quarterly resource for local church elders

January/March 2010

Elder's Digest

The Undershepherds


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12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6516, USA.

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How would you live your life if you knew you had only one year left to live? What would your priorities be?

In Luke 13:6-9, Jesus used a fig tree to teach His disciples a lesson. The tree had borne no fruit for three years. He asked the gardener to cut it down. The gardener requested that it be allowed to live for one more year. The tree was a symbol for the nation of Israel. The owner of the vineyard is God, and the vinedresser is Jesus. Israel is being given one last opportunity to bear fruit. If it fails, it will be cut down. A fruit tree had been planted. The purpose of the tree was to bear fruit. The tree was protected in the vineyard with other fruit trees. The gardener had been patient with the tree, waiting for it to bear fruit. We have been planted by God and chosen by His grace. Our purpose is to bear fruit. We are being protected by the presence of other fruit-bearing Christians. God has been patient with us. If I knew I only had one year left to live, I would make a few things my priority.

I WOULD LIVE MY LIFE ACCORDING TO PRIORITIES

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all of his righteousness.” He knew there would be some things that needed to be second and third. He also knew we would be tempted to put secondary things ahead of necessary things.

1. My family would be a priority. David did not spend enough time with his family. Eli spent too much time in the temple and neglected his boys. If I knew death was imminent, I would want some quality time with my wife, my sons, and other family members. If you are too busy for your family, you are too busy! No one on their deathbed will regret not having spent more time at the office, but many will regret neglecting their families.

2. My church would be a priority. I grew up in this church, I was baptized in this church, I was called by God to work in this church, I was ordained as a pastor by this church, I have preached many of sermons in this church, and I plan for my funeral to be in this church. The church can be like a family. There may be some crazy cousins, eccentric aunts, and a few black sheep. However, the church is as much a part of my life as the air I breathe. Churches aren’t perfect because people aren’t perfect. However, the church is a body, and Jesus Christ is its head. It has the backing of God the Father and the Holy Spirit. It has my support as well. It has the backing of God the Father and the Holy Spirit. It has my support as well.

3. My devotional life would be a priority. This includes praying, studying the Word of God, and meditating. We often use lack of time as an excuse, but there always seems to be an excessive amount of time to fulfill our wants. We have time to do what we think is important to us.

I WOULD DO PERSONAL SOUL-WINNING

Proverbs 11:30 says that “He who wins souls is wise.” I think one of the great joys of heaven will be seeing other people there whom we have helped to bring to the Lord. Ellen G. White wrote, “It was the joy of Christ to save souls. Let this be your work and your joy.”

I think it would be embarrassing to stand before God in heaven without having led anyone to Christ. Some of the most exciting experiences I have had in my ministry have been one-on-one soul-winning encounters.

I WOULD INVEST IN ETERNAL THINGS

The Bible talks more about money than it does about heaven. The widow was commended for giving all she had. It wasn’t much, but it represented a real sacrifice. Money talks. It says something about us. It says something to other people. It also says something to God. The Bible deals with three things: our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with things (stewardship). That makes stewardship pretty important.

Selfishness is occupying much time that the Lord would have devoted to religious activities. I have been shown that the money that is lavishly spent by many believers for unnecessary things should be given to the work of winning souls that are ready to perish.

What will you give that will keep giving when you are gone?

As a church pastor for nearly 28 years, I have preached many sermons for my church members, some of whom died the following week. Life is uncertain. Who knows how long we have to live? In everything we do, we should live as though we will die tomorrow.


Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

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1. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO TRANSCRIBE THE BIBLE?
I worked as a volunteer in China for 8 years from 2000 to 2007. At that time, I struggled with many difficulties related to religious activities, so I had conflicting thoughts and felt disappointed. I realized that being closer to the Lord was the only solution to my problem and so I studied the Bible carefully every day to fill myself with spiritual food. I tried to reflect the Gospel and the fragrance of Jesus through my life and behavior. Then, I was requested to support agricultural development projects from North Korea. As I cannot carry the Bible into North Korea, I started to transcribe the Bible by memory with the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

2. HOW DID YOU TRANSCRIBE THE BIBLE?
I have copied the Bible six times since January 7, 2003 to today. My third transcription was the Chinese Bible. I also transcribed the series of the Conflicts of the Ages region of Korea. The Chilbo Church belongs to the Southwest Korean Conference. Elder Han holds a bachelor’s degree in Theology and for many years used it to serve as an agriculturist missionary in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and China. He also has served as the vice president of the Korea Organic Farming Association and professor at the Public Service Training Center. He enjoys writing agricultural topics which include ‘Secrets of Grape Therapy’ and ‘Country Life and Organic Farming’. His other passions are spreading the gospel and heading the elders of his church.

3. WHAT BENEFIT OR LESSONS DID YOU LEARN THROUGH THE BIBLE TRANSCRIPTION?
Satán deprived people of God’s Word using idols during Old Testament times. He also captures people’s minds through fame, money, pleasure, sports, TV, and computers in the present age. God’s people must practice and keep His Word until death just like the Waldensians did. As Waldensians observed God’s Word through Bible transcription movement, this movement will bring a second Waldensian age. John 17:3 says “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”. I wish all of you could meet and walk with Jesus Christ through the Bible.

4. YOUR MAKING A FOLDING SCREEN WITH THE TRANSCRIBED BIBLE. HOW DID YOU MAKE IT?
I made twelve-folding screens with the fifth transcription. It shows the content of Old and New Testaments at a glance. God sent me a good artist who asked me to make this screen. Many people who look at the screen were so touched and decided to copy the Bible too. The Conflict of the Ages series was also produced as a ten-fold screen.

5. WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?
God has aroused a Bible-transcribing movement in many countries including Korea, China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan through me. The Follow the Bible project initiated by the General Conference emphasizes the importance of the Bible to all people. If possible, I will do my best to transcribe the Bible more and to spread this movement all over the world.

6. WHEN WAS THE FIRST TIME YOU READ THE BIBLE?
I have been reading the Bible since 1959. At that time, I did not have enough money to buy a complete Holy Bible, so I read Bible books in pieces every evening. I borrowed a complete one from a church elder to copy it.

7. IN CLOSING, ANY WORDS TO CHURCH MEMBERS?
Christian maturity, life example, the ability to teach others, and the knowledge of God’s plan for His church are prerequisites for being a good elder. On the other hand, it is expected that the elder be able to preach and counsel, always focusing on what the church believes and preaches. How could an elder do that if he or she is not connected to the Word of God, the source of all knowledge? Impossible! The apostle Paul was right when, in counseling Timothy how to conduct the church, he included advice such as the following; similar advice may also be found in Paul’s epistle to Titus.

• “A bishop then must be blameless . . . able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).
• “If I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13).
• “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).
• “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14, 15).
• “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Therefore, it is the duty of each church elder to be committed daily to studying the Bible as a matter of great personal importance and as a need for their office. I believe studying the Sabbath School quarterly and reading the Bible helps us to become better leaders. We also need to read it to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of church doctrines. On the other hand, it is very healthy for elders to share biblical truths with other people and with small groups; this practice will improve the elder’s ability to teach the distinctive elements of the Adventist faith, and he or she will seek opportunities to teach the Word of God publicly. Regular church services, public evangelism, and special weeks of spiritual emphasis may be a great help for doing that.

Are you an elder? Then start studying the Bible!
In most discussions about spiritual gifts, people turn first to the New Testament, especially to the writings of Paul. And no doubt, the great evangelist had much to say about spiritual gifts. But in this area, as in all others, let us be careful to examine the entirety of Scripture. Spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy, are not simply a New Testament phenomenon. A quick survey will illustrate this point.

• Long before the experience of Pentecost in Acts 2, the Lord promised to give Moses the ability to speak the language necessary to clearly articulate his message (see Exod. 4). This, of course, is the biblical definition of speaking in tongues.

• Later in Exodus, we see the Lord declare of the craftsman Bezalel that He had “filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (31:3).

• After Daniel and his friends passed God’s test of loyalty, the Lord gave them “knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all matters of workmanship” (1:17). Seventh-day Adventists in particular value the harmony of the prophetic spirit with all visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17). Seventh-day Adventists in particular value the harmony of the prophetic spirit with all visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17). Seventh-day Adventists in particular value the harmony of the prophetic spirit with all visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17). Seventh-day Adventists in particular value the harmony of the prophetic spirit with all visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17).

• In Matthew 24, Jesus explains Satan’s goal in employing such agents of deception: “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.”

Ezekiel spoke at length against the dangers of such messengers, and Jesus warned of their deceptive practices extending through the final days of earth’s history. Looking back on the history of Israel and looking forward to the work of the Christian church, the apostle Peter clearly states, “but there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.” In Matthew 24, Jesus explains Satan’s goal in employing such agents of deception: “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.”

Given that the gift of prophecy has been and still remains a valid manifestation of the Spirit of God, and knowing that Satan desires to deceive even the most discerning believers with his counterfeit messengers, it behooves us to take seriously the Bible’s admonition to test the prophets (1 Tim. 5:19-21). To this end, the Bible outlines the following four hallmarks of a true prophet:

• Any future events prophesied must come true (Deut. 18:21-22).

• All prophecies must harmonize with Scripture (Isa. 8:19-20).

• All teaching must affirm that Jesus came “in the flesh” (1 John 4:1-3).

• The Christ-like results of their work must be evident (Matt. 7:15-20).

As outlined in the eighteenth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we recognize that all of these criteria were met in the ministry of Ellen G. White. And as he has done so often in the past, Satan is now making every effort to thwart the work of this remnant people by undermining our confidence in the prophetic gift. Looking ahead to what I believe are the times in which we are now living, Ellen G. White cautioned, “The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’ (Prov. 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God’s remnant people in the true testimony.”

It is my prayer that as leaders and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we will continue to stand firm upon the Bible truth regarding the gift of prophecy. As we see the final events of earth’s last days unfold, let us not concede one inch of territory to our great adversary, but instead move forward in full confidence of God’s Word and His chosen messenger, Ellen G. White.

* Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, 1:48.

Kameron DeVasher is an associate pastor at the Avon Park Seventh-day Adventist Church in Florida. This sermon, adapted for Elder’s Digest, was presented in May, 2008.
By Linda Mei Lin Koh

Whenever there is an Elder’s Digest, I look forward to reading the contributors’ articles. Each issue refills my enthusiasm and supports my belief that Adventist education is the best education. Let me share my thoughts on the recent edition of Elder’s Digest that I received.

I believe church elders can play a significant role in encouraging members to send their children to Adventist schools. When elders are passionate about Adventist education, they can impact parents in their congregations. Through the years, many parents have attended the Adventist school system as inferior, complaining about lack of facilities, small class size, poor teaching, and low academic achievement. But do they know what recent research shows?

A landmark division-wide research study, CognitiveGenesis, which began in 2006 and was conducted at La Sierra University, surveyed 30,000 students, grades 3-9 and 11, who were enrolled in Adventist schools across North America. The two goals for the study were:

1. To determine the achievement (and ability) levels of students in Adventist schools, compared to national norms.
2. To examine relationships between student, parent, teacher, and school factors related to achievement (and ability).

The latest preliminary results from the first three years of the study show both positive outcomes and areas for further investigation. The following are the results for the United States.

### Positive Findings

- Above average for all school sizes
- Above prediction at all ability levels
- Yearly gains in achievement greater than expected for continuing students
- Yearly gains in ability greater than gains in achievement
- Above average for all subjects
- Average prediction at all ability levels
- Above average for all school years

### Areas for Investigation

Some subjects and grade levels have tentatively been identified as areas for further study. In most cases these areas show satisfactory results, but the results are not as superior as the results for other subjects and grades. Examples include:

- Math computation—The North American Division has appointed an ad hoc committee to study math computation. It has met, analyzed the CognitiveGenesis data, and is now collecting additional data based on classroom observations and interviews with teachers. It will meet again to make recommendations for practice based on all data collected.
- Social Studies

- Grades 4 and 5

According to Elisa Kidd, CognitiveGenesis project director, this rigorous research is validating and shows that overall, Adventist school students perform better than the national average. Although 60 percent of Adventist K-8 schools are considered small schools (schools with three or fewer teachers), students in these schools perform just as well. The study also shows that children attending Adventist schools not only achieve half a grade level higher in all subjects than predicted based on their ability scores, they also gain the benefits of Adventist education shown for other research in strong spiritual lives and healthy lifestyle choices.

Indeed, Adventist education offers great potential for our children and youth! We need to acquire the parents in our churches with the value of investing in Adventist education. When I first joined the Adventist Church as a teenager, my head elder was passionate about getting me and my friend into our Adventist school. We were rather reluctant at first because we had heard about the low standards of these schools. But after attending one quarter of classes, it changed my life! So, church elders, here are some things you can do in your churches to promote Adventist education.

- Preach about Adventist education. Whenever there is a special Christian Education day or a special Sabbath offering designated for Christian education, elders can seize this opportunity to preach a sermon on the values of Adventist education. It's time to let parents and pastors know about the benefits of how Adventist education has impacted you, your children, and others, or study the Spirit of Prophecy’s counsels on the importance of supporting Adventist education. Ellen G. White strongly advocates the operation of church schools when she says, “In all our churches there should be schools, and teachers in these schools who are missionaries. It is essential that teachers be trained to act well their part in the important work of educating the children of Sabbathkeepers, not only in the sciences, but in the Scriptures. These schools, established in every Sabbath-school locality, and conducted by God-fearing men or women, as the case demands, should be built on the same principles as were the schools of the prophets.”

- In her counsel to parents and teachers, Ellen White again reiterates that “[a]ll our youth should be permitted to have the blessings and privileges of an education at our schools, that they may be inspired to become laborers together with God. They all need an education, that they may be fitted for usefulness, qualified for places of responsibility in both private and public life.”

- Hold question-and-answer sessions with parents. Before the beginning of a school year, elders can work together with the pastor to organize a meeting with parents to answer questions. This is a good time to supply parents with information on the various church schools that are available for their children, the types of scholarships offered, and the type of programs that are available. Such a list of programs can be valuable to parents who are looking for guidance in making a decision.

- Model your belief. Elders need to practice what they preach. If elders believe in Adventist education, they will send their children to Adventist schools. Such a consistent lifestyle helps to build confidence in parents who may be wavering in their Christian education. Inspire the members and parents with your testimony of how Adventist education has impacted you, your children, and youth! We need to acquaint the parents in our churches to promote Adventist education.

- Create a celebration. Celebrating achievement provides an opportunity for the church to rejoice together with these young people who are the fruits of their investment. Graduating seniors can participate in a special worship service of thanksgiving to God.

- Support church school activities. Elders can encourage other members to support church school activities whenever possible. If the church decides to fund one mission project through a Walkathon, walk with them, but don’t forget to rally other members to support these young people, too. If students are participating in a musical production, get your church to attend the performance. Promote such activities enthusiastically from the pulpit; enthusiasm is contagious! Such moral support impinges upon the minds of young people the value of Christian education.

- Pray for the children and youth. Our children and youth today face many challenges at home, at school, and in the community. It would be wonderful if the church prayed for them regularly. The head elder or any other elder can work with the pastor to design a prayer announcement on the back of the church bulletin each Sabbath. Elders can list the names of two to three children or youth who will be the subjects of prayer that morning. In one church that I attended, the elder called these young people up front before the pastoral prayer and asked them if they had special prayer requests. It was heartwarming for these young people to know that the church family was praying for them. This would undoubtedly help our young people feel that they belong to the church and will most likely “keep them in the church.”

- Yves, considering the recent CognitiveGenesis results, we can be proud of our Adventist schools. This study can provide elders, pastors, principals, and all of us with a new, powerful marketing tool. In the past, parents have lost confidence in the academics of the Adventist education system. Now elders, as well as pastors, teachers, and all church members, can rebuild confidence with this documentation of student achievement, which can also be shared with local churches to become active and strong advocates for Adventist education. Get your church on board to invest in our children and youth. Their disciples are large in both transformed lives, changed development, and spiritual growth!

2. Ibid., 332.
4. Linda Mei Lin Koh is director of Children’s Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
The undershepherds

The pastor is the shepherd of the flock, and the local elder is the undershepherd. Together they have the responsibility of caring for the sheep. On Sabbath they help to provide proper spiritual nourishment, inspiration, and encouragement through Bible study, worship, and fellowship. Sabbath should be a high experience for every Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Each Sabbath should be a step in spiritual growth and another milestone on the road to holiness. Each service should contribute toward the great objective, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

However, as important as the Sabbath service is, we can never feel that our responsibility to the flock begins and ends with the Sabbath. What happens during the week may actually determine the salvation or loss of many souls. Here is where the care that the shepherd and the undershepherds becomes exceedingly important.

THE MISSING SHEEP

On Sabbath the anxious shepherd will look carefully to see which sheep are missing. His heart will go out to the absent ones, particularly to those whom he knows are experiencing spiritual struggles. It is easy to report to the church board that Brother Blank has not been in church for six months, one year, or perhaps several years, but what has been done during that period to encourage the missing member to return?

Visitation with former members have revealed that many of them could have been rescued if they had been contacted, prayed with, and encouraged during the early periods of their declining experience. Eternity alone will reveal how important the visits of faithful pastors and elders have been in saving members for Christ and His church.

MY EXPERIENCE

There was a time when, as a teenager lad, I had become unsettled and carefree. I began slipping away during the worship service, then finally skipped Sabbath School as well. My church was a country church without a pastor, and the full pastoral responsibilities were on the local elders. I shall never forget the night the head elder (a farmer) and one of his associates came to our home. They soon made it known that they had come to see me. Mother directed them into my bedroom, where a friend and I were hanging out. It so happened that the friend was also on the list to be visited.

So they made a most earnest appeal to both of us. They let us know how much they missed us at church and explained how we could be a help, especially to other young people. They pleaded with us to return to Jesus and the church, assuring us that our loving Savior was very willing to forgive and stand eager to help us in our Christian life.

The words touched my heart. I loved the Lord. In fact, as a junior I had already felt the call to the ministry. But then the devil had lured me into the broad and popular way. Now I knew that I must change, and the decision for change was made while these humble lay leaders of the church talked and prayed.

A number of years later, I learned that this head elder, who for years had given spiritual leadership to my home church, was seriously ill in a rest home near where I was then pastoring. I seized the first opportunity to visit him. What great encouragement came into his life, then ebbing away, as I expressed to him my great appreciation for his visit that dark night! Tears of gratitude flowed from each of us. I have often wondered just what would have happened to me if he had not come, if he had not made that personal appeal!

Church Elder, how is it with you? Do you have the same concern? Are you willing, after a busy day at your office, in your shop, or perhaps on your farm, to leave the comforts of your home and go out to search out a missing member of the flock, perhaps a teenager? What efforts are you putting forth to encourage discouraged souls? What are you doing to bring them back to the sunshine of God’s love?

The care of the flock has been entrusted to the pastor and elders of the church. This is not an option; it is a decided responsibility. It can be neglected only at the loss of some dear souls.

In the larger churches, some type of undershepherd plan should be in operation by which the church membership is organized into groups, with undershepherds over each. Where this plan is followed, the prime responsibility for seeing that this plan is actually a functioning process rests with the elders. The deacons and deaconesses should be involved, but the leadership, by precept and example, must come from the elders.

DO NOT NEGLECT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

This phase of responsibility is too often neglected, and as a result we have the wrecks of human souls strewn along the highway to the kingdom. Just recently a dear woman came into my office to discuss a problem with me. She had been disfellowshipped for lack of attendance. There were extenuating circumstances. Admittedly, she could have made a greater effort to contact the church, but through the experience that continued for quite a period of time, little effort was made by the church to contact her. Finally the post office brought her the news that her name had been dropped from the church records. Thankfully, she is preparing to have her membership reinstated in a church in the city to which she has moved. She loved the Lord enough to take the initiative. It would have been much easier for her to have grown bitter and turned completely away from the church.

May the Lord bless both pastors and elders as together prayer are offered, plans laid, and efforts made not only to win souls for the church but to hold those who have already been gathered in. It is part of the self-sacrificing but rewarding labor that God has called you to do. And in thus looking after the flock, you are following the example of the Great Shepherd.

Orley M. Berg was associate Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference when he wrote this article.
God. As I drove through the solitary ranchland, I looked up at the vast Texas night sky and felt closer to God as I looked up into His creation. In desperation, I asked the Lord, “What do you want me to do? You know what we want! How many more anointings do you want us to do? What must I say? Is my prayer wrong? Am I not saying the right words? Lord, if there was ever anyone who deserved healing, it would be Brother Rito. His family needs him, and Your church needs him. What do you want me to do? Please let me know!” Suddenly, it was as though someone had snapped their fingers. A calm came over me, and a voice said, “Don’t you know that I love Brother Rito more than you can comprehend?”

That was it! No matter what happened to Brother Rito, God loved him and would do whatever was best for him, even if I could not understand it.

The next night I shared my experience and we anointed Brother Rito again. But his condition got worse, and a month later he died. His death was a great loss to the church’s leadership and morale, but I am happy to say that Brother Rito’s wife has stepped in to fill his shoes. She is the church’s first woman elder, and the Holy Spirit has empowered her in her work with the church. The same strength and conviction that her husband had, she now brings forth.

Brother Rito’s passing was a trying time for my church and I, but we have grown from this experience and now have a better understanding of God and His love for us. In these uncertain times, we need to strengthen our faith and believe that God knows what is best for us. We also need to recognize that the love that He has for us is greater than we can imagine. We need to trust Him, even if we can’t understand. We also need to appreciate the people God places in our lives. I consider myself privileged to have known Brother Rito. I thank God that He used his life to teach our church a valuable lesson and to strengthen our faith.
Commitment vs. Convenience

Matthew 19:16-24, 21-24

Is serving Jesus a commitment or a convenience? Many people today do not want to be totally committed to the Lord because it demands too much of them. Let’s be honest: commitment becomes someone else’s responsibility when it interferes with our schedules! According to Webster, “commitment” means “to pledge to some particular course or use.” Commitment to Jesus is more than a definition; it requires our life, our soul, my very being! And it’s not just twice a week or even once a week, but all the time! Just look at the cross: Jesus was committed to us all the way.

Many are not committed to the things of God, only to what is convenient before God. A clear example of this lifestyle is when someone says, “I go to church on Sabbath morning. Isn’t that enough?” Webster defines “convenient” as “suited to one’s comfort or ease.” Are we living a life for Jesus that is suited for our own comfort? Do we want to be committed as long as it is easy? What if Jesus had decided not to die for our sins? Where would our eternity be?

I want us to look at being totally committed to God. This commitment should be a part of our everyday lives, not just something we do when it’s convenient or comfortable.

The Convenience of the Self-Serving

The self-serving focus on themselves rather than on God. In Matthew 19:16, we see someone asking Jesus what they need to do to obtain eternal life. Self-serving has to give up something to follow God.

In verse 21, Jesus says, “If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions…” Many today have an uncommitted focus on keeping their possessions rather than on God. In Matthew 19:16, the rich young ruler wanted to follow Christ, but he wanted it to be convenient.

How about you and me? This young man was looking for a better way to get what he wanted rather than wanting God to make him a better man. Are we looking to get what we want out of convenience rather than wanting God to make us better Christians?

God does not give up on the self-serving, no matter what the situation is or conditionally.

Your Actions Speak Louder Than Your Words!

Have you ever asked yourself: “Whose job is it to serve God?” Have you ever answered yourself by saying, “Well, it is the pastor’s job. He’ll take care of it because we pay him to do it.” “If that is your answer, you are lying to yourself. Let’s read what the Bible says about serving the Lord. First, what is the Bible for? (Read 2 Tim. 3:16, 17). We are all instructed to work for the Lord. Second, what is the work to be done? Matthew 28:19 says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We should preach the Gospel to all! Finally, who should serve the Lord? (Read Joshua 24:15) Being committed to serve ought to be the church members’ top priority. Sometimes actions speak louder than words, and God watches both actions and words. While we are still here on earth, we have an opportunity to continue serving the Lord so that He is pleased with us.

If you are not dead, your service to God is not over.

How Can You Be Totally Committed to Serving God?

Do you want to be totally committed to the things of God? Then pledge to focus on a relationship with Christ rather than on other things!

“I for one have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—men’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Matt. 10:35, 36). The committed focus on denying themselves and following Christ rather than loving only themselves. “And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38).

The committed focus on discovering the Source of Life rather than being self-serving. “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39). The lives of the committed shine for Jesus! To what, then, should we be committed?

Committed to church (Heb. 10:24, 25). “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—a all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

We ought to be committed to the things of the church! It is convenient to attend church once a week, but commitment means serving no matter what, no matter what happens in the world and things get in the way, but the Lord never gives us more than we can handle.

Conclusion

Are you totally committed to God in every area of your life, or are you conveniently committed to Him for the sake of your comfort or ease? Jesus is totally committed to everything.
**INTRODUCTION**

A. Mount Everest, in the Himalayas, has an altitude of approximately 29,000 feet; it is the highest peak on earth. Likewise, Isaiah 53 is the highest prophetic revelation about the suffering Messiah.

1. No other Bible passage presents in a clearer way Christ’s vicarious nature and the character of His death. It is the anticipated story of Christ’s suffering.

2. Although it was written in the seventh century B.C., it could almost have been written yesterday. Carlos Spurgeon, the acclaimed evangelist, said “what a chapter! a masterful Bible, the Gospel in its essence!”

B. Its inspiration and its power to move hearts are unattainable.

C. Ellen G. White says that Satan diligently studied Isaiah’s prophecies and other prophecies which referred to the Messiah. The prophecies instilled in him fear and apprehension, and he decided to blind the people so that they could not see the relevance. He was mostly successful, and he is still trying to prevent us from understanding the sacrifice Jesus made for us and from giving Him our love. Ellen White also states that we should “let the immensity of grace and love of the life of Jesus, especially the final ones. This chapter should be studied. It presents Christ as the Lamb of God…The entire chapter should be committed to memory” (Ellen G. White, SDA Bible Commentary, 1:47).

**JESUS FORETOLD (ISAIAH 53:1-3)**

A. A plant has a root that sustains it. When a tree is cut to the root, a tender plant grows and flourishes from the apparently lifeless root.

1. Revelation 22:16 says that Jesus is the “scepter and the offspring” (generation). The root tells us of His divinity; the offspring tells us of His humanity.

2. According to Jehovah’s baby, the word became flesh. It took part in our nature.

3. “God’s plan” was never the original design. “There was neither life nor joy, however, the root was there. Any farmer knows that it is not normal for a sprout to appear in dry land. The lack of nature demand moisture in the ground for germination.

   1. Jesus would come precisely from an origin as strange as “dry land.”

   2. From a human viewpoint, this last comparison is very appropriate. “What distinguished person was born in a stable? Who among the great men of the earth has worked hard to conquer and influence others only by his integrity, character, and virtue?”

**JESUS IS THE SUBSTITUTE (ISAIAH 53:4-6)**

A. We have seen the sickness described in Isaiah 53:4-6. In Isaiah 53, the vicarious nature of Christ’s suffering is emphasized 11 times:

   1. He has borne our grief;
   2. Carried our sorrows;
   3. Smitten by God, and afflicted;
   4. He was wounded for our transgressions;
   5. He was bruised for our iniquities;
   6. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him;
   7. By His stripes we are healed;
   8. The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all;
   9. He was cut off from the land of the living;
   10. He was stricken for our transgressions;
   11. Sinners are justified through Him and He will carry their iniquities upon Himself.

B. The suffering was vicarious, voluntary, in obedience to the Lord, for us, and for mediation.

1. Jesus, too, felt upon Himself our grief and blame and their consequences. Through Christ’s death, both mercy and justice would be kept.

2. He suffered in our place. “It is for thee that the Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt. …He, the Son of the Sin Bearers, endures the wrath of divine justice, and for thy sake becomes sin itself” (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, 755, 756).

**EXPLANATION**

The Work of Creation Can Never Be Explained by Science.

**THE EVEREST OF MESSIANIC PROPHECIES**

Isaiah 53:6

“The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart” (Ibid., 753).

**JESUS COMING TO THIS EARTH TO ACCOMPLISH THE GREATEST WORK EVER ACCOMPLISHED AMONG MEN.**

Ellen G. White, Adventist Home, 133

ELDER’S DIGEST JANUARY | MARCH 2010

**GOD’S CREATION**

**INTRODUCTION**

A. Three classic questions of humanity—Where did I come from? Why am I here? And where am I going?—have been satisfactorily answered by philosophy and science.

B. It seems that the human race has lost its identity. The enemy’s suggestions have led man’s reasoning (Rom. 1:21, 22).

**CREATION WEEK**

A. God created the environment and man, and rested on the seventh day.

B. The earth was disorderly and empty (Gen. 1:1-2). God, the Originator of the universe, still had not created appropriate life sources. In Genesis 1, there is a sentence which is repeated five times: “…and God saw that it was good” (before the end of the chapter, we have an emphasis: “…and indeed it was very good.”) These expressions reflect the fact that God had about His work during creation week.

1. On the first day, He created light. Without light there would be no life. It was essential to create light when God began to establish order from chaos to new life (Gen. 1:3-5).

2. On the second day, He created the atmosphere. No life form is possible without an atmosphere. The sun’s light would be dead if the moon and stars served as permanent instruments of light. The sun, the moon, and the stars were made at creation (Gen. 1:16).

3. On the third day, He created the land, sea, and vegetation. He separated the waters from the dry land, and soon vegetation was called into existence (Gen. 1:9-13).

4. On the fourth day, He created sources of light. The sun, the moon, and the stars served as permanent instruments of light. The sun, the moon, and the stars were made at creation (Gen. 1:16).

5. On the fifth day, He created the creatures. God created everything that would live on the earth in order to serve Him (Gen. 1:24-25).

6. On the sixth day, He created animals (Gen. 1:24, 25) and man—disproving the theory that man was created in God’s image in both exterior likeness and character (Gen. 1:26-27).

7. On the seventh day, God rested. The cessation of the creative work was part of God’s plan that man could enter into His holy rest.

**CONCLUSION**

Seizing that He pleased the Lord to save us, let us be thankful by accepting His salvation today.

Laeacro Mazzaro is the communication secretary for the Central Brazil Union.

**SIN’S ENTRANCE**

A. The angels had the opportunity to choose their loyalty to God. Now it was up to mankind to decide on which side of the conflict they would be. They had to be loyal to the first command. For example (Gen. 2:16, 17).

B. The first consequence of sin: man lost his close relationship with God (Gen. 3:8). He heard God’s voice from the moment he was separated from the Creator (Isa. 59:2).

C. The second consequence of sin: loss of life. “For the wages of sin is death…” (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 6:23). To perpetuate life would mean to extend sin’s existence (Gen. 3:22). The popular belief is that life after death is based on the serpent’s argument, “you will not surely die.”

D. The third consequence of sin: man lost his ability to live in harmony with his fellow beings. Within a short time Cain took Abel’s life (Gen. 4:8).“He was the first of the sinners, the consequence of sin: man lost his control over nature. Pain, suffering, hard work, and a fight for survival is the consequence of sin (Gen. 3:17-19).

E. The fifth consequence of sin: the death of God’s Son to save man from the consequences of sin (Gen. 3:15). Man was taken as the enemy’s hostage, but He sent Jesus to make peace with God, the third person of the Trinity would pay the ransom with His own life. The only way man could be free was by having a substitute. Jesus’ death paid the ransom with His own life.

**CONCLUSION**

A. The life, death, and resurrection of God’s Son provide the recurrence mankind’s kind-condition before sin.

B. If you are connected to God, you will also restore your relationship with others through forgiveness. You will be able to enjoy the beautiful nature God has created, here and throughout eternity. Amen!

General Conference Ministerial Association
PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

INTRODUCTION

We read in the Nativity story that “there was now no room at the inn.” Those are familiar words, but this is not a Christmas message. Life in the first-century Roman Empire was far different from life today. Although there were inns, most people looked to private homes for hospitality.

The Greek word for hospitality (philoxenia) in the New Testament means “a love of strangers.” In Bible times, strangers were welcomed with open arms. One way to destroy enemies was to kill them. Another way was to befriended them. Hospitality does that.

What does the Bible say about hospitality? We’ll look first at biblical instruction, then at some biblical examples, and then we’ll see how they relate to us today.

BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION ON HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is a mark of discipleship. In James 2:15-17, we read, “Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, ‘Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well!’ but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.”

In his letter to the Romans, Paul directs us to “share with God’s people who are in need.” (Rom. 12:13)

A modern translation to John’s command: “To understand what hospitality is and what it is not, we need only look to Luke 10:25-37 and observe two women who welcomed Jesus to their home—Mary and Martha. Here we learn about priorities—it’s more important to be with people, to spend time with our guests, than to fuss and be frustrated about housekeeping details. We choose our priorities by how we invest our time. Many of us give our guests the same rush-through meals and often do not even ask them and observe two women who welcomed Jesus to their home—Mary and Martha. Here we learn about priorities—it’s more important to be with people, to spend time with our guests, than to fuss and be frustrated about housekeeping details. We choose our priorities by how we invest our time. Many of us give our guests the same rush-through meals and often do not even ask them.

When the servant arrived at Rebekah’s house, he was cordially received, and her family’s hospitality helped convince the servant that God had chosen Rebekah to be his bride.

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UNDERS...
HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS
7 SECRETS FOR TRUE LONGEVITY

Adequate Sleep

Certainly it is essential to participate in prayer vigils or to be available to help others in an emergency, but these situations are usually not routine. In most cases, sleeping too late or too little or having an irregular sleep pattern is often unnecessary and avoidable. If we place a priority on this issue, we can easily rearrange things and plan ahead, while still leaving room for special circumstances.

Think about your sleep habits over the past few months. Perhaps you see a pattern of irregularity in your sleep schedule and may even have experienced insomnia or felt unable to enjoy a regular 7-8 hours of restful sleep. Here are some tips for improving sleep and metabolism levels:

• Awaken with the sun, or be exposed to at least 30 minutes of bright light starting within 10 minutes of awakening.
• Establish regular hours for sleeping (ideally before 10 p.m.), for eating, and for exercise.
• When going to sleep, be still with your eyes closed and plan for 7-8 hours of sleep.
• Keep the room quiet, dark, and cool.
• Ask God for peace and restful sleep as you lay your anesthetics on Him.

Isn’t it time to take a second look at the hours spent with God, family, work, and church ministry, while optimizing and planning for healthier sleep patterns? It will not only contribute to your longevity, it will positively impact those around you as well. “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for you alone O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Ps 4:8).

INGREDIENTS OF ADVENTIST WORSHIP

1. Adventist worship should be awe-inspiring. In Revelation 14:4, the first angel declares, “Fear God, and give glory to him.” As Adventist ministers know, this word “fear” does not mean solemnity or reverence and awe. Worship involves having a good relationship with your fellow-worshipers; the gospel of love cannot be realized in isolation. And it involves having warm feelings toward God. But these are only parts of worship. In corporate worship, God’s people enter His throne room together. Worship is not primarily for feeling good but for seeing God. 2. Adventist worship should be joyful. Revelation 14:2, 3 describes God’s redeemed in worship: “The sound I heard was like that of harps playing their harps. And they sang as it were a new song.” This heavenly harp-playing and singing reveal the joy and feeling that belongs in worship. When we who are preparing for heaven worship as we will in heaven, our worship will be joyful. It will include both our thoughts and our feelings, demanding clear heads and warm hearts.

Too many Adventist ministers have had the emotioneducated out of them. Too many of us are so afraid of emotional excess emotion) that we avoid any emotion at all. But we are wrong in presuming we defended our pioneers when we defended only the formal and the rational. Early Adventist worship included lots of relating and participating and sometimes it was highly emotional.

Franklin said, “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” Ben was so right! Today there is plenty of scientific evidence supporting the notion that adequate sleep is indeed a key factor when it comes to living a long, healthy life. Thus, in our list of seven secrets for longevity, getting enough sleep ranks number 3. In our previous health tips, we studied exercise and healthy diet as the first two secrets for longevity. But many do not realize that sleep is just as important as these two items. In fact, some researchers say that “sleep should be considered as essential to a healthy lifestyle as exercise and nutrition.” The truth is that in many instances, inadequate sleep prevents us from getting the full benefits of exercise and a healthy diet.

Here are a few of the many negative effects of poor sleep:

• Slows frontal lobe function, impairing our ability to make good decisions, concentrate, and engage in high-level intellectual tasks
• Contributes to depression and anxiety¹
• Promotes onset and increases the severity of diabetes²
• Impairs the body’s immune system, reducing its ability to fight infection and inflammation³

You may be surprised to learn that you feel physically well even though you are sleep-deprived. In fact, some researchers say that “sleep should be considered as essential to a healthy lifestyle as exercise and nutrition.”³

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The art of speech: SIMPLICITY IN OUR SPEECH

Success for the Gospel

The success of the gospel message does not depend upon learned speeches, eloquent testimonies, or deep arguments. It depends upon the simplicity of the message and its adaptation to the souls that are hungering for the bread of life. “What shall I do to be saved?”—this is the want of the soul.—COL 231.

Purity and Simplicity—Our work should be to embrace every opportunity to present the truth in its purity and simplicity where there is any desire or interest to hear the reasons of our faith.—3T 214.

Work in the Cities—The Lord is speaking to His people at this time, saying, Gain an entrance into the cities, and proclaim the truth in simplicity and in faith. The Holy Spirit will work through your efforts to impress hearts. Introduce no strange doctrine into your message, but speak the simple words of the gospel of Christ, which young and old can understand. The unlearned as well as the educated are to comprehend the truths of the third angel’s message, and they must be taught in simplicity. If you would approach the people among them, they must be taught in simplicity. Introduce no strange doctrine into your message, but speak the simple words of the gospel of Christ, which young and old can understand.—3T 36.

Plain Mileposts—The world needs labor now. Calls are coming in from every direction like the Macedonian cry: “Come over and help us.” Plain, pointed arguments, standing out as mileposts, will do more toward convincing minds generally than will a large array of arguments which cover the same ground, but which none but investigating minds will have interest to follow.—3T 39.

A Few Forcible Remarks—A few forcible remarks upon some point of doctrine will fasten it in the mind much more firmly than if such a mass of matter were presented that nothing was understood. The unlearned as well as the educated are to comprehend the truths of the third angel’s message, and they must be taught in simplicity. Introduce no strange doctrine into your message, but speak the simple words of the gospel of Christ, which young and old can understand. The unlearned as well as the educated are to comprehend the truths of the third angel’s message, and they must be taught in simplicity. Introduce no strange doctrine into your message, but speak the simple words of the gospel of Christ, which young and old can understand.—3T 214.

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I invite you to carefully consider the following points:

1. The church does not recommend unequal yoke (see Church Manual, 183). “The Spirit of Prophecy consistently counsels against marriage between ‘the believer and the unbeliever’ and further cautions against uniting with fellow Christians who have ‘not accepted the truth for this time’” (Ellen G. White, Res-timones to the Church, 5:264).

2. The church cannot use authority or constraints to prevent it (see Church Manual, 183). “… the Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly discourages marriage between a Seventh-day Adventist and a non-Seven-day Adventist, and strongly urges Seventh-day Adventist ministers not to perform such weddings.”

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“The church recognizes that it is the prerogative of the individual to make the final decision relative to the choice of a marriage partner. However, it is the hope of the church that, if the member chooses a marriage partner who is not a member of the church, the couple will realize and appreciate that the Seventh-day Adventist pastor, who has committed to uphold the principles outlined above, should not be expected to perform such a marriage.”

Because this is a biblical orientation, a courtship of this nature may disqualify the person from holding church leadership offices, because it might give the impression that the church endorses such relationships, and others might feel motivated to follow the same example. However, the church needs to be very careful not to show rejection or discrimination to the non-Adventist partner.

This limitation has the purpose of motivating the church member to reconsider the relationship that is incompatible to his or her faith. Thus says the Church Manual: “If an individual does enter into such a marriage, the church is to demonstrate love and concern with the purpose of encouraging the couple toward complete unity in Christ” (183).

The answer is “No.” It is possible that all officers could be re-elected, but we need to follow the steps outlined in the Church Manual, chapter 11.

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, officers are elected every one or two years (see p. 49) through an appointed nominating committee. This committee brings its report to the church, which then acts on the names presented. This procedure enables the church to give careful study to each name prior to election, and avoids the public competitive element that may arise when nominations are made from the floor.

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN RELATION TO A MEMBER WHO MARRIES SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT PROFESS THE SAME FAITH?

A child learns the words, “Jesus loves me this I know… “, a Pathfinder discovers the intricate beauty of nature during a field trip, church members reach out to a family in need at the food bank and youth help to build a chapel during a spring break mission trip. These are snapshots of unsung heroes at work in our churches. Taking on responsibilities, performing tasks and taking risks on behalf of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Quality leadership enables organizations to meet their goals. Numerous books, articles, and papers have been written on the subject. Cindy Tutsch’s book, *Ellen White on Leadership*, is a very resourceful book on leadership because it deals with some of the most essential characteristics of spiritual leadership. In this volume, the author compares Ellen White’s leadership with contemporary leadership publications. Because one could hardly imagine that a nineteenth-century author could articulate such a comprehensive position on spiritual leadership, Tutsch’s book about Ellen White’s outlook on spiritual leadership is fascinating. Tutsch gives some key components that define what spiritual leadership is. She talks about the leader’s relationship with God, self-sacrificial service, delegating, and the need for an exemplary lifestyle. There were several insights in *Ellen White on Leadership* which are pertinent to ministry, but this report will only seek to highlight the most significant insights.

The first insight Tutsch highlights is related to the most basic characteristic of a spiritual leader. She asserts that a spiritual leader is one who uses his or her influence to promote Christ. *Ellen White on Leadership* underscores the fact that true leadership cannot exist without the knowledge of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The author emphasizes that Ellen White’s view regarding the necessity for the leader to be empowered by the Spirit seems stronger than that of any current leadership author. This is especially significant in today’s world, where the spiritual authority of leaders has experienced numerous attacks. Another reason why this is significant is that a leader who is not guided by the Holy Spirit will not be able to give a good representation of Christ. Furthermore, the spiritual leader’s effectiveness is directly connected to his or her relationship with God or the quality of time he or she spends with God. Channeling one’s influence to promote Christ comes from a connection with God. Certainly, spiritual leadership is centered on a leader’s relationship with God, whereby he or she uses his or her influence to honor God.

In addition, Tutsch shows that Blackaby and King, Christian leadership authors, concurred with Ellen White’s perspective on spiritual leadership when they argued that experience alone cannot be our guide; every experience must be controlled and understood within the realm of Scripture. The high view of Scripture proposed by Blackaby and King was emphasized by Ellen White more than a century ago. This is extremely vital for the future of spiritual leadership because relativism, postmodernism, and the New Age movement seem to be engulfing today’s society, leading most people to look to reason and situation ethics as the guiding light of their lives. For the spiritual leader, reason, feelings, and societal norms are certainly not enough. In fact, these things have been found to be inadequate. The only sure foundation is the Word of God. Another significant outlook is that only the Word of God (written or living) is able to transform lives and enhance character development. History is full of examples which illuminate the fact that experience alone is insufficient when it comes to spiritual leadership. There is an urgent need for spiritual leaders to return to the foundation of leadership, the Bible. Obviously, this insight will lead spiritual leaders to be more conscious of the fact that spiritual leadership is rooted in the Word of God.

The idea that spiritual leadership is servant leadership is emphasized by Tutsch in reference to Ellen White’s leadership principles. The term “servant leadership” was coined by Robert Greenleaf. According to Ellen White, spiritual leaders serve, sacrifice, and engage in selfless behavior not because of their innate goodness but rather to emulate Jesus’ humility demonstrated in the incarnation. God, who is the source of true leadership, has set the example of what it means to be a servant leader. Self-sacrificing leadership has become popular today, but only in theory. In reality, the principle of servant leadership appears to be missing from the lives of many of today’s spiritual leaders. The world needs spiritual leaders who exemplify and embody servant leadership.

Furthermore, the essential components of empowerment and mentorship were insight gleaned from *Ellen White on Leadership*. Tutsch writes that spiritual leaders empower individuals and function as mentors to those who have been empowered. A spiritual leader whose responsibilities do not entail mentorship and empowerment ceases to function as an effective leader. Motivating people is a crucial leadership component because leaders who do not train anyone to take over after they leave are deemed ineffective leaders. In other words, leaders who are not creating successors are not really leading. This is significant because the success of one’s leadership is not solely dependent on the success the organization experiences when he or she is leading. On the contrary, its success also depends on the accomplishment it experiences after the leader has left. Certainly, empowerment and mentorship are directly connected to spiritual leadership.

In conclusion, *Ellen White on Leadership* is one of the most comprehensive books written on spiritual leadership. The way in which the author presents the information empowers leaders to be relevant and practical as they seek to embody and exemplify Christian leadership in this postmodern age. Likewise, the parallels that are drawn in this volume between contemporary writers and Ellen White could certainly change the way leaders approach ministry. The parallels used by Tutsch in this volume are similar to the object lessons that were used by the true Servant Leader, Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, this book is a masterpiece on spiritual leadership.
One afternoon while I was standing on a river bank, I saw a huge box floating downstream with the river’s current. Then I saw a tiny fish going upstream against the current. Two objects crossing each other’s paths. One going down, the other going up.

What was the difference? It was LIFE!
The box was very impressive looking, well decorated with all kinds of designs but it did not have life, which is why it was going downstream with the flow.

The fish, tiny as far as size or capacity was concerned, was so small it wasn’t even good enough for Sushi – “Tuna” I mean, but it was going upstream because of its life, its life was mission.
The mission of the church is outreach. Outreach is not just an activity of the church; it is the mission of the church. However, in its institutional preoccupation, some of the churches have abandoned their real identity and reason for existence. They developed a very inward-looking passive culture. “Come and get it!”

Consider our churches, schools, and hospitals: Are the communities a better place to live because of our existence? We have not earned the privilege and trust to share it.

This will require shifting our efforts from just growing churches into transforming communities. Are we making any impact on the communities where our institutions are located?

Consider our churches, schools, and hospitals: Are the communities a better place to live because of our existence? We have not earned the privilege and trust to share it.

The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.” (Ministry of Healing, p. 143)

If I paraphrase the above statement, it says Jesus mingled with people, identified their needs, met their needs, and developed a trust relationship.

Through the trust relationship He built a bridge, and then He said to the people, “Follow Me.”

Jesus went to places where the people were. Therefore we need churches where people are. Mostly, people are not coming to us; we have to go to them.

There are times that we as Christians in the church are great about speaking the truth without Love. We need churches where people are. Mostly, people are not coming to us; we have to go to them.

At an Adventist World Radio training session in Ethiopia, I met a most fascinating person: a former soldier who knew nothing about God until death stared him eyeball to eyeball on the battlefields of war. He eventually became a soldier for Christ, working as a producer for AWR.

Haben is from the Tigrigna region of Ethiopia. From age 6 to 15, he lived in a Christian orphanage. He had no interest in God and didn’t care to know anything about Him. After leaving the orphanage, Haben began studying for his future career. In 1992, war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea; Haben was conscripted into the military and began training as a soldier. Soon he became a qualified commander with the Special Forces and was sent into battle, where he spent 3½ years. The battlefield is a trying place, even for the most experienced soldier. Haben was young, and being in the heat of battle was a terrifying experience.

While on the battlefield, Haben discovered AWR. He recalls, “I used to listen to AWR a lot when I was on the battlefield. [It] gave me a lot of comfort. I would always pray to the God I learned about from AWR. I remember the producer saying ‘This is Adventist World Radio, the Voice of Hope.’ I would always pray, ‘God, help me to escape from this battle.’ I prayed this prayer every time I was about to enter a battle.”

Some battles brought Haben face to face with death. It was in these critical situations that he began making promises to God. He remembers a distinct occasion when his heart felt great ascent from a smoke-filled battlefield.

The incident took place during a very bad fight at a place called Bahir. The soldier in Haben’s unit went without food or water for three days, leaving them very weak and tired. During the battle, many soldiers were either killed or badly wounded. Finally, only Haben and a fellow soldier were left fighting a well-equipped enemy force, which was approaching rapidly.

The two soldiers only had a medium-sized bottle for protection, which left their legs exposed. Yet, despite the heavy artillery fire, they remained unhurt. Haben knew that soon they would be hit. He prayed, “God, if you want me to die, that’s OK with me. I will see you in the resurrection. But if you save me from this bad situation, I will serve you until the end of my life.”

A commander from the other section of the Ethiopian army spotted the two isolated men through his binoculars and arranged to send backup. Soon the enemy was in retreat, and Haben’s life was spared. “There’s no doubt in my mind,” says Haben, “that God saved me from that bad situation. I’ll never forget that. When I was in battle, I saw for myself the love of God. And because of that I opened myself, my heart, to God.”

At the end of his military term, and after the war had ended, Haben returned to the capital, Addis Ababa, and began work at a government office. He fasted and prayed for God to lead him to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to discover how he could serve Him for the rest of his life in fulfillment of his side of the bargain.

A fellow ex-soldier heard Haben was trying to find a Seventh-day Adventist church and directed him to the Ethiopia Union Mission office. Haben received Bible studies and was baptized within a year of leaving the armed services. He went on to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree and then worked as a pioneer church planter for a short period of time. Today he is a Tigrigna producer for the station that introduced him to God on the battlefields of war. He frequently gives his testimony over the air and receives many responses from soldiers who are interested in knowing about the God that Haben now serves.

Ray Allen is the AWR Global Training Director & Africa Region Director

It’s a different world ... It’s a common response to the challenge of sharing the gospel today, yet the commission has not changed.

Sung Kwon, National Executive Director North American Division Adventist Community Services

It is a different world: in several ways:

• Broadcasts bypass political and cultural barriers.
• Programs are created in nearly 80 languages by native speakers from each country.
• Several thousand hours of programs are broadcast each day, covering the majority of the world.
• Programs can be heard on AM, FM, and shortwave radio, as well as Internet podcasts and satellite transmissions.
• Radio can reach more people, for less money, than nearly any other form of outreach.
• Broadcasts bypass political and geographic barriers, bringing the message of hope to people who are otherwise inaccessible.

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Labor. When the woman determined to find the coin, she went to work! Nothing of value comes without effort. The greater the value, the greater the effort that is demanded. To find her coin, the homemaker stirred up some dust as she cleaned thoroughly. Stirring up dust probably aggravated her allergies. Have you ever noticed that some people are allergic to soul-seeking? We need to cure these allergies.

Wait. God's timing is not my timing. The parable of the lost son reminds us that God never gives up—and neither should we. At the very point when all seems hopeless, heaven becomes most patient. How can I know what circumstance or event might trigger an awareness of need?

Pray. Prayer—that key in the hand of faith that unlocks heaven's blessing—is not for the purpose of changing God's attitude toward the lost. Prayer changes my attitude and my efforts toward the lost as I begin to see them as Jesus sees them. And what a thing to pray for—to view every person's potential through heaven's eyes!

Love unconditionally. Jesus does not picture the father as placing any conditions upon his love for his runaway son. Love, acceptance, and forgiveness were always ready. This was what the father also offered the son who remained. In fact, loving those who remain is sometimes the greater challenge.

Welcome. The whole atmosphere was conditioned to embrace the prodigal. The father ran to meet his son. His boy had nothing to prove except that he understood which direction to head when he wanted to go home. Everything expressed warmth and welcome.

Restore. The prodigal son has squandered much with his foolishness, but all was restored when he returned home. The robe, the shoes, and the ring declared his status. The prodigal came home expecting to be a servant and discovered that he was a son! He expected little; he received everything!

Rejoice. Throw a party when the lost are found. Invite the crowd and celebrate the good news of resurrection. Dead sons and daughters are alive! Lost souls are saved! All of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. The least the church can do is sponsor a potluck lunch and a special worship service to welcome the wanderer back. God won't give us more blessings than we are happy to receive!

Yes, we need to seek even those who may not appear to be lost.

The condition of those who are lost is not always apparent. Three parables in Luke 15 merit a closer study as several areas of our world field launch an intensive search for former and inactive members. Although their individual journeys are unique, those represented by the lost sheep, coin, and son all end up the same: Each of them begins as part of the “saved” and ends up lost. They start out as part of the group and end up all alone. The sheep wandered off alone. Its journey away was not a bold move or a mad dash; if it had been, the shepherd would have noticed immediately and launched a rescue mission. More likely it was unintentional drifting of such a gradual nature that resulted in the sheep (or even the sheep itself) realizing it was leaving until it was all alone. The coin never left the premises. It remained in the general vicinity of the group and was found right where it had remained. Nevertheless, it was lost. A person can be lonely even in a group of familiar faces!

The son deliberately chose to leave. He put Palestine in his rearview mirror and probably slammed the door as he left. His choice was clear, and his exit was announced. Everything but the end result was carefully planned. He did not plan to end up alone! Aloneness—the worst part of “lostness” is the separation—from Christ or from His Body. Regardless of how we exit our fellowship, far too many are left alone at the very time we should be searching for them.

How to Find Those Who Are Lost

These three parables offer helpful insights into what it takes to find those who have ended up alone, regardless of why they left.

Count. The shepherd would never have known that one sheep was missing if he had not counted the others. A careful record of those who are regular in their attendance and who participate in fellowship is essential in determining who is missing or inactive.

Risk. The shepherd risked the safety of the 99 sheep to search for the one that was lost. Somehow I had always pictured the group safely protected within the sheepfold. My perception was that the shepherd ventured out into the wilderness only doing everything possible to assure security and comfort for the group. But the text says the shepherd left the 99 exposed to the dangers of wild places while he sought the lost.

Lawrence Geraty is the President Emeritus of La Sierra University. He grew up as a citizen of the world in a Christian missionary family. He received his B.A. from Westmont College, his M.Div. from Howard University, an Interdenominational Bible and biblical archaeology, taking examinations in Ph.D. candidacy. In his notable scholarly career, Dr. Geraty has also served as Professor of Archaeology and History of Antiquity of Andrews Theological Seminary, President of Atlantic Union College, and more recently President and Professor of Archaeology at La Sierra University.

Marguerite Shulsker is the Harold John Eldredge Professor of Preaching and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. She joined the faculty of the School of Theology, leading the Master of Divinity degree in 1992 after serving as an adjunct assistant professor. Her courses include Westminster, Systematic Theology, Making Doctrine Live, and virtue preaching practices. Marguerite Shulsker’s published books include TheFall and Sin: What Has Become as Sion (2004), Perspectives on Oroulos: Essays in Honor of Paul A. Jeawert (1991), Prayer: Power, Presence, Passion, the Dynamics of Evil and Good (1987). She also edited and compiled Jeawert’s Who We Are: Our Identity as Humans (1996) and has published many articles, sermon, chapters, and reviews. She is currently working on a long-term project on the doctrine of divine providence. Marguerite Shulsker is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and served as an associate pastor for six years then as a pastor for five years.

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Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School, and founder and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. A native of Croatia, Dr. Volf has forged a theology of forgiveness and non-violence in the face of the horrendous violent experiences in Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s. While maintaining active interest in many aspects of both’s relation to culture, his primary work has focused on theologies of understanding, the work of the Holy, the visibility, reconciliation, and memory. Miroslav Volf has given many prestigious lectureships and is a highly awarded author. Faith: Hope: Grief: and Forgiving in a Culture Shaped of Scape is selected as the Archaeology of Canterbury’s Loser Book for 2006. Ecclesia and Gnostics: A Theological Explorations of Identity, Otherness and Resurrection received the 2002 Covenant Award. He has also been featured on National Public Radio’s “Speaking of Faith” and Public Televisions “Religion and Ethics”.

James A. Cress General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary
AWR Annual Offering
MARCH 13, 2010

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