

QUARTERLY RESOURCE FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS • 2/2024

# ELDER'S DIGEST



Public Campus Ministry



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# Glory!



We know these *messages* well. All *three* of them. Most of us can recite them—perhaps in multiple translations and languages. They are at the heart of the book of Revelation, the portion of Scripture so important for this era of history.

Literary convention says that they should be referenced in lower case—the *three angels' messages*—but this journal deliberately breaks the rules and capitalizes them: *the Three Angels' Messages*. Such is their importance and significance. Nothing should stifle or silence *these messages*.

Like all things familiar and important in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we have multiple abbreviations for the Three Angels' Messages. They can be referred to as the Three Angels, Revelation 14, Rev 14:6–13, or sometimes just 3AM.

In sermons, books, and articles, code words and phrases are used, such as: “everlasting Gospel,” “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,” “Fear God,” “for the hour of his judgment is come,” “worship him that made heaven and earth,” “Babylon is fallen, is fallen,” “If any man worship the beast and his image,” and “Here is the patience of the saints.” Mature Adventists immediately decipher the code, recall the source, capture the nuance, and comprehend the broader message being evoked.

Though thoroughly acquainted with Revelation 14:6–13, recently I was struck! There was a word that leapt from this almost cliched text. It caught my attention and lodged in my heart. Since that moment I have thought of little else.

The word?  
“Glory”!

I have heard many wonderful sermons on the “everlasting Gospel,” and they have warmed my heart. “Fear God,” and “the hour of his judgment is come” have also been carefully exegeted and prolifically proclaimed—good! These messages need to be! As one non-Adventist scholar author put it, “the three angels progressively announce a last opportunity to repent.”<sup>1</sup>

In all the sermons I have heard and preached, glory has received minimal emphasis. Of course, it has been cited and read. It has been closely connected with worship—another pivotal word in these messages. And it has also been associated with God as Creator and the Sabbath.

But in Revelation 14:7 glory is associated with the judgment. The text literally places “glory” between “Fear God” and “for the hour of his judgment is come.” This is far from the stereotypical image of fear and judgment settings. Inserting glory between fear and judgment transforms the whole context.

When we read about fear and judgment, it is easy for our own fears to consume and overwhelm us, because none of us are innocent and reasonable legitimate fears can color our reading of this judgment.

However, with a loud voice, we are told, “Give him [God] *glory*, because the hour of his judgement has come” (Rev 14:7, ESV).

In the history of this planet, there has been little justice. Multitudes of individuals, groups, races—the faithful—have endured horrendous injustices. Sometimes death was a merciful injustice, so vehement was the persecution of Jesus’ disciples. In Revelation there is another loud cry, this time from faithful witnesses: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood . . . ?” (Rev 6:10, ESV).

These Three Angels’ Messages, including the end-time judgment, are cradled in the everlasting Gospel—the fact that Jesus lived an innocent and pure life, died because of the sins of all humanity, and rose, ascending to atone and share His righteousness and grace with all who will accept it.

The judgment doesn’t save us; His eternal Gospel already does that. But this judgment—pure ultimate justice—gives us every reason to give glory to God. So, with loud voices, and in every way possible, let us give Him glory!

ED

<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 533.



ANTHONY R. KENT | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

# Public Campus Ministry Needs You:

THE LOCAL CHURCH, THE PASTOR, THE ELDER,  
AND THE PCM LEADER TO THRIVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**College** is the time when many young people really explore their faith, develop leadership skills, connect with others, and in many cases make lifelong friends. This is where major decisions are made. Where they evaluate their faith and are forced to figure out their belief. Where they ask questions like, “What do I really believe?” It is on college campuses that many first learn how to evangelize—how to share the Word of God and how to disciple others. It is also on college campuses that some, at this crossroad, miss the way or walk away from their faith because they had no one to encourage or help point them in the right direction. Public Campus Ministry (PCM) is here to walk with them along this reflective journey.

The Youth Ministries Department has various ministries divided into two groups: Junior Youth (ages 4–15) and Senior Youth (ages 16–30+). The Public Campus Ministry (ages 16–30+) falls in the Senior Youth category. PCM is a collaborative ministry with several departments—Education, Ministerial, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, Health, and Adventist Chaplaincy.

This specialized ministry is designed to love, equip, engage, and disciple Adventist students, faculty, and staff on public college/university campuses into being committed to their faith journey and involved in the mission of the church. It seeks to fuse a healthy partnership with local churches and provide mentoring support and spiritual guidance. “The work is done in collaboration with divisions, unions, conferences, and attached fields to assist the church as a whole to be united in its endeavors to keep youth and young adults fully committed to the faith and the mission of the church even as they pursue

their studies in a public institution, and to train and involve them in ministry wherever they are.”<sup>1</sup>

### **UNENTERED TERRITORIES**

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the only United Nations agency with a mandate in higher education, some 254 million students are enrolled in universities around the world—a number that has more than doubled in the last twenty years and is set to expand.<sup>2</sup> We can only imagine that of that number, many are not Seventh-day Adventists or of another Christian faith. College and university students are a powerful group. This is the group that will change the world. These are the future leaders. Many are open to new beliefs that are different from their ancestors. This unprecedented opportunity to share the Gospel with students and others on public campuses globally also brings with it great responsibility, and even an indisputable obligation.

Because of the ratio of Adventists to non-Adventists on public campuses, the General Conference Youth Ministries Director, Pastor Busi Khumalo, has declared public campuses unentered areas that need to be disciplined. Here is our chance to minister to this strategic demographic who is young and vibrant, ready and eager to learn, and open to exploring new ideas, new ideologies, and new faith journeys. The extent to which the local church supports Public Campus Ministry determines the success of the ministry and the penetration of the Gospel in the unentered areas. “The Lord has appointed the youth to be His helping hand.”<sup>3</sup>

In an environment filled with philosophy, scientific concepts, and research, a lot can blow up at university age—for either good or bad. Student-led revolutions across the globe demonstrate the power

of young people to make changes. Several of these student-led protests come to mind: France’s May 1968 protests, China’s 1989 Tiananmen protests, Iran’s 1979 revolution, and South Africa’s Soweto Uprising of 1976. Recently, students in Thailand (2020) and Chile (2019) organized mass demonstrations, and many students worldwide continue to participate in global climate strikes. The church should take advantage of the youth’s energies, creativity, boldness, and determination by empowering them to bring the three angels’ messages to public campuses. Adventist youth studying on campuses are essentially missionaries in unentered areas, and they need the support of the local church. Their presence and impact on public campuses make them an extension of the local church’s work.

### **THE LOCAL CHURCH**

Without a healthy partnership with local churches, PCMers may lack the practical resources needed to have a successful college faith experience. Furthermore, the local church—the keeper of the records—provides accountability (through membership to the larger, global church) and serves as a space where students can explore their faith and seek spiritual and tertiary life guidance from a community of mentors. “Someone from the local church should ‘adopt’ the student as part of a homelike experience, becoming the student’s mentor and spiritual adviser. This new sense of community fills the void created when the student left home to attend school.”<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, the local church plays a critical role in discipling (spiritual) and mentoring (professional) students who attend church at the university or the local church. Because the local church is the primary base for ministry, PCM is

most effective when it is responsive to local needs, guided by local convictions, and placed in the hands of local people. The local church can also provide occasions for the students to participate in organized service projects, partner with local church tutoring programs, and participate in Global Youth Day and other youth ministries and community service opportunities that can foster a sense of purpose and help them develop leadership skills, all while positively impacting their communities. For faculty and staff, PCM can help them navigate the challenges and pressures of their professional lives, build meaningful relationships with others, and provide service ministry opportunities. This level of caring, nurturing, and collaboration between PCM and the local church will provide spiritual growth, a sense of community, unity, and a coordinated effort to bring the good news to public campuses.

### THE PASTOR AND ELDER

We recognize that nothing happens without the support of pastors and elders, the gatekeepers of the local church. Since PCM is a rela-

tively new ministry, it needs heightened attention so that its foundation at the local church is strong and well established. Ideally, pastors and elders should become familiar with the programs and initiatives of PCM and include in their member visitations public campus students, staff, and faculty personnel. This type of intentional attention would go a long way in encouraging these missionaries, these ambassadors of Jesus. With the local church involvement, the programs and initiatives would likely receive advocacy from positions of influence and increase the chance of success and support of all church members for this unique ministry.

To learn more about Public Campus Ministry and how you can become a mentor or be involved, please visit our website.<sup>5</sup> Ministry and outreach to public colleges and universities will benefit more when the PCM fellowship has strong roots in the local church.

### THE PCM LEADER

Just as the local church needs visionary elders and pastors, the Public Campus Ministry leader

is critical to the operations of the ministry. We have noted with grave concern that many local churches do not have an elected PCM leader. Programs and initiatives of the ministry will be starved unless there is vision and direction at the local church. Who will implement the PCM agenda if no one is accountable for it? Who will advocate for the mission on public campuses? Who will be the conduit between the local church and the public campus? The overarching responsibility of the PCM leader is to ensure the holistic development of Adventist students, faculty, and staff on public campuses. It is the leader's job to care for their spiritual, emotional, relational, and practical needs as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of university life. Page 112 of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* encourages churches to "appoint a Public Campus Ministries leader/coordinator to develop an intentional ministry with the purpose of caring for the special needs of college or university students in institutions not operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church." So, if your local church does not

**Consequently, the local church plays a critical role in discipling (spiritual) and mentoring (professional) students who attend church at the university or the local church.**



## The overarching responsibility of the PCM leader is to ensure the holistic development of Adventist students, faculty, and staff on public campuses. It is the leader's job to care for their spiritual, emotional, relational, and practical needs as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of university life.

have a PCM leader, please consider calling a church board meeting soon to fill the vacancy.

### PCM DAY

Public Campus Ministry Day, celebrated annually, is a day of recollection and focus, designed to help PCM members connect locally and internationally. Most divisions celebrate it in June. In 2025 it has been scheduled for Sabbath June 28 by the General Conference. Be sure to check your division's dates. PCM Day is set aside to give young Adventist students, staff, and campus faculty a chance to get together and focus on learning long-term strategies to grow their faith, stay connected with their local church, and share their faith with others. Celebrated at the local church level, PCM Day is a global program that helps to instill and foster profound spiritual growth and effectiveness, and encourage sustainable long-term strategies—not short-term fixes. It seeks to ignite a spirit of mission and unity of purpose that transcends barriers and catalyzes positive and holistic change in the lives of city dwellers. "Every son and daughter of God is called to be a missionary; we are called to the service of God and our fellow men; and to fit us for this service should be the object of our education."<sup>6</sup> At its core, PCM Day is a call to action—a rallying cry for students in urban areas to reclaim the cities for Jesus. It recognizes that the actual world changers are those immersed in spreading the Three

Angels' Messages through personal/lifestyle influence, community service, and digital evangelism.

In particular, PCM Day is designed to:

- connect the local church with Adventist students and staff on public campuses,
- increase visibility and function of the PCM leader at the local church,
- encourage local church members to support students in their academic journey,
- encourage local church members to support staff on their professional journey,
- encourage students and staff to "GO" in mission for God using the method of Jesus, and
- inspire Adventist students and staff to increase their commitment to Christ.

### CONCLUSION

In Ephesians 4:12 Paul reminded the Christian church that it was their responsibility to train believers to serve God, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ," (ESV). This is the role of PCM—to guide, train, mentor, and help them grow in all realms of life. Yes, this is PCM working with the local church to engage young people, staff, and faculty members on public campuses, sharing the Gospel and nurturing their spiritual lives to become committed followers of Jesus, dedicated leaders of the church, foster Christian discipleship and genuine Christian living, and help them find

a sense of belonging. Together, church and campus, working to provide a safe and supportive community for disciples who are devoted to the Word of God, prayer, ministry, and redemptive social involvement, and becoming faithful citizens of the world to come. Public campuses offer significant opportunities for Adventist youth and professionals on campuses to partner with Jesus in the mission of redemption, becoming impactful coworkers in spreading His message. This is PCM! We are true to our motto: follow Jesus, embrace His mission, and change the world!

So, whether you are looking for a place to belong, personal growth, or service opportunities, there is a place in PCM for you to enrich your spiritual life and help you make a more meaningful impact in your community and the world. Remember, over 254 million students are enrolled in colleges worldwide. Sure, there is somewhere for you to help too. PCM needs you. ED

<sup>1</sup> Pako Mokgwane, "Public Campus Ministry Becomes Part of Youth Ministries," *Dialogue*, Vol. 33, no. 2 (2021), 34.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "What You Need to Know About Higher Education" (last updated July 4, 2024), <https://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/need-know>.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings (1902; Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1999), 7:64, CD-ROM.

<sup>4</sup> *Public Campus Ministry Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2017), 8.

<sup>5</sup> "Public Campus Ministry," General Conference Youth Ministries, <https://www.gcyouthministries.org/events-and-projects/public-campus-ministries/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings (1905; Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1999), 395, CD-ROM.

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**PUBLIC CAMPUS  
MINISTRY DAY**



# MISSION WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

**28 JUNE 2025**

**#PCM25**



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# Making a Community: Board Games

**Making** a community is something that we should all strive to do in our local churches. As church leaders and elders, we should lead by example. If we want our churches to become places of mission, places of evangelism, and places of inclusivity, we need to do it first.

Firstly, I would like to define what I see as a community: A community is a group of people who meet regularly, who share life experiences with one another, and who trust each other. Simply put, a community is a group of people who actually care about one another.

With this definition in mind, let's look at what I believe are the four critical steps in making a community:

1. Genuine interest.
2. "Catching" opportunities.
3. Vibes.
4. Finding leaders.

Let's dive into a little more detail for each point, and for each point, I will give a practical example of how I believe I successfully implemented it in my local communities.

## **GENUINE INTEREST**

You have to be genuinely passionate about the community you want to create. Want to create a sewing club? Love sewing! A running club? Be passionate about those runs! Want to create a Bible study group? Be someone who already studies the Bible and *loves* it.

I knew I wanted a way to reach people outside the church in Sarajevo. The thing is, I have no "traditional" skills—at least ones that the church usually uses for evangelism. With no skills in health (diet, exercise), and no major technical skills, I felt I wasn't good at anything.

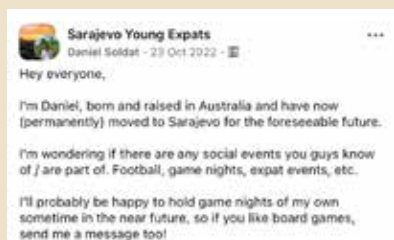


SCAN FOR AUDIO

But I knew I loved board games. Yes, old-school board games. In Australia, before emigrating to Bosnia and Herzegovina, I worked in a board game store, and it was the easiest job of my life. I used to play Bible board games as a kid, played board games at church events, and I used to also play board games with people completely unrelated to the church. I played some version of board games several times a week. But the problem was that I only knew two people in Sarajevo, and neither of them were into board games. Neither did Sarajevo have a board game scene; there wasn't an established board game group, store, or regular meet-ups.

### CATCHING OPPORTUNITIES

If you are in similar shoes—knowing what you love, but seeing that there is nothing established, nothing created—what do you do? You “fish.” And I fished. Because of my nonexistent social network in Sarajevo, I had to do it the “old” way—post on Facebook.

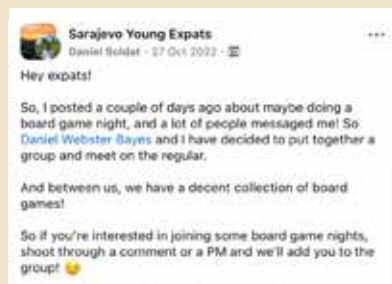


Facebook screenshot provided by Daniel Soldat.

This was my first post, and as you can see, I was testing the waters. I had no idea if any groups existed or if anyone would be interested. You can see that I did not post confidently, nor was I suggesting anything concrete. In hindsight, I recommend suggesting something specific and adding a photo to your post. I got only two people who commented, but built on this.

With this limited interest, I decided to post again. This time specifically mentioning board gaming

and adding a photo. This post got significantly more traction, with over thirty comments. With all of this interest, we started adding people to our board game WhatsApp group. By the end of the week, we had over twenty members!



Facebook screenshot provided by Daniel Soldat.

We started meeting up regularly and I started becoming more confident in leading game nights and teaching games. During these game nights I would take photos and post them on my social media.

Through this, some church members noticed and expressed interest in attending. Soon I started having social nights with the young people from the church. They enjoyed it, and they shared pictures on their social media. Always suggest to people to take photos and post it; it is the best way to grow!

I would like to take a moment to clarify how important it is that you do not overlook opportunities: Kristina (my girlfriend at the time, now my wife) posted a few stories on her Instagram while we were playing games. She mentioned to me that a person she knew was liking all of her stories on Instagram that included board games. She said that as just a comment in passing.

A couple of weeks later he posted a story of himself, playing a board game. At that moment I knew what had to be done, and I do not know why—I have never done something like this before. I said to Kristina, “Message him and say we should play some time.”

We didn't get a response.

Later he posted another story of him playing board games, so again I said to Kristina, “Message him again! Tell him, ‘My boyfriend likes board games, you like board games, wanna grab a coffee with him?’” (Cultural insert: “coffee” in Bosnian is just having a non-alcoholic drink, not necessarily a coffee.)

He accepted. We met, had a non-alcoholic drink, and we became really good friends. In the end we (with our partners) opened Roll&Play together, the only board game club in Sarajevo. It was a huge success. All of our events are always at maximum capacity, and through Roll&Play I met so many



Photo by Daniel Soldat

Kristina and Daniel Soldat, before our first ever Roll&Play Event at DKC Sarajevo.



Photo by Daniel Soldat

Kristina teaching people to play Settlers of Catan at our “Learn to Play” event.

people interested in board games and was able to make so many new friendships. Through our Roll&Play organization, we even changed the city. Two new board game stores opened in Sarajevo to meet the new demand.

### VIBE. VIBE. VIBE.

It wasn't all rainbows, butterflies, and success. There were a lot of moments where it looked like everything was going to come down. At one point with the expat group, I had only two people attending. Why? The vibe. The vibe at my place (which is where we were holding events) was not interesting. Not only did I not drink or smoke, I was focusing more on the games than the people. There was no good ambience. No good music. The design of the room could have been significantly better. I remember sitting there and saying to Kristina, "Something is not working. I am not providing a good enough experience for the people who are coming. Something has to change."

It's hard to admit to yourself that what you're doing is wrong. It's even harder to fix the mistake. And so I started researching. What makes a good board game night? What are good vibes? How should I be teaching board games? I even questioned how often we should be having board game nights. Your vibe needs to be good. You need to have a focus on the people who are coming. You have to create a "brand."

Through a lot of self-analyzing, game nights at my place are now always booked in advance, and spots at our game nights at Roll&Play always fill up between thirty minutes and two hours of us releasing the sign-up form (even for paid events).

If you had a group that was meeting and isn't meeting as often, or less and less people are at-

tending, check the vibe. We've had long breaks (months!) between our events and when we come back, it makes no difference. It's not a summer break that killed your community; it's the vibe.

And I want to mention a critical part of trying to create any community: are you trying to convert someone or do you genuinely care about them? What vibe are you giving off? There was a group of Christians who were running a board game club in Sarajevo for two years before I came. I went once. They had two or three people attending (usually already people who attend their church), and have had no success in Sarajevo. Why? They ended the night with a mandatory prayer and reading from the sectarian literature. You'll never make a friend by trying to convert them. And you'll never be able to share your beliefs with someone who's not a friend—at least, in my opinion. Our Roll&Play nights are designed to make friendships and provide a service to the wider community. They are not designed to convert someone.



Photo by Natalie Soldat

Five friends from the Board Game Group who attended church (front two rows) to support me and show me that they care about me. Names withheld for privacy reasons.

### FINDING LEADERS

One of the big mistakes we make when we successfully create a community is that we don't find what I call "vice-leaders." These are people who can step in when you're not there and can manage the day-to-day of the group. One of my first group members, also called Daniel, greets every new member in the WhatsApp group, tells them we meet at my place, asks them about games, recommends our group to others, and runs events in the park or other public spaces when I'm not around.

Our other Roll&Play friends ran an entire Roll&Play event without Kristina and me when we couldn't attend.

But how do we find these leaders? In my experience it's the people most passionate about whatever the community is and it's usually the person who is most excited about whatever community it is you're trying to make. Typically, it is not the most experienced person.

Once you've found that person, make it obvious to the group that they're your right hand. Mention them to new members. Give them responsibilities.

To sum up: find something you love, and fish for people who love that thing also. Create a good vibe and that will lead to people naturally inviting their friends to the new community.

Let's listen to Jesus' command: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12, ESV).

Remember, let's show God's love, and establish these communities to make real friendships—not just to convert someone. Care about the people in your communities, and they will care about you.

ED

**Daniel Soldat**, BA, is an assistant pastor in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# Elders as Leaders in Local Churches

**During** the early stages of the Christian church, two critical responsibilities for leadership and authority were established: elders, or presbyters, and overseers, or bishops. Presbyters were in charge of pedagogical contact with the congregation, providing leadership and guaranteeing the welfare of its members. They were also entrusted with administering the sacraments and maintaining decorum among the religious community. Simultaneously, bishops' roles expanded to include more extensive responsibilities. These people were tasked with overseeing many congregations, giving overall leadership for the entire church. The names "presbyters" and "bishops" are used interchangeably in the canonical New Testament, and these persons are regarded as essential spiritual shepherds within the Christian community.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

In the New Testament, Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 outline the necessary qualities for these important posts. The faithful must respect and follow these leaders, recognizing the expertise and experience they bring to their positions. Individuals chosen for these positions were generally mature and had substantial experience.

### **SOME REFERENCES TO “ELDERS” IN THE BIBLE**

Exodus 3:16 describes the “elders of Israel” as the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. The apostles of the early Christian church were considered elders (Acts 15:2). Paul mentored and encouraged Timothy as a young pastor. In several of his letters, Paul instructed Timothy regarding the role and selection of elders. Timothy 3:1–7 describes the qualifications for elders, including being above reproach, faithful to their spouse, able to manage their households well, and having a good reputation outside of the church. As leaders and teachers, elders must be able to teach and lead effectively. Paul also instructed Titus, another young pastor, about the appointment of elders in Titus 1:5–9. Both letters emphasize the importance of selecting capable and qualified leaders. Following these instructions, Timothy and Titus could appoint and support elders in their congregations. They demonstrated the importance of mentorship and training in church leadership. Many Bible references refer to “elders” and their roles, and their responsibilities vary depending on the context.

### **THE NEED FOR ELDERS IN CHURCHES**

The reasons may vary, but typically elders serve as spiritual leaders and decision-makers for the congregation. Some reasons for the need for elders in churches include the following:

- Elders provide leadership, guidance, and direction for the church, making important decisions and setting the vision for the congregation (1 Pet 5:1–2).

- Elders are expected to be mature, faithful Christians who can provide wise and biblical counsel to others (Titus 1:5–9).

- Elders may be responsible for teaching and preaching in the church, helping members grow in their faith (Acts 20:28–31).

- Elders oversee the congregation’s spiritual well-being, ensuring members live according to biblical principles (Heb 13:17).

- Elders serve as examples to the rest of the congregation, demonstrating how to live a life of faith and service (1 Pet 5:3).

These are some of the main reasons elders are essential in many churches. Serving in these roles, they help to build and strengthen the church, providing leadership and guidance for the members.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY ELDERS IN A LOCAL CHURCH**

- Elders may have to navigate and balance different opinions and viewpoints within the congregation, trying to find a balance that works for everyone (Acts 6:2–4).

- Elders may be called upon to help resolve conflicts within the church, which can be complex and emotionally charged (Jas 5:14).

- Elders live in a rapidly changing world and often may struggle to remain current and relevant or to keep up with the needs and concerns of younger members of the congregation (Eccl 3:1–8; 12:1).

- Elders may face challenges in managing limited resources, such as finances and personnel, and deciding how best to allocate those resources (2 Cor 8:13–15).

- Elders may struggle to maintain harmony within the church,

especially when differing opinions exist on essential issues (Eph 4:1–6).

- Elders may experience burn-out from the demands of their role and may struggle to maintain their spiritual health and well-being while serving the congregation (1 Cor 9:27).

These are some challenges that elders may face in their role, but with prayer and support, they can continue to serve the congregation and lead the church towards growth and health.

### **ELDERS AND VISITATION**

Visitation is an essential aspect of the role of elders. They are responsible for visiting members of their congregation to offer spiritual support and encouragement and help resolve any issues they may be facing. Here are a few relevant Bible verses that relate to the subject of elder visitation:

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb 13:17, NIV).

“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (1 Thess 5:12–13, NIV).

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2, NIV).

Ellen G. White also wrote extensively on the role of church elders and the importance of pastoral visitation. Here are a few summary statements from her writings on the importance of visiting with our members:

It is not enough to preach to men; we must pray with and for them and sympathize with the souls we want to save by visiting

and talking to them. Working outside the pulpit will yield ten times more than at the desk.<sup>1</sup>

The minister must make house calls. He should talk to all family members, regardless of their beliefs. He must assess everyone's spiritual state and live close to God to counsel, exhort, and rebuke wisely. The grace and glory of God should be in his heart and mind. God forbids frivolity. His remarks should grace heaven.<sup>2</sup>

The pastor should visit each family, teaching, talking, and praying for their souls. Those who want to learn about our faith should be thoroughly instructed.<sup>3</sup>

Preaching is popular, but soul-saving is not. We don't care about dying men like Christ would. Christ's messengers are watchmen for Israel, alerting them of soul perils. Pastors watch, feed, warn, rebuke, and encourage their flock. There is visiting to conduct watchman work, not to chat. These

folks need sincere discussion and prayer. This effort builds Christ's kingdom and provides significant experience.<sup>4</sup>

These citations underscore the significance of the role of church elders (and pastors), the importance of visitation, and the need for practical service in alignment with Christ's teachings.

### THE BLESSINGS OF SERVING AS AN ELDER IN A CHURCH

As elders, we can deepen our faith and spiritual understanding and grow our relationship with God. Elders have the unique opportunity to guide and steer the church in the right direction and positively impact the lives of others. Elders can build meaningful relationships with congregation members, fostering supportive and encouraging communities.

By serving the church, elders may discover new strengths and

abilities and use their talents and spiritual gifts to help it grow. By serving and fostering the church, elders may find purpose and satisfaction. Being an elder in a church can bring many blessings. Serving others can help elders experience profound spiritual growth and a sense of purpose while strengthening the church community. **ED**

<sup>1</sup> For the exact quote please see: Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 8, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> For the exact quote please see: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1885), 2:338.

<sup>3</sup> For the exact quote please see: Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1995), 223.

<sup>4</sup> For the exact quote please see: *Ibid.*, 224.

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## A Tree, a Man, and a Free Dinner: Redemption

### INTRODUCTION

“Long, long time ago there was a short man who . . .” The story captures our imagination. It is a story about Jesus and sinners. It was preserved to teach us how the saving power of Jesus can transform a life. It is a story about a person who was dissatisfied with his achievements and who was looking for something better. His soul was yearning for the good and beautiful; for the divine, and the divine found him where we all were found—on a tree.

### I. ZACCHAEUS, THE CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR

We know a few things about this man. First, his name is Zacchaeus (*Zakchaiōs*), based on the Hebrew *Zakkai*, meaning “clean,” “innocent,” expressing the wishes of his parents. How little we know about the future of our children! They come as a gift, we embrace them with love, and we wonder about their future. We want them to be good, to enjoy life, and to be pure. But others also influence them and often the future we imagined perishes before our eyes. Zacchaeus made a number of choices and they transformed him into who he was.

Second, Zacchaeus is “a chief tax collector” (Luke 19:2, ESV), meaning that he was in charge of collecting the taxes and tolls of a region, and that other tax collectors worked for him. The Roman government allowed persons like Zacchaeus to collect taxes and tolls and to obtain some personal gain by overcharging the people. The result was abuse and the exploitation of the poor. The phrase “Zacchaeus the chief tax collector” is an oxymoron. A tax collector could not be an innocent person!

Third, Zacchaeus is “rich.” Tax collectors were hated by Jews and were never totally accepted by the Romans. He knew that his fortune was the result of his exploitation of the poor. However, the story suggests that Zacchaeus was yearning for something better—friendship, acceptance, and inner peace. Fourth, today Zacchaeus is in Jericho on his business, or so he thought. God never abandons our children because they are also His children. That very same day Jesus entered Jericho on His last journey to Jerusalem. They will meet each other and Zacchaeus will never again be the same.

### II. ZACCHAEUS ON A TREE: JESUS SAW HIM

Zacchaeus sees a crowd in conversation with a person and wonders what is happening. I suppose he asked about this person and, knowing that He is Jesus, he wants to see Him. You have to ask yourself, why would he want to see Jesus? Perhaps, when tax collectors gathered together

to talk about their exploits, someone may have mentioned Jesus and said in a tone of amazement, “The Jewish leaders say that there is something wrong with Him because He eats with tax collectors and sinners” (cf. Luke 7:34). Yes, Zacchaeus has to see this Man who has fellowship with people like him. *Perhaps*, he may have said to himself, *I could invite Him to come home to dine with me*. The yearning was there because the One whom he has not yet seen was causing him to long to see Him. Before we went out seeking for Jesus, Jesus was already there seeking us.

Zacchaeus longs to find out whether Jesus would accept him, the despised chief tax collector. “Is there anyone who really cares for me? If that is the case, I have to see that person.” The story is there for you. It tells you, “Yes, there is such a Person.” Zacchaeus jumps up and down trying to get a glimpse of the young Rabbi, but being of short stature he is unable to see Him. Then, Zacchaeus sees the sycamore tree on the side of the road.

The branches of the tree are low enough for Zacchaeus to grab them and climb on to the tree. From there he sees Jesus! Soon Jesus looks up and says to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down [Gk. *katabaino*], for I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5, ESV). I imagine Zacchaeus thinking, *Jesus knows my name and my desire to be true to it; to be pure, and innocent! He indeed eats with tax collectors and sinners like me!* Jesus had approached other trees seeking fruit and found none, but today, as He is approaching the sycamore tree, He finds a wonderful fruit, Zacchaeus! This fruit must be removed from the tree in order to be part of His Kingdom. So, Jesus shouts to Zacchaeus, “Do not waste time, come down quickly, I am going home with you.” This is divine acceptance. The joy of salvation possesses him and he hurries home with the Man who invited Himself to dinner.

Some in the crowd are not happy: All who saw it “grumbled, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!’” (Luke 19:7, ESV). Somehow we expect God to reject those whom we reject. Somehow we have concluded that our standards for fellowship ought to bind and limit God’s love and compassion. Everybody was complaining, including the disciples. Zacchaeus was a sinner, but not them. We are hard on others because we have forgotten that the grace extended to Zacchaeus was also extended to us.

### III. COME DOWN FOR I WILL GO UP: SALVATION

Repentance is not mentioned, but it is there. Grace brings with it radical change

and we see things in a different light. Zacchaeus is accepted by Jesus and He wants now to be the person he intended to be. Zacchaeus has decided to help the poor (giving them half of what he has), and to redress the abuses he has committed (paying back fourfold those he abused); the fruit of repentance. He wants to be as gracious to all as Jesus has been to Him. The beauty of this response is that it was not solicited by Jesus. It came from the heart of the tax collector as his response to the grace received.

The last voice we hear in the story is that of Jesus. He answers the charges of the multitude and explicitly tells Zacchaeus how divine grace reached him today in Jericho. In the story, salvation and Jesus are equated (Luke 19:5, 9). Jesus seems to be saying to the crowd, “Even before you realized that you were sinners God had sent the Son of Man ‘to seek and to save that which was lost.’” Those who open the door of their heart to Jesus are true children of Abraham.

The mystery of this grace was revealed by the sycamore tree. For Jesus Zacchaeus was in the wrong place; on the tree. His place is at home with Jesus. The tree is for Jesus. He is the One who will go up the tree rejected by all. His enemies will tempt Him to come down from the tree: “If you are the Son of God, come down [Gk. *katabaino*] from the cross” (Matt 27:39–42, ESV).

Jesus will ascend the tree, in order for Zacchaeus to descend from it. Jesus said to him, “Today I must stay at your house.” Soon after that, Jesus ascended to Jerusalem to be nailed to the tree for us (Acts 5:30; 10:39; cf. Luke 23:31). He bore our sin on the tree (1 Pet 2:24) and became who we are. What happened in Jericho was part of the divine plan for Jesus: this “must happen” today. Jesus was taking sinners down from the tree; His mission was to seek them and free them. It happened in Jericho that day; it is happening here today.

### CONCLUSION

The story of Zacchaeus is a story about the cost of salvation; the price God paid to eat with and to transform sinners into clean, innocent persons, children of Abraham. Have you experienced the transforming power of the one who took you down from the tree and accepted you into His fellowship of love? Perhaps today is the day to say to Him, *Please take me and transform me*, or to thank Jesus for taking my place on the tree. ED

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## Universal Harmony: Singing in the Choir

### INTRODUCTION

If we utilize audio for the book of Psalms, we can hear the sound of many voices. The voice of the wicked is heard instigating rebellion against God and His people; the voice of the powerful is full of pride; the righteous praise God and at times weep, asking God for deliverance; the voice of God roars like a lion on behalf of His people, etc. The multiplicity of sounds in Psalms represents the noise produced by humans on a fallen planet. Is there a solution to this complex problem? Yes; it is found in Psalm 148. It identifies (1) the true center and only object of worship, (2) the reasons for worshipping God, and (3) the urgency implicit in the exhortation to praise our God.

### I. THE TRUE OBJECT OF PRAISE

For the psalmist there is only one object worthy of praise: Yahweh. Humans praise each other or the human intellect, ethnic pedigree or tribal superiority. There is nothing wrong with a word of encouragement or recognition for some accomplishment. Praising God is what we do when confronted with the source of our life. To praise God is to surrender our lives to Him; it is a lifestyle characterized by joyful submission to the Lord. In worship, we symbolically act out that daily surrender through our participation in the act of adoration. The ultimate preservation of human life is beyond human power. We must listen to the psalmist as he commands us to praise only God.

Notice in verse 1 the command to “Praise the Lord,” but in verse 5 we are ordered to “praise the name of the Lord.” The phrase “the name of the Lord” describes the Lord as He who revealed Himself to the human race and told us His name. The name is Yahweh’s self-revelation. His name makes Him available to us; we can contact Him through His name. God revealed Himself to us through the Name—that is, Jesus Christ. He is “the Name,” God’s man-ward side. The apostles rejoiced when persecuted because “they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41, ESV).

### II. REASONS TO PRAISE GOD AND HIS NAME

In Psalm 148, there are two sentences, introduced by the prepositions “for, because,” that provide the reasons for praising God, implying that praising God is rational, logical. The first is found in verses 5–6: We are to praise Him because “he commanded and they were created. And he established them forever and ever” (ESV). We praise Him because He is the Creator, the very Source of all life.

However, notice that the text emphasizes the mode of creation. He brought the universe into existence through a command: “He commanded and they were created.”

The Hebrew verb “to command” (*tsawah*) is always addressed to someone to do or not to do something. In verse 5, the “someone” is missing. God is giving an order and yet He is not addressing anyone! The Lord is speaking to that which was not as if it already existed. One could even say that what was not, came into being, in obedience to God. This does not make sense to us! The psalmist explored this mystery and he simply irrupted in praises. Yes, the Lord is to be praised because He brought the universe into existence through a command—in an effortless way.

God is also worthy of praises because He, and no one else, endowed creation with permanency and order. God is the Creator, Preserver, and Sustainer of the universe. He has not abandoned His creation.

According to verses 13–14, God is to be praised “for his name alone is exalted. . . . He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints” (ESV). High places were places of safety, where people built cities or climbed up when threatened by enemies. God is to be praised because there is no one higher than Him to whom we can go in times of distress and conflict.

Humans have created their own security systems and they tend to feel safe. Many scientists and philosophers assure humans that they know where we come from and where we are heading and we pretend to have found meaning for our lives. Then we hear the voice of the psalmist saying, “Human inventions will certainly fail you. You must find safety only in the Lord because He is high enough to raise you above the storms of this world.” Indeed, only God can be our refuge when confronted by pain, suffering, and rejection.

The psalmist adds another thought when he says, “He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints” (v. 14, ESV). “Horn” is a symbol of power or strength. The Lord has power available to His people—the praises of His people. When we praise the Lord we are spiritually strengthened, even empowered to live the Christian life. Praising the Lord does have a personal impact on our life and in the quality of that life.

### III. THE ELEMENT OF URGENCY

The verb “to praise” is used twelve times in Psalm 148, underlying its importance. Its repetition indicates urgency. There seems to be a great urgency as the psalm commands everyone in the universe to praise the Lord. Why the urgency? The answer seems to be provided by the way the psalm is organized. In verses 1–6 the *universe* is commanded to praise God, while in verses 7–14, *planet earth* is commanded to praise Him.

The psalm takes us to the very center of the universe and there heavenly beings are commanded to praise the Lord. It is from that

place in the cosmos that the psalm initiates a cosmic journey. As we travel away from that center, we hear the heavenly hosts being invited to unite their voices to that of the angels in praising God. As we approach our galaxy, the stars are ordered to praise God. And as we get closer to our solar system the invitation is extended to the sun and the moon. Then the psalm captures the shape of planet earth and the element of urgency intensifies as the command is heard, “Praise the LORD from the earth” (Ps 148:7, ESV). The rebellious planet is being invited to join the cosmic choir!

The psalm takes us to the oceans and commands the sea creatures to praise God. The meteorological phenomena—hail, snow, storm, fog, fire—are also commanded to join their voices to the cosmic choir. The psalm speaks to the mountains and hills and the flora and fauna, saying to them, “Join the universe in praising God!”

There is a voice missing in this glorious cosmic choir: the human voice. This voice is different for it is used to praise human accomplishments and power. This voice upsets the harmony of God’s creation and therefore it is indispensable for the human race to join the cosmic choir. Those who have power (kings and princes) are invited to praise the Lord (v. 11). The invitation is for everyone on earth (males, females, young, and old people) because humans need to find their center around the throne of God and His Name (v. 12).

The psalm has painted a canvas of universal harmony. It contains the key that solves the disruption of sin, the cacophony of voices. The universe can be restored to its original unity when up in the heavens and down on earth God becomes the exclusive object of praises and adoration.

### CONCLUSION

We have to ask: Are you part of that cosmic choir? Are you every day praising Jesus through word and action? This is urgent for it is crucial in the resolution of the cosmic problem. The universe will be healed when God is praised in heaven and on earth. And it will! Paul probably had this psalm in mind when he wrote in Philippians 2:9–11: “Therefore God has highly exalted him [Christ] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (ESV).

Let us continue singing in the cosmic choir and inviting others to join us. ED

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## Divine Providence: God’s Unfolding Plan

### INTRODUCTION

Life can be quite difficult and yet it can also be enjoyable. We exist experiencing joy and difficulties and wondering about the meaning and purpose of all we go through. A good biblical example of this situation is Joseph. He went through much, but he finally discovered the true source of meaning for his life. It appears that at some point during his difficult life he decided to analyze his own experience and concluded that what gave meaning to his life was God’s presence. Joseph found a divine purpose in everything he went through and concluded that universal history (history of Egypt) as well as his own personal history were under God’s loving lordship. The divine purpose is constantly unfolding within history. We call this divine activity God’s providence (Latin *providentia*, “to foresee,” including providing for it) or the unfolding of God’s plan and intention for His creation. We talk so little about it and yet it is the very foundation of a meaningful existence.

### I. GOD’S PROVIDENCE AND GUIDANCE

Let me begin by saying that those who believe in God’s providence will have a proper understanding of their function in life. Joseph looked at his brothers and said to them, “God sent me before you” (Gen 45:5, ESV). He saw himself as a servant of the Lord, as God’s agent in His providential care for humans.

We need to own this sense of purpose and mission. If there is a goal for the history of the world, for our lives, and for the church, then there is also a mission to be accomplished and you are part of it. To have a mission is to be persuaded that the Lord sent you to do what you are doing now for Him and for others. This is indispensable for the success of God’s purpose for us and for His church.

God sent you! A wonderful thought! Look back to your childhood and think for a moment about the place you were born, the environment in which you grew up, the schools you attended, and the struggles and conflicts you have gone through. Are you able to see the hand of the Lord guiding your life through all those experiences? Do you see God’s providence guiding your life? We should be able to say, “The Lord sent me; the experiences I have gone through, my mistakes and errors, have been brought under the controlling power of God in order to accomplish His plan for me.”

Your life has not been shaped by impersonal forces and neither has it been the accidental result of what others have done to you. It is the Lord who has been working through the complexity and perhaps wrong

turns of your life to prepare you to be His servant.

Joseph looked at his brothers and said to them, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:4–5, ESV). The one who believes in God’s providence will not allow bitterness to dwell in his or her heart. Notice that Joseph was mistreated by his own brothers, he was taken from one place to another, treated like a slave, and asked to do things that others would not do. There was much loneliness and suffering in the life of this young man. It would have been easy for him to become bitter, hating life and feeling sorry for himself. But he rejected those options. Bitterness is found only in the heart of those who do not seriously believe in God’s providence.

However, Joseph did not excuse the wickedness of his brothers. He said to them, “You sold me” to Egypt. It was not the Lord who sold him to Egypt; it was the brothers who did something cruel and heartless. Yet, God’s providence was powerful enough to create something good and meaningful out of the nothingness of chaos. It was because of that firm conviction that Joseph did not condemn his brothers. They were still his brothers!

### II. CHRIST: THE AGENT OF PROVIDENCE

The biblical doctrine of divine providence states that life is meaningful in spite of the presence of evil in this world. I am sure that there were occasions in Joseph’s life when he could not see or understand God’s providential care for him. But one day he finally saw the providential hand of God in his life and this changed the way he looked at his life and at the life of others. “For God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:5, ESV).

“To preserve life!” This is precisely what the doctrine of providence is all about! God is present in this world because He wants to preserve us alive—eternally alive. Christ entered our world of death and suffering and planted His cross between heaven and earth in order to allow life to flow down to us. He is the greatest manifestation of God’s providence on this planet; He is the true and only Preserver of life. It is because of Him that we can find meaning for our life. It is indeed amazing to find a cross right in the middle of our loneliness, suffering, and death. In the center of chaos we can find something to hold to: the cross of Christ, planted there by God Himself to orient our life and to instill in us the hope of a final victory over death.

Joseph knew that there was a clear and direct connection between providence and life. After he identified himself to his brothers he asked them an important question: “Is my father still alive?” (Gen 45:3, ESV). His brothers did not answer his question; in fact they could not answer it. They were interested in their own life and on how to preserve it. At this point in the story, they were terrified in the presence of Joseph who now had power over their lives. Joseph was ready to preserve their life.

### III. INSTRUMENTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

When our concept of God’s providence is weak, we are constantly over-concerned about the preservation of our own lives, but when it is strong and firm we are willing to do all we can to preserve the quality of life of others. This is possible because we have entrusted our personal life to the Lord and we know that He is able to preserve it even if we would have to walk through great and perplexing situations.

To preserve life, then, means that we are not only the objects of God’s providential care but that we are also channels through which God’s providence becomes effective in the life of others. Christ came to this world to preserve life and so have we! His providence reaches others through us as we proclaim their salvation through Christ.

To preserve life is to do all we can to make the lives of others meaningful and enjoyable. We should never destroy or limit in any way the possibility of joy and happiness for other people. When we share the love of God that is in our hearts, the kindness of the Spirit, and the blessings of the Lord with others, we are working with Christ in the preservation of life. In the process, our own life becomes meaningful and enriched.

### CONCLUSION

Life is meaningful. It is meaningful not because everything we experience is intrinsically meaningful but because God has the power to infuse meaning into our lives. In Christ, God entered into the meaninglessness of our existence and gave significance to that which had none. Whenever discouragement knocks at your door, remember that the Lord is leading you. I can assure you today that from the perspective of eternity you will be able to look back on your experiences in this sinful world and say, “The Lord sent me to planet Earth to preserve life.” Join Jesus in the preservation of life. ED

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# The New in “New Year”

## INTRODUCTION

Each year on January 1 a block of time ends, making it impossible for us to experience it again. We welcome the “New Year,” implying that the previous year is now the “Old Year.” What is the New Year? I suppose that during January 1 we celebrate the birthday of our planet; it is a year older. The truth is that we do not know exactly how old the planet is, though we know that it is very old. It is so old that it is showing signs of decrepitude.

## I. THE OLD: THE WORLD OF SIN

The planet has aged and its insides are sick and occasionally, among other things, it shakes and vomits lava that pollutes the atmosphere and brings death with it. Nature is tired of what humans have done to it. We are polluting the planet at a very fast rate and the result is an increase of suffering on the old planet. Pandemics have filled the human heart with fear and even despair. There is much talk about a very serious pandemic that is filling the earth with violence. We call it the mental health pandemic. Something drastic is happening to the human mind as a result of the moral, spiritual, and physical corruption of human beings. The most horrendous crimes and abuses are being committed around the world. The “Old Year” stands for a planet that is almost agonizing.

Each year we welcome a *new* year. Will it be different, significantly different from the old one? It could bring with it something different, a few things here and there may improve, but it will end the way this one is ending. In fact, the “New Year” is already old; it is part of the old. Nevertheless, there is something in the phrase “New Year” that should be emphasized: namely, the concept of the *new*. Humans exist anticipating the future because the future brings the new, what we have not seen before. Yes, we glance at the past because in some ways the past orients us, but we do not want to dwell there for too long because, even though it contains very good memories, it could be a place of remorse and guilt. So, we spend our life waiting for the new. But the new on this old planet is basically a patching of the old; it is the old with a new cover. The wise man said, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9, ESV)—an inescapable truth, for only God can create the *new*. The new in “New Year” points beyond the “New Year” to the radically *new* that only God can bring to fruition.

## II. ONLY GOD CREATES THE NEW

After sinning, Adam and Eve found themselves without a future. They grew old

in a moment and it happened at such speed that they were about to die. Then God came with the gift of the *new* wrapped up in the words of a promise (Gen 3:15). He created for them a future and a hope. The Lord said to the Israelites, who were in a similar situation to Adam’s, “There is hope for your future” (Jer 31:17, ESV).

The future by itself could be terrifying because it is uncertain. Some of us have gone through so much pain that when the telephone rings we ask ourselves, “Oh no, more problems?” The old has taught us not to wait for the new but for more of the same old stuff—more pain and suffering. In the midst of this terrible situation we hear the Lord telling us, “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth” (Isa 43:19, ESV). Life on this planet is about to change in a radical way . . . the *new* is coming! The Lord is telling us, “In the midst of your trials anticipate the *new*, the good, for I have the power to create the *new*.”

For us the “new” in “New Year” is a reminder of our constant expectation for the coming of hope—the return of Christ. Yes, as Christians we should also look back to the past but we should do it with the intention of looking at the love of God displayed on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. But it is also through the cross that God created for us the *new*: the crucified One is coming in glory. This is the *new*! The “new” in “New Year” should remind us about the most glorious manifestation of the presence of God to be seen on this planet. Look beyond the “New Year” to the coming of the *new* in Christ. This is God’s work.

## III. CHRIST BRINGS WITH HIM THE NEW

At the coming of Christ, the *new* will transform our human nature into a *new* nature free from the power of sin (1 Cor 15:53). There is something deeply wrong with humans that expresses itself in the absence of permanent peace and joy. Trust in Jesus’ power to sustain you, but remember, with the arrival of the *new* we will be changed. Paul says, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform [to change the form of something] our lowly body [damaged by sin] to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:20–21, ESV). The *new* is coming!

Second, the *new* will consist of our removal from a social and physical ecology influenced by evil. We live in an environment that is almost totally possessed by the old. We have damaged genes and we are also damaged by diseases found in our environment. We age and die because the fullness of the *new* is not yet here, but we

now look forward to the *new*: “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23, ESV).

Third, the *new* includes a new way of seeing Jesus. For now we see Him by faith, but at His return we will have permanent, unhindered, and visible access to our Saviour (Rev 1:7). We look forward to a time when we will exist in the immediate presence of the Saviour, never to be separated again (1 Thess 4:16–17) and experiencing eternal joy (Isa 35:10).

Fourth, the *new* includes a cosmic reunion. We have been separated from the visible interaction with angels and loved ones who died, but the *new* ends this condition. This reunion is initiated through the resurrection of the righteous ones (1 Cor 15:54–57). The individual hope merges here with the collective hope of the totality of God’s people and together we will be reunited with the rest of God’s heavenly family. The *new* is coming!

Finally, the *new* also includes the end of the cosmic conflict after the Millennium, when the fullness of the *new* will be realized: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . . ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true’” (Rev 21:1, 5, ESV).

## CONCLUSION

Yes, we are not looking forward to a “New Year,” but to the coming of Christ Who will bring with Him the truly *new*. I suppose this would be a good time to ask you to make new resolutions for the New Year, but I will not do that. What I will suggest to you is to look back to the moment when you first met Christ, when you embraced the hope of the *new* that He offered to you in the form of a promise, and to use this moment to reaffirm that embrace of love in an act of gratitude. This is not a new resolution, but a reactivation of the old one that remains always *new* in our hearts and that strengthens us as we face trials and difficulties while we wait for the consummation of the *new*. ED

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD, is a retired director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.

## SERMON NOTES

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# MARANATHA STUDY BIBLE

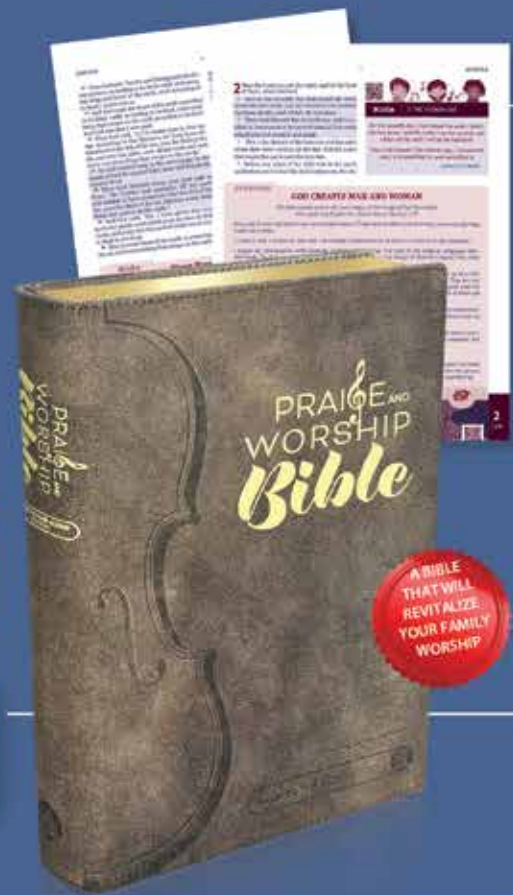
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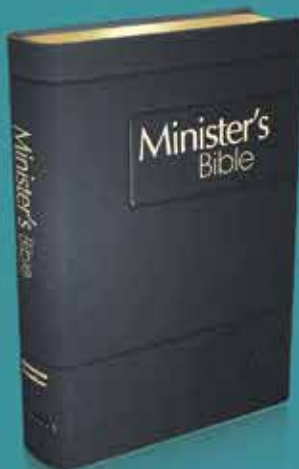


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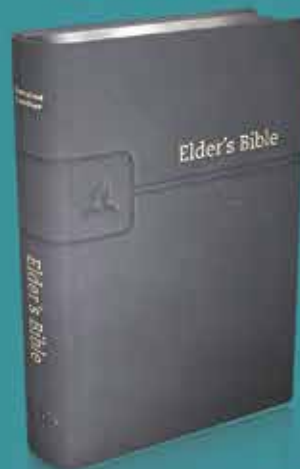


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SCAN FOR AUDIO

# A Testimony: A Story of Love and Redemption

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

This is an amazing and inspiring story of love and redemption, demonstrating the providential leading of a loving and compassionate God. Spanning decades, this transformational testimony shows two young vulnerable lives being gently led from brokenness and suffering to experiencing grace, joy, love, and healing. Leaders are encouraged to meditate and reflect upon the power of God to radically transform lives.

As you read this heartwarming account, ponder the following questions:

How significant was the Bible in Jeff and Gerri's journey?

How vital was a book, shared generations earlier, by a faithful disciple of Jesus?

How has God ministered to me and led me during my life?

Who are the key people who have helped me in my experience with Jesus?

Who are people that I can help to discover grace, joy, love, and healing?

**Jeff:** Next to the base was a small village of rice farmers we protected. We took medical teams in there at times to do basic care for the villagers. It was a good feeling to help them and we got to know them. A few months after we finally left this base to move to another one, the North Vietnamese Army came in and wiped out the whole village. There were old men, women, and children. The young men were in the service.

Nobody wins in a war zone. You started to wonder why there is so much evil. Many people turned to drinking or drugs when life got hard. If they already had a habit, it got worse. Did this help? No. It was a downward spiral.

Eventually my tour was up. The casualty rate in the area I was in was twenty-five percent. I was not one of them. I thought to myself, *I will never complain again! Everyone in the United States has it made and many do not realize it!* Obviously, this is not true. This whole planet is a war zone.

I was discharged on March 10, 1971, in California. Back then, if you wore your uniform you could fly standby for free on any open seats. The only problem we were warned about was the protesters and hecklers who would try to bother us. The protesters would tell us how stupid we were for serving our country. We already felt beaten down and drained. Some wounds are invisible. I came back to Michigan and just wanted to relax, rest, and readjust for a while before looking for work. I bought a fast car and did a lot of drinking and partying.

In June of that year, I was down in Detroit visiting my friend Greg. He was going through a divorce so we went out drinking. That night we were in a bad car accident. Greg was thrown out of the car. I had to be cut out of the car. All my ribs were broken and they cut a hole in my throat so I could breathe. Greg died a couple days later. I ripped all my tubes out; I couldn't take the news about Greg. A day later my kidneys failed. My mind wasn't thinking clearly and, believing I was in a POW hospital, I tried to escape. They put me on kidney dialysis and eventually my kidneys and thinking started to work again. Eventually I went back home to Midland, Michigan, to recover. Would this stop my drinking? No!

I was raised in a loving Christian home. My mother was raised a Methodist and became a Lutheran when she married my father. We went to church most every week. We said prayers before meals. We did not study the Bible or have any family worship though. During my childhood, seeds were planted; church and worship were important.

Drinking and smoking were acceptable in my family and the Lutheran Church. When I turned 16, I got a part-time job while go-

ing to school and bought my first car, a '57 Chevy Belaire. I paid \$250 and got a payment book. I also started drinking with friends at this time. I continued drinking through high school and it became my habit on weekends. Be careful what habits you start; some can be very hard to stop and some have no value! I had no idea where this would lead me.

By the time I graduated high school in 1967, the Vietnam War was going strong. If you could afford college and had the desire to go you could be deferred. I tried taking business and computer programming till spring of 1969 but my heart wasn't in it. I mostly partied and drank with friends. In October of 1969 my cousin Larry Costley had been killed in a helicopter crash in Vietnam, as well as a few of my classmates. More would be killed or wounded.

My friend Bob Beck said he was joining the Marines and they had their training in California. I had never been on a plane so I said, "I'll join too." I thought I should trust the government and do my part. My father served in World War II, so why not me in Vietnam?

There was a lot of drinking and filthy language in the military at this time and my habits got worse. You can always find what you are looking for. Not everyone picked up these bad habits. Some kept their mind clear.

After training, most of us were sent to Vietnam. I was assigned to an artillery combat base, west of Danang. We were flown in by helicopter to many of the bases as it was quicker than roads, which often had landmines and snipers. This area was known as the "Arizona territory" because it was like the Wild West and was a free-fire zone.

My first night at the base the artillery was going all night, the

ground was shaking, and we new guys were not that good yet at determining outgoing and incoming artillery or rockets. We soon got used to it and knew when to get in the bunkers. My friend Bob drove over a land mine but survived it.

After my tour, I went back to drinking. In the fall of 1971 my friend Jim said he was getting a job on a Dodge truck assembly line in Warren, Michigan. He would get me in if I wanted to. I needed to do something, so I said OK. We stayed in hotels for a few weeks and then found a house to rent with a third guy named Curly. We spent our nights and weekends drinking.

Christmas that year we went home to Midland. We were out drinking on Christmas Eve and I got thrown in jail to spend the night. It wasn't pleasant. I called my dad on Christmas Day and asked if he would bail me out. He shouldn't have, but he did. I deserved to sit there and think. He knew I was a mess!

The holiday was over and we went back to work at the Dodge truck plant. That spring, our roommate Curly was drinking and driving his Triumph sports car. He was killed when he rolled his car. It was terrible, but we didn't change our lifestyle. Why would anyone with any sense or thinking continue living this way? How much destruction did I need to see? Is there not a better way to live?

Jim and I decided we couldn't afford a three-bedroom house now that Curly was gone. Jim looked in the advertisements and found a Detroit cop had a three-bedroom house and he wanted to rent two rooms. This didn't sound good to me, but we decided to go and look. The cop had just bought a new yellow Corvette and that's why he needed to rent out two rooms.

## Was God trying to tell me something? A couple of million people live in the Detroit metro area, and this guy ends up across the street from me on Kipling Street. Is the Lord telling me, “I saved your dad and now I am going to save you from your messed up life”?

We decided to try it, thinking maybe it would be a good cover for our poor lifestyle.

It was a nice quiet neighborhood. Across the street lived an old man called Mr. Martin. He asked me my name; I told him Kohtz. He then asked if I had any relatives in Sebewaing, Michigan. I told him my dad’s name is Elmer and he was born there in 1923. Mr. Martin lived in Sebewaing as a young man. He told me that while he lived there a young mother came out of her house one morning, screaming that her two-year-old son was choking and turning blue. Mr. Martin ran into the house and grabbed the boy by his ankles, turning him upside down and shaking him. His throat cleared, and he started breathing. The little boy was my dad!

Mr. Martin told me it was a good thing he saved my dad’s life fifty years ago or I wouldn’t be here today! I agreed and thanked him. Was this a coincidence that I moved into a house across the street from the man who saved my dad’s life? Was God trying to tell me something? A couple of million people live in the Detroit metro area, and this guy ends up across the street from me on Kipling Street. Is the Lord telling me, “I saved your dad and now I am going to save you from your messed up life”?

What is God going to do to me next? Well, then I met a lady named Teresa, in her fifties and living down the street. She wanted

to introduce me and Jim to a couple sisters a few doors down from her. We didn’t really want to meet them. We didn’t think they were our type.

Apparently, they didn’t think we were their type either, and they weren’t interested in meeting us.

Teresa didn’t give up. We all eventually said OK. Have you ever fought something that turned out to be good? Sometimes the Lord is working out good things behind the scenes that we are completely unaware of. I was getting tired of my life with no purpose and the Lord was going to help me change.

I was introduced to a pretty redhead named Gerri. I’d like her to tell her part of the story now.

**Gerri:** What a miracle when God can bring two broken people together and make them whole! That’s exactly what happened. I was on self-destruct when I was talked into meeting this guy who just moved in with the policeman, of all things! I knew it wasn’t going to work out, but to please Teresa, I’d at least meet him.

The last couple years had been hard on me. I did a lot of stupid things. All my life I had been searching for the missing part of me. I wanted a relationship with God. I didn’t find it in the church I went to and never thought of trying another church or, most important, to read the Bible. Those thoughts never even entered my mind. So I looked to the world for answers.

Any time a person thinks the world has answers, they are really turning to Satan for answers. In the ’60s the world was a horrible place to find answers, as it is still today. I was pulled into the “hippie lifestyle” of that time. People say it was the time of love and peace but I think it was a selfish time of people trying to fill their own emptiness using drugs and alcohol and each other. I was trying so hard at that time to like myself, to have others like me. In doing so I was destroying myself and hurting the innocent.

At my lowest point I was just so tired of it all and didn’t see how I could keep going. A thought came to me to just hold on. Just around the corner things are going to change.

Psalm 139:1–3 says, O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways (KJV).

I know God was talking to me! Even though I was so tired I did listen.

In Luke 15:4–7 Jesus asked a question:

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and goes after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.” I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (KJV).

Really all of us need to be rescued.

I was that lost sheep. All alone in the deep, dark woods surrounded by wolves that were attacking me and trying to kill me. But in the far distance I heard a voice calling my name! Could it be that someone cared enough to come into the woods to look for me?

I heard the voice again! It was getting closer! The wolves were backing off. I turned and could barely make out a figure running toward me! Yes! I was being rescued!

It took me a few years to figure out what had happened back then but slowly my life was getting better.

And yes, I met that guy down the street and eight weeks later we married. Little did we know we were starting a journey back to God together! I always picture God and the angels with smiles on their faces that day when Jeff and I met. I think they couldn't wait for us to realize what God was doing in our lives.

**Jeff:** What prompted the short engagement was my moving to

Lansing. I'd only known Gerri for two weeks. I didn't think living together would be right to do. (Me, the person with no morals!)

From that day forward, every day after work we would be together. I was starting to think this could be the one. I was tired of living like I had been.

There was something kind, gentle, and good about her. Did I, as a messed up person, deserve such a gift? I got up my courage and told her I was moving to Lansing and would she like to get married? Quite romantic, right? She said yes.

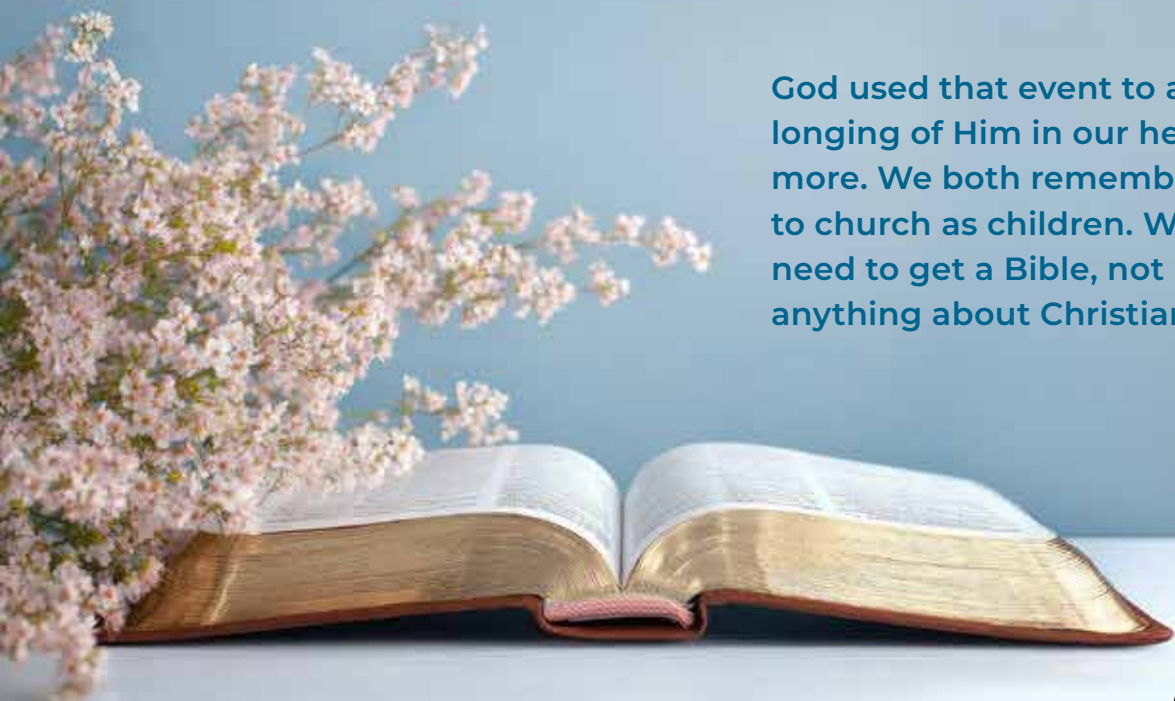
When I called to tell my parents I was getting married my mother said, "I've heard of no girlfriend and now you want to bring your future wife to meet us? What kind of girl is this?" Anyway, Gerri passed the test. My folks loved her of course.

We were married in the Catholic Church. Our families were there. We had a reception at Gerri's parents' house, low budget. Many of the neighbors came. My parents thought maybe I had turned a new leaf. I was starting to—a work in progress.

We lived in Lansing only five months as the wood shop venture I went in with my friend Ray was taking longer to start than I thought. I was still drinking and we moved back to Berkley and eventually bought our first house on 11 Mile Road in Berkley. It cost us \$17,900. In the year 1974, I went through a few more jobs—assembly line again, post office, sales—and decided to go back to college on the GI Bill. I took heating and cooling at Oakland Community College. I was still drinking and had been married for two years at that point. It was starting to put a strain on our marriage. Why would I continue to do something that hurt the one I love? What was my problem? I was thinking about me and what I wanted to do. Also, I was hiding from the past and all the pain.

**Gerri:** By now I had finally quit smoking my pack a day and stopped drinking and other things that were not good for me, with good reason. I was pregnant with our first child. God used that event to awaken the longing of Him in our hearts even more. We both remem-

God used that event to awaken the longing of Him in our hearts even more. We both remembered going to church as children. We felt the need to get a Bible, not knowing anything about Christian bookstores.



bered going to church as children. We felt the need to get a Bible, not knowing anything about Christian bookstores. With it being around Easter, we found a Bible in a drugstore. What a joy it was to read and get to know God. Those of you who were raised in a home with Bibles that were being read are so blessed. I never read the Bible till I was about twenty-three years old. Oh, what wonderful things I found in it!

**Jeff:** We were now blessed with our first son Adam. We started thinking we need to be good parents. As we read the Bible and listened to the Lord speaking to us, our hearts were touched. I asked the Lord to take away my desire to drink and my filthy language and to stop all the problems it had caused. He did that for me! What a miracle!

Psalm 51:10–11 says, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me” (KJV).

So now I had stopped drinking, my mind had cleared up, I was going to college, and we were reading the Bible.

On one of our trips up to Midland, Michigan, to visit my parents we discussed our new interest in the Bible, how I had stopped drinking and how the Lord was changing our lives. My mother told us she had a book that she got from her father that we might find interesting. She hadn't read it and she didn't know if he had either. The book was a 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*.

We took the book home and both started reading it and checking it against the Bible. I started with the chapter on the origin of evil, as I wondered why there is so much misery in this world. I then read how so many reformers, such as Luther, Jerome, Huss, and Wesley fought so hard to make the Scriptures available to all people in their language.

Many people died for this cause. We started to realize just how precious this Bible is. We also read how Jesus and all the apostles kept the Sabbath and it wasn't changed to Sunday till the third century by Constantine.

The author of *The Great Controversy* kept telling us to check everything we are told with the Bible. You cannot go by tradition. The Bible is our final authority. Matthew 15:9 says, “In vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (NKJV). What will we do with this new information?

**Gerri:** What to do with it? Well, we believed we should follow our

Saviour. We accepted the Sabbath because that is what Jesus and the apostles did and it is a part of the Ten Commandments. God showed us His Ten Commandments weren't to restrict us. He wants to protect us. He wants to keep us from destroying ourselves. They are wonderful and give us true freedom!

At the time we didn't know there were any other Christians around who still kept the Sabbath, because the book we had was so old, so we kept the Sabbath by ourselves for a few months. I started to look for work and said I wouldn't work during Sabbath hours. The person at the employment agency asked if I was a Seventh-day Adventist. I said, “Who are they?” We had never heard of them. We looked in a phone book (remember this was in the old days) to see if there was a church near us. We found one in Troy, Michigan, and visited that Sabbath and never stopped going! We believed we were home.

In Matthew 13:45–46 Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it!” (KJV).

I have found that Pearl of great price. That Pearl is Jesus! God made flesh and lived among us! He is in the pages of this book, the Bible, from Genesis to the end of Revelation! I will not give Him up for anything. I love my husband, my children, grandchildren. But I love Jesus more and, because of that, I can truly love each one of them as Jesus loves me.

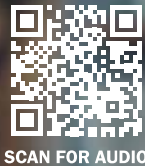
I cannot keep quiet about how much Jesus means to me. He is my life. He is what makes it worth waking up each day. I cannot live without His presence in my life! ED

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**Jeff and Gerri Kohtz** attend the Edenville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hope, MI, USA.



*The Great Controversy* - 1911 edition



SCAN FOR AUDIO

# *Love Is!: A Journey of Grief, Grace, and Gratitude*

**BY FRANK M. HASEL**

In his most recent book, *Love Is!: A Journey of Grief, Grace, and Gratitude*, published by Cascade Books in 2024, Frank M. Hasel embarks on a deeply personal and spiritual exploration of love and loss. His poignant story is not merely a narrative of grief but an inspiring testament to the transformative power of God's grace and how gratitude develops resilience in the face of significant, heart-rending, traumatic loss. Hasel's journey offers a deep and moving reflection on how one can navigate the tumultuous seas of grief and loss while embracing the healing balm of grace and gratitude.

Hasel's raw and authentic account of losing his wife Ulrike, the love of his life, draws the reader into his world of sorrow and healing. Through vivid and evocative prose, he captures the depth of his grief, allowing readers to feel the weight of his sorrow and the void left by her death. Anyone who has experienced significant loss will relate and resonate with his experience and emotions.

What sets this book apart from other stories of loss and grief is Hasel's unwavering focus on the themes of grace and gratitude. As the title suggests, love is not just a positive emotion but is something that encompasses grief, grace, and gratitude. This perspective is a refreshing and uplifting take on the grieving process. He eloquently describes how, even in the darkest moments of his grief, he found glimpses of grace that provided solace and strength. These moments of grace, whether through the comforting presence of friends, the beauty of nature, or the quiet assurance of his faith, serve as beacons of hope that guide him through the valley of sorrow.

The theme of gratitude is woven throughout the book, serving as a counterbalance to the heaviness of grief. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing and appreciating the blessings that remain, even in the face of loss. His ability to find gratitude in small, everyday moments is a powerful reminder that joy and sorrow often coexist. This focus on gratitude does not diminish the reality of his grief but rather enriches his journey by highlighting the moments of light and love that persist even in the darkest times.

One of the most compelling aspects of *Love Is!* is Hasel's unwavering faith. As a deeply committed Christian, pastor, and teacher, it is his very personal faith that plays a central role in his healing process. He shares how his relationship with God provided him with comfort, strength, and a sense of purpose when his pain was all encompassing and overwhelming. His reflections on prayer, Scripture, and the

support of his church family offer valuable insights for the reader who may be grappling with their spiritual beliefs during times of grief.

In addition to the personal anecdotes and reflections, Hasel includes very practical, down-to-earth advice, and pointers for those navigating their journey of grief and loss and for those who want to relate in helpful ways to people who have lost a loved one. His insights into the importance of lament provide biblical perspectives on how not to ignore those painful feelings of grief and loss and express them in healing ways. He offers gentle suggestions and guidance on how to embrace grace and cultivate gratitude, providing readers with tangible steps to incorporate these principles into their daily lives. This practical wisdom, combined with his deeply personal narrative, makes the book a valuable resource for those seeking healing and hope and for those who know people

who are struggling with the aftermath of loss and grief.

The book is beautifully structured, with each chapter building upon the previous one, creating a cohesive and compelling narrative that keeps readers engaged from beginning to end.

*Love Is!: A Journey of Grief, Grace, and Gratitude* is a moving and inspiring book that offers a unique perspective on the grieving process. Frank M. Hasel's heartfelt narrative and profound reflections on grace and gratitude provide readers with helpful thoughts for navigating their journeys of loss and healing, and insights for those who are trying to support them on their journey. This book is a must-read for anyone seeking comfort, hope, and inspiration in the face of loss. **ED**

**Audrey Andersson** is a general vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.



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# The Ministry of Deacons and Deaconesses

>PART 3

## EDITORIAL NOTE

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



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## DAVID'S LEADERSHIP: A TIMELESS MODEL FOR DIACONATE

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

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

## PRINCIPLES OF GODLY LEADERSHIP

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Except for the subheadings, the entire portion that follows is from Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 87-96, and is based on Acts 6:1-7. All scriptural quotations are from the KJV and scriptural references are placed in parentheses.

**He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old.**



# How to Deal with Theological Conflicts

THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDLING SCRIPTURE AND THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE CORRECTLY  
>PART 2

## Controversies <sup>and</sup> dis-

agreements over theological issues are inevitable and can be helpful. These help us to sharpen our understanding of who God is and enable us to better articulate what we believe. However, sometimes disagreements can lead to conflict, hard feelings, disunity, and division in the church, which hinders the work of God in the community! Many of these controversies come from mishandling Scripture, as well as the writings of Ellen G. White. In this article we will cover some practical ways to study to ensure that we remain true to the Scripture.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS**

**The entire Scripture must be taken into consideration.** Many people build a theological idea on just a few texts, often removed from their context. But this is not how the Bible was meant to be used—or else all sixty-six books would read like Proverbs, with each verse talking about something entirely different. Instead, the Bible is full of stories, poems, letters, and instructions, and each verse must be read in its context.

The main intent of Scripture is to reveal God to us, and to help us have a saving relationship with Him. Jesus emphasized that all Scripture comes from God's mouth and is therefore important to us when He quoted Deuteronomy, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; see also Deut 8:3).<sup>1</sup> Paul affirmed the importance of taking the whole Bible into consideration when he wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction

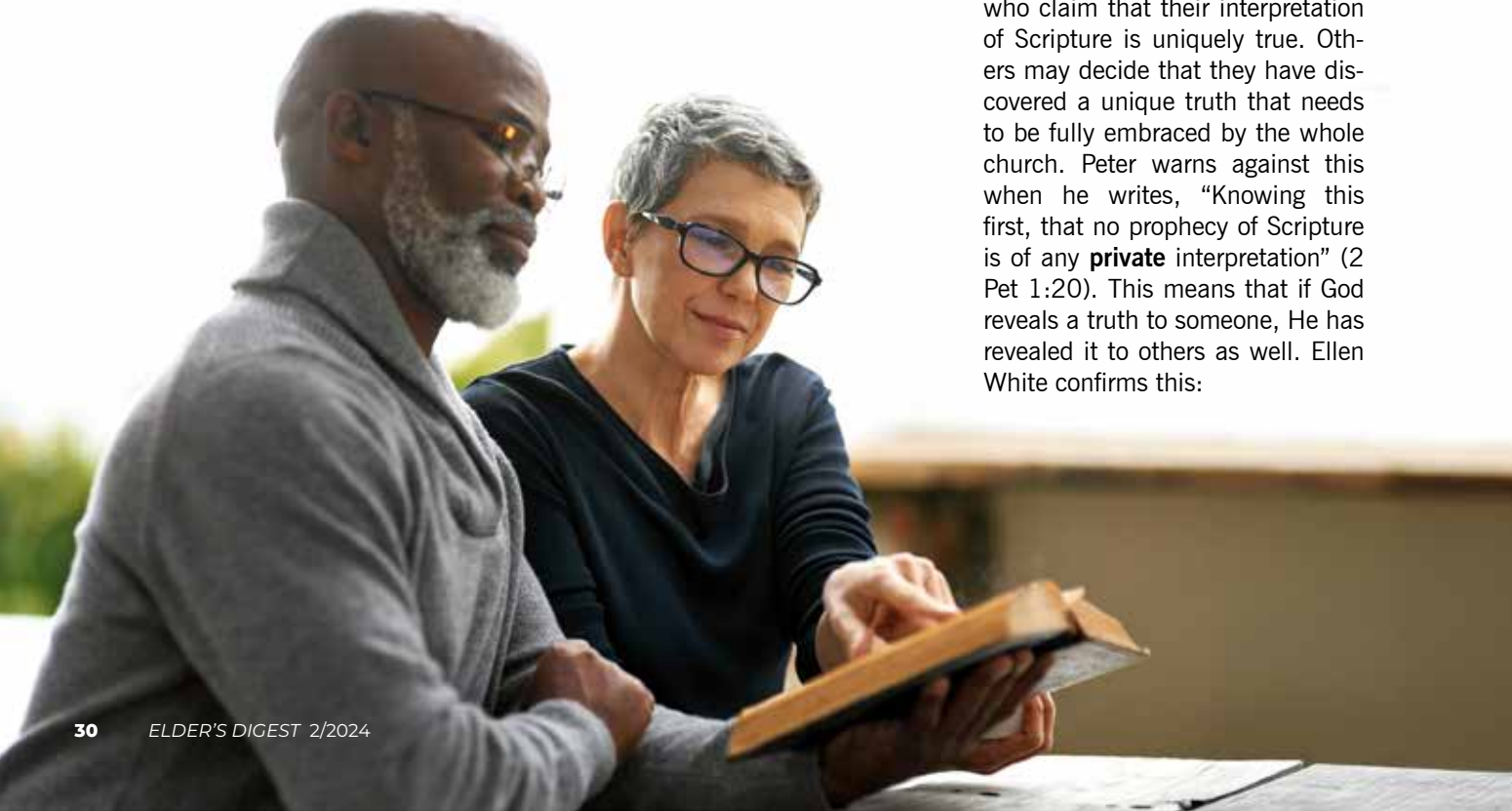
in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). These passages show us that the proper way to use Scripture is to take all, not just part, into consideration.

As we read the Bible as a whole, rather than limiting our study to small portions, we will find that there is a harmonious system of truth that is supported by all Scripture. Paul also told Timothy that the whole point of Scripture is "to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). While theological controversies often take one passage of Scripture and magnify it above all else, the point of Scripture is to show us how we can be saved through faith in Jesus. If we keep this truth at the forefront of our minds as we study and preach Scripture, we will be guarded from overemphasizing one passage, one prophecy, or one theme against the main theme of Scripture: God made a way for us to be saved, through faith in Jesus. Recognizing that we are saved by faith in Jesus gives us matchless hope and enables us to do what Peter exhorted: "Always be

ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15).

**The Bible is the best source for answers.** When we, or others in the church, have questions about Scripture, we often immediately search for sources that can answer our questions. While these sources may be valid, the best place to go when we have questions about the Bible or the truth is the Bible itself. Read the passage(s) slowly and carefully, read the context to see if it is helpful, and search for similar words, phrases, ideas, or stories that can make connections between the Old and New Testaments. Ellen White's writings, as well as commentaries and sermons from others, are valuable resources for validating our study of the Scripture, and they should lead us to other Bible passages that will guide us to a better understanding of the truth. We must look at everything Scripture says about a topic with earnest prayer, and then draw conclusions.

**One's personal interpretation is not enough.** Sometimes our members, in their search for answers, come across pastors or authors who claim that their interpretation of Scripture is uniquely true. Others may decide that they have discovered a unique truth that needs to be fully embraced by the whole church. Peter warns against this when he writes, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any **private** interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20). This means that if God reveals a truth to someone, He has revealed it to others as well. Ellen White confirms this:



There are the main pillars of our faith, subjects which are of vital interest, the Sabbath, the keeping of the commandments of God. Speculative ideas should not be agitated; for there are peculiar minds that love to get some point that others do not accept, and argue and attract everything to that one point, urging that point, magnifying that point, when it is really a matter which is not of vital importance, and will be understood differently. Twice I have been shown that everything of a character to cause our brethren to be diverted from the very points now essential for this time, should be kept in the background.<sup>2</sup>

**Teaching the truth can prevent members from being deceived.** If church members are grounded in biblical truth, they are less likely to fall into controversies. Church elders and leaders, in their sermons, prayer meetings, Sabbath School lessons, small groups, and Bible studies should do their best to focus on the essential truths of the Gospel. Our church has summarized these in its 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Anything beyond these beliefs is not essential to the mission of the church. By focusing on the essentials, you will ground people in the truth and help them to avoid controversies.

**Sometimes, controversy might arise over the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.** We should remember that these beliefs have been developed (and are still being developed) over many years by the careful study of Scripture by many people, including scholars, pastors, administrators, and lay people; are prayed about extensively, and are voted on by representatives from the worldwide church at the General Conference Sessions. Each belief takes the totality of Scripture into consideration and is articulated in words that are

meaningful across all languages, cultures, and generations. For this reason, these beliefs are continually studied, and when revisions or updates are made, they are brought to the General Conference Session.

It is true that some of these beliefs have changed slightly over the years, but this is because from the beginning our pioneers believed in “progressive revelation”—that God reveals truth to His church over time. The pioneers also wanted others to know what we believed, and so in that spirit we revise the language of these beliefs periodically to properly articulate these beliefs to a changing world. Because these doctrines are put together by many people, who have collectively and carefully studied these concepts from Scripture for many years, if we have any doubts or questions about one of these beliefs, we should have the same spirit and attitude as they did, and carefully study Scripture to ensure that we are on the right track. Before we come to a firm conclusion, we should talk to other wise and learned people to get their input. “In the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14).

**Ellen White quotations should be used properly.** As a church, we have been blessed to have an inspired writer who addressed many theological and practical issues during the early years of the Adventist Church. Although she lived over one hundred years ago, her writings still speak to our time. It is important, however, to use her writings properly, especially when using them to combat controversies.

This short column is too small to detail a proper method to use Ellen White’s writings. The Ellen G. White Estate has a helpful article that lists several principles for interpreting her writings. These include focusing on the central issues, studying all available information on the topic, avoiding extreme interpretations, taking time and

place into consideration, studying each statement in its context, using common sense, and discovering the underlying principles.<sup>3</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The best way for us to help others understand God’s Word is to spend time in the Word ourselves. Paul tells us to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). This phrase “rightly dividing” can also be translated “properly handling.” In order to do this, we must study Scripture as a whole, looking to the Bible first before going to other sources, not being satisfied in accepting just one person’s interpretation as the truth. Then, we must teach the truth to our church members, studying with them so we may learn more ourselves.

Ultimately, we must move beyond merely studying the Bible to living and obeying God’s Word. As Joshua made this commitment, we need to do the same: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then, you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh 1:8). **ED**

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White to E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, Letter 37, 1887, in *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, 1887–1888 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate), para. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Read the entire article at “Some Principles for Correctly Interpreting the Writings of Ellen G. White,” Ellen G. White Estate, <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-herm-pri-html/>.

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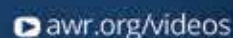
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