers teach according to their own gifts, styles, sentiments, whatever. Thus, take from here what you find useful; disregard the rest.

Of course, before we begin, I’m going to state the obvious: prayer. Pray for yourself, pray for your class. What follows are not, necessarily, in order of most importance.

1 Be enthusiastic for what you are teaching. The class will pick up right away whether you are into it or not. Even if it's a topic you are not particularly thrilled about, or that does not particularly excite you, put a twist and spin on it (as long as it's theologically solid) that does excite you, that does give you some enthusiasm. The truth is deep and rich, and surely you can find a way to make it interesting to yourself. If interesting to you, it will be to the class.

2 Know your material. I have for decades been listening to "The Great Courses," from The Teaching Company. This business goes around the United States looking for the most highly rated teachers and has them teach these courses. They are all experts, and it shows. Now, if you are not an expert, then do the next best thing: *study enough before class so that you know what you are talking about*. You don't have to have a PhD in theology to be a Sabbath School teacher. But you do need to come to class prepared. And if this takes time, then take the time. If you don't have the time to prepare—don't teach.

3 Don't feel the need to teach every day's lesson. Here is where people make a big mistake: they think that they have to touch on every point each day in the course of the week. Don't! Know what the lesson is about and find the points that you think your class (see number 5) would benefit from. Focus on those few points and study them together in your class. If you can get through the whole week, great—as long as it works well.

4 There are two extremes to avoid. First is the extreme of some teacher getting up there and merely lecturing to the class. This is a Sabbath School, not the worship hour. No matter how eloquent you might be, no matter how much deep wisdom you have to impart, merely getting up and lecturing is not how a Sabbath School should be run. On the other hand, don't simply read verbatim from the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. Sure, you can read sections, but that should be at a minimum. The *Guide* was produced to be taught from, not read from.

5 To the degree possible, know your class. Know your class's needs, and then tailor the lesson accordingly. This might not always be easy, and there's no hard and

fast rule to follow, but if you know what some issues are, seek to address them the best way you can. For example, if the church recently suffered a tragedy, the unexpected death of someone, try and steer the class in a direction that could help with that particular topic.

6 The "genius" of the *Adult Bible Study Guide* is that we have one guide for the whole world church. I have sat in apartments in Japan with people studying the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. I have been in courtyards in Africa with people studying their *Guide* outside. At the same time, it's pretty much impossible for one product to meet the specific needs of everyone each week. It doesn't try to. Instead, the key to using it is found in the very name of itself: it is the *Adult Bible Study Guide—Guide*, as in something that gives you direction. We seek to teach biblical principles and doctrines. You, as the teacher, need to take the basic direction of the week's lesson and mold it for your class. There is one Bible for the whole world, and we have one *Bible Study Guide*. Just as you can use the Bible to meet the needs that you face, you can do the same with the *Adult Bible Study Guide*.

7 As a teacher encourage class participation. Interact with your class. Encourage people to speak, to challenge each other. At the same time, you must always retain control of the class. Don't let someone veer it off on some tangent that has nothing do with where you want to go. It's a delicate balance, and not always easy to maintain, but important all the same.

8 Always, as much as possible, seek to keep the lesson cross-centered, Christ-centered. Always try to bring it back to Jesus, to the gospel, to salvation by faith alone. Not every topic lends itself readily to this topic but, again, whenever possible, move it in that direction.

Teaching is an art, not a science (though some would disagree), and no one set of rules makes for a good class. But what I have shared are things that I have picked up over the years, and I hope you can find some helpful. As we say in Yiddish, *Geyn mit got*.¹ ED

¹ "Go with God."

Clifford R. Goldstein is the Editor of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* and a prolific author.



RESPONDING TO:

WHAT DO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS BELIEVE?

SHARING JESUS

I have often been asked what it is that Seventh-day Adventists believe. Experience has taught me that the shorter my response the better. Here is an explanation of Adventism deriving from the Gospel of Mark that I have found to be particularly effective when responding to enquiries about our faith. It is memorable, teachable, and easy to share. This is Adventism explained in under two minutes.

First, I share that Seventh-day Adventists are followers of Jesus Christ who seek to make known His full identity to the world. This identity includes five key claims Jesus made about Himself in the “Son of Man” sayings in the Gospel of Mark. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Jesus forgives sins (Mark 2:10).
2. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28).
3. Jesus died and rose again (Mark 8:31).¹
4. Jesus will return in glory (Mark 8:38).²
5. Jesus came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45).

I affirm that we share with all other Christians the claims that Jesus forgives sins (first saying), that He died and rose again (third saying), and that He came to serve (fifth saying). After the horrors of two world wars and decades of global turbulence, more and more Christians

have come to the conclusion that it is beyond the capacity of the Christian church to establish heaven on earth. It will take the return of Jesus to fundamentally change the world (fourth saying).

This leaves the second saying concerning the Son of Man as Lord of the Sabbath. Unfortunately, I say, this key claim of Jesus is still neglected by many Christians today. Our goal as Adventists is to encourage the acceptance of all of Jesus' claims about Himself.

A few points deserve making on how practically to share this explanation. I am lucky enough to have a complete set of digits on my right hand. As such, I use my thumb and four fingers to count off the five sayings. This serves both as an aide memoir and signals to the person with whom I am speaking that my explanation will not drag on forever.

REMEMBERING THE BIBLICAL REFERENCES

I focus on five key texts in Mark. Other Markan "Son of Man" sayings repeat or expand these texts. The key texts are in Mark 2, 8, and 10 (2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 10:45). These chapters may be remembered easily through the simple sum of $2 + 8 = 10$.

INTRODUCE NARRATIVE DETAIL WHEN NECESSARY

I sometimes expand my explanation to include the narrative contexts of the sayings. I might, for example, refer to the story of the paralytic lowered through the roof by his four helpers as the context for the saying on forgiveness (Mark 2:1–12), or the controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus over the plucking of grain by the disciples on the Sabbath as the setting for the Sabbath saying (2:23–28). Sharing narrative details can help enliven the appeal.

LIFE-CHANGING APPLICATIONS

I might, depending upon the particular context, emphasize a specific application associated with each of the sayings. For example, the saying on forgiveness offers the opportunity to stress divine release from

guilt. The Sabbath saying opens the door to talking about God as Creator and Re-Creator and the need for spiritual and physical rest. The saying on the death and resurrection of Jesus provides hope for those facing death, loss, or persecution. The return of the Son of Man offers hope that better times are ahead and that justice will be established. The service saying permits the contrasting of the emptiness of self-centered materialism and consumerism with the joys and trials of service.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of applications. Many more may be found. The result of sharing such applications is that my initial two-minute explanation often evolves into an extended conversation.

A GOOD EXPLANATION OF ADVENTISM?

There are a number of disadvantages to this way of sharing Adventism. It ignores the historical context of Seventh-day Adventist origins. It also takes the five sayings out of their narrative contexts. A further disadvantage is that much of Mark's nuanced characterization of Jesus is ignored. It says nothing about Jesus' identity as Messiah, Shepherd, Son of God, or Suffering Servant. Exegetical difficulties associated with the Son of Man title likewise remain unacknowledged.

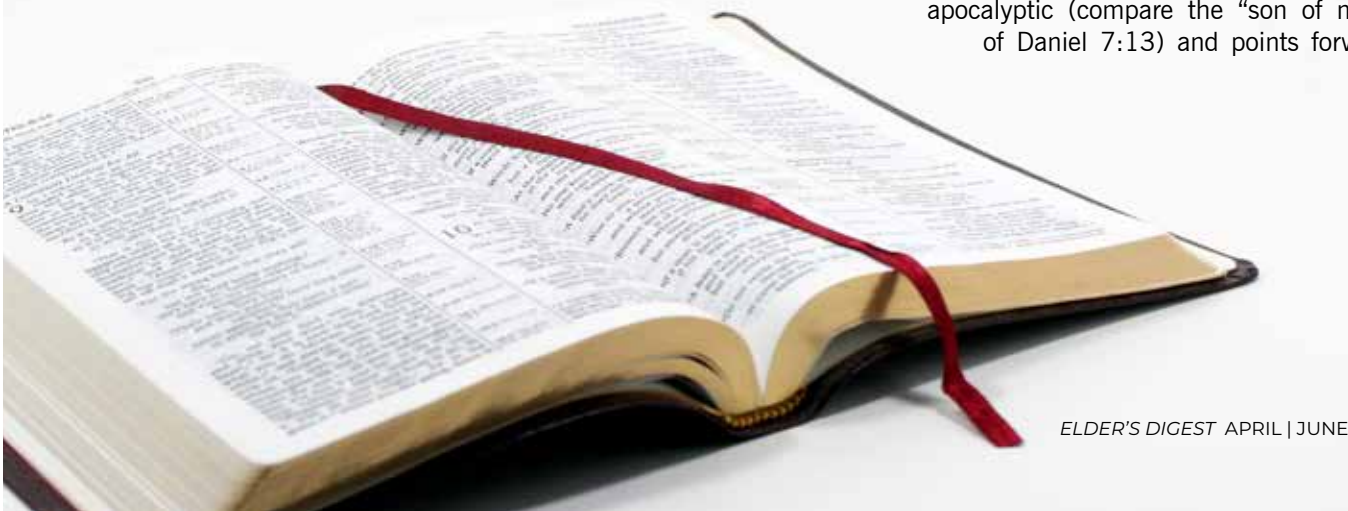
Despite these disadvantages, a number of advantages suggest themselves to sharing Adventism in this way.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THIS METHOD

1. A Jesus-Focused Definition of Adventism

First and foremost, this explanation frames Seventh-day Adventism in relation to Jesus Christ. Many Christians find the apocalyptic portions of the Bible very difficult to understand and so view with suspicion those who emphasize beasts and timelines rather than the words and deeds of Jesus. An explanation based on Jesus' own claims from one of the Gospels offsets this suspicion.

Using the Markan "Son of Man" sayings does not result in the loss of our distinctive apocalyptic identity. Jesus' identity as Son of Man is deeply apocalyptic (compare the "son of man" of Daniel 7:13) and points forward



to the future restoration of divine sovereignty over the whole world. Focusing on Jesus as Son of Man affirms rather than denies our apocalyptic identity.

2. A Call to Accept Jesus in All His Fullness

A second advantage is that this explanation confirms those beliefs that we hold in common with other Christian believers while at the same time urging them to accept the full identity of Jesus, including both His lordship of the Sabbath and, where still unaccepted, His return in the clouds of glory (Mark 8:38).

This explanation does not rely on proof-texting. Instead, it derives from a systematic and sensitive reading of Mark's characterization of Jesus.³ Similar readings could be made of the other Gospels.⁴ These sayings were clearly central to how the first Christians remembered Jesus and provide a model for how He should be remembered by later generations of believers. In sharing these five claims we affirm our mission to restore early Christian teachings that have been neglected.

3. Sidestep the Law Versus Grace Debate

Lastly, sharing Adventism in this manner counteracts the accusation sometimes made that Adventists overemphasize law and neglect grace. The affirmation that the Son of Man forgives sins neutralizes this critique (Mark 2:10). My sins are forgiven *and* I keep the Sabbath—no contradiction!

4. The Start of Something Deeper

In providing any summary of Adventism we face a tension between providing too much or too little detail: Include too much and the explanation becomes overly technical and difficult to remember. Too little and the definition fails to say anything of any great import.

Rarely is someone persuaded by such a short explanation. That is not its purpose. Nevertheless, it provides a focused and Jesus-centered explanation of Adventism that often leads to deeper and more searching con-

versations. Why not preach a sermon (or even five sermons!) on these great claims Jesus made about Himself and train your fellow members to share them with others? ED

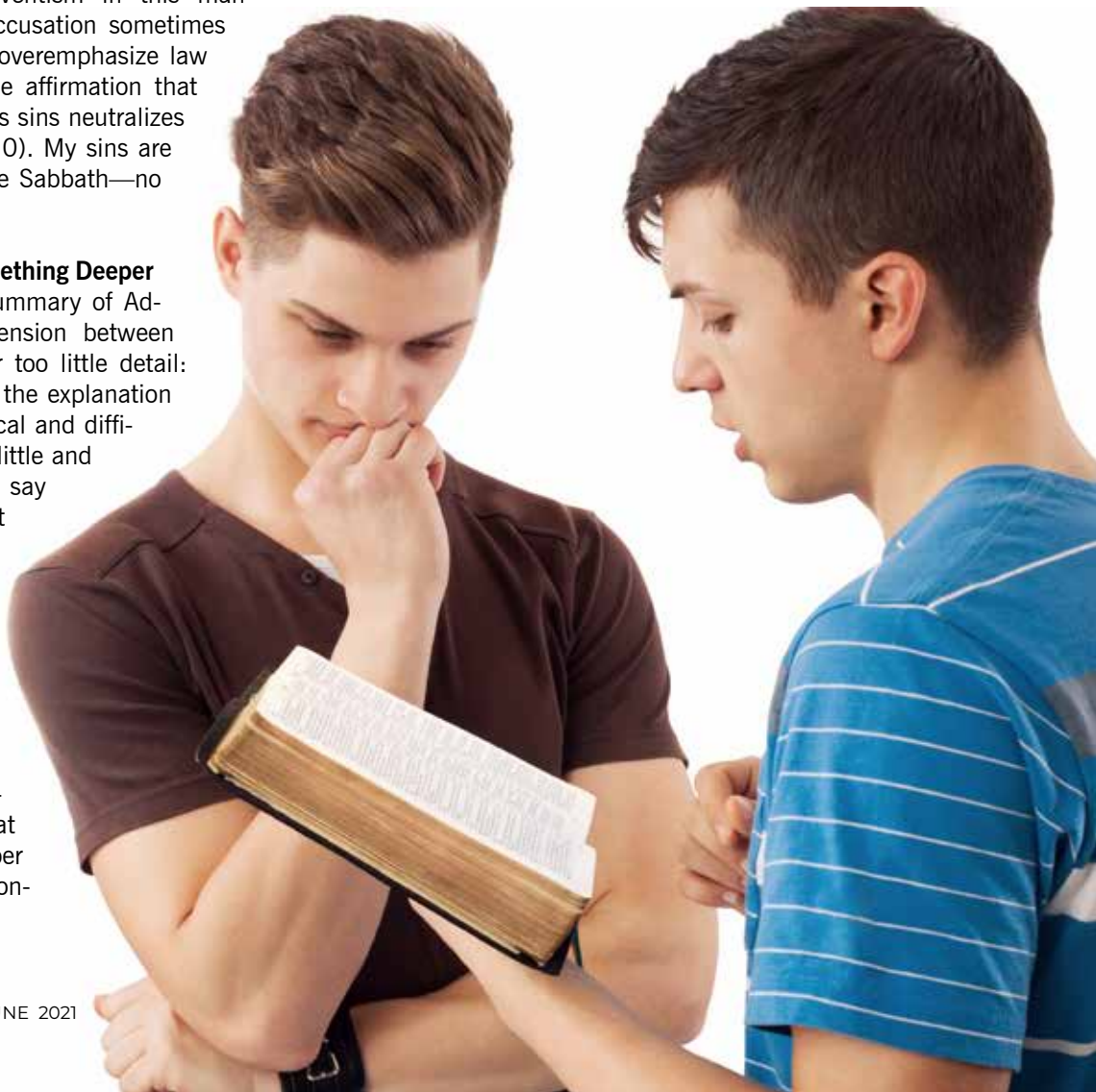
¹ See also Mark 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33; 14:21, 41.

² cf. Mark 13:26; 14:62.

³ See, for example, M.D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark: A Study of the Background of the Term "Son of Man" and its use in St Mark's Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1967).

⁴ For accessible overviews of the Son of Man in the Gospels, see I.H. Marshall, 'Son of Man' in J.B. Green and S. McKnight (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 775-781 and G.W.E. Nickelsburg, 'Son of Man' in J.J. Collins and D.C. Harlow (eds), *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1249-1251.

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JESUS THE LIFEGIVER

INTRODUCTION

Henry Scougal, professor of divinity at King's College, Aberdeen, Scotland, who died in 1678 at the early age of twenty-eight, wrote an influential little book called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. In it he laments that few people of his time seem to understand what true religion means. Some think, he writes, that its essence is "in orthodox notions and opinions," others "in external duties," while still others "put all religion in the affections, in rapturous hearts and ecstatic devotion." Yet religion's essence is neither intellectual, nor external, nor emotional, but "quite another thing." What is this? "True religion is an union of the soul to God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or in the Apostle's words, *it is Christ formed within us*." Any outward duties (i.e., good works) without the divine life no more make a Christian "than a puppet can be called a man"; they constitute "a forced and artificial religion," like a forced marriage without love.

Union with Christ is indispensable to our Christian identity. The New Testament definition of a Christian is a person "in Christ"; it is central to the gospel. According to New Testament statisticians who like to feed concordances into computers, the expressions "in Christ," "in the Lord," and "in him" occur 164 times in the letters of Paul. The question is, what are the blessings this relationship, this union with Christ bring? There are three:

I. THE BLESSING OF A NEW STATUS

"Status" is an important word in contemporary society. Our self image seems to be bound up with our social status. So we tend to be status-seekers. We enjoy titles and honors, big houses and fast cars, badges and uniforms, and friendships with influential people.

But the Bible offers us another status—spiritual rather than social, godly rather than worldly. What is it? It is the status of being a child of God, loved, adopted, and accepted by the Lord Himself. Could there be a greater "status"? As the apostle John exclaims, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1, ESV). His is our high status if we are in Christ. Once we are united to Jesus Christ, God the Father no longer sees us in our sins, for He sees us in Christ. Indeed, He loves us, His adopted children, as He loves Christ His eternal Son. Think of the joys and privileges of being in Christ: in Christ we are justified, or accepted by God; in Christ we are God's children and Abraham's spiritual

posterity; in Christ there is no condemnation to fear, for nothing can separate us from God's love "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (see Rom 8:1, 39).

II. THE BLESSING OF A NEW LIFE

To be in Christ means much more than receiving a new status; it also means receiving a new life. Justification by faith does not offer a change of status without change of life or character, or a free acceptance by God with no ethical consequences. In Paul's day there were those who spread the false rumor that encouraged people to "continue in sin, that grace may abound." But Paul, indignantly repudiating this slander, cried "God forbid"! (Read Rom 6:1–15)

It is quite impossible to be justified by God without being united to Christ. In Christ we are also a new people, living a new life. Paul's strenuous repudiation of works as the basis of justification did not inhibit him from insisting on good works of love as the necessary fruit and evidence of justification. Thus, we must always keep together the "new status" and the "new life" that God gives us. To put it differently, we could emphasize the importance of keeping together the two prepositional phrases "through Christ" and "in Christ," mediation through Him and union with Him. Justification is not a legal fiction that leaves the justified sinner unchanged. It is clear, then, that when we are "in Christ," God both redeems us through His Son and regenerates us through His Spirit.

Supposing a vagrant comes to us in dire need, down and out, in rags and tatters, and sick—even starving. It would be good to give him a bath and a change of clothing, but that is not enough. For he is ill, and under-nourished. So, in addition, he needs food and hospital treatment. Similarly, we come to Christ down and out, in the rags and tatters of sin, spiritually sick and starving. In Christ we are at once made welcome and accepted. God sees us as righteous in Christ. This is our new status. But it is only the beginning. The Good Physician puts His Spirit within us to give us new life and health, and He feeds us with His Word until we are strong and vigorous. There are no half measures with Him.

III. THE BLESSINGS OF A NEW COMMUNITY

While union with Christ is a personal experience with personal blessings, it equally has a corporate dimension. Note Paul's exposition: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22, ESV). Here Paul is contrasting two distinct communities. On the one hand, there is

fallen humanity, which by union with Adam, its founder, shares in his death. On the other hand, there is redeemed humanity, which by union with Christ, its founder, shares in His life. All of us belong to the old, fallen human race, for all of us are "in Adam" by birth. In order to belong to the new, redeemed human race, however, we have to be "in Christ," and this necessitates a new birth. But once we are united to Christ by faith and new birth, we find ourselves *ipso facto* members of the new humanity or new community that God is creating.

In this new community, Paul declares, the barriers that usually divide human beings from one another have been broken down. Christ abolished this "dividing wall of hostility" by His death. In consequence, Jews and Gentiles are fellow members of God's family and the body of Christ (Eph 2:13–3:6). But that is not all: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28, ESV). Now, in Christ, we are absolutely equal before God, irrespective of our race, rank, or sex. The racial, social, and sexual distinctives remain, but now that we see ourselves and each other as equally sinful and equally guilty, we are reduced to the same level and are equally dependent on His grace. So we welcome one another without the distinction or discrimination, for in Christ, by virtue of our union with Him, we are brothers and sisters in the same family.

All divisive barriers among Christian people—racial, social, or ecclesiastical—are displeasing to God the one Father, contrary to the purposes of Christ's death and resurrection, hurtful to the Holy Spirit of unity, ruinous to the credibility of the church, and a grave hindrance to its mission in the world. So, to be in Christ lays upon us the solemn responsibility of demonstrating the reality of the new community.

CONCLUSION

When we are in Christ, personally and organically united to Him, God blesses us with enormous blessings: a new status (we are put right with Him), a new life (we are renewed by the Holy Spirit), and a new community (we are members of God's family).

Let us then be relentless in our pursuit of Christ and in the spirit of Jacob, who cried to the Lord who was wrestling with him, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Gen 32:26, ESV). Then we will be united to Him, enjoying His presence, and drawing on His life and power. ED

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JESUS: HIS UNIQUENESS

INTRODUCTION

In his book *Christianity Among the Religions of the World*, the historian Arnold Toynbee urges Christian people to purge out their exclusiveness, the traditional belief that Christianity is unique. He argues that our persistent emphasis on the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ stands in the way of unity with other religions in our common struggle with our major enemy—atheism. This insistence on the uniqueness of Christ, he thinks, is a subtle form of pride, and we should get rid of it.

But the uniqueness of Christ is what gives us our gospel. In addition, His words and deeds are so original, sublime, and transcendent that they mark Him and make such a difference that “Never [a] man spake like this man” (John 7:46, KJV), “none other name . . .” (Acts 4:12, KJV).

But why should we reexamine our belief in the uniqueness of Christ? Because we are being exposed to new ideas of old religions. The world is not as compartmentalized as it once was, where each nation and religion could live behind protective walls, safe from the invasion of others. The old ethnic religions are becoming alive. They are becoming missionary and aggressive.

So how can we defend the supremacy of Christianity? I suggest the uniqueness of Christianity and the originality of Christ consist of three words:

I. THE SUBLIME SIMPLICITY OF CHRIST

This may not be the most impressive, but neither is it unimportant. Part of Jesus’ profound impact upon His contemporaries and us is due to the masterful ways in which He simplified and clarified the great law—“You have heard it said, but I say . . .” In the second century Christianity faced one of its bitterest enemies, a Greek named Celsus. He despised this new superstition, Christianity. His most effective argument was that Jesus was a plagiarist, that He borrowed His best utterances from other minds in the past. His argument was not disputed simply because most of the teachings of Jesus can be paralleled in the Prophets, the Psalms, and the voluminous writings of the rabbis. This was the textbook of His boyhood. Jesus made constant use of this literary heritage. So in what respect are His words, if not original, unique?

His uniqueness was in His emphasis, the unparalleled simplicity of His mind to see the difference between the true and the false, and to sift the essential from the trivial. The laws of His people were an immense entanglement. Even the best rabbis got lost in it—laws upon laws that Jesus called “heavy burdens and grievous to be borne” (Matt 23:4, KJV); and “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition” (Mark 7:13, KJV).

Where did He learn this wisdom? Who taught this Nazarene Carpenter to see with penetrating clarity into the deep issues of life over which the scholars and rabbis had wrestled? The answer is in the second reason for His uniqueness.

II. THE WORD FULFILLMENT

In what way does that word “fulfillment” inform the wisdom of Christ? Jesus was born of a people whose knowledge of God and human dignity is unparalleled in any race. His school was the synagogue. His textbook was the law and the prophets. He said, “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matt 5:17, KJV). He took up all the great insights of the past and fulfilled them, filled them full of larger meaning. His God, still a national God, the God of Israel, limited and local, is now universalized. He said, when you pray, say “Our Father. . .” Now all the barriers are removed. “God so loved the world . . .” This was a new emphasis.

Further, He took all the great symbols of worship—the temple, the altar, the mercy seat, the feast days—fulfilled them, and removed them from their provincial limitations into wider universal meanings. “The Lord’s Supper,” for instance—the Passover Supper—was intensely national. Every year it brought thousands of the devout to Jerusalem to celebrate the Exodus deliverance. Out of that nationalistic Passover Supper He made the Supper of Remembrance, not to show God’s concern for one people, but His sacrificial love for all people—the whole world. Everything He touched was lifted from the local to the universal, from the partial to the eternal. He fulfilled them.

Scholarship today has furnished us with a wealth of knowledge about old faiths. In their sacred books there is some shining light there; in fragmentary form, even the Golden Rule appears. Why should it surprise us that God has given light to other people? Pascal says, “God has an infinite desire to communicate himself” (see Rom 1:18–20). Jesus came to fulfill.

But let it be clear, notwithstanding some fragmentary parallels to His teachings, there is an impassable gulf between Christ and the oriental faiths. If one is true, the other isn’t. The escape religions of the East that teach withdrawal from the world have submerged the people’s vital life in the peace and quietude of death. What they need, and what we need, is the touch of the transforming Christ who comes to fulfill “that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, KJV).

III. THE TRANSCENDENCE OF INCARNATION

The clearest mark of Christ’s uniqueness is not in His words, but in Him, summed up

in the word “Incarnation”—the Word made flesh and brought to life in a person. It is He Himself who remains through the ages supreme and unparalleled. Though the words He spoke were not wholly new, the Man was. “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46, KJV). Here is the supreme miracle of the ages—a man who towers as high above our century as He did the first. Who can compare to Him?

There’s a story about a Russian novelist who dreamed he stood in a crowded Russian church. The standing congregation swayed in worship like grain before the wind. The sacred candles gleamed red against the altars. Suddenly in his dream he had a strong feeling that Christ was standing just behind him. He dared not turn, but he must; turning, he looked into his face. “What sort of Christ is this?” he thought. “Such an ordinary face. A face like all man’s faces.”

And that is grandly true. The face that looks out from the gospel pages is a human face—a face like all men’s faces. And yet as soon as we come to terms with that fact then we are confronted with another. He was such a man that those who walked with Him knew by an unerring instinct that He was more than any man. Said Simon Peter: “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8, KJV). Like us, yet unlike us—One with us, yet outside us, with an eternal beyondness in Him that no one could grasp. In the moral sublimity of His life, in the texture of His spirit, in the majestic reach of His mind, so unlike us we cannot think of Him as we think of other men. What other name would you put alongside His? In the first century they said, “None.” “None other name” (Acts 4:12, KJV).

CONCLUSION

The reason we reject all concepts of a merely human Christ is this unlikeness, this uniqueness, this transcendence that marks Him off as different from all who came before Him, and remains the increasing hope of our salvation. In the words of C. S. Lewis, “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”¹

None, other name! None! “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46, KJV). **ED**

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: Collins, 1984), 52.

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JESUS: HIS NAME

INTRODUCTION

Henry J. Heinz's first business enterprise was a failure and he was declared bankrupt. Legally Heinz was not required to pay back those debts, but he was determined to preserve the value of his name, so he repaid every penny of those debts. His next attempt to start a business was a success and ultimately became known as H. J. Heinz Company. Although Henry J. Heinz died in 1919, the company he founded is still the beneficiary of his good name.

The most glorious and meaningful of all names is unquestionably the name of Jesus. Isaiah, the "Gospel Prophet," lists five qualities in His name that describe His character and His work: "his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6, KJV). We will examine the meaning and significance of each of these individually.

I. HIS NAME IS WONDERFUL

Before the conversion of William Miller from doubt and skepticism to a firm and unshakeable confidence in Christ, he wrote of his remarkable experience: "I was truly wretched, but did not understand the cause. . . . Suddenly . . . the character of a Saviour was vividly impressed upon my mind. . . . I immediately felt how lovely such a being must be, and imagined that I could cast myself into the arms of, and trust in the mercy of, such a one. . . . I saw that the Bible did bring to view just such a Saviour as I needed . . . in Jesus I found a friend. The Saviour became to me the chiefest among ten thousand."¹

Ellen G. White records having a similar revelation: "I seemed to be sitting in abject despair, with my face in my hands, reflecting like this: If Jesus were upon earth, I would go to Him, throw myself at His feet, and tell Him all my sufferings. He would not turn away from me, . . . and I should love and serve Him always."² Her wish to see the Saviour was granted, and a beautiful angel ushered her into the presence of Christ.

She describes her reactions: "In a moment I stood before Jesus. There was no mistaking that beautiful countenance. Such a radiant expression of benevolence and majesty could belong to no other. As His gaze rested upon me, I knew at once that He was acquainted with every circumstance of my life and all my inner thoughts and feelings. . . . The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with a happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with ineffable happiness, sank prostrate at His feet. . . . His smile filled my soul with gladness. His presence filled me with holy reverence and an inexpressible love."³

Why is Jesus called wonderful?
Because He took the sinner's place
And died to save a guilty race;
Because He stooped to bear the shame:
Forever WONDERFUL is His name.

II. JESUS IS COUNSELOR

We have been warned that, "There is dan-

ger that men will receive the counsel of men, when by so doing they will disregard the counsel of God."⁴

How comprehensive are the counsels of God?

When desiring inner peace—John 14; Romans 8.

When you are anxious for loved ones—Psalm 121; Luke 17.

When you are discouraged—Psalms 22, 23, 42, and 43.

When sorrow overtakes you—Psalm 46; Matthew 28.

When you are tempted—Psalms 15, 19, 139; 1 Corinthians 10:12–13.

Jesus invites us to ask for His counsel. "Sometimes we pour our troubles into human ears, and tell our afflictions to those who cannot help us, and neglect to confide all to Jesus, who is able to change the sorrowful way to paths of joy and peace."⁵

Why is Jesus called Counselor?

Because He bids me come and ask
For guidance in my daily task.
In Him alone all wisdom's found;
So be His name with honor crowned.

III. JESUS IS THE MIGHTY GOD

The psalmist asks the question, "Who is this King of glory?" He answers, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" (24:8, KJV).

What evidence do we have of His might? His power is not only displayed in nature and in the star-studded heavens. His power is mightily demonstrated in human lives that have been changed and transformed.

"I know a life that is lost to God,
Bound down by the things of earth,
But I know a name, a precious name,
That can bring that soul new birth."

Isaiah asks, "Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? 'It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save'" (63:1, ESV).

Why is Jesus called Mighty God?

Because, though veiled in lowly guise,
He came from far beyond the skies,
To all the world the tidings tell,
His name is blest Immanuel.

IV. JESUS IS THE EVERLASTING FATHER

If "mighty God" was amazing, this is more so. Do we not keep Father and Son distinct? But if they are distinct, they are yet one. Jesus claims, "I and the Father are one"—for eternity. The psalmist affirms, "Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages" (135:13, ESV). To us the Son of the Father has all the attributes of Fatherhood. As a father pities his children, so the Lord Jesus has compassion on the multitude. Jesus is to be more than king. He is to be a Father to His people. He is to gather the lambs in His arm

and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are young.

Why is Jesus called The Everlasting Father?
Because He lived a life below
That men might thus His Father know;
The spirit then He bears witness plain—
Now "Abba Father," born again.

V. JESUS IS THE PRINCE OF PEACE

He came as the Prince of Peace to the Remnant, to His own; not to those who cry "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, but to those only who find peace through the blood of the cross. How does He make peace? (1) By making God and man one in His Person—by becoming flesh and dwelling among us, (2) by making man and God one in His death, and (3) by reconciling man to man in His life. "Walk in newness of life," (Rom 6:4, ESV), says the apostle; and among the signs of it: "So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom 12:18, ESV).

Peace, then, means something. It means the disposition to avoid unnecessary causes of hostility. It means mutual courtesy. It means firm resistance upon one's own rights, but the recognition at the same time of others' rights, and straightforward readiness to respect them. It means refusing to be irritated by petty grievances. Jesus personified these qualities and invites us to model the same.

Why is Jesus called the Prince of Peace?

Because, as once by shepherds heard,
"Good will to men." This blessed word
Proclaimed while angel chorus rang,
Will be proclaimed the world around
Till He as King is crowned.

Then all earth's wars and strife shall cease;
The world shall own Him PRINCE OF PEACE.

CONCLUSION

Charles Spurgeon ended a sermon titled "The Eternal Name" in London's Exeter Hall with this impassioned tribute to Jesus' imperishable name: "Let my name perish, but let Christ's name last forever. . . . Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, crown Him Lord of all. You will not hear me say anything else. These are my last words in Exeter Hall for this time. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, crown Him Lord of all." ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 318–319.

² Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1882), 79–80.

³ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1904), 8:146.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1961), 97.

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JESUS OUR SECURITY

INTRODUCTION

She suffered adversity. At the age of only six weeks she lost her eyesight due to the application of a mustard poultice to her eyes by a doctor. Her father died soon afterward, but these tragedies did not affect her happy disposition. At the age of 8 she wrote,

Oh, what a happy soul am I,
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, and I won't!

She married a blind musician, and their only child died in infancy. Later, her husband died. Notwithstanding these tragedies, Fanny Crosby applied her gift for rhyming and devoted most of her ninety-four years of life writing at least eight thousand hymns, following the practice of praying before each composition. Many of her hymns are autobiographical, and reflect a dimension of security unknown in today's world.

A well-known psychiatrist was asked what he had found to be the basic problem troubling the majority of his patients. His reply was: "Insecurity." But the lack of security in so many lives is spiritual in origin. We were created for companionship with God, and without Him we are alone and insecure. In Jesus Christ all of this can be changed. Not that the problems, pressures, and overwhelming circumstances of life will cease, but when Christ lives in our hearts we are not left to struggle alone. For the past there is forgiveness; for the present there is divine companionship; for the future there is absolute assurance. So what are the features of the security that Jesus promises?

I. WE ARE SECURE BY THE REDEEMING WORK OF JESUS

The salvation wrought out for us on the cross was complete. There is nothing we can do to add to its efficacy; there is nothing we can do to take away its sin-cleansing power. It is ours to be received as the free gift of God's loving grace.

Our security is assured because we stand on an immovable Rock, even though our world is changing and uncertain. The apostle Paul informs us that man can lay no other foundation, for there is none, and this foundation is Jesus Christ. Relief for a drowning swimmer is the sudden discovery of a firm rock on which to stand. How much more wonderful it is for us who are surrounded by the difficulties of life, to real-

ize suddenly that underneath there is One who never changes, and that around us are the everlasting arms.

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
. . .
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, . . .
A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
He taketh my burden away,
He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved.

II. WE ARE SECURE BY THE COMFORT OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Confronted with problems, decisions to be made, buffeted by combinations of circumstances over which we have neither control nor solution, we need God's presence, guidance, and help.

Paul says, "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28, ESV). But all things are not necessarily good in themselves. The good may be immediate or far off, but it is God's good in God's own time. This is illustrated in an old story, about the gravel walk and the mignonette:

"How fragrant you are this morning," said the gravel walk.
"Yes," said the mignonette, "I have been trodden upon and bruised, and it has brought forth all my sweetness."
"But," said the gravel walk, "I am trodden upon and every day, and I only grow harder."

There are two characteristics of believers given here: one, their feelings toward God; the other, God's feelings toward them. To those who love God, all things work together for good. It must be so, for love works no evil (Rom 13:10). And "for those who are called according to his purpose," all things find some way, often unknown to us, of working together for our good. It must be so, for He of whom and through whom and to whom are all things (Rom 11:36) would never suffer His eternal purpose to be thwarted by anything really adverse to us. This is security!

Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my guide? . . .

For I know what e'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

III. WE ARE SECURE BY GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE

The cause of Christ has suffered at the hands of those who seem to picture Christianity as a life of guaranteed prosperity and unending exemption from trouble. Absolutely not! When we commit ourselves to

the living God through His Son, we are not carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. We know we are not only tested by adversity, but there are times when our greatest witness for the faith finds expression out of the troubles and sorrows through which we are called to pass. In all these things we can rest secure in the grace, which God unfailingly supplies to those who are His own.

God hath not promised skies always blue, . . .
But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way, . . .
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

IV. WE ARE SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S LOVE

The great characteristic of God is an undefeatable goodwill and an unconquerable benevolence to all men, good and bad alike. When Jesus died upon the cross He was saying, "Nothing that men can ever do to God will stop God loving them. There is no limit to the love of God. There is no end beyond which love will not go and no sin which my love cannot forgive. God loves you like that." It is that undefeatable love that those who seek to be the children of God must reproduce in their lives (Matt 5:43-48). To fail to do so is to fall short of the perfection God requires, and so is to sin. Sin is the absence of love.

The assurance of God's unconditional love has not only therapeutic value to the one who accepts it, but with it an abiding sense of security that no demon can disturb.

O love of God, our shield and stay
Through all the perils of our way!
Eternal love, in Thee we rest,
Forever safe, forever blest.

CONCLUSION

A bricklayer fell from a high scaffold and was lying fatally wounded. A minister approached and pled, "My dear friend, I'm afraid you are dying. I urge you to make your peace with God at once." "Make my peace with God!" exclaimed the injured man. "Why, that was made two thousand years ago when my Savior died. Christ is my peace, and has been ever since I knew Him."

At the center of our security is the Christ of Calvary. In and through Him, the lost have redemption, the lonely have the comfort of God's presence and guidance, the weak the strength of God's grace, and the weary the rest and peace that comes from the assurance of God's unconquerable love. ED

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THE THEOLOGY OF LIFE >PART 8

A BIBLICAL THOUGHT – 1

“Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time *he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now*. . . . So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.”—Galatians 4:28–29, 31, ESV (emphasis added) [read Galatians 4:21–31]

In our last biblical thought we observed the nature of being born again of the Spirit. Paul longed for the people of Galatia to have this experience of trusting and living exclusively upon what Christ has done and through what the Spirit could accomplish in the life of the believer.

In the text, the battle lines are drawn. Paul recounts the story of Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael was born of the Egyptian slave Hagar, and Isaac was born of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. Ishmael was the son of the flesh, and Isaac the son of the promise.

Let’s think about this story for a moment.

God had promised Abraham a family, a future, as numerous as the stars in the night sky. But years went by, and no children came along. So at one point, Sarah and Abraham came up with a plan to help God, to help the promise come true. And by their own efforts, they developed a plan that resulted in the birth of a child. Abraham had relations with Sarah’s servant Hagar, and a son, Ishmael, was born.

By thinking they could help God fulfill His promises, Abraham and Sarah made this decision that resulted in difficulty and strife within the family circle.

Sometime later God had to remind Abraham that He is perfectly able to bring His promises to completion without the help of any human being. God told Abraham that although He would bless Ishmael, the son of the promise was still to come. And Abraham and Sarah, through a divine miracle that made the barren woman conceive, saw the birth of Isaac, the son of the promise.

Paul uses this story to illustrate not only the situ-

ation in Galatia, but the situation of all of those in history who think they can help God in the promise of salvation through their own efforts. So those who tied themselves to the obedience of the written law and believed that they could help God in the process of salvation were compared to Ishmael, the son of Abraham's attempt to help God. And those who trust in the promise—those who know that it is not by their own efforts but by God's action that salvation comes forth—are compared to Isaac. They are heirs of the promise, the blessing and the grace of the God who makes sure His promises come true.

So where are you in your journey with God? Are you living the religion of Ishmael? The religion of thinking that even though Jesus paid it all, you still have to make a few sacrifices to earn His favor? Or are you living the religion of Isaac, the religion of knowing we are free and there are no longer any sacrifices to be made? The religion of Ishmael, of human effort, is very subtle. It recognizes the promise, but it cannot conceive the possibility that there is nothing left to do. On the other hand, the religion of Isaac seems too good to be true. It seems too liberal. It sounds too much like good news.

And it is here that the war begins. Jesus, the son of the promise (Isaac) was persecuted by the sons of "human effort" (Ishmael), the Pharisees. Paul began his life as a son of "human effort" and killed those who believed in the promise. Could this still be a reality today?

My dear reader, may you embrace the fact that we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free woman. May you rejoice in the fact that God does not need your help to accomplish His promises of salvation. He will bless and use anyone who trusts and believes that Jesus paid it all. These will become true sons and daughters of Abraham. These are they who truly keep the commands of God through the faithfulness of Jesus. Because He was faithful, we have favor, we have blessing, we have freedom. May the end of the war begin in us—in our willingness to let go of our desire to help God, and to embrace the fact that we are already His desire, His children, His bride.

A BIBLICAL THOUGHT – 2

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify

WORKS ARE AN INTERNAL/EXTERNAL EVIDENCE THAT WE ARE GROWING IN JESUS, BUT THEY ARE NOT CONDITIONS FOR THE SALVATION THAT WAS GIVEN BY THE WORKS OF JESUS ONLY.

again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, *you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.* For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but *only faith working through love.*"—Galatians 5:1–6, ESV (emphasis added)

In the previous biblical thought we discussed the metaphorical battle between Isaac and Ishmael, a battle

related to different understandings of salvation. On one side, there are those who believe that their efforts contribute to their salvation and that Jesus needs our help to save us. On the other side, there are those who know that only Jesus' righteousness and grace grant us salvation. Throughout the history of Christianity, from Augustine to Pelagius, from Luther to Wesley, every single Christian community has struggled with these issues.

Here, once again, Paul reviews what is at stake in this battle. If anyone believes they can be justified by doing whatever the law demands, they have fallen from grace! And such a life, of constant submission to laws and regulations, is slavery to a system that could only be, and was, fulfilled in Jesus. Notice that the problem in Galatia was not a return to Judaism, but an adaptation of Christianity. While Paul preached grace and freedom, some people in Galatia wanted Jesus and works of the law, including circumcision. And how close is this to home!?

Paul continually argued that it was Jesus who paid the price, but the good news was received by some with unbelief. Now before any of you get confused, let me clarify a few things: Works are good. The book of James is explicit on this and so is Paul throughout his letters. Faith without works is indeed dead. But this is not what Paul is discussing here. Works in the true faith of Jesus are the natural outcome of allowing the Spirit to work in and through us, within our inherent sinfulness, to live a life in the Spirit even though we are all flesh. Works are an internal/external evidence that we are growing in Jesus, but they are not conditions for the salvation that was given by the works of Jesus only.

So what Paul is attempting to undo here is the idea that salvation is exclusively based and dependent upon these works. Salvation belongs to the Lord, cries the prophet Jonah and so many others throughout the Bible.

And when we understand what Jesus accomplished for us, we live a life of freedom.

When we understand that it is by His grace and His works that we are righteous before God, we are compelled by the Spirit to develop a faith that works “through love.” This is the sum of all things. The journey of the followers of Jesus is not one that goes from sin to without sin, but one of growth in love. It is not a life organized around what is and is not sin, but a life organized by the principle of love—in love for God and others. This maturity in love is what Jesus calls perfection (see Matt 5:43–48), and is what a life in the Spirit is all about. A life in the flesh is a life of pure selfishness. And selfish desires are part of who we are as humans. We can see it in our children: the desire to not share, to not care, and to think only of themselves. This will always be part of our life. The difference between those who live in the flesh and those who live in the Spirit is trust in the love of God. And in this trust we grow, little by little, in our relationship with God and others. This is faith

that works through love. And it can only be real if we give up all aspirations for a personal righteousness and holiness attained by external acts and sacrifices. It can be real only if we give up the desire to live a religion that accepts Jesus but tries to help Him out in the process of salvation by including a little bit of works of the law. This is what true sanctification is all about! George Knight writes, “Sanctification is nothing less than the process by which Christians become progressively more loving.”¹

Dear leader, may you trust in this love. May you grow in this love. And may you find the freedom Paul fought and died for in your own personal journey of growth in love with Jesus. ED

¹ George R. Knight, *I Used to Be Perfect: A Study of Sin and Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001), Kindle.

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THE MINISTRY OF A DEACON/DEACONESS:

ELLEN G. WHITE'S PERSPECTIVE > PART 3

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



DAVID'S LEADERSHIP: A TIMELESS MODEL FOR DIACONATE

King David, toward the close of his reign, delivered a solemn charge to those bearing the burden of the work of God in his day. Summoning to Jerusalem "all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men," the aged king solemnly charged them, "in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God," to "keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God" (1 Chr. 28:1, 8).

To Solomon, as one called to occupy a position of leading responsibility, David gave a special charge: "Thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee: . . . be strong" (1 Chr. 28:9, 10).

PRINCIPLES OF GODLY LEADERSHIP

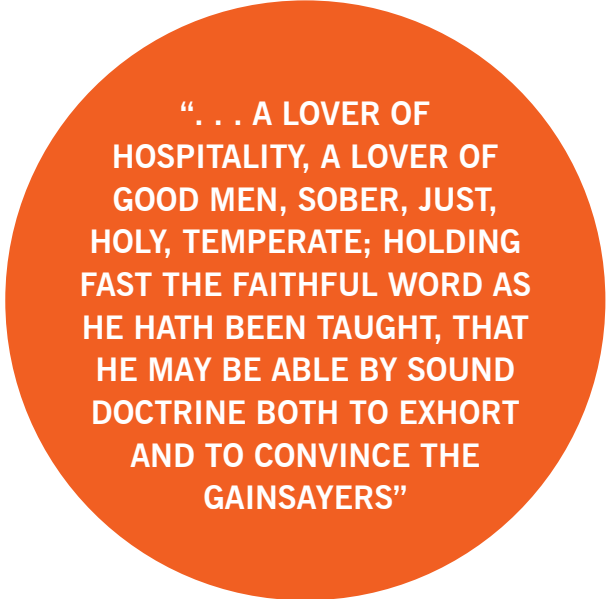
The same principles of piety and justice that were to guide the rulers among God's people in the time of Moses and of David, were also to be followed by those given the oversight of the newly organized church of God in the gospel dispensation. In the work of setting things in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable men to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures. They maintained that he who is called to stand in a position of leading responsibility in the church "must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7-9).

The order that was maintained in the early Christian church made it possible for them to move forward solidly as a well-disciplined army clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose in a local church, as later it did arise in Antioch and elsewhere, and the believers were unable to come to an agreement among themselves,

such matters were not permitted to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted.

"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church with church, the human instrumentality co-operating with the divine, every agency subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of the grace of God. ED

¹ Except for the subheadings, the entire portion is from Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 87-96, and is based on Acts 6:1-7. Scriptural references are placed in parentheses, instead of footnotes as in the original.



“. . . A LOVER OF HOSPITALITY, A LOVER OF GOOD MEN, SOBER, JUST, HOLY, TEMPERATE; HOLDING FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD AS HE HATH BEEN TAUGHT, THAT HE MAY BE ABLE BY SOUND DOCTRINE BOTH TO EXHORT AND TO CONVINCe THE GAINSAVERS”



DISCIPLES KEEPING DISCIPLES:

PARTICIPATORY WORSHIP >PART 6

Early Adventist church worship was participatory in nature. There was singing, shouting, clapping, saying “Amen” in between the preaching, laughing, claiming visionary manifestations, and even speaking in tongues.¹ Besides traditional preaching, they had social meetings where believers shared testimonies.² Music was part of worship, though views on using different instruments varied among those of different generations.³ During the early part of the twentieth century, H. M. J. Richards introduced orderly worship,⁴ which I believe is mostly followed in Adventist churches around the globe. In this type of worship, the format is very orderly but very few get to lead out or minister. The rest of the congregation does very little except singing congregational songs and saying “Amen” to prayers. The ministry participants often become demonstrators and the audience becomes listeners or watchers. But I believe we can encourage full participation of everyone present in an orderly worship.

WORSHIP AT MY CHURCH

Worship at my church is as follows: After Sabbath School, worship service proceeds from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. A praise team starts with singing, then the ministers walk in from the vestry. The ministry team includes the one who offers intercessory prayer, a stewardship talk presenter, a Scripture reader, the preacher, and a person who offers the benediction. After the opening hymn, the intercessor offers a prayer while the congregation is asked to kneel. The announcer, who stands with the ministers, calls for the children’s story. The stewardship talk, special music, and Scripture reading follow the children’s story. Then the preacher comes up to preach for a little over thirty-five minutes. Offering is collected after the sermon while a special music is presented. The service comes to an end with a closing hymn and the benediction.

There is a worship coordinator who instructs each worship participant in how—and how long—to do each item in the program. This systematic and orderly wor-

ship service is attended by well over 60% of the members Sabbath after Sabbath. Worship is, as one of the members puts it, “orderly but rigid.” More importance is given to time. Another member says, “It is more a demonstration than something that is participatory.”

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES IN WORSHIP (EPW)

My dream is that worship be more than just an orderly, well-attended, performance-based service, but rather participatory, giving a richer worshipful experience. My formula for such an experience is “Everyone Participates in Worship” (EPW), where the worshippers are involved and participate along with the ministry leaders on the platform.

I propose seven simple steps of EPW. I introduced these steps in my own church, and we as a church adapted them to make a successful and vibrant participatory worship.

1. Everyone participates in singing. The plan is to encourage everyone, as much as possible, to sing, praise, and worship. The music leader or praise team leader will choose familiar songs or hymns that elevate worship. Through persuasion and motivation, the leader will engage the congregation to sing with him or her. The congregation will be requested to rise and sing along with the team for two out of five songs that are sung. The implementation effect is to take the musical element from performance-based praise to a fully immersed state of praise and worship, where everyone present will feel included and worship together.

2. Everyone participates in prayer. The plan is to provide the opportunity for everyone to pray during the divine service hour, rather than having only the ministry leader praying from the pulpit. Twice a month, the intercessor will announce an important need of the community, state, nation, church, or families and request that the congregation divide themselves into twos or threes to engage in intense prayer for about seven to ten minutes. Before the prayer, they may share their special needs so they may pray for one another. The prayer session will be brought to an end with a sung chorus and blessing from the pulpit. And also, once or twice a month, the intercessor can lead the entire congregation in offering three minutes of silent prayer as they kneel, before he or she offers the intercessory prayer.

3. Everyone participates in reading. The assigned Scripture reader will engage the congregation to read the Scripture responsively. The Scripture reader will ask the congregation to stand, open their Bibles (even on devices), engage in responsive reading, and conclude with a blessing. Or the leader can request the entire congregation to read the Scripture together in unison.

4. Everyone participates in sharing stories. During the meet-and-greet time of the service, the pastor will request that members turn to someone other than a family member or friend and ask a specific question to begin a conversation. The pastor will suggest a question or query, which may be “Tell me about your week,” “Tell me about your hobby,” “What is your favorite dish?,” “What tools do you use to help you in your spiritual journey?,” etc. This provides an opportunity to share stories with fellow believers so they become acquainted and grow closer to each other to worship the Lord together in unity.

5. Everyone participates in teaching/preaching. Opportunities will be provided for the elders, deacons, deaconesses, lay leaders, young adults, youth, and even children to teach and preach periodically. By doing so, the pastor equips the laity to take a leading role in worship.

6. Everyone participates in giving. Recently, my church designed a special offering kit in the form of a pouch, on which is written, “My special gift to the Lord.” This pouch was given to everyone, including children, to participate in giving to the Lord. No one returns the pouch empty; everyone gives.

7. Everyone participates in evangelism. Total participation in worship encourages everyone to participate in evangelism through community outreach, small groups, and engaging in Bible studies and public evangelism. The motto of, “Each family (winning) one family” drives everyone to participate in evangelism. The church that *keeps* disciples *makes* disciples.

CONCLUSION

An inclusive, vibrant, genuine, and participatory worship can make a church a sociocultural religious community. Inclusive participation strengthens member engagement. May our churches transform from demonstrative to participatory worship, where “Everyone Participates in Worship” (EPW), so that each may grow into the body of Christ. ED

¹ Theodore Levterov, “Early Adventist Worship, 1845–1900,” in *Worship, Ministry, and the Authority of the Church*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 67.

² *Ibid.*, 60.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:471.

⁴ H. M. J. Richards, *Church Order and Its Divine Origin and Importance*, (Denver, CO: Colorado Tract Society, 1906), 64.

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THE FALL: SIN AND THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Ten minutes spent watching or reading the news or scrolling through social media will quickly reveal numerous tragedies and atrocities. In fact, in today's age of technology, so much information can be gathered and consumed that the weight of the world's pain can be overwhelming. There is simply so much difficulty and tragedy that our hearts and minds cannot keep up with it all, especially when we are often dealing with our own personal difficulties: sickness, financial hardship, divorce, and death of loved ones are only a few struggles we face.

How did we move from a pristine, beautiful world to the one we know now? All worldviews seek to find a satisfying answer to the question of where suffering comes from. There is the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people, and conversely why good things happen to bad people. Our sorrow

“FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.”

ROMANS 3:23 ESV

and anger in the face of tragedy shows that we know innately this is not how life is supposed to be; perhaps this is an echo of Eden in our hearts. But if we weren't meant for it, why must we suffer? From a biblical worldview perspective, we know that at the fall, the second act of the great controversy, everything suddenly changed. It is this part of the story that answers these difficult questions.

THE FALL OF LUCIFER

Although we may often associate the fall or introduction of sin with the story of Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit, this part of the account actually begins in heaven, where trouble was brewing long before any human act of disobedience. Lucifer, the covering cherub who was described as “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezek 28:12¹), was experiencing a change in his

heart. He had walked and talked with God, had enjoyed the glories of heaven, and had experienced nothing but goodness for all of his existence. But Ellen G. White writes that, “Little by little, Satan came to indulge a desire for self-exaltation.”² Seeing how God received all praise, glory, and honor, Lucifer became jealous. He was not content living the perfect life God had given him. Instead he wanted more: he wanted to be God.

“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isa 14:13–14, ESV). This was the dark jealousy in Lucifer’s heart.³ He yearned to be like God. In this passage we can see how Lucifer’s eyes were locked onto himself, saying, “I will ascend,” “I will set,” “I will sit,” and “I will make myself like the Most High.” It was this pride and selfishness that festered in the heart of the beautiful angel. God offered the perspective of complete and perfect beauty, but Lucifer did not trust this divine view. Rather, he believed that God was being unfair with His authority. From Lucifer’s worldview, he thought that he deserved to be in a higher place than God, and this was the message he began spreading among the angels of heaven. Ellen White writes of Lucifer’s work of sowing discontent among his fellow angels.

Since their natures were holy, he urged that the angels should obey the dictates of their own will. He sought to create sympathy for himself by representing that God had dealt unjustly with him in bestowing supreme honor upon Christ. He claimed that in aspiring to greater power and honor he was not aiming at self-exaltation, but was seeking to secure liberty for all the inhabitants of heaven.⁴

Lucifer’s deception was that God was unjust, unfair. Gone was the trust in their merciful Creator. There in heaven, a new worldview began to develop, darkened by pride and selfishness. This worldview said, “I know better than God. I am more just than God. I am better than God.” And so by choice, Lucifer fell away from God and His compassionate heart. This is ultimately where sin entered into the story: this is the fall. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!” (Isa 14:12, ESV). Lucifer fell from heaven, and just as he had weakened the nations above, now he sought to weaken the new nation of earth.

THROUGH MILLENNIA, HIS WORDS HAVE SHAPED THE WORLDVIEWS OF MANY PEOPLE, CAUSING THEM TO BELIEVE “YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD”

THE FALL OF HUMANITY

After God created the entirety of the garden of Eden, “the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen 2:16–17, ESV). In their forming worldviews, earth’s first man and woman saw no

reason to mistrust God. He was their Creator and Sustainer, and there was no doubt in their minds to cause them to question His character or actions—until Eve happened across the fallen Lucifer, now called Satan, disguised as a serpent.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”’” (Gen 3:1, ESV). Right away, Satan started his work of sowing doubt in what God had said.

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (vv. 2–3, ESV).

Although she did not truly understand what death was, she trusted in what God had told them. But then came the first lie told on earth: “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (vv. 4–5, ESV).

With these words, suddenly Eve’s world changed. Suddenly there was such a thing as deceit, a concept she had never known before. Unfortunately, Eve chose to believe what the serpent told her: God was being untruthful. What was more, He was being unfair, lording His knowledge and supremacy over Eve and working to keep her beneath Himself. And so, Eve chose to abandon her trust in the Creator and instead disobey the only thing He had asked of her. Adam, seeing his life partner eat of the forbidden fruit, moved towards the tree himself, and ate of it out of his love for Eve.⁵ Thus the first man and woman brought sin into the world.

Satan entered into hearts, in heaven as well as on earth, through trickery and lies. The very same tactics of deceit and doubt that Satan used in heaven also worked in Eden to tempt Adam and Eve. Satan is a mastermind of deception. Through millennia, his words have shaped the worldviews of many people, causing them to believe “you will be like God,”⁶ twist-

ing their perceptions on reality too. There was then and continues to be now a struggle over the hearts and minds of people. This struggle is between God and Satan, good and evil.

When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, tragedy entered the grand story. This is where all that was beautiful was ruptured. By Adam and Eve taking this disobedient action, everything changed. The perfect world created in the first act of this metanarrative was suddenly plunged into the darkness of sin, shame, and pain. “For as in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22, ESV). Now we are all under sin’s effects. Romans 5:12 states, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Thus, each human being begins life with a natural tendency to sin.

CONCLUSION

Through Lucifer’s dissenting heart, false perceptions entered the universe. With them was introduced worldviews born out of messages contrary to God’s truth. Here is where we begin to see different assumptions made, as trust is placed either in God or self.

Now we are all under the weight of the fall. This is our plight. But where is God in the midst of all this?

In our next article, we will discuss God’s presence in a sinful world, for despite our sinfulness, “he is actually not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27, ESV). ED

- ¹ Until the nineteenth century, there has been a general assumption within Christianity that Ezekiel 28:11–19 and Isaiah 14:12–15 refer to Lucifer. Some more recent biblical scholars diverge from this position. For further discussion connecting the description of the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 to Lucifer, see Jose M. Bertolucci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1985).
- ² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1911), 494.
- ³ Lucifer’s name, “Day Star” is mentioned once in the Bible: Isaiah 14:12. The name Satan appears fifty-four times, and “the devil” appears thirty-three times.
- ⁴ White, *The Great Controversy*, 495.
- ⁵ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1858), 21–22.
- ⁶ This is at the heart of nonbiblical worldviews.

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MISSION OFFERINGS AND YOU

When my great-grandfather fled the genocide of the Armenians, he never dreamed that the fledgling Sabbath-keeping faith he carried with him was part of a growing worldwide movement. Earlier, Movses Boursalian had spotted a piece of discarded literature by the road that declared, “The Seventh-day is the Sabbath of the Lord.” He compared that claim with the Bible and became convinced of the Sabbath. In his own quiet, unassuming way, he shared his faith with customers

while selling combs made of wood and camel bone. After finding refuge on the island of Cyprus, Boursalian continued his outreach efforts. Sadly, he died in 1931, but the following year when missionaries Elder and Mrs. R. S. Greaves arrived in Cyprus, they were happy to find Sabbath-keeping Chris-

tians already worshipping there. And these local believers rejoiced to learn that their Bible-based faith was shared by Seventh-day Adventists around the world.

Today the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference is still engaging members with the call of mission by providing a clearer picture of what mission looks like in the twenty-first century. Thanks to your ongoing support, God’s message of love is still transforming hearts around the world. Through your faithful support, your church equips and trains cross-cultural missionaries and provides them with resources to reach out through wholistic ministry in schools, hospitals, clinics, and media.

STAYING UP-TO-DATE

Help members in your congregation stay up-to-date with the adventures and challenges Adventist missionaries face around the world. Here are just a few ways:

- **SHARE** heartwarming stories in Sabbath School by accessing the *Youth and Adult Mission Quarterly* and *Children’s Mission Quarterly* at adventistmission.org/mission-quarterlies.

Picture supplied by Adventist Mission



c. 1912: Movses Boursalian, missionary to Cyprus.

- **TEACH** children the value of giving to mission by helping them make their own Thirteenth Sabbath Offering bank. Download the latest printable bank at adventistmission.org/mission-offering-bank.
- **BROWSE** the Adventist Mission website for stories, pictures, and mission videos at adventistmission.org.
- **SIGN UP** for the *Mission Spotlight* email newsletter to view and download mission videos to watch at home or show at church by visiting missionspotlight.org/subscribe.
- **SUBSCRIBE** to our free quarterly *Mission 360°* magazine at adventistmission.org/signup to read highlights of mission stories around the world.
- **WATCH** mission stories in action on Mission 360° TV. Available at m360.tv or on 3ABN and Hope Channel.
- **FOLLOW** Adventist Mission on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

I WILL GO

Objective 1 of the “I Will Go” strategic plan is “to revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples.” While this is a call to reach out to your local community, it’s also a call to prayerfully and financially support the Church’s worldwide mission work, and to encourage your members to do the same.

Thanks to your offerings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the world’s fastest-growing denominations, and in 2019 a new church was organized every 3.62 hours. Yet we still have a challenge: 66% of all people in the world are not Christians.

66%

OF ALL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD ARE NOT CHRISTIANS.



Picture supplied by Adventist Mission

Today: Delmar, Naty and three-year old Clara, volunteer missionaries to Albania

GIVING TO THE WORLD MISSION FUND

For divisions following the Calendar of Offerings Plan, Sabbath, July 10, will benefit the World Mission Fund (called the World Mission Budget by NAD). Adventist Mission provides resources to help you promote this offering on that date. You can find these resources at adventistmission.org/mission-offering. But your members can give to mission at any time by visiting giving.adventistmission.org, and selecting “My donation is for” and then “World Mission Offerings.”

If your division follows the Combined Offering Plan, a portion of your members’ weekly systematic tithes and offerings in your local church supports the World Mission Fund. This helps cross-cultural missionaries, doctors, nurses, and teachers to reach others for Jesus.

ED

Sylva Keshishian is a Marketing Manager at Adventist Mission for the General Conference.

Help us reach the

66 percent

of the world's population who are still waiting to experience the refreshing news about Jesus.

Your ongoing support of Mission Offerings will help change lives.



To ensure the mission river never runs dry, please write in "World Mission Offering" on your tithe envelope or visit **Giving.AdventistMission.org**.



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