

quarterly resource for local church leaders † july/september 2018

ELDER'S

DIGEST

**HOW TO MAKE
YOUR CHURCH
IRRESISTIBLE**



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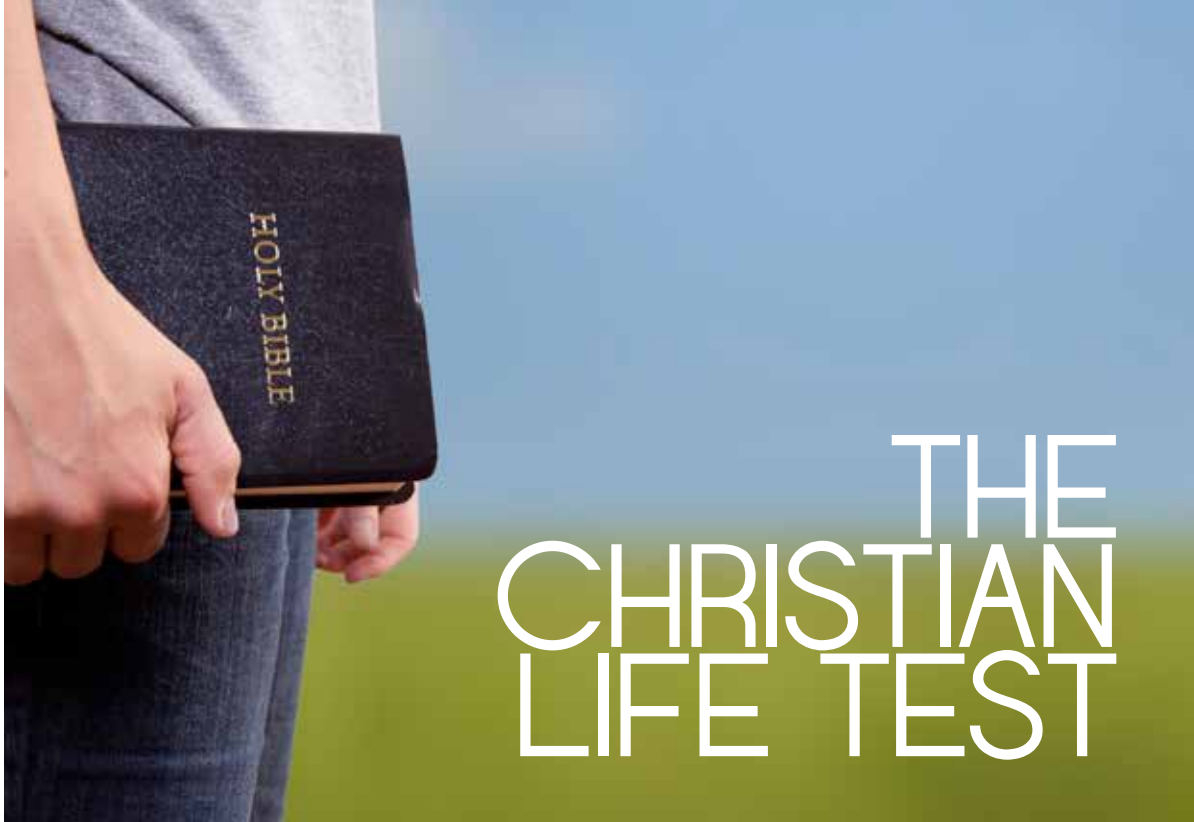
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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TEST

One of the tests for any form of spirituality is how we connect what we believe with everyday life. There are many ways to make this connection, and each Christian does it a bit differently. But the main thing is to be intimately connected to Jesus and to pay attention to His guidance.

As Christians, we know the importance of setting time aside daily to read the Bible and pray; however, if you've been a Christian for more than a week, you've discovered that it's difficult to maintain consistency. Why is that? There are a variety of explanations, but I believe one significant reason is that it's easy to bring a "sacred/secular divide" perspective to our devotionals. We can quickly fall into the trap of thinking that this is our "spiritual time with God" before we move on to our "less spiritual" day at work, at school, on the shop floor, or wherever will be. Don't make this mistake!

Remember, this relationship provides the basis for how we live day by day. For example, as a Christian, you are a follower

of Jesus, and you apply the Bible teachings, especially the teachings of Jesus, to every aspect of your life. The Bible teaches things like honesty, integrity, dignity, respect, treating others with love, being generous, helping the poor, sharing your faith, and many other things. All of these affect your day-to-day living. They enable you to love and forgive, to endure suffering, and have hope when things look hopeless. As you grow in your relationship with God, you will notice changes in your life that will affect how you live.

God is not hiding; He wants to be found. He wants to interact with you 24/7. God wants to bring faith, love, hope, joy, and peace into your everyday life. It's all yours by faith.

Finally, let me say that spirituality is not meant to be always fun. It takes discipline, and it is tough. But if you practice it, the connection between what you believe and the way you live will be apparent in many key areas: self-image, work, leisure, relationships, family, dealing with life's problems, and so on.

You may find the spiritual road demanding or even frightening at times. Trust God. Trust Him with your life, with everything you have, and everything you are or would like to be. This is the stuff of spirituality. You have embarked on a great journey. Now go and put into practice what you believe—and delight in it!



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES >PART 3

The apostle Paul concluded his list of qualifications of deacons and deaconesses in 1 Timothy 3:11-13, which states: “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

The King James Version’s translation of verse 11 is problematic in two areas. First, the words “must their” do not appear in the Greek manuscript, which is why they are printed in italic in the KJV. In the absence of the word “their,” the word “wives” is not in the possessive case; therefore, they are not the wives of the deacons previously spoken of in verses 8-10. The second area is that the word “wives” can

also be translated as “women.”¹ Based upon these observations, a better translation that is consistent with the context would read, “Even so, the women, be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” The word “women” is now referring to the female counterparts of the deacons—the deaconesses. Paul’s instructions to the men deacons also applied to the women deaconesses. He told both to be grave, not double-tongued or slanderers, sober and not addicted to wine, and faithful. It is important that today’s deacons and deaconesses meet these qualifications.

The last qualification the apostle Paul gave is, “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.” This does not mean that deacons have to be married and have children. But, if they are married, they are to have only one wife at a time; and, if they

have children, they are to train them to behave. Ed Glasscock suggests that Paul was probably more concerned about a man's character than his marital status. He states,

"The translation 'husband of one wife' is not the best understanding of the Greek phrase . . . it should be translated 'a man of one woman' or 'a one-woman man.' This understanding emphasizes the character of the man rather than his marital status. Thus, even a single man or a man who has been married only once must demonstrate that he is not a 'playboy' or flirtatious, but that he is stable and mature in character toward his wife or other females. A man who demonstrates a character of loyalty and trustworthiness in such personal relationships is qualified in this area. He, being a one-woman type man, can be placed in this high position and trusted to deal in maturity and with discretion in a situation involving female members. This view shifts the emphasis away from an event that took place in a man's life before his conversion and properly concentrates on the character and quality of his life at the time of his consideration for this high office."²

The implication of this qualification for the deacons and deaconesses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that they are to set a godly example in their homes, be faithful to their spouse if they are married, not be flirtatious with the opposite sex, and train their children to be obedient.

Ellen G. White also stressed the importance of the family of church officers: "The family of the one suggested for

office should be considered. Are they in subjection? Can the man rule his own house with honor? What character have his children? Will they do honor to the father's influence? If he has no tact, wisdom, or power of godliness at home in managing his own family, it is safe to conclude that the same defects will be carried into the church, and the same unsanctified management will be seen there."³

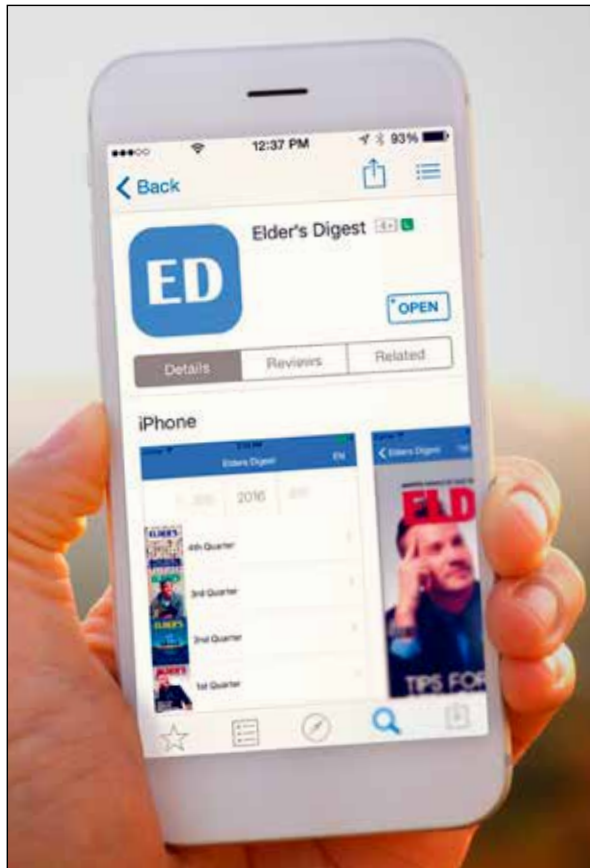
Although it was the hasty election of elders that prompted this admonition from Ellen White, it also applies to the election of deacons and deaconesses. It becomes less of a challenge for deacons and deaconesses to teach others to obey God's Word and the standards of the church when they and their families are teaching by example. ED

¹ Harold K. Moulton, ed., *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, rev. ed., (1978), s.v. "γυναικας."

² Ed Glasscock, "'The Husband of One Wife' Requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (July-September 1983): 249.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:618.

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| ELDER'S DIGEST NEWS

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Elder's Digest Editor



HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHURCH IRRESISTIBLE

One year, as a birthday present, I decided to take my dad to a Chicago Bulls play-off game. Like most dads, he's a very enthusiastic, vocal fan, so I thought he'd love to share that energy with 20,000+ fans in the United Center. We got to our seats and started watching the game. The atmosphere was electric. In the final moments of the game, the United Center was reverberating with the screams of the fans and their energy. To my surprise, for the duration of the game, my dad was securely planted in his seat. Even at the most nail-biting moments, he sat with a church pose: hands neatly folded in his lap, watching the game intently—from his seat—but he didn't make a sound. I

was on my feet with the rest of the fans. It was a close game that the Bulls won in the last few seconds. To this day, I still don't understand what it was about that situation that made my dad so reserved, because I know that when he watches sports at home, he yells and cheers and shouts enthusiastically at the TV.

Have you ever wondered what makes God applaud? What gets Him out of His seat and makes Him yell, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"? When does He get ecstatic and enthusiastic about what's happening here on earth? I think that question is a great starting point for the idea of making your church irresistible.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Have you ever tried to solve a problem, only to realize that you hadn't identified the problem correctly? In our churches, I think we're often after solutions, but we're asking the wrong questions.

One day, I was reading Matthew 6:1-3 in *The Message* Bible version. It says, “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it.

It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding.”

The verse is so blunt and even a bit confronting, but this shock of realism puts a lot of our actions into perspective. How often do we misdirect our actions? How often do we act for others instead of for God? Sometimes, we even do this with good intentions.

The topic of this article—how to make your church irresistible—is the same topic I addressed at a recent leadership workshop. As I prepared for the workshop, I followed a few hunches and then began to research. My hunt led me to a couple of very popular books. Each one approached the idea of church hospitality and creating a friendly church from a different angle. When I read *The Five Star Church*, it approached the topic from a hospitality-industry perspective, encouraging churches to make everything about the experience equivalent to a five-star hotel so that guests would sense the specialness and the uniqueness of the experience. I then moved on to *Making a Good Church Great*. Similarly, this book looked at principles of excellence. It talked about how to infuse the church experience with excellence in each and every area, including guests' experiences. While my research showed the authors approaching the topic in strategic ways, the solutions seemed to lack soul. And having been a guest at various churches throughout my life, I felt that they all failed to address the heart of the matter: how a guest really experiences churches where they don't feel connected.

While making your church friendly is important, friendliness without connectedness is hollow. And excellence without compassion is like a clanging cymbal.

Most often, when we ask a question along the lines of “How can I make my church irresistible?” we're asking the wrong question. Or, better stated, we're asking the *right* question about the *wrong* person.

When we ask the question “How do I make my church irresistible?” we're probably asking the question with our guests in mind. We're wondering how we can make our church irresistible for our visitors so they will return. Do we need to provide the best children's program in town? Do we need to make sure we have the best music program? Should we make sure the service doesn't run over a certain time or that we have people strategically placed at all

of the right interaction points? I'm not underestimating the impact of any of these things, but I wonder if, when we ask this question, we should be asking it of God. So instead of asking “How can we make our church irresistible for our guests?” perhaps the *right* question for the *right* person is “How can we make our church irresistible to God?” When we ask ourselves *this* question, we set ourselves up to learn what makes God applaud.

TRAITS OF AN IRRESISTIBLE CHURCH

Wayne Cordeiro expresses this idea in his book *The Irresistible Church*. In it, he mentions 12 traits of an irresistible church. I'm going to mention two of the 12 and explore a couple of ways you can lead your church toward becoming irresistible to God.

When asking and answering the question “What makes God applaud?” there are several surefire answers we can get through a careful review of the guidance God has given us in the Bible.

God's presence. One of the first things that makes God applaud—and one of the first traits of an irresistible church—is a church where the members insist that God's presence must go with them. This attitude reminds me of Moses' experience in Exodus 33, when he's journeying with the children of Israel. God tells Moses to continue on the journey, but Moses returns to God and says, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.”

What if we as a church body—in our ministries, our communications, and our meetings—determined that we wouldn't go forward with any programming, meeting, or decision if God's presence didn't go with us? What would the outcome be for our churches? If this was our guiding principle, God would surely applaud that. And if God applauds it, it creates an atmosphere that's irresistible to Him. An atmosphere that's irresistible to God is surely irresistible to people because God's Spirit will actively be a part of it.

As it relates to church hospitality and the message it communicates, a church filled with God's presence—especially when it is filled with people who sense His presence and His mission for us—will be a church that embodies the idea of friendliness coupled with connectedness and compassion.

A church filled with love. The next thing that makes God applaud—another trait of an irresistible church—is a church filled with love.

Hospitality is the intentionality of love. We see this quality in Romans 15:7, and God encourages it when it was said, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

When we think of church hospitality, it's not often that we group it in with our church communications. Traditionally, we've reserved communications to include bulletins, signage, newsletters, websites, social media, and text messaging—if you're really on trend.



In John 13:35, Jesus tells His disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” That seems to be the best PR strategy that we can have as a church.

Our church communications must be freed from the bulletin and unloosed from the shackles of belonging to one person or a committee of a few people who are gifted with words and cameras and audio equipment. Don’t misunderstand what I’m saying. I have worked in church communications for the past five years, and I have a deep understanding of the importance of this area of our church. However, as leaders and as church members, we should understand that each of us is a walking bulletin. Every church member’s actions can be as helpful or as harmful as a tweet. The way we talk to one another in meetings, in Sabbath School, and at potlucks can be as effective as a church newsletter. Our church’s hospitality (or the lack thereof) is a major part of our church communications strategy, and these two ministries are intertwined. Our communications is who we say we are. Our hospitality is the opportunity for people to experience who we are.

This is what God applauds. He applauds the intentionality of our love. He applauds us not just for being friendly but for connecting with people that He’s brought to visit our churches. He applauds our compassion. He applauds our love because it’s a reflection of His character.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHURCH IRRESISTIBLE

While asking the right question can help us understand the problem, finding a solution is even more powerful. As a church leader, how can you lead your church toward becoming a church that’s irresistible to God?

Create empathy. In Luke 6:31, we have clear guidance on how we can develop empathy; “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you . . .” One of the

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

most powerful ways we can create a church that’s irresistible to God, especially in the area of hospitality (which is a part of a church’s communications), is to empathize with the people who we expect to visit our churches.

Many members were born and raised in our churches and have met and married there. Their lives are routine. They may not remember what it’s like to walk into a room and not recognize a single face. It is possible they have never experienced hearing unfamiliar theology or hearing greetings like “Happy Sabbath!” How can you or your church members know or remember what that feels like if you don’t actively practice empathy?

Many visitors stand at the door of a church, look around, and feel like they’ve come to a gathering to which they weren’t invited. Everyone is chatting, smiling, and greeting one another, but the guests feel alone—on the outside looking in. Sometimes they don’t return for this reason. Often, we become so entrenched in our church’s life, culture, and relationships that we forget what it’s like not to belong. As a leader, you can actively encourage ministries to practice empathy in their planning as they create programming and in the implementation of their ministry ideas and events. As a leader, if you’re really looking to overachieve, why not visit another church (when you have a chance) to put yourself in the shoes of your visitors?

Create connectedness. A church that longs for connectedness among its ministries and for its members and visitors is a church that God applauds. Connectedness promotes unity, and Jesus prayed that we as a church body would be one, just as He and the Father are one. Actively promoting connectedness and finding ways to promote it among ministries will be a big boost for the church’s hospitality and will make your church irresistible to God.

I once visited a church in Chicago and was struck by its emphasis on creating a sense of connectedness. The experience has stayed with me for years. On my first and second visits, I was amazed by the way multiple people approached me to welcome me to the church. The pastor called me a few days after my visit, and several people added me on Facebook. It felt like a totally organic experience—a church with really friendly people who were interested in connecting. Much later, I met with the pastor and remarked on the friendliness of the church, and he told me that creating this environment required lots of intentionality and planning.

Creating connectedness helps all of your church’s ministries get on the same page about the church’s mission. Ultimately, our mission is to spread a message of love and redemption to a dying world. Within a church body, you may be pursuing something more specific, like creating a church that’s a part of its local community or reaching out to

young families in the area. In talking with your communications team, you may realize that they're trying to reach out to the community with a particular campaign or get visitors to gain awareness of the church through increased signage. The communications team may be running a social media campaign aimed at attracting people from the community. Separately, the hospitality team may be working to create a welcoming environment. Your small-group ministry may be looking to expand some of the church's offerings, and Sabbath School may be working to survive in this modern age. Are these ministries talking? Are they looking for synergy? Does each ministry realize the important role it plays in creating a hospitable environment that God would applaud?

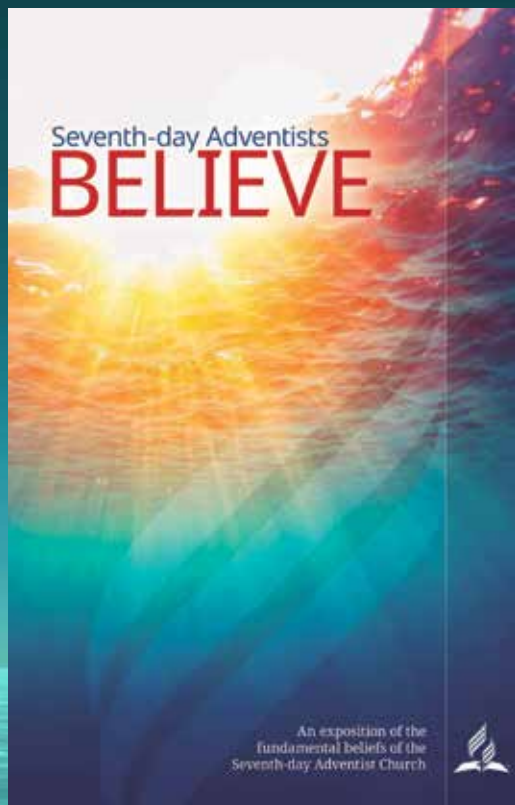
When you create connectedness, all the ministries begin to work in concert. The communications team's message—that you're a community church—should flow through to the hospitality team and inform them as they do their greeting, providing a sense of purpose to the smile, handshake, and bulletin being handed out. Perceptive hospitality team members can alert friendly and compassionate members about visitors they've seen entering the church so the visitor can be greeted again by a church member. Children's Sabbath School leaders should anticipate visitors because the service has been advertised to the community and have a plan in place to welcome visitors to attend the adult Sab-

bath School. Opportunities to attend small groups should be made available in Sabbath School for those who connect with the idea of a group Bible study. Having this sense of connectedness offers multiple opportunities for your visitors to receive the message the communications ministry—and all the other ministries—is trying to share. Most importantly, it allows multiple interaction points, which give visitors opportunities to connect and provides a shared sense of purpose for your church.

So, if you're wondering what makes God applaud, if you're curious to know what gets Him out of His seat and makes Him ecstatic, consider how your church treats its visitors. Consider the atmosphere of connectedness that has been created in your church. When we get this right, we create a church that's irresistible to God and to visitors. ED

This article first appeared in the June 26, 2016, edition of *Best Practice*. It has been lightly edited for *Elder's Digest*.

Rachel Lemons Aitken is a Chicago native who serves as the Communications Coordinator for the Greater Sydney Conference in Sydney, Australia, where she now lives with her Aussie husband Peter. Rachel is passionate about reframing the conversation around church communications.



NEW AND UPDATED SDA BELIEVE BOOK

The 2018 version of the *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* is a freshly edited declaration of the fundamental teachings of the Adventist Church. This new edition includes the changes made in the 2015 GC session, a new "Study Questions" section at the end of each chapter, and it is published in a bigger size and better paper quality.

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ADDING MEMBERS THROUGH STUDIES:

HOW YOU CAN ACHIEVE IT >PART 2 OF 8

Part 1 of this series began by relating the background of how most members are brought into fellowship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is through Bible studies. It also gave the definition of a Bible study: the systematic search for the meaning of a given theological issue. The article then went on to explain the four purposes of the Adventist Bible study philosophy and the wonderful fulfillment one experiences when students choose to accept Christ as their personal Savior and are baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In Part 2 of this series, we'll review the 15 pre-study steps to be taken by the instructor before arriving at the study location and what to do before opening the Bible for the first time with the students in their homes.

The following methodology is based on established procedures used successfully for decades in societies of general Christian background (the United States, Latin America, the Philippines, Australia, Canada, and parts of Europe) and in some non-Christian countries (India, Africa, China, other parts of Asia, and even Russia). The general methodology has already been shown to be successful by thousands of pastors, local church leaders, and laymembers. After a few studies using the following procedures, you—the elder, deacon, deaconess, or lay worker—will become an expert in soul-winning. As your skills deepen and your successes grow, the desire to make every effort to bring Christ to each new contact (and to look for new contacts) will become

a burning passion, and, through you, God will continually increase His kingdom. The subsequent points are directly related to Bible study procedures; a careful study and occasional review of them will increase your skill in sharing Bible studies with your students.

BIBLE STUDY METHODOLOGY: SETTING THE STAGE

1. Before giving the study in your home or office, review the particular study that you are going to give that day. Pray, asking the Holy Spirit to be present and for God to lead you in your delivery and enlighten the minds of the person or group with whom you will be studying. It is true that God can speak through a donkey if necessary (as in the case of Balaam) and that God's grace will cover all the mistakes you are surely going to make. However, God will not give His blessing on a bad preparation.

2. It is important that you have a complete theological understanding of each study you will be giving. Your understanding should be in harmony with the Church's official position; otherwise, if your students learn later that your position is at variance with the Church's or pastor's position, they will be confused, which may lead to a falling away of their personal commitment or previous spiritual and doctrinal development. If you feel you don't have enough understanding, contact your pastor or refer to the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.

3. The studies should be progressive, that is, from the easiest to the more difficult ones. And certain studies should be given before others, so that successive lessons may be more easily understood, such as the Law of God before the Sabbath.

4. During your review, read the texts before and after the verses in the study you will be giving. Sometimes the context verses don't seem relevant to the particular verse you will be using, and since sometimes the people you will be studying with will read these verses and ask questions about them, you need to be prepared to deal with them properly. It could be embarrassing (or worse, you could lose credibility) if you can't give a good explanation.

5. Always look for the good news in every teaching. Find the link between it and Jesus, the loving Savior.

6. During the review, if you are timid, pretend to be actually studying with the students, as in a mock study. You can go through the study with them audibly, asking the questions out loud and making your comments the same way. Hearing your own voice will strengthen your self confidence. Remember that you are not alone: Jesus is with you.

7. While you are doing the personal review/mock study, try to anticipate possible rebuttals and objections that may be raised by your students so that you can prepare satisfactory answers. Make notes in your Bible or in the proper place where you can quickly access them.

8. Arrive at the study on time. Be prompt, even if the culture isn't a precise one. Arriving late may be an excuse for any of the students you will be studying with to absent themselves from the study the next time.

9. After arriving, greet everyone cordially, but don't spend a lot of time chatting. Dive straight into the study. Learn some key sentences to move from small talk to the essential reason why you have come.

10. If you know your students are not acquainted with the Scriptures, explain some basic things about the Bible. For example, you might explain that the Old Testament has 39 books and was written between 1600–400 BC, while the New Testament has 27 books that were written between 35–100 AD. Show the student where the two are divided, how they are separated into chapters and verses, and where the index is. Explain that the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Koine Greek, which was the vernacular of that time and not the same Greek that is used in Greece today.

Explain that the Old Testament is a history of God's people (mainly the Jews). They were first called the Children of Israel, the name God later gave to Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel that later became the Hebrews. The Old Testament is categorized into five sections: Pentateuch (the five books written by Moses), Historical Books, Poetic Books, books of the Major Prophets, and books of the Minor Prophets. The New Testament was written by Jesus' disciples and apostles.

Next, explain that the New Testament tells about Christ's life on this earth, the early works of the apostles, the beginning of Christianity, and the theological writings of various apostles. The 27 books are divided into the Four Gospels, the Historical Book of Acts, the General Epistles, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Prophetic Book of Revelation. There are no original manuscripts (autographs, as they are called) existing today. There are only copies.

Explain to your students that, in ancient times, there were scribes who dedicated their lives to copying the Old and New Testament books, which they did very carefully in order to avoid errors. Religious documents were written by the scribes without commas, periods, semicolons, verses, sentences, or paragraphs. There were no separations between words, and people were used to reading that way. After copying a document, the scribe would find the middle letter and word and check those against the original. If they didn't match, the scribe rechecked the manuscript until the error was found.

Then, in 1227, Archbishop Stephen Langton broke the text of all the books of the New Testament into chapters; later, in 1550, Robert Stephanus printed a final edition into the Greek language that was the first to have word separations, sentences, and verses in it, a feature Stephanus invented to help the reader more easily understand the meaning.

11. If the television or radio is on, ask as diplomatically as possible for it to be turned off. If the hosts have prepared a lot of food, eat it, but make it clear that you do not wish to eat every time you visit them. In some cultural settings, this remark might be a relief for the hosts.

12. Be sure not to offend people. Even if your host insists you should not take off your shoes, always take them off anyway, if that is part of the culture.

13. Invite the family or person to sit at the table or to be seated in a formal setting. This makes the study more serious. Sitting in the living room on the couch and in comfortable chairs changes the dynamics of the environment and often leads to a casualness which isn't conducive to serious study. Be sure to have enough light so everyone can see and read well.

14. Either before or after the study, suggest that the meeting be done alternatively in the students' homes and in your house. Asking people to visit you is a good way to avoid the perception of a giver-receiver relationship.

15. Have prayer if it won't offend them, asking God to enlighten the study. Make the prayer short. Don't ask anyone else to pray. Later on, you may do so when you are able to discern the students' spiritual status and willingness to pray. Don't sing a religious song (or a secular one) unless someone suggests it and you are absolutely sure it won't offend anyone.



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WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS MOST

As leaders in the church, we are to preach the full gospel. Let's look at 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (KJV).

God's Word tells us to preach whether it is convenient or not, to enlighten, to teach doctrine. These are all things that we must do. Let us now focus on the "reprove" and "rebuke" part of 2 Timothy 4:2. While we should not call out someone's name publicly from the pulpit, we are to call out sin and the need for repentance. Let's look at two quotes on this issue.

"Those who have too little courage to reprove wrong, or who through indolence or lack of interest make no earnest effort to purify the family or the church of God, are held accountable for the evil that may result from their neglect of duty. We are just as responsible for evils that we might have checked in others by exercise of parental or pastoral authority as if the acts had been our own."¹

"So men who should be standing as faithful guardians of God's law have argued, till policy has taken the place of faithfulness, and sin is allowed to go unreprieved. When will the voice of faithful rebuke be heard once more in the church? 'Thou art the man.' 2 Samuel 12:7. Words as unmistakably plain as these spoken by Nathan to David are seldom heard in the pulpits of today, seldom seen in the public press. If they were not so rare, we should see more of the power of God revealed among men. The Lord's messengers should not complain that their efforts are without fruit until they repent of their own love of approbation and their desire to please men, which leads them to suppress truth. Those ministers who are men pleasers, who cry, Peace, peace, when God has not spoken peace, might well humble their hearts before God, asking pardon for their insincerity and their lack of moral courage. It is not from love for their neighbor that they smooth down the message entrusted to them, but because they are self-indulgent and ease-loving. True love seeks first the honor of God and the salvation of souls. Those who have this love will not evade the truth to save themselves from the unpleasant results of plain speaking. When souls are in peril, God's ministers will not consider self but will speak the word given them to speak, refusing to excuse or palliate evil. Would that every minister might realize the sacredness of his office and the holiness of his work, and show the courage that Elijah showed! As divinely

appointed messengers, ministers are in a position of awful responsibility. They are to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering."²

There seems to be concerns that seekers or new church members may be turned away by strong preaching that points out sin. On the contrary, these are the very people who want to hear a strong gospel message. They don't want to be flattered with a watered-down gospel.

In my experience at communion service, Paul's exhortation to examine oneself before taking part in the Lord's supper is seldom heard in our churches. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).

As leaders in the church, let us examine ourselves. Let us not preach a watered-down message. Let us preach what Jesus preached. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: 'for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17). Let us continue to teach true doctrine. But let us be courageous and reprove and rebuke with all long-suffering.

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¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 578.

² ———, *Prophets and Kings*, 141, 142.

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SPEED AND TONE

>PART 1



**SPEAK THE
TRUTH IN LOVE
AND IN PITY FOR
THOSE WHO
TURN THE TRUTH
TO FABLES.**

CORRECTION OF RAPID SPEECH

Rapidity of speech can and should be corrected. The teacher must learn daily in the school of Christ, that he may speak in such a way as to make the best and most lasting impression upon his hearers. The appointed guardian of truth, he must conscientiously guard the sacred treasures. He is not to gather only a limited number of surface truths, but is to purchase the field, that he may possess the treasure it contains. He is to seek to improve in methods of labor, and make the very best use of the organs of speech. If the words of truth are of sufficient importance to be spoken before an audience, they are of sufficient importance to be spoken distinctly. The guidance of the Spirit never leads to indistinctness of speech. The Spirit takes the things of God and presents them through the human instrument to the people. Then let them come from our lips in the most perfect manner possible.

ERRORS OF VOLUME AND SPEED

The Lord designs that every minister shall reach perfection in his work, overcoming everything in voice, in attitude, in manner of address, which would lessen his influence. This it is his duty to do. "Be ye therefore perfect," Christ says, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

It is natural for us to expect more from the ministration of the man whose manner of address and tone of voice is attractive than from him whose ways do not please. Two men may handle the same Scriptures and bear a full gospel testimony; one, because he has been careful to overcome his defective pronunciation, because he has learned to control his voice, not allowing it to swell to a high key, may be a most successful worker; the other may have a knowledge of the Word, yet he leaves an impression upon his audience that is not agreeable. He appears excited, and all who hear him wish that he would calm down and talk earnestly, but calmly and unexcitedly.

By talking in a high key, the speaker detracts considerably from his usefulness. There are others who talk so low that their words can scarcely be heard. Another laborer will speak hurriedly, rushing his words one upon another. Half that he says is lost, for the hearer cannot take in the precious words coming from his lips. These are defects which should be overcome.

The habit should be acquired of speaking slowly, yet earnestly and solemnly, with all the assurance which the Word of God can give. Then the hearer gets the benefit of every sentence. Every word is spoken distinctly, and makes its impression upon the minds. Rapid speaking and pitching the voice to a high key is an imperfection which every one should overcome if he would make the most favorable impression when bearing the message from God to the world. Let the Word of God come as a savor of life unto life.

If God's servants will consider this matter rationally, if they will place themselves under the control of sound reason and good judgment, they will see that these errors need not be perpetuated. They will see that such defects can be overcome, and their efforts in the pulpit be of far greater advantage to the hearers, and far less taxing to themselves. Every minister should bear in mind that he is giving to the people the message which God has given him, and that this word involves eternal interests.

TRUTH AT HALF VALUE

Speak the truth in love and in pity for those who turn the truth to fables. Bear in mind the fact that the Lord Jesus is present in your assemblies. He would have you manifest dignity, calmness, and composure of spirit. When you rush one word right upon another, half the power is taken out of your discourse.



This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp 258-260, by Ellen G. White.

BALANCED LIVING, BALANCED TEACHING



It is not easy to maintain balance in a busy life. But, just because it's not easy doesn't mean it's not achievable. Stressful, busy periods of ministering to people may be inevitable and can be manageable in the short-term. But when we don't take steps to keep stress levels under control, we can become victims of long-lasting negative consequences.

No matter how much we enjoy and feel called to do what we do, striking a balance between our work and our physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being is essential. Maintaining stable relationships with friends and family, taking time to engage in fulfilling activities, and taking a break from work (i.e., "coming apart and resting a while") is key to maintaining a quality of life that best serves God, our constituencies, and ourselves.

In a similar way, our approach to health ministry teachings and information should be balanced and reasonable. It is far too easy to become lopsided in our thinking or to hold and cherish an extreme position. Often, we are well-intentioned and "right," but, as mere mortals, we can and do fall prey to deceitfully strong opinions on health reform subjects, especially those related to diet.

As we advocate and practice a balanced lifestyle, so we must practice our health reform position and teaching. Pastors, elders, and health ministry leaders are often confronted by sincere but sometimes misguided brothers and sisters who hold extreme positions. And we, with righteous indignation, may counteract the unbalanced information by moving so far away from it that we end up on the other extreme. It is high time we face the extreme views squarely, but let "our speech be always with grace, seasoned with

salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer everyone" (Col. 4:6, emphasis added).

Ellen G. White is so often misquoted, misrepresented, and even misunderstood that people take extreme positions based on what they *think* she said. Our best course is to investigate well what she has said about contentious matters (such as the use of eggs, milk, butter, cheese, flesh foods, coffee, fruits and vegetables together, chocolate, and the like), giving careful consideration and prayerful thought to everything we can find on the matter in her published writings, now freely available online (egwwritings.org). Knowing what was actually written, we can speak and share from a position of fact rather than conjecture.

We can classify what was given to us by God through Ellen White into three groups of instruction and counsel. The first is what she describes as the ideal or best, the most beneficial, and the most highly desirable. Second is the counsel which considers and recognizes conditions that do not permit the ideal; these are exceptional situations in which there is a reasonable but less-than-ideal solution or the best that one can do in those circumstances. Third is those summarizing or concluding statements about the matter under study. In following this method of classifying God's counsel, we do not overstate, diminish, tarnish, or undermine what may be lifesaving counsel to many, and this will help us avoid becoming extreme in our own views. ED

Zeno L. Charles-Marcel, MD, is Associate Director of Health Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Used with permission from *The Health Connection* (GC Health Ministries Newsletter). Sign up to receive this free newsletter at: <http://healthministries.com/newsletter>.

A GRACIOUS INVITATION

Isaiah 1:2-18

The prophet Isaiah ministered during a turbulent time in Israel's history. The nation had abandoned the way of the Lord and was living in open sin and idolatry. The verses leading up to our text chronicle a scene of rebellion and sin.

- The people were in open rebellion against the Lord (verse 2).
- They refused to acknowledge God and, spiritually, were dumber than the farm animals around them (verse 3).
- They had forsaken the Lord and provoked Him to anger (verse 4).
- They had refused to respond to the Lord's attempts at chastisement (verse 5).
- They were spiritually sick and desperately needed help (verses 5, 6).
- Violence filled the whole land (verses 7, 8).
- In many ways, they had become as vile as Sodom and Gomorrah (verses 9, 10).
- Their religious services were an abomination to the Lord (verses 11-15).
- The only thing that held the nation together was a small remnant of faithful Jews (verse 9).

It sounds as though these events could have been lifted straight from the headlines of today's newspapers. We are in as bad a spiritual shape as was ancient Israel.

These people had been blessed by the Lord in many wonderful ways. Israel should have been seeking God and looking for ways to mend their relationship with Him. Instead, we see the Lord seeking His people and inviting them to make things right with Him.

What we see in this passage are a dirty, vile, wicked people who need to be cleansed. They are approached by the Lord and invited to come to Him for the cleansing they so desperately need. We can also see a principle that is still true today.

I. THE INTENSITY OF THIS INVITATION

A. The word "come" is an imperative, a command. God is reaching out to a wayward, sinful people and calling them back to Him. This is amazing because God knows how they have been living. He knows how they have treated His law. He knows how wicked they have become. Yet, He still loves them and reaches out to them in love, to extend grace and mercy to them if they will repent.

B. The blessing in this verse is the fact that this invitation still stands! God knows all about

the sins in your life and mine. He knows how far down into the cesspool of sin we have sunk. Yet, He loves us in spite of our sinful condition and calls us to come to Him. Listen to the Lord's voice as He calls lost people to come to Him (Rev. 22:17; John 7:37; Matt. 11:28). Have you heeded that invitation?

C. God understood Israel's condition better than they did. They thought they were doing all right. They were playing on both sides of the fence, and they were happy. But God knew that they were in deep trouble, so He reached out to them to call them home. The same is true in our lives as well (Eph. 2:1-3). God, however, knows the true nature of man's condition and has moved to do something about it (Rom. 5:6-8).

II. THE IMMEDIACY OF THIS INVITATION

A. God's command is for them to come "now." There must be no delay! God could see what Israel could not see. He could see where rebellion and sin were leading them. He could see the judgment that was about to fall upon them. He could see their condition and their condemnation!

B. So it is with those who are not right with God today. All they can see is the next step that lies before them. All they can feel is the pleasure of their sins. All they can think about is the here and now. They give no thought to what is waiting for them down the road. If they did, they would see the terrible consequences that their refusal to get right with God will cause their families to suffer.

C. God knows how bad it is going to get. He knows the pain and suffering that is coming. He knows about the judgment that is soon to fall, so He calls the wayward ones to come to Him. He calls them to come now, without delay, for He knows that delay is dangerous.

The time to come to Him is now! Listen to what the Bible says about this matter (Gen. 6:3; Prov. 27:1; 2 Cor. 6:2).

III. THE INTIMACY OF THIS INVITATION

A. The invitation is "Come now, let us reason together." The phrase "let us reason together" is legal terminology. It means "let's settle this matter before a court of law."

However, the phrase "come now" is an invitation for these people to "walk with the Lord." He is not inviting them to a debate. He is not opening the matter up to negotiations. He is inviting them to come to His way of thinking. He is

inviting them to agree with Him (see Amos 3:3). That is grace!

B. God's invitation to follow Him is still an intimate thing! God does not call groups to come to Him; He calls individuals. His call is individual and intimate. When He calls, He always points out the areas of disagreement, and He invites the wayward one to come to a place of agreement with Him.

IV. THE INCREDIBLE INVITATION

A. God's promise to Israel, if they will come to Him, is that all their sins will be washed away. Verse 15 tells us that their hands are stained with blood. They are dirty and unclean in the sight of the Lord. But, if they will just come to Him and heed His invitation, He will cleanse them completely.

The words "scarlet" and "crimson" refer to dye that was extracted both from shellfish and a certain type of insect. When white garments were dyed with these colors, they could never be made white again. Their religious observances would not make them clean. The only hope these people had was to accept the Lord's invitation.

B. This invitation still stands! There is nothing you can do to take away your sins. At best, you and I are dirty and filthy in the sight of the Lord (Isa. 64:6). But He is able to wash us in the precious blood of Jesus and declare us holy and clean (1 Cor. 6:9-11). He is able to cleanse us from all sin (1 John 1:7). That is incredible!

CONCLUSION

What have you done about His invitation? Some of you have heard Jesus calling, and you have answered that call and come back to Him. His promise is secure. It all depends on what you do with the invitation. If He is calling you, then you need to come. Come today and settle your case with God out of court. Get it settled now and never worry about it again!



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

HE KNOWS AND CARES FOR YOU

The world population is over 7 billion people upon the face of the earth. That is an amazing mass of humanity. Now, you may feel that among a number of that size, you are a pretty insignificant person. The Bible reading for today teaches us that He does think about you. In order to approach this subject, it will be necessary to ask and answer three important questions about the Lord's knowledge of your life.

I. HOW WELL DOES GOD REALLY KNOW YOU?

God says, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you." Of course, God was writing to the nation of Israel. They were in captivity in Babylon. God is reminding them that, in spite of their pain and suffering, they are on His mind. He is working out His perfect will in their lives.

A. *God's knowledge of us is individual.* This is a reminder that, of all the people in the world, God has His mind on you. He sees you not as just another member of the vast human race; He sees you as an individual.

B. *God's knowledge of us is intimate* (Matt. 10:29-31). These verses tell us of the value that God places upon His creation. The reality for us is that the Father is so concerned about our lives that He knows the very number of hairs upon our heads. The Lord knows our deepest, darkest secrets; He knows our thoughts, our motives, our plans, and our dreams!

C. *God's knowledge of us is infinite* (Ps. 139:1-19). In this psalm, David tells us that the Lord is everywhere, beholding everything. Even before we came into this world, God was looking upon us and had already determined exactly how we would turn out (verse 16).

D. *God's knowledge of us is instant* (Job 42:2; Ps. 139:4). That is, the knowledge of the Lord in regard to our lives is always before the Lord (Prov. 21:2). In other words, God's eye is constantly upon the affairs of your life (Prov. 15:3). This is an encouragement to me because I know that nothing that happens in my life catches the Lord off guard. He knows about it before it happens (Is. 46:10).

II. WHAT IS REVEALED BY GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF YOU?

Since we can plainly see from the Scriptures that the Lord sees every single detail of our lives, what does this knowledge about us

reveal to the Lord? There are two areas of life that are constantly before the Lord.

A. *God knows about your sins.* God knew all about Israel's sins! There was nothing in their hearts or their lives that He did not know.

B. *God knows about your situation.* God knew everything about the sufferings of Israel. He knew about the wickedness of the Babylonians. He knew about their cruelty. Nothing was hidden from Him!

He knows all that is happening in your life as well! Nothing that has ever come your way has ever taken the Lord by surprise. In fact, He has allowed it to happen for His own purposes and for your good (Rom. 8:28). Often the sufferings and burdens of life are greater than we feel we can bear, but, in the midst of them, we have some pretty spectacular promises:

1. *He knows all about it.* If God knows all about it, then it must be part of His plan for my life. If that is true, I can accept it and trust Him to bring me safely through.

2. *He is there in the midst of it* (Heb. 13:5; Matt. 28:20). There are times when the presence of God can neither be seen nor felt, but He is there nonetheless, protecting, providing, and watching out after His own.

3. *He cares about what we are facing* (1 Pet. 5:7; Heb. 4:15). It may feel like God doesn't care, but in truth, He cares far more than we could ever know.

4. *He has promised grace to bring us through* (2 Cor. 12:9). It may seem that the load is heavier than you can ever bear; however, the Lord has promised to meet the need and to give us grace sufficient for the trial at hand.

5. *He has promised rest in the midst of toil* (Matt. 11:28). Even in the middle of the weary day of trial, the Lord has promised rest to His children if they will come to Him and lay their burdens down.

III. HOW DOES GOD REACT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE OF YOU?

How does God's knowledge of your life and mine cause Him to respond? Consider these three ways that God moves in response to His knowledge of His people.

A. *God reacted toward you in the past.* God moved in Israel's past by choosing them over all the other nations of the earth (Deut. 7:7). He moved by delivering them from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 12-15). He moved by bringing them

through the wilderness and into the Promised Land (Josh. 1:1).

God moved like this in the lives of all His children. God took steps in the past to meet the deepest need we have: our need to be saved. Before there was ever a man to save or a sin from which to save him, God had already provided a means of salvation. The plan then was the same plan we have today (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

B. *God reacts toward you in the present.* From Israel's perspective, it looked as though the Lord had abandoned them. That's how life appears to us at times, isn't it? That is only how life appears! As you go through life, the Lord stands ready and able to help you along the way. You do not have to face the burdens and trials of life alone! God would have you and me to trust Him and to look to Him during the trying times of life (Matt. 6:25-33; Phil. 4:6, 7).

C. *God reacts toward you in His promises.* Israel probably thought the Lord had forgotten about them and about all the promises He had made to their fathers. Our initial text was sent to them to remind them that God has not forgotten. According to our text, the Lord thinks "good" thoughts about His people. His desire is to "give" them an "expected end."

The same is true concerning us. Not a single promise of the Lord will ever fail! He will keep every promise He has ever made. He has a plan for your life. Your duty is to walk in His will (Rom. 12:1, 2).

CONCLUSION

No matter where you are in this world today, no matter what you are facing or what you are going through, there is help and hope in the Lord Jesus today.

You may be walking through the deepest, darkest, longest valley of your life and wondering if the Lord cares or even knows about it. God both knows and cares. Why not bring that need to Him today?



General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

The book of Lamentations is a series of dirges, or songs of mourning, that were written against the backdrop of the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem. In the verses of this book, we can see the awful sufferings endured by the people of that city at the hand of their enemies. Still, even in the midst of all the pain and turmoil, God had His man in Jerusalem to record the events and to bring honor to His name.

The writer of the book of Lamentations is believed to be Jeremiah. He was known as the “weeping prophet.” A study of Jeremiah’s life reveals a portrait of unending sadness and deep depression.

After enduring a life like this; after being rejected, hated, mocked, imprisoned, and ignored; after seeing his beloved Jerusalem ransacked, desecrated, and destroyed; after experiencing the horror of war, the brutality of the enemy, and the pangs of hunger, Jeremiah was still able to stand amid the rubble of the city and the bodies of the dead and lift his voice in praise to God for His great, unfailing faithfulness to His people.

Like Jeremiah, we all go through times when life seems to fall apart at the seams. When these times come, we also need the blessed assurance that God is faithful!

I. GOD IS FAITHFUL IN HIS GRACE (VERSE 22A)

Mercies. This word is translated “loving-kindness” over 30 times in the Old Testament. It is a very expressive word that conveys all the ideas of “love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, goodness, and devotion.” This word pictures God as the divine Lover of men. It finds its New Testament equivalent in the idea of God’s love and grace. Notice a couple of quick thoughts about the amazing grace of God.

A. *His grace saves us.* Only grace could have reached us in our lost, doomed condition (Eph. 2:1-4). We could not get to God, so God came to us!

B. *His grace secures us.* Grace not only sought us out when we were lost in sin; grace keeps us in our saved condition in Christ. We are prone to failure. We are prone to spiritual wandering. Thankfully, salvation is the Lord’s arena and not ours! We are saved by His grace, and we are kept by that same grace (1 Pet. 1:5; Ps. 37:23, 24, 28; John 4:13, 14).

II. GOD IS FAITHFUL IN HIS GIFTS (VERSES 22B, 23)

Compassion. This is a word that literally means “womb.” It means “to be moved in the heart out of love for another.” This word is a picture of the grace of God actively moving in the life of the believer. You see, as we pass through our storms and valleys, we do not do so alone! Notice two thoughts here about the great gifts of God.

A. *God’s gifts are faithful* (verse 23b). God did not promise an easier road, but He promised that His grace would be sufficient for the need (2 Cor. 12:9). Grace is usually defined as “the unmerited love and favor of God toward sinners.” It carries that idea, but this is a word that has come to mean so much more than that. It has come to refer to “the strength of God to face battles and to bear up under times of difficulty.”

As a believer, you’ll never face a situation that God will not give grace to help you make it through. Notice the promise given in Isaiah 43:1, 2.

1. *The gift of His presence* (Heb. 13:5; Matt. 28:20). These verses, along with others, reveal the great truth that God is always present with His children. Even when He cannot be seen, He is there.

2. *The gift of His performance* (Eph. 3:20). Focus on the word “able.” If this verse is to be taken at face value—and I am certain that it is—then it becomes plain that our God is greater, by far, than any problem we have or will ever face.

3. *The gift of His provision* (Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:25-33; Ps. 37:25). These verses teach us the great truth that God is interested in meeting our needs. Are we confident that God will indeed provide for our needs?

4. *The gift of His person* (Heb. 13:8; Mal. 3:6). These verses reveal the truth about God’s nature that makes Him reliable at all times. That is simply the fact that He does not change! God is the same today as He has been forever and the same as He will be forever. He was faithful in the beginning, and He will be faithful in the end.

B. *God’s gifts are fresh* (verse 23a). According to this verse, God’s grace is as fresh as the new day (Matt. 6:34). We do not have to worry about there not being enough for us to make it through, because God’s grace is sufficient for our needs.

III. GOD IS FAITHFUL IN HIS GOODNESS (VERSES 24-26)

The word “good” has the idea of “pleasant, agreeable and excellent.” It refers to the character of God. This word reminds us that God is ever engaged in that which is best in the lives of His children.

A. *He is a satisfier* (verse 24a). God is described as the soul’s “portion.” This word means “share or booty.” It refers to “the spoils of war.” Jeremiah is saying, “In the battle of life, God is my reward, my share, and my portion.” When the Lord is viewed in this light, He will be all that a person needs to be satisfied in his or her soul (Ps. 103:5; 107:9).

B. *He is a sustainer* (verses 24b, 25). God will never fail those who place their trust in Him (Is. 49:23; Rom. 10:11). He will honor every single word of all of His precious promises (Matt. 5:18; Ps. 119:89, 90; Is. 40:8).


C. *He is a Savior* (verse 26). In this context, Jeremiah is saying, “Those who wait upon the Lord will see Him bring them out of their troubles and trials. He will not fail His children, but, in His time, He will deliver them from all their valleys.”

If you will stop trusting yourself, your religion, and your own goodness, and if you will come to God, confessing your sins and calling on Jesus for salvation, God will forgive you and give you the assurance of salvation (Rom. 10:9, 13; Rev. 22:17).

CONCLUSION

Great is the faith that can stand amid the wreckage of life and declare the praises of God. Jeremiah was that kind of a believer. Are you?

As you and I face the battles, burdens, valleys, storms, and trials of life, we must always remember that we are Jesus’ little lambs and that He is able to carry us safely through. So, what kind of battles are you fighting today? Bring them to the Father and trust in His unchanging, unfailing faithfulness.

I hope that you can say, as Jeremiah did, “Great is Thy faithfulness.” Do you need to experience that faithfulness today? 

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTION TO SIN

Various people have various problems. Some people struggle financially, others struggle with health, and some have emotional and mental problems. If we were to open the floor to discussion, we could all share our own sad stories of pain, heartache, suffering, and trouble. While it's true that we all have burdens which vary from person to person, there is one common denominator, and one reality with which we all struggle with day by day: We all must deal with sin!

In these verses, David is dealing with the sin he committed with Bathsheba. He tells us how he handled his sin and how he received cleansing. By the way, this psalm is most likely a companion to Psalm 51. In that psalm, David offers his prayer of confession and repentance. Here, he shares the lessons he learned in dealing with his sin. He is also fulfilling a vow he made to the Lord (Ps. 51:3). Let's look at the lessons David learned and let them teach us.

I. THE PROBLEM OF CONCEALED SIN (VERSES 3, 4)

Unconfessed sin produces problems in three realms of life:

A. The physical realm (verse 3). David tells us that his sin produced problems in his flesh. He says that he became like an old man physically. The sad fact is this: Sin will take a physical toll on the sinner! And I'm not just referring to drunks or drug addicts.

While David's sin was unconfessed, there was something in him that was crying out in distress. There was something that was seeking relief. While he tried to hide his sin, the worry and fear that he would be found out took a physical toll on his body.

B. The spiritual realm (verse 4a). Whether we like to think about it or not, there is a heavy spiritual price to pay for sin in our lives! David says that God's "hand was heavy" upon him. This refers to chastisement! Like it or not, believe it or not, God will chastise His children when they entertain sin in their lives (Prov. 3:11, 12; Rev. 3:19; Heb. 12:5-11). If we refuse to deal with our sins, the Lord will deal with us.

C. The emotional realm (verse 4b). David tells us that he has dried up! Just like the ground after an extended drought, he has dried completely up. What a picture of the believer who has sin in his life! This is a picture of one who has lost his joy! This brings to mind problems in the emotional realm of life! There are many people

today who are suffering emotionally simply because they have unconfessed sin in their lives.

II. THE PATTERN FOR CONFRONTING SIN (VERSE 5)

The pattern for confronting sin in our lives revolves around the word "confess." The way to get sin taken care of is to confess it. What does it mean to confess? The word itself means "to throw down or to cast down." In the New Testament, the word "confess" carries the idea of "agreement." When we confess a sin, we are throwing it down before the Lord and saying the same thing about it that He has said. This verse reveals how confession is to be practiced by a child of God.

In confessing his sins, David used three words to describe the mess he had gotten himself into.

A. Confess the existence of our sins. David says that he "acknowledged" that there was sin in his life. This word means "to know and perceive and to make known to others." Basically, this word teaches us that we must face up to the fact of our own sin, and then we must admit that sin before God!

The first word David used to describe his sin was the word "sins." This refers to man's deviation. The word means "to miss the mark." It is an archery term that refers to an arrow missing the target (Rom. 3:23). Who among us would not admit that we are guilty of missing the mark of God's holiness?

B. Confess the extent of our sins. We need to get honest about the fact that sin has invaded every nook and cranny of our lives! It prevents us from being the servants of God we ought to be. David simply did what always needs to be done with sin: he pulled back the covers and revealed his sin in all of its ugliness and rottenness. David got honest about his sin, and that is what it takes to make things right (Prov. 28:13).

The second word David uses is "transgression." This refers to man's defiance. It means "to step over the boundaries." We commit transgressions when we know something is wrong and do it anyway. It is high-handed sin, and it is open rebellion against God (Isa. 53:6).

C. Confess the error of our sins. The third word used by David is the word "iniquity." This word speaks of man's distortion. This word means "crookedness, or that which is bent." It refers to the natural bent in man toward evil!

Our old sinful nature is always striving to do that which is wrong. This was Paul's problem (Rom. 7:13-25), and it is our problem as well!

III. THE POWER OF CONFESSING SIN (VERSES 1, 2)

What does the Lord say to those who are willing to confess their sins? The first two verses of this chapter answer that question. Notice that David says that the person who has dealt with his sins is "blessed." This word means "happy"! Three blessings come into the life of the one who is honest about his sins and casts them down before the Lord.


A. It brings cleansing. David tells us that those who will confess their sins will experience "forgiveness" and will have their sins "covered." The word "forgiveness" is an interesting word; it means "to lift up and bear away" (1 John 1:9).

B. It brings closeness. Verse 2 speaks of God not "imputing" iniquity to a person. This is an accounting word and means "to account or to reckon." This simply reminds us that when our sins have been taken care of according to God's pattern, He does not hold those sins against us.

C. It brings consecration. Notice that David says the forgiven person has no "guile" in his spirit. That is, there is no more "treachery." There are no more attempts to pull anything over on God. The sinner is honest and, as a result, his whole life grows cleaner and more holy before the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Notice that, by the end of this psalm, David had his shout back! He was able to worship and praise the Lord again. Why? Because he solved his sin problem in the right way.

What you need to do is confess that you are a sinner and acknowledge your need for salvation through Jesus Christ. If you want forgiveness, it is available now. Will you get honest about your sins? Will you solve the sin problem now? 

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

DO CHRISTIANS HAVE TO BE VEGETARIAN?

THE QUESTION OF VEGETARIANISM IN THE BIBLE IS A BIT COMPLEX. THE BIBLE ADDRESSES IT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF CREATION TO RE-CREATION. YET, AT THE SAME TIME, IT ALLOWS FOR HUMANS TO EAT CERTAIN MEATS. THUS, WE CANNOT REQUIRE VEGETARIANISM AS PART OF A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE. BUT LET'S EXAMINE SOME OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE THAT SPEAKS TO YOUR QUESTION.

1. *Vegetarianism in the Bible.* It is well-known that the original diet God gave to humans was vegetarian (Gen. 1:29) and that it remained so after sin entered the world (3:18). This diet was given in the context of God's command to exercise dominion over the animals (1:28), thus setting a limit to humanity's power over the animal kingdom. In the context of the Creation account, the vegetarian diet pointed to the absence of violence and death within the created order and to God's intention to preserve that order. But the diet also revealed God's wisdom and love in providing for humans the type of food that would make it possible for them to work with the Creator in preserving their lives in optimal conditions. Meat was unnecessary to sustain life.

Interestingly, the Bible suggests that, at the end, after the eradication of sin from God's creation, humans will again be vegetarians. This is particularly implied by the prophetic description of the transformation of the animal world and the absence of violence within it: "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isa. 11:9, NIV; see also Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25). The absence of violence in the animal world presupposes its absence among humans.

2. *Restricted meat consumption.* After the global flood, and in the context of the absence of flora, God allowed humans to eat animal flesh (Gen. 9:3). This was based on the divine distinction between clean and unclean animals (Gen. 7:2; Lev. 11). This restrictive use of animal flesh had two main purposes.

First, since it was a dietary law, it identified the flesh of animals that could best contribute to the preservation of human life in a world of sin and death. Second, it served to set limits on human violence against animal life by restricting the consumption

of flesh to a particular number of them. The animals would fear humans and literally run for their lives when seeing one (Gen. 9:2).

The divine ideal of a meat-free diet was not totally forgotten later in the Bible. When Israel was in the wilderness, in need of food, God provided manna. When they insisted on eating meat, the Lord gave them quail, but the result was sickness (Num. 11:4-23, 31-33). According to the Bible, the Lord rarely provided flesh to His people (cf. 1 Kings 17:6). In fact, the Israelites' regular diet was basically vegetarian. Only under special circumstances did they eat meat (e.g., sacrifices, Lev. 3:1-9). Their domestic animals constituted their "bank accounts" and were the source of milk, curds, and cheese (Deut. 32:14; Judges 5:25; 2 Sam. 17:29).

3. *God's ideal for His people.* Adventists have taken seriously the law of clean and unclean animals as representing the minimum the Lord requires from us concerning proper diet. We submit to it in grateful obedience to His will because it expresses His loving interest in our physical and spiritual well-being. By taking proper care of our bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit, we glorify God. Biblical evidence has led Adventists to conclude that vegetarianism is God's ideal for His people. Such an ideal is very relevant in a world that is slowly realizing the tremendous benefits of such a diet.

Vegetarianism is on the rise around the world for a variety of reasons: ethical, ecological, religious, even narcissistic. This may be the proper time to reaffirm that ideal and avoid the use of meat in official meetings of the church (potlucks, workers' meetings, etc.) and, whenever possible, by excluding it from our kitchens.

This I write to you that "you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 2, NIV).



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 garciamarenkoa@gc.adventist.org.

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MUSIC MATTERS >PART 4

THE MATTER OF STYLE



In Part 3 of this series, we established that the musical medium itself is not morally neutral. In fact, the message in the medium is often very powerful. Music itself carries emotional communication. Hence, as Christians, we cannot avoid evaluating that communication as appropriate or inappropriate, even right or wrong in a given context, whether or not it is accompanied by lyrics. However, there is another aspect of musical evaluation that also needs to be considered, and that is the subject of Part 4 in this series of articles.

It is often said by Christians discussing music that musical style is not an issue.¹ This idea is usually strongly argued by those supporting music's moral neutrality.

This view reflects a stance taken in Western musicology over the past several centuries. Since the Enlightenment, when the anti-supernaturalist bias really began to grip Western culture, most disciplines have sought to become independent of metaphysical and religious considerations. This is evident even in the study of the development of musical styles. It has become fashionable to explore and emphasize the influence of environmental, sociological, economic, and even biological factors that may have influenced the development of musical styles. However, the religious influence has been increasingly downplayed, despite general acknowledgment that religion is intimately intertwined with the development of music in every known culture.² But, ethnomusicologists working in non-Western cultures are gradually dragging Western scholars back to some important correctives in their understanding of how a musical style develops.³

Before continuing this topic further, however, we need to define what is meant by "style." Style has been simply described as "a characteristic way of doing something."⁴ Style is a term used almost exclusively to describe human actions or creations. It designates a product of human choices. Clearly, in musical compositions, humans don't create the tones, but the way tones are combined, how they are sounded, and how they are organized in time—are all results of human choice. Hence, these factors become known as characteristics of a particular style.

So, what drives the choices behind the development of style? Why compose this music one way and not another? Paul Tillich once gave succinct utterance to a sweeping truth which sheds light on these questions. He wrote, "Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion."⁵

It is becoming increasingly evident that fundamental beliefs or worldview factors are one of the major determinants of music style. In other words, "that which rules the heart, forms the art."⁶ That is true within a secular culture as much as in an overtly religious culture. Secularism or materialism is still a way of thinking about life; hence, it espouses certain fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality. In any culture, there is an observable human quest for compatibility between fundamental beliefs and the character of the art in that community.

J. H. Kwabena Nketia, describing sacred music in Africa, stated that this was a fundamental principle that appears to underlie the use of music in worship on that continent: namely, that the selection of music used, the control of musical forms and instruments, is in accordance with the conceptualization of the gods or of the individual focus of worship.⁷ Similar substantiation could be cited from various other religions and cultures.⁸

How this happens is well-illustrated in the Islamic context. Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi described how Islamic sacred music style is molded by a significant, fundamental belief: the nonphenomenal and transcendent understanding of divinity. To worship such a deity is to leave the everyday world behind and enter an awe-inspiring realm. Noting this theological emphasis in both Islam and Christianity between 300-800 AD, she observed the following of their music:

"Religious music . . . avoided the emotive, the frivolous, the unfettered responses either to great joy or great sorrow. The limited range and contiguity of notes in Gregorian and Qur'anic chant, the prevalence of stepwise progression, the avoidance of large melodic leaps—all these contributed to this demand. The relaxed tempos, the calm and continuous movement, the rejection of strong accents and changes of intensity or volume were likewise conducive to an attitude of contemplation and departure from worldly involvement. The use of regularly repeated metric units would have tended to arouse associations, kinesthetic movements and emotions incompatible with the notion of religiosity among Muslims and early Christians.

These were therefore avoided. . . . Music contributed little or nothing to dramatic/programmatic content or tone painting imitating the objects, events, ideas, or feelings of this world. Hence, abstract quality has been a marked feature. . . . Formal characteristics accorded with this tendency, making elements of unity and change dependent upon correspondence with poetic units rather than with narrative or descriptive factors.”⁹

She continued by demonstrating that not only structure but also performance practice was belief-driven:

“Performance practice, relying on the human voice, has avoided the secular associations which instruments might bring, as well as the chordal harmonies which could be suggestive of emotional or dramatic effects. Even the use of the human voice or voices . . . has avoided the sensual and imitative in order to enhance the spiritual effect on the listener.”¹⁰

Notice the detailed extent to which musical style is influenced by belief in this case.

As one would expect, emphasis on the inherent conceptualization of deity spawns a very different style of music, including a deliberate rejection of the abstract and the contemplative in favor of a strongly psycho-physiologically stimulating musical expression. Repetitive rhythm is emphasized over melody and harmony. Loud, percussive instrumental playing that promotes group participation and instinctive movement is commonplace. Whereas in the transcendent orientation, meditation or contemplation of the deity’s self-revelation is worship’s goal, in the immanent orientation, possession by the deity is the ultimate desired outcome. Two very different conceptions of the divine engender two very different styles of music because, indeed, whatever or whoever rules the heart, forms the art.¹¹ As Al Faruqi has observed:

“One set of . . . religious beliefs predicates one kind of religious experience and, by extension, a particular notion of suitable religious music. Another set of religious beliefs gives rise to a different kind of religious experience and accordant religious music . . . The examples of religious music are then but reflections and expressions of the complex of religious ideas held in a given culture at a particular time.”¹²

As one begins to explore the intimate connection between worldview and music style, it becomes clear why Tillich suggested that it may be possible to “read styles” with appropriate discernment, to detect which ultimate concerns or worldview factors are driving them.¹³ The development of this thought is beyond the scope of this article. However, the demonstrable relationship between style and belief exposes the superficiality behind the claim that musical styles are neutral and incapable of proclaiming worldview.¹⁴ In fact, the opposite is true. Music styles are value-laden. They are veritable embodiments of beliefs. Stylistic features are brought into existence in a search for a fitting aesthetic expression of deeply held truths about what is real. If this is so, decisions about the appropriateness, even rightness and wrongness, of musical styles, especially for worship contexts, are mandatory, not merely a matter of individual or cultural taste or preference.

Indeed, Titus Burckhardt has a point when he writes: “Granted that spirituality in itself is independent of forms, this in no way implies that it can be expressed and transmitted by any and every sort of form.”¹⁵ He went on to note that “[a] spiritual vision necessarily finds its expression in a particular formal language; if that language is lacking, with the result that a so-called sacred art borrows its form from some kind of profane art, then it can only be because a spiritual vision of things is also lacking.”¹⁶

With the constant borrowing of musical language from various sources that is so often evident in contemporary Christianity, one wonders what the spiritual vision is that drives today’s Christian musical expressions. It would seem that a major opportunity for unique aesthetic witness to the Christian worldview is being lost.

Christians have a moral responsibility to seek not only fitting lyrics for their songs but a musical style that legitimately expresses their understanding of God and of life. Clearly, the evidence indicates that the issues surrounding sacred music style discussions extend far deeper than petty likes and dislikes. The bottom line is that, because of the inherent link between style and worldview, the clash over sacred music styles is really a clash of underlying beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality, not just inconsequential aesthetic preferences. Perhaps that’s why discussions about music won’t go away, because people intuitively sense a deeper substratum to these discussions even if they can’t verbalize what it is.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude about all this? I would suggest at least three points:

1. To seriously espouse the idea that music is a morally neutral medium may be understandable from a secular viewpoint, or if one believes that human creativity is untouched by the Fall. However, if one believes in a moral universe lovingly and purposefully created but infected by sin to the extent that a terrible distortion has marred (though not totally obliterated) God’s image in humankind, one is committed to both appreciating the evidences of good in our world and also recognizing and distinguishing the evidences of evil. The creative or artistic element (so closely tied to the very core of human nature) cannot be considered immune from sin’s distortions. The answer is not to espouse moral neutrality in this domain but to thoughtfully and prayerfully work out ways of facilitating discernment.

2. While individual letters in an alphabet may be neutral, as they are combined together into words, phrases, and sentences, they take on meaning that can be evaluated as refined and decent, crude and rude, reverent and respectful, or blasphemous, appropriate, inappropriate, right, wrong, and so on because of the ideas they encapsulate. In the same way, while individual tones may be neutral in themselves, they never appear in isolation. In music, they are always presented in conjunction with other tones, played with certain accents, in cer-

tain rhythmic formations, and sounded on certain instruments. The ability to understand more precisely the vocabulary and syntax of music's emotional communication is beginning to emerge. Hence, evaluations of calm and peaceful or angry and aggressive, bold and reassuring or fearful and apprehensive, appropriate and inappropriate, right or wrong are increasingly possible. If accurate matching and assessment of music is possible in movie production, it is surprising, even ludicrous, to suggest that it is impossible in the worship setting.

3. As evidence mounts that styles of music are actually artistic embodiments of significant worldview factors in the belief systems of individuals and cultural communities, the implications for moral evaluation become even more imperative for Christians. Taste and preference cannot be the arbiter of appropriate/inappropriate musical styles. However, evaluations cannot be made simplistically or superficially. There are good reasons why the music of Voodoo or Islamic worship cannot be mindlessly transferred into the Christian setting. Similarly, there are reasons why Gregorian chant or the latest rap, as done in their original settings, cannot be whimsically switched into Seventh-day Adventist worship. Styles of music are, in fact, value-laden, and, for this reason alone, evaluation needs to take place. While a start has been made, much more study is required to provide increased discernment in "reading" styles of music and making accurate assessments. But, clearly, this task is not an optional endeavor. The evidence already gathered makes it imperative.

"Thinking about music," although sadly neglected, as Krehbiel suggested (see Part 2 of this series), is a very important task and one that will be rewarded with great insights into one of God's noblest gifts to humankind. It may also open a way for Christians to develop a unique and more consistent aesthetic witness to the worldview they hold. Regrettably, at present, Christians tend to be followers and copiers rather than leaders in the arts, especially in music.

However, this leaves us with an anomaly. Christianity claims a life-enhancing and life-changing message for the spiritual, mental, physical, social, and emotional facets of humanity. But, what distinctive aesthetic witness to a lost world is being given in Christian musical communication? It is often claimed that, if it exists at all, it is in the lyrics, not in the music. Sadly, the message is often perpetrated that, in God's kingdom, we do the musical component the same as the world does it, only with Christian musicians. I believe that the evidence outlined in this series indicates that this is neither a valid nor tenable proposition.

Risieri Frondizi posed a significant and worthwhile challenge when he wrote: "The essence of the moral reformer and of the creator in the field of the arts lies in not adjusting to the predominant norms, or tastes, but unfurling the flag of what 'ought to be' over and above people's preferences."¹⁷

This is the twenty-first century's challenge to all dedicated, Christian musicians, but it's not just an artistic task. It is an objective for any Christian who wants to be a genuine disciple

and present a consistent witness in any area of lifestyle. But, given our endtime mission and the wholistic emphasis in our message, perhaps Seventh-day Adventists have even more reason than most to think about and take on that challenge in the musical arena and let it bear fruit.



¹ See, for example, Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 58-59; and Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 26.

² See, for example, Bruno Nettl, "The Role of Music in Culture: Iran, A Recently Developed Nation," in *Contemporary Music and Music Cultures*, by Charles Hamm, Bruno Nettl, and Ronald Byrnside (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 98-99; and Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 159, 165.

³ Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, "Muwashshah: A Vocal Form in Islamic Culture," in *Ethnomusicology* 19 (January 1975): 1; and Donna Marie Wulff, "On Practicing Religiously: Music as Sacred in India," in *Sacred Sound: Music in Religious Thought and Practice*, ed., Joyce Irwin (Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies, vol. 50, Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 149.

⁴ Robert L. Scranton, *Aesthetic Aspects of Ancient Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 28.

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 42.

⁶ This aphorism was developed during the writing of the author's doctoral dissertation. It is not really a new idea. It is simply a rewording of the biblical principle from Proverbs 23:7 ("As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," KJV) and Luke 6:45 ("Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," KJV).

⁷ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *African Gods and Music* (Legon, Ghana: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1970), 11, 12.

⁸ See, for example, Bruno Bettelheim quoted in Robert L. Scranton, *Aesthetic Aspects of Ancient Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 2; Erik Routley, *The Church and Music*, rev. ed., (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1950), 14; Ravi Shankar quoted in Donna Marie Wulff, "On Practicing Religiously: Music as Sacred in India," 153; Komla Amoaku, "Towards a Definition of Traditional African Music," in *More than Drumming*, ed., Irene V. Jackson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 37; Francesco Gabrieli, "Literary Tendencies" in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed., Gustave E. von Grunebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 87.

⁹ Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, "What Makes 'Religious Music' Religious?" in *Sacred Sound: Music in Religious Thought and Practice*, ed., Joyce Irwin (Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies, vol. 50, Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 28.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The implications of this transcendent/immanent contrast are profound for the Christian setting and are discussed in detail in the writer's doctoral dissertation, "The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style: An Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich, 1993), 218-270.

¹² Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, "What Makes 'Religious Music' Religious?" 27.

¹³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951), 40.

¹⁴ See, for example, Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 42, and Nick Matziske, "What Would Jesus Think of Today's Music?" in *The Edge*, Issue 16 (Record Supplement, March 4, 2000), 5.

¹⁵ Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, trans. Lord Northbourne (London: Perennial Books, 1967), 7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Risieri Frondizi, *What is Value? An Introduction to Axiology*, 2nd ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing, 1971), 29.

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ATTENDING CHURCH

Today, more and more people are just concerned about their own wellbeing without caring much about society, family, or other groups of people. This may also influence Christians and their relation to the church. On the other hand, people like to meet in clubs, pubs, at sporting events, etc. because humans are sociable beings. But is it necessary to attend church?

I. JESUS AND HIS CHURCH

- At the time of Jesus, Jews met every Sabbath in the synagogue for worship (Acts 15:21). It was Jesus' custom to go to "church" regularly on Sabbath (Luke 4:18).

- Jesus established the church. The church is a group of believers who follows Jesus, believes what Jesus believed, and does things together (Matt. 16:18).

- Christians are also called His "flock." This term implies that Jesus' disciples are not only isolated believers but form a group that meets, listens to God's Word, prays, proclaims the gospel, etc. Without meeting, sharing a common message, and being involved in a common task, there is no "flock" or church (John 10:16).

- Sometimes the local congregations may be small, but where two or three are assembled in the name of Jesus, He has promised to be with them (Matt. 18:20).

Jesus emphasized the ordinance of footwashing (John 13:14, 15), instituted the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19, 20), and gave the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). All of this requires a church and believers who meet regularly—particularly on Sabbaths—to worship God and serve humanity.

II. THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

- After Jesus' ascension to heaven, the believers met in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15).

- While together, they experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1).

- Those who accepted the gospel were baptized and added to the church. Baptism involves living with the community and family of Christ—His church (Acts 2:41; 5:14).

- They enjoyed regular fellowship (Acts 2:42, 46).

- While Peter was imprisoned, the church was praying for him and a miracle occurred (Acts 12:5).

III. PAUL AND THE CHURCH

- Paul went to the synagogue on Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42).

- On Sabbath, Paul and his companions were looking for an outdoor gathering place for communal prayer. (Acts 16:13).

- It was Paul's custom to attend worship services on Sabbath (Acts 17:2).

- This was also an opportunity to discuss and teach Christian beliefs (Acts 18:4).

- The Bible contains a clear admonition to meet together. Christians cannot be people who live in isolation, unless they find themselves in a place with no other believers. To meet is necessary in order to encourage, comfort, and strengthen each other; learn from each other; be more and more grounded in the Lord and His message; and be prepared to do what He calls His disciples to do (Heb. 10:25).

IV. CHRISTIANS MEETING OVER THE CENTURIES

Church history reveals that over the centuries Christians maintained that they needed to meet on a regular basis. Even when persecuted, Christians did not give up assembling for worship and other purposes. They may have fled to other places (Acts 8:1, 4). The Waldenses moved to remote places in the Alps; others went underground. Christians, Adventists among them, met regularly.

It was very well understood that it is not optional to form a fellowship of believers in order to meet as a church.


V. ADVENTISTS AND THEIR MEETINGS

Adventists meet on the biblical Sabbath to study and worship. They believe it is necessary to have a Bible study session in which believers and guests can learn, share their experiences, ask questions, make meaningful comments, and prepare for their ministry. Jesus opened the Scriptures on Sabbath morning and shared. Paul taught and discussed the gospel with people on the Sabbath.

In addition, the Adventist Church devotes time to hearing God's message preached in a sermon, singing and praying to the Lord, thanking Him for His guidance, and bringing tithes and offerings.

However, the life of the church is not totally expressed by meetings on Sabbath. There are other meetings and activities on other days of the week. Some churches have official prayer meetings, meetings for Pathfinders and youth, meetings for women and men, social meetings, etc. In addition, larger churches may have small groups that meet for Bible study and prayer during the week and for various other purposes. To join them can be very beneficial.

CONCLUSION

A Christian in deliberate isolation is an oxymoron. Believers in Jesus Christ form His church. They refrain from thinking just about themselves. They form a larger community—a fellowship and family that lives for the common good, shares the wonderful gospel entrusted to it, and reaches out to those having all kinds of needs. 

Ekkehardt Mueller is an 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.

LOCAL FM STATION IN SPAIN REACHES RELIGIOUS LEADER

Not long ago, I received a phone call from a listener in León, Spain. This province is a Catholic stronghold, known as the land of blood and fire because of its intolerance of Protestantism.

The call was from a 57-year-old Pentecostal pastor, who had spent 40 years as a preacher in León. He was obviously excited. He had been listening to our local *Radio Adventista FM* for two years, but on this day something strange had happened.

The Holy Spirit heavily impressed on his mind the importance of the topic being presented. In a burst of emotion, the caller said, “This message should be on every radio and television around the world; everyone should know of the things happening right now!”

After he calmed down a bit, I asked him what the topic was, or at least a clue so I could identify the specific program he felt was so important. It turned out to be a broadcast of the *Seventh Trumpet*, a program we air regularly where current trends in the religious and political worlds are discussed.

The caller asked if he could receive a copy of *Camino a*

Cristo (Steps to Christ), saying this book had made a profound impact on his life. He also shared that that very week he would be speaking to his congregation on the chapter of the book titled “The Most Urgent Need of the Human Being.” I quickly sent this dear brother 50 copies of *Camino a Cristo* and a CD with the audio of all of the topics, so he could share it with his members.

Before ending the call, the man said, “I am already a Seventh-day Adventist. I share all the doctrines and beliefs with my church!”

We can draw a couple of important points from this story. One, God has His faithful and courageous representatives even in places where it is not easy to share the gospel, and two, the prophetic message is not outdated—people all over are intently watching the developments in these latter days, and are asking questions.

Yes, the study of the books of Daniel and Revelation is relevant and will be so until the end of time. ED

Dowell Chow is a retired Adventist World Radio president.

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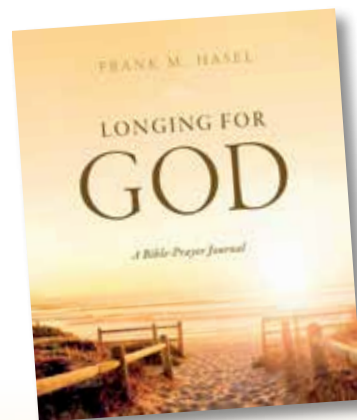
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LONGING FOR GOD:

A PRAYER AND BIBLE JOURNAL¹



Good books are rarely written in times of pleasure; most are written under pressure. This book emerged at a time in my life where I was facing tremendous pressures and challenges due to the unexpected death of my wife. She had breast cancer and died in 2009 at the age of 44, less than one year after the cancer was detected. For her, death was a release from suffering. For us, it was—and still is—a very harsh loss. Coping with a significant loss like this while working full-time and caring for my three sons (11, 16, and 19 years old at the time) was not easy!

Suffering, pain, and the experience of significant loss through death poses some of the most acute temptations of faith. The doubt that suffering initiates even has the potential to destroy our faith. All of a sudden, general responses and traditional answers make no sense.

Where do you turn for hope when your world crumbles under your feet? When I had to face this harsh reality in my own life, I started to practice the very things I mention in my book, and this helped me to stay spiritually sane and even joyful. It also helped me to remember where God had answered prayer and blessed me. This book is an exciting exercise against spiritual forgetfulness.

What distinguishes this book is its clear focus on God and the Bible as foundational to our spiritual relationship with Jesus. Besides the Bible, any spiritual growth should have prayer at its foundation. This double focus on Scripture and prayer is the strength of this book. It includes a brief introduction on how to read the Bible for all it's worth and how to mark your Bible so that you make yourself familiar with the Scriptures. You can even give it to someone who is not familiar with the Bible. It makes a wonderful gift for baptisms, weddings, birthdays, neighbors, and colleagues, and it will foster spiritual renewal in the church.

- For every day of the year, there is a suggested Bible passage from the Old Testament and the New Testament along with space to jot down your insights and discoveries. Within one year, if you follow the suggested reading plan, you will have read through the entire Bible. Of course, you can go at a slower pace if that is your preference.

For every day of the year, there is also room for prayer requests and prayer notes. And on every other page throughout the book, there are inspirational quotes on the Bible and prayer.

- At the end of every month, there is a short section on prayer, where 12 practical suggestions are given to invigorate your prayer life. Here I touch on different aspects: how to praise

God, how to develop an attitude of gratitude, how to pray with the words of Scripture in a meaningful way for others, and how to encourage others. I also talk about some difficult things: what to do when your prayers are not answered, how to get rid of bitterness and grudges in your life, and prayer and fasting.

The helpful suggestions on prayer are intended to be spiritual impulses rather than rigid prescriptions. They have been tried and tested in my own life and will open up new horizons for your own spiritual time with God.



¹ Frank M. Hasel, *Longing for God: A Prayer and Bible Journal* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017).

Frank M. Hasel is a General Conference associate director of the Biblical Research Institute.

The book *Longing for God* has several features that make it unique and set it apart from other journals:

- It focuses deliberately on God and His Word as the foundation of our relationship with Jesus and our spiritual life.
- *Longing for God* is not just empty pages for journaling. At the end of every month, 12 times throughout the year, there are very practical suggestions that will invigorate your prayer life and spiritual walk. These are intended to be spiritual impulses rather than rigid prescriptions. They will inspire you to try out new things in your relationship with God and in your prayers. You will love it, and you will be blessed.
- You will learn how to meaningfully pray for yourself, for your children, for other people, for missionaries, for your neighbors, etc., as well as learn how to pray with a prayer-partner or spouse.
- Some chapters deal with tough questions, such as: What happens when we pray and wait for answers? How do we get rid of bitter feelings and grudges? How do you pray and fast?
- You'll also find inspirational quotes about the Bible and prayer sprinkled throughout the book. At the end of the book, there are suggestions for special prayer emphases for each day of the week.
- *Longing for God* is written in such a way that it can be a blessing even to those who are not familiar with the Bible or who are new believers.
- It is highly practical and easy to use and has an appealing layout and design.

Longing for God is available now at your Adventist Book Center. Why not use this powerful, inspiring book that will help you put your prayer life on a whole new foundation?

INTRODUCING NEW MUSIC IN WORSHIP SERVICES:

HOW TO AVOID CONTROVERSY

PART 1

Thomas Synes was a New England Puritan pastor anxious to promote literacy in his congregation through the new practice of singing from musical notation. In 1723, he wrote this parody of the objections he encountered:

“It’s too new, worldly, even blasphemous. The new Christian music is not as pleasant as the more established style. Because there are so many songs, you can’t learn them all. There is too much emphasis on instrumental music rather than on godly lyrics. This new music creates disturbances, making people act indecently and disorderly. The preceding generation got along without it. It’s a money-making scheme. Some of these new music upstarts are lewd and loose.”¹

Sadly, change in church music selections and performance can create division in a congregation. Here are some hints to help avoid stirring up controversy as new songs are introduced.

1. *Don’t neglect the great hymns of the past.* The Christian community draws strength from a sense of continuity with the past. God has done mighty things as the God of salvation in history; these hymns keep that awareness alive.

2. *Don’t introduce large amounts of new material in a short time.* When presenting new songs, present them to the congregation in a familiar instrumental style. In other words, “Do the new in an old way, and do the old in a new way.”² Use PowerPoint technology. Consider, for a moment, some of the advantages. Musically speaking, it is better for singers to have their heads lifted up rather than buried in a hymnal. Further, congregants are more unified with each other and with music leaders when they are focused on the same point in the sanctuary.

3. *Start new songs that are reminiscent of the familiar hymn style.* Plan for musical variety in their presentation but be aware that “new” music enjoys no immunity to boredom. Tell the story behind the song. Remember to observe copyright laws.³

4. *Be aware that style reflects culture.* It may surprise you to learn that “frequently folk songs and dance melodies were

used for the religious texts.”⁴ For instance, the tune “Amazing Grace” used to be a plantation song, and the music for “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” was a cantata written by Mendelssohn in praise of Gutenberg’s printing press; the music was later united with Charles Wesley’s lyric to become a Christmas carol. For his hymns, Martin Luther chose tunes with which people were familiar. He later saw the incongruity of using tunes on Sunday mornings that were sung in the pubs on Saturday night! However, he added this rejoinder: “Nor am I of the opinion that the gospel should destroy all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them.”⁵

In the end, related to “taste” in church music, Donald Hustad observed that “someone will argue that one’s personal alabaster box is another’s mess of potage. . . . Like the biblical counterparts, one is costly self-indulgence and the other is sacrificial worship.”⁶ Certainly, the ultimate criterion for our choices in church music should be that which would “uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the soul.”⁷

Leaders of worship need to preserve the best of the church’s past musical heritage and foster an openness to discover the best of the present and the future. If choices are wise and the musical offerings beautiful, the souls of the worshipers should be moved.

¹ Leslie Flynn, *Worship: Together We Worship*, 75.

² _____

³ See: Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc., 6130 NE 78th Court, Suite C-11, Portland, OR 97218-2853.

⁴ *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*.

⁵ *Luther’s Works*, 53:316.

⁶ _____

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Education*, 167.

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HYMNS OF GRATITUDE

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH by Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835-1917)

Picture yourself standing at the top of a hill in the city of Bath, Somerset, England. It is late spring, and violets and primroses are in full bloom. At your feet, the Avon River winds its way into the distance. You rest and survey the beauty of the scene. It is the perfect place to meditate. This is the setting that led Pierpoint to write the hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth." With thoughts filled with the manifold gifts of life, his pen quickly summarized these musings leading to this hymn written for a Communion service. It consisted of 8 stanzas, was entitled "The Sacrifice of Praise," and first published in 1864. Besides the beauties of God's creation, the content of these verses also included his social blessings—friends and home, as well as the spiritual blessings as represented by the Church—God's chosen agency for accomplishing His divine purposes in the world.

Pierpoint, was born in Bath, educated in a grammar school, and graduated from Cambridge University with a Bachelor's degree in 1857. He taught classics at Sommersetshire College and later moved to South Devon and did occasional teaching. He published 3 volumes of poems and wrote several hymns. The tune was composed by Conrad Kocher who founded a School of Sacred Song in Stuttgart, Germany, and reformed German church music by creating four-part singing. The hymn is a musical prayer to the One who is the source of every blessing.

LET ALL THINGS NOW LIVING by Katherine K. Davis (1892-1980)

This hymn, a two-part anthem and favorite of church choirs everywhere was written by Katherine Kennicott Davis who was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, USA. She earned her B.A. degree from Wellesley College in Massachusetts and did graduate study in music composition, theory, and piano. She taught at her alma mater for 8 years and went into full-time work as a composer, editor, and arranger. Her most famous text is "The Little Drummer Boy," 1941. Her published works number more than 800, for which she received an honorary doctorate from Stetson University in Florida, USA.

The tune, named THE ASH GROVE is a Welsh melody "that uses the separate notes of the three major chords almost in arpeggio form," making it enjoyable to sing. The source of the tune is from a *Book of National Songs*. The present arrangement in four-part harmony is by Wayne Hooper, a song leader for H.M.S. Richards as well as a member of the King's Heralds.

The song is a lament of a lover for his sweetheart who "sleeps 'neath the green turf down by the ash grove" hence the tune title. However, the tune is far from melancholic, rather, the lilting melody triumphantly sweeps us into "a song of thanksgiving to God the Creator."

NOW, THANK WE ALL OUR GOD by Martin Rinkhart (1586-1649)

It is ironical that a hymn of thanksgiving could be born out of a religious war and a plague that reduced the German population from 16 to 6 million in 30 years!

The author of this hymn, Martin Rinkhart, studied for ministry at the University of Leipzig, taught at the Eisleben secondary school in 1610, conducted choirs, and was called at the age of 31 to pastor the state Lutheran church of Eilenberg, his hometown. His arrival coincided with the beginning of the 30 Years War, a horrendous conflict between warring Catholic and Protestant forces from various European countries.


Eilenberg was a walled city and gave asylum to political and military fugitives. It soon became overcrowded. Food shortages and disease quickly followed. The plague of 1647 came into the walled city, took the life of two residents and two refugee clergymen, including Rinkhart's wife, leaving him alone to minister to the dying and conducting up to 40 burials a day.

This hymn was sung in all the churches as a hymn of thanksgiving for the end of the war. It was titled "The Chorus of God's Thankful Children," was included in Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio *Hymn of Praise* in 1840, and stands as a remarkable statement of faith.

FOR ALL THE SAINTS by William Walsam How (1823-1897)

William How wrote the text of this hymn (originally 11 verses) in 1864 for use in the Anglican church liturgy commemorating All Saints Day. It first appeared in a book compiled by "A Layman," Horatio Nelson, who was the grandson of the brother of Lord Nelson of Trafalgar fame. It was originally titled "Saints Day Hymn-Cloud of Witnesses-Hebrews 12:1."

Of course the "witnesses" refers to the heroes of faith mentioned by the apostle Paul in Hebrews 11, together with their spiritual descendants who have proclaimed, witnessed, and died for the Christian faith.

The tune was composed in 1906 by Ralph Vaughan Williams who is credited with 25 choral orchestral works including "Festival Te Deum" written for the coronation of King George VI and performed at Westminster Abbey, England, in 1937. "For All the Saints" is considered one of the greatest tunes of the twentieth century and combined with the text is a call for all Christians to emulate the noble example of those who paid the ultimate price for their faithfulness. 

STATEMENT ON TRANSGENDERISM

The increasing awareness of the needs and challenges that transgender men and women experience and the rise of transgender issues to social prominence worldwide raise important questions not only for those affected by the transgender phenomenon but also for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While the struggles and challenges of those identifying as transgender people have some elements in common with the struggles of all human beings, we recognize the uniqueness of their situation and the limitation of our knowledge in specific instances. Yet, we believe that Scripture provides principles for guidance and counsel to transgender people and the Church, transcending human conventions and culture.

THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON

In modern society, gender identity typically denotes “the public (and usually legally recognized) lived role as boy or girl, man or woman,” while sex refers “to the biological indicators of male and female.”¹ Gender identification usually aligns with a person’s biological sex at birth. However, misalignment may happen at the physical and/or mental-emotional levels.

On the physical level ambiguity in genitalia may result from anatomical and physiological abnormalities so that it cannot be clearly established whether a child is male or female. This ambiguity of anatomical sexual differentiation is often called hermaphroditism or intersexualism.²

On the mental-emotional level misalignment occurs with transgender people whose sexual anatomy is clearly male or female but who identify with the opposite gender of their biological sex. They may describe themselves as being trapped in a wrong body. Transgenderism, formerly clinically diagnosed as “gender identity disorder” and now termed “gender dysphoria,” may be understood as a general term to describe the variety of ways individuals interpret and express their gender identity differently from those who determine gender on the basis of biological sex.³ “Gender dysphoria is manifested in a variety of ways, including strong desires to be treated as the other gender or to be rid of one’s sex characteristics, or a strong conviction that one has feelings and reactions typical of the other gender.”⁴

Due to contemporary trends to reject the biblical gender binary (male and female) and replace it with a growing spectrum of gender types, certain choices triggered by the transgender condition have come to be regarded as normal and accepted in contemporary culture. However, the desire to change or live as a person of another gender may result in biblically inappropriate lifestyle choices. Gender dysphoria may, for instance, result in cross-dressing,⁵ sex reassignment surgery, and the desire to have a marital relationship with a person of the same biological sex. On the other hand, transgender people may suffer silently, living a celibate life or being married to a spouse of the opposite sex.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO SEXUALITY AND THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON

As the transgender phenomenon must be evaluated by Scripture, the following biblical principles and teachings may help the community of faith relate to people affected by gender dysphoria in a biblical and Christ-like way:

1. God created humanity as two persons who are respectively identified as male and female in terms of gender. The Bible inextricably ties gender to biological sex (Gen. 1:27; 2:22-24) and does not make a distinction between the two. The Word of God affirms complementarity as well as clear distinctions between male and female in creation. The Genesis creation account is foundational to all questions of human sexuality.

2. From a biblical perspective, the human being is a psychosomatic unity. For example, Scripture repeatedly calls the entire human being a soul (Gen. 2:7; Jer. 13:17; 52:28-30; Ezek. 18:4; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 15:45), a body (Eph. 5:28; Rom 12:1-2; Rev. 18:13), flesh (1 Pet. 1:24), and spirit (2 Tim 4:22; 1 John 4:1-3). Thus, the Bible does not endorse dualism in the sense of a separation between one’s body and one’s sense of sexuality. In addition, an immortal part of humans is not envisioned in Scripture because God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim. 6:14-16) and will bestow it on those who believe in Him at the first resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51-54). Thus, a human being is also meant to be an undivided sexual entity, and sexual identity cannot be independent from one’s body. According to Scripture, our gender identity, as designed by God, is determined by our biological sex at birth (Gen. 1:27; 5:1, 2; Ps. 139:13, 14; Mark 10:6).

3. Scripture acknowledges, however, that due to the Fall (Gen. 3:6-19) the whole human being—that is, our mental, physical, and spiritual faculties—are affected by sin (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9; 7:14-23; 8:20-23; Gal. 5:17) and need to be renewed by God (Rom. 12:2). Our emotions, feelings, and perceptions are not fully reliable indicators of God’s designs, ideals, and truth (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). We need guidance from God through Scripture to determine what is in our best interest and live according to His will (2 Tim. 3:16).

4. The fact that some individuals claim a gender identity incompatible with their biological sex reveals a serious dichotomy. This brokenness or distress, whether felt or not, is an expression of the damaging effects of sin on humans and may have a variety of causes. Although gender dysphoria is not intrinsically sinful, it may result in sinful choices. It is another indicator that, on a personal level, humans are involved in the great controversy.

5. As long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to the biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Bible clearly and consistently identifies any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage as sin (Matt. 5:28, 31, 32; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Heb. 13:4). Alternative sexual lifestyles are sinful distortions of God's good gift of sexuality (Rom 1:21-28; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10).


6. Because the Bible regards humans as wholistic entities and does not differentiate between biological sex and gender identity, the Church strongly cautions transgender people against sex reassignment surgery and against marriage, if they have undergone such a procedure. From the biblical wholistic viewpoint of human nature, a full transition from one gender to another and the attainment of an integrated sexual identity cannot be expected in the case of sex reassignment surgery.

7. The Bible commands followers of Christ to love everyone. Created in the image of God, they must be treated with dignity and respect. This includes transgender people. Acts of ridicule, abuse, or bullying towards transgender people are incompatible with the biblical commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

8. The Church as the community of Jesus Christ is meant to be a refuge and place of hope, care, and understanding to all who are perplexed, suffering, struggling, and lonely, for "a bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench" (Matt. 12:20). All people are invited to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church and enjoy the fellowship of its believers. Those who are members can fully participate in church life as long as they embrace the message, mission, and values of the Church.

9. The Bible proclaims the good news that sexual sins committed by heterosexuals, homosexuals, transgender people, or oth-

ers can be forgiven, and lives can be transformed through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

10. Those who experience incongruity between their biological sex and gender identity are encouraged to follow biblical principles in dealing with their distress. They are invited to reflect on God's original plan of purity and sexual fidelity. Belonging to God, all are called to honor Him with their bodies and their lifestyle choices (1 Cor. 6:19). With all believers, transgender people are encouraged to wait on God and are offered the fullness of divine compassion, peace, and grace in anticipation of Christ's soon return when all true followers of Christ will be completely restored to God's ideal. 

¹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (DSM-5™), edited by the American Psychiatric Association (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 451.

² Those born with ambiguous genitalia may or may not benefit from corrective surgical treatment.

³ See DSM-5™, 451-459.

⁴ This sentence is part of a succinct summary of gender dysphoria provided to introduce DSM-5™ that was published in 2013: www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/APA_DSM-5-GenderDysphoria.pdf (accessed April 11, 2017).

⁵ Cross-dressing, also referred to as transvestite behavior, is prohibited in Deuteronomy 22:5.

This Appeal was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Spring Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA, April 12, 2007.

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A close-up photograph of two hands, one from a darker-skinned person and one from a lighter-skinned person, gently cupping a glowing, ethereal heart. The heart is a bright, warm white color with a soft, hazy glow around it, set against a background of warm, golden-brown tones. The hands are positioned as if they are holding the heart together, symbolizing love, care, and forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS: WHAT IT IS

What is forgiveness? What exactly do we do when we forgive? What are the stages of forgiveness?

Webster defines forgiveness this way: “to give up resentment of or claim to requital, to grant relief from payment of, and to cease to feel resentment against (an offender).”

I have defined forgiveness as giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me. It is impossible to live on this fallen planet without getting hurt, offended, misunderstood, lied to, and rejected. However, learning how to respond properly by forgiving, being healed, and looking at the offender through God’s eyes and wishing him or her well is one of the basics of the Christian life.

The apostle Paul defines forgiveness as follows: God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, no longer holding people’s misdeeds against them (2 Cor. 5:19, REB).¹ The word “misdeeds” can be translated as offenses or harmful acts for which the perpetrators are obligated to atone.² But, in this case, it was God in Christ who atoned for them and reconciled the world to Himself. Forgiveness was His decision to relinquish His claim of retribution and judgment on us and to declare us righteous. That is what we need to do for others.

When we forgive, we are to wipe the slate clean, to pardon, to cancel a debt. It is important to remember that forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves to be forgiven; instead, forgiveness is an act of love, mercy, and grace.

How we act toward the offender may change. It doesn’t mean we will put ourselves back into a harmful situation or that we suddenly accept or approve the person’s continued wrong behavior. It simply means we release this person from the wrong he or she committed against us. We forgive

the offender because God forgave us (Eph. 4:31, 32; Rom. 5:8).

There are three stages to forgiveness.

1. *The first stage of forgiveness is to surrender our right to get even.* It is a decision not to inflict a reciprocal amount of pain on everyone who has caused hurt. “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone” (1 Thess. 5:15). When I forgive you, I give up the right to hurt you back. I set you free from the prison I have placed you in within my mind. By the same token, we discover that we are set free from the prison of pain and grudges we have created for ourselves.³

Joseph was treated very badly by his brothers and sold into slavery, ending up in jail. Then he became second in command to the pharaoh in Egypt. He was in a position to get even with his brothers, but he chose to forgive them (Gen. 50:15-21; see also Gen. 45:1-28).

2. *The next stage of forgiveness is accepting the humanity of the person who has wronged us.* This involves a new way of seeing and feeling. What happens when we are deeply hurt is that we equate the totality of the person with the wrong he or she has done. Instead of seeing this person as a human being, we look at him or her as the scum of the world.⁴

When we forgive others, we begin to see more clearly. We do not ignore the hurts, but we see beyond them. We rediscover the humanity of the one who hurt us. “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16). The one who hurt us is no longer just an uncollected debt of pain. He or she is lonely or hurting or weak or near-sighted—just as I am. He or she is also a bearer of the image of God—just as I am.

In the eyes of the church, Saul was a persecutor to be feared. After his conversion, God used Ananias to change the perspective of the church to see Saul/Paul as a chosen vessel for the Gentiles (Acts 9:10-19).

3. *The third stage of forgiving is when we revise our feelings and start wishing the offender well and to hope good things for him or her.* You can hear someone say a kind word about this person without inwardly screaming for rebuttal time. You genuinely hope that things are well between the offender and God, and that all of his or her relationships are healthy. Of course, this does not happen all at once. And it usually doesn't happen once-and-for-all; you will have some backsliding, some moments when you would like to hear that this person has gone through unexpected pain or trouble. However, the trajectory of your heart is headed in the right direction. When you start praying for good things for someone who hurt you badly, you can pretty much know that the Great Forgiver has been working in your heart.⁵

Even though Jesus was treated badly and crucified, He prayed for His enemies (Luke 23:34; see also Matt. 5:43-48). When we forgive, we walk in step with the forgiving God.

FINAL THOUGHT

We will forgive to the extent that we appreciate how much we have been forgiven. The best incentive to forgiveness is to remember how much God has already forgiven you. Think

of how many sins He has covered for you. Think of the punishment you deserved that did not happen because of God's grace. Jesus said, "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Your willingness to forgive is in direct proportion to your remembrance of how much you have been forgiven.

Mark Twain said it this way: "Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet gives to the heel that has crushed it." You are never more like Jesus than when you forgive. You will never be set free until you forgive. Go ahead and release the burden of unforgiven offenses, and you will be set free. EO

¹ This is the *Revised English Bible*.

² Leroy T. Howe, *Guilt: Helping God's People Find Healing and Forgiveness*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 99.

³ Lewis B. Smedes, *The Art of Forgiving*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 3-12.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ R. T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness*, (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House—A Strang Company, 2002), 174-177.

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iFOLLOW BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

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“WHO IS JESUS? AND
WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?”

“Who is Jesus? And what is a Christian?” the woman asked the two missionaries visiting with her. They are working in the 10/40 window—one of the least reached regions of the world, to tell people about Jesus. Their goal is to start a group of believers in a district that is entrenched in local traditions. After the missionaries patiently taught the woman about the loving creator God who saved her from her sins, she gladly embraced Him as her Savior.

But the woman's husband didn't like her new faith. He hit her and grabbed her Bible. The woman prayed that God would soften her husband's heart. Though he is still strong in his traditional beliefs, he no longer stands in the way of her worship of God.

Please give generously on Sabbath, July 14 to help support mission work such as this around the world. If your church is not collecting the World Mission offering on July 14, you can still write in “World Mission Offering” on your tithe envelope or visit Giving.AdventistMission.org.



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