



MINISTRY[®]

INTERNATIONAL

JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

JULY 2011

Prophetic Preaching

AN INTERVIEW WITH
HYVETH WILLIAMS



MOVING MINDS UPWARD

HOLISTIC EDUCATION PAYS OFF

To help children learn better, we may need to expand our idea of education. Often the focus is the classroom, textbook choices and teaching techniques. Of course these are important. But for optimum academic achievement children's minds appear to need far more than school days filled with reading, writing and arithmetic.

The latest evidence comes from the *CognitiveGenesis* study, a four-year look at the Seventh-day Adventist school system—the second largest Christian school system in the world. More than 50,000 students in North America took standardized tests of thinking ability and academic achievement. Scores were compared to national averages.

Among other factors, higher academic achievement was found among students who had healthy relationships with parents, read for fun outside of school, took music lessons, had a positive spiritual outlook, cared for their health and spent time doing family chores. The evidence is in. A commitment to educate the mind, body and spirit pay off in higher academic achievement for students.

COGNITIVEGENESIS.ORG

Key Findings:

- Students in the Adventist school system had higher achievement in all subjects—math, reading, language arts, social studies and science.
- They achieved higher than predicted based on individual ability scores.
- They did even better the longer they were enrolled in the private school system.



06 Prophetic preaching: An interview with Hyveth Williams

What does it mean to be a prophetic preacher?

Derek Morris

10 The Spirit in your life: conditions for endowment (part 1 of 2)

How does the Spirit manifest Himself in the believer?

Ron E. M. Clouzet

13 Loving your enemy: A biblical alternative to revenge

Jesus told us to love our enemies, but how do we do that?

J. Carl Laney

16 How can I live without having all the answers?

Both theology and science have unanswered questions—and some, perhaps, are unanswerable.

Gary Burdick

20 The foundation of genuine community (part 1 of 2)

What category would your reaction to persons of a different culture fall under?

David Penno

24 A House of Prayer Experience (H.o.P.E.) for all people: How your midweek prayer service can be transformed

Seven strategies for reviving your midweek prayer service.

Sabine Vatel

CORRECTION: The three figures were reversed in the May 2011 lead article by Bonita Joyner Shields. The "Reflecting/Observing" box on the left should be on the right, and the "Active/Doing" box on the right should be on the left. We apologize for the confusion this may have caused.

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04 LETTERS

05 EDITORIAL

21 REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

28 DATELINE

29 RESOURCES

30 THE PASTOR AND HEALTH

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MAY WE ENCOURAGE PASTORS AND MEMBERS ALIKE TO READ REGULARLY, EVEN SETTING A TIME FRAME FOR COMPLETION, BUT ALL THE TIME EMPHASIZING QUALITY OVER QUANTITY.

Bible reading plan

In reflecting upon Derek Morris's editorial ("Daily Bread"—May 2011), I am all for a Bible reading plan. The only way we can become familiar with the Bible is to take time to read all of it. But why in one year? How many times have well-meaning saints at the beginning of a new year begun the task of all 1,189 chapters in 365 days and find themselves come to December 25 and discover they are only on 2 Kings? (I am raising my hand.) Or, they may accomplish it, but can't recall anything outstanding about it that comes to mind because they pursued quantity rather than quality? (I confess a second hand raising here.)

I can appreciate M'Cheyne's first and third cautions to the Bible-in-one-year reader that says, "Beware of lifeless formalism, where you are reading the Bible just to fulfill a religious obligation. . . . Beware of careless reading." The problem, as I see it, is that a trip through the Bible for most readers today is an exercise that leads towards both becoming precisely what is warned against because there is so much material to

get through in a year. You fall behind a couple of days and you are quickly snowed under.

In my personal devotions, I have taken a course of two years through the Bible. I just concluded my first exercise this past December. In that two year trip, I challenge myself to read the New Testament (NT) in six months. Thus, I get through the entire Bible once and the entire NT five times. It was enriching. The best part: when I fell behind I didn't panic. I was able to catch up; plus it is at a pace that, indeed, I could take time to absorb, not just accumulate.

May we encourage pastors and members alike to read regularly, even setting a time frame for completion, but all the time emphasizing quality over quantity. Regardless of how long it takes, the point is to get quality time with God's Word, to nurture a quality relationship with its Author.

—Kevin R. James, Decatur, Georgia, United States

Kudos for excellent articles

I am a retired Adventist pastor who has been receiving *Ministry* for

more than 50 years. The March 2011 issue was perhaps the most inspirational that I have ever read. By March 3 I had already read it from cover to cover. I thought Bryan Ball's article, "The Immortality of the Soul: Could Christianity Survive Without It?" (part 1 of 2), was terrific as was also George E. Rice's, " 'My God, My God!' On the Mystery of the Incarnation," and Carl P. Cosaert's, "A Broken Commandment or an Affirmation of Hope?"

God bless you all for the great job you are doing.

—Len Bierlein, Damascus, Oregon, United States

I want to thank you for publishing both parts of Bryan W. Ball's series "The Immortality of the Soul: Could Christianity Survive Without It?" (March, May 2011). I would certainly love to see more such articles in *Ministry* in the future. It had a creative title, was well researched and documented, and thoroughly demonstrated that Adventist theology stands on the shoulders of some great giants. And I could not tell from this piece if the author was a Seventh-day Adventist or not—which is fine with me.

—Jason Belyeu, email ✉



The pastor's prophetic voice

As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1).^{*} This bold declaration was issued by Elijah to King Ahab, but was not as bold as the Mount Carmel experience (1 Kings 18:17–40). As a result, he received a death threat (1 Kings 19:1, 2).

" ' "This is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness...." ' " (Jer. 36:30, 31). Jeremiah also did not refrain later from prophesying against King Zedekiah and the people (Jer. 37:17; 38:2, 3)—leading to Jeremiah being persecuted (Jer. 38:4–6).

Their experience is not unique. Indeed, theirs represents the essence of prophetic preaching. They did not engage in feel-good sermons; instead, they preached what God gave to them—not considering the potential repercussions they could face. Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and so many others recognized the seriousness of the times and uttered the judgment messages the Lord wanted them to present.

Do such prophets exist today?

This month's lead article features an interview with Hyveth Williams, a professor of preaching at Andrews University. She calls for preachers to exercise the authority that God invests in them both locally and nationally. And no doubt exists in my mind that there are many such pastors who lovingly proclaim the

high expectations of God. God, however, in these last days, seeks yet more men and women who will exclaim His Word—regardless of the possible ramifications of doing so.

But why do some pastors fear exercising their prophetic voice? Perhaps some preachers, because of their desire to be loved by their congregations, refrain from saying things that may be controversial or offensive (*offensive* in the sense that viewpoints, although biblically solid, challenge long-held cherished beliefs of the hearers). Or perhaps in this era of megachurches, since the largest, fastest-growing churches don't tend to feature bold prophetic sermons, preaching like the prophets of old has become politically incorrect and hurtful to the church growth movement to which God calls us. Perhaps the focus on grace, necessary as it is, presumes the absence of corrective discourse. Or maybe there's just too steep a political price to pay for "ruffling feathers."

Revival and reformation

Just as Bible prophets preached a judgment message, our mission today includes lovingly proclaiming God's just judgment as found in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12. The goal of our prophetic preaching is renewal and restoration, not doom and destruction—as also was the desire of Elijah and Jeremiah (1 Kings 18:37; Jer. 29:10, 11).


Could it be that a renewed emphasis on prophetic preaching is needed today in order to effect revival and reformation? Could it be that God calls pastors, professors, administrators, chaplains, and other ministers to heed His command, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy

voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1, KJV)? The church needs to experience true godliness on both the personal and corporate levels. Should not men and women of God speak with a prophetic voice as they are led by the Holy Spirit?

Sin—whether it is adultery (often publicized) or pride (often hidden under the guise of good works and ministerial pursuits)—is still sin. These the minister must address, as well as so many other ills that plague the world around us (sexism, racism, classism, to name just a few. And each of the aforementioned has institutional as well as personal elements.).

Prophetic preaching and the kingdom

When God's preachers employ the prophetic voice He has given them and when His people live the truths of Holy Scripture, we find ourselves longing more and more for the day when " 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever' " (Rev. 11:15). A true prophetic ministry, rightly employed, demonstrates our deep desire to hasten the Parousia, the consummation of the Blessed Hope, so we can go home to live in eternal peace with our God.

How about it? The time is now more than ever to "preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). God bless our prophetic voices! 

^{*} Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture is from the NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®.

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Prophetic preaching: An interview with Hyveth Williams



Editor's note: Hyveth Williams brings a rich history of pastoral ministry and homiletic excellence to this interview. She currently serves as professor of preaching, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Derek Morris (DM): *In recent years there has been a growing interest in prophetic preaching. Let's start with a definition.*

Hyveth Williams (HW): Prophetic preaching is a biblically based form of proclamation in which the preacher exercises the divine authority to be a spokesperson for God invested in them. When I speak of *authority*, I mean that which Jesus had. It caused "the crowds to be amazed at His teaching for He was teaching

them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (see Matt. 7:28, 29). While power is a natural derivative of authority, exercising it out of self-will is always dangerous and oppressive. But when power comes from the divine gift of authority, it becomes liberating and redemptive.

DM: Isn't that what is supposed to happen in all anointed biblical preaching? What makes prophetic preaching unique?

HW: Yes, all biblical preachers are to exercise this authority, but prophetic preaching speaks up for God's justice in a way that is different and relevant to the needs or plight of hearers. Prophetic preaching critically challenges the status quo. Prophetic preachers are not preoccupied with being politically correct. Unlike so-called "patriot pastors,"¹ prophetic preachers are willing to confront injustice in the nation as well as in their local communities with divine authority. Jesus gave it to His disciples (Luke 9:1, 2). Listeners can identify this in the delivery of messages because the messenger displays the holy boldness of a lion's heart empowered by the Holy Spirit. I take my cue to preach prophetically from Ellen White who addressed the controversial issue of racism in a powerful prophetic sermon delivered on March 21,

1891, to a group of General Conference leaders.

DM: Can you share something with us from that sermon?

HW: Of course. She said: "There has been much perplexity as to how our laborers in the South shall deal with the 'color line.' It has been a question to some how far to concede to the prevailing prejudice against the colored people. The Lord has given us light concerning all such matters. There are principles laid down in His Word that should guide us in dealing with these perplexing questions. The Lord Jesus came to our world to save men and women of all nationalities. He died just as much for the colored people as for the white race."² Believe me, she rankled the brethren and paid a price for her forthrightness.

DM: That is what Leonora Tubbs Tisdale talks about in her book *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, when she says, "Prophetic preaching is counter cultural and challenges the status quo."³

HW: Exactly. Prophetic preaching not only challenges the status quo but offers theological and biblical insights into the current human situation from an individual's enslavement to sin to current cries

for freedom echoed around the world in massive protests. It provides divinely orchestrated strategies on how to move out of despair with determination and hope.

DM: Tisdale also asserts that “Prophetic preaching is concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order and is often more

it becomes the root of corporate evil. For example, there’s a definite connection between adultery and corporate corruption because a person who is unfaithful to a spouse will more likely be deceptive in their dealings in the marketplace. Prophetic preachers need to speak clearly and powerfully about where we have gone wrong, personally,

to them and can be loved by all. Recently, I was studying the passage in 2 Timothy 2:15 where the apostle Paul encourages the young preacher Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (NKJV). The Greek word *spoudazo* (diligent), also translated as “study,”



Photo: ANN

PROPHETIC PREACHING CRITICALLY CHALLENGES THE STATUS QUO.

focused on corporate and public issues than on individual and personal concerns.”⁴ So how does prophetic preaching connect with the life of the individual hearer and does not simply address broad social concerns?

HW: Corporate sin is intimately connected to personal transgression. In fact, corporate sin begins in the head of an individual long before it gets into the system to pollute or pervert it. That’s why it’s important to confront individual sin before

and then show how to get back on track with God both individually and corporately.

DM: Share with us some specific steps in the preparation of a prophetic sermon.

HW: The first step is to study and integrate the Word of God into one’s mind and soul. This precedes any specific sermon preparation because the prophetic preacher must speak of a God who is known personally

means “to be very active,” implying more than being acquainted with information but possessing the noble trait which distinguishes productive servants of God.

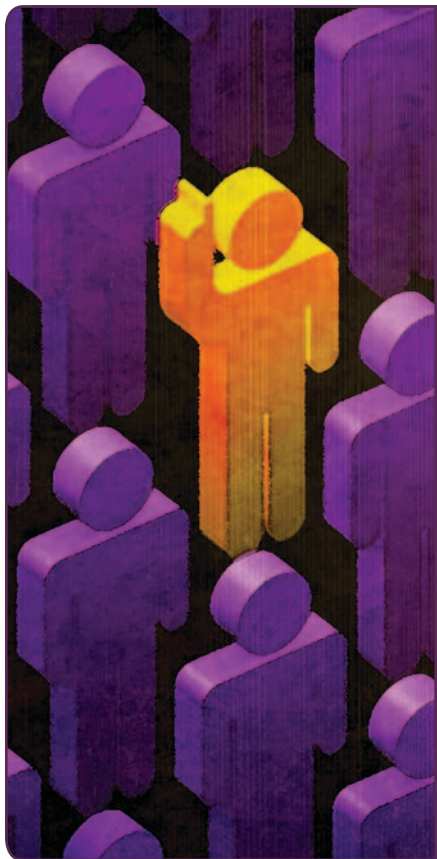
DM: So the first step is to be filled with the Word of God, not just theoretically but in an active life-changing way. What’s the second step in prophetic preaching?

HW: The prophetic preacher needs to carefully examine the present

cultural, social, or religious situation and then put that situation into a theological and biblical perspective. This is accomplished by asking some pertinent questions: Where have the people gone wrong? How have they turned away from God's ideal? What role did their leaders play in this error? In 2006, Dr. Calvin Butts of Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York,⁵ preached a sermon at Oakwood

DM: So prophetic preaching goes beyond simply pointing out what is wrong either with the social order or in individual lives. Tisdale notes, "Prophetic preaching requires the preacher to name both what is not of God in the world (criticizing) and the new reality God will bring to pass in the future (energizing)."⁷ Talk to us about proclaiming that new reality.

illustration that I share with my students. If you come across a house that is on fire and you see a mother and children trapped inside, would you stand outside and say to yourself, "Maybe I should call the fire department"? No! You would shout out with authority and spring into action no matter what the personal cost might be. The world is on fire, morally if not spiritually. It's time for prophetic



THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO RECLAIM THE GIFT OF PROPHETIC PREACHING. WE NEED TO STEP FORWARD INTO THE MARKETPLACE AND DECLARE, "THUS SAITH THE LORD" SO THAT PEOPLE WILL ONCE AGAIN STOP IN THEIR TRACKS AND LISTEN TO WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY.

University entitled "Of Towers and Lights."⁶ He compared the falling of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. He showed how the activity of leaders had destroyed honor and diminished beauty. He noted that the language of the financial community had become confused. Then he spoke a word from the Lord, calling people to reinstate the language of holiness in all of their activities. That sermon was a wonderful example of prophetic preaching.

HW: We have a special message to proclaim in these last days of earth's history. God created our human family to live with Him eternally. We have turned away from God's ideal, but God has made a plan for us to be restored to fellowship with Him. Rather than to simply inform, prophetic preaching aims to redeem and transform, to bring people back to a saving relationship with God. We don't have much time to return. That is why prophetic preaching has a sense of urgency. Here is an

preachers to step up and warn earth's inhabitants how to escape before the final conflagration and show them where to find refuge in Jesus Christ, before He comes again.

DM: What appeals to you personally about prophetic preaching?

HW: The Bible says that Jesus taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22, NKJV). Prophetic preaching appeals to me because it challenges me—in

fact, it challenges all of us—to speak with authority. Jesus said to His disciples, “‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’” (Matt. 28:18, NKJV), and then He gave His disciples authority to “‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’” (Matt. 28:19). Many preachers seem to have lost that authority. Many preachers look more like entertainers rather than Spirit-filled leaders who speak with authority. A few generations ago, people looked up to preachers, viewing them as important figures of authority. Today, we are ignored and presented in the media largely as caricatures or greedy sycophants. The time has come for us to reclaim the gift of prophetic preaching. We need to step forward into the marketplace and declare, “Thus saith the Lord” so that people will once again stop in their tracks and listen to what we have to say. Then they will have no option but to respond to the One who called us to declare righteousness and speak boldly against sin.

DM: Let’s talk about the personal life of the prophetic preacher. An individual in Scripture, who comes to mind as an example of a powerful prophetic preacher, is John the Baptist. He confronted the evils of his day and called people to repent and turn to God and His ideal for their lives. He also lived with such holiness that some even wondered if he was the Messiah. How important is the personal example of the prophetic preacher in giving credibility to the message that is proclaimed?

HW: Not everyone called to preach prophetically will be a John the Baptist of whom Jesus Himself said, “‘Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!’” (Matt. 11:11, NASB). However, a consistent personal witness by the prophetic preacher is essential. I can also say, from

personal experience, that God chooses some of the most unlikely, even broken, vessels to be His prophetic preachers, but they must demonstrate a personal surrender to Christ as Savior and Lord. This means that when they are tempted to compromise a little in some area, they don’t, and this means that when they speak a word, there aren’t members of their family sitting in the congregation saying, “Oh, you should see this person at home.” And this means they are consistently truthful to the high calling God has placed on their lives.


DM: When you look at prophetic preachers both in the Scriptures and in history, it seems that there is a price to pay when you confront a culture that has departed from God’s ideal.

HW: You’re right. Many of those who spoke for God ended up being stoned, imprisoned, mocked, tortured, and crucified (Heb. 11). That’s even true in our day. A twentieth century prophetic preacher who comes to mind is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Others who have paid the price are unsung heroes and heroines whose identities we will not know until Jesus comes. On one occasion Ellen White also said, as any true prophetic preacher would: “I know that which I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, for the conflict has seemed to be continuous of late years; but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. I must follow in my Master’s footsteps.”⁸ These are my sentiments also. Some people will isolate you and say, “Don’t listen to that crazy preacher!” But Jesus said, “‘Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you’” (Matt. 5:11, 12, NKJV).

DM: It’s certainly important to remember that we’re not taking this path as prophetic preachers because it’s the smooth road or the popular path. What books would you recommend for pastors who want to learn more about prophetic preaching?

HW: You have already mentioned the excellent book by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*. That’s one of the best volumes that I’ve read on prophetic preaching. There is also a little volume by Marvin McMickle titled *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?*⁹ Some other helpful books include *Voicing the Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching* by Linda L. Clader¹⁰ and *Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann.¹¹

DM: What words of encouragement would you give to a preacher who is impacted by this interview but feels afraid of what the personal cost might be?

HW: I would say, “Praise God that you don’t feel adequate for the task.” The one who is not scared is the one who scares me. Run from the preacher who is self-confident and self-promoting. That person is a false prophet. When you sense the awesomeness of the task of prophetic preaching, you have something in common with great prophetic preachers like Jeremiah and Isaiah, who trembled in the presence of God but went forward to preach anyway, depending wholly on the power of God. 

1 Marvin A. McMickle, *Where Have All The Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006).

2 Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), 9.

3 Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 10.

4 Ibid.

5 <http://www.abysinnian.org/about-us/pastors-bio/>.

6 <http://www.videosurf.com/video/of-towers-and-lights-buttis-calvin-61656480>.

7 Ibid.

8 White, 11.

9 (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006).

10 (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2003).

11 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

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The Spirit in your life: conditions for endowment (part 1 of 2)¹

As a young man, I attended a charismatic church service on the outskirts of town. Being raised in a conservative Protestant denomination, I suspected the experience would be quite different than my usual fare, but I was ready for a new adventure.

The service was very loud and free-flowing. It looked disorderly to me, bordering on the sacrilegious. I reminded myself I was there to observe and learn, and not criticize. Folks all over the small sanctuary prayed fervently for the Holy Spirit. Some stood, some walked excitedly about, some sat, and some laid on the floor. Some spoke in other tongues. The worship leader was the loudest, while moving from one person to another placing one hand on them, or striking them gently, while holding the Bible with the other. Eventually, quiet resumed, we sang a song, and I left with many questions in my mind.

Years later, I had the opportunity to do serious personal and academic study on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There is a great hunger in the Christian world for the reception and power of the Spirit. Today, the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is in its third wave, or stage,² and has over 600 million adherents worldwide. In barely a century it has grown at a faster rate than even the early New Testament

church. Practically 90 percent of the growth of the Christian church in the Third World today is found in charismatic or Pentecostal churches.

A number of important questions arise in respect to the charismatic movement, such as when does the Spirit come, or how does He manifest Himself in the believer? But the question I would like to consider is this: *What are the conditions found in the Bible for the reception of the Spirit?* Although the list may vary in number, I have found seven significant conditions in the New Testament—four of which we will discuss in this issue.

Repentance

"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37, 38).³

Repentance is first because without it, no other conditions would matter, even if thoroughly met. The word in biblical usage implies "a radical, moral turn of the whole person from sin and to God."⁴ This is not simply changing our minds about the direction we are going, a common understanding by many Christians, but a radical departure

from who we are and what we do. It is not the eight-year-old boy kneeling with his mother before going to bed, praying, "And forgive me for all my sins," without a notion of what they are. The context from Peter's sermon is clear: they needed to repent from the act of rejecting and crucifying the Savior (vv. 22, 23)! This is repentance from unbelief in what Jesus is capable of doing for us, the reason for Jesus' preaching: " 'Repent and believe in the gospel' " (Mark 1:15). The repentance alluded here means a total taking in of who we are in view of who Jesus is, of His long-suffering towards us, and His great love in spite of our great sin.

The Bible tells us what will produce repentance leading to life: exposure to God's character of love and goodness. "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). This is why it is simply imperative that we look for Jesus every day. We must sit at His feet and contemplate His love and goodness toward us. This and only this will bring about genuine repentance, the kind leading a person to surrender all. The kind that makes you give up yourself in the arms of God, knowing full well you deserve nothing of what He did for you. You are then absolutely reduced to nothing before such love.

A number of years ago, while teaching at a Christian university, I went to my office very early in the morning to do some research. My eyes casually stumbled on a paragraph from a well-known nineteenth-century classic on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*. It spoke of Jesus' sacrifice *for me*. It spoke of Christ being brutally abused *for me*: His head, His hands, His feet. It articulated the "unutterable anguish" that filled Christ's soul at "the hiding of His Father's face" because of *my sin*. And then, in a crescendo of painful reality, it pointed its literary finger at me: "It is for thee that the

teacher for years. I had grown up in the church, constantly exposed to the work of Christ on behalf of sinners. I led hundreds of people to the foot of the cross. I had read that passage a number of times before. But that morning, the windows of heaven opened with a flood of light on God's grace I did not suspect coming. On that floor I stayed for the better part of an hour, weeping for having caused His death on my behalf, for living so long without fully appreciating what God had done for me, for wantonly sinning without taking a care of what sin does to Him. How could the God of heaven,

the store should be open at that time. But her faith in that belief can only become trust once she gets in her car and drives there. The driving proves her trust. She is doing something about it.

In the Bible, faith is always trust, never mere intellectual assent. When my daughter was three years old, we were walking on a trail and I decided to put her up on a tree stump as high as my shoulders. Then, I said with my arms forward, "Stefani, put your arms out, don't look behind you, and fall back without bending your knees, and Daddy will catch you!" She did it without a moment's

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Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt; for thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise."⁵

I could not finish reading it. I started weeping right then and there. I tried to finish reading the paragraph but I could no longer see. My eyes turned into rivers of pain, sorrow, mixed with relief. I dropped to my knees, reduced to a violent heaving that would not stop. I cried aloud, "Why, Lord, why would You love *me* so much? Who am I that You would give Yourself up for *me*?" I cried and cried that morning, until my tears ran dry. The love of my Savior, my Master and Lord, was presented to me in a way I had never fully grasped before. I had been a pastor and Bible

the King of kings and Lord of lords, the One to whom we owe *everything*, from our every breath to eternal life, yield His life, His all, *for me*!

As you would expect, my surrender to such love was nigh inevitable. My repentance ran deep because the love of God was deeply perceived. The Spirit of God invaded my heart that morning in ways hard to forget.

Implicit trust

"We would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14).

There is a difference between belief and trust. While trust is moving forward based on certain convictions, belief is simply intellectual assent. Someone may need to go to Wal-Mart at midnight, and believes

hesitation. She liked it so much she kept climbing back up the stump to do it again! That is trust.

Trust is a condition for the reception of God's Spirit in our lives. So often people look for signs and wonders, for something powerful and supernatural that would indicate the Spirit has finally arrived. But we are to trust God that He will send the Spirit because He has promised, not because we feel something. Christians must remember that what defines their walk is faith, not sensory experience. It is holding on to what God says even when unable to perceive any external evidence of the fact.

Oswald Chambers, author of *My Utmost for His Highest*, was a tutor

in philosophy when he heard F. B. Meyer speak about the Holy Spirit. From that night on, he earnestly sought for the better part of four years the outpouring of the Spirit in his life. However, he felt frustrated because nothing extraordinary was happening. "I was getting very desperate," he wrote, "I knew no one who had what I wanted." Until one day, while reading Luke 11:13, he determined "to take God at His Word," and then and there claimed the gift of the Spirit for himself.⁶

We receive the Spirit by faith, without the need to wait for any supernatural manifestation. So, as you meet the various conditions pointed out in Scripture, claim the promise of the Spirit in your life. Thank Jesus for giving you His Spirit, and for heaven's willingness that you be filled to overflowing with His love, His power, and His grace. Then, get up from your knees, telling yourself that this day, the Spirit of Jesus is in control of your life, not because you feel it, but because He said so.

Obedience

"And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

In the Bible, faith and obedience go hand in hand. If you love God with all your heart, you will obey His commands because you trust Him. If you obey Jesus from your heart, this happens because you have come to know Him enough that you trust Him. "If anyone loves Me," said Jesus, "he will keep My word" (John 14:23). "But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:5, 6).

This obedience is not Pharisaic legalism—obedience in order to be saved or be blessed. This obedience comes from the heart, as a genuine desire to please God, to make His day.

Dwight L. Moody was converted in Chicago as a late teen, and led the largest Sunday School in the nation for many years. He was an excellent businessman, and had made considerable money over the years. But now his struggle was whether or not to give *all* to the Lord. On a trip to Ireland, he heard British evangelist Henry Varley say, "The world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and through, and in, and by, the man who is fully consecrated to Him." Moody thought for just a moment, and then pledged: "By the grace of God, I will be that man." He became the most effective American evangelist of the last half of the nineteenth century.


The Holy Spirit will be given to those who obey Him.

A burden to share

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13).

In Luke 11 we find a fascinating story containing additional conditions for the reception of the Spirit. One morning the disciples found Jesus praying. They must have heard Him pray aloud because they were deeply impressed. Even though they had known to pray for some time, to them it was as if they had never learned how, so they asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Christ obliged them, and then illustrated the seriousness and intensity of the task with a story. A man arrives at his friend's at midnight. His host, having no bread, asks the neighbor for three loaves. The neighbor refused because the hour is late, "the door ha[d] already been shut," and his children were in bed (v. 7). However, the man persisted in his request, and kept knocking. The man's bold and persistent petitioning originated from his desire to satisfy the hunger of his traveling friend. The persistence finally paid off, and the man got his bread.

This may be an excellent gauge to evaluate our desire to be filled with the Spirit. Why do we want Him in our lives? Some want the Spirit to *feel* something wonderful, otherworldly, in their lives. Some wish the gift of the Spirit to become spiritual giants of some sort. But it is not until we ask for the Spirit in order to be a blessing to others that God will respond to us. If we have little interest in the salvation of others, if we have no burden for them to know our Savior and grow in Him, the coming of the Spirit in our lives will not make any sense. The Holy Spirit is all about leading people to Jesus. How could we have the Spirit while ignoring others' greatest of all needs?

Evan Roberts, the man God used as a catalyst to start the great Welsh Revival of 1904, expressed such a burden this way: "I was filled with compassion for those who must bend at the judgment, and I wept . . . the salvation of the human soul was solemnly impressed upon me. I felt ablaze with a desire to go through the length and breadth of Wales to tell of the Savior, and had it been possible, I was willing to pay God for doing so."⁷ If we have such a burden for the lost, the Lord of glory will give of Himself without measure to those who ask. 

1 First of a two-part series, adapted from the author's book: *Adventism's Greatest Need: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2011).

2 The First Wave began with the birth of modern Pentecostalism, when Agnes Ozman, a student at Charles Fox Parham's Bible School, spoke in tongues as the result of an earnest schoolwide search for the Holy Spirit. The Second Wave—or neo-Charismatic movement—began with Dennis Bennett, an Episcopalian minister who started speaking in tongues, in early 1960. This so-called neo-Charismatic movement impacted many mainline Protestant and some Catholic churches. The Third Wave began sometime in the 1980s, as evangelical churches sought supernatural manifestation of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues, miracles, and gifts of healing.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages in this article are from the New American Standard Bible, updated edition.

4 William D. Mounce, ed., "Repent, Repentance," in *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 580, 581.

5 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 754, 755.

6 V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960, 1984), 33, 34.

7 Cited in Brian H. Edwards, *Revival! A People Saturated With God* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1997), 152.

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Loving your enemy: A biblical alternative to revenge

A deadly problem is evident in society today. When someone hurts or threatens us, we want to retaliate with words or actions. Even a pastor who had been slighted told me he knew how to “get even.”

Is there an alternative to the “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” mentality that contributes to a never-ending stream of violence around the world?

One of the most difficult teachings of Jesus, both to understand and to apply, is His alternative to getting even: “ ‘But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ ” (Matt. 5:44).¹ To appreciate our Lord’s command, let us consider the context of His saying, the command itself, the call implied, and the practical steps involved.

The context of the teaching

The admonition, “love your enemies,” appears in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). Here Jesus presents an alternative to the most common and frequent manner of dealing with one’s enemies. You will find the contrast evident in His words: “ ‘You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you ...’ ” (Matt. 5:43, 44).

During the time of Jesus, some sectors of Judaism held an animosity against people they did not like, such

as the Samaritans, Romans, and Gentiles. Such an animosity created a relational rule of its own: “ ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’ ” (Matt. 5:43). Jesus corrected this and reminded them of the law that said, “ ‘Love your neighbor’ ” (Lev. 19:18), and reiterated this as His new commandment: “ ‘Love one another’ ” (John 13:34).

What about the words, “hate your enemy”? This command cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. But some people thought that if you loved your neighbor, the opposite feelings were appropriate for an enemy because the Old Testament law of retaliation (Lev. 24:19–21) seemed to sanction “getting even.” Josephus, the first century Jewish historian reports that the Essenes, a contemporary Jewish sect, had to swear to “hate the unjust.”² Jesus was clearly distancing Himself from such thinking.

The command of Jesus

Jesus took the command “love your neighbor” to a new level when He said, “Love your enemies; return good for evil.”

Fred is not exactly my friend. He appeared one morning in my Bible study class with an angry attitude and critical questions. He left before class was over, slamming the door behind him. He was back for the evening service where he repeated

this routine. For the next month or so, Fred was in and out of church, criticizing, condemning, feeling offended, and seeking apologies from pastors and parishioners alike.

It was easy for me to dislike Fred. He was a threat, a disruption to my ministry. The Greek word for “enemy” is *echthros*; literally, it means “hated [one].”³ An enemy is “hated” because of hostility and threat they bring into your life.

How was I to respond to Fred and others like him?

Jesus’ answer is simple but profound, “Replace your hatred with love.” In so saying, Jesus took reconciliation a step further: “Treat your enemy as your beloved friend.”

Fred passed out of my life as suddenly as he had appeared. But during the weeks that he invaded my comfort zone, God helped me show him kindness and compassion as a fellow human being whom God regards as precious.

The call to reflect the image of God

God has made us in His image (Gen. 1:26, 27) and called us to display God-likeness in the way we relate to our enemies. Jesus commanded, “ ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good,

and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' " (Matt. 5:44, 45). These words suggest that when we love our enemies, we reflect the character of God. When we treat both our friends *and* enemies with grace and kindness, we are behaving much like our heavenly Father who is no respecter of persons when bestowing His blessings of sunshine and rain.

"perfect" refers to a complete or mature benevolence that we can extend toward our enemies as we follow the example of God.

Loving those who threaten and intimidate us remains a formidable challenge. But as God enables us to do so, we will reflect more accurately to an unbelieving and hostile world the goodness, grace, and patience of our heavenly Father.

extremely difficult, their objective was reached by many small steps.

What small steps might Christ's followers take to start loving their enemies? Here are a few practical suggestions:

1. *Don't live in your hurts.* People, sometimes, may repeatedly hurt us. Banking those hurts will make it harder to forgive. Peter was living his hurts when he said, "Lord, how

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Jesus pointed out that when we love those who love us, we are not much different than unbelieving tax gatherers who do the same (Matt. 5:46). When we greet only those we consider "brothers," how does that differ from the behavior of unbelieving Gentiles (Matt. 5:47)?

Jesus is calling His disciples to a different standard of behavior than that of the world. He sums up His point in Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus does not suggest that we may attain sinless perfection here on this earth. The word translated "perfect" literally means "having reached its end."⁴ In this context,

I am pleased to hear friends say that my son is just like me in the way he looks and behaves. And I am confident that God is pleased when people can see His character imaged in our lives.

Practical steps for disciples

The challenge was so overwhelming that the goal had never been achieved. Yet on the morning of May 29, 1953, Edmond Hillary and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, began their final assault to reach the summit of Mount Everest. And later that day, with oxygen tanks running low, the two climbers stood together on the 29,028 foot summit. Although

often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' " (Matt. 18:21). Jesus' reply suggests that if you live harping on your hurts, you have not really forgiven (Matt. 18:22). Deal with each hurt through grace and forgiveness even when the offender fails to recognize or apologize for the damage done.

2. *Do not reply in anger.* Proverbs 15:1 reminds us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." If you want the situation to escalate, strike back with piercing words. But if you want to reflect your heavenly Father, surprise your enemy with kind and gentle words. You will find it very hard to be

hostile towards someone who insists on being nice!

3. *Be patient with annoying people.* Like mosquitoes, some people persistently annoy us. But Paul provided the solution when he wrote, "Be patient with everyone" (1 Thess. 5:14).

4. *Pray for those who hurt you.* Jesus said, "'Pray for those who persecute you'" (Matt. 5:44), and He did so Himself when He prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:24). You will find it very hard to hate someone for whom you are praying!


5. *Turn your enemy into a friend.* Solomon said, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). Isaac demonstrated this attitude in his relationship with the troublesome Philistines (Gen. 26:27-31). A more recent example of turning enemies into friends comes from the life

of Abraham Lincoln. When the Civil War ended, a group of angry southerners gained an audience with President Lincoln airing their complaints. His gentle, friendly manner soon thawed their icy hostility and left them with a new respect for their old foe. When a northern congressman insisted that Lincoln must destroy, not befriend his enemies, Lincoln smiled and replied, "Am I not destroying my enemies by making them my friends?"⁵

Accepting the challenge

Jake Sheehan might have been considered an enemy after he accidentally shot Jared Borella, his best friend.⁶ Rhonda Borella sat by Jared's bed at the hospital for three days and three nights while her son was fighting for his life. During those long hours she had the opportunity to reflect on what happened and find it within her to forgive.

When Jake went to visit his friend in the hospital, he was fearful and uncertain. But instead of hostility, he experienced genuine love and a profound forgiveness. Rhonda put her arms around Jake, and they entered Jared's room together.

Godlike love is for everyone—friend and foe alike. Love has greater power to resolve conflicts than hatred and hostility! Surprise the next person who hurts you. Take the Jesus alternative to "getting even." Replace the spirit of retaliation with Christlike love. 

- 1 All Scripture passages in this article are from the New American Standard Bible, updated version.
- 2 *The Jewish War II*, 139.
- 3 *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, eds. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 331.
- 4 G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual of Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 442.
- 5 Dallas Seminary Illustration File (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982).
- 6 "A single bullet shatters two boy's lives," *The Oregonian*, Monday, October 9, 2000, B-10.

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How can I live without having all the answers?

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deut. 29:29, ESV).

If we had perfect knowledge, our science and our theology would never be in conflict because the same God who reveals Himself through Scripture has also revealed Himself through creation, and God is not in conflict with Himself. Thus, when we see conflict between our best theology and our best science, this is merely an indication of our lack of complete understanding. As one well-known Christian geologist states,

Because Scripture and the created universe are both God-given, they cannot be in conflict. They form one comprehensive, unified, coherent whole that is an expression of the character and will of our Creator and Redeemer, who is the author of both. Nature and Scripture form a unity, because God himself is One.... The Bible and nature sometimes seem to be unrelated to one another, in competition with one another or even in conflict with one another. Such disjunctions, however, lie not between the Bible and the created order, but rather between human understanding of the Bible

and human understanding of nature. It is human interpretations of God-given data that lead into discrepancy, conflict and disagreement.¹

We hope to have a greater understanding and to have some (though perhaps not all) of our questions answered at the second coming of Christ. But, until then, how should we live with unanswered questions?

1. Recognize that every discipline has its own unanswered questions.

In theology, Christians struggled for hundreds of years to understand exactly who Jesus is. It was clear that Jesus was a human being who got hungry and suffered pain, as do all humans. It was also clear that Jesus was divine, and accepted the worship of those He healed. But how could Jesus be both human and divine at the same time?

This is a great mystery. Although the Christian church was able to define this mystery with the statement by the Council of Nicaea that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, it did not explain how one person could be both divine and human simultaneously.

Science also has its unanswered questions. For example, what is light? For centuries, physicists struggled to understand the character of

light. Some experiments indicated that light is made up of discrete particles, while other experiments showed that light is spread out in waves. It was not until the development of quantum mechanics in the twentieth century that scientists understood light to be a quantum mechanical “wave-packet” that can exhibit wavelike or particlelike features, depending upon what experiment is selected. However, this only defines the mystery, and does not completely answer the question, because it is not clear exactly what quantum mechanics tells us about the nature of reality.

Most scientists and engineers are willing to accept the results of quantum mechanics without thinking too much about the philosophical questions of what light really is. Quantum mechanics explains the results of our experiments extremely well, and has been successfully used for the development of many important technological devices, such as the laser, the transistor, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and perhaps high-speed quantum computers in the future. However, this still leaves unanswered the question of what real existence light has prior to being measured in an experiment. The answer to that question is unimportant for the development of technology, but leaves a big mystery for any attempt to describe the reality of light. For this

reason, the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics has been characterized as the “shut up and calculate” interpretation, meaning, do not worry about the philosophical ramifications of quantum mechanics, just use it.

Both theology and science have unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) questions, mysteries that we can barely comprehend. But these are mysteries worth struggling with and trying to understand, because they point to some of the most important and fundamental truths about God and reality.

Given that each discipline itself has unanswered questions at its core, we should not be at all surprised to find that attempts to reconcile science and theology would lead to additional unanswered questions. This does not mean that science and theology are at war, and that one side must win and the other lose. Rather, this is another indication that God and reality are greater than we can comprehend. We need to recognize that these “conflicts” may point to important underlying truths. Resolution may not come easily, and these conflicts may not be completely resolvable in this life, but it is worth the attempt to better understand both God and His creation.

2. Investigate the ramifications for each discipline when accepting the “truths” of the other discipline.

It is important to ask what the ramifications would be to our theology from accepting current scientific theories. Theologians, after the time of Galileo, found that no fundamental theological principles were violated by accepting that the earth orbits the sun, rather than the sun orbiting the earth. Biblical statements that appeared to be in conflict with a moving earth (such as Joshua’s command that the sun stand still) were reinterpreted without damaging either the important points being made in the text or the underlying theology.

In cases like this, a clear understanding of Scripture can resolve conflicts. In other cases, the prevailing scientific theory may be found to be incompatible with Scripture. But in either case, the examination process will help reaffirm the most important theological points. This does not mean that all scientific theories must be accepted by theologians, or that science should trump theology. But in some cases, conflict can be avoided by recognizing that an apparent conflict need not exist.

Likewise, it is important for Christians who are scientists to investigate the ramifications of

in the choice and formation of his leading scientific concepts.”²

3. Keep the discussion going.

In both theology and science, some of the most important truths arise out of conflict and contradiction. The proponents of Christ’s humanity and His divinity both had to be heard. We would never have developed a complete picture of the nature of Christ if one side had been allowed to defeat and silence the other. Likewise, we would never have developed quantum mechanics if the scientists who believed that

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Christian beliefs for science. Some of the best science comes from individuals willing to think “outside the box,” and investigate nonconventional hypotheses and theories. The greatest accomplishment of nineteenth century physics was James Clerk Maxwell’s development of electro-magnetic field theory. Maxwell, a devout Christian, credited his understanding of the dynamic relationship of the triune God as an “analogical truth” that helped him develop his dynamic electro-magnetic field theory. “It was not that Clerk Maxwell imported theological conceptions as such into his science, but that it was the slant of his deeply Christian mind informed by faith that exercised a guiding role

light was made up of discrete particles had been allowed to defeat and silence the scientists who believed that light was made up of waves, or vice versa. Even though, in some cases, we may not see how our understandings of science and theology relate to each other, we cannot afford to silence either voice.

Recognizing the need for science and theology to talk with each other, Albert Einstein said: “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.”³ That is, science must ultimately look outside itself to religion for a sense of meaning, and religion ultimately includes all reality (not just the spiritual) and thus should not ignore the physical world.

This relationship has been embraced by the physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne:

People who are seeking to serve the God of truth should welcome all truth from whatever source it may come, without fear or reserve. Included in this open embrace must certainly be the truths of science. In the case of the scientists, the same insight implies that if they want to pursue the search for understanding through and through—a quest that it is most natural for them to embark upon—they will have to be prepared to go beyond the limits of science itself in the search for the widest and deepest context of intelligibility. I think that this further quest, if openly pursued, will take the enquirer in the direction of religious belief.⁴

4. Recognize what is most important.

Although we would like to have all of our questions answered, Jesus made it clear that He came to heal and to save, and that this is more important than answering our questions. When His disciples met a man blind from birth, they asked Jesus why he was born blind, whether it was because of his own or his parents' sin.⁵ Jesus' response was to tell them that the man's blindness was not due to either. But He did not provide an answer to the underlying assumption that adversities such as this man's blindness were a judgment from God because of sin. Rather, He simply stated that God's glory would be manifested through the man's blindness, and then healed the man. Solving the problem was far more important to Jesus than providing an explanation as to why the problem existed in the first place. As the theologian Thomas Tracy states,

The good news proclaimed in the New Testament is that God has

acted to liberate and redeem, not that God has offered us a satisfactory accounting of why things are as they are.... We long for both liberation and comprehension, though neither is within our own power, and it is no surprise that the promise of God's unfailing love is a matter of more urgent concern than the prospect of a fuller explanation.⁶

As the gospel writers proceed to recount the sufferings and death of Jesus, no explanation is given as to why sin, suffering, and death exists, but only that through Jesus' suffering and death, we might be saved. Ellen White wrote,

It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence.... Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it, is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin.⁷

Thus, although we would like to discover the answers as to why the world is the way it is, ultimately the gospel message is that the world needs redemption, and there is a better world waiting for us. Salvation is more important than explanation.

Conclusion

Frank Hasel makes the point: "In science as well as in theology, humility is one of the rarest, yet most important, characteristics and presuppositions of those engaged in the study of both."⁸ Science provides powerful tools to understand the intricate details of God's creation. However, as scientists push the edges of their discipline to search for a more complete picture of the universe, they come to realize their limitations, recognizing that even their explanations reveal an underlying reality that remains inexplicable. Thus, the true


scientists are constrained by their discipline to be humble.

Theologians are similarly constrained by their discipline. The Bible provides a reliable and trustworthy account of how God has interacted with mankind throughout history and provides all that is needed for salvation. But that does not mean all questions regarding the nature of God are answered. There is always something more for the theologian to learn about God.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8, 9, ESV).

The theologian's striving for a complete picture of the transcendent God also requires humility.

We see enough to have certain knowledge regarding what God has revealed about Himself and His creation. However, the picture is still but a shadow of the reality. We look forward to the time when we will see clearly a more complete picture and join our disciplinary perspectives, for to learn about God's creation is also to learn about God.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV). 

1 Davis A. Young and Ralph F. Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks, and Time: Geological Evidence for the Age of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 483, 484.

2 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (Wipf and Stock, 2002), 15.

3 Albert Einstein, "Science and Religion"; in *Ideas and Opinions*, 3rd ed. (Three Rivers Press, 1995), 46.

4 John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Physics and Theology: An Unexpected Kinship* (Yale University Press, 2007), 109, 110.

5 See John 9.

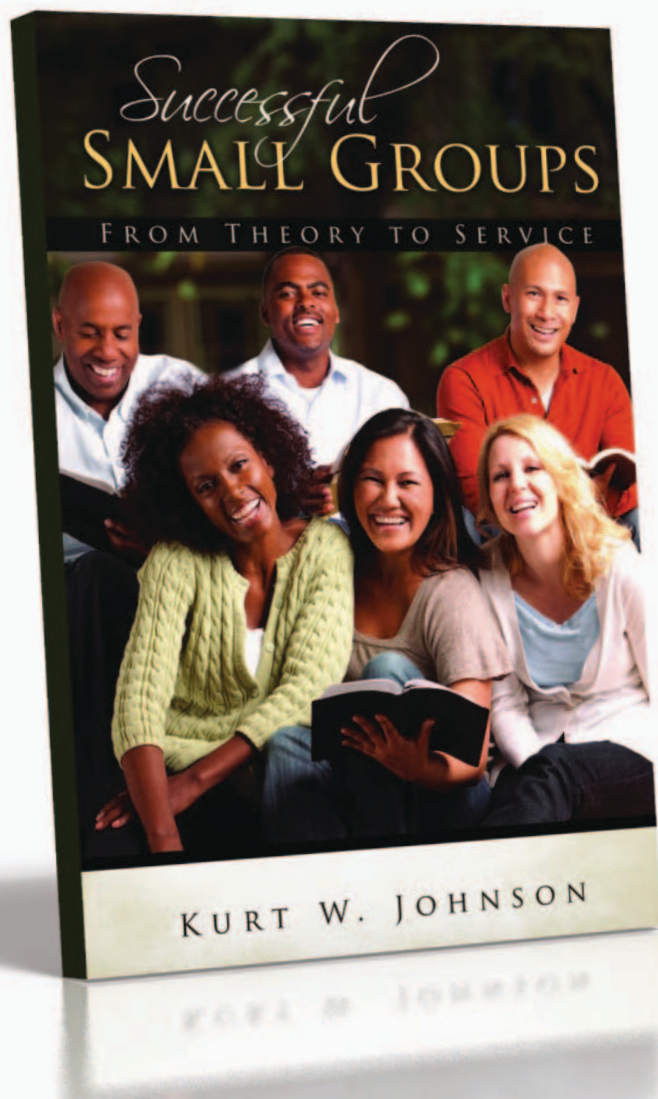
6 Thomas F. Tracy, *Lawfulness of Nature, in Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, vol. 1 (Vatican Observatory Publications, 2007), 155.

7 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press, 1950), 492, 493.

8 Frank M. Hasel, "How to Deal With Open Questions: Facing the Challenges Between Faith and Science," *Ministry*, vol. 79, no. 7 (July 2007), 21–23.

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Review & Herald

David Penno, PhD, is Doctor of Ministry project coach, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



The foundation of genuine community (part 1 of 2)

While studying for a master's degree, I took a class designed to teach those in ministry how to grow in personal spirituality. One assignment was to choose a prayer partner and then pray regularly together. God led Ben and me to choose each other, and we prayed together during those few weeks. After the intensive ended, we continued to pray via telephone. We developed a deep friendship that persists today—14 years later. This relationship brings great joy and happiness to our lives.

Ben is African American; I am Anglo. What enabled two pastors, each from a different organizational context, to develop a deep relationship of friendship and trust? The key is found in the biblical concept of community and our individual role in it.

A new primary identity

Paul, in Galatians 3:26, 27, 29,¹ presents God's ideal for the followers of Jesus.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. . . . And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.

Paul uses the word *sons* (*huiōi*) the same way that Spanish speakers use *hijos*. *Hijos* is the plural of *hijo*, son. But if parents have sons and daughters, they refer to them collectively as *hijos*. So, in verse 26, Paul refers to all Christians of either gender. Our faith relationship with Jesus makes us part of one community, the Body of Christ. Through baptism, we join the family of God and are equal heirs of salvation.

This truth is the primary foundation for genuine community, particularly in the church. Understanding and living this truth is vital for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church—a church called to reach “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6, NKJV).

In Romans 6:3–7, Paul describes the change in the believer's life when they join the community of faith through baptism. First, the old self is crucified. Second, we begin to walk in newness of life. One part of this change includes a shift in our self-identification and how we view our own ethnic and cultural background.

Galatians 3:28 describes this change. The temple in Jerusalem in Paul's day included a court for the Gentiles, one for Jewish women, and another for Jewish men. Exclusion was built into the architecture of the sacred grounds. In this context, Paul says that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor

free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Did Paul intend to say that these three distinctions have physically and literally been eliminated? Of course not.

God does not intend to eliminate these differences but, instead, re-prioritize them. My primary self-identity is no longer my ethnicity. My primary self-identity consists now in my status as a child of God through my connection with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I am a full-fledged member of the Body of Christ. That is who I am at the deepest level of my being. Other distinctions are secondary and subservient to our identity in Christ. Ellen White wrote in 1891 that

The black man's name is written in the book of life beside the white man's. All are one in Christ. Birth, station, nationality, or color cannot elevate or degrade men. The character makes the man. If a red man, a Chinaman, or an African gives his heart to God in obedience and faith, Jesus loves him none the less for his color. He calls him His well-beloved brother.²

We do not lose our ethnic and cultural distinctions as we become a Christian, but these distinctions are no longer primary. I am first

a Christian, a brother in Christ, and secondarily a white person of German descent. Leslie Pollard writes, "the challenge for Christians is to allow the gospel to establish primary identity."³ We must become a "new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17), with a supra-cultural identity.

One bloodline

Paul writes that all humans derive from the same bloodline, first established in Eden (Acts 17:26). Genesis 11:8 records that God scattered humans across the face of the earth by confounding their language, forcing them to separate and live

different ethnic groups exists than between individuals within the same group. "Research results consistently demonstrate that about 85 percent of all human genetic variation exists *within* human populations, whereas about only 15 percent of variation exists *between* populations."⁶

Melanin, which makes human skin darker, is present in all humans except true albinos. We vary only in the degree of melanin we have. If couples composed of one Black individual and one White individual have children, genetically speaking, the color of the grandchildren produced by their children cannot

OUR FAITH RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS MAKES US PART OF ONE COMMUNITY, THE BODY OF CHRIST.

in different geographical areas. This geographic isolation over time allowed for the development of physical and cultural variations.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western scholars often divided humans into three or four categories: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid, and later Australoid.⁴ Eventually many other categories were added. These categories were defined by perceived physical differences. But recent studies in genetics have demonstrated that, biologically, at the genetic level, all humans are very closely related. According to the National Institutes of Health, for any two humans on the planet, there is an average genetic difference of only 0.1 percent.⁵ Often, more similarity between individuals from

be predicted.⁷ Culture, not biology, is what primarily separates us.

Defining culture

But what is culture? According to Kraft,

... culture consists of two levels: the surface behavior level and the deep worldview level. At the core of culture and, therefore, at the very heart of all human life, lies the structuring of the basic assumptions, values, and allegiances in terms of which people interpret and behave. These assumptions, values, and allegiances we call *worldview*.⁸

Hiebert says that "worldview is based on foundational assumptions

Revival
and
Reformation

Formed again

Reformation—a poignant word that stirs us. For some, it brings to mind controversies surrounding reformers like Martin Luther or Zwingli. Others think of pet issues in the church: "Maybe the church will finally do something about . . ."

What should the word *Reformation* evoke? The word literally means "again formed." We find the first reference to "form" in the Bible in Genesis 2:7: "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (NASB). God does the forming. That work of forming is ongoing. In the book of Revelation, one senses the excitement of our God when He says, "I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5, NASB).

Do we want everything to be new? Do we want to be made new ourselves? Are we willing to say with the prophet Isaiah, "O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are the potter" (Isa. 64:8, NKJV)?

Reformation is God's work. It's true that "God calls upon those who are willing to be controlled by the Holy Spirit to lead out in a work of thorough reformation."^{*} But we must always remember that God wants that work of reformation to begin with us.

—JEFF MARSHALL, CHAPLAIN, BASS
MEMORIAL ACADEMY

* Ellen G. White, *The General Conference Bulletin*,
May 29, 1913, 34.

revivalandreformation.org

about the nature of reality, the givens of life. To question them is to challenge the very foundations of life, and people resist such challenges with deep emotional reactions.”⁹ We differ at the level of behavior and worldview; and here, even in the church, we often come into conflict with each other. This is the level that Paul addresses in Galatians 3:26–29.

And how do we get our culture? It is not inherited. Children are born without culture.¹⁰ Therefore, if a baby is born in Chicago to Jamaican parents, and is immediately flown to Beijing, China, and raised by ethnic and culturally Chinese parents, that child will be culturally Chinese. He or she will

speak Chinese, live the Chinese culture, and view that world as other Chinese do. Some people can successfully change their culture, often when they emigrate to another country or region.¹¹ Culture is acquired, usually from our family, close friends, and neighbors, although television and the Internet also play a significant role.

On mission together

My father was a member of a heavy bomber crew for the United States Army in World War II. His crew flew 13 combat missions over

occupied Europe from October 1944 to April 1945. He remembers that, on at least one of those missions, the Tuskegee Airmen flew escort for his squadron. The Tuskegee Airmen were the all African-American Air Force fighter group that flew in the European theater during the war. They are famous for having never lost a single bomber to enemy fighters while flying escort. So on at least one mission, when his B-24 flew into enemy airspace and as my father scanned the sky, his hands on a .50 caliber machine gun, his eyes fell upon the sleek P-51 fighters flying above the bomber formation that sported the distinctive red tail markings of the Tuskegee Airmen. At that moment it did not matter to him that there were Black pilots in those cockpits. What mattered to him was that the men flying those Mustangs were fellow soldiers, ready to give their lives to protect his. Their common identity as comrades in arms superseded their ethnic differences.

The message to us, with a common mission, should be obvious.

Changing how we relate

How we react to persons of a different culture is determined to a large degree on how we identify both them and ourselves. Some have described an individual's or a group's reaction to persons of another culture along the following scale: xenophobia, forced assimilation, ethnocentrism, segregation, acceptance, and celebration.

Xenophobia is the total rejection of persons outside one's cultural group. Ethnocentrism includes the assumption that my culture is the normal one, and all others are aberrations. Segregation allows that the other culture has some degree of validity, but people of that culture must be separated from those of the dominant culture as far as possible. Acceptance of other cultures involves seeing the other culture as valid and



allowing it to function on an equal footing with the dominant one. It is a kind of “tolerance.” Nothing more.

In contrast, celebration of another culture moves beyond toleration or acceptance and actually finds joy and happiness when entering experiences shaped by other cultures. In this case, we actually like to eat the food, sing the songs, participate in the worship style, or speak the language of others. I have experienced this in my work with the Atlanta Ghanaian church family. I was privileged to serve as their pastor for three years as this congregation was forming. I came to enjoy these brothers and sisters in Christ—their unique worship service, music, dress, and food. Even after my tenure as their pastor ended, I would return to enjoy the fellowship and joy of worshiping with them.

The foundation for genuine, joyful community is our relationship with Jesus Christ that enables us to move toward celebrating each other in the diversity of our cultures, social status, and gender. As we develop our relationship with Jesus, we can develop a deeper and wider community that is joyful, genuine, and real. Jesus prayed for this unity. And this type of community becomes a magnet that draws unbelievers to Christ. Ellen White wrote that “the secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ. The reason for all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ.”¹²

Education level, socio-economic status, ethnicity, cultural preferences, language, nationality, family history, fame, achievements, gender, skin color, physical characteristics, for example, all are superseded by our oneness in Christ. That is our primary definition for self-identity, and that foundation unites us across all barriers.

In part 2 of this series we will look at particular ways that pastors and church leaders can guide members and congregations to develop genuine community across ethnic and cultural lines. 📧

- 1 All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.
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- 9 Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 84.
- 10 Stephen A. Grunland and Marvin K. Mayers, “Enculturation and Acculturation,” accessed January 17, 2011, <http://home.snu.edu/~HCULBERT/encultur.htm>, paragraph 9.
- 11 Grunland and Mayers, “Enculturation and Acculturation,” paragraph 47.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 259.

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How to celebrate diversity

Try one or more of the following:

- Make a new friend from a different cultural group.
- Attend a church from another ethnic group.
- Learn a new language.
- Study the history of another group.
- Visit another country to experience a new culture and make new friends.
- Learn from those outside your group how to cook ethnically diverse foods.



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A House of Prayer Experience (H.o.P.E.)

for **all people**: How your midweek prayer service can be transformed

Midweek prayer meetings, as we once knew this gathering, could be described as *dying*, if not already dead. Many church doors are locked on Wednesday evenings. Even though some pastors may still open a small room for a few gray-haired saints to gather, the future looks bleak.

If you are longing to see your midweek prayer service resurrected or revived, check out the following seven strategies working wonders in our church where attendance at midweek prayer service has quadrupled and then quadrupled again in the past five years.

Strategy #1: Plan a Spirit-led service

Our House of Prayer Experience¹ begins promptly at 7:00 P.M. every Wednesday evening and ends promptly at 8:00 P.M. Volunteer prayer ministries leaders and audio-visual team members arrive 15–30 minutes before the service begins. With the order of service carefully and prayerfully planned, each worship leader receives a printed copy

of the evening's schedule. However, we always intentionally give the Holy Spirit permission to direct and redirect the entire service. We know this to be His time, and we are honored to join Him in preparing the way of the Lord.

On one occasion, someone who was scheduled to give a testimony failed to show up, and we wondered if our careful planning had failed. However, we soon realized that the Holy Spirit had something else in mind.

Earlier that same day, a cocaine addict had visited our church. He clearly needed a miracle in his life so he was invited to come to the House of Prayer that evening. He agreed. As the service began, it became apparent that *he* was the one the Holy Spirit had chosen to give a testimony—not a testimony of victory but a testimony of failure. As this young man described the chaos of his life, tears rolled down his cheeks. He cried out to God for help and asked the people of God to pray for him. No one present will ever forget what happened next. People rose from their seats

and swept toward the front of the church like a tsunami of love and intercession. That evening was a turning point in that young man's life, as well as a turning point for our House of Prayer. We are reminded over and over again that in addition to careful and prayerful planning, we must always give the Holy Spirit full permission to direct and redirect the entire meeting.

Strategy #2: Enter into His courts with praise

The psalmist tells us it is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to His name (Ps. 92:1). If we simply come to our midweek prayer service with a "wish list" of prayer requests, we miss out on the great blessing that comes when we lift our hearts in praise to God. We can learn an important lesson from the brief glimpse into the prayer life of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:21. Jesus began His prayer with these words: " 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.' " ²

We begin our House of Prayer experience at Forest Lake church with songs and testimonies of praise

and thanksgiving. Our praise team is intentional about the selection of songs, and provides a song sheet for each person attending. We often sing Scripture songs so we can hide God's life-changing promises in our hearts. We sometimes sing 8–10 songs during our 60-minute service.

We also allocate time at the beginning for short testimonies of praise and thanks to God. These testimonies are brief and focused: one or two sentences where we give blessing and honor to our great and awesome God. We conclude our testimonies of praise by inviting everyone present at the House of Prayer to kneel and offer a personal prayer of praise and thanks to God either individually or in pairs.

Strategy #3: Spend more time praying

Have you ever noticed that many people spend more time sharing prayer requests than actually praying? Rather than spending excessive amounts of time listening to prayer requests, invite those who have gathered for prayer to do just that—pray. Invite prayer partners to agree in prayer with requests they hear

either by saying “Amen” or restating their partner's comments in their own prayers as they bring their own praises and petitions to God.³

One young professional attending our House of Prayer commented that she found prayer especially meaningful for her to pray in twos where she could pray a blessing of God over her prayer partner and receive a blessing in return. This young woman felt a special bonding as a result of that type of prayer encounter. Her testimony confirms the importance of allowing time for prayer in small groups of two or three.⁴

If you want to gather specific prayer requests for times of intercession, invite those in attendance to send requests via email or fill out a prayer request card. Develop an intercessory prayer list that can be distributed at the beginning of each prayer service or posted on your Web site.

Strategy #4: Invite people from your community

A vibrant midweek prayer service becomes a non-threatening environment to invite first-time visitors to

your church. Often up to 30 percent of those attending our House of Prayer are visitors from the community. Some of them are invited by friends; others invite themselves because they have heard our church is a House of Prayer for *all* people. A large digital sign in front of our church reminds people about our midweek prayer services.

One effective way we have increased community participation comes through our Prayers and Squares quilting ministry. A team of about 50 volunteers create beautiful handcrafted prayer quilts that are specifically prayed over at the House of Prayer and then personally presented to people requesting special prayer. Over the past six years, we have given out more than 1,300 prayer quilts to church members and friends in our own community as well as around the world. That's an average of about four quilts per week. On one occasion, a prayer quilt was presented to a young boy who was battling a terminal illness. His entire family came with him to the House of Prayer to give him support and to share in the blessing. This was their first time to step inside



our church sanctuary, and they were blessed to learn that it is a House of Prayer for all people.

Several months ago, Reuben invited his neighbor, Joseph, to the House of Prayer experience. Joseph was also a first-time visitor to our church. He was impacted by the vibrant prayer experience and returned the following Wednesday

Global House of Prayer. I recall an occasion when we received a phone call from Timothy who lives more than 250 miles from our church. He learned about our prayer ministry through our church Web site, and he requested a prayer quilt for his wife, Jill, whose mother was dying. When we presented the prayer quilt at our House of Prayer that same

all to be a part of your House of Prayer for all people.

Strategy #5: Provide concise Bible teaching

A time of relevant Bible teaching is an important component of a vibrant prayer service. Reading Scripture provides the opportunity to listen to God's Word; then our

IF WE SIMPLY COME TO OUR MIDWEEK PRAYER SERVICE WITH A "WISH LIST" OF PRAYER REQUESTS, WE MISS OUT ON THE GREAT BLESSING THAT COMES WHEN WE LIFT OUR HEARTS IN PRAISE TO GOD.

evening. And the next. And the next. Joseph attended the House of Prayer even when his neighbor, Reuben, was absent. Soon Joseph was attending on Sabbath morning, the joy of the Lord radiating from his smiling face. Joseph recently announced that he has started Bible studies while preparing for baptism. The House of Prayer experience was a non-threatening introduction to a Christian community that welcomed Joseph and encouraged him to grow in his personal relationship with God.

On the first Wednesday evening of each month we video stream our House of Prayer experience at www.forestlakechurch.org. This provides an opportunity to invite family members and friends from around the world to join us for our

evening, 15–20 people came forward to tie knots in the prayer quilt and to pray a blessing for Jill and Timothy. We have never met this couple in person, and perhaps we never will, but we were all blessed to include them in our House of Prayer experience. We received the following email four days later: "My wife and I would like to extend to you and our long distance church family our deepest gratitude for the prayers on our behalf. Jill's mom died on Thursday night with family at her side. Jill received the prayer quilt on that Sabbath morning just before the third service. She will find this precious for the rest of her life."

Whether people live within walking distance of your church or hundreds of miles away, invite them

natural response is prayer. The key is to be concise. A midweek service can easily become another preaching service or a lengthy teaching of Scripture that begins and ends with prayer. We plan approximately 8–10 minutes in the House of Prayer for concise Bible teaching. Workbooks and reading assignments can help to provide continuity from week to week.

As part of this concise Bible teaching, we find it appropriate to teach people how to pray. When the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray," He did not rebuke them. Rather He instructed them in the basics of prayer. We are privileged to do the same. Open the truths of God's Word in a clear and concise way. This portion of

the service will add an important learning component to your House of Prayer experience.

Strategy #6: Allow time for special intercession

When you intentionally plan your midweek prayer service as a House of Prayer for all people, you can expect many to come with special needs. Allow time in your prayer service for special intercession.

At a recent House of Prayer, we were impressed to invite those who needed special prayer to come forward. We were deeply moved as we witnessed a stream of 30–40 people make their way to the front of the sanctuary. Prayer leaders also came forward to pray for each individual by name. One of our leaders had the opportunity to pray with a young man named David who had come for the first time to our church. By his own confession, he had not stepped foot in any church for the past ten years. David shared with his prayer partner that he needed a miracle. His life was going nowhere, and he was desperate. That time of special intercession was a turning point for David. He came to church the following Sabbath and attended the House of Prayer the following Wednesday evening. At the end of the prayer service, David came to the front of the church. He was holding a Bible in his hand and smiling as he said, “I’m starting Bible studies!” We gave thanks to God for David.

We include prayer for the sick as part of our House of Prayer experience. On one occasion, a couple flew down from Canada and requested an anointing service at our House of Prayer. The wife was facing some major health challenges and wanted to follow the teaching of God’s Word in James 5:14–16. At the time of her anointing, many participants at the House of Prayer gathered around her like a blanket of blessing. Her silent testimony, as she humbled herself

under the mighty hand of God, gave encouragement to many others who were participating in the House of Prayer. We have witnessed many miracles at our House of Prayer as God has brought the healing blessing in accordance with His perfect will.

Strategy #7: Nurture loving relationships


The book of Acts records that the early followers of Jesus “all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14). They did not simply pray as isolated units, but they “all joined together.” Nurturing loving relationships is an important part of our House of Prayer experience.⁵ People should not come and leave as anonymous strangers. In fact, if they do not experience any loving relationships during the House of Prayer experience, they will probably not return.

One way we nurture loving relationships is by providing a name tag for each person in attendance. We want each person to feel like an active participant rather than a passive observer. With name tags, prayer ministries leaders are able to greet everyone by name, including first-time attendees. When participants pray in small groups, they are able to pray for each other by name. At the end of each House of Prayer, we encourage people to walk up to others in attendance and say, “I’m glad you came to the House of Prayer this evening.” Informal sharing time continues for up to 30 minutes after the close of the prayer service. Often, small prayer groups spontaneously form and people are able to continue earnestly in prayer for each other.

Chuck had just been diagnosed with prostate cancer. He came to the House of Prayer for the purpose of pleasing his mother. But something happened in Chuck’s heart. He found a community that surrounded him with love, and was moved by

their prayers on his behalf. When Chuck returned to the House of Prayer several weeks later, he was shocked to hear people asking him how his chemo treatments were going. People really cared about him. Before long, Chuck requested Bible studies, for he wanted to know more about the God the people at the House of Prayer love and serve. He requested that his baptism take place on Wednesday evening at the House of Prayer because that was where he first felt at home. What a testimony about the impact of loving relationships!

We also encourage those attending our House of Prayer to stay connected during the week via our House of Prayer Experience (H.o.P.E.) page on Facebook. If you visit our Facebook page, you’ll find pictures, weekly updates, special calls for prayer, and a place to nurture loving relationships.

Do you long to see spiritual revival in your church and community? It will only happen in connection with a prayer revival. Scripture records that “after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). May that be our experience for the honor of our great God and the blessing of all of His children.⁶ 

- 1 House of Prayer Experience (H.o.P.E.) is the name we have chosen for our Wednesday evening prayer service at Forest Lake church. We have two other prayer services: one Wednesday mornings at 11:00 A.M. and one Sabbath mornings at 8:00 A.M.
- 2 All Scripture quotations are from the NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® of the Bible.
- 3 Distributing a prayer guide before the meeting has proved helpful for those not accustomed to praying in public. One attendee commented that she learned how to pray with others at the House of Prayer experience and now felt a freedom to pray with others in a variety of settings.
- 4 Small groups of two or three help foster a sense of intimacy and allow opportunity for each group member to actively participate.
- 5 One of our prayer ministries leaders gave this testimony: “On Wednesday night, I come to show love to people by praying for them.”
- 6 To share your thoughts about prayer ministries in the local church or to learn more about the Forest Lake Church House of Prayer Experience, email Sabine Vatel at svatel@forestlakechurch.org.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.



IGNITION Summit 2011

Arlington, Texas, United States—“The speakers, workshops, and resources made available at *IGNITION Summit 2011* have inspired me to do even more ministry

IGNITION points to young adult ministry training across the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. The next division-wide *IGNITION* training is slated to coincide with *Just Claim It*, March 7–12, 2012, in Greensboro, North Carolina. Details to be released at www.adventistyouthministries.org. [A. Allan Martin]



Photo: Josué Murill

for God, reaching new generations,” shared **Trey Sharp**, a pastor from Burleson, Texas. “I am refreshed, energized, and ready to go! *IGNITION* was a huge blessing for me.”

Sharp was among a great constellation of ministry professionals, lay leaders, educators, parents, and young adults who convened in Arlington, Texas, April 4–6, 2011, to receive training in young adult ministry at *IGNITION Summit 2011*.

General sessions by Drs. **Tim Elmore** and **Hyveth Williams**, best practice workshops, *Habitudes* leadership training, and a service excursion to the North Texas Food Bank were among the array of experiences afforded the 120 attendees from across North America and beyond.

ADRA awarded for women's empowerment project in Bangladesh

Washington, DC, United States—The Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) on May 4, 2011, received a Best Practices & Innovations Award last week for its Bangladesh women's empowerment initiative.

InterAction, the largest United States-based alliance of international nongovernmental organizations, honored ADRA with the award for its Improving Livelihoods through



ADRA Bangladesh Country Director Elidon Bardhi accepts an InterAction Best Practices & Innovations Award for the aid agency's women's empowerment initiative in Bangladesh. The program has taught literacy and income generation skills to some 5,400 women in the country's Mymensingh district. [photo courtesy ADRA International]

Women Empowerment, which, over the last three years, has taught literacy and income generation to some 5,400 women in the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. ADRA officials estimated more than 100,000 women have benefited from the project since it began in the 1990s.

“This is a tremendous work ADRA has done in Bangladesh, which started many years ago and has developed and progressed in many stages,” said ADRA Bangladesh Country Director **Elidon Bardhi**. “This isn't just a women's issue but affects the entire community.”

The latest round of training was sponsored by ADRA Sweden. As a result, 80 percent of participants now have the ability to read, write, and actively partake in family making decisions. Seventy percent of participants have increased their household income by 20 percent through the income-generating activities.

This award was the third Best Practices recognition from InterAction. ADRA was awarded in May 2010 for a food security project in Bolivia and in December 2010 for a similar project in Ghana. [ANN News]



Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived, by Rob Bell, HarperCollins, 2011

Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church and leader among young evangelicals, just wrote a highly publicized new book, *Love Wins*, which provocatively attempts to reconcile the love of God with the common understanding of hell. It challenges the notion that God is cruel to the unsaved by focusing on God's endless love and redemptive nature. This book is a surprisingly light and engaging read on heavy topics.

Bell points to three heavens with the first as a place, somewhere unspecified, where dead people exist without bodies. The second is a future experience on earth when God sets up a literal kingdom and gives the dead new bodies. Bell identifies the third heaven as a reality we can experience right now by choosing to live out the life of Christ.

According to Bell, hell is the experience of living contrary to God's ways. God continuously pursues us until our hearts are melted by His love. When we turn to Him, we enter a state of heaven. Eternal torment passages in the Bible are written off as "an intense experience of correction" (91). The focus centers on God's universal desire to restore. He will

even restore Sodom and Gomorrah. God's anger and wrath are to, "teach the people, to correct them, to produce something new in them" (85). "Failure, we see again and again, isn't final, judgment has a point, and consequences are for correction" (88).

Particularly disturbing is Bell's belief that God stands in league with Satan in "God's transforming purposes" (89). "Whoever and whatever" Satan is, "there is something redemptive and renewing" (89) about his work. Bell does not elaborate further, leaving the reader quite puzzled as to the identity of Satan.

Bell affirms Jesus as the only way to the Father, but people come to Jesus in all sorts of ways, cultures,

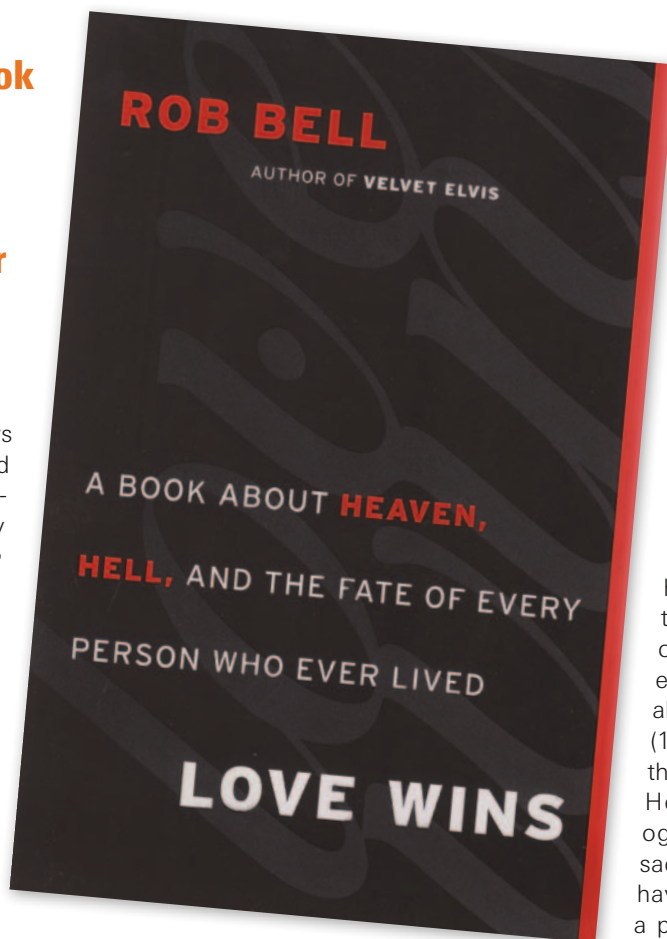
and religions, whether they know it or not. This happens because Jesus declares that, "he is saving everybody" (155).

In answer to the gnawing question of whether everybody will eventually be saved or whether some will perish forever, Bell simply states that we cannot know (115), perhaps to avoid being labeled a Universalist.

Bell emerges as a historical critic throughout the book, minimizing the creation account by repeatedly labeling it a "poem." He alludes to Theistic Evolution (131) that actually destroys the picture of a loving God. He writes off the typology of the Old Testament sacrificial system as simply having cultural meaning to a particular people group at a certain time. This biblical rationalization is Bell's weak point that has caused him to miss the biblical teaching of human nature and destiny that actually would have served his cause in exonerating God's character.

Love Wins is more of a counter argument to commonly held views of heaven and hell than a careful examination of biblical teaching, leading Bell on a poorly defined journey. Reconciling the love of God with justice through biblically sound ways makes a far stronger case for love.

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Environmental health: Are we breathing healthy air?

God gave us breath. He breathed into us the breath of life. Good, clean air is indispensable to our continued health and well-being. However, when the quality of air is poor we are at risk for respiratory conditions and other health problems. How can we prevent these problems caused by air pollution?

According to a World Health Organization assessment of the burden of disease due to air pollution, more than two million premature deaths each year can be attributed to the effects of urban outdoor air pollution and indoor air pollution (caused by the burning of solid fuels). More than half of this disease burden is borne by developing countries.¹

Around the world, many major air pollutants affecting our atmosphere include: sulfur dioxides, carbon monoxides, carbon dioxides, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter. Another cause of air pollution includes the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal, petroleum, and gasoline. Other sources of air pollutants include fires, dust mites, furry pets, mold, tobacco smoke, and certain chemicals.²

Poor air quality can affect your lungs, resulting in coughing or wheezing.

Some other adverse affects of poor air quality include nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, eye irritation, or skin irritation.²

Air quality issues can be minimized by being cautious. The following is a list of environmental issues you may wish to encourage your members to be aware of:³

Car pooling: Forming a car pool will reduce the number of cars causing air pollution by cutting down the use of fossil fuels.

Vehicle care: Regular maintenance of your car helps to keep it in good condition and minimizes harmful exhaust fumes.

Public transport: Whenever possible, travel by public transportation. This reduces air pollution and increases public income. If you are going to a nearby place, walk or ride a bicycle instead of using your vehicle. The objective is to minimize the use of fuels as much as possible.

Alternative energy source: Another effective way to reduce air pollution is to use alternative energy sources such as solar energy, hydro-electric energy, and wind energy. Nowadays, sophisticated technologies such as wind turbine and solar water heaters are introduced to generate electricity and other energy forms for household use.

Saving energy: Saving energy will, of course, help reduce air pollution. Switch off the lights, fans, air conditioners, televisions, and other appliances when not needed. You can also share a room with others when the air conditioner or fan is on, instead of switching them on in every room.

"They say carpooling like this reduces air pollution. Imagine the difference it will make when I get the engine repaired."



Minimize air pollutants: Always try to minimize smoke emission, as it can contribute to air pollution. One way is to compost bio-degradable waste instead of burning it.

Social awareness about air pollution is the most essential step to take for the reduction of air pollution. Improvement of transport facilities and proper use of land for the sake of social benefits are equally important for controlling air pollution.⁴

For indoor air quality, clean your homes, churches, and offices often to reduce dust, pet dander, mold, and other air particulates. Remember to have a well-ventilated area, especially when cooking or involved in other indoor activities. If you are ever near a fire, cover your mouth and protect your eyes.

Let's do our part to keep God's creation clean and preserve a safe and healthy environment. 📧

Medical consultants: Allan Handysides, MB, ChB, FRCPC, FRCSC, FACOG; and Peter Landless, MB, Ch, MMed, FCP(SA), FACC, FASNC.

¹ World Health Organization. *Air Quality Guidelines—global update 2005*. Available at: www.who.int.

² Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Air Pollution & Respiratory Health* (October 27, 2010). Available at: www.cdc.gov.

³ Sandhyarani, N. "Ways To Prevent Air Pollution." Available at www.buzzle.com. 2010.

⁴ Ibid.

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