

QUARTERLY RESOURCE FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS • APRIL/JUNE 2023

ELDER'S DIGEST



Focusing
on Mission



EDITORIAL

EDITOR

Anthony R. Kent

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Alfredo Garcia-Marenko

MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION SECRETARY

Ramon J. Canals

MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATE SECRETARIES

Jeffrey Brown, Aurora Canals, Robert Costa, Pavel Goia, Anthony R. Kent

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Erika Miike

PUBLISHER

Ministerial Association - General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

DIVISION CONSULTANTS

EAST-CENTRAL AFRICA

Herbert Nziku

EURO-ASIA

Victor Kozakov

INTER-AMERICAN

Josney Rodriguez

INTER-EUROPEAN

Ventislav Panayotov

NORTH AMERICAN

Ivan Williams

NORTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC

Jonas Arrais

SOUTH AMERICAN

Lucas Alves

SOUTHERN AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN

Passmore Mulambo

SOUTHERN ASIA

Vara Prasad Deepati

SOUTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC

Rudi Situmorang

SOUTH PACIFIC

Darius Jankiewicz

TRANS-EUROPEAN

Patrick Johnson

WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA

Kwame Kwanin Boakye

TO WRITERS: Articles about the work of the local elder are welcome and may be submitted to eldersdigest@gc.adventist.org or *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA. *Elder's Digest* is published quarterly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association © 2023, which retains full editorial control. It is printed by Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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

SUBSCRIPTION AND ADDRESS CHANGES: One-year subscription, USD 18.00. Three-year subscription, USD 47.00. Please subscribe at www.eldersdigest.org or send check to *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA. Please send address changes to garclamarenkoa@gc.adventist.org.

BIBLE CREDITS: Texts credited to NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®/NAU) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org. Scripture taken from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. Scripture quotations taken from the New English Bible, copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press 1961, 1970. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations are from Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

OUR WEBSITE: www.eldersdigest.org

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER AND LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

FEATURES

- 4 PRIORITIZING AND FOCUSING ON MISSION
- 6 IN DIALOGUE WITH ORTHODOX BELIEVERS
- 11 DUSTY, POT-HOLED DIRT ROADS
- 20 A CONSECRATED MINISTRY >PART 2
- 22 MINISTERING TO AND MINISTERING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE INTROVERTS >PART 1
- 25 WHAT ARE THE TONGUES IN 1 CORINTHIANS? >PART 1
- 28 SUGGESTIONS FOR A TRAINING RETREAT FOR DEACONS AND DEACONESSES



11



22



28

EDITORIAL 3

SERMONS 15

KIDDER'S COLUMN 30

Barnabas: The Son of Encouragement

>PART 2



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Have you ever been disappointed that you had been overlooked for a position or responsibility?

Luke 10:1 describes Jesus sending out the seventy¹ to various places to prepare the way for His ministry. What a potentially dangerous faith venture. They were “lambs in the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3),² with “no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals” (Luke 10:4), and no prearranged accommodation (Luke 10:5–7). But the mission was a resounding success. They “returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’” (Luke 10:17). Jesus responded by saying, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Ellen G. White, addressing this event, notes, “Henceforth Christ’s followers are to look upon Satan as a conquered foe.”³

This was a telling event in the ministry of Jesus, in the lives of His earliest followers, and in the history of the universe.

Was Barnabas one of these seventy? The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*⁴ outlines a tradition that identifies Barnabas as one of them. If so, I wonder how he felt when not named as one of the twelve apostles when a replacement for Judas Iscariot was sought. Barsabbas and Matthias were shortlisted, but not Barnabas. If Barnabas was disappointed there is zero evidence in the Bible of disappointment, jealousy, or resentment. The opposite is true. Acts records Barnabas selling a field and laying the proceeds at the apostles’ feet, without any stipulation about how the money was to be spent. This shows his commitment to the mission, respect for the apostles, and trust in the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This response should be an example to us, especially when things unfold differently to our hopes and dreams.

The character of Barnabas is also revealed in his “sharp disagreement” (Acts 15:39) with Paul. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on their next missionary journey (Acts 15:36–

41). Paul dismisses Barnabas’ idea, because Mark had abandoned them on their last itinerary, and he didn’t want to risk it again. Barnabas saw the potential of his nephew Mark (Col 4:10) and thought otherwise.

If Barnabas was frustrated with Paul, he had every reason. Paul, his previous mentee, needed Barnabas to escort him to the apostles and to speak favorably for him in Jerusalem. Barnabas stood with Paul when no one else wanted to know him. It was Barnabas who travelled to distant Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch to disciple him—and now Paul is doubting Barnabas’ judgment? Resolute in their opinions, both went their separate ways—Paul with Silas, and Barnabas with John Mark.

And what was the outcome?

John Mark developed into a very significant author, whom the Holy Spirit could inspire to invent a new genre of literature, the Gospel According to Mark. Scholars believe that Mark was the first of the gospels to be written, and that it served as a source for Matthew and Luke. Our Bibles today could look very different had it not been for Barnabas’ ministry to John Mark.

But perhaps the most telling of all results was penned by Paul himself. In subsequent years, Paul writes to the faithful in Colossae, encouraging them to welcome Mark. And Paul, not so subtly, notes the shared relationship between Mark and Barnabas (Col 4:10), an implied tribute to the ministry of Barnabas to Mark. And while his imprisonment in Rome lingered, Paul writes to Timothy pleading, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim 4:11). Surely this is a further tribute and recognition of the ministry of Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

Barnabas remains as an enduring role model for all disciples of Jesus to emulate.

ED



ANTHONY R. KENT | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

¹ Seventy-two in some translations.

² All biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1905), 94.

⁴ Siegfried H. Horn, “Barnabas,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), 121.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Prioritizing and Focusing on Mission

One of the main tasks of a leader is to have a clear focus, not to lose track or get distracted, and keep the team aligned to the vision. This is one of the big differences between regular leaders and relevant leaders—not only in the secular world, but especially in spiritual leadership. For this reason, we need to know in depth why we exist as a church. After all, are we a saints' club, a summer camp, or an army moving forward with precision? The answer to this question is fundamental to defining the focus of your work as an elder.

Perhaps the question is overly simple and the answer obvious, but practice shows that the issue is more complex. We have no doubt that we are on the stage of the great controversy, we are called to remain faithful to God, and we have the mission to lead the maximum number of people to Jesus. But when observing the church's walk, it is evident that there are conflicts between vision and action.

We are the remnant people, and we believe that “the end of all things is at hand, and what is done for the salvation of souls must be done quickly.”¹ This is the perspective of a dedicated army, with no time to waste. But despite this, we often act like a club, concerned with satisfying our own interests and making the church just a nice place to attend. The goal is to offer modernity and comfort in the temple, to use the latest trends in technology, to follow the profile of the most popular churches, to apply the most efficient secular leadership techniques, to have a very engaging worship service, to put together a contemporary liturgy, to present an impressive sermon, to have an outstanding pastor, but . . . what about the mission?



Our call is to put both feet on the mission accelerator, for only then will we resist the distractions of the enemy, remain faithful, and prepare a people to meet the Lord.

How many projects, programs, and materials revolve only around us and are only focused on pleasing the senses? Often the justification is the mission, but the focus is on personal satisfaction. We need to leave aside the club vision and commit ourselves definitively to the army vision, following John Wesley's well-known advice: "You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work." We cannot act without a clear focus, wasting time on what is not a priority, because as Dwight Moody said, "someone not involved in evangelism is like a fireman who runs into a burning building just to hang the picture back on the wall." We may look interesting, but in the end we become irrelevant.

There is nothing wrong with making the church a pleasant, receptive, and welcoming place. It is needed, but always with a focus on mission, on reaching out to the community, on embracing the friends who come in, bringing them to Jesus, and making them part of the family as true disciples. It needs to happen not only through the words presented in the pulpit, in the mission statements printed in the church bulletins and displayed on the church walls, or even in the speeches of the leadership. Mission needs to be the spirit, the priority, and the practice of the church. In fact, the stronger the vision, the less it appears in words and the more it becomes evident in initiatives. There is less poetry and technology and more action and passion. When the church really shapes its culture with this vision, it becomes a winning army.

We cannot lose focus, because we were called to be fishers of men, not keepers of the aquarium. Therefore, we cannot develop initiatives that will leave us longer on this earth, but that will take us faster to heaven. This is the focus of mission and the vision of an army, for "God will have men [and women] who will venture anything and everything to save souls."²

What is the reality of your church? A man was talking to a pastor and asked, "How big is your church?"

The pastor responded, "A thousand members."

"Wow," the man replied. "It's a big church. And how many are involved?"

The pastor said, "All of them are involved." The other man was really impressed with such involvement. But the pastor added, "Two hundred are involved with the Lord and eight hundred with Satan."

We cannot take the risk of having a church where the minority is involved, and the majority is distracted.

Ellen G. White warns us that "if every soldier of Christ had done his duty, if every watchman on the walls of Zion had given the trumpet a certain sound, the world might ere this have heard the message of warning. But the work is years behind. While men have slept, Satan has stolen a march upon us."³ We need to be alert, for "Satan is ever ready to employ him who does not employ himself."⁴ This is why we need to strengthen the vision of an army on the march and not a club on vacation. Charles Spurgeon is credited with this thought: "Either

the Christian is a missionary, or he is an imposter."

The formula is still the same. According to David Livingstone, "the best remedy for a sick church is to put it on a missionary diet." Robert E. Coleman also observes, "When our hearts are filled with Christ's presence, evangelism is as inevitable as it is contagious."

Our call is to put both feet on the mission accelerator, for only then will we resist the distractions of the enemy, remain faithful, and prepare a people to meet the Lord. After all, this is the reason why we exist as a church. We are not just here to take care of each other, but to support each other in fulfilling the mission as powerful and faithful witnesses.

Strengthen this vision of commitment to mission and of an army on the march, giving no room for distraction. After all, "the true Christian works for God, not from impulse, but from principle; not for a day or a month, but during the entire life."⁵ The result of this clear focus will always be the assurance that "a working church is a living church."⁶

ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *From the Heart* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2010), 75.

² Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 63.

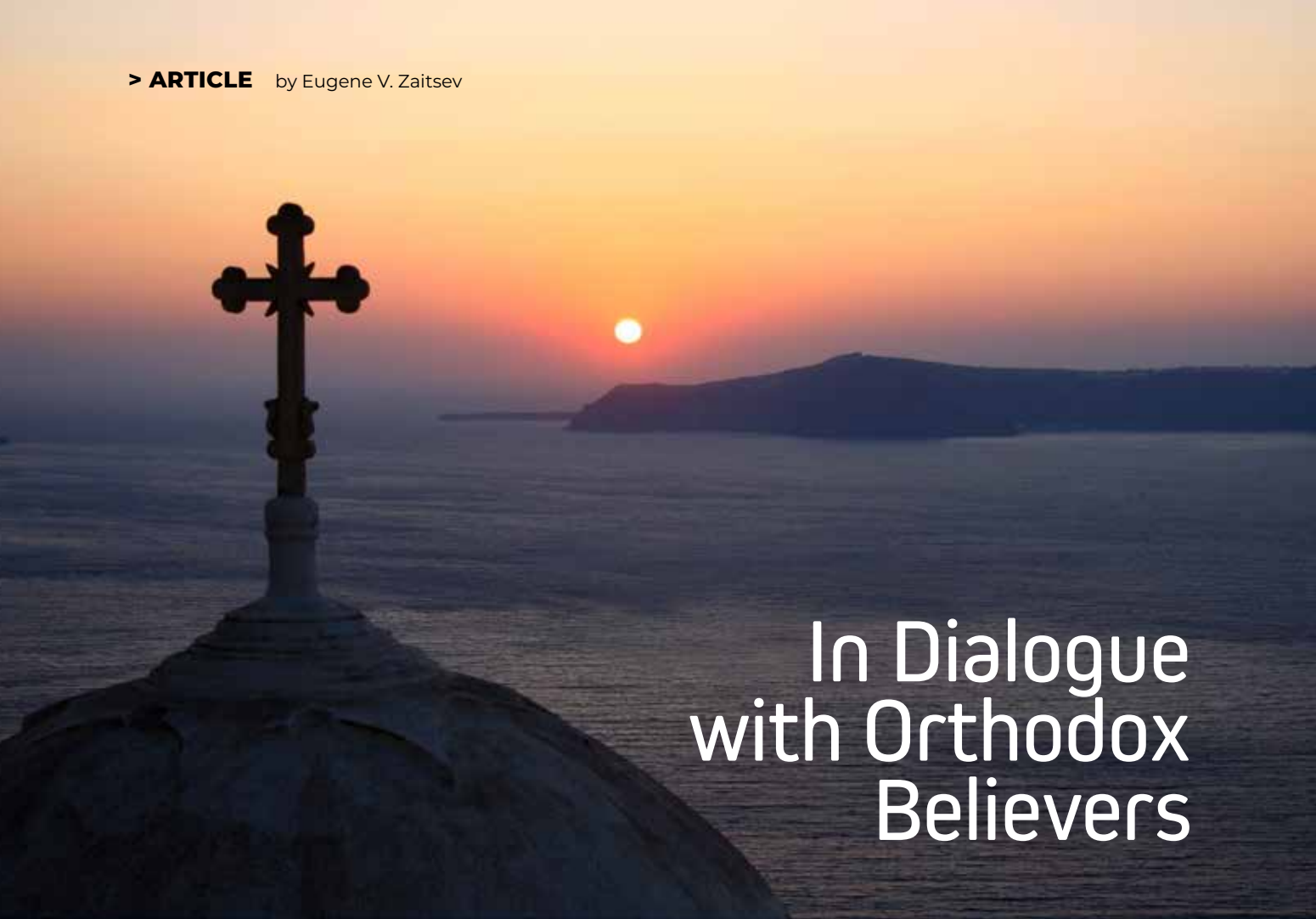
³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:29.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:412.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 84.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1925), 73.

Erton C. Kohler is the secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA. He holds a master's degree in theology and an honoris causa doctorate from Peruvian Union University. He is writing his dissertation for a DMin from Andrews University.



In Dialogue with Orthodox Believers

EDITORIAL NOTE

This article is the sixth in the special series outlining how Seventh-day Adventists can share the Three Angels' Messages with important people groups.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

The Orthodox Church (also called “Eastern” or “Greek” Orthodox), is one of the three main branches of Christianity, along with Catholicism and Protestantism. It is, in fact, a group of independent churches located mainly in Eastern Europe, as well as in the Middle East. This community of Christian churches was historically formed from the church of the former Byzantine Empire.

From an etymological point of view, the Greek word “orthodoxy” has a double meaning—“right belief” and “right glory” or “worship.” It is in this sense that Clement of Alexandria used this word in the second century, contrasting the orthodoxy (right belief) of faithful Christians with the heterodoxy (wrong belief) of heretics.

After the final schism between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity in 1054 (both in matters of liturgical practice and in the field of dogmatics), the word “orthodoxy” was adopted by the Eastern Church. The Eastern Church saw her orthodoxy primarily due to the fact that, unlike the Western (Catholic) Church, no new dogmas had been created since the ecumenical councils. According to the belief of the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church seriously deviated from the true apostolic faith by adopting the *filioque* (the idea of the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son) and accepting the dogmas of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary and the infallibility of the pope.

For many people in the West, Orthodoxy is either completely unknown, or seems to be a mysterious version of Christianity. Because of some external similarities, many Protestants do not see a significant difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, which is completely wrong.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Orthodox Church consists of separate local, so-called autocephalous (self-headed) churches. There are fourteen fully recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches today (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Georgia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Serbia, Russia, Greece, Poland, Romania, Albania, and Czech Republic and Slovakia) and two partly recognized (the Orthodox Church in America, formed in 1970, and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, created in 2019). As independent churches, they are not linked to each other by a central organization and do not have to swear allegiance to one particular person, as Catholics do to the pope. The number of Orthodox Christians in the world is 219 million. One third of Orthodox believers are residents of Russia.

THEOLOGY

The theology of the Eastern Church has a pronounced mystical character. Eastern theology does not resort to irrationality, but, recognizing the limitations of the human mind and the abstract nature of the language of theology, focuses on the mystery of the mystical union of the human being with God, rather than on the rational understanding of God.

THE BIBLE AND TRADITION

For the Orthodox Church, the Bible is the main written source of God's revelation, since God Himself inspired its writing by the Holy Spirit. Though the Scriptures are considered the highest divine revelation by the Eastern Church, it is the Sacred Tradition, being older and larger in scope than the Holy Scriptures, that contains the fullness of the divine revelation. The Bible is only a part of Tradition, or rather one of its forms. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church it is

believed that the Holy Scriptures, being divinely inspired in nature, contain everything necessary for the assimilation of God's truth, as well as for faith and piety. Tradition is generally considered suspect, but some things may be acceptable on the condition that it does not contradict the Scriptures.

GOD

God is understood in the Orthodox Church as the Trinity (the loving communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Faith in the Trinity is at the heart of the Orthodox faith.

There is a certain difference between the Eastern and Western conceptions of the Trinity, and this difference defines the whole char-

acter of theological thought and especially the understanding of salvation. It comes about from a different understanding of the origin or procession of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox Christianity, based on John 15:26, asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, while Western Christianity has maintained the position that the third hypostasis (person) of the deity proceeds from the Father and the Son (the *filioque*).

HUMANITY

Orthodox anthropology differs significantly from the Adventist understanding of the human being. The Orthodox Church has adopted a virtually dualistic, Platonic view of the human being as consisting of a

Though the Scriptures are considered the highest divine revelation by the Eastern Church, it is the Sacred Tradition, being older and larger in scope than the Holy Scriptures, that contains the fullness of the divine revelation.



body and a soul. The soul is considered as a certain substance but is disembodied and insubstantial. It is emphasized that the soul is able to live on its own, without the body, remaining immortal. Adventist anthropology, in its teaching about the nature of human beings, follows a more wholistic view of humanity that reflects the biblical teaching.

SALVATION

While salvation may be described in Eastern Christian theology in a number of ways, one image seems to assume a preeminent place—the concept of *theosis*. *Theosis* refers to the divinization or deification of humanity as the goal of salvation and is a distinctive feature of Orthodox theology. The very purpose of *theosis* is the ontological transformation or transfiguration of created beings, a process which has already begun on earth in and through the Incarnation of the Son of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the Orthodox understanding, the actual accomplishment of *theosis* is realized through the church. The practical expression and existential application of *theosis* is found in the sacramental practice of the church. The sacraments of the church, in particular baptism

and the Holy Eucharist, are the divine actions by which the sacramental grace of God is communicated to the believers.

The Orthodox view of salvation as a process of transformation gives more attention to the idea of sanctification, which is generally downplayed in Protestant tradition. It is a prevailing Protestant tendency to separate the categories of justification and sanctification to make sure that there is no confusion of works with faith, of what sinners do with what Christ does for them. This kind of thinking, according to Orthodox theologians, creates a deep gulf between believers and the work of Christ from whom they receive the gifts of grace.

The Wesleyan-Arminian orientation of Adventist soteriology with its persistent emphasis on sanctification and a real transformation of the Christian's experience, attainable in this life through one's free and active cooperation with God's grace, more closely approaches the Greek Patristic understanding of salvation as opposed to the Western Augustinian and Lutheran-Calvinistic tradition with their ideas of total depravity and predestination.

ESCHATOLOGY

The Orthodox Church strongly

believes in the reality of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. On the great day of the coming of the Son of Man the universal resurrection of the dead in transfigured form will be accomplished. The resurrection of the dead will be universal and simultaneous, both of the righteous and of sinners.

According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, the final judgment will be universal—that is, extending to all people living and dead, good and evil; it will be solemn and open, strict and terrible, final and definitive, determining for all eternity the fate of each one who is judged. The result of the judgment will be eternal reward—blessedness for the righteous and the eternal torments for the evil who are condemned.

HOLY ORDERS

There are three “Major Orders” in the Orthodox Church: bishop, priest, and deacon. Orthodox priests are divided into two distinct groups: the “white” or married clergy, and the “black” or monastic clergy. The bishops are required to be celibate. However, the state of monasticism in many parts of the Orthodox Church today is such that it is not always easy to find suitable candidates for the episco-



The Orthodox Christians prostrate themselves before the icons, and they kiss them and burn candles in front of them. The icons are censed by the priest and carried in procession.

pate, and a growing number of Orthodox consider that the limitation of bishops to the monastic clergy is no longer desirable.

VENERATION OF ICONS

One of the distinctive features of Orthodoxy is the place which it assigns to icons. The icon is, perhaps, the most important symbol of the difference between the East and the West. An Orthodox Church is filled with them: dividing the sanctuary from the body of the building there is a solid screen, called the iconostasis, entirely covered with icons, while other icons are placed in special shrines around the church. The Orthodox Christians prostrate themselves before the icons, and they kiss them and burn candles in front of them. The icons are censed by the priest and carried in procession. Icons are essential to the very identity of Orthodoxy. A Christian life without icons would be unthinkable for an Orthodox believer.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

In many countries where Orthodoxy is the dominant religion, the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Adventist Church is not an easy one. Adventists are seen as something foreign to the national culture, as something imported from outside, and are most often considered as a sect. However, the Adventist Church is open to constructive dialogue with any religious tradition, including the Orthodox Church. For example, in the Euro-Asia Division, a Center for Adventist-Orthodox dialogue has been established to change the biased attitude of society towards the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FRUITFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN ADVENTISTS AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

The following are some consid-

erations for facilitating a dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Seventh-day Adventists.

Basic principles of doing evangelism in general should be first considered: demonstrate caring in tangible ways, cultivate interest through literature, look for opportunities, share biblical answers. It is important to note that the Bible is highly appreciated by Orthodox people. The Holy Scripture is considered the highest divine revelation, although it is regarded more as an object of Christendom than the living Word of God.

In studying the Bible with Orthodox Christians, the ABCs of Bible studies should be remembered: present Jesus first, reveal the truth gradually, make regular appeals.

Dialogue with Orthodox believers should never begin with doctrines that separate them from us, such as icon veneration, prayer to the Mother of God or the saints, etc. There is much more in common between the two traditions that can help make a bridge and establish a good relationship before moving on to the controversial issues. You can unhesitatingly start your conversation with an Orthodox friend with a discussion on divine love, God as Creator, the law of God and divine commandments, Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, and the soon coming of Christ and the signs of the times (a very popular theme among the Orthodox people today). When you feel that a good relationship is established between you and your Orthodox friend, and your friend trusts what the Bible is saying, you may go further. But the truths of God are best revealed gradually so that people aren't overwhelmed. Remember that a great deal of friction builds up when confronted with new ideas and a person's natural inclination is to cling to the familiar things. To minimize this friction, we should


progress step by step, making sure a person absorbs and accepts one doctrine fully before going on to the next. All the doctrines we need to share can best be presented in connection with Jesus Christ, who must always be at the center of any doctrinal discussions.

We should be aware of the perils of a polemical mindset. Mutual distrust, reciprocal reprisals, and unchecked suspicion will never lead to a relationship of friendship or a fruitful dialogue. We should be very sensitive to what is of special value and considered to be "sacred" in Orthodoxy. An incautious word or a critical attitude toward Orthodox beliefs could easily offend or hurt somebody's religious feelings and create obstacles to any further dialogue.

Since salvation is a fundamental desire of human beings, understanding the way God saves humanity from sin is one of the most crucial issues. It is very important to recognize what our understandings of these issues are and to submit these understandings to the judgment of the Scriptures. Only by continually undertaking the task of evaluating whether these understandings are actually consistent with the message and emphases of the Bible can we move beyond a purely "tradition-bound" understanding of the Scriptures and approach its full message more closely.

It should be said in conclusion that there is common ground for building friendly relationships between Orthodox Christians and Adventists, both in terms of serving society and in many theological spheres. That commonality opens the way for a fruitful dialogue between Seventh-day Adventists and Orthodox Christians. ED

Eugene V. Zaitsev, PhD, is a professor of theology at Zaoksky University of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Zaoksky, Tula Region, Russian Federation.



“And I thank
Christ Jesus our Lord
who has enabled me, because
He counted me faithful, putting
me into the ministry . . .”

1 TIMOTHY 1:12, NKJV



PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY





Rob Hansford holding the actual copy of The Great Controversy, owned by his great, great grandfather Thomas Robert Kent. This single copy has led to more than twenty thousand people being baptized as Seventh-day Adventists.

Dusty, Pot-Holed Dirt Roads

God seems to love working on dusty, pot-holed dirt roads. The kind you hesitantly start on hoping that it is the one to take you to your destination. You don't expect anything special to happen until you get there. I am grateful that He uses such roads as they have transformed my life.

In the late 1800s, a Scotsman named Philip Reekie traveled to Australia looking for a better life. Soon after his arrival, he was introduced to Adventist literature, which resulted in his baptism and a desire to share his newfound faith with others. He gave up his profession as an engraver and jumped on his bicycle to share Adventist books.

Phillip Reekie cycled thousands of miles throughout regional Australia, sharing his newfound love of Jesus. He knew that he was sowing seeds that would one day bear fruit and that his rejoicing then would not compare to the joy he would feel when he met in the kingdom of God, those for whom he labored.

On a dusty, pot-holed dirt road near the small town of Eungowra, Philip Reekie met a farmer working in his field. Thomas Kent was strong in stature but broken in spirit. He had just buried his darling wife, Mary. She had succumbed to pneumonia and left Tom with eleven children, the youngest a toddler. Mary had made Tom promise to do all he could to ensure their complete family would be reunited in heaven. It was a promise Tom had no idea how he would keep.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



Philip left Tom a copy of *The Great Controversy*, which he read earnestly. He was confronted with new truths that he didn't readily accept. The seventh-day Sabbath was the most challenging truth to Tom, and it took something miraculous for him to change his mind. One night he saw the fourth commandment illuminated on the ceiling of his farmhouse. It was then followed by John 13:17: "If you know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (KJV). From that night on, Tom decided to keep the biblical Sabbath.

Tom was put in contact with Seventh-day Adventists in Sydney and was soon baptized. Upon returning to the farm, his copy of *The Great Controversy* was shared with his children and five neighboring farmers, who all accepted the Seventh-day Adventist message. A mud-brick church was built on one of the farms and not long after a school for the children of the families.

Tom Kent is my great-great-grandfather. Because of Philip Reekie travelling down a dusty, pot-holed dirt road, the destiny of my

family was changed. The future of the families of the five neighboring farmers was also changed. It has been conservatively estimated that over twenty thousand lives have been divinely transformed by that one book that Philip shared with Tom. I believe Philip may have underestimated the joy he will experience in the kingdom of God.

In April 2021, I received a phone call from my cousin, pastor Anthony Kent. Inspired by the story of Philip and Tom, Anthony invited me down a dusty, pot-holed dirt road. He was planning a bicycle ride from Washington, DC, to St Louis, Missouri, coinciding with the General Conference Session in June 2022. The focus of the ride was to share Adventist literature with those we met.

Being an avid cyclist and having completed many endurance events, I was excited about the idea of riding 1,200 miles (1,930 kms) across the United States. But being an introverted local church elder who was more than content remaining in my comfort zone, I was daunted at the thought of sharing my faith with strangers.

After much prayer and consideration, I reluctantly declined the invitation. I had recently started new employment and having dragged my patient wife, Jane, to numerous endurance events I couldn't justify the cost and time. I thought nothing more of the invitation until I received another phone call in March 2022. The caller had heard about the ride, and that the motivation was the Tom Kent story. They felt strongly that I should be on the ride. They offered to pay for all my costs to ensure I could participate. Because all the participants were paying for their own expenses and the ride was not financially supported by the church, this offer was very appreciated. I haven't before received such a generous offer. I discussed it with Jane and we both felt that God wanted me on the ride—whether it was for my benefit or to benefit others, I wasn't sure.

The I Will Go Ride has been and gone and we travelled down a few dusty, pot-holed dirt roads. It was an amazing experience that has had a profound effect on my attitude to sharing my faith. I formed lifelong friendships with the seven



other riders. I met some wonderful people along the way, who showed me that our stories need to be shared as often and with as many people as possible.

The route of the ride was prayerfully chosen to ensure we met as many people as possible who would be open to the working of the Holy Spirit. It was also chosen to ensure the riding conditions were safe. As a result, many quiet country roads were ridden: some beautifully paved, others in need of repair, and the odd mile of dusty, potholed dirt roads—or so we thought. As it turned out, there were *many* miles of dusty, pot-holed dirt roads. But all were filled with incredibly divinely appointed meetings.

On Smokey Hollow Drive I met Tammy and her grandson AJ. They were sitting on their front porch enjoying a warm West Virginian summer day. I waved to them as we neared their home and they waved back, which I took as an indication that they were open for a chat. Two of us rode into their driveway and they immediately came down to meet us. We shared the Philip and Tom story and they loved it. I offered them a copy of *The Great Controversy* and *Your Bible and You* and they gladly accepted both books. Tammy then looked me in the eyes and said, “This was meant to be.” I thought, *Wow! God, you are amazing.*

I then said something I don’t think I have ever said before to a stranger. I asked Tammy if she would like me to pray with her and AJ. Her response was a resounding “Yes please.” Together the four of us bowed our heads in her driveway and we asked Jesus to be part of Tammy and AJ’s lives. As we rode away from their home, I felt empowered by the Holy Spirit—a feeling I hadn’t felt for so long but was to experience many times over the fifteen days of our riding.

Our longest day was 144 miles (231 kms). It wasn’t supposed to be that long but our “prayerfully” chosen route kept taking us on dusty, pot-holed dirt roads that were slowing us down and causing punctured tires on our “bitumen only” road bikes. To keep to bitumen, our route was gradually increasing.

We had stopped for lunch in a small town called Patoka—the kind of town that was forgotten long ago by interstate highways. We followed our route out of Patoka, crossing the interstate and heading down another country road. About a mile down the road, we hit another dusty, pot-holed dirt road. This one looked nasty—the type that would throw you off your bike and cause an injury. Being in the company of good Adventist administrators, we stopped our ride and formed a committee to decide our

best course of action. After a few minutes of discussion and consulting maps, we decided our best option was to head back towards the interstate highway, travel on it for a few miles, and take another road that would get us back on our route.

As we neared the interstate, a motorcyclist had pulled over and was removing his helmet. As he saw us, he yelled out asking what we were doing. Three of us rolled over and there we met Danny. He told us that he was an ex-Airborne Ranger. We told him the story of Philip and Tom and offered him our books as a gift. He was excited to take them and commented, “You guys don’t realize what I have been through lately.” And I did it again. I said, “Danny, can we pray for you?” Like those before whom we had asked the same question, his reply was instant: “Yes please.” So, by the side of an interstate highway, three of us gathered around Danny and his motorbike and prayed. We asked God to be with Danny and those things that he had been through lately. As I finished my prayer with “Amen,” I heard a shout of exclamation of “Yes Sir!” It was Danny. Never have I had such a response to a prayer.

Again, we rode off with an amazing feeling that the Holy Spirit was at work, making “straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa 40:3, ESV).

As I pedaled away it struck me. We weren't supposed to meet Danny! We were meant to keep riding down that dusty, pot-holed dirt road away from Danny. But God knew that we would change our plans. God ensured Danny would pull over at the exact time we were changing our plans. God had overseen every minute detail of our ride to ensure His divine appointments were kept.

During those fifteen days, we met, shared, and prayed with hundreds of people—appointments all set up by God. Each one of those interactions taught me the same lesson. Sharing my faith isn't daunting. Sharing my faith should be a natural part of my life. People I meet on and off the bike need to know my story. They must know that there is a loving God who wants to meet them where they are and wants a relationship with them. And if I don't share that, then who will?

We all need to look for activities in everyday life that can create opportunities for sharing our stories. Do it with friends in activities you enjoy. It might be as easy as leaving a small book with your tip in a restaurant. Telling your friends about a God experience when they ask about your weekend. Inviting your neighbors to a recreational activity or a cooking program that your local church is running. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:13–15, NKJV).

It turns out I was supposed to be on the ride for my benefit. God took me on a dusty, pot-holed dirt road to show me how easy and rewarding it is to share my testimony, and none of us would be part of the family of God if someone else hadn't traveled down a dusty, pot-holed dirt road. ED

Editor's note: If you would like to discover more about Rob's amazing experience on the I Will Go Bike Ride, visit the Adventist Review TV website (<https://adventistreview.tv>) to view an inspiring documentary video. Alternatively, it can be viewed on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYHCKD2Gtyg>.

Rob Hansford, CA, is the chief financial officer of a retail furniture company and is also an elder of the Eight Mile Plains Seventh-day Adventist Church, Queensland, Australia.



Forgiving and Forgetting

Is There a Limit to How Much You Can Forgive?

INTRODUCTION

Robert Louis Stevenson described two sisters who lived in Edinburgh, Scotland, and who refused to have any dealings with each other: “The pair inhabited a single room. From the facts it must have been double-bedded; and it may have been of some size; but when all is said, it was a single room. Here our two spinsters fell out—on some point—but fell out so bitterly that there was never a word spoken between them from that day forward. You would have thought that they would separate; but no, whether from lack of means or the Scottish fear of scandal, they continued to keep house together where they were. A chalk line drawn upon the floor separated the two domains; it bisected the doorway and the fireplace, so that each could go out and in, and do her own cooking without violating the territory of the other. So, for years they co-existed in a hateful silence, their meals, their ablutions, their friendly visitors, exposed to an unfriendly scrutiny; and at night, in the dark watches, each could hear the breathing of her enemy. Never did four walls look down upon an uglier spectacle than these sisters rivaling in unsisterliness.”¹

I. THE NATURE OF UN-FORGIVENESS

A. *Its universality.*

The ugliness of an unforgiving spirit threatens all of us. Into every life there comes an opportunity to cherish hate or to extend forgiveness. All of us will suffer many wrongs in a lifetime. A friend that we admire, for no clear reason, may turn against us. A business associate whom we trusted may betray us. Someone may borrow money and refuse to pay it back. Words said in anger may wound us deeply, or gossip may stain our reputation. We may be completely innocent. We may have done nothing to deserve the treachery of a friend.

At a time such as that, an unforgiving spirit grows like a choking weed in the soil of our souls. Our strong sense of justice makes us remember the slights. We have a righteous cause, and we want “an eye for an eye, a slight for a slight”—or even more! The injustice done to us can become the consuming passion of our lives.

B. *Its unforgettability.*

A rather well-to-do man was asked the purpose of his life. He replied bitterly, “To get even!” Someone had wronged him, and he lived his life to pay back that wrong.

Sometimes we say rather piously, “I can forgive him, but I can’t forget what he has done!” What we mean is that our memory is at work nursing our anger to keep it warm. Like a dog with a bone, we let our minds dig up all the dirt and go back to past faults.

A colleague of mine sat at dinner with a couple who told him how some friends

had wronged them. The wife reviewed all the details, and it was clear that, if their story were accurate, they had been done a wrong. Then he discovered that all the events had taken place ten years before. For a decade, they had crippled themselves by refusing to forget. The world is filled with men and women who brood over their wounds until it is impossible to forget them.

C. *Its vengefulness.*

How you respond when others treat you wrong is a matter of great concern to God. In 1 Corinthians 13:5 Paul writes that love “thinketh no evil.” At least that’s the way the King James Version puts it. Of course, that is true. Love could never plot evil against someone else; but that’s not what the text is talking about. The New English Bible translators made it clearer, “Love keeps no record of wrongs.” Love does not store up memories of wrongs that it has received.

The Greek word that Paul uses is an accountant’s word. It is a word used for entering an item on a ledger so that it will not be forgotten. When we take an account of evil it is because we plan to recall it. We plan to use it to accuse our neighbor or to get revenge.

You and I select our memories. If you want to remember something, you go over it again and again. The child reviews his spelling words; the actor goes over his lines; you write down the names of people to remember. If you don’t, you will forget. Paul is saying that love chooses to forget the wrongs done against it. It forgives and forgets. It refuses to be resentful.

II. THE REMEDY FOR UN-FORGIVENESS

A. *Leave revenge to God.*

Forgiveness that forgets is hard and costly. You give up your rights and your feelings of innocence. How can you do it when the wound is sore and the hurt is deep? I don’t know what others do, but I can suggest what they *can* do.

Christians can forget the desire to get even by realizing that they can’t do it. Sir Walter Scott once wrote, “Revenge is the sweetest morsel to the mouth that was ever cooked in hell.” Revenge may seem sweet, but it doesn’t really settle the matter. It doesn’t heal your scars to hurt other people. Let God take care of it. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,” (Rom 12:19, KJV). God knows what has been done to us and why. If I leave such matters with Him, then I can live in love and forget. Revenge belongs to God.

B. *Remember how God has treated us.*

If we use the old system of bookkeeping—in which we make a careful record of wrongs—it is a good indication that we have never understood God’s forgiveness of

us. How could we, and behave like that? Through the cross, God has forgotten the Christian’s sin. God gathered up our evil and laid it on His Son—evil that we did against God, evil for which we had no excuse, evil that poured out from the hatred of our hearts. God took all that evil and laid it on Jesus Christ not merely to forgive it, but to forget it. All of my sin has been placed on Christ and by accepting what He has done, I know it is forgiven—and forgotten! That is the force of those magnificent words in the epistle to the Hebrews: “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb 8:12, ESV).

David sings, “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Ps 102:12, ESV). When I first heard that verse, it disturbed me. I knew that, since the earth is round, if you traveled east, you would eventually arrive in the west. Is it possible that if you went far enough, you would meet your own sin again? But, true east and true west go off into space and extend out into infinity. The Psalmist assures us that our sins are gone—God has forgotten them. If God did that for my sin, can I not act to forget the single sins of others toward me?

C. *Realize that forgiveness is difficult and costly.*

Like the two sisters of whom Stevenson wrote, some Christians worship together with a line drawn between them that might as well be a wall. No love or warmth can penetrate that shield. A congregation without forgiving and forgetting love is a farce, not a force. But, forgiving is difficult and costly. Sins which have wounded us and have left their permanent marks on our lives cannot be shrugged off easily. Yet, God commands it: “Forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Col 3:13, ESV). That command demands action. Forgiveness starts in the will, not in the feelings. It demands our willingness to practice it, to admit our failures, and to keep at it—continually.

CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is not easy. The cross of Christ was not “easy.” But it was necessary. Are you bearing a grudge against a friend? Why not write or call them and restore your relationship? Is there an apology that you should make? Is there a matter that you should bury deep and consider gone forever? For the sake of Christ, for your own sake, for the sake of others, do it today. ED

¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, “Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes,” accessed August 17, 2023, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/382/382-h/382-h.htm>.

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

Peter: Regret to Restoration

How Do You Forgive Yourself?

INTRODUCTION

“For all of the sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, ‘It might have been.’” So wrote John Greenleaf Whittier.

Can we all not identify with that statement? All of us have suffered feelings of regret. We know the pain and agony regret brings into our lives. We keep thinking how really different it all could have been if—, if—, if—. You complete the sentence.

There are at least two kinds of regret. There is the regret caused by making human error: you make an honest mistake, and it may have disastrous consequences, and you have to live with them.

There’s a second form of regret that grows out of deliberate disobedience. We choose a certain lifestyle even though we know it is wrong. A small voice tells us our choice is sinful, but we continue the lifestyle anyway. One day we look in the family album and see what we looked like as a little boy or girl, and we suddenly wonder what life would have been like if our choices had been different.

So what can you do about regret? What response will minimize the agony of regret and help you cope with the memory of missed opportunities or wrong decisions? The Bible provides an example that provides an answer.

Read Luke 22:31–34. This passage sets the stage for a decision that Peter, the disciple of Christ, will deeply regret.

I. THE STAGE

Peter is at the final meal with Jesus. They had what we now call the Lord’s Supper. Then the disciples got into a major argument over who was the greatest among them, a development Jesus used to teach them about servant leadership. Peter must have been a central figure in the argument, for Jesus turned to him by name and warned him that Satan desired to sift him like wheat. Then Jesus said something that came back to haunt Peter, “I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32, NIV).

You know the rest of the story. Peter boasted too much, prayed too little, acted too soon, and almost got himself arrested for cutting off a guard’s ear. Later he followed too far off, considered what he was saying too little, and ended up digging a real grave for himself. The crow of a rooster and a glance from Jesus brought him down to earth. Mark, the Gospel writer, reported the result: “And he broke down and wept” (Mark 14:72, NIV).

II. THE PATH FROM REGRET TO RESTORATION

Peter’s experience provides us with clear guidelines on how to move from regret to restoration—how you can move from bitterness over some experience in your past

to blessing. Through the experience of Peter, God draws back the curtain, and offers us four truths that will help us deal with forgiving ourselves.

A. Remember Jesus is praying for you.

When you examine Luke 22:31, you will notice that Jesus addressed Peter as “Simon,” the human being, open to the temptation of Satan.

The reason Jesus prayed for Peter was precisely that he was so weak, that he was the kind of person who could be tripped up easily. You show me a person who cries out to God in the agony of their soul—a person who is fallen and crushed by their sin, who is unstable and unable to get a grip on their emotions, and I will show you a person upon whom the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ may rest.

Significantly, Jesus’ prayer was specifically for Simon. Jesus said “Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31–32, NIV). When wheat grows, it has a protective covering called chaff around the grain. In the winnowing of Jesus’ day, the chaff was separated from the wheat by throwing the mixture into the air while the wind was blowing. Modern harvesting equipment uses a sieve. Peter’s sifting would prove that he was chaff.

Every Christian will be sifted. Satan has made meticulous plans for your downfall. But if you fail, let not the regret over your failure destroy you and your witness. Remember, Jesus is before God as your High Priest and remembers you to the Father.

B. Remember that Jesus understands you.

When Jesus forecast that Peter would deny Him three times, was He trying to prove His omniscience? No! Rather, Jesus knew both the circumstances Peter would get into as well as his weakness. Jesus understood Peter. Likewise, God knows the circumstances that led to your temptation, to your sin, and to your failure as a human being. He has accurate knowledge of every struggle and dilemma that you encounter. That is why He can deal with your regret as well. Jesus knows things about you that you have not even admitted to yourself. That is why He is able to help you cope with regret.

C. Remember that Jesus has compassion for you.

If you have experienced any depth of regret, you will have some idea of the torture Peter must have gone through for the three days after the crucifixion of Jesus. But how did Jesus treat Peter? Look at Mark 16:7 where Jesus is speaking to the women who had come to the tomb. He said to them, “Go, tell his disciples *and Peter*”

(NIV, emphasis added). While the women may not have registered that final phrase “and Peter,” it is clear that Jesus had great compassion and had clearly forgiven the one who had denied Him.

The arms of Jesus even now are reaching out to you in your regret. They are long enough and gentle enough to embrace even the most wayward, backslidden person who has denied the Saviour. I can imagine Jesus has His eyes fastened on you, and He says, “I have compassion on you. I will go out of My way to assure you that you can come back into fellowship with the living God.”

D. Remember that Jesus accepts you and will re-commission you.

The last stage in the restoration of Peter is illustrated in John 21:15–17 where Jesus, in a most tender scene, assigns Peter the responsibility to look after His flock. From a tentative twofold trust to “Feed my Lambs,” to the greater task of “Feed my sheep.” In effect Jesus was saying, “I know I can trust you to be a shepherd to God’s sheep. Don’t let your regret hold you back from the high calling I have given you.” With these new responsibilities, Jesus had restored Peter to his former position of leadership. Regret was replaced by responsibility, indicating full acceptance. Three denials were followed by three affirmations of love. Likewise, if you let the Holy Spirit, He will restore you even while you are experiencing intense regret. He will re-commission you and say, “OK, now strengthen others.”

CONCLUSION

To be able to face and accept oneself is often very hard. But only as we learn to forgive ourselves can we experience self-acceptance and impose self-criticism at the same time. This involves a matter of faith, of truly believing that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, KJV). Self-forgiveness depends simply upon our truly believing that God is keeping His promise.

Peter’s move from regret to restoration teaches us how it is done. Accept the fact that Jesus has prayed for you and is now praying for you. Remember that He loves you through and through—every circumstance you are in. Let His compassion flow out to you and embrace you in forgiving love as you honestly repent of what you have done. Relax in His total acceptance of you, no matter what happened to you or how you sinned. Finally, know that He has restored you to fellowship and assigned you new responsibilities. You’ll be surprised at how beautifully God will direct you in the future if you let Him forgive the regrets of your past. ED

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

Forgiveness: An Unnatural Act

Why Is Forgiving Someone So Hard?

INTRODUCTION

Copernicus, the Polish mathematician whose calculations revolutionized the study of astronomy, was dying. A copy of *The Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies* was laid in his arms. In those last moments, the great mind saw himself in the presence of God not as a scholar, a scientist, or an astronomer, but simply as a sinner. On his gravestone at Frombork is inscribed his own epitaph: "I do not seek a kindness equal to that given Paul, nor do I ask the grace granted Peter, but that forgiveness which Thou didst grant to the robber. That earnestly I crave."

Copernicus craved for it, but why do so many Christians find the act of forgiveness so bitter? What did Jesus mean by forgiveness? What are the things that forgiveness is not? How can we practice forgiveness? These questions we will attempt to answer.

I. THE HARDNESS OF FORGIVENESS AND THE NEED TO BE FORGIVERS

The answer is plain and painful. The kind of forgiveness we love to sing about is not the only forgiveness that matters. We are called to another forgiveness that often tastes bitter, the kind that flows from us to other people.

God forgives us because of what Jesus has done for us, but then He obliges us to forgive others because of what Jesus is doing for us. The proper match to Jesus' prayer from the cross, "Father, forgive them," (Luke 23:34, ESV), is Jesus' imperative, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive your other trespasses" (Mark 11:25, ESV).

The most obvious reason Christians need to be forgivers is the simple command of Jesus Himself. Not only are we told to forgive anyone who has provoked us, but we also learn we cannot enjoy forgiveness ourselves if we are not exercising it toward others.

In the most universal prayer Jesus gave His disciples (Matt 6:9–15), He makes it clear that we can pray for forgiveness only as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Despite all the reasons why we need to be forgivers, we find it infinitely easier to be forgiven by God than to forgive others. The reasons for that cold reluctance are as varied as ourselves and altogether are expressed in "I cannot, just cannot find it in me to forgive them." We struggle to extend forgiveness because the wrongs done to us by others hurt so much. At the same time, we are not completely sure what forgiveness really is or what it might involve. It is not that we *cannot* forgive someone, but that we are *afraid* of what it might cost.

II. WHAT JESUS MEANT BY FORGIVENESS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

What exactly does Jesus expect us to

do in response to His words to forgive if we have anything against anyone?

Three Greek words are usually translated as "forgive." One speaks about having an attitude of mercy or love (as in Eph 4:32, being tenderhearted and forgiving another). Another word describes the cancellation of an obligation (as in Luke 6:37, forgive and you will be forgiven). But the word that Jesus uses in Mark 11 is the most common New Testament word for forgiveness. Literally, it means to release, to hurl away, to free yourself from something. Jesus uses this word to describe the obligation of His disciples when anyone has wronged them.

To forgive, as Jesus intended the word, means willingly to throw away our resentment at being wronged. This entails not just *containing* or *restraining* our resentment, but letting go of it entirely so we can be truly free of its influence. This approach, however, may strike us as phony and sanctimonious, as if we are expected to greet every piece of rottenness dished out to us with a saintly smile and an understanding, "There, there, you didn't mean that did you?" Because we fear that this is exactly what forgiveness means, we find it unpalatable. We are willing enough to suffer for Christ, but there is something in us that does not want merely to be exploited, even for righteousness sake.

Fortunately, forgiveness means more than just rolling over and playing dead. Forgiveness does not mean *pardon*. Forgiveness is personal; it refers to the impact an offense has on you and the need to release the resentment you feel. Pardon is legal rather than personal, concerned only with the legal status of the offense; not the relationship between offender and victim. And pardon, unlike forgiveness, means letting someone off the moral hook and releasing them from the punishment they deserve. It is possible to have pardon without forgiveness—a murderer can be pardoned, but that does not mean the victim's family has forgiven him.

A second thing forgiveness does not mean is *excuse*. When we excuse someone, we suggest that if he would only understand how a person's actions were shaped or motivated by environment or genetic makeup, we would see that he or she had no alternative. And it is true that understanding someone's difficulties or shortcomings can help us forgive. But understanding is not the same as forgiving. Those shortcomings do not negate the fact that fully conscious trespassers remain responsible for what they do. To suggest otherwise means we cannot be responsible for our obedience, either. In that case, Jesus should have said, like machines, they cannot exercise free choice. If this is true, we need not be afraid that in practicing forgiveness we are somehow tolerating wrong or condoning evil. Forgiveness does not mean ceasing to blame, but rather, letting go of resentment. It means being wholly reconciled to those who have done you wrong.

III. THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS

Once we understand what forgiveness is, how do we practice it? For many of us, forgiveness is frightening because we either misunderstand the process of forgiving, or we fear that practicing forgiveness will hurt more than receiving the original offense.

Ethicist Lewis Smedes identifies four stages in the process of forgiveness: The first occurs at the point of our hurt. We have been injured in some way, spiritually, emotionally, or materially, and we *feel* the injury. Second, we hate. The injury we feel boils into an active resentment of the person who committed the injury. And this, too, is a natural response. Third, we heal. At this point, we finally let go; it is the critical moment of forgiveness. To let go of hatred means we need strength to operate on us that will work entirely in the opposite direction of our hurting and hating. Forgiveness looms as a goal to be worked toward rather than a prize to be grasped, and it is something on which we may repeatedly lose or gain ground. It means spending time in prayer over our hurt, in patiently pushing aside its incessant demand for attention, and watching it shrink slowly into remission. Finally, as we heal, we must then *forget*. This does not imply some kind of sentimental amnesia. Nor is it possible simply by the force of the will literally to "forgive and forget." Rather, forgetting means we no longer allow our past resentments to be the judge of the trespasser. Our act of forgetting *may* become a catalyst for change and repentance in the other person.¹

CONCLUSION

George Buttrick says, "A Cross was raised to silence the blasphemy that forgiveness is easy."² Reducing forgiveness to a prescription runs the risk of making it sound easy, of course. It is not: the power to forgive must ultimately come from God. But at the same time, it must be pursued, because the whole point of Jesus' command to forgive dangles on the consequence He draws from forgiveness: "that your Father in heaven may forgive you."

If you want to know the power of the cross, if you want to see whether that cross still has the power to change lives today, if we want to know what the forgiveness of our sins really means and what it really cost, then we will know those things only as we forgive. And only then will we begin to sample the full sweetness of the word "forgiveness." ED

¹ See Lewis B. Smedes, "Forgiveness: The Power to Change the Past," *Christianity Today*, January 7, 1983, 222–226.

² George A. Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1928), 101.

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

David: From Royalty to Ruin

Is There a Point Where We Cannot Be Forgiven?

INTRODUCTION

In the lifeless emptiness of space, three astronauts passed the point of no return. Their moon-bound spacecraft was speeding rapidly away from their Houston homes, two hundred thousand miles behind. Suddenly a tremor rocked Apollo 13 as the number two oxygen tanks exploded, sweeping away most of the life-giving oxygen and water supplies and two of three power cells. This gleaming marvel of technology began to take on the countenance of a coffin. The President of the United States summoned the nation to pray for a safe return, but many hours would pass before circumstances would permit any attempt to turn toward home. The three men had already passed the point of no return.

Is it possible for a person to commit so egregious a sin as to disqualify him or her from receiving forgiveness or ever returning to the Lord? To personalize the questions: Do you harbor in your heart a secret fear that some great sin in the past or some chronic sin in the present is sending you into outer darkness, away from the Lord? You may believe intellectually that Christ has died for all your sins—and yet a skeleton glides out of the closets of your mind and says, “Are you *really* sure that God can forgive this?” David, the man God personally selected to be king of Israel, would understand those feelings all too well.

God had elevated David from the obscurity of tending sheep to the majesty of ruling Israel. God granted David a genius for conquest that brought Israel to the pinnacle of international power. Nathan the prophet informed him that his kingdom would endure evermore (2 Sam 7:16). Only when we understand the greatness of David can we comprehend how well he could identify with our secret fears and how far he fell from God.

ACT 1

I. DAVID'S ADULTERY

And fall he did. In 2 Samuel 11 we get the sordid story of a military genius whose strategy and tactics are skillfully employed for the cause of sin. David conquers not the Ammonite capitol of Rabbah, but rather Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a close friend. Uriah is one of the thirty-seven elite military commanders known as David's mighty men, who often risked their lives for David.

According to the culture of the day, Bathsheba has no opportunity to resist the adulterous actions of David. Afterward she bathes herself in keeping with the Law's requirement of ceremonial purification after sexual relations. She cannot cleanse herself of adultery, but the guilt belongs to David—and more. Bathsheba is pregnant with David's child. His sin of adultery leads to more sin to hide it.

II. DAVID'S BETRAYAL

David calls his loyal friend, Uriah, home from the war to lure him into sexual relations

with his wife. David's strategy fails. “I will not do such a thing” are Uriah's closing words (2 Sam 11:11, NIV). So David adds betrayal of a loyal friend to adultery. Is the sin that you fear as bad as that? But there's more.

III. DAVID'S MURDER

David's chief of staff, Joab, is ordered to have Uriah killed in battle under circumstances which will look natural. Within hours Uriah lies dead near the walls of Rabbah. His life was expendable. David's response to the news of his death chills us with its callousness: “Don't let this upset you [Joab]; the sword devours one as well as another” (2 Sam 11:25, NIV). David the adulterer, the betrayer of a friend, is now a premeditated murderer as well. Has David now passed the point of no return with God?

In all the sin and intrigue of 2 Samuel 11 two things strike us as quite remarkable. First, the hero of the chapter is not God's appointed king, but rather the foreigner, Uriah. Second, the name of God is not mentioned by anyone until the author comes to the final line. The author is implicitly informing us that David has made the fatal mistake of leaving God out of his grand scheme.

And as the curtain falls on Act 1 we are told, “But the thing David had done displeased the Lord” (2 Sam 11:27, NIV).

ACT 2

IV. DAVID'S EXPOSURE

As Act 2 opens in 2 Samuel 12, another general commands our attention, one far more brilliant than David—the Lord of hosts. The Lord again sends the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan seeks David's judgment in a criminal case. Nathan describes the case to the king. *Read 2 Samuel 12:1–4.*

As David hears the case, his action against the merciless action of the rich man becomes almost uncontrollable. David declares that the rich man deserves to die, and then he delivers an official verdict of fourfold restitution for the lamb (2 Sam 12:5–6). David has passed judgment, then Nathan, with piercing eyes looks into the face of David and says, “You are the man!” We can feel the chill of fear descend into the heart of David. The poor man is Uriah, and the ewe lamb is Bathsheba. David's sin is exposed.

The Lord declares that the sword so ruthlessly loosed by David on the house of Uriah will now “devour one as well as another” within David's house. It will not stop until the fourfold punishment declared by David has run its course. In the coming months four of David's sons meet death—the consequences of David's sins.

V. DAVID'S CONFESSION

How does David respond to his sin now that his back was against the wall? He remorsefully admits it is true. He says, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam 11:13, NIV).

David's response to his sin before its exposure was to cover it up. This shows the human way that is an inappropriate response to sin. There are at least two other inappropriate ways that are used to deal with sin: (1) compensating God for sin by our good works, and (2) apologizing to God for our sins. But saying “I'm sorry” comes to our lips more easily than change comes to our lives. We treat God like a slot machine that pays off in forgiveness when an apology is inserted.

But God's way has two aspects, one human and one divine. The *human* aspect is expressed in verses such as Hebrews 12:1–2 and Romans 6:11–14. Put in simplest terms, these verses urge us to stop sinning and start obeying God! The *divine* aspect is seen after David's admission of sin when Nathan says, “The Lord has taken away your sin” (2 Sam 12:13, NIV). What an unbelievably incredible outcome!

CONCLUSION

The sweeping totality of God's grace just takes our breath away! We are staggered by the enormity of such forgiveness. David, the adulterer, the betrayer, the murderer, the blasphemer, has complete forgiveness.

But wait! If God has forgiven David of such terrible sins with such momentous personal, national, and international consequences, can we ever doubt He can forgive the secret sins that haunt us and those chronic sins that eat at our hearts? The divine aspect of dealing with our sins consists of total forgiveness through the finished work of Jesus Christ. So Paul can joyously proclaim, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1, NIV). Wow!

John then gives us the time perspective on our forgiveness when he says, “I write to you, dear children, because your *sins have been forgiven* on account of his name” (1 John 2:12, NIV). The italicized words translate a Greek verb expressing an action which happened in the past with results that continue into the present. We received total forgiveness at that moment in the past when we trusted in Jesus Christ, and that forgiveness continues unbroken to the present moment.

The depth of such forgiveness defies our comprehension. Such forgiveness holds us even when we seem to have passed the point of no return like the Apollo 13 astronauts. Those three men returned alive to earth from the depths of space. But not even the depths of space can match the depth of God's forgiveness toward us in Jesus Christ. We cannot pass the point of no return with God. We have been, and are, and will be forgiven, when like David we say, “I have sinned.” Hallelujah! ED

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

10 DAYS OF
PRAYER

PRIORITIES OF FAITH

January 10–20, 2024

“He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”

MICAH 6:8, ESV

WWW.TENDAYSOFPRAAYER.ORG



A Consecrated Ministry

>PART 2

EDITORIAL NOTE

This is the second of a three-part series featuring “A Consecrated Ministry,” chapter 34 from *The Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen G. White. While the author clearly had Seventh-day Adventist pastors in view when she wrote this chapter, the fact that it was included in a volume with an intended broad audience makes it readily apparent that Ellen White, her editors, and advisors clearly saw that this chapter has important applications for all disciples of Jesus, particularly elders, deacons, and deaconesses. This chapter highlights the value of a soul, provides valuable counsel about the priorities of life and ministry, and inspires all readers to consecrated selfless service. It has been reprinted with the permission of the Ellen G. White Estate.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

He who teaches the word must himself live in conscious, hourly communion with God through prayer and a study of His word, for here is the source of strength. Communion with God will impart to the minister's efforts a power greater than the influence of his preaching. Of this power he must not allow himself to be deprived. With an earnestness that cannot be denied, he must plead with God to strengthen and fortify him for duty and trial, and to touch his lips with living fire. All too slight is the hold that Christ's ambassadors often have upon eternal realities. If men will walk with God, He will hide them in the cleft of the Rock. Thus hidden, they can see God, even as Moses saw Him. By the power and light that He imparts they can comprehend more and accomplish more than their finite judgment had deemed possible.

Satan's craft is most successfully used against those who are depressed. When discouragement threatens to overwhelm the minister, let him spread out before God his necessities. It was when the heavens were as brass over Paul that he trusted most fully in God. More than most men, he knew the meaning of affliction; but listen to his triumphant cry as, beset by temptation and conflict, his feet press heavenward: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18. Paul's eyes were ever fastened on the unseen and eternal. Realizing that he was fighting against supernatural powers, he placed his dependence on God, and in this lay his strength. It is by seeing Him who is invisible that strength and vigor of soul are gained and the power of earth over mind and character is broken.

A pastor should mingle freely with the people for whom he labors, that by becoming acquainted with them he may know how to adapt his teaching to their needs. When a minister has preached a sermon, his work has but just begun. There is personal work for him to do. He should visit the people in their homes, talking and praying with them in earnestness and humility. There are families who will never be reached by the truths of God's word unless the stewards of His grace enter their homes and point them to the higher way. But the hearts of those who do this work must throb in unison with the heart of Christ.

Much is comprehended in the command, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled." Luke 14:23. Let ministers teach the truth in families, drawing close to those for whom they labor, and as they thus co-operate with God, He will clothe them with spiritual power. Christ will guide them in their work, giving them words to speak that will sink deep into the hearts of the listeners. It is the privilege of every minister to be able to say with Paul, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, . . . repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts 20:27, 20, 21.

The Saviour went from house to house, healing the sick, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the disconsolate. He took the little children in His arms and blessed them, and spoke words of hope and comfort to the weary mothers. With unflinching tenderness and gentleness He met every form of human woe and affliction. Not for Himself but for others did He labor. He was the servant of all. It was His meat and drink to bring hope and

strength to all with whom He came in contact. And as men and women listened to the truths that fell from His lips, so different from the traditions and dogmas taught by the rabbis, hope sprang up in their hearts. In His teaching there was an earnestness that sent His words home with convicting power.

God's ministers are to learn Christ's method of laboring, that they may bring from the storehouse of His word that which will supply the spiritual needs of those for whom they labor. Thus only can they fulfill their trust. The same Spirit that dwelt in Christ as He imparted the instruction He was constantly receiving, is to be the source of their knowledge and the secret of their power in carrying on the Saviour's work in the world.

Some who have labored in the ministry have failed of attaining success because they have not given their undivided interest to the Lord's work. Ministers should have no engrossing interests aside from the great work of leading souls to the Saviour. The fishermen whom Christ called, straightway left their nets and followed Him. Ministers cannot do acceptable work for God and at the same time carry the burden of large personal business enterprises. Such a division of interest dims their spiritual perception. The mind and heart are occupied with earthly things, and the service of Christ takes a second place. They seek to shape their work for God by their circumstances, instead of shaping circumstances to meet the demands of God.

The energies of the minister are all needed for his high calling. His best powers belong to God. He should not engage in speculation or in any other business that would turn him aside from his great work. "No man that warreth," Paul declared, "entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." 2 Timothy 2:4. Thus

the apostle emphasized the minister's need of unreserved consecration to the Master's service. The minister who is wholly consecrated to God refuses to engage in business that would hinder him from giving himself fully to his sacred calling. He is not striving for earthly honor or riches; his one purpose is to tell others of the Saviour, who gave Himself to bring to human beings the riches of eternal life. His highest desire is not to lay up treasure in this world, but to bring to the attention of the indifferent and the disloyal the realities of eternity. He may be asked to engage in enterprises which promise large worldly gain, but to such temptations he returns the answer, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36.

Satan presented this inducement to Christ, knowing that if He accepted it, the world would never be ransomed. And under different guises he presents the same temptation to God's ministers today, knowing that those who are beguiled by it will be false to their trust.

It is not God's will that His ministers should seek to be rich. Regarding this, Paul wrote to Timothy: "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." By example as well as by precept, the ambassador for Christ is to "charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." 1 Timothy 6:10, 11, 17-19. **ED**

Ministering to and Ministering with People Who Are Introverts

>PART 1



SCAN FOR AUDIO

EDITORIAL NOTE

In every society there are significant numbers of people who are introverts. This is the first of a four-part series to facilitate a greater understanding of people who are introverts and how to effectively minister to and with introverts.

INTROVERSION: AN EXPERIENCE

"Don't be so shy!"

"Come on, speak up!"

"Don't force me to squeeze the facts out of you!"

I have heard those words countless times in many variations when I was a child. Sometimes harshly, sometimes gently, yet the people who spoke them had one thing in common: they were impatient and/or annoyed with me.

Even before I went to school, I felt I was different from most other children. While they loved to make new friends and play together, I was hesitant to join in with them. When my brother, who is two years older than me, started to go to school and learned to read, I was fascinated—and learned with him. My parents couldn't stop me, so all they could do was make sure I learned correctly. Soon I started to read whole books, and I just *loved* it. In my mind, the figures and scenes came to life, and I imagined being there too, taking part in the adventures the heroes experienced. Even when a book was finished, the images were still with me. Somehow, it was better than reality—of course, imagination allows you to be anything you like. Looking back, I wonder if one could say that the figures from the book were my best friends.

In due time I started to go to school, and I was excited—at first. So many things to learn! But soon I got bored, because especially in the first years, the school material was rather easy. And there were some difficulties with some classmates. Some kids would stay away from me, which made me feel insecure and I would withdraw. Even

The more I learned about this trait of personality, the better I could understand, not only the past experiences but also the present, why I react in a certain way.

in church, at Children's Sabbath School and Pathfinder meetings, this happened. Given the fact that my father was the pastor, maybe it was an even more difficult situation there. Whenever I had a chance, I would go to my books and inner world that was so much better to live in.

During my first two years in primary school, I discovered I had a strong sense of justice and could easily empathize with others. I remember a classmate, a small boy, who had come from another country and had difficulties with the language. At times, when we were supposed to have brought brushes for painting, he did not have them, saying he had forgotten them. Our teacher got angry and slapped him, more than once. I did feel sorry for the boy, and angry at the teacher; I knew what she did was not right but as I was not sure what to do, I kept quiet.

At high school, things got worse. Being the quiet kid I was, classmates found me an easy prey for mobbing. They (luckily not all) would act as if I had some contagious disease, try not to touch me or any of my belongings and if they did, they'd just throw it with every sign of disgust. That stopped only when, in my second high school year (I was twelve years old then), a teacher intervened. I hated to go to school, especially when I had to present something in front of the whole class, or when I knew we had a teacher who was unpredictable. You see, sometimes the teacher was the nicest person in the world, and sometimes this same teacher would react annoyed at the most innocent question, and

I could not understand these discrepancies in behavior. Whenever I came home from school, I went to my room. Actually, I am thankful I had one for myself, because I think it was a challenge for my parents to find a house big enough, since we were four siblings.

I think one could say that I was in conflict with myself: On one hand, I longed for contact, to be with others, to be like them, open, happy, enjoying the company. On the other hand, it was a relief to be on my own. The talking people did all the time seemed useless to me. Why should anyone talk when there was nothing to say?

Also, when I was a teenager in church, in the youth group, most of the time I felt as if I didn't belong. All the others enjoyed being together, singing, playing. When a meeting started, it would not take long until I felt like a fifth wheel and wished I could go home.

I noticed, however, that it was totally different when I was with only one or two persons at the same time, provided that they were respectful listeners. Among my best memories are the moments I shared with a former leader of our youth group. I was a university student then, and she invited me to her home several times, to have breakfast together and then study the Bible trying to find answers to some of my questions. I think that's when I felt taken really seriously for the first time. Though my parents tried, they probably didn't know what to do. Occasionally, my mom would say, "Don't take all that to heart," which served rather to make things worse. It seemed there was something wrong with

me, and I was the one who should fix myself.

Nearly ten years later, I got the explanation. I had been a volunteer in Spain, come back to Germany (my country of origin), and left again for Switzerland to work there. Some years into work, some bad situations accumulated and threatened to drown me. I looked for and got professional help. During therapy we did a test for personality. I don't remember which one exactly it was, nor do I remember most of the results—except one: introvert.

At first, I felt devastated, didn't want to accept that. It seemed to be a disease. Yet I thought I could get to know more about the subject, and started to look for information. One can find a lot when looking through the internet. One of the most helpful things I found is a text about the ten most popular myths about introverts.¹ I could relate to *every single point*. All of a sudden, so many things made sense which I could not understand before. The horror of having to speak publicly. The need for time on my own. The incomprehension for others and their talking. The immense comfort when being able to enter my inner world. What a relief to see that it is normal, it is not a disease that could (or even should) be cured. I could accept that for me, and that's when freedom started. The more I learned about this trait of personality, the better I could understand, not only the past experiences but also the present, why I react in a certain way.

The next big step was when I found that introversion is often linked to a high sensitivity. The nervous system of highly sensitive people is very easily stimulated by little things, like noise and light. These stimuli are processed differently in their brains, and they extract more information from them. As a result, they can be overstimu-

I realized there was a direct connection between the negative feelings and the stimuli from outside, particularly with noise. I found the feelings to be warning signals from my brain, requesting me to reduce the stimulation.

lated very easily and thus it is necessary for them to withdraw to a quiet place to recover more often than lesser sensitive people.

With this information in mind, I started to pay more attention to my inner sensations, especially when I noticed negative feelings. I realized there was a direct connection between the negative feelings and the stimuli from outside, particularly with noise. I found the feelings to be warning signals from my brain, requesting me to reduce the stimulation. For example, when I hear a baby crying, and I notice I feel annoyed, it means “yellow alert;” my brain tells me that soon

it will be too much, and I should start looking for possibilities to relax. If I do not heed to that signal, the next step is “red alert;” I feel aggression raising (and before you get scared, I’m not violent). I believe it is a protective function of the brain to stop too many stimuli—if someone came in that moment, he or she would be repelled by my reaction with rather harsh words. Once I am alone, in a quiet environment, soon things will be okay again. This is my reaction; it can be different for other persons.

I am a highly sensitive introvert, with all the advantages and disadvantages it brings. And because I

know this, I can adapt and make choices accordingly. That means that I more often than not choose not to take part in church activities, because I know that, after a week full of work, appointments, and interactions, I need the time to recharge. It is possible that many people do not understand it. I hope this experience I just wrote about can be an eye-opener for you. Other people may feel the same as I did, but still try to conform with expectations. I hope you can find peace, and a way you can be comfortable, also in church. **ED**

¹ See “10 Myths about Introverts,” Carl Kingdom, accessed August 17, 2023, <https://carlkingdom.com/10-myths-about-introverts>.

Regina Fleischmann serves in the Ministerial Association of the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Berne, Switzerland.

Visit our website which has 25 years of past issues and other leadership resources
www.eldersdigest.org

Paul points out that since spiritual gifts can be controlled by the recipients, only two or three persons should speak in turn and that an interpretation should be provided. If these rules are not maintained, speaking in tongues has no place in the worship service of the Corinthian church.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul continues the discussion of spiritual gifts by focusing on speaking in tongues versus prophecy. However, the real issues are: (1) who is to benefit in a worship context, and (2) disorder creates problems in the worship service. The discussion of tongues must be understood against this background. Who is going to benefit from the exercise of this spiritual gift—the gifted person only or others also (14:2–6, 9)? Paul is clear: The goal must be to edify the church (vv. 4–5, 12, 17, 26). Furthermore, for outsiders the impression must be avoided that church members are out of their mind (v. 23). Verses 27–40 discuss the problem of disorder in the worship service in Corinth. Paul points out that since spiritual gifts can be controlled by the recipients, only two or three persons should speak in turn and that an interpretation should be provided. If these rules are not maintained, speaking in tongues has no place in the worship service of the Corinthian church. The same is also true for prophecy (vv. 29–32). Thus, the context makes it clear that the issue is the abuse of spiritual gifts.

IMPORTANT WORDS

To appreciate what 1 Corinthians 14 teaches, we need to understand the meaning of some of the key terms.

Tongue. The Greek term translated as “tongue(s)” stands predominantly for:

- the human organ of the mouth called the tongue (Ps 22:15, Jas 3:5);
- languages (Gen 10:5; Acts 2:4), including nations that speak other languages (Zech 8:23; Rev 5:9); and
- the tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3).

Speak. The Greek term translated as “to speak” occurs thirty-four times in 1 Corinthians. In chapter 14, it is used ten times with “tongues” and fourteen times without it. Each time it is used without the word “tongues,” the act of speaking involves a real language that contains content that can be communicated. Because the very same verb “to speak” is used in the phrase “speak in a tongue” (14:2, 4–6, etc.), it is expected to have the same meaning in every text; otherwise language loses its meaning. In the same context, a word should have the same meaning unless it is clearly redefined. In chapter 14, in which the author goes back and forth between prophecy and speaking in tongues, the word translated as “tongue(s)” should always have the same meaning.¹

Speaking in Tongues. How are the words “speaking” and “tongue” in the same context and the phrase “speaking in tongues” used in Scripture? (1) In Wisdom Literature: “My tongue speaks” (Job 33:2, NKJV). The tongue of the righteous speaks justice (Ps 37:30;² LXX³ 36:30). “They have spoken against me with a lying tongue” (Ps 109:2, KJV; LXX). (2)

In the Prophets: “Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue” (Isa 28:11, NASB).⁴ “They have taught their tongue to speak lies” (Jer 9:5, NASB). (3) In the Gospels: “They will speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17, NASB). (4) In Acts: The early Christians “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:4, NASB). What they spoke were foreign languages: people from different countries said, “we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (vs. 11, NASB). Foreign languages are also meant in Acts 10:46 in which Peter, referring to Cornelius and his household, says, “Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 11:47, RSV). The same applies to Acts 19:6 in which speaking in tongues and prophesying are attributed to those who received the Holy Spirit. (5) In 1 Corinthians: The phrase “speak with tongues” (RSV) occurs in 12:30 as a description of the spiritual gift. In 1 Corinthians 13:1, it is used to describe human language. The disputed texts are primarily found in 1 Corinthians 14. There the phrase is used with “tongue” in the singular (“speaking in a tongue”) in 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 13, 27 and with “tongue” in the plural (“speaking in tongues”) in 1 Corinthians 14:5 (twice), 6, 18, 23, 39. Because “speaking in tongues” refers to foreign languages throughout Scripture, it is hardly conceivable that the phrase in 1 Corinthians 14 should be understood differently from the rest of Scripture, unless there were clear indicators in the text.

Mysteries. The term “mystery” occurs twenty-eight times in the New Testament, and in twenty-one of those times, it refers to the mystery of the kingdom of heaven and

In Paul's writings, mysteries are truths revealed by God that are related to Christ and the plan of salvation.

related concepts. Other mysteries are “the mystery of iniquity” (2 Thess 2:7, KJV), “the mystery of the seven stars” (Rev 1:20, NKJV), or “the mystery of the harlot” in Revelation 17.

Paul uses the Greek word translated as “mystery” in the singular in 1 Corinthians 2:1 (translated as “testimony,” KJV), 2:7, and 15:51. In chapter 2, the mystery is “Jesus Christ crucified” (v. 2)—that is, God’s saving activity in and through Christ. In chapter 15, the mystery is that not all will die and sleep but that they will be transformed at the Second Coming. The plural “mysteries” is used in 4:1 [KJV], 13:2, and 14:2. In Paul’s writings, mysteries are truths revealed by God that are related to Christ and the plan of salvation.

Spirit. In 1 Corinthians, the word translated as “spirit” usually refers to the Holy Spirit, but it can also describe the human spirit or person (1 Cor 2:11; 5:5; 16:18, KJV), the spirit of the world (2:12), or various spirits (12:10), probably true and false prophets or teachers, etc. The highest concentration of the word translated as “spirit” is found in chapter 12. In this chapter, “spirit” is used once in the plural and eleven times in the singular. Always “spirit” in the singular refers to the Holy Spirit. He is the author of the spiritual gifts. Therefore, it is very natural that 1 Corinthians 14:2, which continues the discussion of spiritual gifts, would refer to the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, when Paul speaks of the human spirit, he makes it quite clear. Either he

uses qualifiers, such as personal pronouns or appositions, “of the man” (1 Cor 2:11, NKJV), or the context of his letter points clearly to the nature of the spirit. Because there is no qualifier in 1 Corinthians 14:2, it can be assumed that Paul refers to the Holy Spirit. This also makes sense with “mystery” being revealed truth. **ED**

¹ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 492.

² Author’s translation.

³ The Septuagint.

⁴ The Septuagint of Isaiah 29:24 and 32:4 also talk about stammering tongues that will learn to speak clearly.

Ekkehardt Mueller, ThD, DMin, is a retired associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AN EXPERT TO HELP PEOPLE MOVE THROUGH THE CHANGES OF GRIEF AND LOSS.

What you do need is a heart of compassion and a listening ear fashioned after the Master Jesus. SEASONS was designed in a way that you can follow the script through each session, allowing ample time for sharing.

SEASONS was created by those who have suffered grief and offers support to those who are grieving. They have experience in the medical, psychological, and practical process of grieving.

Prepared by the Health Ministries Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America



AdventSource

402.486.8800 | AdventSource.org



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Suggestions for a Training Retreat for Deacons and Deaconesses

A weekend retreat at a resort surrounded by nature can be a tremendous blessing to the deacons and deaconesses. It is a time for them to bond with each other, and with the pastor also. Ideally, this would follow a Sabbath service that emphasizes the ministry of deacons and deaconesses, such as Deacon and Deaconess Day, when the congregation is educated about the role of these officers and the importance of training and empowering them.

The purpose of the retreat is to seek God's vision for the deacon and deaconess board, develop a vision statement, a mission statement, and establish goals and objectives. According to James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, "visions are statements of destination, of the ends of our labor; they are therefore future-oriented and are made real over different spans of time."¹ In other words, the vision statement is what these officers aspire to be. The mission statement is how they will make it a reality. Following is an example of a vision statement, a mission statement, and goals and objectives for deacons and deaconesses:



VISION STATEMENT

The deacons and deaconesses of the _____ Seventh-day Adventist Church are filled with the Holy Spirit, are teachers and preachers, students of God's Word, soul winners, and prayer warriors, ministering to the sick and needy, maintaining order in the church, and being of one accord.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the deacons and deaconesses of the _____ Seventh-day Adventist Church is to serve its members and community—especially those who are most vulnerable—by providing for their emergency physical, social, and spiritual needs, addressing relational problems in the church, and teaching and preaching God's Word through public and personal evangelism. We will lead people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and disciple newly baptized church members. We will vis-

it, assess needs, and network with departments within the church and agencies in the community in order to accomplish our mission. We will be responsible for maintaining the upkeep of the church and its properties. We will engage in ongoing personal development through prayer and the study of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and other relevant materials so that we might become better persons who are better equipped to glorify God and serve humanity.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Conduct a survey to identify who are the "most vulnerable" individuals mentioned in the mission statement. Define their needs. Develop ministries to meet those needs. Contact social service agencies in the community and invite their representatives to come and speak to the board of deacons and deaconesses; find out what services they offer to assist these

individuals, and how the deacons and deaconesses can network with them. Identify both human and financial resources of the church that can assist in meeting the needs of these "most vulnerable" individuals.

Below is a suggested outline of events for a weekend deacon and deaconess retreat. Arrive at the resort on a Friday afternoon, in time to get set up and finish supper before time for vesper. Adjust this outline as needed. ED

¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 130.

Vincent E. White Sr., DMin, is a retired pastor and author of *The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting the Biblical Model*, *The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting the Biblical Model Workbook*, and *Problem Solvers and Soul Winners: A Handbook for Deacons and Deaconesses*.

FRIDAY

- 30 mins. Vesper (Deacons/deaconesses)
- 5 mins. Break
- 20 mins. Prayer Session (Seek God's vision for deacons and deaconesses)
- 30 mins. Small Groups Exercise (Develop a vision statement)
- 20 mins. Synthesize Groups' Statements
- 10 mins. Closing Remarks and Benediction

SABBATH

- 75 mins. Breakfast
- 75 mins. Sabbath School (Deacons/deaconesses)
- 20 mins. Prayer Session (Seek God's mission for deacons and deaconesses)
- 10 mins. Break
- 60 mins. Presentation on Biblical Account of Deacons and Deaconesses (Pastor or guest presenter)
- 10 mins. Break
- 30 mins. Small Groups Exercise (Develop a mission statement)

- 20 mins. Synthesize Groups' Statements
- 90 mins. Lunch
- 120 mins. Hike/Relaxation
- 20 mins. Prayer Session (Seek God's goals and objectives)
- 30 mins. Small Groups Exercise (Establish goals and objectives)
- 20 mins. Synthesize Groups' Statements
- 80 mins. Supper
- 30 mins. Vesper
- 10 mins. Closing Remarks and Benediction
- 80 mins. Recreation

SUNDAY

- 75 mins. Breakfast
- 45 mins. Testimonies and Sharing
- 20 mins. Prayer Session (Seek God's power to fulfill His vision)
- 60 mins. Cleaning and Packing
Departure

Hidden Behind the Shield

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Him all Creatures here below! Praise Him above...” Those were the last words I, Boris, heard before my father pushed me to the ground and protected me with his body. The joyful sound of praise was interrupted by the sound of the ceiling falling on top of the congregation. Then, there was silence.

There was dust everywhere. Cries for help replaced the silence, and chaos reigned over what once was a jubilant church. My whole country of El Salvador had just been hit by a 7.9 earthquake. In 1989 a 6.9 earthquake hit the San Francisco Bay Area and caused great destruction and loss of life. The one that hit El Salvador that morning was 10 times more powerful.¹

I was a kid when this happened. There was nothing I could do against the strength of this disaster. I was powerless and scared. My father saw my helplessness and did the only thing he could. He pushed me to the ground and covered me with his body to protect me. He was my shield. His arms had now been set around me like a fortress. He did not regard his safety above mine and in his love gave me a hiding place.

That Sabbath I did not get to hear the pastor speak. God, however, did speak to me through the heroic actions of my father.

Is there something that makes you feel powerless today? What is there to do when a child walks away from the path? Has anxiety about life made you feel powerless? When our whole world shakes, and we are in deep trouble facing the earthquakes in our lives, we can always hide behind our shield, Jesus Christ.

David in the Psalms calls God his shield (Ps 28:7), his fortress (Ps 46:1–3; 62:6) and his hiding place (119:114). There is no question that David faced many troubles and his heart cried out for help. In his agony, in his running away from his enemies, in times when he felt powerless, he discovered that his only haven was found in the Lord. Paul later echoes the same sentiment as he writes, “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one” (2 Thess 3:3).² He also wrote to the Ephesians who were facing challenges and the attack of the evil one to take on “the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph 6:16).



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Every time you are bombarded by the earthquakes of life and are attacked by the enemy, hide yourself in Jesus. In Him you will find strength for every day, hope for tomorrow, and safety for your broken heart. David and Paul knew this and relied on the protection and help from the Lord, and they urge us to do the same.

The Psalms use metaphors to describe what God does for His people. “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps 18:2). A fortress is a structure that is not built for aesthetics. Its function is to defend against a foe that is bent on destruction. Note that a fortress has by default two functions: to protect those who are on the inside and to keep the enemy on the outside. Any fortress built needs to be strong enough to defend against an enemy. It is essential for us to remain within the fortress of God’s love to be protected from the attacks of the enemy.

A hiding place is needed to conceal someone of something. “For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock” (Ps 27:5). When David was running away from Saul, he hid in caves. Jesus as a baby had to be hidden in Egypt by his parents to protect him. In times of trouble, God is our hiding place. Our safety is found in the arms of Jesus.

A shield is used in close combat to parry away the enemy’s attacks. Usually, shields are made from wood or metal. The material that a shield is made from needs to be strong since its primary function is defense. The defense we have today is our faith in Jesus. This faith will protect us in our time of need when we face the enemy. “Above

all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph 6:16).

Each metaphor lays bare the reality that we are in the middle of a war zone. The protection that David finds in God is not the absence of conflict, but rather the means to survive in the midst of it. Believing and trusting in Jesus does not guarantee that those who place their faith in Him will never face adversity. What David states is that when adversity inevitably comes, we can have a safe haven when we hide behind Christ our fortress, hiding place, and shield.

When an earthquake happens, it usually takes a long time for the earth to become stable once again. After the main release of energy there will be hundreds of smaller earthquakes. Every time there was an aftershock, as a kid I ran to my father. He had the wisdom to keep me safe. I remember him singing to me to try and keep me calm. As we slept in the backyard under the stars of the night, he would tell me stories and assure me that we would be okay when the earth shook. Despite the danger, and the state of emergency that an entire nation found itself in, I knew that if my father was with me, I would be safe. His love for me and my family made sure we did not lack anything. I knew then that not even a 10.0 magnitude earthquake could ever shake my father’s love away from us.

God’s love for us does not diminish. It does not end and can never be taken away. Paul writes in the book of Romans that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38–39). No enemy

is strong enough to shake His love away from you.

There are many things that can lead the child of God to feel powerless. This is our enemy trying to destroy our faith in our loving Saviour. Whatever it may be that has encamped around you, seeking your destruction, cannot prevail when you live within the fortress of His love. No enemy will find you when you are hiding in His love. No arrow will hit you when you stand behind Christ your shield. In this life there will be conflict, but with Jesus as our protector, even in the midst of tribulation you can find peace and safety. Come and hide your life behind the shield of God.

When I, Joseph, accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour and became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I faced severe persecution. I lost two years of schooling and a scholarship that covered four years of college education because of keeping the Sabbath in order to be faithful to Jesus and His commandments. My family beat me almost to death and threw me out on the street. The only thing that kept me going was knowing that despite all the challenges I was facing, I had Jesus on my side. I kept clinging to Him all the time. Rather than being overwhelmed with pain and discouragement, I decided to fill my heart with His presence, hope, and joy. I made it because Jesus became my shield and my protector. ED

¹ Every point on the Richter scale represents an earthquake ten times more powerful than the one before it.

² All biblical quotations are from the New King James Version.

Joseph Kidder, DMin, is professor of Christian ministry and discipleship at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

Boris Reyes, MDiv, is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Texas, USA.

BE INSPIRED.



Download the brand-new AWR360° app!

Inspiration and a full media library at your fingertips!



Download on the App Store

ANDROID APP ON Google play

visit: awr.org/apps



AWR360°
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Adventist World Radio 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904

Let's Connect!

[f awr360](https://www.facebook.com/awr360)

[y awr360](https://www.youtube.com/awr360)

[@awr.360](https://www.instagram.com/awr.360)

[y awr.org/videos](https://www.youtube.com/awr.org/videos)

[a awr.org/apps](https://www.awr.org/apps)