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ELDER'S

DIGEST



**THE
MINISTRY
OF
ANOINTING**



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MESSIAH: THE ANNIVERSARY (AD 27–2027)



ANTHONY R. KENT
General Conference
Associate Ministerial Secretary

The year 2027 is fast approaching, bringing with it remarkable opportunities!

Prayerfully meditate on this: the Bible does not give us the exact dates of Jesus' conception, birth, death, resurrection, ascension, or return. However, it does identify the year of His anointing by the Holy Spirit, His baptism by immersion, and commencement of His incarnational ministry (Luke 3:1–2, 21–22). That year was AD 27, the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign.

Here's the *exciting* part . . . 2027 marks two thousand years since Jesus' baptism and anointing by the Holy Spirit, the beginning of His earthly ministry.

Even more compelling, 2027 also marks the bi-millennial anniversary of the fulfillment of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel's Seventy Week prophecy (Dan 9), which accurately predicted the arrival of the Messiah in AD 27. This prophecy was given more than five hundred years beforehand.

What an extraordinary opportunity to commemorate and honor Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, the Savior, the Messiah.

We cannot keep silent! Two millennia ago, the Lamb of God was anointed for His mission to take away the sin of the world and offer grace and salvation to all humanity.

When a married couple reach their twenty-fifth anniversary, they celebrate. When my grandmother turned one hundred, her town celebrated.

But a two-thousand-year anniversary of Jesus' ministry? That deserves global attention. We must acknowledge this profound moment, the mission of Jesus—a mission of love, healing, acceptance, and the promise of eternal life.

But how do we celebrate this monumental anniversary?

By participating in His mission: sharing Jesus as the Messiah, praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, giving the message of hope, preparing people for baptism, and making disciples who make disciples.

A simple conversation starter could be: "Did you know it's been exactly two thousand years since Jesus was baptized and anointed as the Messiah, fulfilling an amazing time prophecy from the book of Daniel?"

Now is the time to pray, plan, and dream. Consider how you can creatively and meaningfully share this good news with your friends, relatives, and acquaintances—your community. And don't do it alone. Join with your church family, your Sabbath School class, your pastor, and fellow elders, deacons, and deaconesses. Begin planning together. Consider sacrificially saving now to ensure resources are available for this once-in-history moment.

Some people would believe in Jesus and accept His invitation of salvation if they knew just a little of the evidence we have. Ellen G. White observed, "All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in."¹

History offers examples of people who recognized their moment. Think of Mordecai's challenge to Esther, "for such a time as this . . ." (Esth 4:14, ESV).

We are living at such a time, perhaps one even more significant.

So, let us celebrate Jesus by sharing in His mission bearing witness to His powerful promise, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32, ESV).

ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 109.

THE MINISTRY OF ANOINTING



Imagine you have been elected and ordained as a local elder of the congregation. Then tragedy strikes. You are informed that Sister Smith is in the local hospital and her condition is serious. You go and visit her. She tells you she does not expect to live long. She would like special prayer now. You remember a text: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas 5:14–15, ESV).

You know little about anointing and have never seen one. How should you respond? What should you do?

As a young pastoral intern, I was assigned a district of three churches in a small town with only one doctor and a clinic. The nearest hospital was sixty-five miles away. The worst happened that tested my inexperience when an auto crash severely injured a church member. As soon as the call came, I went to the clinic to see her. As I arrived, the community’s sole doctor was coming out of her room. He told me, “Pastor, I have done all I can do. Her condition is too critical for movement to a hospital. She may not live through the night. The rest is up to you and God.”

Though her injuries were obvious, she recognized me and seemed glad for my presence. I felt helpless, but after sharing some words of assurance and a brief prayer, I asked if she would be open to anointing. She was not certain what anointing was, so I read the text from James 5.

She then asked that anointing be done. Anointing had not been taught during my years at the seminary, and I had not participated in one previously. So now what?

Fortunately, the elders in my assigned churches were far more experienced spiritual leaders and even preachers than I was. I contacted the first elder, who often proved to be a wise father-type mentor to me, or I may not have survived those early years of unsupervised ministry. We prepared and conducted a service that evening. Our faithful member lived through the night, transferred to a hospital, and after being thoroughly examined, was released for home.

Two days later, she came to the parsonage in person to thank my wife and me for our prayers and visit. We were amazed to see her looking so well. She believed her life was miraculously spared and God had divinely healed her injuries. We all agreed.

In the years and anointings since, nothing that intense has occurred. In fact, several persons have died after being anointed. Others have slowly recovered of illnesses and injuries, seemingly in response only to medical care and treatments by professionals.

Anointing raises several questions to ponder and pray about before rushing to practice:

1. WHAT IS THE INTENDED PURPOSE AND EXPECTED OUTCOME OF ANOINTING?

You may be asked by an Adventist or their family members to anoint a person. In some cases, the patient could be terminal or unresponsive. In exceptionally unusual situations, you might be asked to anoint a non-Adventist believer. Would you be willing to do so?

Each of the Gospels relate Mary anointing Jesus at Simon's feast a week prior to His death with expensive fragrant oil (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–9). Jesus commended her caring act. Are such requests a type of "last rites" either hoping for a miracle, or a last confession before departing life? Perhaps they are a farewell testimony of faith, such as Paul gives in 2 Timothy 4:6–8. Though it can be a final act of ministry to the living, it is not an "Adventist sacrament of last rites."

Throughout Scripture anointing appears used for several purposes: (1) ordinary use of oils for personal reasons, such as to relieve skin dryness; (2) official recognition of priests (Aaron and his sons), prophets (Elijah anointing Elisha),

and kings (Saul, David, Solomon, and Hazael of Syria); and (3) healing as done by the disciples on the first missionary journey (Mark 6:13), and by the Good Samaritan for the victim of robbery (Luke 10:34).

Obviously, the biblical use of anointing is intentional, prayerfully planned, and for spiritual purposes. The Scriptures teach we are to respect and care for our bodies responsibly (1 Cor 6:19–20; 3:16; 10:31). Using anointing as an antidote or "quick fix" for a common cold or upset stomach could be an inappropriate presumption. Does the Lord heal "minor" disease? Of course! All healing comes from following divine physical law. Medical science optimizes the created body to receive divine healing. Frivolous use of something special, even sacred, makes it common and less meaningful.

When agreeing to anoint, make sure the patient and all those present or giving prayers understand that anointing does not create some magic that causes healing, nor does the oil itself heal. That thinking borders on believing in the "charlatans of modern healing ministries" that televise miracles for publicity and profit.

2. WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN PREPARING FOR THE ANOINTING?

The *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* provides clear and concise guidance.¹ Since this book may not be readily available to elders, its guidance is summarized here.

Request for Anointing. Normally, if able, the afflicted asks to be anointed. However, not all believers or church members are aware of this option. An inquiry can be made to the patient, "Are you aware of the option for anointing?" Many church members do not know or think about anointing. If the afflicted person is unable, family and friends may make the request

The anointing service is a personal event that addresses sickness and forgiveness as needed.

for the sick or injured. The anointing service is a personal event that addresses sickness and forgiveness as needed. It is a time of reflection and commitment to the will of God's restoring power and grace.

Officers. The pastor usually leads, assisted by the presence and prayers of church elders. If a minister is not available, other spiritual leaders who believe in divine healing can do so with the approval of the pastor or other minister.

Location. Depending on the circumstances, the location can be wherever the need arises. If the anointing will be inside a medical facility, coordinate with the medical staff ahead of time to minimize any interruption and permit some privacy.

Recipient. Anointing is not intended as a time to prompt confession of past sins. Most people are aware of sin in their lives and may even feel their suffering is divine punishment. When the request for anointing is first made, the pastor or visiting elder has the opportunity to tactfully encourage the recipient to examine their heart and their relationship with God, rather than during the anointing service. The recipient may be inclined to mention any doubts or concerns during the privacy of that visit rather than before a group at the anointing. When that has been sought by the recipient, assurance of forgiveness and grace

can be made confidently in the prayers offered.

Other Attendees. The recipient may wish family members or friends to be present, some of whom may not be believers. It is okay for them to remain.

3. HOW SHOULD THE ANOINTING BE CONDUCTED?

Have a plan and order of service before entering the presence of the recipient. While the anointing should not appear as a programmed or a staged event, the anointing should be orderly. The leading officiant should stand where the recipient can easily see them (usually near the patient's head); the others can stand beside the recipient.

Order of Service. Introducing those who will have a part in the service also gives an order of participation. Give a brief explanation of the purpose for anointing and how it will occur. Read appropriate Bible passages and then let each one who was asked to pray offer prayer beginning with the one being anointed, if he/she so desires. The pastor or leader should pray last and, at the conclusion of the prayer, place a small drop of anointing oil on the recipient's forehead (be careful to avoid the oil running into an eye or any open wound; use a cotton ball or have a tissue handy). While a variety of special oils can be bought from church

supply stores, any clean and fresh olive oil (not rancid) is fine for anointing. Do not attempt to pour or place oil directly on the affected parts of the recipient's body. The anointing oil must only be placed on the forehead.

Prayer. A number of suggested prayers to offer at an anointing can be found on the Internet or generated by AI, but they may not always reflect the teachings of the Bible. Adventist elders would be wise to carefully study what the Bible says about God's will and healing. *The Ministry of Healing* offers some profound insights, especially in chapters "In the Sickroom" and "Prayer for the Sick."²

God chooses how to exercise and reveal His will in response to our needs and requests. Let Him be God!

Conversation. During any visitation to a sick or injured person who may appear unconscious or in a comatose state, wisely continue to guard what is said. Medical workers believe the sensory perception that lasts the longest is hearing. Though the patient may not be able to respond, they may be able to sense what is being said.

Departure. After the anointing has taken place, express a word of

blessing, leave a calling card on how to be reached, and quietly depart. If the anointing has taken place in a hospital, stop by the nurses' station and thank them for their caring service and time allowed for the anointing.

Anointing complements preaching the Gospel with praying for healing of the sick or injured. Balance is key in ministering for others. Even though what appears as a miracle may occur from anointing, Christ is the Great Physician and Miracle Worker. To Him be all glory! Never project the image that *you* are a miracle worker. Miracles are God-given opportunities extended to weak human beings to use the benefit for praising and honoring God by a further life of doing His will in grateful service. Anointing does not heal. Through the prayer of faith, Christ grants His grace and mercy to pardon sin and heal the body. ED

¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association, 2009), 189–192.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905).

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Anointing complements preaching the Gospel with praying for healing of the sick or injured.



HOSPITALITY:

PRACTICAL TIPS TO MAKE THIS BIBLICAL MINISTRY MEANINGFUL, AFFORDABLE, AND LESS DIFFICULT

PART 2



Over decades of church life, our family has hosted hundreds of occasions with guests in our home and at other venues. We believe that home hospitality is a vital part of our Christian life and I would like to share a few suggestions based on what we have learned over the years.

If you are waiting to have the perfect home, menu, or level of preparedness to invite people into your home, it is unlikely to happen. Don't let this stop you! Showing love and care through hospitality is not dependent on how excellent your house, food, or preparation is. When it comes to Christian hospitality, action is more important than perfection and pride can be an unnecessary barrier to this ministry.

Plan dates to invite guests ahead of time, as Jesus did with the Last Supper. If we don't intentionally plan to entertain guests, we will probably not have the time, energy, or

resources needed to make it happen. By planning in advance, we make home hospitality a priority, more successful, and more frequent.

When time to prepare or cost is a barrier, keep the meal simple so that minimal preparation time and cost is required. Accept guests' offers to help by bringing a plate of food if needed.

The same is true for accepting help with preparation or clean up. As the host, if I do these tasks alone, I am missing valuable time and potential opportunities to minister to my guests as I talk and work with them. We need both the Marys and the Marthas when involved in hospitality ministry. While the physical work of hospitality needs to be done, we don't want to miss out on the spiritual opportunities offered at these times because we are too busy or too exhausted from doing all the work alone.

Over the years, my husband and children have been a wonderful help in sharing the workload created by

opening our home to others. The experience is much more enjoyable and repeatable when the load is lightened by many hands.

Another advantage of keeping meals simple is that your guests feel less intimidated to reciprocate, avoiding a possible barrier to further relationship building. When you plan to make hosting easier, it will become more rewarding than exhausting. When you minimize the work and expense to a level you are comfortable with, you are more likely to want to host often, multiplying your ministry.

**When we show
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messages.**



Even Jesus only provided a simple meal of loaves and fish when He fed the multitude. There are no records of tables and chairs being provided, nor napkins, dessert, or even drinks offered. Despite this, the crowd understood Jesus' message of love when He supplied food to meet their needs. Likewise, we don't have to host the perfect dinner party at the perfect venue to show God's love.

"Even among those who profess to be Christians, true hospitality is little exercised. Among our own people the opportunity of showing hospitality is not regarded as it should be, as a privilege and blessing. There is altogether too little sociability, too little of a disposition to make room for two or three more at the family board, without embarrassment or parade. Some plead that "it is too much trouble." It would not be if you would say: "We have made no special preparation, but you are welcome to what we have." By the unexpected guest a welcome is appreciated far more than is the most elaborate preparation."¹

If entertaining in your own home isn't possible, as with Jesus and the Last Supper, plan to entertain at another venue like a park or church hall. It is the loving act of hospitality that matters, not the location or the venue.

Be prepared to be flexible. If you feel impressed to invite more people home for a meal than you have prepared for, have a backup plan. We always have emergency supplies of suitable food (e.g., pasta, rice, or bread) that can be used to multiply the food easily if needed. We also have plans to utilize less food if we have fewer guests than anticipated. In this way, we are not wasting food or making hosting an unnecessary financial burden.

As in all other ministry work, I have found it essential to rely on God for support. Many times, I

have felt exhausted, inadequate, and incapable, but God has always given me the strength, resources, and ability that I needed. We can trust God's promises: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me. . . . And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:13, 19, ESV).

When we show God's love and care through hospitality, our guests become more receptive to the spiritual messages. Don't miss this priceless opportunity for spiritual growth and nurture. During gatherings, plan to make a habit of praying together and praising God (Acts 2:42). This was an integral and vital part of the early Christians' home gatherings and is a key time for us to develop spiritually also.

While our family has often found hosting to be an effort, we have always experienced it to be an even greater reward and blessing. Seeing God reveal ministry needs and opportunities to us as we have fellowshiped and connected with our guests has been a great joy. When we have nurtured and cared for others spiritually, we have also enjoyed vital growth. My husband and I believe God has already blessed us way beyond anything that we have given to Him in ministry or is promised to come to us in heaven.

I love the story of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah found in 1 Kings 17. The widow's incredible hospitality in giving her last food to Elijah was rewarded by the endless supply of oil and flour that kept them alive throughout the time of famine. Her son was also raised from the dead by Elijah. Think of the rewards she would have missed out on if she had refused hospitality to Elijah and

kept the last of her food for herself and her son.

Christian hospitality is a vitally important part of Christian life. When we share our resources and open our homes and hearts, we manifest God's love to others. We build connections and relationships that help our community to prosper and thrive physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We need our churches to be centers of vibrant and contagious spiritual growth!

I would like to challenge you today to plan and find ways to develop and increase your hospitality to others. Open your lives to the great rewards and blessings from sharing in this ministry that God wants you to experience also!

"Christ keeps an account of every expense incurred in entertaining for His sake. He supplies all that is necessary for this work. Those who for Christ's sake entertain their brethren, doing their best to make the visit profitable both to their guests and to themselves, are recorded in heaven as worthy of special blessings."²

"As you open your door to Christ's needy and suffering ones, you are welcoming unseen angels. You invite the companionship of heavenly beings. They bring a sacred atmosphere of joy and peace. They come with praises upon their lips, and an answering strain is heard in heaven. Every deed of mercy makes music there."³

ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *My Life Today* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1952), 194.

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1900), 6:344–345.

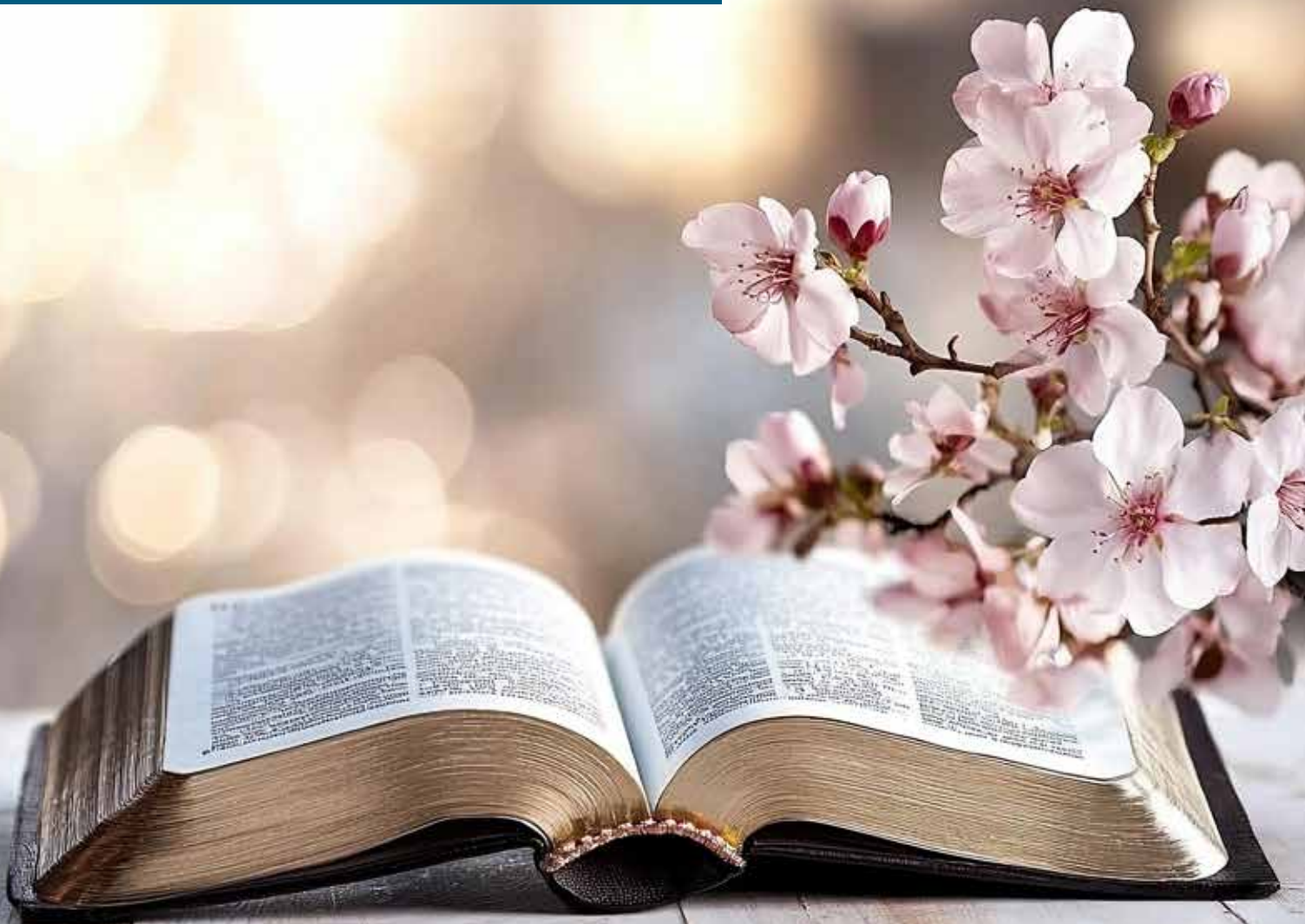
³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 639.

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THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S TRUTH:

HARMONY AND INTERDEPENDENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BELIEFS¹



Scripture provides the bedrock foundation for every doctrine or teaching embraced by the church.

Our 28 Fundamental Beliefs do not exhaust, replace, or complement the Bible. They are rather summary statements through which the worldwide body of believers recognizes some core biblical teachings as an expression of our unity in Christ.²

The relativism and anti-authority bias of the post-modern world make it popular to caricature doctrinal statements as passé or simply a misunderstanding of the gospel. But far from it, such a body of core beliefs gives content and direction to the mission. Thus, the importance of our 28 Fundamental Beliefs cannot be overemphasized. Such beliefs express our understanding of core biblical teachings, provide the foundation for our experience, and guide the church and its mission. It is essential for us to find ways to show the coherence and relevance of our beliefs to our community and personal life, keeping in mind that “Doctrine to the Christian and the church is what the bones are to the body. It gives unity and stability.”³

This article reflects on how our Seventh-day Adventist belief system stands together as a unified and integrated whole. As we reflect on the harmony and interdependence of this system, three significant aspects deserve consideration.

First, we recognize that our belief system rests on the authority and inspiration of the Bible. Second, the doctrines and beliefs accepted by the church reveal an internal coherence in that every part of the system works together to reinforce and explain the

other beliefs, forming a consistent and integrated whole. Third, every individual teaching contributes to the entire system, which shows the depth of God’s love as revealed in Jesus Christ. We will now consider each of these three aspects in more detail.

THE BIBLE AS THE FOUNDATION OF DOCTRINE

Our system of beliefs stands or falls on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Scripture provides the bedrock foundation for every doctrine or teaching embraced by the church. As much as one may appreciate humankind’s long chain of literary works and traditions, nothing compares to Scripture as the foundation for understanding and coping with reality. It is important to note that this conviction does not come from any source of authority outside of Scripture, but emerges from the self-testimony of the Scripture itself. As stated in the foundational text on the doctrine of inspiration: “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).⁴

So, unlike other systems that depend on reason, experience, or tradition, the Seventh-day Adventist system of beliefs rests on the foundation of Scripture. As Peter expressed, the gospel message does not come from “cunningly devised fables” (2 Peter 1:16) but from the testimony of “holy men of God” who “spoke as they were moved by the

Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Clearly, the concept of divine revelation and authority underlies the Bible’s own claim and thus our understanding of it.

THE GRAND OVERARCHING STORY

The internal coherence of the grand, overarching story of the Bible—which spans from creation to new creation against the backdrop of the great controversy—gives authority, coherence, and credibility to our doctrinal system. Although brought together as a collection of sixty-six books composed by various authors in different times and places, the Bible yields a coherent grand narrative recounting the acts of God in creation and His plan to redeem those who believe in Jesus from the power of sin and death. No other sets of books produced by ancient civilizations get even close to the Bible’s unity, integration, and coherence. Ancient civilizations such as those in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, and Greece have passed down many literary works studied and admired by scholars throughout the centuries. It must be noted, however, that such works reflect a fragmented view of reality in which numerous deities haunt human beings without offering any concrete hope to overcome the frustrations and burdens of life beyond temporary relief. Consequently, no ancient collection provides a coherent and integrated view of history and reality as the Bible does.

The grand story of the Bible unfolds in a linear timeline, beginning with creation, followed by the fall and the promise of redemption that will ultimately usher in a new creation. This unity and integration of the various biblical aspects of reality give coherence to the biblical doctrinal system. Therefore, when we speak of the harmony and interdependence of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, we must remember that the system

must be coherent since it flows from a coherent source of revelation. Given the Bible's overarching unity and internal coherence, a doctrinal system that is faithfully based on it must show the same consistency and unity. The following section samples Seventh-day Adventist beliefs to show their connection and interdependence. Given space limitations, only a few aspects are discussed to illustrate how the entire system works.

THE INTERNAL LOGIC AND COHERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BELIEF SYSTEM

Our 28 Fundamental Beliefs are under six central doctrines: God, Humanity, Salvation, Church, Christian Life, and the Last Things.⁵ Although these headings and the beliefs under them are organized topically according to major categories of theological reflection, the list of beliefs builds on one another in a chain of interdependence and reinforcement. The first heading, the doctrine of God, embraces the teaching about the "word of God" and matters related to the person of God. By beginning with the Bible revealing the teachings

on the person of God, the system establishes the foundation for what follows. It would be impossible to understand what follows without a clear understanding of the Bible and the person and nature of God who inspired and revealed Himself in and through it.

Next, the doctrine of humanity covers creation and the nature of humanity. These two beliefs build on the previous ones and only make sense in view of them. Moreover, they are crucial for the following ones. For example, without the biblical teaching on creation, the nature and purpose of humanity would become unclear. Likewise, the doctrine of salvation with the teachings on the great controversy, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the experience of salvation, and growing in Christ would make very little sense apart from the biblical teaching on creation, the fall, and redemption, which unfolds within the framework of the great controversy between good and evil.⁶ The reality of creation gives meaning to the concept of sin, evil, and the promise of redemption through the atoning work of Christ.

Furthermore, without a clear understanding of the preceding

teachings, the doctrine of the church, which embraces the remnant and its mission, the unity in the Body of Christ, baptism, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and the gift of prophecy, would lack a solid foundation and logical coherence. After all, the church's existence rests on the biblical understanding of God, humanity, and salvation. Such doctrines provide the rationale for the church as an institution to be directed by the word of God and dedicated to fulfilling the mission God entrusted to it.

BIBLE DOCTRINES FIT TOGETHER

As must be clear at this point, the doctrine of the Christian life, focusing on the law of God, the Sabbath, stewardship, Christian behavior, marriage, and the family, flows naturally from the above-mentioned doctrines. The law of God and the Sabbath can be fully understood only taking into account creation and the seven-day week that culminates in the seventh day. The entire system of biblical teachings rests on the nature of God and the fact that He created humanity in His image and likeness. At the core of biblical ethics and the



The reality of creation gives meaning to the concept of sin, evil, and the promise of redemption through the atoning work of Christ.

Christian life lies the idea that we have been called to imitate God. From this perspective, stewardship and Christian behavior become profoundly significant in the experience of God's children. In addition, the biblical understanding of marriage and the family stems from creation, and the very constitution of marriage as a union between male and female can be understood given what the Creator established since the beginning (Matt 19:4–7).

From the above, it has become apparent that the doctrine of the last things, which deals with Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the second coming of Christ, death and resurrection, the Millennium and the end of sin, and the new earth unfold from the other biblical doctrines and teachings. The doctrine of the last things can only make sense when considering a doctrine of "first things." Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary presupposes His atoning work on the cross to redeem sinners from the power of sin. Conversely, Christ's second coming presupposes His first coming as announced by the Old Testament and realized in the New Testament. Likewise, the victory over death and the resurrection that will usher in the end of sin and a new earth conceives of death as an intruder that eventually will be obliterated by God's power, already demonstrated in the resurrection of His Son.

In sum, the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs are so intertwined that separating or isolating them is impossible. To be meaningful and consistent, they must be embraced as a whole. However, our belief system should not be embraced only because of its logical or internal coherence and intellectual power. Instead, what brings meaning and beauty to our beliefs is that they provide a beautiful picture of God, whom we serve and worship.

THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BELIEF SYSTEM AS A PORTRAIT OF GOD'S LOVING CHARACTER

One of the most consequential aspects of the harmony and interdependence of the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs lies in the system's ultimate foundation in the person and character of God, whom it portrays according to Scripture. As such, our beliefs are not a mere set of intellectual propositions to be accepted by the believer. Much more than this, our beliefs are windows into the beauty of God's character and, taken together, offer a multi-perspective glimpse of God's infinite love and grace.

Our belief system emphasizes, presupposes, and reflects a God personally involved with creation and lovingly undertaking the mission of rescuing and saving the lost. This personal dimension of God, who communicates Himself with His creatures and reveals His will through His word, underlies every single one of our 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Second, God reveals Himself in Scripture as a tri-personal God from whom flows the eternity of His love. Because God exists as three Persons eternally, love is always present in God's relationships within the Trinity. Therefore, love has always been and will ever be.

GOD'S LOVE IS PERVASIVE

Here are a few examples of how God's love is pervasive as a unifying aspect of our Fundamental Beliefs. First, creation itself and all the provisions to restore creation after the fall are examples of God's infinite love for us. At the core of the plan of salvation lies the cross, where God's Son surrendered His life as an atoning sacrifice for humanity. Apart from the biblical one, no other religion or belief system portrays a God who suffers such humiliation. Religions not based on the Bible usually portray

their gods as capricious, cruel, and often victorious over the trials of life. Only the biblical God goes to the cross and dies to achieve the final victory. So, to speak about God, humanity, salvation, church, Christian life, and the last things is to speak of God who is engaged in redeeming sinners.

Second, God's love manifests itself in the unfolding of the great controversy, a pervasive theme that not only counts as an individual belief but also lies at the backdrop to other beliefs. God could have put an immediate end to Lucifer's rebellion in Heaven or could have prevented his access to the first couple in the garden. God, however, allowed evil to follow its course because He did not want forced worship; instead, He longed for a loving relationship with free creatures. God Himself suffered the ultimate consequences of sin when the Son was crucified. In the sacrificial and priestly work of Jesus, the universe beholds God's loving character, which dispels the lies of Satan.

THE DEPTHS OF GOD'S LOVE

Third, some less obvious aspects of our Fundamental Beliefs that could be understood to revoke God's love are those related to judgment and the final destruction of sin and sinners. However, upon further reflection, even such doctrinal points reveal the depths of God's love. A God who condones sin and evil and refrains from eventually eliminating them could not be taken as a loving God. With all its implications and phases, God's judgment functions as another window into God's infinite love in that it vindicates the righteous and destroys the wicked.

As Ellen White stated: "The feet of the wicked will never desecrate the earth made new. Fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour them—burn them up root and branch. Satan is the root, and his children are the branches. The same fire that

Each Gospel is a supplement to the others, every prophecy an explanation of another, every truth a development of some other truth.

will devour the wicked will purify the earth.”⁷

Through this ultimate act of judgment and purification, God prepares the earth to be the eternal dwelling of the redeemed. This is described beautifully by Ellen White: “The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”⁸

THE BEAUTIFUL TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE

The harmony and interdependence of the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs rest on three foundational and interrelated concepts. First, they rest on the inspiration and authority of the Bible, which provides unity and coherence to our belief system. Second, our Fundamental Beliefs display an internal logic and coherence in that every individual belief finds its rationale and coherence in light of the whole. Third, every belief functions as a window into God’s character of love and mercy, which also plays a role in unifying and integrating our system of biblical doctrines. Indeed, even the biblical message of judgment, which is also integrated into our belief system, tells of God’s infinite love since God

will eventually obliterate everything that stands in the way of His loving purposes in the redemption of sinners and the restoration of this planet.

Speaking about the beautiful truths conveyed by Scripture, Ellen G. White penned some words that can be applied to the harmony and interdependence of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs: “When thus searched out and brought together, they will be found to be perfectly fitted to one another. Each Gospel is a supplement to the others, every prophecy an explanation of another, every truth a development of some other truth. The types of the Jewish economy are made plain by the gospel. Every principle in the word of God has its place, every fact its bearing. And the complete

structure, in design and execution, bears testimony to its Author. Such a structure no mind but that of the Infinite could conceive or fashion.”⁹ **ED**

¹ This article is chapter 2 of *Committed to Our Identity: Message, Mission, Unity*, 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute and Review and Herald, 2024), 25–31. It is being reproduced with permission.

² See “What Do Adventists Believe?,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, accessed August 31, 2025, <https://adventist.org/beliefs#official-beliefs>.

³ Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity,” *The Founders Journal* 3 (1990–1991): 12.

⁴ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

⁵ Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrine* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2018), iii.

⁶ On the great controversy as the backdrop of the biblical system, see Alberto Ronald Timm, “The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Messages 1844–1863 Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Doctrines” (PhD diss., Andrews University Theological Seminary, 1995).

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1882), 51–52.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), 678.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 123–124.

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WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE SABBATH

INTRODUCTION

Jesus honored the Sabbath of the fourth commandment during His earthly life. (Read Luke 4:16.) His prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, recorded in Matthew 24:20, makes it clear that Jesus expected His followers would still be remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy after His resurrection. (Read Matt 24:20.) Jesus also sought to help people understand the true meaning of the Sabbath. The religious leaders of His day had mutilated the Sabbath. They had surrounded the Sabbath commandment with a myriad of man-made rules and regulations. The Sabbath had become a burden. Jesus wanted people to discover the true meaning of the Sabbath, and I am convinced that Jesus still wants each one of us today to discover the true meaning of the Sabbath.

I. JESUS TAUGHT THAT THE SABBATH IS A TIME OF BLESSING

What, then, did Jesus teach about the Sabbath? Jesus taught that the Sabbath is a time of blessing. Our loving Creator provided the Sabbath for our benefit, as a time of blessing. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day had turned the Sabbath into a burden. By a multitude of man-made regulations, they had turned the Sabbath into something that God never intended. They had mutilated God's blessing and made it a burden. And so when they saw the disciples of Jesus plucking heads of grain as they walked through a grain field on the Sabbath, the Pharisees said, "They are breaking the Sabbath. That's not allowed! According to our man-made supplements to the fourth commandment, that's a transgression."

And Jesus confronted this distorted view of the Sabbath. He taught, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).¹ The Son of God, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, created the Sabbath! He blessed it and sanctified it. (Read Gen 2:1-3; John 1:1-3, 14.) That's why He could claim to be Lord of the Sabbath day (Mark 2:28).

The Sabbath is a time of blessing because it is a time to remember who we are and who God is. For six days we labor and do all our work. And if it were not for the blessing of the Sabbath, many of us would be working seven days a week. Am I speaking the truth today? We need the Sabbath. Not as some kind of additional obligation that complicates our already hectic lives. We need the Sabbath as a time of blessing to remember who we are and who God is.

The Sabbath is not only a time of blessing for us as individuals. The Sabbath is also a time of blessing as we allow God to bless others through us. Listen to the words of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 12:12. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." You say, "Why would Jesus need to say that?" Because the Pharisees saw even works of kindness and mercy on the Sabbath as a transgression of the Sabbath commandment. But Jesus says, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." The Sabbath was made for man. It is intended to be a time of blessing, not a burden. If you see someone in need, there is no better time to let God bless that person through you than on the Sabbath day. Why? Because the Sabbath is a time of blessing. That's the radical teaching of Jesus.

Sabbath is a time when we are blessed and when we can extend blessing to those around us. So, bless someone each Sabbath day. Visit someone who is in the hospital. Invite someone who is lonely to take a walk with your family. Share your lunch with someone. Do so knowing that you are experiencing the true meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a time of blessing. That's what Jesus taught.

II JESUS TAUGHT THAT THE SABBATH IS A TIME FOR HEALING

The Sabbath is also a time for healing. Jesus intentionally healed people on the Sabbath day. He knew that His actions would arouse opposition from the religious leaders. He knew that they would accuse Him of being a Sabbath-breaker. He could have waited until another day. But Jesus could not allow the truth about the Sabbath to be distorted by man-made traditions. The Sabbath is a time of blessing and healing.

Let's examine one miracle Jesus performed on the Sabbath day, recorded in John 5. (Read John 5:1-9.)

What a remarkable healing! I have a question for you. Why do you think Jesus asked this man to take his sleeping mat with him? Can you imagine what that sleeping mat smelled like after lying on it year after year? Why, I would have said, "Just get up and walk. Forget about the sleeping mat." But Jesus said, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." Why do you think that Jesus gave those instructions? I think we find the answer at the end of John 5:9. What does the Word of God tell us? "That day was the Sabbath." Jesus was deliberately drawing attention to this healing. Didn't Jesus know that the religious leaders would criticize Him? Didn't Jesus know that they would accuse Him of being a Sabbath-breaker? Of course He did. And that criticism came almost immediately: "The

Jews therefore said to him who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed'" (John 5:10). They totally missed this opportunity to praise the name of the Lord. After all, this man had been a paralytic for thirty-eight years, and he had been healed. But the religious leaders totally missed that. All they could see was a transgression of their man-made Sabbath regulations. But Jesus performed this miracle despite their opposition. He healed this man on the Sabbath day despite the criticism that He would receive. Why? Because Jesus could not tolerate a distorted view of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was given by God as a blessing, not a burden. The Sabbath is a time of blessing and healing. (If time permits, review two other Sabbath miracles that illustrate the teaching of Jesus that the Sabbath is a time for healing: Luke 13:10-17 and Mark 3:1-6.)

What a tragedy! These religious leaders totally missed the true purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was given as a time of blessing and a time for healing, but these religious leaders had mutilated the Sabbath and made it into a burden. And because Jesus didn't yield to their myriad of man-made regulations, they were ready to kill Him.

But it's also a tragedy if we miss the true purpose of the Sabbath. We could also fall into the trap of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy just because "it's the right thing to do," just to fulfill some legalistic obligation. Or we could fail to remember the Sabbath at all, believing the man-made tradition that the Sabbath had been done away with. Don't fall into either of those traps. Jesus wants you to experience the Sabbath as a time of blessing and a time for healing.

CONCLUSION

That was God's original plan in giving us the Sabbath. He didn't create the Sabbath, bless it, make it holy, and then create people whom He could compel to observe it! No. God created the Sabbath as a time of blessing and a time for healing. That's why our Creator blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it. That is why He told us to remember the Sabbath day. We need the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a time of blessing and a time for healing.

Is there anyone here today in need of a blessing? Is there anyone here today in need of healing? I invite you to reach out today to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, and ask Him to bless you and heal you today according to His good plan for your life. If that is the desire of your heart today, I invite you to stand with me as we pray. ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

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WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION

When Derek was twelve years old, he had to stand before a judge.¹ He was shaking in his shoes. His knees were knocking together. And he hadn't even done anything wrong! He was simply called into court because someone had stolen *his* bicycle from the parking lot of the local swimming pool.

Many of us have grown up with similar thoughts of anxiety and fear about the final judgment. Perhaps we have heard the Three Angels' Messages recorded in Revelation 14, which begin with these words: "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come" (Rev 14:7).² We may have heard the solemn warning of the apostle Paul that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). It all sounds very troubling, doesn't it?

Today I want to consider with you what Jesus taught about the judgment. We'll discover that for those who belong to Jesus, the judgment is good news. Jesus clearly taught that there will be a day of judgment. (Read Matt 11:21–24.) Jesus also taught that "for every idle word men [and women] may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matt 12:36). But Jesus also taught three pieces of good news about the judgment.

I. JESUS IS THE JUDGE

Let's begin our search in John 5. (Read John 5:22.) "For the Father judges . . ." how many? "The Father judges no one." Who, then, does the judging? "But has committed all judgment to the Son." The first piece of good news that Jesus teaches about the judgment is that Jesus Himself is the judge.

Remember Derek's anxious encounter with that judge who was perched up behind the huge wooden desk?³ Do you think he would have experienced different emotions if that judge had been his friend? Absolutely! Derek wouldn't have been shaking in his shoes if he had known that the judge was his friend, that the judge cared for him, that the judge loved him.

Do you get my point? Jesus tells us, "There's something very important that I want to tell you about the judgment: I'm the judge. I'm in charge! I render the verdicts." That's good news, my friends! Our precious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves us and gave Himself for us—He is the judge! The Father has committed all judgment to the Son.

II. JESUS WILL IDENTIFY ALL THOSE WHO BELONG TO HIM

There is a second piece of good news Jesus taught about the judgment. It is embedded in a story Jesus told about the time when the Son of Man will perform that work of judgment. (Read Matt 25:31–46.)

Now we need to be careful that we don't read too much into this story. This story is not teaching us how to be saved. We are saved when we look in faith to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. This story is not addressing the issue of how we are saved, but we can learn what happens in the final judgment. Jesus—the Son of Man, Son of God, the One to whom the Father has committed all judgment—identifies those who belong to Him. It's true that those who belong to Him have certain identifying characteristics. But that's not the reason they belong to Jesus. Rather, those characteristics reveal that they do indeed belong to Jesus. This story of the sheep and the goats teaches us that in the judgment, Jesus will identify those who belong to Him. Jesus knows those who belong to Him.

Imagine that I brought a pack of one hundred dogs up here on the platform. Don't worry! I'm not going to do it! But just imagine. How many of you here have a dog as a pet? Imagine your dog was part of the pack. Would you be able to identify which dog belonged to you? You say, "Of course!" How? Why, you know your dog. You know what your dog looks like, and your dog responds to your voice. If you called your dog by name, what would happen?

Do you get the point? Jesus knows those who belong to Him! Jesus won't make any mistakes. He will identify all those who belong to Him. That's good news. What do you say?

III. FOR THOSE WHO BELONG TO JESUS, THE OUTCOME OF THE JUDGMENT IS ALREADY SETTLED

There is a third piece of good news Jesus taught about the judgment—and it's the best news of all. (Read John 5:24a.) You say, "Now, that is good news!" We can know with certainty that through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord we have everlasting life! Amen. But Jesus isn't finished. "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24b).

For the person who belongs to Jesus, the outcome of the judgment is already settled. We don't have to be anxious. We don't have to be afraid. Jesus, our precious Savior, who loves us and gave Himself for us—He is the judge. And in the judgment, Jesus will identify all those who belong to Him. And for those who belong to Him, the outcome of the judgment is already settled. That, my friends, is good news.

Perhaps there is someone here who is thinking, "Wait a minute! How is that possible that those who belong to Jesus can pass through the judgment that easily? How can a just and holy God just pass over all our sins that are worthy of condemnation and death?" (see: Rom 6:23). The Gospel prophet Isaiah answered that question seven hundred years before the Son of God came to this earth. Speaking of the Messiah who was to come, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the prophet Isaiah shared this revelation. (Read Isa 53:5–6.) Jesus was treated as we deserve that we might be treated as He deserves. What amazing grace!

CONCLUSION

So, what have we learned today? When you belong to Jesus, the judgment is good news! We discovered three pieces of good news Jesus taught about the judgment: Jesus is the Judge, He will identify all those who belong to Him, and for those who belong to Jesus the outcome of the judgment is already settled. Isn't that good news, my friends?

I'm wondering if there is someone here today who has been afraid of the final judgment. Maybe it's because you have never personally accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord. You know that if you must stand alone in the day of judgment, you are in deep trouble. You realize that you need a Savior. You need Jesus. You need to know that He will be your Judge. You need to know that He will identify you as one of those who belong to Him. You need the assurance that because you belong to Jesus, the outcome of the judgment is already settled for you. Do you long for that assurance today? Then I want to invite you to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord today. When you do that, the Bible says, you can know that you have everlasting life, and you can also know that you will not come into judgment, but have passed from death into life. Remember, for those who belong to Jesus, the judgment is good news.

And for those of us who have received Jesus as our personal Savior, but we've been anxious about the judgment, accept the good news that Jesus taught. There is no need to be anxious or afraid about the judgment. Praise your Savior, Judge, and soon-coming King today. For those who belong to Jesus, the judgment is good news.

¹ Use your own experience before a judge or police officer, if you have one.

² All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

³ If you used your own opening illustration, put your character into this paragraph.

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WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT DEATH

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, when Jonathan was just a little boy, he acquired a very special key. He bought this key at the gift shop at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was told that this was the key to the lock on the massive front door of Independence Hall. He only paid five dollars for the key, so he was sure it wasn't the original. But Jonathan's inquisitive mind was curious to discover whether it was indeed an exact replica of the original. So, when no one was looking, Jonathan and his daddy tiptoed over to the massive front door of Independence Hall, put the key into the old metal lock, and turned it. To their amazement, it worked! This key locked and unlocked the massive front door of Independence Hall. Well, you can only imagine how important Jonathan felt at that moment. He was holding the key to Independence Hall right there in his hand.¹

The Bible talks about some keys that Jesus holds in His hand that are much more important than the key to Independence Hall. We are going to learn about the keys that Jesus holds in His hand as we consider together what Jesus taught about death.

I. A STRANGE FABLE ABOUT THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

I'd like us to begin with a strange fable Jesus told. It's a fable about two men, a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. This story is only recorded by Dr. Luke. (Read Luke 16:19–31.) During the time of Jesus, the Jews recounted numerous fables and legends about imaginary situations. Many scholars suggest that this story was a modification of one of those popular fables. But why did Jesus tell this strange parable? Was His intention to teach doctrine, to tell the truth about death, or to make some other point using a popular fable of His day? Well, let's look at the story more closely. There are three main characters in the story: a rich man, a poor beggar named Lazarus, and Abraham. There is no evidence from the story that the rich man was an unrighteous or ungodly man. We are simply told that he was rich and lived in luxury. There is also no evidence in the story that the beggar Lazarus was a godly man, a man who placed his faith in God. But the story goes on to tell us that both men died. The beggar was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, which was a popular concept among the Jews. The rich man ended up in Hades, a Greek word which simply means "the grave." Hades is the equivalent of the Hebrew

word *Sheol*. Here we meet our first problem with taking this story as a literal description of what happens when we die: nowhere in the Old or the New Testament is *Sheol* or Hades described as a place of torment. But this story describes Hades as a place of torment.

What's even more troubling if we read this fable as a literal description of what happens when we die is the fact that the place of the saved, Abraham's bosom, and the place of the lost, Hades, are so close to each other that it's possible to see what's happening from one place to the other. It's even possible to talk to people across the gulf. Does that sound like heaven to you? A place where you could hear the screams of tormented loved ones forever and ever?

I believe that it is a mistake to base any doctrine on this or any other fable. Would it really bring any relief if Lazarus dipped his finger in water, reached across the gulf, and cooled the tongue of this rich man who is in fiery torment? The whole story just doesn't make sense if it's a literal description of what happens when we die. So what is the point that Jesus is trying to make? I believe that the answer is found in Luke 16:26. (Read Luke 16:26.)

Once death comes, we have no more opportunity to change. The rich man missed the opportunity to make wise choices before his life came to an end. Once life comes to an end, there is nothing that can be done to make any changes. That's a lesson that we can learn from the fable of the rich man and Lazarus.

II. A TRUE STORY ABOUT ANOTHER MAN NAMED LAZARUS

Where else in the Gospels do we find what Jesus taught about death? I want to draw your attention to another story, also about a man named Lazarus, but this story is true. It's recorded in John 11. (Read John 11:1–6.)

While they are on their way to Bethany, Jesus shares some important teachings about death. (Read John 11:11.) Did the disciples understand what Jesus was saying? No. Listen to their reaction. (Read John 11:12–14.)

Jesus spoke of death as a sleep and He also taught about a resurrection from the dead at the last day. (Read John 5:28–29.) Listen to Martha's testimony. (Read John 11:23–24.) What Martha failed to comprehend was the fact that Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life—can also bring about a special resurrection prior to the resurrection at the last day. Jesus can also wake up those who are in the sleep of death. Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25, NKJV). (Read John 11:38–43.)

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Notice that after his special resurrection from the sleep of death, Lazarus doesn't say anything about his experience during the previous four days. Why? Because he wasn't up somewhere or down somewhere. He was in that rock tomb. That's why Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" Jesus was waking Lazarus up from the sleep of death.

"Ah," you say, "if Lazarus was in the sleep of death, how did he hear Jesus call him?" Lazarus heard Jesus call him in the same way that all who are in the graves will hear the voice of Jesus at the resurrection on the last day. The word of Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, is so powerful that in the milliseconds it takes for the sound to leave His mouth and travel to the place where Lazarus lies in the sleep of death, a miracle of recreation occurs. Remember, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Martha told Jesus that her brother's body was already decomposing. But the word of Jesus is so powerful, the word of Jesus is so full of life, that a miracle of recreation occurred as soon as He spoke, and by the time those words reached the ears of Lazarus, the resurrection had already taken place. Lazarus heard the words of His Savior, and just as he had obeyed Jesus during his life, so now Lazarus continued to obey Jesus, and he came forth from the tomb. Jesus, the Life Giver, woke Lazarus up from the sleep of death.

(Share the story of a loved one who now sleeps in Jesus, and your longing for the great resurrection day when Jesus returns in glory.)

The precious truth that Jesus taught about death is this: death is a sleep, but Jesus holds the keys of the grave and of death! (Read Rev 1:17–18.) A joyful resurrection day is coming when Jesus returns in glory. Listen to the inspired testimony of the apostle Paul, given to him by special revelation from Jesus. (Read 1 Thess 4:13–18.)

CONCLUSION

You do not need to fear death anymore. You do not need to fear the grave anymore. You believe in Jesus. You have received Jesus and He has the keys. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Even if you fall asleep in death before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ returns in glory, you won't stay sleeping forever. You won't be locked up in the tomb forever. Jesus has the keys.

Are you thankful today for the precious truth Jesus taught about death? Do you want to rest your life and your eternal destiny in the loving hands of Jesus? If so, I invite you to stand with me as we pray. ED

¹ Replace this opening illustration with one of your own if you have a story about a special key.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT HIS CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard someone say, “I don’t need the church! All I need is Jesus!” Well, that person is right and wrong at the same time! It’s true that Jesus is all we need, but those who love Jesus and have accepted Him as their personal Savior and Lord will not disregard what Jesus taught about His church! The first recorded teaching by Jesus regarding His church is found in Matthew 16. (Read Matt 16:13–18.) In this brief conversation with Peter and the other disciples, Jesus shared four important truths about His church.

I. JESUS HAS A CHURCH THAT HE CALLS “MY CHURCH”

(Read Matt 16:18 again.) The word *church* in the Greek language is *ekklesia*. It means “called out.” Those who are gathered together in the church that Jesus calls “My church” are the called-out ones. What are we called out from? The apostle Peter gives us this inspired testimony. (Read 1 Pet 2:9.) Aren’t you thankful today that Jesus has called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light?

Do you know why Jesus identifies His church as “My church”? Because others would come and try to set up their own church—and call people out to themselves. (Read Matt 7:15.) What would these prophets, these ferocious wolves, seek to do? The apostle Paul gives us the answer to that question. (Read Acts 20:29–30.) These savage wolves will seek to draw disciples after them. They will try to call people out to themselves, to establish their own church. They teach as doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7). Jesus would not identify every church as “My church,” but it is clear from our study that Jesus has a church that He calls “My church.”

II. JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH

Let’s read again the words of Jesus about His church. (Read Matt 16:18.) A second important truth about the church that Jesus taught is this: Jesus builds His church.

Some people think that it’s their job to build the church. They are mistaken. We are called to join Jesus in what He is doing. We are called to go into all the world and preach the good news about Jesus, baptizing people in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the things that Jesus taught (Matt 28:19–20), but we do not build His church. Jesus builds

His church! Notice the testimony of Dr. Luke about the growth of the early Christian church. (Read Acts 2:47.) Who added to their number those who were being saved? The Lord. Jesus builds His church.

How does Jesus build His church? He uses people. He empowers His followers through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to join Him in building His church. Listen to what happened on the Day of Pentecost, just a few weeks after the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Read Acts 2:36–41.) That same miracle is being repeated around the world right now. Jesus is building His church, and He gives us the privilege of joining Him in His work. (Read Acts 1:8.)

III. JESUS IS THE ROCK ON WHOM HIS CHURCH IS BUILT

There is a third truth that Jesus teaches about His church. (Read Matt 16:18 again.) The phrase “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church”¹ has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some claim that Jesus is saying to Peter, “I’m going to build my church upon you! You, Peter, are the rock upon which I’m going to build my church.” That interpretation emerged in the fifth century AD, proposed by a bishop in Rome who claimed that Peter was the first bishop of Rome and authority was passed down from bishop to bishop by a process known as apostolic succession. It ought to concern you that this interpretation was embraced by a bishop in Rome in the fifth century AD who was trying to consolidate his power and authority.

But let’s look carefully at the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 16:18. “You are Peter [*petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build My church.” If Jesus intended to build His church on Peter, He would have said, “You are Peter and on you I will build my church.” But Jesus uses two different words here: “You are *Petros*, Peter, and on this *petra*, this rock, I will build my church.” So, what is this rock, this *petra*, on which Jesus will build His church, if it’s not Peter? Let me suggest two options. This *petra*, this rock, upon which Jesus builds His church could be the confession of Peter recorded just a few verses earlier. (Read Matt 16:16.) Jesus could be saying, “I’ll build my church on your solid confession that I am the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

But there is a second option. When Jesus says, “Upon this rock, this *petra*, I will build My church,” Jesus could also have been referring to Himself. He uses this same word, *petra*, in His Sermon on the Mount. (Read Matt 7:24.)

Who is that rock? It’s not Peter. It’s Jesus. Peter himself clearly identified Jesus as

the Rock, the *petra*, on whom His church is built. (Read 1 Pet 2:4–8.) Friends, Jesus is the Rock on whom His church is built.

IV. JESUS PROMISES THAT HIS CHURCH WILL BE VICTORIOUS

There is a fourth important truth about the church that Jesus taught. (Read Matt 16:18 again.) Jesus promises that His church will be victorious.

When Jesus tells us that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church, what does that imply? The gates of hell will try to prevail. The gates of hell will try to destroy the church that Jesus calls “My church.” Satan tried to destroy Jesus shortly after His birth. He failed. Satan tried to deceive and bully Jesus in the wilderness. Satan failed there too. Satan tried to crush Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. He failed. Satan tried to overwhelm Jesus on the cross. He failed. Satan tried to keep Jesus in the tomb. He failed there too. And so I believe the words of Jesus when He says, “The gates of hell will not prevail My church.” His church will be victorious.

But there is a conflict, a great controversy. That great controversy began in heaven. (Read Rev 12:7–10, 12.) Satan and the kingdom of darkness are seeking to destroy the church that Jesus is building. They are seeking to destroy those who keep the commandments of God and are faithful to Jesus. But please don’t miss Revelation 12:11. What does the apostle John tell us, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God? (Read Rev 12:11.)

The gates of hell will not prevail against the church that Jesus is building. Jesus promises that His church will be victorious.

CONCLUSION

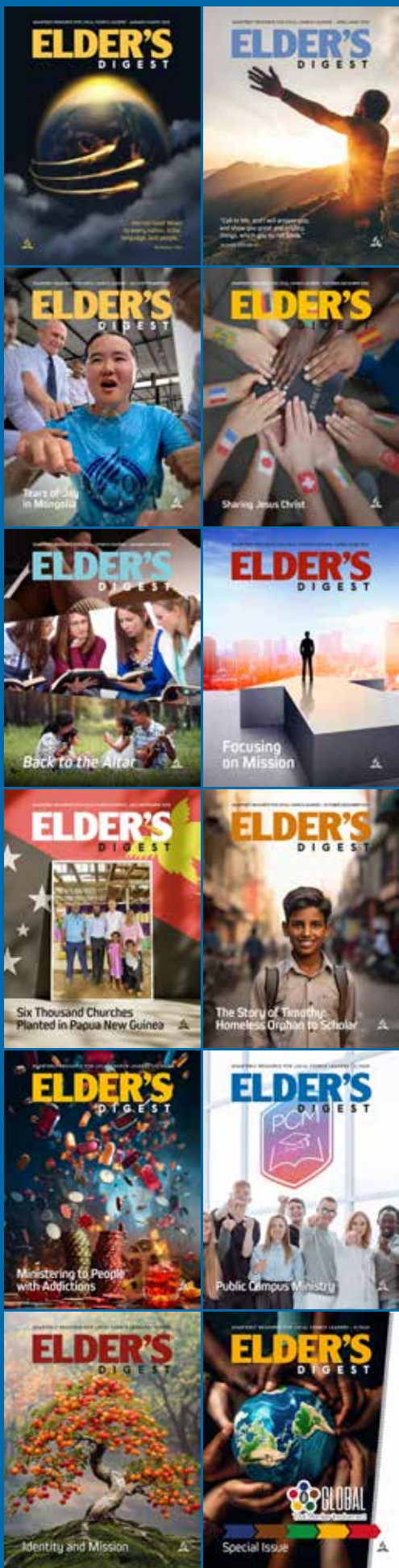
Jesus is building His church even today and Jesus invites you to be part of His church. I want to be a part of the church that Jesus is building. Don’t you? There is someone listening to this message today, and the Holy Spirit is impressing you that you need to make a decision to be part of the church that Jesus is building. Jesus wants you to be part of His church. Jesus invites you to be part of His church. If you sense God calling you to be a part of the church that Jesus is building, I invite you to stand right now and publicly confess the commitment of your heart.

Praise God. Many people are standing, responding to the invitation of Jesus to be part of His church. And if you are thankful that you have already made that decision, I invite you also to stand with us as we pray. Let us pray.

ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

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ELDER'S DIGEST WRITER'S GUIDELINES

ELDER'S DIGEST

WHAT TYPES OF ARTICLES DOES ELDER'S DIGEST PUBLISH?

The best answer to this question can be found by reading a recent issue.

The best articles are relevant to our audience: church elders, deacons, and deaconesses. They enjoy being inspired by new ideas and effective methods of ministry. They prioritize studying their Bibles and growing in their relationship with Jesus. Learning how to resolve challenges is significant too. In short, focus on how elders, deacons, and deaconesses can do their ministries better.

Are you qualified to write for us? Yes! You do not need to be an experienced author to write for us. Anyone with practical experience and knowledge applicable to our audience is qualified to write for *Elder's Digest*. If your material is interesting and helpful, we would be delighted to receive your submission.

TYPES OF ARTICLES WE SEEK

- Articles that will enhance each elder, deacon, and deaconess's relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Articles addressing the elder's personal, spiritual, mental, physical, and social needs.
- Articles that engage with the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- How-to articles about the practice of ministry, leadership, coping with problems, nurturing, lay evangelism, preaching, church administration, etc.
- Theological and biblical articles.
- Sermon manuscripts.
- Articles on family and time management.
- Articles on developing Christ-centered worship services and how to plan all aspects of the worship service.
- Identify the Bible version you are using. NKJV and ESV are well received by our readers.
- For all quotations and references, including the writings of Ellen G. White, please include a citation with full publication details. For books, include the author name, book title, edition number if applicable, publisher, location of publication, date of publication, and page number. For magazines or journals, include the name of magazine/journal and volume/issue number. For websites, include the URL and date accessed.
- Please remember, not all elders are male.
- Send your manuscripts via email and in Microsoft Word document format.
- Above all, we are looking for articles that will encourage elders, deacons, and deaconesses and help them in their ministry.

ARTICLE LENGTH

An average printed page in *Elder's Digest* contains approximately 750 words. We prefer articles with fewer than 1,500 words, or sermons with approximately 1,300 words. We seldom accept articles with more than 3,000 words. We do not accept articles that are simultaneously submitted to other periodicals.

Remember that a good article for a training magazine should be short, practical, and objective.

STYLE AND SUBMISSION

- Keep your writing consistent with biblical principles.
- Write for a global audience. Avoid obscure words that are difficult to understand. Use short sentences. Illustrations add life to articles.

EDITORIAL PROCESS

Elder's Digest undertakes an editorial review of all submitted articles. Articles accepted for publication may be edited for length, grammar, and adherence to in-house style guidelines.

PAYMENT AND COMPLIMENTARY COPIES

We encourage voluntary submission of material. We offer an honorarium for articles accepted for publication. Payment is sent upon receipt of the author's signed publication agreement. Upon publication, you will receive two complimentary copies of the *Elder's Digest* issue in which your contribution appears.

Please email your submission to: garciamarenkoa@gc.adventist.org

MAKING YOUR CHURCH A SAFE PLACE PART 2

HOW TO
NURTURE
A SAFE
CHURCH
COMMUNITY
CULTURE



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



Belonging to a faith community that supports children and youth is one of the greatest joys in the Christian journey. And whether your church has a few children and young people or many, it is a biblical and moral imperative that our church community is committed to keeping children, young people, and vulnerable adults safe.¹

As a church pastor, elder, deacon, or deaconess, you play a vital role in creating and nurturing the right culture at your local church where everyone is valued as a child of God. It does not happen by chance, but through intentional Christlike thought, love, and action. Church board members and ministry leaders share in the responsibility of creating a safe church, not because we expect the worst, but because we want the best

for our church community. When we have a thriving group of people who can act confidently in a safe and secure environment, we are better equipped to fulfill God's mission.

Here's how you can start to nurture a church community where abuse has no place.

PRIORITIZE SAFETY PRINCIPLES

Often the values within a church community might center on justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Mic 6:8). When considering child safety, start by recognizing specific values and principles shared within your church community. For just as faith without action is pointless, principles which are not embedded and ingrained in church culture will most likely fail to have any real meaning or impact.

Identifying specific principles and behaviors will help to foster a deeper

understanding and commitment to child protection. You might find research helpful to develop well-informed values and principles. Valuable insights can be gained from studying the teachings of Christ, as well as consulting child safety experts and service providers. Once you and your leadership team have identified your shared values and principles, use these to help guide church board and ministry decisions and actions.²

Your local church's fundamental principles might include:³

- The best interests of children are always at the forefront of any local church decisions that may impact them.
- Child abuse is not tolerated by the local church.
- Everyone has a role to play in creating a safe environment for children.

The best interests of children are always at the forefront of any local church decisions that may impact them.



- Concerns about child safety are taken seriously by the local church.
- People can report allegations of abuse to church leadership and public authorities without obstruction.

While these principles may serve as a framework for your local church to consider and reflect on child safe practices, it is important that they result in real action.

COMMIT TO ACTION

Being a local church where child safety is important requires more than just talk, policies, or committees, but also requires meaningful action. It is commendable to observe that local churches globally are deliberately implementing measures to ensure a secure environment for children. Those steps may be large or small, but for some churches it is the beginning or continuation of child safety being embedded in the local church's culture.

A CODE OF CONDUCT BUILDS CONFIDENCE

A helpful tool for a local church, conference, or union to use is a code of conduct for church workers and ministry leaders who interact directly with children, young people, and/or vulnerable adults. It would also include those who hold spiritual authority over children, such as elders, pastors, Sabbath School teachers, Pathfinder leaders, etc.

The purpose of a code of conduct is to define how church employees, volunteers, and members should interact with children by clarifying what behaviors or actions towards children are considered appropriate and inappropriate. It provides guidance for decisions and planning around things such as the number of adult leaders who need to be in attendance for a children's Sabbath School class. The aim of the code of conduct is to empower the church

community with confidence in creating a safe place.

PRINCIPLE-BASED REPORTING

Acting on a reported concern or allegation of child abuse can be daunting for even the most experienced church leader. A code of conduct should include a procedure for addressing concerns and complaints. This can cover a range of actions from reporting criminal allegations to police and other authorities to handling minor breaches of the code of conduct in a fair and transparent way. Establishing a values- and principles-based framework for addressing concerns and complaints within church leadership enhances transparency. It shows church workers that there will be consistency, accountability, and fairness applied to any child-related concerns that may arise.

Ultimately, a code of conduct is a tool that aims to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed and/or abused at church activities.⁴ It usually requires the church worker's signature to commit to the church's values, acknowledge understanding of accepted behaviors towards children, and obtain the appropriate or legally required certification to work with children or undergo a criminal check. These commitments reflects the key principle that everyone has a role to play in creating a safe environment for children and makes your local church less likely to attract offenders for fear of being caught and identified.⁵

LET LOVE BE THE MOTIVATION

It is a privilege we have as Christians to minister to our children in Sabbath School, Pathfinders, church camps, discipleship activities, and through various other ministry activities within our church family. The aim of nurturing a safe church culture is

to encourage everyone to practice intentionality and thoughtfulness in making their place of worship a safe place for children and youth. We serve the living God—a God who is intentional, thoughtful, and loving. As church pastors, elders, deacons, and deaconesses, let us embody these godly characteristics through the child safety practices within our church community and in church governance.

SAFEGUARDING LIKE A FENCE

A code of conduct sets boundaries to protect children and church workers, like a fence safeguards people near a cliff. Far better to have a fence than to bring in the ambulances after a fall and people are harmed.⁶

Let us prioritize the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults and act now. May your church be a safe place of worship for every young and vulnerable person (Matt 18:3) to experience the love of Christ! ED

¹ The Office of the Children's Guardian, *Implementing the Child Safe Scheme: An Introduction for Faith-Based Organisations* (New South Wales Government, 2025), https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-03/g_css_introtocssfaithhandbook.pdf, 5.

² Briggam Winkler, "What Can the Church Do about Child Protection?," *The Gospel Coalition*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-child-protection/>.

³ The Office of the Children's Guardian, *Implementing the Child Safe Scheme: An Introduction for Faith-Based Organisations* (New South Wales Government, 2025), https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-03/g_css_introtocssfaithhandbook.pdf, 9.

⁴ The Office of the Children's Guardian, *Risk Management and the Child Safe Standards: Part 1—Responding to Risk* (New South Wales Government, 2023), https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/G_CSS_Risk%20Management_Resourceprt1.pdf, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "New Code of Conduct," *Adsafe*, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.adsafe.org.au/safeguarding/code-of-conduct>.

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SERMON PREPARATION PART 3 WINDOWS



While travelling to Danané, a small town 627 kilometers (389 miles) west of Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire, you may visit the bustling town of Man. Man is a little gem situated in an area of natural beauty surrounded by mountains, forests, and rivers. Mont Tonkoui (1,189 m) is one of Côte d'Ivoire's tallest mountains with some exquisite waterfalls, and is very popular with tourists. Although not on the top of everyone's list of places to go, those tourists who know come to hike and explore this region. Possibly this is the first time you have heard of Man, and now you wish to learn more.

KEEP THE CONGREGATION INTERESTED

This illustrates the point that in order to keep the congregation interested, you must make your sermons interesting. The benefits are threefold: (1) You will enjoy preaching the sermon. (2) The listeners will enjoy what you have to say. (3) It glorifies God. You don't want to have Paul's experience in Troas as you preach. "And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead" (Acts 20:9).¹ It must have been either a really bad or really long sermon for that to happen. If your sermon is boring, the listeners may fall asleep—although they likely won't fall out of a window!

Prior to going into pastoral ministry, I talked with the dean of the seminary at Andrews University to ask his advice on preaching. The dean's advice was to put plenty of windows in your sermon. What was the dean suggesting? What is the purpose of a window? The answer is that they let light shine through them to light up a room. When constructing a sermon, put plenty of windows in it.

COMMUNICATE IN PICTURES

We communicate, and even dream, in pictures. Jacob dreamed of a ladder going up to heaven. "Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!" (Gen 28:11–12).

Similarly, Joseph had a dream that got him in a bit of trouble with his brothers. "Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, . . . 'Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf'" (Gen 37:5–7). Life for Joseph got much worse. In Genesis 40, Joseph was in prison; however, this time, Joseph was able to interpret the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker to the king. Both would be released—the cupbearer to serve the pharaoh and the baker to be hung.

Possibly one of the most profound dreams God gave humankind was given to King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. This dream gave Nebuchadnezzar a summary of what would happen in the future, showing the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, and lastly, the feet of iron and clay that were struck by the rock. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar, "A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure" (Dan 2:45). Through one simple statue of various metals, God gave Nebuchadnezzar an overview of the world's future history.

That's the power of pictures to communicate a spiritual truth. All five dreams had different stories; all their dreams were in pictures rather than words. Why? We communicate through pictures. When used correctly, words create mental images that we can relate to. What does the word *Calvary* bring to mind? I would guess it is a picture of Jesus dying on the cross. That is a powerful image, demonstrating the power of pictures.

USING PICTURES TO COMMUNICATE THE ABSTRACT

Windows in a sermon are picture stories that connect with the listener. In elementary school, to help children learn numbers we use a technique called CPA 1 (concrete, pictorial, and abstract).² First, we introduce children to concrete examples using four wooden blocks to count with. When they have learned to count with the blocks, they learn to count with pictures of four squares, circles, or triangles. Finally, the children are taught to count using numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4.

This is not new; Jesus used the same method to teach spiritual truths. In Jesus' lesson on worrying, Jesus used concrete pictures—lilies from the field. We read, "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matt 6:28–30). The message is simple, yet so profound. Using a flower to instill faith in the heart of the hearer, Jesus used a concrete example to communicate an abstract message. Jesus went from concrete to abstract to explain the need to trust God daily.

Practically all of what is taught within the church is abstract. Think of the concepts of justification and sanctification; can you touch or see them? No. Yet these are important truths that need to be proclaimed. So how do we make abstract truths relevant for today's listener? We tell stories that the listener can relate to. A listener in Bangkok, Thailand, obviously has a different context than a listener in Zurich, Switzerland, or a listener in Los Angeles, USA. But the overarching principle is the same: put pictures in your sermon that people can relate to.

God has used His servants down through time to communicate vivid images, writing down what they saw: Daniel in the Old Testament and his scary beasts, John in the New Testament and pictures of heavenly worship, and Ellen G. White's prophetic visions. Pictures are powerful. Therefore, place them strategically throughout your sermon. The listener will remember your message when you do.

KEEP YOUR MESSAGE POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING

Paul's situation was dire when he wrote these words in Philippians: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8). He was a guest of the Roman Empire. He wasn't enjoying the luxuries of the Marriott Grand Hotel Flora Rome; he was in a stinky prison cell. Yet Philippians is called the epistle of joy, even though Paul's own circumstances were far from joyous.

People respond much better to encouragement, and as a preacher, it is important to bring the good news

to the listener on Sabbath. The most important aspect of the sermon is to bring an alternative to the doom and gloom that pervade this world. We get six days of media telling us humanity is about to fall off a cliff. Sabbath is a day of rest, a rest from the cares of the world and its constant worries. Isaiah explains this need to keep positive. Isaiah reads, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isa 52:7). Preach the gospel, the good news.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) were two literary giants in Denmark. One had an upbringing of wealth and privilege, the other poverty and disadvantage, and with dramatically differing perspectives on life. Kierkegaard sought to be the corrective in Christendom, spending all his life complaining about all the wrongs in the church of his day which needed correcting, while Andersen chose to inspire through his writings. Two storytellers with two different outcomes: one died lonely and miserable, while the other died happy, leaving a legacy of happiness to children with stories such as *The Little Mermaid*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Nightingale*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and *The Tinderbox*. Two great Danes, two different stories, with two different endings. I know which one I prefer—the one where they all lived happily ever after. Keep your sermons interesting and positive. ED

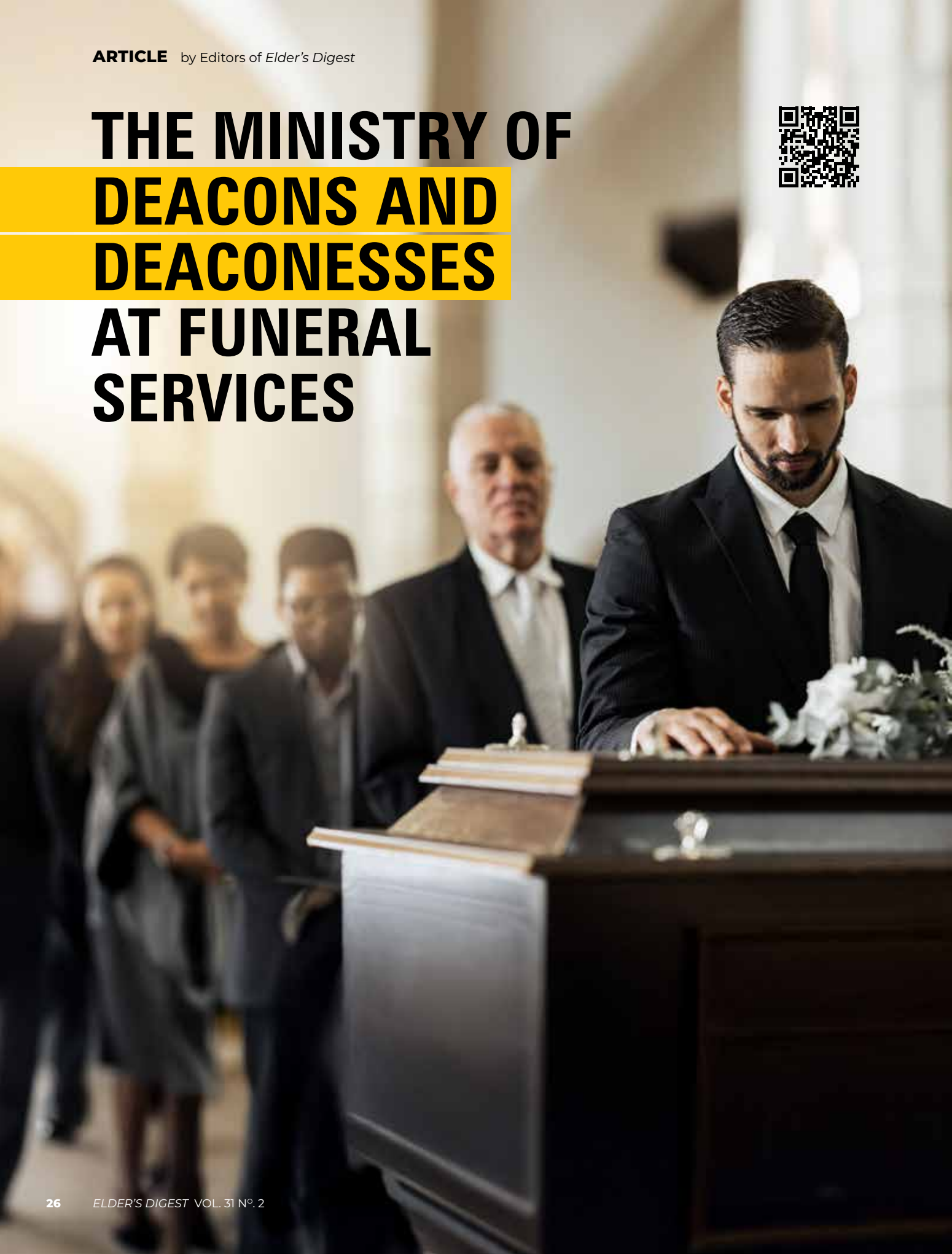
¹ All Scripture references are from the ESV.

² "What IS CPA Maths?," Twinkl, accessed August 27, 2025, <https://www.twinkl.com/teaching-wiki/cpa-maths>.

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THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES AT FUNERAL SERVICES



Unfortunately, the tragedy of death is no stranger to our families and Seventh-day Adventist churches. Thankfully, our Savior Jesus Christ provides the means to enable every person to receive eternal life, so that death is not final, but a sleep until He returns and resurrects His people to eternal life (1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:51–57).

At a funeral service, as well as before and after the funeral, the ministry of deacons and deaconesses is very significant. Those who are grieving—immediate family and other relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors, or acquaintances of the deceased—need practical ministry. Deacons and deaconesses are very important ambassadors of Jesus, who can provide this practical ministry during this time of need.

The apostle Paul succinctly outlines the principle of this ministry and other ministries: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58, ESV). The death of a loved one typically provokes a time of extreme stress and anxiety for the grieving. This is a vital time for deacons and deaconesses to be “abounding in the work of the Lord.” It is also encouraging and inspiring that “your labor is not in vain” at these times. For many years afterwards, the beneficiaries of your ministry will be appreciative of your Christlike, caring labor.

Deacons and deaconesses can provide a valuable and appreciated ministry by providing meals, running errands, helping with household chores, and providing practical support.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Jesus, during His incarnational ministry, cared for people who were grieving. Mary and Martha valued and cherished His presence and support when Lazarus died (John 11:20, 29), as did the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17). As His own death approached, Jesus ensured that His mother would receive practical help and support from the disciple John. Ellen G. White notes, “As Jesus hung upon the cross during those long hours of agony, He did not forget His mother. She had returned to the terrible scene, for she could not longer remain away from her Son. The last lesson of Jesus was one of compassion and humanity. He looked upon the grief-stricken face of His mother, and then upon His beloved disciple John. He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold thy son!’ Then He said to John, ‘Behold thy mother!’ And from that hour John took her to his own house.”¹

Jesus’ love and concern for the grieving has not diminished since His ascension to heaven. Ellen G. White offers the moving insight that Jesus “is touched today by the woe of the bereaved.”² It is a great privilege, as deacons and deaconesses, to serve the needs of the bereaved, reflecting the love and compassion of Jesus.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR DEACONS AND DEACONESSES³

Assisting the Immediate Family.

When a death occurs, there are often many complexities and demands

confronting the immediate family and loved ones. Their grieving may be overwhelmed by the suddenness of the loss or even the reality of an anticipated death. Anxiety, cares, and concerns can incapacitate some people. Planning the funeral and notifying loved ones and family is usually difficult. Many in this situation are not able to perform their regular household duties and responsibilities. Deacons and deaconesses can provide a valuable and appreciated ministry by providing meals, running errands, helping with household chores, and providing practical support.

Unscheduled or Emergency Cleaning of the Church. A funeral may be scheduled in the church before the regular cleaners have had an opportunity to clean the church after the preceding Sabbath service. Deacons and deaconesses should ensure that the church and its facilities are cleaned and prepared for the funeral service.

Preparation of Church Facilities. Some of the regular church furniture may need to be relocated to accommodate the casket at the front of the sanctuary. The aisle of the church may need to be widened to allow the coffin to be carried in and out of the church. Mats or other items that could cause pallbearers to trip may need to be temporarily removed. Winter heating or summer cooling systems of the church should be activated well before the service so that funeral attendees will be comfortable when they arrive for the service.

Prior contact should be made with the funeral director to ensure that the church is opened and accessible at an arranged time before the commencement of the service. Also, be available to assist the funeral director with information about the facilities.

At the Funeral Service. Deacons and deaconesses may be needed to greet and welcome attendees at the entrance of the church. First-time visitors from the community will often be unfamiliar with the church and facilities. Offer directions and help as needed. In some contexts, it may be helpful to provide tissues for attendees.

If the funeral is an outdoor service and exposed to the weather, assist people to manage the heat, cold, rain, etc. In hot weather, drinking water will be greatly appreciated. In freezing temperatures, a warm blanket will be a blessing to those who are suffering, and some umbrellas are always useful if it is hot and sunny or raining.

Deacons and deaconesses can also assist with preparing the refreshments that are often served after a funeral, or arranging tables and chairs for those attending.

Transportation, Parking, and Traffic Management. Grieving relatives and loved ones of the

deceased may require transport to attend the funeral. This is a valuable ministry which could be performed or coordinated by deacons and deaconesses.

Funerals are often conducted during workdays when parking is in greater demand near the church than on a Sabbath. Assist attendees with parking by being ready to help people find a car park, or providing a shuttle service to and from an off-site car park.

When the funeral procession leaves the church, traffic may need to be directed. Work with local authorities to ensure respectful and orderly departure of the procession. The safety of the procession and other road users is an important priority.

Follow-Up Care and Ministry.

The death of a significant person can potentially cause prolonged hardship and loneliness for the survivor(s). In the weeks, months, and even years following a death, the grieving

will most likely need continuing practical ministry and care, which can be provided by deacons and deaconesses. Widows, orphans, and the fatherless are especially identified in Scripture as worthy recipients of special attention (Deut 14:29; Jas 1:27). There is a tendency to assume that after a few weeks, the grieving should have recovered sufficiently and are no longer in need of ministry. This is a false assumption. Visitation and offering tangible support, prayer, and fellowship are much needed by the grieving, and are valuable ongoing ministries offered by deacons and deaconesses. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 5th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1963), 177.

² Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 170.

³ For further information, see "Bereavement Ministry" and "Visiting During Bereavement," in *Seventh-day Adventist Deacon's and Deaconess's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association), 105–107, 118–119.

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

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

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

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

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK WITH GOD?

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NOAH PART 2



After Enoch, Noah is the second character in the Bible who walked with God (Gen 6:9). In the previous article, we learned that walking with God means living in communion and harmonious relationship with God. We as believers today are also called to walk with God as we live lives of obedience and intimacy with Him (see Eph 2:10). In the story of Enoch, there were four lessons that taught us how to walk with God. Today, the story of Noah gives us four more.

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

—Colossians 2:6-7¹

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NOAH

1. Noah walked justly and blameless before God.

Genesis 6:8–9 says, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. . . . Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations.” Other versions say that Noah was blameless among the people of his generation (NIV). During that time, God was sorry He had made mankind because of their exceeding wickedness (Gen 6:5), but Noah was seen favorably because of his blamelessness and justness.

The word for *blameless* means someone who has obeyed God’s commands and stayed away from sin. David once said, “I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity” (Ps 18:23). The word for *just* means being wholeheartedly devoted to God. It is often used in parallel with the word *righteous* in the Old Testament. Proverbs 2:8–9 says, “He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity *and* every good path.” Noah’s life demonstrated obedience and devotion to God with his blamelessness and righteousness.

Noah’s life of righteousness and blamelessness came from his devoted faith to God. Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” Noah’s righteousness is demonstrated by his unwavering preaching of righteousness to ungodly people and warning them of things yet to come (see Ezek 14:14; 2 Pet 2:5).

Ellen G. White makes a strong connection of how our faith can grow and become stronger as we act on it. She says, “While Noah was giving his warning message to the world, his works testified of his sincerity. It

was thus that his faith was perfected and made evident. He gave the world an example of believing just what God says. All that he possessed, he invested in the ark.”²

In our lives, our faith grows when we believe God’s promises, even when we don’t see it. God works behind the scenes, and even when we don’t see His actions, we can believe that He is still at work. God has also called us, like Noah, to walk in faith as we are called to blamelessness and righteousness.

2. Noah walked when the world thought he was crazy.

Noah was different from everyone else around him because he walked with God instead of the world. Psalm 1:1 says, “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly.” The psalmist highlights the difference between a person who walks with God by delighting in God’s laws and a person who walks away from God by following a wicked world.

Up to this point in history, no one had ever seen rain. But Noah, walking with God and trusting in Him and His Word, believed in God’s promise to send rain. Noah shows us that walking with God means believing in what God says, even if it is against what nature had previously shown. Noah walked with God by abiding in God’s Word instead of the world’s wisdom.

Noah’s life of righteousness inspires us to live in the world but separate ourselves from the corruption of the world. For 120 years, Noah preached that rain would come to a world full of corruption and disbelief. Ellen G. White says, “But Noah stood like a rock amid the tempest. Surrounded by popular contempt and ridicule, he distinguished himself by his holy integrity and unwavering faithfulness.”³

In a world of corruption, Noah stood up and believed in the flood that God had promised. Noah acted “on the

basis of a reality yet to appear, even if such action [incurred] the scorn of the world. Indeed, that Noah ‘built an ark’ on no other basis than divine warning.”⁴ In a world where people may think we as Christians are crazy, we have to hold fast to our faith and believe in God’s promises. Peter tells us that in the last days, scoffers will ask us, “Where is the promise of His coming?” But Peter reminds us to trust the Word of the Lord (see 2 Pet 3:1–9). As Seventh-day Adventists, it has been more than 180 years since we have preached that Jesus is coming. Although the world may not believe us, we must continue to believe that Christ’s Second Coming is soon based on the words of His promise.

Jesus tells us that the last days will be very similar to the days of Noah. “As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt 24:37). In a world of corruption, where the vast majority of people are walking away from God, we need to be faithful to God’s Word and walk obediently with Him, distinguishing ourselves from the corruption of the world.

3. Noah walked with God even when God seemed harsh.

Genesis 6:7 says, “So the LORD said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’” When many Christians look at the story of Noah, they see a God who is vengeful, harsh, and easily angered; however, the story of Noah reveals to us the justice and mercy of God. For 120 years, God gave the people ample opportunity to repent. The story of Nineveh reveals to us that even when a punishment is promised, it can be revoked by the repentance of the people (see Jonah 3:4–5, 10).

In contrast to the people of Nineveh, the people in Noah’s time did not repent, and instead mocked

God's promise to send rain. Genesis 6:5 says, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually." The word *wickedness* means that the people were causing innocent victims to suffer and unethically pursuing wrongdoing.⁵ Noah walked with God because he trusted that God was a God who would not allow the godly to suffer unjustly (see 2 Pet 2:5–9). As the justice system imposes punishment onto its worst criminals, Noah knew that God must also punish the criminals who were causing suffering in the world.

Ellen White reveals that the people of the world were not only wicked, but prideful. "They sought only to gratify the desires of their own proud hearts, and reveled in scenes of pleasure and wickedness. Not desiring to retain God in their knowledge, they soon came to deny His existence. They adored nature in place of the God of nature. They glorified human genius, worshiped the works of their own hands, and taught their children to bow down to graven images."⁶ The people were not only engaging in child sacrifices, theft, and violence, but also disregarding God to elevate themselves.

During the end of times, the apostle John tells us that God's people will also ask God how long until He will enact justice. The angel tells the people to wait until the number was completed, and then justice would be enacted on those who had killed God's people and promoted wrongdoing (see Rev 6:10–11). We can rejoice knowing that God does not allow wickedness to continue, but grants mercy to His people who have suffered and are suffering today. As Noah was able to walk upon a renewed earth, with the perpetuators of violence, unjustness, and selfishness removed, so we too will walk upon an earth made new, "and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more

death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

4. Noah walked with God by worshipping Him with gratitude.

Noah demonstrated his faith and walk with God on the renewed earth by worshipping God. The first act Noah did was building an altar to God. He sacrificed offerings to God in gratitude for saving him and his family. "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Gen 8:20). Ellen White says, "In the joy of their release Noah did not forget Him by whose gracious care they had been preserved."⁷ Noah knew that God had preserved his life and the life of his family in the ark during the great flood. In an act of gratitude, Noah worshipped God as not only his Creator, but as his Savior.

Our first action after seeing God's deliverance should be an act of worship. Our lives should demonstrate our gratitude to God as our Savior. Just as Noah was saved from the perils of the flood, we also have sins and suffering that God has saved us from. With rejoicing and gratitude, we should worship God with all our heart, mind, and strength (see Matt 23:37).

Noah's gratitude towards God affected not only his family, but all of humanity, as God promised to never flood the earth again. After Noah worshipped God, "the LORD said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done'" (Gen 8:21). Our worship and gratitude

to God can result in not only our walk being blessed, but others' walks with God being blessed.

CONCLUSION

Both Noah and Enoch's walks with God reveal to us the journey of walking with God. Enoch and Noah's lives reveal the importance of faithfulness, trust, and obedience to God. Both characters enjoyed a long-lasting relationship with God despite the wickedness and ridicule of other people. Their stories reveal to us God's character of love, mercy, and justice.

We, as God's children, are also called to walk with God until the end. "When God takes the members of His church to heaven, it will be because they have walked with Him here on this earth, receiving from above strength and wisdom which enables them to serve Him aright. Those who are taken to God will be men and women who now pray in humility and contrition, whose hearts are not lifted up unto vanity. In their dealing with believers and unbelievers they represent Christ."⁸ May the lives of Enoch and Noah inspire us to represent Christ fully and faithfully walk with God always. ED

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

² Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 95.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, "Hebrews," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1473.

⁵ Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Violence," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1357.

⁶ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 90.

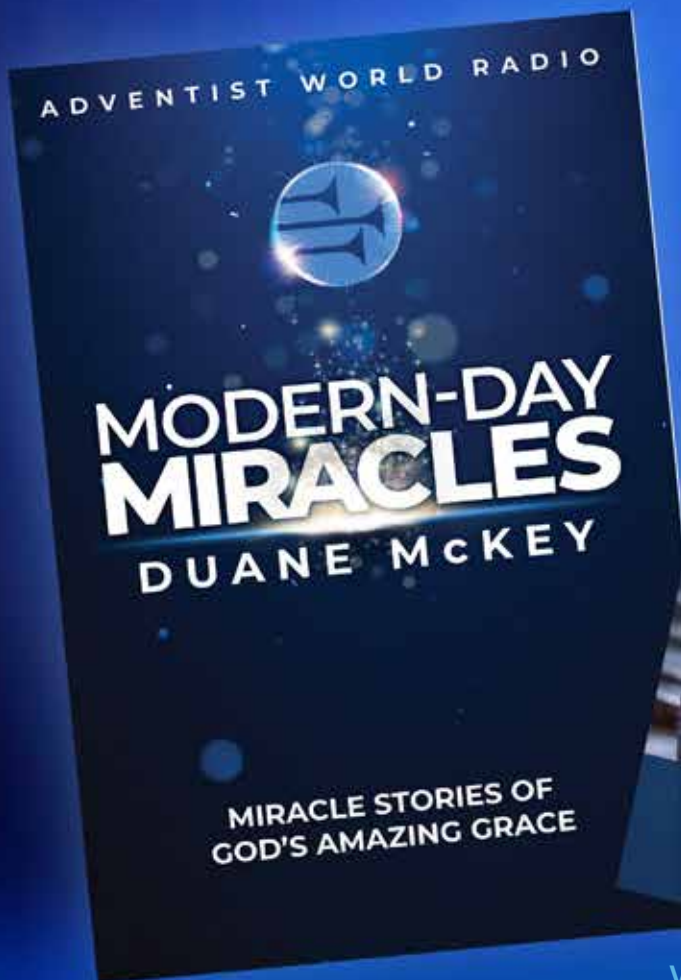
⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *My Life Today* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1952), 341.

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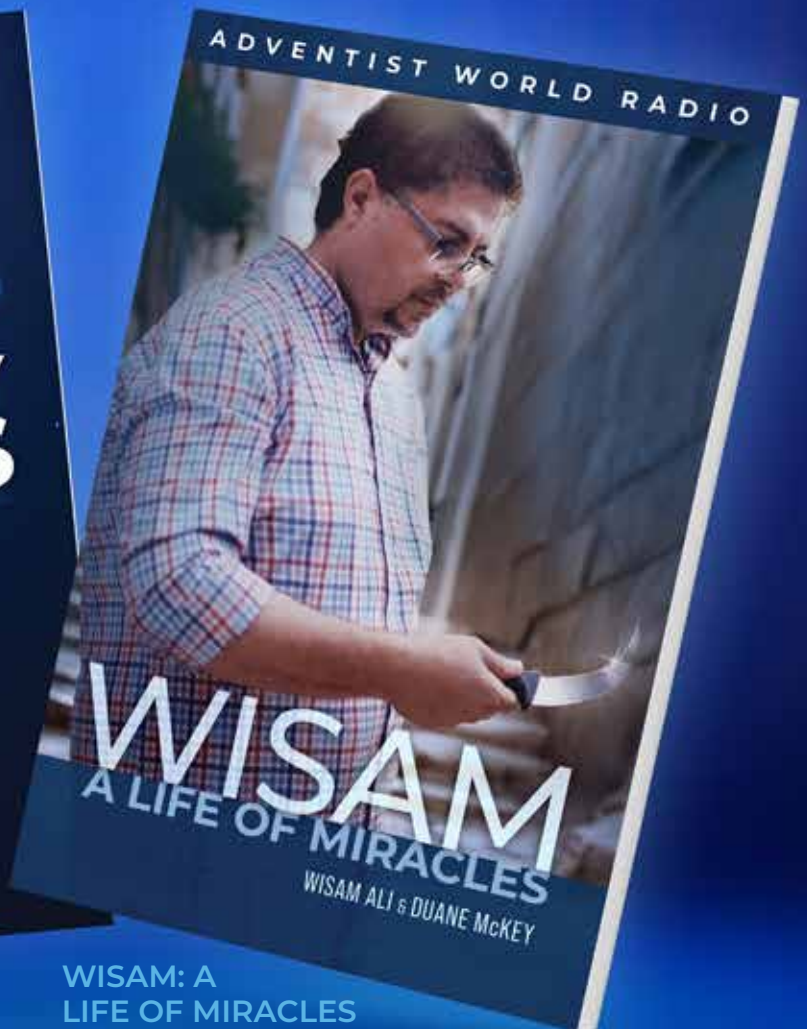
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