



ELDER'S DIGEST

A Quarterly Resource for local Church Elders Vol. 11 No. 3

HE is the
FOUNDATION

1 Cor. 3:10

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The excellence of HARMONY and UNITY

There are many divisive forces at work today which threaten the unity of the church. Because unity was of such importance, Jesus at the close of His ministry on earth made it the central subject of His priesthood prayer.

In our time, all the means of communication are being used by unfaithful members to give wide publicity to the supposed or imagined faults of the brethren, misinterpreting their motives, circulating insinuations, arousing suspicion, and in every conceivable manner breaking down confidence in the integrity of the leaders and destroying the unity of the Advent Movement.

It is the responsibility of every true elder to guard the flock against the attack of these enemies, for such they are regardless of their profession. Amid the perils of the last days every faithful shepherd will endeavor earnestly and perseveringly to keep the flock united when in danger of

being caught and torn by ravenous wolves.

“As we approach the last crisis,” wrote Ellen G. White, “it is of vital importance that harmony and unity exist among the Lord’s instrumentalities. The world is filled with storm and war and variance. . . . While he [the great apostate] seeks to unite his agents in warring against the truth he will work to divide and scatter



its advocates. . . . The members of Christ’s church have the power to thwart the purpose of the adversary of souls. At such a time as this let them not be found at variance with another or with any of the Lord’s workers. Amidst the general discord let there be one place where harmony and unity exists because the Bible is made the guide of life.” —*Testimonies*, Vol. 7, p. 182.

“We are coming to a time when, more than ever before, we shall need to press together, to labor united. In union there is strength. In discord and disunion there is only weakness. . . . Press together, press together, press together. Do not let Satan cast his hellish shadow between brethren. Press together; in unity there is strength.” — *Testimonies*, Vol. 7, p. 374.

That “one place” should be the Seventh-day Adventist Church. “Unity is the strength of the church. Satan knows this, and he employs his whole force to bring in dissension. . . . Great attention should be given to the subject of unity.” —*Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, pp. 159, 160.

When elders, pastors, and church members are living in harmony with God, they will be in harmony with one another. Someone has illustrated the principle of unity by the spokes in a wheel. The spokes come closer together as they near the hub. In like manner the people of God come closer to one another as they come closer to Him and become more like Him in character.

Dear elder, strive to reach this divine ideal in your congregation. Remember that there is strength in harmony and unity.

DISCIPLES

The point of the Great Commission is that the goal of Jesus is the making of disciples. There is the initial discipleship required for baptism and the ongoing discipleship needed for teaching. People are to be baptized when they have arrived at the initial discipleship stage. At that point, they are disciples, although not fully mature. That's why Jesus suggests that we baptize "them," these initial disciples, and continue teaching them in an ongoing discipleship model. It is with this thought in mind that we wish to examine the statements of Jesus about becoming a disciple. It would be these statements that Jesus would have had in mind when He commanded His followers to make disciples. The statements we examine here are those that Jesus indicates are needed in order to become a disciple. Thus Jesus is here dealing with the initial discipleship needed before baptism rather than the ongoing discipleship received after baptism. The first passage detailing what it means to be a disciple of Jesus is found in Matthew 10:24, 25.

How to become a disciple

R u s s e l l B u r r i l l

A student [matbeta] is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!

This passage indicates that one who becomes a disciple enters into a learning relationship with the Master. The disciple is one who has willingness to learn—he or she is therefore teachable. This teachable spirit is an absolute requirement for one who is to be baptized as a disciple of Jesus.

This passage also suggests that the one who becomes a disciple of Jesus can expect to be treated as Jesus was, with misunderstanding and persecution. When people first come to faith in Christ, it is difficult for them to endure trying circumstances for their faith. If, as this text suggests, one who is a disciple is able to withstand these attacks, then that person must have come to a basic maturity of faith in Christ before becoming a disciple. Therefore, part of the evangelistic process of making a disciple is to help that person develop a faith mature enough to withstand persecution or ridicule. This was especially true of the earliest Christians, who many times lost their lives soon after their commitment to Christ.

Discipleship, then, requires a strong commitment to Christ as well as a teachable spirit. This does not usually happen when one first prays the sinner's prayer, but is the result of some initial growing in the Christian faith, so that the person has not only submitted to Christ but has actually begun to learn that he can trust Christ with his very life. The second major passage on

Jesus' understanding of becoming a disciple is found in Luke 14:26, 27, 33.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . In the same way, any of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple.

This passage tells us that large crowds were following Jesus (verse 25). If Jesus believed in mass movements of unconverted people coming to faith, then He made a very inappropriate, discouraging response to the masses in the statement here. There is a cost to following Jesus. Jesus doesn't want half-hearted followers, He desires

fully committed individuals. Those who decide to become His disciples must be willing to give up everything, including home, family, relatives, wealth, and position, in order to follow Him.

According to church growth specialist, Donald McGavran, Jesus should have received the entire crowd and not worried about commitment—He could address that later. But that was not the approach of Jesus. Even when the rich young ruler came to Christ, Jesus discouraged him by demanding full commitment before He would bestow discipleship upon him. McGavran's theology would have been to accept the rich young ruler as he was, make him a disciple, and then hope commitment would come later. That, however, was not the pattern of Jesus. To Jesus, the prerequisite to

Discipleship requires a strong commitment to Christ as well as a teachable spirit.

discipleship was full surrender to Himself and a willingness to give up everything to follow Him.

To become a disciple, Jesus declares, is to be willing to bear "His cross." Note that it is not "my cross," but "His cross." Since those crucified were usually slaves or those convicted of the most terrible crimes, the one crucified often bore his *own* cross to the place of crucifixion. They were often hated and despised by society. Thus, to bear the cross is to do just what Jesus did when He bore the cross, to endure without complaint or regret the frown of friends and relatives and to bear reproach with patience and humility. To be a disciple, one must be willing to bear "His cross." The disciple then has supreme fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. No greater honor can come to any person.

The religion Christ offers when He invites people to become His disciples is not one of ease and self-indulgence but of cross bearing. It doesn't mean that the Christian goes through life moodily and joylessly, but it does mean that the one who has become His disciple finds joy in the affliction and trouble caused by his allegiance to Christ, counting it a privilege to suffer with Him. Christ does not promise ease and pleasure in this world, but He does promise inner peace and happiness. To secure this, the

disciple of Jesus gladly bears "His cross."

This statement of Jesus about initial discipleship emphasizes commitment more than "head knowledge." Discipleship involves total, absolute commitment to the person of Christ more than simply subscribing to a set of doctrines. That is not to say that understanding basic doctrine is not an essential preparation for baptism, but the understanding of doctrine must be for the purpose of helping people give themselves totally to the person of Christ. One does not make a commitment to a person one does not know. Understanding doctrine in the context of this passage should help new Christians learn to know Jesus so that they will feel comfortable making an unreserved, radical commitment to Him.

The third passage which deals with being a disciple of Jesus is found in John 8:31, 32.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

In this passage, Jesus is speaking to people who already believe in Him. If Jesus were to have accepted McGavran's understanding of discipleship, these people would be considered disciples already. Yet Jesus declares that it is not sufficient

simply to believe in Him. To be a disciple means to continually hold on to His teachings. This would suggest, as Bruner did earlier, that being a disciple involves a longer process than simply the initial coming to Christ.

The result of continuing to hold to His teachings, Jesus promised, would be to know the truth. John later has Jesus declaring that He is the truth (John 14:6). One who is to be a disciple of Jesus, then, would be a person who really knows Jesus as the ultimate truth in the life. In order for this to happen evangelistically, the neophyte must be taught the basic teachings about Jesus prior to discipleship. Indeed, the Amplified Version suggests that a disciple is one who holds fast to the teachings of Jesus and lives in accordance with them. A disciple, then, is one who is obedient to what Jesus says: a commandment-keeper. Obviously, he is keeping Jesus' commandments out of his love for Jesus and not because of requirement or duty. This again suggests a strong attachment to Jesus as the basis of discipleship, and obedience to the teachings of Jesus as an outward fruit of that attachment. If this outward fruit were missing, it would indicate that discipleship has not occurred.

A disciple is one who hears the call of Jesus and joins His company. In its Jewish context, it means much more than in secular Greek. For the Greek, it meant student, pupil, or apprentice. In the New Testament, it means total allegiance. This is reflected in the teaching emphasis in making disciples.

The next passage on discipleship is a very short one found in John 13:34.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Love is to be the absolute, infallible test of one's discipleship. You can tell that a person is a disciple when that person loves as Jesus does--unconditionally. It does not mean that love is fully perfected, but the agape love of Jesus should be found, at least embryonically, in the life of the one who is a disciple. Again, Jesus is giving us tests of discipleship. If the Great Commission commands us to make disciples, then to produce people whom we call Christians but who do not have the love of Christ abiding in their hearts is to misrepresent the gospel of Christ.

The fantastic success of the early church was not

so much due to their correct methodology as to their consistent witness by exemplifying in their lives the clear marks of discipleship that Jesus modeled for them. It is a tragedy when the "masses" are brought into membership in the church without these clear evidences of discipleship. This destroys the natural witness of the church and weakens Christianity. Jesus instruction on disciple making as the job of the church seems to be designed to prevent development of a church that would compromise its witness. Jesus is concerned about reaching the masses, but He wants them reached with the "real thing," not with artificial Christianity.

The final passage in which Jesus refers to disciple making is John 15:8.

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Connection with Christ means fruit bearing. It is the inevitable result of such a union. Because it is inevitable, if the fruit is not there, we can know that discipleship is not occurring. Here is another of Jesus' tests by which the church can measure whether or not a person has become a disciple. The person must be producing fruit. What is this fruit? Some may suggest that Jesus has in mind the fruit of the Spirit enunciated by the apostle Paul in the book of Galatians. However, Jesus is speaking prior to Paul. In the context of this passage, Jesus is referring to Himself as the vine and His followers as the branches. The job of the branches is to produce fruit because of their living connection to the vine. Otherwise, they are cut off as nonproductive.

The whole context of this passage seems to center on a mission understanding. The Christian who is not reproducing by creating other disciples is not really a disciple. It is impossible, then, to be a follower of Jesus and not share Him. Disciples must not only share, they must also make disciples; otherwise, they themselves cannot be considered disciples. Jesus' discipleship invites people into a lifetime of disciple making. Jesus wants us to produce much fruit; this is not to be a casual convert once in a lifetime. **E**

Russell Burrill is director of the North American Division Evangelism Institute.

Q & A

Questions and answers

Francis D. Nichols

Christ told the thief on the cross that he would be with Him that day in Paradise. (See Luke 23:43).

The text reads thus: "Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Believers in the doctrine of immortal souls, or spirits, boldly bring forth 1 Peter 3:18-20 in an attempt to prove that when Christ died on the cross He went down to preach to certain lost souls in hell. But that claim is no sooner proved to be groundless than they confront us with this text in Luke 23:43, and inform us that when Christ died on the cross He went immediately to Paradise. We believe that Christ did not go to Paradise that crucifixion Friday, and for the following reasons:

If the reader will compare Revelation 2:7 with Revelation 22:1, 2, he will see that Paradise is where the "throne of God" is. Therefore, if Christ had gone to Paradise that Friday afternoon, He would have gone into the very presence of God. But Christ Himself, on the resurrection morning, declared to Mary, as she fell at His feet to worship Him, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." John 20:17. How perfectly this statement of Christ's agrees with the words of the angel to the women at the tomb: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Matt. 28:6. He had lain in the tomb, that was why He said on the resurrection morning, "I am not yet ascended to my Father." Are we therefore to be placed in the embarrassing position of attempting to decide whether to accept the statements made to the women by Christ and the angel on Sunday morning, or the statement made by Christ to the thief on Friday afternoon? No, Christ did not contradict Himself. Note the punctuation of Luke 23:43.

Then remember that the punctuation in the Bible is quite modern. The early manuscripts of the Bible not only did not use the comma, which is the particular punctuation mark in this sentence, but they actually

ran the words right together in the line. Our translators used their best judgment in placing punctuation marks, but their work was certainly not inspired. Therefore we need not be held to these marks made by translators only about four hundred years ago, when we are endeavoring to determine the intent of the writers of nineteen hundred years ago.

The change of a comma may make a great difference in the meaning. If you write, "*The teacher says my boy is no good,*" you mean one thing. But you mean something quite different if you add two commas, thus: "*The teacher, says my boy, is no good.*" The words are the same, but the meaning is different. Now if the translators, who did such excellent work in general, had placed the comma in Luke 23:43 after "today" instead of after "thee," we would not be confronted with an apparently hopeless contradiction. Christ's words could then properly be understood thus: Verily I say unto thee today (this day when it seems that I am deserted of God and man and am dying as a common criminal), Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise. Instead of being deprived of meaning, the words "today" take on a real significance.

A similar sentence construction is found in the writings of the prophet Zechariah: "Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee." Zech. 9:12. The context shows that the rendering "double" was not to take place on that very "today," but was a future event. It is evident that "today" qualifies "declare." Even so in Luke 23:43, if "today" be allowed to qualify "say," which is not only proper grammar, but a parallel to the language of Zechariah, there is no contradiction between the message to the thief and that to Mary. And, we should add, there is no conscious entity soaring away to Paradise that sad Friday afternoon. **E**

Francis D. Nichol was editor of the *Adventist Review*. This article was taken from his book *Answers to Objections*, pp. 352-353.



Never lose your sense of Urgency

Robert H. Pierson

Urgency must characterize our preaching as well as our planning. Paul's message to Timothy, "Never lose your sense of urgency" (2 Tim. 4:2), was given in context with "preach the word; . . . reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Urgent times demand urgent preaching. It is of the utmost importance that a preacher of the Advent should not "take the hour" or "occupy the pulpit." We stand between the living and the dead, and our preaching must constantly remind our congregations that soon there shall "be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6).

If our gift is preaching," Paul wrote, "let us preach to the limit of our vision" (Rom. 12:7). I learned a valuable lesson early in my preparation for the ministry. I pray that God may never let that lesson grow dim in my thinking. Fresh from conquests in the realm of sports, I had a great deal to learn when the Lord called me to preach the Advent message thirty years ago. A kindly teacher of speech began my "education" the first few days in college when he informed me I was one of the poorest prospects in public speaking he had ever had. This fatherly enlightenment comes to my mind frequently. I am reminded that if I ever accomplish anything in the pulpit it is because of God's help. With most of us, blessing comes to those who sit under our ministry in spite of, not because of, the human instrument. Preaching that saves is a gift from God.

Remembering this, inspired Paul challenges us, "Let us preach to the limit of our vision." We must be the most effective preachers the great Shepherd of the flock can make of us.

What is "the limit of" the "vision" of an Adventist preacher? It is the measure of our message. That message includes such stimulating, challenging themes as righteousness through faith, a finished work, the time of trouble, the latter rain, the shaking, the loud cry, the close of probation, the falling

of the plagues, the coming King, a life that measures with the life of God in a sinless, sorrowless, deathless world. What other group of Christian preachers have been commissioned to herald such an all inclusive, thrilling evangel? We are indeed preachers for eternity. As such, urgency must characterize our every discourse; therefore "let us preach to the limit of our vision."

How sad that in such an hour God should find some of us asleep at our posts. "Many who have been placed upon the walls of Zion, to watch with eagle eye for the approach of danger and lift the voice of warning, are themselves asleep. The very ones who should be most active and vigilant in this hour of peril are neglecting their duty and bringing upon themselves the blood of souls." — *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 234.

God has called us to be watchmen on the walls of Zion. "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me" (Ezek. 33:7). "If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people" (verse 3).

He has placed us there "to watch with eagle eye for the approach of danger and lift the voice of warning" as we meet the perils of the last days. If we do our work faithfully, the Lord declares us guiltless of those who fail to heed our warnings. "Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul" (verses 4, 5).

Some, however, the Lord declares through His messenger, who "should be most active and vigilant in this hour of peril are neglecting their duty." They are not preaching "to the limit of . . . [their] vision." The results? They are "bringing upon themselves the

blood of souls." "But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword comes and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (verse 6).

Our preaching must be characterized by an urgency in keeping with the lateness of the hour and the solemnity of our responsibility.

It is well on occasions for us to consider how the Lord used and blessed some of the mighty preachers of yesteryear. I was arrested by this vivid description of Finney's preaching as described in S. L. Brengle's little book, *The Soul Winner's Secret*, pages 48-49, "When through him [Finney] the violated law spake out its thunders, it did seem as if we had in truth 'come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words.' But when he spoke of Christ, then indeed did his 'doctrine drop as the rain, and his speech distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the mown grass.'"

Most of us will never be able to preach like Finney. Most of us are very ordinary men, but we *do not preach an ordinary message!* When an ordinary man preaches a most extraordinary message "to the limit of . . . [his] vision," the Spirit of God can transform his halting imperfect speech into arrows of righteousness directed straight to the heart of needy sinners and halting saints.

Of Martin Luther it is said, "The energy of his faith poured forth in torrents of fire on their frozen hearts." — D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, p. 125. There was urgency in Luther's preaching. The vision the future Reformer received as he climbed the Scala Sancta on his knees sent him forth not only as a bearer of a creed but as the herald of a passion. The religious world of his day was shaken to its foundations because a poor German monk proclaimed his urgent message of present truth, "to the limit of . . . [his] vision." The religious world of our day must also be shaken to its foundations by God's message of truth, which will prepare the way for our coming King. That message will not be proclaimed by one famous preaching star like the great Reformer, but by thousands of spirit-filled "little" men all over the world preaching a big message "to the limit of . . . [their] vision."

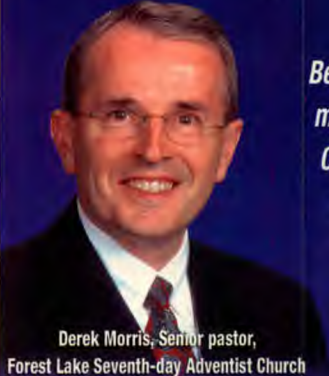
Of Jesus in His day it is said, "They were amazed at his way of teaching, for he taught with the ring of authority." This is but another way of saying there was a ring of urgency in His preaching. It is said that Christ saw in every person with whom He came in contact a soul for whom He was to give His life. This lent to His preaching a spirit of urgency.

(Continued on page 19)

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As "living stones," believers have a relationship to one another as well as to Jesus Christ. He is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:10, 11) and the chief cornerstone of God's church, the temple that he is building for eternity (Eph. 2:20-22). He places each stone just where it ought to be. And if that stone is out of place, it may cause others to stumble.

But keep in mind that we are "living stones" and we have an influence on one another. The New Testament uses the word *edify* to describe this influence. It comes from the Latin word *edificio*, which means "to build." When Christians edify one another, they build up one another and make the church strong.

How can the "living stones" edify one another? Several personal admonitions from Paul, the master builder (1 Cor. 3:10), help to answer that question.

Believers as Builders

"Living Stones"

J o s a b u r o B a n d o

We help to build each other when we *practice love in all we do and say*. The Corinthian believers were very proud of their "knowledge" of spiritual things (1 Cor. 1:4, 5), but they were using that knowledge to attack one another, not to help one another. How true it is that "*knowledge puffs up*" (1 Cor. 8:1). The believer who thinks he "knows it all" and monopolizes every Bible study discussion or committee meeting is only proving that he is proud and ignorant of his own basic need for Christian love.

Love "*builds up*" because love accepts others, even when there are disagreements. Love is patient and kind and creates an atmosphere in which people can understand each other and help each other. Love does not compete or compare. It seeks only to build people up and glorify the Lord.

We build others up by a godly example (Rom. 14:1-15:4). The Roman assemblies were divided over how to practice the special diets and days given to the Jews in the Old Testament Law. The weaker saints, who may have been converted Jews, felt obligated to practice their liberty in Christ. What a dilemma!

The answer? First, Paul admonished the stronger believers not to despise the weaker members because of their legalistic approach to the Christian life. Then he cautioned the weaker saints not to pass judgment on the stronger members because they were enjoying their freedom in Christ. But then he spoke to both groups and warned them not to do anything that would cause somebody else to stumble. When a "living stone" stops helping others, he starts to hinder others by his bad example.

So, the question we ask about "*questionable things*" is not "*Can I do it safely?*" but "*If I do it, will it hurt somebody else?*" The mature Christian can afford to set aside some of his rights so that he might show love to others and help them grow in the Lord. When our four children were small, my wife and I tried to be very careful about where we put knives and scissors, and about whether we closed and locked the doors. We were also careful about the kinds of books and magazines that were left around for little eyes to see.

Keep in mind that the mature Christian lovingly "*gives in*" to the weaker Christian so that the weaker Christian will be kept safe and be allowed to mature. We must not allow the immature brother or sister to stay immature. The whole purpose of Paul's admonitions in Romans 14-15 is to help the weak saint become a strong saint. Too often the weaker saints enjoy staying that way, like little children who will not grow up and accept new responsibilities.

Believers edify one another by their speech (Eph. 4:29). When God created the first man and woman, he gave them the wonderful gift of speech, a gift that we too often take for granted. Paul warned against "*corrupt communication*," which Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translated "*very word that is rotten and unfit for use*" (*The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, Eerdmans, 1961). Things that are rotten infect other things, and the decay starts to spread. One morsel of gossip, one off-color joke, one unloving statement, and Satan goes to work.

The best way to keep our speech from rotting is to make sure it is "*seasoned with salt*" (Col. 4:6). We must never say, "Now take this with a grain of salt!" We must put the "salt" into our speech by obeying God's Word, speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and sincerely seeking to edify others.

Notice also that in both Ephesians 4:29 and Colossians 4:6 there is an emphasis on grace. We should follow the example of our Savior and have God's grace poured into our lips (Ps. 45:2).

As a radio Bible teacher, I receive a great deal of mail, and I must admit that some of it needs to be salted. On the other hand, I receive letters that edify my heart far more than my radio message edified the listener who wrote to me. Sometimes I hear from dedicated pastors or missionaries telling how God is answering prayer and building the church. Or it may be a note from a young couple sharing how God is blessing in the raising of their children. These letters minister grace to my heart because they magnify Jesus Christ.

We certainly can edify others by our praying (Col. 4:12). I like the New International Version translation of this verse: "*Always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*" Prayer can be hard work. Sometimes it feels like you are in a wrestling match. As we pray for others, the Spirit of God can work in their lives and build them up in the faith. They will know the will of God and stand firmly in it. They will mature and have full assurance in their relationship to the Lord.

One of the greatest "tools" for edifying others is the Word of God (Acts 20:32). The Word of God is able to make us "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15; James 1:21), and then, after we are saved, able to build us up and make us spiritually wealthy. There is an inheritance waiting for all believers who will take the Bible seriously and make it a vital part of their lives.

Vance Havner once said, "*in a day when the living faith of the dead has become the dead faith of the living, just as America needs to get back to the Constitution, so the church needs to return to the cross and the Bible.*"

Finally, we edify one another by exercising our spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:12, 26). Some of the Corinthians thought that spiritual gifts were toys to play with, so they were using them in a most unspiritual manner and bringing division and disgrace to the church. Each believer has at least one spiritual gift; and as good stewards, we must use our gifts in the power of the Lord and for the glory of the Lord (1 Peter 4:10, 11). "Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. 14:26).

If each member of a local church would discover, dedicate, and discipline his or her spiritual gifts,

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When a church is worshipping

John 20:21-23

Gabriel Paredes

I. Introduction

Peter Marshall told the story: It was quiet on the battlefield. In the bright early summer sunshine the air was balmy and had a breath of a garden in it. By some grotesque miracle, a bird was singing somewhere near at hand. On the firing step with his rifle lying in a groove in the parapet stood a young soldier in field gray, his uniform stained with mud and blood.

On his face, so young yet strangely marked with the lines of war that made him look old, was a wistful, faraway expression. He was enjoying the sunshine and the quiet of this strange lull in the firing. The heavy guns had been silent. There was no sound to break the eerie stillness.

Suddenly a butterfly fluttered into view and alighted on the ground almost at the end of his rifle. It was a strange visitor to a battleground. But it was there, a gorgeous creature, the wings like gold leaf splashed with carmine swaying in the warm breath of spring.

As the war-weary youngster watched the butterfly he was no longer a private in field gray. He was a boy once more, fresh and clean, swinging through a field in sunny Saxony, knee deep in clover, buttercups, and daisies. That strange visitor to the front trench recalled to him the joys of his boyhood when he had collected butterflies. It spoke to him of days of peace. It was a symbol of the lovelier things of life. It was the emblem of the eternal, a reminder that there still was beauty and peace in the world.

He forgot the enemy a few hundred yards across no man's land. He forgot the danger and privation and suffering. He forgot everything as he watched that butterfly. With all the hunger in his heart, with the resurrection of dreams and visions that he thought were gone, he reached out his hand toward that butterfly. His fingers moved slowly, cautiously, lest he frighten away this visitor to the battlefield. In showing one kind of caution, he forgot another. The butterfly was just beyond his reach, so he stretched, forgetting that watchful eyes were waiting for a target.

He brought himself out slowly until he had just a little distance to go. He could almost touch the wings that were so lovely.

Then . . . ping, ping. A sniper's bullet found its mark. The stretching fingers relaxed. For the private soldier in field gray the war was over.

There is always a risk when you reach for the beautiful. And worship is a reach for the beautiful. It is our attempt to reach from the squalor of the earth and our existence to the very beauty of God Himself.

Notice the marks of the church that belong to the living Lord. Worship is one of those marks. See what happens when a church worships.

II. When church worships in the right day

Exodus 20:8-11.

It is the seventh day, the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, when we meet for worship.

While every day has meaning to God and for a Christian all time is to be used wisely and well, there is something special about this one day each week that we dedicate to God. The dedication of this one day to God is a token of the fact that all of time is in God's hand. Because of this we owe God a part of life, a portion of our time in worship.

There is something deep within us that calls for this day of worship, a period of time for God.

III. When church worships with right purpose

John 20:20.

We worship to see God.

There is a time when we have to move aside all of the other things of life that crowd out and obscure God so that we can seek and see His face.

Why? For one thing, life frightens us. We are literally pushed into the arms of God. Notice that the disciples were gathered together that day because they were afraid.

There is certain spontaneity about worship. The disciples apparently were not called together that day; they just met together.

Hebrews 10:25 admonished, ". . . not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. . . ." There is something instinctive in us that calls for the need of worship. Pushed by our sins, the weight of the world, and the problems of life, we move into the presence of God.

IV. When church worship recognizes the person who is worshiped

John 20:20.

The central element in the worship service is the presence of Christ. It was when Jesus was in their midst that the disciples knew something unique had happened.

There are many reasons for corporate worship. They have to do with such things as the gathering of the family of faith, the witness to the world, the sharing of joys and sorrows, the strength derived from meeting with others of like hearts and minds. But the only real reason for worship is to meet Christ.

It is then that we can claim His promise of Matthew 18:20 that He is with us.

It is then that we can claim His promise that He will go with us even to the end.

The presence of the person of the resurrected Christ is what sets worship apart from everything else.

V. When church worship sees the product of worship

John 20:21-23.

From this experience we can see what happens when we worship God.

- A.** We receive the word of comfort from Christ.
- B.** We receive the gift of His peace (vs. 19, 20).
- C.** We receive a commission for service, a responsibility for life (vs. 21).
- D.** We receive the spirit of power (v. 22). And that Holy Spirit gives us the power to witness to the forgiveness of sins and to receive the forgiveness of sin.

VI. Conclusion

Someone has observed that in the church in which William Shakespeare worshiped in Stratford-on-Avon the woodcarver had the privilege of carving his own inspiration under the choir seats after he had carved the ornate altar. What can be seen are the pious, serene, and holy carvings. But underneath the choir seats are carvings that are dark and unseemly: monsters, dogs biting people, unholy and impious acts. But that is what worship does. It delivers us from the dark and unredeemed impulses that would destroy us. It is a reach for the beautiful, for God.

VII. Quotations

- A.** Worship helps us find who we are and why God has placed us here on the earth. When we bow in God's presence with worship, only then are we made complete. — Judson Cornwall. *Leadership*, Vol. 16, No. 2.
- B.** In order for us to worship, our mind, will, and emotions have to be moved. — Tim Keller.
- C.** The current phrase "worship experience" merely serves to confuse us. Those who worship with the expectation that the act ought to generate certain experiences for them will undoubtedly have many experiences. But they will probably not be the sorts of experiences that Christian worship

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Jonah—The God revealed to Jonah

Jonah 4:2

Rafael Monteiro

I. Introduction

This prophecy may be seen as a drama in four acts, corresponding roughly with the four chapters.

A. Act 1 we may call, "*A Prophet in rebellion*" (1:1-16).

Called to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, Jonah headed for Tarshish, a Phoenician town on the southwest coast of Spain, as far from Nineveh as he could go. When a violent storm at sea made it obvious to the superstitious sailors that someone on board had offended some god, Jonah was found to be the culprit. At his suggestion, the sailors, against their will, were persuaded to throw him overboard. There Jonah was swallowed by a "great fish." Disobedience is redeemed by self-sacrifice.

B. Act 2 we may call, "*A Prophet rescued*" (1:17-2:10).

Jonah prayed to God from inside the great fish. God graciously heard his prayer, and, upon command, the fish "vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (2:10).

C. Act 3 we may call, "*A Prophet in revival*" (3:1-10).

This time, when God called, Jonah went to Nineveh and preached God's impending judgment upon the wickedness of the imperial city. The result was tremendous. The whole city repented. Fasting and sackcloth were the order of the day. God decided to spare the city.

D. Act 4 we may call, "*A Prophet's petulance*" (4:1-11).

Jonah's preaching had been embarrassingly successful. He was indignant. Personally, he had hoped to see a wholesale holocaust at the divine hand. In chapter 4, God tried to explain to Jonah why He spared the city. He pointed out that mercy is a quality of God. Jonah indicated that he knew this, but that, personally, he was not for it, preferring death, even his own, to such an exhibition of divine forgiveness.

The prophet Jonah is not the hero of this story. He is rather the villain of the piece. God is the hero. The author's theology echoes John 3:16, "God so loved the world." A man with an accurate view of a great and merciful God wrote this superb story. What are the characteristics of the God revealed to Jonah?

II. The God revealed to Jonah is a God of universal love

God loves all people. The Book closes with some painful questions that God asked His loveless prophet. With a soft but pointed sarcasm God asks Jonah: "Have you any right to be angry?" (4:4). The same question is asked about the vine that the cutworm destroyed. But the climax is this: "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (4:11). Jonah was a bigot, selfish and arrogant; the God revealed to him was gracious in love, plenteous in mercy, loving everyone.

Religious people like Jonah put Jesus to death on the cross. Our Lord taught people about a God of universal love. God had a place in His love for the despised Samaritans; for an officer in the Roman army of occupation; and for the people of the land of Palestine who would not or could not keep the Jewish law. Had you asked Jesus why he loved these people, He would doubtless have replied, "Because God loves them."

Through the message of this inspired book God was seeking to reveal the universal scope of His love to Israel.

III. The God revealed to Jonah is a God who is sovereign

- A. God is sovereign in His claims. Without explanation, "The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it" (1:1-2). The God revealed to Jonah laid the claim of divine ownership upon Jonah's person, his time, and his talents, that he might communicate God's message to the people of Nineveh. Any person trying to get away from God will always find someone else going in his direction, just as Jonah did. There is sure to be a ship sailing for Tarshish on which the runaway can book passage. A college student came to our evening worship service saying that God had called him to preach and he was surrendering to that call. Immediately afterward he started running in the opposite direction. Three years later, in a revival, he came rededicating his life, saying, "I do not yet know where my Nineveh is, but I sure know the way to Tarshish." Don't we all?
- B. God is sovereign in His complete control of things. The Book of Jonah is filled with evidence of this truth. It was God who sent the mighty storm to intercept Jonah. It was God who prepared the great fish that swallowed this disobedient prophet. Jesus did not regard this as a joke or tall tale, for He used it to illustrate His own resurrection: "Jonah was for three days and three nights, in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). It was God who directed the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land. It was God who gave him success in his preaching in Nineveh. Jesus also used this as an illustration: "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41). It was God who prepared the gourd vine, and it was God who prepared the worm to destroy it. It was God who prepared the sultry east wind to beat upon Jonah's head. God is in control.

IV. The God revealed to Jonah is a God who disciplines His own

God repudiated absolutely Jonah's right to flee to Tarshish. He set a great tempest directly across his path to hinder his selfish purpose. He put Jonah in such a position that he was willing for his body to be used in preaching to Nineveh, though his heart was not in it and his spirit was wrong.

The New Testament teaches that whom the Lord loves, He disciplines. The writer of Hebrews tells us: "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons" (12:7). This same writer says: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by" (12:11). We can be certain of the disciplined hand of God upon us if we are disobedient in Jonah-fashion at the point of communicating His message to others.

V. The God revealed to Jonah is a God who gives a second chance

There is a thrilling word here: "And the word of Jehovah came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" Jonah 3:1, 2. Notice carefully the writer's words. He says, "The second time." There can be no doubt. The Scriptures teach the gospel of the second chance. The God revealed to Jonah did not utterly cast him off because of his disobedience, but came to him in love and grace, offering him another opportunity to serve.

And how he served! The chief city of the heathen world was startled by his voice proclaiming its overthrow: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be over-turned" (3:4). All Nineveh repented. No preaching, before or since, has ever accomplished such results.

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Singing about Jesus

Exalt Christ not MAN

Paulo Sarli

There was a holy hush throughout the auditorium as the liquid notes of the soloist, inspired by the Holy Spirit's power, soared into the hearts of the congregation. She sang with praise in her heart and in her voice to Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords. Eyes were wet and hearts tender, her song brought us into the very presence of God.

She sat down, and in the silence which followed we continued to worship. Then the leader of the meeting took his place at the pulpit. With one icy blast of praise to man, he blighted the warmth, the fervor, the blessedness of that moment as he praised the singer in glowing terms, comparing her at length with a well-known soloist of worldly fame and assuring us that we had been greatly honored by her presence.

I shall never forget the look of shocked amazement on that singer's face before her head dropped and she covered her eyes with her hands to hide the tears in her eyes, I am sure, for I found tears in mine.

She had been singing about Jesus, she had been thinking of Him. She had been worshiping God in song. Somehow this wrenching of hearts and minds from Him to her was sacrilege.

Others were also affected. Quite suddenly, under the touch of that leader, the congregation which had gathered to worship God became merely an audience of spectators.

The tragedy is that the instance just described is no rare occurrence. More and more often the meetings of the saints of God, even some of the great mass meetings involving great outlay of time, energy and money, culminate in the gathering of an audience rather than a congregation. How often in such meetings I have sat with heavy heart while leaders talked with forced gaiety, forced enthusiasm, with almost a theatrical manner, as if Jesus Himself were not able to bless or to reach hearts without the salesmanship of their jovial remarks. How often I have wondered, as they introduced singers, musicians and speakers with lengthy laudations, what would happen if all the people of God gathered there would suddenly lift their eyes from man to the Creator and worship Him, praising Jesus Christ and giving place to the leading of the blessed Holy Spirit. With God receiving the glory, with Jesus the object of every worshiper's love, with the Holy Spirit leading, surely blessings, conviction and power to the salvation of souls would flow in the hearts and lips of every person present.

It is not altogether the fault of the leaders that Jesus has but little place in many of our meetings. As Hosea tells us, "And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their doings. For they shall eat, and not have enough" (Hosea 4:9, 10).

Perhaps we come thinking in terms of the persons who are to speak or appear on the program, rather than in terms of meeting with God.

Frequently we must admit that we are slow to respond to the wondrous truths of the Word with glowing faces and nodding heads. But how quick we often are to react to levity! Such response on the part of a congregation cannot help but affect the speaker, because response is an important part of his ministry.

If we, the saints, come to be entertained, that is all we can expect. But let us remember: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

If this very thing has been the burden of your heart, and it is the burden of many hearts today, for as a layman I hear of it everywhere I go, then

pray. Even two or three, by earnest, effectual, fervent prayer, can change a merry-go-round meeting spotlighting people to a Holy Spirit-directed meeting with God.

In 1 Chronicles 15:22, 23 we read, "Chenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it. Berechiah and Elkanah were to be doorkeepers for the ark."

Chenaniah was talented, he was skillful in song, and we thank God for that. What would our meetings be without song? But Berechiah, which means "Jehovah hath blessed," and Elkanah, which means "God has possessed," were doorkeepers for the ark. Who shall say which is greater in God's sight, to be blessed by God and possessed by God as doorkeepers, or to be the instructor in song because of skill? Not too long ago I heard this plea, "Come to this conference and mingle with God's elite—the greatest singers, musicians and speakers in the nation."

That same afternoon I visited a saint of God who was ill, and there I met others who had gathered to pray and to help in whatever way they could.

None of those present was financially able to spend a week at a conference, but as they prayed, and as they prayed for that very conference to be blessed of God, I thought, "Surely, here too, are, God's elite." For not only the talented, but the faithful are God's elite, His select group, His chosen ones. And I was glad to mingle with the Berechiah's and the Elkanah's who were joyfully doing the will of God.

Oh, saints of God, leaders, singers, musicians, speakers, pastors, teachers, doorkeepers, congregation—let us give honor where honor is due. Let us love one another with pure hearts, fervently. Let us esteem very highly for their work's sake the leaders of God's people; but let us say with David, "*I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together*" (Ps. 34:1-3). **E**

Paulo Sarli writes from Brazil where he is the speaker and director of the radio program "*Light in the Way*".



Children's story

Margarida F. Sarli

1. Midnight express

Lesson: Ezekiel 3:17.

At eleven o'clock on the night of July 6, 1881, 15-year-old Kate Shelley stood on the porch of her small home on the east bank of Honey Creek, Iowa, and watched the worst storm she had ever seen.

Wind howled, lightning flashed, thunder boomed, and rain came down in gale-whipped sheets. The usually placid creek was now a raging torrent beating against the railroad trestle. Then Kate saw the dim light of a freight engine round the curve beyond the west side of the bridge. She watched as it rolled onto the wooden trestle. There was a splintering crash, and the engine plunged into the swollen creek.

Kate ran inside to tell her mother. "I've got to cross the creek to the station and stop the midnight express, or lots of people will die," she said. "There isn't much time. I must hurry."

"Don't go!" pleaded her mother. "You might die yourself!"

"I have to try," Kate insisted. "It is my duty. I can't simply stand here and watch the train fall into the water and listen to the screams of the dying people. I must go."

"Go then, but be careful," her mother said. "I'll be praying for you."

Kate ran out the door into the blinding storm. Slowly she crawled across the narrow catwalk that was still intact. Gale force winds threatened to blow her off the shaky ledge.

It seemed an eternity before she reached the other side. Once there, she raced to the station. Throwing open the door she shouted, "The bridge is out! Stop the express! Quick! The freight engine has gone into the creek!"

The stationmaster dashed outside and flagged the express train to a stop. Another minute and it would have been too late!

It is now minutes to midnight in this world's history. People are rushing down the track of life toward eternal death. They don't know the bridge is out. Someone must warn them before it is too late. God

has given that message to you and me. It is our duty. If we do not do it, lives will surely be lost.

2. Swallowed by a whale

Lesson: Jonah 2:1.

On August 25, 1891, James Bartley was on board the ship *Star of the East* near the Falkland Islands when the crew spotted an eighty-foot sperm whale. James was one of the crewmen who went in rowboats to harpoon it. The whale was wounded and lashed out, almost overturning the boats. When the men returned to the ship with the dead whale they noticed that James Bartley was missing.

On August 26, when the men were removing blubber from the whale they were startled by a movement in the stomach. Cutting it open they discovered Bartley. He was unconscious, but after a bath of cold seawater he recovered and told his strange story.

He had been tossed from the rowboat by a flip of the whale's tail and had landed in its open mouth. The inside was soft and spongy, and James felt himself slipping along a smooth passage. Suddenly he found himself in what was like a tremendous sack, much larger than his body. All was completely dark. He felt around with his hand and came in contact with several fish that squirmed away at his touch.

For a short time James struggled and tried to call out, but breathing became difficult, and the heat was unbearable. His head began to ache terribly, and he felt he had only a few more moments to live. Then he lost consciousness until cold water was poured over him, and he found himself on the deck of the ship.

It must have been something like that for the prophet Jonah. There in the darkness, heat, and slime of the fish's stomach he knew that he would die unless God worked a miracle for him. He called out to God for deliverance, and the fish vomited him up on the beach in answer to prayer.

Sometimes you may feel that your life is in a real mess, but you cannot be in a worse situation than Jonah. If God could hear him from the stomach of a fish at the bottom of the sea, He will surely hear your prayer, wherever you are, and whatever your circumstances. Reach out to God in faith and He will deliver you. **E**

Margarida F. Sarli works at the Ministerial Association as researcher and assistant at Shepherdess International.

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Never lose your sense of urgency

The one great obsession of our Savior's ministry was to "finish his work." "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). This passion filled His preaching with a dynamic urgency.

What is dearer to the heart of an Adventist preacher than the hope of seeing the work finished? We talk about it. We sing about it. In almost every prayer we plead for it. We preach about a finished work. In our ministry, as in that of our great Example, should not this finished work obsession lend our preaching a sense of urgency? Should not the sight of unsaved masses around us in every land inspire us, as burdened apostles of righteousness, to preach with an earnestness and an urgency commensurate with the hour in which we live? Only such preaching will change "a finished work" from trite terminology into glorious reality.

Jesus, the Gospel writers tell us, spoke straight to the people in His day. The Savior dwelt upon practical themes. His was plain, pointed, practical preaching. Those whose minds were not closed by blind prejudice knew what He was talking about. I once heard a budding young preacher speak from the Gospel of John, chapter twenty-one, verse three. His emphasis was laid on the words "And that night they caught nothing." After listening to him speak for a few minutes I was convinced his text was well chosen. There was no hesitancy in his speech. Indeed, on occasions his fluency reached the heights of near eloquence. He "took with him words."

There was only one problem. He, like the disciples, "caught nothing." When he sat down, neither I nor, I feel sure, the approximately one hundred other persons in the congregation, knew what he had talked about. Instead of speaking directly to us with a message of urgency he dwelt in the stratosphere of oratory. Often his thread of thought was obscured by his pearls of speech. He indeed "caught nothing." Jesus spoke straight to His people. The messenger of the Lord counsels us to do likewise. "I urge upon you who minister in sacred things to dwell more upon practical religion." — *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 539.

The Advent message is a practical message. Preparing to meet Jesus is a practical theme. When we sit down after preaching, our people should go away knowing what we were talking about.

Marjorie Lewis Lloyd in her inspiring little book

Love on Fire, challenges us with this solemn thought: "People do not come to church to watch a sermon go by. They come to church hoping, desperately hoping, that the sermon will get into their hearts and meet their needs and change their lives. People want to be changed. They are tired, so tired of the defeated lives they live. It is not preaching, but help that they want, and if a man can give that help, the people will come." — pages 42, 43. Not just someone to "take the hour" or to "fill the pulpit". That is not what people today want or need. They need help to discern and overcome sin in their lives. They need help to live victoriously in this evil, sin-filled world. They need help over the rough course of life's uneven journey. They need reproving, warning, and loving! And they need it *urgently, for the hour is late and their need is great.*

"The preacher the people love most is the one who gives them the most help in daily living". — *Love on Fire*, p. 43.

How better could I close this little message than by quoting Paul's words to Timothy as recorded in the *Amplified New Testament*: "I charge [you] in the presence of God and Christ Jesus Who is to judge the living and the dead, and by (in the light of) His coming and His kingdom. Herald and preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency (stand by, be at hand and ready, whether the opportunity seems to be favorable or unfavorable, whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it be welcome or unwelcome, you as a preacher of the Word are to show people in what way their lives are wrong) and convince them, rebuking and correcting, warning and urging and encouraging them, being unflagging and inexhaustible in patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:1, 2).

May it please God to make us preachers of righteousness! **E**

Robert H. Pierson, was former president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

One day we will be called up

We are the citizens of heaven. Therefore, the heavenly home is our destiny.

The Savior is now preparing a place for each of us in the Father's house, and he has promised to return and take us to that wonderful home. (John 14:1-6).

When he will return, nobody knows, and it is dangerous to set dates (Luke 17:20-37).

We Adventists believe in what is called *"the imminent return of Christ."* The word imminent means "ready to take place." In other words, nothing special has to happen for the Lord to return. He may come today, or he may wait another generation. Since nobody knows when Jesus Christ will return, it behooves all of His people to be ready every hour of every day to meet their Lord.

Realizing that at any moment we may be "called up," we should concentrate on holy living (1 John 2:28-3:3) and faithful service (Matt. 25:14-30). Each believer's works will be judged at

the judgment seat of Christ, and all faithful service will be generously rewarded by the Lord (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:9, 10). If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:15). It is the servant who says, "My lord delays his coming" who gets into trouble (Luke 12:41-48).

Since our citizenship is in heaven and our home is in heaven, we as God's pilgrims must cultivate a "heavenly mind" as we journey here on earth. We must constantly be looking for the Savior (Phil. 3:20). This does not mean that we neglect our earthly responsibilities and, as D. L. Moody used to say, become "so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good." Quite the contrary is true. People who are looking for their Lord ought to be more faithful as parents, children, employees, citizens, friends, and servants of God. It was this *"heavenly hope"* that motivated men of faith like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for they *"looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb. 11:10; note vv. 13-16). The eyes of God's pilgrims must not look back to the old life (Luke 9:62), or look around at the distractions of the world (Gen. 13:10-11). They must focus above, by faith, and be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:1-2). Because we have been raised with Christ, we should 'seek those things which are above' (Col. 3:1).

It is not easy to be one of God's faithful pilgrims; to live a separated life and be ready at all times to move as He commands. But the rewards are worth it. We not only enjoy His presence and blessing on earth, but we have the assurance of a wonderful future in heaven. We know that Christ has promised to return, and when He does, we will be *"caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:17).

After all, you shouldn't mind being a pilgrim and stranger in this world when you know your destination is heaven. **E**

Kathy Beegles writes from Sydney, Australia.



Heaven



(Continued from page 11)

Believers as builders

and put them to work for the glory of God, we would see our churches grow and experience a new dynamic. It is my guess that about 15 percent of the members of the average church are really actively serving the Lord. The rest are spectators, cheerleaders, or critics. Sometimes the fault lies with the leadership of the church. It is so set in its ways that there is no opportunity for others to participate. The same people "hold" (but don't use) the same offices, and the new people (if there are any in the church) are not allowed to serve.

The church of Jesus Christ in this world is a glorious temple that God is building, though we cannot see the total edifice now. As "living stones," our responsibility is to find the place where God wants us to work and to be faithful in that place. We also have the privilege of praying for and encouraging other "living stones" in many parts of the world as we build together.

Anybody can go through life and work with Satan in tearing things down. Christians are working with Jesus Christ to help build his church, and what they build will last forever. **E**

Josaburo Bando writes from Japan, where he serves as pastor.

(Continued from page 15)

Jonah—The God revealed to Jonah/sermon 2

God never gives up on us. Jesus described the shepherd hunting all over the mountainside for that hundredth sheep. He was unwilling to give up until he had found it. Jesus portrayed the housewife continuing her search in every corner of the house until the lost coin was found. He pictured the father of the prodigal keeping watch on the wall of his home until the figure of that disillusioned lad appeared on the horizon. Thank God for the gospel of the second chance!

VI. Above all, the God revealed to Jonah is eager and willing to save

Jonah knew that God was merciful and willing to forgive (Jonah 4:2). The reason he disobeyed and fled to Tarshish was the fear that his preaching would be effective! "Now look what you've done!"

he railed at God. "You did forgive them; and this makes me mad enough to die."

That was Jonah's problem. With God using him, he won the war. He didn't want to; and it made him so angry!

In its own context, the message of Jonah strikes at the narrow nationalist spirit of religious exclusiveness that characterized the Jewish people after the exile. This spirit, vividly portrayed by Jonah, is severely criticized by the overall impact of the Book. God is eager and willing to save all people.

VII. Conclusion

But this book is also for our times. The Book ends abruptly, leaving Jonah mad out there on a hill above Nineveh, with his blistered baldhead and his withered gourd vine. Why doesn't the book tell us what this very minor prophet did, or what became of him? That problem was not the writer's; it is the reader's problem.

That problem is ours—yours and mine. The question is: Are we willing to face the embarrassment of real religion? Are we willing to allow the battle for spiritual values to be a real war within ourselves? If not, what then? **E**

Rafael Monteiro writes from Belem, Brazil, where he serves as pastor of a large congregation.



God and the Spider

During World War II, a US marine was separated from his unit on a Pacific island. The fighting had been intense, and in the smoke and the crossfire he had lost touch with his comrades.

Alone in the jungle, he could hear enemy soldiers coming in his direction. Scrambling for cover, he found his way up a high ridge to several small caves in the rock. Quickly he crawled inside one of the caves. Although safe for the moment, he realized that once the enemy soldiers looking for him swept up the ridge, they would quickly search all the caves and he would be killed.

As he waited, he prayed, "Lord, if it be your will, please protect me. Whatever your will though, I love you and trust you. Amen."

After praying, he lay quietly listening to the enemy begin to draw close. He thought, "Well, I guess the Lord isn't going to help me out of this one." Then he saw a spider begin to build a web over the front of his cave.

As he watched, listening to the enemy searching for him all the while, the spider layered strand after strand of web across the opening of the cave.

"Hah," he thought. "What I need is a brick wall and what the Lord has sent me is a spider web. God does have a sense of humor." As the enemy drew closer he watched from the darkness of his hideout and could see them searching one cave after another. As they came to his, he got ready to make his last stand. To his amazement, however, after glancing in the direction of his cave, they moved on.

Suddenly, he realized that with the spider web over the entrance, his cave looked as if no one had entered for quite a while. "Lord, forgive me," prayed the young man. "I had forgotten that in you a spider's web is stronger than a brick wall."

We all face times of great trouble. When we do, it is so easy to forget the victories that God would work in our lives, sometimes in the most surprising ways. As the great leader, Nehemiah, reminded the people of Israel when they faced the task of rebuilding Jerusalem, "In God we will have success!" [Nehemiah 2:20]

Remember: Whatever is happening in your life, with God, a mere spider's web can become a brick wall of protection. Believe He is with you always. Just speak His name through Jesus His Son, and you will see His great power and love for you! **E**

Author unknown

(Continued from page 13)

When a church is worshipping/Sermon 1

offers to those who seek only the face of God through song and prayer, preaching and sacrament. Liturgists can generate many powerful experiences, but when experience is the aim, this becomes cheap theater at best and manipulation at worst. Both are repulsive substitutes for an encounter with the power of the living God. — Mark Horst in the *Christian Century* (Nov. 11, 1987) and *Christianity Today*, Vol. 34, No. 16.

- D. Ellen G. White: "Those who worship Him in sincerity and truth will be accepted by Him. If church members will put away all self-worship, and will receive in their hearts the love for God and for one another that filled Christ's heart, our heavenly Father will constantly manifest His power through them. Let His people be drawn together with the cords of divine love. Then the world will recognize the miracle-working power of God, and will acknowledge that He is the Strength and the Helper of His commandment-keeping people". — *Bible Commentaries*, Vol. 7, p. 939.

Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be revered; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him, and, like Jacob beholding the vision of God, they will cry out, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 252. **E**

Gabriel Paredes sent this contribution from Quito, Ecuador, where he serves as an elder.



How shall we search the Scriptures?

Ellen G. White

How shall we search the Scriptures? How shall we search the Scriptures in order to understand what they teach? We should come to the investigation of God's word with a contrite heart, a teachable and prayerful spirit. We are not to think, as did the Jews, that our own ideas and opinions are infallible; nor with the papists, that certain individuals are the sole guardians of truth and knowledge, that men have no right to search the Scriptures for themselves, but must accept the explanations given by the fathers of the church. We should not study the Bible for the purpose of sustaining our preconceived opinions, but with the single object of learning what God has said.

Some have feared that if in even a single point they acknowledge themselves in error, other minds would be led to doubt the whole theory of truth. Therefore they have felt that investigation should not be permitted, that it would tend to dissension and disunion. But if such is to be the result of investigation, the sooner it comes the better. If there are those whose faith in God's word will not stand the test of an investigation of the Scriptures, the sooner they are revealed the better; for then the way will be opened to show them their error. We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances, to be relinquished. There is but One who is infallible, He who is the way, the truth, and the life. Those who allow prejudice to bar the mind against the reception of truth cannot receive the divine enlightenment. Yet, when a view of Scripture is presented, many do not ask, is it in harmony with God's word? By who is it advocated? Unless it comes through the very channel that pleases them, they do not accept it. So thoroughly satisfied are they with their own ideas that they will not examine the Scripture evidence with a desire to learn, but refuse to be interested, merely because of their prejudices.

The Lord often works where we least expect Him; He surprises us by revealing His power through instruments of His own choice, while He passes by the men to whom we have looked as those through whom light should come. God desires us to receive the truth upon its own merits—because it is truth.

The Bible must not be interpreted to suit the ideas of men, however long they may have held these ideas to be true. We are not to accept the opinion of commentators as the voice of God; they were erring mortals like ourselves. God has given reasoning powers to us as well as to them. We should make the Bible its own expositor.

Carefulness in presenting new views

All should be careful about presenting new views of Scripture before they have given these points thorough study, and are fully prepared to sustain them from the Bible. Introduce nothing that will cause dissension,

without clear evidence that in it God is giving a special message for this time.

Beware of rejecting that which is truth. The great danger with our people has been that of depending upon men and making flesh their arm. Those who have not been in the habit of searching the Bible for themselves, or weighing evidence, have confidence in the leading men and accept the decisions they make; and thus many will reject the very messages God sends to His people, if these leading brethren do not accept them.

No one should claim that he has all the light there is for God's people. The Lord will not tolerate this. He has said, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Even if all our leading men should refuse light and truth, that door will still remain open. The Lord will raise up men who will give the people the message for this time.

The truth will stand

Truth is eternal, and conflict with error will only make manifest its strength. We should never refuse to examine the Scriptures with those who, we have reason to believe, desire to know what truth is. Suppose a brother held a view that differed from yours and he should come to you, proposing that you sit down with him and make an investigation of that point in the Scriptures; should you rise up, filled with prejudice, and condemn his ideas, while refusing to give him a candid hearing? The only right way would be to sit down as Christians and investigate the position presented in the light of God's word, which will reveal truth and unmask error. To ridicule his ideas would not weaken his position in the least if it were false, or strengthen your position if it were true. If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it. There must be no spirit of Pharisaism cherished among us.

The Scriptures to be studied with reverence

We should come with reverence to the study of the Bible, feeling that we are in the presence of God. All lightness and trifling should be laid aside. While some portions of the word are easily understood, the true meaning of other parts is not so readily discerned. There must be patient study and

meditation and earnest prayer. Every student, as he opens the Scriptures, should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit; and the promise is sure that it will be given.

The spirit in which you come to the investigation of the Scriptures will determine the character of the assistant at your side. Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance. But if the Bible is opened with irreverence, with a feeling of self-sufficiency, if the heart is filled with prejudice, Satan is beside you, and he will set the plain statements of God's word in a perverted light.

There are some who indulge in levity, sarcasm, and even mockery toward those who differ with them. Others present an array of objections to any new view; and when these objections are plainly answered by the words of Scripture, they do not acknowledge the evidence presented, nor allow themselves to be convinced. Their questioning is not for the purpose of arriving at truth, but is intended merely to confuse the minds of others.

Some have thought it an evidence of intellectual keenness and superiority to perplex minds in regard to what is truth. They resort to subtlety of argument, to playing upon words; they take unjust advantage in asking questions. When their questions have been fairly answered, they will turn the subject [and] bring up another point to avoid acknowledging the truth. We should beware of indulging the spirit which controlled the Jews. They would not learn of Christ, because His explanation of the Scriptures did not agree with their ideas; therefore they became spies upon His track, "laying wait for Him, and seeking to catch something out of His mouth, that they might accuse Him." Let us not bring upon ourselves the fearful denunciation of the Savior's words, "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered."

In simplicity and faith

It does not require much learning or ability to ask questions that are difficult to answer. A child may ask questions over which the wisest men may be puzzled. Let us not engage in a contest of this

kind. The very same unbelief exists in our time as prevailed in the days of Christ. Now as then, the desire for preferment and the praise of men leads people away from the simplicity of true godliness. There is no pride so dangerous as spiritual pride.

Young men should search the Scriptures for themselves. They are not to feel that it is sufficient for those older in experience to find out the truth; that the younger ones can accept it from them as authority. The Jews perished as a nation because they were drawn from the truth of the Bible by their rulers, priests, and elders. Had they heeded the lessons of Jesus and searched the Scriptures for themselves, they would not have perished.

Young men in our ranks are watching to see in what spirit the ministers come to the investigation of the Scriptures; whether they have a teachable spirit, and are humble enough to accept evidence, and receive light from the messengers whom God chooses to send. We must study the truth for ourselves. No man should be relied upon to think for us. No matter who he is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a criterion for us. We are to counsel together, and to be subject one to another; but at the same time we are to exercise the ability God has given us, in order to learn what is truth. Each one of us must look to God for divine enlightenment. We must individually develop a character that will stand the test in the day of God. We must not become set in our ideas, and think that no one should interfere with our opinions. When a point of doctrine that you do not understand comes to your attention, go to God on your knees, that you may understand what is truth and not be found as were the Jews fighting against God. While warning men to beware of accepting anything unless it is truth, we should also warn them not to imperil their souls by rejecting messages of light, but to press out of the darkness by earnest study of the word of God.

When Nathanael came to Jesus, the Savior exclaimed, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said, "Whence knowest Thou me?" Jesus answered, "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." And Jesus will see us also in the secret places of prayer, if we seek Him for light that we may know what truth is.

If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us; for if it is truth, we need to know it. The Sabbath school teacher needs to know it, and every Sabbath school scholar ought to understand it. We are all under obligation to God to understand what He sends us. He has given directions by which we may test every doctrine- "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." But if it is according to this test, do not be so full of prejudice that you cannot acknowledge a point simply because it does not agree with your ideas.

It is impossible for any mind to comprehend all the richness and greatness of even one promise of God. One catches the glory of one point of view, another the beauty and grace from another point, and the soul is filled with the heavenly light. If we saw all the glory, the spirit would faint. But we can bear far greater revelations from God's abundant promises than we now enjoy. It makes my heart sad to think how we lose sight of the fullness of blessing designed for us. We content ourselves with momentary flashes of spiritual illumination, when we might walk day after day in the light of His presence.

Dear brethren, pray as you never before prayed for beams from the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon the word, that you may be able to understand its true meaning. Jesus pleaded that His disciples might be sanctified through the truth-the word of God. Then how earnestly should we pray that He who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God," He whose office it is to bring all things to the remembrance of God's people, and to guide them into all truth, may be with us in the investigation of His Holy Word.

God wants us to depend upon Him, and not upon man. He desires us to have a new heart; He would give us revealing of light from the throne of God. — *Review and Herald*, February 18, 1890. **E**

Ellen G. White, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and messenger of the Lord.

A decision to be baptized into the remnant church

A decision to keep the Sabbath

A decision for Christ

A decision for prayer

decisions



How to get more decisions

Kembleton S. Wiggins

My Order of the
in Red

The spirit of prophecy says that a decision must be called for at the right moment (*Evangelism*, p. 283). That book also says that we are to bring those under conviction to decision at the earliest period possible, or the conviction will wear away (p. 229). It is with this counsel in mind and the knowledge of the way the human mind works in decision making that I recommend the following tested techniques for more decisions.

You gain decisions by asking for them. The more often you ask, the more decisions you will get. If you master the technique of making calls, you will increase your usefulness in evangelism. The key to getting decisions for baptism is to lead people into progressive decisions. In my meetings people are asked to make four important decisions in a definite and planned order:

- 1) A decision for prayer
- 2) A decision for Christ
- 3) A decision to keep the Sabbath
- 4) A decision to be baptized into the remnant church

At no time should a person be asked to make a decision out of the order outlined, and at no time should a person suspect that he must make a decision ahead of the one he has made until he arrives at that point. Thus your meetings are divided into four distinct phases and you should never be drawn into any phase ahead of the one where you are at any particular time. Resist the temptation to answer questions on subjects you have not yet presented.

The call for prayer

This is made every night when an altar call is not made and is very important. The key to your success in gaining a large number of decisions is right here. These calls are easy to make, and they pray people right into the church.

You should build up to a strong climax in every sermon, ending on the main point. Here is an example of how you go into your prayer: "*Dear heavenly Father, we thank Thee that soon Jesus will come to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. Now as every head is bowed and every eye is closed, how many would like to say, 'Pastor, pray for me that I'll be ready when Jesus comes?' May I see your hands? Hands are being raised all over the building. How many more would like to say, 'Pastor, include me in that prayer. I want to be*

ready when Jesus comes?' Will you raise your hands quickly? It seems that every hand is raised. Lord, help us to be ready. Bring us back tomorrow night. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you are in an area where people are suspicious of your intentions, it is good to preface your call for hand raising the first three nights with these words: "As every head is bowed and every eye is closed, I am going to ask you to raise your hands for prayer. This is not a call to come to the altar. This is not a call to join the church. This is simply a call to raise your hand for prayer. How many would like to say, 'Pastor pray for me that I'll be saved in God's kingdom'? May I see your hands?"

It is prayer that will change the lives of your listeners. Prayer makes it possible to work with the Holy Spirit. It is prayer that will make men willing to leave jobs, churches, friends, and old habits to follow Jesus all the way. Make these calls for prayer every night, and unless the people definitely resist, they will be converted and take their stand with the remnant.

The call to accept Christ

Many people do not believe they are saved unless they move forward in an altar call. Tactful methods require that you do not depart from the people's customs or ways of thinking unless they are theologically wrong. Ellen White says this was Jesus' method, and we cannot improve upon it. Therefore I almost always ask the people to accept Christ and to demonstrate their decision by meeting me at the altar for prayer.

For best results you should operate on the following psychological principles:

1. Tell the people in advance that you intend to make an altar call.
2. Explain why it is made.
3. Tell them what will happen to them when they come to the altar.

Here is an example: "*Tonight, after the sermon, I am going to ask all of you who have never made a personal decision for Christ to decide for Him right where you are. Then I'm going to ask you to leave your seat and meet me at the altar for prayer. You ask, 'Pastor Wiggins, why should I come?' You should come because every person Jesus called in the New Testament He called publicly. He also said that we are to confess Him before men. So it is very important that you come. When you come,*

I'll lead you into a prayer of commitment, and you'll return to your seats. It will not be a call to join a church. It will be a call to give your life to Christ and be saved. I will be praying for you, and I know you will come."

On the night that you plan to make an altar call you should ask the people to stand for prayer at the end of the sermon. The call will proceed along these lines:

"Let us stand for prayer. Eternal Father, we thank Thee that all of us can receive salvation tonight through Jesus Christ. As every head is bowed and every eye is closed, how many of you know deep down that you are not saved and would like to be saved tonight, may I see your hands? Hands are being raised all over the place. How many more would like to be saved tonight, may I see your hands, quickly? God bless you. Now will all of you who raised your hands and mean it meet me here at the altar? Come quickly. God bless you."

At this point you should start to sing 'Just as I Am' or some other appeal song. When the people are at the altar, thank God for their decision and ask the people to repeat a prayer of commitment after you. *"Dear Lord, I realize I'm a sinner. (Repeat). I need Jesus as my Savior. (Repeat). I am sorry for my sins, and I invite Jesus to come into my heart. (Repeat). I intend to live for Him for the rest of my life. (Repeat). Whatever He says to do, I am willing to do. (Repeat). Wherever He says to go, I am willing to go. (Repeat). Amen."*

Present them to Jesus and give them a word of assurance based on 1 John 1:9. The people should return to their seats accepting their salvation as a fact.

On the nights that you know there are not many who are prospects for acceptance of Christ, you should make two calls in one. You may ask all who would like a closer walk with God and all who would like to accept Jesus as their personal Savior tonight for the first time to come forward. Another night you may ask all who have decided for Christ for the first time to come, and all who would like prayer for someone else's salvation to come. When they come, let them raise their hands to show which group they are in, and then lead them into prayer accordingly. Whenever possible, let those who are deciding for Christ for the first time fill in a decision card that contains that decision only. They may be visited and given assur-

ance and told that the Christian life has just started for them and that they must keep attending the meetings so that they may grow up in Christ and discover God's will for their lives.

The call to unite with the Church

Before people are asked to unite with the church, they should be made to understand, in strong language, that God has a special message for these days in Revelation 14:6-12 and Revelation 18:4. They should grasp the truth that the church of Revelation 12:17 is the church that will preach this three-fold message and that the call to come out of Babylon into the remnant church has come to them at last. Only when people get that truth clearly should they be asked to unite with the church by baptism or vote of the church. It will surprise you to see the ease with which they decide when they understand this truth. And we are not complete Seventh-day Adventist preachers unless we emphasize this truth.

Use strong texts, and there will be no need for many. Get to the point quickly and show by your manner that you believe everyone accepts that truth. When the first baptism is over and not before, tell the people that all of God's people were not baptized, so you will have another baptism the next Sabbath.

Make an altar call every night during the week for people to be baptized on Sabbath. Vary your altar calls. Ask them to go to the vestry, or come to the front, or sit in the benches up front. Always tell the people, before the sermon, that you will make a call and what they must do. All who come forward must follow the same procedure of signing cards, etc., as was followed from Monday night onward during your Bible class week. Since most of your new candidates were in your class the week before, there is no need for a class this week. Give private instruction to all who may need it.

Problems

Keep Philippians 4:13, 19 before the people. Challenge all to gain the victory during the Bible class week. Help those with Sabbath work problems. Teach the people to pray. Do not talk doubt. You'll be surprised at the victories gained. Keep saying, 'You'll make it!' They will.

Objections

Find out what the common objections are and answer them in your sermons. Never give people the impression that God will accept an excuse. Every excuse is a sin. Honest people who love Jesus obey immediately no matter what the cost may be.

You will observe that there is no call to keep the Sabbath. Sabbath keeping has little significance outside the context of Revelation 14:6-12. Thus it is presented as a part of the three-fold message, and people are asked to decide for the message as a whole.

It is important, however, that you be sure that the Sabbath truth is understood and accepted before you present the subject of baptism into the remnant church. This is easily accomplished by asking two simple questions as part of a questionnaire or in your visitation:

- 1) Is the Sabbath truth clear to you?
- 2) Have you ever thought about keeping Jesus' Sabbath holy?

I recommend the questionnaire.

When the person says Yes, you reply immediately, "Good. Don't put it off. Let us pray." Thank God for the decision and ask Him to help the person to obey Him immediately. Experience has taught me the amazing effectiveness of this simple method.

If you feel you want them to come to church, read Isaiah 58:13, 14; then invite them to try God out this coming Sabbath. Do not give them the impression that it is perpetual. Ask them to try God out at least once. Conclude by asking: "Is that too hard for you?" If the person hesitates, add, "Of course not. You love the Lord and want to follow Him." Have a word of prayer to seal the decision. After the service on the Sabbath in question secure a decision for attendance next Sabbath. **E**

Kembleton S. Wiggins was an evangelist in the Inter-American Division when he wrote this article.

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James A. Cress



The peril of playing one note



I increasingly suspect both individuals and entities that seem unable to move beyond the one note they have perfected. Rather than engaging a wide range of options— theological, practical, or liturgical—these “same songers” seem content, even committed, to repeating over and over their one noise until the brassy clanging become so familiar that volume is valued over substance.

“For in fact the body is not one member but many . . . But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased . . . And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you . . . there should be no schism in

the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:14-27).

Recently, I have observed a few breakaway groups whose singular focus appears to be removing themselves farther and farther from the established body as they strive (and strife is typical of the process) to establish their independence. Unfortunately, those who embark on these ventures, typically slalom the same downhill slopes.

First, although they proclaim their intentions only



to reform, they assert their own greater trustworthiness over established structures to manage tithes and offerings. In reality, their independence is from management and oversight by church leaders and policies rather than independence from the financial support by church members.

Then, in hopes of maintaining the initial surge of enthusiasm which seems to swarm like yellow jackets to warm lemonade, these groups begin to subtly distinguish their more pure theological views or enhanced applications of various doctrines or missions. The more convoluted their reasoning, the more successful they appear.

One such group, in the process of legally establishing itself as separate and independent from church structure has already abandoned the great commission of going to the world with the gospel and, instead, has begun to focus on going to various unions and conferences with initiatives to recruit the “already saved.” Despite protestations to the contrary, these zealots, perhaps well-intentioned, are far more adventurers than adventists.

In addition, I also see the following dangerous deficiencies:

- No organizational or doctrinal unity among individual congregations.
- No organizational or doctrinal accountability. Heresy may freely develop in one congregation of such loosely-linked fellowships with no power by others to call for repentance or reform.
- No support for pastors except by local congregations.
- No security for properties, buildings, institutions, etc.
- No safeguarding of initial theological educational processes for ministers.
- No plans to professionally develop or continually educate the clergy.
- No equitably-balanced financial remuneration policies for pastors in large versus small assignments.
- No retirement system or healthcare benefits.
- No educational benefits for PKs and no parochial schools for any of the church’s kids.

- No coordinated method for transferring, calling, ordaining, or disciplining workers. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes.
- No financial accountability to constituency sessions.
- No broad-based emphasis (i.e., laity training, family ministries, women’s ministries, health-ministries, publishing, etc.) in support of common values.
- Little stabilizing discipleship of new converts into responsible members focused on a world view more than local growth. This neglect of steady spiritual discipline in favor of that which is the most new and exciting venture of the moment metastasizes uncontrolled, spreading here or there but seldom creating a vision beyond the borders of local province.

Why the impetus to self-directed independence? Individuals will often more easily pursue a course of action which they would have previously eschewed if a root of bitterness over perceived slights is nurtured and allowed to flourish. Life is always unfair this side of God’s new creation and the urge to separate and operate independently of the authoritative body flourished even in paradise with Lucifer’s rebellion.

Perhaps the saddest reality of these self-determined ventures is the probability that they will self-destruct under the weight of their own lack of accountability. Not because either their original intention or their intended processes were evil, but because any narrowly-focused group, by definition, suffers from tunnel vision, unable to see beyond their self-established boundaries. That narrowed vision becomes the true selfishness of playing one note. **E**

James A. Cress is the Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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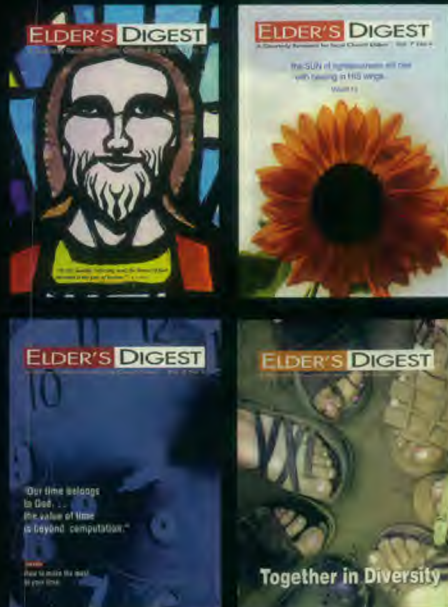
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