

quarterly resource for local church elders † october/december 2009

ELDER'S DIGEST



15TH ANNIVERSARY



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ELDER'S DIGEST'S 15th ANNIVERSARY



I am delighted to celebrate with you the fifteenth anniversary of *Elder's Digest* and the rich heritage of this magazine. I am reminded how faithful God has been—from the creation of *Elder's Digest* magazine to the new and exciting horizons of this international communications ministry.

This magazine was founded by James A. Cress, and its beginning can best be described in his own words: "This magazine is designed to attend to the needs of local church leaders around the world. Through this resource we would like to help elders grow in their skills and abilities as leaders. It is our intention to supply them with good information, practical articles, and life-changing sermons to preach. It is also an expression of recognition from the worldwide church for the wonderful work they are accomplishing."

Cress' vision became a reality in 1994 when approximately 5,000 copies of *Elder's Digest* rolled off of the press and into the hands of local elders and church pastors. The first issue was sent out to every union and conference worldwide as a 'sample' issue, to get the word out. In the beginning, the highest subscription count was around 3,000 copies.

Over the next 15 years, *Elder's Digest* helped shape the profile of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. Committed to Cress' original vision, this magazine continues to influence and guide our local church leaders in a variety of ar-

reas. It has earned the reputation of being one of the best resources for our elders. Today about 100,000 magazines are delivered each quarter. This magazine is also printed in different parts of the world and in other languages. When we include these editions, more than 200,000 copies are printed each quarter and delivered to more than 100 countries, encompassing all world divisions. What a blessing!

I would like to say a few words of gratitude to the two previous editors of *Elder's Digest*. James H. Zachary was chosen to be the first editor of *Elder's Digest* magazine. A few months later he was replaced by Joel Sarli, who did a wonderful job until his retirement in July 2005. When I see this magazine reaching and blessing thousands of local church leaders and hear how pleased they are with this helpful resource, I praise God for this outstanding literary ministry. God has been so good!

What challenges does *Elder's Digest* face in the coming years? In many places of the world, this magazine is not yet available. Many countries are still in need of this magazine. Translation and financial limitations (particularly the high shipping costs) are some of the challenges we face today and as we work to overcome them, I ask that you keep this magazine in your prayers.

Once again, we thank God for His faithfulness. I would also like to thank our church leaders in the world divisions who make this magazine available to elders. And we are especially grateful to you, our readers, who make this ministry an outstanding success.



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

“I SAW THE LORD”

Isaiah walked through the crowded streets of Jerusalem with a heavy heart. His nation faced great trouble. Storms of war threatened from the north. The young man made his way to the temple and fell prostrate. Before the Lord, he poured out his heart in prayer.

And God answered. He always does.

The veil of the temple seemed to be drawn aside. In vision Isaiah saw the glory of God. “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a very high throne. His long robe filled the Temple. Heavenly creatures of fire stood above him. Each creature had six wings: It used two wings to cover its face, two wings to cover its feet, and two wings for flying” (Isa. 6:1, 2, NCV).

Try to capture the glory: the high throne, the Person of God, the robe filling the temple, and the heavenly angels!

Then the temple echoed with praise for God (Isa. 6:3, NCV). “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord All-Powerful. His glory fills the whole earth.”

Fear clutched at Isaiah’s heart as an earthquake moved the posts of the building and the smoke of God’s glory filled the temple.

“I saw the Lord.” The power, the righteousness, and the love of God filled Isaiah’s mind from then on.

Like Isaiah, elders need to take time daily to “see” the Lord. Morning by morning we need to look at Jesus’ life by meditating upon the gospels or on His life as described in the book *The Desire of Ages*. We must stop the rushing flow of life’s duties to learn about the greatest Life ever lived.

Isaiah saw the Lord. Then he saw himself. What a contrast! We cannot truly see ourselves until we see the Lord. With the building shaking around him and the glory of God almost blinding him, Isaiah cried out in agony, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the Lord All-Powerful” (Isa. 6:5).

I am reminded of another man who came to the temple—Herod’s temple. “The tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even look up to heaven. But he beat on his chest because he was so sad. He said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13).

God always answers this prayer immediately. The publican was accepted, forgiven, and declared righteous by the Lord Jesus.

We see our spiritual condition most clearly after seeing the Lord. How dangerous to compare ourselves with others! We will come up with false high marks for ourselves when we do. But when looking upon the Lord of glory, the best of us will cry with Isaiah and the publican, “I am a sinner, Lord; have mercy on me.”

Picture the young Isaiah kneeling on the temple floor, weeping in penitence before the King of the universe. Then the Lord summons an angel to take a live coal off heaven’s altar. Swiftly the angel flies to Isaiah’s side and touches his lips. What joy comes to him as he hears the words of the angel: “Your guilt is taken away, because this hot coal has touched your lips. Your sin is taken away” (Isa. 6:7).

When Jesus takes away our sin, with its guilt and shame, peace and joy fill our hearts.

“I saw the Lord.” This experience in the temple transformed Isaiah’s life. There on his knees he heard the call of God, “Whom can I send? Who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8).

Isaiah came face-to-face with the priorities of his God. All of heaven is deeply involved in a gigantic rescue mission for Planet Earth. This is the work of the heavenly angels and the three members of the Trinity.

Still prostrate before the Lord, Isaiah said, “Here I am. Send me!” (Isa. 6:8).

Isaiah spent the rest of his life in the service of the Lord. And while the northern nation of Israel felt the severe blows of divine justice, Judah responded to the preaching of this gospel prophet who saw the Lord that day in the temple.

How much each elder needs to see the Lord each day! How much we need to see our great need. How much we need the healing grace of the gospel to bring peace to our hearts. How much we need the vision of the divine task that God has for each one.

May we daily see the Lord!

ED

James H. Zachary was Associate Secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association and the first editor of *Elder’s Digest* when this article was written.



HEALTHY ATTITUDE TOWARD TRUTH

An elder’s attitude to truth is a life-and-death issue, both in his leadership and for the congregation. Our very destiny depends upon the attitude that leaders assume. Differing attitudes prevail, finding their ultimate expression in two extremes. These extremes represent a small minority in terms of numbers but are not always minorities in terms of peril for the ones who are related to them.

The first group takes pride in emphasizing its orthodox conservatism, which, when stripped of its assuring phraseology, is often just plain reaction, however harsh the term may sound. These individuals view any change or revision as perilous, mainly because it is different from what they used to know or do.

Some cleverly contrive to portray themselves as the ultimate defenders of the faith, the last stand of loyalty. Either by implication or declaration, they declare all who differ from them to be dangerous innovators. Their penchant is to maintain a status quo which supports their rigid views. They condemn, openly or by implication, equally loyal, self-sacrificing, truth-loving heralds of this message who differ from them. This group is represented by some independent ministries today. They easily mix truth and criticism in attacking the leadership of the church.

Dear Elder, be perceptive. Don’t fall into the devil’s trap. The Lord Himself is the one who ultimately takes care of His own church. Stay on the side of God’s people and be loyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On the other end of the spectrum stands another group, ready to press views of liberal progressivism that are seriously revolutionary, perilous, and disruptive. Some in this group are retired pastors, theology professors, and administrators. A few of them may say, “Now we can speak out on what we believe because we are retired.”

On this side lies the peril of abandonment of our distinctive Advent-movement principles, rooted in Scripture and confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy. This group advocates the acceptance of specious principles that simulate light but contradict or neutralize the soundly buttressed historic positions which have made us a separate people. Such teachings usually touch either the sanctuary truth or the Spirit of Prophecy, which constitute the distinctive and separating features of this movement,

and are a stumbling block to all critics and apostates. Here again we must keep watch and stand by revealed truth, no matter who the innovator is or what his standing or record may be.

These two groups, each appealing to a partial set of principles of commonly acknowledged truth, make more difficult the sound, reverent, and loyal stand of the majority who reject upon principle the position and perils of both extremes. It is essential for elders to clearly understand the situation so that they can intelligently and properly protect the congregation.

Elders need the Holy Spirit’s guidance so they will have sound judgment, spiritual discernment, and unswerving fidelity to God’s ever-expanding truth, revealed in His Word and buttressed by the confirming witness of the Spirit of Prophecy. Anything else, or anything less, will prove disastrous. We should not permit ourselves to be forced into situations that are intolerable and unnecessary. There is no need to allow a few reactionaries to halt legitimate progress. Let us not permit the devil set the agenda for our congregation. The voice of God to speaking to us through the representative body of the church should prevail.

Dear Elder, avoid any extremes in your attitude as a leader. The pathway of the advent herald is beset with perils today. Your only safety lies in ceaseless, progressive study of the Word, individually and in groups, invoking the promised presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit “but when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13), and the matchless counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy. The elder who follows this divine program of guidance and protection has the assurance that God will keep him from pitfalls in leading his congregation.

ED

Joel Sarli was Associate Secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association and the second editor of *Elder’s Digest* when this article was written.



PREACHING



Douglas Jacobs

is a professor of Preaching and Church Ministry at Southern Adventist University, in Collegedale, Tennessee. The son of missionary parents, he grew up in Pakistan, attended High School in India, served as a student missionary in Bangladesh, and has conducted evangelistic meetings in the Philippines, Pakistan, and Honduras. Before joining SAU's School of Religion in 2002, he served for 26 years as a pastor in the Florida Conference. His Doctor of Ministries studies at Andrews University explored the theological foundations of the Adventist doctrine of health. He is currently completing his Thesis-Report for a second D. Min. in Homiletics from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on the subject of preaching to older church members. Dr. Jacobs is married to Lanell and they have two daughters, Janell and Katie. He is passionate about helping pastors and lay members develop their preaching skills. He has conducted preaching seminars for pastors and elders in the United States and Canada.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD?

When you preach, you are sharing God's Word with God's people. As Paul told the Thessalonians: "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:1).

Remember that it was through words that God created our world. What a privilege preachers have to share God's creative, life-transforming Word!

SHARE A DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL PREACHING.

Adventists see a definition of Biblical preaching in Revelation 14:6: "Then I saw another angel flying in midair and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth." When we preach, we are really communicating to others the eternal Gospel, the Good News about Salvation.

WHERE DO YOU START WHEN PREPARING A SERMON?

The foundation for any sermon must be a pas-

sage or passages from the Bible. The Word of God gives us authority to stand up and speak. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit to help us interpret the Word of God. So I can confidently preach, even if I haven't taken a class in preaching, if I simply share a message based on a Bible passage which I've studied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

BUT HOW DOES ONE DECIDE WHICH BIBLE PASSAGE TO USE?

Recently I had the opportunity to talk with United States Senate Chaplain and Adventist preacher Dr. Barry Black. He told me, "The starting point of a sermon doesn't have to be the Bible, but every sermon needs God's Word as an anchor. Sometimes the precipitating spark of the sermon may be a need discovered in your pastoral outreach. Then you should find a Bible verse or passage that addresses that need."

As Chaplain Black suggested, listen to your audience by asking them about their needs. Ask what issues the youth are facing, what challenges young families are having, or what fears the older members of your church are experiencing. Then find biblical

passages which answer their questions or concerns. You must also listen to God's voice when selecting a passage for your sermon. One way I listen to God is by journaling. You don't have to be a theological professor to do this; just read the Bible and write down your thoughts. As you read and journal, the Holy Spirit will point out preaching passages.

AFTER SELECTING A PASSAGE, HOW DO YOU PREPARE THE SERMON? WHAT STEPS SHOULD YOU FOLLOW?

First, read the passage several times, writing down your questions and comments. Ask others for their insights and consult available commentaries. Use a free computer Bible program like E-sword (www.e-sword.net) and see what Ellen White has said about your passage (www.whiteestate.org).

Next, look for the passage's central truth. What is the passage teaching? Why was it included in the Bible? Now comes the hard part; write out the central truth in a single sentence. This will focus your preaching and give it power.

Haddon Robinson, my homiletics professor, suggests using three questions to develop a passage's one-sentence central truth into the two hundred sentences found in a half-hour sermon. Ask: 1) what in the passage will need to be explained to your listeners, 2) what will need to be proved to them, and 3) what in the passage can be applied to their lives.

When you've studied a passage, determined its central truth, and decided what will need explaining, proving, or applying, you are ready to make an outline, find illustrations, and write a sermon manuscript.

YOU MENTIONED SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS. HOW DO YOU ILLUSTRATE YOUR SERMONS?

Avoid illustrations from distant history or from a sermon illustration web site. These seldom work because neither you nor the audience has any connection to the illustration. The most effective illustrations picture someone or something which both the preacher and the audience have experienced. The next best illustrations come from what your listeners have experienced.

Good illustrations apply the truth of the sermon to the lives of your listeners. In 2 Kings 6:15, when Elisha's servant discovers they are surrounded by Syrian soldiers, he cries out: "O my Lord, what shall we do?" To illustrate his fear I recently asked a congregation,

"Have you felt surrounded with no way of escape? Perhaps you've lost your job and your debts threaten to bankrupt you . . . Or you've been diagnosed with an illness that endangers your health . . . Or Satan is attacking your marriage, your children, or you personally."

After connecting my listeners' fears with the fears of Elisha's servant, they were ready to hear Elisha's response as though he were speaking to them: "Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16).

WHAT TYPE OF SERMON SUBJECTS SHOULD ONE USE?

I believe that the goal of preaching is to heal people from the disease of sin. The Greek word *sozo*, "to save," also means, "to heal." So share messages that offer healing for the sicknesses of your listeners. Such sermons will keep their interest because you are talking about their felt needs.

However, you should also speak to needs not yet felt by your congregation. My wife once took care of a patient who didn't discover he had cancer until a week before his death. He died because he didn't know he was sick until it was too late. The preacher has a God-given responsibility to diagnose needs his or her listeners haven't yet discovered or problems they are purposely ignoring.

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT STYLES OF PREACHING? WHAT MAKES ONE STYLE EFFECTIVE OR INEFFECTIVE?

Topical sermons start with a topic, a doctrine or theme such as Creation, prayer, tithing, or child-rearing, and show what the Bible says about that topic. Evangelistic sermons are usually topical because each sermon covers one Bible teaching. Topical sermons work well for sermons on Bible doctrines and themes. But topical sermons can be shallow if the preacher doesn't have time to explain each Bible text. Also, it's easy to select texts which support your pre-conceived ideas.

Expository sermons start with a Bible text and show how the central truth of the passage can be applied to the listener. I like expository preaching because it helps me preach God's message instead of my own. It goes deeper into the word because the sermon is based on only one or two passages, and it is more easily remembered by the audience.

CELEBRATING PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY



Today I write not as a pastor but as a member of this church, as someone who was born into an Adventist home and who from childhood learned to respect and appreciate the job and the image of the pastor.

WHAT IS PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY?

Protestants usually set apart the month of October as "Pastor Appreciation Month." Just as there is a day on the calendar to celebrate certain professionals, there is also a day to celebrate the person and function of the pastor. As Seventh-day Adventists, we suggest to set apart in our denominational calendar the fourth Sabbath of October as "Pastor Appreciation Day." However, we recognize that appreciation for and recognition of our spiritual leaders is appropriate each and every day of the year.

WHY IS THIS DAY NEEDED?

The nature of the work performed by the pastor and the pastor's family is singular. God has entrusted them with one of the most precious responsibilities: taking care of His flock's spiritual welfare. When a pastor fails to reach this goal, church members are greatly harmed. In this context, the pastoral family has a great responsibility in relation to the churches they serve.

In general, the church expects that the pastor has an ideal family with perfect kids who are always smiling and cooperative. The pastor is also seen as someone who can answer any question, has an elegant posture, and has no problems or conflicts. Some church members are disappointed when the pastor is depressed or faces personal or family problems. The pastoral family lives as the proverbial fish bowl, with the congregation watching every move they make. It never occurs to church members that they might be the cause of the pastor's worry or failure.

This is why God has instructed us to recognize and value His servants, our spiritual leaders. "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17, NIV). The good news is that as church members, we can make a difference in the pastor's life. Pastor Appreciation Day is a good opportunity to express our love and appreciation for our pastor's ministry and influence in our lives.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

There are at least two ways to celebrate Pastor Appreciation Day. The first way is what members can do individually to pay homage to the pastor: a simple phone call, a card, an invitation to lunch, a special prayer for him/her, a car wash, a small gift, or some words of appreciation.

The second way is to celebrate Pastor Appreciation Day with the congregation. Members can organize some type of public recognition: a special lunch celebration, a gift in the name of the church, a tree planted in honor of the pastor—the sky is the limit!

Doesn't the pastoral family deserve this kind of homage? Take the initiative today and make plans so that the celebration of Pastor Appreciation Day in your church is an exaltation of the pastoral ministry established by God to be a blessing to His children.

Jonas Arrais is editor of *Elder's Digest*.



WHAT DOES PREACHING MEAN TO YOU?

When God called me to preach He gave me the privilege of sharing His truth with others. What I get to share is summed up in the Hebrew word *Shalom* which means not only peace but wholeness and completeness. This is God's goal for everyone. When I preach, I am sharing God's *Shalom* with His people. What a wonderful privilege and an awesome responsibility!

WHAT ARE SOME MISTAKES TO AVOID?

Some sermons are merely springboards to launch the preacher's own ideas. The point of the sermon is often not the point of the biblical passage. Or the sermon may not be based on the Bible.

Too many preachers leave out important parts of the passage because they assume the audience is familiar with the Bible. If you preach as if your audience is reading the Bible passage for the first time, your visitors and members will thank you.

Remember that each sermon should communicate one main idea. You can have a variety of ideas in the sermon but each one should be related to your sermon's central truth.

WHICH BOOKS HAVE BEEN INFLUENTIAL FOR YOU?

If you can only buy one book, buy Haddon Robinson's, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.) Robinson's ten-step model for sermon preparation and delivery is what I use in my preaching classes at Southern Adventist University.

Preaching the stories of the Bible is a great way to reach today's audiences.

Stephen D. Mathewson's *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002) transformed the way I preach Bible stories. Mathewson based his book on Robinson's ten-step model so these two books complement each other.

If you want to splurge, get *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*. (Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, gen. eds., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). It is a comprehensive one-volume

collection of more than two hundred articles by one hundred plus writers on all areas of preaching, and it includes a CD with audio examples.

WHAT PARTING WORD OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ELDERS WHO ARE INVITED/ CALLED TO PREACH?

Share what the Holy Spirit has given you. You may not have the experience of another speaker, but you can share what your text means to you, and you will help people where the more experienced preacher cannot touch. Preaching is like cooking. While we all love an occasional meal prepared by a master chef, most of us thrive best on home cooking.

I want to thank each Elder who preaches the Word of God. Wherever I go, I meet dedicated men and women who are passionate about preaching God's Word. May God bless you as you develop your skills in sharing His Word with others.

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER'S DIGEST



To commemorate and celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of *Elder's Digest* is to recognize the value and virtue that this spiritual resource has brought to the ministry of the elders in our church. It is an excellent tool that has strengthened lay leadership in the churches of the Inter-American Division

and is a great supplement to the resources of our ministers. Our church is better today because of the influence of this invaluable resource over the past 15 years. Inspired vision and leadership gave birth to *Elder's Digest*.

In our territory, where the multi-church pastorate is a reality, what could speak more powerfully to the needs of a pastor with 23 churches than *Elder's Digest* with its many features that are spot-on for the moment? Congratulations to the founders and to the present leadership of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference for energizing and sustaining this great resource. From the Ministerial Association of the IAD, we say, "Live on, *Elder's Digest*; we appreciate your value and prowess. Live on, *Elder's Digest*; you're a resource of great import. Live on, *Elder's Digest*; we need you. Live on!"—Balvin B. Braham, Associate Ministerial Secretary, Inter-American Division.

THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

General

Mark W. Clark, a veteran of World War II and Korea, said that his entire life had been spent “in a search for the mysterious intangible—the quality known as leadership.” Field Marshall Montgomery called leadership “the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose.” No matter how we define it, one thing is certain: there is never enough of it available.

Where does juvenile delinquency begin? In leaderless families. Where do slums fester? In leaderless cities. Which are the armies that falter, which political parties fail? Poorly-led ones. Why are many nations facing economical problems? Greed and poor leadership! Why are families disintegrating? There is no leadership in the home!

As pastors and elders, we have a tremendous responsibility to lead the church family into the kingdom of God and to provide a healthy environment for them to grow in their Christian experience.

YOUTH TRENDS

During my ministry with young people, there was one story that really touched me. This was during the 1960s, when young people faced a lot of problems. The problems were reflected in their appearance, their music, and their “hippie” lifestyle. On one particular Sabbath, as the pastor delivered the sermon, the congregation was amazed to see a colorfully dressed, long-haired hippie walk in.

The pastor and the congregation froze as an elder walked toward the hippie. Everyone assumed that the elder was going to throw him out, but to their surprise, he sat right next to him. That day the congregation learned what true love was all about. Everyone was reminded that Christ died for everyone, including that hippie.

Over the years, young people have faced problems ranging from depression to violence. When pastors and elders work for the youth alongside teachers and parents, we can rest assured that the future of our church will reap a bountiful harvest.

Youth today are crying out for quality relationships with adults. Because our youth are not being fed, they are looking to other pastures, and the media is constantly feeding them negative values. The challenge now is how to deal with these problems in such a terrible world.

Just as God uses adults to reach youth, He also uses high-quality peers to plant the seeds of good morals in the hearts of our youth. When our youth are driven by the love of God, they are empowered to do wondrous works, just as in March 2009, when a group of teenagers went to Florida on spring break—not to party, but to perform community service.

YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

According to researchers, parents and children differ in areas such as drug use, occupational goals, marital relationships, and child-rearing. Youth often view adults as hypocrites, saying one thing and doing another. They witness the frequency of unsanctified marriages, divorce, and adultery.

I ran a workshop for a European youth congress in which I spoke to 400 young people on the topic of marriage. When I challenged them to model and observe their parents and other married couples, one youth said afterward that there were no role models in his church to follow.

Ellen G. White says: “The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. Far more powerful than any sermon that can

be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives. As the youth go out from such a home, the lessons they have learned are imparted. Nobler principles of life are introduced into other households, and an uplifting influence works in the community.”^a

YOUTH AND THEIR LEADERS

Some time ago, *Youth for Christ*, an organization involved in youth ministry, released findings of an extensive research project in conjunction with Michigan State University. The survey focused on the qualities young people most desired in a leader, whether an adult or one of their peers. The study examined 11 desirable and 11 undesirable leadership behaviors. They ranked one set which dealt with peers and one set that dealt with adults. The findings showed that the characteristics many young people look for in good leaders are characteristics they see in their parents. Here are some samples of the most important qualities:

- People-oriented programs
- Avoiding authoritarian leadership
- Listening (the most important behavior listed for both peers and adults)
- Hypocrisy (ranked as the most undesirable behavior that young people see).

However, it was interesting to see what qualities parents, ministers, elders, or teachers should have as they work with young people in the home, school, or church.

CONFIDENCE

Hannibal believed he could lead an army of 66,000 men and scores of elephants over the Alps through a blinding snowstorm to attack the Romans. That confidence in himself was planted and nurtured by his father, the great Carthaginian Hamilcar, and it resulted in the most daring march in military history.

We see this quality in the life of Jesus. Ellen G. White says that “He honored man with His confidence, and thus placed him on his honor.”^b She also says that “when men will show confidence in their fellowmen, they will come much nearer to possessing the mind of Christ.”^c

ENERGY

To work with youth, a leader must be energetic and in good shape. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was a frail man. But every morning he rose at 4:00 a.m., delivered his first sermon at 5:00 a.m., and was on the road by 6:00 a.m. Every day he traveled 60 or 70 miles on horseback, preaching to anyone who could hear him. At night he sat up writing books or composing hymns by candlelight. In all his 87 years, he never once spared himself, and people admired and followed him because of it.

Ellen White says this about leaders: “Courage, energy, and perseverance they must possess.”^d She adds that “Christian life is more than many take it to be. It does not consist wholly in gentleness, meekness and kindness. These graces are essential; but there is need also of courage, force, energy and perseverance.”^e

TIMING

Pastors and elders cannot have Model-T leadership when Model SS is in the marketplace. One of the most unsuccessful launches of an automobile was the famous Edsel. It had some marvelous looks and features, but Americans did not like it. It was released at the wrong time. Today it has become a classic!

We need to be aware of current events and trends. The saying “In my day . . .” has been said all too often. Let us try and reach the youth at their level. Let us try to understand their language, goals, and aspirations without compromising our principles. The Bible says that “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4, ESV).

There were other qualities listed in the *Youth for Christ* survey: clarity, tenacity, boldness, concern, and morality. They are all important. However, I like the last one.

FAITH

Leaders must believe in the youth and believe that God can help them. They must be believers in God who study the Word, are exemplary family members, who take time with their families and with the youth, and are humble shepherds. Faith means Forsaking All I Take Him. Not only must leaders have faith in the young people, they must also have faith in themselves that they can help the youth reach their goals.

William George, former CEO of Medtronics, said, “To create lasting value in our corporation, we need a new generation of authentic leaders to step up and take charge of our companies. Only then we will regain the trust of the American people.”^f

Prophetic words for our times! In the same article, Warren Bennis, at the University of Southern California, said that “leadership is based on character.” However, I would like to close by mentioning one of the essential qualities that pastors, elders, parents, and teachers should hold as they deal with the complicated issues and problems that young people face.

PATIENCE

In the book *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White describes how Jesus, in His youth, learned the lessons of patience and endurance. His patience, His treatment of people, and the lessons from His parents were displayed during His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. During their dialogue, Christ listened with attention and tried to communicate with this poor woman. “Patiently Jesus permitted her to lead the conversation whither she would. Meanwhile He watched for the opportunity of again bringing the truth home to her heart.”^g

What an example from our Master! Patiently we must wait for the opportunity to bring the love of God to the young people of our church. Patience is one of the qualities of the saints in the last days: “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

At the end of His ministry, when confronted with Herod, Jesus displayed calmness and patience. Here is

what Mrs. White says of this famous encounter.

“Christ might have spoken words to Herod that would have pierced the ears of the hardened king. He might have stricken with fear and trembling by laying before him the full iniquity of his life, and the horror of his approaching doom. But Christ’s silence was the severest rebuke that He could have given.”^h Some time ago I heard Dr. Arthur Bietz, then-pastor of the Glendale Seventh-day Adventist Church in California, describing Jesus’ encounter with Herod. He said that “Jesus was faced with nothing and there was nothing to say.”

Let us follow the example of our Savior by demonstrating faith in our young people. Yes, they will make mistakes. The famous Olympic swimmer, Michael Phelps, winner of eight gold medals at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, tarnished his image when he was discovered smoking marijuana on camera. He admitted his mistake and apologized.

That is why we need patience, love, and understanding as we deal with our youth. We must have faith in them in spite of their foolish mistakes! Our youth and children are the most precious treasures we have in our churches. They are not only the present but the future of our church. Many of the young people that I have met in my ministry are now pastors, doctors, nurses, and administrators of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained . . . how soon the message of a crucified, risen and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world.”ⁱ

^a Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, 328.

^b ———, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 190.

^c *Ibid.*, 189.

^d White, *Gospel Workers*, 39.

^e *Ibid.*, 290.

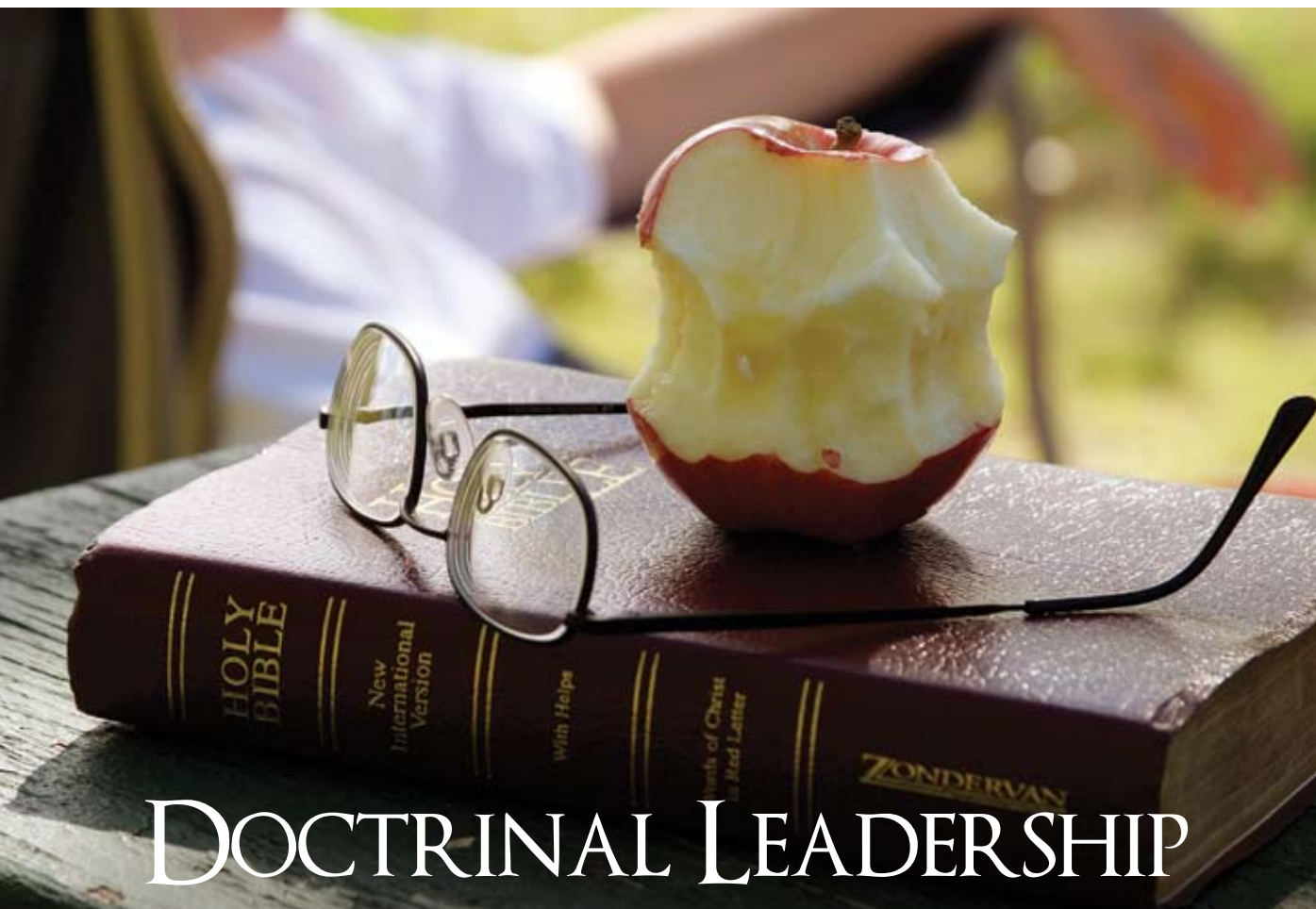
^f *The Costco Connection*, March 2004.

^g White, *The Desire of Ages*, 186.

^h *Ibid.*, 730.

ⁱ *Messages to Young People*, 196.

Leo Ranzolin, now retired, is a former Youth Director and Vice President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



DOCTRINAL LEADERSHIP

The modern systems of communication facilitate the transfer of dysfunctional doctrinal and theological views from one part of the world to another. Church members with access to the Internet can navigate for hours in an ocean of web pages containing distortions of our message and sensationalist expositions of our eschatology which do not contribute at all to their spiritual development. I am referring to websites of individuals or groups that, while claiming to be Adventist, promote positions that are not representative of our message and mission.

Furthermore, there are occasions when such individuals are invited to speak to our congregations and in camp meetings, leaving behind them confusion, conflicts, and in many cases disrespect for pastors and leaders. They support most of the Adventist message but their main interest is to promote their own peculiar views and to obtain the financial support of church members through selling their books or through donations. Often those who invite them do not know them well enough to anticipate the danger. What can you do to protect your field from these spiritual predators?

First, motivate church members to spend more time studying the Bible. If they know the truth they will develop spiritual discernment that will enable them to distinguish truth from error. We need to bring the Bible back to the life of the church not only in the exposition of our message but also in our daily Christian experience.

Second, we should hear from our pulpits messages that will contribute toward grounding our church members in our message and mission. Proclaim the gospel in the context of the end-time message of the Adventist church and under no circumstances allow the pulpit to become a forum for doctrinal and theological controversies. In churches where different and contradictory doctrinal views co-exist, church growth and spiritual vitality are languishing and are almost non-existent. A church that is vibrant and active is a church with clear biblical and doctrinal convictions and consequently ready and willing to share them.

Third, before you invite a speaker to your field, find out who this person is and what she or he is promoting. Ask the person to send you their materials and, since most of them have websites, examine what they have on

“A church that is vibrant and active is a church with clear biblical and doctrinal convictions.”

their websites. Sometimes their websites are deceptive, giving you the impression that they are faithful Adventists when in fact they hold views to the contrary. You can also ask them to provide you a list of places where they have been invited to speak and then contact the pastors or church leaders in some of those places. This will take time, but you should be careful or otherwise you may regret it.

Fourth, it is important to keep church members informed about websites where they can find trustworthy information about our message (e.g., www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org and www.whiteestate.org). This should be done on a regular basis through the means of communication available to you. I understand very well how difficult it is to keep individuals who promote their own peculiar and divisive message away from our churches. In fact, some of them may be retired ministers or may even work for the church. I can only encourage you to do all you can to make sure that you know enough about them to hinder them from damaging the unity of the church in your respective fields. ED

This article was written by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez and has been reprinted from *Reflections*, the Biblical Research Institute Newsletter, edited by Clinton Wahlen, Ph.D.



October 24, 2009 has been designated as Creation Sabbath, a day when churches are encouraged to emphasize in the worship service God as our Creator. For program suggestions visit www.creationsabbath.net.

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER'S DIGEST



Congratulations to *Elder's Digest* on your fifteenth anniversary! Being a pastor myself, I understand the challenge for our elders in their local churches to nourish parishioners. *Elder's Digest* contributes largely in helping our elders to develop their skills in preaching and in uplifting members in their churches through the quality of its

presentations. At the same time it supports the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because our brothers and sisters will be encouraged to share what they hear with neighbors and friends. We appreciate the variety of themes in *Elder's Digest*, as well as the way it invites people to improve their relationship with Jesus. We recommend *Elder's Digest* to all our members who want to enter the ministry of preaching; the magazine will bring many blessings to them.

Thank you to the *Elder's Digest* team; you are a blessing to the church. All of the elders from the Euro-Africa Division send their greetings and their appreciation to you, and you can be assured that we are praying for you and for the wonderful ministry you accomplish in the precious name of our Savior.—Bruno Vertallier, President, Euro-Africa Division.

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER'S DIGEST



The Inter-American Division is pleased to join you in celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of *Elder's Digest*. At the same time we want to congratulate the General Conference for being the means by which such a vital magazine is able to reach each individual church elder, many of whom are faithful workers who dedicate their

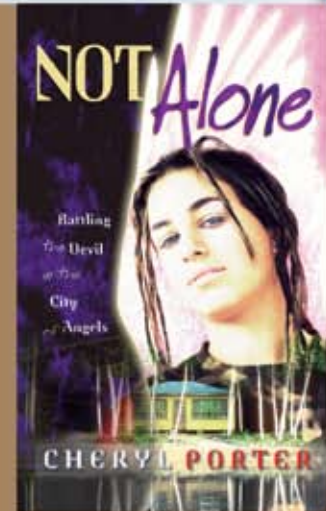
lives and talents to the service of God without remuneration and without expecting anything in return.

In Inter-America, church elders represent a powerful army that, along with our pastors, fight daily against those who wish to discourage and defeat faithful church members. In this sense *Elder's Digest* has become a vital weapon in this war. With each article, our army is fortified and gains strength to continue in the battle, until that glorious day when Christ shall appear in the clouds and the redeemed shall be taken to their celestial home.

Blessings to you! Keep moving forward in this important ministry. You will always have our prayers and support.—Hector Sanchez, Ministerial Secretary, Inter-American Division.

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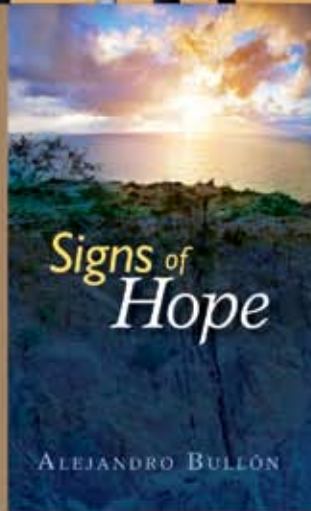
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| SERMON 1

MARKS OF WORLDLINESS

1 John 2:15-16

The Bible defines worldliness as a covetous desire after the possession of worldly things. Worldliness is lust of the flesh (a passion for sensual satisfaction), lust of the eyes (an inordinate desire for the finer things of life), and pride of life (self-satisfaction in who we are, what we have, and what we have done). Worldliness, then, is a preoccupation with ease and affluence. It elevates creature comforts to the point of idolatry; large salaries and comfortable lifestyles become necessities of life.

Many people think that worldliness is limited to external behavior. Others think that worldliness means hanging out with the wrong kinds of people. But worldliness is an attitude of the heart that indicates a lack of a totally consuming love for God.

There are many ways that worldliness dilutes, pollutes, and distorts the thinking of millions, to their detriment. The following characteristics are often associated with worldliness.

• PREOCCUPATIONS WITH EARTHLY CONCERNS

People today are busy. We like to stay active, but we often get preoccupied with things that distract us from Christ and His priorities. We focus on the wrong things, and there is little room left for what God wants for us. Paul wrote, "Set your thoughts on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).

• PRIDE

The Greek word for pride is *alazonia*, which means to boast of one's importance to the point of it becoming vain glory. It is pitiful when people think they are better than they really are. Proud people set themselves up for disappointment. Pride is an overbearing opinion about self, worth, or "indispensableness." Paul wrote to the proud Corinthians, "If anyone thinks he stands, let him take heed lest he falls" (1 Cor. 10:13). Peter warns, "God humbles the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

• PLEASURES

Too often human desires incline our hearts toward things that will please our sinful natures instead of pleasing God. Paul wrote, "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is

life and peace" (Rom. 8:6-8).

• POSSESSIONS

Do not let the craving to accumulate things overcome your commitment to storing up treasures in heaven. Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:24).

• POPULARITY

Some people are so fixated on how they appear to others that they gravitate only to those leaders who are popular at the time. As a result, these individuals are mercurial in who leads and influences them. Paul wrote, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

• POWER OBSESSION

Some people are obsessed with being in control. They are not happy until they sense that they have dominance in every situation and discussion. Paul learned to be content in every situation. He said, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

• POSITION

We live in a very competitive society. From the time we are young, we are encouraged to be our best, to get to the top of the class, and to be the "head" instead of the "tail." When we become adults, it is often difficult for us to be stuck in a job where we have not been promoted for many years. It is important to remember what God told Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-5.

• PEOPLE-PLEASING

We all enjoy being around people who appreciate us. Worldly people live in a constant state of anxiety, fearing that important people may not approve of what they are doing. Performance-driven people are secretly insecure because they have not completely trusted in the Lord

for their affirmation. Paul wrote, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

People are fickle, but God's love for us is constant. "Do you work as unto the Lord and not unto men knowing that from the Lord we will receive the reward of our inheritance? It is the Lord Jesus Christ whom we serve and not men" (Col. 3:23-24).

• PRIVILEGES SEEN AS SELF-CENTERED RIGHTS

When you first got your driver's license, you learned that driving was a privilege, not a right. Yet some of us have witnessed how difficult it is for elderly people to give up their driver's licenses; they have forgotten this important lesson. In the same way, we must remember that every good thing is a gift from God. As Job learned, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Let us also say like Job, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Let us not begrudge the Lord for taking things away (such as possessions or privileges that we have assumed are our rights). Yield all of your rights and privileges to the Lord. David wrote, "He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with what is good" (Ps. 107:9).

Some years ago, musicians noted that errand boys in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. Someone suggested that perhaps the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes, and they were discordant. The boys did not know there was anything wrong with the peals, and quite unconsciously they had copied the bells' pitch.

We tend to copy people with whom we associate. We borrow thoughts from the books we read and the programs to which we listen, almost without knowing it. God has given us His Word, which is the absolute pitch of life and living. If we learn to sing by it, we shall easily detect the false notes in the music of the world.

Let us focus on loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. When we do this, we can avoid worldliness and its consequences. ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Titus 2:1-8

Going to the doctor for a checkup is something many people do regularly. They want to make sure their health is not failing in ways they can't detect on their own. Likewise, we are prone to miss signs of poor spiritual health if we don't check up on it regularly.

In Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, he uses a word that helps evaluate spiritual health. The word is "sound." When the Bible speaks of sound doctrine, sound faith, and sound speech, it is talking about healthy doctrine, healthy faith, and healthy speech.

How do we maintain good spiritual health? How do we know we are spiritually well? This is a very important question on several levels. One of current importance is, "There are so many different claims of spirituality in today's society; how do I know if I'm truly spiritual?"

I. SOUND DOCTRINE

In 1 John 4:1, we read that the first test of good spiritual health is our relationship to "sound doctrine." This is the foundation. If our spiritual health is going to be good, it has to be based on the right information.

Consider what the Bible says about sound or healthy doctrine (read Titus 2:1; 2 Tim. 1:13 and Titus 1:9). Sound doctrine, then, has an encouraging and uplifting effect. One of the reasons we read, study, hear, teach, and preach from the Word of God is because it is very encouraging! Sound doctrine is healthy and encourages us because it is true and trustworthy!

Sometimes our spiritual health grows weak because we are pulled down by the discouraging things around us. But our hope can grow when fed a constant diet of sound doctrine.

On the other hand, false doctrine leads to a spiritually unhealthy lifestyle (1 Tim. 1:8).

Why are some people spiritually unhealthy? The doctrine they have been following is not sound. We cannot maintain good spiritual health if we are following false teaching. The Word of God issues some of its sharpest warnings in this area (2 Tim. 4:3).

We can digest false teaching because it's what we want to hear at the moment, but our spiritual health will inevitably suffer. We will find ourselves

more easily discouraged, more likely to sin, and more easily led astray by even more serious false teaching.

II. SOUND FAITH

The second diagnostic test for spiritual health follows logically. The Bible talks about "sound faith" (read Titus 1:10-13). Do you see the connection? If we listen to and follow doctrine that is unsound, then our faith won't be sound. Only sound doctrine produces sound faith. Sound spiritual health is predicated on sound spiritual intake.

Look at some of the Bible's definitions of a life of sound faith (read Titus 2:1-8).

Verse 1: "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine."

Verse 2: "Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance."

Verse 3: "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good."

Verse 4: "Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children . . ."

Verse 5: ". . . to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God."

Verse 6: "Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled."

These verses suggest that our spiritual health is based on sound doctrine, which is evidenced by sound faith, which determines how we live.

"How can I tell if my spiritual health is good?" How "good" am I living?

III. SOUNDNESS OF OUR SPEECH

Thirdly, the state of our spiritual health can be diagnosed by the soundness of our speech. Let's go just a little further with Titus 2. Read verse 6 again: "Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled."

Verses 7-8: "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In showing your integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us."

As a young man himself, Titus set an example with his own life for the young men in his congregation. As a pastor, he was to be sound in speech, but this was also part of what he was to teach the members of his congregation.


How can you tell if your spiritual health is good? How are you talking? Is your speech sound? Is it uplifting and positive? "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29).

Negative talk denotes a spiritual health that is not good. Gossiping; backbiting; harsh, unwholesome, negative words—they don't build anyone up, so we shouldn't use them. They are indicators of poor spiritual health.

No wonder God's Word admonishes us, "My dear brother, take note of this, everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:29).

So how do you know if your spiritual health is good?

- Sound doctrine: do you listen to it and follow it?
- Sound faith: is your life producing the right kind of works?
- Sound speech: are you talking correctly?

How will you respond if the Holy Spirit convinces you that you have room for improvement in these areas? 

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

CHURCH PILLARS

Philippians 4:19

Even a layperson can recognize the importance of pillars in construction. In the great spiritual building of the church, there is also a need for strong, unshakable pillars.

What are these pillars? Dedicated members, full of responsibility and committed to the church program. This is how the apostles were considered (Gal. 2:9). Thanks to these fearless men who were full of the Holy Spirit, the primitive church grew until it reached the entire world with the message of Jesus.

I. TODAY'S PILLARS

There is no doubt that, today more than ever, the church needs consecrated men and women who are willing to commit themselves to the church program and to the fulfillment of its noble mission.

But where are these pillars? Usually, when the church is selected for a special mission, few are willing to serve, and most members hide in the crowd or behind barriers of excuses such as "I have no ability" or "I don't know how to speak."

If you are in the group that offers excuses but are honest in wanting to do something for Jesus, I would like to present you the following promise: Philippians 4:19. The essence of this promise is: "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Note that "all your needs" doesn't mean only financial need; it also includes time, ability, wisdom, talents, resources, and everything else you need to become a pillar.

II. JEHOVAH JIREH—THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

A. God will provide ability.

1. If you feel incapable of becoming a missionary, remember Moses' story. He also felt incapable for the task (read Exod. 4:10).

2. Here is God's answer, which also applies to us (read Exod. 4:12).

3. Place yourself in God's hands and He will provide the ability.

B. God will provide courage.

1. If you lack the courage to witness for Jesus, remember Gideon. He wanted to present an excuse to avoid the mission (read Judges 6:15).

2. Here is the answer God gives to us today (read Judges 6:12, 16). In God's hands we become courageous pillars in the church.

C. God will provide power.

1. If someone feels spiritually weak and wishes for more courage to use his or her talents, remember the apostles' experience. Who were the apostles? Simple humans like us. But here is the reason for their transformation (read Acts 1:8). Through that power, they shook the world!

2. This same power is available to us. "The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children" (Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 251).

3. Full of this power, all will be covered with courage to work for the church.

D. God will provide wisdom.

1. If someone feels incapable or lacks wisdom, God can help (read James 1:5).

III. ALL NEEDS SUPPLIED

Have you noticed how faithful God is in His promises? He supplies all our needs so that we can be active participants or pillars in His church.

Don't be stagnant before this knowledge! The church needs your talents and abilities to collaborate in fulfilling the mission of the gospel and sharing the news of Christ's Second Coming. Free your talents (read Luke 19:29-31).

Remember that the donkey was tied to the post; if no one had set it free, it would never have been useful for Jesus. It is the same today. Too many talents are tied to the platform of commodity, laziness, excuses, or pretexts, but Jesus tells us to loosen these bonds. Why? Because the Lord needs our talents (Luke 19:31)!

Unleash your talents; Jesus and His church need them. And if you feel inadequate, remember "Jehovah Jireh"—the Lord will provide.

CONCLUSION


A man tied his boat at the river's edge during the winter. One day he noticed the ice was melting, so he went to the boat to clean it, but the strong wind tore the boat loose from its moorings.

He (in the boat without paddles) was swept by the current toward a dangerous waterfall.

Seeing the situation, a neighbor ran to the other neighbors and cried: "Everyone, grab a rope and follow north." Not even knowing what was going on, people followed his emphatic order. When they got to the bridge, they saw the boat coming down the rapids. Then the leader cried: "Everyone, throw your ropes down." They all obeyed, thus forming a net of ropes, about three feet apart from each other, and the castaway grabbed the closest rope under the bridge and was saved.

Can you imagine if the neighbor had gone alone? His rope could have been too far away, and the man wouldn't have been able to reach it. But with everyone's help, there were ropes everywhere, and the man was saved.

The church is like that. It is not enough for one or two to throw their ropes of salvation; in fact, it may be too little. Everyone needs to stretch their ropes to form a saving net to reach the castaways, lost in the world of sin.

Free your talents today, and throw the rope of salvation. Become a pillar in your church. 

Antenor Cruz da Costa is a retired pastor in Brazil.

Sermon Notes:

A RIGHT WAY TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

Many families have Christmas traditions. Some households gather on Christmas Eve to open some or all of their gifts. Some families have a special meal. Others have a birthday cake for Jesus. In some homes the family reads the Christmas story from the Bible. Some decorate Christmas trees. We all have our traditions.

What is the appropriate way to celebrate Christmas? To answer this question, we are going to look at the biblical accounts of the Christmas story and seek to discover how the various players in the story responded to the birth of Jesus.

I. WORSHIP (MATT. 2:11)

Both the Magi and the shepherds responded with worship. Perhaps we can represent worship with an offering plate. The Magi offered gifts, and the shepherds offered their praise to God. The Magi, the shepherds, and all the other participants in the Nativity story gave themselves to the Lord. They worshipped God.

There are at least two reasons why this is an appropriate response. First, we should worship God because He is God. In Bethlehem, God came to earth.

The second reason is because of why God came to earth. Jesus came into the world to help us find the way to be right with God. He came to communicate God's love and goodness to those who cast Him aside. He came to give His life for us.

There are many stories of people who have become friends because of a gift of a kidney or bone marrow. One person gives sacrificially, and the recipient feels gratitude for the rest of his or her life. How much more should we be grateful for what God has done for us in Christ?

It would be unthinkable to go to a birthday celebration and give gifts to everyone but the person having the birthday. What plans have you made to honor the King? (Read Luke 2:20)

II. CELEBRATION (MATT. 2:10)

The second element of an appropriate Christmas observance is celebration and joy. In the same chapter of Matthew, we read that when the Magi saw the star, they were overjoyed. When Elizabeth (Mary's aunt who was pregnant in her old age with John the Baptist) heard Mary's greeting, she said her baby jumped for joy!

The Bible speaks of songs that were sung or spoken by Mary, the angels, and Simeon (the old man who blessed Jesus when He was brought to the temple). That first Christmas was a time of joy! Is there any better news than that "God has come and opened to us the way to eternal life?" (Read Luke 1:44, 46; 2:29)

III. REFLECTION (LUKE 2:19)

A third response is seen in Luke 2:19. We read that after Mary was told all the things the shepherds saw and heard, she "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

If you have been blessed to have had a child of your own, think back to that wonderful day when your child was born. You smiled and thanked God, but more than anything, you held that child and treasured and pondered how your life had changed. You thought about your responsibility to protect this new life.

I encourage you to take some time to reflect on the birth of Jesus. Stop and think about the difference that His coming makes to your life. Think about how His entry into the world has changed everything (even for those who don't believe). Find a quiet place and ponder and reflect on the truth of His coming. As you do, your heart will be led into worship.

IV. EVANGELISM (LUKE 2:17)

Fourth, it is proper to use this time to tell others about Jesus. Notice that in Luke 2:17, we are told that after the shepherds met Jesus for the first time, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child.

The birth of Jesus is a life-changing event for all of us, and because He has changed our lives, we are driven to tell everybody about what He has done. Why wouldn't we share such great news with others? We feel hesitant about evangelism because we don't believe we can answer the questions of a skeptic or point to the right Scripture passages. The shepherds couldn't do any of these things either. All they could do was testify of what they had seen and heard. We can do the same today.

V. OBEDIENCE (LUKE 1:38, 2:15)

Finally, we see in the original Christmas story that there was one response from those who met Jesus: obedience.

- Joseph obeyed God; he took Mary as his wife and named the child she delivered, Jesus.

- The Magi, having been warned in a dream, did not go back to Herod.

- Joseph obeyed the angel and took Mary and Baby Jesus to Egypt.

- Joseph brought Jesus back to Israel and eventually ended up in Nazareth because this was what God had told him to do (Matt. 2:23).

- Mary responded to the request of the angel with the words, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

- The shepherds went to see the baby that the Lord's angels had told them about (Luke 2:15).

Each person in the Nativity story honored God by obeying Him. These people didn't obey because what they had been asked to do seemed like a good idea; they obeyed because they trusted God. They obeyed because they had faith.

It is an appropriate response to Christmas. If you love someone, you show your love by how you live. If you are grateful, you show it by the things you do. At Christmas, it is a good time to obey God by:

- Forgiving an offense or letting go of resentment.

- Telling the truth.

- Reaching out to someone who is hurting.


- Receiving Christ as the one who can save and transform you.

- Sharing the message of Christ with someone close to you.

Obedience illustrates our devotion. (Read Matt. 1:24, 2:12,14)

CONCLUSION

As you prepare for Christmas, do you see worship, celebration, reflection, evangelism, and obedience in how you plan to celebrate Christmas? It is possible to have wonderful family traditions and still miss the real celebration of Christmas. You can go to church and never worship. You can sing the carols of the season and never encounter Christ. You can spend thousands of dollars on gifts and still ignore the One whose life we honor.

Enjoy your family traditions, but don't forget to honor the King. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

CHAIRING COMMITTEES



Chairing committees is one of the most significant, time-consuming, and sometimes exasperating thing a pastor or elder can do. Do you want to do it better? Here are some tips.

Prepare an agenda. An agenda is a list of items for the committee to consider and act on. Each member should receive a copy, preferably well before the meeting date so that members can come prepared. Under some circumstances, it is wise to screen the agenda through a smaller group such as the Elders' Council. When there is consensus among the elders, the church board will usually agree.

Begin and end on time. Whether everyone is present or not, begin the meeting on time. If you start late, you end late. Besides, starting late gives people the idea they can come late and not miss anything. Listing agenda items can help keep a committee on schedule.

First, list the items that do not require everyone's presence, such as the treasurer's report or other routine business. Next, list the heavy, time-consuming items. After the committee talks for an hour and members realize they've addressed only a fourth of the agenda, they'll become more businesslike. Next, list the brief, shorter items. Finally, include items that must be considered eventually but could be postponed if you run out of time.

Provide information. A committee working in the right spirit and with the right information will almost invariably make good decisions. Inadequate information often leads to wrong decisions. The chairperson need not be the source of all information but should ensure that the committee gets the information it needs to act intelligently.

Create a team spirit. Research shows that a committee becomes ineffective when there is a hostile spirit within the group. Members must want to work together and want to agree. The chairperson has much to do with creating this kind of team spirit.

Don't over-control. Unless the committee is oversize, members shouldn't have to address the chair when they wish to speak. Dialogue should flow freely and directly from person to person. Understand and at least informally observe the rules of parliamentary procedure. This gains respect for your leadership, establishes an organized sense of fairness, and protects the democratic process.

Nothing helps create a team spirit more effectively

than a wholesome sense of humor. If you can smile together, you can usually work together.


Control participation. Ensure a broad spectrum of participation and encourage everyone to join in the discussion. Gently bypass those who have already shared their point of view and tend to dominate. Specifically ask more timid members to share their thinking. When these nonparticipating members learn that their contributions are heard and respected, they will usually speak again and continue to participate.

Respect others' ideas. Pastors and other denominational chairpersons tend to be too autocratic. They believe they know more about the subject than the committee members, probably because they have been more closely involved with the issue. But this does not mean their judgment is superior to that of the group.

Stick to the problem. A committee solves problems by a cooperative pooling of information and judgment. But when the problem proves especially difficult to solve, the group (or at least some of its members) will tend to talk about something unrelated to the problem. The chairperson must kindly but relentlessly keep the committee focused on the problem at hand.

Summarize periodically. Rather than spending a lot of time presenting your own arguments as chairperson, concentrate more on condensing and summarizing the arguments given by others and working toward areas of consensus.

See that decisions are recorded. This may seem unimportant in smaller, informal groups. But forget that you can remember, and remember that you can forget. Recorded minutes can keep the pastor or elder out of a lot of trouble.

Support the decision. Few things aggravate a committee more than finding out that the pastor and other church leaders have ignored a committee decision and done things their own way. When you're voted down, either accept the committee's wish or bring together additional information and ask the group to reconsider. Everyone together is more likely to be right than anyone alone—including the pastor. 

Floyd Bresee wrote this article when he was the Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference. The article first appeared in the July 1992 issue of *Ministry*.

HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS

7 SECRETS FOR TRUE LONGEVITY HEALTHY DIET <

Welcome back to “Healthy Tips for Elders.” In the last issue of *Elder’s Digest*, we talked about the number one secret for true longevity: regular physical activity. I must re-emphasize its importance. Physicians worldwide often prescribe physical activity to their patients. It’s amazing how science continues to catch up with inspired counsel, who stated decades ago, “A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine

the doctors may prescribe.”^a Also, the American College of Sports Medicine announced the publication of a new book, *Exercise is Medicine*,^b promoting this principle. If you are not yet physically active on a regular basis, you can start walking today. Better yet, join the North American Division’s physical-activity initiative *InStep for Life*^c “Glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20) and try this number-one secret for a long, abundant life.

Now, let us focus on Secret #2: healthy diet. There is plenty of counsel and research on what constitutes a healthy diet. Much information seems contradictory. Some people claim that a healthy diet is a vegan diet. Others promote a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet. Others cite data suggesting we must have some fish since it is a good source of omega-3. What really constitutes a healthy diet?

First, science agrees that eating red meat will contribute to premature death. Recently the *Washington Post* reported the results of a major research study involving over 500,000 Americans. The study concluded, “Eating red meat increases the chances of dying prematurely, according to the first large study to examine whether regularly eating beef or pork increases mortality.” In this study, researchers found that “those who consumed about four ounces of red meat a day [the equivalent of about a small hamburger] were more than 30 percent more likely to die during the 10 years they were followed, mostly from heart disease and cancer. Sausage, cold cuts and other processed meats also increased the risk.”^d The evidence is clear.



However, this same article encourages people to consume chicken and fish which, according to this study, seems to decrease the risk for premature death. But looking at previous data from the Adventist Health Study, we see different results. For instance, Adventist men who consumed a vegetarian diet, including eggs and dairy products, had 61 percent fewer heart disease deaths compared to men who ate meat regularly. The greater benefit was for vegetarians who used no meat, fish, milk, or eggs. Compared to the general population, these men were 86 percent less likely to die of heart disease. Because heart disease is the #1 killer worldwide, this finding is significant. But the benefits go beyond heart disease. Adventist vegetarians between 30 and 50 years of age were found to have four times less risk of death from all causes, compared to those who eat meat.^e This seems to be a great advantage for longevity, doesn’t it? (We need to note that the Adventist Health study continues to report its findings, and new results will soon be available.)

It is a mistake to conclude, however, that by staying away from meats and eggs and dairy, you will live a long, healthy life. One can be “vegan” or vegetarian and still have a very unhealthy diet. Many “good” vegetarians regularly indulge in ice cream and desserts, consume high-sodium processed meat substitutes, enjoy fried foods and sauces high in saturated fats, and do not eat enough fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and nuts. If we have a diet high in unhealthy fats and sugars without the life-giving nutrients of plant foods, we may not reap the benefits of a long, productive life for God after all. Phytochemicals, anti-oxidants, vitamins, minerals, fiber, and natural omega-3 fatty acids contained in plant-based foods are shown to be the true contributors to longevity.

Isn’t it time to make healthier choices in your diet? You can start today by remembering that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). ED

^a Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, 57.
^b <https://www.acpm.org/members/030609.htm#15> (American College of Preventive Medicine).
^c www.InStepforLife.com
^d http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/23/AR2009032301626_pf.html
^e Neil Nedley, *Proof Positive* (Nedley Publishing, 1998), 84.



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THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER’S DIGEST



The journey back to my host division usually takes us over part of the Sahara Desert. As I peer from the window of the plane, I can see only gorgeous formations of rock and sand, with nothing to feed on should the plane crash and someone survive. But as we near the edge of the Sahara, the dry and barren desert gives way

to green fields and rivers of water.

In a similar way, *Elder’s Digest* has been a desert oasis in the West-Central Africa Division. Elders were scurrying around in the desert, trying to find an oasis of helpful resources. There was nothing. Some had even resorted to materials which were not theologically germane to Adventism. Now they are being blessed as they feed at the fountainhead—the quarterly *Elder’s Digest*—being nurtured, tutored, and equipped to offer professional service to their congregations. Pastors, elders, group and company leaders, and members all testify that their elders are leading better, preaching better, and “doing church” better. There is now an oasis, streams of living water, because of *Elder’s Digest*.

What a joy it has been for the Division to receive this help in manpower development and empowerment. The magnitude of the help is revealed when, on any given Sabbath, over 6,000 elders and lay leaders preach, complementing our 1,000 pastors. This is distance learning at its best. Only a magazine of this nature, covering such themes as leadership techniques and skills, sermons, suggestions, and news, could have filled this critical need.—R. D. Francis, Ministerial Secretary, West-Central Africa Division.





“
*Let us not become
 weary in doing good,
 for at the proper time
 we will reap a harvest
 if we do not give up.*

Gal. 6:9, NIV



DO YOU HAVE COMPASSION FATIGUE OR JOY IN SERVICE?

COMPASSION FATIGUE

One day, after attending a meeting of Adventist Community Services leaders and church administrators, a leader who was there with me commented that he wished there had been more joy expressed as they gave their presentations, their reports, and shared about their service. There appeared to be a heaviness, an attitude that it sometimes seemed overwhelming to serve God on behalf of others. That comment really hit me and is the catalyst for this article.

In my sometimes hectic life of service, I have occasionally felt this heaviness, this lack of joy. In fact I recently caught myself praying the following prayer when I was especially tired at the end of a busy work day:

“Lord, sometimes I get so tired serving You and Your people on this planet. This can’t go on. It is too much for me. I’ve got my regular employment at the General Conference, traveling, and additional responsibility to care for my in-laws when I’m not working at the GC. And there is the rest of my family, my children’s issues, and nurturing my relationship with my husband, as well as community service in conjunction with my church. And I must spend 30 hours/week studying to be a Certified Senior Advisor, and I must finish writing my latest book, and I must. . . . There is no end to it all, Lord—always more than I can handle. It’s too much! Lord, help me—please! Amen.”

This is a strange prayer from someone who is supposed to inspire others to serve God and people. I am reminded constantly that I can’t do it on my own, and sometimes I find myself bending under the load of service. Jesus’ followers have been given the task to do Jesus’ work—which is presented in Luke 4:18—“He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted. . . .”

“BUT Lord, I need healing. I feel broken. My life is out of balance and out of harmony with itself. I have compassion fatigue. There is so much need all around

me that I become overwhelmed and desensitized. I am tired, Lord!”

Sometimes compassion fatigue can be an attitude issue, as is shown by some people portrayed in Isaiah 58. God is not happy with His people because they are asking, “Why have we fasted, . . . and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” (vs. 3, NIV).

Whining—that’s what that is. In today’s lingo, their whining might sound like this: “Lord, can’t you see what I’m going through?! I’m tired of this! I have been serving you for 40 years. There is no joy in doing this! The only joy I get is when others notice and give me credit. That includes You, Lord. Sometimes it seems like I’m so alone in serving you. Why don’t others help too? And, sometimes it seems that people don’t appreciate what I do for them.”

One morning for our couple worship, my husband and I read a statement that I knew was especially for me: “We need to beware of self-pity. Never indulge the feeling that you are not esteemed as you should be, that your efforts are not appreciated, that your work is too difficult. Let the memory of what Christ has endured for us silence every murmuring thought. We are treated better than was our Lord.”^a

Then there is Psalm 100:2 (KJV), which exclaims, “Serve the Lord with gladness!” Joy and service belong together—like a horse and carriage!

Many times we have viewed service as an obligation rather than an opportunity. When our lives are overtaxed and out of balance and harmony, the obligation part might overshadow the opportunity part. Joy is hard to come by when you are worn and tired.

JOY IN SERVICE – HOW CAN IT HAPPEN?

To experience joy when serving God and others, our

priorities need to be in the following order:

1. God (my inner self must be in order and in tune with God)
2. Family
3. Work /service

Not only must priorities be in a certain order—these general priorities need to be in harmony with each other—as the individual parts of pleasant music. Dissonance and imbalance between them will diminish the joy of living and of service.

Priority #1—God—is the melody line in life’s song. When He takes the lead in our lives and we have regular time with Him in Bible study, prayer, and Sabbath observance, our family and our work/service will be infused with joy. “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm 16:11, KJV).

“Nothing is more needed in our work than the practical results of communion with God.”^b After we have absorbed the joy in His presence during our intentional devotional time, we can continue the practice of His joyful presence all day as we work side-by-side with Him. Don’t work *for* Jesus—work *with* Him! Now, that’s joy!

Priority #2—Family deserves our quality time. One prominent church leader told me that he took no vacations with his family, and he is reaping the results because his children felt that God and the church took Daddy from them. Jesus said to His “family:” “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31, NIV). Everything won’t fall apart if you do so. If you don’t come apart—you will fall apart! There is no joy in that!

Priority #3—Work/service. Put reasonable boundaries on your service and factor in your relationship with God and your family. Then with the strength given to you from Christ (Phil 4:13) – serve Him with gladness (Ps 100:2) – with JOY! When needs are overwhelming, and we feel we are not successful in making a difference, and are not making an impact in our work and service, remember the words of Mother Theresa: “God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful. And I do what I can each day in faithful accountability to God.”^c Not worrying and leaving the results with God surely makes me more light-hearted and joyful as I serve Him.

Another way to have joy in service is to love and respect the people whom we serve. Several years ago, I heard an unhappy missionary complaining about how stupid the people were in the country where he was serving. I felt like telling him, “Why don’t you go home, then, so you can be happier!” When we look at the people we serve through love and respect “glasses,” we will discover a joy in serving them that we might not have without these “glasses.” Otherwise we might get mad at them and end up serving the Lord with MADNESS!

EXCITING INFORMATION ABOUT JOY AND SERVICE

With priorities in place—and with joy, serve God with the whole of your joyful heart! Both joy and service bring many blessings in their train. Joy gives us health (Prov 17:22) and strength (Neh 8:10), as does service: “The pleasure of doing good to others imparts a glow to the feelings which flashes to the nerves, quickens the circulation of the blood, and induces mental and physical health.”^d “Doing good is a work that benefits both giver and receiver.”^e When we serve with joy, we have double benefits!

In *WIN! Wellness: Integrated Balanced Living*,^f John, Millie, and Wes Youngberg share several examples of the health benefits of joy and service. For example, a study of 3,296 volunteers performing acts of kindness established a clear cause-and-effect relationship between helping and good health. A happy feeling accompanies kind acts. Helping contributes to maintaining good health, and it can diminish the effect of both serious and minor diseases and disorders, psychological and physical.

After performing a kind act, the volunteers sensed a rush of euphoria, followed by a longer period of calm. Dr. Allan Luks calls this feeling “helper’s high.” We call it joy. The body’s natural painkillers, the endorphins, are released when helping occurs.^g

The best way to counteract depression is to find the joy of service. After the depression recorded in the first part of Isaiah 58, Isaiah recommends to these depressed ones a life of unselfish service (Isa 58:6-7). Then he exuberantly breaks into joy: “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, your healing will quickly appear (vs. 8, NIV) . . . , and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday” (vs. 10, NIV).

Try it! You’ll like it!



^a Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1909), p. 476.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 512.

^c Quoted by Lilya Wagner, *Caring Is Not a Spectator Sport* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1986), p. 57.

^d Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1952), p. 303.

^e Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2 (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1948), p. 534.

^f John B. Youngberg, Millie Youngberg, Wesley Youngberg, *WIN! Wellness: Integrated Balanced Living* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: WIN! Wellness, 2007).

^g Allan Lukes and Peggy Payne, *The Healing Power of Doing Good*, 1991. (Quoted in WIN! Wellness, p. 177).

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CHILD PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE

IS IT PROPER TO ALLOW UNBAPTIZED CHILDREN OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE: THE ORDINANCE OF THE HUMILITY, AND THE SERVICE OF THE LORD'S TABLE?

It has not been our practice to invite unbaptized children of our church members to participate in the Communion service, either in the foot-washing or in the partaking of bread and wine.

A poll of several ministerial brethren reveals that they all believe that participation in the Communion service should not begin for children until they are baptized and become members of the church. One of the purposes of the Communion service is to make evident the fellowship of the family of believers. While in a sense it is true that young, unbaptized children may believe, the full meaning of belief calls for baptism and entry into the church (see Mark 16:16).

Unless we hold that there is a great and real significance to church membership, we undermine the whole idea of the need to join the church. If we allow unbaptized children to take part in Communion, we are preparing the way for them to continue to participate through the years even though they have never been baptized as members of the church. Thus we destroy some of the prime symbolic value of Communion and make it a common thing in which any may participate without an open avowal of Christ and a dedication of life to Him.

It is true that the Adventist Church practices what is known as open Communion, and those who participate are not required to be members of our particular religious body. But we do ask that those who visit us from other congregations examine their own hearts, and if they have accepted Christ and are walking in fellowship with Him in their church, they may feel free to partake with us. However, this principle of open Communion does not apply to the question under consideration.

SHOULD WE KNEEL IN PRAYER?

Although statements in the Spirit of Prophecy strongly advocate kneeling in prayer, a number of our religious assemblies have a tendency to ask the congregation to stand for prayer, even when there is ample room to kneel. Which is correct?

In many instances there are valid reasons for asking a congregation to remain standing during prayer. But in any discussion of the subject of bodily posture in prayer, we may well consider the following statement from Ellen G. White: "Christ's followers today should guard against the tendency to lose the spirit of reverence and godly fear. The Scriptures teach men how they should approach their Maker—with humility and awe, through faith in a divine Mediator. The psalmist has declared: 'The Lord is a great God, And a great King above all gods. . . . O come, let us worship and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.' Both in public and in private worship, it is our privilege to bow on our knees before God when we offer our petitions to Him.

"Jesus, our example, 'kneeled down, and prayed.' Of His disciples it is recorded that they, too, 'kneeled down, and prayed.' Paul declared, 'I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' In confessing before God the sins of Israel, Ezra knelt. Daniel 'kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.'"^a

There is a certain relationship between pose of body and mood of spirit. It seems to me that a mood of contrite confession and genuine adoration can find best expression in the soul when one is on bended knee.

However, it would be sad indeed if in any of our churches we permitted the question of kneeling versus standing to become the occasion for controversy. In that event, our prayers would likely avail little, no matter what our bodily pose.

^a Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 48.



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

ADVENTIST PREACHING OFFERS SOLUTION FOR HOLIDAY WORSHIP

Do holidays go unnoticed at your church? Have you walked away from services on a holiday weekend only to be reminded by the CD playing in the car that the whole world was observing the holiday except your small community of believers?

There are several reasons why this could happen. 1) Your church may be one of three or four congregations in the district and this year the pastor was scheduled to be in another church. 2) Your membership is small with limited resources for music and other talents to create unique worship experiences. 3) There may not be anyone in the congregation that feels called to be a lay preacher.

Adventist Preaching's third Signature Edition is the answer to problems like these. *A Collection of Holiday Sermons* was designed to offer sermons and dramatic presentations for holidays throughout the entire year. Derek Morris in *The Testimony of Melchior* plays one of the Magi. His portrayal is prefaced by narration and music and, with the addition

of local talent, can be a program for Christmas Eve. There's even a Communion homily and a tribute to Veterans so local congregations can honor those in the pews who have bravely served our country. Gary Councell, director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, presents *For God and Country*, which can be used on Veteran's Day or Memorial Day.

No longer is it necessary for smaller churches to long for beautifully themed worship services that enhance the worship of larger churches. Through the DVD technology of Adventist Preaching and the generosity of select preachers, all churches can enjoy the same advantages.

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LEADERSHIP: HOW TO LEAD YOUR CHURCH TO GROWTH

The word “vision” has several meanings. “Vision comes from faith and allows a church to be or do something beyond its current abilities to impact the Kingdom. . . . Though these things cannot be seen physically, they must be seen mentally and spiritually if people are to commit themselves to the task.”^a

In a research study conducted by the Billy Graham School of Mission, hundreds of lay people were asked to define the purpose of the church. Less than 25 percent answered “evangelism,” but 90 percent mentioned “relationship” as the key purpose of the church. This shows that most believers consider the church more of a meeting place than an outreach agency.

DISCOVERING GOD’S PURPOSE

In a brief statement, Ellen G. White reveals her comprehension of God’s purpose for the church: “God demands that every soul who knows the truth shall seek to win others to the love of the truth.”^b

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus makes clear that the church’s main purpose is to preach the gospel. His explanation to the disciples can be summarized in three words: *Go, teach, baptize*. The fulfillment of this mission occurs when disciples are added to the body of Christ and are responsibly involved in evangelistic projects.

Thom Rainer says, “The vision comes from God and it should be the result of a leader’s life of prayer.”^c According to Rainer, for leaders to understand God’s immediate purpose for His church, prayer is indispensable. Through prayer, God makes leaders aware that they are at war “against principalities, against powers” (Eph. 6:12, 18) and that their mission is to be ambassadors for Christ and to work to free those enslaved by Satan (verses 19-20).

The elder needs to understand the difference between mission and vision:

1. Mission is the primary purpose of the gospel, in which all Christian churches should be involved. It includes worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship.

2. Vision is God’s specific plan for a specific church in a specific time. “The vision God gives to a church is not the same as He gives to another church.”^d

For a church to fulfill its mission, the elder needs to assist the church in recognizing the needs of the non-Adventist community in which the church is located. Working together with the congregation, elders can develop an efficient program to meet those community needs. “In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness.”^e That operation may be a combined effort of community service and evangelism. It is important that the vision not only reveal something that “needs to be done,” but that something “needs to be done to help others.” This vision that comes from God revives the heart of the church for the community’s needs through events, tasks, and specific programs.

ESTABLISHING OBJECTIVES FOR GROWTH

Lyle Schaller said, “Producing a congregation above 40 members is like pumping water up a hill. It can be done, but it means to go against powers of nature, and it requires persistent and continuous effort.” This principle can be applied to any church that wants to grow.

One of a leader’s major challenges is to mobilize people to reach outside their comfort zone. One method that works is to present the church with a numeric comparison chart showing church growth in recent years. The leader might explain that a church grows in three ways: (1) biologically (baptism of members; children); (2) by transfer; or (3) by the conversion of outside people. Make a comparison

separate from each of these topics and then discuss the subject openly with the church.

The church expresses interest in growing as it establishes its mission objectives and plans an efficient evangelistic program. It is the leader’s responsibility to assist the church in defining its objectives and focusing on the evangelistic program so that it is an entirely biblical activity. It should be clear to the members that the primary task is to bring unbelievers to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and to assist them in becoming active and responsible members in the church.

To be successful, elders should: (1) learn to humble themselves before the Lord so that the Lord can fill them with His Spirit (that means to study the Word of God and dedicate themselves to intercessory prayer); and (2) formulate with the pastor and congregation a church-growth strategy based on principles (guided by the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy) which brings life and encourages growth.

In this process of removing obstacles to encourage church growth, members are usually enthusiastic about evangelism, and everyone wants to participate with their own vision, which means each member will have an idea of what the church should be or do. The local pastor and leaders can help the church decide on a course of action. Choosing a course of action may seem easy, but it is not because it requires a change in style, location, system, leadership, and plans. It will certainly involve a lot of work.

LEADING WITH CREDIBILITY

The church leadership cannot change a church without the church’s permission. We elders need to motivate the church in the correct way. In Acts 6:1-5, we see how the apostles worked. First, they met with the church members and identified the challenge. A team was selected to deal with the challenge, and people were empowered for ministry. The challenge was a catalyst for growth, not a cause for division. Thus, the members were united instead of divided.

A church leader needs to have credibility before presenting a new task. Credibility is reached by progressively casting the vision. Initially, we should celebrate small victories with our members and rejoice in what God has done through them. Once the vision is successful, it will be easier to progress to the next level of ministry and service. It doesn’t matter if your church is new or old, large or small: it can also have this experience. The first step is to pray for vision.



^a Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 46.

^b Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 8.

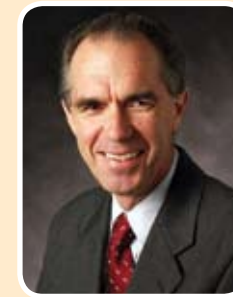
^c Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 177.

^d *Ibid.*, 178.

^e Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 8.

Paulo Pinheiro is editor of the Portuguese edition of *Elder’s Digest*.

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER’S DIGEST



Congratulations, not only for 15 years of ministry to our elders through *Elder’s Digest*, but also for the excellent and practical resource that it is. We are delighted that church leaders at all levels in the South Pacific have worked together to make *Elder’s Digest* available to elders across the Division.

The role of elders is critical to the growth of the church, and your magazine is playing a vital role in keeping elders informed, relevant, and up-to-date in their work. An elder’s role covers a variety of areas, and we appreciate how the magazine seeks to address the various aspects of the elder’s responsibilities.

Elder’s Digest is undoubtedly one of the most important resources for our elders in the South Pacific Division. Keep up the good work your team is doing in helping elders maintain a “discipleship” mission focus, which includes showing God’s love through word and deed, bringing people into God’s love through witness and evangelism, and growing these new members into the full stature of Jesus Christ.—Gary Webster, Ministerial Secretary, South Pacific Division.

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER’S DIGEST



Some time ago I visited a firefighter who had been injured in a fire. He was in intensive care; the situation was delicate, but not drastic. After an introductory greeting and an attempt to cheer him, we congratulated him for his courageous action and spirit of service. Barely opening his eyes, he thanked us with a weak but convincing voice but added, “That’s what we’re here for.”

I thought many times about his five-word sermon: “That’s what we’re here for.” In reality, a firefighter exists not to be harmed but to protect life and property. In doing this, it is necessary to risk one’s life, and that is why firefighters exist.

So for *Elder’s Digest’s* 15 years of existence, I congratulate and thank you. For 15 years this journal has been asking questions: Are we as pastors, elders, leaders, and children of God, who are called by the Lord, doing what He requires of us? Do we guard, protect, search, rescue, and restore lives?

“By faith we can be on the threshold of the eternal city, and hear the kind welcome given to those in this life together with Christ” (Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 479-480). On this earth, we must be in communion with God and know our mission, so that we may soon be where we want to be—with Jesus, forever.—Bruno Raso, Ministerial Secretary, South American Division.

The art of speech

PERSUASION IS MORE THAN A TECHNIQUE

“ *Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? . . . I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone.* ”

Gal. 4:16, 20, NIV

The goal of the messenger is to lead the public to believe that the message is truly the voice of God. Therefore, messengers need an important communication “favor”: the persuasion proposal. After all, preachers don’t want to only pass on information; they also want to explain doctrine and convince listeners. That is why they make use of a series of resources capable of leading listeners to accept their version as truth. But what is the mystery of those who, having little knowledge of the language and no access to the culture, are capable of leading a multitude of people? “Persuasion” is the answer.

What is persuasion? It is more than simply sharing information; it means to convince someone, to make someone believe that what you are saying is the best option. You need to show your audience that your message may change their lives for the better. You need to gain their trust, and you will need to make use of all arguments that reveal your seriousness, competence, and trustworthiness. This is called persuasion.

Persuasion is based on the message and is directly influenced by three important factors that may help it reach its goals:

1. *Credibility of the source.* The information has to come from a source that inspires trust. The source may be a person, book, newspaper, magazine, the Internet, etc. For a preacher or elder, the Word of God is the most trustworthy source.

2. *The speaker’s reputation.* The person intending to persuade must be interesting and attractive to the public. The public should desire to be like him or her. Remember, persuasion doesn’t have anything to do with the beauty of the speaker but with the beauty of the presentation of what is being said.

3. *Attractiveness of the proposal.* The proposal must somehow correspond to the needs of the public. The attraction in the speech starts when we point out facts that are a part of everyone’s lives or a reality to the public we want to reach. When we do that, we become the listeners’ “partner,” and that is fundamental for persuasion.

Some may think that persuasion is a bad thing, for it forces a person to make a decision. However, preachers and elders should never forget that this technique is to be used with respect, certainty, and assurance. They should always remember that they are spokespersons for God.

Once you believe in what you are saying, you should act accordingly. One of the ways to know if something is true is to look at the speaker’s life. Therefore, when we look at Paul’s life and read his writings, we are persuaded to change and to live as he lived.

May we bring many people to Christ through our example!

Alexandra Sampaio is a speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

As Elders **it used to be enough** to keep our teens away from premarital sex, drugs, and secular music, but today’s teens have to worry about: sexting, texting, televisaphone-netting, peer pressure, Facebook, MySpace, poor self-mage, low self-esteem, anorexia, cutting, “The I-culture,” consumerism, bullying, internet porn--the list could go on forever. Thank God we have a tool to share with our youth that helps them deal with these issues and presents them with positive teens who are serving God passionately in their lives and communities.

As an Elder it’s your duty to look out for the next generation. Thank God there’s a tool! **Thank God for Insight!**



Insight magazine is our church’s weekly evangelistic magazine to help you lead your youth to Christ. Insight features stories from real Adventist youth who are eager to share the difference that Jesus has made in their lives. To order Insight for your youth please ask your Sabbath School secretary to add it to your churches standing order of Sabbath School products. **If you would like to receive a one-week sample of Insight magazine to share with the youth at your church, please call us toll free at 1-800-456-3991.** We are happy to serve you!



TAKING THE PLEDGE

My congregation lived in denial until the moment our notions of how things "ought to be" were startlingly interrupted when a prominent member offered to lead an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group in our church.

Explaining that she herself needed regular attendance at AA meetings, this church member convinced me to present the concept to our board of elders. Their first response was, "Why? Adventists don't drink!"

Boldly venturing "where Adventists typically don't go," we announced to our members the formation of various 12-step ministries, including Sunday-morning AA meetings in our facility.

Within six weeks we had welcomed over 200 alcoholics attending "the meetings" and discovered that ours was one of only two locations in a metropolis of four million where people could attend AA on Sunday morning when most other church facilities were in use. Within six months, some of my own members began to trust enough to seek help in their own church home.

Some may ask, as did my elders, if temperance is a fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists, why would we need to sponsor AA? And here's the heart of the

challenge: What we believe and how we behave are not always consonant.

It's time for the Adventist Church to come out of denominational denial. We must seriously address the reality that we have members ranging from teetotalers to occasional social drinkers to falling-down-drunk bingers and chronic, unrehabilitated alcoholics. They are in my family, they are in my church, and they are in yours as well.

Despite our long temperance heritage of fighting against alcohol, tobacco, and addictive substances, we discover that the battle has come to our schools, our churches, and some of our pastoral families.

And what a heritage we have. Early Adventists stayed at the forefront of the "temperance" movement by preaching against "demon rum" and lobbying for prohibition. Mrs. S.M.I. Henry, cofounder of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), became an Adventist and was strongly supported by the church in her activism. Today's WCTU world president, Margaret Jackson, is a Seventh-day Adventist in New Zealand.

A century ago, many Adventists strongly supported suffrage so as to register thousands of women who were most likely to support prohibition. Ellen G. White even

advocated that Adventists should vote in favor of Sunday blue laws if it meant closing the saloons and taverns for at least one day.

Have we abandoned our heritage? In 1989, Duane McBride published statistics on the drinking habits of North American Adventists. At that time, five percent of those over 65 years of age had consumed wine at least monthly in the previous year, compared with 25 percent of the 18-29 age group. Three years later, the Valuegenesis study confirmed these findings and the trend appears to be ongoing.

Debate if you will—and some spend far too much time and energy arguing over the alcoholic content of communion wine or the cardiac/gastric value of moderate consumption—but reality forces us to concede that alcohol use among our membership exists and is increasing. My colleague, Dr. Peter Landless, Associate Director of Health Ministries, states: "On balance, the hypothesis that alcohol consumption improves health is scientifically unfounded. This is especially so when all aspects of alcohol and health are reviewed."

And rather than berating our college and academy campuses for not "doing enough to expel students who drink," as one correspondent recently demanded,



Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

Col. 3:23



we should applaud those schools which take this challenge seriously and provide spiritual programs, group and individual counseling, and 12-step recovery programming. Remember, the child or grandchild who is spared might be your own.

As you struggle with appropriate responses to these challenges which infect your own congregation, consider the following initiatives:

* Pray that together we will impact the rule of evil and resist the addictive control that alcohol exerts.

* Preach biblical temperance and teach the evil of alcohol abuse.

* Provide 12-step programming for your community and your members.

* Pledge your personal abstinence and encourage your members, especially the young, to follow your example.

* Prioritize relationships which connect your members with Jesus first, and then with one another as encouragement and example in discipleship.

* Promise that by all means you will do something in order to save some!

James A. Cress
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER'S DIGEST



The Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division started receiving *Elder's Digest* in the first quarter of 2007. The information contained in *Elder's Digest* has been a source of inspiration and encouragement for elders throughout our territory. There is a diversity of topics, and the letters of encouragement serve to provide a renewed sense of energy and confidence in carrying out elders' duties. Many have said that the articles are relevant to the time in which we are living.

We hope to increase the number of our elders who receive this magazine. It has become one of the tangible evidences that elders are a significant part of the Ministerial Association. Our particular urgent need is to make *Elder's Digest* available to our Portuguese-speaking unions (such as Angola and Mozambique) which don't receive the magazine at present. Congratulations for your vision!—P. Hachalinga, Vice President and Ministerial Secretary, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

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