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# A pastor after God's own heart

One of the greatest privileges is to be a pastor for Jesus Christ during these last days of earth's history. Without question, Christ is the Head of the church, and He is the Chief Shepherd. And as such, He has called you and me as His ministers, to be special servants and pastors after His own heart. In Jeremiah 3:15, God says, "I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."<sup>1</sup>

**In the near future,  
we will look up and  
see a small cloud  
that will get larger  
and brighter.**

The work of the local pastor is vitally important and foundational to the success of God's church throughout the world. Thank you for the very important work you do: feeding, nurturing, and guiding God's people; leading out in dynamic evangelistic outreach and training members for active participation (one of your most important duties); and sharing the Word of God in its complete message from Sabbath to Sabbath.

As you go about the work of pastoral ministry, remember that the Head Shepherd is constantly by your side to strengthen, encourage, and guide you. God has called you, and His orders are clear: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince,

rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

In order to do this, it is so important to be daily connected with Christ—to be revived and reformed by the Holy Spirit for our mission of lifting up Christ, His love, His righteousness, His plan of salvation, the sanctuary service, the three angels' messages, and His soon coming. We are to proclaim in word and in practical activity His Advent message of truth to "reach the world." We are told, "The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm."<sup>2</sup> *This* is the secret of your power as a pastor after God's own heart. Every morning, place yourself in God's hands asking that He lead in all that you do.

When I was a freshman in college, my father took the time to write me a letter and enclose a beautiful handwritten quotation from the book *Steps to Christ*. I have never forgotten it! Pastors, take time to write, call, or text your children. Let them know of your spiritual interest in their lives. Here is a portion of the quotation that my father sent to me: "Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' ... Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

As you allow the Lord to lead you each day, your ministry will flourish and become a great blessing as you become a pastor who is more and more after

God's own heart. You can then identify with Paul, who said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

Jesus is coming soon! In the near future, we will look up and see a small cloud that will get larger and brighter. Soon it will fill the whole sky—all of heaven poured out for this climactic event of earth's history. And there, seated in the center of the cloud of angels, will be our Savior and Chief Shepherd. The One who came to this earth; lived a perfect life; died for us on the cross as the perfect, sinless Lamb; rose again; and ascended into heaven to become our High Priest, where He is interceding on our behalf in the Most Holy Place at this very moment. But He will take off those priestly robes and put on His kingly robes to return and claim us as His own. We will look up and say, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us" (Isa. 25:9). And Christ will look down and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant and pastor, enter into the joy of your Lord" (paraphrase of Matt. 25:21). Through Christ's grace, let us plan to be there!

Arise! Shine! Jesus *is* coming!

Yours in the blessed hope,

**Ted N. C. Wilson**, President  
Seventh-day Adventist Church

- 1 All Scripture references are from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 509.
- 3 White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 70.

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# Faithful to the end

On behalf of the entire *Ministry* team, we want to thank you, the many clergy who read this journal, for your faithful ministry. And when we speak of the team, we recognize that it takes more than an editor and associate editor to produce this publication. Indeed, this monthly magazine would not exist were it not for the scores of behind-the-scenes personnel: our editorial specialist, our finance and technology manager, our subscription manager, our editorial consultants, our graphic designer, international advisers and editors, our advertising representative, and the Pacific Press Publishing Association team.

In this double issue, we focus on the important themes of the second coming of Jesus and mission. These two themes are inextricably linked together. Our mission assignment from Jesus is clear:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19),<sup>1</sup> and our blessed hope is certain: “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). We believe that soon “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

We want to share with you some good news: this entire double issue is immediately available at [www.MinistryMagazine.org](http://www.MinistryMagazine.org).<sup>2</sup> On that Web site you will also find archived materials, searchable by author or topic, dating back to the inception of *Ministry* in 1928. Please take advantage of this valuable

collection of resources. Each day of the upcoming General Conference session, July 2–11, 2015, you can also download a different free book from our Web site [www.MinistryMagazine.org](http://www.MinistryMagazine.org). Visit daily to download the complete library of 11 books.

For those of you who will attend the General Conference session in San Antonio, Texas, please stop by and visit us at the Ministerial Association booth area (B401) in the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center.

May you find strength and comfort in the words of Jesus: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). 

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version.  
2 Normally, unless you are a subscriber signed up for digital delivery, only the lead article can be read immediately; the complete issue is unavailable online for three months.

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Alberto R. Timm, PhD, serves as an associate director, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



## Longing for His appearing

When I arrived home after a long trip several years ago, my family welcomed me back warmly, except for our little son, William. My wife explained that during my absence he had missed me and even gotten sick, and now he was hiding from me. But in a short while he showed up very excited, saying, “Daddy, I already know what I will be when I grow up! I will be a pilot, and we will have our own airplane. So, we will always travel together as a family, and I will take you wherever you need to go.” William’s creative idea cut my heart, but this thought reflected his strong desire to keep us all together as a family.

The Adventist movement comprises a worldwide spiritual family (cf. Eph. 2:19) that misses Jesus’s physical presence and longs for His return. Already during His earthly ministry, the disciples asked, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).<sup>1</sup> Just prior to His ascension, the disciples inquired again, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Almost 2,000 years have passed, and Jesus has not yet come.

This article deals with the time element as related to the Second Coming and the establishment of God’s kingdom.

### An imminent expectation

The New Testament speaks of a literal and visible second coming of

Christ to occur in the near *and* not-so-near future. From the *near* perspective, Christ states, for instance, that “‘you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes’ ” (Matt. 10:23); “‘there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom’ ” (Matt. 16:28; cf. 2 Pet. 1:16–18); “‘this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place’ ” (Luke 21:32); and “‘Surely I am coming quickly’ ” (Rev. 22:20). The apostle Paul reflected the same view in the inclusive expression “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15).

From the *not-so-near* perspective, Jesus mentioned some general signs of the times, and then warned, “‘but the end is not yet’ ” (Matt. 24:4–6). To this He added, “‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come’ ” (v. 14). In a similar tone the apostle Paul stated that the Second Coming would occur only after the great “apostasy” and the manifestation of “the man of lawlessness” and “the son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:1–12, NASB).

Several scholars have tried to solve the tension between these two types of statements regarding the Second Coming and the establishment of God’s kingdom. Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer proposed a kind of *frustrated* eschatology. Assuming that “there are no stages of” the coming of God’s kingdom, Weiss argued in 1892

that “at some earlier period in His ministry Jesus believed the coming of the Kingdom closer than turned out later to be the case.” So, “under the pressure of certain circumstances, Jesus became convinced that the end had been postponed.”<sup>2</sup>

Much in the same line, Schweitzer suggested in 1906 that Jesus’ early Messianic expectation was that He would soon be “supernaturally removed and transformed,” and then “revealed as the Son of Man” in the Parousia. But the nonfulfillment of the promise of Matthew 10:23 frustrated His plans and became “the first postponement of the Parousia.” For Schweitzer, the whole history of Christianity down to the present day “is based on the delay of the Parousia, the non-occurrence of the Parousia, the abandonment of eschatology, the progress and completion of the ‘de-eschatologizing’ of religion which has been connected therewith.”<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, C. H. Dodd advocated a *realized* eschatology when he argued in 1936 that the content of Jesus’ message was not a future coming and a future kingdom, but rather a kingdom that had already arrived.<sup>4</sup>

Avoiding the previous one-sided perspectives, Geerhardus Vos and George E. Ladd argued for an insightful *already-and-not-yet* eschatology, implying that God’s kingdom is *already* present but *not yet* fully installed. In 1930, Vos suggested that “the world to come” is already “realized in principle,” and overlaps with “this age or world” from the resurrection of Christ to the

Parousia.<sup>5</sup> For Ladd, “at the heart of Jesus’ mission was a spiritual struggle with the powers of evil. In Jesus’ person and mission the Kingdom of God was conquering the kingdom of Satan” to such an extent that “the death of Jesus is both an act of Satan and an act in which Jesus wins the victory over Satan.” So, the time between the resurrection of Jesus and His parousia is “a time of the overlapping of the two ages.”<sup>6</sup>

of Christ.<sup>7</sup> So, God’s children are still in the world without being of the world (John 17:14–16). In Christ they already dwell “in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6)<sup>8</sup> and experience “the powers of the age to come” (Heb. 6:4, 5; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13, 14).

But if the kingdom of grace was established without any delay at Christ’s death in the middle of the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24–27 (cf.

will take place. Ellen White affirms, “But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay.”<sup>9</sup>

On the other side, we are faced with the notion of a “delay” of the Second Coming. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Christ stated that “ ‘while the bridegroom was delayed [Greek *chronizontos*], they all slumbered and slept’ ” (Matt. 25:5).

**God knows precisely when Christ will return, even though the time when that event will occur is at least partially dependent on human behavior and performance.**



Back in 1888, Ellen G. White emphasized a *twofold* understanding of the kingdom of God. She pointed out that the expression “kingdom of God” is employed in the Bible to designate both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. The proclamation “ ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’ ” (Mark 1:15) referred to the kingdom of grace “established by the death of Christ” and characterized by “the work of divine grace upon the hearts of men.” But the kingdom of glory (see Matt. 25:31, 32) is yet future and will not be installed before the second coming

Gal. 4:4), can we speak of a delay of the Second Coming and, consequently, of the establishment of the kingdom of glory?

### **The dilemma of the delay**

The Bible says that in God “there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17), and that His purpose always “prevails” (Prov. 19:21, NIV) and cannot “ ‘be thwarted’ ” (Job 42:2, NIV). In regard to the Second Coming, Christ even stated that God the Father knows the “ ‘day and hour’ ” when that event

Commenting on 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (“for *that Day will not come unless*”; emphasis added), Ellen White stated that the Second Coming “could not take place before” the end of the 1,260 year-days in 1798.<sup>10</sup> But from the late 1860s she spoke of an actual delay of the Second Coming and even presented basic reasons for it.<sup>11</sup>

Different attempts have been made to solve this tension as well. With emphasis on the *human* endeavor, Seventh-day Adventists eventually became convinced that the Second Coming was an unconditional event

that will occur only when the Adventist message is preached to the whole world (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6, 7).<sup>12</sup> But some authors have subscribed to the so-called harvest principle, suggesting that the Second Coming will take place only when God's people reach the stage of sinless perfection.<sup>13</sup>

Looking more from the *divine* perspective, various authors believe

Dealing with the two perspectives, Ralph E. Neall admitted to feeling uncomfortable with the attempts to harmonize the tension in Ellen White's writings on the subject, "except perhaps by suggesting that the time of the end is fixed from God's viewpoint but delayed from man's."<sup>16</sup> Studying those writings, Neall grasped that in Mrs. White's thought "the Lord is *waiting* for the church to finish

up denying any delay of the Second Coming. Those who accept process theology tend also to believe that God's foreknowledge is causative, but they provide room for human free will by denying that God actually knows future human decisions, but only the possibilities.<sup>19</sup> However, if we agree that God's foreknowledge is absolute but *not causative*,<sup>20</sup> then there is room

**Bible hope is anchored on a sound dialogue between the eschatology of the world . . . and the eschatology of one's own life.**



that there is no real delay of the Second Coming. For example, in his book *The Apparent Delay*, Arnold V. Wallenkampf argued, "By saying that God had to postpone His Son's second coming because of our dalliance, we deprive Him at one stroke of both His foreknowledge and omniscience. In so doing we lower our omniscient God to our own level."<sup>14</sup> Mario Veloso suggested that there could be a delay only if Christ "had set an announced time for His return" and if there would be no more historical events to manifest themselves prior to His manifestation.<sup>15</sup>

proclaiming the three angels' messages along with her parallel teaching that the church must proclaim the message *because* the Lord is coming soon."<sup>17</sup>

Should we simply live with such an unsolved tension, or is there something else that can shed light on this complex matter?

### **Divine foreknowledge**

Crucial for the whole discussion is the interplay between human free will and divine foreknowledge.<sup>18</sup> Those who believe that God's foreknowledge is *causative* usually also accept double predestination and, consequently, end

for a delay of that event.

According to Siegfried J. Schwantes, "the Biblical view of history rejects casual determinism as undermining personal responsibility."<sup>21</sup> In the Bible there is an ongoing interplay between God's sovereignty and a human's moral responsibility for his or her own actions. God even "altered the details of His plans because of man's perversity and sometimes because of his repentance,"<sup>22</sup> as is well illustrated in the case of the Flood (Gen. 6:1–8) and Nineveh (Jon. 3). But no local and temporal adjustment can take God by surprise or frustrate His ultimate goals (cf. Dan. 4:32).

The notion that God’s foreknowledge is absolute and not causative means that “free actions do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they are to take place.”<sup>23</sup> From a more practical perspective, God knows whether I will be saved or lost, and even so, I am free to choose my own destiny. In a similar way, God knows precisely when Christ



will return, even though the time when that event will occur is at least partially dependent on human behavior and performance. So, “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion suggests that the tension between the various New Testament statements about the

kingdom of God can be harmonized through the already-and-not-yet concept and the twofold view of a present kingdom of grace that precedes the future kingdom of glory. The tension between the fact that God knows the time of Christ’s return and the delay of that event can be synchronized through the notion that God’s foreknowledge is absolute but not causative. But one may still wonder why such tensions were left in the New Testament. Could not the Bible be more explicit on these matters?

We have to realize that “some passages of Scripture will never be perfectly comprehended until in the future life Christ shall explain them”<sup>24</sup> and that to a certain extent our own sinful nature limits our understanding of truth (John 16:12). So, in His teachings, Christ sought to encourage and prepare His disciples for the future, without deceiving them “with false hopes.”<sup>25</sup> We are told that while answering the disciples’ question, “ ‘Tell us, when will these things [the fall of Jerusalem] be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (Matt. 24:3), Jesus “mingled the description of these two events,” so as not to discourage His disciples.<sup>26</sup>

Bible hope is anchored on a sound dialogue between the eschatology of the world (vv. 29–31) and the eschatology of one’s own life (Heb. 9:27). Christ not only warned, “ ‘Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming’ ” (Matt. 24:42) but even contrasted the faithful servant who waits for the imminent coming of his Lord (vv. 43–47) with the evil servant who says, “ ‘My master is delaying his coming’ ” (vv. 48–51). This blessed hope has warmed the hearts of past generations and should do the same for ours. As my son longed for me to return, we, too, long for the coming of the Master. ❏

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

- 2 Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, eds. Richard H. Hiers and D. Larrimore Holland (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 73, 85, 86.
- 3 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), 356–358, 363.
- 4 C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1937), 142–149.
- 5 Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 38, 39.
- 6 George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. by Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1994), 66, 67, 192, 713.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 346, 347. The wording goes back to the 1888 edition.
- 8 For a further study of the meaning of the expression “in the heavenly places,” see Carmelo Martines, “Una re-evaluación de la frase ‘en los lugares celestiales’ de la carta a los Efesios,” *DavarLogos* 2, no. 1 (2003): 29–45.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 32.
- 10 White, *The Great Controversy*, 356.
- 11 See Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 694–697.
- 12 See P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 271–293.
- 13 E.g., Herbert E. Douglass, “Men of Faith—the Showcase of God’s Grace,” in Herbert E. Douglass et al., *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1975), 9–56; C. Mervyn Maxwell, “Ready for His Appearing,” in Herbert E. Douglass et al., *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility*, 137–200; Herbert E. Douglass, *Why Jesus Waits: How the Sanctuary Message Explains the Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976).
- 14 Arnold V. Wallenkampf, *The Apparent Delay: What Role Do We Play in the Timing of Jesus’ Return?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn, 1994), 91, 92.
- 15 Mario Veloso, “There Is No Delay,” *Ministry*, December 1996, 6–8.
- 16 Ralph E. Neall, “The Nearness and the Delay of the Parousia in the Writings of Ellen G. White” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1982), abstract, 246.
- 17 Ralph E. Neall, *How Long, O Lord?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1988), 114.
- 18 For further discussion of the subject, see James K. Beilby et al., eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 32.
- 19 Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 32.
- 20 Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 32.
- 21 Siegfried J. Schwantes, *The Biblical Meaning of History* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1970), 32.
- 22 George E. Shankel, *God and Man in History: A Study of the Christian Understanding of History* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1967), 205.
- 23 Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907), 286.
- 24 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 312.
- 25 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 21.
- 26 White, *The Desire of Ages*, 628.

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# Final breakthroughs for mission

**M**y wife, Janet, sometimes gives me warnings. I do not always like to get them but I am blessed if I listen attentively. I remember the time I returned home late Sabbath afternoon exhausted after a long day of ministry. I was scheduled to lead a meeting at a local church where members had strong, conflicting views on an important subject. It would be difficult. In love and concern, Janet suggested I take a short nap or delay the meeting because I was so tired and my emotional reserves might not be strong enough for the hard meeting. I decided to ignore the warning and press forward in my own strength with little prayer.

However, after keeping my emotions in control, even with unfair attacks, I was less than Christlike with a couple of individuals in private conversations after the meeting. In short, the meeting did not end well. I should have listened to my wife.

Later that week, while praying and studying, I felt convicted by the Holy Spirit that I needed to call the entire group back together the next Sabbath to apologize, which I did. It was humbling, but I learned a good lesson.

## The final crisis

The Lord is so good. He always gives us warnings. They come through conviction from the Holy Spirit, Scripture, prophets' writings, friends,

providences, and many other ways. All too often we hear them as harsh and threatening, but they are always an opportunity if we would but listen and respond appropriately.

We are in the last great crisis of this earth's history. Will we listen to the warnings and appeals of our loving God and grasp the opportunity to be a part of the final breakthroughs before Jesus comes? He has sent us clear warnings and signs that His return is soon.

As we look at Matthew 24, we realize how clearly those signs are being fulfilled. Natural disasters, uncontrollable political and military upheavals, people's hearts full of fear, false prophets and religions, moral decay, and sinfulness are rampant around this world.

## The last two signs

I believe there are two signs just before Jesus comes that we are seeing fulfilled right now. Ellen White describes the first: "The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God."<sup>1</sup>

The Word of God is under attack. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of a very few Protestant churches that still believe in the literal seven-day Creation week. Of course, much of the rest of Scripture and its miracles are challenged by others as allegories and myths. The Bible certainly is not seen as the truthful, inspired writing of our Lord through His messengers.

All of the prophets have always been ridiculed and attacked, and Ellen White is no exception. This sign of making of "none effect" the testimonies also happens by simply ignoring or failing to read and follow the counsels and warnings the Lord has given us. This is the very last deception, and it is happening now.

We can read the second sign, found in Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (NKJV).

It really is amazing what the Lord has done with this last-day movement since the disappointment of 1844 and the call He gave the new Sabbath keeping believers to take the three angels' messages to the world. That small movement has grown into a worldwide church that has more than 18 million members speaking 926 languages and that preaches the last-day messages of Revelation 14 in more than 200 countries. Today, every 29 seconds a new person is baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist, about 3,000 people a day. And about every 4 hours a new church is organized.<sup>2</sup>

In October 2013, General Conference leaders called an Urban Evangelism Conference. First, the archives and statistics specialists brought in facts and reports of how the Lord has blessed the Global Mission initiatives started 25 years before.

So many unentered territories back then now have Adventist work, and we rejoiced to see what the Lord has done.

Yet, more needs to be done. As of 2013, about half of the world's population (about 3.5 billion) now lives in the major cities, a percentage that will continue to grow because people are constantly migrating from rural areas. At the same time, more than 500 cities have more than one million people; 236 of these are in the extremely difficult-to-reach-evangelistically areas of the 10/40 Window (Northern Africa, Middle East, India, China, and Southeast Asia). Other statistics about these cities are just as sobering:

- There is an average of one Adventist congregation for every 89,000 people
- 100 cities have fewer than 1 Adventist for every 20,000 people
- 45 cities have fewer than 10 Adventist believers
- 43 cities are without even one Adventist congregation<sup>3</sup>
- Some cities probably have never had an Adventist even set foot in them<sup>4</sup>

## Work to be done

Jesus told us through His messenger Ellen White that He could have come soon after 1844.<sup>5</sup> We must mourn the fact that we have not responded as we should have and are still in this world.

How long will it take until our mission is finished and Jesus comes? What is He waiting for? Even as we intensify our current efforts to use Christ's method to reach the cities, the work before us remains daunting.

Several years ago I was speaking to a group of pastors and local church leaders in Africa. "We would never want this to happen," I asked, "but if the president of the United States was suddenly killed, how long would it take for every villager in Africa and everyone in the whole world to know?"

One man answered, "Two days."

Others shook their heads and said, "One day."

Most of the others were convinced it would take only a few days. Since then I have asked many groups all over the

world, and all agree that a major event like that can certainly be known by everyone in the world in a short span of time.

So, if Jesus could have come back in the 1800s and certainly wants to now, He could do one or two major paradigm-shifting miracles or events, turning the attention of the whole world in a few days to the three angels' messages. He then, in a very short time, could return.

Why does He not do it? What is He waiting for?

## Three appeals

I believe that God has given us three extremely urgent appeals. He is still waiting in mercy for His people to intensely answer His three appeals. When that happens, the three angels' messages will fly to every corner of the world, completing the mission.

What are the appeals? Major lay member involvement in the mission; a powerful movement of prayer—personal and united with others; and true repentance, confession of sin, and reconciliation for one accord among our Lord's last-day people.

*First appeal: A major lay movement to accomplish the mission.* "The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed."<sup>6</sup> This promise is for a movement greater than the Pentecost in Acts 2.

We know it will take more than just public proclamation. But Christ's method alone, mingling with the people, sympathizing, ministering to their needs, winning their confidence, and calling them to follow Jesus, includes what it will take to finish the work. This work cannot depend on paid pastors and other gospel workers. We need a culture of lay involvement.

The promise is given, "Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, and the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit."<sup>7</sup> When this happens, the

power of the Holy Spirit will accomplish the final breakthroughs so the mission will be finished and Jesus will come!

*Second appeal: A movement of prayer—personal and united prayer.* Joel chapters 1 and 2 and the book of Acts make it clear that the final breakthroughs will come only in response to much prayer. In Joel 2:28, 29, leaders and people were called to consecrate a fast, call the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord, and cry out to Him. "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days'" (NIV).

In his book *Partners in Prayer*, John Maxwell recalls a quote from an evangelical pastor, "In Acts chapter two, they prayed for ten days. Peter preached for ten minutes and 3,000 were saved. Today, churches pray for ten minutes, preach for ten days and three get saved."<sup>8</sup>

"A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work . . . Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessings. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer."<sup>9</sup>

Prayer is such a precious gift. Through this communion, we experience intimate relationship with Him, His presence, and what He can do when He unleashes His power.

Why do we resist? One reason many avoid more prayer is because often we are reminded of what is separating us from Him—our sins. We do not really want to surrender them, to be cleansed and allow His character to form in us. We do not want to be still and listen to Him in prayer.

*Third appeal: True repentance, confession of sin, and reconciliation for one*

*accord.* It is the upper room experience, a time of heart searching, of confessing and putting aside all known sin. In Joel and in the days of Acts, God’s people were called to prayer that led to specific confession of all known sin. That led to a body of believers fully surrendered to their Lord and in one accord. Then the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost with power so His followers could take the gospel to the whole world.

Ellen White writes, “We have been asked why it is that there is so little power in the churches, why there is so little efficiency among our teachers. The answer is that it is because known sin in various forms is cherished among the professed followers of Christ, and the conscience becomes hardened by long violation. . . . As a result we see manifested in the church selfishness, covetousness, pride, strife, contention,

hard-heartedness, licentiousness, and evil practices. Even among those who preach the sacred word of God, this state of evil is found.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus wants His last-day people to follow Him and enter into the upper room experience. The Holy Spirit is waiting for us to be ready. Our Savior longs to pour down the latter rain and fill us with His power, to take the mission out of our weak hands and finish it in glory to Him!

Like the disciples gathered in that upper room waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit before they went out, we need much intense personal and united prayer, much heart searching with confessing and repenting of all known sin, reconciling all differences. Then we can go forward as a powerful movement involving every member to share the last-day message and mission.

We have been warned, over and over again. The question remains: Will we listen and obey? 

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 48.
- 2 “Seventh-day Adventist World Church Interesting Facts and Figures,” documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Other/InterestingFacts2013.pdf.
- 3 “It’s Time: The Urgency of Urban Mission,” news.adventist.org/fileadmin/news.adventist.org/files/news/2013/It\_s\_Time\_document.pdf. Information on the Mission to the Cities initiative can be found at missiontothecities.org.
- 4 Heard in verbal presentation by a leader in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Union Mission.
- 5 See White, *Selected Messages*, v. 1:67–69.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1963), 304.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 143, 144.
- 8 John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 10.
- 9 White, *Selected Messages*, v. 1:121.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), 162, 163.

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# Focus on Christ, not the crisis: *A discussion on end-time events*

What is the sign of your coming?" (cf. Matt. 24:3b),<sup>1</sup> the disciples asked Christ. They expected a specific answer. Instead, Christ replied: "Don't be deceived" (cf. v. 4a), a word He used three times in Matthew 24. He was concerned that "great signs and wonders" could deceive even the "elect" (v. 4b).

Besides the warning about deception, Christ mentioned crises to occur prior to His coming: wars (v. 6), famines and earthquakes (v. 7), persecutions (v. 9), and many apostasies (v. 10, 12). He also exhorted His followers to study the abomination in Daniel (v. 15; see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) and to keep the Sabbath (Matt. 24:20).

Finally, after all these, Christ answered the question the disciples had asked. He said, "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (v. 30). His glory is like lightning flashing across the heavens (v. 27). A counterfeit Christ, out in a desert or in an inner room, cannot come through the heavens in blinding glory (v. 24–26). But a counterfeit Christ powerfully

deceives people (v. 24) and robs them of salvation.

Ellen G. White said, "Satan is not permitted to counterfeit the manner of Christ's advent. . . . As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. . . . Satan will, if possible, prevent them from obtaining a preparation to stand in that day."<sup>2</sup> No wonder Christ spoke of deception. The greatest crisis precedes the true Second Advent. In order to be relevant, Satan's counterfeit must come before the genuine. Christ is saying *do not be captivated by a counterfeit Christ on earth. Look to the biblical Christ and avoid the great crisis.*

At the true Second Advent, Christ will send His angels "with a loud trumpet call" to gather His people (v. 31). Paul adds that these people will rise up to meet Christ in the air, and together go with Him to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16–18). The rendezvous with Christ will be in the sky, not on earth. So anyone claiming to be Christ on earth is a counterfeit. Christ does not return to this earth to set up a kingdom or to rule a kingdom already set up—various views of nonbiblical theology.<sup>3</sup> The sign is Christ coming in the sky. Above all other signs, Christ wanted His disciples to know *the sign.*

No question, the world and the church are facing stupendous events as we reach the end of time and the final crisis that precedes it. This article unfolds different aspects of the end-time crisis and points to the way to survive it.

## Look to Christ, not to the crisis

Looking to Christ, not to the crisis, is a timeless principle in Scripture. For example, when God's people were in the land of promise, the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites came to make war against King Jehoshaphat and Judah. They made up "a vast army" (2 Chron. 20:1,2). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat sought the Lord in prayer and with fasting. "Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (v. 12). He looked to the preincarnate Christ, and not to the crisis, and great was the victory.

When the Egyptian army was behind them and the Red Sea in front of them, God's people were trapped. They faced annihilation. "They were terrified and cried out to the LORD" (Exod. 14:10). "Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance

the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still” (vv. 13, 14). They were to focus on Christ, not on the crisis. Had they forgotten what Christ had already done for them? Had not Christ protected them in Goshen, when plagues fell on Egypt? (Exod. 8:22, 23). Had not the Jewish firstborn been spared through the blood of the lamb when the Egyptian firstborn perished (Exod. 12:6–13)? The deliverance at the Red Sea will be repeated by the end-time deliverance in Armageddon. Whereas only the greatest contemporary military opposed God’s people at the Red Sea, nearly the entire world will be against God’s people in the end time (Rev. 13:3b, 4; 16:12–16).

### “Thief in the night” crisis

Now fast-forward to the end time. Christ said the end would come when the gospel is preached to the whole world (Matt. 24:14), but it will still be a complete surprise, like the global flood. Christ therefore urged “‘keep watch’” (v. 42)—“‘be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him’” (v. 44; Luke 12:40), just like a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3).

But how can Seventh-day Adventists experience the thief in the night at Christ’s second advent? Would they not expect His return after the Sunday law, death decree, and plagues? Surely, *they* will not be surprised? But what if *the thief in the night experience* takes place before the Second Advent? What if it takes place at the coming of the latter rain?

There are two comings of God in the end time: the coming of the latter rain, and the coming of Christ. Just as Christ comes a second time, the coming Pentecost is the second coming of the Holy Spirit. Preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit is the most important need for us today. This is why the call for revival and reformation is so timely. We must be ready to be sealed by the Holy Spirit in order to be ready for Christ’s second advent.

### How can we avoid the “thief in the night” crisis?

Christ spoke of ten virgins, representing those who believed in the second coming. But five of them lacked oil (Matt. 25:1–4). The foolish virgins were superficial, unprepared, and left out of heaven (vv. 9–13). They were seemingly unaware of their crisis, not looking to Christ. For some time they were satisfied with their state. After all, they were virgins waiting for the Bridegroom. But they were satisfied with only a little of God’s oil when they really needed much. They still had a flickering flame, for their lamps had not gone out as stated in the King James Version of Matthew 25:8. They were not candidates for the sealing.

End-time Christians have a form of godliness but deny the power of God (2 Tim. 3:1–5). Christ speaks of the end-time church as Laodicea, which thinks it needs nothing but really needs everything that counts for salvation. They keep Christ outside of their lives (Rev. 3:14–21). They are defeated by the crisis of self-satisfaction, not looking to God for wisdom and guidance.

Looking to Christ, not to the crisis, includes the knowledge and experience that will allow them to be sealed (cf. Rev. 7:1–3). Ellen G. White defines the sealing as “a settling into the truth, both intellectually [knowledge] and spiritually [experience], so they cannot be moved.”<sup>4</sup> So, the sealing involves a deep study of and a deep love for truth. The sealing takes place at the outpouring of the latter rain. Without the seal, or without the latter rain Holy Spirit, no one can survive the times of trouble. But the good news is that all who are sealed cannot be moved. Look to God’s gift of sealing, and be unmoved by the coming crisis.

Looking to Christ, not to the crisis, means looking to Christ in order to gain knowledge of Him and to have an experience with Him. When we receive this dual gift, we find ourselves hidden away in Christ. Jesus said, “‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28). But coming to Him is not enough. We need

to stay. Christ said, “‘Remain in me, as I also remain in you. . . . Apart from me you can do nothing. . . . If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you’” (John 15:4, 5b, 7).

Christ continues, “‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands [commandments, New King James Version], you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete’” (vv. 9–11).

### Keep looking to Christ

Every day, preferably first thing, we need to set aside time to mediate on Christ. We then need to commune with Him through the day and revel in His embracing love. If we want to spend eternity with Christ, we need to spend time with Him each day now. As we do this, we will grow so deeply in love with Him that nothing, no crisis, “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Here are some lessons from *The Desire of Ages* regarding the life of Christ that we should dwell on:

1. “Jesus did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost. He left the heavenly courts for a life of reproach and insult, and a death of shame. He who was rich in heaven’s priceless treasure became poor, that through His poverty we might be rich.”<sup>5</sup>
2. “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’”<sup>6</sup>
3. “Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth

from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."<sup>77</sup>

4. "Though now He has ascended to the presence of God, and shares the throne of the universe, Jesus has lost none of His compassionate nature. Today the same tender, sympathizing heart is open to all the woes of humanity. Today the hand that was pierced is reached forth to bless more abundantly His people that are in the world. 'And they shall never perish, neither shall any man

pluck them out of My hand.' The soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world. The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom. He will never abandon one for whom He has died. Unless His followers choose to leave Him, He will hold them fast."<sup>78</sup>

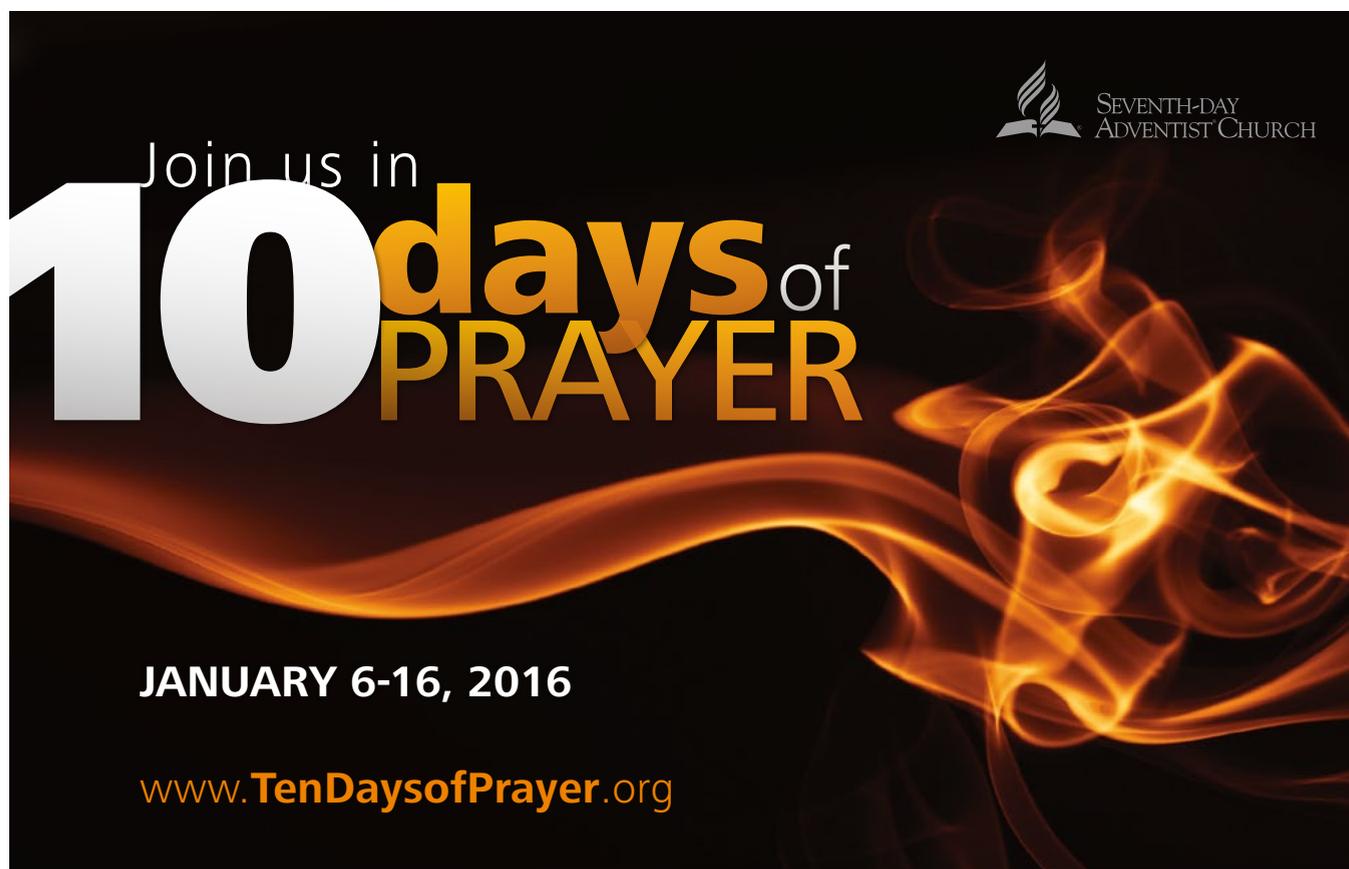
## Conclusion

There is a principle in Scripture, that by beholding we become changed. This is good news for those concerned about the coming crisis. Paul says God's people "are being transformed" by "beholding . . . the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV). This is in the present continuous tense. Every day we dwell upon the lavish love of Christ (cf. 1 John 3:1), we are being transformed, or becoming like Him. That is why John says, "When Christ appears, we shall be

like him" (v. 2b). This is the ultimate in looking to Christ, and not to the crisis. Christ promises, " 'Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' " (Matt. 28:20b). " 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them [or the coming crisis], for the LORD your God goes with you, he will never leave you nor forsake you' " (Deut. 31:6). 

- 1 Unless otherwise stated, the 2011 New International Version is used throughout this article.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), 625, 624.
- 3 For example, Augustine in the fourth century considered the millennium (or kingdom) to be the duration of the Christian age. In our postmodern era, Emergent and National Apostolic Reformation movements focus on building the kingdom on earth to prepare for the second coming of Christ.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992), 220.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 417.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 753.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 480, 483.

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Elizabeth Ostring, PhD, is a pastor for *It Is Written* Oceania, residing in Auckland, New Zealand.



# Living in expectation of the second coming of Jesus

For two millennia Christians have prayed, “Thy kingdom come.” With awe and immense gratitude they have looked back to the first coming of Jesus, in which the whole course of human misery was changed. Now they look forward to a renewed earth, where death and tears will be wiped away and they can spend eternity with their beloved Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Contemporary Christians, like the disciples of Jesus, want to know exactly when Jesus will return. It is not easy to accept His declaration, “‘But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only’” (Matt. 24:36, ESV). Yet Christians take comfort from one biblical text: “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:12, ESV). Peter implies that Christians can actually hasten the waiting process and bring forward the coming of Jesus.

But how does one’s understanding of eschatology impact daily living? More importantly, how does a pastor help parishioners hasten the day that they long for?

## The impact of eschatology on work

For Christians who have a postmillennial understanding (Jesus comes *after* the millennium) of the second coming of Jesus, the “how” of hastening

this momentous event seems straightforward. This involves transforming our world, its governments, and its services under the guidance of the Holy Spirit into a place of peace and perfection ready for the reign of Jesus.

Swedish theologian Göran Agrell noted, “Variations in the view of work are related to different ways of looking at eschatology.”<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf recognized the significant connection between eschatology and approaches to ordinary work and noted that there are “two basic positions on the eschatological future of the world. Some [have] stressed radical discontinuity between the present and future orders, believing in the complete destruction of the present world at the end of the ages, and creation of a fully new world. Others postulated continuity between the two, believing that the present world will be transformed into the new heaven and new earth.”<sup>2</sup> Volf subscribes to the last view and offers a generally hopeful theology of human work that encourages all efforts that lead to the transformation of the world and thus usher in the millennium of peace prior to the return of Jesus.

Christian mission, meanwhile, has long been regarded as a major avenue to hasten the coming of Jesus. David W. Miller<sup>3</sup> and David J. Bosch<sup>4</sup> agree that Christian mission is, in essence, about transformation but in the context of millennialist theology. Miller says

that mainstream Protestantism has embraced postmillennialism, with its emphasis on transforming society, but suggests that premillennialists have placed the emphasis on the saving of the individual soul. Miller does not discuss the possible dangers of a focus on the transformation of society, that is, the possibility of coercion might be employed in order to achieve what the majority perceive as perfection.

For many premillennialists (who believe that Jesus comes *before* the millennium), the saving of the individual soul is considered to culminate in (as some believe) a secret rapture, an individualistic focus of personal safety, and removal from the end-time horrors of this world. While the world stays enveloped in chaos and misery, the “saved” soul escapes to the glory of God.

Seventh-day Adventists are premillennialists, and they have placed a great deal of emphasis on the saving of individual souls. However, they argue that the context of Matthew 24:40, 41 (the unknown hour and the history of the days of Noah and the Flood) suggests preparation rather than the secret rapture.

But a premillennial focus on individual salvation could result in the perception that hastening the coming of Jesus is demonstrated in conversion statistics and church growth rates. Because this seems to be work for the

trained pastor, it generally appears daunting or even irrelevant for the ordinary layperson.

## The hastening strategies of Jesus

When Jesus' disciples asked about the "end of the age" and He discussed His second coming with them, He did not seem to endorse either a transformation of the world or a specialist approach to soul saving (Matt. 24:3-14). He did not describe a transformed society and clearly indicated that the problems of natural disasters (earthquakes and famines) and human-fueled calamities (wars and rumors of wars) would continue until the end. However, He does indicate that the most significant sign of the imminence of His return would be the proclamation of the gospel to all the world, yet apparently without offering strategies for achieving this.

However, Jesus closed His discourse with the three well-known parables in Matthew 25 that do offer strategies: the ten virgins, emphasizing being ready, and especially having the oil of the Holy Spirit in each believer's life; the talents, indicating the good stewardship of the servants of the man going on a journey by their use and improvement of the abilities each was given; and, finally, the parable of the judgment of the sheep and the goats, which highlights the activity of the good servants.

The surprise of these parables is their focus on the ordinary, everyday work of the servants and that good servants do ordinary things. They feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome strangers, visit prisoners, and give water to the thirsty. The activities are so ordinary that the righteous "sheep" have no realization of having done anything important. "Lord, when did we feed you or clothe you?" they ask in shock.

## Encouraging the ordinary parishioner

Pastors interested in the salvation of individual souls rightly encourage their parishioners to become actively

involved in gospel-sharing outreach activities. But the discourse of Jesus indicates that the pinnacle of second-coming hastening activity is found in kindly involvement with other people and their needs. This involvement is not an extra activity that good people do after they have attended to their routine work activities but rather is simply how these servants, those blessed by their Master, approach their life and work. They care about others, whether they are thirsty or hungry; in need of clothing, health care, or comfort; or in need of spiritual food. Their relationship to others demonstrates they are citizens in God's kingdom and reflects their relationship with Jesus.

This means that car mechanics hasten the coming of Jesus by offering the best possible service at reasonable pricing to those whose vehicles are not performing well, thus blessing the owners. It means plumbers fix the leaky pipes of elderly widows cheerfully, and maybe at a reduced cost. It means that schoolteachers not only offer information but also recognize that the troublesome student in their class is a child coping with severe family dysfunction and in urgent need of love and support. It means that the city employee, paid to collect rubbish, willingly picks up the scattered mess of a trashcan overturned by a carelessly backed car or perhaps waits a few seconds while a tired and tardy shift worker drags a can of rubbish to the curbside. It means, simply, that whatever these people do, while waiting eagerly for the coming of their Lord, they do it with love and care, and with all their might (Eccles. 9:10). They are actually transforming the world, making heaven a little closer for those with whom they come in contact. Of course, their care of others includes sharing the good news of the gospel whenever they have the appropriate opportunity.

## An ancient command

This approach to life fulfills an ancient command. When God called Abram from the culture of Ur of the Chaldeans, the call consisted of seven

blessings.<sup>5</sup> At the center of God's call was a command, "Be a blessing!"<sup>6</sup> Rather than the text being a passive "you will be a blessing," this call is an imperative.<sup>7</sup> Abram was called to leave his own world and enter one where he could work to be a blessing to others. To be a blessing means not only kindness but also the development of appropriate expertise, as demonstrated in the narrative of Joseph and his work in Egypt, first with Potiphar, then in the prison, and finally as a senior official working for the good of the whole kingdom.

Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats endorses this approach to life. While the greatest blessing that can be offered another person is the good news of Christ's death, not everyone is immediately ready to receive it. Jesus' own life showed a dedicated commitment to offering practical blessing to humans of all ages, nationalities, and genders. For much of His life, He performed the work of a tradesman, assisting people with their practical needs. A carpenter of His day was involved with the work of a builder, cabinetmaker, toolmaker, and mechanic. The extended time Jesus spent on these practical duties indicates the importance He ascribed to them in meeting the ordinary needs of people. Even when He began His public ministry, He did not confine His work to preaching but, by His practical work of healing, showed how much He cared about people's suffering.

Jesus' own life thus clearly shows that meeting the practical needs of people opened their hearts to receive the good news of His saving power. Although the witness of His public work supports the value of a health ministry as a tool to reach the needs and hearts of people, the hidden years of His life in Nazareth indicate that He was fulfilling the command given to Abram 2,000 years earlier ("Be a blessing!") by faithfully carrying out His ordinary work as a carpenter.

## Reaching the postmodern heart cry

Ideologies of various colors and descriptions clamor to be regarded as

the answer to human misery, from the dogmas of Lenin and Mao to New Age philosophies. Christianity can be easily regarded as just one of these numerous competing dogmas or, worse, relegated to the status of an outdated ideology responsible for war and international misunderstanding.

Truly, Seventh-day Adventists, as premillennialists, have a deep interest in individual salvation. They long for the good news to be proclaimed throughout the world. But they also recognize that the soil of each heart must be prepared before the seed of the gospel can be received and grow.

Postmodern people, like everyone else, feel an intense need to have the problems of their lives solved. The postmodern slogan, What is right is what is right for me, has an element of truth. When people are starving, they need food; when they are sick, they need health care; when they are lonely, they need a friend. Meeting these needs when we can is what God's righteous people do and how they can hasten

the Second Coming. They mingle with people in the course of their daily work and seek to understand and meet the needs of those around them. Then they can share the good news of Jesus and bid people "Follow Him."<sup>8</sup>

The work of a pastor becomes that of coach, but not purely coaching people in associate pastoral duties. The pastor shows each person how they can use their regular duties as opportunities to minister. The pastor takes the deep doctrines of the Bible and translates them into parables that his or her parishioners can live out in their daily lives.

### When did we?

The most striking thing about the hastening activities of the righteous is that the performers were completely unconscious of what they had done. They do not add good deeds to their already overloaded programs. Doing good to others is simply part of their total commitment to Jesus and is so programmed into their approach to life

that it becomes second nature. They talk to others about Jesus because He is their friend, and if no one wants to listen, they still pray. Their focus remains on their Savior and not on their own performance, critical though that may be for sharing the good news with others. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" is both their focus and their cry from the depths of their hearts (Rev. 22:20). 

- 1 Göran Agrell, *Work, Toil and Sustenance*, trans. Stephen Westerholm (Lund: Verbum-Håkan Ohlssons Förlag, 1976), 151.
- 2 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 89.
- 3 David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24, 25.
- 4 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), xv.
- 5 Umberto Moshe David Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Part 2): From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 312.
- 6 C. Marvin Pate et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 37.
- 7 Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 64.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.

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## God uses children

October 27, 2012, witnessed the closure of a seven-day reaping campaign held at the Jakarta International Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jakarta, Indonesia, where 277 people were baptized.

After the baptism and just before people filed out of the church, a man walked forward pushing a tearful lady in a wheelchair. Speaking through a translator, she told the preacher that though the baptism had already taken place, she wanted to be baptized. The lady was Augustina, and the man pushing her was her husband, Deswanto.

Pastor Ronny Rambli, the pastor of this church, had been visiting

this family for some years for prayer sessions and Bible study. Early in Pastor Rambli's visits, the family's oldest son, Wira, who was 12 years old at that time, decided to be baptized. When the evangelistic meetings were scheduled, Pastor Rambli invited the couple to attend, but they refused.

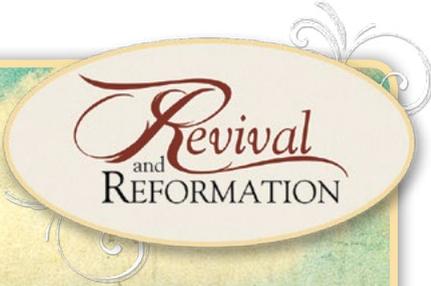
Unknown to Pastor Rambli, from the time Wira was baptized, he tirelessly talked to his parents concerning Bible truth. Now, four years later, a tearful Wira had left for the last day of the meetings after failing to convince his parents to come for baptism.

When Wira saw his parents go forward, not believing his eyes, he

broke down and wept. Deswanto carried his wife, Augustina, in his arms and walked in to the baptismal pool. They were both baptized. There was hardly a dry eye in the church.

Definitely, God uses children.

— SAUSTIN SAMPSON MFUNE IS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT, GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES.



Revival  
and  
REFORMATION



# “Going home”: Good news from the second angel

**H**istorically, Seventh-day Adventists have seen their mandate and message as rooted in the urgent call of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12, more familiarly known as the three angels’ messages. Sadly, the second angel’s message has not often been delivered as a relevant message for us but rather as one needing to be delivered to others. Our practice ignores our belief that the three angels’ messages should be a central platform in preparing all the people of God for the last days.

The Elijah message of Malachi 4:5, 6, the final appeal of the Old Testament and echoed in the New (Luke 1:17), warns the world and prepares a people for the great day of God and has been seen by Seventh-day Adventists to be fulfilled by both John the Baptist (Matt. 17:11–13) and the three angels’ messages. All three angels have a restoring, reforming message to ready God’s people for Jesus’ return (Rev. 14:14–20). They are God’s response to the beasts of Revelation 13—the “present truth” needed and delivered by those enduring these end-time events. As a preparatory message, how does the second angel’s message have relevance for all the people of God?

## Overview of the three angels’ messages

An amazing progression of focus and teaching characterizes the three

angels’ messages. The messages move from the everlasting gospel to the commandments of God, from grace to law. They move from a message of mercy to the announcement of an impending executive judgement. They move from a message filled with hope to a solemn warning to those who would be murderers of God’s people. They begin with the worship of the Creator and then focus on those who worship the beast. They contrast the rest that the Creator gives to those who worship Him with the experience of the beast worshipers who receive no rest (Rev. 14:11). The picture that emerges is one of a panorama of acceptance and rejection, of salvation and damnation.

It is easy to see the good news in the “everlasting gospel” (v. 6), the good news that Jesus came to live, die, and be resurrected as our Savior.<sup>1</sup> The first angel expands on this good news by reminding us that Jesus is our Creator, due our worship, and a judgment is announced that confirms those who are trusting in the everlasting gospel. Rewards can then be given accordingly. The first angel’s message further includes the good news that we can reverence God and give God glory by our choices, worship, and lifestyle, all of which are elements that can be readily shared, indeed *must* be shared, within our community and with others.

Often, as deliverers of these messages, we see our role to be the

proclaimer of the three angels’ messages rather than the ones who are called to live them. However, in each of the three angels’ messages, the focus remains on *everyone*. From the first angel we learn that “every nation” (v. 6) gets to hear the gospel. The second angel attests that “all nations” (v. 8) who have heard of Babylon’s deceptions also hear of God’s merciful response. The third angel is similarly all-inclusive, focusing on God’s judgment for anyone and everyone (vv. 9, 11). We cannot exclude ourselves from these preparatory messages. How does the second angel’s message fulfill its role as a preparatory message for the saints?

## Significance of “Babylon”

Revelation 14:8 comprises the first time “Babylon” is introduced in the book of Revelation.<sup>2</sup> But it is only in the later chapters of Revelation that we learn about the all-encompassing identity of Babylon.<sup>3</sup> In the first use of the word, John intends to point the early Christians to Daniel’s time, when Babylon ruled the world and the false religion of Babylon dominated the people of God.<sup>4</sup> The book of Daniel begins with Yahweh apparently losing the war against Babylon’s gods. Yahweh allowed the temple to be destroyed and the people of God to be taken off to Babylon as captives. The vessels of the temple were placed within the

Babylonian temple of Bel and Marduk, emphasizing Yahweh's apparent defeat and shame (Dan. 1:1, 2).

The Babylon of Daniel's day offers false worship, deifies the king, and expects the worship of an image "60 cubits by 6 cubits" (Dan. 3:1). Babylon's philosophy is "bend or burn": failure to worship as Babylon requires is punishable by death. Babylon is the epitome of all that sin represents. Satan's government can be seen.<sup>5</sup> Sin has matured to the point where Satan will kill all those

NKJV). The repetition encourages all the saints. The certainty of Babylon's fall is definitely good news for them. God's people have long hoped for the fall of their enemy, symbolized in Babylon. When the enemy falls, the people of God are free. In Daniel's time, the people had expected deliverance after their 70 years of captivity, expecting that the fall of Babylon would see them returning home. So the fall of Babylon was a time of great rejoicing.<sup>7</sup> Just as the fall of ancient Babylon was

God's people in Babylon are called out so as not to be morally corrupted by her sins (Rev. 18:4). However, those sins lead to Babylon's fall and destruction. In Revelation 18, we see the destiny of Babylon: "she will be consumed by fire" (v. 8), "your doom has come" (v. 10), "has been brought to ruin" (v. 19), and "thrown down, never to be found again" (v. 21, NIV). Our conquering King does more than put a stop to the monstrous depravities of Babylon or mete out justice—our King comes to



**This is a message of mercy.  
Clearly this message  
reveals that the door of  
mercy is still open—that  
one's location does not  
determine one's destiny.**

who are opposed to his will and his right to rule.

Babylon includes more than false worship and an illicit union of church and state.<sup>6</sup> It also has a false way of salvation, teaching that, through the works of one's hands, one makes appeasement to God. The Babylonian gods save through a mixture of human effort and atonement. Babylon has therefore counterfeited the whole of the first angel's message. Both their gospel and their law are counterfeits.

### Exploring Babylon's multiple falls

The angel announces to John that "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Rev. 14:8,

a God-ordained certainty (Isa. 21:9) for the Israelites of Daniel's day, so will the fall of end-time Babylon be a certainty for God's end-time people.

God's present people need to hear that the fall of Babylon means that they, too, can go home. Our heavenly home awaits us. The "kings of the east" (Rev. 16:12) that cause the fall of Babylon during the sixth plague make it possible for us to go home. King Cyrus<sup>8</sup> came from the east to defeat Babylon. So our King Jesus, our Christ and our Cyrus, comes from the east to deliver us. The final fall of Babylon means we are fully free and can go home.

Often we have looked at Babylon's fall as simply being moral. It is clear that

deliver His people. Our King comes to defeat Babylon so that He can take us home "together" (1 Thess. 4:17). As Jon Paulien states, "In Revelation God sends his end-time Cyrus to dry out the end-time Euphrates to deliver God's end-time Israel from end-time Babylon so that they can live in a new Jerusalem."<sup>9</sup>

The message of the fall of Babylon contains wonderful news also for those who are prisoners within Babylon. This is a message of mercy. Clearly this message reveals that the door of mercy is still open—that one's location does not determine one's destiny. The love of Jesus in the hearts of those who are called "my people" (Rev. 18:4) within

Babylon is more important to God than their badges and labels. How urgently does the heart of God plead that His love should reach even those within Babylon to help them realize that they are not where He wants them to be? How important it is for the people of God to sound like God as they learn to utter these words with compassion.

So, the call for them to come out of Babylon is a call of amazing mercy and grace. They are called to go to a better place and serve a better gospel than a gospel limited by a belief in an ever-burning hell. They, too, can go home because Babylon's fall does not need to include them. They can be free from the deceiving experiences and false promises of Babylon. This message of freedom and deliverance for those listening and responding continues the wonderful good news of the first angel. I often wish that we could have the pathos of Jesus in calling people into the light of the everlasting gospel that they might see that the everlasting gospel teaches that God achieves a complete solution to sin.

So often people who are locked into confusion have been told that the Cross is so small that God can only quarantine sin, sinners, and Satan in hell. This hell, they are taught, goes on eternally. How wonderful is the good news that Jesus is mightier than they had ever thought. Jesus has come to deal with sin fully and finally. They can now believe the promise, given to Adam, that Satan's head will be crushed (Gen. 3:15). This is God's sovereign plan. The message we have to share with Babylon about the everlasting gospel is a bigger concept of God's love and what Jesus did by His life and death. This bigger gospel teaches that sin has an end and that Jesus' victory over sin is final and conclusive.

The fall of end-time Babylon is tied directly to the plagues in Revelation 16:12–16. The physical fall of ancient Babylon echoes through the drying up of the Euphrates, thus further reassuring God's end-time people that

end-time Babylon will meet the same fate as her predecessor. Jesus alone defeats Babylon (vv. 15,16), and His war is on behalf of the saints. The fall of Babylon is Armageddon. As Hans LaRondelle states, "Armageddon and the destruction of universal Babylon are therefore identical."<sup>10</sup> Jesus comes to deliver the proclaimers of these three messages and those who have left Babylon. Thus, the preaching of Jesus' return is integral to the second angel's message. Jesus' return is a message full of hope, anticipated by the saints for millennia (Rev. 22:20). This message means that we can all go home to be with Jesus forever.

The second angel's message is largely a future message. We are still waiting for "all nations" to be deceived.<sup>11</sup> The long process of this moral fall is climaxed, like in the case of literal Babylon (Dan. 5:26–28), in an utter eschatological destruction of spiritual Babylon. For this ultimate deliverance we must wait until Babylon's guilt is complete and God's mercy is exhausted (Rev. 18:5–8). The end of the systems that would kill God's people is greeted by a resounding cry of Hallelujah (Rev. 19:1). Sin's reign on earth is over for the saints. They are on their way home. No wonder the celebration dwarfs any previous celebration on planet Earth.

These additional thoughts do not contradict what we have always taught on the moral fall of Babylon, but rather they expand them and show that Revelation 14:8 is more than a moral fall. The fall of Babylon is a message that Jesus is coming soon. As such this message prepares the people of God for that "great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal. 4:5, NKJV). It is hope that purifies (1 John 3:3), and it is the return of Jesus that reminds us what persons we ought to be (2 Pet. 3:11). The good news of Jesus' return is a preparatory message for all people.

## Conclusion

The second angel tells of a system that has actively tried to hide the

gospel and all that Jesus has done for us. The second angel announces that Babylon's works and salvation are fallen while God's people are destined to go home. Each of these three messages of Revelation 14 is indeed a love message that comes from the heart of God not only to warn the wicked but to prepare the people of God for what lies ahead. As messages of mercy, they are good news. If we can but reframe our focus, we can see the true heart of God and His purposes in having these messages delivered to everyone. They are timely, true, and still our message and mandate. As preparatory messages for God's people, they help us see things from God's perspective. They can be summed up quite succinctly: God hates sin, and Jesus wins so that we can go home together. 

- 1 For a textual comparison of Revelation's gospel with Paul's gospel, see P. Richard Choi, "Paul and Revelation 14," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 20, no. 2 (2009): 223–243.
- 2 For an extensive study of the typological implications of Revelation's use of "Babylon" and its fall, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1987), 82–107.
- 3 See the work of Edwin E. Reynolds, "The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1994).
- 4 For example, Richard Bauckham writes that the allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation are meant to "recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy." *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), xi.
- 5 *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* reminds us that "the prophet Isaiah identifies Lucifer as the invisible king of Babylon (see on Isa. 14:4, 12–14)." Francis D. Nichol, ed., vol. 7 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), 829.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 831.
- 7 "The description of the collapse of end-time Babylon in Revelation is based on the fall of ancient Babylon." Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 447.
- 8 *Cyrus and Christ* both mean "anointed one."
- 9 John Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1994), 135.
- 10 LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 100.
- 11 To see the author's perspective on this being a future message, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), 389, 390.

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# Preparing the world for the coming of Christ

Recently on a flight overseas, I struck up a conversation with my seatmate. When he learned I was a pastor, he asked the all-too-familiar question, “How can you be sure you’re in the right church when they all claim to have the truth?” And then he added, “Is it really that important? After all, don’t we all believe in the same God?”

If you are a pastor or if you have ever discussed religion with a person on the street, you are sure to have encountered similar questions. That is because more and more people today are buying into the belief that truth is relative—there is your truth, and there is my truth, but ultimately, there is no absolute truth.

Or worse yet, many believe that truth is irrelevant. Since truth cannot be determined, we should stop trying and focus on what is really important: personal fulfillment.

## The postmodern Christian

One hundred years ago, and as recently as the 1950s, the questions people posed were very different. In a predominantly Christian America, people were searching for biblical truth. Pointing someone to a certain Bible truth was proof enough for the sincere seeker, and the Bible alone was the yardstick by which truth was measured.

But for many today, truth is a matter of convenience. That is why some may attend a church on their street just because it is close to home or go to a large community church farther away because of its outstanding musical program, and even one in a neighboring town for its church school.

The landscape of Christian America changed radically with the 1960s “revolution,” disrupting the traditional order of things and challenging every aspect of American life. This landscape introduced new lifestyle options into mainstream America, both in the secular and the religious sphere, blurring the lines of demarcation.

If we add the influx of Middle Eastern and Eastern religions (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam), the truth would appear to have been lost somewhere in translation. Our distinct beliefs became just one more option among thousands, and with no yardstick in common by which to measure truth, truth became relative.

## The challenge

How, then, do we reach people from all walks of life and cultures with the gospel message? And more importantly, how do we reach the world with the three angels’ messages—the distinct biblical truth for our time?

This involves a double challenge, because while the core gospel message

has never changed—Adam and Eve accepted salvation by faith in the Lamb who was to come, just as we accept it by faith in the Lamb who died for us—some aspects of truth for each generation do change.

Every generation had a particular truth to proclaim. Noah accepted the gospel message of salvation by faith in the coming Messiah, but he had a distinct message to present to the world: the earth would be destroyed by water, and all who would be saved must enter the ark. Elijah, too, had a message, as did John the Baptist and all the prophets throughout the Bible, all within the context of the gospel.

## Presenting today’s message

Martin Luther was a devout Catholic monk who desperately sought the favor of a harsh and exacting God, following the rules of his order to the letter. But the harder he tried, the less deserving he felt, until that fateful day when, in abject despair, he climbed on his knees up the marble staircase purported to have been climbed by Jesus on His way to the cross. He felt that maybe this would finally atone for his sin.

But that day, everything changed, because he suddenly understood with lightning clarity the text that flashed through his mind: “The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17, KJV).

As the light of truth flooded his mind and filled his heart with joy, he jumped up and resolutely walked down the steps, to the astonishment of those around him.

Why is this so relevant today? Because 500 years later, people are still climbing stairs, creating a salvation of their own making. If there is one thing that distinguishes the gospel message from every other religion and philosophy in the world, it's that justification is by faith in the works of Someone else and not our own. It is a gift from God.

The only staircase that matters is the shining staircase that Jacob discovered nearly 4,000 years before, when he, too, was at a low point: a staircase that leads straight to heaven. That staircase is Jesus Himself. He describes it in John 1:51: “you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending *on the Son of Man.*”<sup>1</sup>

That is our distinct message. Jesus is the only One who bridged the gap between heaven and earth. His sacrifice allowed heaven to come down to us and our prayers to ascend to God's throne. We are not climbing Jacob's ladder toward our salvation!

The gospel message is distinct in that it is a message of grace and forgiveness. “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). He took our punishment and died for us that we might live (Isa. 53:5).

To the Christian, salvation is by grace: being justified by faith through the merits of Jesus who died on the cross to save us. That is our distinct message.

But all Christians believe in that. So how is it distinct, and how does salvation by grace tie in with the three angels' messages?

Look for a moment at Cain and Abel. Both desired to worship God. Abel threw himself on God's mercy and trusted Him implicitly. Cain believed he had a better idea than what God required: a form of worship of his own making, a salvation by his own works.

Cain's idea may not be a bad one and may have made complete sense. But it was not what God required.

Whenever we deviate from God's explicit Word and follow a form of worship of our own making, we are rejecting salvation by grace. We are believing that our method, tradition, ideas are better suited to work out our salvation. We stop trusting implicitly in a “thus says the Lord,” and our straight and narrow becomes a thousand winding roads of confusion.

When we look at the three angels' messages, we see in them *salvation by faith* adapted to what God's people will face in the time of the end. They are a call to face the judgment through the merits of Jesus, to come out of a form of worship that God does not approve, and to trust implicitly in the Word of our Creator. This constitutes a call to examine what He has said in His law and abandon what He has not sanctioned so that we may receive the seal of God.

## The mission

But the question remains: If our central message centers on the gospel in the context of the three angels' messages, how do we convince people who do not accept our yardstick?

We do not. We do not have to convince anybody. We just have to present the message. We have been called to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. And while searching for methods and studying cultures to better reach people is imperative, ultimately, the work of conversion is not ours, because we cannot change a single heart.

What we sometimes forget is that we are not struggling alone to fulfill our commission. In fact, this is not even our work—we are just co-laborers with Christ. It is His work through the Holy Spirit that changes hearts.

We are not even asked to be successful. We are only asked to be faithful in proclaiming the message. The results belong to God. If I have learned anything in 32 years of ministry, I learned that I cannot convince

anybody of anything. But what I *can* do—what we have been commanded to do—is to present the gospel message regardless of how futile or hardened our audience may seem, because the Holy Spirit is at work.

Recently, I was in a country where Christianity is a small minority. I had been asked to speak at a very well-to-do church on Sabbath morning, and before the service began, I asked one of the elders whether he knew how many visitors were present because I always like to pray for them at the end of a service. “Sir,” he told me emphatically, “we do not have visitors in this church.” To my surprise, there was a hint of pride in his voice: pride at a church so exclusive that visitors opted to go elsewhere.

At the close of the service, I decided to risk the elder's ire and ask, anyway, whether there were any visitors present. Five people stood up, and I invited them to come forward for a special prayer. As one of the ladies approached, I noticed two burly bodyguards flanking her and then retreating as she reached the front.

After the prayer, I spoke a few words with each guest and asked them to whom I had the pleasure of speaking. The lady said, “I am the wife of the postmaster general of the country. I have been attending this church for three months, and this is the first time anybody has spoken to me.” Nobody had invited her, she said; she had been attending because she wanted to know more about the Christian faith.

## God's work, not ours

Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). If we believe this, we must know that we are not working alone and that the work of conversion is His. Jesus said that if we are silent, “the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40). And if God can use stones, He can use you and me. But we must speak up and not be silent.

There will soon come a time when God will pour out His Spirit, and we will see Jesus and His sacrifice as we

have never seen Him before. Zechariah described this in his book in chapter 12, verse 10: “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”

God does not say He will pour His Spirit on the whole world, but on His people—His church, the spiritual Israel. And as a result of that weeping, “A fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zech. 13:1).

unity is good, unity in error is not—and never unity at the expense of Bible truth.

But God also has three angel messengers who are calling the world to a place of reunion. They are not going to the kings to enforce civil laws but going to every person on the planet, speaking to their hearts and calling them to a reunion on Mount Zion. They are calling people to come out of error and trust implicitly in what God has said in His Word. The three angels’ messages are God’s last message of love and mercy to the world.

We know that whenever God’s people have been faithful throughout history, this faithfulness has incited the

coming when people will be called to take a stand: “Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. . . . Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.

“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God.”<sup>2</sup>

As the earth plunges into ever-deeper moral, political, economic, and ecological chaos, the Bible clearly describes those who stand for truth and proclaim the message during this

**Whenever we deviate from God’s explicit Word and follow a form of worship of our own making, we are rejecting salvation by grace.**

God’s people will be cleansed and purified. The Holy Spirit will be poured out in full measure to enable us to finish the work of proclaiming the gospel to the world. What a time that will be!

### **The grand finale**

There are incredible signs impossible to miss taking place right now in the sociopolitical world. We know that Satan has “three impure spirits that looked like frogs” going to the kings of the world “to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:13, 14). We know that Satan calls the world to a place of reunion, to a false unity. And while

fury of those who are not. God rejected Cain’s worship, and Cain despised his brother and set out to destroy him. That pattern has continued throughout history.

Now, as the world spins toward the final battle between Christ and Satan, we are being asked to take a stand and proclaim with power God’s distinct message for our time. There are more than 3,000 different evangelism and outreach methods, and they all work if we just try them—because God’s Spirit seizes any opportunity to influence hearts.

In her book *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White describes the time that is

time: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

Great times are ahead for God’s people, and the best chapters of the book of Acts have yet to be written. When we embrace evangelism and make it a part of our ministry, we place ourselves in the center of God’s action—and what a place to be! 

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture passages are from the New International Version of the Bible. Emphasis in this passage added.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 612.

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# The last generation: *How the Advent hope defines us*

I hope to be among the last generation on earth when Jesus returns. As an Adventist Christian, I long to see Jesus; and I believe our Savior will physically return. Now in my 60s, strong in my faith that death is only a rest until He comes, my longing for the imminence of His return continues. My desire for an end to sin and the consequent suffering that destroys life on this earth has only increased with the passing of years.

The term “last generation” evokes differing mental images. For some, the term introduces the horrifying reality of earth’s inability to infinitely sustain life; for others, the devastating destruction of nuclear warfare; and for others, an impending cosmic calamity. Ironically, for those who anticipate the return of Christ, these fearful predictions are themselves affirmations of Christ’s return, and they sustain our hope to be among the last generation.

## Promises of the Second Advent

As others do, I often review the promises of Jesus’ return provided within Scripture. “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2, 3).<sup>1</sup> When Jesus ascended from this earth, angels

proclaimed the promise of His return: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The earliest believers in Christ were comforted with the promise just as we are:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:51–55).

I find it helpful to rehearse these and many other familiar Bible passages that proclaim the return of our Lord (for example, 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Cor. 3:13; Rev. 22:7). The blessed hope (Titus 2:13), the return of Jesus, is central to my faith and to that of others who share biblically grounded Christian beliefs. I readily confess there are times when secular concerns, disappointments, suffering, or the

sinfulness of this world assault my confidence in the promises of the second coming of Jesus. At such times the Holy Spirit uses these inspired texts to keep the blessed hope alive in my soul. All of us disciples of Jesus must constantly reinforce the blessed hope with these assurances from Scripture.

## The problem of time

Time is a problem for us. We have waited, and our hope for Christ’s return has subsequently moved from expectation to disappointment. I recall the lament of a faithful uncle who had experienced the great American Depression in the 1930s, World War II, nuclear fears during the cold war, and countless calamities. He had given a lifetime of Christian service, but in the end felt let down; that belief in the return of Christ seemed a vain hope. For some, the response to waiting has been to seize on some means for controlling the determined moment of Christ’s return rather than submitting to His providence, as though we might, through some effort of our own, become that last generation.

We are a bit like the disappointed disciples of Jesus who treasured the idea of the restoration of the glory of Israel in their lifetime. Ellen White’s account of their confusion as Jesus turned to Jerusalem and the cross reveals that Jesus attempted to nurture their longing for the kingdom

into enduring trust in His providence. She wrote of their experience, "Then for their encouragement He gave the promise, 'Verily, I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom.' But the disciples did not comprehend His words. The glory seemed far away. Their eyes were fixed upon the nearer view, the earthly life of poverty, humiliation, and suffering. Must their glowing expectations of the Messiah's kingdom be relinquished?"<sup>2</sup>

How shall we relate to our hope? Faced with waiting, hope creates tension. This tension does not constitute something negative; rather, this tension is positive, even necessary. The tension challenges us to exercise faith while living as His good stewards (Matt. 24:45-51) in the present time, actively and joyfully caring for His household. Jesus apparently recognized, even nurtured, that tension by providing signs of

His coming that every generation has observed as harbingers of His return.

## Signs of the Second Advent

Since my childhood, events in the natural world and affairs of our society have been noted as signs of Christ's soon coming. These events have provided a source of encouragement in one sense. Sabbath School teachers, pastors, a succession of evangelists, and even my mother all described natural disasters, political and religious events of importance, and the increase of knowledge in our society as certain signs of Jesus' soon coming. Though such signs often are in the context of horrific human suffering, the words of Jesus serve to remind us during such times that He is coming to put an end to this age.

To recognize these events as signs is not simply wishful thinking. Jesus taught that such events are signs of His return: " 'wars and rumors of wars' "

(Matt. 24:6); " 'famines and earthquakes in various places' " (v. 7); " 'false prophets will arise and lead many astray' " (v. 11); " 'lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold' " (v. 12); and then my favorite, " 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come' " (v. 14). These and many other Bible references to signs on earth or in the expanses of our environment affirm, and create, a sense of the imminence of Christ's return as years pass.

But time has become a problem for us. Reflection on the redundancy of these signs as my years advanced led me to examine the urgency of my hopes in light of the providence of God. Jesus did caution us to understand that there is an appointed time that we do not know. " 'See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet' " (v. 6). " 'All these are but the beginning of the birth pains' " (v. 8).

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“But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (v. 13). “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (v. 42). Believers in Thessalonica were cautioned to wait expectantly but without identifying the day of Christ’s return (2 Thess. 2). Jesus apparently intended for us to rehearse the promise of His coming daily but to trust in His providence while caring for His household—the world and its citizens, whom He so passionately wishes to redeem.

## Theological tension

In her work on the life of Jesus, Ellen White cautioned Christian disciples: “But the day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. . . . The exact time of the second coming of the Son of man is God’s mystery.”<sup>3</sup>

In the earliest years of my pastoral ministry I came to realize the importance of both nurturing the blessed hope and avoiding sensationalizing that hope. Generations of Christians have waited expectantly. In their hope of Jesus’ return, people can be manipulated through the coming and passing of current events. Some become skilled at manipulating these events. The news from any particular day can be heralded as the last warning, and fear may fill empty church pews.

Certainly, God wishes us to hold on to His promise. We should reflect on His Word constantly. However, we can so sensationalize every devastating earthquake, every outbreak of human violence, and every political or religious event that it eventually undermines faith. Our need is to affirm the inspiration of Scripture, proclaim the gospel, magnify the love of God, so that every reoccurrence of these signs serves as a reminder that our Lord promised to return and will return.

Is this caution a threat to our faith? No. No one comes to Christ through fear. Some may come to the church or to a decision to exercise greater moral resolve through fear. But I am convinced

through the Spirit-led testimony of Scripture and years of working with people that love draws one to Christ, and love has a far greater power than fear. “Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (v. 8). “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17–20). Love sanctifies: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

If received, this caution regarding how we regard the signs of Christ’s coming will, in fact, strengthen our church and its mission, not weaken it. Truth is powerful. And the truth? We do not know when Christ will return (Matt. 24:44), nor are we to know. Just as I believe He is coming very soon (and the signs encourage me in that belief!), so my great-grandmother believed. And if we are still here on this earth a century from now, I hope and pray my great-grandchildren will treasure that belief as well. They should likewise review the signs of Christ’s coming. But if sensational messages are substituted for careful exegesis of the Word, that hope will dim.

## The last generation

After years of serving God’s church, my observation is that faithful stewardship in the proper tension with hopeful expectancy yields to the control of our human need. The transition is a subtle one, clothed in spiritual language, but nonetheless human in nature. We drift to believing we influence the determined time of the return of Christ,

believing we have delayed His return or can hasten His return. Clothed in religious tones, this provides the control we need.

Thus, we drift from believing His coming is so near that we are the last generation to believe that we may become, by our own efforts, the last generation. This seems honorable. We determine within ourselves to be a people of a special quality, a distinct people like the world has never before known, fit for the return of Christ. We certainly pray earnestly for that transformation. To be more like Christ is the longing of our hearts. And, as the Scripture affirms, the longer we follow Jesus, the more His transforming work will be experienced: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). Exegesis of the text suggests Paul’s ambiguous sense of reflecting the righteousness of Christ while, at the same time, experiencing continuing and progressive transformation provided by the Holy Spirit. No sense in the text exists suggesting that work has an ending point.

Rightly understood, the ongoing transformative work of the Holy Spirit helps us understand the mission of the church. That is, the call of the church to gather a people who are becoming more and more like Jesus while anticipating the day of His return. Ellen White wrote, “Had the church of Christ done her appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would before this have been warned, and the Lord Jesus would have come to our earth in power and great glory.”<sup>4</sup>

Careful attention to her thought is important. She states in the same context: “By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord’s return.”<sup>5</sup> The context of these comments is her reflection on the intention of God for the mission of the church. We are to gather people who are being transformed as they anticipate and long for the return of the Lord. We do not satisfy our mission by issuing warnings but by leading people to Jesus. She

underscores the mission the church is to engage in and suggests that the end of this history could have been before our time had that work been faithfully done. Several points are worth noting when examining her thought: (1) this refers to a sign—the worldwide preaching of the gospel; (2) the thoughts are not formed as a reference to a supposed higher spiritual nature of God’s people; and (3) there is no reference to the human moral condition being determinative. White’s thoughts reflect on the call to mission. In the context, she repeats the several biblical references to the gospel being carried to the entire world before Jesus returns.

It is compelling to note, and important to repeat, that the aforementioned thoughts responded to Jesus’ speaking of the call to disciples for engagement in mission. Waiting for Jesus to return means caring for His household, sharing the gospel, sharing His love. Waiting is not idleness nor focused on self. Indeed, Jesus called us to be a selfless and serving church as we wait.

Believing we become the last generation by our own spiritual

performance produces a focus on ourselves. Inevitably, such a focus leads us to moralism and perfectionism as ends in themselves and as substitutes for faith and humble proclamation of the grace of God. The vital tension of faith with a transformed life can be lost. The message of the last generation is the love of God, His grace, His redeeming power, the call to serve as enduring stewards of His household in the present time, and joy in the promise of His return.

## Conclusion

Long for the return of Jesus! Rejoice in the promise of His return! At the same time, knowing this is God’s world, be active in the concerns that impact human experience. Share the gospel. Be engaged in issues of poverty, climate, health care, pollution, hunger, and violence. We are His stewards, servants of the One who has redeemed us, who is risen from the grave, who ministers for us in heavenly places, and is returning. Serve in love and joy!

I long to be among the last generation. Perhaps you do as well. In

His providence, it may be the next generation, or generations from now. We do not know when He will return. Nor do we need to know.

He will come at a time we do not expect (Matt. 24:44). The conditions on earth affirm that the Second Advent is near. Could Jesus return today? That question creates some tension. We anticipate a time of trouble greater than the world has known (Mark 13:19) while we acknowledge that for many of God’s children on this earth, that time is here. The last generation may be surprised by His appearing!

This we do know: Jesus is coming again. Time is not a problem for God. The redeemed will give Him glory and welcome Him with joy at the appointed time.

Meanwhile, let us be about our Father’s business. 

- 1 All scripture references are from the English Standard Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 417.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 632, 633.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 633, 634.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 633.

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## Preparing for His return

Now more than ever it is time to prepare the church for the return of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake—Jesus Christ will come again, and God has given us specific instructions regarding what we should do while we wait. As spiritual leaders, we have a special mission to teach and preach the Word.

We need to pay careful attention to the world around us while keeping the lightest possible hold on the things of this world. Obviously, we live in the world, but this doesn’t mean we have to be of the world. In other words, we should take care not to become so involved in the things

of this life that we forget what really matters.

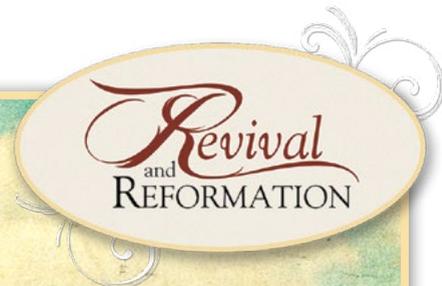
As we draw closer to Christ’s second coming, it is imperative that we are prepared and eagerly waiting. Indeed, we have entered the fearful end-time years that are the grand climax of human civilization. If ever there was a time to pay attention and get prepared, it is now.

If you have a real sense of Christ’s imminent return, it will also impact the way you live (1 John 3:3). God’s ultimate goal for your life on this earth is not comfort but character development. He wants you to grow up spiritually and become like

Christ. He wants you to reflect His character in your daily life. “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church.”\*

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\* Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 69.



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# Preaching the Second Coming

I had a vivid imagination as a child. Perhaps it was because I was an only child until my sister was born nine years later, so I had to learn how to entertain myself. I would imagine what life would be like if I had brothers and how good we would be in athletic competition. Of course, I would be the best of us all.

My imagination would extend to spiritual matters as well. This began while viewing the Sabbath School picture rolls of life in heaven: playing with nondomesticated animals, sitting with other smiling children in the presence of Jesus, and having a mansion built just for me. My childhood was happy, but life as portrayed in these pictures was even better than what I was already experiencing.

The Apollo space missions, in which men landed on the moon and walked on its surface, also sparked within me a desire to travel through space to worlds unknown. That is what I wanted to do when Jesus came back to earth at the Second Coming. I was told by pastors and evangelists that the journey to heaven after Jesus comes to earth again will take seven days; and I could picture myself floating in weightlessness upward with loved ones, angels, and Jesus. I was so excited to know that these things would soon take place—perhaps even before I became an adult.

## Losing focus

Before I turned 20 years old, however, something happened. My vivid imagination began to dissipate. This undoubtedly happened because of the demands of high school and university life. But more important, my dissipated imagination affected how I saw—or in this case, did not see—the second coming of Christ. I was busy laying the foundation for my career in gospel ministry. Looking back on it all, I find it embarrassing that I was preparing for a life of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church yet was no longer giving much thought to the reality of the Second Advent.

But I was not the only one losing focus on the Second Coming. As a child, I heard countless sermons that heralded the message, “Jesus is coming again. Are you ready to meet Him?” But with each passing year, I heard less and less about Jesus’ return and more and more about the “how-tos” of life: how to have a better marriage, how to deal with anger, and a host of other worthy topics. I heard little that took me beyond the *now* to the *not yet*.

Why do many of us not preach the Parousia like we once did? I could offer a number of suggestions; but they might prove to be merely anecdotal. Has the pursuit for wealth—albeit a relative concept—infected us with “dissipation, drunkenness, and the

anxieties of life’ ” (Luke 21:34)?<sup>1</sup> Do we find it easier to preach to the needs of our congregations, whether such needs are real or perceived? Have we, as preachers, become illiterate as it relates to our understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation; as such, is it more convenient to preach things that do not require as much mental exercise to comprehend and share? Or might we avoid preaching the Parousia because the Second Coming brings an end to our current ways of living and ushers in final judgment for which many ministers of the gospel do not feel ready to face?

## Regaining focus

Thirty years ago, I was focused on starting my ministerial journey—being the best pastor I could be, caring for my church members, attending to the needs of my three-church district. Maybe one day the conference leadership would ordain me. I had my priorities straight. Or did I?

Thirty years later, with more yesterdays in my ministerial rearview mirror, the question constantly arises in my mind: *Should I redeem the time and preach the Second Coming like the preachers of my childhood did?*

I need to do so because I must recapture those same spiritual elements of that vivid imagination I had as a child. Life was simpler then, as

it should have been. But amid the complexity of adult life in the twenty-first century, it becomes easy to forget that God has the present in His hands and our glorious future under control. It becomes easy to fall into the trap of wanting to fix everything, to guarantee that all things—both personally and professionally—transpire exactly as we believe they should.

It also does well to preach the Second Coming because it serves as an antidote to the infection of dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life. The promise of Christ's return reminds me that "the world and its desires pass away" (1 John 2:17) and that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that

let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy" (vv. 10, 11). When I preach the Second Coming, I am constantly reminded that the God of love wants to judge me as worthy to eternally live with Him because I have allowed Him to live in and through me. When we preach the Parousia, it should spur both us and those who listen to our sermons to strive for holiness (see 2 Pet. 3:10–13).

### Sharpening focus

When we deepen our commitment to preaching the Second Coming, we need to inspire people with a vision of the not yet; and in doing so, we need

Paul, who believed that many in his generation would still be alive when Jesus returned. When members of the church in Thessalonica saw their loved ones passing away, Paul, upon receiving word of their concerns, comforted them with the promise of a future resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–16). Yet and still, he believed that some of them—including himself—would be alive to witness the Second Coming. Several years later, when writing to the church in Corinth, he still held that same view (1 Cor. 15:51). If his was a mistaken notion, how could he have made such a mistake? Certainly he was aware of what Jesus had taught the Twelve about His return.

**Could it be that our use of the term *soon*, while well intended, serves to encourage date setting as it relates to what is better described as Christ's imminent return?**

will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan. 2:44).

Ministers must also preach the Second Coming because the message of Christ's return points to judgment that results in deliverance for His saints. John wrote Revelation 22:7–11 within the context of Christ's imminent return, and he concludes with these words: "Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile;

to be faithful to the text, allowing it to speak from its life setting into our twenty-first-century life setting. Pastors serve as resident theologians in their congregations; and one of our key responsibilities is to maintain a sharp focus on allowing God's Word to explain itself, especially as it relates to helping people understand various questions surrounding the Second Coming.

*How near is "near"?* One of the biggest questions generations of Christians have asked is, "What's taking Jesus so long to return?" For 2,000 years, Christians have believed in the imminent return of Christ—including

In addressing His disciples' query about the sign of His coming and the end of the world (Matt. 24:3), Jesus spoke extensively about a number of things for which they should look. During the discourse, He told His disciples to learn a lesson from the twigs and leaves of the fig tree. The budding of the leaves signals the arrival of summer (v. 32). In the same way, Jesus continued (referring to His return), "when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door" (v. 33). Greater confusion could arise because of verse 34: "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

Many years after Paul's martyrdom, John the revelator shares the words of the True Witness who says "I am coming soon" (Rev. 22: 7, 12, 20). How, then, are we to understand the concepts of *near* and *soon*? The word employed for *soon* is the Greek term *tachu*, from which is derived the medical term *tachycardia*. *Tachycardia* comes from the Greek, loosely translated "sudden heart" or "quick heart." While the quickened heart rate is the most notable result of the condition, its asymptomatic nature sounds the potential alarm. One never knows when the next battle with tachycardia will come; it simply comes!

As preachers, we need to express the biblical concept that the nearness of Christ's return reflects an event that transpires suddenly. When it happens, it happens in a flash. Paul employed the "thief in the night" concept (see 1 Thess. 5:2) to express the nature of the return of Christ. In fact, in verse 3, he uses the word *suddenly* to describe the Day of the Lord and its accompanying events.

Could it be that our use of the term *soon*, while well intended, serves to encourage date setting as it relates to what is better described as Christ's imminent return? Could such use also unintentionally discourage people from appropriately preparing for the Second Coming because they have heard of this *soon return* year after year after year? A focus on the imminent nature of His return encourages me to "be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when [I] do not expect him" (Matt. 24:44).

*How does one become ready?* Never should we preach Matthew 24 without also preaching Matthew 25. The former tells us Jesus is coming; the latter tells us how to prepare.

In giving us instructions on readiness, Jesus shared three well-known parables. The parable of the ten virgins speaks to preparing for the coming of the Bridegroom and closes with the counsel to "keep watch, because you

do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 25:13). The parable of the talents speaks to using that which has been entrusted to us, not for ourselves, but wisely and with an eye toward the future—a caution against living for today. The parable of the sheep and goats speaks to our responsibility to others, uncovering that horizontal spiritual dimensions are an important life factor as are the vertical dimensions. Jesus connects our duty to others with fitness for His eternal kingdom (vv. 34–40).

As preachers, we often focus on the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study as essential elements of character development. But Jesus clearly teaches that our unselfish and altruistic relationship with the impoverished, disenfranchised, and outcast serves as the practical outgrowth of time spent in secret with God. In other words, Jesus is coming back for those who walk with Him *and* others—including "the least of these brothers of mine" (v. 40).

Peter, as did Paul, had to address those who questioned whether Jesus would return (2 Pet. 3:4). He acknowledged that the concept of time in the sight of mortals greatly differs from that of divinity (v. 8). Then he shared a reason for the delay, pointing to divine patience (v. 9).

But divine forbearance is not to be taken for granted, as if God is One who practices theological Universalism. Divine patience should be welcomed with human readiness. We "ought to live holy and godly lives as [we] look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (vv. 11, 12).

But how do we "speed its coming"? The Greek verb employed connotes the concept of "striving for" something.<sup>2</sup> Our responsibility, as preachers, is to exhort our listeners (including ourselves) to live the commands and principles of Matthew 24 and 25—not only what was previously mentioned in light of the three parables but also to proclaim the gospel to all people

groups (see Matt. 24:14). We do so ever keeping in mind that "like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay."<sup>3</sup>

## Restoring focus

Finally, we need to cast a vision for our listeners of what Jesus is preparing for us. That is what He did for His discouraged disciples. After predicting His betrayal and imminent departure (John 13:21, 36), Jesus pointed them to their future reality. "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3, KJV).

Those who sit in our churches need to be reminded that Jesus is coming again and that His coming is both sure and imminent. They need to see the glory of His return (see Rev. 1:7). They need to hear the loud trumpet call that dispatches the angels who will "gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matt. 24:31). They need to know that they will be reunited with their loved ones, who on that day will be resurrected (1 Thess. 4:16), and that they will be free from all traces of disease (1 Cor. 15:52, 53). They need to one day sing and shout "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments" (Rev. 19:1, 2). "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (v. 6, KJV).<sup>4</sup>

In short, they (and I) need the imagination of a child. 

<sup>1</sup> Unless noted otherwise, all scripture is from the New International Version.

<sup>2</sup> F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 762.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 32.

<sup>4</sup> For a picture infinitely brighter and better than I could ever attempt to paint, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1888), 635–652.

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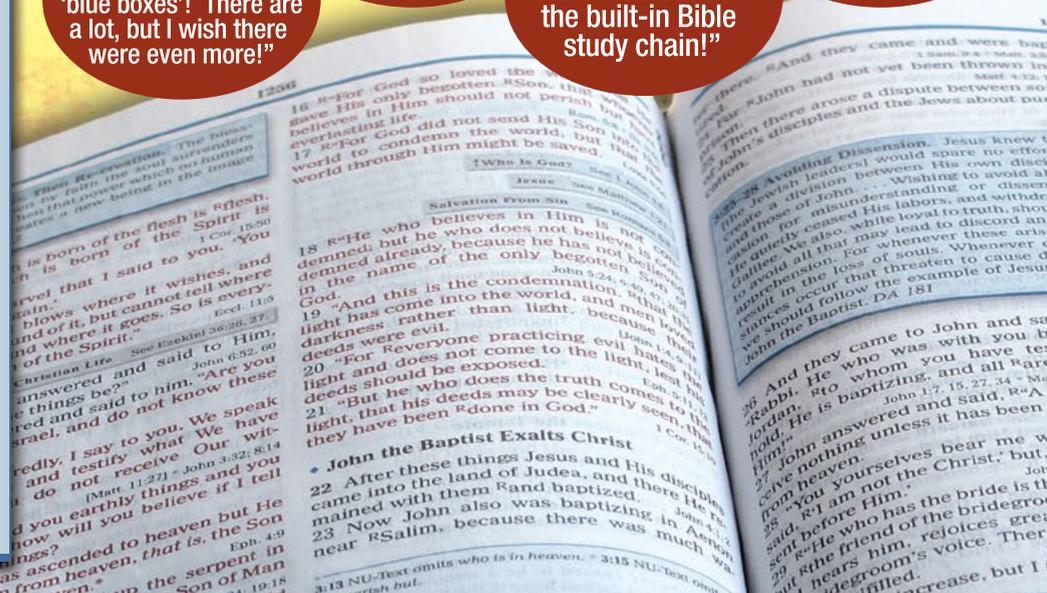
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## Enough fuel to **make it home**

**M**ichelle was really late for work. Her 35-minute drive seemed like an eternity to her, but she made it on time for work. The work day went off as usual, but as she was starting for home, the car's low fuel warning light came on. She made it to the nearest gas station, but her eyes almost popped out when she realized she had left her wallet at home. No cash, no credit or debit cards. She took out her phone and posted her desperate status on Facebook: "I still got some 30 miles to go and the low fuel warning light is already on. Do I have enough fuel to make it home?"

### Enough fuel for a daunting task

Like Michelle, Christians are driving a vehicle, called *witness to the world*. As this vehicle makes its journey to many points in the world, the time has come to raise the question: Do we have sufficient fuel left to propel the gospel vehicle to reach every unreached area or population segment in the world?

Consider the current world population's allegiance to various religions. Of the total world population, Christianity still claims the most adherents with more than 2 billion (strong and nominal) believers—and this is still a minority, with only 33 percent of world population. Islam comes next with about 1.5 billion (21 percent of world population). Hinduism claims 900 million believers (14 percent). Over 370 million are Buddhists (6 percent). The remaining 24

percent of the world population belong to other smaller religious persuasions, secular, nonreligious, animist, atheist, or agnostic groups.<sup>1</sup>

Just the varying religious groups, each one with millions of people, constitute how far Christian witness has to go to reach the world. Add to this daunting task another dimension: it is estimated that 42.1 percent of some 16,000 people groups in the world have not yet been reached with the gospel,<sup>2</sup> and about 2,000 language groups do not have even one verse of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> The task is staggering.

The idea that other religions are just as good as Christianity or even better (and that trying to convert people from other religions to Christianity might be unnecessary or even an absurd interference in their private lives) is not new<sup>4</sup> and is gaining more adherents than ever. Some argue that "there are nine thousand and nine hundred distinct and separate religions in the world, increasing by two or three religions every day."<sup>5</sup> As the Seventh-day Adventist Church drives on the highway of mission, do we, as a church, have enough fuel to finish the task that was given to us?

### Fueling the hearts

The Seventh-day Adventist message is now being proclaimed through the written and spoken word in at least 914 languages and dialects, and the church has been adding more than one million people to its membership every year for ten years in a row. Some 125 people join the church every hour.<sup>6</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized in 1863 with 3,500 members. In 1979, 116 years later, worldwide church membership was only about 3.5 million. The next 30 years would see the church's membership jump from that number to roughly 16.9 million in 2010, which means that during those three decades, the church received five times more members than in the rest of its previous history. From the time the church was organized in 1863 to the present, Adventists have given over US\$60 billion in tithe and offerings to advance the mission of the denomination.<sup>7</sup> I cannot help but praise the Lord for the blessed hope that has fueled the hearts of so many people and has made it possible for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to reach so many people from all over the world.

### A little more fuel for our car

But not everything is bright and nice in our mission endeavors. Sometimes we find ourselves a little too busy running the church, and we forget about mission. Russell Staples suggests that this should not be a surprise because expansion and other circumstances often cause agencies and institutions of different sorts to slowly deviate from the original purposes for which they were established.<sup>8</sup>

In 2011, when G. T. Ng presented his General Conference Secretary's Report to the Annual Council, he explained that as the church grows, it tends to become institutionalized and to spend more

resources on baptized membership than on mission, and while “mission is not forgotten,” it is “sidelined amidst pressing demands of programs and institutions.”<sup>9</sup>

Adventists are not alone in this trend, however. For example, it is estimated that 73.1 percent of foreign missionaries of all denominations are being deployed to places with access to Christian witness and where most people would say they are Christians; another 24.5 percent of missionaries are sent to places where people have access to Christian witness although many have not decided to become

had defeated death and rose from the grave, He was soon to break their hearts again because He was about to leave them and go to heaven.

After Christ’s ascension, two of the most exalted angels were sent to bring comfort to the brokenhearted disciples. “‘Men of Galilee,’” the angels said, “‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11).<sup>11</sup>

When the disciples went back to town, the people in Jerusalem expected their faces to appear down-

the disciples as the Lord used them in fulfilling the Great Commission. This blessed hope also fueled early Adventists into fulfilling their God-given mission.

## The hope that fueled mission among early Adventists

When his friends started questioning the 34-year-old former deist William Miller right after his decision to follow Jesus, he suddenly found himself with his back against the wall.

“How do you know there is a Savior?” they asked him.

**Could it be that we need to stop for a moment and drive to the nearest gas station to get a little more fuel for our mission endeavors?**

Christians; only 2.4 percent of missionaries are serving in places where most people are not Christians and do not have access to a Christian witness. Simply put, only 2.4 percent of the missionaries who are being deployed to foreign fields are actually working among the 1.6 billion people who have not had a chance to hear the good news of the gospel.<sup>10</sup> Could it be that we need to stop for a moment and drive to the nearest gas station to get a little more fuel for our mission endeavors?

## Enough fuel from the Olivet

Without knowing it, the disciples “drove” to such a “gas station” in the Olivet some 20 centuries ago. And they desperately needed this. Jesus, their beloved Master, had been crucified. And they thought that all their hopes had also been nailed to the cross with Him. Although their faith came back to life when they realized Jesus

cast and ashamed after all they had gone through. But they were not filled with sorrow and defeat. In their hearts were only gladness and triumph. “Their faces were aglow with a happiness not born of earth. They did not mourn over disappointed hopes, but were full of praise and thanksgiving to God. With rejoicing they told the wonderful story of Christ’s resurrection and His ascension to heaven, and their testimony was received by many.”<sup>12</sup>

The message they heard from those two angels changed the way the disciples looked at Jesus’ departure. They knew their Master had been separated from them and that they were surely going to have a hard time struggling with the trials and temptations of the world, but the Bible says they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:52, 53). The good news that one day Jesus would return became a most effective fuel to energize

“It is revealed in the Bible.”

“But how do you know the Bible is true?”

Though perplexed, Miller decided that he would not give up. He would rather study the Bible thoroughly and do his best to harmonize all of its apparent contradictions.

William Miller’s famous two-year journey through the Scriptures might have first been propelled by peer pressure. But at the end of that period, the farmer came to a conclusion that was far beyond his initial expectations and would stand the fiercest opposition: by 1818, he had concluded “that in about twenty-five years from that time all the affairs of our present state would be wound up; that all its pride and power, pomp and vanity, wickedness and oppression, would come to an end; and that, in the place of the kingdoms of this world, the peaceful and long-desired kingdom of the Messiah would be established under the whole heaven.”<sup>13</sup>

Through the blessed hope of Jesus' second coming, God touched the heart of that humble farmer and invited him to share his convictions with others. "For weeks, months, yes, for years, the command, 'Go tell it to the world,' had been impressed more and more deeply on his heart."<sup>14</sup> But William did not want to do it, and he had many



reasons for his decision: he was not a trained preacher, he was not quite ready, he was slow of speech, and the conclusions of his study might be wrong after all. So he studied and studied the subject for another thirteen years until it all seemed clear in his mind, and he found no workable objections to his own theory. But by 1831, Miller had another reason not to preach; he was too old.

One Saturday morning, as Miller was studying his Bible, he felt God's voice talking to him with greater urgency than ever, "Go, tell it to the

world." In an effort to calm his distressed conscience, he promised God that if someone would come and invite him to preach, he would go. His burden seemed to go away immediately. After all, he had never received an invitation to preach, and who would invite a 50-year-old, slow-of-speech farmer to preach?

But the test to his promise would come almost right away as his nephew, Irving, arrived with a message: there was no preacher for the next day in their church, and Irving's father wanted Miller to share with the small congregation what he had been studying about the second coming of Jesus.

William Miller was flabbergasted by this sudden invitation. "Surprise gave way to rebellion. And rebellion quickly ripened into a determination to break his covenant."<sup>15</sup> But without answering a word, he turned his back on the boy. After about an hour struggling with God, Miller decided to go preach. The 16-mile ride to that small church would be the first of William Miller's many preaching appointments. Some have said that he gave at least 3,200 lectures between 1832 and 1844. He faced tremendous opposition, but he kept up with his God-given mission, not dismayed because of it all but fixing his mind on the blessed hope, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Just like Miller, plenty of others in the Millerite movement gave up everything they had for the sake of mission. These God-fearing people who came from different religious backgrounds saw themselves as participants in a prophetic movement whose task was to prepare the world for Christ's return.<sup>16</sup> Even after the great disappointment in 1844, a faithful remnant emerged from the scene and came to be known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>17</sup>

## Enough fuel to make it home

It was the blessed hope that energized the disciples in the fulfillment of

their God-given Great Commission. It was the blessed hope that has fueled the efforts of so many dedicated leaders in Adventist history, taking them to the ends of the earth to bring God's end-time message of hope to all peoples of the world. And it will be the same blessed hope that will encourage Seventh-day Adventists in our days to reach and disciple some three billion individuals who have no fair access to the gospel.

We have a way to go to fulfill our mission, and the low fuel warning light already glows. May God fill our hearts with the wonderful fuel of His promise: " 'Yes, I am coming soon' " (Rev. 22:20). 

- 1 See Adherents.com, "Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents," accessed December 10, 2010, www.adherents.com/Religions\_By\_Adherents.html; David Van Biema and others, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?—Religion: Missionaries Under Cover?"
- 2 Joshua Project, "All Progress Levels," accessed March 26, 2013, joshuaproject.net/global-progress-scale.php.
- 3 Paul Eshleman, "World Evangelization in the 21st Century," October 22, 2010, joshuaproject.net/assets/media/assets/articles/essential-elements-of-great-commission.pdf, 5.
- 4 See "The American Board: Eighty-Eighth Annual Meeting at New Haven," *Christian Work: Illustrated Family Newspaper* 63, no. 1601 (1897): 654.
- 5 See Jorge N. Ferrer, "Spiritual Knowing as Participatory Enaction," in *The Participatory Turn*, eds. Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 135.
- 6 2014 Annual Statistical Report, in documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2014.pdf, 2.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Russell Staples, "Maintaining the Adventist Mission," *Ministry*, February 1997, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1997/02/maintaining-the-adventist-vision.
- 9 G. T. Ng, "Membership Dilemma: Promise and Peril, Secretary's Report to the Annual Council," slide 33.
- 10 Global Frontier Missions, "State of the World—the Task Remaining," accessed March 27, 2013, www.globalfrontiermissions.org/stateofworld.html.
- 11 Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is from the New International Version of the Bible.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2006), 832.
- 13 Paul A. Gordon, "William Miller: Preparing to Preach," Adventist Heritage Ministry, www.adventistheritage.org/article/50/resources/pioneer-stories/william-miller-preparing-to-preach.
- 14 Matilda E. Andross, *Story of the Advent Message* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1926), 9.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 See P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).
- 17 See Andrew Gordon Mustard, "James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 1844-1881" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1987).

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# Engaging a heart for mission to children

When Jesus gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, 20 to bring the gospel to all the people of the world, I believe He was also including children. While we evangelize adults, we must not forget that children need the Lord too. In fact, millions of children, especially in the 10/40 Window, have never heard the name of Jesus. We want to bring them to Jesus and prepare them to meet Him when He comes again.

Wess Stafford, president emeritus of Compassion International, advocates for a major paradigm shift in our thinking in the church. He believes that children are too important and intensely loved by God to be left behind or left to chance. Children belong to all of us; we are compelled to intervene on their behalf.<sup>1</sup> We must invest in their spiritual welfare. Hence, we need to be intentional in our mission to children.

## Mission to children

Why should we minister to children? The following are some reasons we need to get involved in the mission to children.

*Children are valuable to Jesus.* Jesus recognized the importance of children and youth. He was asked by the disciples, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’ ”

“‘If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea’ ” (Matt. 18:1–6, NIV).

Have we truly listened to Jesus’ teaching about the place of children in the kingdom of God? Children model faith and discipleship by showing us adults how to humbly repent and trust in the God of salvation. When we welcome them, we are accepting and respecting them as Christ Himself did. Notice that Jesus made it very clear that if we neglect and abuse them or turn them away from faith in Christ, we will face severe judgment from God Himself.

In Scripture, we see examples of God using children to transform their world. Remember Samuel, who was just a child but used by God to deliver a needful but difficult message to Eli, the high priest (1 Samuel 3)? Josiah

was a boy king whom God used to reform the religious state of Judah and bring the people back to God (2 Kings 22).

God used children and young people as special instruments at a special time. They are valuable in the kingdom work of the Savior. Can we do anything less?

*Many children live in the 10/40 Window.* Luis Bush’s study on reaching and evangelizing children in the 10/40 Window reveals fascinating figures of this group, ages 5–14, worldwide. Topping the chart is India. With 20 percent less population than China, India has over 30 percent more children and youth. This is due to China’s one-child policy. Nigeria and Indonesia, with half the population of the United States, actually have more children and teens in absolute numbers. In the United States, 25 percent of the nearly 42 million school-age children are Hispanic—though Hispanics comprise only 15 percent of the general population. And, as the map indicates, in Africa and the Middle Eastern countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and others, 40 to 50 percent of the population are less than 15 years old.<sup>2</sup>

The 10/40 Window is home to 65 percent of the world’s population and to the largest population (86 percent) of unreached people groups. These people have never heard the name of

## POPULATION OF CHILDREN AGES 5 TO 14 BY COUNTRY (2010)<sup>3</sup>

### TOP TEN COUNTRIES

INDIA	248,253,120
CHINA	180,084,594
INDONESIA	42,716,276
NIGERIA	42,716,276
USA	41,819,347
PAKISTAN	38,118,459
BANGLADESH	36,068,928
BRAZIL	35,263,734
ETHIOPIA	23,990,943
MEXICO	20,855,453
TOTAL (TOP TEN)	709,595,962
TOTAL (OTHERS)	508,921,404
GLOBAL TOTAL	1,218,517,366

Jesus; they do not have the Bible and have few Christian friends and neighbors. Most of the world's Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists, and Muslims live within the 10/40 Window. And within this window are many children who need to know the Savior and be prepared for His return.<sup>4</sup>

*Children are most receptive.* Major child development theorists like Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg echo vehemently that there are critical periods or sensitive periods during the early years of childhood when values, morality, cognitive thinking, worldviews, and perspectives of life are shaped either positively or negatively.<sup>5</sup>

Wess Stafford of Compassion International resonates the same belief, that the spirit of a little child is a lot like wet cement. When a child is

young, it takes little effort to make an impression that can last a lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

In the United Kingdom's Nutbrown Review for early childhood education, Cathy Nutbrown affirms that "the love and care that children receive from their families . . . are fundamental to their healthy growth and development. Parents influence children's values, behaviours and ambitions, and lay the foundations of who their children are and what they might become."<sup>7</sup>

Ellen G. White held a similar view when she wrote, "Too much importance cannot be placed on the early training of children. The lessons that the child learns during the first seven years of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years."<sup>8</sup>

At another time, Mrs. White also stated that, "It is still true that children

are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received."<sup>9</sup>

George Barna's research indicates that 32 percent of those who accept Jesus as their personal Savior are children between 5 and 14 years old. He cautions that if individuals do not accept Jesus before they are 13 years old, the chances of their doing so at a later time is rather slim.<sup>10</sup>

*Children can become effective missionaries.* From a mission standpoint, our interest in the 4 to 14 age group is not only because they are *receptive* but also because they can become *effective* agents to carry the gospel commission forward. Once you tell a child, he tells the world. Children are our best evangelists!

Clifferson Araujo dos Santos from Manaus, Brazil, runs a small group for 23 to 28 children in his neighborhood, many of whom are poor or have parents in prison. He shows them a video of a Bible story and then leads them to study that story. Each child is given a Bible, and they passionately underline the Bible verses as they discuss the lesson. Only 11 years old, Clifferson is a real missionary at work in preaching the gospel.

Ellen G. White reminds us that "whole armies of children may come under Christ's banner as missionaries, even in their childhood years. Never repulse the desire of children to do something for Jesus. Never quench their ardor for working in some way for the Master."<sup>11</sup>

*We need to reach kids in cities.* As we noted that many children below the age of 15 live in the 10/40 Window, within this window, many are in big cities. The world's cities present the Seventh-day Adventist Church with a formidable challenge in evangelism as more people are moving from rural communities to big cities where jobs are available.

Statistics from *Christianity Today* tell us that in 2008, for the first time, the world's population was evenly split between urban and rural areas. "Fewer

than 30 percent of the world's 2.5 billion people in 1950 lived in cities. By 2050, almost 70 percent of the world's estimated 10 billion people will do so, according to the United Nations.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Ellen G. White strongly advocates such work: "There is no change in the messages that God has sent in the past. The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of

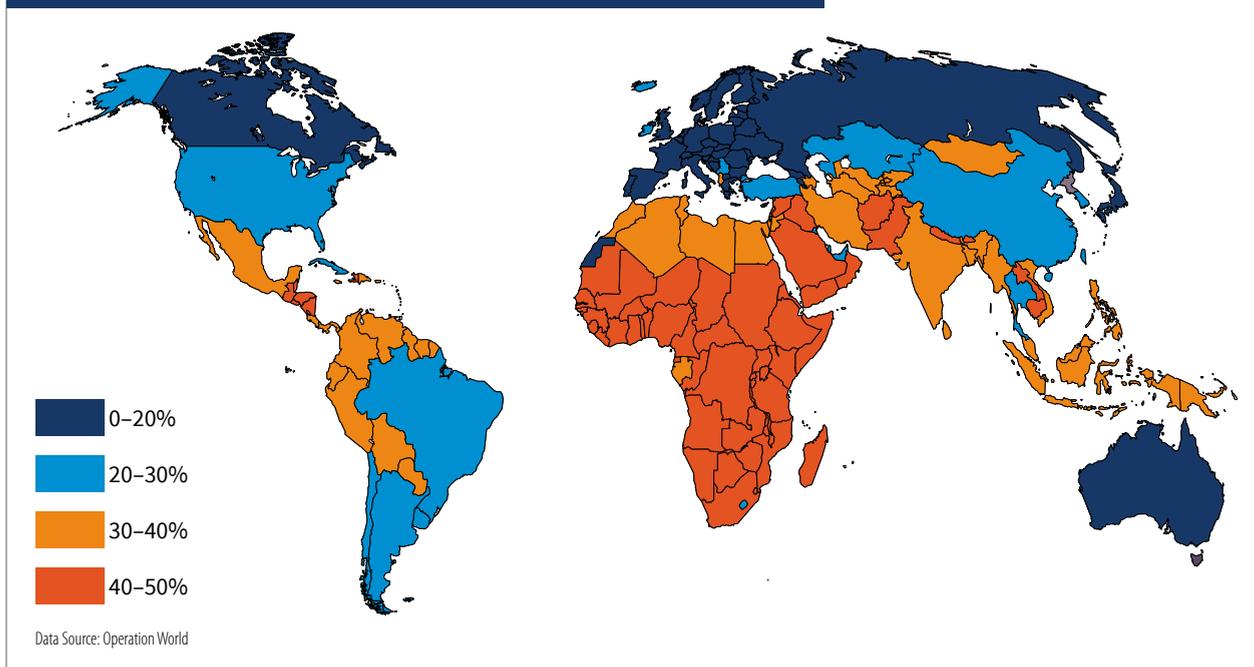
to share Jesus with their friends. That is when we need to involve children in mission at home and abroad. We can start training them to be Christ's witnesses and to serve others unselfishly.

In fact, Ellen G. White counsels, "By precept and example parents are to teach their children to labor for the unconverted. The children should be so educated that they will sympathize with the aged and afflicted and will seek to alleviate the sufferings of the

service to the less fortunate and for God.

One seventh-grade student, Chris from the Spencerville school in Maryland, participated in a mission project in Central America to help build a church and run children's programs. He testified afterwards, "Mission trips have changed my outlook in life. It helps me think more of others and less of myself. Doing even little things can change lives. Mission is for me."

## WORLD POPULATION UNDER 15 YEARS OLD



a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed."<sup>13</sup>

The church needs to be intentional and serious in planning its mission to children within both the church and the community. Included in their strategic plans should be projects to evangelize children—Vacation Bible School, health expos, evangelistic campaigns, craft days, and Bible camps—projects that reach community children with the gospel of love.

### Children in mission

When children accept Jesus as their special Friend, they are inspired

poor and distressed. They should be taught to be diligent in missionary work; and from their earliest years self-denial and sacrifice for the good of others and the advancement of Christ's cause should be inculcated, that they may be laborers together with God."<sup>14</sup>

The following are some benefits of involving children in mission.

*Children's lives are transformed.* Children and teens who have participated in mission or community service have positive responses. They come home excited and inspired to recommit themselves for greater

*Children develop compassion.* Children should be given an opportunity to respond to the needs of their world. Getting children involved in helping at a shelter, praying for the sick, and giving their money and toys for flood victims helps to develop their compassion for the less fortunate. Giving and serving from childhood help them grow into caring adults.

After moving to the United States, the Owino brothers, Brian, Calvin, and David, received word that some of their cousins had died of HIV/AIDS. So they launched the BCD Can Project to raise funds to help HIV/AIDS children

in Malela, Kenya. They collected soda pop cans every day after school, then cashed in the deposits and sent the money to AIDS orphans in Africa. They have raised US\$33,000 in four years and have helped more than 400 AIDS orphans.

*Children learn to share Jesus.* When children are inspired and trained to witness and share the gospel with their friends and schoolmates, they experience joy in seeing others accept Jesus. Mateus Soares from Brazil started sharing Jesus when he was eight years old. He visited his neighbors to pray for them and then invited them to his

passionate in fund-raising for mission projects than are many adults.

When we brought our two sons to help distribute food baskets to the poor families and help children living by the railroad tracks, we noticed that, after getting home, they pulled out a lot of their books, toys, and clothes to give to the poor children.

*Children learn to trust in God.* After participating in mission projects, children learn to trust God to help them out of situations. Once, a group of preteens was helping build a church in Guatemala. When the rains threatened to destroy the roof, they prayed

We need to sow the seeds of mission interest in our children at an early age if we expect to reap missionary recruits and strong mission supporters in the years ahead. Time is short. Jesus is coming soon. Involve our children *now*. 

- 1 Wess Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore: Why the Least of These Matters Most* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007).
- 2 Luis Bush, "Raising up a New Generation From the 4/14 Window to Transform the World," 4/14 Window Movement, accessed March 22, 2015, [www.4to14window.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/4-14%20Window%20Booklet%20Full%20Resolution.pdf](http://www.4to14window.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/4-14%20Window%20Booklet%20Full%20Resolution.pdf).
- 3 Ibid., Indonesia and Nigeria populations [sic].
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Angela Oswald, "Sensitive Periods in Child Development," MentalHelp.net, updated January 17, 2008, [www.mentalhelp.net](http://www.mentalhelp.net)

**We need to sow the seeds of mission interest in our children at an early age if we expect to reap missionary recruits and strong mission supporters in the years ahead.**

Bible study class. After some time, he brought 25 people to the Lord, and they were baptized into the church.

Ellen G. White points out that "in their early years children may be useful in God's work. . . . He desires them to be His little missionaries, denying their own inclinations and desires for selfish pleasure to do service for Him; and this service is just as acceptable to God as is the service of grown-up children."<sup>15</sup>

*Children learn generosity.* Parents whose children have been involved in missionary projects or mission trips testify that their kids become more sensitive to the needs of the less fortunate and are more generous in donating their own money to help out. In fact, they are more enthusiastic and

earnestly for God to hold back the rain until it got dry. God answered their prayers. This situation strengthened their faith and trust in God.

Yes, it is imperative that we see children and young people as a crucial, strategic force that can finish the task of the Lord. Ellen White wrote, "In the closing scenes of this earth's history many of these children and youth will astonish people by their witness to the truth, which will be borne in simplicity, yet with spirit and power. . . . In the near future many children will be endowed with the Spirit of God, and will do a work in proclaiming the truth to the world, that at that time cannot well be done by the older members of the church."<sup>16</sup>

- .net/poc/view\_doc.php?type=doc&id=7923&cn=28.
- 6 Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore*, 248, 249.
- 7 Cathy Nutbrown, *Foundations for Quality: The Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications, Final Report*, June 2012, [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/175463/Nutbrown-Review.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175463/Nutbrown-Review.pdf), 11.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1954), 193.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 515.
- 10 George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003).
- 11 Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1964), 42.
- 12 Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, "Urban Urgency: Missionaries Follow Migration to City Centers," *Christianity Today*, August 16, 2010, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/august/21.14.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/august/21.14.html).
- 13 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1932), 304.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 487.
- 15 Ibid., 486, 487.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 166.

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# Why did Jesus promise signs and wonders?

If we believe all of the analysis about our postmodern, post-Christian culture, it is not going to be an easy task to share the gospel in the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> Many are disillusioned with organized religion and have rejected the Bible as a reliable source of truth. “You can decide what’s right for you,” we are told, “but don’t tell me what’s right for me.”

As followers of Jesus, we long for His return in glory and the establishment of new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells, but first we have a mission assignment to complete: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).<sup>2</sup> However, those of us who are called to share the truth about Jesus in the twenty-first century face a massive challenge. This is the same daunting task that the apostles faced when they set out to share the gospel 2,000 years ago. They were called to be witnesses, not only in welcoming communities but “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The apostles were also dealing with an uninterested, hostile culture. Rational argument or quoting from the Sacred Writings was not enough. What would it take to get a hearing and for people to sit up and listen?

Jesus knew the answer to that question. Right after His challenge to “go into all the world and preach the

gospel to every creature,” He gave this promise: “These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17, 18). Jesus was aware of the challenges His followers would face preaching the gospel to an uninterested, hostile culture. But why did He promise that supernatural signs and wonders would accompany the preaching of His word?

## Not to entertain the curious

Clearly, Jesus did not promise supernatural signs and wonders to entertain the curious. How do we know that? Consider an incident from the life of Jesus: He had just stood before Pilate and heard the declaration, “I find no fault in this Man.” But Pilate refused to take the responsibility for releasing Jesus. So, hearing that Jesus came from Galilee, Pilate shifted the responsibility over to Herod Antipas, tetrarch over Galilee. This is the same Herod Antipas who ordered the execution of John the Baptist.

Luke records the following encounter between Jesus and Herod Antipas: “Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he

had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him” (Luke 23:8).

Was Herod Antipas genuinely interested in the word of truth that Jesus had brought from His heavenly Father? Not in the least. Notice Herod’s behavior when he does not get his way: “Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate” (v. 11). Herod was not interested in the truth. He did not want to hear the testimony of Jesus. He was just curious. He wanted to be entertained. But God does not send supernatural signs and wonders to entertain the curious.

When Jesus sent the apostles out to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, He never intended that they should gain a hearing by conducting a religious circus, a supernatural road show, as it were.

## Not to appease the critics

Why, then, did Jesus promise that supernatural signs and wonders would accompany the preaching of the gospel message? It was not an attempt to appease the critics.

In Luke 23, Jesus has been unjustly condemned to death, even though Pilate found no fault in Him. And Jesus could have delivered Himself by calling 10,000 angels to come to His aid. But He

willingly laid down His life as an atonement for our sins. As He was hanging on the cross, His critics taunted Him: “ ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God’ ” (v. 35).

Were these mockers anxious to hear the life-changing testimony that Jesus could share with them? No. They were determined to kill Him. And yet they taunted Him, urging Him to perform a supernatural sign by coming down from the cross. Could Jesus have done that? Absolutely. But He never performed supernatural signs and wonders to appease the critics, for nothing would

that the stone be rolled away. Then He cried out in a loud voice, “ ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ ” And the Scripture records, “And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go’ ” (John 11:44). As a result of this amazing, supernatural sign, many believed in Jesus as the Messiah—but not His critics. The enemies of Jesus began to develop a plan to kill Him. By the time of His trial, His enemies were more determined than ever to silence Him. They would not believe even if

this paralytic on a stretcher and were so determined to get their friend to Jesus that they literally tore up the roof. What a picture of godly friendship! Mark records, “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’ ” (Mark 2:5). Apparently, Jesus discerned that this man needed spiritual healing even more than he needed physical healing. When Jesus offered forgiveness to the paralytic, His authority was immediately challenged: “ ‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ ” (v. 7). Jesus responded, “ ‘Why do you

**When Jesus sent the apostles out to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, He never intended that they should gain a hearing by conducting a religious circus, a supernatural road show, as it were.**

be accomplished by such action. Some of the critics who stood before the cross, mocking Jesus, had already witnessed several supernatural signs and wonders just a few hours before in the Garden of Gethsemane. They had witnessed a miraculous demonstration of Christ’s glory as the only begotten Son of God, and they had also witnessed a miracle of healing. But they persisted in their opposition of Jesus. No supernatural sign or wonder would convince them.

Their response was the same when Lazarus was raised from the dead. Without a doubt, this miracle was one of the most remarkable signs that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah. Lazarus had been dead for four days. No one challenged that fact. But Jesus made His way to the tomb and commanded

someone came back from the dead. No supernatural sign or wonder would have made any difference to them.

### **To confirm the Word that is proclaimed**

Why then did Jesus promise that signs and wonders would accompany those who went out to preach the gospel? Mark provides this testimony: “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20). Jesus promised supernatural signs and wonders to confirm the word that was proclaimed.

Jesus was teaching in Capernaum when four individuals brought their invalid friend to Jesus. They carried

reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Arise, take up your bed and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ Immediately, he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’ ” (vv. 8–11).

The supernatural wonder that occurred was a confirmation of the word of truth that Jesus had proclaimed. The sign validated the word. The sign did not make the word true. The word that Jesus spoke was already

true, and the supernatural sign simply confirmed that fact.

The same was true for the apostles as they boldly preached the gospel of the kingdom. Peter bravely declared on the Day of Pentecost, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. . . .

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:32, 36).

Undoubtedly some questioned, “How can I know that Peter’s testimony about Jesus is true?” The answer comes in Acts 3. Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray. At the gate called Beautiful, they came across a lame man who was begging. Peter focused his attention on the lame man and said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (v. 6). The subsequent supernatural sign, performed in the name of Jesus, confirmed the word about Jesus that was proclaimed. What the apostles had testified about Jesus was true.

## The promise of Jesus for today

What about today? Can we expect that the promise of Jesus recorded in Mark 16 will be fulfilled in our day as we prepare for the imminent return of Jesus? Is it still God’s plan that supernatural signs and wonders confirm the word about Jesus that we proclaim? I would suggest to you that we need this promise of Jesus fulfilled more than ever. Ellen White makes this bold assertion regarding signs and wonders in our day: “The promise is as far-reaching as the commission. Not that all the gifts are imparted to each believer. The Spirit divides ‘to every man severally as He will.’ 1 Cor. 12:11. But the gifts of the Spirit are promised to every believer according to his need for the Lord’s work. *The promise is just as strong and trustworthy now as in the days of the apostles.*”<sup>3</sup>

Quoting the words of Jesus recorded in Mark 16:17, Ellen White affirms:

This is the privilege of God’s children, and faith should lay hold on all that it is possible to have as an indorsement of faith.

“They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” This world is a vast lazaret house, but Christ came to heal the sick, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan. He was in Himself health and strength. He imparted His life to the sick, the afflicted, those possessed of demons. He turned away none who came to receive His healing power. He knew that those who petitioned Him for help had brought disease upon themselves; yet He did not refuse to heal them. And when virtue from Christ entered into these poor souls, they were convicted of sin, and many were healed of their spiritual disease, as well as of their physical maladies. The gospel still possesses the same power, and why should we not today witness the same results?<sup>4</sup>

We can expect the promise of Jesus, recorded in Mark 16, will be fulfilled in our day. In the midst of an uninterested, hostile culture, the gospel will be heard. The strongholds of the enemy will be torn down. People will be transformed.

We always need to remember that the supernatural signs are not an end in themselves. If we preoccupy ourselves with simply looking for supernatural signs and wonders rather than boldly proclaiming the word, we will be deceived. Why? Satan can also perform signs and wonders. The apostle Paul prophesied, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:9, 10). Jesus warned, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we

not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt. 7:22, 23).

We should not focus on signs and wonders. We should focus on Jesus and His word. As we boldly proclaim that word, God will perform the signs. We proclaim; God performs. We focus on the proclamation; God gives the confirmation. The supernatural signs and wonders are God’s responsibility, not ours. He will confirm the word that is proclaimed in the way that He chooses, at the time that He chooses. But of this we can be certain: as we boldly proclaim the word, God will perform the signs.

In response to the promise of Jesus, the apostles prayed a bold prayer that I believe would be a very appropriate prayer for us to pray today, both as individuals and as a church. In the midst of an uninterested, hostile culture, this was their prayer: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29, 30).

The early Christian leaders realized the challenges of their mission assignment were great, but they knew Jesus had promised divine assistance. Supernatural signs and wonders would confirm the word that they proclaimed. The same supernatural confirmations can be expected today as we complete our global mission assignment with the promise of Jesus ringing in our ears: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). 

1 See “Engaging Adventist Millennials: A Church That Embraces Relationships,” by Clint Jenkin and A. Allan Martin, *Ministry*, May 2014.  
2 All quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.  
3 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 823; emphasis supplied.  
4 *Ibid.*

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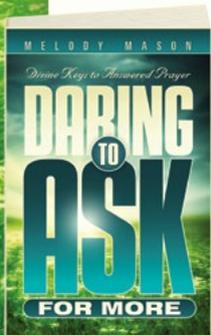
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## Impacting the world— one life at a time

I never knew in all my life that there was any religion other than Buddhism and Hinduism—until you introduced me to Jesus Christ. Thank you for allowing me to taste the sweetness of God.” Responses like this one from listeners across the planet are what keep Adventist World Radio (AWR) broadcasting day and night in more than 100 languages—ever expanding—ever seeking to fulfill the great commission of our Lord, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

As the radio arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, AWR strongly believes that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14).

Our studios in Tula, Russia, receive bags of mail on a regular basis. I discovered the story of Antonina, who lives several hours outside of Moscow. She said, “I grew up under communism so God was not talked about. When Easter or Christmas came around, that was the time to remember Christ. When I was going through hard times I would pray. During good times, I forgot about God.” But then something happened in her life. “I and my son began studying the Bible,” she said, “but there was no one to turn to for answers until someone told me to listen to AWR’s *Voice of Hope* radio program.”

Antonina continued to listen to our programs, eventually deciding to be baptized. She sent a letter to our studio in Tula, but a response did not come quickly enough for her liking. How did she deal with this problem? She went down to the river and baptized herself! Yes, she was on fire for God, and nothing was going to stop her desire to serve her new Lord. Eventually, one of our pastors did make the journey and officially baptized her.

To see and hear this level of excitement from listeners is not unusual. While in Nepal, I spoke with a middle-aged fellow who was a tailor by trade. He worked and lived in a very remote and mountainous region. One day, as he was tuning his radio to the BBC News, he came across our program. The messages were far different from what he had been accustomed to hearing as a Hindu, but after listening for some time, he gave his heart to the Lord. Then he began radiating a smile that was infectious as he shared with me, “I am responsible for many people coming to Christ.”

“How many?” I asked.

With an even bigger grin, he said, “Two hundred and fifty!”

For a large percentage of the world, radio is one of the few effective means of sustainable evangelism. The reasons are many, such as laws that prohibit sharing the gospel one-on-one, religious intolerance and persecution, or

geographical restriction—mountains, jungles, and so on. To know that AWR is normally able to reach past any and all restrictions in order to bring the hope of Jesus Christ to this lost and dying world is exciting.

Shiva was one such person—discouraged and experiencing hopelessness—until someone told him about Jesus. He was thrilled to hear of a God who would die for him, but as soon as he shared his newfound faith, the Hindu village rose up against him and made his life horrible. It was not long before he made the choice to forget this new God and return to the thousands of gods of his fathers.

This reversal of belief brought little peace to his life. Yes, the persecution had ended, but there was a great emptiness. One day, while tuning his shortwave radio, he heard AWR’s *Voice of Hope* broadcast. “The moment I heard about Jesus,” he said, “my heart jumped for joy. I began listening every day, and every day my faith grew stronger.”

Life was different for Shiva this time. Now he had the daily support of the radio broadcasts. He soon found the courage to change his name from Shiva—the destroyer god of the Hindus—to Solomon—a strong biblical name. He began inviting his family to listen to the radio broadcasts and then his neighbors. It was not long before the Holy Spirit assembled a large AWR

listener group. (This is not unusual. We have listener groups all over the world consisting of 30–100 listeners. It starts with one person inviting another to listen, and soon the flame of the Spirit has caught an entire village on fire for Christ.)

When I met Solomon, he was building a large bamboo home. I was amazed to discover that the entire third floor was a church sanctuary. And on the very pinnacle of his new three-story home, centered in a Hindu village, Solomon placed a towering Christian cross. What had changed from his first encounter with Christ? Receiving the daily support and comfort he needed to sustain his young faith via the radio.

He told me, “So many people are attending services on Sabbath that we no longer have room for the children, so we had to move them downstairs for separate services.” That is the power of God using radio!

While traveling in Madagascar, we were told by our radio producer in that region that they had recently discovered more than 25 AWR listener churches. Many of these groups had constructed their own churches, acquired Bibles, and were meeting for weekly Bible study, worship, and prayer. Most groups have never had—or have rarely received—a visit from a minister. Radio has become their pastoral support and lifeline to the church.

I visited a family who had been entrusted with a solar-powered radio that they received some years ago during a radio giveaway program sponsored jointly by the government and AWR. They were so proud of their radio they could not wait to show it to me. Leading a huge procession of listeners, the patriarch ushered me past the farm animals to his humble home, all the while negotiating deep ruts in the red clay earth.

Each evening, after everyone returns from laboring in the fields, he ascends his wobbly staircase to the second floor deck, hooks up the radio, and proceeds to play the AWR program

for the 250 people who faithfully huddle into the tiny, brick-enclosed yard.

The radio giveaway program has been a highly successful means of spreading the gospel to the far corners of civilization. The units are compact in size and have four sources of power: crank generator, solar, battery, and electric. This affords the user a wide variety of options. For those of us who can afford batteries and have easy access to megastores, the need for other sources of power may escape our notice. But we know of listeners in Africa, for instance, who have gone without food for three days just so they can afford to buy batteries for their radios in order to listen to AWR. That’s how strong the desire is to hear the Advent gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition to radios, we also distribute a unit called a Mega Voice. These are solar powered units, about the size of a small smartphone, that can be preprogrammed with up to 500 hours of gospel content. Even though the unit is small in size, the audio speaker is large enough to be heard by 50–100 people in a village setting. Units such as these allow us to provide in-depth training for listeners who many not have Bibles, Spirit of Prophecy writings, or other study materials available.

An exciting example of our giveaway program comes from the country of India. We gave out T-shirts and hats that read Adventist World Radio, radios, and bicycles to 50 Bible workers. In two years, these traveling workers had won 6,000 souls to Christ.

Yes, people are responding to God’s Word daily. Some of the countries we work in are too sensitive to share what the Holy Spirit is doing, but allow me to give you an example. From our Guam shortwave complex, we have five antenna arrays that are each about the size of a football field (visualize them resting on their side). Several of these arrays blanket all of China with the gospel for ten hours each day. We cover the great nation of India in 12 languages, plus we cover North Korea, Bhutan, Tibet, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia. And the list goes on.

AWR constructs FM studios across much of Africa and supports FM work throughout Central and South America, as well as in many nations. Truly, the task is massive, and much more must be done to take this gospel to the world, but God continues to open new and exciting opportunities every day.

Several years ago we began to podcast. I must admit that, at the time, most of us knew little about this new technology—at least the potential to reach such massive audiences using such simple means. We began by purchasing a media assets management tool for our offices in England. This hardware/software tool reduced our program editing time to almost nothing. What would normally take half an hour of manual labor to edit a single program for the Internet now took less than a minute.

In 2014 alone, four years since we went operational with this new technology, we experienced 8.75 billion program downloads in more than 100 languages. And some of the countries that have the greatest religious restrictions are the countries experiencing the greatest number of downloads.

To date, AWR is the largest provider of audio content for iTunes in the world, and our chief engineer tells us that podcast growth doubles every six months. People are hungering for the Word of God, and He is leading many of them to AWR. Even more exciting, we have come to realize that this form of media—podcasting—is typically a young people’s media. This means that God has enabled us to reach an entirely new audience.

If you are seeking to reach language groups in your area, you can visit [awr.org](http://awr.org) and download a small, but colorful, invitation that says something like “I have discovered peace and happiness through programs such as these. I hope you and your family will experience the same joy we have experienced.” The hand-out lists the Web location for that particular language—Vietnamese, Hmong, or Spanish, for example. To

witness easily—you do not need to speak the language—just smile and hand them the colorful invitation written in their native tongue.

If you are seeking to reach the big cities of the world, radio is your key to success. Have you ever been stuck in traffic in Mumbai? How about Dhaka, Rio, Los Angeles, or New York? Ask yourself, What does almost every driver have in common? Answer: They are listening to their radios.

There are millions of people hungering to hear the spoken word. I met Mila, a Buddhist who had been a monk his entire life—I am guessing he was in his late 60s. He took me to his monastery and showed me the gold-covered walls and stunning vistas that shouted magnificence from every corner. He

ushered me inside during the time of the evening service, where dozens of monks blew their mighty horns in unison. My entire being experienced the vibration as the sound resonated throughout my chest cavity. The striking of tiny brass cymbals created a sweet sound in my ears while mingling with the powerful, but delicate, smell of incense.

But this former monk humbly shared with me, “I had no peace in my life.” Yes, it may be hard for some people to think of a monk without peace, but then he added, “I was tuning my radio to the BBC News and found your program. The speaker was talking about Jesus Christ and His amazing love. At that very moment, an unexplainable peace poured into

my life. It was not like anything I had ever experienced.”

Then Mila told me he could no longer be a monk. “I must follow Jesus Christ.” He then shared, “I save enough money each week so I can take the bus to church. It costs me most of my weekly earnings. People in my town say, ‘You only go to that church because they pay you.’ I tell them I go because I am in love with Jesus.”

I asked him, “If there was one thing in the whole world you could have, what it would be?”

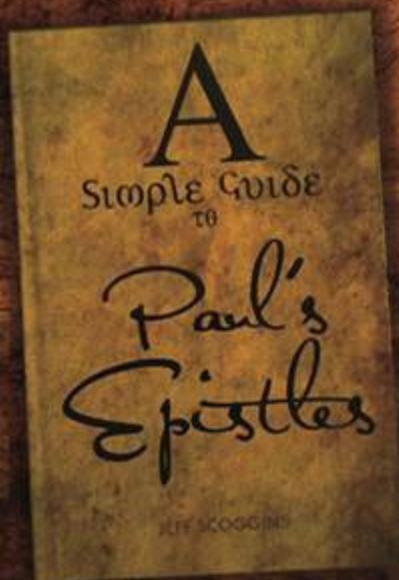
His response was rapid: “If I could just win one person to Jesus Christ!”

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**Shawn Boonstra** is speaker/director of Voice of Prophecy, Loveland, Colorado, United States.



# Noticing where God is already at work

I know we often talk about them, but the last couple of decades have taught me that there is no such thing as a cold interest. If someone shows an interest in what you have to say about Christ, it is because God has already been wrestling with him or her.

When Peter baptized 3,000 in a day, his audience was “devout men, from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5).<sup>1</sup> They were *already* spiritually inclined. The Ethiopian eunuch? Already studying the book of Isaiah before Philip gave him a Bible study. Saul of Tarsus? Already had an encounter with Christ before Ananias showed up. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert? Already a “devout man” who gave of his possessions.

## God always takes the initiative

Every time someone comes to Christ, you will discover that God was working with that person long before you came into the picture. God has already stirred the heart and made a person interested. Paul is pointed in his remarks: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

John Wesley would have spoken of this phenomenon in terms of *prevenient*

*grace*. He developed an idea that some would consider the middle ground in the Calvinist-Arminian debate. God retains His sovereignty, making the first move in the sinner’s heart. He wakes up the conscience, making a person spiritually receptive—but the individual retains the ability to choose. He or she can respond or refuse. Wesley’s idea fits the biblical data: God arouses interest in a sinner’s mind, and *then* He sends in the preacher or teacher.

## My personal testimony

This was also true for me. A direct path into the church was charted the moment the first Gulf War broke out in the early 1990s. For some reason, that event completely arrested my attention. Every evening, I was riveted to my television. I also heard the endless string of evangelical commentators speculating that the next development would likely be Russia joining the Arab nations and ushering in the battle of Armageddon.

It was irresistible, because when I was younger, I had read *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. Much of what Hal Lindsey was saying did not make sense. But then the war started years later; and for a moment I found myself wondering, *Was he right?* Some of what was happening in Iraq seemed to square with the predictions of the dispensationalist preachers: the world at war in the

Middle East, threats against the nation of Israel, the rumors that Saddam Hussein considered himself a modern-day Nebuchadnezzar with plans to rebuild the city of Babylon.

But where did my strong, sudden interest come from? I had read through the book of Revelation as a child, but my upbringing did not offer much in the way of prophetic study or interpretation. The churches I had attended treated the book of Revelation as a mysterious appendage to what would be considered the more serious portions of Scripture. We never heard a sermon from Revelation.

So, why was I suddenly obsessed with the idea that the world might be ending? Why was this so dramatically irresistible? It seems strange to write, but in a peculiar way, Hal Lindsey may have actually helped me into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In spite of his book’s obvious flaws, his writing proved to be a catalyst. He imparted a sense of urgency to his readers. He gave his audience a distinct sense that it is no longer *business as usual* on planet Earth, and in that regard, he was right.

In hindsight, I can easily identify many other factors that contributed to my arrival at the doors of a Seventh-day Adventist church. Some were subtle; others dramatic—even miraculous. An Unseen Hand carefully choreographed

my journey to the baptistry, all without violating my freedom of choice.

The pastors and evangelists were simply the final contact before the decision. God did absolutely everything else. I have met tens of thousands of new Adventists over the last couple of decades, and they all tell the same story: it happened over years, and God did it.

### Current interest in end-time events

I have discovered that few things arrest public attention like the Second Coming and other apocalyptic themes.

right now, at this very moment, God is busy in every community, waking people up.

The same is true of evangelistic advertising. People have pleaded with me that the time has come to move away from prophecy in public outreach. And naturally, there *is* room for other approaches. No two people are alike; God labors with people on numerous fronts, using many different subjects. But every time I advertise the book of Revelation, the hall is *full*. And it stays full for *weeks*.

Pay careful attention to the entertainment industry, where executives

### A relevant message for the 21st century

It is important to remember that the twenty-first century did not catch God by surprise. He did not fail to anticipate secularism or the postmodern generation; postmodernism, in fact, was already being shaped in the minds of philosophers at the very moment the Second Advent movement was taking root.

Experience has shown me that our message actually sells *better* to this current generation. I get better audiences now than I did 20 years ago, and that is because God has been busy

**Preaching the Second Coming works because there is a growing sense of unrest in the hearts of many people and a struggle to make sense of an increasingly confusing world.**

It flies in the face of conventional church board wisdom, which has been increasingly telling us that we need a new approach to the public, one without beasts or atom bombs. And every so often, I have experimented with trying to attract the public with other themes. But nothing has drawn a crowd like the end of the world.

For a number of years now, I have been putting a simple card in the mail, inviting people to take Bible studies. Some have raised their eyebrows when they see what I have printed on the card: *Interested in Bible Prophecy?* “Tell me you’re not going to put *that* in the mail! In this day and age? This is the postmodern, secular world!”

There is no way I could make a *truly* secular person interested in spiritual matters. But I also understand that

sink millions into marketing research. Look through available programming and note the large number of programs with an apocalyptic flavor. They air those programs because the audience *is* interested. They are not guided by evangelistic conviction but by the bottom line, and the Apocalypse sells—more than ever.

In 2014, nearly half of Americans (49 percent) believed that extreme weather patterns are a sign of the end. That is up from 44 percent in 2011. Of course, America is still quite religious, but even among the religiously unaffiliated, a full one-third believe that changing weather is a sign of an impending apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> Those people are our audience. They are already awake, trying to make sense of a quickly changing world.

building the audience. In fact, my very *best* audiences are almost always found in places that are traditionally difficult or notoriously non-Christian. There are thousands of people going through the same experience as I did many years ago. They might treat your claims with skepticism; they might actually be dismissive to your face. But that does not mean they are not interested. It might mean that you are not approaching them the right way, but it does not mean they are not interested. It is important to understand that you and I are not in the business of converting people; we’re in the business of finding people that God is converting.

People have asked why I continue to use the second chapter of Daniel as my opening night topic. The answer is simple: it *works*. I have never seen

anything arrest—and keep—attention like that statue. For the Christian (or the person with a Christian background), Nebuchadnezzar’s dream seems exciting because it provides powerful and clear affirmation that the Bible is reliable. For the non-Christian, it is like a bucket of cold water—stunning evidence that the Bible is no ordinary book and that somebody or something *must* be working behind the scenes. The second chapter of Daniel *demand*s attention and speaks powerfully to the unrest, the deep interest, the sense of eternity that God places in human hearts.

But approaching the public with the Second Coming also makes sense. I have opened public events with all sorts of topics over the years, but nothing has consistently captured and retained audiences like the return of Christ.

## Conclusion

If you know people personally, you can start your spiritual discussion with just about any topic, particularly if the topic is one they are most interested in. But when it comes to a large audience, the best approach is to follow the order of subjects, step by step, that God used to build this movement in the first place. He started us on the Second Coming and then worked His way through the message of Revelation 14.

Preaching the Second Coming works because there is a growing sense of unrest in the hearts of many people and a struggle to make sense of an increasingly confusing world. The topic of the Second Coming works because it answers the disquiet that God plants in the heart. It works because God designed it that way. Every time you preach it, He has already got an audience for it.

Every time I launch a public event, I now pray for one thing: *Lord, fill these seats with the people who have been hearing Your voice. Allow me to give them what You gave me when I came to one of these meetings. Let them recognize that the Voice in this Book is the same Voice that has been whispering to their hearts for years. Let them recognize this moment as theirs, the moment when they will finally come home.*

That is the kind of prayer God loves to answer because He has been waiting for us to notice where He is already at work. 

- 
- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the New King James Version.
  - 2 Emma Green, “Half of Americans Think Climate Change Is a Sign of the Apocalypse,” *The Atlantic*, November 22, 2014, [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/half-of-americans-think-climate-change-is-a-sign-of-the-apocalypse/383029/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/half-of-americans-think-climate-change-is-a-sign-of-the-apocalypse/383029/).

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# Adventist mission: *From awareness to engagement—Part 1*

## An invitation to focus and unity around every Seventh-day Adventist's reason for being

**M**ore than 140 years have passed since J. N. Andrews left for Europe as the first official Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionary. The decision by the General Conference Mission Board to sponsor “the ablest man in all our ranks,”<sup>1</sup> coupled with Andrews’s passion and disposition to face the life-threatening challenges and take a special prophetic message overseas, marked the consolidation of a deep revelation-inspired conviction and established a paradigm for the missionary ethos of the Adventist movement. As we celebrate the past and are challenged by the future, it is time to reflect on the reason for the Seventh-day Adventist presence in this world.

### After 100 years

In September 1974, *Ministry* published an article titled “Adventist Mission: After a Hundred Years” by Gottfried Oosterwal. His assessment of the first century of official Adventist mission noted some trends that

included (1) the membership growth (from 6,000 to 2.4 million); (2) the geographic expansion (from exclusively in the United States to 80 percent of the members living in other countries); (3) the ethnic diversity of missionaries (despite no exact numbers, it was supposed that non-American missionaries accounted for 60 percent of those coming from North America); (4) the immense and continuous growth of the Advent movement around the globe (nearly 5.7 percent per year); (5) the large number of institutions (hospitals and clinics, colleges and academies, elementary schools, publishing houses, orphanages, and old peoples’ homes, food factories, 70,000 employees); and (6) the high per capita giving (US\$161.31 per year).

What amazed him, however, was not just that information, as incredible as it was, but a more remarkable aspect of a century-old Adventist mission: its unity. “After a hundred years Seventh-day Adventist mission, universally,” the article says, “is still fervently proclaiming the same message that also moved

its pioneers and founders—namely, that Christ, the Redeemer of all men and the Lord of this world, has now entered the last phase of His mission, the judgment, to bring about the restoration of the kingdom of God in full glory.”<sup>2</sup>

### More than 40 years ago

In 1974, the most striking change in the nature of Adventist mission had been the shift from pioneer evangelism and the planting of churches to the specialized ministries of education, hospital work, technical assistance, and administration. Less than 2 percent of all missionaries were called to work on the ground as *grass-roots* missionaries. The large majority was part of the institutional ministry of service. In many places in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, that was the natural result of a growing church, which had then developed a support system through its institutions.

Besides the need for a continuous fostering of the true nature and mission of the church and a clear theology to guide that enterprise, two trends of the

mid-1970s were listed as limitations: “one is the all-too-exclusive emphasis of our overseas missionary movement as an intrachurch program, with its lack of evangelistic outreach to all the peoples on earth; the other is the concept that missionaries should return home as soon as there are indigenous workers and leaders prepared, able, or willing to take over their specialized ministries.”<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the challenges after 100 years of mission, the overall assessment was optimistic due to the fact that the church’s diversity had not affected its unity. The writings of Ellen G. White were cited as one of the causes because they had given “the church not only a

of 2013, the Adventist Church had more than 18 million members<sup>6</sup> (18,143,745), while an estimated 25 to 30 million men, women, and children attend weekly Adventist worship services in 76,364 churches and 68,845 companies around the world.<sup>7</sup>

Sabbath School membership continues a trend of being higher than actual church membership.<sup>8</sup> The last 40 years witnessed a membership increase of 659 percent<sup>9</sup> with an average annual growth of 4.76 percent.<sup>10</sup> In the last ten years, more than a million people have joined the church every year.<sup>11</sup> Adventism, it turns out, is the fastest-growing denomination in countries like Australia and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

percent of membership) contributed 56.5 percent of world tithe in 2010, the membership of the Global South has become a more significant world contributor in recent years. In 2010, the Global South contributed \$885 million (43.5 percent) of the world tithe.<sup>16</sup>

Another trend in the last few decades is an increase in the number of Adventist institutions. By 2012, the church had more than doubled the number of secondary and tertiary schools, reaching a record high of 2,128 institutions. The number of orphanages, nursing homes, and retirement centers also more than doubled since 1980.<sup>17</sup> When including food industries, hospitals, clinics, and

## While the church has rejoiced in its advance in many fronts, both internal and external challenges remain.

common authority but also a common principle of hermeneutics on almost every aspect of church life and theology.”<sup>4</sup> Common polity, theology, and brotherhood were other important elements of a dynamic that maintained the unity of the church. Despite the challenges, one thing certainly was evident in 1974—the missionary era had not ended.

### Today

A close look at the annual statistical reports of the General Conference and other recent information should help describe Adventist mission after 140 years. The Adventist work has been officially established in 208 of 232 countries (recognized by the United Nations). From the seven billion people who live in the world, only about 155 million live in countries without any Adventist established work.<sup>5</sup> At the end

A study of the reality of the church today will underline interesting trends. In the last four decades, there has been a clear shift in the world Adventist presence. Following the general trajectory of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South, the majority of Adventist members today live in what were once missionary-receiving areas: 6.6 million in Africa, 5.8 million in Latin America, and 3.4 million in Asia.<sup>13</sup>

Membership has also increased in the 10/40 Window.<sup>14</sup> Following the growing membership, tithes and offerings also increased in the last 40 years. In 2012, there was a record high total in tithe and offerings (\$3,276,600,259): 70.6 percent from tithes, 4.1 percent from world mission (including Sabbath School and other GC and ingathering funds), and 25.3 percent from intradivision and local church funds.<sup>15</sup> While the Global North (approximately 8.5

publishing houses, the total number of institutions hit a record setting 2,841 (besides 5,714 primary schools). The 14 media centers account for a new category created since the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> The same trend is identified in terms of administrative organizations. In 2012, there was a record high number of union conferences and missions and local conferences and missions. Consequently, the number of general and institutional employees more than doubled since 1980.<sup>19</sup>

A more missiological reading of the reports may give clues to the outreach approach the Adventist Church as a world denomination has employed.

1. The traditional group of literature evangelists seems to have been steady from 2008 to 2011 at around 7,000 (credentialed and licensed) around the world. In 2012, 13,543

- full-time literature evangelists were listed under publishing.
2. Media ministries also continue to be part of the outreach strategy following general tendencies of society. Compared to 1980, the church owned and operated only one-seventh of the radio stations in 2012, and more than doubled the television stations.
  3. The creation of Women's Ministries (in the 1990s) has helped local churches focus on the needs and interests of that particular segment of the population. In 2012, they reported 129,320 persons baptized as a direct result of ministry by women, 63,180 reclaimed members, and 100,933 non-SDA women attending their meetings.
  4. Children's Ministries are another example of segmented outreach. In 2012, 138,630 evangelistic outreach programs around the world were put on for children.
  5. The main evangelistic thrust of the church, however, remains at the local level by the laity involved in Bible schools. In 2012, 716,162 baptisms (compared to 193,783 in 1980) were reported as being a direct result of that outreach. Interestingly enough, Bible school enrollments have decreased. In 2012, only 545,374 enrollments (down from 700,777 in 1980) and an unusually high number in 2012 of lay campaigns/seminars with 1,198,968 (compared to 251,691 in 2010 and 52,877 in 1980).<sup>20</sup>

While the church has rejoiced in its advance on many fronts, both internal and external challenges remain. Internally, the issue of membership retention, which has received attention lately, has led the church to emphasize the study and implementation of intentional discipleship processes and encourage global programs of

auditing. In 2013, the membership increase (262,254) was lower than the number of those who left the church (the total of persons who joined the church was 1,091,222).<sup>21</sup> Some have pointed out that the process of institutionalization has not been efficiently connected with the purpose of the church they serve, instead making it even harder to fulfill the Adventist mission. Others have been concerned about the laity commitment to mission. Even though mission offerings hit a record high \$85,254,154 in 2012, it has reached a record low percentage of total tithes and offerings—2.6 percent in 2011 (compared to 8.67 percent in 1980<sup>22</sup>). The number of lay Bible studies has also decreased: 6,759,370 in 2012 (down from 9,184,988 in 1980). Finally, the number of missionaries has fluctuated: around 1,700 new missionary arrivals (including interdivision employees [IDEs], Adventist Volunteer Service, and Global Mission pioneers).



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In 2012, there were 2,260 missionaries serving (IDEs and Global Mission pioneers).<sup>23</sup>

That reality seems to have been reflected in the lower average annual growth in the last ten years (3.3 percent). Traditional Adventist areas have plateaued,<sup>24</sup> including southern Germany, Poland, Japan, Hungary, Switzerland, New Zealand, Austria,

raised in the two regions: while the Global North has been actively discussing women's ordination, the Global South seems to have dismissed that in preference to staying focused on mission. Analyzing this current panorama, David Trim, director of the Office of Adventist Archives, Statistics, and Research, commented that "we are excited at this growth at a time when,

will the church accomplish the almost impossible task of reaching the world with the gospel? What more can be done (and in better ways) towards this overarching goal? How could the church channel its enormous "mission energy," especially with the youth? How can the church provide mission opportunities for people who want to serve in the mission field? Can new structures and



Portugal, and Australia. Three unions in North America are also part of this list: Pacific, Lake, and North Pacific Unions.

However, the 15 fastest-declining unions are in Euro-Asia, Trans-European, and Inter-European Divisions.<sup>25</sup> As G. T. Ng points out, "Membership [has] increased in tandem with baptisms, rather than merely reflecting demographic factors. In 1960, the baptisms in the Global North represented 31 percent and in the Global South, 69 percent of world baptisms, respectively. By 2010, baptisms in the Global South increased three fold to an extraordinary 96.2 percent of all baptisms that year."<sup>26</sup>

These dissonant realities are also confirmed by the different concerns

globally, many religious groups are no longer growing. We thank God that, in the face of challenges such as political oppression, religious persecution, and increasing materialism and secularism, this movement, which emphasizes hope and wholeness, is continuing to grow."<sup>27</sup>

### Tomorrow

Opportunities and challenges during the last 40 years, and especially in the beginning of the twenty-first century, have led the Adventist mission to learn, emphasize, and develop specific missionary dynamics. As the Adventist Church faces the future, some old questions remain and some new ones also demand an answer: How

platforms for mission be created so that more missionaries will serve in unentered areas (10/40 Window, etc.)? How will the church reach the urban masses and the urban poor, and not neglect the urban rich? Can we create more service opportunities on the continuum between IDEs and Adventist Volunteer Service/tentmakers? We will address these important questions in part 2 of "Adventist Mission: From Awareness to Engagement" in the September 2015 issue of *Ministry*. 

1 Ellen G. White, Letter 2a, 1878 (To "Dear Brethren in Switzerland," August 29, 1878., *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, 436.

2 Gottfried Oosterwal, "Adventist Mission: After a Hundred Years," *Ministry*, September 1974, 24–27.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

- 5 "Established work" is officially defined as a country or area of the world where one or more of the following criteria have been met: (1) an organized church meets regularly; (2) a mission station, health care facility, or school is functioning regularly; or (3) a regular full-time denominational employee is based in the country or area carrying on outreach or soul-winning activities through such units as a Sabbath School, an organized company, or a language school.
- 6 Mark A. Kellner, "Adventist Church Membership Passes 18 Million Member Mark" *Adventist Review*, December 17, 2013, [www.adventistreview.org/church-news/adventist-church-membership-passes-18-million-member-mark](http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/adventist-church-membership-passes-18-million-member-mark).
- 7 *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 27. [documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2014.pdf](http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2014.pdf).
- 8 In 2011, it represented 107 percent compared to 119.07 percent in 1980. *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, revised August 11, 2014, 7, [documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2014.pdf](http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2014.pdf).
- 9 There were 2,390,124 members at the end of 1973. Numbers used to calculate percentages are from *111th Annual Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventists 1973* <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR1973.pdf> and *2014 Annual Statistical Report*.
- 10 The average annual growth rate was based on the table found at [www.adventiststatistics.org/stats\\_y\\_ga.asp?fieldID=G10001&view=y\\_ga&StartYear=1973&EndYear=2013&submit=Build+Table](http://www.adventiststatistics.org/stats_y_ga.asp?fieldID=G10001&view=y_ga&StartYear=1973&EndYear=2013&submit=Build+Table).
- 11 Andrew McChesney, "Church Membership Reaches 18.1 Million," *Adventist Review*, October 12, 2014, [www.adventistreview.org/church-news/church-membership-reaches-18.1-million](http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/church-membership-reaches-18.1-million).
- 12 Edwin Manuel Garcia, "Membership Nears 18 Million, Secretary Highlights Regions of Growth, Decline," October 13, 2013, *Adventist News Network*, [news.adventist.org/all-news/news/go/2013-10-13/membership-nears-18-million-secretary-highlights-regions-of-growth-decline/](http://news.adventist.org/all-news/news/go/2013-10-13/membership-nears-18-million-secretary-highlights-regions-of-growth-decline/); G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Adventists' Back-to-Basics Faith Is Fastest Growing U.S. Church," *USA Today*, March 17, 2011, [usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-03-18-adventists\\_17\\_st\\_n.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-03-18-adventists_17_st_n.htm).
- 13 Garcia, "Membership Nears 18 Million."
- 14 Fewer than two million members lived in the Global North at the end of 2011. Middle East numbers have been audited. Membership in the 10/40 Window increased from 250,000 in 1992 to over 2.5 million in 2012, but the proportion to the population has only marginally increased, thus, not following what has happened in other parts of the world. *2013 Annual Statistical Report*, 2, 4, and *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 80.
- 15 In 1980, for example, tithes represented 62.1 percent, world mission 11.2 percent, and intradivision and local church 27.1 percent of total tithes and offerings. *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 4. An important observation is that more of what members are giving goes to tithe rather than world mission.
- 16 Compared to 1960, this was an increase of 1,171 percent in real terms, as opposed to the 131 percent for the Global North. G. T. Ng, "Seventh-day Adventist Mission: The Shifting Landscape," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 43.
- 17 Summary of Institutions (table 7), *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 4.
- 18 Secondary and tertiary schools: more than doubled since 1980, 882 schools; orphanages: from 80 in 1980 to 170 in 2012; total institutions: from 1,451 in 1980. *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 4-6.
- 19 Union Conferences and Missions: 124, a 55 percent increase from 80 in 1980; local conferences and missions: from 377 in 1980 to 601 in 2012; and, general and institutional employees: in 2012 there were 255,982 active employees compared to 85,839 in 1980. *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 4, 5.
- 20 Literature evangelists were 7,073 in 1980 and 5,315 in 2012. In 2012, radio stations were 455, down from 3,328 in 1980, while TV stations owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church amount to 918 in 2012, up from 343 in 1980 with a peak in 2004 of 2,252. In terms of Children's Ministries, vacation Bible School attendance by Adventist families and non-Adventist families peaked in 2005. *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 5-7.
- 21 *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 27.
- 22 *2014 Annual Statistical Report*, 88, \$34,564,983 (mission offering) divided by \$398,880,407 (tithe).
- 23 IDE appointees are down from 1,497 in 1980 to 92 in 2012. Active IDEs are down from 1,388 in 1980 to 839 in 2012. There has been an overall downward trend since the 1980s. David Trim, *2012 Annual Council Report*, figure 4, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Other/ACRep2012.pdf>
- 24 "Plateaued" is defined as having membership growth rate of less than 12 percent in a ten-year period.
- 25 The reason given is the population loss in the Eastern European nations that have been set back by a major economic crisis and high unemployment in and around the former Soviet Union.
- 26 G. T. Ng, "Seventh-day Adventist Mission," 38.
- 27 Kellner, "Adventist Church Membership."

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## Adventist Evangelistic Preaching

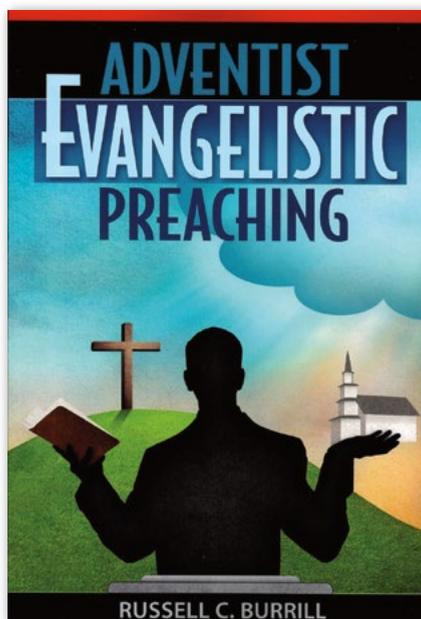
by Russell C. Burrill, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2014.

Whether you are a seasoned Adventist evangelist or are preparing for your first evangelistic meeting, *Adventist Evangelistic Preaching* will be a valuable resource for you.

Adventist evangelist and retired seminary professor Russell Burrill begins his book with a review of preaching in the New Testament. He concludes with saying that all Adventist preachers must be evangelistic preachers; evangelistic preaching should be our highest priority; Jesus, our Redeemer, must be the center of our evangelistic preaching; and Adventist evangelistic preaching should include a focus on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

The chapters that follow provide some practical instruction for effective evangelism. For example, how do you design the order of presentations for your evangelistic series? Burrill maintains that “one of the unique characteristics of the Adventist message is that all parts fit together in a harmonious whole” (45).

The author lists 26 subjects that he believes should be presented before a person joins the Seventh-day Adventist Church (46, 47). While we might debate what subjects should be included on this list, we would all agree that the order of presentations is vitally important. Burrill shares his own recommended order at the conclusion of the chapter “Developing a Logical Progression of Subjects” (70, 71). He maintains, “Adventism is a very logical religion. Our theological system has been well thought through. Each part fits with the other parts. Adventism is also very biblical, and this biblical,



logical presentation is what is unique about our evangelistic messages” (103).

When developing “the order of evangelistic presentations, the author encourages the evangelistic preacher to follow the Three Cs of evangelism: Christ, Commandments, and Church. Do not try to convince people to keep the commandments or join the church before you have introduced them to a life-changing relationship with Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.

Burrill reminds us of Ellen G. White’s quote regarding our public proclamation: “Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel’s message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center

of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out. It is at the cross of Christ that mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kill each other. The sinner must be led to look to Calvary; with the simple faith of a little child he must trust in the merits of the Saviour, accepting His righteousness, believing in His mercy.”\*

Burrill also gives practical instruction regarding the preparation and delivery of evangelistic sermons. Every evangelistic sermon, whether thematic or expository, needs to present a single idea—what Burrill calls “a theme sentence.” That single dominant idea should be developed in a logical way.

Of particular interest is the author’s chapter titled “Appeals for Decisions.” He describes three types of appeals: general appeals, specific appeals, and altar calls.

The author notes that “appeals may be frightening and may make an evangelist nervous because the results are out of the evangelist’s control. But the people who attend the series are in the hands of God, and the Holy Spirit is working with them. . . . We must trust Him to do as He has promised, and we must prepare ourselves to welcome those in whom the Holy Spirit is working as we appeal to people in God’s powerful name” (117, 118).

The back cover of *Adventist Evangelistic Preaching* includes this bold assertion: “This book belongs on your bookshelf.” I wholeheartedly agree.

—Reviewed by Derek J. Morris, DMin, editor, Ministry.

\* Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 156, 157.



## **The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief, second edition**

by Bryan W. Ball, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014.

**T**he publishers are to be congratulated for issuing a second edition of this significant book. This book contains a reflective foreword and a conclusion that were not in the original.

The primary relevance of the book will have a strong appeal for Seventh-day Adventists. Criticisms of our beliefs tend to question whether our faith is biblical, evangelical, or Protestant. Dr. Ball demolishes all criticisms of this nature. He demonstrates the indisputable connection of Seventh-day Adventist faith with scripture and the evangelical beliefs of the Puritans.

However, the book has a more extensive interest for historians and sociologists of religion and is in no way a sectarian polemic. The author writes from a wide knowledge of the religious foment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This approach strengthens his claim that the theology and religious faith of Seventh-day Adventists is neither novel nor cultic. He shows beyond controversy that the beliefs of our church are rooted in Scripture and in orthodox Protestant theology.

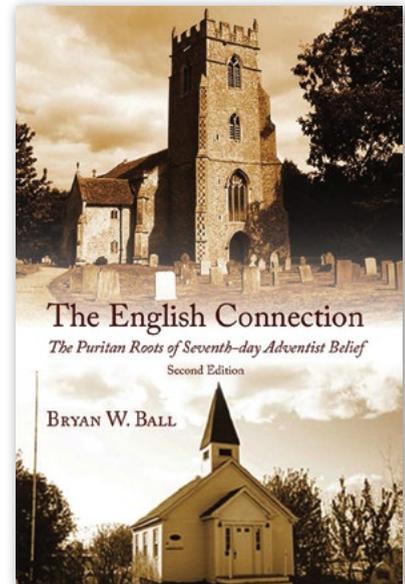
In 12 chapters, he selects the cardinal Christian doctrines. He juxtaposes, as an introduction to each chapter, clear evidence from Seventh-day Adventist statements of faith with similar ones from the writings of Puritan theologians. The unity and harmony of the beliefs are incontrovertible. Some of the chapter headings will give an indication of the topics discussed: “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” “The Incomparable Jesus,” “The Lord Our Righteousness,” “The Seventh-Day Sabbath,” “A High Priest in Heaven,” “The Return of Christ,” “That

Almanac of Prophecy.” All of these are core Christian and Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

I do not criticize this book to observe that it is not solely in Puritan theology that our roots are to be located. The theology of the radical Reformers of the sixteenth century also contributes to our beliefs. In his book *The Reformation and the Advent Movement*, the late W. L. Emmerson shows how the majority of our doctrines are also related to Anabaptism. However, the theology of the Anabaptists was not unified in any one wing of the movement. The seventh-day Sabbath, justification by faith, the law of God, conditional immortality, and footwashing were held by different sections of the movement and rejected by others. There was no overall unanimity. Emmerson saw the various doctrines of the groups coming together and being unified in the Advent people, or, as he expressed it, God’s last-day ecumenical movement.

The value of Ball’s book lies not alone in the connections he makes with Puritanism but in the depth of his treatment of the doctrines discussed. The richness of the theology and its evangelical emphasis is heartening. The book contains a compendium of Christian theology with a clear writing style. The content is biblical and evangelical. Theologians, pastors, and lay members will find the contents a stimulus to faith and devotion.

Few would deny that the Protestant pulpit has fallen on hard times. The same is true, to a significant degree, of the Seventh-day Adventist pulpit. The only corrective for this would be a return to



the preaching of the great themes of salvation. Neglect of these themes and a failure to preach them leads inevitably to formalism, legalism, extremism, and a loss of mission.

A careful reading of the introduction to *The English Connection* is essential. There the reader will come to understand the value and necessity of grasping the role and purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its self-understanding.

I find this a beautifully written book, free from prejudice and with a generous spirit, and the format is attractive. This book can be read with profit by anyone, but it will have strong appeal to new members who may not be as familiar as they could be with the origins of our church and its roots in Scripture and Protestant theology. Bryan Ball has done his own church, and the wider Christian fellowship, a service in bringing before us the truths that center and hold their meaning in the incomparable Christ.

—Reviewed by Patrick Boyle, MA, a retired pastor living in Watford, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. 

## ► 53 churches destroyed by Cyclone Pam

**Port Vila, Vanuatu**—The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Vanuatu is trying to remain positive as they look to rebuild after Cyclone Pam, but the situation is dire. Fifty-three churches have been “lost” according to latest reports, six schools have had multiple buildings destroyed, and 20 pastors and 100 teachers have lost their homes, not to mention all the other church members.

The rebuilding may take years because many church members have lost homes and income sources to the cyclone. Tithes and offerings will be significantly reduced for some time, because 80 to 90 percent of church members are subsistence farmers who operate on a cash crop economy. For many, crops and livelihoods are wiped out and will take a long time to recover.

“Yes, the devastation to our church properties is great. Many churches, both permanent, semi-permanent, and temporary, have all been destroyed—some partly, some with complete destruction,” said Vanuatu Mission president **Nos Terry Mailalong**. “That is a big blow to the members, for most of these people in the rural areas would not have any source of income because their source of income is completely destroyed.”

While the government may provide support to rebuild the schools, and agencies like the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) are working to keep people fed, sheltered, and healthy, there is no money to rebuild the churches that have been destroyed. Mailalong has called for groups who want to do “fly ’n’ builds” to come and help.

“The biggest need is . . . for the church in the South Pacific to stand together to rebuild the loss to the church. Our biggest need is funds to provide building materials, fly and build



Photos: Vanuatu Mission

teams willing to go and reconstruct the lost church infrastructure. This is probably one of the disasters in the Pacific Islands where the church has incurred the biggest loss ever.”

“[In the short term] for most of our churches that are destroyed [we need] tarpaulins that can be used to provide temporary shelter for worship, and even to house some of our pastors/ministers who have lost their homes,” said Mailalong. “About twenty of my ministers/pastors have lost their homes, personal belongings, and books. So I am appealing for anyone

who has spare books that you think can be useful to my pastors out here in the islands, and they will be very much appreciated.”

Pastors through the ministerial associations of the South Pacific Division and Australian Union Conference are helping provide Bibles and books for those pastors who have lost their resources, and Adventist schools throughout Australia are hoping to do the same for teachers and schools.

Last year, Vanuatu experienced its highest number of baptisms ever, and



the churches swelled to overflowing after the Port Vila Evangelism 2014 campaign. The challenges of nurturing and finding space in churches for all these members has been heightened by Cyclone Pam's destruction.

A special fund, held in trust by the South Pacific Division (SPD), is being

set up to help with the reconstruction of Adventist churches and schools that have been damaged. If you live in SPD, donations can be made through the Adventist eGIVING Web site, under the option labeled "Vanuatu Cyclone Pam Assistance." The Hope Channel has also established a special fund

to assist in this rebuilding effort. Visit [www.HopeChannel.com/donations/vanuatu-appeal](http://www.HopeChannel.com/donations/vanuatu-appeal) to give.

To donate to ADRA's Vanuatu Disaster fund, visit [www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org). Money donated to this fund will be used to support ADRA projects throughout Vanuatu. *[Adapted from Jarrod Stackelroth/Record.net.au]*

## ▶ Adventist Church president holds first meeting with United Nations chief

**New York City, New York, United States**—United Nations Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon** expressed concerns about growing religious intolerance worldwide and invited the Adventist Church to work with the United Nations (UN) in helping people during a private meeting with Seventh-day Adventist Church leader **Ted N. C. Wilson** on April 6, 2015.

Wilson, the first Adventist Church president to meet with a UN chief, noted that the church has long supported religious liberty and said it was willing to team up on initiatives that followed Christ's ministry of helping people physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. "Seventh-day Adventists should be ready to witness for the Lord anywhere we go and to testify of God's blessing in our lives and what we can do in His name," he said. "The world is waiting for this type of heaven-inspired testimony with clear answers to today's problems."

Ban spoke about global issues such as poverty and a lack of

education before voicing his concern about religious intolerance reaching unprecedented levels globally. Ban underscored his belief that people should cultivate a respect for all,



UN chief Ban Ki-moon with Adventist Church leader Ted N. C. Wilson [photo: Evan Schneider / UN]

including those of other faiths. He indicated that he appreciated the Adventist Church's work in promoting religious liberty as well as education,

health, and humanitarian aid through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). ADRA has worked with the UN in assisting refugees in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Wilson told about various church initiatives that correspond with the UN's mission to help people. "We had an excellent meeting with the secretary-general and some of his staff, sharing with them about the Adventist Church's activities," Wilson said. "We focused on certain things that the Adventist Church can help with, such as religious liberty, freedom of conscience, ethical and spiritual values, respect for human dignity, family guidance, encouragement for young people, and basic human necessities like pure water and fundamental education." Wilson added, "Only if we are led by the Lord can we be truly effective in our outreach to the world, preparing them for Christ's soon coming by carrying out the practical ministry of Jesus through the Holy Spirit's power." *[Adapted from Andrew McChesney/Adventist Review]*

**Peter N. Landless, MB, Bch, MMed, FCP (SA), FACC, FASNC**, serves as director of Health Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



## Fit to serve?

A major reason for the gift of the health message to the Seventh-day Adventist Church was to fit its members and leadership for service to others. When one considers the poor state of James White's health at the time of the Otsego vision in 1863, one understands that there were changes that needed to be made then that we would do well to make in our lives now, changes that might extend our usefulness and longevity in service.

One of the most common excuses offered by those encouraged to exercise, rest, and take time for recreation is "I don't have the time!" Time taken in caring for our physical and mental health is time well spent. We do not have time *not* to care for our health. Based on our understanding of the balanced development of body, mind, and spirit, it is essential for us to include health reform in our daily journey. This is a key characteristic of the Adventist health message and advantage: addressing the needs of the whole being.

"Since the mind and the soul find expression through the body, both mental and spiritual vigor are in great degree dependent upon physical strength and activity; whatever promotes physical health, promotes the development of a strong mind and a well-balanced character. Without health no one can as distinctly understand or as completely fulfill his obligations to himself, to his fellow beings, or to his Creator. Therefore the health should be as faithfully guarded as the character."<sup>1</sup>

Ellen White counseled, "As we near the close of time, we must rise higher and still higher upon the question of health reform and Christian temperance, presenting it in a more positive and decided manner."<sup>2</sup> This advice is even more pertinent than ever as we see the burgeoning amount of illness brought on by the noncommunicable diseases, which are mainly diseases of lifestyle. The world faces unprecedented challenges both in the developed countries and the emerging economies by the

issues of obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, tobacco-related diseases, and coronary artery disease. We are called not only to practice temperance in our lives but also to share it with a dying world. We are familiar with the tremendous mission that lies ahead of God's church in proclaiming the three angels' messages. We intellectually assent to the fact that the health message composes part of the great warning of Revelation 14:6–12 and is also a means of meeting the needs of the community, as well as preparing for the harvest. Do we believe it enough to live it?

Right now we are seeing a resurgence of interest among many churches in meeting the health needs of the community. In 2006, a church in Tennessee opened an exercise facility and had 200 members at the time. That same church now runs a health center and has grown to 3,000 members!<sup>3</sup> In 2011, Rick Warren challenged his church when he stated that he had gained three pounds each year over the 30 years he had been pastoring his church and was going to try and lose this weight. He asked whether anyone would want to join him in this venture, which became known as the Daniel Plan. Just two years later, Saddleback congregants had lost more than 270,000 pounds!<sup>4</sup> These are just two examples of much that is happening in the world of health reform. What would happen if each one of us were to take hold of the acknowledged Adventist advantage, which has been publicized in *Time* magazine, *National Geographic*, CNN, *USA Today*, and various other media, and live it, model it, and share it?

We should be careful not to produce another measure to "assess" the spirituality of others by measuring the size of the jeans, the intensity of the workout, the strictness of the diet, or even one's energy level. We need to come to the point where we understand that allowing Christ to take control of every aspect of our lives as leaders and as a people is a matter of the heart.

In his book *Dramatic Prophecies of Ellen White*, Herbert Douglass shares the following challenge, including an excerpt from *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, page 35: "Heart reform comes before health reform. Ellen White kept her priorities straight—preserving health is primarily a spiritual challenge: 'Men will never be truly temperate until the grace of Christ is an abiding principle in the heart. . . . No mere restriction of your diet will cure your diseased appetite. . . . What Christ works within, will be worked out under the dictation of the converted intellect. The plan of beginning outside and trying to work inward has always failed, and always will fail.'"<sup>5</sup> In the same vein, the challenging words of Hudson Taylor echo in my own heart: "Christ is either Lord of all, or is not Lord at all! . . . If He is Lord, let us treat him as such."<sup>6</sup> He takes control of every aspect of my life. "Men will never be truly temperate until the grace of God is an abiding principle in the heart."<sup>7</sup>

As a church, we have been blessed with a privileged revelation of how to live life to the full. To care for the body temple has become a sacred duty, to then spend and be spent in service to a broken world crying out for a grace-filled revelation of Jesus Christ through His followers and the truths entrusted to them all these years.

Will you answer that call and honor Him in body, mind, and spirit and thus "preserve every power in the best condition for highest service to God and man"?<sup>8</sup> 

1 Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1954), 360, 361.

2 Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1957), 467.

3 Leslie Leyland Fields, "The Fitness-Driven Church," *Christianity Today*, June 2013, 38. Available at [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/fitness-driven-church.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/fitness-driven-church.html).

4 Ibid.

5 Herbert Edgar Douglass, *Dramatic Prophecies of Ellen White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2007).

6 Roger Steer, *Hudson Taylor: Lessons in Discipleship* (OMF International, 1995), 34.

7 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, 64.

8 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 319.

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