

quarterly resource for local church leaders † july/september 2013

ELDER'S DIGEST



DEACONS:
SERVANTS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

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DISTRACTING DEVOTION



As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

If most of you are anything like me, I'm sure that you've read these verses of Scripture on some occasion and made a silent petition for the Lord to forgive the Martha in you, and make you more like Mary in your devotion to Him. However, much like Martha, the problem usually isn't our devotion itself, but it's our devotion to the wrong things.

Can you recount some area of your ministry in the church where God has called you to serve or something that you know He has

purposed you to do, and you start out with this whole-hearted devotion to Him that slowly but surely became a going-through-the-motions-type routine, with you showing no genuine dedication to His work, and no longer having any real expectations of Him? It is so easy to get caught up in the preparation of unnecessary or even necessary tasks that we end up missing out opportunities to spend intimate moments with the Master altogether. Therefore, in our service to God it is vital that we do not allow ourselves to get distracted by our devotion to the tasks God has called us to complete.

God often chooses to use such tasks for the purpose of drawing us closer to Him. No matter what God calls us to do, or how much He calls us to do, our works will never make us righteous (Philippians 3:9). During this process of spiritual growth our focus should stay on Him. We are to be ever decreasing (John 3:30), yielding to the Master's complete control, so that through our labor others may be drawn to Christ and not to ourselves (John 12:32).

"Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42). It is imperative that we not allow anything other than our desire for God Himself to hold our absolute attention. Anything else is a distraction.

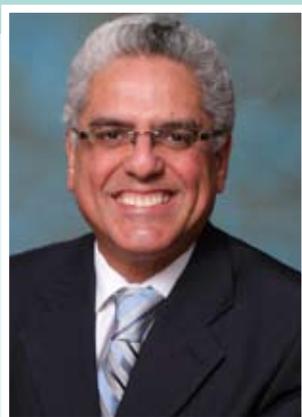
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JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

EFFECTIVE CHURCH COMMUNICATION

VISION, PLANS, AND RESOURCES



Williams Costa Jr. was born in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil.

He concluded three college degree programs in Brazil: Piano (1972), Composition and Conducting (1974), and Music Education (1975). In 1976 he earned a master's degree in Music History and Composition at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. He worked as music teacher, as well as a choir and orchestra conductor for almost 20 years. During this time he produced and recorded almost 100 albums and composed more than 1,000 hymns, orchestral arrangements, and original compositions.

In 1991 he was invited to be the *It is Written* (IIW) producer for the Portuguese language. After five years, he became the Brazilian IIW associate director and in May of 1998 he was called to be the Western Hemisphere Adventist Satellite Television (WHAST) director, institution created and maintained by the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists.

After two years, Novo Tempo TV and Nuevo Tiempo TV started. They are the South American Division's Hope Channel in Portuguese and Spanish respectively.

In 2005 he was called to be the South America Region Communication and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director.

In October of 2006 he accepted the call to serve as an associate Communication Department director at the General Conference (GC) responsible for the Media Services. At the last GC Session in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, in 2010, he was called to be the GC Communication Department director.

WHAT IS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE GC COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT AND HOW IT IS IMPACTING OUR WORLDWIDE CHURCH?

The main purpose of the GC Communication Department is to serve. We exist to share, help, and support the communication process of the departments and institutions of our Church worldwide. Without communication there is no information, inspiration, and consequently, motivation. Good and positive communication binds people, strength goals, and empowers vision. Communication is the soul of relationship. We can't strength a relationship without communication. On the other hand, hatred normally comes from preconceive perceptions and miscommunication. The first reaction of an

enemy is, "I don't want to talk with you." Friendship is based in good communication. In a world church like the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is indispensable to communicate, because communication is the divine way to converge and integrate. Communication is the fuel for unity.

WHAT ARE YOUR VISION AND STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CHURCH MARKETING USING HIGH-TECH DEVICES AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA?

We can't ignore the time that we live. The world has changed and there are a number of things that we also need to change. I don't support the concept of changing for change sake. We

always need to have a reason for an initiative. My vision for effective church marketing is lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot share what we don't have. Marketing is not magic. You must have something inside to have consistent and meaningful content to share outside. Without Jesus in the heart there is no strategy that can make a good marketing. In this context it is important to be inserted in the society using the high-tech devices and the social media. Everybody is migrating to these devices. We can't ignore them. I strongly believe that we can't substitute the personal touch, but I also recognize the effectiveness of the quick messages on Twitter; the pictures on Instagram, the video chats on Skype, just to mention some of the possibilities. More than ever we can testify about Jesus in a personal way and also through the social network.

“TELL THE WORLD” IS THE PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH FOR THIS QUINQUENNIAL. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE MANY WORLDWIDE INITIATIVES LIKE “REVIVAL AND REFORMATION,” “MISSION TO THE CITIES,” AND OTHERS. WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT TO PROMOTE THESE MILESTONES?

Since I came to GC Communication Department I caught people by surprise asking “what can we do to inform what you are doing?” Many people look to me thinking: “what does this department want from mine?” Well, the essence of our mission is not to work “as a department.” If you think carefully, a “Communication Department” has nothing to communicate, unless it receives content from other departments – Sabbath School/Personal Ministries, Education, Stewardship, etc. “Tell the World,” “Revival and Reformation,” “Mission to the Cities” and many other worldwide initiatives need to be announced. If people know what has been done, surely it will be a great blessing and inspiration. This is the role of communication. I don't say that we have a “responsibility.” Responsibility sounds to me “too heavy.” I would say it is our privilege to announce, inform, and support what has been planned, what has been done, and what the church plans to do. We are pleased to communicate.

THE CHURCH ELDERS ARE THE KEY LEADERS TO PROMOTE THE PLANS, INITIATIVES, AND DECISIONS OF THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH. HOW CAN THEY SUPPORT THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT AT THE LOCAL CHURCH LEVEL?

In many parts of the world people think that the pastor is the spine of the church. Of course the pastor is the leader, the

main figure of a church, but I remember once traveling along the Amazon River and we stopped in a little village. It was a little community of 500 people. All of them were Seventh-day Adventists. In the center of the village they had a beautiful church with 500 seats. This village was part of a pastoral district of 36 churches. The churches were far from the pastor's home. To get to some of them it took two days by traveling in a little boat. The pastor was only able to get to the churches in his district one or two times a year. I asked the elder how they “survive” without a pastor. He said: “We understand that is humanly impossible for the pastor to be with us every Sabbath. We do our best to organize and help. We divide the responsibilities and everybody participates. When the pastor comes, it is a big celebration. Generally we have baptisms, communion service, and weddings. Our pastor remains as our leader and we do everything possible to support him and our Church.” I became very impressed with his answer. My understanding of the elder's role in the church changed forever. Even in churches that have the presence of the pastor regularly, the church elders are key leaders to promote the plans, initiatives and decisions in all churches of the world. I always saw the Elder's Digest magazine as a tremendous resource, a tremendous communication tool to support the local church leadership.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES CAN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION GET FROM THE GC COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT?

If the local congregation keeps in touch with the GC Communication Department, they can have access to all kinds of information and resources that have been produced. On a weekly basis, Adventist News Network (ANN) shares news, stories, testimonies, and plans of all departments and institutions. Carefully, we try to have a balanced participation giving opportunity to everybody to communicate. This is our mission.

HOW CAN I ACCESS GC COMMUNICATION ON THE INTERNET?

I suggest the official site of the Church: www.adventist.org. For ANN, www.news.adventist.org. GAIN conference, <http://gain.adventist.org>. Facebook, [facebook.com/adventistnews](https://www.facebook.com/adventistnews). Twitter, [@adventistchurch](https://twitter.com/adventistchurch).

If the local congregation keeps in touch with the GC Communication Department, everybody will be informed of church's development. Let's keep in touch and communicate the good news of salvation.



DEACONS: SERVANTS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

THE QUALITIES OF A DEACON ACCORDING TO ACTS 6:3
AND 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-15

The Bible gives us a number of specific qualities a man must model to serve as a deacon. Let's look at 12 of these qualities:

1. *Of good reputation.* The idea here is simply that deacons should have a good name in the community, both inside and outside the church. This is the same qualification Paul would later give to elders in 1 Timothy 3:7: "He must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." A deacon's character is known and thought well of by all. When someone asks, "Hey, what do you think about Philip?" (Acts 6:5), the response would be, "He is a good man: stable, honest, sincere, and trustworthy."

2. *Full of the Spirit.* A deacon is to be "full of the Spirit." This phrase simply means that he is a man in whom God is working. By this man's faith in Jesus, the Spirit has come to dwell in him and change him into a man of God. In Ephesians 5:18-20, Paul describes one who is "filled with the Spirit."

3. *Full of wisdom.* A deacon is wise, not because he is a wise man naturally but because God has filled him with wisdom. He has gleaned wisdom from the Word of God—learned it, applied it, practiced it. This quality goes beyond the character of the man and begins to address his ability. He is able to accomplish the assigned task. He has the wisdom to deal with problems and will not have to come back to the apostles with questions about everything. The apostles wanted deacons who would have the wisdom to accomplish their assignments. This is what they meant at the end of verse 3 when they said, "whom we may put in charge of this task."

The good news is that these seven men—Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas—were faithful in their task, which enabled the apostles to keep their priorities of prayer and the Word. Verse 7 reads, "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the



disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Had the deacons not been “full of wisdom,” and able to be “put in charge of this task,” the apostles would not have been able to keep their priorities. Eternity alone will reveal how many deacons in the church were faithful in their task, allowing pastors to focus on their priorities so that God could bless the church mightily. Without the faithful servants in the church, God’s Word fails to spread. How many times has the ministry of the Word been stifled because there weren’t enough deacons to bear the load?



Now let’s turn our attention to some other qualities of deacons. Read 1 Timothy 3. In this letter, Paul was teaching Timothy, a young pastor, how to conduct himself in the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). The qualifications for the leaders in the church are listed in the first 13 verses of chapter 3. In the first seven verses, Paul writes about overseers (pastors, elders, shepherds), but in verse 8, he begins writing about deacons.

4. *Dignified* (1 Tim. 3:8). A deacon must be dignified. Being dignified means to be somber and serious-minded. A deacon is level-headed and understands that spiritual conflicts are happening all around him. His life is under control, and he is worthy of respect. He never laughs at dirty jokes. He never makes light of a serious situation. He recognizes that the church is not simply a matter of life and death; the church is a matter of *eternal* life or *eternal* death. It takes serious men to lead the church in these matters.

5. *Not double-tongued* (1 Tim. 3:8). The Greek word here is literally “two-worded.” It describes someone who says one thing to one person and another thing to another person. A deacon’s tongue speaks one thing: truth.

A leader in God’s church needs to lead with truth, not with deception and lies. So, a deacon’s speech is important. In the next quality, we will see that his drink is also important.

6. *Not indulging in much wine* (1 Tim. 3:8). Indulging in much unfermented wine could lead to excess and eventually to fermented wine and alcohol. Some may argue, “Well the old wine yes, but not the new wine,” but Paul is not sanctioning to drink modern “wine” which is an alcoholic beverage. Alcohol is a dangerous beverage. It is addictive. It is deceptive (Prov. 23:31, 32). It has destroyed many lives. Alcohol inhibits sound judgment (Prov. 31:4, 5). Alcohol is a huge temptation in the world today. But this warning applies not just to alcohol; it also applies to other addictions: food, drugs, the news, internet, hobbies, sports, novels, movies, etc. Deacons are to be examples, remaining free from self-indulgence, overindulgence, excess, and addictions.

7. *Not fond of sordid gain* (1 Tim. 3:8). A person who is “fond of sordid gain” is willing to get ahead through shameful means. This person cuts corners, plays the lottery, takes advantage of others, and is dishonest. Deacons need to be blameless in their desire for improper gain. This is an important quality for deacons, especially those who deal with the financial matters of the church. When the apostles delegated the serving of tables, there were financial resources involved (food, money, resources). The seven deacons could easily have stolen some of the food for themselves. But, the church has no place for greedy, self-centered leaders who will bend the rules for their benefit.

8. *Hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience* (1 Tim. 3:9). Holding to the mystery of the faith is a synonym for believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It means understanding the mystery of Christ that has been revealed. But the key to this phrase is “with a clear conscience.” The conscience

is the part of us that tells us when we are doing wrong. Conscience is to the soul what pain is to the body. Pain alerts our body to problems. Our conscience tells our soul that we are in danger. When we ignore pain, greater injury can develop. When we ignore our conscience, our soul is in danger.

A deacon believes in the gospel and knows of nothing that would incriminate him of any wrong. His conscience is clear. The deacon must affirm with Paul, who told Felix, “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men” (Acts 24:16).

9. *Beyond reproach* (1 Tim. 3:10). This means that a deacon is blameless, like Daniel. When jealous leaders sought to trap Daniel in wrongdoing, they could “find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him” (Dan. 6:4). A deacon is like Noah: a “righteous” and “blameless” man (Gen. 6:9). He is like Job: “blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil” (Job 1:1). This does not mean that a deacon is perfect; it simply means that accusations made against him are foolish. He has established himself as an upright and honest man against whom no accusations can be made.

10. *A one-woman man* (1 Tim. 3:12). There is much discussion about this quality. Most translations render this qualification as “a husband of one wife,” as if to imply that the man cannot be a polygamist. Some say that this phrase disqualifies a man who has been divorced (regardless of the circumstances surrounding the divorce). Some say that this phrase disqualifies a man who is not married. Some say that this phrase disqualifies a man who remarries after his first wife dies.

I believe that Paul is speaking about something far deeper than one’s marriage history. I believe this means that a deacon will have a singular devotion to his wife. People will know of his love for his wife because he speaks highly of her. People will see that his affection for his wife has no rivals. Literally, the Greek says that he is a “one-woman man.” He does not flirt with other women. He does not have lust after other women. He is sexually pure in his mind as well as in his body. This disqualifies those who struggle with pornography, who are in the habit of seeing the wrong movies, and/or who have inappropriate relationships with women.

11. *Good managers of their children* (1 Tim. 3:12). This qualification points to a deacon’s life at home. When a man is a husband and father, he is the head of the house, and there are certain responsibilities that come with this role. He brings up his children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). He leads his family in spiritual matters. He reads the Bible with his children and teaches them how to interpret it. He encourages his children to memorize the Bible. He prays with his family. In other words, he conducts family worship in his home. He has the responsibility to make sure that it happens.

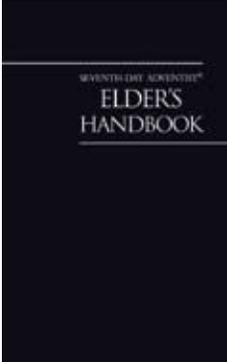
12. *Good managers of their own households* (1 Tim. 3:12). The affairs of a deacon’s house are in order. He oversees the financial matters of his household. His checkbook is balanced. His bills are paid on time. His home is clean and neat. His yard is not a mess. He is not wasting his resources.

These are 12 characteristics of a deacon. But, that is not all; I skipped a little word in verse 8. The word is “likewise.” This is referring to the overseers (referred to in verses 1-7). A deacon is to be like an overseer—not exactly alike, but similar. The qualifications for a deacon are similar to that of an overseer. A deacon must be like an elder in his character.

There are great rewards to serving as a deacon: “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). An official servant of the church who does his work well will put a smile on God’s face. God will bless this man with two things: a high standing and great confidence in the faith. The path to greatness in the Christian life is a path of self-sacrifice and service to others. “Humble yourselves . . . under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:6). Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Matt. 20:26, 27). This is not the world’s way, but it is God’s way. God’s path to life is down. God loves those who humbly look to the cross of Christ. It is when we are weak in ourselves that we are strong in Christ. You get right with God not by being great but by realizing that Jesus is great on your behalf.

God delights in those who are humble and who serve others sacrificially. He will exalt these people at the proper time with a high standing (John 12:26). God will also grant to these people a confidence in Christ that many can only wish for. Confidence in Christ Jesus comes when you know that you are in the center of His will, and His will is that you see your unworthiness and trust His worthiness instead. 

General Conference Ministerial Association



**NEW REVISED
ELDER'S HANDBOOK**
(Soft cover only - 176 pages)

Each church leader
should get a copy of
this new Handbook.

For more information, please contact the
Ministerial Secretary in your field.

PRAYER LIFE

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PRAYER LIFE?

Christian prayer happens when a believer communicates with God, often by speaking or thinking. Prayer is essential to Christian growth. Here are some suggestions regarding Christian prayer.

UNDERSTAND THE TIMES AND TYPES OF PRAYER

- *Morning*—Morning is a good time to thank the Lord for helping you make it through the night. This prayer is my longest and most devotional prayer. I use the ACTS formula, which we will discuss below.

- *Meals*—Before every meal, we should thank the Lord and ask Him to bless the food we are about to eat. A long prayer with bowed head and closed eyes is not necessary, especially if we are hungry!

- *Bedtime*—Before you retire for the evening, thank the Lord for another day. I often pray a shorter version of the ACTS formula that we will discuss later. I like to get on my knees, bow my head, and close my eyes in total submission to God.

- *Worship*—In the worship service, you should pray silently while others are leading you in prayer. In some churches, people are asked to pray out loud and all together; sometimes they read a prayer together.

- *Trouble*—In times of trouble, we tend to move past “saying prayers” to actually praying. Thankfully, God is able to hear us all at the same time and work things out for our good.

- *Special occasions*—When big decisions need to be made or when you simply feel like praying, pray. When someone asks you to pray for them, pray.

THE ACTS FORMULA

The ACTS acronym will help to galvanize your prayers with the following four elements:

Adoration—Christian prayer should express to God that you are aware that He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Acknowledge that the Lord has brought you this far; you have not gotten here by yourself.

Confession—Tell God that you have sinned. Name some sins that come to mind. Tell Him that you are sorry. Ask Him to forgive you through Jesus.

Thanksgiving—Thank God for the many blessings He has given you. Thank Him for food, clothing, and shelter. Thank Him for life, health, and strength. Thank Him for protecting you from things and people that might hurt you.

Supplication—Ask God to supply the needs of others; this is called intercessory prayer. Ask God to bless your pastor and your church. Ask God to bless your family and loved ones. Even ask God to bless those who create stress in your life. And then ask God to meet your needs. Ask Him to fix what is broken and smooth out the rough places. Most of all, ask God to have His way in your life. When God has His way, He will always do what is best for His people.

Sometimes I switch things up and pray using the ATCS model. I start with adoration and thanksgiving and close with confession and supplication. Sometimes, after I finish adoring God, thanking Him, and confessing to Him, I feel almost ashamed to ask Him for anything else.

Prayer is personal, and you can pray in whatever way is most comfortable for you; however, the ACTS method can be a very helpful guide.

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

OTHER-CENTERED WORSHIP MINISTRY

There are many questions about what worship *does*. Implicit in these questions is a central critique: that our concern for effective communication in worship sometimes eclipses the importance of the worshipping community and true communion with God. In our understandable eagerness to communicate a message *about* God, we may overlook the priority of the people who are gathered and the God who is present to meet us. Meaning starts to take precedence over meeting. Presentation becomes privilege over presence. And production values begin to trump pastoral sensitivity as we lead worshipers in what should be participatory prayer.

As a church musician and liturgist, I am sometimes tempted to plan worship as if it were a presentational event. But through repeated missteps, I am slowly learning an important principle: Worship is not an artistic, production-centered ministry in which we utilize people; it is a God- and people-centered ministry in which we utilize artistic production.

Here are three suggestions for how we might prioritize the “who” of worship—God and the worshipers—over the “how” of communication and ritual artistry:

1. *Think of ways to be physically present to one another in worship.* As Marshal McLuhan famously asserted, “The medium is the message.” If a worship experience is predominantly mediated by projection screens and amplified sound, to what degree are we truly present to one another? And what does being digitally present to one another suggest about how God is present to us and how we are present to God? Plan moments where worshipers can tangibly interact. Even a simple physical greeting can enable participants to more fully embody the body of Christ in worship.

2. *When planning worship, consider relationships first and artistic production second.* Before beginning any worship-planning session, think through the impact of the planning process itself on the leaders involved. Efficient ministry is not always effective ministry. For example, emails and text messages can be a quick way to get things done, but without the nuances of nonverbal communication, such efficiencies are often more than offset by the time it takes for relational damage to be undone. Whenever possible, meet face to face.

3. *When meeting to plan worship, we must remember that we are discussing an encounter with a holy God who is already present.* Too often, we talk about God as though He isn’t there—as though God isn’t listening to the conversation. We speak differently—positively or negatively—about someone when we know he or she is in the room. Perhaps if we planned worship with a greater sense of God’s presence, we would be less cavalier in what we say, less confident in what we intend to do, and more prayerfully expectant regarding what God might do. Perhaps if we planned worship with a greater sense of God’s presence, we would worship with a greater sense of God’s presence—the presence of the One who graciously meets us when we gather in Jesus’ name.

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This article was first published in *Best Practice*, September 30, 2012.

Nicholas Zork is a doctoral student and part-time pastor at Advent Hope in Manhattan, New York, USA.



SAYING “YES” TO A HEALTHY DIET



Adventists are known for their vegetarian lifestyle choice; however, we all know that being a vegetarian does not necessarily mean having a healthy diet. Yes, the Adventist Health Study has shown the many benefits of vegetarianism, but the truth is that many vegetarian diets are high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sugar, which is not necessarily healthier. You can intentionally “Choose Full Life” by choosing to eat more plant foods and a balanced diet. Here are some Facts with Hope:¹

Fact: A study found that 59 percent of added-sugar calories comes from food and 41 percent from beverages. About 65 percent of these calories are consumed at home.

Hope: Water is the best drink ever. Why not switch from sugary drinks to 7-8 glasses of water a day?

Fact: Research shows that a daily single serving of leafy green vegetables lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease by 11 percent and diabetes by 9 percent.

Hope: Don't like leafy green vegetables? Try adding them to other foods. Toss a handful of spinach in a pasta dish, soup, or even a smoothie. You'll hardly notice the taste difference, but your body will enjoy the added health benefits.

Fact: Individuals who eat high levels of saturated fats (e.g., fried foods, animal fats like cheese, etc.) tend to develop Type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases at high rates, while those who eat more polyunsaturated fats tend to have better cardiovascular and metabolic health.

Hope: We can help to prevent diabetes and cardiovascular disease by paying attention to the types of fat in our diet. The best sources of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are found in vegetable oils, nuts, seeds, and fish. Homemade healthy salad dressings and avocados, nuts, and olives are also beneficial.

Fact: The latest nationally-representative surveys in the United States find that 80 percent of people don't eat enough fruit, 90 percent don't eat enough vegetables, and 99 percent fall short on whole grains.

Hope: Make a game of choosing colorful, natural plant foods over processed foods and animal products.

As a church, we have been blessed with wonderful counsel about a healthy diet, and books like *Counsels on Diets and Foods* and *The Ministry of Healing* bring important concepts

that highlight not only what the ideal diet is but also the benefits it brings to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Additionally, studies suggest that the closer we get to God's recommended plant-based diet, the lower our risk for illness and the higher our chance for longevity. A researcher from Harvard's School of Public Health recommended in a recent report that people should “cut back on or eliminate refined grains, sugary snacks, soda, potatoes, cheese, butter, and red meat.”²

Many researchers who have never heard of the Adventist Church or our health message are sometimes better advocates and promoters of the health message that we were asked to share with the world. Perhaps it is time for us to consider this question: “What am I doing with the message of health that has been given to me as a gift of grace?”

As we approach the last days and seek revival and reformation, God is calling us to re-evaluate our lifestyle choices, including what we eat. Healthy food is not just about healthy bodies; more importantly, it is about healthy minds. Inspiration says, “Few . . . understand how much their habits of diet have to do with . . . their health, their characters, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny.”³ Let us embrace this choice by God's power and teach others to understand this truth in a patient, caring, non-judgmental, and loving way. 

¹ “Facts with Hope,” from *Health Unlimited*, March 2012:4. See www.nadhealthministries.org.

² S. M. Krebs-Smith, et al, *Journal of Nutrition*, 2010. Emphasis supplied.

³ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diets and Foods*, 51.



Katia Reinert is director of the Health Ministries Department for the North American Division.

SABBATH SCHOOL ROLLS OUT

RESOURCE FOR NEW MEMBERS

One of the greatest joys of any growing church family is the addition of new members. Since the very beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—150 years ago—the consistent advance through a clear vision of mission has brought eager new converts to the doors of our churches on Sabbath morning.

But these very successes often lead to new challenges for local churches and local church leaders. A significant responsibility of the local church elder is to encourage a warm and welcoming atmosphere to the entire church family. New members are newborn babes in Christ and perhaps some bruised wanderers who have returned to Him. They are looking to their new church family for guidance and support in their new life with Jesus. Baptism is not a graduation ceremony but a birth event.

The familiar social networks of the new members have most likely been ruptured. Friends may ridicule and then desert them. They are in the process of changing basic perspectives on life, and they have not yet acclimated to their new church family. Each new member has behind her or him a large group of family members, friends, and co-workers who are “with them” in the sense that their beliefs and comments are putting pressure on the new member, either approving or disapproving of the radical changes they are making in their lives.

In Step With Jesus, four quarterly Bible study guides, address these kinds of issues directly. These guides have been prepared expressly for new members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Sabbath School classes and other small study groups are responding with enthusiasm. The goal of these guides is to introduce new members to Adventist belief, heritage, language, and lifestyle. Through a series of 52 lessons, these guides help to transition them smoothly into the regular study of the Sabbath School *Adult Bible Study Guide*—and to a full, rich life in the church.

“For many years,” says Bonita Joyner Shields, assistant director for discipleship in the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, “leadership and local churches have

expressed the need for a resource to introduce recent converts to Adventist culture and to start them on a path of fruitful discipleship that will encourage them to engage in an increasingly active part of church life.”

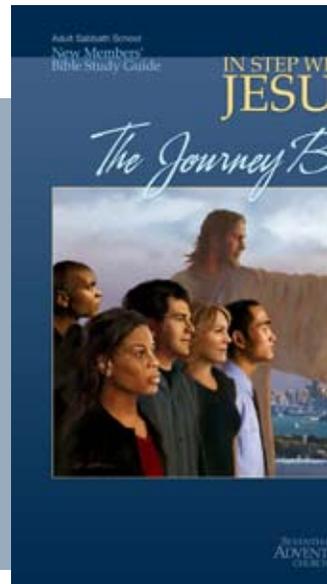
The four quarterly student guides were authored by Dr. Jane Thayer, professor of religious education in the Andrews University Theological Seminary. They are fully approved by the Biblical Research Institute and are grounded firmly in the “Together Growing Fruitful Disciples” curriculum developed in a cooperative effort among the General Conference departments and the Andrews University Theological Seminary and the School of Education.

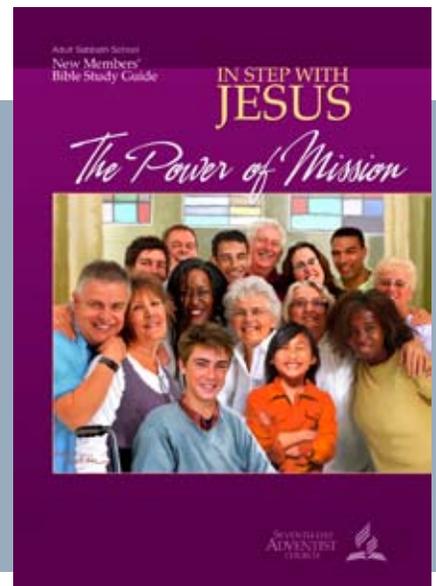
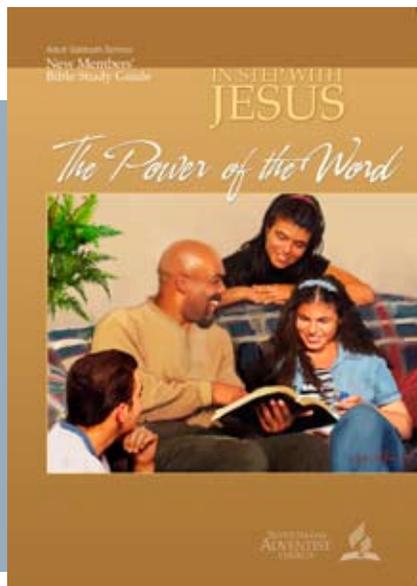
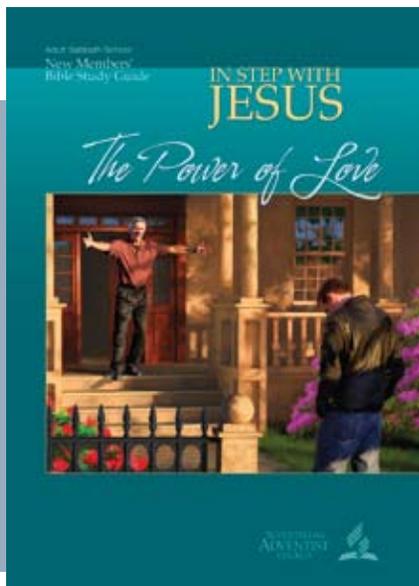
The “Together Growing Fruitful Disciples” curriculum centers on development of four essential elements: connecting (growing in relationship with God, self, and others); understanding (growing in knowledge of Jesus and His teachings); equipping (growing the body of Christ by walking alongside other disciples to support, nurture, and strengthen in love), and ministering (growing in participation in God’s mission of revelation, reconciliation, and restoration). These four emphases serve as the framework for the full spiritual development of disciples. (For additional information regarding the framework, see <<http://www.growingfruitfuldisciples.com>>.)

In Step With Jesus, the New Members’ Bible Study Guide, offers a multimedia approach to this introduction to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is comprised of:

- four quarterly Bible study guides for the student
- four corresponding leader/teacher guides to provide transformational, interactive tools for the group studies
- A website where new members may explore a rich array of content, commentary, and other creative resources. (See <<http://www.InStepWithJesus.org>>.)

The result of more than four years of research and development, including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and pilot presentation, *In Step With Jesus* offers a balance of content and socialization that will encourage new members to become fully engaged in church life. Published by the





General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, it is printed by the Pacific Press Publishing Association and may be ordered through the PPPA website or at Adventist Book Centers.

“And one of the additional strengths of this resource,” says Shields, “is that with its undated weekly lessons, teachers or leaders of groups of new members may begin to use it at any time during the year. There is no need to wait for the beginning of a quarter.”

As *In Step With Jesus* enters the second year of its use around the world, more and more congregations are discovering its unique strengths in discipling new members. By learning to grow ever nearer to Jesus, these new members are also finding and embracing their specific and personal roles in the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

ED

Gary B. Swanson is associate director of the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department.

MISSION to the CITIES

Mission to the Cities is an emphasis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on sharing Jesus' love and the hope of His soon return with people in urban settings. It envisions initiatives in more than 650 of the world's largest cities, starting with New York City in 2013 and running through 2015.

Please pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Mission to the Cities:

- For the church members and church leaders working in these cities
- For the people yet to be reached with the Gospel
- For each world division and union that is now preparing the soil for Mission to the Cities
- For the thousands of evangelistic series that will take place
- For the strongholds of Satan to be broken, and relationships with Christ to be established

For a list of cities and more information, go to:
www.MissiontotheCities.org and www.RevivalandReformation.org/777

FM PROGRAMS LAUNCHED IN INDIA: A HISTORIC FIRST

Late last year, a Seventh-day Adventist program was broadcast for the first time on FM radio in India. The program was produced by Adventist World Radio (AWR) in the Telugu language and was on a station in Hyderabad, India. The name of the program is *Avennel*, which means *Moonlight* in Telugu.

“This is a very significant step to reach the large cities in India, involving two years of intensive work negotiating with related agencies and preparing the programs,” says AWR president Dowell Chow. “Thanks to God and our faithful supporters, we are now blessed to be able to witness the opening of a new window of opportunity to reach the people of India with the gospel of salvation.”

Hyderabad—known as India’s “cyber capital”—is a city of more than nine million people and has the largest Muslim population in India. After China, India is the second most-populated country in the world.

Additional broadcasts have started in English in the cities of Pune and Shillong, and others will follow in Hindi and

English in large cities such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, and Delhi, as resources permit.

AWR works with the All India Radio Authority to clear the programs for airing. The agent, Avinash Paul, is a young entrepreneur and dedicated Christian from another denomination. He said, “I am really thankful to know how important this project is for AWR and for Indian listeners to transform themselves and know about the truth. I am grateful you considered me to be a part of this project, and I promise you that I will dedicate myself to its success.”

AWR currently broadcasts programs for Indian listeners in 11 languages through shortwave radio, on demand, and podcasts. Two additional languages—Gujarati and Oriya—are in development. Worldwide, AWR programs can be heard in nearly 100 languages. Please visit awr.org or iTunes for more information. 

Shelley Nolan Freesland is AWR communication director at the General Conference world headquarters.



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“I am thankful to AWR for broadcasting such wonderful programs. These programs give comfort and peace to perishing souls like me. I had decided to commit suicide, but after listening to your programs I have decided to accept Christian faith and take baptism and live for Jesus. I want to serve Jesus by witnessing among my village people.”
– Listener in Asia

PRAYER IS ABOUT REQUESTING

Matthew 6:11

In Matthew 6, the Lord's Prayer opens with an exclusive desire to bring honor and glory to God. We are taught to pray for His glory, His kingdom, and His will. In verse 11, however, we are taught to pray for ourselves. On the surface, this petition seems narrow and selfish, compared to the broad and unselfish attitude manifested in the first part of the prayer. Yet, even this request for personal needs is intensely spiritual in nature. Prayer is about adoration, devotion, and worship. It is also about asking, dependence, and needs. Let's consider the simple sentence "Give us this day our daily bread." As we do, we are going to learn that *prayer is about requesting*.

I. THE DEVOTION OF THIS PRAYER

By coming to God to ask for the basic needs of life, we are entering into a time of profound worship. In reality, no higher form of worship exists than that for a child of God to enter into the presence of his or her heavenly Father and unashamedly declare, "I cannot make it without You! I am totally dependent upon You, Lord!"

A. *We believe in God's power.* When we pray for God to meet our needs, we are proclaiming our faith in His power to do just that. We are telling our Father that we believe He is able to take care of us. This is the Bible's testimony concerning our God (Job 42:2; Luke 1:37; Eph. 3:20).

B. *We believe in God's promises.* When we pray this simple prayer, we are confessing our faith in the promises God has made to His children. The Bible is very clear when it tells us that the Lord will take care of His own (Ps. 37:25; Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:25-34).

C. *We believe in God's personality.* When we ask God for the daily needs of life, we are not trying to twist His arm to get Him to give us things He does not want us to have. We are not trying to overcome His reluctance to meet our needs. We are merely laying hold on His provision. We are humbly acknowledging His willingness to give. Nothing honors God more than His children coming to Him in childlike faith, asking Him for what they need and believing that He loves them and that He is a generous God.

God is not a miser who must be persuaded to meet our needs. He is our

Father, and He delights in giving us the good things of life (Luke 12:32).

II. THE DEPENDENCE OF THIS PRAYER

Not only does this prayer honor the Lord by worshiping Him as the great Giver, it also expresses the total dependence of God's children upon their heavenly Father. Notice what this prayer says about us and our relationship to the heavenly Father.

A. *It is a prayer of confession.* This simple statement says, "I can't meet my own needs, but You can." When we pray this prayer, we are confessing our own weaknesses and limitations and confessing that we believe God is able where we are not. When we pray this prayer, we are not resting in our own ability to work and provide food for our tables.

B. *It is a prayer of confidence.* The idea of this simple prayer is this: "Give us day by day the things that are necessary for life." This is not a request for God to meet needs that have not yet arisen; it is an expression of faith in God that says, "I believe You will take care of me one day at a time" (read Matt. 6:34).

C. *It is a prayer of contentment.* This simple prayer says, "I am willing to accept the things You will send into my life today." We may not always like the bread God sends our way, but we can trust Him to send us exactly what we need day by day. So, if we are called upon to eat the bread of sorrow and affliction, He knows best. If we are allowed to feast on angel's food and heavenly manna, that is also His choice for us. Our duty is to trust Him to do in our lives exactly what needs to be done every day (Rom. 8:28).

The practice of contentment is one of the greatest challenges believers face. Yet, it is what God expects from us (1 Tim. 6:6-8; Heb. 13:5, 6; Phil. 4:10-13).

III. THE DEPTH OF THIS PRAYER

On the surface, this request—"Give us this day our daily bread"—is a simple, straightforward request, and yet, when you think about it, this prayer is very large in its scope.

A. *It is a communal prayer.* Notice the words "us" and "our." This is not a prayer that can be prayed selfishly. It is not just about getting "my" needs met; it is about

praying for the needs of the family of God. We are challenged and commanded to have the best interests of our brothers and sisters at heart as we pass through this life and as we pray (Phil. 2:4; Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 10:24).

We are to pray for one another; for preachers, teachers, missionaries, single mothers, struggling teenagers, families that are suffering, and those who are sick; and for every conceivable need in the lives of others.

B. *It is a comprehensive prayer.* One commentator said this phrase could be expressed in this way: "Give us this day the things sufficient for our subsistence." This is more than a prayer for food on our plates; this is a humble request for God to provide everything we need to make it through each day. If we could ever get to the place where we truly trust Him for all we need, day by day, worry would no longer be a part of our lives. We would be in a place of contentment and peace, knowing that our heavenly Father is in perfect control of all the situations in our lives (Phil. 4:6, 7).

It is not wrong to pray for our needs. Some people will not pray for themselves, believing it to be selfish and not spiritual. Jesus clearly commands us to pray for the necessities of life; therefore, let us not be ashamed to bring every need and every matter to Him, knowing that He will hear us, sustain us, and supply us as we move through this world (Heb. 4:14, 15).

May the Lord help His people realize that we are to ask, and if we will ask, we will receive (Matt. 7:7-11; James 4:2). God is not a tight-fisted, mean-spirited, heartless dictator who delights in watching His children struggle. He is a gracious, loving heavenly Father who delights in giving His best gifts to those who know Him!

CONCLUSION

I encourage you to come to the Father and tell Him about the needs in your life. Never be afraid, never be ashamed, and never limit your praying to "important" matters. Come to Him and call on His Name, believing that He cares, that He hears, and that He will answer you for His glory!

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

PRAYER IS ABOUT RELEASING

Matthew 6:12

Prayer is about releasing. Why is this important? It is important because our prayer lives, the reality of God's presence in our lives, and the closeness and power in our fellowship rest on how well we deal with our sin problem, both vertically and horizontally.

I. THIS PRAYER INVOLVES A CONFESSION

A. When we pray this prayer, we are confessing before the Lord that we have a problem. This is a truth that many believers have trouble with, but the fact is, we may be saved but we can and do still sin. This sad fact is made plain in 1 John 1:8, 10. It is also clear from the testimony of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25. His experience is one we all share.

We need a clear consciousness of our sins! Many believers act as though they think sin is something that happens to others but not to them. As a result, they never go to the altar to pray. They never confess their wrongdoings and shortcomings. They never go to another believer and say, "I'm sorry. I hurt you, and I was wrong."

B. We all have a problem with sin in our lives, and we all need help dealing with that problem. It is also true that if we are ever to get the help we need to deal with our sin problem, we need to admit our guilt before God.

C. Matthew 6:12 uses the word "debts" to refer to our sins. This is one of the words used in the New Testament when speaking of sin. Let's look at these words and where each can be found.

1. *Romans 3:23 and Luke 15:21.* This particular word is used several times in the New Testament and means "miss the mark." It is an archery term and is used to refer to an archer shooting an arrow that falls short of its target. It refers to the fact that in our sins, we all miss the standard of God's perfect righteousness.

2. *Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 3:13.* This word is often translated as "offense" or "trespass" in the New Testament. It carries the idea of slipping or falling. It refers to sins that result from carelessness instead of intentional disobedience.

3. *James 2:9.* This word is usually translated as "transgression." It refers to "an

intentional crossing of the boundaries established by God in His Word." This is a far more conscious sin than the preceding two.

4. *1 John 3:4 and Matthew 7:23.* This word is usually translated either as "iniquity" or "transgression." It literally means "without the Law" or "lawlessness." It is direct and open rebellion against God, His ways, and His Word.

5. *Matthew 6:12.* This word is translated as "debt, debtor or ought." It refers to something that is "owed to another party." Here, Jesus says that our sin is like a debt owed to God and to our fellow man.

So, when I pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," I am confessing to the Lord that I have a problem with sin in my life and that I recognize that I owe God a debt I cannot pay on my own.

II. THIS PRAYER INVOLVES A CRY

If our greatest problem is sin, our greatest need is forgiveness. But, practically speaking, we sin on a daily basis. We may be in a permanent relationship with God that can never be affected by sin, but our walk with Him and our daily fellowship with Him can certainly be damaged by the sins that come into our lives (Is. 59:2; 1 Cor. 9:27).

A. When sin rears its ugly head in our lives, we do not need to hide it. We should never attempt to sweep sin under the rug and pretend it does not exist. Instead of hiding our sins, we should drag them out into the light and confess them as far as they are known. When it comes time to deal with them before the Lord, we should "confess" them to Him. The word "confess" simply means "to agree with, or to say the same thing as." God wants us to reach the same place He is concerning our sins. He wants us to see sin's horror, its pain, and its perversion as He does. He wants us to deal with sin as He does. He wants us to judge it in our own lives (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). This is the only way our sins can be forgiven and our fellowship restored with our Father.

B. This simple prayer is about confessing our problem before the Lord and voicing our plea to Him for forgiveness. If we could ever learn to do it His way, we could walk in constant victory before Him.

III. THIS PRAYER INVOLVES A CONDITION

The most difficult part of this prayer is the last part. When this prayer is understood correctly, it is a prayer for God to extend forgiveness to us to the same degree that we extend forgiveness to others.

A. When we refuse to maintain fellowship with other believers in the family of God, our relationship with God the Father is affected. Regardless of what anyone does to us in this life, it could never possibly rise to the same level as our guilt before the Lord. Jesus illustrated this truth in Matthew 18:15-35.

The lesson is clear: If we expect the Lord to forgive us when we cry out to Him, then we must be quick to forgive those who have wronged us. We are to forgive them to the same level that we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). If we refuse to forgive our brethren, then we should not expect the Lord to forgive us. After all, He is clear that our forgiveness before Him hinges on our willingness to forgive others (Matt. 6:14, 15).

B. When we have been wronged, offended, and hurt by others, we are to carry that need before the Lord, leave it with Him, and forgive the offender (Rom. 12:19). The Bible is clear about this matter: We are to forgive those who offend us and let their offenses go (Luke 17:1-5; Col. 3:12, 13; 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

We are never more like Jesus than when we forgive those who have offended us! So, when we pray this simple prayer, we are saying, "Lord, help us to be more like you!"

CONCLUSION

Forgiving and being forgiven are more important than we can ever imagine. Praying is about releasing. It is about us releasing our sins into God's hands of grace, so that we can experience His forgiveness. It is about us releasing the debts others incur in our lives, so that our fellowship with God and with man is not hindered.



General Conference Ministerial Association

PRAYER IS ABOUT RELYING

Matthew 6:13 is all about trusting the Lord in the greatest battle we will face in life. This is not the battle to put food on our tables or clothes on our backs. This is not the battle to approach God for forgiveness or even the battle to forgive those who have treated us wrongly. Rather, it is the battle we face every day as we fight the temptations of the flesh and the attacks of the devil.

Prayer is about relying. In the greatest battle of life, we need to learn to rely on God, for therein lies the secret of our victory!

I. THE PROBLEM OF TEMPTATION

The Lord Jesus tells us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” This simple request literally brims over with meaning.

A. *This statement presupposes the leadership of the Lord in our lives.* I think we would all agree that our heavenly Father is a sovereign God. Since this is true, does this also mean that God leads us into places where we are tempted to sin?

The answer to that question is a resounding “No!” This problem is addressed in James 1:13. When Adam was tempted and fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, he tried to lay the blame at the feet of the Lord (Gen. 3:12). But, the fault did not lie with the Lord. The fault was with Adam and Adam alone!

God never leads us into direct contact with sin, but as we travel the path of life, every crossroad brings with it the option to take a path which leads us away from the Lord’s will for our lives. Every trial we face comes with the potential to fail. We may sin, but when we do, the fault lies with us and not with God.

So, what is the Lord telling us to pray? Here is what I think this petition requests: “Lord, please do not lead us into a trial which will present a temptation stronger than our power to resist it.”

B. Since this is true, where does temptation come from? Again, James tells us very clearly that *temptation arises from within the human heart* (James 1:14, 15). You see, our human flesh is hopelessly flawed and given over to sin (Eph. 4:22; Mark 7:21, 22).

Temptation in and of itself is not a sin. But, when the instant temptation is embraced and pursued, sin is the result (2 Sam. 11). Just seeing Bathsheba on the rooftop bathing in the nude was not a sin. But, when David desired

and pursued her, sin had been born, and the end of that sin was death and destruction!

The essence of temptation is a problem within man. You see, the heart of the problem is a problem in the heart (Matt. 15:17-20). We need help! We need a Helper who is greater than we are. We need Someone who can strengthen us in times of temptation (Heb. 2:18).

II. THE POWER OF TEMPTATION

Our need to pray for the Lord’s protection from temptation is so great because we are so prone to failure. We have already discovered that our drive for sin, our hunger for sin, and our capacity for sin dwells within our own hearts. Temptation is merely an outgrowth of who we are by nature, and that is why it is so often so hard for us to resist.

A. *Temptation is a powerful opponent, but most Christians have no idea as to its real power.* You’ve heard someone say, “The temptation was so powerful that I couldn’t resist.” But, in truth, the person who gives in to temptation’s allure knows nothing at all of its power! Only the person who stands against it and wins the victory over it can testify to the great power temptation can wield!

So it is with temptation and sin. When we yield to the attractions of the flesh and the world, it is easy to go wherever temptation takes us. But, when we stand our ground and refuse to yield to sin’s siren call, we discover just how much of a pull the flesh and sin have on our lives.

B. *Thank God, the power of temptation has no more force in our lives than we allow it to have!* If we wish to stand against it, we can! Our Lord has given us some precious promises that will strengthen us in the midst of our temptations and guarantee our victory over them, if we yield to His will and not to temptation! What are those promises? Read Isaiah 43:2; 1 Corinthians 10:13; and 2 Peter 2:9. What we need is a living revival of Romans 6:6-18!

III. THE PLEA IN TEMPTATION

This verse closes with the words “but deliver us from evil.” This verse is really saying, “Deliver us from the evil one.” As Christians, we all have an enemy who hates us and wants nothing more than to see us fall

and fail. The ultimate goal of this enemy is to use us to bring disgrace and dishonor to the name of the Lord Jesus and God the Father. This enemy is the devil, and he desires to see us fail (Eph. 6:12)!

A. *When we pray this prayer, we recognize that we are unable to fight this war on our own.* Therefore, we call on the name of the Lord, employing His power to stand against the devil in the battle with temptation and sin. This was the tactic Jesus used during His time of temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). When Jesus was tempted, He turned to the spiritual resources of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and made His victorious stand against evil.

B. *We are to appropriate the resources we have been given in the Person of the Holy Spirit and in the power of the Word of God.* We are to dress up in the “whole armor” of God and make our stand (Eph. 6:10-18). Incidentally, the phrase “having done all to stand” means to “fight to a standstill.”

CONCLUSION

Through prayer, victory is ours in the battle with temptation. We are challenged to pray about our needs in this battle, and we are to trust the Lord to deliver us in the hour of temptation. He will do His part.

Victory is available, but only those who are serious about waging war on the lust that dwells within them will experience the Lord’s victory.

Do you need help in the battle with temptation? If you need something from the Lord or if you just wish to seek His help in avoiding the pitfalls of sin, come before Him and look to Him for the strength you need. Prayer is about relying. May the Lord teach us that in the greatest battle of life, we need to learn to rely on Him, for therein lies the secret of our victory!



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

PRAYER IS ABOUT REJOICING

The precious prayer in Matthew 6 ends as it began. Jesus taught us to begin our prayers with praise. We are told to pray “Hallowed be Thy name.” Now, we are called to rejoice in who God is and in the power He holds.

We have covered much ground in these sermons. We have learned that:

- Prayer is about *remembering*: “Our Father which art in Heaven.”
- Prayer is about *reverencing*: “Hallowed be Thy name.”
- Prayer is about *ruling*: “Thy kingdom come.”
- Prayer is about *resigning*: “Thy will be done.”
- Prayer is about *requesting*: “Give us this day our daily bread.”
- Prayer is about *releasing*: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”
- Prayer is about *relying*: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

We will learn today that prayer is about *rejoicing*: “For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever, Amen.”

In a world filled with trials, troubles, and problems, it is a comfort to serve a God who is worthy of all the praise and glory we can give Him. It is a comfort to find Someone and something to rejoice about.

I. WE CAN REJOICE IN HIS PRE-EMINENCE

A. *He is sovereign.* The word *sovereign* means “independent and holding complete power.” When we say that God is sovereign, this is what we mean. He is “over and above” this world.

The Bible is clear: The God we serve is all-powerful and in absolute control of all things (Is. 43:13; 46:10-11; Eph. 1:11). Christians, rejoice! Our Father is still on the throne, and no one will ever dethrone Him (Ps. 45:6; 145:13).

When Jesus first taught this prayer, Caesar in Rome literally ruled the world. The Roman Empire stretched from the British Isles all the way across the Mediterranean and as far away as India. Caesar had power over every man, woman, and child in the known world. And yet, Jesus said to pray, “Thine is the kingdom . . .”

Don’t let a lost, cynical world tell you that God is out of business. He is still on His throne, and the kingdom of this world is His. One day, the announcement will come from

glory (Rev. 11:15). What will be revealed to all on that day is a reality today!

B. *He is supreme.* When man was created and placed in Eden, he was given dominion over this world (Gen. 1:26-28). When man sinned, he gave that dominion away, and Satan, not man, became the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). When Jesus Christ came into this world, died on the cross, and rose from the dead, He redeemed everything Adam had given away. He paid the price and destroyed Satan’s dreams of ruling the universe. Our God, not Satan, is now the supreme Lord of the universe. He alone deserves our worship, love, devotion, and allegiance.

Therefore, when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we acknowledge God’s supremacy and our subjection to Him as our Sovereign God. We are acknowledging that He is our King and we are His servants. This implies that we are His and His alone.

II. WE CAN REJOICE IN HIS POWER

A. *His power is enormous.* We have established the fact that God is sovereign and in control. Now we are told to rejoice in the fact that He has the power to control things as well. Friends, we do not serve an anemic, weak God. We serve a God of power and ability! He can do anything He pleases because He holds all power. He is Almighty God! Allow me to share some verses with you that showcase the power of God: Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Psalm 62:11; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Ephesians 3:20.

B. *His power is eternal.* We are told that God’s kingdom, power, and glory are “for ever.” Another of God’s great attributes is the fact that He is immutable. This word means “unchanging or unable to change.” This describes our God (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). His power today is the same as it has ever been! What confidence that should give us when we come to Him in prayer! All God has ever been, He still is and will continue to be. After all, He is “I AM.”

III. WE CAN REJOICE IN HIS PERSONALITY

A. *He alone deserves glory.* Everything God is doing as He exercises His pre-eminence and His power is for His glory (Ps. 8:1). He does what He does so that He might be honored by His creation. He does what He

does so that humanity might be drawn before Him in worship. He does what He does so that His name may be exalted. He alone is glorious, and He alone deserves glory!

Our God is a jealous God, and He will not share His glory with another (Ex. 34:14; Is. 42:8). When we pray, let us therefore remember that not only does our Father have the authority and the ability to answer our prayers; He also has the alacrity to answer them as well. He wants to move in our lives, our homes, our churches, and our world in power and for His glory, but He will only do so when He—and He alone—receives all the glory!

B. *He alone determines glory.* We learned earlier that God’s kingdom, power, and glory are “for ever.” This is a great promise we can rejoice in. He will always possess the kingdom, the power, and the glory, but I want to point out that He and He alone determines who will share His glory someday. Only those who know Him in a grace relationship will be permitted to enter into His glorious kingdom (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

CONCLUSION

The Lord’s Prayer closes with the word “Amen.” What does “amen” mean? A lot of us say it, but do we really understand what it means? Here are some interesting facts about the word “amen.”

- It is the last word in the Bible.
- Jesus’ first word in John 1:51 was “Amen.”
- “Amen” was among the last words in Jesus’ life while He was on the cross (Luke 23:43).
- The word “Amen” is found 25 times in the Old Testament.
- The word “Amen” is found 125 times in the New Testament.
- “Amen” is often translated in the Bible as “Verily, verily.”
- “Amen” means “so be it,” “let it be true,” “I affirm this,” and, in some places, it means “true.”

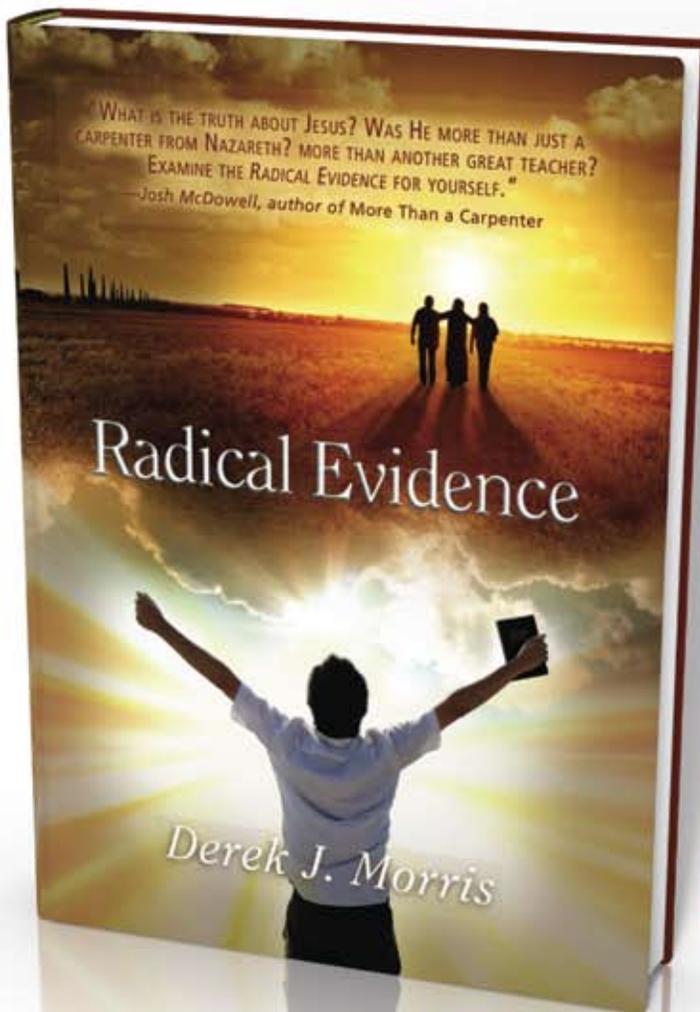
Prayer is about rejoicing! It is all about rejoicing in the pre-eminence, the power, and the personality of our heavenly Father! We are to rejoice because all that is His is ours because we are His (Rom. 8:17).



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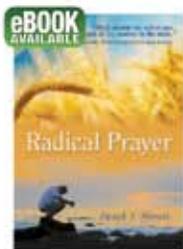
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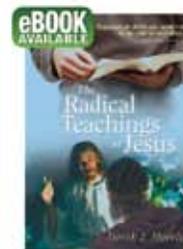
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Review & Herald

“YOU’RE THE FIRST CHURCH THAT EVER ASKED”

“How to Be a Good Farmer—Even in a City: Creating a Community-Based Ministry” appeared in the January–March 2011 issue of Elder’s Digest. This article proposed 10 “farming commandments” which systematized Jesus’ ministry method into 10 intentional action steps for our time¹ and served as an introduction to a series of Elder’s Digest articles that will address these commandments in more detail.² The following article is the fifth in the series and will focus on the seventh “farming commandment.”

“We don’t want your water project!” said the women in the village. The government of an African country had received funding from the World Bank for community-based development projects. Bank officials and representatives from the government selected a water project for a certain village in this large country. They knew that this village did not have a water tap and that the villagers had to walk far to find water each day.

These officials were bound by law to visit the community where the project would be done and talk with the village leaders before starting the project. When the officials met with the chief of this community, he informed the government and bank officials that the women in the village did not want the water project; instead, they wanted processing/grinding machines for the shea fruit that grew in their village. Many companies in the neighboring areas needed the processed fruit as



raw material for their products. The women already supplied the fruits to the companies through middlemen, but they knew that if they could get the fruit in partially-processed form as the companies wanted it, they would be in a position to sell more to the companies than they were able to at the time.

The water project was cancelled because a major requirement for funding was that the project had to be selected by the recipient community. The World Bank introduced this rule after observing that projects selected by government officials did not necessarily match the needs of the community.

In the fall of the same year, after all the documentation had been dealt with, several grinding machines were purchased and presented to the community, and there was a ceremony to mark the occasion. The women could now grind the shea fruit themselves, skip the middlemen, and sell the partially processed fruit directly to the factories which made shea butter.

One year later, bank officials made a follow-up visit to the community to see how it had fared. The project was successful beyond expectation! The women now operated as a cooperative, and, from the proceeds of the shea butter business, the community had installed *several* water taps in a central area of their village!

What can you as a church leader learn from this story? What does it teach you about assessing community needs before launching your outreach projects? A great weakness of many community ministry projects is that church leaders assume they already know what the community needs, as did the bank and government officials in the African country. Assessment is the essential first step in reaching out to any community.

After you have studied the demographics of your community and have done a walking or driving survey³ through it, you will need to get direct input from the people in the community by talking to them. This leads to Farming Commandment 7: "Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them."

You can acquire worthwhile information about community needs from a random sample of 12-18 civic thought leaders. The main kinds of leaders in each community are found working in business, education, government, health and social services, media, and religion. If you line up a sample that includes these types of leaders, you will have a balanced view of the community's needs.

Begin this process⁴ by arranging an appointment ahead of time, either by phone or by visiting the civic leader's office and speaking with his or her scheduler. When asked about the purpose of the interview, you can say something like this: "My church (or Adventist Community Services organization) is doing a community assessment, and we want to interview civic leaders to listen to their views on the needs in the community."

When you arrive for your interview, briefly introduce yourself and thank the civic leader for the opportunity to interview

him or her. Assure the leader that no names will be mentioned in any reports and that all comments will be anonymous. *Listen carefully* and take notes. Do *not* use a recording device. *Remember that you are not there to share your opinions* or give a Bible study. If you notice that the interviewee is interested in spiritual things, silently ask the Holy Spirit to guide you on how to respond. You are not there to push your beliefs, but allow the interviewee to openly share his or her opinions. Don't correct statements about your church that are untrue. Perhaps later you will have opportunity to clarify what the interviewee has heard. In this way you are gaining the leader's confidence so he or she will be more open to the gospel in the future.

Ask core questions:

1. What are the biggest assets and strong points of your community? What services does your organization provide?
2. My church wants to help with some of the most important needs in your community. What are some of the important needs you think might be good for us to focus on?
3. What could a church group do that would be helpful in the needs you have mentioned? (Go through the list item by item and ask for specific suggestions for each one.)
4. Who are some of the influential leaders in the community we should interview with the same questions? Do you have contact information for them? May I tell them you referred me?
5. What do you know about my church? What is your impression of its contribution to the community in the past?

Be flexible. Feel free to ask follow-up questions to clarify what you are hearing. It would also be good to share with each leader what you have discovered so far in your community assessment process. For example, mention ideas for community projects that you thought of while doing the walking/driving survey. Ask each leader whether these projects would be needed or if someone else is already addressing those needs. When finished, thank the leader and leave.

When you do personal interviews such as these, you are not only obtaining valuable information, but you will become known among key people in the community. This will help you gain their support for your community-service activities, and you will have gained a friend.

When your team has completed all the interviews, compile a written report of your findings. Monte Sahlin, an expert in community organizing, suggests that after you collect all the interview notes, you should:

1. Organize the responses under each question.
2. Count the number of times similar responses were given.
3. Note the key themes and specific opportunities that have surfaced.

4. Ask how you can use this information in your planning.

In your report, also include documentation from all four assessment steps:

1. The map showing your territory
2. Findings from your walking/driving survey
3. Key demographic information
4. Results from interviews with civic leaders

You can then make recommendations for future planning which will lead into crafting your wholistic mission action plan (strategic plan). An upcoming article will review the process of strategic planning for your church.

A local church's Social Action Leadership Team (SALT) was interviewing local community leaders. A few team members were meeting with the manager of a certain community within a large city. The manager gave valuable input as she answered the interview questions mentioned above. When the team asked her the last question—"What do you know about my church?"—she answered, "I don't know very much about your church, except that you are involved in the annual July 4 parade we organize; however, I am now very impressed with your church, for you are the first church that has ever asked me for input on what your ministry should be."

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¹ The 10 Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus' ministry method and pray for...; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a Social Action Leadership Team (SALT); (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as *they* see them; (8) Thou shalt earn "Social Capital;" (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the resources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate... and an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to *reap* where thou hast farmed and *keep* what thou doest reap (disciple, preserve the harvest)!

² So far, these follow-up articles have appeared in *Elder's Digest*: (1) "Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand . . ." (Oct.–Dec. 2011); (2) "Our Community Does Not Know Us . . ." (Jan.–March 2012); (3) "Help, Lord! I've Been Asked to Plant a Church!" (July–Sept. 2012); and (4) "As I Walked Around and Looked Carefully . . ." (Oct.–Dec. 2012). To access these articles online, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi. Click on "Articles & Media." To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on "Resources" and "IICM Community Services Certification Program Curriculum."

³ See previous articles in this series.

⁴ This assessment process is adapted from a module in the IICM Community Services Certification Program Curriculum—"CS 102: Community Assessment and Social Capital," by Monte Sahlín.

The next article in the series will discuss the eighth "Farming Commandment."

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PLEASING IN VOICE AND SPEECH

THE GIFT OF SPEECH. OF ALL THE GIFTS THAT GOD HAS BESTOWED UPON MEN, NONE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN THE GIFT OF SPEECH. IF SANCTIFIED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, IT IS A POWER FOR GOOD. IT IS WITH THE TONGUE THAT WE CONVINCED AND PERSUADE; WITH IT WE OFFER PRAYER AND PRAISE TO GOD; AND WITH IT WE CONVEY RICH THOUGHTS OF THE REDEEMER'S LOVE.

More attention should be given to the culture of the voice. We may have knowledge, but unless we know how to use the voice correctly, our work will be a failure. Unless we can clothe our ideas in appropriate language, of what avail is our education? Knowledge will be of little advantage to us unless we cultivate the talent of speech; but it is a wonderful power when combined with the ability to speak wise, helpful words, and to speak them in a way that will command attention.



Speak Clearly and Distinctly. When you speak, let every word be full and well rounded, every sentence clear and distinct to the very last word. Many as they approach the end of a sentence lower the tone of the voice, speaking so indistinctly that the force of the thought is destroyed. Words that are worth speaking at all are worth speaking in a clear, distinct voice, with emphasis and expression. But never search for words that will give the impression that you are learned. The greater your simplicity, the better will your words be understood.

An Indispensable Qualification. The ability to speak clearly and distinctly, in full, round tones, is invaluable in any line of work. This qualification is indispensable in those who desire to become ministers, evangelists, Bible workers, or canvassers. Those who are planning to enter these lines should be taught to use the voice in such a way that when they speak to people about the truth, it will make a decided impression for good.

Tell Them With Simplicity. Men and women are wandering in the mist and fog of error. They want to know what is truth. Tell them, not in high-flown language, but with the simplicity of the children of God.

The Saviour's Voice. The Saviour's voice was as music to the ears of those who had been accustomed to the monotonous, spiritless preaching of the scribes and Pharisees. He spoke slowly and impressively, emphasizing those words to which He wished His hearers to give special heed. . . . The power of speech is of great value, and the voice should be cultivated for the blessing of those with whom we come in contact.



This article is excerpted from the book *Colporteur Ministry*, pp. 70-74, by Ellen G. White.

THE GIFT OF SEXUALITY

IN EDEN GOD GAVE WONDERFUL GIFTS TO HUMANITY. TWO HAVE SURVIVED PARADISE, THE SABBATH AND MARRIAGE. THESE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE ENJOYED AND CELEBRATED. HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE IS ABOUT COMPANIONSHIP, LOVE, AND MUTUAL SUPPORT. IT IS ALSO THE PLACE TO USE THE GIFT OF SEXUAL INTIMACY. WHEN WE TALK ABOUT STEWARDSHIP OF OUR BODIES, THIS INCLUDES THIS VERY GIFT.



I. MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Institution and Meaning of Marriage

Marriage differs from non-marital sexual relations by its public and legal recognition. It was instituted when God created the first human couple. Therefore we have to go back to the creation account when we talk about marriage.

Gen 1:26-27 - Both men and women were created in the image of God in spite of their sexual differentiation.

Gen 1:28 - The first divine mandate for humanity used the plural. That means that the woman had a special status, comparable to that of Adam, which was unique among ancient Near Eastern religions.

Gen 2:18-23 - Man and woman are created for each other. They share a common identity and are of the same value and coequal. God took Eve, brought her to Adam (Gen 2:22), and performed the first wedding.

Gen 2:24 - This verse contains five characteristics of marriage as designed by God:

- (1) Marriage has a clear beginning. The husband leaves his parental family and becomes somewhat independent, ready to enter into an intimate union with his wife.
- (2) God's will is heterosexual monogamy.
- (3) Marriage is complete companionship. It is about becoming one in thinking and feeling, in will and action, climaxing in becoming "one flesh."
- (4) In its character marriage is indissoluble. It is a union marked by trust and faithfulness.
- (5) Marriage is the legitimate place for sexual intimacy.

God created marriage. It is not a human but a divine invention.

2. The Wedding

In the Old Testament (OT) a wedding was connected to the following steps:

- **Courtship:** Typically parents selected spouses for their children (Gen 21:21, 24). However, there were also cases when the young people could choose or at least were asked (1 Sam 18:20-21; Gen 24:57-58).

- **Engagement, Marriage Contract, Bride Price (Dowry):** It can be assumed that engagement was associated with the payment of the bride price (Gen 34:12; Exod 22:16; 1 Sam 18:25)

- **Wedding Ritual:** The wedding consisted of three elements, (a) the wedding procession (Judg 14:11; Ps 45:14-16), (b) the marriage banquet (Gen 29:22; Judg 14:12, 17), and (c) the wedding night (Gen 29:22-23; Deut 22:13-21)

In the OT marriage was neither a private matter between a man and a woman nor a form of concubinage, but a public event involving the families and the community. It has legal implications. Sexual intimacy by itself does not constitute a marriage, but is the consummation of the marriage after the other steps have been taken.

II. MARRIAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

With regard to marriage, the New Testament (NT) follows the OT and does not develop a new form of marriage. This

is not an exception because other OT teachings and institutions are also presupposed and continued in the NT, such as creation, the Decalogue, and the Sabbath.

Jesus - He participated in a wedding (John 2) and referred to marriage in various places, dealing with marriage (references to the creation account; various parables, e. g., Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13), adultery, and divorce (Matt 5:27-32; 19:1-10). He also made provisions for remaining single (Matt 19:12).

Paul - He dealt with marriage and related aspects in various places (e. g., 1 Cor 7). In Eph 5:22-33 he compared marriage of a man and a woman with the relationship between Jesus and His church. This appreciation of marriage has deeply influenced Christianity.

Matt 1:18-20 - Mary and Joseph are engaged but not yet involved in sexual intimacy.

Matt 19:5 - Jesus refers back to Gen 2:24 and stresses the permanence of marriage.

John 8:41 - The Jews suggested that Jesus was an illegitimate child, looking down upon him.

1 Cor 7:8-9 - A legitimate alternative to getting married is not to cohabit but to “burn” (with passion).

According to the NT, marriage was instituted by God at creation. The NT maintains the marriage constituting elements of the OT. Again, marriage is not just a private matter but has a public and legal character. Premarital virginity is stressed. In both Testaments marriage is protected by God in a special way (Mal 2:14-16; Matt 19:4-6). Therefore, Christians commit themselves to their spouses publicly, exclusively, and permanently, seeking God’s blessing in the community of believers.

III. SEXUALITY GONE WRONG

1 Cor 6:9-11 - This passage and its context answer the following questions:

1. Why Should Christians Avoid Sexual Sins?

- Because there is a kingdom to gain. A misuse of the gift of sexuality does not square with God’s rule and His kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10).

- Immorality is damaging. It harms or destroys relationships with spouse, family, friends, and neighbors (1 Cor 7:10-14). It harms the relationship with God (1 Cor 6:15; 7:35). And it harms ourselves—emotionally, psychologically, and physically (1 Cor 6:18). God wants us to live fulfilled lives (John 10:10).

2. What Are Sexual Sins?

- **Fornication:** Fornication is a broad concept in Scripture and typically includes all sins of a sexual nature such as premarital sex, adultery, incest, homosexuality, sodomy, and others. However, if it is listed with some or all of these other sins, it may describe premarital sexual intimacy (see Heb 13:4).

- **Adultery:** Adultery describes a sexual affair with a person other than one’s spouse (John 8:3-11; 1 Cor 6:15-20).

- **Homosexual Activity:** In 1 Cor 6:9 the effeminate seems to play the female in a homoerotic relationship, while the second Greek term, *asernokoitēs*, the male who lies with a male, obviously describes the one playing the male in such a relationship. See also Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27.

- **Incest:** Incest describes a sexual relationship with a close relative (1 Cor 5:1-2; Lev 18:6-18).

- **Divorce:** Following Jesus who had addressed the matter of divorce (Matt 19:1-10; Mark 10:1-10), Paul is also opposed to divorce (1 Cor 7:10-16). See also Mal 2:16.

- **Intentional Mixed Marriages:** A widow and—by implication a widower—may remarry, but it should be “only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39). In the context of 1 Cor 5-7 this has been understood as a warning against a marriage with an unbeliever whatever philosophy of life this person would adhere to other than true biblical faith. See also Deut 7:3; Neh 13:23-25.

3. Why is there still hope for sinners?

The last part of our passage is full of hope: “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). If we have failed and sinned, forgiveness and a new beginning are possible through God’s grace. Yet Jesus challenges us also: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

CONCLUSION

God has given humanity the gift of marriage including sexual intimacy. This gift of true love needs to be treasured, kept pure, and protected against abuse. It is a symbol of our relationship with the Lord. ED

Ekkehardt Mueller is associate director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference World Headquarters. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI Newsletter, edited by Elias Brasil de Souza.



OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

FOUR HOME TRUTHS – Part 2 | OBEDIENCE AND THE SABBATH

III - OBEDIENCE

"We were born subjects, and to obey God is perfect liberty. He that does this shall be free, safe, and happy."—Seneca

1. **Obedience is the test of a genuine Christian (Mt. 12:50).**

- (1) The danger of pretense without conformity (Luke 6:46).
- (2) The characterization of those who do not obey (1 John 2:3, 4; Rom. 8:7).
- (3) The test of love for God (John 14:15, 21; 8:47).

2. **Obedience to the 10 Commandments is the standard for all (Matt. 19:10).**

- (1) Obedience required of all the 10 commandments (Matt. 5:19; Eccl. 12:13).
- (2) Obedience is not the means of salvation (Rom. 8:34; Phil. 4:13; Gal. 3:10-13).
- (3) Obedience does not make grace and faith unnecessary (Rom. 6:14, 15; 3:31).

Church Sign: *"Think metric. Observe the Ten Commandments."*

3. **Obedience means to act on God's instruction (John 7:17).**

God's instruction is summarily comprehended in 10 principles (Ex. 20:1-17).

- (1) Loyalty: *"Thou no gods shalt have but me"*
- (2) Worship: *"Before no idol bend the knee"*
- (3) Reverence: *"Take not the name of God in vain"*
- (4) Sanctification: *"Dare not the Sabbath day profane"*
- (5) Respect for authority: *"Give to thy parents honor due"*
- (6) Love: *"Take heed that thou no murder do"*
- (7) Purity: *"Abstain from words and deeds unclean"*
- (8) Honesty: *"Steal not, for thou by God art seen"*
- (9) Truthfulness: *"Tell not a wilful lie, nor love it"*
- (10) Contentment: *"What is thy neighbor's do not want"*

4. **Obedience to the law pre-dated Sinai (Gen. 26:5).**

- (1) The law pre-dated Sinai (Rom. 4:15; 5:13).
- (2) The law given before the existence of the Jews (Ex. 32:15, 16; Ps. 89:34).
 - a. Ceremonial and judicial statutes were given to Moses for his people. The *former* ceased to be obligatory at the cross, and the *latter* ceased to operate when the Jews were scattered as a nation (Eph. 2:15; Heb. 9:1).
 - b. The term "the testimony" is applied to the Decalogue but never to the ceremonial and civil statutes (Ex. 25:21; 31:18; 32:15).
 - c. Other terms given to the 10 Commandments (Ex. 34:28, 29; Rev. 11:19; 12:17).
- (3) The consequences of disobedience apparent before Sinai (Rom. 5:14; 6:23).
- (4) The angels recognized the law as the rule of the universe (Ps. 103:20).

5. **Obedience to the law exemplified in Jesus' life and teachings (John 15:10).**

- (1) The wise obey (Matt. 7:24, 25); fools don't (vs. 26, 27, 21; Luke 12:47, 48; Prov. 13:15).
- (2) Obedience leads to liberty not bondage (Ps. 119:45; James 2:12).
- (3) Tradition should not interfere with keeping the law (Mark 7:7-9).
- (4) The beatitude of Scripture (Rev. 22:14; cf. Jer. 31:33; Ps. 37:31).

"All true obedience comes from the heart . . . And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses."
—Ellen G. White (*The Desire of Ages*, 668)

IV - THE SABBATH

" . . . Ignoring the Sabbath acknowledges a philosophy that the world relies on 'my' work instead of God's provision."—Walter Brueggemann (AU Jan 12, 2012)

1. **The Sabbath pre-dated sin (Gen. 2:1-3).**

"The Sabbath is a primeval institution, established for men at the beginning of creation, it and marriage being two blessed things saved from the wreck of Paradise."
—Bishop Warren A. Candler

2. **The Sabbath is a Memorial of Creation (Ex. 31:17).**

- (1) God created all from nothing (Heb. 11:3).
- (2) God upholds all things (Heb. 1:3).
- (3) God sustains life (Acts 17:28).

"God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise . . . He needed a Sabbath to remind him more vividly of God, and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator."—Ellen G. White (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 48)

3. **The Sabbath is a Commanded Institution (Ex. 20:8-11).**

- (1) An eternal blessing (1 Chron. 17:17; Num. 23:19, 20).
- (2) It was observed before Sinai (Ex. 16:26, 28; Gen. 26:5).
- (3) It was observed by the OT prophets (Is. 58:13, 14; Jer. 17:21, 22).

"It will be surely far safer to observe the seventh day, according to the express commandment of God than on the authority of mere human conjecture to adopt the first."—John Milton

4. **The Sabbath is the Seal of the Ten Commandments (Rom. 4:11).**

- (1) The Sabbath reveals His name: *"For in six days the Lord"*

- (2) The Sabbath reveals His authority: *"made"*

- (3) The Sabbath reveals the dominion over which He rules: *"heaven and earth"*

"The Sabbath: the birthday of the world."—H. M. S. Richards

The fourth commandment authenticates the whole law, revealing its great Originator, and without it, the ten has no validation.

5. **The Sabbath was observed by Christ and His followers (Luke 4:16; 23:55, 56).**

- (1) It was expected to be observed after Christ's death (Matt. 24:20).
- (2) The NT Church celebrated the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 11).
- (3) The Sabbath was made for all men, not the Jews (Mark 2:27, 28).
- (4) The Sabbath will be observed in the New Earth (Is. 66:22, 23).

6. **The Sabbath is a Memorial of Redemption (Ex. 16:28; Luke 23:54; Col. 2:12).**

- (1) The Sabbath is a sign of physical rest and spiritual renewal. His observance of the Sabbath was an acted-out parable inviting all men to find their rest in Him and were made for fellowship with Him (Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:3, 4).
- (2) The Sabbath is a sign of God's creative, sanctifying, redeeming power (Eze. 20:20).

7. **The Sabbath will be restored in the Last Days (Rev. 14:6, 7, 12; 12:17; 7:1-4).**

A work of Sabbath reform is to precede the salvation which Peter says will be *"revealed in the last time"* (Is. 56:1, 2; 1 Pet. 1:5).

*"A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content,
And health for the toils of the morrow;
But a Sabbath profan'd, Whatso'er may be gain'd,
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow."*—Sir Matthew Hale

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST RESPONSE TO SAME SEX UNIONS

A REAFFIRMATION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Over the past several decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has felt it necessary to clearly state in various ways its position in regards to marriage, the family, and human sexuality. These subjects are at the heart of many pressing issues facing society. That which for centuries has been considered to be basic Christian morality in the marriage setting is now increasingly called into question, not only in secular society but within Christian churches themselves.

The institutions of family and marriage are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart. An increasing number of nations are now debating the topic of “same-sex unions,” thus making it a world issue. The public discussion has engendered strong emotions. In light of these developments, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is clearly restating its position.

We reaffirm, without hesitation, our long-standing position. As expressed in the Church's Fundamental Beliefs, “marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.”¹ Though “sin has perverted God's ideals for marriage and family,” “the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship,” and thus “families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships” (*An Affirmation of Family*, 1990).² God instituted “marriage, a covenant-based union of two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as ‘one flesh.’” “The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is . . . the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression.” “Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal” (*An Affirmation of Marriage*, 1996).³

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disorder and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by sin coming into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen

“MARRIAGE WAS DIVINELY ESTABLISHED IN EDEN AND AFFIRMED BY JESUS TO BE A LIFELONG UNION BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN IN LOVING COMPANIONSHIP.”

human nature, “we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word” (*Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality*, 1999).⁴

We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. However, it is very clear that God's Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle; neither has the Christian Church throughout her 2000 year history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical teaching is still valid today, because it is anchored in the very nature of humanity and God's plan at creation for marriage.



¹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe—A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Doctrine 22 on ‘Marriage and the Family.’

² Public Statement, *An Affirmation of Family*, released July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session, Indianapolis, Indiana.

³ Statement voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996.

⁴ Statement voted by the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999.

This document was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), March 9, 2004.

PREACHING ETHICS:

IS PULPIT HUMOR EVER APPROPRIATE?

Is pulpit humor ever appropriate? Our church's head elder recently posed the following question for consideration by the Board of Elders: "How much humor—if any—during the worship service is acceptable? In my mind, I am torn between reverence to God (no humor) and the use of humor to make a spiritual point." What follows is my studied response, incorporating material from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

For the sake of argument, it may be safely assumed that some Christians feel strongly that there is no place whatsoever for anything like humor in the pulpit. They think that the sacred desk is to be reserved exclusively for purely solemn discourses. They might consult the apostle Peter, who wrote, "The end of all things is at hand: Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7).¹

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that those occupying the pulpit should give the impression that the Christian life must be totally cheerless. The life of Christ provides helpful insights.

DID JESUS SMILE OR LAUGH?

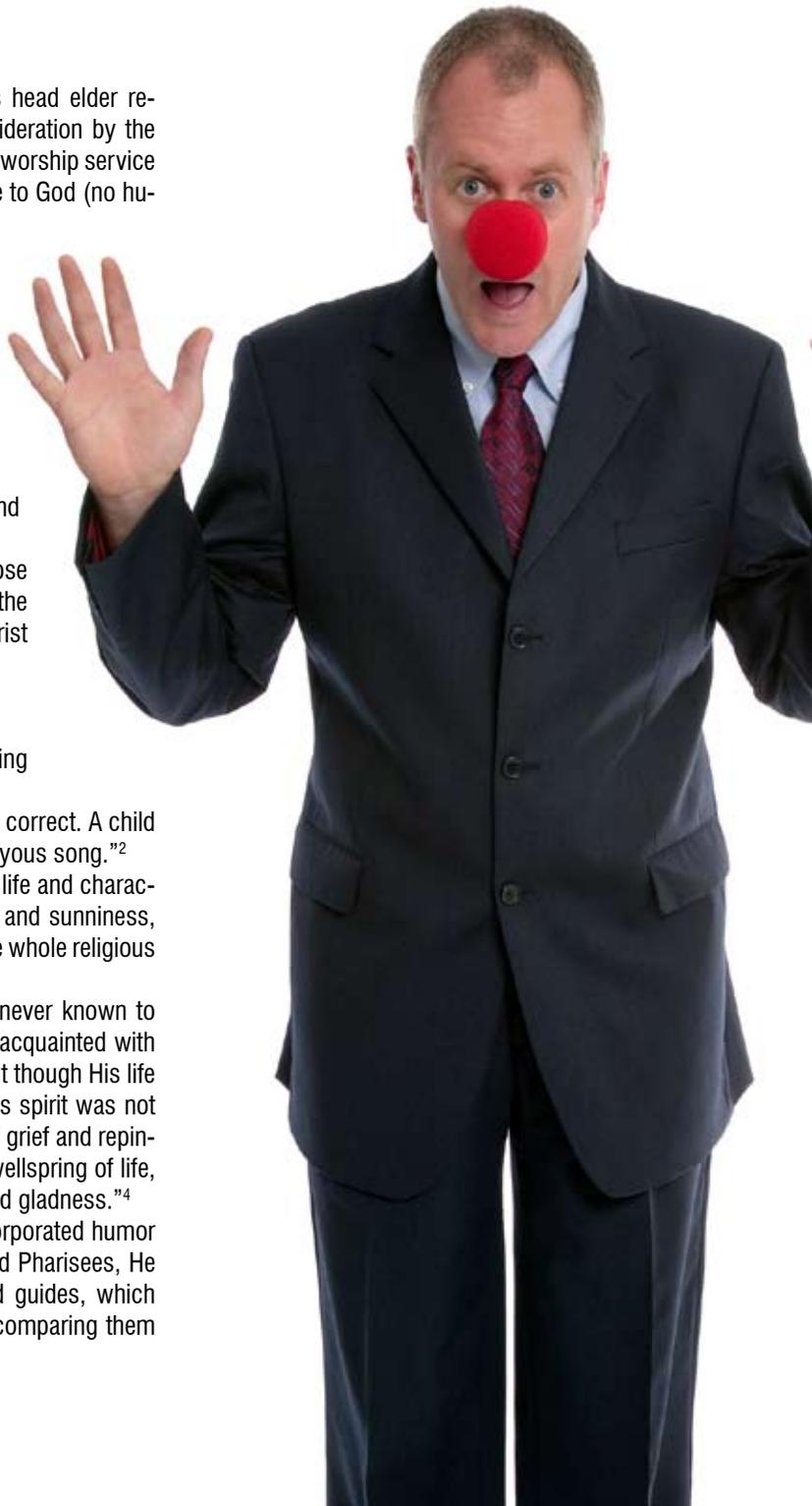
For an answer to this question, let's look at the following inspired quotations:

"It has been said that Jesus never smiled. This is not correct. A child in its innocence and purity called forth from His lips a joyous song."²

"There are many who have an erroneous idea of the life and character of Christ. They think that He was devoid of warmth and sunniness, that He was stern, severe, and joyless. In many cases the whole religious experience is colored by these gloomy views."³

"It is often said that Jesus wept, but that He was never known to smile. Our Saviour was indeed a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief, for He opened His heart to all the woes of men. But though His life was self-denying and shadowed with pain and care, His spirit was not crushed. His countenance did not wear an expression of grief and repining, but ever one of peaceful serenity. His heart was a wellspring of life, and wherever He went He carried rest and peace, joy and gladness."⁴

Unless I am utterly mistaken, Jesus sometimes incorporated humor in His teaching. Speaking to the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, He once pronounced a woe upon them, saying, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." Or how about comparing them



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for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:11, 12). If taken literally, how preposterous such scenarios appear! I'm sure the targets of the Master Teacher's spiritual irony often frowned or grimaced, while others within earshot might have been given plenty to think about, and maybe even been constrained to laugh out loud.

THE SOLEMN SIDE OF JESUS' TEACHING

We hasten to say that it would be a grave mistake not to mention what should be obvious: Though Jesus' teaching sometimes contained elements of humor, it was, for the most part, solemn and full of pith and marrow. Let's review a few illustrations that demonstrate His teaching method:

"Jesus was the greatest teacher the world ever knew. He presented truth in clear, forcible statements, and the illustrations He used were of the purest and highest order. He never mingled cheap symbols and figures with His divine instruction, or sought to pander to curiosity or to gratify the class that will listen simply to be amused. He did not bring sacred truth down to the level of the common, and the comical illustrations that some ministers of the Gospel use were never uttered by His divine lips. Christ did not employ illustrations that would create amusement and excite laughter. . . . He never stooped to utter that which was comical, in order that He might attract an audience."⁵

MINISTERS WHO MISUSE HUMOR

The case of Moses Hull provides a striking illustration of what happens when ministers fail to balance the sacred with the common. Ellen G. White had occasion to reprimand this pastor in the following words:

"You stand in the desk and handle the most holy, sacred, elevating truths in an able manner; but when treating upon the most solemn subjects, you often bring in something comical to create a smile, and this frequently destroys the force of your whole discourse. You handle solemn truths with ease, but do not live them, and that is the reason why the heavenly

to "whitewashed tombs . . . full of dead men's bones" (Matt. 23:24, 27)? Another example: "How canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (Luke 6:42). And this: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he

endorsement is lacking. Many whose ears you have pleased will talk of the smart discourse, the able preacher, but are no more impressed with the necessity of obeying the truth than before they listened to it."⁶

Let's also consider the following inspired quotations:

"What can the minister do without Jesus? Verily, nothing. Then if he is a frivolous, joking man, he is not prepared to perform the duty laid upon him by the Lord. 'Without Me,' says Christ, 'ye can do nothing.' The flippant words that fall from his lips, the trifling anecdotes, the words spoken to create a laugh, are all condemned by the Word of God and are entirely out of place in the sacred desk."⁷

"Ministers are not to preach men's opinions, not to relate anecdotes, get up theatrical performances, not to exhibit self; but as though they were in the presence of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are to preach the Word. Let them not bring levity into the work of the ministry, but let them preach the Word in a manner that will leave a most solemn impression upon those who hear."⁸

PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS

What are we to make of all this? To me, the whole matter depends on the speaker's motivation while occupying the pulpit. If the purpose of an anecdote is merely to elicit a good laugh, that is wrong. On the other hand, certain illustrations (like the one in which our head elder once related the case of a physician who had to eat crow after mistakenly pronouncing a woman dead and then passing off his terrible goof a few hours later by saying to woman's husband, "There has been a slight improvement in her condition") cannot help but produce a smile or an outright laugh.

The wise man once wrote, "A merry [rejoicing] heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken" (Prov. 15:13) and "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (17:22). I see no reason why those who minister in the pulpit shouldn't feel comfortable incorporating appropriate illustrations that make a spiritual point while being careful to refrain from undue emphasis on humor for humor's sake. Such an approach strikes a healthy balance between Solomon's encouragement to cheerfulness and Peter's call for solemnity. 

¹ All Bible references are from the King James Version.

² Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, 57.

³ White, *Steps to Christ*, 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ White, *Review and Herald*, August 6, 1895.

⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:435. Incidentally, Hull eventually became a spiritualist.

⁷ White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 142, 143.

⁸ White, *Evangelism*, 207.

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THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN GOD

>PART 3

The book of Titus describes the lifestyle of those who believe in God. Titus 1 highlights the high moral qualifications and role of elders in God’s family, the Church. Titus 2 focuses on the moral conduct of individual members of the church who have experienced salvation by grace. These chapters were covered in Parts 1 and 2 of this series.¹

In Part 3 of this series, we will look at Titus 3 and consider the following:

1. The responsibilities of Christians toward authority figures
2. Salvation by grace
3. The importance of maintaining good relationships

In all three chapters of Titus, elders have a role to play as leaders of God’s spiritual flock.

I. RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIANS TOWARD AUTHORITY FIGURES (TITUS 3:1-3)

A. *Concerning proper conduct to authority figures and others:* “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone” (Titus 3:1, 2).²

B. *Why we should respect those in authority:* “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

II. SALVATION BY GRACE (TITUS 3:4-7)

A. *The kindness and love of God:* “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy . . .” (Titus 3:4, 5a).

B. *Through washing and renewal:* “. . . He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5b-7)

C. *By trusting in God:* “This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (Titus 3:8).

D. *By avoiding unprofitable and useless controversies:* “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and argu-

ments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned” (Titus 3:9-11).

III. IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS (TITUS 3:12-15)

A. *Final remarks:* “As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives” (Titus 3:12-14).

B. *Final greetings and prayer:* “Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all” (Titus 3:15).

CONCLUSION

Titus 3 deals with living responsible Christian lives as a witness to unbelievers. The elders and the church at large are counseled by Paul about how they should treat one another: to respect those in leadership and authority and to be ready to do whatever is good for all men. As Christians we are exhorted to behave with gentleness and humility, especially because at one time we too were lost, foolish, deceived, and enslaved by sin, but the grace of God has saved us and changed the condition of our hearts from disobedience to obedience. Thus, having experienced the saving grace of God, we too must share that salvation in proportion to that which we ourselves have enjoyed through Christ. Consequently, elders and members of the church must learn to trust God more and to avoid unprofitable and silly controversies (3:8-11), to devote ourselves to good works, and to provide for the urgent needs of God’s people (verses 12-14). What would the church be like if both elders and members of the church lived responsible Christian lives?



¹ The previous articles of this series were printed in the first and second quarters of *Elder’s Digest*, 2013.

² All Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

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CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP:

LOVING GOD AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

What is Christian discipleship? By definition, a disciple is a follower, one who accepts and helps to spread the teaching of another. A Christian disciple is a person who accepts and helps to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, the Greek term for “disciple” is *mathetes*, which means more than just “student” or “learner.” A disciple is a follower, someone who adheres completely to the teachings of another, making them his or her rule of life and conduct. The Pharisees prided themselves in being disciples of Moses (John 9:28). Jesus’ followers were called disciples. Their discipleship began with Jesus’ call and required them to exercise their will in response to Jesus (Matt. 9:9).

NEW LIFE

A true disciple is a believer in Christ who possesses new life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and shows total obedience to Jesus. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Christian discipleship, therefore, is the process by which followers of Jesus grow in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit to overcome the pressures and trials of this life and become more like Christ in His love, vision, mission, and character. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to examine their thoughts, words, and actions and compare them with the Word of God.

The life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ centers on two important arenas: loving God and loving our neighbors. Let’s take a closer look at these areas.

LOVING GOD

When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, His response was: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment” (Matt. 22:37-38; see also Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28).

Discipleship is about loving God. It is more than an acknowledgement of God’s existence or a statement of belief regarding God; it is total devotion and head-over-heels-in-love-with adoration. It is the deep desire to know God, to be one with God, and to worship God.

There are many ways to develop our knowledge of and love for God: prayer, Bible study, worship, fasting, conversation with other Christians, etc. These things will strengthen our relationship with God and enable us to experience God’s presence in our lives.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

After Jesus said we must love God with all we have, He immediately broadened the meaning of love by saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

Again and again, the Bible teaches us that loving God and loving our neighbors are two sides of the same coin. We cannot do one without the other. Read the following passages for a glimpse of how prevalent this understanding of Christian discipleship is:

- Matthew 5:43-48, 25:31-46
- Luke 10:25-37
- John 15:12-17
- Romans 12:9-18
- 1 Corinthians 13
- 1 John 4:19-21

From these passages and others, we can draw several conclusions about what it means to love our neighbors. First, loving our neighbors means responding to specific needs—hunger, illness, imprisonment, loneliness, and so forth. Love is more than a feeling; it is a behavior. It is practical and concrete.

Second, our neighbors include many people. Within the context of the Christian community, our neighbors are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Neighbors may also refer to the contemporary understanding of those who live near us. However, from a biblical perspective, neighbors often include people whom we might not normally consider: strangers, prisoners, people who mistreat us (our enemies), people from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds, people from different religious traditions, and people who irritate us and push the boundaries of our patience.

Hence, loving our neighbors requires attention and sacrifice. We must pay attention to what is happening around us in order to see our neighbors and recognize their needs. We must also consider their needs to be as important as our own. Loving our neighbors is more than random acts of kindness. It takes time, energy, and commitment. It is a lifestyle carefully cultivated in response to God’s command.

Finally, these passages emphasize that loving our neighbors is mandatory, not optional. It is what Christians do and what Christians are. Our lives are a testimony to our love—our love for God and for our neighbors.

CONCLUSION

Christian discipleship is grounded in the love and grace of God, experienced through Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is our response to God’s love and grace.



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