

quarterly resource for local church leaders † october/december 2020

# ELDER'S DIGEST



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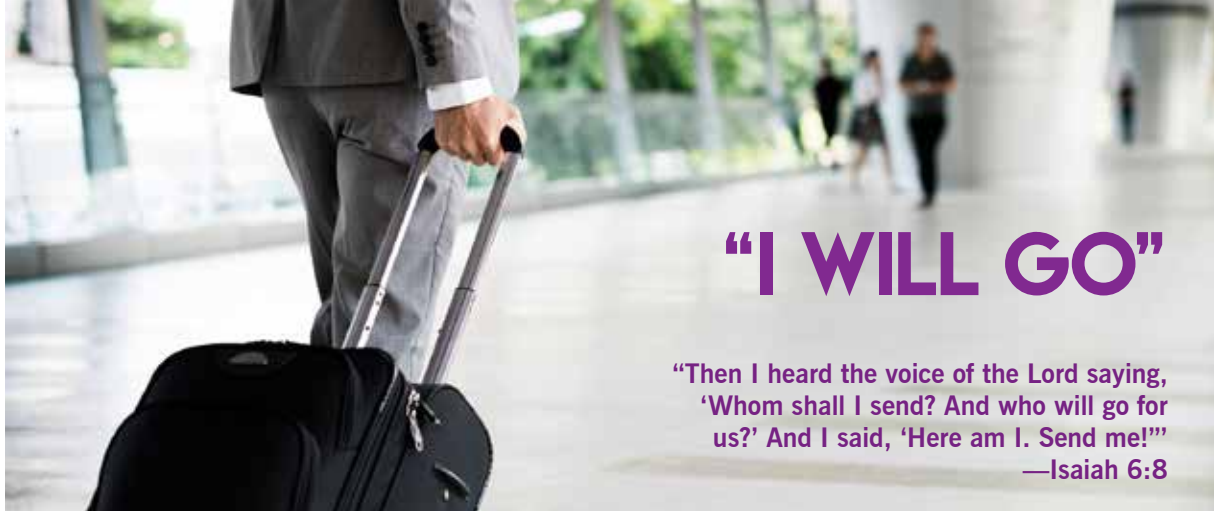
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## “I WILL GO”

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”  
—Isaiah 6:8

This is such a familiar Bible verse for most Christians. Church leaders pull out this text when they are trying to encourage people to sign up for responsibilities at church. Pastors sometimes use it during ordination services for elders, deacons, or deaconesses.

There is nothing more exciting and motivating than the words “Here I am!” or the request to “send me!” These words are meant to fire up the people of God for service. These words are meant to stir up the people to go out to **Reach the World**. These words are meant to inspire the people to embrace their call to discipleship. Here I am! Send me! **I Will Go**, Lord! The result will be **Total Member Involvement**.

In other words, the Lord has a ministry for everyone to do. He asks even today, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Throughout history, the Lord has chosen to use men and women in His service. There is a lot of work to do and He needs a lot of workers to do the job. Isaiah responded to the Lord’s call by saying, “Here am I; send me.” He wanted to be used by God; he was willing to work for the Lord. Even today we need people who are willing to get involved in serving God and doing His work! We have a mission to fulfill as a church. We have a message to share. Are you as a church

leader willing to get involved in this endeavor with your congregation? I urge you to answer Him, like Isaiah, “Here am I, Lord! I will go, Lord, and lead Your people. I will go and hold Your people in my heart. I will go and show Your love to Your people. I will go and work to bring about the kingdom of God here on earth!”

The work of the Lord still demands a vision, a vessel, a life of vitality, and a willing volunteer. In light of this need, this issue of *Elder’s Digest* highlights the new initiative “I Will Go,” the Adventist Church’s new mission-oriented strategic plan. Enjoy the reading!

### A WORD OF GRATITUDE

God gave me the opportunity and privilege to be the editor of *Elder’s Digest* for the last fifteen years. With passion and total commitment, I have tried to provide the best resource possible for local church elders, deacons, and deaconesses around the world. And God has blessed this effort! But now it is time to pass the baton to someone else. Pastor Anthony Kent, with extensive ministerial experience, will be the new editor of this journal. I pray for him with the assurance that God will continue to use him in a powerful way. Many thanks to those who worked close to me— Pastor Alfredo Garcia-Marenko, Gloria Massenburg, Sheila Draper, Schuyler Kline, and Erika Miike—with deep gratitude for their dedication and commitment. ED

JONAS ARRAIS



ANTHONY KENT



# “I WILL GO”

WHAT YOU NEED TO  
KNOW ... TO GO!



“I WILL GO” is the exciting global strategic focus for all Seventh-day Adventists from 2020–2025.

“I WILL GO” is a bold inspirational initiative which involves all church members in reaching the world, inspiring and equipping each one of us to use our God-given spiritual gifts in witness and service for Christ.

As a continuation of the Reach the World strategic plan, the “I WILL GO” initiative offers something for the whole church—local churches, missions, conferences, unions, divisions, the General Conference, and institutions. It’s a tool to help the Church be more focused and effective in performing critical and urgent tasks.

This strategic plan is biblically based and echoes the Great Commission, which calls each of Jesus’ followers to go and make disciples of all nations.

Local church elders, as influential leaders within the 160,000 congregations around the world, are particularly important people in this whole exciting plan. Imagine what can be achieved with 21.5 million Holy Spirit inspired Seventh-day Adventists, following Jesus, and faithfully pledging, “I will go!”

It was our victorious resurrected Saviour Jesus who said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age**” (Matt 28:18–20 ESV).

“I WILL GO” also perfectly reflects the mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

## OUR MISSION

Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt 28:18–20, Acts 1:8, Rev 14:6–12).

## OUR METHOD

Guided by the Bible and the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists pursue this mission through Christ-like living, communicating, discipling, teaching, healing, and serving.

## OUR VISION

In harmony with Bible revelation, Seventh-day Adventists see as the climax of God’s plan the restoration of all His creation to full harmony with His perfect will and righteousness.

“I WILL GO” also aligns with the clear advice offered by Ellen G. White:

“The home missionary work will be farther advanced in every way when a more liberal, self-denying, self-sacrificing spirit is manifested for the prosperity of foreign missions; for the prosperity of the home work depends largely, under God, upon the reflex influence of the evangelical work done in countries afar off. It is in working actively to supply the necessities of the cause of God that we bring our souls in touch with the Source of all power.”

—Ellen G. White,  
*Testimonies for the Church*, 6:27

## OBJECTIVES

These are some of the major objectives of “I WILL GO.”

### THE MISSION OBJECTIVES ARE:

- To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors, but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples
- To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and underreached people groups, and to non-Christian religions

### THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OBJECTIVES ARE:

- To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives
- To increase accession, retention, reclamation, and participation of children, youth, and young adults
- To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview

To keep everyone focused on the essential goals and for evaluation of “I WILL GO,” the initiative has key performance indicators [KPIs]. Some of the most notable ones for elders and church members to address are:

## KPI 1.1

Increased number of church members participating in both personal and public evangelistic outreach initiatives with a goal of Total Member Involvement (TMI).

## KPI 2.1

A worshipping group is established in each country of the 10/40 Window where there currently is no Seventh-day Adventist presence.





### KPI 5.1

Significant increase in numbers of church members regularly praying, studying the Bible, using the Sabbath School Bible Study Guides, reading the writings of Ellen White and engaging in other personal devotions.

### KPI 5.2

Significant increase in numbers of church members and unbaptized children and youth regularly attending divine service and Sabbath School.

Elders of congregations are particularly vital in *Objective 6*, and can make very strong contributions, especially to the following KPIs:

### KPI 6.3

Evidence of new members being nurtured through active discipleship programs.

### KPI 6.4

Significant increase in number of church members regularly engaging in family worship.

### KPI 6.5

All members and yet-to-be-baptized young people embrace and practice stewardship principles regarding time, spiritual gifts, and tithes and offerings.

Embedded within the “I WILL GO” initiative is the important element that people who “go” do not go alone. Jesus promised in The Great Commission, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Those who “go,” go with Jesus, as well as the prayerful support and the available resources of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## WHAT “I WILL GO” REALLY MEANS ...

It means surrendering all—all that we are and all that we have—to Jesus, following the leading of the Holy Spirit and going to others to share the beautiful Saviour Jesus Christ.

This divine call is to each follower of Jesus to reach out to those who do not know the love of Jesus and to share His pure love of salvation. Thus each person can discover Jesus and eternal life, which is only available through Him.

This means going to a family member or friend—even *going* to someone who lives in your house!

“I WILL GO” means that you’re willing to go to people across the street, across your town, suburb or city.

“I WILL GO” is making yourself available to God, giving Jesus permission to call you, to go ... to go to strangers—people you don’t know—to go to your neighbors, country, your island, your continent, your world!

Dear elder, are you willing to prayerfully promise your Saviour, “I will go”?

## FOR REFLECTION:

“I will go” is a significant reoccurring phrase in the Bible. When Bible characters said, “I will go” and faithfully went, they changed the world! God went with them and blessed them and their efforts. Prayerfully meditate upon “I will go” in these verses, their wider context and application: Genesis 24:58; 45:28; 46:4, 31; Exodus 4:12; Ruth 1:16; Psalm 43:4; Isaiah (6:8); 45:2; Matthew 26:32; Mark 14:28; and Acts 18:6.

ED

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For more information, helpful resources and to download a comprehensive booklet visit: <https://iwillgo2020.org/>

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# THE THEOLOGY OF LIFE >PART 6

## A BIBLICAL THOUGHT—1

*“Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds, meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”—Galatians 3:15–18*

In many of his letters Paul discusses the issue of who is a true Israelite—especially after the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus. While many still believed that adherence to the law and being in the right lineage granted them the title, Paul argues that that objective criteria is simply not enough. In this text, Paul speaks about the role of the law in the journey of faith of those who follow Jesus.

He argues that before the giving of the law, 430 years before, everything God did for humanity was based on a promise: the promise that through Abraham all nations would be blessed. And this promise preceded the law. So, everything God did from the calling of Abraham onward, was to begin a relationship with people that would eventually reach every single living person on earth, through the promise that all nations would be blessed. So if this was the case, what was the role of the law before Jesus, and what is the role of the law after Jesus?

Let’s continue reading what Paul has to say in Galatians:

*Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:19–29, emphasis supplied)*

My dear reader, if you read the text above quickly, I recommend that you read it again! Do you realize the power and depth of these words? The law was given to Israel so they would be conscious of what was harmful—both to the individuals who submitted to the law, and to those around them. But the law did not impart life! It just showed us how to live. And this was to be so until Christ, the living Word, showed us a better way, a visual way, a clear path in the true fulfill-





ment of the law. This fulfillment is ultimately realized through love—through His love and sacrifice for us, and through our response in love. In fact, Paul makes this point explicit in Romans 13:8 when he writes, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” When we look to Jesus, and live as He lived, we are living the true life God willed for all humanity.

So Paul says that before Jesus, the law was to be a “guardian”—a guide that led us to Jesus Himself. This word is also translated “tutor,” and scholars believe that the word “tutor” referred, in ancient times, to slaves who would take care of their master’s children in their absence. So before Jesus, we needed a supervisor, a guide. But after Jesus, as we look at Him, and as we live a life that is a reminder of His life, suddenly, everything the law required is lived out through our emulation of Him! As we live as Jesus lived, we will live a life of joy, love and peace toward one another. This is why He said that we would be recognized as His followers through love. So in Jesus, everything that separated us from one another—religion, ethnicity, or gender—is done away with. In Jesus we are all under the promise, and through faith, we have salvation and peace. This has been the will of God since the beginning: blessing to all nations!

My dear reader, may you look to Jesus and see in Him a pattern for life. And as you read about Him, as you walk with Him, as you hear His words, may you also become a living reminder of who He is in your own life. May your life be a living reminder of Jesus, and a proof that the promise of Abraham is good, true, and real. May your life in Christ be the true fulfillment of the law through love.

### A BIBLICAL THOUGHT—2

*“What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.”—Galatians 4:1–7*

In the previous biblical thought we reached the epicenter of the power of the gospel. Jesus paid it all, and now, through Him, we live as equals before

God. As we live in Jesus, everything the law required meets its true fulfillment and we find the true freedom the gospel offers all humanity: the freedom to love because we are loved, the freedom to forgive because we are forgiven, and the freedom to serve because Jesus served and serves us today and always.

As we read chapter 4, we must realize that Paul continues explaining who truly belongs to Israel and what the sacrifice of Jesus has accomplished. In the previous chapter he compared the law to a prison and a tutor. Now Paul uses the imagery of inheritance and adoption. Before Jesus we were no better than slaves, serving under rules and commands that kept us in bondage. Through Jesus we received freedom and now we are no longer slaves. Now we are considered sons and daughters of God, and we have received the promised inheritance from the Father.

When Jesus was baptized He heard a voice from heaven saying, “You are my beloved son.” Up until that point Jesus had done nothing to “earn” or “deserve” this love. God simply pronounced the objective reality: Jesus was a beloved Son. This proclamation echoes through the ages, and reaches us even today. Once we realize we are loved regardless of what we did or do, we understand the power of divine love. God loved us while we were still sinners, and when we embrace this truth and live by faith in it, the Spirit will continually confirm in our hearts that God is “Abba, Father.” Even those who hide their fragility and vulnerability under a cloak of righteous deeds and visible performances know, deep down, that they need a Father—a Father who knows everything, yet who loves us and cares for us. It is the Spirit who creates this need and realization in us.

And if we indeed embrace the fact that we are loved, regardless of what we did, do, and will do, if we indeed look at God as a loving Father, we will see all around us the faces of brothers and sisters who were also adopted by God. Whether they realize it or not, they are beloved children as well.

So, my dear reader, may you live in the joy of this freedom, knowing that we do not have to please God with many works of penitence, or performances, or prove anything, because Jesus paid it all. We are no longer slaves; now we are sons and daughters of God and we may go to Him knowing that in Him we have a loving Father who knows every single detail of our life, and who walks with us. And as you see in the face of God the face of a loving Father, may you look at your neighbor and see a brother or sister who was bought by the blood of Jesus to live a life of true freedom in love. ED

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# EMPOWERING THE YOUNG

Last year I was ordained as an elder. I was twenty-one years old. When I received the call from my church's nominating committee, I was confused. In my experience, elders were people who were well established, probably with a few grey hairs, and—to a young person like me—seemed to be on another plane of existence. A university student barely scraping by does not fit the image of a traditional elder, at least in my experience.

There is something incredibly powerful about feeling as though others in your congregation trust you to step into a leadership role. I prayed about the call and took the position. Although even some of my confidants and I felt that I was too young, I was reminded of Jesus' emphasis on empowering those whom society usually does not let have a voice—especially the young. When Jesus was on this earth, He, the Son of God, chose twelve young men, most of whom were teenagers, to follow Him. Not only that, but following His death, Jesus trusted these young people to spread His message across the world. It is indisputable that these people diligently did what they were instructed—and they did it well! Paul also empowered young people to lead; he told Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because he was young (1 Tim 4:12). Several of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were hardly older than twenty, if that! God uses young people just as much as He uses the more experienced.

Since joining the leadership team of my church, I have received an immensely valuable experience that I think that any young person, regardless of their position, should be exposed to. Getting to sit in on board and business meetings, organize worship services, and be involved in the church's strategic planning have been fantastic opportunities. I suddenly find myself being much more involved in my church, with a new appreciation for its organization. I have enjoyed talking to the other elders, all of whom are at least two generations older than me. Hearing about their experiences and perspectives has helped me see issues from their point of view. I hope that my own age and experience have also been an asset to the leadership team. An intergenerational group allows for a unique team planning experience.

From my perspective, it appears that we want youth to be involved, yet we are often unwilling to give them a seat at the table. Initially, I felt awkward during our meetings. I was not sure whether I could share my opinions and be heard. As I began to share, there were

times when I felt overlooked, but there were more times when I felt as though my opinion was just as valued as everyone else's.

What I loved about my experience is that while I had previously been disengaged with my church community, I was now involved in the everyday running of the institution. I became immersed in the church.

There is power in intentional mentorship. It is never a good idea to throw someone into the deep end without a way out. When I was about seventeen, the head elder started to teach me how to coordinate church services. He stood by me for the first few services and walked me through how to do it. He then started letting me coordinate it by myself and put me on the roster to regularly organize services. When I got the call to be an elder, years later, some of my fellow elders intentionally looked out for me and modelled what I should have been doing. This mentorship was an excellent way for me to start as an elder in a safe environment where I felt confident.

I am still learning, but I think we all are. I'm learning how to better fulfill the role of an elder by continuing to watch those around me and by reading the *Elder's Handbook*. I also seek God's guidance as He continues to shape me.

I implore you, as a team, to prayerfully look for leadership potential in the young people who attend your church. When we give young people the keys to the church and the permission to thrive in their roles, we are ensuring a vibrant future for our church. If you are willing to walk alongside a young person in your church and intentionally mentor them for leadership, you will be astonished by how much it will mean to them and how much of an impact it could make for the kingdom. The prerequisite for becoming an elder should not be based on one's earthly maturity (age), but rather their spiritual maturity and discipline, as mentioned in Titus 1:5–9. The role of the elder can involve emotionally draining and challenging situations—ones in which age can perhaps be a positive influence. In these situations, you can help young people grow into the role and develop their wisdom! Young people do not want to be passive observers; we want to be involved in the life of the church where we are called to be. For some young people, that means taking on the position of elder despite their age. ED

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Kira-leigh Josey is an elder at Thornleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sydney, Australia.

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# THE ELDER'S ATTRIBUTES IN STEWARDSHIP

## PROMOTION

The call to the office of an elder is critical. In a pastoral visitation with one of the elders in a multi-church district I once led, I learned that non-members spoke so highly of him that they called him a pastor of the church. Elders are best positioned to promote stewardship and its initiatives because they have the privilege of accompanying the pastor during stewardship visitations. Additionally, they are trusted individuals who are listened to by people. And since they live among the people, they are able to speak their language. Considering the importance of these leaders' role in stewardship, I developed an acronym from the word "elder": "E" means an *exemplary educator*, "L" a *listening leader*, "D" a *dynamic disciple*, "E" an *educable expert*, and "R" a *reliable rabbi*.

## EXEMPLARY EDUCATOR

One of the qualifications of an elder is the ability to teach (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24). Ellen G. White implores the church to "appoint pastors or elders who are devoted to the Lord Jesus, and let these men see that officers are chosen who will attend faithfully to the work of gathering in the tithe."<sup>1</sup> She further urges them not only to teach, but also to be diligent in delivering service.

Unlike other teachers who may lecture on issues that contradict their practice, the elder is obligated by Scripture to "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). Elders must be able to say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Elders are encouraged to foster tithing through setting a good example by being a faithful steward.<sup>2</sup> If these local church leaders love money (cf. 1 Tim 3:3), they can-

not teach principles of financial stewardship with remarkable candidness and conviction that will help the members of the church accept the message heartily.

## LISTENING LEADER

As those who lead the flock entrusted by God, elders not only listen to the voice of the members, but also the voice of the God who sent them. The church members are "pulled in different directions by a cacophony of competing voices, all demanding allegiance to the same things that tempted Jesus: the desire to be special, successful, and secure,"<sup>3</sup> thus compromising their faithfulness. The voice that comes from a listening leader will help them become committed stewards. An elder's heart must be large enough to listen to the needs of the church so as to respond to them accordingly. All hindrances to active listening must be cleared. The church elder, in symphony with the pastor, must create a welcoming ambience that enables a feeling of belonging.

Members must find the church to be a safe haven for offloading all their burdens. Visitation can be a good starting point for building a good relationship with them. John R. Stott notes, "There is no quicker way of bridging the gulf between preacher and people than meeting them in their homes."<sup>4</sup> Thus, their participation in stewardship will be enhanced.

## DYNAMIC DISCIPLE

The goal of stewardship is disciple-making. While this is a spiritual exercise, the elder acts as a visible guardian of the members. The possible result is a church that has not only members, but disciples who are committed and faithful stewards. Such a church is inconceivable when the discipler is neither a disciple nor dynamic.

Since the church is relatively young, it needs an elder who will not only exude energy in making disciples, but also exhibit positivity and creativity. *Group Magazine* surveyed ten thousand young people about the kind of church they would choose. While seventy percent of the young people needed a church that accommodates teenagers, seventy-three percent of them said they preferred a welcoming church that allows them to be themselves.<sup>5</sup> In a “culture of consent,” where individuals agree before they obey,<sup>6</sup> dynamism, vision, and innovation should characterize the work of the elder if the young people in the church are to participate in stewardship. These growing parishioners should not feel that the church only needs them when it is time to give money to God, but that they belong to the body of Christ.

### EDUCABLE EXPERT

Another qualification for elders is that they must not be novices in faith (1 Tim 3:6); they must be such “experts” in their Christian walk that they can assist both new and old members in being faithful stewards. This quality does not negate the fact that they should be teachable. They must be willing to be taught by the Holy Spirit. No one who refuses to be led can successfully lead the flock of God. So this is the work of teaching members in the way of righteousness.

Elders not only need to learn the language of the people, but also how to speak it. They need to learn of their hurts, pain, frustrations, and setbacks so as to minister meaningfully. In accompanying the pastor during home visitation, elders learn how the cleric does the work of God. While elders may possess great people skills that are invaluable in creating a sense of belonging, a failure to quickly learn and adapt to changing environments may inhibit their attempts to raise a generation of faithful stewards.

### RELIABLE RABBI

The work of the elder may be loosely equated to that of the ancient rabbis. The word translated as “rabbi” is *rhabbi*, which means “my master.”<sup>7</sup> It may sound antithetical to the teaching of Jesus (Matt 23:1–8) to call an elder a “rabbi.” In His rebuke of the Pharisees, addressed to the crowd and the disciples, He warned, “You are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers” (Matt 23:8). My intent is not to ascribe the title to elders, but rather to draw important lessons on issues that elders should avoid, which would compromise their reliability. Also, the word suggests virtues that can be applied to the elders as they dispense with their duties. They may be summed up with three words: sobriety, sincerity, and humility.

**1. Sobriety.** While the Pharisees were honored to be in Moses’ seat (Matt 23:2), they inappropriately used that position and demanded to be called “rabbi” (Matt 23:7). Instead of abusing the office of an elder, there is a call to be sober. Jesus implored the rabbis to avoid being under the influence of the power that comes with occupying a revered position.

**2. Sincerity.** Pharisees did not practice what they preached (Matt 23:3). If elders are to be trusted, they should not emulate the leaders of the time of Christ. Being exemplary in tithing and faithfulness in all aspects of life is not optional. Unlike Pharisees, who would “tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders,” they should teach the simple principles of stewardship as outlined in God’s Word.

**3. Humility.** Pharisees loved to boastfully display all they did (Matt 23:5) and hungered for recognition (Matt 23:7). The mind of Christ is needed in order to avoid falling into this trap. Christ is the goal of ministry.

Elders are not only *exemplary educators*, but also *listening leaders*. While they incline their ears to the members, they listen to the voice of God as they lead the church. In an ever-changing world, these leaders inject dynamism, vision, and innovation into their work. As *dynamic disciples*, they do not forget that the church is relatively young and that God expects youths to be faithful stewards as well. They are not novices in issues of faith, but rather must be *educable experts*. Nothing will promote faithfulness in all aspects of stewardship than having a *reliable rabbi*. White writes, “Those in responsible places are to act in such a way that the people will have firm confidence in them.”<sup>8</sup> This may raise the level of faithfulness among the members of the church. ED

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1940), 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 75, 137.

<sup>3</sup> Chuck DeGroat, *Toughest People to Love: How to Understand, Lead, and Love the Difficult People in Your Life—Including Yourself* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 20.

<sup>4</sup> John R. Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 88.

<sup>5</sup> Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn’t Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 161.

<sup>6</sup> C. Handy, *The Age of Unreason* (London: Arrow, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, electronic ed., s.v. “*rhabbi*.”

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate), 13:198.

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## AGENTS OF HEALING: LIGHT IN A DARK WORLD

We have all witnessed the rapid, worldwide contagion of the novel coronavirus, causing the World Health Organization (WHO) to call it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Amidst the almost unreal impact on the lives of most people around the world, health professionals have received our utmost attention and respect. We have seen their faces marked with the indentation of the facemasks and goggles they wore for hours on end. Those marks express their tireless efforts to save lives and to bring healing and light at a time of crisis and uncertainty.

Nurses are among the many health professionals at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. Nurses provide high quality, respectful treatment and care, addressing fears and questions through community and one-on-one dialogue, collecting data for clinical studies, advocating for policy change, and educating people on how to protect their families and communities. Quite simply, without nurses, there would be no response. Why are we highlighting nurses? Simple: 2020 is the year of the nurse and the midwife.

Beyond this pandemic, nurses and midwives play a vital role in providing health services to people around the world. They devote their lives to caring for mothers and children, giving lifesaving immunizations and health advice, and meeting everyday essential health needs. They are often the first and only point of care in their communities. According to the WHO, the world needs 5.9 million *more* nurses and midwives. That's why the World Health Assembly has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

As Adventists, we join this year-long effort to celebrate the work of nurses and midwives, highlighting the challenging conditions they often face and the opportunities they have to provide hope and whole person care, including spiritual care, to all they serve. For over a century, Adventist nurses have been instrumental leaders in providing wholistic healing. In 1883, the first school of nursing was established in Battle Creek Sanitarium, Michigan, USA, with that goal. As the health ministry of the church reached around the globe, mission-minded nurses had a vital role. They assisted in the development of clinics, hospitals, and schools of nursing as early as 1898 in Australia, in South Africa (1900), Argentina (1908), China (1921), and India (1925). Today, nursing schools continue to expand rapidly, totaling more than seventy-five around the world. Thousands of nurses serve in hospitals on every continent.

On April 7, 2021 (World Health Day), let us join the WHO in celebrating the work of nurses and highlighting the need for more of them. The global shortage ensures a demand for Adventist nurses who will extend Jesus' ministry by sharing health, healing, hope, and wholeness, serving all who are in need. We praise God for nurses who bring light to a dark world pointing to Christ, the Healer and light Source. **ED**

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# JESUS AND GOD

## INTRODUCTION

H. G. Wells in one of his books tells of a man, near to mental and spiritual collapse under the stress and strain of things, who was told by a nerve specialist that his only hope lay in fellowship with God. The man's amazed answer was that he would as soon think of cooling his throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with the stars as having fellowship with God. That is parallel to the Orthodox Jewish idea of God in the days of Jesus.

What was the Jewish conception of God? It can be summed up in one word: "holy," meaning "different," "separate," "set apart." By implication their God was unapproachable (see Jacob, Gen 32:30; Moses, Exod 33:20; Gideon, Judg 6:22; Manoah, Judg 13:22). Not only was God dangerously unapproachable, but His holiness affected His relationship with the sinner (see Ps 104:35; Isa 1:28; 13:9; Amos 9:10). There was a rabbinic saying: "There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world." Therefore, in Judaism men tended to think of God as the sworn enemy of the sinner. Further, God's holiness and transcendence removed Him from human contact altogether. They even delegated to the archangels the duty of presenting the prayers of the faithful to God.

Similarly, the Greeks considered it an insult to God to involve Him in the world or in the human situation at all. The entry of Jesus into the world is the proof that God is involved in, and identified with, the human situation. In Jesus the God who was afar off has indeed been brought near.

So, what was the good news about God that Jesus brought to the Jewish nation and the world? That good news consists of four truths about God:

### I. JESUS CAME TO TELL US OF AN INVITING GOD

One of the great characteristic words of Jesus is the word "Come!" He invited men to follow Him in discipleship (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17). He invited His own men to share His solitary prayer and communion with God (Mark 6:31). He invited the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him for rest and help (Matt 11:28). He likened His own invitation to the invitation for a marriage feast (Matt 22:4; cf. Matt 25:34). Continually on Jesus' lips there was an invitation. Further, the rending of the veil in the temple is symbolic of Jesus coming with an invitation to approach the God to whose presence there are no longer any barriers.

H. V. Manson in *A Traveler in Rome* tells of seeing a woman in the Church of St. Clemente. He watched a poor, old, ragged woman like a little black ghost who came

shuffling in wearing carpet slippers. "She was like a bundle of old dry leaves wrapped round with cobweb. First she knelt, approached the crucifix, and bending forward, kissed the feet, and placed her cheek against them, whispering all the time. She seemed to be holding a conversation with the crucifix, pausing as if for a reply, and speaking again. I fancied from her manner that she was in the habit of talking to Christ like this, perhaps telling Him her anxieties, and maybe the events in the tenement where she lived." Here is a simple person conversing with God, just as Jesus invited us to do.

### II. JESUS BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS OF A FORGIVING GOD

This invitation was not only for those who were spiritually devout, but to sinners. Around Him, the tax collectors and the sinners and the women of the streets gathered (Luke 15:1). He ate with them (Matt 9:10), so that the righteous orthodox of His day called him the friend of sinners (Luke 7:34; cf. 5:32), and that He had come to seek and save the lost (Matt 18:11). He said there would be a celebration in heaven over one sinner who repented (Luke 15:7, 10).

There is a world of difference here. The Orthodox Jews who kept the law avoided sinners. People who were sinners would never dare to approach them, even if they wished to. This is a far cry from the God who can only be approached by those who have clean hands and a pure heart (Ps 24:4), and whose aim is to obliterate the sinner.

Jesus came with the message of a God whose love not even sin could destroy, and whose heart's desire was that men should accept the offer of forgiveness, and being forgiven learn to mend their ways.

### III. JESUS BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS OF A SEEKING GOD

This is a God who did not wait for the sinner to come back, but who went out to seek and search for him, and appeal to him to come back (Luke 15:1-10). In Christianity, it is God who comes to man. God, then, is the Great Disturber, and His pursuit is relentless.

There is a famous poem that captures the drama of God in pursuit of man. The author, Francis Thompson, was from London. Before the age of thirty, he had been, on various occasions, a medical student, a dope fiend, a newsboy, a vendor of matches, a vagrant amidst the rubbish and garbage at Covent Garden, and a poet. Three years before his death he wrote *The Hound of Heaven*. It is a story of escapism, the avoidance of confrontation with Divinity, a

running from the Hound of Heaven. Thompson describes his flight from God:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years; . . .

I hid from Him, Adrown Titanic glooms of chasm'ed fears,

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

When Jesus said that God would go out and seek the sinner, as He did, to Thompson, that was something sublime, and something new—the good news of God.

### IV. JESUS BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS OF A GOD OF INDIVIDUAL LOVE

It is not humanity that God loves; it is *humans*. Other thinkers have called God by various names—the Supreme God, the First Cause, the Life Force. All these descriptions of God have one characteristic: they are *im-personal*. But Jesus always spoke of a God who is a *person*. In all reverence we may draw a certain conclusion from that. No person can live in isolation; personality and isolation are mutually contradictory. Every person needs other persons to be complete. It is in communication and fellowship with other persons that personality is realized. We therefore come to the astonishing conclusion that God *needs people*—that in some mysterious sense, creation was for God a necessity, and that somehow God needs the world and people to complete Himself. That is why God loves people with an everlasting love, and that is why God would go to any lengths of sacrifice to bring them back to Himself.

### CONCLUSION

There is truth there—the truth that God needs man, because God is a Person—and from that truth springs the forgiving, seeking, individual love of God. But that is something of which no one had dreamed till Jesus brought to men the good news of God. ED

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### SERMON NOTES

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# JESUS AND OUR ADOPTION

## INTRODUCTION

It is the most comforting gospel revelation that in Christ Jesus, God from eternity has adopted us and chosen us to be His children. It was definitely a manifestation of Christ's sincere love for His disciples when He called them His "friends" (John 15:14), but the term "sons and daughters," which Scripture ascribes to Christian believers, implies far greater privileges than that of "friend."

In his monograph *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*, R. A. Webb writes of God's gracious adoption of believers as His dear children: "When calamities overcome us and troubles come in like a flood, we lift up our cry and stretch out our arms to God as a compassionate Father; when the angel of death climbs in at the window of our homes and bears away the object of our love, we find our dearest solace in reflecting upon the fatherly heart of God; when we look across the swelling flood, it is our Father's House on the light-covered hills beyond the stars which cheers us amid the crumbling of the earthly tabernacle" (p. 19).

Consider with me the ineffable solace of the biblical doctrine of adoption.

## I. DEFINITION OF ADOPTION

In his *Systematic Theology*, A. H. Strong offers a definition of the doctrine of adoption: "This restoration to favor, viewed in its aspect as the renewal of a broken friendship, is denominated reconciliation; viewed in its aspect as a renewal of the son's true relation to God as Father, it is denominated adoption" (3:857). Similar is the definition given by another theologian: "Adoption . . . is that act of God's free grace by which, upon our being justified by faith in Christ, we are received into the family of God and entitled to the inheritance of heaven" (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopaedia*, s.v. adoption). According to these definitions, adoption embraces both the renewal of the soul's true relation to God as Father and the bestowal of the privileges of sonship in this life and that to come. Thus, we who by nature were alienated from God are received by Him as His dear children and heirs of eternal life.

## II. ADOPTION IS AN ACT OF DIVINE GRACE

The doctrine of adoption embraces Jesus' incarnation, vicarious atonement, and resurrection, for "when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Gal 4:4–5). Therefore, the adoption is an act of God's free grace and excludes all human merit; it is absolutely *sol*

*gratia*. We have been redeemed purely by grace; so also we have been adopted purely by grace. Thus God heaps grace upon grace in electing, redeeming, and adopting us.

While Scripture ascribes to the Father the adoption and to the Son the redemption, it ascribes to the Holy Spirit the sanctifying act by which we become believers in Christ and so God's dear children. The apostle teaches this truth clearly in Romans 8:14–17. In this life the assurance of our adoption is apprehended merely by faith, but on the day of the final resurrection we will be delivered "from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). By becoming a believer in Christ, "you are all children of God through faith" (Gal 3:26). This means that at the very moment of conversion to Christ we are children of God. But in that very moment we are also justified, or declared righteous before God. The apostle stresses this comforting gospel truth in Romans 5:1: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But this verse also declares that we are in possession of reconciliation with God. According to Scripture, reconciliation is that very act of divine grace through which we are granted peace with God by His forgiveness of our sins.

But by faith in Christ we receive also regeneration or the new birth, as John writes, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). This, moreover, means that we are converted, since conversion in its proper sense is the turning "from darkness to light" by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18). The estranged sinner, who was turned away from God, is now turned toward his divine Lord with genuine trust and sincere love (see 2 Cor 4:6). The regenerated believer is given the firm conviction that Christ is his personal Savior who has redeemed him from sin and death. So also by faith in Christ the believer obtains the gift of sanctification or the gradual putting off of the old, which is corrupt, and the gradual putting on of the new (Eph 4:22–24). Thus our faith in Christ accomplishes the entire renewal: our justification, reconciliation, regeneration, conversion, sanctification, and last but not least, our adoption to sonship. Paul sums up this whole spiritual process of the believer's turning from unbelief to faith, from sin to holiness, from death to life, in Ephesians 2:8–9 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. There is in all of this a note of triumphant rejoicing in the sweet gospel proclamation that we are God's dear children (1 John 3:2). Thus the adoption may be regarded as the crowning act of God's saving love.

## III. THE BLESSINGS OF ADOPTION

Scripture is very clear in describing the ineffable blessings of our adoption. According to Romans 8:14–17 there are five blessings:

1. The sanctifying leading of the Holy Spirit.
2. The removal of the servile spirit of fear.
3. The filial trust by which we call God "Abba, Father," joining two words and giving emphasis to our endearing relationship with God.
4. The witnessing of the Holy Spirit with our spirit that we are children of God.
5. The assurance that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

The blessing of the Spirit's witness in our hearts is stated with the same emphasis in Galatians 4:6; here the joyous prayer "Abba, Father" is ascribed directly to the Spirit's witnessing. Accordingly, we call God "Abba, Father" as the immediate effect of the assuring testimony of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of adoption assures us of God's fatherly love toward us and of our sure salvation. In times of trial we, because of the weakness of our faith, may not always perceive the Spirit's witness, but it is nevertheless there as long as our faith in Christ prevails; for in the final analysis faith itself is nothing else than the Spirit's persuasive witness in our hearts.

As adopted sons and daughters, we enjoy all the benefits of redemption and we have everything. What can children in a father's house have more than a full place there? Their position, privileges, and prospects are as high as they can be. If a father who is good and rich and influential gives his children a happy home under his roof and treats them as children in all respects, there can be no more that would be good for them to receive. If this be so in the human relationship, must it not be yet more so as between God and His people? If He is the Father, and I am the child, then there is nothing between me and infinite wealth and goodness and blessedness. If He is my Father, He can give me everything I need. If I am His child, I can receive His benefaction, up to the limits of my nature and circumstances.

## CONCLUSION

Our conviction as Christian believers is that, in Christ Jesus, we are God's dear children, and that is deeply written in our hearts with all those who "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:2). ED

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# CHRIST: THE TEMPTATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

The Wilderness of Judea stretches from the hill country south of Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea. It covers an area of thirty-five by fifteen miles, and in the Old Testament its Hebrew name means “devastation.”

It was into that grim and bleak loneliness that Jesus went to make His great decision.

There were three temptations: first, to turn the stones into bread; second, to leap down unharmed from the pinnacle of the temple; third, to worship Satan and so gain the lordship of the kingdoms of the world.

## I. THE FIRST TEMPTATION

What temptation could be more natural to a man who had fasted for forty days, especially when the little pieces of limestone rock looked exactly like round loaves of bread? But Jesus countered this temptation with the words of the law: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Deut 8:3).

This temptation was twofold: First, it was a temptation to use His power selfishly to satisfy His own needs, not for others. Jesus would not use miraculous powers to provide food for Himself, as He would not use them, later on, to come down from the cross. Jesus was not denying that men should be fed; He was asserting that these things are not foremost and that there were deeper needs in man than crushed wheat, and there are greater joys than the full stomach.

Second, it was the temptation to attempt to win men by material gifts, and so to bribe them into becoming His followers. His response to Satan was, “You tempt Me to a religion that would relieve want: you want Me to be a baker, instead of a Savior; to be a social reformer, instead of a Redeemer. You are tempting Me away from the cross, to fill people’s bellies instead of their souls, to bring outer abundance instead of inner holiness. You and your materialistic followers say, ‘Man lives by bread alone,’ but I say to you, ‘Not by bread alone.’ Be-gone, Satan! I am not a social worker. I reject any plan that promises to make men richer without making them holier.” There is no real security apart from the Word of God.

## II. THE SECOND TEMPTATION

The second temptation was also twofold. First, Satan now tempted Him to fulfill the nation’s messianic expectations by leading a sensational rebellion against Rome. It

is the grim fact that in Palestine between the years 67 and 37 BC no fewer than one hundred thousand men perished in aborted rebellions. The day was to come when Theudas would persuade a great mass of people to follow him out to the Jordan, with the claim that he would part the waters in two, and they would pass over dry-shod, only to have his followers annihilated by Cuspius Fadus, the Roman governor. The day was to come when an Egyptian imposter (Acts 21:38) would lead hordes of Jews to the Mount of Olives with the promise that with a word he could cause the walls of Jerusalem to collapse, only to have his revolt crushed by Antonius Felix. Now Jesus was confronted with a temptation to the same way of self-styled saviors of their country.

Second, by leaping from the temple pinnacle, Satan dared Jesus to do something heroic! “Clothe yourself with wonders. Throw yourself down from the pinnacle, then stop just before You hit bottom; that will be spectacular. But leave their consciences alone!” In the desert there are no spectators to see a miracle of turning stones to bread, but on top of a city pinnacle there would be plenty of spectators. Such a display of wonders would prove His Messiahship.

The second temptation was to forget the cross and replace it with an effortless display of power, making it easier for everyone to believe in Him. Further, it would give His Father an opportunity to protect Him. The truth is that faith in God must never contradict reason. Jesus refused to make Himself an object of special care, exempt from obedience to natural laws. Once again Jesus cited Scripture in His defense (Matt 4:8).

Jesus was saying, “I must win followers not by test tubes, but with My blood; not with material power, but with love; not with celestial fireworks, but with the right use of reason and free will. ‘Be-gone, Satan! Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God.’”

## III. THE THIRD TEMPTATION

The final assault took place on the mountaintop. It was the third attempt to divert Him from His cross, this time by coexistence between good and evil. He had come to establish a kingdom on earth by acting as the Lamb going to sacrifice. Why would He not choose a quicker way, by striking up a treaty, that would give Him the world, but without a cross? Read Matthew 4:8–11.

Satan promised to give Jesus the world just so long as He would not change it. But it would still be a kingdom of evil and the

hearts of His subjects would not be regenerated. Jesus could have mankind, as long as He promised not to redeem it. Jesus, knowing that those kingdoms could be won only by His death, said to Satan, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matt 4:10). What Jesus was saying was, “You want Me to worship you, which means I would serve you, and to serve you would be slavery. I do not want the world, which you do not even own yourself. Now, I will conquer your world by going into the hearts of your dishonest tax collectors and your false judges, and I will redeem them from their guilt and sin, and send them back clean to their professions. I shall tell them that it profits nothing to win the whole world if they lose their souls. All I want of this earth is a place large enough to erect a cross. I shall let you nail Me in the name of the cities of Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, but I will rise from the dead, and you will be crushed. You want me to become anti-Christ. Before this blasphemous request, patience must give way to just anger. ‘Get thee behind Me, Satan.’”

## CONCLUSION

Jesus came down from the mountain as poor as when He ascended it. When He had finished His earthly life and had risen from the dead, He would speak to His disciples on another mountain; read Matthew 28:16–20.

Christ withstood the test of appetite and the selfish use of power, the test of loving the world and setting material benefits above values, and finally the test of loving display by sensational means and winning popularity by compromise, which leads to presumption.

So, we learn from the first temptation to bring our appetites into subjection to the will of God—to obey His commands and trust His promises. We learn from the second temptation that if we do not consent to temptation, we will not be overcome. And finally, from the third temptation we learn that we can save ourselves from Satan’s power, if we remember that “the name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe” (Prov 18:10). “Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name.”<sup>1</sup> **ED**

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 131.

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# CHRIST: A THREEFOLD IDENTITY

## INTRODUCTION

Euripides expressed his pessimistic view of life when he said, “Account ye no man happy till he die.” His philosophy was similar to that of Buddha, who taught that the way of life is hard, full of darkness and trouble, and that the only answer to life’s problems is either death or nirvana.

By contrast, Jesus was the only one who ever made His personality the only way of securing peace and eternal life. However, Jesus identified His personality with a door, which is an emblem of separation because on the one side is the world and on the other side the home; but it is also a sign of protection, hospitality, and relationship. As the old city of Troy had only one gate, so Jesus said that He is the only Gate to salvation. Being united with Him combines a personal relationship with practical obedience in the world of action.

But He not only identified Himself as the door; He also claimed to be “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). That is equivalent to saying that without the Way there is no going; without the Truth, there is no knowing; without the Life, there is no living. Let us then examine each of these three points of His identity individually.

## I. JESUS IS THE WAY

Jesus is the Way, but the Way becomes loveable not when it is in abstract code and commandments, but when it is personal. As Plato once said, the Father of the world is hard to discover, and when discovered cannot be communicated. Our Lord’s answer to Plato would have been that the Father is hard to discover unless He is revealed through the Person of His Son (see Matt 11:27).

But Jesus is not only the Way to the Father; He is also the Way to eternal life. This gift purchased at Calvary cannot be possessed by us apart from a living union with Christ. That union is so real that His fullness passes over to my emptiness, His righteousness into my sinfulness, His life into my death, as surely as the electric shock thrills my nerves when I grasp the poles of a battery (John 6:56–57; Rom 6:23; Col 3:4; 1 John 1:1–2; 5:11–12; 2:14, 25). But our privilege of *participating* in that eternal life is directly dependent on our continuing to abide in Him, for in Him alone is that life available to us.

Further, He is the Way by the doctrine that He taught, by the death that He died, by the inheritance that He purchased, by the example that He set, by the abiding and indwelling of His Spirit, by His sanctification, and by His eternal redemption. In the words of Edward Mote:

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

## II. JESUS IS THE TRUTH

Jesus said also, “I am the truth.” There is no such thing as seeking first the truth and then finding Christ, any more than there is any point in lighting a candle to find the sun. As scientific truth puts us in an intelligent relationship with the cosmos, and as historic truth puts us in temporal relationship with the rise and fall of civilization, so does Christ put us in intelligent relationship with God the Father; for He is the only possible Word by which God can address Himself to a world of sinners.

Before his death, Buddha said to Ananda, his favorite disciple, “The doctrines and the laws, O Ananda, which I have taught and proclaimed unto you, they shall be your master when I have left you.” By contrast, Jesus left the world without leaving any written message. His doctrine was Himself. The truth that all other ethical teachers proclaimed, and the light that they gave to the world, was not in them, but *outside* them. Jesus, however, identified Divine Wisdom with Himself. He embodied the truth He taught (John 1:17).

A journalist once asked Texas Congressman Sam Rayburn, “Mr. Speaker, you see a hundred people a day. You never seem to take notes on what you have told them, but I never heard of your forgetting anything you have promised them. What is your secret?” Rayburn’s hot brown eyes flashed. “If you tell the truth the first time,” he replied, “you don’t have to remember.”

Jesus practiced the truth that He taught. Likewise, in our spiritual journey, a profession of faith must be supported by appropriate acts of faith. A “plus-nothing” faith avails nothing (Jas 2:14–26).

## III. JESUS IS THE LIFE

Finally, Jesus is the Life. Life is resident in Him. There is no hope for immortality apart from Him. Euripides looked for it when he wrote,

If any far off state there be  
Nearer to life than mortality,  
The hand of death hath hold thereof  
And mists are under the mists above.

The ancient mystery religions sought it. By elaborate initiation ceremonies such as baptism in a bath of bull’s blood, they sought it. The Egyptians thought that hiding the remains of the Pharaoh’s mummified bodies in monumental pyramids and underground tombs would guarantee their immortality. None survived. Today, Chris-

tian Scientists believe that disease, sickness, and death are not real, but only a state of mind. The spiritualistic medium naively claims the seven spheres of life on the other side. All are fallacies. Only through Jesus who is the Life can we claim the bright hope of immortality.

During World War II, a Marine Corps sergeant led his men into action on a precarious beachhead on a Pacific island with the bold challenge, “Come on, men! Do you want to live forever?” The universal answer is, “Yes!” And it is such a life that God’s grace deigns to bestow on us.

What is this “eternal life” that God has given to us in His Son? It is something more than endless existence promised at the eschaton. For the Christian, it is the reception and enjoyment of the life of God through Christ; it is a gracious participation in the very life of God, now. But what has been provided must be appropriated; what is objective must become subjective. Therefore, “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:19–20). Personal reconciliation to God in Christ is actual for us, only as we trust in Him.

Sometime ago, the body of a prospector who had evidently died of thirst was found in a desert in California. He had died clutching a bag of copper pyrites, “fool’s gold.” In his pocket was a piece of paper on which he had written, “I died rich!”

Before us are riches unimaginable, immeasurable, and unsearchable (Eph 3:8; 2:7). What are these promised riches? “Redemption through his blood” and “the forgiveness of sins” (Eph 1:7). “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance” (Eph 1:11, NKJV). Let us not then “despise the riches of His goodness” (Rom 2:4).

## CONCLUSION

We may be wrong about many things, doctrinally, and yet be saved. But we may dare not be wrong about the object of our faith and the ground of our hope for God’s salvation. Christ Himself must be the sole object of our faith and the exclusive ground of all our hopes for heaven and eternity. To be wrong at this point is to miss the Way. Those who rest their faith on any other foundation are destined for everlasting despair. Jesus said, “Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it . . . I am the door . . . I am the way . . . no man comes to the Father but through me.”

Today, follow the Way, accept the Truth, and receive the Life. ED

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**“Remember  
your leaders,**  
who spoke the word of God to you.  
Consider the outcome of their way of  
life and imitate their faith.”

HEBREWS 13:7 (NIV)



PASTOR'S APPRECIATION DAY  
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# CONFIDENCE IN THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

We, the delegates assembled in Utrecht for the fifty-sixth session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, express praise and thanksgiving to God for His gracious gift of the Spirit of Prophecy.

In Revelation 12, John the Revelator identifies the church in the last days as the “remnant . . . which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (verse 17). We believe that in this brief prophetic picture the Revelator is describing the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which not only keeps “the commandments of God” but has “the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is “the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

In the life and ministry of Ellen G. White (1827–1915), we see God’s promise fulfilled to provide the remnant church with the “spirit of prophecy.” Although Ellen G. White did not claim the title “prophet,” we believe she did the work of a prophet, and more. She said: “My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there” (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 36); “If others call me by that name [prophetess], I have no controversy with them” (*ibid.*, p. 34); “My work includes much more than this name signifies. I regard myself as a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people” (*ibid.*, p. 36).

Ellen G. White’s chief burden was to direct attention to the Holy Scriptures. She wrote: “Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light” (*Review and Herald*, January 20, 1903). She believed that although her writings are a “lesser light,” they are light, and that the source of this light is God.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that “in His Word God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 7). We consider the biblical canon closed. However, we also believe, as did Ellen G. White’s contemporaries, that her writings carry divine authority, both for godly living and for doctrine. Therefore, we recommend:

- 1) That as a church we seek the power of the Holy Spirit to apply to our lives more fully the inspired counsel contained in the writings of Ellen G. White, and
- 2) That we make increased efforts to publish and circulate these writings throughout the world. ED

This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 30, 1995.

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# THE SABBATH IN COLOSSIANS 2

**MORE ADVENTISTS KEEP THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH THAN DOES ANY OTHER GROUP ON EARTH, INCLUDING JEWS. SO WHEN PEOPLE TAKE A HARD LOOK AT THE SABBATH, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE PROVIDE CLEAR BIBLICAL TEACHING.**

One passage that has always been important to Adventists is Colossians 2:16–17: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

Some see this passage as a challenge to the perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath, grouping it with Jewish feasts and new moons and terming them all as “shadows.”

Is the weekly Sabbath in play here? And if so, has it been relegated to “shadow” status?

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* says,

The type of sabbath under consideration is shown by the phrase “which are a shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:17, KJV). The weekly Sabbath is a memorial of an event at the beginning of earth’s history. . . . Hence, the “sabbath days” Paul declares to be shadows pointing to Christ cannot refer to the weekly Sabbath designated by the fourth commandment, but must indicate the ceremonial rest days that reach their realization in Christ and His kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulty with this explanation is that it’s circular; it rules out the Sabbath based on our own understanding of the Sabbath. That isn’t good enough. If the New Testament declares the Sabbath to be a shadow, we must be open to that.

Adventist theologian Ron du Preez, in his book *Judging the Sabbath*, makes a much stronger case that “sabbath days” in this passage are, in fact, ceremonial days. Citing the chiasmic structure used by Hebrew writers, du Preez points to Hosea 2:11, which he says partitions the annual Jewish festivals into two categories: “feast days” and “sabbaths” (KJV).

If, for the sake of argument, the weekly Sabbath was in view here, does that mean it has been fulfilled along with the feasts and new moons? Not necessarily. Whenever we find the sequence of feasts, new moons, and sabbaths in the Old Testament, it’s al-

most always within one particular context: sacrifices. Ezekiel 45:17, for example, says, “It will be the duty of the prince to provide the burnt offerings, grain offerings and drink offerings at the festivals, the New Moons and the Sabbaths—at all the appointed festivals of Israel.” This passage, and others like it, use the same key terms as Colossians 2: meat, drink, feasts, new moons, sabbaths. The context is *sacrifices*.

So what could Paul mean by “shadow” in Colossians 2:17? Most scholars argue that the shadows are the feasts, new moons, and sabbaths. But a new moon can’t be a “shadow,” because a new moon had no religious significance in itself. A new moon’s only significance was its association with sacrifices. Instead, the shadow must have something to do with what all these particular days had in common: the sacrifices *offered* on them.

Is there support for the idea that “shadow” refers to sacrifices? Yes. The two other New Testament references to shadows are found in Hebrews. “There are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (Heb 8:4–5). And “the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. . . . Therefore, when Christ came into the world he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me’” (Heb 10:1–5).

At a time when sacrifices were still being offered in Jerusalem (even by early Christians), Paul taught that the age of sacrifices was over. They were shadows of something better to come: the body of Christ, for which the weekly Sabbath remains an enduring symbol of our salvation—rest in Him. ED

<sup>1</sup> The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, volume 7, pages 205–206.

This article originally appeared in *Adventist Review*, August 2010.

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# THE LAST ENEMY



Although some obituaries claim that God has taken a loved one into a better world, others do not reflect any hope. Nevertheless, all of them remind us that one day it will be our turn.

A kind of obituary is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. It contains four statements: (1) Christ has died, (2) Christ was buried, (3) Christ arose from the dead, and (4) Christ appeared to different persons. Jesus Christ, our Creator and Savior, knows exactly what happens when humans die. In addition, He has experienced death Himself, and through the Bible He can give us important information about this topic.

## I. THE CAUSE OF DEATH

God's statement (Gen 2:17): The possibility that death may become a reality is introduced. Satan's statement (Gen 3:4): Immortality is part of humanity.

After the fall, death became the bitter reality affecting all human beings (Rom 6:23).

## II. THE STATE OF DEATH

### 1. *Death in the Old Testament*

Genesis 2:7 states that God gave life to the body that He shaped from the dust of the ground and that up to that time was without life (dust + life = a living being). If God withdraws life, the former state—earth, dust—is found again (cf. Eccl 3:19–20).

In death, there is no activity. The deceased have no consciousness (Eccl 9:5–6, 10).

Death is compared to sleep, which seems to imply: (1) It is a state of unconsciousness. The dead are “sleeping” in the earth. (2) There will be an awakening (Dan 12:2, 13).

### 2. *Death and Jesus*

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 20, Jesus is called the “first fruit” or the “first of those who are asleep.” As such, Jesus also “slept” when He was dead. After His crucifixion, He did not go directly to the Father, but rested in the tomb until His resurrection (John 20:17).

### 3. *Death in the New Testament*

- The dead are in the grave (John 5:28–29).
- David, a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22), rests in the tomb and is not with God (Acts 2:29, 34).
- Where Jesus is, His disciples cannot come immediately (John 7:33–34; 13:33).

The Old Testament, the New Testament, as well as Jesus' own experience suggest that death is an unconscious state called “sleep” (see also John 11).

## III. AND AFTER DEATH

There is a resurrection. Believers will receive a new body. However, we have no detailed information about what this body will be like. A writer once compared the old body to coal and the new body to a marvelous diamond; both consist of carbon, and yet they are so different from each other (1 Cor 15:42–44).

- A child of God expects the resurrection (1 Cor 15:22–23).
- Jesus has prepared dwelling places for His people that they will inhabit after His second coming (John 14:1–3).
- Finally, death will be done away with. Death will be the end only if my life does not belong to God (Rev 21:4).

## IV. PREPARATION

We are preparing (Ps 90:12). We get our priorities straight. Important things must remain important.

In ancient Thessalonica, two inscriptions were found that obviously come from the same period. One says, “No hope.” The other one reads, “Christ is my life.” Two inscriptions and two different philosophies of life: resignation and assurance. What about your life? ED

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# DEUTERONOMY 22:5

**IS DEUTERONOMY 22:5 RELEVANT FOR CHRISTIANS AND THEIR LIFESTYLE? IF NOT, WHY? IF YES, WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?**

The passage you refer to reads, “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.”

Most commentators interpret this legislation in terms of the practice of transvestism among non-Israelites. It is believed that in Canaanite fertility rites the exchange of dress between men and women somehow contributed to the fertility of the land. The evidence for this type of exchange is practically nonexistent. Yet we know that the goddess Anat is described in one document as acting and dressing like a man.

More clear evidence for ritual transvestism is found in the cult of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. It was believed that a ritual change of sex occurred by exchanging clothes, and on occasion emasculation may have been practiced.

Among the Hittites we also find rituals in which transvestism was apparently practiced, only among men and for the purpose of removing femininity from the man, restoring his masculinity. Others find in this biblical legislation a rejection of ritual homosexual practices among pagans.

These are attempts to identify the cultural background for this biblical legislation. Scholars disagree about the specific cultural or religious practice that the biblical writer had in mind. This points once more to the fact that ultimately it is the biblical text itself that has the final word in terms of its meaning.

First, we should observe that the prohibition is carefully phrased: “No woman shall wear an article of man’s clothing” (NEB). The Hebrew word translated “clothing” (*kali*) in the New International Version could include more than what is usually implied by “clothing,” and therefore “article[s] of clothing” may be a better rendering.

The emphasis is on the apparel that distinguishes a man from a woman. The man is not to “put on [a] woman’s dress” (NEB). The Hebrew term *simlah* (“mantle,

wrapper”) refers to a square piece of cloth worn as a mantle or wrap. This type of clothing was also worn by men, but the difference, according to authorities, may have been the finer materials and vivid colors of the woman’s dress, as well as its distinctive embroidery.

Second, the context is formed by a collection of different laws dealing with a variety of human actions, seeming to emphasize respect for other persons and their properties and respect for nature. The unifying topic may well be respect for the social and natural order established by God. There is nothing in the context about pagan ritual practices.

Third, a reason is given for the prohibition: the Lord “detests” a person who does these things. It is here that some find the ritual element. The term “detest, abominate” is used in other places to refer to pagan religious activities that are not acceptable to the Lord. But it is also used to refer to social behavior that is repugnant to the Lord (see Deut 24:4; 25:16). This seems to be the case in Deuteronomy 22:5.

It appears that the legislation under consideration is not controlled by ancient cultural concerns that are meaningless to us, but is in fact based on a very relevant principle for Christians today: that God is a God of order, and He establishes boundaries within creation to preserve the order instituted by Him.

The distinction between male and female was established at creation when the human race was defined as “male” and “female.” Anything that alters that distinction is rejected. In the setting of the daily life of the Israelites, this would have been a rejection of transvestism in pagan rituals. But the principle cannot be limited exclusively to that cultural expression, because it is based on the order of creation.

This certainly impacts our lives today. Every Christian should dress in such a way as to preserve the distinction between the sexes. The details in the implementation of the principle, in our complex society, should be determined by the believer in communion with her or his Lord. Although society defines the way we dress, Christians are to select from what society offers that which is compatible with biblical values. ED

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

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# DISCIPLES KEEPING DISCIPLES:

“BEING THERE” > PART 4

In my last article on disciples keeping disciples, I concluded that members are more likely to stay in the church once they attain the level of sharing stories with one another because they will have friends with whom to share their joys and sorrows. The next critical step toward making everyone family and friends—which is the foundational key to keeping them in the church—is “being there.”

## “BEING THERE”

I define “being there” as being physically present in times of need. Here is an example: Suzy and her husband attended church only occasionally, even though the church always tried to keep in touch with them. One day Suzy’s husband was taken to the hospital with symptoms of chest pain, which turned out to be a heart attack. We, as pastors and members of the congregation, visited Suzy and her husband several times over the three weeks he was in the hospital. But on one Saturday, even as the church was at worship, news came that he succumbed to his ailment. The head elder and I rushed to the hospital to support Suzy and her family at the time of loss, and afterwards we provided for a decent burial in our church cemetery.

This is an example of the ministry of presence—being there in a time of need. The following words from the *Journal of Jewish Spiritual Care* sum up a ministry of presence:

Words do not have to be said—giving a bottle of water to a thirsty person speaks volumes about not being forgotten. Maintaining a calm presence at the bedside does not remove fear; it lessens isolation. To be with a person at a time of need is to honor the survivor’s humanity, the

inherent dignity endowed by the Creator. Teaching others how to be present, and how to listen to those in distress is a divine-like intervention that spreads the safety net of care and concern.<sup>1</sup>

## FOCUS ON THE DISENGAGED

Even though a certain percentage of members disengage from church, no longer attending and showing total disinterestedness in its mission, it is the duty of the church to minister to them in spite of their stance. Jesus was the model, mingling with sinners and tax collectors who were disengaged from the mainline “church” activities of their time. Jesus died for us even though we were disengaged. The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) is a good example of being there to help in spite of hatred and animosity. The Bible admonishes us to comfort each other and edify one another (1 Thess 5:11). I believe this admonition applies not only to those in regular standing, but also to the disengaged and disinterested. “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn,” (Rom 12:15) includes mourning with those who are disengaged. This is the ministry of presence.<sup>2</sup>

## MINISTRY OF VISITATION

The ministry of visitation is an old practice. In modern times many substitutions have been introduced, such as text message ministry, praying over the phone, and even prayer walks. These are good because people are sometimes too busy to have a pastor or a group come by for a visit. But in spite of technological advancements, the ministry of presence is a valuable way to forge connections and build relationships. An African proverb says, “You don’t know someone until you have stepped in her or his home.”<sup>3</sup> “Knowing”



means something deeper than just a social visit; it carries along with it the idea of being a family together, demonstrating true care. Even the disengaged—who probably have agendas other than church on the day of worship—feel cared for when they see Christ’s disciple at their home.

Being there with anyone, either disengaged or engaged, promotes a feeling of inclusiveness—despite the disengaged having disconnected themselves from the church. Sitting with someone who is sick, attending an event unexpectedly, and sharing in their suffering, both in person and place, can bring them to the neutral ground of inclusion. Meeting people on their own ground as one acquainted with their problems and challenges<sup>4</sup> can help them adapt to the church culture of inclusion.

### STRATEGIES FOR “BEING THERE”

- Create a prayer hotline. Pastors and elders rotate the responsibility for the phone on a weekly basis. Distribute the number to church members and even those in the community so they may call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week in times of need or crisis.
- Create a text, WhatsApp, or email group so church members can be there for one another in times of need.

- Attempt to be the first responders in times of crisis.
- Be physically present as much as possible.
- Take food when a disengaged or engaged member is experiencing serious illness or has lost a loved one. Food can be a way to connect with others.
- Spend time with others; time spent is friendship gained.

This is an opportunity to put our arms around the ones who are disinterested in the church. Through our deeds, we say to them that we love them and want to include them. The disengaged will appreciate our care and come back; the engaged will stay on. ED

<sup>1</sup> Myrna Matsa, “Jewish Theology of Disaster and Recovery,” *Journal of Jewish Spiritual Care* 10, no. 1 (2010): 20–31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–31.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, *Strengths-Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow* (New York: Gallup, 2008), 266.


<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 254.

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# THE MINISTRY OF A DEACON/DEACONESSE:

ELLEN G. WHITE'S PERSPECTIVE > PART 1

The ministry of deacons and deaconesses had its beginning in apostolic times and was related to various kinds of service in the early church. It is a commonly accepted belief that the work of the deacons began with the apostles' selection of seven men, including Stephen and Philip, to care for the charitable work of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5–7). Later, the New Testament also mentions the service of female deaconesses, such as Phoebe (Rom 16:1). Thus the ministry of deacons and deaconesses is biblical in origin. A totally converted life of godliness, moral and spiritual uprightness, identity with God's people and His cause, and wisdom and discernment are some of the essential qualities of those called to church leadership. The following is an invaluable perspective on the ministry of deacons and deaconesses for the service of the church. This selection is from *The Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen G. White.<sup>1</sup>

In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

## THE CHALLENGE OF A GROWING CHURCH

The early church was made up of many classes of people, of various nationalities. At the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, "there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Among those of the Hebrew faith who were gathered at Jerusalem were some commonly known as Grecians, between whom and the Jews of Palestine there had long existed distrust and even antagonism.

The hearts of those who had been converted under the labors of the apostles were softened and united by Christian love. Despite former prejudices, all were in harmony with one another. Satan knew that so long as this union continued to exist, he would be powerless to check the progress of gospel truth; and he sought to take advantage of former habits of thought, in the hope that thereby he might be able to introduce into the church elements of disunion.

Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, the enemy succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders, and so "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the He-

brews.” The cause of complaint was an alleged neglect of the Greek widows in the daily distribution of assistance. Any inequality would have been contrary to the spirit of the gospel, yet Satan had succeeded in arousing suspicion. Prompt measures must now be taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction, lest the enemy triumph in his effort to bring about a division among the believers.

### **ORGANIZING FOR EFFICIENT SERVICE**

The disciples of Jesus had reached a crisis in their experience. Under the wise leadership of the apostles, who labored unitedly in the power of the Holy Spirit, the work committed to the gospel messengers was developing rapidly. The church was continually enlarging, and this growth in membership brought increasingly heavy burdens upon those in charge. No one man, or even one set of men, could continue to bear these burdens alone, without imperiling the future prosperity of the church. There was necessity for a further distribution of the responsibilities which had been borne so faithfully by a few during the earlier days of the church. The apostles must now take an important step in the perfecting of gospel order in the church by laying upon others some of the burdens thus far borne by themselves.

Summoning a meeting of the believers, the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit to outline a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church. The time had come, the apostles stated, when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the gospel. “Wherefore, brethren,” they said, “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” This advice was followed, and by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons.

### **THE RESULT OF SHARED LEADERSHIP**

The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church. These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole.

That this step was in the order of God is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen.

“The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” This ingathering of souls was due both to the greater freedom secured by the apostles and to the zeal and power shown by the seven deacons. The fact that these brethren had been ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success.

To the early church had been entrusted a constantly enlarging work—that of establishing centers of light and blessing wherever there were honest souls willing to give themselves to the service of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel was to be worldwide in its extent, and the messengers of the cross could not hope to fulfill their important mission unless they should remain united in the bonds of Christian unity, and thus reveal to the world that they were one with Christ in God. Had not their divine Leader prayed to the Father, “Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are”? And had He not declared of His disciples, “The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world”? Had He not pleaded with the Father that they might be “made perfect in one,” “that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me”? (John 17:11, 14, 23, 21). Their spiritual life and power was dependent on a close connection with the One by whom they had been commissioned to preach the gospel.

Only as they were united with Christ could the disciples hope to have the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit and the co-operation of angels of heaven. With the help of these divine agencies they would present before the world a united front and would be victorious in the conflict they were compelled to wage unceasingly against the powers of darkness. As they should continue to labor unitedly, heavenly messengers would go before them, opening the way; hearts would be prepared for the reception of truth, and many would be won to Christ. So long as they remained united, the church would go forth “fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:10). Nothing could withstand her onward progress. The church would advance from victory to victory, gloriously fulfilling her divine mission of proclaiming the gospel to the world. ED

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<sup>1</sup> Except for the subheadings, the entire portion is from Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 87–96, and is based on Acts 6:1–7. Scriptural references are placed in parentheses, instead of footnotes as in original.

# PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS: ADVENTISM’S ESCHATOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

**Seventh-day** Adventist Christians are pretty special people. We consider ourselves the eschatological remnant of Bible prophecy (Rev 12:17), making us a unique group of people called out of darkness into a marvelous relationship with God (1 Pet 2:9). Adventists also believe it is our role in the world to restore all truths and worship of God as Creator and Redeemer of the universe (Mal 4:5–6; Isa 58:12–14; Rev 14:6–12). Yet, in spite of huge investments of time, resources, and expertise, the Adventist Church continues to face great challenges. Although there are many external threats to the Church and its mission, none compares to the greater challenges that threaten the Church from within.

## DISTINCT CHALLENGES

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul alludes to two distinct challenges confronting God and His people throughout all time. For God, the challenge is to fulfill an eternal purpose of saving lost humanity (Eph 1:4–5). For God’s people, the church, the challenge is to live a vibrant Christian life while waiting for Jesus’ return (Eph 1:14; 4:30). The latter is crucial in view of the increasing hostility of Satan and his evil forces against the church at the end of time (Eph 6:12).

## COSMIC CHALLENGES

In Ephesians 1–3, Paul stresses the cosmic challenges of redeeming individuals who make up the body of Christ according to God’s eternal purpose of salvation (Eph 2:8–9). Underscored here is the astronomical gift of salvation as the sole act of God. Through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:4, 7), God took the ultimate risk to redeem us. The initiative was not an afterthought of God, but rather by divine wisdom was part of His

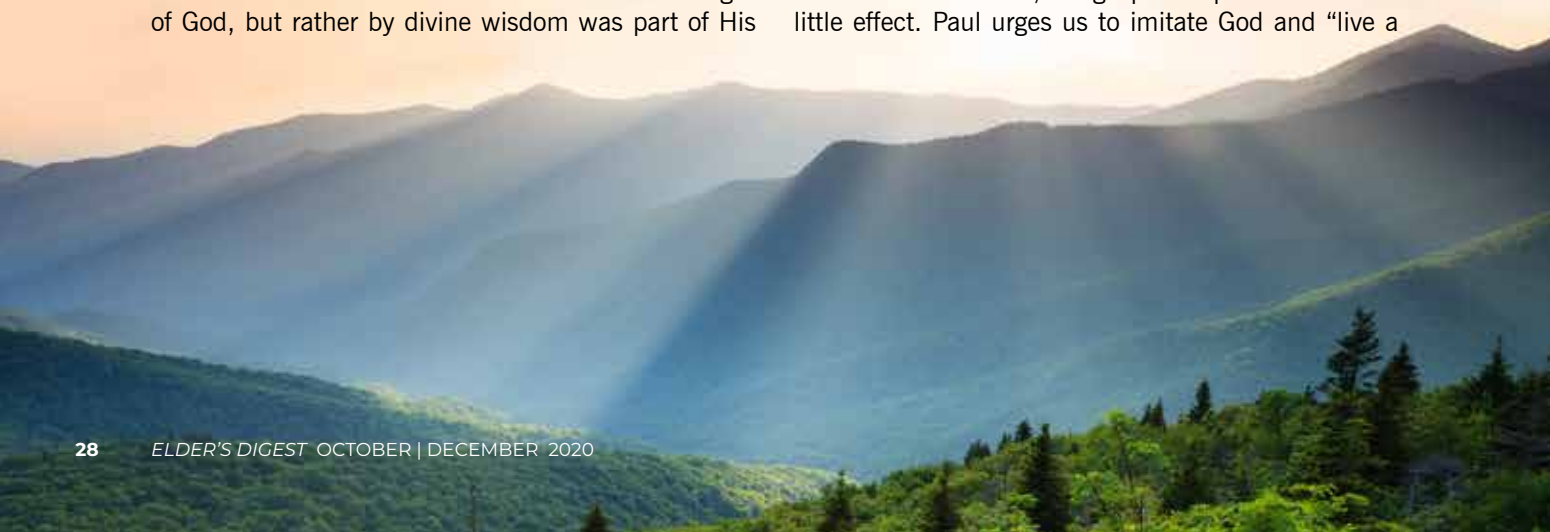
plan for the redemption of the human race (Eph 1:4). In Jesus, God has forgiven us (Eph 1:7b–8), releasing us from the bondage of sin (cf. Heb 2:14). The basis for our redemption and forgiveness of sin—either of a willful or an unintentional sideslip—is the grace of God, not any good deed of our own (Eph 1:7).

## PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Ephesians 4–6 zeroes in on the practical challenges faced by individual believers as recipients of God’s glorious grace (Eph 2:10). Paul argues that the unmerited and redemptive grace of God is the basis for obedience. He underscores several clear imperatives as ongoing challenges for Christians:

**1. Growing in Christ.** There is no substitute for spiritual growth. While the Christian life receives meaning and significance from heaven (Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10), it is not to be a life devoid of earthly use. Practical Christianity fulfills God’s purposes on earth, enabling believers to minister to one another and promoting unity and maturity in the church (Eph 4:1–16). Like going on a journey, we are called upon by God to live a life worthy of our calling (Eph 4:1), and not as those who do not know God (Eph 4:17–32). We are children of light (Eph 5:8); as such, we must grow in humility, patience, love for one another, and unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:2–3). Unless we grow to maturity, we will stagnate and die spiritually. Our failure grieves God (Eph 4:29–32).

**2. Living by example.** Yes, the world is sick with sin, injustice, and cruelty, but Christians do not wait for solutions; we create them!<sup>1</sup> What better way than to live an exemplary Christian life? Actions do speak louder than words, and unless people are able to see that we walk the talk, the gospel we preach will have little effect. Paul urges us to imitate God and “live a



life of love” with Jesus as our supreme example (Eph 5:1). Such love requires that all forms of evil (sexual immorality, greed, foolish talk, coarse joking, etc.) cease among us (Eph 5:3–4). As born-again Christians, we should bear the fruits of goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph 5:8–9) and make the most of every opportunity we have to build up the body of Christ (Eph 5:16–21).

**3. Maintaining familial harmony.** Amidst what seems a trend of crisis for married life, we are called upon by God to demonstrate the sanctity of marriage. Wives are exhorted to respect and submit to their husbands just as the church is subject to Christ (Eph 5:22–24). Much seems to be expected of a wife, but much more is required of her husband. Paul instructs husbands to love their wives in the same way Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph 5:25–32). This admonition is for matrimonial unity, love, and commitment “until death do us part.” In Ephesians 6:1–4, children are instructed to obey, honor, and respect their parents. Here lies the secret of longevity, prosperity, and fulfillment. Parents need not provoke their children to anger (Eph 6:4). Sadly, some parents become a hindrance to their children’s salvation. They fail to emulate the love of Christ, make false promises, use abusive or belittling language, show favoritism, project unrealistic expectations, and fail to allow their children to grow at a normal pace. These behaviors often cause adverse and permanent scars on a child.

**4. Upholding equity and fair play.** More than any other denomination, Seventh-day Adventists should be at the forefront of ensuring equity and fairness in their dealings with people. Sadly, this has not always been the case. Even Adventist Christians succumb to human nature and discriminate between minority groups, races, colors, and genders. The admonition (applicable to all levels of the church as the body of Christ) is to ensure that our practices are in accordance with the great truths we profess so dearly. Employees are counseled to uphold a work ethic as to a higher authority—Christ—and not to work just to please men (Eph 6:5–8). In like manner, employers are cautioned to treat their subordinates with respect, not threatening them, for they themselves are subject to God and will one day be answerable to Him (Eph 6:9).

**5. Living as victors.** This is the goal of the Christian life. Victory is ours when we are adorned in the armor of Christ. This armor includes truth, righteousness, readiness to preach the gospel, faith, salvation, and being firmly established in the Word (Eph 6:10–20). Living as victors will not always be easy. Ellen G. White observes the following hallmarks of overcomers in Christ:

When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason.<sup>2</sup>

Those who would be victors should contemplate and count the cost of salvation. Strong human passions must be subdued; the independent will must be brought into captivity to Christ. The Christian is to realize that he is not his own. He will have temptations to resist, and battles to fight against his own inclinations; for the Lord will accept no half-way service. Hypocrisy is an abomination to Him. The follower of Christ must walk by faith, as seeing Him who is invisible. Christ will be his dearest treasure, his all and in all.<sup>3</sup>

### TAKING STOCK

The unmerited privileges God lavishes upon us come with great responsibility. Taking stock of our spiritual journey is a vital aspect of responsible stewardship. We can ask ourselves several questions:

- Are we constantly growing each day in Christ?
- Is the life of Jesus seen in us?
- Does the undying love of God have a positive impact on our familial relationships?
- Do we uphold equity and fair play in our dealings with others?
- Are we victors in Christ?

It seems obvious that Paul’s epistle to Ephesus stretches beyond his time to include every child of God today. The fruition of a vibrant and living experience with Christ will be an excellent indicator of a salvific relationship with God. Although we will constantly face challenges, our Christian life, transformed by divine grace, must remain a lifetime experience of constant trust and faith in God until the day of our redemption. May this be our experience! ED

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Schuler, “How to Lead by Example: Ten Rules for Working and Living,” Schuler Solutions (accessed July 24, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1882), 5:136.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), 271.

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# WORLDVIEW THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself."—Psalm 89:1–2

"With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare, 'Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.'"<sup>1</sup>

In this day and age, there is a lot of talk about worldviews. It is discussed in matters of politics, media, education, and general societal discourse. Everyone subscribes to one worldview or another; even though our views may be different, we all have this characteristic in common. From our research we have discovered that there is little written on worldviews from the Seventh-day Adventist perspective. Therefore, in five articles, we will discuss worldviews through the lens of the great controversy.

The first question that a worldview will seek to answer is: where does truth come from? After all, answers to all other important questions are found via the answer to this initial question. The source of truth will serve as a guide in all areas of life. So where does truth come from? In John 17:17, Jesus is recorded praying to God His Father, saying, "Your word is truth." For those with a biblical worldview, God's Word is the standard for truth. Paul writes that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Looking through the lens of the Bible brings answers to the great questions of worldview, and as we do so, we begin to better understand God Himself. "To think like God, one must think like Scripture."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible presents a metanarrative that tells the story of the universe. In this narrative can be found all the answers to the basic questions a worldview asks. The stories we create and tell today in books and films echo the rise and fall of the grand narrative

found in Scripture. From *The Chronicles of Narnia* to *Star Wars* and the heroes of the DC and Marvel universes, we can see elements of the story Seventh-day Adventists call the "great controversy." Christians and non-Christians alike feel the pull of the metanarrative of the great controversy between God and Satan, and it shows in our creative works. After all, as Scripture shows us, this is the story of the universe imprinted on our hearts and minds.

This story is especially significant for Seventh-day Adventists, as Herbert Douglas notes:

For Seventh-day Adventists, the Great Controversy Theme is the core concept that brings coherence to all biblical subjects. It transcends the age-old divisions that have fractured the Christian church for centuries. It brings peace to theological adversaries who suddenly see in a new harmony the truths that each had been vigorously arguing for. . . . The distinctiveness of Adventism rests in its overall understanding of the central message of the Bible that is governed by its seminal, governing principle the Great Controversy Theme.<sup>3</sup>

John C. Peckham agrees with this notion of the centrality of this theme for Adventists: "Broadly speaking, this concept of a cosmic conflict between God and Satan is by no means unique to Adventist thinking, but it is uniquely essential to Adventist theology. It provides a great deal of the framework within which many doctrines of Adventist theology make sense."<sup>4</sup>

We see this great controversy theme playing out all around us, serving as the metanarrative for the universe. When we read the Bible, we can see that this story is composed of four acts: creation, the fall, redemption, and re-creation.<sup>5</sup> Adventist theology is based out of this story, and most of Ellen G. White's writings reflect this narrative. Joseph Battistone notes, "The theme of the great controversy between Christ

and Satan is without question the central and most important theme in the writings of Ellen G. White.”<sup>6</sup> Clearly this narrative cannot be ignored.

White points out how its theme can be found etched throughout the pages of God’s Word:

The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise of the Revelation, “They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Rev 22:4), the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme,—man’s uplifting,—the power of God, “which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). He who grasps this thought has before him an infinite field for study. He has the key that will unlock to him the whole treasure house of God’s word.<sup>7</sup>

In the articles to come, we will explore the four acts of the great controversy and see how the great controversy gives answers to the most pressing questions our hearts ask, providing a worldview rooted in Scripture. ED

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 671.

<sup>2</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, “Cultivating a Biblical Mindset,” in *Think Biblically!*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert E. Douglas, “The Great Controversy Theme: What It Means to Adventists,” *Ministry*, December 2000.

<sup>4</sup> John C. Peckham, “Great Controversy Issues,” in *God’s Character and the Last Generation*, ed. Jiří Moskala and John C. Peckham (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Some may use the word “restoration.” This four-part perspective can be found in many Christian circles. Adventist theologian Jiří Moskala uses a similar perspective in *Back to Creation: Toward a Consistent Adventist Creation—Fall—Re-Creation Hermeneutic (Biblical-Theological Reflections on Basic Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics Applied to the Ordination of Women)*, Theology of Ordination Study Committee (Baltimore, MD, July 22–24, 2013), <https://www.adventistarchives.org/back-to-creation.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Battistone, “Ellen G. White’s Central Theme,” *Ministry*, October, 1975. Battistone also argues that the great controversy serves as the primary theme in the parables of Jesus; see Joseph J. Battistone, “The Great Controversy Theme in Jesus’ Parables,” *Ministry*, October, 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1903), 125–126.

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