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**Six Thousand Churches
Planted in Papua New Guinea**



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Barnabas: The Son of Encouragement

>PART 3



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Barnabas, the son of encouragement, is known for his deeds. He rarely speaks. When the Bible records a speech of his, it's time to pay attention. We have only two recorded speeches of Barnabas (Acts 13:46–47; 14:15–17), and each is in unison with Paul.

During the first missionary journey Barnabas and Paul traveled to Lystra.

Notice these eight literary, thematic, and theological similarities between Acts 14:8–23, the record of their visit to Lystra, and the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:6–13.

1. The Good News. The gospel is emphasized in both passages, specifically in Acts 14:7, 15, 21, which links them with that pivotal phrase of Revelation 14:6—"the everlasting gospel."

2. Proclaim it loudly. When Barnabas and Paul speak in Acts 14:10, 14, they speak loudly. Except for word order, the Greek is identical in Acts 14:10 and Revelation 14:7; it literally means mega phono.

3. Warning against vain gods. When the people of Lystra equated Barnabas with Zeus and Paul with Hermes, the apostles were outraged. Barnabas and Paul called these false gods useless (Acts 14:15). In Revelation 14:8, Babylon, which literally means "gateway to the gods," or more accurately "gateway to the [false] gods," is described as fallen and, consequently, broken. Babylon similarly promotes false and useless worship.

4. Turn from worshipping falsehoods like Zeus, Hermes, and Babylon. Barnabas and Paul plead with their audience in Lystra, saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God" (Acts 14:15, ESV). The apostles are calling the people of Lystra to repent and turn from false worship. This, too, is the message of the three angels, to turn from Babylon, repent, and prepare for the judgment (Rev 14:7–8).

5. Both Acts 14:8–23 and Revelation 14:6–13 quote Exodus 20:11. Barnabas and Paul, as well as the three angels, beg their respective audiences to

worship the living God—the true God—by quoting Exodus 20:11: "[Who] made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (ESV). This quotation by Barnabas and Paul in Acts 14:15, and the three angels in Revelation 14:7, is important. These words were originally written by God's finger in stone (Exod 31:18). Barnabas and Paul, as well as those who proclaim the Three Angels' Messages, recognize that the very identity of God and His creative powers are seen through the lens of the Sabbath. And this is how the Living God, the Creator of the universe, would like to be known by all people.

6. The foundational issue of worship. In Lystra, decorated oxen are presented for sacrificial worship to the gods. In contrast, Barnabas and Paul enlighten the people of Lystra with the truth that the Creator God is a loving God who provides "rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17, ESV). This is the God whom the people of Lystra are invited to worship. In Revelation 14:6–7, there is a similar emphasis on worship. Hearers are invited to worship the God of the everlasting gospel.

7. International mission. In Acts 14:8–23, Barnabas and Paul are visiting and proclaiming the gospel in far-flung Lystra, a city that speaks a foreign language (Acts 14:11), has a pagan priest and temple (Acts 14:13), and no synagogue. Their mission in Lystra is the embodiment of Revelation 14:6, where the everlasting gospel is to be proclaimed "to every nation and tribe and language and people" (Rev 14:6, ESV).

8. Discipleship. When Barnabas and Paul visited Lystra and other cities, their goal was to establish disciples (Acts 14:21–23). They were successful. Timothy and other disciples came from Lystra. Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders to strengthen the disciples. The apostles suffered persecution, not for the sake of temporary converts but for lifelong dedicated disciples. This is the essential point in Revelation 14:6–13: disciples immersed in the everlasting gospel, who have endurance and "keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (Rev 14:12, ESV).

When Barnabas and Paul spoke in Lystra, they lovingly and courageously contextualized the Three Angels' Messages. Today, the ministry of Barnabas continues to encourage us. Will you speak like Barnabas and Paul, sharing the everlasting gospel wherever the Lord leads you? **ED**



ANTHONY R. KENT | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



Kelvin Waukave in the shelter used for a “hand church” with visitors from the South Pacific Division office.



Glenn with Kelvin's children: Jantina, Raven, Nini, and Tom Waukave (left to right).



Kelvin Waukave and Glenn Townend.

Six Thousand Churches Planted in Papua New Guinea: Elders Instrumental



SCAN FOR AUDIO

When the government of Papua New Guinea restricted group gatherings to a maximum of ten people in March 2020 because of the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, most churches in Papua New Guinea were not able to meet or worship together in their buildings.

Kelvin Waukave, as an elder in the large district church, worshipped on the first restricted Sabbath with his family in their house. Kelvin was not a preacher, but he had recently learned how to run small groups using the Discovery Bible Reading method. This is a simple reproducible method that anyone can do. It begins with a simple prayer and then two different people reading the Bible passage that will be discussed, all the way through. Then someone retells the Bible passage. Then Kelvin, as the leader of the group, asks five basic questions for the participants to answer. What is new? What surprises you? What don't you understand? What will you obey or apply? What will you share with someone this week? (The church in the South Pacific has recently created new open-ended questions for Discovery Bible Reading.) Most of the time is taken up with the biblical discussion as people share their thoughts answering the non-confronting and easy-to-answer questions. The group finishes with a prayer.

The Waukave family enjoyed the discussion and listening to each other's perspectives. The children were so excited by their experience—they were really understanding God and how to live for Jesus—that they invited their friends to



Kelvin and Glenn with Simon's family.



The uncompleted two-story home where a group of forty adults and children meet each Sabbath for worship.

Photos supplied by Glenn Townsend

come. The group grew from eight to eighteen. Thankfully the number of people permitted in groups as the pandemic progressed increased. Some of the neighbors were invited and joined in, and before long there were more than twenty-five youth and adults in their small group, each week reading through the Gospel of Mark and applying it to life. Kelvin built a temporary shelter outside the home because there was no space inside the house. Some of the people were wanting to follow Jesus, and they had more personal and group Bible studies. The local district pastor helped in this process and there were baptisms—eleven in the first year and four in the second. Now the group averages thirty to forty each Sabbath. Kelvin says there are still more new people from the nearby village who come to their small group.

COVID restrictions have long since gone and people are free to worship where they want to. Neither Kelvin nor his family want to go back to their large district church. They like knowing each

other and learning about Jesus together. They like being able to invite people to their home and learn how to do life together with Jesus. As an elder of the large district church, Kelvin has attached his new Sabbath Bible Discovery Group as a “hand church,” or a new sponsored church from the large organized or mother church. The district church has eight new “hand churches.” I have visited the district, seen the district church and many of the new churches. These churches were all started with the Discovery Bible Reading method by elders, deacons, or deaconesses during the COVID restrictions. They are within two to three kilometers of each other in a very densely populated area of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea.

The Discovery Bible Reading method is effective not only because it is simple and anyone can do it, but because it is based on solid biblical concepts. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is the teacher. Humans are not the teachers; they are the facilitators.

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).¹ No one acts as the Bible knowledge expert or teacher; all are humble and teachable and allow the Holy Spirit to be the teacher. The Holy Spirit promises to “guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is God and has the power to lead a person to Jesus and conviction to change their life. No human can change anyone else—we can only choose to change ourselves under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Because no one is the teacher, the Holy Spirit can be the teacher in the group and guide all who are open into the truth about Jesus.

Simon, a newly baptized member, lost his job at the airport when COVID started. This was devastating to him, his wife, and their young family—they could not afford to complete building their new house even though he now had time to build it. However, Simon had just learnt how to give group Bible studies, and he now had



No human can change anyone else—we can only choose to change ourselves under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

time to see if they would work in his village, which is located in a city. He asked his close relatives and their children to join them. They liked what they heard, and they told other village people about the joy they had learning about God together. Now in the uncompleted two-story home, a group of forty adults and children meet each Sabbath for worship with Simon and his family.

Discovery Bible Reading is also effective because of the prominence of the Holy Scriptures. Paul reminds Timothy, “And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. *All Scripture is God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:15–17, emphasis supplied). The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit and have a spiritual power that can change lives. They reveal Jesus and His full and free salvation and the basis for growth of any disciple of Jesus (see also John 5:39–40; Heb 4:12). If they are read, discussed, and applied, the Scriptures will change lives from within (1 Thess 2:13).

A leading businessman, who is an elder in one city church, was concerned with the amount of crime, which historically came from the local settlement. When visiting the

settlement one day he discovered it had slippery clay paths and poor drainage. He cemented the paths and made drains. The people were overwhelmed with the kindness. They wanted to know the God he served. But the businessman was not a preacher. He offered Discovery Bible Reading groups. Young men and women joined the group, and as they read and discussed the Bible together, the Holy Spirit changed them from the inside out. Today at the place they used to drink, smoke, take drugs, gamble, and plan the next crime, they have a place of worship where they run their Discovery Bible Reading group.

In my personal reading of the gospels this year I rediscovered Jesus’ methods of developing faith. Jesus preached and told stories to large crowds; but one-on-one or in small groups, although He still told stories, He asked questions. More than four hundred questions! From my perspective there are four types of questions Jesus asked.

1. Jesus asked questions to start a conversation with a person. For example, in a crowd Jesus asked who touched Him. He knew who had touched Him, but He asked the question to have a conversation with a woman who had shown great faith (Luke 6:3).

2. Jesus asked the Pharisees if they had read the Scriptures about David eating the bread from the temple (Matt 12:1–12). This kind

of question asks the person if they are aware of biblical facts.

3. When talking to the young lawyer Jesus asked him, “What is written in the Law?” (knowing the facts) but then asks, “How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26). In other words, what do you think the Scripture means? Such questions challenge people to reflect on the message and apply it in their life.

4. Finally, Jesus asks questions to challenge people to faith. That is exactly what He did with the twelve disciples in Caesarea-Philippi. “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” and then, “Who do you say I am?” (Matt 16:13–16). Jesus asked questions about relationships, biblical facts, Bible interpretation, and possible faith application. Asking questions was Jesus’ method of building faith in Him. The questions in the Discovery Bible Reading method can do the same thing.

I could take you to homes, fields, businesses, orange groves, parks, gardens, building yards, and offices all over Papua New Guinea where lay people have faithfully invited family, neighbors, and friends to small groups and simply conducted a Discovery Bible Reading. They have trusted the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and asked questions like Jesus did, to make disciples. This simple process has led to more than six thousand new churches being planted in Papua New Guinea in the past three years. All of them started with four to twelve people and now have between thirty and 180 participating. This is explosive growth in a country of about ten million people. ED

¹ All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

Glenn Townend is the president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia.

Back to the Altar



SCAN FOR AUDIO

What do you do when others look to you for spiritual leadership and you are tired, weary, and worn? Do you pretend your strength is invincible? Do you put on an act that you are untouched by discouragement, trials, and darkness?

Elijah the prophet stood unflinchingly before a vast crowd of past believers in the living God. His voice sounded like a trumpet across Mount Carmel, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people did not answer him a word” (1 Kgs 18:21).¹

Throwing caution to the wind, Elijah eyed the broken-down altar of the living God. He knew what he must do. He called out to all the people, “Come near to me.’ So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar to the Lord which had been torn down” (1 Kgs 18:30).

While the crowd stared sullenly, the lone prophet dug a trench around the altar. Thoughtfully, he placed the wood on the altar, butchered an ox, and placed it on the wood. He stepped back and eyed the altar, the wood, and the sacrifice covered with the relentless dust blowing from more than three years of drought.

He commanded that four pitchers of precious water be poured over the sacrifice. The water soaked the bloody sacrifice and dripped onto the wood. He ordered four more pitchers of water to be poured out over the sacrifice, and the tinder-dry wood soaked up the water. He called for four more pitchers of water, and the water streamed down the sides of the altar and filled the trench . . . and the people wondered if the prophet of the living God had lost his mind.



At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said,

“O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God” (1 Kgs 18:36–39).

Later that same day, Elijah prayed seven times for rain to come upon a land that had received no rain in response to the prayers of seven thousand faithful believers. The prophet prayed and prayed until one small cloud appeared over the Mediterranean Sea, and he immediately had his servant inform King Ahab that he must leave the mountain before the heavy rains stopped him.

As the rain fell in torrents, it was Elijah who ran in front of the king’s chariot. The prophet ran mile after mile through the mud, down the mountain, and all the way to Jezreel. It appeared that nothing could stop Elijah.

But wet, weary, and hungry, the prophet faced an unexpected obstacle: the wrath of Queen Jezebel. She sent him this message: “So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.’ And he

was afraid and arose and ran for his life” (1 Kgs 19:2, 3).

He ran and ran and ran until he could run no more. How could such a mighty man of God run away from one threat from an angry woman after refusing to fear Ahab’s accusations or the unsmiling faces of a vast crowd of unbelievers? Where was God in all of this?

Elijah ran into the wilderness, sat down under a juniper tree, and begged God to take his life. He felt discouraged by the angry threat of the queen when he had hoped for an immediate national revival. He was wading through a deep spiritual and emotional darkness. The tired prophet fell fast asleep.

Into that spiritual darkness came an angel sent by God. The angel touched him and told him, “‘Arise, eat.’ Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again” (1 Kgs 19:5–6). God sent an angel again and again. God provided the run-away prophet with food and fresh water. With that God-given nourishment, Elijah hiked all the way to Horeb, which was called the mountain of God.

It was there in a cave on Mount Horeb that God cried out to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kgs 19:9). It was and continues to be a powerful question.

Are you tired, weary, and worn? Are you discouraged by what God’s people are saying about you or to you? Are you disillusioned with the walls and ceilings you are running up against in doing what God has called you to do in the church? God asks you, elder in the church or leader in the congregation, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Why are you sitting in the darkness when you know the God of the Light? What made you lose your grip on the One who loves you the most and forget how He led

you in the past? What must you do now, while all you may be seeing is darkness?

Here are some practical steps to live at the altar of God when you are exhausted or discouraged:

1. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:1, 2).

a. Look for a fresh picture of Jesus each morning as you read His written Word. He is the One who is with you in your storm. He is the One who will never leave you. He is the One who will grow your faith at the very time Satan hopes to destroy your faith in the Lord Jesus.

b. Praise Jesus for who He is. Sing and pray praise to the Lord. Praising God is a powerful weapon against darkness and discouragement.

2. Remember that God runs with you in your darkness.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa 43:2, 3). Train your mind to claim God’s promises of His presence through your day.

3. Notice how He cares for you when you have nothing.

“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). Make a prayer journal and record how God is providing for you. Tell others of His care for you.

4. Listen to His answers. “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer 33:3). Take time after you study God’s Word and pray to be still and to listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say about what you read. Test all you hear by the written Word of God.

5. Return in His power. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 4:6). Re-engage with your ministry as an elder with a fresh dependence on the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

6. Refuse to let discouragement or failures define you. “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Satan wants you to look back at all your failures. The Lord Jesus calls you to look forward to all He has called you to be and to do by His great grace and power!

7. Pour your life into your God-given Elisha. “Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place” (1 Kgs 19:16). Ask God for the name of a young person of your own gender that you can mentor to do what God has called you to do. Raise up a young leader by the power of the Lord to replace you!

Elder, find courage and joy in the following inspiration!


For the disheartened there is a sure remedy—faith, prayer, work. Faith and activity will impart assurance and satisfaction that will increase day by day. Are you tempted to give way to feelings of anxious foreboding or utter despondency? In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God. He knows your need. He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary. Fear not that He will

fail of fulfilling His promise. He is eternal truth. Never will He change the covenant He has made with those who love Him. And He will bestow upon His faithful servants the measure of efficiency that their need demands. The apostle Paul has testified: “He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. . . . Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.² ED

¹ Unless otherwise marked, all Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the NASB.

² Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 164.

Don MacLafferty, MDiv, is the president of In Discipleship in Chattanooga, Tennessee, United States.



Ask God for the name of a young person of your own gender that you can mentor to do what God has called you to do. Raise up a young leader by the power of the Lord to replace you!



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Children of Ishmael: Walls of Separation or Bridges of Understanding?

EDITORIAL NOTE

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

The Seventh-day Adventist Church identifies its mission with the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12 and is compelled to reach “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.”¹ For the past two thousand years, there seemed to be a clear distinction of people groups in the world. Mission to all cultures required that missionaries be sent abroad to far-off countries where most of the non-Christians lived. In the twentieth century, this mission movement enabled individuals to be sent to those lands, especially where descendants of Ishmael lived, but after many years there was negligible success. However, a very interesting scenario has played out in front of our eyes towards the end of the twentieth century. We find that millions of people from different social and religious backgrounds, who used to live in those far-off countries, are now dispersing throughout the world and living in our neighborhoods. Today, in the traditionally Christian West, we have immigration from the East, including those who claim their lineage from Ishmael. According to Pew Research today, 25 percent of the world population is Muslims. As a church, how do we connect with millions of those people not just in other parts of the world, but to those who are now living in our neighborhoods, going to school with our children, doing jobs alongside of us, and can be seen in big numbers in our society? As a church, what should be our response to these neighbors?

Could it be possible that God is bringing them to us so that we can bless them in His name by showing the love of Jesus?

There are two possible reactions to this overwhelming migrant influx in the West. One reaction is to ignore their presence and continue business as usual. If one is driven by fear, such as the fear of losing one's job to immigrants, or fearing violent behaviors from them, then the reaction would be of prejudice. Aligning mission to meet their needs would seem out of sync, and any realignment of mission to those who are negatively perceived would seem to be a waste of resources.

There is another way to respond. Instead of seeing them with prejudice and ignoring them, the church may see that immigrant influx within the plan of God, orchestrated by God to make the work of the church easier than before. We may realize that something more is compelling them to come to our borders than just war or economic benefits. Could it be possible that God is bringing them to us so that we can bless them in His name by showing the love of Jesus? When the church sent many missionaries to the region of the world known as the 10/40 Window, there was negligible success after a century of work due to limitations of sharing the gospel in those countries—especially in the Middle East. However, now because of migration those same people are living in countries where there is general freedom to share. God seems to be giving the church another chance to share the love of Jesus with them.

The unbelievable thing is that God has already revealed that He has a plan for the children of Ishmael before the end of time. As I travel to different parts of the world, one question that Christians

often ask is, “What does the Bible say about the role of Islam in the Last Day events?” At the turn of the twenty-first century, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, Protestant Christians paid keen attention to the apocalyptic role of Islam.² Early pioneers and Adventist theologians have traditionally accepted that Revelation 9 is about Islam³ but have debated whether Daniel 11:40–45 has any relevance to Islam.⁴ However, there is a prophecy that has gone unnoticed that refers to the role of the children of Ishmael in the end times. We notice the following prophecy in Isaiah 60:7: “All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall ascend with acceptance on My altar, and I will glorify the house of My glory.”

At the outset one may not be aware that this verse relates to the children of Ishmael or the people of the East, but by understanding the names mentioned here (Kedar and Nebaioth), the link becomes obvious. This verse plays a crucial part in the plan of God for the children of the East in general, and children of Ishmael in particular. Who were Kedar and Nebaioth? These two names mentioned in Isaiah 60:7 can also be observed in Genesis 25:13 as follows: “And these were the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar. . . .”

Kedar and Nebajoth were the sons of Ishmael and grandsons of Abraham and Hagar. Isaiah 60:7 seems to claim that the children of Hagar (through her son Ishmael) will come when the light of the gospel is proclaimed (Isa 60:1).

They shall come into the presence of God, and God declares that “they shall ascend with acceptance on My altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory” (v. 7).

Today the Islamic religion and the Qur'an specifically claim their heritage from Ishmael, who is mentioned in the biblical narrative. Richard Davidson, a renowned Old Testament scholar of the Adventist Church, concurs in his paper on the “Children of the East” that the Qur'an and other Islamic traditions trace the genealogy of their prophet and Islamic Arabs to Ishmael son of Abraham. Though the direct link to the prophet of Islam is far from certain, Davidson believes that “the general genealogical tie between the nomadic tribes of northern Arabia . . . and that the nomadic tribes descended from Ishmael has solid support from a biblical-historical perspective.”⁵

I am convinced that this migration of the people from the East may represent something more than a random, haphazard movement of people from the lands of Ishmael. It could be God's way of fulfilling this prophecy in Isaiah 60. When the church recognizes that their coming is within the plan of God, and that we have a part to play in that plan, then our perspective changes towards the people who claim the lineage of Ishmael. The recognition that actually God is doing something changes our perspective from indifference to appreciation that God is opening a way for us to fulfill His mission. The question for us is: What is our perspective of their presence and what we are going to do about it collectively as a church and individually as Adventist believers?

BUILDING BRIDGES

Perhaps we can begin by accepting appropriate values to build bridges of understanding as we engage with our Muslim friends.

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Since most Christians generally eat pork and drink alcohol, Muslims do not consider present-day Christians to be the true People of the Book since they do not eat *halal* (or clean) foods. However, in the Qur'an it says, "Among the People of the Book are some who have faith" (Surah Al-Imran 3:110). Some Muslim scholars have pointed out that they see Seventh-day Adventists as the true "People of the Book" among Christians because of their lifestyle and because they distinguish between *halal* and *haram* (clean and unclean), abstaining from pork and alcohol.

APPRECIATING OUR DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

In building bridges of understanding, we need to identify the similarities and differences between us. This was demonstrated in Paul's ministry at Mars Hill (Acts 17) when he used concepts from other faith orientations as footprints of truth to link to biblical truths.

PRESENT THE MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT

Seventh-day Adventists are called to prepare people of the

world from different faith orientations for the soon return of Jesus the Messiah. The judgment and Second Coming of Jesus can be found in the Bible (Rev 22:12; John 14:1-3) but are also accepted by most mainline Muslims. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, many Muslims believe that because of current world events, Jesus will come again during their own lifetime.⁶

RESPECT OTHER CULTURES

We respect other people's culture and religious beliefs as we endeavor to share the love of Jesus with them in humility, while we are confident of our own beliefs. By considering the existing religious-cultural diversities among the people, our engagement with them needs to be done with consideration of their cultural values.

BARRIERS TO BUILDING BRIDGES

Have you wondered why sometimes Adventists do not connect with Muslims? Some reasons are:

- **Lack of knowledge.** Many Adventists do not know much about their faith, so they don't know how to connect.

- **Fear factor.** Many Adventists are afraid of connecting with them because they presume that they are militant. Like us, most Muslims also like to live in peace and have the same felt needs.

- **Cultural barriers.** Most Muslims operate from the Near Eastern cultural paradigm. Sometimes, Adventists find it challenging to relate to these cultures and therefore don't know what to do.

- **Confrontational approach.** Sometimes Adventists use a confrontational approach of denouncing other people's religion, prophet, or religious book. This method generally does not cultivate friendships and build bridges.

HOW CAN MY CHURCH AND I DEMONSTRATE THE LOVE OF JESUS TO OUR COMMUNITY?

Is it possible that most Adventists do not know how to connect with people from Middle Eastern or South Asian religions because of some misconceptions?

Some may think that relating with people from Middle Eastern religions requires a lot of expertise. But one of the best ways to build bridges is to simply develop relationships with people. Does one



Some may think that relating with people from Middle Eastern religions requires a lot of expertise. But one of the best ways to build bridges is to simply develop relationships with people.

require a vast knowledge about how to relate to the people around us or do acts of kindness?

Building bridges among the people from any background should be anchored on “Christ’s method alone,” as Ellen G. White states in *The Ministry of Healing*. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with people as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He invited them, ‘Follow Me.’”⁷

We may be eager to preach the truth to people, but it seems like a daunting task when done with people who are so different in culture and religion to the one we are used to that we become discouraged. But the local church can make an intentional effort to share acts of kindness with their community by finding out the needs of the community. People have needs, and instead of leaving it

to one or two individuals who struggle on their own to do acts of kindness in their community because they are driven by Micah 6:8 “to show mercy,” it could be an intentional effort of the regional church or the local church to meet the needs of the community, especially if they are from another culture or religion. Mingling with people, meeting their needs, and winning their confidence were all things that Jesus did, because He desired their good. Through us, they can be introduced to the love of Jesus. ED

¹ All biblical quotations are from the New King James Version.

² Thomas S. Kidd, “Islam in Apocalyptic Perspective” (Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor University, 2010), 6.

³ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan & Cadell, 1776); and Gordon L. Ziegler, *Trumpets Sound Again* (n.p.: Benevolent Enterprises, 2010), 93.

⁴ Miguel Luna, “Is Any Trace of Islam in Daniel 11? A Theological Perspective on Daniel 11:40–45” (Biblical Research

Committee, November 11, 2015); Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “What Is the Message of Daniel 11:40–45?” (Biblical Research Institute, Seventh-day Adventist Church, April 2, 2013), <https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-ot-texts/daniel-1140-45>; Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding Daniel’s Prophecies* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1975); Robert D. Brinsmead, *The King of the North and the King of the South* (Conway, MO: Gems of Truth, 1960); Taylor G. Bunch, *The Book of Daniel* (n.p., 1950); Donn W. Leatherman, “Adventist Interpretation of Daniel 10–12: A Diagnosis and Prescription,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1996); and Tim Roosenberg, *Islam and Christianity in Prophecy* (Calhoun, GA: Teach Services, 2021).

⁵ Richard Davidson, “The Children of the East,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 14, no. 1 (2019): 76.

⁶ Michael Lipka and Conrad Hackett, “Why Muslims Are the World’s Fastest-Growing Religious Group,” Pew Research Center, April 6, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), 143.

Petras Bahadur is the director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations, Silver Spring, MD, USA.

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Matthew 13: The Parable of the Sower

INTRODUCTION

I watched the news recently. Little of it surprised me. There were stories about conflicts between nations. Invasions across borders and refugees fleeing for their lives. Political leaders facing trial for corruption and fraud. Promises to voters about how wonderful things would be if they would vote for a particular political party. The nature of the kingdoms of this world was plain to see.

As Christians we live as citizens of those nations and kingdoms. But we are also citizens of the kingdom of God—an altogether different kingdom, according to the Gospels. It is Matthew who gives us the richest exposition of Christ's teaching on the kingdom of God. John uses the term only twice. Mark and Luke have only two parables each on the kingdom of God. Matthew, by contrast, recalls *eleven* parables of the kingdom. And in chapter 13, he provides us with a summary of Jesus' teaching by bringing together seven of those parables.

So, according to Jesus, what is His kingdom like? Well, it is like a sower; like wheat and weeds growing together; like a tiny mustard seed growing into a large plant; like a Jewish housewife kneading dough in her kitchen; like a laborer discovering hidden treasure; like a pearl merchant discovering a pearl beyond his wildest dreams; like fishermen pulling in the net after a day of labor. None of these images exhausts the kingdom, but each illustrates a significant aspect.

Did you notice that Jesus never uses images taken from the kingdoms of His time? He never says, "Now the kingdom of God is like a Roman legion; it's like Caesar sitting on his throne." He never says, "Now the kingdom of God is like the Coca-Cola Corporation." The images He uses are completely different because His kingdom is completely different. The kingdom of God is not a human empire or business. And we have to get that right, because if we get the kingdom wrong, we will inevitably get the church wrong.

Let's look at Christ's first parable (Matt 13:3–9). As Adventists, we like the parable of the sower, for we are a task-oriented church—to preach the gospel to the world. And in this parable of the sower, we have often seen an image of ourselves, sowing the seed of the gospel in the world.

But what, exactly, does the parable of the sower tell us about the kingdom of God? Let's take a closer look. We're used to reading, "Behold, a sower went out to sow" (Matt 13:3, NKJV). Most versions translate it that way. But the text actually says, "Now *the sower* went out to sow." Not just any sower, but one in particular. And who might that be? Well, in the next parable of

the wheat and weeds, Jesus says explicitly, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man" (Matt 13:37, NRSV). Almost certainly, therefore, in the parable of the sower, *the sower* is Jesus Himself. This is a parable showing how *Jesus* sowed the seed of the kingdom of God, how *Jesus* spread the good news of the kingdom.

When Jesus spoke about the sower, He had in mind how a Near Eastern farmer of His time sowed seed. The farmer would scatter seed everywhere and then plow it into the thin soil. And that haphazard, indiscriminate scattering of seed summed up how Jesus spread the gospel.

But this parable is not just about how the gospel is given. It also shows how the gospel is *received*. It gets a mixed reception—from hard footpaths, thistles, stony ground, and good soil. And we all know what a mixed reception is. Just recall those sermons we've heard encouraging us to share our faith more fervently. Some may have responded, but others didn't. And Matthew's Gospel underlines Christ's mixed reception: Pharisees who oppose Him; Peter who believes and then denies Him; the rich young ruler who won't commit; the women who follow Him, and so on. All kinds of people; all kinds of soil; all kinds of results. Yet despite the mixed reception, the Sower still went out to sow. And there was a harvest.

But what, exactly, is that harvest? The harvest is clearly important to the sower. It's why he went out to sow in the first place. He sowed seed so that there would be a harvest. And what a harvest! Each of the seeds that fell on good ground yielded a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred-fold. Absolutely unbelievable. Yes, unbelievable—because even a thirty-fold return would be generous, let alone the mind-boggling sixty-fold or the utterly fantastical hundred-fold. The average yield on a Near Eastern farm was about 7.5-fold, or in a good year, ten-fold. But that's Christ's way in these parables. He deliberately exaggerates to make His point. In other parables, a mustard seed grows into a tree—when it's only a shrub about three meters high. A Jewish housewife kneads dough that weighs about 110 pounds (50 kg). Imagine it! A woman wrestling with a ball of dough weighing 110 pounds. He exaggerates because the kingdom of God exceeds our wildest dreams.

But again, what exactly is *the harvest* of the kingdom? Frequently, we simply assume the harvest is baptisms. Obviously, baptisms are important, and we rejoice for every one of them. But this parable has its eye not simply on baptisms. We can count baptisms. But evangelism also results in matters of the heart and soul that are of

primary importance, but which can't be counted so easily. When the Pharisees asked Jesus what was the greatest of all the commandments, He replied that it was to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind (Matt 22:37). And it seems that this type of spiritual harvest, in which a person's whole being is reshaped and realigned with God's purpose, is the focus of Jesus' parable of the sower. We see that in the words He uses.

What Jesus says, literally, is that the seed sown in good ground produced "fruit." That's a favorite word in Matthew's Gospel. To the Pharisees Jesus said, "Bear fruit worthy of repentance" (3:8, NRSV); concerning prophets, He said, "You will know them by their fruits" (7:16, 20, NRSV); He talks about the fruits of the kingdom (21:43). In Matthew's Gospel, "fruit" often describes spiritual maturity. The fruit of the kingdom of God is spiritual fruit (see Luke 8:15). The harvest of the kingdom of God is faith, love, joy, peace, compassion, sacrifice. Let's ask ourselves this question: In twelve months from now, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could report a thirty-fold, sixty-fold, or hundred-fold increase in those gospel virtues? And that harvest begins when the sower sows seed haphazardly and indiscriminately on all types of soil and waits for God to produce the harvest.

CONCLUSION

What Jesus sets out in the parables of Matthew 13 in general, and in the parable of the sower in particular, is the general theory of the kingdom. It is not His strategy for church growth in Sweden, Kenya, or Papua New Guinea in the twenty-first century. It is the theory of the kingdom. In this first parable of the kingdom in Matthew 13, He sets out some principles of His kingdom theory: like the sower, preach the gospel indiscriminately. Do not simply target good soil. Give every type of soil the opportunity to produce a spiritual harvest. That is the theory.

Theory has a bad name in some quarters. In fact, perhaps you have said, "Don't waste my time with theory. I'm a practical person." Well, let me tell you something. There is nothing so practical as a good theory. Without a good theory, we can tick boxes to give the illusion that we are busy. Without a good theory we will aim at the wrong target. Successful practice is applied theory. In our witnessing and evangelism, how about applying Christ's theory—otherwise known as the parable of the sower! ED

Laurence A. Turner, PhD, is a principal lecturer emeritus in Old Testament at Newbold College of Higher Education, Bracknell, UK, and adjunct external higher degree research supervisor at Avondale University, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.

Matthew 13: The Parables of the Wheat and Weeds; Mustard Seed; Yeast

INTRODUCTION

The Guinness Book of World Records is one of the world's best sellers. The reason is simple. People are fascinated by the fastest, biggest, and best. Usain Bolt, the world's fastest human, ran 100 meters in 9.58 seconds. Sultan Kösen, the tallest man, is 251 centimeters (8 ft 2.8 in). And so on. Success or fame frequently rests on being impressive.

But Christ's parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 cause us to adjust our thinking. After His first parable about the sower, showing how the kingdom *is given*, Jesus tells three parables about how the kingdom *operates*. And He says nothing about the fastest, biggest, or best—in fact, just the opposite.

His second parable (Matt 13:24–30) concerns a farmer who sows wheat in his field. But an enemy then plants weeds among the wheat. Such people were the ancient equivalent of creators of computer viruses. In the parable, the wheat is now infested with bearded darnel—a plant indistinguishable from wheat in the early stages of development, but clearly observed later. Bearded darnel has a bitter, unpleasant taste, and usually harbors a poisonous fungus.

But what does this tell us about the kingdom of God? Well, just like the farm workers in the parable, our first instinct is to make quick judgments and act impulsively. And that is just what the enemy wants. He plants weeds among the wheat *hoping* that the farmer will be impatient, *knowing* that if he is too impatient to wait for the harvest, then *there will be no harvest*. The only way to trump the enemy is to allow matters to run their course. Let the wheat and weeds both grow and come to maturity. At harvest, any fool can tell the difference between wheat and bearded darnel. So what at first sight appears to be a crisis is solved by applying that most difficult of virtues: patience. For in the kingdom of heaven, the final judgment is God's business, not ours. If we're too quick to jump in and judge who is who, we're likely to root up prize wheat thinking it is weeds. Before the harvest, the work of the kingdom is not to judge who should be uprooted but to plant the people of the kingdom in the world. Be patient.

Even when you have correctly identified bearded darnel in the field of wheat, as Jesus said, it isn't best to pull it up immediately. If you do, you'll uproot some wheat with it. If we are to be an agent for the kingdom of God, like the farmer in the parable, we must learn to be patient. Parables convey general truths. So, perhaps on occasions, more immediate action is necessary. But generally not. Be patient.

And Jesus told them yet another parable about sowing seeds (Matt 13:31–32). But in this parable, Jesus turns His atten-

tion to one individual seed: **a mustard seed**. The mustard seed Jesus identifies is indeed tiny. One kilogram (2.2 pounds) of mustard seeds contains about 750,000 of them. Here, Christ's main point is the contrast in size between the beginning and the ending. Starting from a tiny seed, it can grow by autumn into a plant standing up to four meters (13 feet) tall, with birds resting on its rigid stems.

But what does this tell us about the kingdom of heaven? In this parable Christ uses common Old Testament images. For example, in Nebuchadnezzar's vision of Daniel 2, the small rock, representing the kingdom of God, strikes the image and grows enormously until it fills the earth (Dan 2:35)—rather like the tiny mustard seed, representing the kingdom of God, becoming a “tree.”

Note that Jesus calls the mustard plant a “tree,” even though it isn't a tree. Jesus calls it a tree because His eye is on the Old Testament. There, a tree is a common symbol for a kingdom. For example, King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream (Dan 4:10–12), in which the kingdom of Babylon is like a great tree with its top in the heavens and birds in its branches. The prophet Ezekiel likens the kingdom of Assyria to a tree, a mighty cedar, with its top in the heavens—and again, birds nesting in its branches (Ezek 31:3–9).

And Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard tree with birds in its branches. But the kingdom of heaven's mustard tree seems insignificant next to Nebuchadnezzar's tree that could be seen from the ends of the earth, or Assyria's mighty cedar with its top in the heavens. That's because Christ's kingdom is surprising—not a mighty cedar, but a humble garden plant. For this is a kingdom based not on might nor on power but on faith in Jesus.

As agents for the kingdom of God, we must reject the standards which this world counts as greatness. Of course, we need to strive for excellence in all we do as a church. But our goal is not self-congratulation. Our primary goal is to be faithful to Christ, to model the principles of His kingdom—like the One who came to serve rather than to be served, content to be a humble mustard plant rather than a cedar of Lebanon.

And then Jesus gives one final illustration of how the kingdom of heaven operates (Matt 13:33). Here we meet **a woman kneading dough**, preparing leavened bread. And for this she needs to add yeast to the dough. But as with the other parables, a surprise awaits us here too. It concerns the amount of flour. This woman is kneading “three measures” of flour. That is, more than one hundred pounds (more than 45 kg) of flour. And there she is in the kitchen, kneading and kneading and kneading . . . Jesus is exaggerating. Just as He did when He called

the mustard plant a tree. And His exaggeration makes His main point: a small amount of yeast raises a large amount of dough, just as the tiny mustard seed grows into a large plant.

But this parable does not simply repeat the mustard seed parable. What Jesus says literally is that the woman “hid” the leaven in the dough. That's an odd way to put it. Consult any bread recipe you can find and I doubt if any would say, “Hide the yeast in the flour.” But Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a woman who “hides” leaven in a batch of dough. For this is a hidden kingdom and will reach its goal like yeast working in dough—in hidden ways. So, we can be agents for this kingdom not only through faithfully preaching the word in our church services, or by public evangelism, but also through witnessing for the kingdom in understated ways, like yeast in a batch of dough. People commit to the gospel not just because we change their minds but because they see the difference it makes. As Jesus said, the kingdom works within us. And it works in hidden and surprising ways, such as those times we meet people who tell us that something we said and have long forgotten changed their lives for the better. Our words were like yeast working in dough—secretly, silently, in hidden ways. And Jesus said, “This is the kingdom of God.”

As Ellen G. White wrote, “The leaven of truth works secretly, silently, steadily, to transform the soul.”¹

CONCLUSION

In a world hypnotized by size and power, Christ reminds us that His kingdom embraces the slow things, the small things, the seemingly insignificant and hidden things.

So, what counts as success in the kingdom of God? Christ calls us to be faithful rather than to be famous. And in the kingdom our best efforts will often be hidden in the lives of those we serve, where its influence can sometimes be seen only by faith, and often seems to produce insignificant results. But not by the measure of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom in which the harvest is coming; the seed is growing; the yeast is doing its work. Let us rejoice and be glad. Let us celebrate the slow and patient things, the apparently insignificant things, the hidden things. For Jesus says, this is the kingdom of God. ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1900), 98.

Laurence A. Turner, PhD, is a principal lecturer emeritus in Old Testament at Newbold College of Higher Education, Bracknell, UK, and adjunct external higher degree research supervisor at Avondale University, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.

Matthew 13: The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl

INTRODUCTION

Many people spend their lives waiting for that stroke of luck that will give them the break they long for—hoping to clinch that business deal that will set them up for life. Over the centuries, they have gone to great lengths to achieve their dreams. Such as those people in seventeenth-century Holland who made and lost huge fortunes speculating on tulips, or the one hundred thousand who migrated to the Yukon region of Canada in the 1890s in the great Klondike Gold Rush.

People were no different in the time of Jesus. And Jesus used parables to explain to them what His kingdom was about. In Matthew 13 Jesus tells two parables that show how the kingdom is *acquired*.

The first of these two parables is in Matthew 13:44. In the ancient East, wealthy people divided their estate into three parts: one part for doing business, one part converted into portable wealth such as jewels they could grab and carry off in times of trouble, and one part hidden, with the hope of returning to recover it. Some, of course, never returned, and this is the setting for this parable. Jesus describes a man plowing a field. He is a day laborer. The pay for his services would have been one denarius per day. This was just enough to support himself and his family. So here he is, in a field, with an ox and plow, when the plow hits an object in the ground. Out of curiosity he stops and bends down to see what he's hit. And then he sees it. Hidden treasure! His eyes grow wide in amazement. He'd been looking for no more than one day's wages, a single denarius, but found treasure instead. So with his heart pounding inside his chest, he covers it up, dashes home, sells every last stick he possesses, borrows money up to the hilt, and buys the field to get the treasure. And, says Jesus, this is just like the kingdom of heaven.

But what, exactly, does buried treasure and a farm laborer tell us about the kingdom of God? First, the value of the kingdom. When the plow hit the pot containing the treasure, what did the plowman do? Did he sit down and ask himself, "I wonder what this is"? No! He knew immediately. He knew that people don't bury in a field a pot full of worthless baubles. He knew it was treasure. And he knew it immediately.

This parable tells us something else about the kingdom. He had to possess it. But he was only a laborer. It would take everything he had or could beg or borrow to buy the field. But he did it without thinking twice. In other words, compared to the kingdom of God, nothing else matters.

A helpful exercise for us is to make a list of treasure in our lives—beliefs, books,

good advice, experiences, people, and so on. When we do that, we often realize how much treasure we actually have. And we recognize that too often we concentrate on our poverty rather than celebrate our riches and treasures. And the greatest of these, says Jesus, is the kingdom of God.

But not only does Jesus' parable tell us the value of the kingdom, it also shows us how the man acquired the treasure. Its discovery was totally unexpected. When he set out to plow that day, he had no inkling that he would find it. And that, says Jesus, is often the way it is with the kingdom. We meet people in the Gospels who had that experience—like Matthew himself (Luke 5:27). There he was, just doing his job, when unexpectedly this charismatic carpenter tells him to drop everything and follow Him. And he does! Indeed, many of us have had experiences where the joy of the kingdom has taken us by surprise. Sometimes in simple occurrences like hearing about other people's experiences of God, or reading a single verse of Scripture, our lives were changed by something we could not have predicted. C. S. Lewis tells of how he came to faith in Christ: "I was driven to Whipsnade [Zoo] one sunny morning. When we set out, I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."¹ Surprised by joy. And this, *this*, says Jesus, is the kingdom of God.

Then, Jesus tells another parable (Matt 13:45–46). Now, we are not walking across a field with a farm laborer but sitting next to a pearl merchant. This man travels the Mediterranean world, bartering with representatives of royal families and the fabulously rich, being commissioned by prominent politicians.

One day he sits down to barter. On the trading table is a pearl that catches his eye immediately. He picks it up and subjects it to a battery of tests: luster, surface, shape, color, size. First, luster: the most important factor in choosing pearls. Now *this* pearl has the highest luster he's ever seen. Its inner glow is hypnotic. Second, surface: he can detect no surface blemishes. It is flawless. Third, shape: this is perfection itself. An absolutely round, spherical pearl. Fourth, color: now in his time he's seen all colors. This pearl is the most prized of all: a delicate rose tint. Fifth, size: well, he already knows this is the largest pearl he has ever seen. So, he subjects it to the final test. He rubs it gently against the edge of his tooth. It feels slightly rough, like fine sandpaper. And with that, he knows it is genuine. Imitation pearls are as smooth as glass.

He whips out his mobile phone, contacts his financial advisers, and yells, "Sell.

Sell everything. I've found it! A pearl beyond my wildest dreams." And this, says Jesus, is the kingdom of heaven.

But what does a pearl trader tell us about the kingdom of God? Well, like the treasure found by the laborer, we see its *value*. The merchant knew its value as soon as he'd assessed it. Just like the pearl, says Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is priceless. Also, like the laborer, he realized he would need to sell everything he possessed. So, says Jesus, the kingdom is worth all that we have and all that we are (Phil 3:8–9).

But the merchant also differs from the laborer. Searching for pearls was his business. He was looking for what he found. He took his time. Only when completely satisfied did he sell everything. That's the way it is for many who enter the kingdom of God. They take their time. So, the church should be a place where people can take the time to test the kingdom. Some of us recognized the value of the gospel years ago, spontaneously, like the plowman. Some of us are still with the merchant, testing the pearl.

And there are plenty of so-called pearls: materialism, secularism, atheistic humanism, and so on. One by one, we examine them and put them to one side. They have the surface luster, but these are not pearls in which you will sink your life's savings. And this, quite rightly, takes time. As a church we should not forget this. Because this, says Jesus, is also the kingdom of heaven.

CONCLUSION

Let's remember these parables in the mission of the church. Let's remember that some people meet the gospel and accept it immediately. But for others, commitment to the gospel comes only after a lifetime of searching. In our witnessing as a church, we need to be receptive to both the laborer and the pearl merchant.

Jesus said that the kingdom is like treasure hidden in a field; the kingdom is like a fabulous pearl that takes your breath away. It's so precious that however you encounter it—by surprised discovery, or after years of thought—in comparison, everything pales into insignificance. This is the kingdom of God. ED

² C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis Signature Classics Edition (London: Collins, 2012), 189.

Laurence A. Turner, PhD, is a principal lecturer emeritus in Old Testament at Newbold College of Higher Education, Bracknell, UK, and adjunct external higher degree research supervisor at Avondale University, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.

Matthew 13: The Parable of the Net

INTRODUCTION

One of the marvelous aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that we are an international family of brothers and sisters. We speak many different languages, come from numerous countries, have a huge range of ethnic differences, and practice our faith in many different contexts. Together with our unity of faith, we have great diversity. As Jesus comes to the end of His seven parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13, He turns His attention to the diversity we find in the kingdom of God.

Jesus' last parable in Matt 13 concerns a fishing net. And in it, He shows how the kingdom will be fulfilled at the end of the age (Matt 13:47–50). Yet it seems like an anticlimax coming after the others. All the other parables end on a positive note. Seed falls on good ground. Despite the weeds, there is a wheat harvest. The mustard seed becomes a large plant, the yeast raises dough, the laborer finds treasure, and the merchant acquires a fabulous pearl. But the last parable about the fishing net concludes with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Why such an anticlimax to such an upbeat sequence of parables? So, let's take a closer look at how the parable of the net illustrates how the kingdom will be fulfilled at the end of the age.

In Jesus' time, fishermen used two kinds of net. The first type of net, a casting net, was relatively small, roughly circular in shape, with lead weights around its edge. When a fisherman saw some fish he wanted to catch in shallow water, he would throw it over the surface of the water, so that the net unfurled to its greatest extent. It would sink rapidly, drawn down by the lead weights, covering the fish. When the net was pulled up, the lead weights would draw together at the bottom, trapping the fish within. But importantly, this is not the picture Jesus has in mind.

The second kind of net, the one specifically referred to by Jesus, was the dragnet. Fishermen pulled a dragnet behind their boat, or spread it between two boats, and then hauled it to shore, hopefully capturing a shoal of fish within. And using a dragnet, says Jesus, is like proclaiming the kingdom of God.

So, what exactly does fishermen using a dragnet tell us about the kingdom? First, a dragnet is not a casting net. A casting net is targeted fishing. But a dragnet gathers up everything in its path. It doesn't discriminate, catching all kinds of fish. The Sea of Galilee has thirty-six species of fish, and all of them can end up in a dragnet.

But the dragnet is even more indiscriminate. It doesn't just catch fish. It catches everything that is swept into it. Many Bible versions say that the net

“caught all kinds of *fish*,” and the fishermen “collected the good *fish* in baskets, but threw the bad away” (Matt 13:47–48, NIV, emphasis supplied). However, the original text never mentions fish at all. It simply says they caught all sorts/kinds. Now, of course, a dragnet catches fish. That is its purpose. But it catches more than fish. In recent years, fishermen off the coast of Great Britain have caught all kinds of things in their dragnets, such as a World War II torpedo warhead, two hundred kilos (440 pounds) of high-grade cannabis, and, perhaps most remarkable of all, a married couple. A husband and wife who spent the day diving off the south coast of England were hauled up onto the deck of a fishing boat in a dragnet. Yes, fishermen land more than just fish when they use a dragnet. So Jesus is saying, I think, “They caught *all kinds of stuff*.” And this, says Jesus, is how we should preach the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Anyone who reads Matthew shouldn't be surprised by this. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus said, “I will make you fish for people” (Matt 4:19, NRSV). And now, as Jesus tells this parable of the net, crowds surround Him. Throughout Matthew, Jesus attracts a huge variety of people. So, there's likely to be paralytics (4:24); people from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan (4:25); Roman centurions (8:5); scribes (8:19); Pharisees (9:11); rulers of synagogues (9:18); ostracized women (9:20); and blind men (9:27). There are those whose interest in the kingdom is a passing fad, and others who'll be just too busy to make a commitment. Yet, there are those who will commit themselves to the kingdom, day in, day out, for the rest of their lives. There's Matthew the tax-collector, Roman sympathizer, standing next to Simon the Zealot, anti-Roman terrorist. He'd also see Judas who would betray him; Peter who would deny him. *All kinds of stuff!*

As a church, who have we caught in our gospel net? Are they mainly folks who are already Christian, committed to the authority of the Bible? If we are fishing as Jesus suggests, we should expect all kinds of stuff. People who look remarkably like us, and *those who don't*.

There's always a temptation to target fish that look very much like us—people we'll get on with because they come with the same culture, education, or view of the world we have. But that is using a casting net. Jesus said preaching the gospel of the kingdom is like using a dragnet. Why? Because it catches all kinds of stuff.

And there should be all kinds of stuff in the kingdom, because the kingdom is

indiscriminate. That's how Matthew brackets this collection of Christ's parables. In the first parable of the sower, the seed is sown randomly, in an untargeted way. The sower just scatters seed everywhere. The seed falls on *all kinds* of soil. And now, in the last parable, the parable of the fishing net, the fishermen use a dragnet. They trawl through the lake and catch, indiscriminately, *all kinds* of stuff. That's what the kingdom is like. That's what the mission of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom is like. Like a sower scattering seed *everywhere*, or a dragnet capturing *everything*.

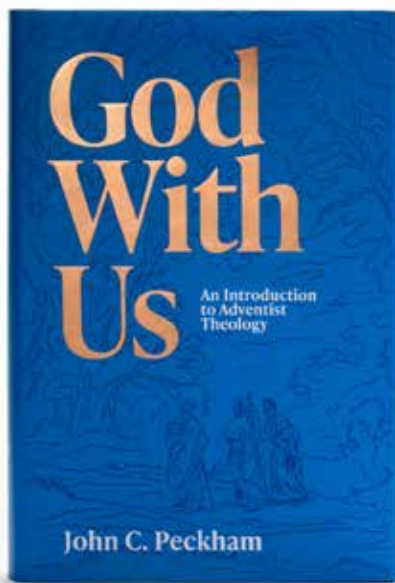
The parable of the fishing net teaches that when the mission of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom is fulfilled, at the end of time, we will discover how indiscriminate the kingdom has been. Jesus didn't waste His time telling parables of no consequence. He told this parable because He thought it was important. In fact, He wanted to make sure His audience understood it. He asked them, “Have you understood all this?” (Matt 13:51, NRSV).

Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that all kinds of stuff are caught up into the gospel net. And that is because our witness should not discriminate and our evangelism should not always be narrowly targeted. As a consequence, the kingdom will contain all kinds of stuff. At the same time, Jesus says there will be a judgment at the end of the age. Not everything the net catches will be acceptable. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It matters what you believe and do, and in particular how you treat other people. But that judgment will be God's, not ours.

CONCLUSION

How is it with us? In our church community there are those who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and mind. Those who live their lives as diligent ambassadors for the gospel of the kingdom of God, and those on the brink of making that decision—or turning away. Let's consider all our differences, and prayerfully consider all our diversity. All the differences of spiritual maturity and varieties of commitment. All kinds of stuff. Let's remind ourselves that God is the judge, at the end of the age. And as we look at the contents of the dragnet, and see all kinds of stuff, let us say with Christ Himself, “This is the kingdom of God.” ED

Laurence A. Turner, PhD, is a principal lecturer emeritus in Old Testament at Newbold College of Higher Education, Bracknell, UK, and adjunct external higher degree research supervisor at Avon-dale University, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.



John C. Peckham.
God With Us: An Introduction to Adventist Theology. Andrews University Press, 2023.

“

Peckham shows how Scripture portrays God as dynamic and vibrant.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Asking questions can be exciting, especially when we get great answers to them. As elders we are asked many questions, and we probably have a few ourselves. In his new book, *God With Us*, John Peckham addresses many pertinent questions surrounding God’s nature (who is He?) and what His heart yearns for (what is He really like?). For numerous reasons, this is the kind of book you will want to have on your shelf.

First, it is an amazing discipleship resource. Whether you are new to the Bible or a veteran Bible student, there is always more to learn. Peckham shows how Scripture portrays God as dynamic and vibrant. Topics such as how God saves us are treated with the breadth the topics deserve, giving the reader a deep knowledge and appreciation for God’s work in our lives. Yet, this is done in a clear and simple way that makes it easy to understand.

Second, Peckham includes sections on “competing Christian views,” where he details how others, either in the past or in the contemporary Christian landscape, have had different understandings. This is tremendously helpful for at least two reasons: (1) it helps us better understand why different denominations believe what they believe, and thus (2) aids us in better articulating how our beliefs are different, and why we believe it to be a more suitable interpretation of Scripture. While the primary purpose of the book is not apologetic in nature, it nevertheless provides strong reasons for advancing Adventist theology. Peckham treats alternative views with the fairness and respect that we should all give generously to those who view things differently than ourselves, yet with a confidence that is saturated with biblical texts and reasoning that cannot be easily dismissed.

Another reason you will want this book is that Peckham gives strong scriptural support on topics that are near and dear to Adventism. If you have ever wondered about the nature of the Godhead; the personhood of the Holy Spirit; understanding the ramifications of the creation-evolution debate; what the inspiration of Scripture really means and how we should be interpreting the Bible faithfully; the role of Ellen G. White in the church; the significance of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary; why God permits suffering; and so much more, this book will be invaluable to you. The real strength of this work is not merely found in Peckham’s explanation of “what” we believe, but in the “why” we believe it. And I believe this is something many people today—especially young people—need to hear.

Lastly, each chapter ends with an appeal to make the intellectual practical. After all, if true knowledge does not impact the way we live and change us, it is useless. As Peckham presents, Scripture portrays God as one whose heart yearns to be *with* His children, despite the intrusion of sin. The remaining question is, will our hearts yearn for Him? ED

Endi Stojanovic, MDiv, is an assistant professor in the department of religion at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

A Consecrated Ministry >PART 3

EDITORIAL NOTE

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

The experiences of the apostle Paul and his instruction regarding the sacredness of the minister’s work are a source of help and inspiration to those engaged in the gospel ministry. Paul’s heart burned with a love for sinners, and he put all his energies into the work of soul winning. There never lived a more self-denying, persevering worker. The blessings he received he prized as so many advantages to be used in blessing others. He lost no opportunity of speaking of the Saviour or of helping those in trouble. From place to place he went, preaching the gospel of Christ and establishing churches. Wherever he could find a hearing, he sought to counteract wrong, and to turn the feet of men and women into the path of righteousness.

Paul did not forget the churches that he had established. After making a missionary tour, he and Barnabas retraced their steps and visited the churches they had raised up, choosing from them men whom they could train to unite in proclaiming the gospel.

This feature of Paul’s work contains an important lesson for ministers today. The apostle made it a part of his work to educate young men for the office of the ministry. He took them with him on his missionary journeys, and thus they gained an experience that later enabled them to fill positions of responsibility. When separated from them, he still kept in touch with their work, and his letters to Timothy and to Titus are evidences of how deep was his desire for their success.

The heart of the true minister is filled with an intense longing to save souls.

Experienced workers today do a noble work when, instead of trying to carry all the burdens themselves, they train younger workers and place burdens on their shoulders.

Paul never forgot the responsibility resting on him as a minister of Christ, or that if souls were lost through unfaithfulness on his part, God would hold him accountable. “Whereof I am made a minister,” he declared of the gospel, “according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.” Colossians 1:25–29.

These words present before the worker for Christ a high attainment, yet this attainment all can reach who, putting themselves under the control of the Great Teacher, learn daily in the school of Christ. The power at God’s command is limitless, and the minister who in his great need shuts himself in with the Lord may be assured that he will receive that which will be to his hearers a savor of life unto life.

Paul’s writings show that the gospel minister should be an example of the truths that he teaches, “giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed.” Of his own work he has left us a picture in his letter to the Corinthian believers: “In all things approving

ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich.” 2 Corinthians 6:3, 4–10.

To Titus he wrote: “Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.” Titus 2:6–8.

There is nothing more precious in the sight of God than His ministers, who go forth into the waste places of the earth to sow the seeds of truth, looking forward to the harvest. None but Christ can measure the solicitude of His servants as they seek for the lost. He imparts His Spirit to them, and by their efforts souls are led to turn from sin to righteousness.

God is calling for men who are willing to leave their farms, their business, if need be their families, to become missionaries for Him. And the call will be answered. In the past there have been men who, stirred by the love of Christ and the needs of the lost, have left the comforts of home and the society of friends, even that of wife and

children, to go into foreign lands, among idolaters and savages, to proclaim the message of mercy. Many in the attempt have lost their lives, but others have been raised up to carry on the work. Thus step by step the cause of Christ has progressed, and the seed sown in sorrow has yielded a bountiful harvest. The knowledge of God has been widely extended and the banner of the cross planted in heathen lands.

For the conversion of one sinner the minister should tax his resources to the utmost. The soul that God has created and Christ has redeemed is of great value because of the possibilities before it, the spiritual advantages that have been granted it, the capabilities that it may possess if vitalized by the word of God, and the immortality it may gain through the hope presented in the gospel. And if Christ left the ninety and nine that He might seek and save one lost sheep, can we be justified in doing less? Is not a neglect to work as Christ worked, to sacrifice as He sacrificed, a betrayal of sacred trusts, an insult to God?

The heart of the true minister is filled with an intense longing to save souls. Time and strength are spent, toilsome effort is not shunned; for others must hear the truths that brought to his own soul such gladness and peace and joy. The Spirit of Christ rests upon him. He watches for souls as one that must give an account. With his eyes fixed on the cross of Calvary, beholding the uplifted Saviour, relying on His grace, believing that He will be with him until the end, as his shield, his strength, his efficiency, he works for God. With invitations and pleadings, mingled with the assurances of God’s love, he seeks to win souls to Jesus, and in heaven he is numbered among those who are “called, and chosen, and faithful.” Revelation 17:14. **ED**

Ministering to and Ministering with People Who Are Introverts

>PART 2

EDITORIAL NOTE

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



SCAN FOR AUDIO

While extrovert filters are more flexible and porous and let pass most things without getting clogged, introvert filters are finer and more rigid.

INTROVERSION: AN APPROACH

Our culture made a virtue of living only as extroverts. We discouraged the inner journey, the quest for a center. So we lost our center and have to find it again.—Anais Nin

Introversion and extroversion are among the most researched subjects in personality psychology. Both types can be found in ancient poetry, philosophy, and even in the Bible. And yet too many people seem to have never heard about them and are not aware of how much this affects all our lives. Especially in Western culture, we are given to understand that extroversion is the ideal personality. Though Eastern culture may not celebrate this ideal to the same extent, it seems that recently things are changing there too, and society is slowly coming to give more value to extroverted personalities. However, studies show that at least one-third to one-half of the population is introverted—though the numbers may vary depending on the country and culture—and it's about time to raise awareness for the differences and suffering the idealization brings, especially to introverts.

Many introverts hide, often behind a mask of extroversion, so you may be surprised to know who identifies as introvert. This may actually be easier for some introverts than others, because not all introverts are the same. On the introvert-extrovert spectrum, some are more on the introvert side, while others come close to the extrovert part of the continuum. Some people can even “switch” between the two; they are called “ambiverts.”

The main characteristics that define introversion are:

1. Energy source. Introverts are energized by solitude. It is the inner world of their ideas and feelings that refuels them. Generally, this is done in private or with only one or two close friends present. Some people take the need for solitude as antisocial behavior. They do not understand that being with other people drains introverts, even if they enjoy the event and know and like the people there. Without a chance to refill their energy, introverts are *physically* exhausted. Contrary to this, extroverts get their energy from outside. It is with external stimuli that they recharge, and too much time in solitude leaves them feeling drained. Additionally, it is necessary to distinguish between energy source and energy level. Introverts may start with a high energy level in a conversation—sometimes even a higher level than an extrovert. However, energy is lost over time, like a battery. Many introverts have learned to preserve energy by moving and talking slower than extroverts, which is sometimes taken as disinterest in the conversation.

2. Internal processing. We are continuously exposed to a multitude of stimuli—images, sounds, conversations, and so on—that require processing, or deciding on important information to keep and unimportant data to discard. It is like a filtering system, which works differently for extroverts and introverts. While extrovert filters are more flexible and porous and let pass most things without getting clogged, introvert filters are finer and more rigid. They allow only small amounts of stimuli to pass and get clogged up faster. This filtering process is

done preferably while removed from other stimuli, because it is done internally, in the mind. You may have heard the phrase “extroverts speak in order to think, whereas introverts think in order to speak.” This thinking process can also happen while speaking, thus creating pauses when introverts look for the right words—and these pauses can drive extroverts crazy, because they are not aware or don't understand the process. Sometimes, they may even start to speak, trying to finish the sentence. This interruption, however, is difficult for most introverts, because it disrupts the train of thought, and as a result, they may decide to stay quiet. Once the introvert filter is clogged, the person often goes silent for inner processing. Usually you don't notice it from the outward appearance, but introvert minds are constantly active. If this processing is impeded, the result can be disastrous, especially for the introvert.

3. Depth over breadth. This preference applies to various aspects of life. Often, introverts have fewer yet deeper relationships than extroverts. Group socializing and small talk are rather tiring and less fulfilling for introverts. They prefer one-on-one interactions, which allow for deeper connections. Likewise, introverts usually have fewer interests but crave to explore them in all their complexities. That's why many great scientists, artists, and others like them are introverts. This passion for depth extends also to the inward, a longing for understanding oneself. Introverts are more often than not aware of the motivations, feelings, and assumptions their decisions are based on.

In spite of the idea many extroverts have that introverts should learn to overcome their “feebleness” and be more like extroverts, there's more and more evidence that this is a question of “hardware”—their brains working differ-

ently. They have different chemical balances and react differently to the different neurotransmitters (substances that transmit nerve impulses). One of them is dopamine, which is produced when people are active and in motion. It produces an “act and react” response. Extroverts require much of this neurotransmitter in order to feel good. Introverts need lesser doses, and if there’s too much dopamine in their brains, they easily feel anxious or “over aroused.” Introverts need more of another neurotransmitter, acetylcholine, which produces a “rest and repose” posture. It results in introverts processing more and reacting slower, thus allowing more for perceiving connections and subtleties that extroverts may be unaware of. Also, that’s why many extroverts perceive introverts as less expressive with their bodies, and thus, less passionate.

In addition, introverts have busier, more active brains. Studies show that some infants already tend to be “high-reactive”—more sensitive to external stimuli like noise and light—and they usually turn out to be introverts later in life. Recent research shows that most introverts are “highly sensitive,” meaning that they are very sensitive, or reactive,

to external stimuli—that is, everything that can be perceived through the senses. This is connected to the brain functions and the procession of stimuli. Highly sensitive people are often highly empathic and tend to have strong consciences. Unfortunately, especially in Western culture, this sensitivity is considered rather a stigma and undesirable.

When signs of introversion, including sensitivity, are seen in children, the parents and/or other custodians believe them to be weakness and try to teach the children to “overcome” this problem. However, as introversion is an innate trait of personality, it is not a disease that can be cured or a weakness that can be overcome. It defines who we are and “influences our choice of friends and mates, and how we make conversation, resolve differences, and show love. It affects the careers we choose and whether or not we succeed at them.”¹

Can you imagine what it does to a child if he or she is constantly told that something is wrong with him or her? Do you know how damaging it is to a child to grow up thinking he or she is one big mistake? Why is it that introverts are being told to “stretch” themselves and behave or even become

more like extroverts and adapt to an extroverted world, while no one requests of extroverts any adaptation to a world of introverts?

It is true that we can “stretch” our personalities, but only up to a point, like a rubber band. If stretched too much, it breaks. Though introverts, in general, may dread public speaking, they can do it, and even strikingly well. As said previously, you probably won’t notice they are introverts. Why can they do that? We have a free will and can decide to act out of our character for the sake of a greater reason, a “core personal project,” or a passion. Allow an introvert to be himself or herself, and give them space to explore their interests and passions, and then watch and see what can happen. But just as introverts can stretch their personality, extroverts can do the same. It probably does require work; however, I believe they can do it—just as introverts can put in some effort and grow; introverts to the outside, extroverts to the inside.

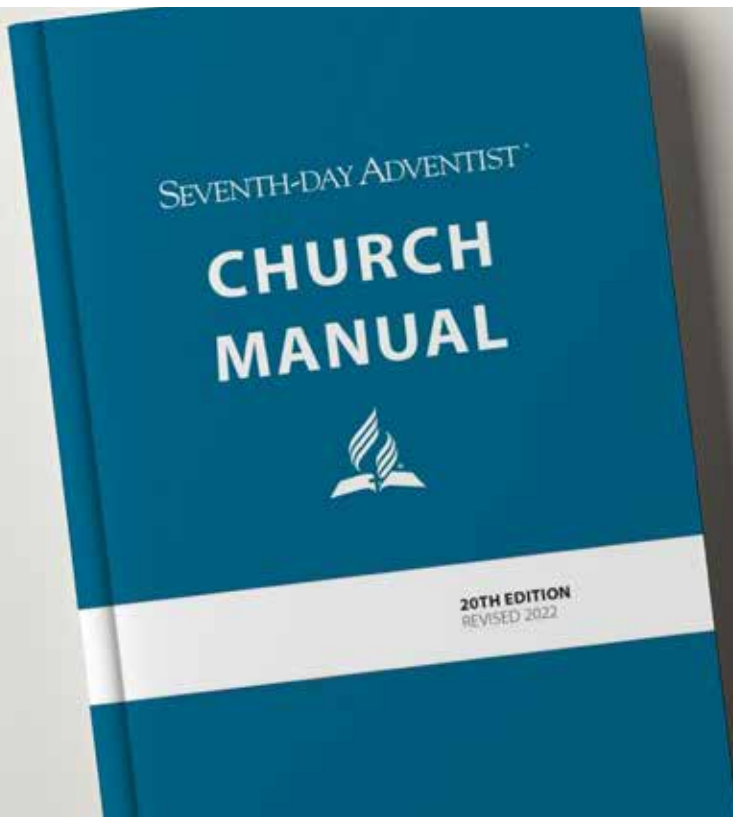
I hope this information may give a hint about the vast subject of personality, especially the question of introversion and extroversion, and open the way for greater understanding, for oneself and for others.

As different as we are, I believe we are created that way, and God meant us to be that way. I think we can learn so much of each other, if only we treat each other with respect and allow for each one to develop properly. This will be helpful in our personal lives as well as in our families and in relationships at work and church. ED

¹ Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 2.

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





Why Do We Need a Church Manual?

The **NEW** electronic version of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* is available for **FREE** download at www.eldersdigest.org

During the sixty-first General Conference Session that took place in St. Louis, Missouri, United States in 2022, the Seventh-day Adventist Church approved updates in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. **The new electronic version is available for free download at <https://www.eldersdigest.org>.**

WHY A CHURCH MANUAL?

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* has an essential role within the church organization. It reminds us of the church's purpose, local organization, and relationship with the world church. It also describes the implementation of various departments and ministries at the local level; the primary objective of the church's existence is to serve the community and make disciples.

God is a God of order, and God does all things well. "With God, disorder and chaos give way to order and peace."¹ Since the beginning of the creation, the chaos became "very good" (Gen 1:31). Order and peace are evidenced also through redemption. Consequently, order is an integral part of His church. "Order is achieved through principles and regulations that guide the Church in its internal operations and in the fulfillment of its mission to the world. In order for it to be a successful ecclesiastical organization at the service of the Lord and humanity, it needs order, rule, and discipline. Scripture affirms that 'all things be done decently and in order' (1 Cor. 14:40)."²

According to Robert Pierson, former president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Rules and policies we must have in our church program. Every administrator and pastor has experienced the strength that is his when he faces difficult decisions and is able to turn to the *Church Manual* or the denominational policy book and there find counsel."³

The *Church Manual* deals with church organization and authority, the pastoral role, congregational governance, and the meaning of membership (duties and responsibilities). It also covers details about discipleship, worship service, liturgy, Christian lifestyle, and many other themes related to the daily life of congregations, such as church discipline and many other operational specifics of the local church.

CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Church leaders did not quickly produce a book of rules for church governance, even though the General Conference Session met annually during the church's early years and delegates voted on matters of church order and life. They feared a manual might formalize the church and take from its pastors their freedom to deal with issues of order as they desired.

When discussion of a manual had first arisen at the General Conference Session in 1878, what had been requested was really a policy book with "Constitution and By-Laws" and guidance on parliamentary procedure. However, the 1882 session specifically asked for a manual that would provide "instruction to church officers" at the local church level. Thus, the proposed manual addressed both.

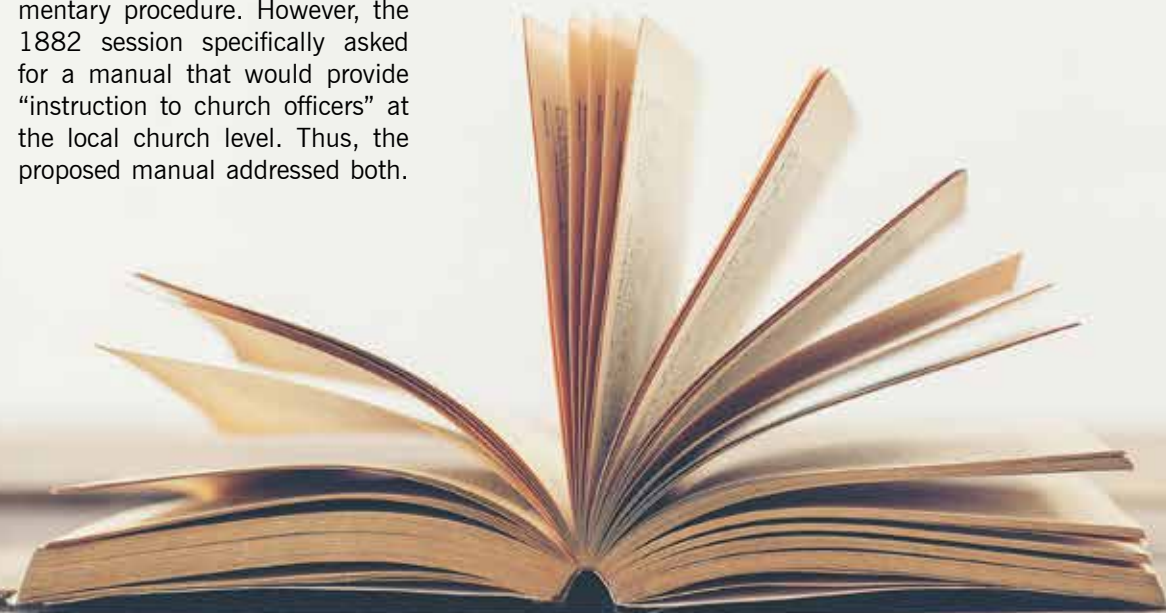
It specifically dealt with issues of local church order and governance but also policy. The manual was basically descriptive, as indicated by the frequent use of such phrases as "it is customary among Adventists," "at the present time," and "experience has shown." The manual also included Uriah Smith's summary "Statement on Fundamentals."⁴

A survey of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* of 1882–1883 indicates that the young denomination was working hard at developing a consensus on matters of church polity, teaching, and practice. Considerable diversity of practice and sometimes confusion existed among the churches.⁵

When the first sample of the manual was presented in 1883, the General Conference Committee rejected the adoption of a manual. The main concerns were to move in the direction of "the formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible," which the denomination had "been opposed to."⁶

Even though there was a need to standardize church-related procedures and to establish guidelines, and the denomination continued to take actions at the local and General Conference sessions, it took fifty years for the denomination to overcome those fears—not that they did not exist anymore, but the circumstances and needs to adopt a manual surpassed the worries.

A couple of years after the rejection of the manual, J. H. Waggoner brought back the issue to the General Conference, and it was recommended that it should be published under the author's name. A couple of decades later, as the denomination was facing serious internal challenges, John N. Loughborough took the challenge to write *The Church: Its Organization, Order, and Discipline*. It was extremely helpful as a practical guide to the church. Even though it was not a church manual, over the next twenty years it served as one in a practical way. "The book touched on local church issues," focusing "on the church as a broad organization as opposed



The standards and practices of the church are based upon the principles of the Holy Scriptures. These principles, underscored by the counsel offered in the writings of Ellen G. White, are set forth in the *Church Manual*.

to the individual worshiping congregation,”⁷ although it also gave practical recommendations on procedures, structure, and offices.

As the church worldwide grew rapidly in the early twentieth century, it increasingly recognized the need for a manual for worldwide use by its pastors and lay members. In 1931 the General Conference Committee voted to publish a church manual. J. L. McElhany, later president of the General Conference, prepared the manuscript, which was published in 1932.⁸

The opening sentence of the preface of that first edition observed that “it has become increasingly evident that a manual on church government is needed to set forth and preserve our denominational practices and polity.” This was no attempt to suddenly create and impose upon the church a whole pattern of church governance. Rather it was an endeavor first to *preserve* all the good actions taken through the years and then to add rules required by the church’s increasing growth and complexity.⁹ Maybe some of the fears of the pioneers still existed, especially the challenges of having a manual that would be more prescriptive than descriptive.

The process of the creation of the first official manual is not clear. In 1926, James L. McElhany was asked to prepare a draft, and he had strong support from General Conference officers to execute the project. It was a combination of some principles used by Loughborough and others from Brother Stevens, in addition to a variety of

suggestions and principles to address local church challenges.

AUTHORITY AND FUNCTION OF THE *CHURCH MANUAL*

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* has existed in its current format since 1932. Since its adoption, the *Church Manual* has been widely used and very helpful to give guidance, structure, and strength to the worldwide church. It describes the operation and functions of local churches and their relationship to the denominational structures in which they hold membership. The *Church Manual* also expresses the church’s understanding of Christian life, church governance, and discipline based on biblical principles and the authority of duly assembled General Conference Sessions. “God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.”¹⁰

The *Church Manual* is divided into two types of material. The content of each chapter is of worldwide value and is applicable to every church organization, congregation, and member. Recognizing the need for variations in some sections, additional explanatory material, presented as guidance and examples, appears as notes at the end of the *Church Manual*.

The standards and practices of the church are based upon the principles of the Holy Scriptures. These principles, underscored by the counsel offered in the writings of Ellen G. White, are set forth in

the *Church Manual*. They are to be followed in all matters pertaining to the administration and operation of local churches. The *Church Manual* also defines the relationship that exists between the local congregation and the conference or other entities of Seventh-day Adventist denominational organization. No attempt should be made to set up standards of membership or to make, or attempt to enforce, rules or regulations for local church operations that are contrary to these decisions adopted by the General Conference in session and that are set forth in this *Church Manual*.¹¹

UPDATING AND MAKING CHANGES

The denomination developed a system to preserve and update church policies and documents. There is an ongoing process to review and update these documents through the diligent work of committees and sub-committees that report to larger committees formed by worldwide delegation. Through this procedure, the church has ownership in the decision-making process, and the Holy Spirit can reveal God’s will through the principle of “many advisers bring success” (Prov 15:22, NLT).

The General Conference through the years voted important changes concerning the *Church Manual*. Realizing the importance of conducting the worldwide work of the church “decently and in order,” the 1946 General Conference Session voted that “all changes or revisions of policy that are to be made in the Manual shall be authorized by the General Conference Session.”¹²

Careful control of the changes made to these documents allows us to see how the documents have evolved and to ensure that the most recent version is used. Reviewing these documents, making necessary changes, and commu-

nicating the updates to the worldwide church facilitates the denomination's unity and identity. By following this strategy, the church can ensure that its documents and policies are up-to-date and accurate, which can help to improve efficiency, reduce errors and conflicts, and enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of the work.

WHERE TO GET ADVICE

From the beginning of its adoption in 1932, "it stated that the manual was set forth 'as a guide' in matters of church administration. It was not, however, just to set forth 'denominational practices and polity'— but also to 'preserve' these."¹³

Church officers and leaders, pastors, and members should consult with their conference for advice pertaining to the operating of their congregation or on questions arising from the *Church Manual*. If they do not reach mutual under-

standing, they should consult with their union conference/mission for clarification.¹⁴

Even though Seventh-day Adventists reluctantly adopted a church manual, the benefits of this decision can be seen as a robust worldwide church. On the other hand, some reasons that prevented the pioneers from moving forward in that direction are still present today. Therefore, it is up to the leaders of this denomination to learn from the past and wisely fulfill their call with humility and an open heart to continue receiving God's guidance. **ED**

¹ "What Does the Bible Say about Order vs Chaos?," Got Questions, accessed December 8, 2023, <https://www.gotquestions.org/order-vs-chaos.html>.

² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 20th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2022), 16.

³ Robert H. Pierson, "The Letter of the Law," *Ministry*, November 1964, 13–14.

⁴ Uriah Smith, "Statement on Fundamentals," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 5–September 25, 1883.

⁵ Gil Valentine, "The Road to a Church Manual, Part 1," *Ministry*, April 1999, 14.

⁶ *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 20, 1883, 733.

⁷ Gil Valentine, "The Stop-Start Journey on the Road to a Church-Manual," *Ministry*, June 1999, 19.

⁸ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), 9:261.

¹¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17–18.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18; General Conference Report 8 (June 14, 1946), 197.

¹³ Valentine, "Road to a Church Manual," 22.

¹⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19.

Gerson P. Santos is an associate secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

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Mentoring as a Way of Life for the Local Church

MENTORING IS A KEY TO KEEPING YOUR CHILDREN AND GROWING YOUR CHURCH

>PART 1

When I (Tom Grove) was the executive pastor at the Arlington Adventist Church in Texas, my son was nine years old. However, he did not have much interest in going to church. He wanted us to get to church as late as possible and leave as soon as we could. One day as he was sitting in my office waiting for my wife and me to finish visiting, our community services director saw him and asked him,

“Mark, would you be interested in learning how to run one of the cameras for our media ministry?”

I don't know what prompted Mark to say yes, but he did. She told him that one of our media team members would be in touch. The next Sabbath after church, one of the media volunteers found Mark and showed him how to run the camera. He told Mark that he would be scheduled for the next Sabbath to be on duty. The following week, Mark was sitting behind one of the cameras operating it during a church service. For the next few months, Mark was scheduled almost every week running a camera.

About this time, Mark had begun to make friends with some of the media ministry volunteers. One of the individuals Mark met was our internet broadcast sound engineer, Doug. Doug was in his early sixties and was, by his own admission, “loudmouthed and cranky.” But for whatever reason, Mark and Doug clicked. Mark started learning about running the sound board but also began to learn some life lessons from Doug. Questions and situations that Mark wouldn't discuss with my wife and me, he began to talk to Doug about. Because Mark wanted to spend time with Doug, he started begging to get to church early and leave late.

Unfortunately, in the summer of 2021, Doug contracted COVID-19, was hospitalized, and ultimately succumbed to the virus. Mark was devastated. At Doug's memorial ser-

Mentoring is the process of intentionally facilitating the spiritual development of an individual through spending time and training with someone who is more experienced.

vice, Mark decided he had to say something about Doug. He told the entire congregation how much Doug meant to him. He told how Doug would give him advice on life situations, taught him how to be a sound engineer, and shared his love of sports.

A few weeks later, I received a text from our media director that contained a picture. It was of Mark sitting in Doug's chair, running the sound board that Doug had once run. Doug's mentoring paid off, and his legacy lives through Mark leading in the media ministry of the church.

In this two-part article we will give the definition of mentoring, some biblical examples of mentoring, some of the benefits of mentoring, and how to create a culture of mentoring in the local church. If this culture becomes a part of the local church, you will see your children, youth, and young adults engaged in spiritual development and growing their faith through ministry. You will also see your church more effective in ministry and new ministries emerge as this culture grows.

DEFINITION OF MENTORING

Mentoring is the process of intentionally facilitating the spiritual development of an individual through spending time and training with someone who is more experienced. This was a way of life in Scripture and should be a way of life today. The apostle Paul wanted to build this culture as part of the DNA of the church, so he instructed Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reli-

able people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2, NIV). This is how values, faith, experience, and ministry are passed on from generation to generation.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF MENTORING

Some biblical examples of mentoring are Jethro to Moses, Moses to Joshua, Eli to Samuel, Elijah to Elisha, Mordecai to Esther, Jesus to His disciples, Barnabas to Paul, Paul to Timothy and John Mark, and Timothy to all the faithful Christians who mentored others. Each mentoring chain equipped believers to carry on the work of God.

Note how Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the disciples mentored the new generation of ministers and the lessons we can learn from them. Jesus modeled wholistic and effective mentoring relationships with His twelve disciples. The group watched how Jesus demonstrated living in the will of His Father, His nights of prayer, the journeys they took together, and how He treated people. Because He was with them constantly, He was able to impact them by using teachable moments. They also had plenty of opportunities to watch each other, contrasting their behavior with that of Jesus. The disciples were able to learn from each other as Jesus sent them out two by two. They became sources of support and encouragement as they shared life experiences with each other.

THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING

One benefit of mentoring is seeing the baton of leadership passed

on from one generation to another. We see this in the ministry of Paul as he mentored the next generation of church leaders, Timothy and Titus. He saw the potential in these two young men and then invited them to accompany him and do ministry alongside him. When Paul felt they were ready, he assigned them leadership responsibilities in some of the churches they had already planted. He assigned Timothy to Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3) and Titus to Crete and Dalmatia (Titus 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:10).

The second benefit is passing on faith from generation to generation. This begins in the home as parents teach and model their faith to their children (Deut 6:4–9). The instructions of God to Moses are that teaching of faith is much more than just a few minutes a day; instead it must become a part of seizing every opportunity to teach our children about God through nature, Scripture, experience, and even work. This can be done not only by parents, but grandparents, aunts, uncles, and any loving and concerned church members.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, mentoring plays an important role in the home and the local church. Mentoring was an integral part of the culture in biblical times, and we in the twenty-first century need to recapture the importance of mentoring in passing on faith and leadership to the next generation. **ED**

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

Tom Grove, DMin, is the associate director of ministry and evangelism for the Texas Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Alvarado, Texas, United States.

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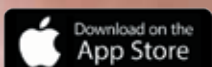


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