

QUARTERLY RESOURCE FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS • APRIL/JUNE 2022

# ELDER'S

## DIGEST



“Call to Me, and I will answer you,  
and show you great and mighty  
things, which you do not know.”

Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV)



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# When an Elder is an Elder. . .



Neville's smiling face was instantly recognizable. It has changed little over the decades. It still radiates the love of Jesus! As I looked at the picture of his friendly, smiling face on Facebook, I could feel myself smiling. Then I read the caption, and tears began pooling in my eyes. Neville hadn't posted his own picture on Facebook—he's not that kind of person.

Neville Leeson will long be remembered as an elder in the Lismore Seventh-day Adventist Church, Australia, where I was born and where I grew up. For more than fifty years, I have been blessed to know Mr. Leeson—as I called him as a child. For as long as I can remember, he was an elder because of his consistent Christ-like character and ministry. Through the decades, I have never detected any political maneuvering or lobbying on his part to retain his position as elder—he's just not that kind of person.

So why was this octogenarian featured on Facebook?

Recently, there was a flood in Lismore—the biggest recorded flood since the time of Noah! While prolonged torrential rain gushed from the sky in what was described as a “rain bomb,” hundreds of people needed to be rescued by boats from their rooftops. Numerous houses were completely submerged. Too many people were swept away or drowned in their own homes.

After the murky, deadly waters subsided, while the lingering stench of the putrid mud was heavy in the air, a professional photographer, Wes Tolhurst, came to Lismore to capture and record the history.

And there was Neville, dressed in practical appropriate attire, volunteering! Serving. Giving. Loving. Sacrificing. Smiling! The tears didn't just pool in my eyes; now they were rolling down my cheeks.

Memories came flooding back . . . Neville had been my Pathfinder director. *Pathfinder* really is an apt term: he really did help me find the right path in life—by modeling and showing, rather than simply telling me. As an elder, Neville preached. Before he retired, he was a lecturer of

mathematics at what is now a university. I fondly remember one of his sermons from more than forty years ago, in which he described the enormity of the number one million. According to Neville, it takes more than eleven and a half days to count to a million, if you can count a number per second without taking a break!

As an elder, Neville often made visits to homes with other elders. Among so many others, he came to our home. It wasn't just a drop-in visit or social time: it was a spiritual visit. He kindly encouraged our family in our Christian journey and prayed with and for us. When the church celebrated the Lord's Supper, he took the emblems to the elderly and shut-ins, so they could share in the blessing.

Much more could be written about Neville, but space—even for the editor—is limited.

Thankfully, there are others like Neville—innumerable elders, deacons, and deaconesses who daily demonstrate Jesus to all they meet.

Right now, our world is in diabolical trouble. We haven't recovered from the COVID pandemic and now terrible wars and conflicts are mounting, as well as escalating natural disasters. So many of our 7.9 billion fellow inhabitants of our planet are anxious, fearful, stumbling, and in need of a Saviour.

Now, like never before—for such a time as this—elders, deacons, and deaconesses are needed to be representatives of Jesus. With perpetual prayers for the latter rain, loving smiles, Holy Spirit-filled hearts, gospel-nurturing speech, and actions reminiscent of the Saviour, elders, deacons, and deaconesses are needed to touch lives for eternity.

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:1–3, ESV). ED



ANTHONY R. KENT | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary





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# When God's People Pray

**Ed** Walker had suffered all his life from glossophobia, the fear of public speaking. When in school and asked to speak to the class, he would be scared to death, get lightheaded, sweaty, his heart beating out of control. Because of this fear, he would never take a role in the local church that required public speaking.

One day, Ed was working in his almond farm machine shop when his pastor stopped by for a visit. "I need you to be an elder," the pastor said, getting right to the point. Ed repeated his excuse—"I can't speak in public"—and then refused. The pastor looked Ed straight in the eye and said, "It's because of your own foolish pride that you can't speak in public." Ed felt like he had just been punched.

The pastor continued, "I want you to pray about this. And, by the way, I need you to be the head elder." Ed protested, "I haven't even been an elder! How would I know how to be a head elder?" The pastor said he would guide him, and then left. After praying for some days, Ed accepted, although he was very afraid.

## THE PANIC ATTACKS

Within three months, that pastor retired early due to cancer. There went the mentoring! Every week that Ed needed to be on the platform, he would have a panic attack. He dreaded it so much that he would look for any excuse not to even go to church.

One Sabbath Ed was on the platform waiting for his part in the service. During another panic attack, he desperately prayed, "Lord, you have to fix this, or I quit!" It was not an el-



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loquent prayer, but it was the cry of his heart. The moment he prayed, his glossophobia was gone!

Ed had never felt such complete relief. He knew this was a clear healing and it gave him a new awakening into the real power of earnest prayer. Before this, his prayer life had just been routine. Now, he found his personal time with Jesus to be a wonderful opportunity to draw close to Him.

### **THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL**

Over the next few years, the little church Ed and his wife Lisa attended outside of the small rural town of Chowchilla, California, USA, was in a downward spiral. It had dwindled down to about thirty-five attendees, and their small church school was down to twelve students. Another pastor had come and gone and now Ed was the leader of this struggling congregation.

Then something happened that dramatically changed Ed and Lisa's lives, their little church, and eventually the whole local conference.

### **THE POSITIVE TURN**

Lisa became the church's prayer ministries leader. She called my wife, Janet, and shared how God had laid a burden on her heart to meet with a group of women and pray for the Holy Spirit, their church, their men, and their community. When women get together to pray like this, God is about to move!

Months later, Lisa and Ed came to a prayer ministries seminar Janet was conducting. In looking at Ed and his body language, Janet could tell that he did not want to be there. When she asked him about it, he admitted that Lisa had dragged him there against his will and he did not want to be there. So, Janet handed him a notepad and pen and said bluntly, "Take notes! You are going to learn a lot

today!" He had a look of disbelief and annoyance on his face.

During the seminar, several elders of different churches shared how, when they were without a pastor and did not know what to do, they started praying privately and unitedly with other members, pleading for the Holy Spirit. Then they shared miracle after miracle of how new people began coming to their churches.

Ed was moved by the testimonies and thought, "I can try this! Let's see if united prayer really makes a difference."

### **PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE**

Ed started praying with Lisa, and then her prayer group, and eventually decided they needed to really make prayer meeting a *prayer* meeting. They started praying over each other's needs, which drew in more people wanting prayer. People then invited friends with special concerns to come and have the church pray for them. God was answering their prayers, and that excited the members!

In his own prayer time, Ed became convicted over the text where God says, "My house is a house of prayer" (Luke 19:46).<sup>1</sup>

Ed and Lisa then decided to have quality prayer time in the church service itself. They passed out prayer request cards and people would come down to the front to be prayed over. People loved that and brought more friends with needs to church.

Without any earthly invitation, God started bringing new people to church. Ed would greet everyone warmly and immediately write their names down to follow up. He would be sure that all visitors were invited for lunch. True, loving fellowship began to spread.

Ed was spending more private time with God than ever before, and he fell deeply in love with Jesus. He shares how he loves the

**"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."**

**Jeremiah 33:3**

quiet time with his Bible open, praying, and he knows Jesus is right there, asking him, "What do you want to know?"

### **THE ABUNDANT GROWTH**

The little country church kept growing and growing. They went from thirty-five to over a hundred attendees—a thriving church! The school grew to forty students. Ed noted that, over the years, when they started to take things for granted and pray less fervently, things begin to slide backward again. They would then become more focused and intentional to reverse that trend.

Ed became a motivated and passionate person for personal and united prayer. He is now involved in organizing many prayer events in the conference. He and Lisa have become associate prayer ministries leaders for their conference, making a tremendous difference in many churches.

When Paul went to answer the Macedonian call in Philippi and joined a women's prayer group, it led to Lydia's conversion, the planting of the church in Philippi, and eventually to the expansion of the gospel to all of Europe! (Acts 16:12–15, 40). Small prayer groups are powerful in the Lord!

### **PRACTICAL ESSENTIALS FOR ELDERS**

Here is a summary of the awakenings that Ed, and so many other elders, have discovered which can transform their lives and whole churches.

## Believe That Prayer Really Makes a Difference

Jeremiah 33:3 says, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” One of God’s rules of engagement He established in the great controversy is that “you do not have because you do not ask” (Jas 4:2). He has limited Himself in some ways to our asking. But He does answer every earnest prayer in the best way, even though it might not always be the answer we want.

## Personal Prayer Time with Jesus

Jesus said in His last most important instructions to His disciples, “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). There is nothing more important for an elder to do than to make sure he or she enjoys quality time with Jesus each day!

As Ellen G. White puts it, Many even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ’s loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work. These workers can never attain the highest success until they learn the secret of strength. . . . Not a pause for a moment in His presence, but personal contact with Christ, to sit down in companionship with Him—this is our need.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then promises seven times in John 14–16, when we do take time to abide with Him, that “if you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).

## Praying Together with Others

We have been guided by both Jesus and Ellen White that there is more power in praying together than even in our personal prayers.

The reason is that there will be unity of our hearts’ desires, our love for God, and our love for each other.

In Matthew 18:20 Jesus says, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

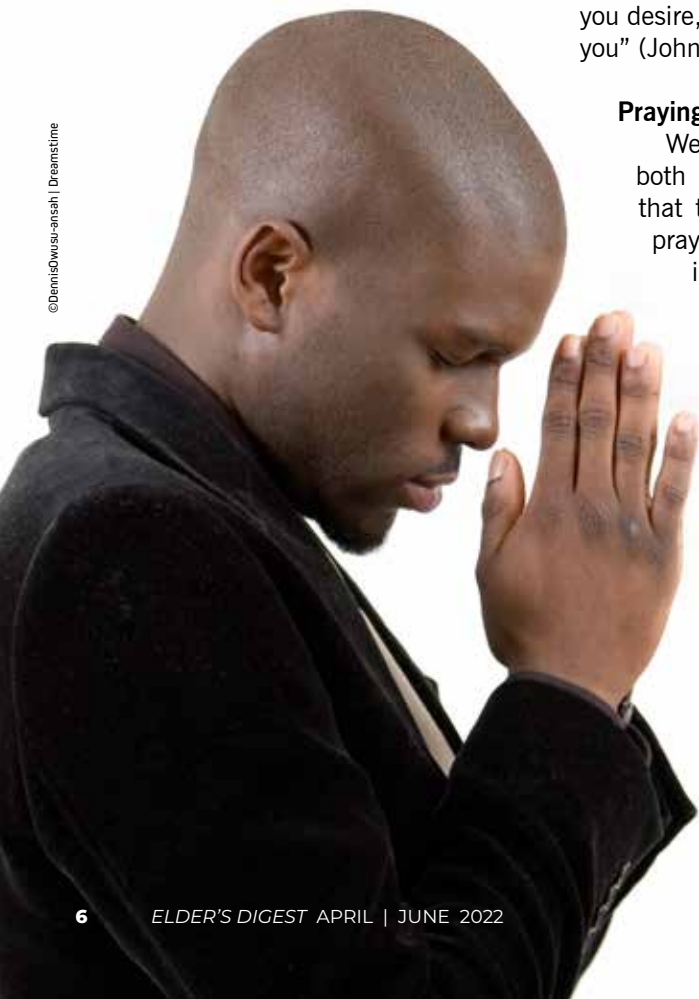
Ellen White comments on this verse, saying, “The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love for God and one another.”<sup>3</sup>

Repeatedly in the book of Acts, as the believers faced obstacles, problems, persecutions, and opportunities to spread the gospel, they followed these steps:<sup>4</sup>

1. They gathered together, prayed, and fasted.
2. The Holy Spirit showed up.
3. The Word of God went forth in power.
4. People were converted.
5. The church grew dramatically.

John Maxwell says, “In Acts chapter two, they prayed for ten days, Peter preached for ten minutes, and 3000 were converted. Today churches pray for ten minutes, preach for ten days, and three get saved.”<sup>5</sup> We, as elders, need to put the proven steps given to us in the book of Acts into constant practice!

**There is nothing more important for an elder to do than to make sure he or she enjoys quality time with Jesus each day!**





### Prayer Itself Is an Excellent Outreach Ministry

Most people are open to praying about their needs and as a method of reaching others. Prayer works better than many other methods, and in many cultures around the world. For example:

In the Bergamo church, Italy, the elders' main focus was on prayer and loving people, and the church grew from sixty to over three hundred in attendance, and the elders started three new church plants.<sup>6</sup>

In Kenya, the Eldoret church elder, his wife, and their pastor called for regular prayer at seven each morning. Members also invited their friends to join them. Then they joined the annual worldwide 10 Days of Prayer,<sup>7</sup> 40 Days of Prayer, and 100 Days of Prayer ahead of the 2015 General Conference Session. Everyone was so excited to see many answers to prayer. Attendance grew to four

hundred, including many non-Adventists and pastors of other denominations, too. Friendships and questions about Adventist beliefs multiplied. They started a small Bible study school that resulted in many new baptisms, with over 120 other church pastors baptized now, and some even bringing their churches and buildings with them. Prayer is evangelism!<sup>8</sup>

Pray the Lord will lead you to His plans for you!

### CONCLUSION

The elder's prayer life is all about a living intimate relationship with the risen Jesus, who can do the impossible! Those early believers had no buildings, few pastors, no institutions, no education, no big resources, and were being persecuted, but still turned the world upside down in twenty-five years. Nothing is impossible if you are used fully by our Lord. Ask and you shall receive! (Luke 11:9–13). **ED**

**“The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love for God and one another.”**

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NKJV.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 260–261.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, Letter 32, 1903, in *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 9:5.

<sup>4</sup> For examples, see Acts 1:14–15; 2:41–47; 4:18–33; 6:1–8; 12:1–25.

<sup>5</sup> John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 10.

<sup>6</sup> See Bettina Krause, ed., “Churches Born of Prayer,” chap. 1 in *It’s Time: Voice from the Front Lines of Mission*, Global Missions Centers 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Mission to the Cities Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> The 10 Days of Prayer event happens annually in January. For more information and resources, visit <https://www.tendaysofprayer.org>.

<sup>8</sup> For hundreds of practical resources to improve your prayer and spiritual life search, visit <https://www.revivalandreformation.org/prayer>.

**Jerry N. Page** is the secretary of the Ministerial Association at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.





SCAN FOR AUDIO

# Learning to Bless Buddhists

## EDITORIAL NOTE

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

**“Oh!** Your tree is beautiful,” my saffron-robed visitor exclaimed. “I know Christmas is a Christian festival. What is it all about?”

Stalling for time, I took another sip of ice water on that dusty December day nearly two decades ago. My family had moved to tropical Laos the year before as tentmaking missionaries. How had we ended up in that Southeast Asian nation? During seminary studies, my wife and I had prayed for a place to pioneer the gospel of Christ. We talked with leaders and explored statistics in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Through much prayer, we settled upon Laos because it had no ordained pastors, only two organized churches, and a mere 277 members. Although there was no paid position for us, our young family went as volunteers knowing that God was leading. We arrived to a warm Adventist reception and fell in love with the people and landscapes of rice paddies, mountains, and pagodas.

The young monk sitting across from me had walked from Wat Ban Fai, a Buddhist temple two kilometers away, and was wanting to know the meaning of Christmas. Where should I begin?

Taking a deep breath, I launched in: “To understand Christmas, you first need to understand the story behind it.” Then, for twenty minutes, I told of creation, Adam and Eve’s disobedience bringing suffering and death, God’s promise of rescuing the





## “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

James 1:27

world, and the birth of Jesus. Since I seemed to have an interested audience, I felt it would be unfortunate to stop there. I talked about Jesus' life, miracles, and teachings. I shared about His death for us, His resurrection, and His ascension back to heaven with a promise to return and bring us with Him to heaven.

However, even as I was talking, I could tell my guest wasn't impressed. At first his wide grin was encouraging, but soon I noticed he was snickering in the typical embarrassed way people do in uncomfortable social circumstances. Once I had finished my monologue, he changed the topic and a few minutes later, he took his leave. I felt disappointed and reviewed the conversation with my wife, trying to figure out what had gone wrong.

In the nearly two decades that have passed since that conversation, I have learned a lot. As I travel and share my experiences with my colleagues in church planting and soul winning around the world, I have the privilege of learning from them. Allow me to share a few insights.

Today, 8–10% of the world's population identifies as Buddhist, making Buddhism the fourth largest world religion after Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Although Buddhists are concentrated in Asia, the missionary religion has been spreading into Western societies since the mid-1800s. As the West secularizes, more and more people are exploring Buddhism and its associated practices such as meditation. Buddhism has been

growing rapidly in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Austria, Australia, and other locations. Today, Los Angeles, CA, USA, has more Buddhist schools and learning centers than any city in Asia. In America, one in three Buddhists are Westerners who have converted from a Judeo-Christian cultural background. So, whether you are serving as a local church elder in China or California, you would be wise to invest some time into learning about Buddhism and how best to share the blessings of Jesus with Buddhists.

The principal figure of Buddhism is, unsurprisingly, the Buddha—a title that means “enlightened one.” The religion does not depict him as a god, but as a model who found the way of liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. His role is not as a god or divine savior, but as a teacher guiding others on their way to attaining nirvana. Although often confused with a celestial paradise, nirvana is not a place, but is understood to be the liberated condition. To attain nirvana, spiritual advances are achieved through moral discipline and meditation until the three root causes of suffering—greed, hatred, and ignorance—are extinguished and rebirth ceases. Named Siddhartha Gautama at birth, Buddha was a contemporary of the Hebrews Daniel, Nehemiah, and Esther.

So, what should I have done differently in sharing my faith in Jesus with the young Buddhist monk on my front porch twenty years ago?

First and foremost, it is important to understand that Buddhism,

like Christianity, is an experiential religion. When Buddha arrived in ancient Kesaputta in modern day Bihar, India, his disciples announced him as the world's pre-eminent authority on knowledge and truth. The citizens replied with perplexity, “All the ascetics and brahmins promote their teachings and deride all other gurus. How can we know what is truth?” Buddha instructed them to reject the claims of oral traditions and scriptures, and disregard logical argumentation and the authority of teachers. Rather, he advised that they “know for yourselves” what was true by determining whether the teachings lead to wholesomeness, blamelessness, welfare, and happiness. If so, then live in accordance with them. But if not, reject them (*Anguttara Nikaya* 3:65).

Didn't Jesus teach something similar? Jesus warned against believing false prophets, saying, “You will know them by their fruits. . . . every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. . . . Therefore by their fruits you shall know them” (Matt 7:16–17, 20).<sup>1</sup>

Here is a good starting point for Buddhists: Begin by modeling the blessings you want them to experience in their own life. Show people how Jesus is changing you to be a loving and lovable human being. No, I don't mean always smiling and speaking with sweet tones. Anyone can act this way. Rather, live a noble life of honesty, purity, and care for others. Admit quickly when you are in the wrong and be quick to apologize even if the problem wasn't completely your fault. James writes, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Jas 1:27). Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt

5:16). The goal of this first phase of witnessing to a Buddhist is to gain their trust in the same way Jesus did.<sup>2</sup>

As you befriend Buddhists, privately and continually pray that Jesus will bless them and reveal Himself to them in a personal way. Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal their needs to you so that you can work with wisdom, asking for guidance about what to say and do. Rather than witnessing by a formula, witness by faith. If the just are to live by faith (Hab 2:4), shouldn't the just also witness by faith? Witnessing by human works and wisdom is powerless to convert hearts. If God is prompting each step, there is power in our witnessing and all success belongs to God.

The thing to remember about sharing Jesus with Buddhists is that your first focus should be about what He is doing to change you and bless you. Your focus should be on introducing them to Jesus and asking Jesus to reveal Himself to them in a special way, showing that He is real and cares for them, so that they come to faith. So the way to share your faith is to gossip about what Jesus is doing in your life and in your friends' lives. Don't

only share how He blessed you ten or twenty years ago; keep your stories current. If you have a vibrant relationship and prayer life with Jesus, you will always have something current to share. The impact on your Buddhist friend should be pleasure and a desire to have the same experience. If they respond positively, don't hesitate to offer to pray for Jesus to bless them.

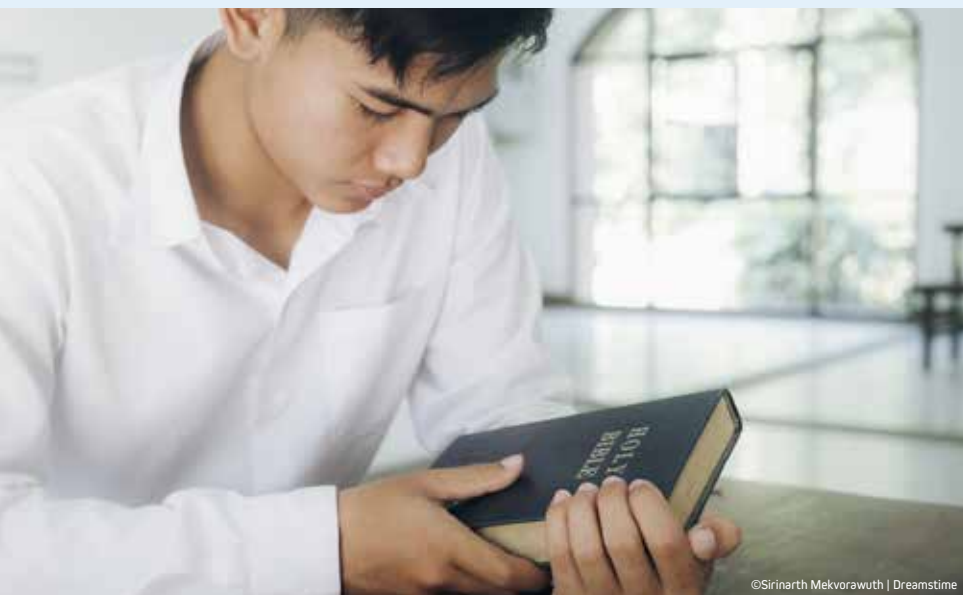
Something else you can do is share tracts that tell how Jesus blesses people.<sup>3</sup> Remember, the goal in this second step is to bless a Buddhist with an encounter with Jesus, leading them to believe that He is real and that He cares for them.

The third step of blessing Buddhists involves two main activities—joining your Buddhist friends to your Adventist friends and introducing them to the salvation Jesus offers. Be sure that the friend group you draw them into are those who also have a vibrant and open lifestyle with Jesus. As your Buddhist friends are welcomed and join such a group, they will experience belonging and belief in Jesus will strengthen more quickly. The fellowship should include plenty of socializing and play, but never

without spiritual encouragement and prayer. If you share genuinely and in a natural way about your experiences with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will be present, and your Buddhist friends will be drawn to Jesus.

When it comes to sharing about salvation in Jesus, it is important to know that this should be done after they have already discovered that Jesus is real. Don't get ahead of the Holy Spirit. Once they encounter Christ, they will naturally have questions. Answer the questions—not in a heavy and exhaustive way, but by sharing the stories of what Jesus did and taught on earth, and what the salvation is that He offers. The goal is to lead them to a place where they desire to become followers of Jesus.

Buddhists have a different concept of sin and death than Christians do. The Bible teaches that sinfulness is rebellion from God and that death is the conclusion that sin leads us toward because sin separates us from the source of life—our Creator. Because every human being is born with a sinful nature, we lean toward rebellion from God and self-destruction. Only God can cure us and give us



**Your focus should be on introducing them to Jesus and asking Jesus to reveal Himself to them in a special way, showing that He is real and cares for them, so that they come to faith.**

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power to become like Him. Only God can forgive the guilt that we possess because of our willful disobedience to His law of love.

On the other hand, Buddhists understand sin as a misdeed or the suffering that results from former bad deeds. Buddhists believe that the only way to deal with immorality is to choose to be moral. They believe there is no God who can forgive past immorality or who will change our hearts to become moral beings. Buddhists have a neutral view of human nature, believing that people are capable of being pure through self-discipline and meditation. Death is not viewed as the fruit of sin, but a natural doorway to the next life. The idea of eternal life may be attractive to some Buddhists, but Buddhist doctrine views eternal life as a delusion and that if eternal life could exist, it would be eternal suffering. As far as going to heaven, Buddhism names twenty-six heavens. When a human being dies, it is believed that they are born back into this world, into hell, or into one of the heaven planes and that one will remain in that realm until their karma dictates the timing of death and rebirth into another life plane. This process goes on for innumerable rebirths. The only release from this transience of life is to attain nirvana, which is described as a permanent condition that is neither life nor death.

When well-meaning Christians focus their witnessing on salvation from suffering by believing in Jesus and having eternal life in heaven, most Buddhists aren't impressed. Instead, we have found that Buddhists are attracted to the concepts that Jesus heals our hearts

to be wise and to desire purity and compassion. Secondly, rather than preaching about heaven, our focus has been on the creation of a new heaven and new earth where life is completely different—it is a permanent condition of joy and harmony with all beings—with no more death. I share the following Bible texts: Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:10–13, and especially Revelation 21:1–8.<sup>4</sup>

As your Buddhist friend continues to receive God's blessings into their life, it is only natural to ask them if they will choose to become a follower of Jesus. When they affirm that this is their desire, plan a special service to bless them as a new disciple of Jesus, presenting them with a Bible and inviting them to begin Bible studies and prepare for baptism. This ceremony formally welcomes them into a new identity of being a Christian as they prepare to become a member of the family of God. It also transforms their focus from being the recipient of Jesus' blessings to an ambassador of Jesus and sharing His blessings with others.

The next step of blessing Buddhists is to then study the story of redemption with them from the creation of the world to the creation of the new earth. The focus in the study should always be upon the question: so what? What does this mean for my living today? The goal of reading these Bible stories, along with the topical studies on Bible doctrine, is for them to learn that the Bible is a source of truth and to form their relationship with Jesus. The Bible tunes their ear to know God's voice so that when they pray, seeking wisdom for their

lives, they will be walking in harmony with Him.

As I think back nearly two decades to the conversation with the monk on my front porch, I have sadness that I didn't understand these principles then that I know now. But I am also thankful for that failure because it drove me to research these things and learn the importance of focusing on blessing Buddhists rather than preaching to them. Over the past two decades of working to bless Buddhists, I have witnessed the sick healed, the jobless employed, the depressed encouraged, the demon oppressed set free, the fearful at peace, the addicted released, the selfish made selfless, and the isolated filled with joy—all in the loving name of Jesus. As Buddhists learn that Jesus is real, and that Christianity is all about knowing and obeying God's voice, and being a blessing to others as we prepare for eternity on the earth made new, they respond eagerly to Jesus. ED

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NKJV.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 143.

<sup>3</sup> My wife and I wrote a tract for Buddhists with this in mind, titled *Jesus Can Help*. It is printed by GLOW Tracts and can be ordered through your local Adventist Book Center or from GLOW directly at <https://www.glowonline.org>.

<sup>4</sup> You can also share resources produced by the Global Mission Center for East Asian Religions (see below), including a GLOW tract titled *A Better Future*.

**Gregory P. Whitsett** is the director of the Center for East Asia Religions, Adventist Mission, at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.

If you would like to learn more about how to bless Buddhists and find resources for your ministry, contact us at the Global Mission Center for East Asian Religions at <https://cear.globalmissioncenters.org>.





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EDITORIAL  
NOTE

This article is the second in a four-part series on ministering to those with mental health issues.

# Ministering to the Traumatized

The Bible is filled with stories of trauma, but also of perseverance after trauma. Adam and Eve suffered the loss of a son in a cruel murder. The murderer was their other son. Noah and his family knew, as they heard water flood the world outside, that family and friends were drowning all around them. Joseph was mercilessly betrayed by his own family, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and suffered for years in prison. Moses killed a man with his own hands and fled for his life. David was hunted, but he also had lots of blood on his own hands. His daughter Tamar was raped by one of his sons. The Israelites killed and were killed in countless wars. Mary, the mother of Jesus, saw her son tortured and executed in a most gruesome way. And there are many more stories of abuse, cruelty, and loss of life.

Since creation, we have desired to be loved, to be safe, and to be happy. That's what we were created for. Sadly, we live in a world where we all, sooner or later, experience hurt, harm, and death. Trauma is the result of painful and frightening events that emotionally overwhelm us and affect our capacity to cope. They are unbearable and intolerable experiences. Trauma leaves a lasting impact on how we feel, think, act, and relate.

Trauma is not only about what happens to us, but also about what happens inside us as a response to a traumatic event. Two people who experience the same event may have very different responses. Still, neglect, abuse, or violence—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—often result in trauma. Other traumatic events are accidents, natural disasters, war, or seeing something terrible happen to a loved one or someone else. Research indicates that



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## For someone who has suffered trauma, it's important to get to the point where they can say, "I am not bad. But I struggle because something bad happened to me."

70% of us experience at least one traumatic event in our lifetime.

What characterizes trauma is that it isn't over when the traumatic event itself is over. It continues to live within us as memories, dreams, and flashbacks. We may live with constant stress. We are on the lookout for threats and danger. We feel that something bad could happen any time. And we're easily triggered.

For the traumatized, the world feels like an unsafe place. Life becomes about how to survive. The effects of trauma may endure for weeks, months, years, and even decades. They affect how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we see the world. Trauma may become the filter—the glasses—through which we see and experience practically everything.

People who have survived trauma often blame themselves for being weak, think it was their fault that they couldn't protect themselves or others, and may even feel responsible for what happened. Often, they have a deep sense of guilt and shame. They may think they are worthless, wrong, and damaged. For someone who has suffered trauma, it's important to get to the point where they can say, "I am not bad. But I struggle because something bad happened to me."

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA?

After a traumatic event, some recover quickly. Others do not return to normal; they keep living as if the traumatic event never ended. They have become traumatized. The core symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, are:

- **Intrusion.** Unwanted memories that suddenly intrude into the present moment; recurring dreams or nightmares; flashbacks where one feels and acts as if the event is happening right now.
- **Avoidance.** Attempts to avoid any distressing memories, thoughts, feelings, and reminders of what happened.
- **Hyperarousal.** A state of chronic stress where the person often has heightened alertness, is easily startled, has increased irritability, and problems with concentration and sleep.
- **Numbness.** Feeling distant and detached from almost everything, including oneself. It may be difficult to connect in important relationships. It may be hard to feel anything except fear, anger, guilt, and shame. Interests and activities that used to be important and enjoyable may not feel significant anymore. Even the memory of the traumatic event may be fragmented and incomplete. A severe form of numbness is dissociation. Dissociation is a disconnect from reality. One feels disconnected from one's own mind and body, and from time, space, and what's going on around. Things may feel unreal and dreamlike.

When such symptoms last for more than a month after a traumatic event, and cause significant distress or impaired functioning, then it may be PTSD. And when there have been repeated traumatic events, prolonged trauma, and especially childhood trauma,

one may develop complex PTSD, a severe form of PTSD.

### WHAT ARE THE COMMON CAUSES OF TRAUMA?

Globally, around 4% will experience events that are so distressing, threatening, and overwhelming that they will develop a post-traumatic stress disorder. From research, we know that sexual violence, such as rape and other kinds of sexual abuse and assault, is the leading cause of PTSD. Sexual violence is all about violence, and very little about sex. It's one of the most evil and hurtful things people do to others. Claims of sexual violence are usually true. They should not be dismissed without careful consideration. Any kind of sexual violence or harassment should never be tolerated or excused.

The second leading cause of PTSD is domestic abuse. These are behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone close to us. For each person traumatized in war or conflict, there are many more who are traumatized within the walls of their homes by someone who should have loved and protected them.

One of the most common traumas is unexpected loss of a loved one. It can lead to complicated grief and PTSD. Other major causes of PTSD are traumas related to war and conflict, witnessing something terrible happening to others, experiencing physical violence, accidents, and disasters.

In general, the more intense or long-lasting the traumatic event was, the higher the risk of PTSD.

### WHO ARE MOST VULNERABLE TO BECOMING TRAUMATIZED?

In general, men experience more traumatic events, but females are more likely to develop PTSD. Other vulnerability factors are:

- younger age;
- having experienced earlier traumas, including adverse childhood experiences;
- previous mental health challenges and substance abuse;
- lower socioeconomic status; and
- lack of social support.

In this world, the reality of trauma is something we all should care about. Many traumatic events involve people willfully hurting others. Instead of hurting each other, we should protect one another and prevent unnecessary suffering. And we should be kind, compassionate, and supportive of those who suffer from trauma.

### WHAT THE TRAUMATIZED NEED

Experiencing something traumatic impacts us deeply. Healing from trauma is about reclaiming your mind, body, and relationships, and managing how you feel, think, act, and relate. Someone who is suffering from trauma should not have to struggle with it alone. They deserve and need social and professional support.

The goals in trauma recovery are to stay safe, be able to manage the symptoms, process the trauma memories, be fully alive in the present, and enjoy fulfilling relationships with other people. To feel safe, any ongoing trauma must stop. Whenever traumatic events are ongoing, it is the natural and healthy response to be on the alert and feel unsafe.

After a traumatic event, being with loved ones and someone who holds one's hand or gives a hug when it's wanted, a safe place to stay, food, practical help, and time to rest and sleep may help minimize the impact of the trauma. In addition to the social support of friends, family, and the church community, it is recommended that the traumatized seek help and work with

a trauma therapist to manage the symptoms and challenges following a trauma.

Depression, anxiety, eating disorders, addictions, self-harm, and suicidality are common symptoms in trauma. It is important to replace self-destructive survival strategies with healthy strategies for emotional relief and stress reduction. Medication can help make symptoms more manageable and may be beneficial in the recovery processes. But medication alone is not sufficient treatment for trauma.

Eventually it will often be necessary to work on the trauma memories. The goal is to be able to remember and understand relevant aspects of the trauma without becoming overwhelmed by emotions or bodily reactions. In processing trauma memories, it's essential to pace oneself under the guidance of a therapist so it won't be too much too soon.

Traumatized people often feel detached from their thoughts, feelings, body, other people, and the world around them. The goal of trauma recovery is reconnecting and becoming fully alive in the present. For this to become a reality, one needs to develop self-awareness and mindfulness, becoming fully present in one's mind, body, and the environment; to notice and reflect on what is going on inside and around oneself. Many people find that deep breathing, relaxation techniques, stretching, walking, and nature help them become more aware and grounded in the present. When one becomes open and sensitive to what is going on inside and around, one will feel more alive.

Ultimately the goal is to truly enjoy safe and fulfilling relationships again. To feel physically and emotionally safe, we need people in our lives who are available, sensitive, and responsive—people who come close and provide support when we experience fear and pain.

Family, friends, therapists, support groups, and religious communities may provide that. For some, bonding with a dog, a horse, or some other animal may also be a way to experience closeness to another being. Being connected and supported is a powerful protection against becoming traumatized, and it is essential for recovery. Even if someone has been alone and lacked support in the past, it is never too late to connect. Being loved, supported, and close to people who are available, sensitive, and responsive is healing. Recovery happens in relationships.

### WHERE IS GOD?

And, ultimately, where is God for the traumatized? Where was He when the traumatic events happened? We know that we are living in the great controversy between good and evil, and no one feels this more acutely than the traumatized. God's will is not hurt, harm, or death. But we're still in this world of sin. And, as long as we are, it is my conviction that any time someone is traumatized, God is right there and suffers with the sufferer. Through the prophet Isaiah He speaks these words of comfort, courage, and hope to the traumatized:

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand (Isa 41:10, NLT).

He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth (Isa 42:3–4, NLT). ED

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**Torben Bergland, MD**, is a psychiatrist and an associate director of Health Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.



## Generous Lives

A pastor friend of mine once made a provocative statement about the church. He said, “It may be the body of Christ, but it’s also a food chain!” Wow. Is that offensive? Too strong? Or on target?

Jesus and His disciples are gathered for the Passover meal. In only about eighteen hours, the body of Jesus will hang dead on a rough-hewn cross. But for now, they are in an upper room, gathered to share Passover together. Jesus knows that the storm is about to burst upon them. In fact, He realizes that a storm is already raging *within* their community. They are like an angry family entertaining guests and trying to appear as though all is well. The disciples try to hide their tension from Jesus. But hiding something like that from His all-seeing gaze is just not possible. Judas arrives with a secret plan to betray Jesus, so there’s a traitor in the camp, a traitor with a deadly secret. Then, as the meal is set to begin, every single disciple refuses to stoop and wash the feet of the others. Too proud? Maybe. Too fearful of being viewed as *less than*? Likely.

While they recline at the table, Jesus says, “One of you will betray me.” According to Luke, it’s right after Jesus says *that* that the “food chain” becomes evident among them. “I’m the greatest!” they whisper. Suspicion also begins—“It’s not *me*. Must be *you*!” Peter weighs in with the strongest statement: “Even if everybody else betrays you, I will not! I’m ready to die for you—that’s how much I love you, and that will show everyone just how loyal I am!” Jesus’ response? “Really? You’ll *die* for me, Peter?! Actually, before the night’s over, you will have denied three times that you even *know* me!”

Denial and fear and anger and lust for supremacy—those are just a few of the emotions and inclinations swirling around in this community. Simply put, the air was filled with every kind of emotional experience guaranteed to obliterate community. And then, right in the middle of it all, Jesus says something that we can’t afford to miss. He makes a statement that gives them—that gives us—the basis for *all* true community. And it’s *that statement* over which we will linger today.

This passage comes right after Judas leaves the upper room. In fact, the verse that immediately precedes this passage says, “As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night” (John 13:30, TNIV). And then *this* passage will begin with the words “When he was gone . . .” (John 13:31, TNIV). While

the stench of betrayal still hangs in the air as our passage begins. It’s what’s at the middle of the passage that interests us today.

Read **John 13:31–38**. Jesus’ new command to “love others as I have loved you” is buried right in the heart of a passage where two of His inner circle are about to betray him and deny Him. It’s right in the heart of a passage filled with things guaranteed to fracture community. In other words, the very reality that will create the deepest and truest community is spoken of right in the context of a broken community. That means that this command to love one another is not an antiseptic command that has no contact with our realities or with our brokenness. Rather, it is found right at the heart of *broken* community. And there, at the heart of broken community, Jesus says, “Love each other as I have loved you.”

He says it is a *new* command. How is it a new command? After all, the command to love others is as old as the early parts of the Old Testament. The newness of this command is found in its standard. In the previous commands to love, the standard is healthy self-love: “Love your neighbor *as yourself*.” In *this* command, the standard is the love of Jesus for us. “Love each other *as I have loved you*.”

Notice three aspects of this command to “love one another.”

**1. In the community of Christ followers, love is not an option.** It is a *command*. Here’s what Jesus says: “A new *command* I give you: *Love one another*.” In other words, it’s not something we can opt out of. There may be many other options in the Christian life—what songs we sing in worship, what ministries we choose to engage, how we dress when we come to church. But this command is not an option. And it is precisely because He loves us that He can command us to love one another.

**2. In the community of Christ followers, love is not a feeling.** Did you notice? “Love one another *as I have loved you*.” Do you know what that love is going to require of Jesus? It’s going to require that while the disciples sleep, He agonizes in Gethsemane. It’s going to require that while the disciples flee, He subjects Himself to arrest. It’s going to require that while the disciples hide, He staggers down the *Via Dolorosa* under the burden of the cross. It’s going to require that while

they watch from a distance, He cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” So when He says, “Love one another *as I have loved you*,” He’s not asking you to feel all warm and fuzzy toward the person sitting down the pew from you who, just before you entered the sanctuary, took your parking spot. He’s not asking you to get all choked up with emotion at the Sabbath School teacher who never remembers your name. In fact, He’s not asking you or me to *feel* anything at all. He’s just asking us to *act* with love in the same way that He did.

**3. In the community of Christ followers, love cannot be hidden.** Jesus says, “By this will *everyone know* that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Love, then, is the virtue that draws this community together, that makes it safe and real and lasting. And love will be both the supreme and the identifying characteristic of the body of Christ. Can you imagine the ethos of this church if we could honestly say that *that* is what characterized us?!

It reminds me of the little girl who prayed, “Dear Jesus, make all the bad people good, and all the good people nice.” When love is placed where it belongs, people become nice! And when people are nice, others feel accepted. And when they feel accepted, they blossom and grow. And when they blossom and grow, lives are changed. And when lives are changed, people make amends for the ways in which they’ve hurt others. And when people make amends for past hurts, relationships are reconciled. And when relationships are reconciled, the church truly becomes a healthy body—the body of Christ. And when the body of Christ functions as a *healthy* community, people say, “I want to be a part of that! I want to know the God that you know! I want to have what you have!” And it all began because of the simple fact that love was set free in the church—free to do its work. And because it was, we soon discover that the church is filled with people—filled with Christ followers—who live generous lives.

Love is not an option; it’s a command. Love is not a feeling; it’s an action. Love cannot be hidden. It will change *everything* and *everyone* will know it! **ED**

**Randy Roberts**, DMin, LMFT, is the senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church and vice president of Spiritual Life and Mission, Loma Linda University Health, Loma Linda, CA, USA.

## Willing Hands

The story is told of a man having dinner with his parents at a stylish London restaurant. The food was superb; the setting was elegant. Everything seemed exquisite. When his mother's main course arrived, she wanted some salt. Trying the three silver shakers that were on the table, she discovered each contained pepper. She called the waiter over only to be told that she must be mistaken. Each table always contained two dispensers of pepper and one of salt. A second attempt, however, showed that their table did, indeed, have three pepper shakers. Embarrassed, the waiter immediately brought her a salt shaker. When it was time for dessert, the waiter appeared, insisting that because of the oversight they choose something "on the house."

The woman protested, "It's not that important."

"But, Madame," he replied in all seriousness, "what if you had been the queen?"

What if the church were to be characterized by service of that kind? What would stop us from being characterized that way? In this sermon we explore one of the many "one another" passages in the New Testament. Our "one another" passage today is found in Galatians 5. Galatians is all about freedom in Christ! So, as we read today's passage, remember that that message of freedom in Christ is its background. Our question today is: in the context of community, what does it mean to be free?

Read **Galatians 5:13–15**. What does it mean to be free? First Paul says, "I don't want you to use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature." In the original Greek, that's an interesting word, the word "indulge." It basically means, "a starting point or base of operations for an expedition." In other words, it's a place where an enemy can get a foothold in your life. So what Paul is saying is, "Don't let the sinful nature get a foothold in your life, because where things begin is *not* where they will end. It will always get worse than what it was when it started." Now, if you want to know what Paul is talking about when he speaks of the sinful nature, just skip down a few verses and read what he calls "the acts of the sinful nature." Notice as we read it that each of the realities he includes in this list is guaranteed to fracture true human community.

Read **Galatians 5:19–21**. These verses outline what Paul doesn't want Christ followers to do with their freedom. But then he gives us something that he *does* want us to do with our freedom. Remember that back in verse 13 he said, "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather,

serve one another humbly in love" (Gal 5:13, TNIV). *Serve one another humbly in love*. That's what we will do if we walk by the Spirit. And if we walk by the Spirit, we will grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We read his list of the acts of the sinful nature, so let's now read his list of the fruit of the Spirit. And as we read this list, please take notice that each of these qualities is guaranteed to help build true community.

Read **Galatians 5:22–23**. These two lists contain realities that will either *form* true community or *fracture* true community. The acts of the sinful nature will fracture it, while the fruit of the Spirit will form it. In fact, one of the key differences between the acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit is the fact that the first are such that tend to fracture community by *using others*, while the second are such that tend to build community by *servicing others*. The acts of the sinful nature objectify—that is, they make objects of—other people. And we human beings intuitively know that it is okay to *use* an object. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit are such that they tend to humanize other people. And we human beings rather intuitively respond with grace towards those who are humanized in our eyes.

And the reason Paul is discussing these two alternatives is because people are asking questions about how they are to handle their freedom in Christ. "Don't use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature," says Paul, "but use it to serve one another humbly in love." *Serve one another humbly in love*. Do you know what I think Paul is saying here? Maybe the best way to put this would be to say that when Jesus sets my heart free, He makes my hands willing. If my heart is free in Him, my service will be freely given to others. After all, that's what Jesus came to do. He made statements like, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (see Matt 20:28, NIV). And He repeatedly made such a mission clear in His life.

The sociologist Rodney Stark says that one of the key ways in which Christianity rose from being a small group to being a dominant force in the Roman Empire—and one of the key reasons it did so in such a short time—was that Christians took care of their own. He speaks of the fact that there were two great epidemics during those first few centuries. If those who were affected were cared for, there was a good chance they would survive. But often when a member of the family contracted the disease, the other family members left that person uncared for and left their homes for places not affected by the disease.

"The Christians, however, did not do this. . . . The Christians [cared for their own family members and] also cared for those who were left behind by [their] family members. Stark points out that the willingness to suffer in order to care for the sick had a part to play in large numbers of people in the Roman Empire turning to Christ."<sup>1</sup>

It's almost as though they were saying to themselves, "What if it had been the Queen?"

This service we're talking about in this passage is so much more than a program; it's a mindset, an attitude, a lifestyle. It comes into connection with others in the body of Christ not with an attitude that says, "What can you do for *me*?" but rather, "What can I do for *you*?"

With that in mind, let me ask a question I've been asking myself this week: how often do you speak the words, "May I help you?" I'm not asking how often you have used those words at work where you are *paid* to use them! I'm asking how often you have used them at home, in the classroom, in your neighborhood, here at church. *May I help you? May I serve you? Do you need a seat? Here! I'll scoot over. May I serve you at our foot washing service? How can I help with the funeral service?* It's an attitude that, well . . . How was it that Paul put it? Serve one another humbly in love. How might we put it? When Jesus sets my heart free, He makes my hands willing.

Some time ago, I read of a soldier watching a nurse clean and dress the gangrenous wounds of those fallen in battle. After watching this unappealing spectacle for a while, he finally said to her, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars."

And the nurse replied, "And neither would I."

After all, what if it's the queen? Or . . . what if there's someone even more important than the queen? After all, I remember that verse in Matthew 25, that verse about service, where Jesus says that one day the King will say to those who served, "You did it for me."

And they will say, "What?! For *you*!?"

And the King will say, "Yes, you did it for *me*!"

And they will say, "Wow. We thought we were just doing it for the queen!" **ED**

<sup>1</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry* (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2008), 91

**Randy Roberts**, DMin, LMFT, is the senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church and vice president of Spiritual Life and Mission, Loma Linda University Health, Loma Linda, CA, USA.

# Caring Hearts

Loneliness is at epidemic proportions. Is there something that Scripture might offer to lonely, struggling souls? Among the “one another” statements of the New Testament, is there one that might provide hope?

Read **Galatians 6:1–5**. I am especially drawn to “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2, NIV). Or, as the ESV renders it, “Bear one another’s burdens . . .” We can only bear one another’s burdens if we are aware of one another’s burdens.

Every single one of us needs friends—not acquaintances, but *friends*—with whom we have the ability to be completely open and real. These are the people with whom we can share our joys and our sorrows, our victories and our defeats. They know who we are and we know who they are. When either of us asks, “How are you doing?” the answer that comes back will be real and authentic and accurate. When that happens, sharing happens. And when sharing happens, bearing can happen. And when we bear one another’s burdens, we are carrying out, fulfilling, the law, the will, the desire and design of Christ. The simple truth is, you never know what burdens another human being might be bearing . . . including the human being seated next to you in the pew.

The author Craig Gross notes the fact that the beautiful Golden Gate Bridge, the icon that connects the city of San Francisco with Marin County, California, USA, despite all of its beauty, has also become a destination for people caught in a web of isolation and depression and hopelessness. They go there hoping to put an end to their suffering. Gross notes that a suicide note was “collected [there] a few years ago that was written by an anonymous person as they made their way to the Golden Gate Bridge. The writer remarked that he was walking to the bridge with the intent of ending his life; but one sentence of the note immediately leapt out. . . . [It simply said,] ‘If one person smiles at me on the way . . . I will not jump.’ . . . [Tragically,] he jumped.”<sup>1</sup> You just never know what burdens another human being might be bearing . . . including the human being seated next to you in the pew.

Essentially, Paul says that in the Christian community, no one is to bear anything alone. In that classic book, *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White writes, “There are souls perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the Unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ’s

stead, can be a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Do you know what is really sobering about those words? Here today is someone who came to worship staggering under a secret burden. You’re surrounded by people, and yet you feel all alone. You feel that no one understands, that no one cares, and maybe most painful of all, you feel that if others knew the *real* you, they would reject you, walk away, and leave you alone to fend for yourself. And so you have built an isolating wall around you that no one can penetrate. But behind that wall you experience deep loneliness. Behind that wall, you weep bitter tears. Behind that wall, you stagger under a heavy burden. And the fact that you’re trying to carry it all alone only makes it seem heavier. Well, if that describes you, then Paul has something to tell you today. He has a word for you—a message of both challenge and encouragement. To you he says, “In the Christian community, no one is to bear anything alone.”

But you may feel that it’s all your own fault that you’re there, that your own unwise choices are responsible for placing you behind that wall of isolation. Well, you probably noticed that today’s passage began with the words “If someone is caught in a sin . . .” (Gal 6:1, NIV). One of the clear outcomes of falling into sin—whether we do so willingly or whether we fall out of weakness—is that it will leave a burden in its wake, a burden that we have to carry. That burden can be the burden of guilt or the burden of consequences or the burden of broken relationships with God and with others. The burden of sins committed is a heavy burden to bear.

So Paul says, “restore that person gently. . . . Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1–2, NIV). *In the Christian community, no one is to bear anything alone*. Some may say, “I don’t *need* that kind of relationship, that kind of intimacy.” Well, it’s worth noticing what the following verse has to say. The next verse, verse 3, says, “If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves” (Gal 6:3, NIV).

So today I want to ask you to do something about Paul’s words. While it is true that there are those here today who struggle under heavy burdens that they have shared with no one, it is also true that there are those missing today whose reason for not being here is that very same thing. And I want to ask you to go to them and offer to help carry their burden. I know that’s frightening, but I want you to consider it.

First, right now, think of the name of someone you haven’t seen here in a while. I think we all have names like that. Think of the name of someone like that and then write it down. Secondly, commit to praying for that person throughout this coming week. Pray that God will touch them, bless them, and encourage them. Pray that they will have a vibrant relationship with God and a healthy relationship with others. And thirdly, contact them in some way this week. Text, email, phone call, face-to-face—contact them in some way. Contact them and let them know you’ve missed them.

Over the years, I’ve discovered that there are many reasons why people stop connecting with others here in this local expression of the body of Christ. They’ve gone through a divorce, and the shame is too strong. They’ve lost a job, and the embarrassment is too deep. Their children have made unwise choices, and they can’t bear for others to say, “How are your kids doing?” They’re caught in an addiction. They’re struggling with depression. They’re facing a financial reversal. And the bottom line is simple: *they’re bearing a heavy burden*, and many times, they’re doing it alone. Well, I’m asking you to offer to serve them, to offer to come alongside them, to offer to non-judgmentally listen and care and pray with and for them. I’m asking for you to let them know that *in the Christian community, no one is to bear anything alone*.

Would you make that commitment here today? And then would you follow through? This week? ED

<sup>1</sup> Craig W. Gross, *Go Small: Because God Doesn’t Care about Your Status, Size, or Success* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2014), 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA, Pacific Press, 1894), 297.

**Randy Roberts**, DMin, LMFT, is the senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church and vice president of Spiritual Life and Mission, Loma Linda University Health, Loma Linda, CA, USA.

## SERMON NOTES

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## Open Doors

I have two questions for you. First: How many homes of people from this church have you been in? You got an invitation; you went over to their house; you spent some time there; you had lunch or dinner or snacks; you fellowshiped there. Is it one? Or two? Or five? Or ten? Or more?

Now, the second question: How many people from this church family have been in *your* home? People that you've had over for the evening; over for Sabbath lunch? One? Two? Ten? *None*!?

Do you realize that the Bible has something to say about such things? The truth is it has a lot to say about hospitality. We're going to read a passage that was written to a church that was suffering persecution. Times were hard. The future was filled with uncertainty. The culture that surrounded them was against them. Furthermore, it was a church that believed that the coming of Jesus was likely just around the corner.

And then they receive a letter from the apostle Peter. He writes to them regarding how they are to deal with the difficulties they face, and how to live in light of what they believe to be the imminent advent of Christ. And I have to tell you, I'm a bit surprised by what he says.

Read **1 Peter 4:7–11**. This passage begins with the statement “The end of all things is near” (4:7, NIV).<sup>1</sup> The passage that follows, then, offers Peter's assessment of how we are to live considering what he calls the imminent return of Christ. And what things does he call on that community of Christ followers to do? “Be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray” (v. 7b). That makes sense. He continues: “Love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins” (v. 8). In other words, when you love people, you overlook all kinds of things that you wouldn't overlook with others. He also says, “Use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms” (v. 10). He continues by telling them that if they speak, “do so as one who speaks the very words of God” (v. 11a). And then he adds that if they serve, “they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (v. 11b).

In the context of the world in which they live—a world in which Christ followers are being persecuted, and they expect Jesus to come soon—all those instructions make sense. But you may have noticed that we overlooked one directive that Peter proclaims, and it is the one found in verse 9. Here's what it says: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” It's quite striking that, particularly in the context in which Peter writes—dealing with the second coming of Christ and the end

of the world—that he would include something like this. *Offer hospitality without grumbling.* Seems strange, doesn't it?

I mean, I know that it makes sense in the world in which Peter is writing. It's a world where the message of the gospel is spreading, and it's spreading because missionaries are carrying the message abroad. And they're facing persecution for it. It's a world where Hilton Hotels do not exist. In fact, the only places where people could find lodging were notoriously filthy, dangerous, not to mention often immoral, places to be. And so I can understand that Peter is concerned with telling the young church, “Open your doors! Invite people in!” But there is no indication that his directive is time-limited, any more so than any other directive in this passage. In other words, if we are to take his words “Love each other deeply” and “Be alert and sober so you can pray” as having enduring significance, then we have to take his words “Offer hospitality” just as seriously. After all, other Bible writers make the same kind of statement. In fact, Paul, in Romans 12:13, makes it very simple by just saying, “Practice hospitality.”

Members' homes were central to the life and community of the early church. Max Lucado writes about the central role that hospitality played not only in the life and community of the early church, but even in the fulfillment of its mission:

Long before the church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church. The primary gathering place of the church was the home. Consider the genius of God's plan. . . .

Not everyone can serve in a foreign land, lead a relief effort, or volunteer at the downtown soup kitchen. But who can't be hospitable? Do you have a front door? A table? Chairs? Bread . . . ? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality. . . . Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community. It's no accident that *hospitality* and *hospital* come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: “You matter to me and to God.”<sup>2</sup>

So Peter tells a congregation who is stressed under the reality of persecution, a congregation praying for the soon coming of Jesus, “Offer hospitality to one another.” But the truth is, that's not the end of his directive. I *wish* it were the end of his directive, but it isn't. Because what he actually says is to offer hospitality to

one another *without grumbling*. What do you mean, Peter, *without grumbling*? I. Howard Marshall, writing about this verse, notes: “Showing hospitality is particularly demanding, and Christians needed to be reminded to show it to one another. But the accent lies on the last phrase, *without grumbling*. The arrival of guests can be inconvenient for many good reasons, and guests themselves can be awkward people. Therefore, Christians must give hospitality without . . . grumbling, whether secretly or openly.”<sup>3</sup>

Hospitality is not about the size of your house, but about the size of your heart. If your heart's big enough, your apartment's not too small. But if your heart's too small, even the biggest house will always be too small. I think that's what Peter's saying. He writes about prayer and about loving each other deeply and about serving one another as God's faithful stewards. In other words, he's writing about matters of the heart. And it is in that context that he says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

Today, I'm asking you to make a choice to move out of your comfort zone. I'm committed to doing the same in my own life. Listen to what James W. Cox says about this topic:

You and I tend to offer hospitality to only a limited number of people—persons whom we already know, mostly relatives and a few close friends. But, in [the ancient world], hospitality was extended to whomever needed it—strangers and acquaintances alike. In fact, in its original form, “hospitality” combines two separate words—one meaning *friend* and the other meaning *stranger*. So, from the beginning of its usage, hospitality has carried with it the idea of making friends out of strangers.<sup>4</sup>

So how do we do that—*make friends out of strangers*? Maybe one of the most important ways is to simply open the doors of our homes. What was it that Peter said? *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling*. Open doors is not about the size of your house, but about the size of your heart. Are you ready to open your doors today? **ED**

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NIV.

<sup>2</sup> Max Lucado, *Outlive Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 55.

<sup>3</sup> I. Howard Marshall, “1 Peter 4:9,” in *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), Logos Bible Software.

<sup>4</sup> James W. Cox, *The Minister's Manual* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 109.

**Randy Roberts**, DMin, LMFT, is the senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church and vice president of Spiritual Life and Mission, Loma Linda University Health, Loma Linda, CA, USA.



# Preaching from Daniel

The book of Daniel is a treasure trove for expository preaching—that is, preaching on the meaning of a text. The prophecies in Daniel 2, 7, and 8–12 are rich in material that explains God’s sovereignty in history (chap. 2; 7; 10–12) and His plan of salvation in the sanctuary ritual (chap. 8–9). The historical chapters 1–6 provide stories whose practical lessons can be applied to the lives of the listeners.

## PROPHETIC CHAPTERS

Ellen G. White repeatedly calls attention to the study of the book of Daniel: “As we near the close of this world’s history, the prophecies recorded by Daniel demand our special attention, as they relate to the very time in which we are living.”<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2 provides an outline of world history from the time of Babylon to the second coming. Daniel 7 builds on chapter 2, but adds an important player on the stage of history—the little horn, a symbol of the papacy.

Apart from explaining the symbols for the various nations in history and the stone as the second coming, Daniel 2 also has important lessons and points for a good sermon: (1) God is in control of history. (2) There is power in united prayer. (3) History is indeed His-story. The right reading of history brings the assurance that “He who controls the cosmos also guides the atom.”<sup>2</sup> (4) The historical fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 2 confirms the inspiration of the Bible, which could be a sermon on its own. Some of the les-



In chapter 1, we learn that tests of character are opportunities to grow, and that Christians must stand up for what they believe.

sons of Daniel 7 are: (1) Prophecy is the foundation of our faith (2 Pet 1:19). (2) The fact that Daniel 7 largely repeats Daniel 2 indicates that God sees this message as very important for His people. (3) The pre-advent judgment that began in 1844 is the first phase of the final judgment. A sermon would include the other phases: the judgment during the millennium (Rev 20:4) and at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:11–15).

The vision in Daniel 8 is the climactic conclusion of the symbolic presentations in the book. What follows from 8:15 to the end of the book is supplementary to the vision of chapter 8. The message of Daniel 8 is the pre-advent judgment illustrated in the Old Testament sanctuary service. A sermon on this topic would explain the Old Testament sanctuary service and how this explains the pre-advent judgment beginning in 1844.

The fulfillment of the seventy-week prophecy in Daniel 9 is another faith-strengthening prophecy. But beyond that, this chapter reveals Daniel as a man of prayer, an example to be imitated by all ministers and lay members. Neither his work as a statesman nor the “good life” at the luxurious Babylonian court could distract him from his daily communion with God.

Daniel 9:24–27 is a sermon on the Messiah, the time of His appearing, His life and work, and His death. Yet no amount of intellectual understanding of this prophecy will benefit us unless we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. This salvation, according to the New Testament, is offered freely to all humanity. Such a salvation, however, cannot be purchased; it can only be experienced through the surrender of oneself to Jesus—all elements of a sermon on this topic.

Daniel 10 introduces the last vision in Daniel 11–12, but it contains the most important text for a sermon on the great controversy. No other text in Scripture describes more clearly the struggle between the invisible powers that control and influence nations than verse 13. Daniel 10 reveals that a human being has the freedom to oppose God. And a sermon on the resurrection will include Daniel 12:2, one of two clear texts in the Old Testament on the resurrection.

### HISTORICAL CHAPTERS

The stories in the historical chapters 1–6 are full of life’s lessons. In chapter 1, we learn that tests of character are opportunities to grow, and that Christians must stand up for what they believe. In

chapter 3, we see that throughout history God’s children have always received grace in times of need (Heb 4:16), and that “there is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.”<sup>3</sup> In chapter 4, we discover that God’s judgments may be averted by repentance and conversion. We should never despair of the conversion of anyone. This story also reveals most graphically the danger of pride. In chapter 5, we find that sin does not go unpunished, and we see how prone we are to forget the lessons of the past. Chapter 6 teaches us that a consistent refusal to do evil will bring Christians into situations similar to the lions’ den. Daniel’s experience in chapter 6 is a reminder that a governmental decree in the future will require all mankind to worship the “beast and his image” (Rev 13:11–15).

### THEMES IN DANIEL

#### Jesus

Jesus is at the center of this book: (1) He is the stone in chapter 2. (2) He is the man in the fiery oven in chapter 3. (3) He is the Son of Man in chapter 7. (4) He is the Prince of the host in chapter 8. (5) He is Messiah the Prince in



chapter 9. (6) And He is Michael in the last vision in chapters 10–12.

### Judgment

Daniel means “God is my judge,” and throughout the book we find explanations of that truth. The book begins and ends with references to judgment: at the beginning, apostate Judah is judged (Dan 1:1–2); at the end, the king of the North (11:40–45). In the middle of the book (7:9–14), the Ancient of Days chairs a judgment in which, in the presence of a multitude of angels, books are opened and “a judgment was made *in favor* of the saints of the Most High” (7:22). On each side of this great judgment scene, we find further references to judgment. In chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar, the proud king of Babylon, is judged and reduced to animal status, and in chapter five Belshazzar, his grandson, receives the message: “You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting” (5:27,

NKJV). There is no shortage of material for a sermon on God’s judgments.

### Vindication

The historical chapters of the book (chap. 1–6) illustrate how God vindicates and delivers those who remain faithful to Him in a hostile pagan environment. These chapters contain the motif of trial and trouble ending in elevation and glory. Thus, the good news that trials and temptations are followed by blessings for those obedient to God is proclaimed throughout these chapters. For example, in chapter 1 the four young Hebrews are tested concerning their commitment to the law of God. They are found faithful and are promoted to the palace of the king (1:19). In chapter 3, Daniel’s friends are tested again and found to be faithful. God delivers them, and instead of being burned alive, they prosper as a result of further promotion by the king (3:30). In chapter 6,

Daniel is falsely accused and condemned to death. However, the conspiracy of the king’s counselors fails, and the prophet experiences deliverance from the lions’ den. As a result, “Daniel prospered” (6:28, NKJV).

Preaching from Daniel can be a life-changing experience for the preacher and listeners, whether you preach from the prophetic or biographical chapters of the book. ED

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 547.

<sup>2</sup> Desmond Ford, “The Family Tree of Nations,” *Ministry*, March 1974, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 159.

**Gerhard Pfandl**, PhD, prior to his retirement was associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

# Deacons and Deaconesses in Early Adventism

> PART 1

In early Adventism, according to the *Ellen G. White Writings, Complete Published Edition*, the word “deacon(s)” was recorded fifteen times. Only four of these recordings related to their ministry in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church. The word “deaconess(es)” was recorded eighteen times, of which only three related to their ministry in the church.

The first area concerning the deacons pertained to the kind of wine that they should use in the Lord’s Supper. The following statement is a critique of the book *Prophess of Health* that was published in the *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1867. The issue was what Ellen White meant when she said that she approved of a “little domestic wine.” Here is the response: “Domestic wine occasionally referred to by Ellen White and in the *Review and Herald*, we would understand to be the juice of the grape pressed out and at first free from fermentation. James White counseled in 1867: ‘Know what you use. Let the deacons obtain the cultivated grape, see the wine made, and secure from the air to keep it from fermenting as much as possible.’”<sup>1</sup> This statement indicates that

the deacons in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church were responsible for supplying the wine used in the communion service. That they were instructed to use unfermented grape juice for this ordinance may also imply that they were to abstain from fermented wine, as were the deacons of the first-century Christian church (1 Tim 3:8).

The second area relating to the deacons' ministry in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church pertained to their responsibility in handling the tithe. In the following letter, the issue was that the Battle Creek church needed additional persons—a clerk and a treasurer—other than the deacons to look after the tithe. Ellen White agreed with the Battle Creek church's decision to use a portion of their tithes to pay their clerk and treasurer for the services they rendered. That practice was also adopted by other large churches. The treasurer was also referred to as a "tithe collector." C. F. McVagh, president of the Southern Union Conference, wrote a letter to W. C. White on October 24, 1912, to get verification that Ellen White approved of this practice. W. C. White's response was,

In the olden days, when the Battle Creek church was growing, it was found that unless the work of collecting the tithe was followed up regularly that the amount received was very much less than if the matter were followed up in a businesslike way by a collector who made the work his regular duty. We also found that this work demanded more time than it was right for us to ask any one, two, or three of the deacons to give to the matter, and it was thought by the church council that it would be good policy, and for the best interests of the tithe payers, and for the best interests of the conference, to have a good collector chosen and employed

and paid a reasonable amount for his time. This plan, with the reasons therefore, was placed before Father and Mother, and received their hearty approval.<sup>2</sup>

This next statement also dealt with the responsibility of the deacons in relationship to the tithe. The purpose of this statement was to clarify where the storehouse is. The statement reads as follows:

A fair reading of Ellen White's statement leads unquestionably to the conclusion that, in her mind, the church treasury was the store house of Malachi 3. She used the words "treasury" and "storehouse" as synonyms when she wrote, "If all the tithes were brought into the storehouse, God's treasury would not be empty." Concerning the church treasury, she stated: "Many presidents of state conferences do not attend to that which is their work—to see that the elders and deacons of the churches do their work in the churches, by seeing that a faithful tithe is brought into the treasury."<sup>3</sup>

It can be concluded from these two sources that the deacons in the

early Seventh-day Adventist Church were responsible for encouraging members to return a faithful tithe, and for collecting the tithe from the members. Sometime before the death of James White in 1881, after the deacons collected the tithe in the larger churches, specifically at Battle Creek, they turned the tithe over to the treasurer or tithe collector of the church. However, according to the letter W. C. White wrote to C. F. McVagh, the smaller churches did not follow the practice of hiring a treasurer. Therefore, the implication is that the deacons collected the tithe and served as treasurer in the smaller churches. **ED**

<sup>1</sup> *Ellen G. White Writings*, Complete Published Edition 2005, Ellen G. White Estate Research Documents Full Text Search, s.v. "deacons" (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2006), CD-ROM.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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# How Can One Know the True Church?



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Editorial Note: With permission from the Arthur S. Maxwell estate and the Review and Herald Publishing Association, it is a pleasure to present for *Elder's Digest* readers this inspiring and enlightening chapter from the classic, *Your Bible and You*. The reprinting of this chapter is intended to offer readers a resource and model for sharing this important message with others.

**There** are more than 200 denominations in the USA alone. Most of these are nominally Christian, varying in belief from “left” to “right,” from extreme liberal to extreme conservative.

Some are large organizations with millions of members, while many are small splinter groups with comparatively few adherents. All, however, have one point in common. Each group believes that it is the chief—if not the exclusive—repository of truth and therefore has a duty under God to continue its separate witness. Some openly claim to be the true church of Jesus Christ, with a prior claim upon God’s favor.

Because of such a confusing situation, it is no wonder that many, both within and without these organizations, are asking, Which, if any, is the true church? Maybe you have asked this question yourself.

Sometimes it is said that the true church is invisible, being made up of people of all denominations who love the Lord in sincerity and try to serve Him the best they know how. There may be some truth in this. Nevertheless, there is no good reason that the true church should not be visible. As your Bible makes clear, the time will come when good people everywhere will detach themselves from their present affiliations and identify themselves with the body that most closely conforms to God’s ideals in this present evil world. See Revelation 18:4.<sup>1</sup>

Suppose someday you should look for such a body; what should you expect to find? What should it teach? What should be its standards?

Here again your Bible can be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Within its pages you will find all the specifications necessary for easy identification.

## **1. IT WILL RADIATE THE LOVE OF GOD.**

Says Jesus: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, RSV). Love is paramount. Any group that is critical, censorious, and legalistic could not possibly be the true church. “He who does not love does not know God,” says the apostle John, “for God is love” (1 John 4:8, RSV). “Beloved,” he adds, “let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and loves God” (verse 7). Again, in verse 16, he says, “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

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In his great chapter on love the apostle Paul suggests that though a group claim to have apostles, prophets, teachers, and even miracle workers, if it does not manifest love, it is no more than a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” See 1 Corinthians 12:28–13:1, RSV.

In other words, love, expressed in kindness, graciousness, tolerance, and compassion, is the most conspicuous sign of the true church.

## **2. IT WILL EXALT JESUS CHRIST AS THE SON OF GOD.**

Once when Jesus was talking with His disciples He asked them to tell Him who they thought He was. “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:16, 18).

“Upon this rock” Christ builds His church. Not upon Peter, of course, but upon Peter’s glorious affirmation of the divinity of Christ. Belief in this great truth is fundamental. As Paul says: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

“Neither is there salvation in any other,” says Peter: “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Declares John: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15). And what is true of the individual is true also of a religious group. Unless it exalts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and confesses His divinity before men, it is not and cannot be the true church. See Matthew 10:32, 33.

## **3. IT WILL HONOR THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD.**

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul says: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, RSV).

Bidding farewell to the Christians in Ephesus, he says: “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32, RSV).

Likewise he tells the Romans: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4, RSV).

Peter says that the Word of God “liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:23), and that the “holy men of God” who wrote it spoke “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

Such was the attitude of the early Christians to the Holy Scriptures. They revered them as the inspired word of God. So will the true church today.

## **4. IT WILL REGARD THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS THE HOLY LAW OF GOD.**

“By this we may be sure that we know him,” says the apostle John, “if we keep his commandments. He who says ‘I know him’ but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:3–6, RSV).

So if we “know him” and if we are “in him” we will keep His commandments and walk as He walked.

How did Jesus walk? Unquestionably in the way of the Ten Commandments. “I have kept my Father’s commandments,” He says, “and abide in his love” (John 15:10). Again: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17).

One great purpose of His first advent was to “magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isaiah 42:21), and such will be the purpose of His true church in every age. Indeed, it is said of His people in the last days of earth’s history: “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

## **5. IT WILL OBSERVE THE SEVENTH DAY AS GOD’S SABBATH.**

It is inconceivable that God’s true church could keep any other day than His day. And His day, as your Bible so clearly points out, is the seventh day.

Observance of the seventh day is, in fact, an outstanding sign of the true church. “It is a sign,” God says, “between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you” (Exodus 31:13).

This is repeated in Ezekiel 20:12: “I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.”

So the true Sabbath is not only a memorial of Creation but also of sanctification. It was designed to remind God’s people of His power to create and redeem. Consequently, it is a most fitting sign of His true church in every age, throughout all generations.



## 6. IT WILL PRACTICE THE BIBLICAL METHOD OF BAPTISM.

This follows very simply from the command of Jesus to His disciples: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism in Bible times was not by sprinkling, but by immersion. You will find an example of this in Acts 8:38, where Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch “went down both into the water” and later came up “out of the water.” And there was good reason for this method, as Paul points out in his letter to the Romans.

“Know ye not,” he says, “that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3, 4).

By allowing himself to be lowered under the water a new member of the church signified his willingness to die to his old life of sin. By rising out of the water he declared his determination to live a new life in Christ.

It was a fitting introduction to the true church, and its valuable meaning has not changed with the passing years.

## 7. IT WILL CELEBRATE THE LORD’S SUPPER IN SIMPLICITY.

Says the apostle Paul to the Corinthians: “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

“After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

Here is something the true church will do till the end of time. No grand and pompous ceremony is called for, but the reverent partaking of bread and wine in memory of the sufferings and sacrifice of its Founder.

How simple was the first such service is revealed in Matthew 26:20–30, Luke 22:7–20, and Mark 14:17–25, and John adds the sweet story of how, in preparation for the solemn ceremony, Jesus humbly knelt and washed His disciples’ feet. “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet,” He says, “ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. . . . If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:14–17).

The true church will be found following Jesus’ bidding and example.

## 8. IT WILL POSSESS THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the early church He brought “diversities of gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:4). To one was given “the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues” (verses 8–11).

Each of these gifts was for the help and blessing of the church. Those receiving them were to work together in harmony for the edification of the entire membership, with no exaltation of one above another.

Repeating this information to the Ephesians, Paul says: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–13).

In view of the fact that these gifts are to remain with the church until it attains “the stature of the fulness of Christ,” it is reasonable to assume that some, if not all of them, are still available to the true church. Where they are most in evidence, that church is likely to be found.



**“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”**

Mark 16:15

### **9. IT WILL BE MODEST IN APPEARANCE, GENTLE IN SPIRIT.**

It would be hard to associate the church of the humble Galilean with lavish display, ornate ceremonies, and wasteful extravagance. Such things are completely out of harmony with His life of humble, holy, selfless service for others.

Says the apostle Peter, remembering the precious days by Galilee, “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” Then he bids women not to overdress, but rather to put on “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” To men he says, “Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing” (1 Peter 3:1–9).

This is the sort of church God wants today. Its members will manifest the same beautiful spirit both in their private lives and corporate activities.

### **10. IT WILL BE CLEAN-LIVING, UPRIGHT, AND NOBLE, EAGER TO HELP IN ALL GOOD WORKS.**

The grace of God, says the apostle Paul, teaches us that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,” if for no other reason than that Jesus “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:12, 14).

Likewise Peter describes the followers of Jesus as “a chosen gen-

eration, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.”

“As strangers and pilgrims,” he exhorts them, “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that . . . they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:11, 12).

Ever seeking by divine grace to emulate the perfect example of their beloved Master, members of the true church will be conspicuous for their upright and noble lives and their eagerness to help the needy. When disaster strikes, be it fire, flood, or famine, they will be first in line to serve their fellow men.

### **11. IT WILL LOOK EAGERLY FOR CHRIST’S RETURN.**

This outreach to others will be an outgrowth of a firm belief in the personal return of Jesus. The church that is “zealous for good deeds” will look with longing for the fulfillment of the blessed hope, “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, RSV).

It will cherish the Master’s promise, “If I go . . . , I will come again” (John 14:1–3).

It will be ever on the alert for the promised signs of His return (Luke 21:25–27).

It will heed His solemn warning to “watch” with increasing vigilance as it sees the day approaching (Matthew 24:42), while its constant prayer will be “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

Belief in Christ’s second advent is indeed one of the most vital marks of the true church.

### **12. IT WILL HAVE A WORLD PROGRAM.**

It cannot help it. Ringing in its ears will be the Master’s command:

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Nor will it ever forget His prediction: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14).

In the light of these great passages of Scripture, the true church will not confine its activities to one locality, or one country, or even one continent. Its eyes will roam over the whole wide world. Its vision and compassion will reach to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6).

With a mission program that encircles the globe, its members will dedicate themselves and their all to completing the proclamation of “the everlasting gospel” in order that their beloved Lord may soon return in glory. Fearlessly, daringly, confidently, they will cry “with a loud voice” to all mankind, “Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (verse 7).

If you should ever hear this message, look at its messengers and their manner of life. Examine their credentials in the light of your Bible. See whether they fit in with the twelve identifying marks set forth in this chapter. If they do, let your heart leap with joy. You may well have discovered God’s true church, the spiritual home you have been seeking. ED

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the KJV, unless otherwise indicated.

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**Arthur S. Maxwell** was a well-known author, editor, and administrator. He wrote a total of 112 books during his lifetime and is known affectionately around the world as “Uncle Arthur,” the author of *Bedtime Stories* and *The Bible Story*.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

# Re-Creation: God Restores Everything

**“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.”**

**(Isaiah 65:17)<sup>1</sup>**

**When** my (Katelyn's) mother passed away, it was a very difficult time for me. My sense of loss and longing was great. In addition, though, there was something bittersweet about her death. You see, within the metanarrative of the great controversy, death is indeed a tragic experience. But it is not intended to be the final experience. God has promised that He will make all things new, that He will restore all that has been. Even death cannot rule over His plans for us. This is the worldview I believe in my heart, not just my head. Michael Palmer writes, “When people embrace a worldview, they commit themselves not just intellectually but also emotionally and spiritually.”<sup>2</sup> A worldview is embraced holistically. It is not just for debate of convictions and beliefs. This worldview that I cling to brings me comfort and hope even in the face of death. It helps me see and rise above the despair of the world around me, because I know that just as God created the world, He will restore everything to the way it was intended to be. This is the final act of the great controversy: re-creation.

## **LIVING FOR ETERNITY: ENJOYING GOD'S PRESENCE**

A few questions that worldviews seek to answer include, *Is there an afterlife?* and, *What hope is there when we are faced with the evil of the world?* Within

some worldviews, it is believed that when you die, you return to earth as a new creation; some worldviews say that your spirit continues forever; some believe that there is absolutely nothing beyond death. Some worldviews paint a picture of an end to earth, and some are convicted that life will forever continue as it always has. There are many different answers that have been given to these questions.

In Scripture, answers to these questions were given to John the Revelator. While imprisoned on the island of Patmos, John was shown what is to come in the future. In vision, he was taken to heaven and given a glimpse into the throne room of God, where he heard a wonderful declaration: “Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev 21:5a). This is the joyful decree of our Creator—the answer to what there is to experience after life and the answer to where hope is found in a sin-infested world. What we experience now is not the end. Everything will be made new. God has a plan to restore all that He has made, making everything “very good” (Gen 1:31) once more.

How long God has waited and yearned for this re-creation! The earth itself “eagerly waits” for its liberation from sin (Rom 8:19–22). Generation after generation and millennia after millennia have passed since the fall. From the moment sin entered the world, Adam and Eve felt their communion with God severed, and ever since then, we have been separated from our Creator. Sin has run its course so long that despair has seemed to permeate every piece of the planet. But soon, all this will change. “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Pet 5:10). “He who believes in the Son

has everlasting life” (John 3:36a). If we answer God’s call to glory, if we follow Him, we will get to experience the wonder of everlasting life and His restoration.

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.’” (Rev 21:1a, 3). This beautiful vision given to John demonstrates just what God has in mind for the future. The suffering and curse of sin will vanish. The pain and tears we have known all our lives will be gone. Perhaps best of all, we will experience true communion with God.

As Adam and Eve communed with God, so shall we. At Jesus’ second coming, earth’s first humans will at last be reunited with their Creator, and we will too. In intimate relationship we will walk hand in hand with our Lord into eternity. Ellen G. White writes of this new intimacy in multiple places: “They will stand before the throne, accepted in the Beloved. All their sins have been blotted out, all their transgressions borne away. Now they can look upon the undimmed glory of the throne of God.”<sup>3</sup> “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.”<sup>4</sup> At last we will be in true, full communion.

### **LIVING WITHOUT SIN: NO MORE DEATH, PAIN, OR SORROW**

Not only will we have this full communion with God, but we will have no residual effect of sin whatsoever. When our Saviour returns

to this world, sin’s grip will be released from each person. “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). The “former things” have all been “swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54).

How great our joy will be to have such pain and sorrow behind us, especially the pain of death. God has fashioned a beautiful plan to care for those who have already died. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul writes of those who have died, saying that they have essentially fallen asleep (v. 13). When Christ returns at His second coming, His work of re-creation, which includes everything on earth and in the heavens, begins with His followers who have died. Before any other restoration of the universe takes place, Jesus will restore life to believers who fell asleep in Him (v. 16).

This view on death is quite unique compared to many other worldviews. For example, a naturalist worldview espouses that there is nothing beyond what can be touched, seen, and heard. Thus, there is nothing to experience beyond death. Philosopher Bertrand Russell states that “no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave.”<sup>5</sup> Some other worldviews—such as those connected to Eastern religions and New Age beliefs—posit that all of humanity is spiritually a part of a larger soul, force, or consciousness. This means that death is seen more like a transition than an end. For example, in Hinduism the belief of reincarnation means that “a person’s present life was preceded by other lives and will likewise be followed by other lives . . . the way that life is lived in one lifetime determines the quality of the next incarnation.”<sup>6</sup> Within a



New Age perspective, “physical death is not the end of the self; under the experience of cosmic consciousness, the fear of death is removed. . . . We are not just our physical bodies, says the New Age. Human beings are a unit beyond the body.”<sup>7</sup>

In a biblical worldview, the love of God truly shines through even in humanity’s death. First, there is a hope of something after death: we are not left in darkness. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’” (John 11:25; see also Luke 20:35–36; 1 Cor 15:21; 2 Tim 2:11). We know that this life is not the end. In His love, God has something wonderful awaiting us even beyond death.

We also are not stripped of our identity after death. Ellen White writes that at the resurrection, “friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God.”<sup>8</sup> We will not be refreshed as completely different people; we will still recognize, know, and love the ones we knew on earth. After all, God has intentionally and lovingly crafted each one of us. “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Ps 139:13–14).

Finally, God will not allow death to be humanity’s perpetual experience. There will be an endpoint to death, a final death, so that it will no longer plague God’s universe of life. This final death, known as the second death, is reserved for Satan and his followers.

Although you and I may experience death on earth, if our faith is placed in Jesus, we will not experience the second, permanent death of sin. However, those who

have chosen Satan over Christ will be given over to the second death, and with them all traces of sin shall be destroyed. “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:14–15). Although this will be a dreadfully sorrowful event, this cleansing must take place for the universe to truly be free from sin. This will at last be God’s final triumph over evil. The universe will then be perfect and just as God intended.

“Every sinful tendency, every imperfection, that afflicts them here has been removed by the blood of Christ . . . and the moral beauty, the perfection of His character, shines through them, in worth far exceeding this outward splendor.”<sup>9</sup> This is the picture of our lives without sin. God will bring complete restoration to the universe, paralleling His original perfect creation.

## CONCLUSION

Healing, restoration, and a new start to life: this is what awaits us in Christ’s re-created kingdom. This is the blessed hope we have to hold on to, the hope to sustain us. With our hearts rooted in Christ and our eyes ever on Him, we will find that our attachment to the world grows less, and our attachment to God will grow more.

This is the last act of the great controversy. Within our biblical worldview, this is the ultimate answer and solution to all the sin and suffering in the world. God’s re-creation will leave the universe cleansed and whole, ready to live forevermore in joy and peace in God’s presence.

In that day the redeemed will shine forth in the glory of the Father and the Son. The angels, touching their golden harps, will welcome the King and His trophies of victory—those who have been washed

and made white in the blood of the Lamb. A song of triumph will peal forth, filling all heaven. Christ has conquered. He enters the heavenly courts, accompanied by His redeemed ones, the witnesses that His mission of suffering and sacrifice has not been in vain.<sup>10</sup>

Refashioning the world to the way it was intended to be—that is God’s plan. We were purposed to live this sort of life, and so God will re-create the world so that we are able to enjoy it as He long ago intended. This is the beautiful finale of the epic: God reunited forever with His people. With this story serving as the backdrop to everything we experience in the world, it equips us with a biblical worldview capable of satisfying the deepest questions of our hearts. ED

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- <sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NKJV.
  - <sup>2</sup> Michael D. Palmer, “Elements of a Christian Worldview,” in *Elements of a Christian Worldview*, ed. Michael D. Palmer (Springfield, MO: Legion Press, 2002), 53.
  - <sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), 9:285.
  - <sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Heaven* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003), 148.
  - <sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 107.
  - <sup>6</sup> Julia Mitchell Corbett, *Religion in America* (Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 250.
  - <sup>7</sup> James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 157.
  - <sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 644–645.
  - <sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 126.
  - <sup>10</sup> White, *Heaven*, 81.

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

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**Katelyn Campbell Weakley** is an MDiv and MSW student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.



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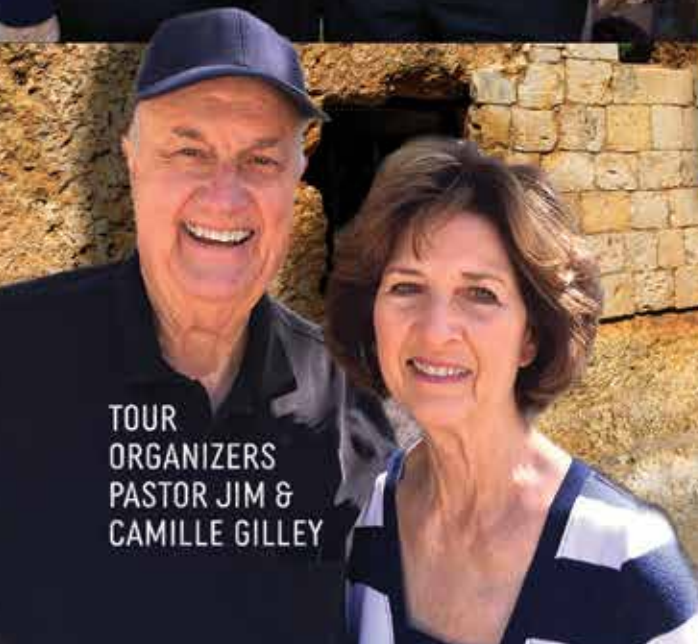
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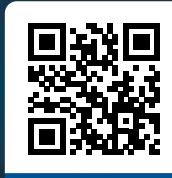
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