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ELDER'S

D I G E S T



CLOSE
that DOOR

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The priority of heaven and of the church

When I think about heaven, I imagine a place with lots of joy and celebration. It generates curiosity in all of us to understand the greatest reason for this joy. Jesus says that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7, 10). I like to think that Heaven is more festive when lost people here in this world are found and saved by God’s grace.

The main reason that Jesus came to this world was to save those who were lost (Matthew 9:13). God’s mission is to save the lost. He wants everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1-4; 2 Peter 3:9). The Bible affirms that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

In the plan of redemption, God did, is doing, and will do His part. Jesus died on the cross in our place. He is now in Heaven interceding in our favor, and He promised to come back and take us to heaven. While we wait for His coming, our job is to testify of His love and lead people to respond positively to this love.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20). This is our priority and challenge as a church.

Ellen G. White comments in the book *Christian Service* that “it was the joy of Christ to save souls. Let this be your work and your joy.”¹ She also says that “to save souls should be the life work of every one who professes Christ.”² Then she amplifies the concept by saying, “Not upon the ordained minister only rests the responsibility of going forth to fulfill this commission. Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellow men.”³

Church activities such as prayer, adoration, music, fellowship, and other ministries are important, but taking salvation to the sinner—who is far from God and from His church—is our greatest responsibility. In heaven we will no longer evangelize, but while we are here on earth, evangelism should be part of our life experience. As leaders of God’s church, let us always remember that the main priority of heaven is our greatest task here on earth.

1. Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 110.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Jonas Arrais

General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



Interview with SSD Ministerial Secretaries

At the Southern Asia-Pacific Division ministerial advisory, Jonas Arrais had the opportunity to talk with leaders from each union, discovering the challenges they face, the commitment of the church members to the church's mission, and how pastors and local church elders are working together. We hope this information will help you in your commitment as church leaders.



Houtman E. Sinaga
Southern Asia-Pacific
Division Ministerial
Secretary

This division is comprised of eight unions and two fields, with more than 6,000 churches and 1 million members. A population of over 720 million—distributed across Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam, Myanmar, and other territories—makes this division diverse with culture.



Edison Pandjaitan
West Indonesia Union
Ministerial Secretary

Churches: 636
Members: 102,603
Population: 119,117,390
Primary religion: Islam
Church elders: Approximately 1,300
Pastors: 426

A major challenge in our union involves reaching urban areas, where people practice a more materialistic lifestyle. Obtaining government permits to build church buildings is also a major issue. We challenge our pastors to train lo-

cal church leaders and laity to conduct evangelistic meetings on their own.



Ventje Lumowa
East Indonesia Union
Ministerial Secretary

Churches: 634
Members: 92,471
Population: 22,814,619
Primary religions: Islam, Protestant,
Catholic
Church elders: Approximately 1,500
Pastors: 294

Our main challenge as a union is to reach the Muslim people. They comprise approximately 80 percent of Indonesia's population. Conversion to Christianity is punishable by death in the Muslim culture, and public evangelism is forbidden in their communities. We are training pastors and church elders to reach Muslim people for Christ.



Edward P. Chambugong
Bangladesh Union
Ministerial Secretary

Churches: 105
Members: 24,320
Population: 144,233,000
Primary religions: Islam, Buddhist, Hindu
Church elders: Approximately 110
Pastors: 28

Penetrating Muslim areas and involving lay people in the evangelistic work are real challenges for us. Open evangelistic meetings are prohibited by the government. The government frequently asks what the church is doing and teaching. As pastors, we are training local elders—not only in how to care for the church,

but also how to be involved in home cell-group ministry. Church leaders are doing a great job giving Bible studies and visiting church members. We need to recognize their work, provide additional training, and prepare supportive materials.



Caleb Paw
Myanmar Union
Ministerial Secretary

Churches: 204
Members: 24,853
Population: 50,519,000
Primary religions: Buddhist, Hindu, Christians
Church elders: Approximately 125
Pastors: 92, and 65 licensed ministers

We need freedom of worship. Sabbath worship cannot be held regularly in the same place. We are not allowed to hold evangelistic meetings or build new churches. We cannot operate our schools. Almost all examinations and tests in public schools take place on the Sabbath. Church members are faithful, but they lose the chance to study. Our pastors and elders face huge challenges as spiritual church leaders. We would like to provide more training for laymen in areas such as preaching, giving Bible studies, and counseling.



J. William Reith
Sri Lanka Mission
Ministerial Secretary

Churches: 36
Members: 3,480
Population: 19,722,000
Primary religions: Buddhist, Hindu, Islam and Christians
Church elders: 36
Pastors: 14, and 11 licensed ministers

Our challenges are with the Buddhist and Hindu resistance to the gospel. It is a challenge to involve lay members in evangelistic programs. We have been training local elders to prepare sermons and give Bible studies. The field recognizes the important role of church elders and the necessity of getting them to work in harmony with the *Church Manual* and mission policy.

Roman Catholics, comprise almost 80 percent of the population
Church elders: Approximately 4,200
Pastors: 159

Local church elders have fostered the spiritual needs of members by preaching and visiting. They are also involved in leading the evangelistic thrust of the church. The field recognizes the work of these elders in many ways and supports them by providing good resource materials and conducting leadership training whenever possible.

Church elders: 60
Pastors: 17

Our territory's population is very materialistic. They see religion as a second choice. In our culture, people tend to retain the beliefs of their parents and grandparents; they do not readily accept new beliefs. Church elders work actively with pastors to face these challenges. We are also trying to provide additional materials and information to support their ministry.



Francisco D. Gayoba
North Philippine
Union Ministerial
Secretary

Churches: 1,290
Members: 187,924
Population: 52,427,153
Primary religions: Christians, primarily Roman Catholics, comprise nearly 80 percent of the population
Church elders: Approximately 4,500
Pastors: 256

The main spiritual challenge in our Union is to equip pastors and elders to nurture spiritual growth. We also have to train them for evangelism in a growing secularized context. Through their worship programs, visitations, and evangelism, they must renew and redirect church life. Doing this provides a more effective method of discipleship for everyday church members.



Leonardo R. Asoy
South Philippine
Union Ministerial
Secretary

Churches: Nearly 1,900
Members: 432,321
Population: 17,690,455
Primary religions: Christians, primarily Roman Catholics and Islam in some areas
Church elders: Approximately 7,500
Pastors: 259

Our main spiritual challenge is the influence of secularism. People are easily influenced by the current trend of being worldly. We need to decrease the apostasy in our midst, and local leaders are important in this process. They are preaching, visiting members, and doing evangelism. We need to offer them more training and workshops to maintain their spiritual focus.



Elton Lee Ki-Plin
Southeast Asia Union
Mission Ministerial
Secretary

Churches: 296
Members: 73,178
Population: 198,340,000
Primary religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism and Christianity
Church elders: Approximately 2,000
Pastors: 177

We face many challenges in our Union: diversity of languages and cultures, lack of freedom in some countries, diverse teachings, and limited theological training for many of our pastors. Local elders are helping to translate English materials into the Malay, Thai, Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian languages. ^{ED}



Agapito Catane, Jr
Central Philippine
Union Ministerial
Secretary

Churches: Nearly 1,500
Members: 107,000
Population: 14,647,392
Primary religions: Christians, primarily



Smehl Gallen
Guam-Micronesia
Mission Ministerial
Secretary

Churches: 22
Members: 4,112
Population: 437,000
Primary religion: Christianity

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

FERNON RETZER and MIKE SPEEGLE

spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21, NKJV). We believe the same Holy Spirit can instruct us in all that we need to know to understand the Bible better.

"Search its pages for yourselves. The knowledge of God is not to be gained without mental effort, without prayer for wisdom."¹

The material in *You Can Understand the Bible* is not original. Some of it has been gathered over many years from a variety of sources. I am grateful for what others have liberally shared with me, verbally and in writing. I now want to share some of these joys of Bible study with you.

You can understand the Bible

- *It was written for the average person.* "Every child of God should be intelligent in the Scriptures, and able, by tracing the fulfillment of prophecy, to show our position in this world's history. The Bible was written for the common people as well as for scholars, and is within the comprehension of all."²
- *It is understood through personal examination.* "We have the truth

brought out in publications, but it is not enough to rely upon other men's thoughts. We must examine for ourselves, and learn the reasons of our faith by comparing scripture with scripture. Take the Bible, and on your knees, plead with God to enlighten your mind. If we would study the Bible diligently and prayerfully every day, we should every day see some beautiful truth in a new, clear, and forcible light."³

- *Time and effort are needed to study it effectively.* "It is proper and right to read the Bible; but your duty does not end there, for you are to search its pages for yourselves. The knowledge of God is not to be gained without mental effort, without prayer for wisdom in order that you may separate from the pure grain of truth the chaff with which men and Satan have misrepresented the doctrines of truth."⁴

Key principles

"The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture."⁵

- *View the Bible as a whole.* "The student should learn to view the Word as a whole, and see the relation of its parts."

You Can Understand the Bible has been prepared to encourage people to study and understand the Bible for themselves. Sometimes it's easy to think that only those who are skilled and well-trained can understand the Bible. But we must never forget that "holy men of God

- *Keep in mind its central theme.* "He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption."
- *Understand the battle between good and evil.* "He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their workings through the records of history and prophecy to the great consummation."
- *Grasp the importance of the Great Controversy and how it impacts the human experience.* "He should see how the controversy enters into every phase of human experience: how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found."⁶

A biblical foundation

- "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they that testify of Me" (John 5:39). "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth" (John 17:17).
- "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word. . . . Your Word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:9-11). "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to

all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8). Our prayer should be: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Digging deeper

- *Read to learn something new every day.* "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). "Every day you should learn something new from the Scriptures. Search them as for hidden treasures, for they contain the words of eternal life. Pray for wisdom and understanding to comprehend these holy writings. If you would find new glories in the Word of God; you would feel that you had received new and precious light on subjects connected with the truth, and the Scriptures would be constantly receiving a new value in your estimation."⁷
- *Read each verse for all its worth.* "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isaiah. 28:10). "In daily study the verse-by-verse method is often most helpful. Let the student take one verse, and concentrate the mind on ascertaining the thought that God has put into that verse for him, and then dwell upon the thought until it becomes his own. One passage thus studied until its significance is clear is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view, and no positive instruction gained."⁸
- *Take your time when you read.* "All scripture is inspired by God and is

useful for teaching truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed" (1 Timothy 3:16, 17, Good News). "The prayer of Christ for His disciples was, 'Sanctify them through my truth: Thy word is truth.' If we are to be sanctified through a knowledge of the truth found in the Word of God, we must search the Scriptures, not merely rush through a chapter and repeat it, taking no pains to understand it, but we must dig for the jewel of truth which will enrich the mind, and fortify the soul against the wiles of temptations of the archdeceiver."⁹

- *Cultivate a love for scripture by reading it.* "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). "When a real love for the Bible is awakened, and the student begins to see how vast is the field and how precious its treasure, he will desire to seize upon every opportunity for acquainting himself with God's Word. Its study will be restricted to no special time or place. And this continuous study is one of the best means of cultivating a love for Scripture. Let the student keep his Bible always with him and, as he has opportunity, read a text and meditate upon it. While walking on the streets, waiting at a railway station, waiting to meet an engagement, let him improve the opportunity to gain some precious thoughts from the treasure house of truth."¹⁰
- *Remember its central message.* "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death

of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10). "But above all else, the Word of God sets forth the plan of salvation, shows how sinful man may be reconciled to God, lays down the great principles of truth and duty which should govern our lives, and promises us divine aid in their observance. It reaches beyond this fleeting life, beyond the brief and troubled history of our race. It opens to our view the long vista of eternal ages—ages undarkened by sin, undimmed by sorrow."¹¹

- *Apply yourself to learn all that the Bible has to offer.* "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). "The Word of God is to us a tree of life. Every portion of the Scripture has its use. In every part of the Word is some lesson to be learned. Then learn how to study your Bible. This book is not a heap of odds and ends. It is an educator. Your thoughts must be called into exercise before you can be really benefited by Bible study. Spiritual sinew and muscle must be brought to bear upon the words of Christ. He will enlighten the mind and guide the research."¹²
- *Read it to be challenged and changed.* "And they said one to another, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32). "I would impress upon all the fact that a casual reading of the Scriptures is not enough. We must search, and this means doing all that the word implies."¹³

- *God promises to help us understand it.* "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). "The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinion, but in order to know what God says. A true knowledge of the Bible can be gained only through the aid of that Spirit by whom the Word was given. And in order to gain this knowledge, we must live by it. All that God's Word commands, we are to obey. All that is promised, we can claim. The life which it enjoins is the life that, through its power, we are to live. Only as the Bible is thus held can it be studied effectively."¹⁴ "You should strive earnestly in your investigations to aim at nothing less than a thorough knowledge of every point of truth, that you may not be found in the day of God among those who have not lived by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."¹⁵ ED

This article is excerpted and adapted from the practical resource, *You Can Understand the Bible*, by Fernon Retzer & Mike Speegle. The entire book is available for purchase at <www.ministerialassociation.com>

Books by Ellen G. White

1. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 307.
2. *Counsels for Sabbath School Workers*, p. 23.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 307.
5. *Education*, p. 190.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *My Life Today*, p. 22.
8. *Education*, p. 188.
9. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 10.
10. *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 463.
11. *My Life Today*, p. 22.
12. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 989.
13. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 307.
14. *Education*, p. 188.
15. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 32

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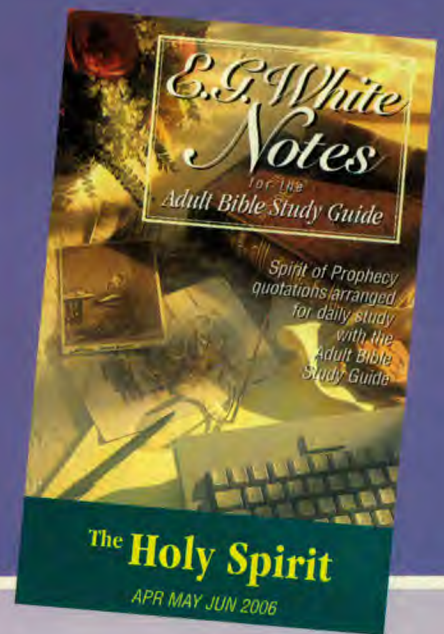
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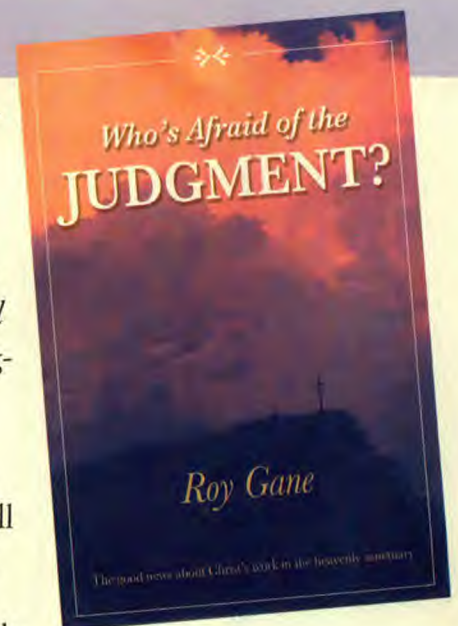
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CLOSE THAT DOOR



If departures from the church continue at the present rate, there will soon be more ex-Christians than Christians. Sinners use this fact to question the power of God. "Cannot Christ keep His own?" they ask. The answer is that He can. However, He has committed to the church the awesome responsibility of partnership in this divine undertaking. Each individual minister has a God-given responsibility in this matter. To us comes the command, having the force of the Ten Commandments, "Close that door! Block the exits! Stem the tide of apostasy!"

Of universal concern to the Christian church is the fact that not all of its adherents are true. Those who leave the faith are termed apostates, and so they are. Haunting the conscience of the conscientious clergyman, however, is the disturbing question: "How might I have saved them?" Compounding his perplexity is the fact that the apostasy rate is not diminishing. On the contrary, it has exploded. Its chilling draft threatens the total health of the church. This depressing exodus of the sinful and disillusioned gives significance to the title of this article, "Close That Door" (the back door, that is).

Who is to blame?

It is regrettable but true that the majority of apostates leave the church after more than 10 years' membership. That they would leave at all is a sobering thought. Just who is to blame for this state of things? The evangelists? To be sure, they are far from perfect and would be the first to admit that if they knew of a better method of reaching souls, they would adopt it. But is it fair to hold men responsible for souls when they move to another

E. E. CLEVELAND

field and are probably hundreds of miles from the scene? "But if they are genuine, they will stick" is expert philosophy, but it has little basis in fact.

Why are ministers counseled to "feed the flock of God"? Why urge men to visit and counsel the church membership? The answer is clear. No farmer would plant a crop and leave it unattended on the assumption that the good will survive. No, newborn babes in the kingdom don't just "stick." What father reading this article would dare leave his newborn offspring unattended on the assumption that "if he's any good, he'll survive"?

Well, then, who is to blame? The pastor? He is charged with the responsibility of holding what he has and adding thereto. The best pastor admits his need and longs for better answers. Let us face it: He is no superman. But it would take a superman to do all that his job demands of him. There is a growing conviction in some quarters that he is not supposed to do it all. But what of the old slogan: "A leader must lead"? The answer is simple: "The leader who leads out in everything will be a dead leader."

Some suggest a wider distribution of responsibility among qualified laypeople. With this the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy agree. Any promotion that would make a machine man out of a God-called soulwinner is a gimmick. The

pastor is an evangelist; his church is an evangelistic center. The winning of souls must claim his first attention. Leave other things to others.

But who is to blame for the apostasy rate? The church organization? For years I have dealt with administrators, and I have yet to meet one who claims infallibility. Unfortunately, there are imperfections wherever the hand of man touches the "gospel plow." But how else would you direct and promote a world operation? Insistence on performance of duty is not an infringement of freedom; rather, it ensures the same. How else, except through administrative organization, can the cohesive strength of the whole be realized? Administrators are expected to promote and inspire. In implementing the program, the pastor has broad freedom. With this attitude we may properly conclude that those who blame the program would, in the absence of this excuse, blame the weather. While the buck is passed and blame is spread, the back door stands ajar and the exodus of the apostates continues.

Are we in a rut?

Part of the trouble stems from the disease of doing the usual things in the usual way. At a recent evangelistic council, I had the privilege of hearing a minister who had concentrated on making the midweek prayer service unusually interesting. His countenance shone with

excitement as he spoke of the hundreds who gathered for the weekly service. Another man told of how he transformed his Sunday night service from a "dry bone" for the saints to a feast for the general public.

During certain campaign seasons, some pastors bombard the saints with a hail of promotion, leaving little room for the preaching of the cross. Others plan behind the scenes and promote the event through home visitation and committees, thus relieving the Sabbath service of burdensome detail. Is not this the better way? Routine and repetition breed apostasy. Is there not a crying need for fresh music and refreshing sermons? The pulpit is no place for the "same old soup, heated up a bit." Spirit-filled preaching that casts old truth in a new light will pack the pews again. The virus of conformity threatens our lives. The germ of life is being stifled by routine. Suffocating saints plead for a fresh breath of air. And we who guard the exits must let them live.

Closing the door

We do not have to accept the church apostasy rate. Large-scale apostasy is *not* inevitable. The number of defecting saints may be reduced, but how?

1 The evangelist should integrate the pastor into the evangelistic program. This makes for an easy transition when the evangelist leaves the area.

2 The pastor should guard the souls added to the flock with the same zeal as if he had been the one who brought them in. In Lynchburg, Virginia, where an evangelist raised up a new church and left for other fields, the pastor frequently refers to the evangelist. This does much to endear him to the congregation.

3 New converts should be tactfully integrated into the financial program of the church. While tithe and freewill offerings are basic to Christian development, time and tact should provide the atmosphere for growth in the other graces.

4 Visitation units should be set up with the sole purpose of systematic contact with new converts. A recent convert told me how let down he felt after his baptism when the constant prebaptismal visitation ceased. He stated that he needed it more after baptism than before. This is our Achilles' heel. Closing this gap will staunch the flow of apostates.

5 Some form of specific responsibility should be assigned to new converts shortly after baptism. Some of these people have previously borne responsibility. Nothing holds a convert like a good job. An active layman is less likely to backslide.

6 One minister conducted a weekly Bible class on Friday nights at his church. To make it interesting, he had a varied program that included a true-false test, a Bible drill, special music, and attendance awards; on each night, he focused on a church doctrine. This not only grounded the new converts but attracted visitors.

7 Finally, nothing can close the door of apostasy more effectively than

Christ-centered Bible preaching. It should be remembered that a sermon text is merely an avenue to Christ. *Every sermon* should be about Him; anything else is a lecture. The minister should be less concerned with adjusting his message to meet the minds of the classes than revealing Christ to the masses. Christ will draw.

To close the door against those who, through weakness, fear, or disillusionment, would plunge into the abyss requires the best in all of us. Lamentation will not profit, nor blame save the day. Immediate, resolute action alone will avail. A soul won and then lost is worse than a soul never gained. Nor should the apostasy rate dampen the ardor of those who win the lost. Just because some converts leave is no reason to stop baptizing; rather, this fact lends urgency to increased productivity. Nor should we subscribe to this negative philosophy: "If we only saved what we have, it would equal the total baptisms in any given year." The times demand that we save what we have plus increase baptisms. Would you put a song on the lips of angels and bring joy to the heart of God? Then close the door of the church to apostasy, and the morning stars will sing together, and all the sons of God will shout for joy. **ED**

E. E. Cleveland

Retired Associate Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference

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Q: When an elder who has been ordained commits a moral fault, receives a discipline of removal, and then is rebaptized, can he/she assume the same position in the future?

A: It is always good to remember that when a person has been removed from church membership by ecclesiastical discipline, his or her re-admission will usually be preceded by rebaptism. An elder automatically loses his or her ordination at the time of ecclesiastical discipline. When he/she is rebaptized, he/she becomes a regular member of the church. The *Church Manual* does not forbid his/her ordination once again as a church elder; however, such a process should be carefully considered by local church administration. This practice is rather uncommon; therefore, each case deserves careful attention and time for consideration.

Q: I've been a church elder for almost a year, and I still haven't been ordained. Is this delay normal?

A: No! An elder who is elected should automatically be ordained. The authorization for ordination is implied by your nomination. For many years, it was common practice for newly-appointed elders to undergo a probationary observation period before being ordained; however, this should not occur. Such observations should be made before the nomination. When a nominating committee selects someone for eldership and the church approves, it is understood that this person has fulfilled all requirements for such a function. Care should be taken when nominating someone to be a church elder. The *Church Manual* says, "Election to the office of elder does not in itself qualify one as an elder. Ordination is required before an elder has authority to function in that office" (p. 50). Naturally, there is a technical time period between the nomination and ordination, but this time shouldn't be long, and it shouldn't be used for observation. It should be a short period in which one has the opportunity to set the date or wait for the presence of a qualified person to perform the ordination ceremony.

Q: How much time should pass between member discipline and rebaptism?

A: The *Church Manual* does not set a fixed period of time. It only says: "Because removal from church membership is the most serious form of discipline, the period of time before such an individual may be reinstated should be sufficient to demonstrate that the issues which led to

removal from membership have been resolved beyond reasonable doubt" (p. 199). Considering that when a member receives discipline by censure (which lasts from 1-12 months), such a person has technically committed a smaller error than the one whose name has been removed. Therefore, he or she should not be rebaptized in less than one year. Although, we recognize that there are exceptions, they should not be turned into rules.

Q: How long should a person be a church member to qualify for the office of elder?

A: The main characteristic for a person to be nominated for eldership is not how long they've been a church member, or their age, or their social status. Maturity and time in the faith should definitely be considered; however, the main characteristics should be (1) moral and spiritual credibility; (2) capability and knowledge; and (3) availability of time and commitment to dedicate himself/herself to the church's work.

A person also doesn't need to be married to be an elder. A single person could very well fulfill such requirements. However, when a person is not married, the biblical orientations regarding a family should be taken into consideration. When the Bible says that we should not be hasty in the laying of hands (1 Timothy 5:22), it is specifically referring to the lack of criteria and proper consideration at the time of someone's nomination for eldership.

Q: Could we elect as a church elder someone whose spouse is not an Adventist?

A: We cannot forget that the elder is an important spiritual leader of the church. In the absence of the pastor, the elder is the religious leader of the church and by example and precept should be a model to all. Theologically there is not much difference between a pastor's and an elder's ordination. How would you view a church pastor whose spouse was not a Christian? I believe that as we choose someone for eldership, we should seek the best. An individual may have all the right moral, spiritual, and personal characteristics or qualities, and yet may wish to serve the church other than as an elder if they lack the support and example of a Christian family committed to such a ministry.

THE MEANING OF FAITH

INTRODUCTION

For years, an old woman had been thoroughly overcome by all kinds of troubles and trials in life. Her family had done all they could for her, but nothing seemed to help. Finally, they gathered together one day and told her, "Grandma, we've done all we can for you. From now on you're just going to have to trust God." A look of fear and total dejection came over her face as she said, "Oh, dear! Has it come to that?" It always comes to that!

Our world seems not to know what to do with God. Should we believe in God or not? Should we cover our bases and believe in God *and* in whatever else seems to work? If we believe in God, can we somehow cover it up so people won't think we're fanatics?

Even in religious circles, we've become unsure about what a faithful person is. Today I want to address some "faith basics"—some fundamental truths about faith that can make all the difference in how we deal with God.

I. WHY IS THE SUBJECT OF FAITH IMPORTANT?

Hebrews 11:6 says that we cannot please God without faith (a negative statement). With faith, we can please God (a positive statement). Therefore, if we want to please God, faith must be a primary or basic foundational element.

Romans 1:16, 17 is a plain statement: The righteous shall live by faith. The righteous do not live by their own righteousness. Paul made it very clear that faith relates to the gospel of Jesus and that faith and the gospel go together to produce salvation. Romans 3:20, 28 say that justification before God relates directly to faith. No one is justified by works of merit; faith is essential:

- A. We must have faith to please God.
- B. We must have faith to be saved.

- C. We must have faith to be justified.
- D. There is no relationship with God apart from faith.

II. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF FAITH

Most people think that faith simply means to believe, to give a mental assent to something. This basic concept is at the root of the spurious "belief-only" doctrine of salvation.

Faith is sometimes defined as a firm persuasion, a conviction, a trust, and an assurance. The Bible can also define its own terms. In Hebrews 11:6, we find one of the best practical definitions of faith.

Faith is composed of two vital elements: (1) a belief that God exists and (2) the action of seeking after Him. One element or the other may be the emphasis in different verses, but the two never contradict each other.

The following passages illustrate that Bible writers understood that faith is comprised of both belief and action:

- A. Salvation passages: Romans 1:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.
- B. The Hebrew writer's encouragement: Hebrews 3:18-19. The King James Version uses "believed not" in verse 18, but the word is better translated as disobedience.
- C. James's explanation of faith clearly states this idea: James 2:17, 26. He isn't suggesting that we add works of merit to our faith, but rather that only a faith that works is alive. Faith is the unalterable combination of two elements:
 1. A firm belief, a trust, a conviction, and an assurance of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.
 2. The consequent action (obedience) which logically results from what we believe.

CONCLUSION

The religious world may be caught up in a "belief-only" concept of faith, but we must

learn its true definition. The non-religious world may not understand the importance of faith, but we must remember that it is the foundation of our relationship with God.


What kind of faith do you have today? Could it be described by Hebrews 11:6? If so, then keep that faith. If not, learn to practice a new kind of faith. **ED**

ELLEN G. WHITE TALKS ABOUT FAITH

"True faith and true prayer—how strong they are! They are as two arms by which the human supplicant lays hold upon the power of Infinite Love. Faith is trusting in God—believing that He loves us, and knows what is for our best good. Thus, instead of our own way, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership, and accepts its blessings. Truth, uprightness, purity, are pointed out as secrets of life's success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these. Every good impulse or aspiration is the gift of God; faith receives from God the life that alone can produce true growth and efficiency" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 259).

"To talk of religion in a casual way, to pray without soul-hunger and living faith, avails nothing. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. He who waits for entire knowledge before he will exercise faith cannot receive blessing from God" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 261).

General Conference Ministerial Association



THE EMPTY HOUSE

INTRODUCTION

In Matthew 12:43-45, we find Jesus describing the spiritual condition of the generation of His day. He described them as “evil and adulterous” (Matthew 12:38, 39). He also commented how that generation would be condemned by the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba in the Day of Judgment (verses 41, 42). In our present text of study, they are described as “this wicked generation” (verse 45).

Using the example of demon possession, Jesus warned that it is not enough to go through the process of having one’s sins forgiven. Unless reformation continues and something positive is put in its place, the end might prove worse than the beginning. Such had been the case with the Jews of Jesus’s day.

There is an important lesson to be gleaned here that applies to us today, a lesson on the evils of neutrality—we must replace evil with good.

I. THE DANGER OF AN EMPTY HOME

A. Our heart is like a home. In it can reside things that produce much harm (Matthew 15:19). But it can also be the source for much good (Matthew 12:35a).

B. Our house can be cleansed. For our heart is cleansed (Hebrews 10:22; Acts 15:8, 9). Our conscience is purged from dead works to serve God (Hebrews 9:14).

C. We are expected to “fill” our home. Through faith Christ Himself is to dwell in our hearts (Ephesians 3:17). God’s peace and grace are to fill our hearts (Colossians 3:15, 16). Even God’s law must be written in our hearts (Hebrews 8:10).

D. What happens when we do not fill our home? Nature abhors a vacuum, and if we do not attempt to fill our homes with good things, evil things are likely to return—with a vengeance! Consider the example of the Corin-

thians. They had been washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Corinthians 6:11), and yet they later engaged again in sinful conduct (2 Corinthians 12:20, 21). The false teachers had escaped the pollution of the world through the grace of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 2:1), but they became entangled again: “The latter end [was] worse for them than the beginning” (verses 20-22).

E. How do things become worse than at the first? In the case of the false teachers, they had forsaken the right way (2 Peter 2:15). Their eyes were full of adultery, and their hearts were trained in covetousness (verse 14). They even denied the Lord who bought them (verse 1).

Our hearts can become so hardened through willful sin (Hebrews 3:12, 13) that we trample the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant a common thing, and insult the Spirit (10:26-29). We can reach the point where it becomes impossible to be renewed again to repentance, and then we again crucify the Son of God and openly shame Him (6:4-6). In such a case, the following statement is all too true: “The last state of that man is worse than the first.”

How important it is, then, that we do not let the home of our heart remain empty and thus invite worldly things to take up residence! We must fill our homes with good things.

II. FILLING THE HOME OF YOUR HEART

A. Fill it in principle. “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15). The word “sanctify” means “to set apart.” Set aside a special place in your heart for God as the Ruler of your life.

Be selective about what goes into your mind. Set your mind on things above (Colossians 3:1, 2). Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (verse 16). Follow David’s example (Psalm 101:3, 4). Think upon things that are good and wholesome (Philippians 4:8). Remember, transformation of character starts with a renewed mind (Romans 12:1, 2).

B. Fill it in practice. Utilize every opportunity to study God’s Word (2 Peter 2:1, 2). Attend all church services. Participate in the Bible study programs that are offered. Read your Bible daily (Psalm 1:1-6). Fill your heart with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. “For this is how you let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Allow yourself to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18, 19). Sing at church, at home, in the car; sing alone and with others. Let your mind dwell on things that are worthy of praise and virtue (Philippians 4:8).

Be selective about what you watch on television or at the theater. Choose your books, periodicals, and magazines carefully. Choose your friends carefully (1 Corinthians 15:33); they will either help you to be strong or hinder your efforts (Proverbs 13:20). We cannot have communion with darkness and expect the light of God to dwell in us (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

CONCLUSION

What is the condition of your “home” (heart)? Are you filling it with things that are good? If not, then your heart becomes an abode for every evil thing—and the condition of your heart may become seven times worse than before!

Have you experienced the initial cleansing of your “home” (heart)? Have you been cleansed by the blood of Jesus in baptism? Don’t be deceived into thinking that you do not need to be concerned about filling that dwelling with the presence of God and all that is good!

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). ^{ED}



THE MORAL HEART

INTRODUCTION

The moral heart is widely misunderstood, and one of our major concerns about being sound and faithful has to do with heart problems. Although great progress has been made in understanding the disorders of the physical heart, many are dying spiritually each day because of moral heart disease.

Let's study the four chambers of the moral heart. Notice that when we keep these in good working order, we will be the kind of Christians God wants us to be.

I. INTELLECT IS THE DIGESTIVE CHAMBER OF THE MORAL HEART

This chamber equips man for three activities: knowing, thinking, and understanding. Its function for the moral man is closely related to that of the digestive organs for the physical man. It is more than a receptacle; it is also a facility for knowledge, just as the stomach is not just a silo but also a refinery for food.

The intellect collects and stores (knowing), chews and breaks down (thinking), and then distributes and assimilates (understanding) the information and experience gathered through the five senses. Faith is an act of intellect, not an act of the emotion. Paul said, "For with the heart man believeth . . ." (Romans 10:10).

Paul is speaking of the intellect because faith is an intellectual persuasion based on knowing, thinking, and understanding the evidence about God (Romans 10:17).

There are three rules for the care of the intellect that correspond to the three God-given faculties that it possesses: proper diet, proper exercise, and proper clothing. The proper diet for the intellect is "truth" (John 8:32; 14:6). The proper exercise for the intellect is the "study and meditation" of truth (1 Timothy

4:13; 2 Timothy 2:15). The only way to clothe the intellect and protect it from falsehoods and myths is by "applying the truth to oneself."

II. EMOTION IS THE COMBUSTION CHAMBER OF THE MORAL HEART

As the word suggests, emotion is the portion of the heart that moves a person. Emotions are fueled by intellect. Information and experience gathered through the five senses and digested by the intellect feed and ignite reactions within the emotional chamber. These reactions (emotions) then spark a chemical change within the body that motivates us for action—to flee, fight, cry, rejoice, love.

The physiological changes that accompany the emotions are so intense that the ancients identified the seat of the emotions in the belly and loins. First Peter 1:13 indicates that emotional reactions can and must be controlled reactions that prepare us to run in the right direction.

We control our emotions by steering our intellect. We turn off our emotional burners by turning our heads or attention and by refining the mixture of information and experience which fuel our emotions. We control our emotions by pondering wholesome things (Philippians 4:8).

III. CONSCIENCE IS THE JUDICIAL CHAMBER OF THE MORAL HEART

Conscience is the apparatus that sits in judgment over a man's actions; for this reason, conscience is described as the judicial chamber of the heart. As the judge of our moral condition, the conscience is constantly on guard, delivering its verdict on past, present, and even future actions. It commends or condemns past action, accuses or excuses present conduct, and approves or disapproves contemplated activity (Romans 2:15).

The conscience is properly a judicial, not a legislative, chamber. The conscience does not

make laws; it only enforces them. The conscience must be informed properly of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and evil, sin and righteousness, vice and virtue. The conscience is good at judging and policing action, but it is only as dependable as the standard it has been taught.

The conscience is quite vulnerable to some sorts of injuries. An uneducated or misinformed conscience is like an ignorant jury or a sleeping dog that permits trespassers to go free; so Paul said when he persecuted the church (Acts 26:9). If, like unshod feet, the conscience is regularly disregarded and trampled upon, it will grow calloused and become dull and insensitive (Ephesians 4:19).

IV. THE WILL IS THE EXECUTIVE CHAMBER OF THE MORAL HEART

Man is endowed with the power of choice, and the will is the seat of that faculty. The other chambers of the moral heart are subject to the will. The intellect empowers the will to make informed decisions, but the attention of the intellect is turned by the will.

Just as we decide what foods to put in our bodies, we also choose what we want to put into our minds. By our choices, we develop habits of thought. While the will must push the intellect, it must also restrain the emotions. The emotions tug at the will like a horse at the reins, but the will is in the saddle and tames the heart (emotion) by turning the head (intellect) this way and that. In fact, we sometimes say to the impatient, "Hold your horses!"

CONCLUSION

The physical heart is a thing of wonder, but the moral heart is even more amazing. See how it is made, learn how it functions, know the risk factors, and understand how to care for your moral heart. Keep it healthy. ^{ED}

General Conference Ministerial Association

GOD WILL FINISH WHAT HE HAS STARTED IN YOU

INTRODUCTION

Do you have an unfinished project waiting for you at home? Something you have been working on, trying to get finished—maybe for a long time—but for some reason, you haven't quite completed it? I would guess that most of us have some kind of project, some kind of goal we are working on. It's part of human nature; we all tackle various kinds of projects.

Do you work on only one project at a time and not even think about starting another one until the first one is finished? If so, I would guess that unfinished projects bother you until they're done, right? Or maybe you're the type of person who can have two or three projects going at once, all of them half done, and your attitude is, I'll get to them when I get a chance.

If you ask these two types of people to work on the same project, there may be a conflict! But you can also understand why these two types of people can complement each other and work well together.

The topic of this sermon isn't conflicting personalities; instead I want to remind you that God is going to finish what He has started in you and in me. God is not done with us. In fact, I get the feeling He's just getting started.

I want to share three things to remember as we talk about how God will finish what He has started in our lives.

I. REMEMBER GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU

In Luke 15:8, 9, Jesus tells a parable, a story that describes the Father's love. Think about what it means in your life today.

God spared nothing in His search for you. He gathered the greatest search party ever formed

to find you. He sent His Son, His Spirit, and His Angels after you. As they searched, His people prayed for you. You will never fully know how deep, how thorough, and how costly His search was. You do not belong to Him today because of chance, accident, or a stroke of fate. You are His because He never gave up His search until He found you. Read Romans 8:32. Remember, God rejoices over you not based on how good you are—He loves you and values you for who you are.

II. REMEMBER, GOD IS WORKING IN YOU

You are a work in progress. You are a project that God is working on, and you will not be complete until Christ comes back. If you dislike projects that don't get done "right now," you may have a hard time accepting this idea. But people who don't mind a couple of projects going at once will find this idea easy to accept.

Let me give you the key. Allowing God to change you, mold you, and use you is often painful, but it's always rewarding and fulfilling. I can look at some of my church members and see how God has done so much in their lives. What I see today is a result of God's working, but the changes come about because the members allow God to work in them.

God will finish what He has started in you, but you must remember that God is the one working in you. It's not your project, and you can't produce what only God can give. Only God through His Holy Spirit can produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

III. REMEMBER, GOD DOESN'T SEE FAILURE WHEN HE LOOKS AT YOU

We like to keep score, don't we? It's human nature to keep accounts, to keep score, to look for a winner and a loser. We bring this whole idea into our human relationships and into our relationship with God. We rate our-

selves in relationships based on many things: we compare ourselves to others, we look at worldly possessions—all kind of things get involved. Because we use these types of criteria, does that mean God uses them too? I believe that not only do we apply unrealistic standards for success or failure to ourselves, but we also think somehow that God judges us by those same standards.

When the Father sees you, He's not looking at your report card, or your work schedule, or your pay stubs. He's looking at your heart. Do you love Him? Do you love Him more than anything else? Will you serve Him?

Failure is part of the growing process. The truth is, there is no achievement without failure. How many times did the disciples have to fail miserably before they could see their need for the Holy Spirit? How many times did the Apostle Paul get thrown out of town while trying to preach the gospel? How many times was he arrested? Beaten? How many different plans do we need to accomplish what we want? The truth is, We don't stop. We don't give up. With every defeat, we're that much closer to victory.

CONCLUSION

Today I challenge you, in your own spiritual life and in the church. You need to know and believe that God is not done working in you, and He is going to complete what He has started in you, and in the church.

So I ask you—I plead with you—to put away your doubts. Put away your fears. Those things are not of God. Stand on truth, live by faith, believe and be excited about what God is doing and will continue to do in our community of faith. Remember, God is still working in you! **ED**

General Conference Ministerial Association



THE REASON FOR MISSION

Have you ever asked yourself why the Lord Jesus entrusted us with mission? Couldn't He have taken the Gospel to the world through other means? The Spirit of Prophecy affirms, "God could have proclaimed His truth through sinless angels, but this is not His plan."¹

Do you remember the day that God needed someone to give the message to Balaam? There was no evangelist around, no volunteer preacher, no minister, no church elder. What did God do? He took a donkey, gave him an outline, and the donkey preached! Centuries later, Jesus, referring to the disciples' possible silence, stated, "I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40). In other words, God has many ways to evangelize the world. The

Spirit of Prophecy says that "God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid."²

So what led Jesus to entrust His mission to human beings? The Spirit of Prophecy answers this question, indicating that "for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work."³ In the divine plan, those who do nothing in God's cause do not grow in grace or in the knowledge of truth.

Jesus came to this world to seek and save the lost. This lost soul was each one of us when we did not know the gospel, but one day we accepted Jesus as our Savior, and at that moment we were saved. The great challenge of the Christian life is to remain within the experience of salvation. To remain in God's love and

GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES

to grow in grace requires two things: daily Bible study and constant prayer.

Most Christians discover that as time passes, they begin to lose their desire to pray and read the Bible. Why? "There is but one genuine cure for spiritual laziness, and that is work—working for souls who need your help. . . . This is the recipe that Christ has prescribed for the fainthearted, doubting, trembling soul. Let the sorrowful ones, who walk mournfully before the Lord, arise and help someone who needs help."⁴

According to these quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy, the first purpose of mission is not just to evangelize the world. Jesus could have reached this objective in many ways. When Jesus entrusted mission to human beings, He intended that men and women could grow in grace, leave their spiritual indolence behind, and go forward as strong souls.

If you as a church elder see Christians in your congregation who do not become involved in mission, who do not win souls, and who do not participate in church outreach program, you should be very concerned, not because the church will fall short of its baptismal goal, but because when a member does not witness, he or she is missing out on a complete Christian experience. Healthy Christians are committed to the church's mission.

Sometimes we get confused. We think that the objective of mission is to baptize, so we invent methods and strategies to baptize more people. This would be fine if the purpose of mission was just to increase the number of members. On one occasion we asked an agent at one of Brazil's largest advertising agencies what would happen if the Seventh-day Adventist Church held an advertising campaign through the largest means of media available. Do you know what he answered? "That would be no problem. It would cost you a lot of money, but you could get that. The problem would be: Where would you put all the new church members? You would need several years to build enough churches to hold all the people who would join the church as a result of the campaign."

If mission meant only bringing people to the church, a good advertising campaign would solve the problem. But Jesus was think-

ing about the spiritual growth of the church. "There is no such thing as a truly converted person living a helpless, useless life."⁵ "There is danger for those who do little or nothing for Christ. The grace of God will not long abide in the soul of him who, having great privileges and opportunities, remains silent."⁶

When Jesus entrusted us with the mission of His church, He said, "You will be my witnesses." "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness." "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world." "Go and make disciples." In all of these commands the individual is required to participate. The Lord Jesus did not entrust His mission only to professional evangelists.

When we as ministers, elders, or Bible instructors take the church's mission in our hands and forget to make each member a missionary soul-winner, we run the risk that we will one day be held responsible for the blood of those Christians who did not grow spiritually because they did not understand that there can be no salvation experience without witnessing.

The great challenge that you have as a church leader is to keep watch so that each member fulfills his/her mission. "Let ministers [the church elder is a volunteer minister] teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of leading souls into the truth. Those who are not fulfilling their responsibility should be visited, prayed with, [and] labored for."⁷ **ED**

Think on this!

1. Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 7.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 13; see also Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 280.

6. White, *Christian Service*, p. 89.

7. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 200.

Alejandro Bullon

South American Division Ministerial Secretary

GOD'S

PULPIT

H. W. LOWE

"The Christian pulpit is not a throne—
Do not lord it over the people.

It is not a judgment bar—
Do not condemn.

It is not an auction stall—
Do not buy or sell.

It is not a theatrical stage—
Do not perform.

But it is God's table for hungry souls,
Sin-sick hearts, and burden bearers.

Your ministry's highest service as
requested by the great Master Shep-
herd is "Feed My Sheep."

This verse was taken from the door leading to the pulpit of one of our churches in Johannesburg. Although used in *Ministry* some years ago, we felt it was arresting enough to use once more, especially because of a criticism which had been made the week the verse had been drawn to our attention.

A gathering of friends graced our home one Sabbath afternoon. We had all been to church that day—some nearby, some farther afield—and we were comparing notes on the services. In our church we had had a good sermon, and we said so.

Then one of our visitors observed, "We had another scolding, as usual!" We will not repeat more, except to say that if people should not talk publicly in that way,

neither should we preachers provide the temptation for them to do so.

It is true that the man of God must "reprove, rebuke, and exhort," but that is only *part* of the apostolic admonition. These things are to be done "with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). In the Revised Standard Version, the words are rendered as "be unflinching in patience and in teaching."

Not a throne

The pulpit is not a place from which the minister dispenses orders and incessantly reproves either the faithful or the unfaithful. If pastors would fill their sermons with the teaching (*didache*) of Christ, the reproof would go silently home to the heart of the hearer through the compelling power of truth. Cracking the whip, haranguing the people, and denunciatory speech aimed at everything and everybody cheapens the pulpit and disgusts the people. It is a poverty-stricken pulpit where the preacher's only weapon is a whip. These habits can be cured if a minister will think, study, and preach the great and positive themes of the Word of God, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end.

Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), a Scottish preacher and theologian, was the brilliant pastor of a Scottish church when he was only 23 years old. His small congregation loved him but could not understand why, after a hard week's work, they came to church only to hear the marvelous young preacher thundering away against all kinds of sins as though the members had spent the

week in open shame. This went on from 1803–1811, and then a sudden change occurred. Chalmers ceased to thunder against the grosser crimes and against the iniquities of Napoleon; instead, he always had something fresh to say about the love of God, about the cross of Christ, and about the way of salvation.¹ Chalmers explained that in 1811, he was converted after eight years of what has been called "whiplash preaching." He carried into a wider ministry of preaching, teaching, and writing the lessons thus learned among the humble Scottish cottagers, where the last four years of his preaching produced many a trophy of redeeming grace.

John Bunyan (1628–1688) was once a "whiplash" preacher and says: "I went for the space of two years crying out against men's sins and their fearful state because of them. After which the Lord came in upon my own soul with peace and comfort through Christ. He gave me many sweet discoveries of blessed grace through Him. Wherefore now I altered my preaching and did much labor to hold forth Christ in all His offices, relations, and benefits unto the world. After this, God led me into something of the mystery of the union with Christ."²

We have long had before us such admonition as the following: "It is natural for some to be sharp and dictatorial, to lord it over God's heritage; and because of this manifestation of these attributes, precious souls have been lost to the cause."³

Perhaps some of us need to drop the whip, and, abasing ourselves at the foot of the cross, learn anew that love is Christ's most potent weapon, that truth as it is in Him is the great sanctifier of the soul (John 17:17-20), and the Holy Spirit is the greatest corrector of wrong (16:8)

and the one guide into all truth (verse 13). No, the pulpit is not a throne!

Not a judgment bar

The pulpit is not a judgment bar before which any and every question of human controversy can be decided. Failure to grasp this will find the preacher in deep water. A minister does not know everything and is not expected to. The Bible does not answer all human problems; It is a textbook of the science of salvation, and not a *vade mecum* to every question under the sun.

How often preachers have allowed themselves to be drawn into political controversy to the detriment of their success as pastors and evangelists! Christian workers of all classes should not be drawn "into debate or controversy on political or other questions."⁴ To counsel and advise on great moral issues before the public is one thing; to press a certain solution dogmatically and publicly is quite another.

The pulpit must of necessity be a place where controversial issues are dealt with. In a certain sense, the main issues of Christianity are controversial. Sin, atonement, redemption, the deity and nature of Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, the eschatology of Scripture—these are issues from which we must not—dare not—shrink. Here is a warning word from the famous W. H. Griffith Thomas: "We have to take care that we are not mere controversialists, for this type of man is one of the most unlovely, unspiritual, and objectionable of beings. We must not wage war for the love of it, but if we find it necessary to wage it, we must do so in love."⁵

The very nature of our role as Adventist preachers with an unpopular message can easily cause us to become denunciatory, controversial, and condemnatory. So

many issues that contradict God's Word must be opposed, and the faith must be delivered, defended, and commended to the saints. We have to preach so that the arrows of the Word reach human hearts, and we must preach in the divine pattern of Christ: "Every time He addressed the people, whether His audience was large or small, His words took saving effect upon the soul of someone. No message that fell from His lips was lost. Every word He spoke placed a new responsibility upon those who heard. And today the ministers who, in sincerity, are giving the last message of mercy to the world, relying on God for strength, need not fear that their efforts will be in vain."⁶

We must make God's pulpit heaven's trysting place for needy sinners instead of a judgment bar that metes out nothing except condemnation.

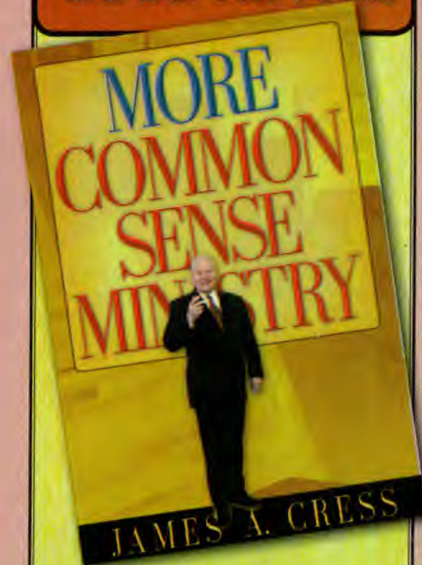
Not a theatrical stage

Under pressure to fill the church, preachers have sometimes resorted to novel expedients. The preacher who titled his sermon "How a Man Sinned by Having His Hair Cut" had a unique way to introduce Samson, but was it dignified? Did it add to the attractiveness of the church? Did it draw others besides the curious?

No one likes to listen to preachers who stand unmoved and lifeless as statues while they preach. How can men be on fire with a message impregnated with life-and-death issues and be statuesque, unemotional, unmoved, and unmoving? But when emotion and sensationalism run riot, then the pulpit degenerates into a theater. "Surely the house of God is not a theatre, or a concert hall, where it becomes the great object of the proprietor to fill the building, and make it pay."⁷

"In this age of extravagance and outward show, when men think it is necessary to

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make a display to gain success, God's chosen messengers are to show the fallacy of spending needlessly for effect. As they labor with simplicity, humility, and graceful dignity, avoiding everything of a theatrical nature, their work will make a lasting impression for good."⁸

A table for hungry souls

One of the great failures in pulpit ministry today is seen in the quality of its sermons. In too many cases, they cry out to heaven that preachers—Adventist and non-Adventist alike—are not studying the life-giving Word. Just as surely as this continues, the enemy will come in like a devastating flood and sweep away the faith of many. Many persons who remain in churches served mainly by non-biblical preaching become weak in their faith and are often easy prey for non-biblical teaching. We must "feed the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2) or it will languish.

The table the Lord has prepared for His people is His will revealed through the Bible. God's people can feast on that Word in two ways—through private study or in public worship. A small number do both, but preachers know that private Bible study is almost nonexistent. In a group of Christian college students, 73 percent recently admitted they have never prayed with either one of their parents, and it is almost certain that the same confession applies to Bible study. It therefore remains for the preacher to help by his sermons, studies, and interviews to try to fill this terrifying vacuum in the lives of his people.

"The minds of men must be called to the Scriptures as the most effective agency in the salvation of souls, and the ministry of the Word is the great educational force to produce this result."⁹

The pulpit must become the Lord's table around which the hungry church family gathers, and it must here be fed, inspired, and built up in the "most holy faith" (Jude 20). Here the Holy Word must be dispensed and the holy Christ exalted.

"The whole Bible is a manifestation of Christ, and the Saviour desired to fix the faith of His followers on the Word."¹⁰

Preachers who make the sermon hour a feast of good scriptural things for the hungry soul can make the pulpit a dispensary of redeeming grace for hungry souls, and a place from which the Redeemer's welcome voice can be heard from week to week.

"Father of mercies, in Thy Word, / What endless glory shines!

For ever be Thy name adored, / For these celestial lines.

Here the Redeemer's welcome voice / Spreads heavenly peace around,


And life and everlasting joys / Attend the blissful sound."¹¹ ED

1. Charles L. Goodell, *Cyclopedia of Evangelism*, pp. 133, 136.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 137.
3. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 223; cf. pp. 280, 302.
4. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, p. 122.
5. W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Work of the Ministry*, p. 150.
6. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 150, 151.
7. Joseph Gowan, *Homiletics*, p. 157.
8. *Gospel Workers*, p. 346.
9. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 288.
10. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 390.
11. Anne Steele.

H. W. Lowe

Former Managing Editor, *The Ministry*


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WHY PRAYER FAILS



How often have you heard it said, “Well, I prayed and nothing changed?” It is probably safe to say that at one time or another, we have all felt that God has turned His back on us. If we are truly honest and face the truth about ourselves, we can find the reason, the hindrance to the prayer plan. Prayer is God and man uniting purposes to accomplish results. Our asking and expecting, joined with God’s doing, bring about results that would otherwise be impossible.

Sin hinders prayer. This should come as no surprise to us, but we blame God entirely when our prayers fail to bring results. Prayer is pulling with God to shape the world. Prayer is useless and a waste of breath if we are holding something in our lives that is displeasing to God. Sin can be defined as anything that separates us from God. The second petition of the Lord’s prayer, “Hallowed be thy name,” suggests beyond any doubt that our lives are to be lived to honor our heavenly Father. This in itself clears the channels of our lives so that God’s love can come in and fill our hearts, allowing us to be in constant touch with God. Read Isaiah 1:15; Isaiah 59:1-3; and Psalm 66:18.

James 4:2, 3 says that we receive not because we ask for the wrong things. That is, we are selfish in our prayers. We say, “Change my son. He bears my name and I want to be proud of him.” Our motives are wrong.

Prayer can be offered for personal things such as healing, money, and physical strength. God loves us and wants us to enjoy our lives to the fullest, but our motive determines whether or not our prayers are proper. The purpose of our prayers should please Him. There are many reasons for perplexity in praying.

The Bible talks clearly about these problems, and we are well aware of many of our own personal difficulties. “Your iniquities have separated you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you” (Isaiah 59:2, KJV). “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8, KJV). “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23, 24, KJV). Search your soul: Do you harbor a grudge, wish for another’s harm, envy someone, behave carelessly, think bad thoughts, cherish sins (great or small), and act selfishly?

Moods also influence our prayer lives. Life does not allow us to maintain constant high spirits. Mountains and valleys and emotional ups and downs are natural. Moods are the clouds of our lives; they will pass. Jesus went from transfiguration to His hour of bitterness: “And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, la-ma sabach-tha-ni? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46, KJV). Pray whether or not you feel like it. Pray when you are depressed and when you feel good about yourself.

One important consideration is the individual temperament. Every person must be allowed to pray in his or her own way. We are each different and unique—God likes us that way. The Bible mentions a vast variety of prayer attitudes: kneeling (Acts 20:36); standing (Jeremiah 18:20); sitting (2 Samuel 7:18); prostrate (Matthew 26:39); silently (1 Samuel 1:13); aloud (Ezekiel 11:13); in the Temple (2 Kings 19:14); in bed (Psalm 63:6); in fields (Genesis 24:11, 12); on the hillside

(Genesis 28:18-20); on a battlefield (1 Samuel 7:5); by the riverside (Acts 16:13); at the seashore (Acts 21:5); in private (Matthew 6:6); practical (Nehemiah 1:3, 5); poetic (the Psalms); melancholy (Jeremiah 14:19); and radiant-spirited (Isaiah 12:2). Prayer is not reserved for a special class of people. Each individual should cultivate in himself or herself a respect for his or her own natural type of prayer.

The presence of God can be experienced only within our own hearts. God blesses us through our own capacities to receive and appropriate. If we love one another, God abides in us (1 John 4:12). We are a temple of the living God. God said, “I will dwell in them” (2 Corinthians 6:16). “If any man . . . opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). “The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water” (John 4:14). “I cry unto God . . . I commune with mine own heart” (Psalm 77).

The *only* way any man can commune with God is through his own heart. No one can experience the presence of God until he or she accepts the fact that God is seeking him or her. Luke 15 cites three instances of this. Our search for God means simply to surrender to His search. We consent to be found by Him. **ED**

This article is excerpted and adapted from the practical resource, *Learning to Pray*, by Carolyn Shealy Self and William L. Self. The entire book is available for purchase at www.ministerialassociation.com



BUILDING STRONG

KAREN AND RON FLOWERS

God put human beings into families and into His big family to make sure everyone had a place to feel special and to be affirmed in a world where many feel lonely and isolated. How is it that we often take something like family—so vital to the health and well-being of humankind—for granted? Why do family problems so often need to reach crisis proportions before family ministry becomes a priority in the church? Perhaps it's because the church has been slow to recognize a very simple principle: Healthy families don't just happen. Families need care if they are to be strong and healthy.

The care of families is important because family relationships are dynamic. Families need to be cared for because relationships are constantly changing and developing. The images gracing our wedding photo album are certainly not the same two faces that greet us each morning in the mirror nearly 40 years later! The stresses and strains of the journey up the corporate ladder are worlds away from the challenges of growing old. Husbands and wives who once playfully enjoyed one another may one day find themselves living silently under the same roof and wondering how a marriage that began with such promise could disintegrate to this sad state. Without intentional care, vibrant health in families can slip away as easily as an individual puts on weight and loses muscle tone over the holidays.

The care of families is important because change is inevitable and difficult. Families everywhere are in the throes of social, economic, technological, and political change. Some change is predictable, and preparations can be made. For example, as surely as the leaves come out on the trees in the Spring, children and teens will enter the wider world with all of its influences—good and bad. Parents who are helped to anticipate this challenge will be better equipped to prepare their children and to set appropriate limits.

Not all change is predictable, however. Sometimes events that change life forever in a family come suddenly and without warning: a child dies in a tragic accident, parents lose their jobs, war breaks out and families must leave their homes for safety, etc. Families can be empowered for growth and change, or they can be left highly vulnerable to the powerful and sometimes destructive winds that often accompany change.

The care of families is important because the strength of the church and society is dependent upon the health of their most basic unit—the family. A small boy who was building a church from toy blocks on an uneven surface was exceedingly frustrated because his church kept tumbling down. In desperation he finally said, "If I can't find a better place to build this, there's no use in building!" How right he was in observing that no structure can be any stronger than the base upon which it is built. Ellen White summed up this principle nicely as it applies to the im-

portance of keeping families strong and healthy: "The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. . . . The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences."¹

Strong families communicate with each other. Caring families listen and share in ways that make people feel safe in sharing their innermost thoughts and feelings. They intentionally create opportunity for dialogue. One mother quickly learned that a few minutes of rubbing her son's tired legs at bedtime loosened his tongue amazingly! A doctor found that his daughter enjoyed making rounds with him. The trip to and from the hospital and

Strong families find joy in each other. A gospel song has a line that goes, "We're going together, enjoying the trip, getting used to the family we'll spend eternity with." Family living may be filled with challenges, but Christian families can experience a deep abiding joy in the surety of the full and complete salvation which is theirs in Jesus Christ. Finding the joy and sharing it in the family and in the wider circle is what being family is all about.

The church has a major role to play in caring for families. Start with one of these "do-ables" this week:

FAMILIES

A seminar at church offers this family a creative family worship



through the halls gave them a time and place to keep in touch with one another.


Healthy families show their love and affection for one another.

Kay Kuzma, a popular Adventist author on family living, visualizes every human being as having a "love cup" inside. When love cups are full to overflowing, people experience an inner sense of personal well-being that is likely to spill over and spread love to whomever their lives touch. Healthy families look for ways to communicate their love in ways that make each individual family member feel that love personally.

Well-functioning families have realistic expectations. They expect sticky things to be spilled, siblings to quarrel, and getting everyone out the door on time to church to be a challenge. Healthy families are able to grow toward the ideal while at the same time being patient with one another as growing human beings.

Strong families spend time together—working, playing, worshipping. Even in the midst of activity overload, successful families make time for each other. They make a concerted effort to eat together at least once a day. They share responsibility for chores to keep the household running smoothly. Our family plays table games. Our good friends make kites. Another family gives teams of two responsibility for designing a creative worship activity for Friday evening each week. Families whose members enjoy one another's company often will likely continue throughout life.

- Plan a family church service, giving various families responsibility for reading Scripture, providing music, acting out a Bible story as a children's feature, etc.
- Honor a member of your community in church who provides a service to families in your area—a family counselor, physician, director of a shelter for abuse victims, etc. Use this opportunity to educate families about the community resources available to them.
- Go on retreat together as a church family and just enjoy learning, playing, and worshipping together.
- Invite the youth of the church to put on a Sweethearts' Banquet for all the married couples in the church.
- Start a parents' support group that meets monthly for one year to learn from each other about the needs, joys, and challenges of each stage of child growth and development.

Family is worth caring for. And cared-for families help to make a church the family of God. 

1. Ellen G. White *Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 349.

Karen & Ron Flowers

General Conference Directors of Family Ministries



The meaning of Marriage

CAROLYN SHEALY SELF and WILLIAM L. SELF

The New York Times Magazine recently featured an article about the demise of suburbia. One of the obvious but still shocking causes of the failure of suburbia has been divorce. In 1978 alone, there were two million marriages and one million divorces in the United States. The nuclear family, consisting of the breadwinning father, homemaking mother, and 3.1 children, all cozy and happy, is getting more difficult to find. When we hear of another divorce, we ask, "What is happening to marriage?" And we wonder, "Will it happen to me?"

We need to take a realistic look at what marriage really is. Marriage is a union of two individuals. Both come with their own ideas, attitudes, and ways of doing things and handling problems. Suddenly they have to learn to live with someone else's ideas, attitudes, and ways of doing things and handling problems. How well the marriage works depends on how well spouses understand themselves and how well they can tolerate and accept the differences of their mates. Someone said, "All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes trouble." We are often impatient when love and marriage do not solve life's problems, but romantic love is worthless if it is not grounded in reality.

Reality is sometimes not only a shock but also a surprise. Nobody likes surprises like these: he comes home tired and irritable; she is not always sexually responsive; someone has to take out the garbage and clean the bathtub; money will stretch only so far, and you thought Daddy was going to provide the extras forever; she's a night person, he's a day person, etc.

We all expect some magic in every place—jobs, home, vacation, children, marriage. We all want the ideal, the perfect in everything. We need to learn that when a good thing happens, when a good relationship develops, it is the result of working creatively

with realities, one at a time. A fantasy concept of marriage on the part of either the husband or the wife needs immediate help from a competent counselor. Never hesitate to seek help. It will be a growing experience for both husbands and wives.

Giving up "fantasy" or "magical" notions about marriage does not mean you lose the beauty and mystery of this most intimate relationship. It does mean that you can realistically approach each other without having to wear a mask or hide a part of yourself. It frees the couple to express—without fear of being misunderstood—their innermost feelings and longings. You can dream together and make realistic plans together.

Your marriage is not soundly built until married love has taken the place of romantic illusions. Married love develops after marriage. This means that even sturdy, married love requires attention if it is to remain healthy. From the very beginning, you need to creatively nurture your relationship. Little things mean a lot. Bill and I give loving greetings and farewells and affectionate glances to each other in a crowd. We are interested in each other's activities, and we enjoy doing many things together. Continual nurturing must take place, however you accomplish it. Marriage is the most intimate human relationship. It is a beautiful and delicate mystery that is never completely revealed; there is always more to discover.

A healthy marriage needs goals and priorities. Set goals together—marriage goals, lifetime goals, individual goals. I don't mean high-sounding goals like these:

WIFE: "I will make our home a calm, quiet haven of rest; it will be well-organized and run smoothly."

HUSBAND: "I will provide my family with all the things they

Marriage can be happy, satisfying, successful, and rewarding



need to be happy; my wife can always depend on me for all her needs.”

WIFE: “I know my husband isn’t perfect; he drinks too much sometimes and he doesn’t always follow through on commitments, but I love him so much and I’ll make him so satisfied and happy that he will change.”

HUSBAND: “We will buy a house in two years, go to Europe in three years, and start our family in five years. We will be happy.”

HUSBAND and WIFE: “Our goal is to have a successful marriage; a nice home in a nice neighborhood; two cars; intelligent, well-behaved children (a boy first, then a girl); and an ego-satisfying job, total sexual fulfillment; no sickness; and no conflict.”

These may sound far-fetched to you, but they are examples of the ways some people idealize marriage. One couple I know got into an argument nearly every evening after he came home from the office and before dinner. The wife had gotten into the habit of greeting her husband with a recitation of all her woes of the day. He had no time to shed the troubles he had accumulated before she hung more on him. He became more and more withdrawn, and she resented this feeling of isolation. This situation could have been resolved by allowing each spouse a little space. Allowing the husband a little time to shed the office—a glass of juice or a cup of tea in a quiet spot, with nothing but pleasant conversation or no conversation and no children for even ten or fifteen minutes—would have worked wonders for the relationship.

One of the most beautiful women I know, Mrs. Baker James Cauthen, in talking about how Dr. Cauthen had been able to carry the world in his heart and deal with the day-to-day “nitty-gritty,” said: “We agreed early that he would not have to rehash his day’s work when he came home. I have found my fulfillment in many areas of service and, of course, I’m always ready to listen when he needs me to be a sounding board.” This dear couple has been through all the traumas that a long, useful life can bring and are living proof that two people whose commitment is to God and to each other can come through it all with grace and dignity. This commitment has been the overall goal in their lives.

As the years have gone by, they have examined and adjusted their daily and weekly priorities so that they are in keeping with their lifetime goals.

Sometimes I hear a remark like, “Jane and Bob have an ideal marriage.” Chances are that while Jane and Bob may have a good relationship and life together, they also encounter the thorns and booby traps common to human relationships. We should never succumb to the temptation to pattern our lives after someone else’s, because what is ideal for one couple may be intolerable to another.

Marriage can be happy, satisfying, successful, and rewarding. It is not a static state of perfection; it must always be a moving, alive relationship, adjusting and changing to accommodate life’s situations. Did anyone say to you when you got married, “Now you can settle down?” They were saying, “Now you’re grown up. Now that you are an adult, nothing will change anymore.” Nothing could be further from the truth. This would be like saying to a person who has just become a Christian, “Now you’re saved; that’s all you have to do.” The Christian life is one of dynamic growth. The New Testament is growth-oriented, and inspired writers often rebuke Christians for failing to grow.

Marriage and families should also experience growth as they move through the changing cycles of life. This cannot be automatic or always upward. Life is a constant “becoming.” We have to ask, “Becoming what? Where am I going? Where are we going? Continued growth creates vitality, excitement, feelings of accomplishment, and the ability to cope with crises in one’s marriage. There are peaks and valleys in any relationship, and family life is no exception. ^{ED}

Bible Passages

Ephesians 4:15-16; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Corinthians 13

This article is excerpted and adapted from the practical resource, *Survival Kit for Marriage*, by Carolyn Shealy Self and William L. Self. The entire book is available for purchase at <www.ministerialassociation.com>

how about platform appearance and **MANNERS?**

W . A . H I G G I N S

In my work as publishing department director, one of my responsibilities is the training of literature evangelists in the art of gospel salesmanship. Among other things, we point out the importance of a good personality, the need for courtesy, and the necessity of avoiding distracting mannerisms. Ministers and local elders are salespeople too. We are selling the greatest product of service in all the world, and our habits and appearance decidedly help or hurt our chances of success.



I have been thinking about some habits that greatly affect a minister's usefulness. Some of them may seem small and insignificant, but if they influence the hearers unfavorably, we ought to avoid them.

Personal appearance

People begin to judge you at their first glance, and the way you dress speaks to them before you say a word.

Certainly ministers ought to give careful thought to make sure that they dress in keeping with their profession. *Gospel Workers* offers this counsel regarding the minister's dress: "Carefulness in dress is an important consideration. The minister should be clothed in a manner befitting the dignity of his position."¹ Of course, customs vary in different climates and countries, but we feel that sport clothing or loud ties are not appropriate for pulpit wear in any city church.

Again we are told that "untidiness in dress brings a reproach against the truth we profess to believe. . . . This is not a matter of little consequence, for it affects your influence over others for time and for eternity."²

Platform manners

When you are seated on the platform, keep both feet flat on the

floor. Look alert, interested, and not too relaxed. Do not cross your legs; some who do this expose short socks or worn shoe soles. This informal attitude does not reveal the best platform manners. Don't whisper. There may be occasions for some brief question or a word of explanation, but it should be done quickly and as inconspicuously as possible, because whispering can be very disturbing to the one who is speaking from the pulpit, as well as being distracting to the audience. If you are one of those seated on the platform, avoid distracting mannerisms, such as repeatedly clicking a pencil, which can be extremely annoying to the person addressing the congregation, as well as disturbing to the people in the first few rows of the church.

Participate in the congregational singing. Follow the text as the worship leader reads. Don't just sit and read your Bible during the service. Look at the speaker. Look at the congregation. Stay alert. Whether you are giving the message or seated on the platform, don't obviously look at your watch during the service. It may cause others to do the same thing and thereby divert their minds from the message being delivered. It will start them thinking about how much time remains in the service and what they may do following the sermon. Speakers should be aware of the time they are taking and be certain to finish at the correct hour, but they should not call attention to the time.

In announcing songs, some leaders say, "We will now sing page 163" when they actually mean "hymn number 163." There is a difference! Occasionally the most experienced speaker may misuse or mispronounce a word. The list of such words is long. Here is an example we heard recently: "We'll send you a little momento." Of course he meant "memento." Such errors are as distracting to some people as a discordant note is to the ear of a musician.

"By the atmosphere surrounding us, every person with whom we come in contact is consciously or unconsciously affected. This is a responsibility from which we cannot free ourselves. Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, have an influence. Upon the impression thus

made there hang results for good or evil which no man can measure."³ If your personality, dress, speech, or habits offend people, you make it difficult for them to accept your message. Check up on yourself. Be the best person possible to deliver the greatest message and invitation in all the world.

"The minister must remember that favorable or unfavorable impressions are made upon his hearers by his deportment in the pulpit, his attitude, his manner of speaking, his dress. He should cultivate courtesy and refinement of manner, and should carry himself with a quiet dignity becoming to his high calling."⁴

What do people think of you on Sabbath when you are seated on the platform or standing behind the desk? Remember,

great characters are formed by little acts and efforts, and ministers who are constantly before the people are judged by the way they look, act, and talk.

How about your platform appearance and manners? **ED**

1. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 173.
2. White, *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 65.
3. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 339, 340.
4. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 172.

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DISCIPLESHIP

JESUS LOVES THE LITTLE CHILDREN



"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world." You remember the tune you learned as a child. Today's blight of clergy child molestation might force us to reword the tune: "Jesus used to love the children; Now He doesn't anymore!"

Imagine the horror when a church leader violates a child; the terrible incongruity of spiritual leaders who represent Jesus but who take advantage of their powerful positions to molest those least able to defend themselves. Ministers who abuse those who should be able to depend on the church and its leadership for protection shatter a youngster's view of God even as they destroy the youngster's emotional future.

While all sin is abhorrent in God's sight, some sins are, indeed, more heinous than others. Even Jesus, who extended mercy to adulterers, advocated immediate capital punishment for those who violate children. "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2).

Note, Jesus taught zero tolerance—execution by drowning. The God of "second chances" refused to give abusers future access to their victims. The same Savior who challenged those without sin to cast the first stone advocated millstones

around the necks of child abusers. Some advocate mercy for those who violate children, and, of course, forgiveness is available to any sinner. Scripture, however, advocates mercy for their victims and protection for those who would become their victims if they were loosed to prey again upon the innocent.

Beyond decrying these horrid misdeeds, as church leaders we must proactively protect our children and youth from predators. Some simple guidelines:

Value your church's children. Recruit the best possible leaders for children's ministries, budget for quality resources, and monitor behavior to ensure the safety of all who participate in church functions.

Establish performance standards. No program should be sponsored which permits children to be supervised by a lone adult, whether clergy or laity. Children should be transported to and from church events only by their own parents or by a two-adult-minimum team. Clearly announce time schedules for activities and demand close adherence.

Monitor compliance. Elect leaders for Children's Ministries and request frequent reports to the Board. Both policies and personnel should be reviewed to assure the best possible standards and protection.

Avoid even the appearance of evil. Consider simple measures like installing windows in all church offices, declining to meet alone with parishioners, insisting that private conversations occur in public settings, rejecting any person suspected of abuse as a children's leader, and establishing a pastor/elder presence at every church-sponsored event.

Do not hide the truth. When abuse occurs, do not disguise the reality in the misguided belief that you are protecting the church. Even clergy confidentiality is not sufficient reason to avoid appropriate disclosure and discipline. It is nonsense to feel that because a parishioner has confided their misbehavior to a minister, they should be protected. Their helpless victims must be protected and the perpetrators ("perps") must be dealt with by legal authorities. When accusations of sexual misconduct against children are made, do not assume or defend the innocence of the alleged perp. Permit the legal system to investigate all issues.

Notify civil authorities immediately when abuse is suspected. Learn the legal requirements about reporting abuse and never fail to follow the law. In most jurisdictions, clergy members who become aware of abuse are required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

Screen all volunteers. Never feel compelled to place people in position of authority or give them access to children just because they volunteer. Avoid placing newcomers into positions of responsibility until you have had opportunity to observe them over a sustained period of time. Especially beware of those who rush to children's ministry. Thank them for their interest, share how your organization values children, and explain your mission of leading youngsters to a personal relationship with Jesus. Observe how they relate to authority and their own families, check references carefully, and provide all children's workers with written rules of conduct and expectations. Then, only after months of observation, invite them to participate by completing a volunteer screening form and

orient all volunteers to a team approach for service. Those unwilling to follow this approach should not be entrusted with your children.

Bobbie Drake, a specialist in abuse prevention and intervention to support victims, recommends specific actions when allegations are made:

Believe the child or teen. Fewer than five percent of allegations are false, even when custody issues are at stake. Be supportive of the victim and his or her family.

Report allegations promptly. For cases of incest, contact Child Protection Services; report other abuse to the police. Resist the temptation to contact or negotiate with the alleged offender. Most molesters can manipulate even clergy or therapists. Civil authorities will follow legal procedures.

Provide appropriate support to the alleged offender. Say, "I will pray for you while you go through the judicial court system, but the church cannot interfere with that process or serve as your defense reference."

Notify judicatory administrators. Congregations should always engage leadership in decisions that impact the de-

nominal entities or public media. I always advise pastors, "If in doubt, call your conference president!"

Notify insurance providers. Immediately notify your insurance provider of any complaint and follow their guidance in issues that affect liability and treatment. Secure competent therapists for victims. Seek the best sex-abuse therapist in the area. Avoid those with no specialized training in this discipline.

Remove accused perpetrators from leadership. Require accused individuals to step aside until all issues are resolved. If a false accusation has been made, specialists can determine by pertinent testing whether allegations are true. Children tell their stories differently than adults and, if questioned by an expert, the basic truth will be revealed.

Level with your congregation. Do not hide reality or attempt to "sweep bad news under the rug." You can announce, "I am sorry to tell you that there has been a sexual abuse allegation against Brother Perp. The church is taking appropriate steps by contacting the public and church authorities, and we will report the conclusions only after this matter is settled. We ask that you pray for both Brother Perp and the victim's fam-

ily. Both of these families are precious to us and to Christ."

Avoid ongoing analysis or do not make additional statements. Announce that you will not provide updates until the authorities conclude their investigation, and then stick to your vow of silence. This approach will reduce speculation, gossip, polarization, and innuendo. Ask judicatory administrators to appoint a spokesperson and refer all media requests to that individual.

Educate yourself, your children, and your leaders. Excellent resources are available, including a children-focused training book by Bobbie Drake, *Friends: Good, Bad, and Secret*, and a special eight-page resource, *Making Churches Safe* (online at <www.ministerialassociation.com>), which was originally published in Australia by the South Pacific Record.


Exalt Jesus' example. Our Lord's own interest in children should show the priority of reaching, protecting, and developing the potential of our youngest believers. **ED**

James A. Cress, General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

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