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OCTOBER 2015

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

Relating to  
**imperfect  
leaders:**  
Lessons from  
**David  
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Jonas Arrais, Robert Costa,  
Willie E. Hucks II, Anthony Kent,  
Derek Morris, Janet Page

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Cathy Payne  
888-771-0738, +1 301-680-6508  
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*“During this end-time period full of spiritual and leadership challenges, it is of paramount importance for us to remain people of the Word—especially as we wait for the imminent return of Jesus.”*

### Reflections on the special double issue

Thank you for the outstanding article by Marcelo Dias and Wagner Kuhn, “Adventist Mission: From Awareness to Engagement—Part 1 of 2” (July/August 2015). The unfinished task of world evangelization is our greatest calling; but my impression is that some Adventists don’t recognize the essential place world mission has in accomplishing it. When William Carey spoke of the church’s responsibility to reach the unsaved world, an elder rebuked him, saying that God would reach the

heathen by Himself “without consulting you or me.” Similar opinions seem to be expressed nowadays: “The whole world has already been reached by Adventist radio,” or “God will give everyone a dream in which they hear the call,” or “We don’t need to send missionaries anymore; instead, we should focus on our own home country.”

The fact is that God uses people to reach people, and the article reminds us there are 155 million who have no opportunity to hear the gospel from an Adventist because none of our people live in those places. Radio and television is a great evangelistic tool, but it

has to be combined with the personal touch of follow up. Nebuchadnezzar had a wonderful dream, but it wasn’t until God used Daniel to explain it to him that it became spiritually effective in his life. Are 155 million not enough to justify sending more missionaries?

Sunday laws, ecumenical movements, earthquakes, wars, and rumors of wars are all very interesting to us as fulfillments of last day prophecy; but let us not make the fatal mistake of ignoring the most important sign of the end, the challenge and progress of reaching the world for Christ.

I am looking forward to part 2!

—Barry Kimbrough, pastor, Morgantown/Kingwood, West Virginia, SDA churches

Thank you for the July/August issue of *Ministry*. It is full of insights for ministers, our church members, and others who read it.

During this end-time period full of spiritual and leadership challenges, it is of paramount importance for us to remain people of the Word—especially as we wait for the imminent return of Jesus.

—Niyonagize Jean Baptiste, pastor, Rwanda

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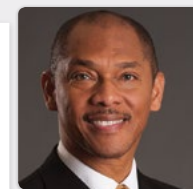
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# From disappointment to delight

**T**hey had had such high hopes, convinced that a new era had arrived. They had thought that what they had anticipated for the last several years was going to be fulfilled. Indeed, the signs were everywhere, but their hopes had ended in bitter disappointment. How could they move forward into an unknown future?

Then the two men walking on the road to Emmaus recognized that Jesus had been in their presence all along. And His presence changed everything. They traveled the proverbial road from disappointment to delight. How did they do this? Our journey through their story can be found in Luke 24.

## They shared their thoughts with each other (vv. 14–16)

I know very few people who don't have at least one person in whom they can confide their hopes, dreams, secrets, joys, pain, and fears. Human nature demands that we not keep matters of importance only to ourselves.

The two travelers spoke of their hopes that the Messiah would soon come and their dismay that their dreams remained unfulfilled. Little did they realize how literally near He was to them; that He had already come. Ellen G. White says of them, "they were so absorbed in their gloom and disappointment that they did not observe him closely."<sup>1</sup> They allowed their feelings about recent events to eclipse their ability to see that Jesus

was near them, waiting to share eternal insights with and through them.

## They expressed their feelings to Jesus (vv. 18–24)

Although these two men shared their thoughts with each other, they didn't experience the breakthrough they needed until they expressed their feelings to Jesus. They were heartbroken; but Someone was about to turn their disappointment into delight.

## They listened to what Jesus had to say (vv. 25–27)

Jesus was waiting to speak words of comfort to their troubled souls. No sooner did they open their hearts to Jesus than He revealed life-changing light to them. More than that, what Jesus had to say was squarely focused on His mission. The work of God didn't start just three-and-a-half years earlier, and it certainly didn't find an inglorious ending 48 hours prior. His mission was clearly to be seen in every lamb sacrificed on altars, and had also been ultimately witnessed as the Lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross.

## They welcomed Jesus even when they didn't discern Him (vv. 29–31)

The men, still not knowing who Jesus was, invited Him to rest with them and share a meal. He, who thrilled their hearts with what He said earlier, now thrilled their souls as He took the bread, broke it, and gave

it to them. At that time, their eyes were opened, and they realized that the One who just blessed the bread was the One who had always been blessing them with the hope that they would one day see prophecy fulfilled.


## They preached the message Jesus gave them (vv. 33–35)

Without regard for hunger, weariness, personal safety, or a host of other physical or mental factors,<sup>2</sup> these two men proclaimed "a message of glad tidings upon which the hopes of the human family for time and for eternity depend."<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

In ministry, we face all types of disappointments—far too many to enumerate at present. When we encounter them, it seems as if the end of the world has come, and we have no hope for the future.

However, the question we must ask ourselves is, "How does one move from disappointment to delight?"

The two men of Luke 24:13–35 traveled on something more than the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They traveled the road from disappointment to delight—a delight rooted in Christ's presence with them and the burning desire to share the good news of the Savior with others. May we all do the same! 

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 801.

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

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Glenn Townend, MA, serves as president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia.



# Relating to imperfect leaders:

## *Lessons from David and Saul*

**A**s a pastor, have you had church leaders interfere in your church affairs without your knowledge? Have you had leaders, in deference to powerful or rich members, fail to stand by you in critical moments when you need their assistance? Have you worked under leaders who promised much and delivered little? Have you been handed down unreasonable decisions from the “powers above” that affect you in a negative way? Have you served alongside fellow leaders who, without much thought, make unwise decisions that hurt others?

In my early years of ministry, I would not only listen but also contribute when pastors discussed perceived weaknesses of conference administration. But this perspective changed when I was first asked to serve on the Conference Executive Committee. I noticed and appreciated that decisions were made with much prayer. I also noticed that decisions appearing to be simple and easy were often complex, involving material that could not be shared widely. Leadership is more complicated than I thought!

Pointing out weaknesses is easy. We all have them, and they are usually obvious. In contrast, encouraging people to do their best and being supportive of others takes more effort and courage.

### Example of David and Saul

The story of how David related to Saul has helped me much in relating to church leadership, particularly when it seemed that leaders were imperfect, unfair, and perhaps revengeful and autocratic.

David, the giant-killing, harp-playing shepherd of Bethlehem, was under constant threat. King Saul, who had made David an army general because he slew Goliath, became jealous of David’s rising popularity. After a particular victory in a battle, when the triumphant David marched through the city, the women of Israel welcomed him with a rousing song: “‘Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!’” (1 Sam. 18:6–9, NLT). Saul did not take kindly to the comparison, and jealousy overtook him. This attitude of distrust and envy became a lifelong obsession with Saul in his relationship to David. Saul wanted David dead. Twice, Saul threw a spear at David while David was trying to soothe Saul with harp music (1 Sam. 18:10, 11; 19:9, 10). Saul even sent men at night to slay David in his home (1 Sam. 19:11–18). The danger to David’s life was so real that he had to flee Saul’s presence, sharing the sad sequence of events with his best friend, Jonathan, Saul’s eldest son. Even this did not stop Saul from pursuing David (1 Sam. 24:14).

Once, when Saul was chasing David in the desert, Saul went into a cave

to relieve himself (1 Sam. 24:1–22). Unbeknownst to Saul, David and his men were hiding farther back in the cave. David’s men urged David to make the most of the opportunity while Saul was defenseless. David’s acts show his respect for God’s chosen leadership. He snuck up on Saul without being noticed. But instead of using his sword to get rid of his nemesis, he just cut a part of Saul’s garment and retreated quickly, unnoticed, back into the cave.

Later, David revealed himself. From a distance he held up the piece of Saul’s garment with the unspoken challenge, “Lost something?” Saul was highly embarrassed and repentant. David was also repentant, stating clearly that he was wrong to cut off the hem of the king’s garment and that he should not have even thought of killing the Lord’s anointed and appointed ruler. “‘Some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, “I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’s anointed.”’” (1 Sam. 24:10).<sup>1</sup> An amazing statement! It was not as if David had not killed anyone before, for He was a warrior with the blood of many on his hands and continued to be a warrior all his life. Imagine the emotional pressure of running for one’s life every day just to stay alive and not retaliating. How could one be that way?

David had another opportunity to kill Saul one night when Saul, his 3,000 soldiers, and an elite bodyguard were in

deep sleep (1 Sam. 26:1–25). Saul again repented. David commanded his soldier Abishai, “‘Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?’ ” (1 Sam. 26:9). David would not kill the LORD’s anointed. Publicly David was respectful and loyal to a God-ordained king who had a severe emotional obsession against David.

But how did David handle this emotional strain?

### David’s coping strategy

During the time David was running from King Saul, he wrote a number of psalms. In these psalms we find his coping strategy. David was honest with God. He did not like being on the top of Saul’s most wanted list and being pursued all over Palestine. David did not want to live the life of a nomadic vagabond, dragging his wives, children, and friends all over the land. Being enemy number one in Israel hurt, and hurt badly. David did want his enemies

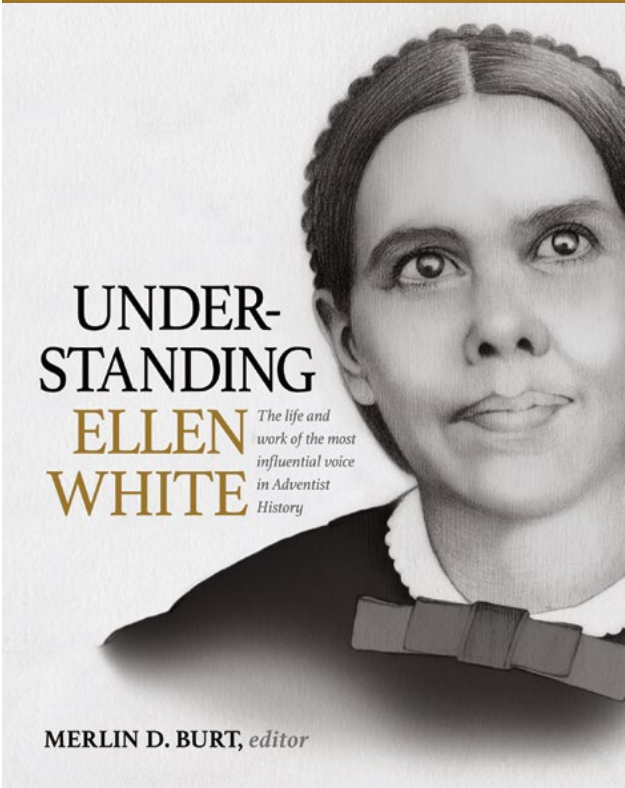
destroyed. He wanted a normal life. He wanted the situation to change; having Saul and his supporters dead would be nice. But David chose to respect God’s anointed leadership and found his strategy to cope with his emotional distress and dangers in a different, more powerful way. In many of his psalms, David made his coping strategy very clear.<sup>2</sup>

Let us begin with Psalm 59. David composed this in the context of Saul sending soldiers to watch David’s house so they could kill him (1 Sam. 19:11–16). He let the matter rest with God: “For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their pride. For the cursing and lies that they utter, consume them in wrath; consume them till they are no more” (Ps. 59:12, 13).

Consider Psalm 142, written when hiding in a cave, where David seemed to have found refuge (1 Sam. 22:1, 2). Look at how the psalmist placed his agony in the context of his hope. “With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my

voice I plead for mercy to the LORD, I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him. When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. I cry to you LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.’ Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!” (Ps. 142:1–7).

Or consider David’s contemplation in Psalm 52 after hearing that Doeg the Edomite informed Saul that Ahimelech the priest gave David bread and Goliath’s sword while David was on the run from Saul (1 Sam. 21) and that Doeg had killed 85 priests, all relatives of Ahimelech (1 Sam. 22:9–23). David lets judgment on this matter rest with God: “But God will break you down








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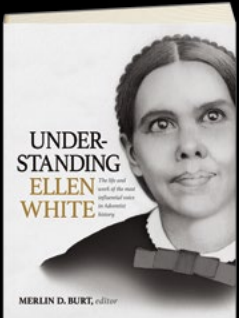
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forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living” (Ps. 52:5). Beyond that, David chose to leave himself with God: “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. . . . I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly” (vv. 8, 9).

Similar themes of leaving everything to God and trusting in Him in moments of adversity appear elsewhere. “O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men

in absolute danger, David found his coping power and overcoming strength in his private prayer life with God and dependence upon God’s ultimate vindication and justice. For another, David always acknowledged God, and His readiness to let His justice work things out. But David was also very honest and open with God about his true heart, his anger and pain and desires for change. He handed to God all the emotional rubbish he felt. He did not hold back. David’s experience leaves us this challenge: when we are emotionally honest with God in our private prayer and trust

eventually God sorted things out. Saul died, and David became king.

In many ways David exemplified the apostle Peter’s advice, “Casting all your anxiety on him [Jesus], because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). The word *cast* Peter uses for giving our emotional burdens to Jesus is the word he would also use to “cast” a fishing net into the sea. Strong fishermen do not place nets nicely into the water; they throw the nets with all the effort muscles can muster. We must throw our hate, jealousy, rage, fear, contempt, and any emotional baggage, with all our

*When we are emotionally honest with God in our private prayer and trust in God to deal with our circumstances, we can live exemplary lives in the public sphere.*

seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. . . . Behold God is my helper” (Ps. 54:2–4).

Again, in Psalm 18, David referred to God rescuing him from Saul and all his enemies. “I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD” (Ps. 18:3–6). Later he wrote, “He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me; for they were too mighty for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity; but the LORD was my support” (Ps. 18:16–18).


What can we learn from this brief survey of psalms written in the midst of adversity, betrayal, and suffering? For one thing, even when his life was

in God to deal with our circumstances, we can live exemplary lives in the public sphere.

### **How to cope with leaders we perceive as poor**

Leaders do have weaknesses; do show favoritism; and, at times, make bad decisions that affect us negatively. The natural response to the hurt of injustice is to criticize and talk negatively about leaders to anyone who will listen. The Bible refers to this as gossip or slander and asks us to get rid of it (Eph. 4:25–31). Slander and gossip may hurt the other person, but the person who slanders and gossips also gains a poor reputation. None of us needs a bad reputation; life and ministry are hard enough. David’s strategy in dealing with the death threat of Saul is the best method. Feel the pain, express and give it to God privately, and publicly support the leader. David trusted God, and

strength to God, and let Him handle them. God listens, understands, takes the burden, and replaces it with peace (Phil. 4:6, 7).

David did not publicly denounce King Saul because the king was God’s anointed. David, himself, was the Lord’s anointed successor to Saul. If David was seen pulling down leadership, even with good reason, he knew it would give others permission to challenge his leadership as well. David lived out how he wanted to be treated. He also modeled Jesus’ challenge, “Do to others what you would have them to do to you” (Matt. 7:12, NIV). The best leaders have been loyal followers who respect the dignity and challenge of leadership and know how to deal with their emotional baggage. 

1 Except as otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are from the English Standard Version.

2 See, for example, Psalms 18; 52; 54; 57; 59; 63; 142–144.

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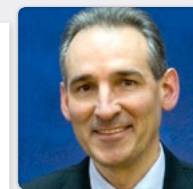
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Eugene Zaitsev, PhD, is president of the Zaoksky Christian Institute of Economics and Humanities, Zaoksky, Tula, Russia.



# “There is no fear in love . . .” (1 John 4:18)

Describing the world before His second coming, Jesus said: “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” (Luke 21:26, KJV). The New International Version reads: “‘People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”<sup>1</sup> Either way, fear, terror, and apprehension will become the main characteristics of human life before the second coming of Jesus.

We, of course, do not like to talk about fear. We do everything we can to be free from it. Yet fear is an essential part of human existence and, like it or not, some fear will accompany us, always and everywhere, until the end.

Paul Tillich, in *The Courage to Be*, writes about the triple nature of human fear or anxiety. Three existential fears, he writes, accompany life:

1. Fear or alarm of death
2. Fear or alarm of emptiness of life and its meaninglessness
3. Fear of guilt and condemnation

The question for us then is, if Tillich is right, how does our faith in Christ address these fears?

## Fear of death

Of all our fears, to most, death is the most frightening. Nobody wants to die; nobody wants even to think about

death. Many avoid thinking about the stark fact that sooner or later we die. The only out, it seems, is to believe that we continue our existence after death.

The “immortality of the soul” is, thus, a common belief. From ancient time until now, people have been comforting themselves with the idea that life after death does exist. Ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Slavs—all believed in the immortality of the soul. Even most forms of Christianity have adopted that idea, although it is not in the Old or the New Testament. No matter how popular, the teaching is wrong, regardless of the comfort it supposedly brings.

Another way to avoid thinking about death is through positive language. No one ever dies anymore; instead, one simply “passes away.” Death is made to sound like a pleasant little trip. There are no longer cemeteries or graveyards; what we have, instead, are “memorial parks.” The experience of growing old, which signals the approach of death, is carefully masked with euphemisms like “senior citizen” and the “golden age.”

The manifold ways in which death is disguised or ignored sometimes constitute a virtual denial of death, which in itself reveals our fear of death. However, all those ways to avoid thinking about death do not obscure its reality and tragedy. Death is death; and—regardless of whatever ways we attempt to

mask it—its reality, and the fear that reality brings, will always be with us.

## Fear of meaninglessness

Next, people want to make their lives meaningful. Some see the purpose of their lives in their careers, raising children, gaining wealth, becoming popular, or maybe in doing scientific research. Others find the meaning of life through the very process of searching for the meaning of life.

But without God and the revelation from Him about the true meaning of life, one will never find anything that really works. After all, what does the meaning of life mean if everything inevitably finishes with death? And, as we know, only in God do we have the answer to death.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR), the Soviet people were trying for decades to build new lives, a utopia without class struggle, exploitation, social inequality, violence, and unfilled economic needs. All people would live happily. The communist leaders often meant well; many sincerely believed that it was possible to build a kind of paradise here on Earth. They lived with that hope, they dreamed of that bright tomorrow for their children, and some even sacrificed their own lives for that idea.

But one day that communist idea collapsed, the USSR disassembled, and another side of Soviet history was



exposed. Many people who piously believed in the communist ideals and dedicated their whole life to them suddenly lost the meaning of their life. After communism in the USSR collapsed, suicides increased dramatically. The fear of emptiness of life and its meaninglessness overcame even the fear of death.

## Fear of guilt and condemnation

Finally, everybody knows how painful guilt and condemnation can be. They can deprive you of internal peace and harmony. Guilt can cause both mental and physical damage.

Who has not struggled, to some degree, with guilt and fear? One can only imagine how political leaders who

have done evil in the past, deal with the guilt that surely must plague them at times.

One thinks of the agony of David's soul when he struggled with the consequences of his sins. "He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them" (2 Sam. 12:16, 17).

The suffering was real; the pangs of guilt tormented his soul. Life loses its beauty, its joyfulness and happiness, if there is no peace and harmony. "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Isa. 57:20, 21).

## Freedom from fear

The question remains, then: What escape can we find from the fear of death, meaninglessness, and guilt?

We can find escape in Jesus Christ: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

First, Jesus is the only One who can save us from the terror of death. As He said to the mourning sisters in the village of Bethany after their brother, Lazarus, died, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25).

Death did not have power over Him. On the third day after His crucifixion,

# Know who you are

I was born in an Adventist home. My father was a pastor, but as a Seventh-day Adventist minister in the Soviet Union, he was always under pressure from the state authorities. The Soviet regime was atheistic, so religion was often practiced underground. It was not an easy time for true believers.

From my childhood, I had dreamed of being a medical doctor. But it was practically impossible for "sectarians" to enter a medical school. However, I passed all the exams and started my studies in Gorky Medical School. Realizing that administration of the school was intolerant toward religion, I decided to keep my personal beliefs a secret.

I was constantly afraid of being found out and expelled for my faith. For three years I lived in fear.

It is not easy to live under such pressure, waiting for the call to come to the dean's office, where I would hear the words, *Zaitsev, we have heard you are a Christian. You well know that a Soviet physician cannot be a sectarian, so you are no longer a student of medical school.*

So, to make sure that it would never happen, I did everything I could to blend in. But being raised in a Christian home, I felt the difference between good and evil, and so to act in the ways of the world was quite a challenge. I managed to, though, and the longer I did it, the easier it got.

When at home, I was a good son of my Christian parents; when in school, I was like everybody else. This was a really strange situation. Who was I—a Christian or a man of the world; a believer or an unbeliever? I was like an actor playing two roles: one was at home, another at school.

And the main reason was fear, a fear that not only caused me not to live an abundant life in Jesus but led me to sadness and a loss of joy.

I am so thankful that my father, seeing my personal anxiety and worries, challenged me, saying: "Son, I know that you do not have peace in your soul. This is due to uncertainty in your life. You do not have an answer about your self-identity. You do not know who you are. You need just to answer for yourself: am I a Christian or

not? If you choose to be a Christian—just say it to yourself. If not—say it to yourself, as well. Be honest with yourself. Stop playing a part; instead, start to live openly. People should know who you are. Be either Christian or non-Christian. I will respect your choice. Just make a decision, and you will feel much better."

Then he asked me to pray with him, and after praying, I decided to give myself fully to Jesus and be baptized. And as soon as I made that decision, all my fears disappeared. What a relief I felt in that day when all my fears and terrors, all my worries and anxieties, were buried in baptismal waters!

I continued my studies, but now as an open Christian. I shared my personal beliefs with other students and teachers, and did so openly and without fear. For the first time in my life I realized that there is no fear in love if only you know Christ as your Master and Savior. "But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine'" (Isa. 43:1).

*Eugene Zaitsev*

Christ rose from the dead. He became a victor, a conqueror over death. Thus, Paul could write: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” . . . But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55–57).

Those who mourn their dead can find great hope in these words! And these words, too: “ ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades’ ” (Rev. 1:18).

Next, Jesus is the only One who can save us from the sense of a meaningless and empty existence. Only the One who created us in His image and likeness can give us purpose. And our lives have meaning only when connected to God and His will.

What has God said about His will regarding us? What makes our lives meaningful? In two main commandments, God gives us the answer to those questions: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the

second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments’ ” (Matt. 22:37–40).

God is love, and being created in His image, we are called to reflect that love in our lives. These two dimensions—love to God, and love to our neighbor—determine the meaning of human existence.

And if our lives are filled with that love, there is no room for fear: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18).


Finally, only Jesus can save us from the pain of guilt and condemnation. David, for instance, knew where to go to find the peace that he longed for. “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice” (Ps. 51:8). “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (v. 10). “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (v. 12).

David experienced freedom from guilt and condemnation, but only after he confessed his sins before God. “Blessed is the one whose

transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps. 32:1, 2, 5).

For all those who suffer under the same burden of guilt for their sins, there is hope in God’s Word. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

## Conclusion

If Tillich is right and these three fears dominate human existence, it is no coincidence that in Jesus Christ we have the answer to such fears. Thus, as ministers, it is important we know for ourselves the freedom from these fears that we can have in Jesus; then, out of our own experience, we can share this good news with the flock under our care. 

\* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the New International Version

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## Are your dreams temporal or eternal?

When I hold money in my hand, my dream of wealth comes closer to reality. The falsehood of materialism states that possessions are the answer for everything. But they do not always live up to our expectations and can disappoint.

The rich young ruler entertained the possibility of following Christ, but he walked away sorrowful (Matt. 19:16–26). He saw the possibility of Jesus but did not make Him a reality; he did not actualize Him. The rich young ruler chose the temporal life of wealth over eternal life with Christ.

The main difference between Jesus and wealth is that Jesus never disappoints. Zacchaeus dreamed of seeing Jesus, and that dream was actualized while he was up in a sycamore tree. Jesus became real to him, and reformation was the result (Luke 19:5–8). In front of everyone, the heart of Zacchaeus was opened, and his mission was to give away his wealth and repay those he had wronged. Revival and reformation were connected that day.

Too many people only dream of the possibility of a relationship with Jesus.

Stop dreaming and make Christ a reality. Stop obsessing about the temporal things and give all to the Eternal One. Discover your mission. You will not be disappointed.

—John Mathews serves as stewardship director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

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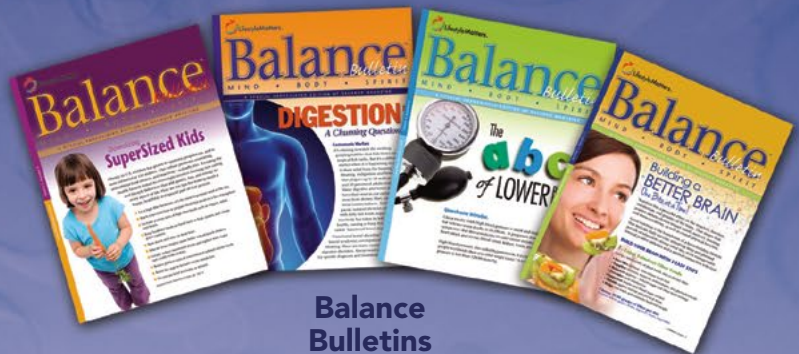
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**Gabriel Adu-Acheampong** serves as a pastor in the South Central Ghana Conference, Kumasi, Ghana.



# The paradox of comparison

One day a lady commented to a young minister that she prayed he would be as great as some popular veteran ministers. The young minister answered: “I do not want to be like them, but like Christ.” This response should be the aspiration of every pastor. We should not limit ourselves by aspiring to be like humans, but like Jesus.

Many people find joy in comparing themselves with others. The parable of the publican and the Pharisee is given to warn every Christian to be careful about anthropocentric comparison.

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10–14).<sup>1</sup>

The Pharisee left the temple without his prayer being answered. His self-righteous conduct was foolishness. Author Ellen White says that, in contrast, “the prayer of the publican was heard in the courts above, because it showed dependence reaching forth

to lay hold of Omnipotence. Self was to the publican nothing but shame. Thus it must be with all who seek God. Faith and prayer are the two arms which the needy suppliant lays upon the neck of infinite Love.”<sup>2</sup>

## An application

The Pharisee considered himself to be perfect and boasted in his self-righteousness. His sins were not exposed in the news headlines; he did not consider his secret sins to be that serious. Comparing himself with others, he looked good.

However, God does not care about the comparisons we make of ourselves with others. Rather, we should compare our sinfulness to the righteousness of Christ alone. Then it will be apparent that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). It is easy to blame the Pharisee for looking down upon the publican in his prayer, but sometimes we behave the same way.

As ministers of the gospel, each may have different spiritual gifts, or some may have privileges others may not have. But, the person, for instance, who has the gift of healing should not think that he or she is higher or lower than the person with the gift of discernment, because they are all gifts of the Holy Spirit. Comparing yourself with others in order to feel better about yourself can only make you proud. And, as C. S. Lewis said, “as long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking

down you cannot see something that is above you.”<sup>3</sup> Ellen White expressed a similar sentiment: “Many measure themselves among themselves, and compare their lives with the lives of others. This should not be. No one but Christ is given us as an example. He is our true pattern, and each should strive to excel in imitating Him.”<sup>4</sup>

Have you considered yourself to be superior to a colleague, or a colleague superior to you, because of differences in opportunities and privileges? Do you sometimes consider yourself to be closer to God than others are? Again, this is a dangerous temptation. As Scripture says: “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12). Comparison brings discord and does not allow the Holy Spirit to do His work of transformation in our lives. Whom do you work to please? Anytime we do something simply to look good to others, we miss the mark. Paul writes, “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

## The wisdom in Christocentric comparison

Jesus Christ alone should be our standard of comparison. When we compare ourselves to Jesus Christ, we see our sinfulness in the light of His



perfection. This realization makes us humble and draws us closer to Him in order to be more like Him. The Bible records, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus passed every human test. That is why we should compare ourselves to Him alone, and not to fellow sinful human beings.

Paul appealed to followers of Christ to compare themselves with Jesus Christ alone: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Cor. 13:5–8).

Comparing ourselves with Christ is seeking for the wisdom from above. The apostle James writes: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:13–17).

In the vineyard of God, nobody should compare themselves with anybody under any circumstance, nor do anything for self-glory. We should, instead, compare our weakness to the strength of Christ so that we aspire to be like Christ, who passed through every test possible to man and triumphed. “Humble workers, who do not

trust in their great gifts, but who work in simplicity, trusting always in God, will share in the joy of the Saviour. Their persevering prayers will bring souls to the cross. Heavenly angels will respond to their self-sacrificing efforts.”<sup>5</sup> Why do we compare ourselves with sinful human beings who should look up to Jesus Christ for everything? Christ draws our attention to the need to compare ourselves to God. Jesus said, “‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’” (Matt. 5:48).

## Aspiring to be like Jesus

When we think like Christ, we become like Him and reflect the beauty of His character. But how did Christ think, and what was the result of the way He thought? The Bible says

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).


We, as Christians, should never consider anybody’s status when it comes to service. Instead, our goal should be to serve in humility to the glory of God. “Humility is the only true wisdom by which we prepare our minds for all the possible changes of life.”<sup>6</sup>

If we really want to work for God, humility is a needed virtue. In order not to compare ourselves with others, we should have the mind-set that whatever

we are able to do, we do that to God’s own glory. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:23, 24).

## Conclusion

God gives us whatever we have, which is why we should not boast but give glory only to Him. Like the Pharisee in Luke 18, we should not set ourselves as the standard and look down upon others. Rather, we should compare ourselves only to Jesus, so that we can see our unworthiness in light of His perfection and draw closer to Him. When we compare ourselves to human beings, we become proud and foolish; when we compare ourselves to Christ Jesus, we become humble and wise. We should therefore think and aspire to be like Jesus alone, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

“Compare yourself alone to the holy God,” said Pastor Aaron Bublitz. “Humble yourself before him. Look to Jesus alone to justify you before him. Cling to his work of salvation for you. And God promises that he will exalt you. He will exalt you to live in the righteousness of Christ. He will exalt you to live not to compare yourself to others, but to love others. He will exalt you to live for him, as you live in his forgiveness and in his grace.”<sup>7</sup> 

- 1 All Scripture references are from the 2011 New International Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1967), 69.
- 3 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, quoted in “Quotes About Pride,” goodreads, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/pride>.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1964), 174.
- 5 White, *In Heavenly Places*, 68.
- 6 George Arliss, quoted in “Quotes on Humility,” Leadership Now, accessed December 11, 2014, [www.leadershipnow.com/humilityquotes.html](http://www.leadershipnow.com/humilityquotes.html).
- 7 Pastor Aaron Bublitz, “Compare Yourself,” sermon for Ash Wednesday, February 13, 2013, [mlebanonluth.org/home/180004499/180004499/docs/Series%20C%20-%20Ash%20Wednesday%20-%20Luke%2018.9-14%20-%20written%20sermon.pdf?sec\\_id=180004499](http://mlebanonluth.org/home/180004499/180004499/docs/Series%20C%20-%20Ash%20Wednesday%20-%20Luke%2018.9-14%20-%20written%20sermon.pdf?sec_id=180004499).

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**Rick L. Johns, MDiv**, is a district pastor in the Potomac Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Stone Ridge, Virginia, United States.



# The power of rest

**A**s a boy I loved sports. I participated in any sport that was happening near me and enjoyed the challenge and camaraderie. This love continued during college and seminary years, when I played many different games. But then I graduated . . . and things changed.

As a pastor in a rural district with two small, older congregations, my physical activity dropped off. Like most pastors, my time was consumed with mental and social activities that required little of me physically. This was not intentional, but before I realized it, I was out of shape. I was no longer the athlete of my youth. I tried many different ways to add exercise to my busy schedule, but I could not seem to make it a regular part of my life.

However, this would all soon change in ways that I could never have imagined. Three years ago my wife declared she was going to purchase a new exercise program. She asked whether I would be interested in joining her. I agreed, and we ordered the program.

When it arrived, we read the materials and committed to do the 90 days. This was not a small commitment, because it required us to exercise for 60 to 90 minutes each day, six days a week! The workouts were harder than anything I had ever tried. But instead of discouraging me, the difficulty of the workouts made me want to push

harder. I wanted to be able to complete an entire workout.

This was the beginning of my love for intense training and pushing my physical limitations. And while I no longer regularly use the same exercise program, I definitely use the principles instilled in me.

## An unexpected lesson

In this program I discovered an unexpected lesson that has altered my professional life. In addition to physical exercise, the program emphasized the importance of rest. Every seventh day of the program was a rest day. Every fourth week was a week of recovery. The program developer makes this profound statement, “Remember that your body only gets stronger while at rest, so the value of a well-designed recovery week . . . is essential to getting the most out of any exercise program.”<sup>1</sup>

I had never fully considered this reality “that your body only gets stronger while at rest.” This is a radical concept, especially since most people would likely think that strength is gained only through the ability to stress our muscles. Instead, your ability to perform at a high level also relates to your commitment to rest. Rest and recovery are vital if you want to *improve* your performance.

This principle has some profound implications for the professional lives of clergy. Ministry can be a completely time-consuming, life-consuming reality. Day after day we plan, encourage,

lead, minister, teach, share, listen, organize, and problem solve. There is always one more call that needs to be made, one more appointment that needs to be set up, one more hour needed for sermon preparation, and one more person who needs our attention. What is worse, with all the demands around us, we can feel selfish for taking time to rest and nourish our souls.

But what fitness trainers know is that you need time out, recovery time, if you want to improve your performance. In other words, you can be better at your job if you work less. And, perhaps, no other profession is more in danger of violating this health principle than the clergy. After all, ministers are typically on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clergy do not have set work hours and definitely do not have weekends off. And because the job description is so varied and complex, it makes it difficult for even the most disciplined pastors to believe they have worked enough for one day. Many ministers spend every day trying to keep up with demands, and they never pause to let their spiritual muscles recover. And the consequences of overwork are significant and dramatic.

## Importance of recovery time

In their book *The Power of Full Engagement*, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz share what they learned by



training world class tennis players. After watching hundreds of hours of video tapes on the top ranked tennis players, Jim was getting increasingly frustrated because there seemed no discernible difference between the skills of the top ranked players and the rest of the pack. He was frustrated until one day when he noticed a pattern. Each of the top players had developed a ritual they followed between points. They followed their routine every time there was a break in the game, and Jim theorized that this was an unconscious ritual of recovery.

In order to test his theory, Loehr hooked up these elite athletes to an electrocardiogram and measured their heart rate as they were playing. Result? A startling discovery! In the 16 to 20 seconds between points, the top competitors were able to lower their heart rates as much as 20 beats per minute! This was a remarkable drop in a very short amount of time. Not surprisingly, the lower ranked players, without a regular recovery ritual, had no such drop in their heart rate.

Schwartz and Loehr then concluded, “Imagine two players of relatively equal talent and fitness in the third hour of a match. One has been regularly recovering between points, while the other has not. Clearly, the second player will be far more physically fatigued. In turn, fatigue has a cascade effect. A tired player is more susceptible to negative emotions such as anger and frustration, which will likely push his heart rate still higher, and lead to muscular tension. Physical fatigue also makes it far more difficult to concentrate. The same phenomenon applies even for those of us who work in sedentary jobs.”<sup>2</sup>

This is a powerful reality to understand and put into practice: to recognize that we are most effective not because of the quantity of minutes we dedicate to a task but because of the quality of the energy we bring. In order to be their best, ministers need to build periods of rest and recovery into every day, week, month, and year.

## God calls us to rest

Of course, as disciples of Jesus, we should already know the importance of rest. It was Jesus who said, “‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ ” (Matt. 11:28).<sup>3</sup> For some, these may be just the magic words we need to hear. We know we need to rest, but we need someone to give us permission to rest. We need to understand that rest, recovery, and spiritual renewal are just as much a part of our calling as are saving souls and shepherding the church.

God does not desire that we be constantly working. “This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength’ ” (Isa. 30:15).

Is it possible that this passage has often been overlooked in our desire to keep up with our current insane culture of busyness and instant results? We are easily influenced by the expectations of our members, community, and employers and, tragically, forget from where we receive strength and salvation. God’s rebuke to His people of long ago remains just as relevant to His leaders today. Those who neglect rest and quietness, who try to skirt by repentance and trust, are destined to be “ ‘those who carry out plans that are not [God’s]’ ” (Isa. 30:1).

## What are we modeling?

If that is not sobering enough, we need to consider the influence of our lifestyle on our members. If we do not model the repentance, rest, quietness, and trust that Isaiah speaks about, how can we expect our members to do so?

Many in our churches are weary and spiritually dry. They feel pressured by society to run their lives at a frantic pace that leaves them feeling that there is no time to stop. We fail them as ministers when we clamor to meet all their demands and do not show them the importance of saying No and taking time apart from work. A spiritual leader should be known as one who prioritizes time in quietness and

rest. And while we may fear that our members will view us as lazy, we need to realize that their misperception suggests a minor problem compared to their pastor being spiritually bankrupt.

Far from disappointing our members, the effect of proper rest will give us a presence, energy, and wisdom that will likely inspire others to follow our leadership. They will see that we have something for which they are searching.

## The *shabbat* principle

Having come to value the importance of rest more fully through my commitment to intense physical training, the next question for me was “How do I implement it in my profession as a minister?”

The first, most obvious, practical example of this principle given in Scripture is the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a concept that is introduced to humans almost immediately after their creation. This is a fascinating scenario because God introduces the concept of rest before the new human couple had lived long enough to have even been tired! What is more, Genesis states that “on the seventh day [God] rested from all his work” (Gen. 2:2). If rest is prioritized by God (who never gets tired, emotionally drained, burned-out, or overworked), there must be a depth to its value beyond what most of us have considered.

The word *Sabbath* is *shabbat* in Hebrew and is derived from the Hebrew verb that means “to cease.”<sup>4</sup> Historically, God’s people understood this call to cease on the seventh day of the week as a call to cease from work, a day to rest from physical labor. And while physical rest is necessary and beneficial, it is obvious that the Scriptural meaning of the Sabbath transcends simple cessation of physical activity.

I realized that though I had been keeping the Sabbath day since I was a child, I was not getting much rest and recovery from it. And this is understandable for us as ministers, because we often work hardest on the Sabbath

day. We condone the labor because it is done for the glory of God and even see it as completely different from working a “regular” job, where the work could be physically demanding or secular in nature. But the question we fail to consider is, “Where is my Sabbath, my day to cease?” While we are likely blessed by leading in the worship of our awesome God, our leadership at the worship service is a culmination of our work week, not a cessation from it.

## Finding the power of rest

It took an intense exercise program for me to begin understanding the

Therefore, I began to make my day off an intentional day to do something that ministered to my soul. This did not have to take up the whole day, but it did have to fill my heart and draw me closer to God. I have found my commitment to this weekly time of rest and recovery to be as beneficial to my ministerial performance as my recovery days were to my physical performance.

What I have learned from the principle of rest should not be misunderstood with the call to cease from secular work implied in the fourth commandment. The Sabbath is a day of rest, and as pastors we should celebrate its holiness and call for refraining from ordinary labor. In addition to the

night’s sleep is no longer a luxury, but a priority, and a nap is not being lazy; it is an opportunity to increase my performance for the second half of my day. Each time I exit a building, I try to pause and find some object in nature to hold my attention, to consider its beauty and the good God who created it. This interrupts my often negative thought patterns, and I can recover in the reminder that God is with me.

Of course, there are many other ways you can build rest and recovery into your days, weeks, and years. This is not so much what you do, but that you make it a regular and intentional part of your ministry. You may be surprised that by doing less you are

*We need to understand that rest, recovery, and spiritual renewal are just as much a part of our calling as are saving souls and shepherding the church.*


power of rest. Because it is during rest that muscles heal and grow, the recovery days in my training are almost completely about input, not output. From extra nutrition to stretching or massage, recovery days are designed to feed my weary muscles. They are days to give to my muscles, not take from them.

In my professional life, I recognized that my day off needed to provide time to feed my weary soul. It needed to be a day where I ceased from doing, giving, producing, and working and instead focused on being, receiving, feeding, and healing.

sacredness of Sabbath rest and the involvement in the call of holy ministry during those sacred hours, ministers should intentionally set aside a day during the week for themselves for physical rest and relaxation and family togetherness. Such a day should be a day free from pastoral duties and part of a pastor’s rest and recovery period.

I have added other recovery periods. I have sought out spiritual retreats where I can get away for several days in quietness and nature. I routinely take small breaks during my day to pause, evaluate my soul, and make sure I am in tune with God. A good

able to give more.

Remember God’s words, recorded in the book of Isaiah, “ ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.’ ” 

- 1 Tony Horton, *The P90X Fitness Guide* (Beachbody, 2008), 2.
- 2 Tony Schwartz and Jim Loehr, *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal* (Free Press, Kindle edition, 2003), Kindle locations 588–592.
- 3 All Scripture references are from *The New International Version*®.
- 4 William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 360.

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Jon L. Dybdahl, PhD, retired, is president of Gospel Outreach, College Place, Washington, United States.



# Spirituality: *Biblical and nonbiblical*—Part 1 of 2

## Prelude

In 2008, Review and Herald Publishing Association published my book *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*. In that volume I tried to do two things. First, I wanted to testify to the journey God had taken me on to find closeness to Him and true, biblical heart religion. Second, I wanted to help others who also long to grow closer to God. At the time I first wrote, there was little or no controversy about what came to be called “spiritual formation.” Soon after the book was published, however, some in the Christian world (eventually including some Seventh-day Adventists) began to use the term *spiritual formation* to describe dangerous, counterfeit spiritual practices. I am thankful that the book was received as a real spiritual blessing by many. Much to my surprise, however, I soon discovered that others viewed the book with suspicion and labeled me as a dangerous heretic.

Given the current climate, I would like to clarify several things. I am a lifelong Seventh-day Adventist who cares deeply about my church. I am opposed to all forms of spirituality that are contrary to the principles of the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. I would also be the first to admit that my book is far from perfect. If I could turn back the clock, I can think of a number of changes that I would make in the original manuscript. For example, I would quote passages from Ellen White

that speak to the subject, even though Review and Herald suggested that I not do this because of their plans to market the book to the non-Adventist public I would correct a chart that, at first glance, makes it appear as if I believe in Karma. Obviously, I do not. I would attempt to clarify that the term *spiritual formation*, as I understand it, is a term very similar to *sanctification* or *spiritual growth* and would point out that it has been used in Adventism without controversy for many years (see, for example, “*Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook*,” The Ministerial Association, 1997, 24–26). I would also not include a bibliography of books for additional reading, since some critics apparently understood this to be my blanket endorsement of all that the various authors wrote or believed. This is certainly not my position. Furthermore, I would be more careful to clarify, define, or omit terms that have become the center of so much misunderstanding and suspicion. Finally, I would explain that while I support biblical repetition within the appropriate context (see Ps. 136), I oppose, as the Bible does (Matt. 6:7), meaningless, mind emptying-repeating, and/or mantra-like meditation and prayer. I hope that such changes would have allowed all my readers to more easily understand my position.

In a certain sense, this two-part article (part 1 follows this prelude; part 2 will be published in the November 2015

issue) is meant, in part, to answer two larger questions that have arisen in connection with the book. In part 1, I explore how biblical Christian spirituality contrasts with that of the so-called Eastern religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and the New Age. Part 2 is a response to the question of whether Adventist spirituality is unique. I believe it is and will explain why. I hope this two-part article can be a blessing and further promote a closer walk with Jesus.

In humanity, in whom God has implanted a hunger for Himself, the search for God takes place in many forms. Some of these forms are valid for Christians and some are not. This article suggests ways to tell the difference between biblical spirituality and other major forms of spiritual life. In particular, I present the contrast between Christian spirituality and Hindu/Buddhist/New Age (HBN) spirituality.

A few years ago, respected Christian pollster George Barna published an article, based on a poll, under the title “Christianity Is No Longer Americans’ Default Faith.”<sup>1</sup> In the past, if Americans became religious, most embraced some form of Christianity. Now half of all adults believe Christianity is just one option among many. While people remain increasingly dependent on religion in their lives, they do not necessarily turn to Jesus for guidance. Even those who claim to be Christians are more open to non-Christian faiths and practices.

This presents a major challenge for biblical Christianity. Whereas in the past, much effort was spent explaining or defending a certain type of Christianity in a context of differing denominations, it seems clear that Christians must now explain themselves in the larger context of other world religions.<sup>2</sup> Even among those who call themselves Christian, a large majority feel free to pick and choose their beliefs to fit personal views and ideas in an individual mix of ideas and practices. This may explain why some estimate that “about 60% of Christians in America accept some New Age beliefs and practices even if they do not always associate them with the New Age.”<sup>3</sup> While this statistic is probably too high, the influence of New Age is clearly widespread.

One area of religion where this is particularly true focuses on the spiritual life, or spirituality.<sup>4</sup> Many voices speak, inviting people to practice various methods of experiencing the Divine.

This confronts Bible-believing Christians with questions such as, What is biblical spirituality?<sup>5</sup> How does it compare with other forms of spirituality? What should Christians do in response to the present situation where differing religious practices are used?

While there are clearly Jewish and Muslim forms of the spiritual life, as well as differing Christian types, they are not our main concern here. For many people the more urgent issue is the one posed by Hinduism, Buddhism, and their contextualized forms in what has come to be known as New Age. There are many varieties and syncretistic blends of these faiths, but most hold a common core of ideas that we will discuss in this article. In a short article like this, the risk of superficiality and oversimplification is present, but the topic has become so crucial that this subject deserves an initial attempt to understand.

In what follows, I deal with this issue in three sections: (1) inadequate ways of dealing with the challenge of HBN; (2) major concepts of biblical spirituality and HBN spirituality; (3) the joys and advantages of biblical spirituality.

## Inadequate ways of dealing with the issue

Some have attempted to meet the challenge of HBN spirituality to biblical spirituality by comparing and evaluating certain terms. Using this methodology, some terms are condemned and other terms are seen as safe. While some terms or concepts are out of line with biblical spirituality and can be quite easily rejected, such as *reincarnation*, *Karma*, and *pantheism*, many terms are less clear and can have both acceptable and unacceptable meanings. Examples of such ambiguous words are *spirituality*, *spiritual formation*, and *meditation*. Before such terms and what they supposedly mean are condemned, clear definition and explanation must be given. This means that dealing with this issue solely on the basis of terms can be misleading and is often superficial.

Others have chosen to deal with the issue by the use of history. Spiritual practices can be accepted and rejected on the basis of their roots in history. For example, one may say that such and such a practice comes from Hinduism and thus is false. This method, while at times interesting and perhaps helpful, has two major problems. First, there are varying interpretations of history, and the origin of many spiritual practices is difficult to prove. Second, conservative Christians look to the Bible for their authority, not history. The right question to ask is, Is this belief, or practice, biblical?

Some contrast biblical and HBN spirituality by condemning or accepting certain practices. Again, this works in some cases. Most Christians would rightly reject such things as invoking or venerating various gods and goddesses and Zen meditation. However, on the other side, some tie the wholistic health movement to the New Age. For example, Richard Kyle says, “In practice the New Age and wholistic health movement are one movement.”<sup>6</sup> While it is true that diet and vegetarianism are important for many HBN followers, it is also true that some Christians are vegetarians for valid biblical reasons.

For that reason, I disagree with Kyle. I believe that vegetarianism is valid for Christians as long as vegetarianism is seen in the biblical context. The practice cannot be evaluated by itself but must be evaluated in its context to judge truly, whether it is biblical or not.

Thus, while in some instances, appeals to terms, history, and practices can be helpful, in many cases these methods are inadequate and incomplete. A better place to begin is to compare and contrast principles and the theology of each belief system and then move on to what this implies for the spiritual life and practice.

## Biblical and HBN spirituality: Key principles

In this section I outline four fundamental biblical teachings that form the conceptual basis for biblical spirituality and explain the spiritual life to which they give birth. I do the same for HBN spirituality and then compare the two systems.

Four basic concepts underlying biblical spirituality are as follows:

1. *A unique, personal Creator God who is active in the world.* The Bible begins with the story of God’s creation of the world and humanity (Gen. 1; 2). It describes this God as personal. He creates humans, male and female, in His divine image (Gen. 1:27). He speaks to them and blesses them (Gen. 1:28–30). No other God is like Him, for He alone is to be worshiped (Exod. 20:3). This worship is because of His creatorship and saving power (Exod. 20:1, 2, 8–11; Deut. 5:6, 12–15). From the very beginning, when He walks and talks with Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:8–10), all the way through the Bible until the very end in Revelation, when He dwells with people (Rev. 21:3), God remains in active contact and communion with the world and people.

2. *Humans are wholistic, created beings who have sinned and disrupted their relationship with God.* Since humans went against God and disrupted His good creation and betrayed His love (Gen. 3), their salvation depends on



God's love and grace, which He freely gives (John 3:16). We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Our love and response to God involves our whole being—heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:29, 30). Over and over the Bible calls us to repent—admit we have sinned and cast ourselves on God's grace (Ezek. 18:30; Matt. 3:2; Acts 2:38).

3. *The world was created "good" by God, but it has been devastated by human sin.* Over and over God calls His creation "good" and in summary calls the whole endeavor "very good" (Gen. 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Sin marred the earth (Gen. 3), but we can still see God in the created world (Rom. 1:20). In the end, God re-creates His world, completely restoring and healing the relationships broken by sin (Rev. 21:1).

4. *Jesus is the culmination and center of God's healing and restoring relationship with His people and His world.* From the beginning God has had a plan to restore His people and the world and heal the broken, disrupted relationships caused by sin. The climax of God's plan was sending Jesus to enter human life and sacrifice Himself to save the world and His people (Heb. 1:1, 2). Jesus lived here in our world, died to save us from sin, and was resurrected (1 Cor. 15:1–8). He now sends His Holy Spirit to be present with believers and minister to their needs (John 14:26). Thus, believers interact with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Given these four basic concepts, biblical spirituality is the following of the God-given ways of working to restore the relationship with God now and paving the way to final restoration in a new heaven and earth. Based on these four principles, we can begin to trace the type of life and action that constitute biblical spirituality. Since God is loving, gracious, and saving, He approaches humans with the offer of fellowship. The best response humans can make to this approach is admission of need and then worship. Worship is indeed the primary, most common response of believers to the personal God of the Bible. Humans cannot repay God's grace or earn His favor: the

worship they give and the obedience they practice are just appropriate ways for them to show their gratitude.

This personal interchange initiated by worship is nurtured through various means. Prayer is one. Prayer addresses God with our thoughts, needs, praise, and requests. Prayer is also listening to this personal God to discover what He may say to us through the Bible, nature, and His still small voice (John 10:3, 4; Ps. 33:6, 9; Rev. 3:20).

Meditation is another way we enter into relationship with this personal God. In meditation, we reflect on and ponder God's Word and works by quietly speaking them or silently and atten-

impure and untrue. There is not the choosing of the better part, the sitting at the feet of Jesus, as did Mary, to learn the most sacred lessons of the divine Teacher, that they may be laid up in the heart, and practiced in the daily life. Meditation upon holy things will elevate and refine the mind."<sup>7</sup>

Other major ways to enhance our relationship with God include living in obedience to God's Word, fellowshiping with other believers, and fasting. In this relationship, several things must be remembered. First, there is a divine-personal dimension to all of these practices. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is truly present and at

*Jesus is the culmination and center of God's healing and restoring relationship with His people and His world.*

tively pondering what He would have us understand and do. The Bible speaks often of meditation—Joshua 1:8, Psalm 48:9; 77:5–7; 119:15, 148; 143:5. Ellen White has this profound statement:

"Why is it that our youth, and even those of maturer years, are so easily led into temptation and sin? It is because the word of God is not studied and meditated upon as it should be. If it were appreciated, there would be an inward rectitude, a strength of spirit, that would resist the temptations of Satan to do evil. A firm, decided will-power is not brought into the life and character because the sacred instruction of God is not made the study, and the subject of meditation. There is not the effort put forth that there should be to associate the mind with pure, holy thoughts and to divert it from what is

work to teach, guide, encourage, and bless (see John 16:13–15). In biblical spirituality, real divine-human communion takes place. Second, all we are as humans is part of this relationship and communion. As mentioned earlier, we are to respond to God with all we are—soul, mind, and body. Some may emphasize the mind and cognition as the key to spirituality. Overemphasized, such a view can neglect the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of biblical spirituality. Others, even some Christians, denigrate the physical or emotional aspects in order to be more "spiritual" and deal only with the realm of the abstract or immaterial. Some may want to live outside of the mind and exist in a so-called *realm of the spirit*. All of these views are imbalanced. God created all aspects of us,

and we must keep all these elements in balance.

In the world today, a cosmic conflict continues between good and evil. The forces of evil, Satan and his host, seek to disrupt the work of God in us. This is a practical reality that must be recognized but must not be applied in an imbalanced manner. Those who ignore or deny the presence of evil need to recognize the possibility of deception. At the same time, there are some who see Satan almost everywhere and create such a fear of deception that anxiety keeps sincere Christians from experiencing all that God wants for them. Such people make Satan so powerful, to the extent that they forget that Jesus gained the victory over all evil powers and is truly Lord over all.

In biblical spirituality, Jesus is the center. Since He is Creator and Savior, we worship Him. He sends the Holy Spirit, who comes to us as we commune with God, and teaches us, leads us, guides us, and even helps us pray (Rom. 8:26, 27). Since Jesus has triumphed over Satan and sin, we may seek His help and power when we face evil. We pray in the name of Jesus (John 14:13, 14) with direct love and devotion to Him.

## HBN core concepts

While there are exceptions and some variations, most HBNs would believe in the following four concepts:

1. *“God” is an impersonal power or cosmic force permeating all things.* This teaching is common to all pantheistic beliefs: God exists everywhere and in everything. He is not a Person outside of us, but rather an impersonal force in us, outside of us, over us, and in all things, material and immaterial. As God is not a personal being, so Satan is not a personal being. Consequently, the Christian position of sin as a personal rebellion against God is not tenable to HBN, and the cross as God’s way of salvation is indeed considered “foolishness.”

2. *Humans have the divine within them and need to learn how to experience and enlarge that power through enlightenment, meditation, knowledge, and service.* The law of Karma (the cosmic law of cause and effect) and the process of reincarnation (the endless possibilities of birth-death-birth-death . . . ) provide for human life a limitless path of advancing to higher stages of enlightenment, finally reaching a state of oneness with god (nirvana or bliss). This route is endless and cyclic, and one’s onward progress or downward

plunge depends upon one’s good works or lack thereof in current life.

3. *The path to enlightenment and salvation is based on discipline and practice.* Meditation, which puts people in touch with the divine inside them and the world, is a key ingredient. As one experiences altered states of consciousness through such things as meditation, chanting, certain types of exercise, and breathing, the presence of divinity is said to become real.

4. *Jesus is absent, de-emphasized, or reinterpreted.* Indeed, some HBN movements neither find a need for Jesus nor provide for one. Mostly, HBNs see Jesus as one among many gurus or religious teachers.

Based on these beliefs, HBN spirituality uses a variety of means to rid one of ignorance and make progress toward enlightenment that gives ability to experience the divine in all beings. In most cases, the foremost method includes some type of meditation that, in particular, helps one to connect with the power of “the divine” within. Often, various states of altered consciousness are cultivated to escape from the normal reasoning processes seen as a hindrance to the experiential state of higher consciousness.

## Another joy in eternity

I have recently found myself giving renewed thought to what heaven must be like. I challenged myself to think of things that I had not focused on before. It is easy to reflect upon spending time with Jesus, my guardian angel, and saints from the Bible and upon reuniting with loved ones who had passed away. But, what else will be there?

I have always held this utopian hope of deep and long-lasting harmony among people on earth—not a harmony based on professional affiliations, schools attended, churches attended, or similar political ideologies. Rather, a harmony based on accepting people

for who they are: God’s created beings whom He loves with an everlasting love and died to save.

Perhaps middle-aged realism (or apathy) has settled in. But now I think more and more of the New Jerusalem: a place where people are not judged on whether they are rich or poor, fat or skinny, black or white, blue collar or white collar, uneducated or educated. I want to live in a place where people are genuinely accepted for who they are: sons and daughters of God.

But in order to prepare for that place, I need the Holy Spirit to come into my life every day, instilling these

principles in my heart and living out these principles in my professional, ecclesiastical, and societal relationships with others.

“Dear Lord and Father, live out Your life within me!”

—Willie E. Hucks II, DMin, serves as associate editor, Ministry

**Revival**  
and **REFORMATION**  
YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY



The process is powered by personal decisions, self-effort, and teachings of spiritual leaders. Since one lifetime will most likely not suffice for release to nirvana or bliss, reincarnation and rebirth will facilitate more opportunities to arrive at that state.

As we examine HBN spirituality, we can immediately see factors that are contrary to biblical spirituality, and therefore should be shunned by Christians. Any form of meditation that seeks to escape from or leave behind the mind should be rejected. Christians believe that the mind is an important part of who we are, and leaving it behind is not biblical. Indeed, the biblical anthropology recognizes the crucial role of the mind in both the corruption of sin and the transformation of the redemptive process. Biblical meditation, thus, engages the mind and the heart. Any form of meditation preceded by or involving the invoking of the name of a guru or god should be rejected. Any meditation practice that purports to lead to a state of higher consciousness beyond thought or any that is clearly based on a pantheistic belief system cannot be biblical.

It is helpful to keep in mind four major ways that HBN spirituality contrasts with biblical spirituality. First, biblical spirituality is a relationship with a personal Creator God who interacts with His creation. HBN spirituality seeks an impersonal god/force/power that interpenetrates the world. Second, biblical spirituality sees all of life, including body and mind, as a good gift of God. HBN devalues the body and is suspicious of reason, making both subject to higher spiritual consciousness. Third, biblical spirituality recognizes the sinfulness of humans and their need to repent and seek God's help. HBN spirituality has no room for sin as a rebellion against God such as in the biblical view, and often leads to a silencing of conscience and reliance on one's own good works to move upward in the path of Karma toward the

attainment of bliss. Fourth, biblical spirituality rejoices in the uniqueness of Jesus and authority of the Bible. HBN ignores, de-emphasizes, or reinterprets these truths. Jesus' uniqueness is strangled by the fraternal embrace of HBN.

## Advantages and joys of biblical spirituality

Sometimes Christians have spoken of the wrongness of HBN spirituality without showing or sharing the privileges biblical spirituality offers. Some of these privileges are as follows:

First, biblical spirituality is communion with a personal God. The vocabulary of personal relationship and friendship fit with biblical spirituality. When Christians pray, they encounter a God of love and compassion who communicates grace, mercy, and concern with the details of life.


Second, biblical spirituality expects the real presence of the resurrected Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is there (Matt. 18:20). His final word to His disciples is that He will be with them to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19, 20). Some present-day Christians have lost sight of this truth. A secular worldview has made people suspicious about talk of Jesus' presence because they take an overly rational approach to belief. In some cases, this suspicion about biblical spirituality has led people to seek a religious experience that HBN promises. True biblical spirituality unites reason and experience. An undue emphasis on either aspect is dangerous. We must both think and experience.

Third, biblical spirituality is based on grace. Worship does not seek to gain God's favor but to celebrate His presence and grace. Christians obey, not to earn salvation, but in response to God's love and grace. God does not hear prayers because we pray the right way; He hears because He loves His children. In HBN spirituality we must follow right methods or it does not work. In contrast

to the biblical spirituality of grace, HBN advocates advance to bliss through their own works.

## Conclusion

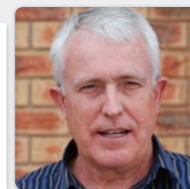
Biblical spirituality is thus unique—a way of life rooted in human helplessness in the presence of sin and God's empowerment through His love and grace. While biblical spirituality recognizes that humans in their own strength stand helpless and powerless, they have God's eternal offer that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, NKJV). Biblical spirituality recognizes the primacy of God's grace first, and only out of that grace is one capable of leading a life of spiritual victory. As the apostle says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:8–10, NKJV).

As Christians we must be able to give a reason for the life we lead, reveal the empowerment of the Spirit in our daily life, and joyfully proclaim the privileges of communion with a loving, personal God. 

- 1 The Barna Group, "Christianity Is No Longer Americans' Default Faith," January 12, 2009, [www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/15-christianity-is-no-longer-americans-default-faith](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/15-christianity-is-no-longer-americans-default-faith).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Richard Kyle, *The New Age Movement in American Culture* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 66. It should be noted that Kyle's definition of the New Age movement is rather broad.
- 4 For a definition, see Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell's, 1999), 2.
- 5 It should be noted that this article deals with general Christian biblical spirituality. The author is a Seventh-day Adventist and in a later article deals specifically with the unique facets of Adventist spirituality.
- 6 Kyle, *The New Age Movement*. See pages 153–74 on New Age elements in health trends.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1923), 132. See also Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 2:187; Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), 188.

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**Peter Roennfeldt, DMin**, a retired pastor active in equipping church planting teams and disciple making around the world, lives in Caroline Springs, Victoria, Australia.



# Insights for mission *from the context and flow of* Revelation 14:6–12

For most commentators, the book of Revelation is the place to go for last-day events. And rightly so, for in this book, referred to as the “Apocalypse of John,” final events are portrayed in graphic language.

Yet, there is more to Revelation than just end-time events. Linked to those events is something deeper, and that is the call to mission. Revelation is a *missionary* book. It demonstrates that mission flows from God’s heart. Grace and peace come from Him. He “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev. 1:4, 5).<sup>1</sup> This began long before Calvary or even Bethlehem: Jesus was “the Lamb . . . slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). He extends an open invitation to all who wish to “Come!”—and His mission culminates in His return (Rev. 22:17, 20).

The Apocalypse provides unique insights into God’s mission. Could this revelation also suggest strategies for mission? Might the context, order, and flow of the book, and specifically the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, provide helpful insights for evangelism and disciple making? This article seeks to address these questions.

## Unfolding God’s message

The idea that the context and flow of the three angels’ messages provide

a framework for mission is not new. It was articulated by pioneer Adventist evangelist and seminary teacher J. L. Shuler, who shaped the preaching of about 3,000 Adventist pastors—including William Fagal, founding speaker and director of *Faith for Today*; George Vandeman, founding speaker and director of *It Is Written*; and public evangelists Fordyce Detamore, who developed a ministry for former members, and John F. Coltheart, who pioneered an archaeological approach—first using *Dead Men Do Tell Tales* for his opening meetings.<sup>2</sup>

Shuler taught that an evangelistic series should be “the plain unfolding of the special message of Revelation 14 . . . a connected exposition of that threefold message, with *Christ as the center*.”<sup>3</sup> His commitment to this method was seen in his preaching.<sup>4</sup> Early in a series of meetings, he would present Revelation 14:6–12, not attempting to explain the three messages but, simply, to whet the appetite of his audience. These messages then provided the framework and order that enabled him to progressively unwrap each message—going “no farther into the truth in any one sermon than the people are able to follow.”<sup>5</sup>

## The context

Before identifying the flow in the messages, we need to see their context.

The vision of Revelation 12–14 provides a graphic account of the experiences of God’s people, with Jesus’ birth, sacrifice, ascension, and the attacks of evil against Him all dramatically portrayed. The three angels expose a rampant trinity of evil—the dragon, beast, and false prophet—using spiritual deception, economic sanctions, and manipulative force (Rev. 13:1–18; 19:19, 20). Like an end-time Elijah (Mal. 4:5, 6; cf. Matt. 17:11), the three angels make a final appeal to prepare for the great harvest, the coming of Jesus (Rev. 14:14–20).

Each message is of striking significance for those in environments hostile towards God, faith, and obedience. The first loudly proclaims God’s *eternal good news*; the second, *the fall of Babylon* (the trinity of evil); and the third, the choice all must make between damnation and deliverance. Adventists find identity in proclaiming these final appeals to the world. In both personal and public evangelism, we have sought to progressively unfold these truths to the world.

## The flow

Within these messages can be found a certain flow or development. They move, as illustrated in figure 1, from the context, to gospel



proclamation, to Christian living. The heavenly messengers then challenge with distinctive doctrines, prophetic warnings, and the call to faithful witness and the multiplication of disciples.

how to pray, read the Bible, meditate, worship, experience family worship, participate in small groups, and introduce others to Jesus. Life concerns will be addressed: addictions, hurts,

turn, reach new people for God. The three angels represent God's people sharing their faith, and "their deeds will follow them" (Rev. 14:12, 13). In life and death, their witness multiplies. These are not simply the deeds at steps 4 and 5, but the witness of each step. Those bearing the three angels' messages are avid disciple makers: disciples making disciples who make disciples!

**Figure 1. As reached, each step continues to be significant**

- 1 relate to the context
- 2 tell the story of Jesus
- 3 live practical Christianity
- 4 explore doctrine
- 5 explore major prophetic themes
- 6 multiply disciples

This suggests a framework for mission, an order, or steps, for sharing:

*Step 1—context.* There is a sense in which evangelism starts with understanding the person's world context rather than with the message. Jesus mingled with people and instructed His disciples to do the same. The end-time Elijah message engages with common interests and meets people's needs: cultivating initiatives that alleviate suffering, transform communities, and heal broken relationships (Mal. 4:5, 6).

*Step 2—gospel.* Jesus' commission to share the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 24:14) and to make disciples of all (Matt. 28:18–20) is affirmed in the *sign* of end-time disciples proclaiming "the eternal gospel . . . to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6). Known for their love for Jesus, they prioritize the "eternal gospel"—salvation through Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

*Step 3—living.* The first angel's message then moves to practical life concerns: "'Fear God and give him glory'" (Rev. 14:7). To *fear God* means to "hate evil . . . pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (Prov. 8:13). This calls us to live for God in end times, to shun the fearful deceptions and evil allures of the dragon, beast, and false prophet.

For those who have come to know Jesus (step 2), practical Christian end-time living (step 3) involves learning

brokenness, alienations, self-identity, forgiveness, family, children, sexuality, belonging, and trust, as well as other problems. Justice issues will arise. Many of the major questions of secular postmoderns need to be explored and responses initiated. This evangelism step, once reached, continues to be significant in the journey of Christian growth.

*Step 4—doctrine.* No dichotomy exists between Jesus and doctrine, or practical Christian living and doctrine. Steps 1–3 relate to our understanding of God, salvation, and life—doctrine. But there is progression. The messages move to address what could be called *distinctive doctrines*<sup>6</sup>: "The hour of (God's) judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev. 14:7).

*Step 5—prophecy.* Because many have a limited knowledge of God or His Word, little is gained from rushing to the major prophetic warnings of the second and third angels—concerning the fall of Babylon, the beast, his image, mark, and fate (Rev. 14:8–11)—before finding common ground, sharing Jesus, and cultivating practical Christian life values. These warnings are of vital significance but have more meaning and relevance when discussed with the heart concerns of listeners kept in mind.

*Step 6—multiply.* Good evangelism always equips new disciples, who, in

## Practical implications of this framework

What are some implications of suggesting the three angels' messages provide a frame for mission?

First, it provides a structure for careful evangelistic instruction and progressive understanding. Once a person's spiritual interest has been cultivated through identifying with common concerns from the context of life and the world, the evangelistic task is to unpack God's last day message of Revelation 14:6–12.

Second, it provides a path that shows awareness of each person's journey but is not prescriptive. The significance of each evangelism step, for each person or group, is assessed. If committed believers, step 2 gospel discussions will be times of rejoicing in shared faith while reviewing Jesus' life-story and ministry—rather than weeks reading the Gospels and providing apologetic evidences for Jesus. However, if new to faith in Jesus, step 3 life discussions will involve teaching, modeling, and practicing Bible reading, prayer, family worship, and faith sharing—not to mention support through a myriad of life issues such as overcoming destructive addictions, finding healing for brokenness, offering forgiveness, and cultivating trust. Some steps might take significant time, but that will depend upon those with whom you are sharing.

There is an important implication for those engaged in public evangelistic preaching. In the past, public evangelists adjusted their topics as they progressed through their series of meetings. If it became evident that

a better foundation was needed before moving from one step to another, further evangelistic topics relative to that area were added. However, with the pressures of modern life, it has become necessary to reduce the number of meetings, and with the innovation of packaged presentations, the liberty to insert supplementary themes becomes limited. Unfortunately, in moving quickly to distinctive doctrinal and prophetic themes, steps 1–3 can be neglected or truncated, robbing the message of its appeal and transformative power. To ensure this does not happen, visitation must be a top priority.

At the same time, these six steps keep the evangelist moving forward. The task is not complete until all aspects of this end-time Elijah message are shared and explained. Each

(step 5), many of their friends will be *burned* by the experience and will never wish to hear more. We can use the six steps as points of reference for the development of new disciples—and, in turn, for their disciple making.

### A framework for answering questions

Before responding to questions, it is a simple thing to ascertain the step of faith of the enquirer. If you are at step 1 (where you are seeking to understand and relate to the person's world) and the person asks a doctrinal (step 4) or major prophetic (step 5) question, we must answer in their context; i.e., step 1. For example, how could you respond if a person at step 1 asks: "Tell me, what do you think happens when a person dies?" This is a step 4 doctrinal question being asked by a

want to encourage you to read the Gospel of John, chapter 11, in the Bible." Explain how to find this—even downloading an easy to read Bible onto their phone or tablet—affirming: "This story explains what I believe happens at death. Read it, and the next time we meet, let me know what you discover and what you think." In this response you are introducing them to the gospel (step 2).

The same principles can be applied for all questions:

1. Ask questions to understand their context—their real reasons for asking.
2. Answer in the frame of their present step of understanding and growth.
3. Point to a story of Jesus relating to their question—encouraging discovery.

## *Adventists find identity in proclaiming these final appeals to the world.*

step provides a foundation for what follows and, as reached, continues to be significant in the Christian journey. Adventism is not shaped alone by doctrinal (step 4) or prophetic understandings (step 5). Undergirding all is our relationship with Jesus Christ (step 2) and the values that shape our lives (step 3). However, steps 2 and 3, without steps 4 and 5, do not provide a full understanding of Revelation 14:6–12 either—and to neglect step 6 (*disciple making*) at each step further truncates this last-day, end-time message.

It is important that new disciples are provided with a simple framework for sharing faith and given instruction on how to share with family and friends at each step. If they wait to share when convicted of distinctive doctrines (step 4) or challenged with major prophecies

person with limited or no knowledge of Jesus Christ, Christian life, or biblical teachings.

Rather than providing a full Bible study on the state of the dead, a step 1 response might be a question: "Why do you ask—and what are your thoughts?" We have learned that few ask this question without a context. Has this young man had a friend killed in a work accident recently? Or, did this elderly lady lose a newborn baby 60 years ago? Or, has this young lady recently supported a friend through an abortion? This context and the person's understanding will inform your response. To neglect this and blithely quote Bible verses could destroy spiritual interest.

If the person persists in knowing your opinion, another step 1 response to this step 4 question might be: "I

4. Affirm your confidence in these biblical accounts—and in Jesus.
5. Inquire as to what they discover in reading the Bible story.

Even for questions within the frame of their present step of understanding, this approach fosters greater ownership of Bible discoveries.

### Unique challenges and fresh opportunities

At first glance, this frame seems predicated upon control: share step 1 information until ready for step 2—and keep step 4 and 5 insights from them until they are prepared. To think that we could achieve this in our information-saturated world is unrealistic. As soon as people know we are Christian or Adventist, they surf the Internet—where there is no sequence

to the mix of related and unrelated information and misinformation.

Another challenge is the prevalence of post-Christian paganism. It is more difficult to witness to those who have rejected Christianity because of Christians acting more un-Christianly (religious wars, abuse, manipulative control, injustice, the accumulation of wealth, discrimination) than in pre-Christian pagan societies, where the name of Jesus and church seem unknown. Further, those shaped by postmodern thought will not suffer discrimination of any hue. And, for them, for a Christian to claim to have defined truth is the height of arrogance, and to point to the error of others is deemed defamatory.

Yet, this framework does not depend upon manipulation or control. Nor does it find its effectiveness

in invectives hurled at others, but suggests fresh possibilities, for it is about relationships. This is why step 1 (relating to their concerns) is so important. Read Jesus' instructions in Luke 10:8 and 9 again: listen to *their story*—as you eat together; let them experience *your story*—that their hearts might be prepared for *God's story*—for the kingdom is near. People are bombarded with information, but they make decisions with people whom they trust.

Within the circles of trusted friends, truth (and whether it works or not) is explored. This relational, experiential priority of our postmodern world offers prime opportunities but means connecting with people and their concerns. This is how Jesus shared His message—and, the flow of Revelation 14:6–12 affirms: "Christ's method alone will give

true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' ”<sup>7</sup> 143

- 1 Bible quotations are from the New International Version.
- 2 Daniel R. Guild, "The Life and Work of J. L. Shuler," *Ministry*, October 1972, [www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1972/10/the-life-and-work-of-j.-l.-shuler](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1972/10/the-life-and-work-of-j.-l.-shuler).
- 3 J. L. Shuler, *Public Evangelism*, Review & Herald, 1939:78; emphasis by Shuler.
- 4 J. L. Shuler, *Evangelistic Lectures*, Review & Herald, 1950, [members.impulse.net/~uhl/bible/eBooks/evangelistic\\_lectures.html](http://members.impulse.net/~uhl/bible/eBooks/evangelistic_lectures.html).
- 5 Shuler, *Public Evangelism*, 1939:80.
- 6 Such as *hour of judgment* and *Sabbath* as introduced by the text; but also, examples like sanctuary, standards of Christian living, stewardship, state of the dead, second coming, and human destiny.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.

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## “What Are Human Beings That You Remember Them?”

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- WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF DEATH AND HELL?
- ARE WE INDIVISIBLE OR IS THERE A SOUL THAT SURVIVES DEATH?

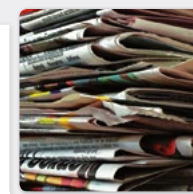
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## ► Adventists named “most racially diverse religious group in United states”

**Silver Spring, Maryland, United States**—Do not worry if you happen to walk into a Seventh-day Adventist church in the United States where English is not the first language of choice. Chances are you are worshipping in one of the increasingly typical Adventist congregations across the country.

Seventh-day Adventists are the most racially and ethnically diverse religious group in the United States, according to the Pew Research Center, a respected nonpartisan organization.

“Thirty-seven percent of adults who identify as Seventh-day Adventists are white, while 32% are black, 15% are Hispanic, 8% are Asian, and another 8% are another race or mixed race,” Michael Lipka, a Pew editor who focuses on religion, wrote in the report.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis, based on data provided by the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, looked at the racial and ethnic composition of 29 major religious groups. Racial and ethnic groups were broken down into five categories: whites, blacks, Hispanics of all races, Asians, and other races and mixed-race Americans.

**Gary Krause**, director of the Office of Adventist Mission for the Adventist General Conference, said the church’s very mission of preparing all people for Jesus’ second coming calls for diversity.

“We’re not an American church. We’re not an African or Asian church. We’re not a European church,” Krause said. “We’re a worldwide movement with a mission to all people groups.”

He noted that the Adventist Church operates in 215 countries and territories. “But we’re not happy about it because the United Nations lists 22 more countries where we don’t have established work,” said Krause, whose office coordinates and provides funding for the church’s global mission work. “We’re all God’s children, and we love to welcome people from all races into our family.”

In the United States, the Adventist Church has grown more diverse since 2007, according to a similar Pew study<sup>2</sup> carried out that year. In just seven years, the number of white Adventists has decreased by 6 percentage points, from 43 percent to 37 percent, while the number of black Adventists has increased by 11 points, from 21 percent to 32 percent. Asian members grew by three percentage points, from 5 percent to 8 percent, and Adventists in the other/mixed-races category doubled from 4 percent to 8 percent.

**Daniel Weber**, communication director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, said the 1.2 million Adventists in the United States are a direct reflection of the church’s worldwide membership of 18.5 million people and growing.


“As our church has grown overseas and is represented in almost every culture, race, and language group, this same diversity has also changed in North America because

our experiences with different cultures overseas has allowed us to be more effective in reaching the diverse growing populations here,” Weber said. “The Gospel Commission calls for us to reach all people of all cultures.”

The Adventist world church has not conducted research solely on its diversity. But the findings of an unpublished 2013 general survey of North American church members that included questions on ethnicity fall in line with Pew’s new report, said **David Trim**, director of the world church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

Trim was not surprised by the Pew report, saying, “The Adventist Church as a whole is very accepting of all people, and its message emphasizes commonalities such as a community in Christ and the hope in the Second Coming rather than differences. We have an identity that transcends national and ethnic differences—and that is not true for every church.”

The Pew report defines a denomination as diverse if no racial or ethnic group amounts to more than 40 percent of its adult membership. Only two other religious groups fit that definition: Muslims (with a score of 8.7) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (8.6), which placed second and third, respectively, after Adventists. On the other end of the index’s spectrum, the least religiously diverse groups tend to be denominations where most of their members are either mostly white or mostly black.

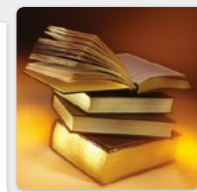
The report includes three subsets of people who are unaffiliated religiously: atheists, agnostics, and “nothing in particular.” All three groups are mostly white. [Andrew McChesney and Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*] 

Some of the 70,000 Seventh-day Adventists who attended the General Conference session in San Antonio, Texas, in July.  
[Photo by David B. Sherwin]



1 Michael Lipka, “The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups,” PewResearchCenter, July 27, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>.

2 <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/Appendix-D-Detailed-Tables.pdf>.



## Adventist Maverick: Celebrating the Work of George R. Knight

Gilbert M. Valentine and Woodrow W. Whidden II, eds., Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2014.

George R. Knight has impacted numerous Seventh-day Adventists through his writing, teaching, and public speaking. Those familiar with Knight and his work will appreciate a new book, entitled *Adventist Maverick*. This edited volume, compiled by Gilbert M. Valentine and Woodrow W. Whidden II, features essays written by Knight's friends, colleagues, and former students. Most contributors provide innovative and personal perspectives on Knight's life and career within three disciplines: Adventist history, theology, and the philosophy of education. Knight also provides some autobiographical material that helps illuminate the man behind it all.

In the essay entitled "George Knight's Contribution to Adventist Theology," readers will appreciate Denis Fortin's concise explanation of Knight's views on sin, atonement, and salvation. If it is not already clear why "SIN is love" or how Eve sinned *before* eating the forbidden fruit, readers will appreciate Fortin's thoughtful treatment of Knight's stimulating approach to theology.

Other essays within this book provide helpful summaries of Knight's contributions to theology and biblical studies. Gerald Wheeler, for example, provides a helpful glimpse of Knight's devotional commentaries on Scripture, which are written "from a pastoral heart" (173). Similarly, Theodore Levterov has provided an overview of Knight's daily devotionals and explained how they "have had a significant impact on Adventism" (215).

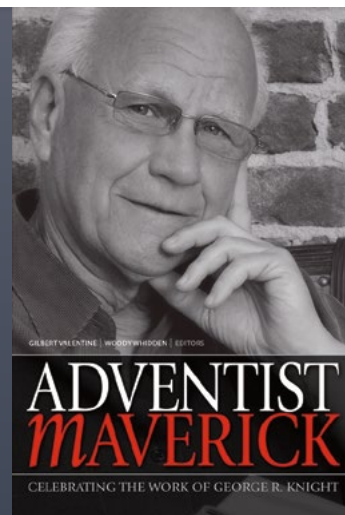
While many have read Knight's numerous works on the history of Adventism, few may realize or appreciate his revisionist perspective. Numerous contributors help

place Knight's own contribution in its historical context. For example, Gary Land explains how Knight was able to provide a more balanced view of Millerism by accepting some facts pointed out by the critics, while reject-

ing an "undercover Jesuit" because I was laughing so hard (221, 222).

*Adventist Maverick* is a valuable sourcebook for pastors, teachers, theologians, and Adventists in general, delivered in nice, bite-size pieces with


*The reader will enjoy an informing overview of Knight's major contributions to Adventism and find ways to explore Knight's own writings in more detail.*



ing the flaws of certain apologists. In this way, Land explains, "George recognized his denomination's origins in fanatical Adventism and described its subsequent development as a 'disentanglement' " (93). The beauty of *Adventist Maverick* is that it helps people today understand and appreciate how Knight has been able to guide Adventists away from quasi-hagiographical interpretations of their "collective past" (15).

Readers will also be delighted with George Knight's response at the end of *Adventist Maverick*. His autobiographical account is fascinating and sprinkled with his usual sense of humor. In fact, I had to set the book down when he described his supposed identity as

chapters that usually do not exceed ten pages in length. The reader will enjoy an informing overview of Knight's major contributions to Adventism and find ways to explore Knight's own writings in more detail. Those who have not had the privilege of studying with George Knight in his classroom can now drink in the wisdom of Adventism's most influential author within the last 35 years and better understand his lasting impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

—Reviewed by Kevin M. Burton, who is currently studying toward a master of religion degree at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. 

**S. Joseph Kidder, DMin**, serves as professor of Christian Ministry, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



# A church filled with God's grace and love

In an interview of 230 people,\* asking them what they expected from church, 61 percent said that the quality they wanted in the church was that of a loving church. People wanted to feel loved and accepted by their community of faith. I believe the greatest need that we have is to love and be loved. That love should always be found in a biblical church founded on God's Word.

People will tell you that they want a friendly church, but our research shows that the definition of *friendly* has changed. In the past, being friendly meant being nice, saying hello, acting courteously. Today, it means offering acceptance and respect for the person. It means *community* in a safe and loving environment. It means that whether people go to church in a blue suit or blue jeans, whether they show up with a bottle of water or a cup of coffee, whether they quote Ellen G. White or Oprah Winfrey, they are welcomed, respected, and valued.

I have been to a lot of churches, some of them full of warmth, love, and a spirit of acceptance; some of them harsh and full of backbiting; some of them perfectly happy with each other and with no desire to bring in any guests. But I have never heard any of them say, "We are critical and faultfinding; we're not as loving as we should be," or "We are friendly with each other, but we tend to alienate visitors."

One of the distinguishing traits of the early church was its members' love for one another. You could see the love in the early church because they looked out for each other. "And all that believed were together, and

had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44, 45, KJV).

Every church says they are a loving church. Compare your church with this definition.

A loving church is . . .


- defined by the quality of caring, not the formality of the greeting time.
- a "home" where one's fears, joys, yearnings, and aspirations can be shared without fear of condemnation and rejection.
- a supportive community for those who are struggling.
- a place for *friends* who can be trusted, depended upon, and enjoyed and who share the same goals.
- where God's love is experienced in a concrete way through His people.
- where imperfections are acceptable and people discover their greatest potential.
- where people are open and honest together without the fear of being judged.
- where distinctions of personal rights, possessions, thoughts, emotions, and actions are secondary to a commitment to each other and the kingdom of God.
- where people laugh with others, not at others; cry with others, not because of others; forgive others, and are forgiven by others; love others, and are loved by others.

Through God's grace and power, your church can become a caring and warm community of faith where

all kinds of people are accepted and loved, where members are excited about coming to church and bringing their friends with them because they will have a feeling of belonging.

Here are some ideas to make your church a loving church.

1. *Pray about it.* The power of God has a way of changing people as nothing else can. Pray that your church will be the place where people feel at home and experience love and grace.
2. *Be loving.* Our study found that loving congregations are led by loving leaders. This becomes contagious.
3. *Preach and teach about it.* Change in the church happens by example, encouragement, and biblical principles. God wants His church to be a reflection of His love, grace, and acceptance.
4. *Highlight the loving people in the church.* Let them share stories about giving and receiving love. This is a way to inspire and motivate people to act more like Jesus in His love and treatment of people.

Keep doing the things above, and eventually your church will be like the church of the book of Acts, filled with God's grace and love. 

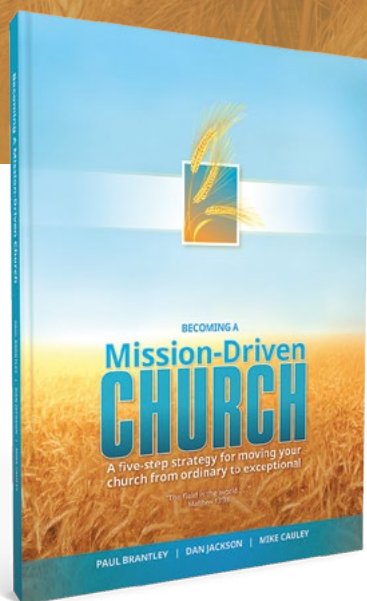
\* This group of interviewees included about 15 pastors, 40 leaders, 40 members from growing churches, equal numbers from plateauing or declining churches, and about 40 seekers in the same geographical area. We defined a growing church as a congregation experiencing a 3 to 5 percent growth in membership, baptisms, and attendance for a minimum of three years.

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