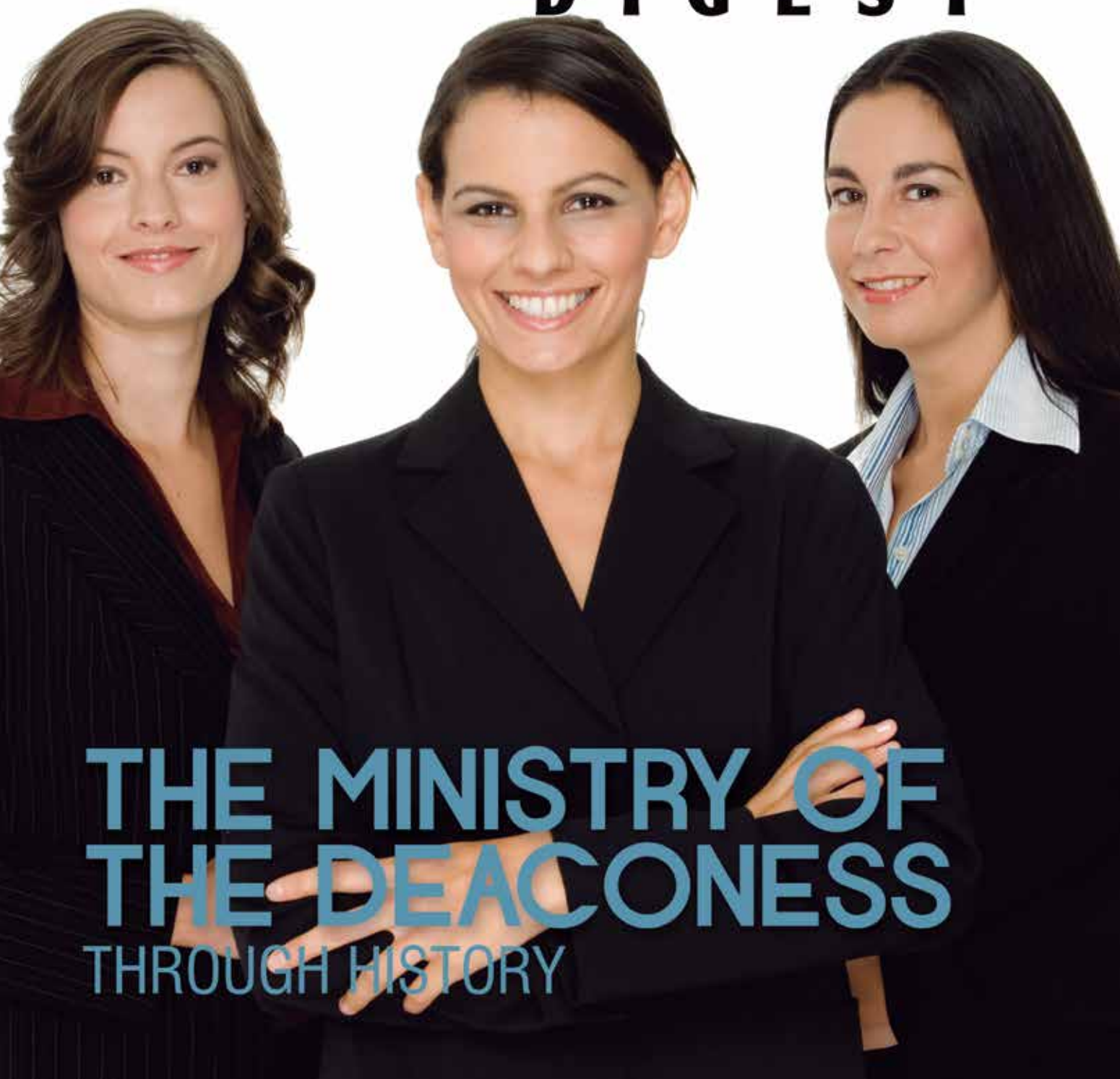


quarterly resource for local church leaders † july/september 2017

ELDER'S DIGEST



THE MINISTRY OF
THE DEACONESS
THROUGH HISTORY

FEATURES

- 4 THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACONESS THROUGH HISTORY
- 8 LESSONS FROM DANIEL 10
- 11 NO LONGER ALONE
- 12 4 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE SAFETY AT YOUR CHURCH
- 14 RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, EVANGELISM, AND PROSELYTISM
- 20 SHEPHERDING ARTISTS IN THE FLOCK: A MUSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON CULTIVATING CREATIVE COMMUNITY
- 24 PREACHING POWERFULLY: IS IT POSSIBLE?
- 28 GREAT HYMNS OF THE CHURCH - PART 3



EDITORIAL	3
SERMONS	15
QUESTION & ANSWER	19
THE ART OF SPEECH	23
HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS	27
KIDDER'S COLUMN	30

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THE IMPORTANT MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

Deacons and deaconesses play a very important role in the church. They are not meant to be mini-pastors or super-laypeople, but the church, as we know it, wouldn't be the same without them. Although they have a ministry of service, the fact that they have been chosen demonstrates that they are respected spiritual leaders among the church members. Without their ministry, the church would not operate properly.


As we know, some of the biblical duties of the deacons are to relieve pastors of responsibilities that would keep them from doing their best in studying the Word, spending time alone with God in prayer, and teaching the Word effectively. These are some of the reasons the first deacons were chosen (Acts 6). Deacons still need to work closely with pastors and elders to make sure they have enough time for the priorities in their ministry. Many

churches are hampered in their growth and spiritual development because the pastor or elders have "laid down" the Word of God to do other things. Churches with spiritual servants like deacons and deaconesses will be blessed indeed. Pastors and elders who have such a deaconate to help them will be better church leaders because of them. The Bible states that deacons who serve well "obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith" (1 Tim. 3:13).

As a church, we are indebted to our deacons and deaconesses. For many years, they were forsaken and forgotten by the church

and did not receive proper recognition and appropriate training. We should express more words of appreciation to them, give them visible support, and provide them with the right resources—including the new *Deacon's and Deaconess's Handbook*—to be more effective in their ministry.

Thank God for this army of servant leaders! What an incredible spirit of service they possess! They are providing a great ministry to our church. We are blessed by their commitment and loving ministry.

In this issue, emphasis is given to the ministry of deacons and deaconesses. Enjoy the reading! 



DID YOU KNOW?

The General Conference, during Annual Council on October 16, 2013, voted that "the Ministerial Association is responsible to empower, train, and equip the deacons and deaconesses in the Seventh-day Adventist Church globally."

During the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, USA, it was voted to include in the *Church Manual* this statement: "The Ministerial Association, in connection with the departments, promotes the training and equipping of deacons. However, the pastor, in conjunction with the elder(s), has the primary responsibility for training the deacons."

We have a website with many resources and guidelines to train and equip deacons and deaconesses. Please visit www.eldersdigest.org.

JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACONESS THROUGH HISTORY

>PART 1 OF 2

EDITOR'S NOTE: PART ONE OF A TWO-PART SERIES EXAMINES THE ROLE OF THE DEACONESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHURCH. PART TWO, TO APPEAR IN THE NEXT ISSUE, WILL EXAMINE THE ROLE OF THE DEACONESS IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH.¹

What was the role of the deaconesses in the New Testament and in the church through history? To understand this issue fully, we shall first turn to the New Testament for a study of the word deaconess and review the life and work of some of the deaconesses mentioned there. Then we shall briefly explore the role of the deaconesses in the early church from available historical records.

THE WORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word deaconess is the feminine counterpart of the male deacon. Both words come from the Greek verb *diakone* (to serve, to assist, to minister).

In Matthew 8:15, Luke 10:40, and Acts 6:2, the authors used the verb *diakone* in connection with serving food and other aspects of ministry. For example, Jesus



coming to minister or serve (Matt. 20:28); Paul's trip "to Jerusalem to minister to the saints" with the offerings he collected in Europe (Rom. 15:25, NKJV); and the commendation of believers "ministering" to the saints (Heb. 6:10).

The noun *diakonia* also describes: the table ministry the apostles entrusted to the seven (Acts 6:1, 2); Paul's God-given ministry of the gospel (Acts 20:24); and the spiritual gifts given to the saints to prepare them for ministry (Eph. 4:12).

The noun *diakonos* is used in several ways. It denotes one who waits on tables, as at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:5). Jesus told that "whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*]" (Mark 10:43, NKJV). With Paul, the word takes on a specifically Christian sense. Paul is a *diakonos* of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), of God (2 Cor. 6:4), and of the church (Col. 1:25). In these texts, the meaning comes much closer to *minister* than to *servant*.

In Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, *diakonos* identifies specific church officers. There was evidently a spiritual occupation, for the requirements were spiritual, personal integrity, and blamelessness.

The Greek, which usually distinguishes carefully between masculine and feminine forms of a noun, does not do so with *diakonos*. The same word is used for male and female religious servers, both in pagan religions and in Christianity. When the article is used, the gender is visible: *ho diakonos* (masculine) and *h diakonos* (feminine). The feminine *diakonissa* appeared only in the early fourth century.

WOMEN DEACONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Phoebe. Paul, in Romans 16:1, 2, called Phoebe a *diakonos* of the church of Cenchræa. Besides this brief statement, we know nothing about Phoebe, except that she was a benefactor of Paul and others, and that Paul commended her to the church in Rome.

That she was a benefactor or patroness (*prostatis*) suggests a woman of wealth and position. In the first-century Mediterranean world, a patron or benefactor funded the construction of monuments or buildings, financed festivals or celebrations, and supported artists and writers. Of interest to this study, Paul recognized Phoebe as a *diakonos*, or minister, of the church at Cenchræa. Only here is *diakonos* used in relation to a specific church, implying some kind of position in the church. Translation of the term *diakonos* in this passage has more to do with the translator than the meaning of the Greek word. The KJV has "servant"; the NIV has "servant," with "deaconess" in the note; the NRSV says "deacon," with "minister" in the note.

Early church writers give their own interpretation of this passage. Origen (185–254) interprets Paul's statement to teach "that there were women ordained in the church's ministry."² About Phoebe and the other women of Romans 16, John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) wrote: "You see that these were noble women, hindered in no way by their sex in the course of virtue; and this is as might be expected for in Christ

Jesus there is neither male nor female."³ Theodoret (393–460) noted Phoebe as "a woman deacon, prominent and noble. She was so rich in good works performed as to have merited the praise of Paul."⁴

"*The women likewise.*" In 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Paul lists the characteristics of bishops or overseers. Verses 8-10 describe the spiritual traits required of *diakonois*. Verse 11 seems something of a digression: who are these "women"? The Greek word, which can be translated "women" or "wives," has been variously translated as "women," "women deacons," or "their [deacon's] wives."

The suggestion that the term refers to wives of deacons presents difficulties, for in the Greek there is no possessive. Whose wives were they? On the other hand, if one takes the context seriously, these women serve the church as do their male counterparts. Quite probably, these women were female deacons, as was Phoebe.

In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria (155-220) indicated that this text presented evidence for the existence of *diakonon gunaik n* ("women deacons"). John Chrysostom and Theodoret, writing in the fourth and fifth centuries respectively, also understood these women to be female deacons.⁵

WOMEN DEACONS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

During the early centuries, women deacons and widows were recognized church leaders. We will examine evidence for the existence, tasks, and ordination of women in the diaconate⁶ and then point to reasons for the demise of the female diaconate.

The existence of deaconesses. Somewhere between A.D. 111 and 113, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, wrote to the Emperor Trajan asking how he should deal with Christians. In the letter, he tells of questioning two women, who were called *ministrae*, the Latin equivalent of *diakonos*.⁷

Of the ministry of women, Clement of Alexandria wrote: "But the apostles in conformity with their ministry concentrated on undistracted preaching, and took their wives around as Christian sisters rather than spouses, to be their fellow-ministers ["fellow deacons"] in relation to housewives, through whom the Lord's teaching penetrated into the women's quarters without scandal."⁸

The Didascalia Apostolorum [Teaching of the Apostles], undoubtedly from the eastern part of the empire and composed in the third century, gives specific instructions about the role of men and women church workers: "Therefore, O bishop, appoint yourself workers of righteousness, helpers who cooperate with you unto life. Those that please you out of all the people you shall choose and appoint as deacons: on the one hand, a man for the administration of the many things that are required, on the other hand a woman for the ministry of women."⁹

Tomb inscriptions also provide evidence that female deacons served the church. Among others, an inscription found

in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives tells of “Sophia the Deacon.” Dated to the second half of the fourth century, the tombstone reads: “Here lies the slave and bride of Christ, Sophia, the deacon (h diakonos), the second Phoebe.”¹⁰ As a “bride of Christ,” Sophia would have been celibate.

A sixth-century inscription from Cappadocia in Asia Minor gives not only the title, but shows what this female diakonos did: “Here lies the deacon Maria of pious and blessed memory, who according to the words of the apostle raised children, sheltered guests, washed the feet of the saints, and shared her bread with the needy. Remember her, Lord, when she comes into your kingdom.”¹¹

In the East, deaconesses appear as late as the twelfth or thirteenth century. The *Liber Patrum* states: “As for deaconesses, they must be wise. Those who have provided a clear witness of purity and fear of God are the ones who should be chosen. They should be chaste and modest and sixty years or older in age. They carry out the sacrament of baptism for women because it is not fitting that the priest should view the nudity of women.”¹²

The ordination of deaconesses. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (late fourth century) give instruction to the bishop on the ordination of church leaders, male and female. The bishop is to lay hands upon the woman and pray: “O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Hulda, who didst not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple didst appoint women to be keepers of Thy holy gates,—Do Thou now also look down on this Thy servant who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that she may worthily discharge the work committed to her to Thy glory and the praise of Thy Christ.”¹³

At the Council of Chalcedon (451), the ordination of deaconesses is expressly called ordination by the imposition of hands. Members of the Council agreed that “a woman shall not receive the laying on of hands as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination.”¹⁴

Emperor Justinian directed a novella (March 16, 535) to the archbishop of Constantinople, indicating that the church there should have 40 women deacons. In subsequent instructions, he stated that the same rules should apply to women deacons as to priests and deacons. As virgins or widows of one husband, they merited sacred ordination.¹⁵

The Barberini Greek Euchology, an eighth-century Byzantine ritual for the ordination of male and female deacons, calls for the laying-on of hands in ordination. The first of two prayers was said by a deacon, and noted that God sanctified the female sex through the birth of Jesus and has given the Holy Spirit to both men and women. The second prayer, said by the archbishop, stated: “Lord, Master, you do not reject women who dedicate themselves to you and who are willing,

in a becoming way, to serve your Holy House, but admit them to the order of your ministers. Grant the gift of your Holy Spirit also to this your maid servant who wants to dedicate herself to you, and fulfill in her the grace of the ministry of the diaconate, as you have granted to Phoebe the grace of your diaconate, whom you had called to the work of the ministry.”¹⁶

Tasks of deaconesses. From ancient documents, we learn of the functions performed by early deaconesses. The Apostolic Constitutions command the bishop to “ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministrations towards women. . . . For we stand in need of a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities.”¹⁷ Female deacons had a special ministry for women, especially in pagan homes, where male deacons were not welcome. They took the eucharist to women who could not attend church. In addition, they ministered to the sick, the poor, and those in prison.¹⁸ The most important ministry of the female deacons was to assist at the baptism by immersion of women. The deaconess anointed the baptismal candidate with oil, apparently over the whole body. In some cases, she held up a veil so that the clergy could not see the naked woman being baptized. She may have accompanied the woman into the water.

The *Disdascalia* points to the role of women deacons in the teaching ministry: “And when she who is being baptized has come up from the water, let the deaconess receive her, and teach and educate her in order that the unbreakable seal of baptism shall be (kept) in chastity and holiness. On this account, we say that the ministry of a woman deacon is especially required and urgent.”¹⁹

James of Edessa (683–708) noted that deaconesses in the Eastern Church “had no authority regarding the altar.” They could “sweep the sanctuary and light the sanctuary lamp.” In a community of nuns, they could take “the holy sacrament from the tabernacle and distribute this” to her fellow nuns.²⁰

DEMISE OF THE FEMALE DIACONATE

While deaconesses appear in the Eastern Church until the twelfth or thirteenth century, in the West their end came much earlier. British monk Pelagius (c. 420) wrote that the female diaconate was an institution fallen into disuse in the West, though remaining in the East.²¹

The Synod of Nimes (396) pointed out that the problem with deaconesses was that women had “assumed for themselves the ministry of the Levites,” which was “against apostolic discipline and has been unheard of until this time.” Further, “any such ordination that has taken place is against all reason and is to be destroyed.”²²

A series of church councils made pronouncements against the ordination of deaconesses. The First Council of Orange (441) ordered: “In no way whatsoever should deaconesses ever be ordained. If there already are deaconesses, they should bow their heads beneath the blessing which is given to all the people.”²³ The Burgundian Council of Epaon (517) ruled: “We abrogate totally within the entire kingdom

the consecration of widows who are named deaconesses.”²⁴ The Second Synod of Orleans (533) followed up on this prohibition. Its Canon 18 states: “To no woman must henceforth the benedictio diaconalis be given, because of the weakness of the sex.”²⁵

The ordination of deaconesses, rather than their work, seems to have become an issue, perhaps because of their monthly “impurity.” Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis (315-405), who held that women “are a feeble race, untrustworthy and of mediocre intelligence,” pointed out that deaconesses were not clergy, but served the “bishops and priests on grounds of propriety.”²⁶ In a letter to John, Bishop of Jerusalem, he insisted he had never “ordained deaconesses . . . nor done anything to split the church.”²⁷ By 1070, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch, could affirm that “deaconesses in any proper sense had ceased to exist in the Church though the title was borne by certain nuns.”²⁸ One of the reasons he gave was the “impurity of their menstrual periods” and the fact that law “prohibits women from entering the sanctuary.”²⁹

Jacobite author Jahya ibn Jarir, writing from Persia in the third quarter of the eleventh century, wrote: “In antiquity deaconesses were ordained; their function was to be concerned with adult women and prevent their being uncovered in the presence of the bishop. However, as the practice of religion became more extensive and the decision was made to begin administering baptism to infants, this function of deaconesses was abolished.”³⁰

Michael the Great, patriarch from 1166 to 1199, seemed to agree: “In ancient times there was a need for deaconesses, principally to assist with the baptism of women. When converts from Judaism or paganism became disciples of Christianity and thereby became candidates for holy baptism, it was by the hands of the deaconesses that the priests and bishops anointed the women candidates at the time of their baptism. . . . But we can plainly see that this practice has long since ceased in the Church. . . . There is no longer any need for deaconesses because there are no longer any grown women who are baptized.”³¹

CONCLUSION

The existence and ordination of deaconesses in the early church is evident. Their tasks—assisting at the baptism of women, teaching, and caring for people—are also clear. Yet, they disappeared.

Three factors seem to have contributed to the demise of the female diaconate. First, infant baptism replaced adult baptism, making the assistance of a female at the baptism of adult women unnecessary. Second, the sacrifice of the Mass, which gave to the priest the power of converting bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus, shaped the understanding of clergy and laity and removed lay people—male and female—from ministry.³² Further, the rise of monasticism, with the institution of nunneries and the insistence on celibacy, changed the focus of church work for women.



¹ A fuller version of this article appeared in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43 (2005): 133–158.

² Origen, *Epistola ad Romanos* 10.17.2; commentary on Romans 16.

³ John Chrysostom, *Homily 30*, on Romans 15:25–27; taken from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 11:1002.

⁴ Theodoret, *Interpret. Epist ad Rom.* 16:1, PG 82, Cols. 217D, 220A.

⁵ Clement Stromata 3.6.53; John Chrysostom, *In Epistola 1 ad Timotheus* 3, *Homily 11.1*.

⁶ For further information on the history of female deacons, see “The History of Women Deacons,” at http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/deac_ovr.htm (May 21, 2007). See also, John Wijngaards, *No Women in Holy Orders? The Ancient Women Deacons* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 2002). While Wijngaards interprets the evidence as including women deacons in the clergy, Aimé Georges Martimort, whose careful analysis, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) is considered a classic on the topic, admits the existence of women deacons but denies that they were ever considered clergy.

⁷ Pliny, *Letters* 10.96.

⁸ Clement, *Stromata* 3.6.53; English translation from Clement of Alexandria, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 85 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1991), 289.

⁹ “Concerning deacons and deaconesses,” *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, ed. Arthur Vööbus, *Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium*, 407 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1979), 2:156.

¹⁰ Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 164–167.

¹² *Liber Patrum*, ser. 2, fasc. 16, in *S. Congregatio pro Ecclesia Orientali, Codici cationes canonica orientales*, *Fonti* (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930), 34, quoted in Martimort, 158.

¹³ *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.3.20, ANF 7:1008.

¹⁴ Canon 15, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 94.

¹⁵ Justinian, *Novellae* 3.1; 6.6; *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 3, *Novellae* (Zurich: Weidmann, 1968), 20, 21, 43–45.

¹⁶ Barberini Greek Euchology 336; for the original Greek, English translation, and the history of the manuscript see http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/deac_gr1.asp (May 15, 2007).

¹⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.2.16 (ANF 7:884).

¹⁸ Mary P. Truesdell, “The Office of Deaconess,” in *The Diaconate Today*, ed. Richard T. Nolan (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1968), 150. Truesdell, an Episcopalian deaconess, based much of her writing on secondary sources, such as *The Ministry of Women: A Report by a Committee Appointed by His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: SPCK, 1919).

¹⁹ *Didascalia* 16, Vööbus, 2:157.

²⁰ Syrian Synodicon, in “James of Edessa.”

²¹ Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 16:1, Theodore de Bruyn, *Pelagius’s Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 150, 151.

²² Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1871), 2:404.

²³ Canon 26, Council of Orange, in Charles Joseph Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d’après les documents originaux* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1908), 2:1:446, 447. In a long note, Hefele outlines the history of the female diaconate and maintains that the council had to take strict measures with deaconesses because they were attempting to “extend their attributions” (447).

²⁴ Council of Epaon, Canon 21, in Edward H. Landon, *A Manual of the Councils of the Holy Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), 1:253.

²⁵ Hefele, *A History of the Councils*, 4:187.

²⁶ *Against Heresies* 79.1, 3, 4.

²⁷ Epiphanius, *Letter to John Bishop of Jerusalem*, ² <http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/epiphani.asp> (May 15, 2007).

²⁸ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Deaconesses.”

²⁹ Replies to the Questions of Mark, reply 35, <http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/balsamon.asp> (May 15, 2007).

³⁰ Jahya ibn Jarir, *Book of Guidance of Jahya ibn Jarir*, G. Khori-Sarkis, *Le livre du guide de Yahya ibn Jarir, Orient Syrien* 12 (1967): 461, quoted in Martimort, 166.

³¹ Syriac Pontifical, *Vatican Syriac MS 51*, quoted in Martimort, 167.

³² Daniel Augsburg, “Clerical Authority and Ordination in the Early Christian Church,” in *Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1998), 77–100.

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LESSONS FROM DANIEL 10

HUMANS MAY NOTICE WHAT IS VISIBLE TO THEM, AT LEAST TO SOME EXTENT. INSIDERS TAKE NOTICE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING BEHIND THE SCENES. THIS IS SO IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND POLITICS AS WELL AS IN MANY OTHER AREAS. IN CONTRAST TO THE INSIDERS, MOST PEOPLE CAN ONLY GUESS AT WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING. HOWEVER, WHEN IT COMES TO THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD, ALL OF US ARE OUTSIDERS. WE CAN GUESS, BUT WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON. WE ARE CAUGHT IN OUR THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORLD AND HAVE NO ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE BEYOND OUR SPHERE—THAT IS, UNLESS GOD REVEALS IT TO US AND WE CARE TO LISTEN. DANIEL 10 IS A UNIQUE CHAPTER IN SCRIPTURE. IT NOT ONLY INTRODUCES DANIEL'S LAST VISION BUT ALSO DRAWS THE CURTAIN ASIDE SO WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO OUR STRUGGLES ON EARTH.

I. STRUCTURE OF THE VISION OF DANIEL 10–12

The broad outline below comprises Daniel 10–12, although for now we will concentrate on chapter 10 only. It consists of three major parts and helps us see the contours of the entire last vision of the book of Daniel.

- Prologue to the last vision of Daniel (10:1–11:1).
- The vision of the kingdoms (11:2–12:4).
- Epilogue to the last vision and to the entire book (12:5–13).

In the beginning of chapter 10 Daniel mourns (10:2, 3). At the end of the vision he is told that he would rest and experience the resurrection (12:13). The man in linen clothes, who appears in Daniel 10:4–9, reappears in Daniel 12:6, 7 (13). He may be present during the entire vision. Michael is found in Daniel 10:13, 21 and Daniel 12:1. This shows that the introduction and the conclusion of the vision correspond in an important way. There is Daniel, the prophet of God, who sees what the people of God will experience. There are heavenly beings and a divine being who control events on earth and sustain the people of God. In the end, there will be the resurrection. There is hope.

For now, we will concentrate on chapter 10 but the outline helps us to see the larger issue more clearly. Chapter 10 can be structured in the following way:

- *Historical Setting (10:1).*
- *Daniel Mourns (10:2, 3).*
- *The Man in Linen Clothes and Daniel (10:4–9).*
 - Description of the Man in Linen Clothes (10:4–6).
 - Daniel's Reaction to the Vision (10:7–9).
- *The Angel and Daniel (10:20–11:1).*
 - The Angel's Actions and Speech (10:10–16a).
 - Daniel's Response (10:16b–17).
 - The Angels Action and Speech (10:18–19a).

- Daniel's Response (10:19b).
- The Angel's Speech (10:20–11:1).

II. SURVEY OF CHAPTER 10

A. Time Frame

Daniel received his vision during 536/535 BC, the third year of the Persian king Cyrus. Having been deported from Jerusalem in 605 BC, he was an old man in his late eighties. The vision of chapter 11 begins in Persian times and extends to the end of time.

B. Distinctive Features of Daniel 10

While the chapter is cast in a narrative framework and contains insights into the practical life of a believer—namely how to relate to God—it also contains one of the most fascinating biblical revelations. A number of persons appear, although it is not completely clear how many. In any case, there are Daniel, the man in linen clothes, probably an interpreting angel, Michael, and the princes of Persia and Greece.

In this chapter two visions are mentioned: the vision of the man clothed in linen and the vision about the kingdoms and the people of God, which will be developed in chapters 11 and 12a.

Remarkable are also the phenomena describing a prophet in a vision.

III. THE DISCUSSION OF THE CHAPTER

A. The Historical Setting

Verse 1: While the revelations of chapters 7 and 8 are given during the first and third year of a Babylonian king, those of Daniel 9 and 10 occur during the first and third year of Persian kings. When Daniel experienced what is described in chapter 12, he was at the Tigris river

(Dan 12:4). The vision deals with a part of the great controversy. Daniel understood what was shown him in the next verses, but we know from the book that certain parts of what he had seen he did not understand. They were sealed “until the time of the end” (Dan 12:4).

B. Daniel Mourns

Verses 2, 3: No reason is provided for Daniel’s mourning. However, the historical context may indicate that he was afraid that Cyrus’ decree, which allowed the Jews to return to Palestine, might not be completed due to the resistance on the part of the Samaritans. In his distress, Daniel sought God’s presence through prayer (Dan 10:12) and partial fasting.

C. The Man in Linen Clothes

Verses 4–6: The first vision is one of the man in linen clothes. It is distinct from the vision of the kingdoms in Daniel 11, which is described with a different Hebrew term. A similar vision was seen by John in Revelation 1:12–16. *What are the similarities between what Daniel saw and what John saw?*

- Both supernatural beings are described as men.
- They wear long, priestly garments.
- They have a golden sash or belt, which may point to royalty.
- Their eyes are like flames of fire.
- Their feet and legs are like burnished bronze.
- Their faces were like lightning, or the sun shining at full strength.
- They both have a mighty voice.

In Revelation, it is very clear that this person is Jesus, and that Jesus is God. Some of the characteristics of Jesus in Revelation 1 are those of the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9; Rev 1:14). In Daniel, we also have to assume that this person is Jesus. Daniel 10:4–6 reminds us of the heavenly Son of Man (Dan 7:13, 14). So Daniel encounters the pre-incarnate Jesus in His glory.

D. Daniel’s Reaction to the Vision

Verses 7: The fact that while only Daniel saw the vision, the people with him, while they did not see the vision, trembled and fled, indicates that they somehow felt the divine presence. It reminds us of Paul’s Damascus experience and the effects on his companions in Acts 9:7.

Verses 8–10, 16–19: It is very rare in Scripture that we hear about the prophets’ physical reactions when they received a vision. This is due to the fact that the emphasis is not on how prophets were affected but on the message they had to deliver. Nevertheless, in the case of Daniel we are informed that no strength was left in him. He fell on his face, was helpless, and fainted. That he was without breath could mean that he ceased breathing. Therefore, he needed to be strengthened in order to stand upright (Dan 10:11). The call, “Fear not” seems to indicate that he was afraid. The physical and emotional phenomena are reminiscent of Ellen G. White’s experience when she was in a vision. In Daniel 10 we do not have a lot of “message”; rather we

see the majestic Jesus and some actions. *What could be some reasons for these phenomena to be recorded here?*

- Daniel sees a theophany, an appearance of God. While the appearance of angels, such as Gabriel, evokes fear in humans (Dan 8:16, 17; 9:21; Luke 1:11–19, 26–29), this can hardly be compared to Daniel’s strong reaction in chapter 10.
- To see God, even in a veiled form, is almost too much for humans—even believers. God is the sovereign Lord and not just a good friend. Therefore, awe, respect, and love go hand in hand. We cannot play games with God.
- It is this majesty of heaven, the Almighty, that is able to settle all things and keep the power of human beings, but also of evil supernatural beings, in check (the princes of Persia and Greece). God is able to solve the problems of His people. While this message of God’s might and sovereignty is sometimes presented in words, it is occasionally also presented without words, by a direct appearance of God.
- Daniel and all followers of Jesus need encouragement when the future looks bleak. The Lord does not run out of possibilities to intervene and bring to a conclusion the plan of salvation.
- Daniel and Christ’s disciples need to have a personal relationship with the Lord and recognize their personal responsibilities.

E. The Angel

Verses 10, 16, 18: Three times Daniel is touched. Physical touch is important to most humans; they are encouraged and comforted by the presence of other beings who draw close and show care. Here Daniel is being touched by a being.

Is it the man in linen or is it an angel? There is a correspondence in terminology and concepts between Gabriel’s appearance to Daniel in chapter 9 and the person who touches Daniel in chapter 10 (e.g., the heavenly being coming to Daniel in 9:22 and 10:20; Daniel as being loved in 9:23 and 10:19; to give understanding in 9:22 and 10:14). Therefore, it is often assumed that here we have presented Gabriel as interpreting angel, as he also appears elsewhere in Scripture.

F. The Dialogue between the Angel and Daniel

Verses 10–11:1: In the ensuing dialogue the angel speaks three times; Daniel speaks just twice.

- Daniel is being encouraged. Twice he is told that God loves him greatly (Dan 10:11, 19). Who would not like to hear that from fellow humans—and all the more from God? Twice Daniel is also told not to fear (Dan 10:12, 19). Peace will be with him.
- While being strengthened, he is also affirmed that his intercessory prayer for his people is heard and that it has made and will make a difference (Dan 10:12). It was heard right away and was not put on a waiting list. Therefore, he now can be strong and of good courage (Dan 10:19).

- His understanding will be enlarged (Dan 10:13, 20). He has not only seen the pre-incarnate Jesus but will also know that behind the scenes a great battle is going on that will be won by the supreme Lord. It is not only the Samaritans who cause problems to the Jews returning from exile; there are evil angels engaged in warfare against God and His people.
- So the present issues behind the scenes as well as the future of God's people are revealed to Daniel. Verse 14 is crucial. The kingdoms described in chapter 11 do not reflect all major powers in the history of this earth or even the major political players that still may appear. The focus is not so much on these kingdoms, but rather on the people of God, especially "in the latter days."

Verses 16, 17, 19: Daniel seems to contribute little to the conversation with Gabriel. *Why is it important anyway?*

- He acknowledges his weakness and his respect for the heavenly being. But this makes all the difference.
- Daniel knows that he is not in charge; God is.
- What is really important is that Daniel wants to listen to the message from God.

G. Michael

Verses 13, 21: Twice the angel informs Daniel about Michael. *What do we know about Michael?*

- Michael came to the help of Gabriel, who was involved in a spiritual battle against the prince of Persia—obviously a fallen angel, if not Satan himself. Michael is involved in a spiritual battle against evil powers in favor of his people. The battle extends also to the heart of the pagan king. Michael is one of the chief princes (Dan 10:13).
- Michael is "your prince" (Dan 10:21), the prince of God's people, who intervenes with the Persian and Greek overlords and by implication with all hostile overlords.
- Daniel 12:1 again calls Michael the great prince of "your people." He will rescue all those "written in the book." There will be a future resurrection (Dan 12:2).
- Michael has fought the dragon, Satan, and gained the victory (Rev 12:7–8; Jude 1:9)
- He is the only one to be called archangel in Scripture (Jude 1:9).
- His name means "Who is like God?" – Jesus will return with the voice of the archangel (1 Thess 4:16).
- Obviously Jesus is the archangel Michael, as He is the Chief Shepherd (literally "arch-shepherd," 1 Pet 5:4).

If this conclusion is correct, then Daniel encounters the pre-incarnate Christ as the Man Clothed in Linen, but he also hears about His involvement as Michael in the spiritual battle against evil powers.

H. Result

As other chapters in Daniel have a strong emphasis on the (at this time) still future Messiah, and as Daniel 9 even


indicates the time of His public appearance as a human being on earth, so Daniel 10 is all about Jesus.

IV. APPLICATION

There are a few lessons for us to learn from Daniel 10:

- Our spiritual life is important. It is dangerous to neglect one's spiritual life. A day without prayer can easily become a lost day. We also need to recover fasting, even if it is a partial fasting. Fasting may go beyond abstaining from food. We may need to abstain, for instance, from excessive work, the preoccupation with material things, the Internet and the constant occupation with mobile phones and other devices, or from the obsession to be reachable at any time and to reach others at any time. We should live our lives in the presence of God instead of being chained to our devices.
- Our dedication to God and the welfare of His people are important. Life is not only about ourselves; it is also about others, including the community of faith. When things go wrong in the church, people today tend to withdraw. Daniel, while suffering, held on and interceded for his people. He did not cut himself off from the fellowship of believers. God heard his prayer, encouraged him, and granted him inner peace.
- While God considers us His beloved children, we also need to love him. A formal religion, a mere adherence to biblical beliefs, and even a strict observance of God's commandments are insufficient if we do not love God and each other.
- Battles behind the scenes continue today. We do not recognize and understand all of them, and full understanding may not even be necessary. But there is someone who knows all things. He cannot be deceived, and His plan cannot be thwarted. Daniel was not able to fight all the battles; he had to leave them to the Lord. It is best for us to leave the battle in Jesus' hand, while we follow Him faithfully with all our heart, soul, and mind. He has already gained the victory, and this victory will fully be realized at His second coming and after the Millennium.
- Therefore, we are not alone when evil powers assault us (Eph 6:10–18). In all temptations, suffering, and persecutions Jesus will be with us as He has promised (Matt 28:20)—even to the end of the world. Those who belong to Michael will also be victorious.

V. CONCLUSION

Daniel 10—and we have to repeat this—is all about Jesus, the Man Clothed in Linen and Michael, our Prince. It is all about Him, who has saved us and will save us completely. 

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NO LONGER ALONE

AWR has always been a worldwide ministry, but that definition took on new meaning when we began offering all of our programs online several years ago. Since then, listeners have been able to continue hearing the voice of hope in their own language, even if they are living far, far from home. Sister Rabemahatsara, a native of Madagascar, found new hope in Christ through AWR's French podcasts and shares her testimony here.

"I have been living in Brittany, France, for five years. I was an Adventist, but my faith wasn't very strong. I looked for a church, but there were none in my area.

"I have suffered a lot in the past: I lost my mother, the only family I had left; went through a divorce, disease ... my life was falling to pieces. I felt abandoned and lonely in this environment, far from my country. I tried hard to make it on my own, but I had so much sadness that day after day my health was getting worse.

"One day, I went online to try and find some comfort. I came across the AWR website, which was in several languages. I started listening to the programs out of curiosity, but then I burst into tears, as for the first time in a year I felt at peace, no longer alone.


"Within days, AWR helped my faith in Jesus Christ grow. Every time I felt sadness or pain, I would get up, pray, and listen to the programs again and again. I could no longer start my day without praying and listening to this program. At night, when I struggled to fall asleep, I couldn't wait for it to be 4 a.m. to pray with AWR and learn from the Word of God.

"With my growing thirst, I felt inclined to once again look for a church on the Internet. God answered my longing, and I found

a church in Brest, which is still far, but for God, distance doesn't count. I was made welcome and felt at home in this church. The members and Pastor Daniel were a blessing from God for my daughter and me.

"I was baptized on June 13, and I can't stop sharing my experience with all my acquaintances—even those in Madagascar. I talk about your programs and how there is nothing greater than living with God and experiencing life with Him on a daily basis! I am happy now, in spite of a few health issues, but God is with me and His love is great. "Thank you to all those involved in this program and for all you do for us!"

AWR's French podcasts attract listeners from around the world; producer and host Oscar Mihani has received feedback from people in Canada, Africa, Japan, and more. The well-crafted programs feature both spiritual and lifestyle topics, from family education to tips for healthy habits, recipes, and more. Monthly interviews with other Adventist entities introduce listeners to a broader range of church activity. Out of AWR's entire range of 100+ podcasts, the French programs regularly place in the top three most-popular languages with our listeners, alongside Mandarin and Arabic.

AWR's ministry encompasses the entire spectrum of listeners' spiritual journeys, from broadcast to baptism. We call this "AWR360," and we're intentionally working together with other ministries to finish the Lord's work. Learn more at awr.org. 

Shelley Nolan Freesland is Adventist World Radio Communication director at the General Conference world headquarters.



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4 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE SAFETY AT YOUR CHURCH

INTEGRATING RISK MANAGEMENT IN CHURCH FINANCES MEANS ACCOUNTING FOR POSSIBLE LOSSES.

If you are reading this, you are a leader in your church. As leaders, we help the church keep running in various ways. Whether you create the worship program each Sabbath, meet with the church board to discuss future events, or provide a listening ear to the congregation, each responsibility contributes to the continuity of the church and its members.

Risk management is a crucial area to the continuity of the church. It is your duty to make safety a priority. The Bible instructs us to, “Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds,” (Prov. 27:23, NLT).

Here are four steps you can implement as a church leader to improve safety at your church.

1. **DISCUSS**

Have the nominating committee select a new leader to be the official church safety officer, and provide ample time for the decision to be ratified by your church congregation. The selected safety officer should be inducted into the church board and be included in each board meeting in order to share any safety concerns. Encourage your safety officer to gather a team of individuals to help him/her monitor the safety of your church in all areas.

2. **BUDGET**

A church can be at risk for potential losses if there is no room in the budget to handle repairs or replacements. Integrating risk management in church finances means accounting for possible losses. Make sure the church budget includes funds for any repairs or seasonal maintenance tasks that the safety officer and his/her team may find.

3. **FOLLOW THROUGH**

Work with your church safety officer and team to create a safety plan for the church, and then follow through. During each church board meeting, review

the plan with your safety officer and allow time to voice any safety concerns. Review the concerns and create actionable steps to address them.

Additionally, it is important to make sure you are providing support to your safety officer and team. This support includes relevant training or literature needed to equip the team for their job. Provide the safety officer with access to pertinent information, such as church blueprints and security codes, to maintain the safety of the church.

4. **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Your chief objective is to remain accountable to what you and your safety officer have deemed necessary for the protection of the church. As church leaders, you set an example and influence those around you to the standards of your church. Do fellow church members see the prioritization of risk management? Are safety measures included in each program or event?

Be accountable to each other as church leaders too. Make sure everyone carries out risk management tasks. Allow them to check in with you as well. It may be an uncomfortable situation when you must approach a fellow leader and point out that they have not prioritized risk management in a particular event. It is better to do this than to risk the safety of your members, visitors, or church.

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

As you conduct your church board meetings this quarter, Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) challenges you to prioritize risk management in your church. It is on us as church leaders to integrate risk management into all planning and activities to make our churches safe. Will you accept the challenge?



Elizabeth Camps is a writer and public relations specialist at Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, EVANGELISM, AND PROSELYTISM

Seventh-day Adventists believe that freedom of religion is a basic human right. As Christians, they are persuaded that the dissemination of religion is not only a right, but a joyful responsibility based on a divine mandate to witness.

God has called Christians to evangelism—the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ (Matt 28:19, 20). This is central to Christian life and witness. Thus Christianity is missionary by its very nature.

In affirming global mission and evangelization, Adventists are motivated by willing obedience to Christ's commission and by a sincere desire that every human being be saved and inherit eternal life. They are also motivated by a sense of urgency in expectation of the imminence of Christ's return. In endeavoring to fulfill the gospel commission, Seventh-day Adventists are thus witnessing, preaching, and serving today in more than 200 countries.

In the context of the dissemination of religion, the issue of "proselytism" has arisen because the term "proselytism" is defined in a number of ways and increasingly is being given a pejorative connotation, associated with unethical means of persuasion, including force. Seventh-day Adventists unequivocally condemn the use of such methods. They believe that faith and religion are best disseminated when convictions are manifested

and taught with humility and respect, and the witness of one's life is in harmony with the message announced, evoking a free and joyous acceptance by those being evangelized.

Evangelistic and missionary activity needs to respect the dignity of all human beings. Individuals need to be truthful and transparent when dealing with other religious groups. Terminology should be used which avoids offending other religious communities. Statements which are false or ridicule other religions should not be made.

Conversion is an experience of the Spirit, and should therefore in no way be connected to offering and receiving material inducements. While the right to engage in humanitarian activities must be fully recognized, such action must never be linked to evangelism in a way that exploits vulnerable people by offering financial and material incentives to entice them to change religion.

Seventh-day Adventists are committed to serving their fellow men by preaching the everlasting gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (Rev 14:6). EO

This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.

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THE PERFECTION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

2 Timothy 3:14-17

The word “unique” describes the Bible well. The dictionary defines “unique” as follows: “1. Only one; being the only one of its kind. 2. Better than others; superior to all others. 3. Unusual; different from others in a way that makes something worthy of note.” The Bible is the only book of its kind in existence! Several features point out its uniqueness:

- The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years by over 40 different authors living in many different places and times.
- The Bible was written in three different languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.
- The Bible was written with many different literary styles: prose, poetry, historical narrative, romance, law, biography, parable, allegory, and prophecy.
- The Bible addresses hundreds of difficult issues without a single contradiction.

The Bible is a unique book! It achieves its uniqueness through a process known as “inspiration.” Let’s look into the matter of inspiration and think together about “the perfection of the holy Scriptures.”

I. THE PROCESS OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

What process did God use to get His Word into the hands and hearts of men? There are three terms that must be addressed as we deal with this matter.

A. Revelation. This is the process whereby a man hears from the Lord just what the Lord wants him to write down. At varying times, God used varying means to give His revelation to men. He spoke through angels (Gen. 18; 19; Luke 1; 2; Matt. 28). He spoke with an audible voice (Gen. 3:9-19; 12:1-3; Ex. 20:1-17; Josh. 1:1-9). He spoke through nature (Ps. 19). He spoke in dreams (Gen. 28:12; Matt. 1; 2; 2:19-22). He spoke through visions (Is. 6:1-6; Dan. 7; 8; 10; Acts 16; 19).

We do not know the exact process by which God spoke to the original authors, but we have God’s Word on the fact that He did (2 Pet. 1:21). So, revelation is God telling a man what He wants written down.

B. Inspiration. This is man writing on paper what God has told him to say. As we have already seen, this process is said to be “God-breathed.”

- The Bible clearly claims inspiration for itself (2 Tim. 3:17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; Heb. 1:1).
- Paul believed his writings were inspired (1 Cor. 4:2; 15:3; 1 Thes. 2:13; 4:15).

- Peter believed the writings of Paul to be inspired (2 Pet. 3:15, 16).

Somehow God superintended the process of getting His Word into a man and then through that man onto paper. Inspiration has been defined as “God’s superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs.”¹

C. Illumination. This is the process by which God uses the inspired written record of His revelation to speak to the hearts of individual people. This is when the Holy Spirit causes the light to come into in the human heart and men to see themselves as they are and to realize that Jesus is what their hearts need. It is also the process whereby the Spirit of God allows us to understand the truth of the Word of God.

II. THE PROOFS OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Now that we have an idea of what inspiration is, how can we be sure that our Bibles are genuinely inspired by God? Let me share a few tips with you.

A. It passes the historical/archeological test. For many years, people laughed at Bible believers because the Bible referred to places, people, and events that had no basis in recorded history. However, in His wisdom, God has allowed the archeologists’ spade to uncover many items from the ancient past that confirm the factual nature of His Word. Consider these important discoveries:

- For years, men said that a place called Ur of the Chaldees never existed; proof was discovered that it did.
- The death of Jesus has been proven to be a historical fact.

The list could go on for hours, but, suffice it to say, the Bible has been and continues to be proven accurate in every detail it records!

B. It passes the scientific test. Some people have mocked the Bible and claimed it was woefully inaccurate in matters of science. However, time has once again vindicated the accuracy of the message of the Bible. The Bible says the earth is a sphere (Is. 40:22); man discovered this in the fifteenth century. The Bible says the earth is suspended in space (Job 26:7); Sir Isaac Newton discovered this in 1687.

C. It passes the prophecy test. The Bible contains literally thousands of prophetic predictions. Some of these prophecies are quite dramatic. For

instance, Isaiah mentions Cyrus the Persian King by name 125 years before he was born!

Not one single prophecy made in the Bible has ever failed—or will ever fail—to come to pass! Some of the most remarkable prophecies are those related to the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider some of them: He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). He would be betrayed by a friend (Ps. 41:9). He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12). He would be crucified with thieves (Is. 53:12). Not a bone in His body would be broken (Ps. 34:20). Darkness would cover the earth (Amos 8:9).

D. It passes the unity test. What God begins in Genesis, He ends in Revelation (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 21:1; Gen. 1:27, 28; Rev. 21:9). This could never be duplicated by any human work!

E. It passes the honesty test. If the Bible were merely a human book, it would gloss over the failures of the people found within its pages. However, the Bible does not hide Noah’s drunkenness, Samson’s lust, David’s adultery, Elijah’s depression, or Peter’s denial. It tells the truth from cover to cover!


III. THE PRODUCT OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

If we accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, what does that teach us? What can we take away from such an examination? We are left with three precious truths that must never be taken for granted:

1. The Bible is infallible.
2. The Bible is inerrant.
3. The Bible is complete.

The final analysis is this: When you read your Bible, you are reading the very words of God. You can base your faith upon it. You can embrace its message, knowing that it reveals the very mind of God to man. It cannot fail! It cannot err! It will never be corrected, updated, or amended. It is complete, and it is perfect!

CONCLUSION

I hope this message has served to further anchor your faith in the blessed Word of God. I thank Him for His perfect Word! I am also thankful that God illuminated my heart to allow me to see not only myself and my need but also Jesus Christ, the solution to my problem. 

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*.

General Conference Ministerial Association

THE PRESERVATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Psalm 12:6, 7

In the previous sermon, we examined evidence for the inspiration of the Word of God. We learned the blessed truth that God literally “breathed” His Word through human personalities to give us an inerrant, infallible, and inspired record of His revelation of Himself and of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

To this list, I would like to add the word “preservation.” This is the process by which God has supernaturally protected His Word through many reproductions and translations. The idea of preservation holds that God has faithfully superintended His Word down through the ages so that, even today, many years after portions of the Bible were written, we can say that what we possess, what we love, and what we read are the very words of God!

Now, we have already discovered the tremendous truth that the original autographs (the writings of the original authors) were divinely inspired. Sadly, none of those original autographs have survived to this day. In other words, you can’t go anywhere in this world and find a scrap of paper containing the actual writings of Paul, John, Moses, Peter, James, Daniel, Isaiah, or any of the other biblical writers.

Since that is true, how can we be confident that the Bible we possess today is accurate and is the very Word of God? Let’s examine this issue of “the preservation of the Holy Scriptures.”

I. SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY GOD’S PROMISES

Let’s examine the internal evidence from the Bible itself. The Bible contains several passages that affirm God’s intention to preserve His inspired Word for all generations.

A. Old Testament promises of preservation: Numbers 23:19; Psalm 12:6, 7; 89:34; 119:89; Isaiah 40:8.

B. New Testament promises of preservation: Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:25.

The conclusion from these verses is clear: God had indeed promised to preserve His Word! The question I have for you is this: How many times does God have to say anything before we can conclude that He means it? Once! We have the promise of God, who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), who identifies Himself as the “Faithful and True Witness” (Rev. 3:14), that He will forever perfectly preserve His Word, and that is good enough for me. However, while that may be all

the evidence Bible believers need, that is not all the evidence we have!

II. SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY GOD’S POWER

A. Jeremiah 36:1-32 tells the story of God giving Jeremiah revelation and inspiration to write a portion of the Word of God. Jeremiah writes as he is commanded, and King Jehoiakim listens to the Word of God. He receives illumination from the Lord, but he rejects the message. He takes the scroll Jeremiah has written and literally cuts it to pieces and burns it in the fireplace (Jer. 36:23). Apparently, he thinks that destroying the written word will erase what God has said. However, God’s Word is settled not on earth but in heaven (Ps. 119:89). God merely sent His Word again through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 36:28). Despite the actions of Jehoiakim, God preserved His Word!

That is just one example of what God has always done to protect and preserve His Word down through the ages.

B. The following are several concerted efforts by pagan unbelievers to eradicate the Word of God:

In A.D. 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered the confiscation and destruction of all Christian scriptures. Thousands of early copies and possibly some original autographs were burned. However, the Word of God was not eradicated! Earnest believers protected the Word and hid it away in catacombs, caves, and graves. Thus, the Word of God survived that attack!

The French humanist Voltaire once said, “Another century and there will not be a Bible on the earth.” Two centuries have come and gone, and the circulation of the Bible is one of the marvels of the age. After Voltaire died, his old printing press and the very house where he lived was purchased by the Geneva Bible Society and made a depot for Bibles.

For thousands of years, the enemies of truth have sought to destroy the precious Word of God. Every attempt to do so has failed miserably as the Bible continues to be read and loved by millions of people.

III. SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY GOD’S PROVIDENCE

Despite the fact that God promised to preserve His Word and that He has exerted His divine power to preserve His Word, there still may

be some doubt in a few minds about whether or not we have an accurate record of God’s inspiration in our hands today.

A. The authenticity of the Old Testament text has never really been appropriately questioned. The Jewish scribes were faithful copyists of the divine text. They actually had men whose only job was to count the letters in the copies. They counted the “jots and tittles” (Matt. 5:18) or the “little horns” that formed parts of the letters themselves. If the number of letters, jots, and tittles did not match the number in the original, the copy was destroyed! If there was even one error—no matter how small—in the text, the copy was destroyed, and the copyist started over. These Jewish scribes were so faithful to the Word of God. When they came to the name of God, they would wash themselves and get a new pen before they wrote God’s name. Then they would discard that pen and use another to proceed. Due to their meticulous care of and reverence for the Old Testament Scriptures, the Hebrew text, called the Masoretic text, has never been appropriately questioned.

B. The issue we face is more related to the New Testament. The question is this: Can we really say with confidence that we have a copy of the inspired Word of God? Ellen G. White says, “Every part of the Bible is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. The Old Testament no less than the New should receive attention.”¹ She also says, “The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. Christ, as manifested to the patriarchs, as symbolized in the sacrificial service, as portrayed in the law, and as revealed by the prophets, is the riches of the Old Testament.”²

CONCLUSION

I have merely scratched the surface of this matter of the preservation of the biblical text. However, I hope you are now confident that you hold in your hands, and hopefully in your hearts, the very Word of God.

I close with this question: Has God perfectly preserved His Word to this day? All the evidence says He has! Therefore, read your Bible with confidence!



¹Ellen G. White, *Education*, 191.

²———, *Counsels to Teachers*, 462.

General Conference Ministerial Association

THE PURPOSE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

2 Timothy 3:14-17

In our text, Timothy is challenged to maintain a close relationship with the Word of God. Paul tells him of the benefits that come from such a relationship. He is reminded that the Scriptures have taught him what he knows about God. It is the Word of God that has fed him and led him to this point in his life. The Bible has been foundational in making him the man of God he is (verses 14, 15). He is to continue in them so that he might continue to progress as a believer and as a man of God.

Why did God feel the need to give His revelation to the original authors of the Bible? Why did God feel the need to exert supernatural power to inspire His Word? Why has He demonstrated the same supernatural power in preserving that same Word? Let's examine the purpose of the Holy Scriptures.

I. THEY SERVE THE PURPOSE OF REVELATION

Revelation is the process of God telling the Bible writers exactly what He wanted to say. Of course, just as God revealed His mind to the Bible writers, His inspired Word continues to reveal Him and His mind to all those who open the Book and read. This is illumination, and it is what Timothy had already experienced, according to Paul (verses 14, 15). Notice what the Bible reveals about God.

A. *It reveals God's person.* The only way God can be known by us, at least now, is through His Word. The Scriptures reveal God to be holy, loving, just, eternal, glorious, exalted, loving, gracious, merciful, and infinitely good. They teach us that He is Lord, He is Sovereign, and He is a consuming fire. In the Bible, we learn truth that man could never have come to by himself. In the pages of the Bible, we meet God Himself! We could never know Him as well any other way.

B. *It reveals God's power.* In the pages of Scripture, we can read of the awesome power of God. We can read of His power to create (Gen. 1-2; Isa. 40:12); of His power in impossible situations (John 6; 11); of His power to heal; of His power to do anything that He desires to do (Luke 1:38; Job 42:4; Eph. 3:20).

C. *It reveals God's promises.* Thousands of promises fill the pages of the Word of God, and every single one will be kept (Rom. 4:21)! The saints of God need never fear that any of God's promises will fail!

D. *It reveals God's plan.* It is in the pages of the Bible—God's inspired, infallible, inerrant book—that we can read of God's plan to save the sinner (Rom. 5:8; 10:13); satisfy the saint (Ps. 103:5); secure the saved (John 10:28; 6:37-40); and supply His sons (Phil. 4:19; Ps. 37:25).

II. THEY SERVE THE PURPOSE OF REDEMPTION

The Bible is the unfolding of the story of redemption. Verse 15 reminds us that the Scriptures are "able to make thee wise unto salvation." From the moment man sinned in the Garden of Eden, there is a continuous red thread that can be traced through the pages of the Bible.

A. *They demonstrate the wickedness of the sinner.* The Bible teaches us that we are sinners in need of a Savior (Rom. 3:10; 3:23; Gal. 3:22).

B. *They demonstrate the wrath of the Sovereign.* (Rom. 6:23; John 3:18, 36; Ps. 9:17).

C. *They demonstrate the worth of the soul* (2 Pet. 3:9; John 3:16).

D. *They demonstrate the way of salvation* (John 3:16; Matt. 11:28; Eph. 2:8, 9; Acts 16:31; 4:12).

III. THEY SERVE THE PURPOSE OF REINFORCEMENT

Verses 16 and 17 speak of the benefits that can be derived from a careful and close study of the Bible. After we have received God's revelation and are part of His redemptive plan, the Bible serves as a reinforcement tool, helping us to grow and develop into all God wants His children to be. I want to point out two ways in which the Scriptures can help us to develop as believers.

A. *They build us up through their standards.* The Bible is sometimes criticized as a rule book. People do not like the idea that the Word of God tells them how to live their lives. But, the guidelines for living found in the Bible enable us to live lives that bring honor and glory to the name of God. Jesus said that keeping the commandments was the tangible evidence that we really love Him (John 14:15). John says that the commandments of the Lord will not be harsh to the believer, but they will delight the soul (1 John 5:3). Those who determine to live out the commands and teachings of the Bible will grow.

B. *They build us up through the symbols.* The Bible identifies itself through several clear metaphors and similes; these symbols serve the purpose of helping us understand what the Bible is and what it can do in our lives. Let's examine a few of those symbols today.

1. *A mirror* (James 1:23-25). As a mirror, the Word of God perfectly reflects the mind of God and the condition of man.

2. *A seed* (1 Pet. 1:23). When the Word is properly planted in the human heart, it will bring forth life, growth, and fruit.

3. *Water* (Eph. 5:25-27). As water, the Word has the power to cleanse, quench, and refresh.

4. *A lamp* (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23). The Word is a lamp because it shows us where we are, guides us into the future, and keeps us from falling.

5. *A sword* (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17). The Bible is called a sword because it has the ability to pierce the heart. It is equally effective on sinners, saints, and Satan.


6. *Precious metals:* gold (Ps. 19:10; 119:27) and silver (Ps. 119:127; 12:6). The Bible is referred to as gold and silver because of its desirability, preciousness, and value.

7. *Food* (Job 23:12). The Word of God is called food because it strengthens those who partake of it. The verb "furnish" (verse 17) means to be "finished, complete." It is used in the passive voice. In other words, this completing ministry of the Word is something that is "done to" the one who gets into the Word. If you will feed on the Bible, you will grow!

8. *Hammer* (Jer. 23:29). The Bible is referred to as a hammer because it possesses the ability to tear down and build up.

9. *Fire* (Jer. 20:9; Luke 24:32). It is called fire because it has the power to judge, purify, and consume!

CONCLUSION

Thank God for the Bible! God has blessed us beyond our ability to comprehend! He has given us an inspired, infallible, inerrant record of Himself, His will, and His ways. May we take this blessed old Book, love it, read it, and carry it in our hearts, assuring ourselves in the fact that it is the truth! It will develop us, feed us, and teach us all the way home to heaven! 

General Conference Ministerial Association

THE PROFIT IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17

Let's examine the benefits that come from a close relationship with the Word of God. We are told in 2 Timothy 3:16 that the infallible, inerrant, and inspired words of God are "profitable." This word means "beneficial, useful, and full of profit." I would like to zero in on that aspect of the Word of God today and preach on "The Profit in the Holy Scriptures."

I. THEY PERFORM AN EQUIPPING MINISTRY (VERSE 17)

The word "furnished" means "to be complete and equipped."

A. *They equip us for the faith.* In the pages of the Bible, we learn all we need to know to give us:

1. *Saving faith* (2 Tim. 3:15). The Bible shows us our condition, gives us our condemnation, and tells us how to obtain our conversion. The Bible shows us a crucified and risen Savior who gave His all so that anyone who believes in Him might be saved. The Word of God is a book about redemption!

2. *Serving faith* (2 Tim. 2:15). Here we are commanded to "study" the Bible. This word means "to be diligent, to labor." If we will spend the time we need in the Word of God, we will be able to "rightly divide" that Word. This is a surgical term that means "to make a straight cut."

B. *They equip us for the fight* (Eph. 6:18). When Paul described the armor of the believer, he only mentioned one weapon: the sword of the Spirit, or the Word of God. The word "sword" comes from the Greek word *rhema*. It refers to what was called the "Roman short sword," which was much like a dagger. This short sword was on the belt of all Roman Legionnaires. They carried it wherever they went and used it in many tasks—from preparing food to hand-to-hand combat.

By the way, when you try to fight the battles and the enemy of life in your own strength, you will fail (1 Cor. 10:12). But, when you fight the battles of life with the Sword of the Spirit, you are assured of victory (Matt. 4:11)! Learn the layout of the army; it will enable you to fight far more efficiently!

II. THEY PERFORM AN ENABLING MINISTRY (VERSES 15, 17)

A. *They enable us to grow spiritually* (2 Tim. 3:15). Here we read that the Scriptures have the power to make us "wise." This word means "to teach or to have understanding." I would submit

to you that there are people in this room today who have not had the benefit of obtaining an extensive formal education but who know the ways of God better than many theologians, because they know their Bibles.

If you will get the "seed" of the Word within your heart, God will water it, and it will bear fruit. You will grow! As you abide in Him, through prayer and through studying and meditating on the Word of God, you will find that "fruit" will be produced in your life. You won't have to struggle to grow in the Lord; you just will! "Furnished" in 2 Timothy 3:17 is in the passive voice. How much time and effort are you putting into your study of the Word (Ps. 1:2; 119:148)?

B. *They enable us to go spiritually* (2 Tim. 3:17). The Word of God gives us all the tools we need to go to work for the Master. The Bible teaches us about:

- *God's works* (what He is doing around us).
- *God's will* (what He wants from us).
- *God's ways* (how He accomplishes His will).

As we read the Word of God, we discover that there are some things we are to avoid and some things we are to do.

As we obey the Word of God, we will find ourselves "thoroughly" or "completely and perfectly" "furnished" or "equipped" to do the Lord's work in this world!

God saved you to work for Him (Eph. 2:10; James 2:18, 20). The Lord saved us to work, and the Bible tells us how!

III. THEY PERFORM AN ENLIGHTENING MINISTRY

A. *We are enlightened through their coaching ministry.* The Scriptures teach us "doctrine." This word simply means "teaching or instruction." It refers to the body of truth that we believe and practice as part of the Christian faith. Everything we know about God and believe as Christians has been taught to us by the Word of God.

B. *We are enlightened through their chastising ministry.* The word "reproof" means "to be convicted." It conveys the idea of putting something to the test. The Word of God will put your life to the test. It is like a set of scales or balances; it will show you where you fall short. It is like a plumb line; it will show you where you do not line up! God's Word is like a mirror, and it will reveal the true you (James 1:23-25).

The word "reprove" comes from the same word that is translated "evidence" in Hebrews 11:1. In both cases, it refers to "convincing evidence." In modern language, we would call it "the smoking gun."

C. *We are enlightened through their correcting ministry.* The word "correction" means to "restore to an upright or correct state." The Bible doesn't just show us what is wrong in our lives; it also teaches us how to fix what is wrong. It teaches us about repentance and the confession of sin (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9). If you do what the Bible says to do about the wrongs it exposes, you will be on the right path in short order!

D. *We are enlightened through their commanding ministry.* "Instruction in righteousness" refers to "instruction that aims at increasing virtue." The Bible will tell you what is wrong with you. It will also tell you how to fix what is wrong with you. Then, it will tell you how to live so that you can avoid being found in the wrong again. Literally, the phrase "instruction in righteous" means "that which cultivates the soul." The Word of God, if read, believed, and lived out in your life, will cause you to become more like Him!

CONCLUSION

A New York art enthusiast had a good collection of paintings, one of them being the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which hung over his writing desk.

For a long time, he noticed that it persisted in hanging crooked despite the fact that he straightened it every morning. Finally, he asked the housekeeper if she was responsible for its lopsided position each morning. "Why, yes," she replied, "I have to hang it crooked to make the tower hang straight."

Does that sound strange? That is exactly how a lot of people read the Bible. Many people twist the Word of God in order to justify their own opinions or actions, or doctor it to make everything appear right. Let us not twist the Scriptures to suit our own fancy. Let us be sure to hang the picture right! Preachers and teachers need to be especially careful that we "cut it straight" (James 3:1). We must not allow our opinions to cloud the message God wants His people to hear!

There is great profit in the Word of God, but only as we take it as it is written and conform our lives to it! Thank God for the Bible!



General Conference Ministerial Association

CHRIST'S NATURE

AT CHRIST'S SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS, DID ONLY HIS HUMAN NATURE DIE OR DID HIS DIVINE NATURE DIE AS WELL?

This is a complex and easily-distorted subject, and one can be tempted to replace divine revelation with his or her own speculative theories. But certain inspired statements can help us to better understand the subject. For instance, in Isaiah 9:6, Christ is called “Everlasting Father.” In John 11:25, Christ Himself affirms, “I am the resurrection and the life.” In John 10:17, 18, He adds, “. . . because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again . . .” And Ellen G. White says, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”¹


In harmony with these statements, Ellen White argues: “He who had said, ‘I lay down my life, that I might take it again’ (John 10:17), came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Humanity died; divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are recipients of the life of the Son of God. However able and talented, however large their capacities, they are replenished with life from the Source of all life. He is the spring, the fountain, of life. Only He who alone hath immortality, dwelling in light and life, [could] say, ‘I have power to lay it (my life) down, and I have power to take it again’ (John 10:18).”²

The following statement by Ellen White confirms the above-mentioned concept: “Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person—the man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would

have been impossible. . . . When the voice of the angel was heard saying, ‘Thy Father calls thee,’ He who had said, ‘I lay down my life, that I might take it again,’ ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,’ came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Deity did not die. Humanity died, but Christ now proclaims over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ In His divinity Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He had life in Himself to quicken whom He will.”³

In Ellen White’s devotional book entitled *Lift Him Up*, she adds: “Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death. He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man Christ could die. By death He overcame death.”⁴

But even if “the life of an angel could not be accepted as a sacrifice”⁵ for the fall of the human race, would it be enough if only Christ’s human nature died on the cross? This is, undoubtedly, a mystery for which we don’t have all the answers. However, we should not forget that Christ came as the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) to pay the price for the ransom of humanity (see Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:20-22). He died as a man for all human beings. In addition to that, Christ died the “second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) from which there is no resurrection of creatures. Because this death means the eternal alienation of the creature from the Creator, only He who has life in Himself could resurrect from this death.

Therefore, even if we don’t have answers to all the questions about the “mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16), by faith we accept the inspired statements that tell us that on the cross, only Christ’s human nature died, not His divine nature, which was mysteriously veiled during the incarnation. 

If you have a question about church policy or procedure, let us know! Every quarter we address these issues in our “Question and Answer” column, and we would love to hear from you! E-mail us at garciamarenkoa@gc.adventist.org.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 530.

² ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1:301.

³ ——— quoted in the *SDA Bible Commentary*, 5:1113.

⁴ ———, *Lift Him Up*, 345.

⁵ ———, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 66.

This question is answered by Alberto Timm, an associate director of the General Conference Ellen G. White Estate.

SHEPHERDING ARTISTS IN THE FLOCK:

A MUSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON CULTIVATING CREATIVE COMMUNITY



A community that sings is a community that has something to express. As we sing, we transmit our sentiments, beliefs, and hopes. We also express our cultural distinctions and peculiarities. It is not surprising that dictatorial governments throughout history have taken measures to silence singers and songs that would question the status quo. French neurologist Boris Cyrulnik, a survivor of the Holocaust, affirms that “all dictatorial regimes have considered art a suspicious activity.”¹

Singing within a Christian community is an expression of worship, and, as such, it is dedicated to God; yet, as we worship with songs, we also connect to each other, edifying the body of Christ.

Paul encourages us to “teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts” (Col. 3:16, NTV).

How can we create a welcoming space in our communities so musicians will feel free to express worship through songs in creative ways?

GOD, MUSIC, AND CREATIVITY

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines creativity as “the ability to produce original and unusual ideas, or to make something new or imaginative.”²

The Bible begins by describing God’s creativity: “In the beginning, God created . . .” (Gen. 1:1). The very first verb used in the Scriptures is *bara*—to create. Creativity is intrinsic to God, and because we are created in God’s image, creativity is engraved in our human essence as well. When it comes to music, whether it may be to compose, perform, conduct, arrange, or record, creativity is essential.

In the context of music-making within a Christian com-

munity, musicians face several challenges regarding music and creativity. Here are some important questions to ask:

- How open is the community to exploring new musical expressions of worship?
- Should musical creativity be subordinated to established traditions, principles, or personal preferences?
- How can worship planners achieve a balanced relationship between music and theology?
- How open is the community to listening to the questions that musicians raise?
- How can we cultivate a creative community within the church?

A GLIMPSE AT CHURCH MUSIC HISTORY AND CREATIVITY

Throughout history, the Christian church has been challenged by the introduction of new musical expressions and instruments into the prevailing tradition of worship. One element to consider is the fact that music and theology are different fields, sometimes wrongly considered as opposing fields:

THEOLOGY	MUSIC
The study of the nature of God	The art and science of expressing emotions and beauty through sound
A search for unchanging truth	An expression of a constantly changing human reality
A search for a method to explain God	A search for ways to express both subjective and objective matters
Offers answers to life and human nature	Raises questions about life and human nature

The tension between music and theology led the church fathers in the fourth century A.D. to regulate and control musical creativity in order to avoid what they perceived as “improper musical expressions” that posed a threat to established truth and traditions. Worshippers were effectively silenced for nearly 1,000 years. The following is one example:

COUNCIL OF LAODICEA	YES	NO
Congregational singing		X
Use of instruments		X
Borrowing tunes from secular repertoire		X

SINGING WITHIN A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS AN EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP, AND, AS SUCH, IT IS DEDICATED TO GOD; YET, AS WE WORSHIP WITH SONGS, WE ALSO CONNECT TO EACH OTHER, EDIFYING THE BODY OF CHRIST.

In the fourteenth century, Martin Luther, recognizing that Christian music is an expression of Christian theology, advanced the Reformation with a musical revolution at its center. Luther was both an accomplished theologian and musician, and he viewed the relationship between both disciplines as complementary rather than confrontational.

Luther writes: “Except for theology there is no art that could be put on the same level than music, since except for theology music alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely, a calm and joyful disposition. . . . The prophets did not make use of any art except music; when setting forth

their theology they did it not as geometry, not as arithmetic, not as astronomy, but as music, so they held theology and music most tightly connected, and proclaimed truth through psalms and songs. My love for music . . . is abundant and overflowing.”³

CULTIVATING CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Today we can learn some lessons from history regarding creativity in worship expressions and its impact on church growth.

In its 2014 report, the Hartford Institute for Religious Research concludes that “whatever a congregation’s sense of innovation in worship, one thing has remained constant over our 15 years of surveys—namely, the strong relationship that changing worship has to both growth and spiritual vitality. One of the reasons for this is the relationship between innovative worship and distinguishing oneself from other congregations in one’s community. Such differentiation provides a notable boost in growth.”⁴

Some suggestions that may be useful to intentionally cultivate creative communities in our local congregations are:

- *Listening*: “Listening is essential to cultivating any healthy community,” writes Nicholas Zork.⁵ Paul wrote about it as well. Take a look at his advice to the early Christian church: “Well, my brothers and sisters, let’s summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you” (1 Cor. 14:26, NTV). Don’t be afraid of what people in your congregation have to express. A platform of genuine conversation needs to be provided so they have a true sense of support and confidence.

- *Invest time and resources:* Quality music and a healthy, creative community require the investment of human energy, supportive presence, and financial resources (for equipment, training, and community gatherings). It will not happen without the support of local ministers, church elders, other lay leaders, and the church board.

- *Stay open:* Encourage participation and innovation in your congregation. Creative people usually come with unexpected ideas. Be ready to test those new ideas in the light of the Word of God, not tradition or personal preferences.

- *Encourage genuine worship:* Michal perceived David's dance as an inadequate worship expression (2 Sam. 6:16-21, NTV). God, however, accepted David's expression of worship because God understood his motivation. God knew David was being genuine. Even though we should strive for excellence in worship, we need to encourage authentic, genuine worship above all; otherwise, worship can become more of a production or performance than an opportunity to come before God in honest, humble gratitude.

As I read the biblical psalms, I enjoy the diversity of themes, authors, and atmospheres created by the narratives. The book of Psalms represents a compilation of old and new expressions of worship, which constantly invite

us to be creative as we come before the Lord to express our gratitude.

"Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives. Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery! Replace the evil years with good. Let us, your servants, see you work again; let our children see your glory. And may the Lord our God show us his approval and make our efforts successful. Yes, make our efforts successful!" (Ps. 90:14-17, NLT).

May the Lord make our efforts successful as we cultivate a creative community in which people may encounter and respond to a fresh revelation of Jesus as we affirm the Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music. ED

¹ Boris Cyrulnik, *Sauve-toi, la vie t'appelle*. Odile Jacob, ed. (Paris, 2012), 152.

² <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/creativity>

³ Martin Luther, *Works*, 49:427, 428-8 (letter to Lois Senfl).

⁴ <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.nadministerial.org/article/1305/worship-resources/cultivating-community-with-artists-an-interview-with-ben-grace>

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THIRD QUARTER 2017

Day of Prayer and Fasting

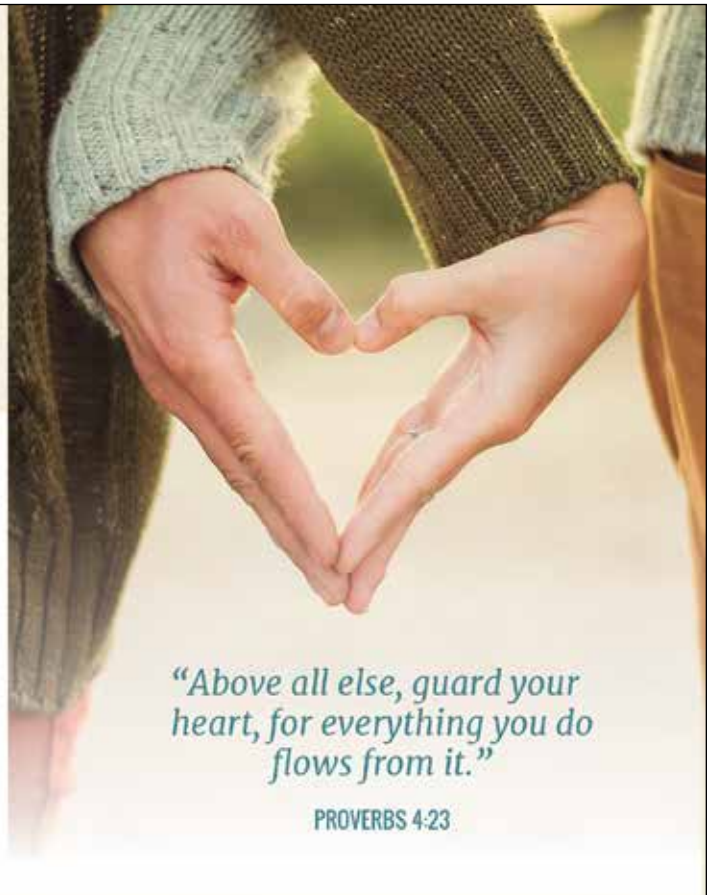
SABBATH, JULY 1

The Battle Belongs to the Lord: Fighting for Our Hearts

Visit www.revivalandreformation.org for quarterly prayer and fasting materials and additional resources.

Revival
& REFORMATION

Save the date: October 7 - Fourth Quarter



BREVITY

>PART 1

SHORTER SERMONS, MORE MINISTERING

Long sermons fail to do good, for both the speaker and the hearer become weary. Discourses should be shortened, and the physical and mental powers of the minister should be preserved for ministering, and a far greater work could be accomplished.

TENFOLD GREATER RESULTS

If our ministers would preach short discourses, right to the point, and then educate the brethren and sisters to work, and lay the burden upon them, the ministers themselves would be saved from exhaustion, the people would gain spiritual strength by the effort put forth, and the result would be tenfold greater than now is seen.

SERMONS SHORTER BY HALF

Ministers give too much time to preaching, and exhaust their vital forces. . . . It is the many long discourses that weary. One half of the gospel food presented would tell to much better advantage.

BODILY ORGANS OVERTAXED BY LONG SPEECHES

There is one matter about which I wish to caution you. In addressing a congregation, do not speak for too long a time; for thus you put a heavy strain on the delicate organs brought into action. I have to pledge myself not to speak too long; for I know that if I do, stomach and lungs and kidneys will be overtaxed, and suffering will result.

PLEASANT INCENSE TO GOD

Let the power and glow of the truth find expression in appropriate words. Express the joy and gratitude that well up from the heart as you see of the travail of your soul in the conversion of sinners. But in speaking to the people, remember to stop in season. Do not weary yourself so that you become nervous and debilitated, for the work you will need to do in addition to the preaching, requires tact and ability. It will be a potent agency for good, as pleasant incense rising to God.

A RESERVE OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL POWER

Never use up all your vitality in a discourse so long and wearisome that you have not a reserve of physical and mental power to meet inquiring minds, and patiently seek to remove their doubts, and to establish their faith. Make it manifest that we are handling weighty argument which you know

“LET THE POWER AND GLOW OF THE TRUTH FIND EXPRESSION IN APPROPRIATE WORDS.”

cannot be controverted. Teach by precept and example that the truth is precious; that it brings light to your understanding and courage to your heart. Keep a cheerful countenance. You will do this if you present the truth in love. Ever bear in mind that eternal interests are at stake, and be prepared to engage in personal labor for those who desire help. . . . In plain, simple language, tell every soul what he must do to be saved.

LONG SERMONS A TRIAL TO SPEAKER AND HEARERS

Those who shall be mouthpieces for God should know that their lips have been touched with a live coal from off the altar, and present the truth in the demonstration of the Spirit. But lengthy discourses are a taxation to the speaker and a taxation to the hearers who have to sit so long. One half the matter presented would be of more benefit to the hearer than the large mass poured forth by the speaker. That which is spoken in the first hour is of far more value if the sermon closes then than the words that are spoken in an added half hour. There is a burying up of the matter that has been presented.

This subject has been opened to me again and again that our ministers were making mistakes in talking so long as to wear away the first forcible impression made upon the hearers. So large a mass of matter is presented, which they cannot possibly retain and digest, that all seems confused.

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 247-249 by Ellen G. White.



PREACHING POWERFULLY: IS IT POSSIBLE? >PART 6 OF 6

The first five articles in this series talked about preaching styles and pulpit delivery and the factors that can affect (either positively or negatively) the delivery. It also explained when to start preparing for your sermon and where to find sermon material. This final article, Part 6, explains what the elder should and should not do in the pulpit; what should be done at the end of the sermon; how to manage an altar call; and finally, where to file your sermons.

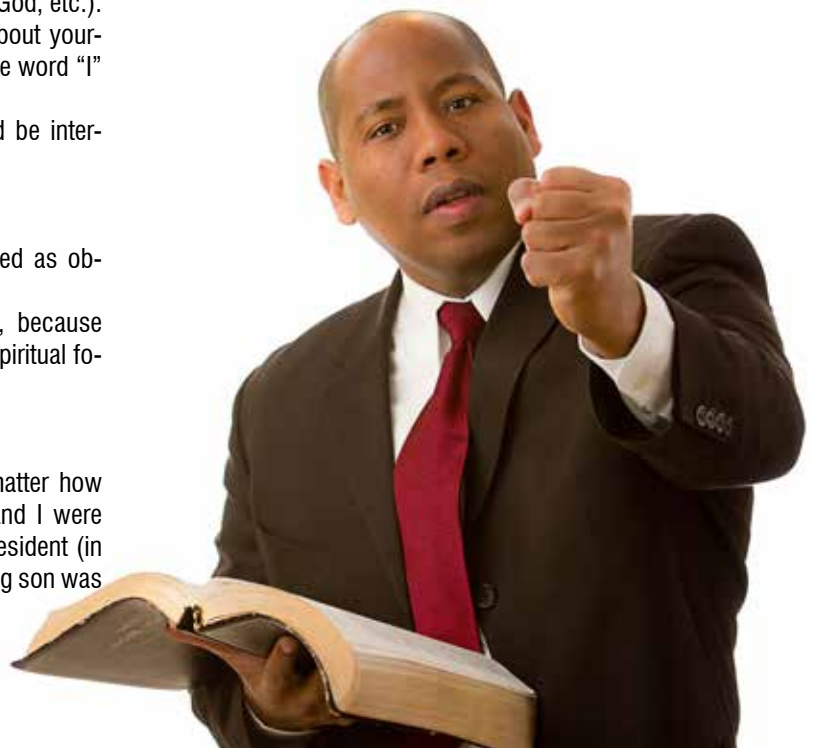
WHAT NOT TO DO DURING A SERMON

- Don't—please, never!—apologize for your sermon, even if you really feel that it isn't up to your standards (as a result of circumstances that prevented you from spending the time you needed and are thus truly ill-prepared). No matter how dreadful your situation may be, practically nobody in the congregation will notice that you aren't prepared as well as *you* think you should be.

- Don't tell stories of cute and sexy young girls.
- Don't use language that is sex-related.
- Don't use coarse language (such as four-letter words).
- Don't use the Lord's name in vain, even if it's more modified language (golly, gee, darn, heck, oh my God, etc.).
- Don't use vain language—and don't talk about yourself in an obviously proud way. Especially keep the word "I" to a minimum.
- Don't use words or illustrations that could be interpreted as racist or discriminatory.
- Don't tell off-color jokes.
- Don't tell jokes that are racially-oriented.
- Don't use gestures that could be interpreted as obscene.
- Don't tell jokes that are hilariously funny, because these types of jokes turn the mind away from a spiritual focus.
- Don't shout.
- Don't laugh raucously.
- Don't rebuke people from the pulpit, no matter how unhappy you are with their behavior. My wife and I were once rebuked from the pulpit by a conference president (in another country) while attending church. Our young son was

using a pacifier, which the president had never seen, and because he thought the pacifier was strange and unnecessary, he made a very negative statement from the pulpit and used our names. Of course, it was not pleasant for us.

- Don't illustrate points by using extreme physical activity (falling down, spinning, flailing your arms, dancing, throwing your head back, etc.—this tends to amuse people and distract them from the object of the sermon. Billy Sunday did it, but he was unique.
- Don't become too active (running back and forth across the platform, jumping up and down, going down to the lower level, etc.—people get the idea without the speaker going through these antics.
- Don't use illustrations or sensitive incidents that refer to contacts or encounters you had with people or members of your congregation.
- Don't refer to sensitive incidents that occurred in your own family that could cause embarrassment or lower your image or reputation in the eyes of the congregation.
- Don't condemn people you don't like or talk badly about them, especially if they are known by the members. Such



behavior will lead the people to believe you are not a loving person, one who doesn't forgive easily, or one who can't be trusted to keep a secret, or worse, that you're a bigot.

- Don't express your political leanings or discuss politics in general in the pulpit.
- Don't talk negatively about the Spirit of Prophecy (Ellen G. White).
- Don't talk negatively about your superiors.
- Don't talk negatively about the church to which you belong.
- Don't talk disdainfully (with arrogance) about other religious denominations.

WHAT YOU CAN DO DURING A SERMON

- Show a general attitude of seriousness, but not with a long face.
- Tell moderately humorous anecdotes to make a point.
- Laugh moderately.
- Cry, but remain controlled. Appropriate occasional tears will not impact your reputation or lower your credibility.
- Call sin by its right name, firmly, without apology, but always with an objective tone of voice.
- Praise those who deserve it, that is, those for whom it will have meaning in the congregation.
- Show sadness, but not during the entire sermon.
- Show happiness.
- Show optimism.
- Show empathy.
- Show sympathy.
- Show nostalgia.
- Show understanding.
- Show patience.
- Show pity.
- Show tenderness.
- Show respect.
- Show love.

WHAT TO DO AT THE END OF YOUR SERMON

- Make a rhetorical call—no expected physical response.
- Make a specific call—with a physical response.
- Have an altar prayer (optional).
- Make no call.
- Sit down.
- Close with a song.
- Close with a prayer.

HOW TO MAKE AN ALTAR CALL

An altar call is the most sacred part of the sermon, and it behooves the preacher to be spiritually prepared for it, meaning that when it is predetermined to make a call, he or she pleads earnestly and fervently for the Holy Spirit to guide and direct the call. If there is anyone in the congregation who

is in the valley of decision, the preacher needs to offer up a special petition for that person (or persons). The procedure for the call is as follows:

- Tell the congregation from the beginning that you will make an altar call at the end of the sermon (optional).
- At the end of the sermon, give an appropriate illustration which will set the mood and rivet attention on the direction you are going.
- Make your call simple and clear—so the congregation will clearly know what you are doing and what you expect from them.
- Always focus on Christ and the Holy Spirit, who at this moment are speaking to the people's hearts.
- Don't let anything distract you.
- Have soft background music playing, usually instrumental, and if possible, live; however, some preachers don't have music, so it is your decision to use it or not, although usually it sets a more reverent atmosphere and tends to touch the hearts of the listeners.
- Ask clearly for a decision on whatever you are asking for—giving their hearts to Jesus, start keeping the Sabbath, changing their lifestyle, joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, being baptized, consecration, revival, etc.
- Ask them to signify their decision by one of various responses—raising a hand, standing, or coming to the front of the preaching platform.
- If there is a delay in response, pause for a special music presentation, if necessary.
- Ask the congregation to pray for those in the valley of decision.
- Pause and don't say anything for a while; long and short pauses can be very effective.
- A pause for a prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to touch the undecided person's heart, can also be very effective.
- Repeated calls for a decision are OK.
- Never demand a decision.
- Never show disappointment when a decision isn't made. Keep the door open.
- Never show anger when a decision isn't made.
- After the response, always have a prayer in which you thank God for each person's decision and ask God to help him or her keep that promise.
- When the call has been for baptism, ask to meet afterward with those who responded to talk specifically about the time and circumstances of the baptism.
- Finish with a prayer, but not a long one, since they have already been detained quite a while.
- Final song.
- Dismissal.

HOW LONG TO MAKE AN ALTAR CALL

- Short (five minutes or less) when you have a congregation in which you know the members very well but have someone present, or even a regular non-baptized attendee,

who needs to make a decision, as determined by previous visits with that person.

- Long (up to 20 minutes) when you have a large congregation with many non-baptized regular attendees—and even sporadic attendees—who need to make a decision. Long calls need more expertise, mainly in what to say for such a long period.

HOW OFTEN TO MAKE AN ALTAR CALL

- At the end of every sermon. Making a call at the end of every sermon is up to the preacher. Some preachers feel moved to make a call at the end of each sermon; others don't feel so motivated.

- Occasionally, when the Spirit strikes you.
- When you see people moved by the Spirit in your congregation.

HOW AND WHERE TO FILE YOUR SERMONS

Keeping a record of your sermon is important. Why? Because you may need it again. There is nothing wrong with preaching your sermon more than once. Many pastors do so, not likely to the same congregation, but a preacher may have more than one congregation to whom he or she can preach; many preachers are called to preach in other places where they can use their sermons again. So, here's what

should you do with your sermons. File them:

- By topic.
- In alphabetical order.
- In a small portable file.
- In a large, permanent file.

And so, as the title asks, Is it possible to preach powerfully? For those who are serious about preaching, who improve their delivery, and who feel called by the Holy Spirit to be active in the church, the answer is yes! Anyone who wants to improve his or her preaching ability by applying these principles of preparation and delivery and who diligently seeks the Lord for guidance will, indeed, learn to preach powerfully enough to always move someone in the congregation. They will not fail.

Of course, some of you will preach more powerfully than others, but all of you will make a positive impact. Be assured that God will continually give you spiritual support and help you to improve your delivery. Such elder-preachers will win souls for the Lord and strengthen the members of their congregations, and they—you—will feel exceedingly fulfilled. And God will be exceedingly pleased with you. Make no mistake about it!

ED

Lamar Phillips is a retired minister and church administrator who served for 39 years in six world divisions.

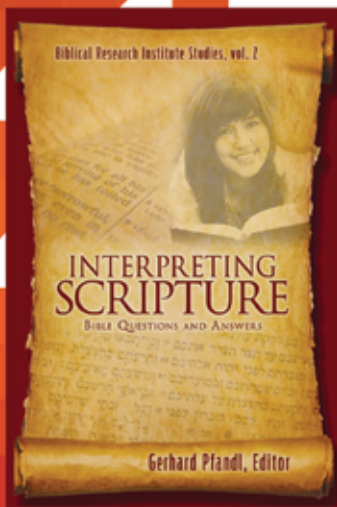
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GLOBAL HEALTH ISSUES: ALCOHOL AND YOUTH

Although the Seventh-day Adventist church has preached a message of temperance for more than 150 years, and prevalence of alcohol use is very small in Adventist communities, many Adventists, particularly youth, are impacted by the use of alcohol. Alcohol use is a major public health issue that continues to impact individuals, families, and communities globally.

Every year, 3.3 million deaths—about 5.9 percent of all deaths globally—result from harmful use of alcohol. Alcohol abuse is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions and brings significant social and economic losses to individuals and to society at large.¹ For this reason, the United Nations' "Sustainable Development Goal #3" includes a focus on strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including the use of alcohol.²

A major concern is that far too many young people use alcohol and get started at an early age. We know that by age 15, about 35 percent of teens have had at least one drink, and by age 18, about 65 percent of teens reported having had at least one drink.¹

Although young people drink less often than adults do, when they do drink, they drink more. That is because they consume more than 90 percent of their alcohol by binge drinking (consuming many drinks in a single occasion).

ADVENTIST YOUTH AND ALCOHOL

We would like to believe that Adventist youth use very little or, ideally, no alcohol. But research conducted among Adventist youth attending 69 academies in the United States and Canada suggests that this is not the case. Researchers found that although rates of alcohol use were lower among the students they studied when compared with youth in other schools, the rates were higher than expected. About 45 percent of Adventist youth in these schools reported using alcohol, and 20 percent of those reported having their first drink before age 13.³ In more than 25 years of research at Adventist colleges and universities, it was found that about 30 percent of surveyed students reported using alcohol in the previous year, and 40 percent had used it in their lifetime.

FOSTERING RESILIENCE

The good news is that there are many things we can do to reduce the chances that young people will engage in alcohol use or other at-risk behaviors. We can help them become resil-

ient. From a student survey at Andrews University in Michigan, USA, researchers learned some key protective factors; many of these are related to family, church, or school life, such as:

- Consistent, warm, and positive relationships with a caring adult.
- Positive family environment and bonding.
- Positive parental modeling of resilience and coping skills.
- Extended support networks, including family and friends.
- Positive school environment.
- Volunteer service with an adult mentor.
- Having an adult to talk to about anything.
- Family dinners five or more times per week before college.

In addition to these factors, youth in Adventist colleges and universities reported that their most important reasons for not using substances were:

- Commitment to Christ.
- Concern for their health.
- Fear of grieving their parents.
- Belief that the Adventist church is the true church.
- Attending Sabbath School nearly every week.
- Reading the Bible at least weekly.
- Personal prayer several times a week.
- Belief that God wants them to care for their bodies.

This brings hope to many parents and church leaders. Programs like *Youth Alive* are designed to build resilience in youth. There is more we can do. The Bible tells us to teach our children in the way they should go, and, in the end, they will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6, NIV). Elders can have a significant influence on and positive impact in the lives of youth in the church. Learning their names, becoming their trusted friends and mentors, and showing care and acceptance are critical. Bringing the *Youth Alive* program to your church and teaching youth that their health is valuable and their body is God's temple all add up and go a long way toward preventing at-risk behaviors, such as alcohol use. Consider what you can do.



¹ National Survey on Drug and Alcohol Use (NSDUH) 2014. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabs2014/NSDUH-DetTabs2014.htm#tab2-15b>

² United Nations Sustainable Development Goal <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/>



³ *Youth Alive*, General Conference Health Ministries.

Katia Reinert is associate director of the Health Ministries Department for the General Conference.

GREAT HYMNS OF THE CHURCH >PART 3

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A “GOOD” HYMN

Hymns are expressions of worship. They are our glad and grateful acknowledgement of the “worth-ship” of Almighty God, our confession of our own humanity before our Creator, and our bowing before the transcendence of God. Hymns are a celebration of what God is and what He has done: songs of praise, thanksgiving, and joy in God. Christians sing hymns because God is worthy to be praised.

If a hymn is an expression of the “worth-ship of God,” a statement of Christian belief, a means of teaching biblical truth, and a witness to Christian experience, it follows that its words are of utmost importance. It is words that describe the worth of a hymn. The music is merely the setting against which the words will be experienced; the hymn’s purpose is to strengthen and enhance the message of the words. The best hymn tunes are those that best illuminate their text. With this background, let me suggest seven characteristics of a good hymn.

1. *Good hymns are God-centered, not human-centered.* “The science of salvation,” urges Ellen G. White, “is to be the burden . . . of every song.”¹ Good hymns adore God for what He is, worshiping Him for His holiness, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, mercy, and truth. They praise Him for His mighty acts—for creation, preservation, redemption; for guidance, provision, protection; for the hope of glory.

2. *Good hymns are theologically sound.* A hymn is a persuasive thing; it makes us feel that this is what we think, not just what the writer thinks. A singing congregation is uncritical, but it matters very much what it sings, for it comes to believe its hymns. Singing can become an emotional experience rather than an expression of worship in truth; therefore, we should seek out hymns that are true to Scripture.

3. *Good hymns are doctrinal in content.* True worship is inseparable from the foundational truths of our faith. Hymns can instruct and bless congregations as the great doctrines of the faith come before it in continual renewal and review.

4. *Good hymns express the thoughts and feelings of believers.* The doctrine of good hymns is true to Christian experience as well as to Scripture. It does not describe as commonplace certain emotional, mountaintop experiences that, for most Christians, occur rarely. They help worshipers to live as Christians should. As Ellen G. White suggests, “Often by the words of sacred song the springs of penitence and faith have been unsealed.”²

5. *Good hymns have words of beauty, dignity, reverence, and simplicity.* Whether lofty exultations or simple declarations

of trust, good hymns are chaste, precise, and lovely in their utterance. Their language is clear and precise. Such hymns are not glib, extravagant, or sentimental; they are always true. “The melody of song,” writes Ellen G. White, “poured forth from many hearts on clear, distinct utterance, is one of God’s instrumentalities in the work of saving souls.”³

6. *Good hymns can change attitudes and behaviors.* A “song has wonderful power. It has power to subdue rude and uncultivated natures; power to quicken thought . . . to promote harmony of action, and to banish gloom . . . and impart courage and gladness”⁴ and is a “weapon that we can always use against discouragement.”⁵

7. *Good hymns turn heavenward.* A good hymn will look on the face of God, embrace His will, and sing His grace. Such hymns speak often of the soul’s true home and will carry “the mind from earth to heaven . . . from [our] earthly exile to the heavenly home.”⁶

In the end, good hymns are not the result of desire or ambition but are an outgrowth of spiritual life. Good hymns are free from introspection, are based not on feeling but on eternal verities, centered not on man but on God.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 502.

² ———, *Review and Herald*, June 6, 1912.

³ ———, *Testimonies to the Church*, 5:493.

⁴ *Evangelism*, 496.

⁵ White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 254.

⁶ *Evangelism*, 499.

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



HYMNS OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY by William Cowper (1731–1800)

The author of this hymn was only 6 years old when his mother died. He was high-strung and sensitive; he was mercilessly bullied in a boarding school, attended a secondary school, and though he trained in law, he never practiced. It was arranged for him to be a clerk in the House of Lords, but he had a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized and attempted suicide several times. He was befriended by John Newton (a former slave owner) and assisted him in his ministry in Olney, Buckinghamshire. They collaborated in producing 348 hymns of which 68 were written by Cowper. "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" was one of them and was originally titled "Conflict: Light Shining Out of Darkness." His other hymns include "O for a Closer Walk" and "There Is a Fountain."

Cowper became a leading poet and even translated Homer, the Greek poet, into English. The *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* lists 12 columns of his popular quotations, reminding the world of the genius that once lived in sleepy Olney. Cowper, the half-crazed poet, found his strength in weekly prayer meetings, kneeling with the one-time captain of a slave ship. What a picture of conversion and providential leading!

NEARER, MY GOD TO THEE by Sarah F. Adams (1805–1848)

This hymn was written by Sarah Flower Adams, who, because of serious health issues, lived only 43 years. After a successful career on a London stage as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, she began to write and became widely known for her literary accomplishments.

In 1840, Sarah's pastor, William J. Fox, asked for a new hymn to accompany his sermon on the story of Jacob and Esau. Sarah carefully studied Genesis 28:10-22, and, within a short time, completed all five stanzas of "Nearer, My God to Thee." These stanzas are a simple paraphrase of Jacob and his flight from home and his encounter with God. It so happened that Sarah's sister Eliza was gifted musically and often composed melodies for Sarah's poems. Together they contributed 13 texts and 62 new tunes for a hymnal that was being compiled by their pastor.

The stanzas that picture Jacob sleeping on a stone and dreaming of angels seem to reflect a common yearning to experience God's nearness, especially in times of deep need. At such a time, this hymn was played aboard the *Titanic* when, on the night of April 14, 1912, it sank in the Atlantic Ocean.


IN THE GARDEN by C. Austin Miles (1868–1945)

The author of this hymn was born in Lakehurst, New Jersey, USA, and began his musical career at age 12 by playing for a funeral in a rural Methodist church. He played a "slow march," the only one he knew, not knowing that it was the "Wedding March" from *Lohengrin*. He became a pharmacist, but because of his interest in writing gospel songs, left his occupation and became editor and manager of a publishing company in Philadelphia. He composed several anthems and cantatas but preferred to write gospel songs.

In 1912, a music publisher invited him to write words to a hymn that would be "sympathetic in tone, breathing tenderness in every line; one that would bring hope to the hopeless, rest to the weary, and downy pillows to dying beds." Miles turned to the Garden of the Resurrection and, reading John 20, seemed to see the story enacted before him. He saw it all: Mary, John, Peter, the empty tomb, the tears, and the risen Jesus. "I became a silent witness to that dramatic moment in Mary's life, when she knelt before her Lord, and cried, 'Rabboni.'" Miles awakened with "muscles tense and nerves vibrating." Gripping his Bible, he wrote the poem exactly as it had appeared to him. That same evening, he writes, "I wrote the music."

GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU by Civilia D. Martin (1869–1948)

This hymn was first printed in a songbook compiled by a Baptist pastor, Walter Stillman Martin, for a Bible school in 1905. One year prior, his wife Civilia had been confined to bed and was unable to accompany her husband to his preaching assignment. As Pastor Martin considered cancelling his trip, their young son exclaimed, "Father, don't you think that if God wants you to preach today, He will take care of mother while you're away?" Returning that evening, Pastor Martin found his wife greatly improved and busily writing this text, which had been inspired by their son's words. He sat down by his portable organ and wrote the music, providing the world with an endearing hymn. No matter how great the task or how difficult the test, "God will take care of you."

Pastor Martin was born in Massachusetts, USA, attended Harvard University, was ordained as a Baptist minister, and later switched denominations to work for the Disciples of Christ. He became a professor of Bible study in a Christian college in North Carolina and traveled widely, conducting Bible conferences. Collaborating with his wife Civilia, he wrote a number of gospel songs to use in his work. 

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: GOD'S DESIGN FOR GROWTH

Community is one of God's greatest gifts; it is the gift of a rich and challenging life together. Christian community means sharing a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self-interested isolation of the private lives and superficial social contacts that pass for "Christian fellowship." Instead, the biblical ideal of community challenges us to commit ourselves to a life together as people of God.

We know that maturity takes time, but it also takes the support of our sisters and brothers in Christ. It is a process that is revealed in the "each other" language of the New Testament: Love each other, forgive each other, teach and correct each other, encourage each other, pray for each other, serve each other, and submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. This list reminds us that we need the community of faith to grow up in Christ.

A WAY TO SEE CHRIST IN OTHERS

One of the most important ways the community helps us is by embodying Christ's continuing presence on earth. When my brothers and sisters love and accept me, I feel Christ's love, too. When I confess my sin and they forgive me, I know that God forgives me, too. When they pray for my brokenness, I know they are sharing in the healing work of Jesus. When we feel the crush of hostility and of our own failures, our Christian community surrounds us with compassion and encouragement. They lighten our loads, strengthen us, and give us the courage to keep on trying.



A SOURCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND GUIDANCE

The community is also a place where we teach each other and hold ourselves accountable to each other. When I hear what God is teaching others, I learn, too. When I submit to the guidance of my brothers and sisters, I am forced to grow and be accountable.

Such accountability does not need to have overtones of checking up and scolding; instead, it works to encourage and help us in our growth and commitments. We may ask for guidance about how to handle a difficult relationship or about how to have meaningful family worship. The community gives us a place to air our struggles, successes, and failures and guides us more fully in the ways of Christ.

A PLACE TO PRAY AND WORSHIP

The community helps us grow, too, as it becomes a place for prayer and worship. We are called to live lives of prayer, worship, and praise. The human tendency is to be a spectator instead of an active participant, but being spectators in the Christian life is not enough.

We need to pray for each other and be prayed for personally (Eph. 6:18; James 5:16). Many of us are never really prayed for beyond a brief mention in quick-list prayers. I once privately offered a simple prayer of blessing for a friend who had been in public ministry for many years. I was touched when he said to me afterward, "No one has ever prayed for me like that before."

Similarly, as we learn the ways of worship in our Christian community, we not only deepen our own lives but enrich our experience of public worship. Community is at its best when it becomes a training center, teaching us more about prayer and worship.

A PLACE TO SERVE

The community is also where we learn to strip away self-interest in order to serve others. It is here that we learn to share what God has given us, whether it be goods or spiritual gifts. It is also here that we learn to be served, though we are sometimes prideful and reluctant like Peter, who balked at Jesus washing his feet (John 13:2-10). Sometimes we are the washers and sometimes we are the ones being washed, but, in many ordinary ways, we can learn what submission and service mean.

One community I know gave time and money so a mother worn down by the demands of young children could take a spiritual retreat. Others have found practical ways to swap mowers, ladders, and childcare; I have seen people abandon a special outing to fix a friend's leaky basement. Community means watching over one another for good, knowing that as we serve, all of us are growing stronger in Christ.

A WITNESS TO THE WORLD

Christian communities, by their character and action, witness to the power and presence of God in the world. They are models of what God wants for humankind. Jesus' disciples are to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16), shining like bright stars (Phil. 2:15), reflecting the brightness and the glory of God (2 Cor. 3:18). The unity and mutual love that distinguished Jesus' disciples demonstrates that Jesus was, in fact, sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world (John 17:23).

Christian communities everywhere can radiate the good news of God's loving intentions for all creation. People from the outside will look at these clusters of Christians and see them serving and honoring each other. They will see love and acceptance, compassion and kindness. They will see the

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stark contrast of these communities compared with the world around them, and this will be a very compelling witness.

AMBASSADORS OF GOD'S LOVE

These communities not only demonstrate God's love, they also mediate it and carry "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18) to those around them. This brings God's compassion and healing power into a broken world. They do this by being intentionally focused on spreading the good news of the hope and grace of Jesus Christ. Each community, with its particular mission, is a rescue unit, establishing a beachhead for God's peaceable kingdom in a hostile world. From those outposts, God's love flows freely.

A CALL TO COMMUNITY

God never intended that we should go through life alone. We simply cannot experience fully the power and delight of life with God without also being drawn into life together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Without experiencing such life together, we will not discover how wonderful the news about Jesus really is. The reward of living in community is to enter into life as God intended it to be lived. EO

S. Joseph Kidder is a professor of church growth and leadership at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

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