**FEATURES**

1. **I SAW THE LORD**
2. **HEALTHY ATTITUDE TOWARD TRUTH**
3. **CELEBRATING PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY**
4. **THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP**
5. **DO YOU HAVE COMPASSION FATIGUE OR JOY IN SERVICE?**
6. **LEADERSHIP: HOW TO LEAD YOUR CHURCH TO GROWTH**
7. **THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP**
8. **CELEBRATING PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY**
9. **HEALTHY ATTITUDE TOWARD TRUTH**

**EDITORIAL**


**ELDER’S DIGEST’S 5th ANNIVERSARY**

I am delighted to celebrate with you the fifteen-anniversary of _Elmer’s Digest_ and the rich heritage of this magazine. I am reminded how faithful God has been—from the creation of _Elmer’s Digest_ magazine to the new and exciting horizons of this international communications ministry.

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

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

Over the next 15 years, _Elmer’s Digest_ helped shape the profile of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. Committed to Cress’ original vision, this magazine continues to influence and guide our local church leaders in a variety of areas. It has earned the reputation of being one of the best resources for our elders. Today about 100,000 magazines are delivered each quarter. This magazine is also printed in different parts of the world and in other languages. When we include these editions, more than 200,000 copies are printed each quarter and delivered to more than 100 countries, encompassing all world divisions. What a blessing!

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

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

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

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**EDITORIAL**


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

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

Try to capture the glory: the high throne, the Person of God, the robe filling the temple, and the heavenly angels! Then the temple echoed with praise for God (Isa. 6:3, NCV). “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord All-Powerful. His glory fills the whole earth.”

Fear clutched at Isaiah’s heart as an earthquake moved the posts of the building and the smoke of God’s glory filled the temple. “I saw the Lord.” The power, the righteousness, and the love of God filled Isaiah’s mind from then on. Like Isaiah, elders need to take time daily to “see” the Lord. Morning by morning we need to look at Jesus’ life by meditating upon the gospels or on His life as described in the book The Desire of Ages. We must stop the rushing flow of life’s duties to learn about the greatest Life ever lived.

Isaiah saw the Lord. Then he saw himself. What a contrast! He saw his own shortcomings until we see the Lord. With the building shaking around him and the glory of God almost blinding him, Isaiah cried out in agony, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among the angels and the three members of the Trinity. Still prostrate before the Lord, Isaiah said, “Here I am. Send me!” (Isa. 6:7-8).

Isaiah came face-to-face with the priorities of his God. All of heaven is deeply involved in a gigantic rescue mission for Planet Earth. This is the work of the heavenly angels and the three members of the Trinity. How much each elder needs to see the Lord each day! How much we need to see our great need. How much we need the healing grace of the gospel to bring peace to our hearts. How much we need the vision of the divine task that God has for each one. May we daily see the Lord!

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

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

“I saw the Lord.” This experience in the temple transformed Isaiah’s life. There on his knees he heard the call of God. “Whom can I send? Who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). Isaiah came face-to-face with the priorities of his God. All of heaven is deeply involved in a gigantic rescue mission for Planet Earth. We must stop the rushing flow of life’s duties to learn about the greatest Life ever lived.

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

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

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

The first group takes pride in emphasizing its orthodoxy, conservatism, which, when stripped of its assuring phraseology, is often just plain reaction, however harsh the term may sound. These individuals view any change or revision as perilous, mainly because it is different from what they used to know or do. Some cleverly contrive to portray themselves as the ultimate defenders of the faith, the last stand of loyalty. Either by implication or declaration, they declare all who differ from them to be dangerous innovators. Their penchant is to maintain a status quo which supports their rigid views. They condemn, openly or by implication, equally loyal, self-sacrificing, truth-loving heralds of this message who differ from them. This group is represented by some independent ministries today. They easily mix truth and criticism in attacking the leadership of the church.

Dear Elder, be perceptive. Don’t fall into the devil’s trap. Don’t allow the devil to use the speech of the gospels or on His life as described in the book The Desire of Ages. We must stop the rushing flow of life’s duties to learn about the greatest Life ever lived. The preacher of this gospel prophet saw the Lord that day in the temple. How much each elder needs to see the Lord each day! How much we need to see our great need. How much we need the healing grace of the gospel to bring peace to our hearts. How much we need the vision of the divine task that God has for each one. May we daily see the Lord!

And God always answers this prayer immediately. He will prove disastrous. We should not permit ourselves to be forced into situations that are intolerable and unnecessary. There is no need to allow a few reactionaries to halt legitimate progress. Let us not permit the devil set the agenda for our congregation. The voice of God to speaking to us through the representative body of the church should prevail.

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

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD?

When you preach, you are sharing God’s Word with God’s people. As Paul told the Thessalonians: “When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:1). Remember that it was through words that God created our world. What a privilege preachers have to share God’s creative, life-transforming Word!

SHARE A DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL PREACHING.

Adventists see a definition of Biblical preaching in Revelation 14:6: “Then I saw another angel flying through the heavens, having great power, and sharp two-edged sword. He was also wearing a coat dipped in blood, and his name was called Sozo.” This defines the picture given in Isaiah’s servant discoveries they are surrounded by Syrian armies who are with them” (2 Kings 6:16).

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE TO USE?

To illustrate his fear I recently asked a congregation, “Have you felt surrounded with no way of escape? Perhaps you’ve lost your job and your debts threaten to bankrupt you . . . Or you’ve been diagnosed with an illness that endangers your health . . . Or Satan is attacking your marriage, your children, or you personally.”

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

WHAT TYPE OF SERMON SUBJECTS SHOULD ONE USE?

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT TYPE OF SERMON PREPARATION MAKES ONE STYLe EFFECTIVE OR INEFFECTIVE?

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

But how does one decide which Bible passage to use?

Recently I had the opportunity to talk with United States Senate Chaplain and Adventist preacher Dr. Barry Black. He told me, “The starting point of a sermon doesn’t have to be the Bible, but every sermon needs God’s Word as an anchor. Some preachers don’t have time to explain each Bible text. Also, it’s easy to select texts which support your pre-conceived ideas.

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

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

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

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

How do you mention sermon illustrations?

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WHAT DOES PREACHING MEAN TO YOU?

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

WHAT ARE SOME MISTAKES TO AVOID?

Some sermons are merely springboards to launch the preacher’s own ideas. The point of the sermon is often not the point of the biblical passage. Or the sermon may not be based on the Bible. Too many preachers leave out important parts of the passage because they assume the audience is familiar with the Bible. If you preach as if your audience is reading the Bible passage for the first time, your visitors and members will thank you.

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

WHICH BOOKS HAVE BEEN INFLUENTIAL FOR YOU?

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

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

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

If you want to splurge, get The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators. (Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, gen. eds., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). It is a comprehensive one-volume collection of more than two hundred articles by one hundred plus writers on all areas of preaching, and it includes a CD with audio examples.

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

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

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

THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELDER’S DIGEST

To commemorate and celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of Elder’s Digest is to recognize the value and virtue that this spiritual resource has brought to the ministry of the elders in our church. It is an excellent tool that has strengthened lay leadership in the churches of the Inter-American Division and is a great supplement to the resources of our ministers. Our church is better today because of the influence of this invaluable resource over the past 15 years. Inspired vision and leadership gave birth to Elder’s Digest.

In our territory, where the multi-church pastorate is a reality, what could speak more powerfully to the needs of another speaker, but you can share what your text means to you, and you will help people where the more experienced preacher cannot touch. Preaching is like cooking. While we all love an occasional meal prepared by a master chef, most of us thrive best on home cooking.

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WHAT CAN WE DO?

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS PASTOR APPRECIATION DAY?

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

WHY IS THIS DAY NEEDED?

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

In general, the church expects that the pastor has an ideal family with perfect kids who are always smiling and cooperative. The pastor is also seen as someone who can answer any question, has an elegant posture, and has no problems or conflicts. Some church members are disappointed when the pastor is depressed or faces personal or family problems. The pastoral family lives as the proverbial fish bowl, with the congregation watching every move they make. It never occurs to church members that they might be the cause of the pastor’s worry or failure. This is why God has instructed us to recognize and value His servants, our spiritual leaders. “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17, NIV). The good news is that as church members, we can make a difference in the pastor’s life. Pastor Appreciation Day is a good opportunity to express our love and appreciation for our pastor’s ministry and influence in our lives.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

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

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

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

Jonas Arrais is editor of Elder’s Digest.
The Pastor and the Congregation

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

Youth today are crying out for quality relationships with adults. Because our youth are noise seeking, they are looking to other pastures, and the media is constantly feeding them negative values. The challenge now is how to deal with these problems in such a terrible world.

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

Youth and Their Parents

According to researchers, parents and children differ in an astonishing range of drug use, occupational goals, marital relationships, and child-rearing. Youth often view adults as hypocrites, saying one thing and doing another. They witness the frequency of unsanctified marriages, divorce, and adultery. Christinelement ran a workshop for a European church congress in which he spoke to 400 young people on the topic of marriage. When I challenged them to model and observe their parents and other married couples, one youth said afterward that there were no role models in his church to follow.

Ellen G. White says: “The home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world, far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives. As the youth go out from such a home, the lessons they have been learned are imparted. Noble principles of life are introduced into other households, and an uplifting influence works in the community.”

Youth and Their Leaders

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

- People-oriented programs
- Avoiding authoritarian leadership
- Listening to understand (such as an active mobile listed for both peers and adults)
- Hypocrisy (ranked as the most undesirable behavior that young people see)
- However, it was interesting to see what qualities parents, ministers, elders, or teachers should have as they work with young people in the home, school, or church.

Confidence

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

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

Energy

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

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

Timing

Youth and elders cannot have Model-T leadership when Model SS is in the marketplace. One of the most unwelcome things about the Edsel (such as the famous Edsel) Edsel was the famous Edsel. It had some marvelous looks and features, but Americans did not like it. It was released at the wrong time. Today it has become a classic!

We need to be aware of current events and trends. The saying “In my day,” has been said so often. Let us try to reach the youth at their level. Let us try to understand the language, good and bad, and aspirations without compromising our principles. The Bible says that “when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4, ESV). This is the same quality listed in the Youth for Christ survey: clarity, tenacity, boldness, concern, and morality. They are all important. However, I see the last one.

Faith

Leaders must believe in the youth and believe that God can help them, something we all need. Peter said that study the Word, are exemplary family members, who take time with their families and reach the youth at their level. Let us try to reach the youth at their level. Let us try to understand the language, good and bad, and aspirations without compromising our principles. The Bible says that “when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4, ESV). This is the same quality listed in the Youth for Christ survey: clarity, tenacity, boldness, concern, and morality. They are all important. However, I see the last one.

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

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

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

Third, before you invite a speaker to your field, find out who this person is and what he or she is promoting. Ask the person to send you their materials and, since most of them have websites, examine what they have on their websites. Sometimes their websites are deceptive, giving you the impression that they are faithful Adventists when in fact they hold views to the contrary. You can also ask them to provide you a list of places where they have been invited to speak and then contact the pastors or church leaders in some of those places. This will take time, but you should be careful or otherwise you may regret it.

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

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

Congratulations to Elder’s Digest on your fifteenth anniversary! Being a pastor myself, I understand the challenge for our elders in their local churches to nourish parishioners. Elder’s Digest contributes largely in helping our elders to develop their skills in preaching and in equipping members in their churches through the quality of its presentations. At the same time it supports the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because our brothers and sisters will be encouraged to share what they hear with neighbors and friends. We appreciate the variety of themes in Elder’s Digest, as well as the way it invites people to improve their relationship with Jesus. We recommend Elder’s Digest to all our members who want to enter the ministry of preaching; the magazine will bring many blessings to them.

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

The Inter-American Division is pleased to join you in celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of Elder’s Digest. At the same time we want to congratulate the General Conference for being the means by which such a vital magazine is able to reach each individual church elder, many of whom are faithful workers who dedicate their lives and talents to the service of God without remuneration and without expecting anything in return. In Inter-America, church elders represent a powerful army that, along with our pastors, fight daily against those who wish to discourage and defeat faithful church members. In this sense Elder’s Digest has become a vital weapon in this war. With each article, our army is fortified and gains strength to continue in the battle, until that glorious day when Christ shall appear in the clouds and the redeemed shall be taken to their celestial home. Blessings to you! Keep moving forward in this important ministry. You will always have our prayers and support.—Hector Sanchez, Ministerial Secretary, Inter-American Division.

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

Furthermore, there are occasions when such individuals are invited to speak to our congregations and in camp meetings, leaving behind them confusion, conflicts, and in many cases disrespect for pastors and leaders. They support most of the Adventist message but their main interest is to promote their own peculiar views and to obtain the financial support of church members through selling their books or through donations. Often those who invite them do not know them well enough to an...
MARKS OF WORLDLINESS

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

Many people think that worldliness is limited to external behavior. Others think that worldliness means hanging out with the wrong kinds of people. But worldliness is an attitude of the heart that indicates a lack of a totally consummating love for God. There are many ways that worldliness dilutes, pollutes, and distorts the things of life), and pride of life (self-satisfaction in who we are, what we have, and what we have done). Worldliness, then, is a preoccupation with ease and affluence. It elevates creature comforts to the point of idolatry; large salaries and comfortable lifestyles become necessities of life.

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- PREOCCUPATIONS WITH EARTHLY CONCERNS
  People today are busy. We like to stay active. However, we often get preoccupied with things that distract us from Christ and His priorities. We focus on the wrong things, and there is little room left for what God wants for us. Paul wrote, “Set your thoughts on things above, not on earthly things.” From the time we are young, we are encouraged to be our best, to get to the top of the class, and to be the “head” and not the “tail.” When we become stuck in a job where we have not been promoted for many years. It is important to remember what God told Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-5.

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

- POSITION
  We live in a very competitive society. We all enjoy being around people we respect and admire. Pride of life (self-satisfaction in who we are, what we have, and what we have done). Worldliness, then, is a preoccupation with ease and affluence. It elevates creature comforts to the point of idolatry; large salaries and comfortable lifestyles become necessities of life.

- PEOPLE-PLEASING
  We all try to please people who appreciate us. Worldly people live in a constant state of anxiety, fearing that important people may not approve of what they are doing. Performance-driven people are secretly insecure because they have not completely trusted in the Lord for their affirmation. Paul wrote, “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court, indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

- PRIVILEGES SEEN AS SELF-CENTERED RIGHTS
  When you first got your driver’s license, you learned that driving was a privilege, not a right. Yet some of us have witnessed how difficult it is for elderly people to give up their driver’s license because they have forgotten this important lesson. In the same way, we must remember that every good thing is a gift from God. As Job learned, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Do we also say like Job, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Let us not be like the king, who judges me” (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

General Conference Ministerial Association

Elder’s Digest October | December 2009

OCTOBER | DECEMBER 2009
SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Going to the doctor for a checkup is important, but maintaining your spiritual health is also vital. You want to make sure their healthy isn’t failing in ways they can’t detect on their own. Likewise, we are prone to miss signs of poor spiritual health if we don’t check up on it regularly.

I. SPIRITUAL HEALTH

The Bible speaks of spiritual health, faith, and sound speech, it is talking about healthy doctrine, healthy faith, and healthy speech.

How do we maintain good spiritual health? How do we know we are spiritually well? Let’s look at a very important question on several levels. One of the key elements is, “There are so many different claims of spirituality in today’s society; how do I know if I’m truly spiritual?”

I. SOUND DOCTRINE

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

Consider what the Bible says about sound or healthy doctrine (read Titus 2:1, 2; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:20). Sound doctrine, then, has an encouraging and uplifting effect. One of the reasons we read, teach, and proclaim from the Word of God is because it is very encouraging! Sound doctrine is healthy and edifying because it is true and trustworthy.

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

On the other hand, false doctrine leads to a spiritually unhealthy lifestyle (1 Tim. 1:18).

Why are some people spiritually unhealthy? The world’s way of life is a very important question because it’s what we want to hear at the moment, but our spiritual health will inevitably suffer. We will find ourselves more easily discouraged, more likely to become angry, and more easily led astray by even more serious false teaching.

II. SOUND FAITH

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

Look at some of the Bible’s definitions of a life of sound faith (read Titus 2:1-10).

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

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

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

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

Verse 5: “...to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to respect their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”

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

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

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

III. SOUNDNESS OF OUR SPEECH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• Sound doctrine: do you listen to it and follow it?

• Sound speech: are you talking correctly?

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

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

I. TODAY’S PILCHARDS

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

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

If you are in the group that offers excuses, but are honest in wanting to do something for Jesus, I would like to present you the following promise: (read Philippians 4:19).

The essence of this promise is: “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Notice that “all your needs” doesn’t mean only financial need; it also includes time, ability, wisdom, talents, resources, and everything else you need to become a pillar.

II. JEHOV AH JIREH—THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

A. God will provide ability.

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

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

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

B. God will provide courage.

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

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

C. God will provide power.

1. If someone feels spiritually weak and wishes to encourage (read Titus 1:9). When Titus or her talents, remember the apostles’ experience. Who were the apostles? Simon Peter? No, he was because of the reason for their transformation (read Acts 1-8). Through that power, they shook the world!

2. This same power is available to us. “The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children” (Ellen G. White, Christian Service, 25).

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

D. God will provide wisdom.

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

III. ALL NEEDS SUPPLIED

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

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

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

Unleash your talents; Jesus and the church needs them. And if you feel inadequate, remember “Jehovah Jireh”—the Lord will provide.

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Antonio Cruz da Costa is a retired pastor in Brazil.

Sermon Notes:

CHURCH PILLARS

Philippians 4:19

church pillars

16

ELDER’S DIGEST October | December 2009

17

ELDER’S DIGEST October | December 2009

| SERMON 3 | SERMON 2 |
Many families have Christmas traditions. Some celebrate Christmas Eve to open some or all of their gifts. Some families have a special meal. Others have a birthday cake for Jesus, in some homes the family reads the Christmas story from the Bible. Some decorate Christmas trees. We all have our traditions Jesus loves.

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

I. WORSHIP (MAT. 2:11)
Both the Magi and the shepherds responded with worship. Perhaps we can represent worship with an offering plate. The Magi offered gifts, and the shepherds offered their praise to God. The Magi, the shepherds, and all the other participants in the story gave themselves to the Lord. They worshipped God.

There are at least two reasons why this is an appropriate response.

1. We should worship God because He is God. In Bethlehem, God came to earth. Everything is because of why God came to earth. Jesus came into the world to help us find the way to be right with God. He came to communicate God’s love and goodness to those who cast Him aside. He came to give His life for us.

There are many stories of people who have become friends because of a gift of a kid or a birthday cake. One person gives sacrificially, and the recipient feels grateful for the rest of his or her life. How much more should we be grateful for what God has done for us in Christ? It would be unthinkable to go to a birthday celebration and give gifts to everyone but the person having the birthday. What plans have you made to honor the King? (Read Luke 2:28)

II. CELEBRATION (MAT. 2:10)
The second element of an appropriate Christmas observance is celebration and joy in the true sense. Matthew, we read that when the Magi saw the star, they were overjoyed. When Eliza (Mary’s aunt who was pregnant with Jesus) heard the baby that the Lord’s angels had told them about (Luke 2:15), every part of her was affected. The second shepherds met Jesus for the first time, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child. The birth of Jesus is a life-changing event for all of us, and because He has changed our lives, we are driven to tell everybody about what He has done. Why wouldn’t we share such great news with others? We feel restless about evangelism because we don’t believe we can answer the questions of a skeptic or point to the right Scripture passages. The shepherds couldn’t do any of these things either. All they could do was testify of what they had seen and heard. We can do the same today.

V. OBEDIENCE (LUKE 1:38, 1:25)
Finally, we see in the original Christmas story that there was one response from those who met Jesus: obedience.

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

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

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

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

In EVANGELISM (LUKE 2:17)
Fourth, it is proper to use this time to tell others about Jesus. Notice that in Luke 2:17, we are told that after the shepherds met Jesus for the first time, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child. The birth of Jesus is a life-changing event for all of us, and because He has changed our lives, we are driven to tell everybody about what He has done. Why wouldn’t we share such great news with others? We feel restless about evangelism because we don’t believe we can answer the questions of a skeptic or point to the right Scripture passages. The shepherds couldn’t do any of these things either. All they could do was testify of what they had seen and heard. We can do the same today.

V. OBEDIENCE (LUKE 1:38, 1:25)
Finally, we see in the original Christmas story that there was one response from those who met Jesus: obedience.

• Joseph obeyed God; he took Mary as his wife and named the child she delivered, Jesus.
• The Magi, having been warned in a dream, did not go back to Herod.
• Joseph obeyed the angel and took Mary and Baby Jesus to Egypt.
• Joseph brought his family back to Israel and eventually ended up in Nazareth because this was what God had told him to do (Matt. 2:23).
• Mary responded to the request of the angel with the words, “I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38).
• The shepherds went to see the baby that the Lord’s angels had told them about (Luke 2:15).
• Each person in the Nativity story honored God by obeying Him. Those people didn’t obey because what they had been asked to do seemed like a good idea; they obeyed because they trusted God. They obeyed because they had faith.

It is an appropriate response to Christmas. If you love someone, you show your love by how you live. If you are grateful, you show it by the things you do. At Christmas, it is a good time to obey God by:
• Forgiving an offense or letting go of resentment.
• Telling the truth.
• Reaching out to someone who is hurting.
• Receiving Christ as the one who can save and transform you.
• Sharing the life of Christ with someone close to you.

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

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

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

General Conference Ministerial Association
HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS

7 SECRETS FOR TRUE LONGEVTY

HEALTHY DIET <

Welcome back to “Healthy Tips for Elders.” In the last issue of Elder’s Digest, we talked about the number one secret for true longevity: regular physical activity. I must re-emphasize its importance. Physicians worldwide often prescribe physical activity to their patients. It’s amazing how science continues to catch up with inspired counsel, who stated decades ago, “A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe.”1 Also, the American College of Sports Medicine announced the publication of a new book, Exercise is Medicine,2 promoting this principle. If you are not yet physically active on a regular basis, you can start walking today. Better yet, join the North American Division’s physical-activity initiative InStep for Life3 and try this number-one secret for a long, abundant life.

Now, let us focus on Secret #2: healthy diet. There is plenty of counsel and research on what constitutes a healthy diet. Much information seems contradictory. Some people claim that a healthy diet is a vegetarian diet. Others promote a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet. Others claim that a vegan diet is the healthiest. Many “good” vegetarians regularly indulge in ice cream and desserts, consume high-sodium processed meat substitutes, enjoy fried foods and sauces high in saturated fats, and do not eat enough fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and nuts. If we have a diet high in unhealthy fats and sugars without the life-giving nutrients of plant foods, we may not reap the benefits of a long, productive life for God. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).3

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

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

Isn’t it time to make healthier choices in your diet? You can start today by remembering that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). 4

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Isn’t it time to make healthier choices in your diet? You can start today by remembering that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). 5

References:

1. Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, 57.
3. www.InStepforLife.com

Katia Reinert
Family Nurse Practitioner at Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA.
Joy in Service – How Can It Happen?

By May-Ellen Colón

Here are some ideas to help you find joy in service.

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

Not all three priorities need to be in the following order:

Joy in Service – How Can It Happen?

To experience joy when serving God and others, our priorities need to be in the following order:

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

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**QUESTION & ANSWER**

**CHILD PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE**

**IS IT PROPER TO ALLOW UNBAPTIZED CHILDREN OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE?**

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

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

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

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

In many instances there are valid reasons for asking a congregation to remain standing during prayer. But in any discussion of the subject of bodily posture in prayer, we may well consider the following statement from Ellen G. White: “Christ’s followers today should guard against the tendency to lose the spirit of reverence and godly fear. The Scriptures teach men how they should approach their Maker—with humility and awe, through faith in a divine Mediator. The psalmist has declared: ‘The Lord is a great God, And a great King above all gods. . . . O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.’ Both in public and in private worship, it is our privilege to bow on our knees before God when we offer our petitions to Him. “Jesus, our example, ‘kneed down, and prayed.’ Of His disciples it is recorded that they, too, ‘kneeded down, and prayed.’ Paul declared, ‘I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ In confessing before God the sins of Israel, Ezra knelt. Daniel ‘kneeded upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.’

There is a certain relationship between pose of body and mood of spirit. It seems to me that a mood of confidence and genuine adoration can find best expression in the soul when one is on bended knee. However, it would be sad indeed if in any of our churches we permitted the question of kneeling versus standing to become the occasion for controversy. In that event, our prayers would likely avail little, no matter what our bodily pose.

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

**SHOULD WE KNEEL IN PRAYER?**

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**ADVENTIST PREACHING OFFERS SOLUTION FOR HOLIDAY WORSHIP**

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

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

Adventist Preaching’s third Signature Edition is the answer to problems like these. A Collection of Holiday Sermons was designed to offer sermons and dramatic presentations for holidays throughout the entire year. Derek Morris in The Testimony of Melchior plays one of the Magi. His portrayal is prefaced by narration and music and, with the addition of local talent, can be a program for Christmas Eve. There’s even a Communion homily and a tribute to Veterans so local congregations can honor those in the pews who have bravely served our country. Gary Council, director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, presents For God and Country, which can be used on Veteran’s Day or Memorial Day.

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

The 3-DVD set with a booklet of sermon notes and biographical sketches is a preaching resource for both home and church. However, the sermons by renowned preachers will ensure that your holiday services receive the attention they deserve even when your pastor is away.

So treat yourself to the very best in biblical preaching and join the host congregations as they enjoy what has become a unique bonus of Volume 24–choral excerpts from Handel’s Messiah. With them, lift your eyes towards heaven and glorify the Father by singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving, also a feature of this edition.

A Collection of Holiday Sermons was designed to reflect the spirit of significant days in your community. Check it out now so you can be prepared when the possibilities are and when it becomes your responsibility as an elder to plan the worship service, you’ll have something ready to use that will combine the holiday with worship.

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**Do holidays go unnoticed at your church?**

*The third Signature Edition of Adventist Preaching is a collection of nine sermons and dramatic presentations designed to enhance holiday worship services.*

**Sermons by:**

- Gary Council – Veterans Day
- Derek Morris – Christmas Eve
- Dwight Nelson – Sabbath after Thanksgiving and Christmas
- John Nixon – Easter
- Chris Obeng – New Year
- Randy Roberts – Thanksgiving and Christmas
- Sharon Terrell – Communion

**Unique to this edition, some presentations include music and narration, includes a booklet of notes about the sermons, suggestions for use and biographical sketches of the preachers.**

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

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

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

Discovering God’s Purpose

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

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus makes clear that the disciples can summarize in three words: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

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God makes leaders aware that they are at war “against principalities, against powers,” (Eph. 6:12, 18) and that their mission is to be ambassadors for Christ and to work to free those enslaved by Satan (verses 19-20).

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

1. Mission is the primary purpose of the gospel, in which all Christian churches should be involved. It includes worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship.
2. Vision is God’s specific plan for a specific church in a specific time. “The vision God gives to a church is not the same as He gives to another church.”

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

Establishing Objectives for Growth

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

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

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

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

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

Leading with Credibility

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

A church leader needs to have credibility before presenting a new task. Credibility is reached by progressively casting the vision. Initially, we should celebrate small victories with our members and rejoice in what God has done through them. Some time ago I visited a firefighter who had been injured in a fire. He was in intensive care; the situation was delicate, but not drastic. After an introductory greeting and an attempt to cheer him, we congratulated him for his courage and spirit of service. Barely opening his eyes, he thanked us with a weak but convincing voice but added, “That’s what we’re here for.”

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

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

“By faith we are able to stand on the threshold of the eternal city, and hear the kind welcome given to those in His love together with Christ” Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, 670-680. On this earth, we must be in communion with God and know our mission, so that we may soon be where we want to be—with Jesus, forever.—Bruno Rosa, Ministerial Secretary, South American Division.

6 Ed Stetzer, Comeback Churches, 46.
7 Ellen G. White, Christian Service, B.
8 Ibid., 178.
9 Ellen G. White, Christian Service, B.

Paulo Pinheiro is editor of the Portuguese edition of Elder’s Digest.
The art of speech

PERSUASION IS MORE THAN A TECHNIQUE

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

Gal. 4:16, 20, NIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

May we bring many people to Christ through our example!

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

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

As an Elder it’s your duty to look out for the next generation. Thank God there’s a too! Thank God for Insight!
TAKING THE PLEDGE

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

Col. 3:23

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

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

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

Within six weeks we had welcomed over 200 alcoholics attending “the meetings” and discovered that ours was one of only two locations in a metropolis of four million where people could attend AA on Sunday morning when most other church facilities were in use. Within six months, some of my own members began to trust me in my church, and they are in yours as well.

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

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

A century ago, many Adventists strongly supported suffrage so as to register thousands of women who were most likely to support prohibition. Ellen G. White even advocated that Adventists should vote in favor of Sunday blue laws if it meant closing the saloons and taverns for at least one day.

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

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

And rather than beating our own members to the realization that alcohol abuse is increasing. My colleague, Dr. Peter Landless, Associate Director of Health Ministries, states: “On balance, the hypothesis that alcohol consumption improves health is scientifically unfounded. This is especially so when all aspects of alcohol and health are reviewed.”

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

As you struggle with appropriate responses to these challenges which infect your own congrega- tion, consider the following initia- tives:

* Pray that together we will impact the rule of evil and resist the addictive control that alcohol exerts.
* Preach biblical temperance and teach the evil of alcohol abuse.
* Provide 12-step programming for your community and your members.
* Pledge your personal abstinence and encourage your mem- bers, especially the young, to follow your example.
* Prioritize relationships which connect your members with Jesus first, and then with one another as encouragement and example in discipleship.

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

James A. Cress
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

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

Col. 3:23

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

Col. 3:23

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

We hope to increase the number of our elders who receive this magazine. It has become one of the tangible evidences that elders are a sig- nificant part of the Ministerial Association. Our particular urgent need is to make Elder’s Digest available to our Portuguese-speaking unions (such as Angola and Mozambique) which don’t receive the magazine at present. Congratulations for your visit!—P. Hachal- ings, Vice President and Ministerial Secretary, Southern Africa-IIndian Ocean Division.
What would you give to see them in heaven?

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