

quarterly resource for local church leaders † july/september 2021

ELDER'S DIGEST



**FINDING
BALANCE**



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You won't hear any mother-in-law jokes from me! Not only have I been blessed with a godly biological mother, but I have also been blessed by my beautiful wife's mother. Her name is Jenny Velt-Neale. During our happy marriage of thirty-five years, my mother-in-law has never said or done anything to me that I could construe as offensive. It's not as though she doesn't have her own opinions; she does! However, she expresses them honestly, in a kind and gracious manner. She also does her best to see things from the other person's perspective and always attributes the best of intentions to the other person—without being patronizing or naïve.

Jesus offered a special blessing upon peacemakers (Matt 5:9) and Jenny is worthy of that blessing.

Jenny was born in 1939 in the Netherlands, when the world could have done with more peacemakers. Holland, like too many other places, suffered during World War II. Although the war ended in 1945, Dutch society was not peaceful in the aftermath of the war. Many Dutch people had lost their lives resisting and at the hands of the Nazi forces during the war. Others collaborated with the Nazis, thinking this was the new reality and wanting to survive. As the Nazis departed, it was a time of justice with some retribution too. This happened in cities and villages alike, even in Jenny's small village of Koekange. School was a painful place. The children were divided by their loyalties and losses during the war. Families had lost fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters in the war. Some families had members who were imprisoned during the war, while others were jailed afterward. Tensions were extreme among the kids.

Jenny was upset with the lack of peace and decided to do something about it. She and her friend had an idea: what if everyone who wanted peace met at the bench seat under the tree in the school yard and ate their lunch together? They circulated a note, inviting everyone who wanted peace to meet for lunch at the "peace bench."

Conflict isn't confined to post-World-War-II school yards, but is found in every country, community, church, and family—even Seventh-day Adventist churches and families.



ANTHONY R. KENT | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

HOW WE MANAGE CONFLICT IS MOST IMPORTANT.

Is conflict always wrong? Hardly. Jesus even said that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (Matt 10:34). So, avoiding conflict is not the solution; rather, how we manage conflict is most important.

Jesus confronted dangerous errors so that the truth could be revealed. But not all conflict we encounter in our families and churches is about theological truth and error. Sometimes there is scope for some give and take. John was inspired to record for us that Jesus was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, ESV) and that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17, ESV). These attributes of Jesus are worthy of prolonged reflection and implementation in our own lives.

Conflict is also a very serious issue for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Surveys of why people leave the Adventist Church often show there is a strong correlation between conflict and departure. Conflicts among the followers of Jesus emerge in Acts and Paul's epistles. Their differences were not airbrushed out of history or politely ignored, but were addressed. The text of the New Testament shows us the emotions, frustrations, and pain in reaching a resolution. Harmony and unity didn't just miraculously happen.

Ellen G. White writes, "God and Heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed."¹ She also says, "If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties."²

David had every reason to write, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore" (Ps 133:1–3, ESV).

By the way, every kid in Jenny's school ate lunch together at the "peace bench" and her school became a peace haven. Is your church a peace haven? Or does your church need a "peace bench"? ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1922), 203.

² Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1882), 119.



FINDING BALANCE

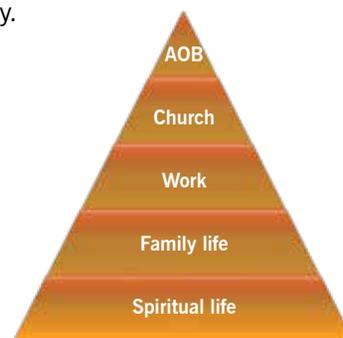
HOW CAN AN ELDER EFFECTIVELY MEET MULTIPLE EXPECTATIONS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY LIVING A BALANCED, SUCCESSFUL LIFE?

Hello, friends! My name is Mandela Thyoka, a registered medical doctor, church elder, husband, and father. I'd like to share with you how I learned to successfully fulfill multiple roles and live a balanced personal life as a church elder. You may be thinking, *When has this ever been possible?* True, it is not possible on our own strength. As Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26, ESV). God, who calls us to ministry, will equip, direct, and strengthen us.

I have been a church elder for more than fifteen years, having served in three churches under five different pastors, and I have often struggled to perfectly balance work and my personal life. However, I have come to learn that there is no "one-size-fits-all" blueprint for a successful work-life balance. So this article provides pragmatic—not prescriptive—principles from my experience that have helped me to effectively meet multiple expectations while living a balanced and successful personal life. I also recognize that each elder

has a unique set of multiple roles that may have an impact on how one effectively balances them. As the popular proverb says, "experience is the best teacher."

The four main areas of life that an elder must carefully consider are the spiritual life, the family life, the professional life, and ministry. Illustrated in the form of a pyramid, I have listed them in order of decreasing priority, with the most important at the base of the pyramid. These four main domains are not mutually exclusive, but each ought to receive its due attention and priority.



SPIRITUAL LIFE

The spiritual life forms the first and broadest building block on the pyramid, emphasizing its practical importance in the life of a church elder. Included in this domain are devoted personal prayer, Bible study, and meditation time—quiet time listening to God’s still, small voice. The spiritual life forms the foundation of one’s life; if one gets this part right and balanced, then everything else will easily follow, up to the apex of the pyramid.

FAMILY LIFE

We are relational beings, created by a loving God in His own image (Gen 1:26–27). It comes as no surprise that family life forms the second most important domain. It is imperative that we devote quality time to our personal and family relationships. While family life places huge demands on our time, when we devote quality time for our spouse, children, extended family, and friends they form a pillar of strength in our other roles. Some of these responsibilities to our families include children’s playtime, school activities, and homework. Similarly, quiet time with your spouse often helps maintain a positive and successful relationship.

WORK LIFE

Our professional work, which provides financial income for our families, impacts so much of our lives, with most of the hours of the day spent at work. Unfortunately, most work schedules are fixed and non-negotiable, leaving no room for change. For example, as a medical doctor I usually work an eight-hour day

on weekdays with possible weekend cover on a rotational basis. Like many other elders, I find these hours can be long and unsociable, adding pressure to the other domains of life and jeopardizing the quality of my free time. One of the main ways to guard against professional work encroaching on other domains is to make a rule to not bring any work home—even with deadlines looming.

CHURCH MINISTRY

Church ministry is one domain that can easily be an overindulgence to the detriment of the other domains. This is usually due to the fact that we believe it is alright as long as we are doing God’s work. However, we have also been called to be faithful stewards, particularly in regards to time. In my years in ministry, I have come to recognize that there is strength in shared church responsibilities through delegation and total member involvement, offering adequate peer support to those who need it most.

ALL OTHER BUSINESS (OTHER ROLES)

Unfortunately, as with life in general, there will be other responsibilities outside these four domains. These all fall into this last category, a proportionately small block at the apex of the pyramid. I leave this domain to the mercy of the other four domains. When it comes to “all other business,” I am more than happy to say no to requests, especially if time does not permit. It is also in this domain where I have often found many distractions that need to be identified and avoided.

MY TIME WITH GOD IS THE MOST IMPORTANT, AS HE IS THE SOURCE OF ALL MY STRENGTH.



BALANCING MULTIPLE ROLES

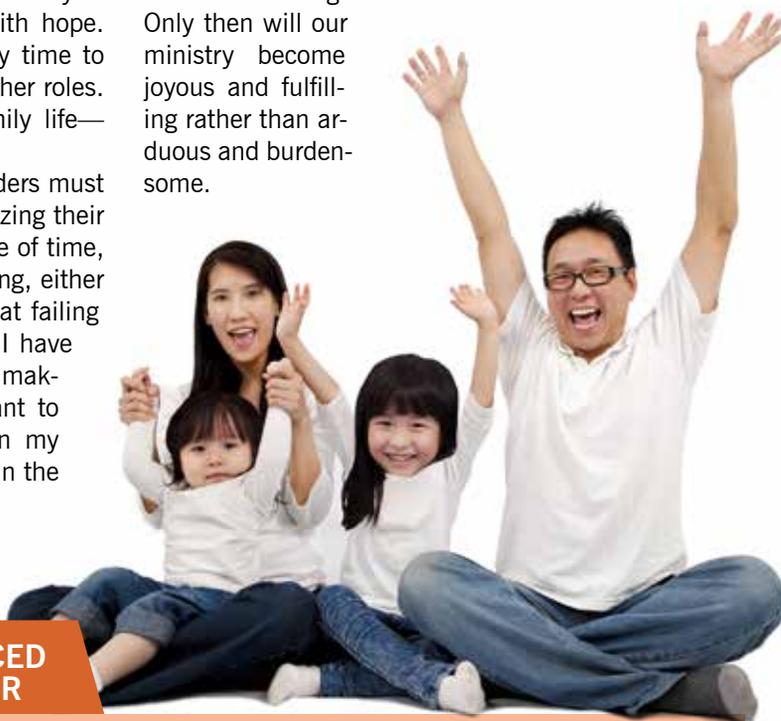
I discovered early in my ministry that balancing these multiple roles was paradoxical, if not impossible by human standards. There were times when one role became a priority over the others, necessitating more attention devoted to it. This is when, through prayer, I learned that my biggest and first challenge was to have a sure foundation. I started to spend time with God in prayer, Bible study, and meditation as the basis for my spiritual strength. My time with God is the most important, as He is the source of all my strength. We would do well to follow in Jesus' footsteps (Mark 1:35). Starting each day at His feet makes you face the challenges with hope. I also started to purposefully devote quality time to my family, who then supported me in my other roles. These two domains—spiritual life and family life—formed the non-negotiable parts of my life.

Time is the most precious commodity elders must manage to stand the best chance of maximizing their different roles. In order to make effective use of time, a lot hinges on prior preparation and planning, either personally or with your family. We know that failing to prepare is preparing to fail. This is why I have learned to plan for the short and long term, making sure to clearly set goals on what I want to achieve in each of my roles—especially in my spiritual and family lives, which are pivotal in the life of an elder.

MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEAMWORK AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES ALLOWS FOR A BALANCED MINISTRY WITHOUT THE RISK OF BURNOUT.

Looking back on my career, the most productive time of my professional life as a medical doctor was during the four years when I worked in London, a two-hour train ride each way from my base in Doncaster. I maximized the “dead” time of the commute by catching up with other parts of my life, allowing me to switch off from work and just be with my family when I arrived back home. I strongly believe we should separate our personal and professional lives, not allowing either to encroach upon the other. While both are important to our physical and mental well-being, neither should be neglected.

Only then will our ministry become joyous and fulfilling rather than arduous and burdensome.



BENCHMARKS FOR A BALANCED MINISTRY AS A CHURCH ELDER

1. Spending time with God.

Spending quality time with God (personal Bible study and prayer) recharges your spiritual life and ultimately helps you achieve all the other benchmarks.

2. Looking after yourself.

It is one's own ultimate responsibility to maintain health and well-being

through adequate exercise, sleep, and rest.

3. You cannot please all people all the time. While this is a people-oriented ministry, it is inevitable that some will not be pleased with our service.

4. Some tasks are thankless. These tasks still need to be

done, but do not expect a “thank you” in return.

5. Minimize idle time. Idle time is the tempter's treasure.

6. Know when to say no. Know your limitations and avoid taking on too much, recognizing that no is as perfect an answer as yes.

One major mistake I made during the early part of my ministry was not spending enough time with my family, as we all had busy lives at work or school. Even simple things like family mealtimes were lost in the busyness of our days. So, we agreed that we would make time every Sunday morning to have a full English breakfast together as a family, and just sit around the table after breakfast to talk with each other. Our children would reflect on their experiences in the previous week and we would then make plans together for the week ahead. This helped us bond, recognizing the value of our time together.

It's also important to schedule time for adequate rest. This can easily be neglected in a busy life, but the importance of getting eight hours of sleep daily and periods of exercise and rest during the daytime cannot be overemphasized.

In conclusion, it is not always easy for a church elder to successfully fulfill multiple roles while simul-

IT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY FOR A CHURCH ELDER TO SUCCESSFULLY FULFILL MULTIPLE ROLES WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY MAINTAINING A BALANCED PERSONAL LIFE AS A CHURCH ELDER, BUT THERE ARE SOME PRINCIPLES THAT ARE PIVOTAL.

taneously maintaining a balanced personal life as a church elder, but there are some principles that are pivotal. The first task is to prioritize your various roles and allocate proportionate time to each role. This ensures that your spiritual life becomes foundational to everything you do. Secondly, purposeful planning, both in the short and long term, allows you to set goals for each role. Finally, maximizing opportunities for teamwork and shared responsibilities allows for a balanced ministry without the risk

of burnout. As such, the benchmarks for a balanced life in ministry are spending quality time with God and your family, looking after yourself, knowing and recognizing that you cannot please all people all the time, recognizing that many tasks are "thankless," minimizing idle time, and knowing when to say no. ED

Mandela Thyoka is a physician and elder of the Doncaster Seventh-day Adventist Church, Yorkshire, England.

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LEADING SPIRITUALLY IN A NOT-SO-CHRISTIAN WORLD

Leading spiritually is challenging. Spiritual leaders today serve under significant pressure due to the rise of secularism and societal norms with a worldview that is not just nonbiblical, but in many ways antibiblical. Church elders, deacons, and deaconesses serve in an environment characterized by a lack of trust. Trust is an attribute no longer freely given to anyone with a church leadership title. Trust costs; it has to be earned through relationships over time with those we serve and those we do ministry alongside.

If you have been asked to serve as a church leader in your congregation, do you know what is required? Is there a code of ethics? What leadership examples should be lived? And in these polarized times, how can a church leader navigate the nuanced gulf of differences to bring the congregation together?

Here are a few leadership best practices and what I call “life-lived” spiritual norms for the church elder, deacon, and deaconess to put into action while serving in ministry.

CHARACTER OVER COMPETENCE

Ideally, the church needs both character and competence in leadership. But if you had to choose between the two, what choice would you make? Character’s goal is Christlikeness for every believer. It is the essence of biblical spirituality, and to live as one professes is much more influential than any knowledge or spoken words. Competence is a learned or practiced ability for successful outcomes. Character is only given and grown at the feet of Jesus and manifests itself through compassion, love, humility, and grace. Character builds more authentic spiritual momentum and can grow to be congruent with competence; however, competence without character cannot be trustworthy of spiritual leadership.

BE PRESENT

Can you be counted on to be present through the ups and downs of the church’s life? As stewards of God’s grace, faithfulness is required (1 Cor 4:2). If you have accepted the call to serve as a church elder,

deacon, or deaconess, to be present or consistently available shows a commitment that speaks of faithfulness. Don't underestimate the power of showing up to a meeting or church service. Presence can have a powerful spiritual influence toward righteousness. A prayer, word, response, smile, or show of support goes a long way. Show up even if others do not.

BE MISSIONAL

The church is not a club. The gospel is not exclusive or confined to Christians only. It does not belong to an "in crowd" or "out crowd." Christ's instructions included sharing with the entire world—every race, language, tongue, and people. The mission to touch and tell the world consists of connecting with everyday people, church and unchurched: those who choose faith, as well as those who have spiritual doubts, question faith, and are skeptical of religion.

Its essence is to multiply, grow, and share the good news. It was set in motion by Jesus when He told His followers to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19, ESV). Fueled by the gospel, the church's lifeblood continues forward by this "sending" or "going." Though Jesus didn't marry us to a particular method or solidify a specific means or way of reaching people, He did model with His life, sent out followers two by two, and taught us how to love and live, which is the essence of discipleship.

The isolated way of keeping the good news to oneself is not an option. It leads to the same failed missional results of those who lived before us, as expressed by Dragutin Matak, who writes, "The ancient Jews could not fully achieve their mission to the world because they claimed their rich history for themselves, instead of sharing it and appreciating that their Benefactor was ready to bestow wonderful blessings on them and all the earth. They mummified Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses in their history instead of sharing the spirituality of the patriarchs with the whole world."¹

BE TRANSPARENT

Transparency is the new currency of trust. It confronts a double life. The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote to the church in Corinth: "We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist

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God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God" (2 Cor 4:1–2, MSG).

Spiritual leaders have nothing to hide. It doesn't mean we betray people's confidence, but it should express an open approach to church ministry, including its business practices. Building a culture of transparency raises credibility and relevance in any organization.

BE COLLABORATIVE

Continuously practiced isolated ministry is not what Christ modeled to His followers. He chose twelve (Luke 6:12–16) to mentor and coach to become scientists for people. He sent out seventy disciples (Luke 10:1), two by two. His witness to us was one of collaboration. He showed that working with others was essential to mission accomplishment.

Jesus is our model. Desire and seek out the willing to join you in your ministry endeavors. Be flexible, adaptable, and communicative in vision casting. Don't be tempted to place people on your team who think just like you. Groupthink may appear attractive at first, but having a diversity of thought always yields better long-term results and missional outcomes.

In conclusion, to be elected to serve as a leader in your congregation is not a right, but a great privilege. Spiritual leaders should lead with integrity. Lowell Cooper, retired General Conference Vice President, best summed up this essence. He said, "The call to function in a role of (spiritual) leadership assumes that one will be able to live and act above the level of self-centeredness," and "a trustworthy God is never made known by an untrustworthy representative."²

ED

¹ Dragutin Matak, "The Misuse of History through Religious Exclusiveness as a Major Obstacle to the Transmission of the Gospel," in *Faith in Search of Depth and Relevancy*, ed. Reinder Bruinsma (London: Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists), 349.

² Lowell Cooper, PowerPoint presentation, Adventist Risk Management Symposium for NAD Presidents, Silver Spring, MD, October 30, 2014.

Ivan L. Williams, Sr., is the North American Division Ministerial Association Secretary.

SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR COMMITTEE MEETINGS

INCREASING THE JOY AND BANISHING THE PAIN!

I love committee work! I know it's not everybody's cup of tea, but when a meeting is well prepared, led by a competent chair, and bathed in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than confrontation, it can be a source of great blessings and even personal satisfaction. Like many, I have had my share of boring board meetings, difficult meetings, and meetings going nowhere. These have a way of demotivating and discouraging members from attending, and even from being willing to serve in a leadership capacity.

But here are a few principles and rules to turn committee meetings into a source of joy for those who serve on them.

PRINCIPLE 1: TIME IS PRECIOUS

There are certain cultures, including church cultures, where committee work is a way to socialize and talk. I have pastored churches where it was the expectation that board meetings would run well past ten in the evening, often to eleven or even midnight. There are times, of course, when the agenda is unusually full or difficult decisions need to be taken. But these

need to be exceptions, and even so, there are ways to handle them that will not cause the committee to run into the middle of the night. As a rule, the business of the committee is to transact the business of the church, not to be a forum where members can talk about everything that goes through their head. This is where the chair needs to be gentle but firm, cutting short rambling monologues or, worse yet, provocative diatribes that call for defenses and counterattacks.

PRINCIPLE 2: PREPARATION IS HALF THE WORK

Every good meeting has an agenda prepared in consultation with the elders. That seems obvious, but just jotting a few points on a sheet of paper will not make you well prepared. The pastor, the elder, or the chair needs to communicate with the individuals responsible for presenting each item and agree on how much time to allow for the presentation. There also needs to be a clear understanding of whether this is for information only and merely needs to be voted "to receive," or whether an action is expected. If so, that



action needs to be spelled out clearly, preferably in writing. Depending on the nature of the action and the other items on the agenda, the chair needs to have a definite idea of how much time to allow for discussion. Of course, this is an exercise in guesswork, but doing so will provide a clear timeline. To make sure it works according to plan, the better the information and the motion, the shorter the discussion will be.

When the agenda is put together, make sure every item has an allocated time limit. This will help the chair stay on track to finish at the appointed time.

PRINCIPLE 3: DISCIPLINE

Discipline is the key to success in any endeavor, including in the way church boards are conducted. It begins with the committee chair but should also be part of the culture of the group as a whole. As with any skill, it comes with practice on the part of the chair, but also with education on the part of the committee. Both the committee and the chair need to understand the following:

1. There are reasons why someone needs to make a motion first, to be “seconded” before the discussion opens. If someone has only a random idea that doesn’t interest anybody else, there is no need to waste precious time in discussions. I’ve been surprised to see how many fail to grasp this simple rule. They are so undisciplined that even before someone has finished making the presentation, someone interrupts to ask questions, voice an opinion, or even make a counterproposal. Someone else quickly adds their five

cents, and before you know it, people talk randomly, without even knowing what the motion will be.

2. If a discussion gets to be too long and the minutes are ticking away, it is always the prerogative of the chair to ask for a “question on the motion,” which is a motion to stop the discussion, so the board can proceed to a vote. Note that a question on the motion also needs to be seconded—but not debated—before being voted. If at least two-thirds vote in favor, the chair can then simply call for a vote on the main motion, and be done with it.

3. However, sometimes discussions can get heated or fail to generate a consensus. Occasionally, it is wise to simply table the motion, which means that the motion returns from the floor where it was debated, to the table, where it can be picked up at a later time. This can be suggested by the chair, and agreed by common assent, or if spirits are really worked up, the chair can suggest that a motion be made to table. This must also be seconded, but not debated. A simple majority is enough to postpone the item to a later meeting.

It is amazing how greatly committee members appreciate the kind of discipline that respects their time and gives them a good night’s rest.

A few years ago, I ran into a former member of a church board I used to chair fifteen years before. Somehow, the conversation came to the things he remembered about my pastorate. To my surprise, he said that it wasn’t the sermons or the pastoral calls I made to his home, but the meetings I chaired. Compared to what he was used to, they were short and sweet. By ten in the evening, everybody knew they could go home for a good night’s rest. Quality of work, quality of rest. Joy in service. ED

Claude Richli is a pastor and an associate secretary at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, MD, USA.



FURTHER RESOURCE:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, like many other organizations, has adopted Robert’s Rules of Order for its committees and boards. You can find many answers to your questions at www.robertsrules.com.

WHEN YOU ARE ASKED,

"WHAT DO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS BELIEVE?"

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

You may have heard the story of the man who was asked, "What do you believe?" He replied, "Well, I believe what my church believes."

"And what does your church believe?"

"Well, my church believes what my pastor believes."

"And what do your pastor, your church, and you believe?"

"Oh, that is very simple. You see, my pastor, my church, and I all believe the same thing."

Although we may chuckle at this, it is not a laughing matter. Suppose someone asked you, "What do Seventh-day Adventists believe?" How would you respond? The response to this question may impact someone's eternal destiny.

The apostle Paul tells us that we must always know how to answer that question: "Walk in wisdom

toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Col 4:5–6, ESV). Here Paul is saying that *what* you answer is not as important as *how* you answer. Your response can focus on sharing church doctrines or on sharing the love of Jesus.

Consider Angelina, a faithful church member. She was so in love with Jesus that her passion for Him overflowed to everyone she met. One hot summer day, she met Denise, a young woman who had suffered abuse since she was a child and lived on the streets. Because of her experiences, Denise did not trust anyone. She had given up on life, erroneously concluding that nobody cared for her and all people wanted was to take advantage of her. Nonetheless,



Angelina started helping Denise. She invited her for lunch. She bought her new clothes. She kept looking after her. Despite Angelina's best intentions, Denise was suspicious. She knew Angelina was a religious person and began to suspect that Angelina was only being nice in order to lure her to church.

One day she asked Angelina what church she attended. Angelina replied, "I'm a Seventh-day Adventist." When Denise asked, "And what is that?" Angelina responded, "I am a Christian, a disciple of Jesus. I love the Lord and I love people."

Denise thought for a moment and said, "Oh, I see. If you're doing all these things for me to lure me to your church, you can forget about it. I am never going to visit your church. Christians are a bunch of hypocrites." Angelina calmly said with a smile, "Denise, I help you because I love you. You are a child of God, and I sincerely want to help you."

Angelina kept showing the love of Christ to Denise in tangible ways until one day Denise asked, "Can you please take me to your church?" Once Denise realized that her friend wanted to help her selflessly, she saw in Angelina a reflection of Jesus' character. She decided to give her life to the Lord Jesus and was baptized.

You see, people can argue about doctrine. But nobody can resist the power of love.

We must never forget that a critical part of Christian witness involves how we relate to people. When people sense the love of Jesus flowing from our lives to theirs like a sweet aroma, they will be powerfully impacted. "When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden. Its holy influence will be felt by all with whom we come in contact."¹

So, how do we answer the question? How we answer is not about strategy or methodology. It's about love! Someone may ask the question out of curiosity, in which case any answer will do. However, they may ask the question because they saw something in you that they like—something they want to emulate—in which case you cannot just answer the question and move on. Instead, take time to look at them the way God looks at them. How does God see people? God sees every person on the planet as a candidate for heaven. He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3–4).

Let's be clear: while we search in love for ways to connect with people, we must never hide who we are or what we believe. We are a prophetic movement

"BUT IN YOUR HEARTS HONOR CHRIST THE LORD AS HOLY, ALWAYS BEING PREPARED TO MAKE A DEFENSE TO ANYONE WHO ASKS YOU FOR A REASON FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU; YET DO IT WITH GENTLENESS AND RESPECT."

1 PET 3:15, ESV

Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Cor 2:14–15, ESV).

Christ's method alone will give real success in reaching people. And Christ's method is *how* Angelina answered the question! Instead of sharing the church's propositional tenets, she began by showing the love of Jesus. She befriended Denise by communicating sympathy, ministering to her needs, and winning her confidence. Then, the love of Jesus compelled Denise to follow Him. We can do likewise. "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15, ESV). ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 77.

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BEING A GENUINE SUPPORTER

PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY, SABBATH, OCTOBER 9, 2021

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to yell at ‘cha.” My heart was warmed by this unexpected demonstration of grace. I was in the self-checkout line at Walmart. After bagging my few purchases, I turned to walk away but realized that it would be best to double bag the heavier glass jars. Turning back to the self-checkout register, I realized that someone had approached the spot where I had been and begun to place their groceries on the counter for scanning. Quickly, I tried to pull two bags from the bag dispenser, but could not find a grip to retrieve one or two single bags. Feeling awkward, I tried even harder to pluck a couple of bags free from the stack when I heard a kind voice beside me. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to yell at ‘cha. I’m not going to be late for anything if it takes you a little longer.” I turned to face a woman, perhaps from an agrarian background—maybe sixty years old, tussled red hair, with sun-damaged skin showing the effects of much outdoor labor. I had not felt such kindness from a stranger for a long time. Grace. Kindness. Undeserved favor. We experience too little of these virtues.

Serving as a local church elder is one of the most important responsibilities in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The local church is the source of all accessions of new believers, the place from which children come to attend our church schools, and the source of financial support for preaching the gospel around the world. The effectiveness of pastors and lo-

cal congregations increases when local church elders pray for the pastor and support the mission endeavors and discipleship training that the pastor leads.

My work as a church pastor and leader over the years was radically blessed by the prayerful support of church members who loved me, who at times spoke truth that was hard to hear yet who consistently remained loyal and “in my corner.”

Here are a few practical tips on how to bless your pastor and, in turn, bless your congregation:

1. Show grace toward your pastor. Love your pastor in spite of their weaknesses. We all have both strong points and areas in need of growth. Pastors are no exception. Life experiences leave many of us wounded when we get to adulthood. Therefore all people, including pastors, make mistakes. The only course is to love your pastor even when they misstep, either due to not knowing or an inherent manifestation of emotional or spiritual immaturity. Others may make mistakes but when the pastor missteps, it is noticed by more people. Grace means being kind and giving the benefit of the doubt even when people stumble.

2. Affirm your pastor when you see them doing well. Affirmation is powerful. It must be sincere and based upon something that is credible. Genuine compliments lift a load and keep the pastor moving forward with strength and courage.

3. Speak the truth in love. Sometimes your pastor may benefit from sensitive counsel. But don’t talk to others; just talk to your pastor. Pray for your pastor—frequently, and especially before you address the pastor with concerns or challenges. If you always talk to Jesus before you speak to the pastor about a sensitive matter, it will be much more impactful.

The apostle Paul often began his letters to believers with the words “grace and peace.” Extend grace to your pastor, and give your pastor the benefit of the doubt. And praying for your pastor regularly and often will help your pastor succeed, enjoy a fruitful ministry, and grow to be more effective as a worker for God. **ED**

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JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION

The call to lead, to speak forth for God, and to minister among God’s people, is not a call to popularity. It is a call to faithfulness. Those who would lead must serve in both good and difficult times, as we see in the life of Jeremiah.

I. JEREMIAH’S CALL

In Jeremiah 1:4, Jeremiah presents his credentials: he is not a prophet for hire, and he does not follow the latest streams of fashionable thought. His vocation as a prophet is by virtue of a divine commission. This sense of God’s calling was the driving force for his ministry, and his support during his long years of persecution and discouragement. He had this burning fire in his bones and could not be silent (Jer 20:9).

In Jeremiah 1:5, even before he was born, God had purposed that Jeremiah would fill the prophetic office. Likewise, to every individual, young and old, God has assigned a place of duty and responsibility in His plan for humanity’s salvation, and our purpose in life is to find and be obedient to God’s purpose for us. To be told, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” gives Jeremiah a new sense of perspective, away from his plans for himself and back to God’s master plan.

“I formed you,” says God (Jer 1:5). God speaks here of His care in hand-molding Jeremiah. It was no accident that Jeremiah had such a sensitive nature. Jeremiah was handmade by God for his God-given task. He was fit for God’s purpose—as are modern-day disciples! “I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5). Before his birth, God had set Jeremiah apart for his prophetic calling. God was calling Jeremiah to holiness. “I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” God now sends teenage Jeremiah out to a dying world. *Goyim*—the nations, not just Judah.

God gave Jeremiah two signs (1:11–13). The first was an almond tree branch. The word for almond means “wakeful,” for the almond tree is the first to awaken in winter as it senses the coming spring (blossoming in January in the northern hemisphere). The message is clear: when all seems dormant, when evil seems triumphant, when God’s people seem spiritually dead, when there seems to be no hope, God is wakeful, ready for His moment to fulfill His Word. God promised He would deliver His people from their time of trouble in Babylon. The second sign was a tilted cooking pot. Before God’s deliverance, there would come a time of trouble upon God’s people, in the form of Babylonian attack, oppression, and captivity. Jeremiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem would learn the hard way that

being God’s people does not guarantee them diplomatic or spiritual immunity. No, the message of Jeremiah was that God’s people would live through a time of Babylonian supremacy and oppression, but during this time of trouble they had the assurance that God would rise to deliver His faithful people in His time.

II. JEREMIAH’S MINISTRY

Jeremiah lived during the darkest era for God’s people—immediately before the Babylonian exile. The northern ten tribes had been swept into captivity by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah veered between good and evil kings. Towards the end of evil Manasseh’s reign, two God-fearing boys were born: Josiah and Jeremiah. Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight and was a reforming king, noted for his religious zeal and piety. He cleansed the land of idols, closed down the occult, repaired the temple, and the discovery of a scroll containing the covenant (the book of Deuteronomy) led to a national reformation. In Josiah’s thirteenth year (627 BC), God called Jeremiah, a teenager, to the prophetic ministry. Living in Anathoth—two miles from Jerusalem, a town of priests—and of priestly descent, Jeremiah was a priest in training. Yet, immediately after his call, God instructed Jeremiah to go to Jerusalem and proclaim God’s message, followed in Jeremiah 11:6 by a command to conduct a national preaching tour.

Jeremiah called the people to return to God, accept Babylonian rule, and prophesied that after seventy years God would restore His people to Jerusalem. He was labeled a traitor and faced intense opposition throughout his ministry. He ministered for forty years and was persecuted, imprisoned, flogged, condemned as a traitor, starved, and forced to migrate to Egypt as an old man, living with the constant threat of execution or murder, and yet he lived to see the fulfillment of his prophecies of Babylonian captivity. Naturally a timid individual, he longed to withdraw from public life and weep over God’s people (Jer 15:17; 20:10a; Lam 3:14, 20.)

When Jerusalem fell, the Babylonians offered Jeremiah the choice to go to Babylon, where he would be well looked after, or stay with the remnant of God’s people in battered Judah (Jer 39:11–40:6). Although ignored by his own people, his prophetic ministry was recognized and respected by the pagan Babylonians! As then, so today. Faithfulness in ministry has an unforeseen and untold ripple effect, reaching well beyond our local congregation to those who ostensibly are far from God. Jeremiah opted

to stay. Although he disagreed with God’s people on just about everything, Jeremiah never walked away from them. He stayed with them no matter what, because God had called and gifted him to minister to these people. Leaders today are called to such steadfastness in ministry—for we seek God’s approval, not that of fallen humanity.

III. JEREMIAH’S MESSAGE

His message applies to us today. God’s people would go through a terrible time of trouble, but God would eventually deliver them. If God’s people wish to live through the coming time of trouble, and experience God’s deliverance, then God’s people are to repent of their sins and turn to God with faith and obedience.

Jeremiah called people away from a superficial religion to a true inner walk with God. He taught that spiritual evil has its source in a wicked heart (Jer 17:9). Without a new heart, the wicked will remain wicked (13:23). What is needed is a new heart, bringing with it a new love for God, faith in God, and obedience to God (24:7). He pointed forward to the conversion miracle for all who follow Jesus Christ in the new covenant experience (31:33–34).

APPLICATION

God was blunt with Jeremiah, as He is with His people today. “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you” (Jer 1:19, ESV). God’s people are not alone. For Jeremiah, and for the Lord’s followers today, God’s way is not to stop the fight, but to stand with those who follow Him. Like modern-day disciples, Jeremiah was being sent out as a lamb amongst wolves (e.g. Luke 10:3). However, we today have the assurance of God’s presence and protection. Hallelujah! ED

Conrad Vine, DMin, is the president of Adventist Frontier Missions, Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

SERMON NOTES

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THE LITTLE MAID

INTRODUCTION

Yuri Gagarin was born on March 9, 1934 in the Soviet Union. On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to enter space. He orbited the earth, and on reentry became an instant national hero and international celebrity. His story was told worldwide. Shortly thereafter, a Soviet teacher was praising Gagarin's flight, the seeming absence of God in space, the technological prowess of the USSR, the inevitability of world class struggle, and liberation from the now-disproven faith in God. As she spoke, a small child raised her hand and spoke up: "Please, Miss, my God lives higher up." Wherever the story of Yuri Gagarin is told, so is the story of this little child. God works through the witness of faithful children, so we now turn to another faithful witness, the little maid.

I. THE SITUATION

In 2 Kings 5:1-2 the context is set. Ahab was dead, succeeded in turn by his wicked sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram. Elijah had been taken to heaven. Elisha was now God's prophet in Israel. Although Israel and Syria were at peace, Naaman, a mighty Syrian general, would lead raiding parties into Israel, during which he captured a little maid and forced her into slavery within his own home, serving his wife.

II. THE COMPLICATION

The little maid noticed that beyond the glamour of Naaman's home, there was a shadow, a ghost at every banquet, for Naaman had leprosy. What to do? Rejoice at God's judgment on her captor? Speak vindictive words to her master? Gloat over the imminent death of her oppressor? In 2 Kings 5:3, the little maid tells her mistress that, if Naaman would go to Israel and meet with Elisha, then Naaman would be healed. Amazing words. What do they reveal? In the midst of bitter personal grief, the little maid had found forgiveness, peace, and healing. No longer was Naaman that wicked general whose soldiers had forcibly kidnapped her into a life of slavery. She now saw Naaman as a victim needing God's intervention, just as the little maid wished for God's deliverance for herself.

III. THE SOLUTION

In 2 Kings 5:4, Naaman went to the Syrian king, and told him the words of the little maid. The KJV translates this as "Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel." "Thus and thus"—we may wonder what the little maid said. What did she talk about? Elisha's miracles, Elijah on Mount Carmel, God's power to raise the dead? Whatever that little maid said, her witness

was shared with Ben-Hadad, the pagan king of Syria, who heard of the power of the God of Israel. Words, once spoken, can never be taken back. A gracious and faithful testimony, once spoken, can ripple through society and reach the ears even of national leaders, who may never otherwise hear the gospel. The little maid never personally met Ben-Hadad, but her faith-filled testimony reached his ears. Unfortunately, her witness got lost in translation, for the king of Syria thought the little maid was referring Naaman not to Elisha, but to the king of Israel, so he sent Naaman with gifts to the king of Israel, asking him to heal Naaman of his deadly disease.

The king of Israel in turn sent Naaman to Elisha. Elisha sent out his servant to tell Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan. Proud Naaman was upset. Were not the rivers of Damascus cleaner than the Jordan? He intended to ignore the prophet's command but his servants wisely counseled him to at least try. After all, wouldn't Naaman have undertaken the most heroic of tasks and paid any price for healing? Naaman was confused. Surely God wanted something special from him—something so difficult it would be spoken of for generations. Yet the command for Naaman to be cleansed seemed to be just too easy! What God required was not the fulfillment of a difficult task, but a demonstration of trusting obedience. Likewise today, God seeks not extravagant sacrifices, but for us to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8, ESV).

So, Naaman went down into the Jordan. 1-2-3-4-5-6-still a leper-7-clean! Imagine the sheer joy when Naaman realized that God had indeed given him the gift of life! The horror of that death-dealing disease was gone. Naaman arose from the waters a new man. In the Hebrew, the little maid is referred to in 2 Kings 5:2, 4 as *na'arah*, and Naaman comes up out of the water (5:14) as a *na'ar* ("like the flesh of a little child")—the masculine form. Naaman's experience with God parallels that of the little maid. Although enemies in human terms, both were caught in desperate circumstances, both were facing separation from their loved ones, and both needed and both received the healing touch of God. God, in His grace, can heal burdens and restore former enemies into His kingdom.

IV. THE CONVERSION

Naaman rushed back to Elisha's home (2 Kings 5:15-19)—his body healed, his fears relieved, his spirit humbled, his hope restored, his heart converted. From now on, he would be a worshipper of the true God, and so asked for two mule-loads of earth

so when he prayed to the God of Israel at home in Damascus, he would be kneeling on soil from Israel. Elisha recognized Naaman as a fellow God-worshipper, thus transcending the Israelite hatred of the Syrian Naaman for his past, and responded, "Go in peace." Naaman now had the assurance of God's forgiveness. In verse 1 (ESV), we first met Naaman as a "commander of the army of the king of Syria . . . a great man. . . . a mighty man of valor," but in verse 19 he is a new creation. A diseased man is now a healthy man. A dying man is now a living man. A man facing separation from his family is now looking forward to a long life together. A pagan is now a God-fearer. A man of war is now a man of peace. And all because the little maid spoke up!

APPLICATION

"Please, Miss, my God lives higher up." "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (2 Kgs 5:3, ESV). What did these two children have in common? These were the words spoken by children raised in God-fearing families. Both families lived in a rather godless age, both families lived in societies where the worship of God was suppressed, both families lived in an era where God-fearing parents had excuses not to nurture the fear of God in their children, yet both families took seriously their God-given responsibilities to raise God-fearing children. And the rest, as they say, is history. How about you and your family? **ED**

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SERMON NOTES

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THE LITTLE MAID'S PARENTS

INTRODUCTION

Captured by Naaman, snatched from her home and parents, and forced into slavery in Syria, Scripture thus introduces the little maid, who soon realized that Naaman, her captor, was dying from leprosy. “Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy” (2 Kgs 5:3, ESV). So said the little maid to Naaman’s wife, and what she said spoke volumes about her parents and to parents today.

I. WHAT THE LITTLE MAID DID SAY . . .

The little maid pointed Naaman’s wife to Elisha, God’s prophet in Israel. In 2 Kings 4, we read four miracle stories of Elisha: the miraculous provision of oil for the widow so she needn’t sell her children into slavery, the raising from the dead of the Shunammite’s boy, the removal of deadly poison from the soup about to be eaten by students, and the miraculous multiplication of a few loaves and some ears of grain into food sufficient for one hundred starving people. Elisha performed miracles that showed God’s power over death, disease, deadly poison, and desperate financial and family circumstances. He is the God who delivers! There is no human challenge beyond His reach!

The little maid’s witness reveals the importance of parenting. In harmony with Deuteronomy 11:18–21, she had learned in her home that God’s people were to be a light to the nations. “There is no higher trust than that committed to fathers and mothers in the care and training of their children.”¹ Rather than sinking into bitterness, she chose to be an agent of healing and conversion for the ostensible enemies of God’s people.

“We know not in what line our children may be called to serve. They may spend their lives within the circle of the home; they may engage in life’s common vocations or go as teachers of the gospel to heathen lands; but all are alike called to be missionaries for God, ministers of mercy to the world. They are to obtain an education that will help them to stand by the side of Christ in unselfish service.”² Parents and caregivers, we are raising our children not merely to love God, but to be His witnesses wherever life takes them. We raise them so that whilst we do not know where they will go, we know with whom they will go. While we may, we plant the seed of the Word in their hearts, and then allow the Spirit to bring a harvest in due time, wherever they may go.

The little maid’s witness revealed her parents to be part of God’s hidden yet faithful remnant in apostate Israel, maybe

even among the “seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal” (1 Kgs 19:18, ESV). From her parents she had learned of love for her enemy, compassion in speech, mercy for the lost, and to point others to God. Her actions reflected her parents’ careful instruction in the fear of the Lord, which transcended political and ethnic boundaries, and her faith that in lifting Yahweh high, He could and would draw all people to Himself, even a leprous war criminal like Naaman (John 12:32).

II. WHAT THE LITTLE MAID DIDN'T SAY . . .

There is much she could have said about Israel other than point to God. In her parents’ lifetime, Ahab was king, a wicked king. He had married Jezebel, a Syrophenician princess, who imported Baal worship into Israel. Hundreds of prophets of Baal were supported from the public purse. Jezebel had hunted down and killed God’s prophets. Faithful Naboth and his family lay dead, killed at the conniving of Ahab, Jezebel, false prophets, and corrupt civic leaders. A huge temple for Baal worship had been built in Samaria. Golden calves had been installed in Dan and Bethel to prevent Israelites from worshipping in Jerusalem. The rich oppressed the poor. Injustice was rife. Israelite society was rotten, from top to bottom.

Yes, there was much the little maid could have said, but she didn’t. Criticism of God’s people to non-believers never leads to their conversion; it merely hardens them in their unbelief. Had the little maid waxed lyrical about Israel’s problems or the failures of Israel’s leadership, Naaman may never have been converted. He would have remained a leprous man of war dying without hope.

“Many who listen to the preaching of the word of God make it the subject of criticism at home. They sit in judgment on the sermon. . . . The message that should be regarded as the word of the Lord to them is dwelt upon with trifling or sarcastic comment. . . . Severe judgment is pronounced . . . and this in the hearing of the unconverted. Thus are destroyed respect for God’s messengers, and reverence for their message. . . . And the parents question why their children are so little interested in the gospel.”³ Oh parents, be careful what you say. If you have genuine reason for concern, speak privately, or you may inadvertently be raising gospel-hardened heathens in your home.

APPLICATION

Life doesn’t always work out as

we hope or plan. Plans do go awry. Sin intrudes via disease, discouragement, divorce, depression, and death. The little maid did not plan on being kidnapped and forced into slavery, but she did purpose on being faithful to the God of Israel, no matter what happened in life. “He who sent . . . the little Israelite maiden to the help of Naaman, the Syrian captain, sends men and women and youth today as His representatives to those in need of divine help and guidance.”⁴ Like Paul and Silas singing in jail, Jonah praying in the belly of the fish, or Daniel and his three friends purposing in their hearts to not defile themselves, so the little maid had little control over her external circumstances, but she could choose a God-honoring response. And so can we!

We are also called to reflect on what we speak about. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth does speak. By our words, do we build up or tear down? Do people learn of the loving character of God or the troublesome saints of God? Would we ever wish for a wandering child to stumble across our comments on an Adventist website? Does our speech honor God and those of the family of faith in harmony with Ephesians 4:29–5:2? Our speech can lead to eternal consequences, one way or another, for others. O be careful, little mouth, what you say!

And finally, Jesus said, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16, ESV). The fruit of the little maid’s faithful parenting was Naaman’s physical healing and eternal salvation. By God’s grace, in what we say and what we don’t say, may the fruit of our walk with God be the healing and salvation of all those whom God places in our path, and in the lives of our children. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 245.

² Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1954), 483.

³ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 45–46.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1970), 227.

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EARLY FAITH: DAVID

INTRODUCTION

Names both reflect and are windows into character. Sarai (Sarah), Abram (Abraham), Simon (Peter), and Saul (Paul) all had new names that reflected their unique spiritual experience. God has many names, each of which is a window of understanding into His character: El Roi (“The God Who Sees,” Gen 16:13), Qedosh Yisrael (“The Holy One of Israel,” Lev 19:1–2), Yahweh Shalom (“The Lord Is Peace,” Judg 6:24). Reflecting on God’s names, David writes, “And those who know your name put their trust in you” (Ps 9:10, ESV), and expresses his faith in God as Yahweh Tsebaoth (“Lord of Hosts”) in the battle with Goliath.

I. DAVID’S BACKGROUND

David’s job as a shepherd was dangerous, for Israel teemed with wild animals—lions and bears, which he would fight off with his sling and rod (1 Sam 17:34–36). After an attack, rather than hustling the flock to safety, David went after the lion to rescue the bloodied, stolen lamb, showing that no cause was a lost cause for David (as nobody is a lost cause for the Son of David!) Whilst in the fields, he had time to reflect on the character of God, and in the beauty of nature and the solitude of his work, he gained profound insights into God’s character. He learned of Yahweh Roi—“The Lord Is My Shepherd”—a name for God, and expressed his understanding in song (Ps 23). As with David, so God reveals Himself today to those engaged in difficult, dangerous, or menial work, yet who are open to Him, no matter their age. Young people, listen for God, look for God, learn of God, and He will reveal Himself to you.

David came from a difficult family. His mother barely appeared, and his seven older brothers were either hostile or indifferent to him (Ps 69:8). When the family threw a feast in honor of Samuel, David was not invited (1 Sam 16:6–10). When David came to the battle, he had to face Eliab’s baseless accusations (1 Sam 17:28). As the youngest, he was forced to do the most menial task in the family—looking after the sheep. He also had a difficult boss, Saul. Just as the Spirit of God came upon David, so the Spirit of God departed from Saul, and an evil spirit tormented him (1 Sam 16:13–14). Imagine how David must have felt! He knew he was the anointed of God, yet he faithfully served the brooding and paranoid king whom God had abandoned, allowing God to take care of the bigger issues. Likewise, we are to faithfully serve difficult bosses, even those we consider far from God.

This, then, was David’s background: a difficult job, a difficult family, a difficult boss. Yet, at no time did David complain, criticize, or confront. He was faithful in his job, peaceful in his family, an agent of healing for his boss. And most importantly, being open to God, He gained insights into God’s character that prepared him for the battle ahead.

II. DAVID’S BATTLE

Today, as then, our world is teeming with enemies, and God’s timid armies long for a glimpse of His power. Oh to see God acting to defend His name! In 1 Samuel 17:32, 37, David offered to fight, because he knew God was with him. David had been faithful with his earthly father’s flock; now he was called to champion the cause of his heavenly Father’s flock. Small victories bring with them promise of greater victories, so bring on the giants! David refused Saul’s armor and, after choosing five smooth stones from the riverbed, drew near to Goliath. David would not trust in another man’s armor, but in his trusted equipment. We may see others doing wonders for God, but we are not to copy them, hoping to find similar success. Thank God for those who dare to minister using the gifts He has given them! The Philistine approached the Israelite champion, and saw it was only a shepherd boy, armed with a shepherd’s rod and a slingshot (1 Sam 17:42–44). Goliath cursed David and promised to feed his flesh to the birds of the air and the animals of the field. Goliath represents the fragile certainty of physical strength, the pride of self-exaltation, the vanity of popular acclaim, yet David stood before him calmly, manifesting a quiet trust in divine strength and the determination to glorify God by carrying out His will. Goliath advanced with sword, spear, and shield. Clad in bronze armor, his spear tip was iron, the latest weaponry of the late Bronze Age (17:7), but David fought in the name of Yahweh Tsebaoth, a name that emphasizes God’s rule and sovereignty over every power in the universe. It is not the weapons in our hands that count, but the banner under which we march! A whole world is waiting, including Israel then and today, to know that our God is alive. David triumphed, and instead of Goliath feeding David to the beasts of the field, Goliath’s body was fed to the beasts of the field. How is this possible? God acted so that “all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s” (17:47, ESV). Why, though, was David so confident of victory?

III. DAVID’S BELIEF

According to Psalm 46:1–7, Yahweh Tsebaoth is a refuge for His people, present with them in their darkest hour. We can be still. Why? Because Yahweh Tsebaoth is with us, no matter what is happening in our world. God promised David that one day he would be king (2 Sam 7:8). David trusted Yahweh Tsebaoth as a covenant-keeping God, so whatever else happened in the battle with Goliath, David would not die that day because God’s promise had not yet been fulfilled. And David looked forward to Yahweh Tsebaoth as the coming King of glory, strong and mighty, mighty in battle, the all-conquering Messiah for God’s covenant people (Ps 24:7–10). Yes, David could overcome the giants of his day because he knew Yahweh Tsebaoth by name and could put his trust in Him. Yahweh Tsebaoth fights for His people. Yahweh Tsebaoth is a “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1, ESV). Yahweh Tsebaoth is a covenant-keeping God; those who worship Him can build their lives on His covenant promises. He is the coming King of kings and Lord of lords.

APPLICATION

Today, whatever giants stalk our hearts or homes, we can likewise put our trust in the Lord of Hosts, and ask Him to fight and overcome those giants so that we, like David, may sing hymns of praise to the One who delivered us. Jesus promises that when we get to heaven, “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2:17, ESV). Our new names will reflect our unique spiritual experience and Spirit-shaped character. What a promise! **ED**

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SERMON NOTES

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THE THEOLOGY OF LIFE

>PART 9

A BIBLICAL THOUGHT – 1

“You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”—Galatians 5:7–15, ESV (emphasis added)

In our last biblical thought, we discussed how the journey of the followers of Jesus is not one that goes from sin to without sin, but rather is one of growth in love, going from selfishness to unselfishness. It is not a life organized around what is and is not sin, but a life organized by the principle of love and service, in love for God and others. In this Bible text, Paul continues

his argument and fleshes out what freedom in Christ truly means.

At this point in the letter, there is no discussion of the fact that Jesus, through His sacrifice, grants freedom to every single person who believes in Him. Christian communities have downplayed this freedom throughout the centuries. The reasoning is that if people are given freedom, people will sin. So instead of freedom, human religion creates ways in which humanity becomes busy attempting to please the gods. And this attempt, as history attests, really ends with humans pleasing other humans who place themselves in positions of control. This was the context of the Christian church before the Reformation. Salvation, forgiveness, and everything Christ gave and gives freely was assigned a price and a method of purchase. And who benefited from this? Humans who were in control. The freedom of the gospel has systematically been subverted and replaced by human control (be it through traditions and laws in Galatia or indulgences and offerings before the Reformation). This reality was even picked up by the Russian writer Dostoyevsky in his book *The Brothers Karamazov*, where he writes that the church took away the freedom Christ gave people and in exchange it gave them security—a false security based

on human sacrifice and offerings.¹ As long as people paid the price, they believed they would be fine.

This extreme must be avoided. It undermines the freedom of Christ because of the risk of sin, and it results in human control. And yet, there is another extreme that should be avoided: the extreme of thinking that freedom implies permission to do whatever humanity wants—what Paul calls living “according to the flesh” (Rom 8:5, ESV). This is an extreme that Paul fights in this portion of the letter. Paul is a man who trusts the work of the Spirit. He does not trust in himself or in any other human being, but he trusts the work of the Spirit in the life of an individual. Here Paul writes, “Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13, ESV). Why is Paul so concerned about the other extreme, the extreme of living in the flesh with the freedom that was given by Jesus? Because a life in the flesh is truly a life of selfishness. It hinders us from doing what Paul calls us to do: service to one another in love. Why is Paul against sexual promiscuity? It is not only a question of personal sin, but of using other people’s bodies for our own pleasure. In using the other person’s body for our own pleasure and benefit, we are practicing selfishness. We are destroying ourselves and others. Christ has reconciled us to the Father and to one another; by living in the flesh we live for ourselves and deny God.

So, what is the balance? It is living a full life of true freedom in Jesus within the parameters of the fruit of the Spirit. Nobody with the fruit of love, patience, faithfulness, and self-control will fall into a life predominantly guided by the selfish desires of the flesh. Jesus has paid the full price and now we are free to live in joy and love in the trust that if we fall and “confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, ESV). And by this trust in this love, we will grow in our relationship with God and others, practicing loving service. In this trust we will also develop the discernment to know that “all things are lawful” but not all things are helpful” (1 Cor 10:23, ESV). This discernment will keep us away from the extremes that lead to both a false religion of human control and a selfish life under the pretense that we are free to live a life in the flesh.

My dear reader, may you trust in the love that casts you into a life of true freedom! And as you grow in this love, may you realize how true, how beautiful, and how meaningful the religion of Jesus is. The weight of human religion can only be felt in the active mistrust in the love of Jesus for us. So trust, trust, trust. I heard a song this week that summarizes it well: “What could I bring, for your gift is complete, so I trust you, simply trust you Lord, with every part of me.”² May we trust and continue on this liberating path of growth from selfishness to unselfish love and service to one another.



A BIBLICAL THOUGHT – 2

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other*, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. *Now the works of the flesh are evident*: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. *But the fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*”—Galatians 5:16–26, ESV (emphasis added)

Read and re-read this text again and again! Paul describes what life in the flesh and life in the Spirit actually look like. Notice that in both of these explanations, flesh and Spirit are opposite ways to live, opposite ways to see the other, opposite ways to relate to the other. While life in the flesh is nothing more and nothing less than the outward manifestation of selfishness, life in the Spirit is the outward manifestation of unselfishness.

The ending of Galatians 5 is the summary of what Christian religion should be all about: freedom to live within the parameters set forth by the Spirit who dwells in the life of those who respond to His gracious leading. And within these relational parameters, we find the center of what true life is all about: loving God and others.

**SO THERE IS TRULY
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THOSE WHO DO NOT WILL
MANIFEST THE FRUIT OF
THE FLESH.**

In fact, the only way to know whether somebody has or has not been with Jesus is by the manifestation of fruit in their life. The natural human being, those who do not respond to God’s grace, will live a “fleshly” life of selfishness. These are the true unbelievers, whether they are inside or outside church buildings. The unbeliever will manifest fruits of the flesh. Here is the list of actions that manifest our natural selfish tendencies:

- sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality
- idolatry
- sorcery
- enmity
- strife
- jealousy
- fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, and divisions
- envy, drunkenness, and orgies

Now as for those who do respond to grace, they will live—although within the natural tendency to live in the flesh—according to the impulses of the Spirit, a life of unselfishness. And these are the true believers, whether they are inside or outside church buildings. The believer will manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which is:

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness and goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control

Against this list there is no law, because if the law is summed up by love for God and others, this list shows what that looks like! So there is truly no way to fake our way into the kingdom of God. Those who respond to grace, in time, will manifest the fruit of the Spirit, and those who do not will manifest the fruit of the flesh. We live a life either guided by the selfish flesh or by the unselfish Spirit. And the battle between both will follow us until our last day.

So, my dear reader, may you live and walk by the Spirit! May your living out of loving unselfish service make you into a living reminder of Jesus for those around you. And may your religion be centered by this action of the Spirit in and through you. ED

¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor,” bk. 5, chap. 5 in *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 1992).

² “I Will Trust My Saviour Jesus,” track 6 on *CityAlight, Yet Not I*, CityAlight Music, 2018.

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A THEOLOGY FOR THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

Editorial introduction: This article is the first in a new series that examines the ministry of deacons and deaconesses biblically and throughout history. Awareness of the biblical foundations and historical background of deacons and deaconesses reveals valuable insights into the purpose as well as the significance of the roles and functions of deaconesses and deacons.

The ministry of Jesus as a servant provides the foundation for a theology for the ministry of deacons and deaconesses. Jesus defined His ministry in terms of service by stating that He “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matt 20:28, KJV). The Greek words for “to be ministered unto” and “to minister” come from the root word *διακονέω*, which is derived from the word *διάκονος* (“deacon”). It means “one who renders service to another; an attendant, servant.”¹ This implies that deacons and deaconesses are people whose ministry is to render service to others. They are called to follow the example of Jesus.

There are wider implications that can be drawn from the ministry of deacons and deaconesses for the church at large. Deacons and deaconesses symbolize the work of the church. Therefore, every church member is a deacon or deaconess, even though he or she may not bear the title. Jesus calls everyone who becomes a member of His church to a ministry of service.

D. Edmond Hiebert states that “in His earthly ministry Jesus Himself was the ‘Deacon’ par excellence. He set the example not only for deacons but for all believers.”² James Monroe Barnett likens

the deacon as a symbol of the church's ministry. He says,

The origin of diaconate and its development in the first centuries reveals above all the deacon as symbol. He is the symbol par excellence of the Church's ministry. In the deacon is seen the indelible character of service Christ put on his ministry and of servant on those who minister. He is the embodiment of the first principle of this ministry which is sent to serve.³

Therefore, it is evident that Jesus' ministry as a servant provides the theological foundation for the ministry of deacons and deaconesses. As deacons and deaconesses follow Jesus' example, they are to enlist the members of the church into a life of service.

The deacons of the first-century Christian church were elected based upon spiritual qualifications—an "honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3, KJV). These qualifications enabled them to carry out their responsibilities of solving relational problems among the members, caring for the needs of the poor, and teaching the Word of God. Scriptural evidence and extrabiblical sources indicate that female deacons or deaconesses served the first-century Christian church.

They ministered to the women, especially to those who were poor and sick. Deaconesses have continued to serve in various church denominations throughout the centuries.

Although very little is written about the work of deacons and deaconesses in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these officers did exist and still do. The church has always recognized and embraced the theological grounds for their ministry. **ED**

¹ Harold K. Moulton, ed., *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), s.v. "διάκονος."

² D. Edmond Hiebert, "Behind the Word 'Deacon': A New Testament Study," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (April–June 1983), 160.

³ James Monroe Barnett, *The Diaconate—A Full and Equal Order: A Comprehensive and Critical Study of the Origin, Development, and Decline of the Diaconate in the Context of the Church's Total Ministry and a Proposal for Renewal* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 141.

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

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DISCIPLES KEEPING DISCIPLES:

THE LEADERSHIP PATH >PART 7

Who are the leaders in a church? Is the pastor the only leader? At churches, when members talk about leadership, it is usually about pastoral leadership alone. It seems an uphill task to make members understand that each member is a leader in a church. This article presents how each member can be a leader in their respective church.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Nominating committees¹ of each church appoint ministry leaders once every one or two years. Besides the ministry of elders, deacons, and deaconesses, there are several ministries such as Sabbath Schools, personal, family, health, social, community, prayer, hospitality, choir, Pathfinders, Adventurers, and women's ministries. In some small churches, all these departments may not be in function. Members of the church are nominated to be leaders of these ministries.

The following is a nominating committee outcome I observed in a large church. On October 8, 2017, the pre-nominating committee met with the church board members to choose a nominating committee to elect ministry leaders for the years 2018 and 2019. There were twenty-five people in the conference room. The chair of the combined committee proposed to choose five individuals among the men, women, and youth/young adults, totaling fifteen. The chair suggested that everyone write three names for each group. If each of the twenty-five had suggested different names from the congregation, then they would have suggested 225 names. But in total, when the suggested names were arranged, there were only about sixty unique names suggested. One of the pre-nominating committee members questioned why certain names were repeated again and again by many of the committee members instead of suggesting different names. The simple answer was that only about 20–25% of the

members were actively involved. Therefore, only such visible active members' names were suggested to be on the nominating committee. This percentage correlates with a survey I conducted for my own research, which indicated that about 21% of members were actively participating. The survey also revealed that 84% of members wanted to be involved in some ministry or other, but they themselves did not know what they could do. It is important that each church does a spiritual gift audit to help the members know what gifts they are imbued with.

GOAL FOR THE CHURCH

The goal for each church should be to create a leadership path that engages more and more members not only to take leadership roles, but also to actively participate according to their skills, talents, and gifts. I believe the design starts with the leader who intends to create the involvement path, as well as the ones who want to be leaders.

Every organization has its leaders. Organizations do talent audits to identify individual and organizational strengths and weaknesses, assess strengths in key roles, evaluate talent capabilities, and identify new talents from the pipeline. Talent audits are done in organizations to create a better match between people and roles, resulting in higher performance. The simple reasoning behind creating a better match is that people perform at their best when their abilities are well matched to their roles. An organization can get the best out of people if they know what they

can do, what they could be capable of, and where in the organization their abilities are best put to work. It is similar and different in church organizations: it is similar in that the church organization wants to best match talents with the assignment of responsibilities; it is different in that the church is not recruiting to employ, but attempting to match talents with ministry roles so that the member will accept the call to serve efficiently and interestedly.

The tool that church organizations have in hand to assess talents is the gift assessment. We believe every believer is imbued with gifts of the Holy Spirit. Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10, ESV). Paul writing to the Corinthians states,

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills (1 Cor 12:7-11, ESV).



“AS EACH HAS RECEIVED A GIFT, USE IT TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER, AS GOOD STEWARDS OF GOD’S VARIED GRACE”

1 PET 4:10, ESV

“GOD HAS SET IN THE CHURCHES DIFFERENT GIFTS. THESE ARE PRECIOUS IN THEIR PROPER PLACES, AND ALL MAY ACT A PART IN THE WORK OF PREPARING A PEOPLE FOR CHRIST’S SOON COMING.”

ELLEN G. WHITE

Yet when the nominating committee sits to nominate leaders for various responsibilities, the committee struggles to find the suitable or right person to assign each responsibility. Many members with different gifts are not brought to the forefront because they themselves have not assessed their gifts and the church does not have them in mind to appoint and use. As I observed among several of the Adventist churches in the Washington, DC, area, gift assessments have not been initiated and done for many years. Thus, only about 20% of the members are used and rotated every year by changing them to a different role. Therefore, I propose to initiate a gift assessment process to make people aware of their gifts and also to help the church identify God-given gifts in the membership. The names with their respective gifts could be kept on record to tap their gifts for engaging in the ministry and mission of the church.

CREATING LEADERSHIP PATH

I propose the following steps toward assessing gifts and creating a leadership path among the members:

1. Preach sermons on spiritual gifts to create an awareness that God has imbued His gifts to all believers.
2. Prepare a contextual assessment tool to be administered to the church.
3. Set up online booths to encourage members to do the assessment.
4. Offer a hard copy assessment for people who do not wish to do it online.
5. Take an inventory of the prevalent gifts in the church.
6. Assign responsibilities according to the gifts for effective ministry and mission engagement.

The challenge will be for churches to create sufficient opportunities to serve. Nelson Searcy advises that churches give ample opportunities to become involved, take on responsibilities, and thrive in a service environment.² Ellen G. White puts it beautifully: “God has set in the churches different gifts. These are precious in their proper places, and all may act a part in the work of preparing a people for Christ’s soon coming.”³ **ED**

¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (Nampa, ID: Review and Herald, 2015), 72.

² Nelson Searcy, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 139.

³ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 481.

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THE FALL: SIN AND THE CHARACTER OF GOD

In the previous article, we examined the second act of the great controversy—the fall. We saw how the fall introduced new worldview concepts into the universe. However, from a practical standpoint, can knowledge of the great controversy actually make a difference in our lives? Someone could easily suggest that the story behind suffering doesn't matter nearly as much as figuring out what to do with our experience of suffering. How can this perspective in worldview actually impact our lives as we live in a sin-infested world? Because the experience of pain is so personal, we'd like to answer these questions with a personal story.

A CONSEQUENCE OF THE FALL

The June before I, Katelyn, left home to attend graduate school, my mother was diagnosed with

**“... I HAVE
MADE THE
LORD GOD MY
REFUGE ...”**

PS 73:28, ESV

stage 4 cancer of the ureter. It was an aggressive strain of cancer, but the unusual thing was that she did not meet any of the cancer's common risk factors and did not even have a family history of cancer. There was no obvious reason for why this happened to her at fifty-six years of age. Over the summer I drove her to various medical appointments for check-ups and treatment. I made all the grocery runs and pitched in more around the house. At her request, though, I left for school at the end of the summer. It was difficult saying goodbye to her. Even at the time, I was not certain if I would see her again.

After leaving, I kept up with my parents over the phone. I would text my mom throughout the day, sneaking messages while attending class. As I was working on my studies on one side of the country, her body was quickly deteriorating on the other. By

October she had already been taken to the emergency room multiple times and had been admitted to the hospital for days at a time. There were evenings where planned phone calls were forgone because my father said they were rushing to the hospital. I would wait anxiously until I heard from him again, giving a sigh of relief when an update was finally sent. As her hospital trips became more frequent, I determined I needed to fly out to see her.

She was in the hospital when I arrived, and she had just decided she wanted to stop all active treatment and instead move to palliative care. I cried with her in her hospital room as we felt the weight of her imminent passing. My brother, his wife, and my grandmother all flew in over the next few days while she was still cognizant. We spent her last day together, talking to her and telling her what a difference she had made in so many lives. And then, she was gone.

After her memorial, I returned to my studies and tried to continue on with my life. My body was wracked with grief and overwhelmed. I struggled for quite some time to find a new normal for life without my mother. It was difficult, but through supportive friends, counseling, and a dependence on God, I began to find healing.

WHERE IS GOD IN THE FALL?

Since my mom's death, people have asked me if I was ever upset with God. After all, my mother was

a beloved woman. She was kind and compassionate and was a light to many. So why would a loving God allow this to happen to her? Why would He allow me to experience the pain of losing my mother? I must admit, though, that I was actually never upset with God. Yes, there were times I was angry at cancer and angry at the circumstance that my mother, myself, and my family were experiencing. I was angry and hurt that this was our story. But I was never angry with God. I was raised to view life through the lens of the great controversy story. I knew that "there was war in heaven" (Rev 12:7, KJV). I knew that the plague of sin had to spread across the world to ultimately demonstrate God's fairness and Satan's deceit. With this perspective, my mother's death was a casualty of war. It was not the result of an inactive or uncaring God. It was simply the tragic result of living in this world of sin.

Throughout my grieving process in the wake of her death, I did not see God as cold and uncaring. I did not see Him as weak and unable to help. Rather, I experienced a God who grieves with His people. In the New Testament, Jesus is called Emmanuel, meaning "God with us" (Matt 1:23, ESV). The prophet Isaiah calls Jesus "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3, ESV), and Peter notes that God is "not wishing that any should perish" (2 Pet 3:9, ESV). God Himself despises the effects of sin, and He cries with us in the face of death. But



**"THE LORD IS NEAR TO
THE BROKENHEARTED
AND SAVES THE
CRUSHED IN SPIRIT."**

PS 34:18, ESV

we have a loving God who is also grieved by sin and who stands with us through our grief. “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps 34:18, ESV).

In suffering, it can be very easy for us to place our focus on ourselves, others, or our circumstances. We may be tempted to blame others for our suffering or to blame ourselves for not doing something differently. “If only I had. . .,” we may say. Or “If only he hadn’t. . .”

We can get so caught up in the pain of suffering that we may find ourselves drifting away from God, when in fact He desires to be right with us, strengthening us and empathizing with us through our trials if we would only put our trust in Him. That was the experience of the psalmist Asaph, but we can see that he found a solution to his problem: “But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works” (Ps 73:28, ESV).

REACTIONS TO GOD AND THE FALL

Because pain and suffering are everyday experiences for humanity, and because they are uncomfortable and undesirable, every worldview seeks to explain the existence of suffering, or at least propose a way to inhibit it. Using Scripture as a guide, the explanation behind our miseries is clear. The reality of our world is that it is infested with evil as a result of the fall of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, even though suffering is commonplace in our lives, it makes sense that we disdain it because we ultimately were not created for it. Our Creator has always had desires of good for us. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jas 1:17, ESV). Even Jesus said, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matt 7:11, ESV).

There are some worldviews that acknowledge God and at the same time blame Him for all the evil that has poured out upon the earth. Some may suppose that maybe God is angry at them, and that is why this tragedy has happened. Or they may ask, “God, why have you done this?” There is even the phrase “act of God” used to describe a natural or unforeseen disaster. God is made out to be the cause of suffering. But when looking through the metanar-

“IF YOU THEN, WHO ARE EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN GIVE GOOD THINGS TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM!”

MATT 7:11, ESV

rative of the great controversy, we can see that Satan is the arbiter of evil, and God’s character of love remains true. Some may suggest that while God does not directly bring evil and punishment upon people, His inaction to prevent suffering in fact demonstrates evil within His own heart. A point to note on this, however, is that God has the larger story in mind, beyond the small pieces we can see. Ellen G. White describes this loftier plot point:

Satan’s rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin. The working out of Satan’s rule, its effects upon both men and angels, would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority. It would testify that with the existence of God’s government and His law is bound up the well-being of all the creatures He has made. Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin, and suffering its punishment.¹

CONCLUSION

It is clear from Scripture and Ellen G. White that the source of evil originated in Lucifer’s heart of pride and resentment. This is ultimately what brought pain, calamity, and difficulty into the world. However, it is also clear that God desires our good and wants what is best for us. The greatest evidence for this can be seen when He sent His Son Jesus to rescue all of humanity. While the second act of the great controversy is dark under the shadow of sin, the third act is filled by the light of the Son. We will explore this part of the story in the next article. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 499.

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REACHING THE HEART OF "THE OX"



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Two years ago, Pastor Borjan,¹ an Adventist World Radio evangelist, was contacted by a man called “The Ox,” a commander in a well-organized anti-government drug cartel in an undisclosed country.

The Ox told him, “I’ve been listening to the AWR audio messages and I have many questions. Would you be willing to meet with me? I’ll personally guarantee your safety.” Pastor Borjan was astonished, but he agreed, and after a difficult border crossing into that country, he met with The Ox. The commander began to speak with a quiet voice of authority:

“I have never been a religious person and have lived an active life of crime. For most of my adult life, I have been unable to sleep much at night. All I do is replay in my mind the things I’ve done. I am not a good man.”

For the next two hours, this powerful man confessed to crime after crime. He continued:

“Despite all this, when I began to receive the audio messages, I knew for the first time in my life that God is real, because as I listened to the messages, I had a strange sense of peace and of God’s presence. I now sleep much better at night, but I would like you to pray for me. I simply can’t believe that God can forgive me.”

Pastor Borjan said, “Yes, you have done some terrible things, but God’s grace is greater than all our sins combined. He is able and willing to forgive you if you ask Him. He died for you even before you were born—before you committed your first crime.”

They spoke into the early hours of the morning as the general asked questions and received answers from God’s Word.

A few weeks passed, and Pastor Borjan received another strange call. The caller said, “Do you remember the man who said he didn’t know if God could forgive him? Well, he now believes that God has forgiven him and he wants to be baptized!”

AWR was overjoyed at this news, and one year ago, Pastor Borjan had the privilege of baptizing The Ox along with three other generals and fifteen soldiers. They exchanged their guns for a new life in Jesus.

THE STORY CONTINUES

We hadn’t heard from The Ox in nearly a year, and all Pastor Borjan and the AWR team could do was pray for him. Then Pastor Borjan received a phone call from a soft-spoken woman whose voice he didn’t recognize. She said, “Pastor, I’m the daughter of the man you know as The Ox. Do you remember him?”

Did he ever! Immediately, Pastor Borjan replied that he did, and this woman continued:

“I’m calling to thank you for changing my father’s life. Knowing Jesus made all the difference. He found so much peace during this past year. Unfortunately, my dad died of a heart attack a few weeks ago, but before he passed away, he shared with me his AWR solar radio with all the presentations. I am now listening to the messages that changed his heart, and I called you because I want to say thank you for giving Jesus to my daddy, because he passed this wonderful truth to me. He wanted me to experience what he had found.”

It was a few moments before Pastor Borjan could speak again. There was a knot in his throat—not just for sadness at the death of this man, but a quiet rejoicing that salvation had reached him just in the nick of time. This once-hardened criminal had not only found Jesus, but a desire had grown in his heart for the salvation of his own daughter, and that desire—that prayer of his heart—had been answered. ED

¹ Name changed for safety.

This article was authored and supplied by AWR Staff.

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"As you sent me into the world, so
I have sent them into the world."

JOHN 17:18, ESV

