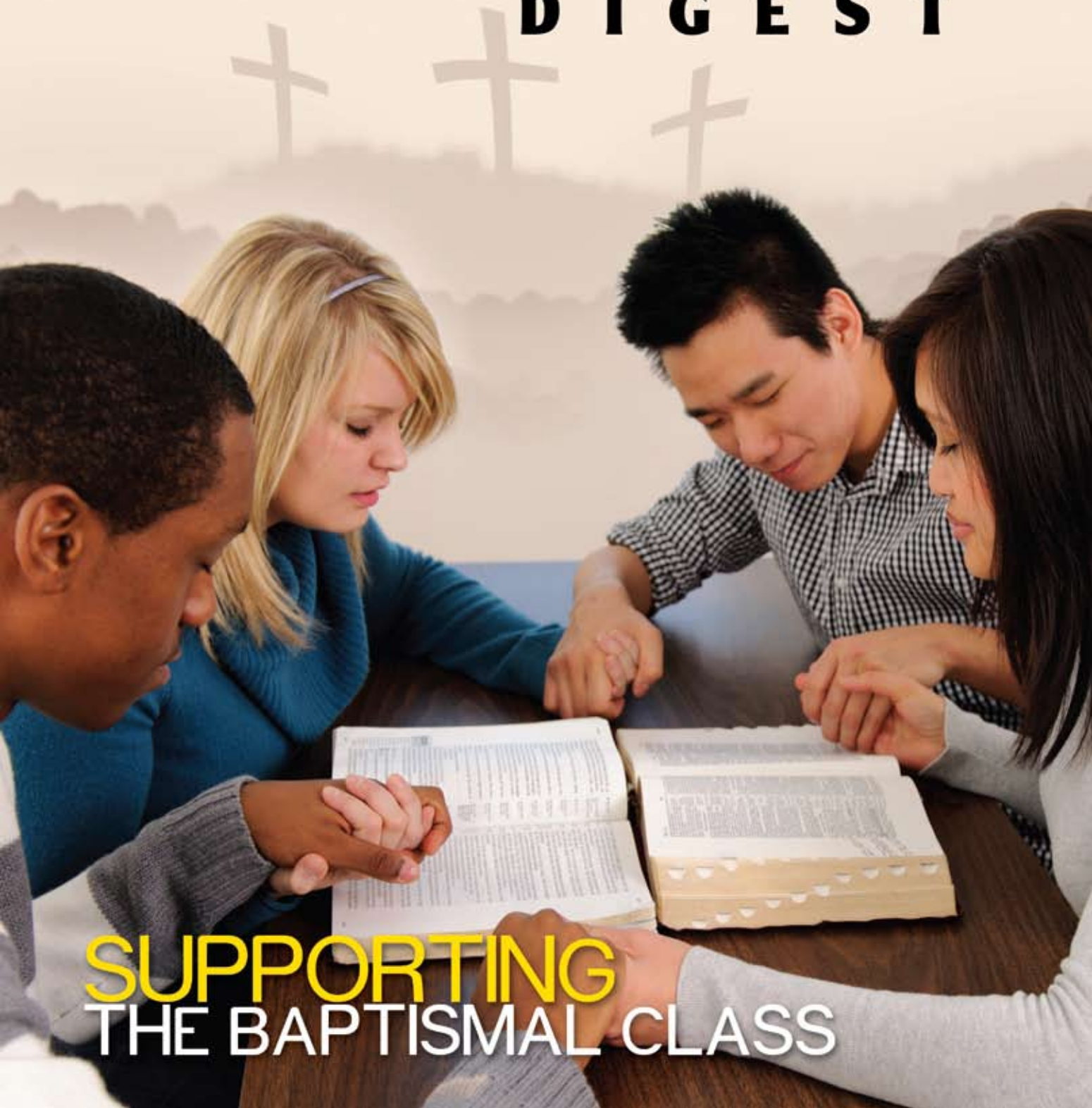


quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2011

ELDER'S DIGEST



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THE BAPTISMAL CLASS

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DEAD OR ALIVE?

In ancient Israel, God’s people often drifted away from Him, away from reverence toward His law, and away from His protection. As a result, they were often controlled by heathen nations. It was in such a dark hour that the prophet Samuel arose to bring the stern reproof needed to draw Israel back to God. A great spiritual revival was needed before the strong hand of the Philistines would be removed. In leading the people back to a relationship with God and His law, Samuel helped the Israelites recognize how far they had drifted into secularism and idolatry. With deep humiliation, they confessed their sins. Samuel brought a revival of spirituality to Israel.

“There is need today of such a revival of true heart religion as was experienced by ancient Israel. Repentance is the first step that must be taken by all who would return to God. . . . We must individually humble our souls before God and put away our idols.”¹

Revive means to “bring back to life.” Today there is a great need for revival, for renewal of spiritual life, and for a resurrection from apathy and spiritual death.

Is our spirituality and the spirituality in our congregations in need of revival, of being brought back to a vigorous life? What are the signs in our lives? What barriers limit the deep relationship God wants to have with us? Are we too busy with everyday cares to spend time with Him? Have big homes, expensive possessions, ocean cruises, or fame and prestige become our idols?

How do we spend our time? Are we often in prayer, seeking to know God’s will, or do sports, TV, and hobbies hold all our attention?

Without revival, we are spiritually dead. Spiritual lethargy overcomes us. But the good news is that revival is possible for everyone. The key is spending time with God in prayer and in the study of His Word. We need a deep understanding of the mercy that God offers us, recognizing that He accepts us through Christ.

Inevitably, as we realize our complete helplessness, we will feel a deep and terrible sense of sin. In our helplessness we will cast ourselves upon the

love, mercy, and compassion of God. This is the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that revival occurs.

And what are the results of revival, of renewed spiritual life? God’s people will have a special concern for their family members who do not know Jesus. They will tell others about Him. There will be a passion driving them.

Ellen G. White assures us, “If the life of Jesus were in you, you would be filled with vital energy. The church would not be in a cold, backslidden state, but we should see the revival of the missionary spirit. You . . . would seek to extend the glad tidings of salvation to this and that relative, neighbor or friend.”² This revival will be the result of earnest heart-searching and solemn prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Are you praying for such a visitation? Are you yearning for revival in your own life and in your church? God is waiting for us to turn to Him with our whole hearts. He longs for a people faithful to His commandments and drawn by His mercy and love. He promises to again pour out His spirit.

This is what God can do. This is what God has done. Together let us ask Him—plead with Him—to do this again, that His mighty hand may be known and His great name be glorified and magnified among the people.

ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 590.

² “Ye Are Complete in Him,” part 3; abstract of a sermon in Melbourne, Australia, December 19, 1891.



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

AN ELDER WITH A

teaching heart



Esther Díaz Sablón is an elder at the Boyeros SDA Church in Havana City, Cuba. Married to Pastor Juan Guerrero López, they have two married daughters and one grandchild. Esther studied Secretariat and Bible Work in Antillian College and finished her Bachelors in Religion and Masters in Education at Montemorelos University, Mexico. From there, she was chaplain and teacher at the Adventist College of Caracas, Venezuela. Later, she was dean of women and vice-president at the Cuban Adventist Theological Seminary where she eventually headed the institution for eight years. She considers herself “retired” but her passion for teaching keeps her in the seminary.

HOW MANY ADVENTISTS, CHURCHES, PASTORS, AND ELDERS ARE THERE IN CUBA?

The SDA church in Cuba is growing at an incredible rate! Today we have over 45,000 Adventist believers; 30,000 baptized. We have 279 organized churches and more than 150 companies. There are 98 credentialed pastors and 65 have ministerial licenses. We have about 1,200 elders who dedicate a good amount of their free time to work for God.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH IN CUBA?

I believe our greatest challenge is the need for more churches. And to build them in better, safer areas. Another big challenge is to obtain more literature so that the Gospel can reach every corner of Cuba so that all may know Jesus and His love and may sincerely open their hearts to the truth.

WHAT SUBJECTS HAVE YOU TAUGHT OR CURRENTLY TEACH AT THE SEMINARY AND HOW IMPORTANT ARE THEY FOR A MINISTER OR AN ELDER?

I've taught Grammar and Orthography, which are essential for the development of anyone, whether a minister, elder or laity leader. I also teach Home and Family, which considering the condition of many homes nowadays, I believe it is extremely important to keep unity and love

among family members in such a way that they can be a light in their community. I also teach Youth Ministry and Philosophy of Christian Education, which is important due to the many Adventist and non-Adventist youth who desperately need a good influence and upbringing. I also teach some Ministerial Practices such as strategic planning to better grow our churches and small groups. These courses have been a great blessing because we now have better prepared elders to fulfill duties in their various congregations and communities.

IN WHICH CHURCH DEPARTMENTS HAVE YOU SERVED?

Besides being an elder and deaconess, I have served in the children's, youth, Sabbath school, community, pathfinders, and women's ministries for over 25 years.

WHAT IMPORTANCE DO YOU GIVE TO THE WORK PERFORMED BY AN ELDER?

I would say the elder is the pastor's right hand; meeting the church's well-being, spirituality and needs. This includes visiting, encouraging, and supporting. In the absence of the pastor, the elder is the person indicated to lead forward with the church activities. Something that brings me great joy is that a few years ago church elders were only adults, but now we see many young people taking this office and they are doing it for the glory of God.

AS A WOMAN, WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A FEMALE CHURCH ELDER?

Woman elders are very important and needed for good functioning of a church. They assist the pastor in different departments and activities, but their role is especially vital in reaching other women. There are times when it is more appropriate for a woman to assist in certain situations, rather than male elders. In most cases, it is easier for a woman to share her problems with another woman than with a man.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT BEING AN ELDER?

I especially enjoy preaching, promoting evangelistic meetings, teaching Bible studies and organizing the platform. I like to offer a diversity of programs that are attractive and at the same time spiritual. I also enjoy visitation and love to encourage members to continue in their faith, especially during hard times.

EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE NOT AN ORDAINED ELDER, WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO DO THIS JOB?*

Despite not being ordained, I do believe that I have God's ordination. And because everyone has a work to do for Christ, I believe this is what He expects from me and I desire to do it with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Even if they never ordain me, I will keep on working for God and for His church to finish the work and hasten His coming.

DO YOU FEEL THE CHURCH APPRECIATES THE WORK YOU HAVE DONE?

I believe so. Although the most important thing is God's approval, it is always an incentive to receive human recognition. In 2005, I received the title of Women of the Year by the Adventist Women's Association. I received recognition from the Adventist Theological Seminary of Cuba and the University of Andrews in Michigan granted me the title of Doctor in Divinity, Honoris Causa. Also, the Department of Education at the Inter-American Division granted me the Ellen White Medal. All of this has been a great encouragement of mine, but what I want the most is to have my name written in the books of Heaven and to meet many people whom I helped get there.

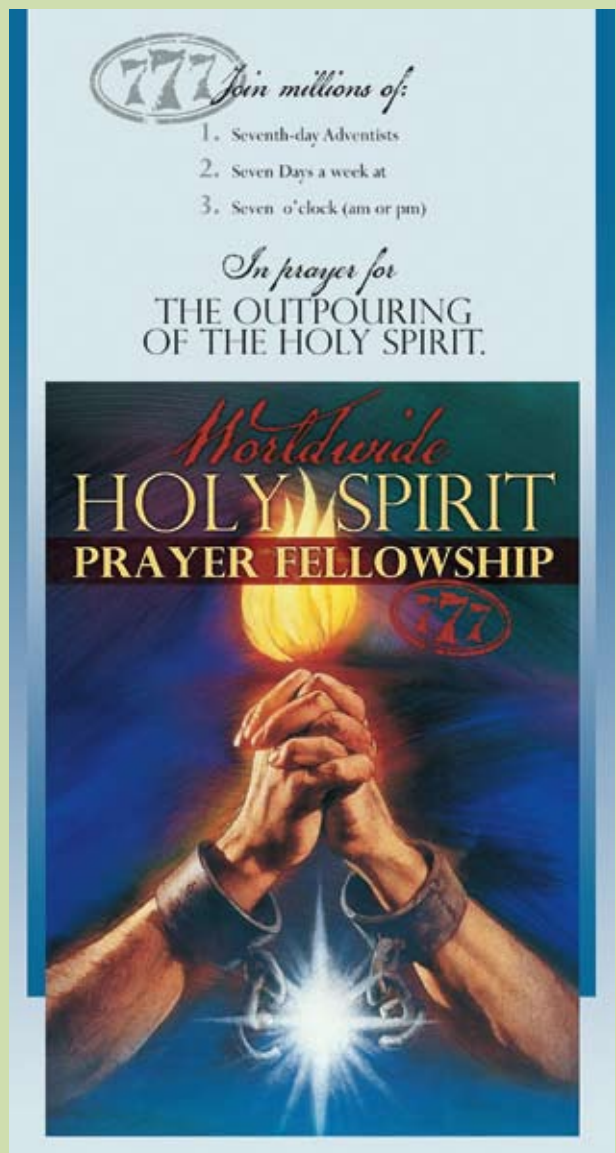
WHAT IS YOUR DREAM FOR THE CHURCH IN CUBA?

My dream is for us to go out and proclaim Jesus' soon return. To accomplish this, we must work together and prepare Cuba and the world to receive Him in glory and majesty. May we be faithful until that day approaches.

WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEAVE TO THE LADIES OF OUR CHURCH?

If you are called to accomplish any job in the church, including that of an elder, do your very best because God needs you. He needs you to be His helping hands for the salvation of souls. Do your job with love and dedication, like a modern-day Priscilla, in such a way that when Christ comes again you may together, with the gentlemen of the church hear the Savior's heavenly voice saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:23). ED

*NOTE: Shortly after this interview, Esther was ordained as a church elder.





LEADERSHIP AND THE CHURCH

Many Adventists consider elections at a General Conference Session the most important agenda item. And we want to wish our leaders God's abundant blessings, the guidance of His Spirit, strength, wisdom, and a loving heart. But elections also trigger considerations about the nature of leadership and the people of God, including the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

In 1 Peter 2:9, the community itself is called a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." . . . With the baptismal commitment of faith, all Christians become priests in the pattern of Christ—preaching, sacrificing their lives for their brothers and sisters, and becoming prayerful stewards of the universe.¹

The priesthood of all believers has important dimensions. All believers have direct access to the throne of grace (Rom 10:13; 1 John 1:9) because they are redeemed by Christ's blood (Heb 10:19-22) and saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). They can understand Scripture and therefore should have access to it (Acts 17:11). It also teaches the ontological equality of the believers and, consequently, their involvement in the mission, worship, and understanding of the theology of the church as well as the offering of spiritual sacrifices which include good conduct (1 Pet 1:15; 2:2; 3:16), service, and self-dedication (Rom 12:1).

Since the church as a whole is a priesthood, there is no room for unbalanced individualism or congregationalism. Unfortunately, in church history the priesthood of believers was divided into a twofold priesthood. Even today "the common priesthood of Christians is generally acknowledged but often muted in the interests of a special priesthood of the ordained."²

On the other hand, church leadership is a biblical concept. Leaders develop plans, motivate church members to adopt and execute them, and encourage

them to come up with their own. They stand up for truth, make tough decisions, and seek the best for the church, sometimes at great personal cost. Good leadership refrains from exercising kingly rule over the church (1 Pet 5:3). Following the example of Christ's servant leadership (Matt 20:25-28; 23:8, 11), leaders allow the members to participate in decision-making, regarding them as having high potential and wonderful spiritual gifts needed to further God's cause. The NT metaphor of the church as a body (1 Cor 12) points to a desirable diversity within a marvelous unity. Its members are called to respect elders, pastors, teachers, and administrators, who in turn are to exemplify humble service:

Men whom the Lord calls to important positions in His work are to cultivate a humble dependence upon Him. They are not to seek to embrace too much authority; for God has not called them to a work of ruling, but to plan and counsel with their fellow laborers" (9T 270).

The concept of the priesthood of all believers *put into practice* allows individuals to attain greater maturity and contributes to a climate of mutual love and to church growth. It also helps believers rejoice in their election and holiness and join in the effort "by all means [to] save some" (1 Cor 9:22).



¹ Stephen Happel, "Priesthood," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. by D. W. Musser and J. L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 380.

² D. F. Wright, "Priesthood of All Believers," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 532.

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HOW CAN WE REACH THE DIFFICULT AREAS IN THE 10/40 WINDOW?

Careful plans are being laid for penetrating unreached areas. Global Pioneers and various evangelistic outreach methods are being employed to find practical and personal ways of beginning work in difficult settings. In addition, there are many media outreach opportunities being utilized to saturate difficult areas with the Seventh-day Adventist message. Certainly, the Holy Spirit directs those who are interested in the message of the various media programs. Please pray for the millions of unreached people groups in the 10/40 window.

SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT THE CHURCH IS BECOMING EXCESSIVELY ECUMENICAL. WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM?

There is always the danger that the church will want to become more and more like other churches in society. We must never let that happen. We are a unique people called of God as outlined in 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 12:17, and Revelation 14:12. We are called to proclaim the messages of Revelation 14 and 18. We must resist the temptation to join ecumenical movements since this will neutralize our distinctive message. We should certainly be friendly and loving to all people, but maintain, by God's grace, our distinctive approach to the world and our activities to point people to the true worship of God.

HAS OUR DIALOGUE WITH EVANGELICALS CHANGED THE SECTARIAN OPINION SOME MAY HAVE ABOUT US? HAS IT OPENED DOORS?

It depends on which people you may be talking to. Certainly, as we focus on Christ as the center of our lives and existence, people will understand us better. However, we should never diminish the respect given to our doctrinal beliefs, all of which have Christ as the center. It is important that we always lift up Christ in all we do so that people will have less reason to accuse us of being legalists.

IS IT IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY WITH THE POPULAR EVANGELICALISM OR STICK TO OUR DISTINCTIVE MESSAGE?

I believe it is much more important to identify the distinctiveness in our message than to try to become more like evangelicals. We are Seventh-day Adventists and we should be very willing to live and act as children of God with a great mission to proclaim the three angels' messages. We should focus on our Biblical message which will tell the world that we are different . . . not in a bad sense, but because of the close association we have with Jesus and His soon return.

This question and answer column has been answered by Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson, the worldwide president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



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



SUPPORTING

THE BAPTISMAL CLASS

One of the most important periods of Christian development is the time new converts spend preparing for baptism. Baptism is the symbol of entrance into the family of God's church. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4, NIV).

"Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Those who are baptized in the threefold name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King."¹

Right at the beginning of their Christian experience, those preparing for baptism need careful attention and support. A person who has been well-instructed in the baptismal class will have received a strong foundation for a happy and victorious Christian life.

PREPARING CANDIDATES FOR BAPTISM

A time of instruction. Time spent in preparation for baptism ought to be a time of instruction. Jesus urged His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV). Preparation for baptism is a time when candidates are taught the truths of the Bible. Its great themes need to be clearly presented, and each should be taught in a simple manner so that baptismal candidates can grasp their importance and accept them by faith (Acts 8:30-38). These themes include:

- The fall from heaven and the great controversy between Christ and Satan
- God's plan of salvation
- The Incarnation
- The sinless, serving life of Jesus
- Christ's all-forgiving death on Calvary
- His resurrection and His atoning ministry in heaven
- The distinctive Bible doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Because of heavy pastoral responsibilities, the pastor may find it impossible to study the Bible with every new believer. Elders and other church leaders who have teaching abilities may assist the pastor in this work by meeting with baptismal candidates and bringing them to an understanding of Bible truth and of Christ's demands on their lives.

A time of spiritual development. Early in their spiritual experience, new converts should be led through the steps of becoming children of God (Acts 2:37-41). The baptismal class will assist new converts in understanding and experiencing:

- Repentance, confession, and forgiveness
- How to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives
- How to overcome temptation
- How to develop a strong devotional life
- How to strengthen their faith in God and develop a strong, mature Christian lifestyle

Baptismal-class teachers often concentrate on doctrinal topics, excluding many essential truths. At the time of their baptism, most candidates have a good understanding of the distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; unfortunately, however, many are baptized without understanding God's plan of salvation or knowing how to live as Christians in non-Christian surroundings. Therefore, many have little strength to resist the temptations that come after baptism. Those being prepared for baptism must be brought to Jesus and taught how to accept Him as Lord of their lives. Jesus said, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32, NIV). Hearts that have been melted by the love of Jesus will happily accept all other demands on their lives. Spiritual development grows from a relationship with Jesus.

A time of preparation. During the early days of the Christian experience, those preparing for baptism should be trained and prepared for the privileges and responsibilities of being Christians in God's church. Topics of discussion should include:

- Christian behavior
- Church organization and procedures

- Principles and practice of worship
- Tithing
- Sabbath-keeping
- Christian stewardship
- Witnessing

Candidates should also be helped to discover their spiritual gifts and shown how to employ these talents to build up the church and its witness.

A time of social change. When people make the decision to be baptized and join the church, they are often subject to demanding social changes. Their decision is often misunderstood by relatives and friends, who may oppose their baptism. Sometimes their decision to follow Jesus will cause them to be rejected by family and friends. To be shut out and excluded from their families or to be socially rejected by friends will place these new Christians under a great deal of stress.

When people choose to become Seventh-day Adventist Christians, they often experience a dramatic change in lifestyle. Some will leave membership in another church to join an Adventist congregation. Others will leave one job and look for another that does not require them to work on God's Sabbath. Some will reject certain social and cultural practices that are not compatible with the Christian lifestyle. Those preparing candidates for baptism should be aware that these kinds of changes are not made easily.

When people are called upon to change their religious beliefs, quit their jobs, and abandon the support and security of friends and family, their lives come under considerable strain. Many are leaving behind so much that has been familiar and reassuring to pursue a new lifestyle that for them has many uncertainties. As you lead them toward accepting new beliefs and a new lifestyle and help them make new acquaintances within the new church community, you will need to provide them with very special support to assist them through this process of change. Encourage church members to be very accepting of these new people. Help them feel that they belong and are welcome in your church. Encourage people in your congregation to make a special effort to befriend these new believers. Their social integration into your church family is vital to their long-term spiritual growth and security. (See Luke 11:24-26.)

METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

In most areas of the world, people are prepared for baptism through a series of Bible studies that are usually given in the homes of the people or in a baptismal class. Others are instructed through Bible correspondence courses, Bible classes, or individual study. Whichever method is used, the content of the lessons should include the major teachings and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

However, it is important to remember that more is required for baptism than just a knowledge of church beliefs. During the course of instruction, there should be several oc-

casions when you, as the instructor, have opportunity to get personally acquainted with each candidate. This will give you time to study and pray with him or her and to assess each candidate's needs and spiritual condition. It will also give candidates an opportunity to ask questions and share joys or concerns with you. You should satisfy yourself that the people you are instructing understand sufficiently their involvement in God's plan of salvation and their duties and responsibilities as they become members of His church.

"There is a need for more thorough preparation on the part of candidates for baptism. They are in need of more faithful instruction than has previously been given them. The principles of the Christian life should be made plain to those who have newly come to the truth. . . . It is the duty of the pastor to have special meetings with them. Read to them the teaching of the Bible in regards to conversion. Show what is the fruit of conversion, the evidence that they love God."²

WHEN ARE CANDIDATES READY?

To be ready for baptism, candidates must give evidence:

- That Jesus is Lord of their lives (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:15).
- That repentance and conversion have taken place (Acts 2:38; 3:19).
- That they have an active belief and trust in Jesus (Mark 16:16).
- That they have a daily, saving relationship with Jesus.
- That they have completed a course of instruction in the teachings of Scripture and the distinctive biblical doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Matt. 28:20).
- That they have been prepared for responsible membership in God's remnant church.
- That they are involved in the worship and witness of the church.

Before baptism, candidates should be visited by the head elder or church pastor to confirm their readiness for baptism. And finally, they should have approval for baptism from the church board.

Baptism is an extremely important experience in the life of a new Christian. Careful preparation for baptism is vital to the person's future development. Every lesson, every Bible study, and every visit that a new Christian receives should be well-presented so that the best possible opportunities are provided to strengthen him or her for the Christian walk.



¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 6:91.

² *Ibid.*, 91-95.

Douglas E. Robertson is senior lecturer in the theology department at Avondale College, Australia.



TRINITY IN THE BIBLE PART 3

ADVENTISTS AND THE TRINITY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today is a Trinitarian church. While not believing everything said about the Trinity throughout history, we have clearly expressed—as our Fundamental Belief states it—that there is “one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.”

To many, it is a surprise to learn that a large portion of our pioneers of the 19th century did not hold to this belief. To some it is a worry. Several of our pioneers spoke strongly against the teaching of the Trinity as they understood it.¹ Is it really possible for me, as a Seventh-day Adventist today, to claim to be the heir to their hope and faith if I do not share their belief on this point?

My answer to this question is a strong affirmation—not just a vague “yes.” The development of this doctrine illustrates in my view how God has led the church and, in reaching our present understanding, we build on a fundamental principle laid down by our pioneers.

THE FOUNDATION FOR DOCTRINE

In the late 1880s, R A Underwood, an associate secretary of the General Conference, wrote a series for *Review & Herald* entitled “Christ and His Work.” Discussing whether Christ was created and had a beginning in time, Underwood seemed to believe Jesus as the “firstborn” had a beginning. Nevertheless, he did not want to be too dogmatic about it but left it to readers to come to their own conclusion. To facilitate such conclusion, Underwood simply quoted the biblical texts and referred to the best of contemporary scholarly biblical lexicons on the meaning of words like “firstborn.”²

Underwood would most likely be characterized as a “semi-Arian.”³ Seventh-day Adventists today disagree with his conclusion. But Underwood wanted to base his belief on detailed study of the Word of God and with that, Adventists today fully agree.

The present Adventist belief in the doctrine of the Trinity is different from what many of the pioneers believed but it follows the principle they held as foundational. We are part of a movement. Like the pioneers, we want to build our doctrines on the Bible and the Bible only. What we know about God, we know from His self-revelation in Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Bible.

The Bible—not the views of our pioneers—is our authority. They would have been horrified if they saw how many today in misperceived loyalty and conservatism use their statements as authoritative and their positions as binding. Like our pioneers, we believe we are able to receive new light from the Bible, which will not threaten the pillars of our faith but enhance their significance in light of a deeper understanding of God.

NOT ONE OF THE FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

No specific view of the Trinity and the Godhead was regarded by our pioneers as one of the foundational pillars of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. That we have gained more insight from Scripture and so now hold a different view evidences that we belong to a movement but not that we have left the foundation. This conclusion is confirmed by a number of observations.

First, the topic of the Trinity was never a major point of discussion in the early Adventist movement. Today, it is possible

via computer to gather what seems, when viewed in totality, an impressive amount of anti-Trinitarian quotes from the period of 1844 to 1888, and in the following decade but when read in their historical context, along with all the other issues debated by the pioneers, Trinitarian issues quickly disappear from our radar. During this period, they did not occupy a major place in the minds of our pioneers.

Second, even some of the most open critics of Trinitarian beliefs changed their own position over the years. This holds true for influential leaders like Uriah Smith and James White. Uriah Smith first believed Jesus to be created but changed his view to think that the Son was “born but not made.” James White, who in 1846 spoke harshly about “the old unscriptural trinitarian creed,”⁴ in 1876-77, in a comparison of our beliefs with the Seventh-day Baptists, stated that “Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarian, that we apprehend no trial [controversy] here.”⁵ The pioneers themselves moved.

Third, new members of the Seventh-day Adventist movement in these years came from many different denominations, most of them Trinitarian. These new members were not usually asked to make any changes in their Trinitarian beliefs, and most became members without being challenged in this area. When baptized, they were asked to confess their belief in the Second Coming and the prophecies, the sanctuary, the Sabbath and the nature of man but not to confess any specific position for or against the Trinity.

Accordingly, when Ellen White at a later stage responds to the fear new ideas might overthrow the pillars or landmarks of our beliefs, she speaks in favor of both progressive openness and healthy conservatism but she clearly does not include a specific view of the Godhead among the distinctive pillars of our faith: “The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God’s people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels’ messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, ‘The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.’ One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God’s law. The non-immortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks.”⁶

Our move toward a Trinitarian understanding is thus based on the principle of biblical authority and an openness to new light arising from the study of Scripture. Furthermore, as Trinitarian we are walking in the footsteps of our pioneers because we continue in the direction they followed in the early period of our church’s journey. This becomes evident when we look at the development of our understanding.

HOW GOD MOVED THE CHURCH

How did the change come about? What concerns led the Adventist movement to reflect on various aspects of the Trinity and, by close attention to the biblical testimony, reach our present position? Three episodes in our early history pointed us in this direction:

1844-1855: Battle with Spiritualizers

In the years following the Great Disappointment in 1844, many areas of doctrine were studied afresh. The Adventist pioneers had been kicked out of the Christian communities in which they grew up and were naturally skeptical toward established authorities. In their struggle to make biblical sense of their experience, the concept of the heavenly sanctuary created a new revolution in thinking, confirming their hope in the Second Coming and opening their eyes to the Sabbath.

One of their major challenges came from the so-called Spiritualizers, who in their description of God broke down the distinction between the Father and the Son as two different personalities. These people presented the Father and the Son as one and the same person, a so-called modalist position.⁷

Faced with such belief—which many of our pioneers mistakenly took to represent the official Trinitarian doctrine of the major churches—James and Ellen White, among others, spoke out. If accepted, this view would have done away with the teaching of the Second Coming as a truly historical event and with the newly found doctrine of a sanctuary in heaven. Led by God, our pioneers denounced the modalist heresy and upheld the distinction between the persons of the Father and the Son. In doing so, they created *the first building block of which our Trinitarian doctrine today is made.*

1888: Focus on Christ

The following period saw little immediate development in the understanding of the Godhead. The distinction between the Father and Jesus was clearly established but the exact relation between the two received little treatment. Ellen White would begin to highlight Christ’s eternal pre-existence⁸ but many issues engaged the growing church, such as organization, health reform, the move toward world mission and, of course, events on the world scene as they related to prophetic interpretation.

The Bible Conference, held in conjunction with the General Conference in Minneapolis in 1888, however, brought Jesus into major focus. Of the two main presenters on the topic of righteousness by faith, not least Waggoner in his description of Jesus repeatedly used expressions taken from the Nicene Creed, such as “born/begotten, not made” and Jesus as “light of light” and “God of God.”

This was quite natural, as many new members would have been familiar with such expressions from the churches they left and had taken their belief with them as they became Adventists.⁹ John Matteson, for instance, who established the first non-English speaking Adventist church, brought the Adventist message to Scandinavia and organized the first non-English speaking Adventist conference, did not hesitate to express the Adventist faith in the context of the Apostolic Creed¹⁰ and claimed that Adventists agreed with Martin Luther in the three articles of faith in his catechism, which would imply a Trinitarian belief.¹¹

Underwood’s series in *Review & Herald*, therefore, highlights how Adventists began to discuss how to understand the divinity of Jesus and the true relationship between the Father and the Son, including the meaning of such terms as “firstborn” and “born/ begotten.” Bible studies and discussions would go on for several decades, lingering far into the 20th century.

The Bible alone is our foundation for doctrine and God wants us to do our own Bible study, independent of the gift of prophecy.

While never deciding the issue, Ellen White's Christ-centered writings were significant in pointing the direction for the Adventist movement. Not least her identification of Jesus with Jahveh/Jehovah, the great "I Am" of the Old Testament, the first and the last, the eternal God, published most widely in *The Desire of Ages* in 1898, became an eye-opener for many Adventists. In the discussion of whether the preexistence of Jesus was eternal, statements like "in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived"¹² had tremendous impact.¹³

A young minister who would become one of the most influential Adventist theologians of the 20th century, M. L. Andreasen, decided to check for himself whether Ellen White had really written words like these. He travelled to California, spent three months with Ellen White, and brought a clear message back to the Adventist community in Battle Creek. The expressions were genuine.

Ellen White's continuous exaltation of Jesus, evident in her early teenage love for her Savior, strongly expressed in the testimony "The Sufferings of Christ" in 1869, and reaching maturity in her old age in works like *The Desire of Ages*, helped the growing Adventist movement realize that only if Jesus is "God essentially, and in the highest sense," "possessing the attributes of God" and being "co-equal with God,"¹⁴ is atonement truly possible.

In our study of the biblical texts about the divinity of Jesus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has arrived at the belief in the eternal pre-existence of Jesus and thus clarified the relationship between the Father and the Son. This forms *the second major building block of our present Trinitarian doctrine*.

It is important to underline that the church has reached its position by studying the biblical texts. Many argue today against our present doctrine by pointing out that if it were true, Ellen White should far earlier, and far more directly and forcefully, have told the brethren! But this line of argumentation is based on a total misunderstanding of the purpose of spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy.

Our beliefs are not built on Ellen White but on Scripture and God did not lead her to establish doctrine. Only when studies were made, Ellen White would speak to support or to point in the right direction. This is how other doctrines of our church were formed. The establishment of the doctrine of the Trinity is no exception. The Bible alone is our foundation for doctrine and God wants us to do our own Bible study, independent of the gift of prophecy.

1901: Kellogg crisis and pantheistic controversy

At the turn of the century, another major battle shook the Adventist movement. John Harvey Kellogg, the most famous Adventist and leader of the Battle Creek Sanitarium—one of the foremost health institutions in the world—developed views of God based on certain health-inspired philosophies, rather than on God's self-revelation in Jesus.

Inspired by pseudo-scientific views of his time, Kellogg understood God to be like a substance present in all elements of nature. Ellen White saw in his teaching a reawakening of the heresies rejected during the earlier battle with the Spiritualiz-

ers. If Kellogg's views of God became the teaching of the church, the distinction between the persons of the Godhead would once again disappear.

In comparison with the previous theological struggle, two new aspects had become significant in the discussion—the atonement of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White was shown that if God is a substance in everything, He is in me too, and I no longer

need Christ as my Savior and the cross for atonement. Further, Kellogg's description not only blurred the distinction between the Father and the Son, it also destroyed the newly-won understanding of the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit.

The many references by Ellen White to the Holy Spirit as a distinct person during this period must be seen against this background. Her expressions used about the Holy Spirit are reminiscent of her statements about the distinct personalities of Father and Son:

- "The oneness existing between the Father and the Son does not affect the distinct personality of each. And though believers are to be one with Christ, their identity and personality are recognized through the whole of this prayer" (referring to John 17).¹⁵

- "The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ's name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality."¹⁶

- "The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. . . . The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.'"¹⁷

Consequently, the Holy Spirit is to be understood as a distinct person in a manner similar to the distinction upheld between Father and Son. *This is the third major building block of the Seventh-day Adventist teaching on the Trinity.*

Kellogg tried to save his position by claiming it to be simply Trinitarian. It was not—and no classical Trinitarian would ever be able to accept his views. But his attempt to justify his views by making such a claim clearly shows the tide was changing. He pretended to believe in the Trinity because he thought it the prevailing view of the Adventist leaders and Ellen White, and that his position, therefore, would be met with approval. However, the concept of the Trinity embraced by the church was based on God's self-revelation in Scripture, not on philosophical speculation.

Ellen White never used the term "trinity," yet her clear and unambiguous support of the "threeness" of the one God is evident from her numerous references to the three distinct persons of the Godhead. By using the words "three," "third" and "trio," she clearly rejected any position that would make the Spirit completely identical with the Father and/or the Son, or just an impersonal power or influence. The following quotes are representative of her consistent mentioning of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three—not two or four:¹⁸

• “There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.”¹⁹

• “Our sanctification is the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the fulfillment of the covenant that God has made with those who bind themselves up with Him, to stand with Him, with His Son, and with His Spirit in holy fellowship. Have you been born again? Have you become a new being in Christ Jesus? Then cooperate with the three great powers of heaven who are working in your behalf.”²⁰

• “The eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit— . . . would advance with them to the work and convince the world of sin.”²¹

• “We are to cooperate with the three highest powers in heaven—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—and these powers will work through us, making us workers together with God.”²²

While Ellen White did not use the word “trinity,” the term was used by other prominent Seventh-day Adventists, such as F. Wilcox, editor of *Review & Herald*, who always worked closely with Ellen White, and who proclaimed in 1913, in a description of the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists, that “we shall state that Seventh-day Adventists believe in the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, . . . of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, . . . the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead.”²³

The exact implications of this belief has then been the focus of major study and reflection throughout the years since. In 1931, the annually-published yearbook included a statement of 22 fundamental beliefs, the first of these confessing the Trinity. This statement was voted by the General Conference in session in 1946, and in 1980, a more exact formulation of our Trinitarian understanding was included in the then 27 Fundamental Beliefs.

HOW GOD HAS LED

The journey of the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward a Trinitarian belief mirrors the experience of the early Christian church in many ways. We have struggled with pagan-based philosophies; and we have tried to refrain from claiming more about God than the Bible tells, thus upholding the uniqueness, majesty and mystery of God. We seek to describe God on the basis of His self-revelation in Jesus, as presented by the Spirit in the Scripture. Yet there are also differences. Though being Trinitarian, the Adventist Church has not bound itself by historical, creedal expressions.

The understanding is growing that to know God is to know the crucified Savior and that true theology takes God at Calvary as its starting point. If we want to know who and what God is, we look at the Person dying on the cross. Our Trinitarian belief further underlines that only because the Holy Spirit has portrayed the Crucified through the Bible and comes to our aid when we kneel at the foot of the cross to meditate on the sacrifice of God, are we truly able to know God.

God has guided our church in this journey. He helped the Adventist pioneers to maintain the distinction between the Father and the Son; He guided us in our study of the Bible to

understand the eternal divinity of the Son and His relationship as “co-equal” with the Father; He has helped to better understand the distinct and personal nature of the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit to focus on the cross and the atonement as the basis for our theology.

I trust and pray He will continue to lead as we move ahead and continue to learn more about Him.

ED

¹ *The historical development of the Adventist views on the Trinity has been well documented in articles by, among others, Merlin Burt, “History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity”, Journal of Adventist Theological Studies 17 (2006), pages 125-139; and Jerry Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate,” Part I and II, Andrews University Seminary Studies 41 (2003), pages 213-229 and 275-292.*

² *Other related words and concepts which have been studied in the course of our history, are, for instance, the expression “begotten” (from Greek monogenes), inheritance, the nature of Sonship and Fatherhood. See the first article in this series.*

³ *While “Arian” usually denotes people who believe Jesus was created, the term “semi-Arian” has often come to designate people who believe Jesus had a beginning though was not created. Such distinction may at times confuse rather than clarify. To the early Christians, the distinction was between those who believed Jesus had a beginning, and thus was created, and those who believed Jesus as fully God was without any beginning.*

⁴ James White, *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, page 25.

⁵ James White, “The Two Bodies,” *Review & Herald*, October 12, 1876, page 116.

⁶ *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pages 30-31.

⁷ *This view is not Trinitarian but actually one of the non-Trinitarian heresies rejected by the early Christian church. It is technically labeled modalism and its presence illustrates that in the Protestant world at the time, not least in the North American environment, the general understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity was limited.*

⁸ *Speaking, for instance, about Jesus in His pre-existence as “equal with God” (“The Sufferings of Christ,” Testimony 17, 1869) and as the “eternal Son” (Review & Herald, August 8, 1878).*

⁹ *It is worth noting that though confessing the doctrine of the Trinity, the major stream of Christianity at the time of the 19th century paid little attention to the doctrine. It was usually relegated to an appendix in systematic theological presentations, and widespread confusion reigned among both Catholic and Protestant Christians as to the actual meaning of the expressions used. Today it is common among theologians to characterize this period in history with expressions such as “the exile of the Trinity.”*

¹⁰ See “A Summary of the Confession of the Seventh-day Adventists,” *Advent Tidende* 5, 1880, page 71.

¹¹ *“I also believe that the three articles of faith in Luther’s Catechism are in agreement with the Bible,” Advent Tidende 6, 1872, page 143.*

¹² Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 530.

¹³ *Compare these and many similar statements by Ellen White: Christ “is the self-existent One” (The Desire of Ages, page 469); “He is the eternal, self-existent Son” (Manuscript 101, 1897); and “It was the Source of all mercy and pardon, peace and grace, the self-existent, eternal, unchangeable One, who visited His exiled servant on the isle that is called Patmos” (Manuscript 81, 1900).*

¹⁴ Ellen White, *Review & Herald*, April 5, 1906. *“It was to save the transgressor from ruin that he who was co-equal with God, offered up his life on Calvary” (June 28, 1892, paragraph 3).*

¹⁵ *Letter 317, 1904.*

¹⁶ *Manuscript 93, 1893.*

¹⁷ *Manuscript 20, 1906.*

¹⁸ *Some modern day non-Trinitarians while maintaining that the Spirit is a person, also teach that the Holy Spirit is the personal presence of the Father and/or the Son, thus believing in either two or four persons in the Godhead.*

¹⁹ *Evangelism*, page 615.

²⁰ *The Signs of the Times*, June 19, 1901.

²¹ *Evangelism*, page 616.

²² *ibid*, page 617.

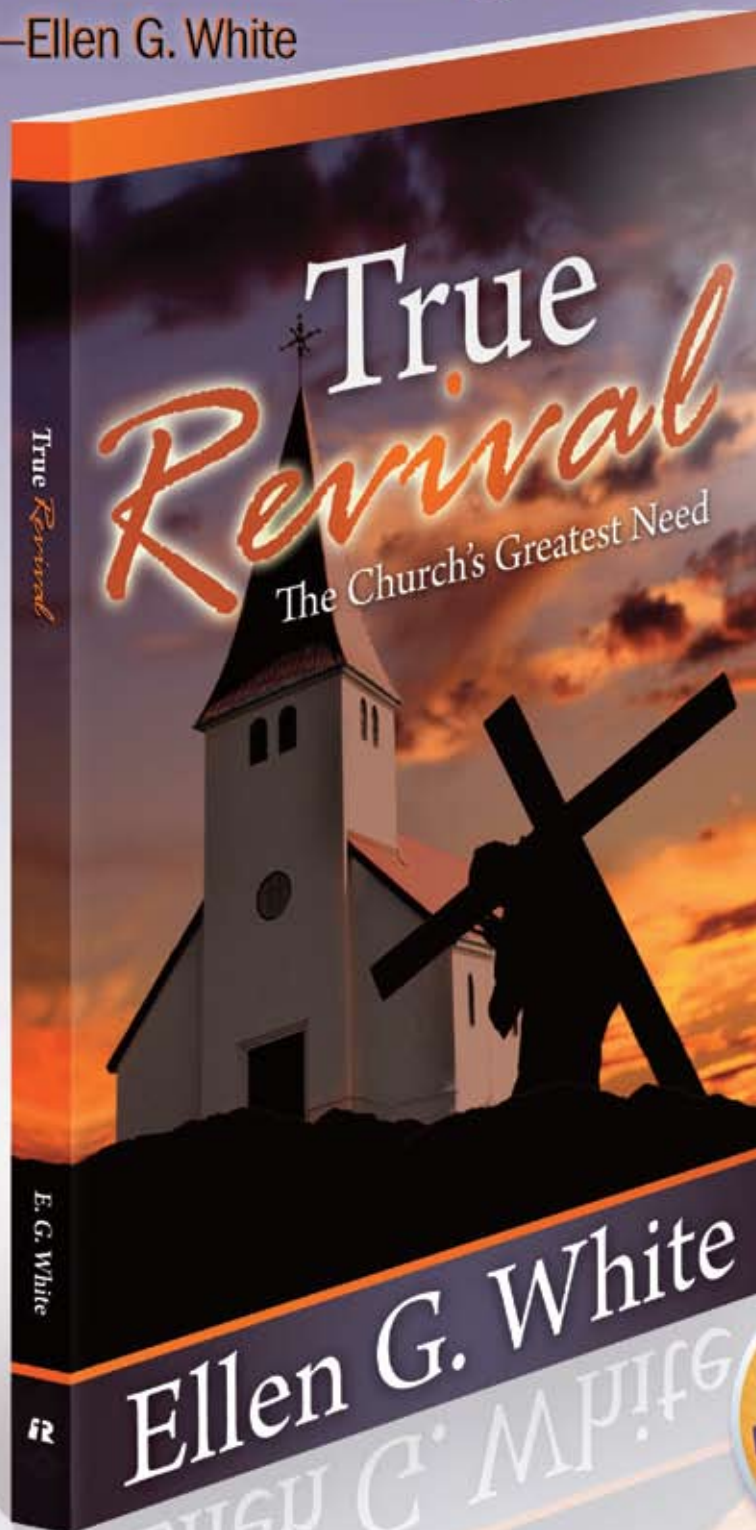
²³ *F. Wilcox in Review & Herald*, October 9, 1913, page 21.

This is the third article in a series of three dealing with the issue of the Trinity in the Bible, in the early church and in the Seventh-day Adventist movement. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Record* magazine, published by SPD.

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“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs.”

—Ellen G. White



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HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

To be an effective person of prayer, you must have a relationship with the One to whom you pray. Above all else, prayer is an opportunity to enjoy intimacy with God. Prayer is all about a relationship with God the Father, and He longs to have a relationship with you.

To know God is to realize that you are in a relationship, a covenant relationship with Him. You are His child; He is your Father. You are His bride; He is your Groom.

Jesus warns us that we can do His works and yet not be known of God. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers!'" (Matt. 7:21-23, NIV).

How can you develop an intimate relationship with God?

A. SPEND TIME WITH THE LORD DAILY.

In any relationship, the way to develop that relationship is to spend time together. Intimate relationships are born by learning to trust. To be an intimate friend of God, you need to be able to pour out your heart to Him, sharing with Him the most intimate details of your life—your hopes, your dreams, and your very heart.

A prayer life that consists only of petition and intercession can lead to anger and frustration. If prayers are not answered as fast as you want, you can become bitter and resentful toward God. However, if you grow to know God, a delayed answer will only be an opportunity to pray again. Spending time with the Lord is how you come to truly know His ways and not just His acts. Knowing God leads to our resting in the assurance of His ultimate goodness, in spite of our circumstances.

B. STUDY HIS WORD AND PRAY.

As you study God's Word daily, you will soon get to know His will, His ways, and His heart. When you understand how He moves in the lives of people, you can pray prayers that are in line with His will. Psalm 119 is a wonderful passage to meditate upon, as it describes to us the rewards of studying His Word.



He who has
learned to pray has
learned the greatest
secret of a holy
and happy life.



William Law

C. AS WE WORSHIP HIM, WE DRAW CLOSER TO HIM.

In worship, we are lavishing all our attention and affections on Him. A good worship time refreshes and revives you. It speaks to your spirit the truth about God and His power. Worship will awaken and sharpen your spirit to be in tune with the will of the Lord.

D. TRUE WORSHIP LEADS TO HEARTFELT REPENTANCE.

Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal to you anything wicked in it. The Lord is faithful to show us our motivations and secret desires. First John 1:8-9 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

E. PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

Practice just "being with God." Enjoy His company. Sitting with the Lord in silence can sometimes bring deep communion and refreshment to your spirit, soul, and body. An earthly example of this sort of "being" would be a loving couple who has been married for years. They do not have to say a word to each other, yet with a glance or a smile they can share deep intimacy.

You don't always have to be talking to God. You don't always have to expect


profound insights. In prayer and quietness you can just enjoy being with Him.

Part of practicing the presence of God is understanding that He is with you always. The Bible assures us that this is a truth, not just a feeling. Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

GENERAL HELPS FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER

- Have on hand your Bible, a pen, and a notebook.
- If possible, find a quiet place to pray. When this is not possible, God will still bless your prayer time in the midst of distractions.
- Become accustomed to periods of silence, and don't be afraid of pauses.
- If you find your mind wandering during prayer:

1. Pray out loud.
2. Read scriptures out loud. If you don't know what to pray, then pray the prayers of the Bible; there are dozens of prayers that you can take as your own. For example, pray the Psalms. They are songs, and perhaps they will reach the heart more easily when heard by the ear.
3. Ask the Lord to protect you as you pray.
4. Declare that you are determined to pray.
5. If there is a pressing need on your mind, submit it to the Lord in prayer. Write down any distractions that cause your mind to wander, and submit them to the Lord.
6. Stand up. Walk. Change your posture. If you find yourself dozing off regularly during your devotions and prayer times, stand up and walk around the room.
7. Ask the Lord if this is the best time for you to be praying. Some people are morning people, and others prefer to talk to the Lord at night. Find the time that works best for you.

May a richer, more effective prayer life fill your heart with peace and joy, and may the strength and beauty you find in your time with your heavenly Father spill over to bless everyone around you. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

THE IMPORTANCE OF SABBATH

We live in a time of privileges and contrasts. Our society is more and more populated, yet more people than ever suffer from isolation and loneliness. Today, people can circle the globe quickly in airplanes, but they can be insensitive to the needs of the people closest to them. With telephones, fax machines, and the Internet, people can communicate with anyone anywhere in the world, yet sometimes they cannot communicate with those under their own roof. People seek peace and calm somewhere far from agitation, yet they cannot overcome anxiety and preoccupation. People can obtain lots of information and solve many problems, yet they are unable to resolve their personal and family troubles. Human beings have explored the complexities of our solar system and the immensity of the universe, yet they have forgotten the One who created it. It is obvious that knowledge, fame, and possessions cannot overcome emotional frustration, physical decadence, and spiritual emptiness.

I. IN A WORLD OF PRIVILEGES AND CONTRASTS, WE BELIEVE THAT:

A. The recovery of key biblical teachings, such as the observance of the Sabbath, may help humanity find solutions to their serious problems.

B. A correct observance of the Sabbath will help people overcome loneliness as they start to experience Christian friendship and the peace that they seek. God gave the Sabbath to us as a gift, a blessing, a time to draw close to Him; it was His plan that our happiest moments and hours would happen on the Sabbath.

II. AS CHRISTIANS, WE SERVE GOD EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK; HOWEVER, THE SERVICE WE RENDER TO GOD ON SABBATH IS DIFFERENT FROM OUR SERVICE TO HIM DURING THE REST OF THE WEEK.

During the week, we serve God while fulfilling our responsibilities to our employer, family, church, and community. Our two-fold responsibilities are exemplified by two sisters in the Bible: Mary and Martha. Martha exemplifies the Christian's life during the week; she has God, her work, and daily concerns on her mind. Mary exemplifies the Christian's life on Sabbath; Christ is the absolute center of her attention, and all worries and per-

sonal interests are left behind as she sits at His feet. It should be thus as we spend time with Him on the Sabbath.

III. WHAT SHOULD THE SABBATH MEAN IN OUR LIVES?

A. Celebration. It is a time when Christians celebrate God's creative power and His unconditional love for His creatures. This celebration is expressed communally in the worship service. During the weekly worship service, we celebrate our Creator and Savior. We celebrate the manifestations of His care and love in our lives. This celebration should be a symbol of happiness, gratitude, and service.

B. Rest. The fourth commandment is a call to rest. It should not be seen as a long holiday; it goes beyond a physical and mental rest from the week. The center of Sabbath rest is not in men but in God. God wants us to recognize His sovereignty over our time and life. Sabbath puts a limit on our tendency to deify our work and reminds us that God is the Lord of all.

C. Revelation. On Sabbath, God promises to manifest Himself to all Sabbathkeepers in a special way and with a special blessing. Such a revelation can only be understood when we set this day apart for its sacred purpose.

D. Worship. In Revelation 14:7 we are called to "worship him who made heaven and earth." Sabbath is an encounter of the Creator with the creature. Every time we worship God on Sabbath, we honor Him as the Creator.

E. Reflection. Sabbath is an invitation to reflect, a time when we can rethink life's values and priorities. Today, transcendental meditation is in vogue, but Sabbath is an invitation to spiritual introspection (silence of the soul).

F. Meditation. Sabbath is an invitation to meditation, not upon an abstract being but on a real being: the true God. The sabbatical meditation is not an escape from the present reality; rather, it is a way to introduce God's presence into it.

G. Renewal. Sabbath is a time to recharge our physical, emotional, and spiritual batteries. The pressures of modern life have taken from us the balance between material and spiritual things. One of the purposes of the Sabbath is to restore that balance.

H. Love. For some, Sabbath is a day for personal sanctification; however,

many forget that this day also has a humanitarian function; a time to share and do good deeds. Sabbath is an ideal day to share the blessings of salvation. It is a proper day to show compassion and love in a special way.

I. Family. Activities of the week—school, work, and other responsibilities—pull the family in many directions. The rush of life may deprive us of time with our children and spouse and prevent us from enjoying the quietness of our home. Sabbath unites the family and gives time for fellowship free from weekday obligations. Picture the family united on Friday night and having sunset worship (without television). Imagine everyone going to church together, having lunch together, walking together, and spending time together. A miracle? No, it's Sabbath!

IV. THE INSTITUTIONS OF SABBATH AND FAMILY WERE ESTABLISHED IN EDEN TO BE A BLESSING TO HUMANITY.

Sabbath should not be a legalist imposition on our lives; it should be a celebration of joy and happiness. It should not be a burden or a day regulated by rules and lists of things we shouldn't do. Sabbath should be a happy day.

With wisdom, parents may make Sabbath the happiest day of the week for their children. For troubled families, Sabbath is an opportunity to renew their vows of love and fidelity and to heal wounded relationships. Sabbath teaches us that our covenants with God and our spouse are sacred.

CONCLUSION

When God established the Sabbath, He did it so we could be happier. If we are not making good use of this blessing today, let us stop and examine our lives and priorities. Sabbath was given to us as a special gift, a gift not to be forgotten but to be remembered and loved. How are you keeping this day? Is there something that could be changed to make Sabbath a happier, more meaningful day?

The Sabbath is special, a day to spend time with special people (whether family, church members, the lonely, or the needy) and with our heavenly Father.



General Conference Ministerial Association

THE HOLY SPIRIT, A WONDERFUL BEING

John 14:16

The Bible does not reveal much about the nature of the Holy Spirit; rather, it gives emphasis to His work. What is your concept of the Holy Spirit's personality? What is your idea about this third person of the Godhead?

The Bible's silence regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit has led people to believe various things about Him, such as He is:

- An influence of God over human minds and hearts;
- A neutral entity—a robot—who executes God's will;
- God's helper;
- An inferior god without original life, for His life derives from the Father;
- A magical being, perhaps even part of an occult.

To better understand the Holy Spirit, we need to understand the mystery of the Godhead. To illustrate this concept, we will use the shape of a triangle. A triangle is a geometrical shape with three sides, but it is only one shape: a triangle. In the same way, the Godhead is three beings but only one God.

We accept the Godhead by faith and through personal experience with Him. The nature of the Holy Spirit and His work are not so much to be understood as to be experienced.

In the Old Testament, the member of the Godhead who stood out the most was *God the Father*. In the New Testament, the member of the Godhead who stood out the most was *Jesus*. From the foundation of the apostolic Church until today, the member of the Godhead who stands out the most is the *Holy Spirit*.

Tiago Denney was correct when he said, "For the men who wrote the New Testament, and for those to whom they wrote, the Holy Spirit was not a doctrine, but an experience. Its slogan is not "believe in the Holy Spirit," but "receive the Holy Spirit."

The greatest invisible reality of the world today is the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth."¹ Only one person—the Holy Spirit—could substitute for another wonderful person—Jesus. He is the "par-

aclete," which means "invited to be next to." He is the special Helper invited to help us, summoned to stay by our side.

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD.

The Bible gives attributes to the Holy Spirit that are appropriate to God:

- He is omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10)
- He is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10)
- He is omnipotent (1 Cor. 2:11)
- He is eternal (Heb. 9:14)
- He performs miracles (Rom. 15:19)

The Holy Spirit is God, equal in authority and power to the Father and to Christ. He has a special function in the salvation of the human family. John 14:16 says, "And I [Jesus] will pray to the *Father*, and He will give you another *Helper*" (emphasis supplied).

The order we usually follow in naming the three persons of the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) has nothing to do with their relative importance, for the Godhead is unique and is one God. One of the reasons for this order may be the fact that in relation to man's redemption, the Persons of the Godhead stood out one by one, in successive periods and with specific functions. However, we don't mean to imply that the Holy Spirit was not engaged and interested in the unfolding of the great plan of salvation during those times when the Father and Son were at the forefront.

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON.

The Bible reveals enough so that we can be sure the Holy Spirit is not merely a force or influence of God; the Holy Spirit is a *Person*. The Holy Spirit does not have a body, but He has characteristics of a being with a definite personality. Ellen G. White says, "We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God, is a person."²

Through the Bible, all attributes of a person are attributed to the Holy Spirit. What are these attributes?

- *Intellect*. He has infinite understanding and unlimited knowledge. He even knows the deep things of God. "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things . . ." (1 Cor. 2:10).
- *Will*. The Holy Spirit executes His will and indicates decisions to the believers. He distributes the gifts to each one as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11).
- *Feelings or sensibilities*. He has

emotions; He feels, thinks, speaks, and acts. He is capable of infinite love and suffering. He may grieve and feel sad because of our conduct (Eph. 4:30).

• *Thoughts*. He is capable of teaching us all things (John 14:26). He knows all things and illuminates and guides our minds to spiritual things.


• *Love*. He loves us. He imparts His love and loves us with the tenderest affection. He is patient with believers and non-believers.

• *Power*. He distributes His special gifts to believers according to the church's needs. He enables believers with special gifts. He transforms people and consecrates them to the ministry. Luke affirms that the Holy Spirit is the source of Jesus' spiritual power. When the apostles spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit, 3,000 people were added to the Church.

• *Intelligence*. He convinces of sin, justice, and judgment. He teaches, gives orders, and guides.

CONCLUSION

The greatest need of the church today is the power of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the greatest and best gift one can receive.

"There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God."³ Let us pray each day for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. 

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 669.

² White, *Manuscript 66*, 1899.

³ White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 159.

Laercio Mazarro is head of the communication department at the Central Brazil Union Conference.

Sermon Notes:

WALKING IN ABSOLUTE HOPE

1 Corinthians 15:58

The church at Corinth was fraught with problems. There were divisions in the church; sin was being tolerated, false doctrine abounded, and strange worldly practices dominated the worship services. Paul wrote the book of Corinthians to address these problems and to bring the Corinthian believers back in line with orthodox faith and practices. According to verse 12, some believers in Corinth denied the reality of the resurrection. Paul spends the remainder of this great chapter declaring the awesome doctrine of the resurrection and laying a solid foundation for our hope as believers.

Looking around at the world today, we might conclude that there is not much room for hope. Wars, crime, sin, depravity, and the rest of the horrors of modern life can leave us feeling as if there is no hope for the future. I want to show you that we do have a reason to walk in absolute hope.

I. THE PEOPLE OF HOPE

Who are the people that possess this great hope? Paul calls them “my beloved brethren,” and he is referring to the children of God—not just the believers in Corinth but the saints of all the ages. He is talking to you and me! We—those who are born again—are the people of hope!

A. *They are a people delivered by grace.* Verses 1 and 11 reveal the fact of their conversion experience. They were a people saved by God’s amazing grace from the depravity and death of sin (Eph. 2:1-10). They have been brought into a personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

B. *They are a people destined for glory.* As you read 1 Corinthians 15, you begin to understand that God has some big things waiting for His people. We are a people who possess the powerful hope of a bright and better future (1 Cor. 15:49-57). Do you have that hope today (1 Cor. 2:9; John 14:1-3; Rev. 21:4, 27)?

II. THE POWER OF HOPE

In verse 58 of our scripture, the word “therefore” draws our minds back to all that Paul has said earlier in this chapter. He is telling us that the hope we possess is a motivator to spiritual action for God’s glory. Being saved means



If you knew that hope and despair were paths to the same destination, which would you choose?



Robert Brault

we are to get to work for the glory of God! Knowing the truth about God and salvation is a powerful motivator for service. You see, *belief always affects behavior!* Believing the right things about Jesus and about the future will cause us to get busy for His glory.

A. *Hope causes us to be stable.* The word *steadfast* means “to be seated; settled and firmly situated.” It reminds us that we are to be rooted and grounded in what we believe. We are to be firm in our personal convictions. The bottom line is this: If we have no hope, we might waver in our faith and be drawn to enticements of the world. When our hope is real, we are stable in our faith.

B. *Hope counsels us to be stubborn.* The word *unmovable* means “cannot be moved from a place; firmly persistent; motionless.” There are many times when stubbornness is not appropriate, but in the Lord’s work, a good dose of determination is perfectly in order! We must allow nothing to distract us from our firm determination to serve the Lord!

C. *Hope challenges us to abundant service.* The word *abounding* suggests “exceeding a fixed amount; overflowing.” When we consider what we have and who we are by grace, we will be motivated to go all out for the Lord. He lavishes His grace on us when He saves

us (Eph. 1:7-8). The least we can do is let our service for Him be exceedingly abundant.

III. THE PROMISE OF HOPE

If this life is all there is, if there is no hope for eternity and no possibility of a resurrection, if all we have to look forward to is the grave, then we have real reason to despair. This is what Paul says in verses 13-19. But Paul sets forth the blessed truth that there is a resurrection! Jesus Christ did rise from the grave! There is hope for those who have faith in Christ!

A. *Our hope gives us confidence.* Paul tells us that “we know” that our work for Jesus matters. There is no sacrifice, no struggle, no self-denial too great. No work for Him goes unnoticed. So keep praying, keep serving, and keep living for Jesus. What you do for Him in His name is “not in vain.” That is, it is not a waste of time. It is not an exercise in futility. One day He will reward His faithful ones (Rev. 22:12).

B. *Our hope gives us consolation.* Sometimes the road we walk is hard. Sometimes the burdens we bear are heavy. Sometimes the work we are called to do seems endless and unrewarding. Paul offers us the assurance that we work “in the Lord.”

CONCLUSION

We are blessed today. We may not have many of the problems that plagued Corinth, but I am sure that some people today are losing hope. I am also sure that there are others who could exercise the power of their hope and do more for Jesus.

Are you a person of hope? Are you walking in the power of hope and doing all you can to serve the Lord? Are you resting in the promise of your hope, knowing that one day Jesus will reward you for the things you are doing for Him?

If He has spoken to you about something you are doing, something you are not doing, or something you need to be doing, the altar is the place to be. I thank God for hope, but hope is not the end of the matter. Hope is merely the catalyst that should cause us to get busy in the Lord’s work.



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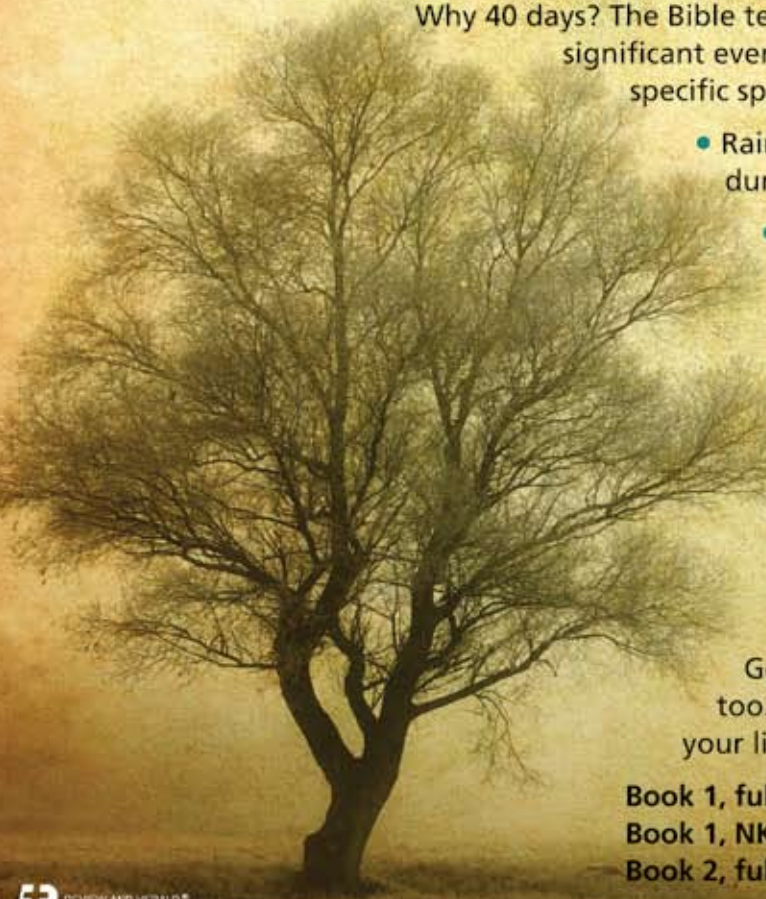
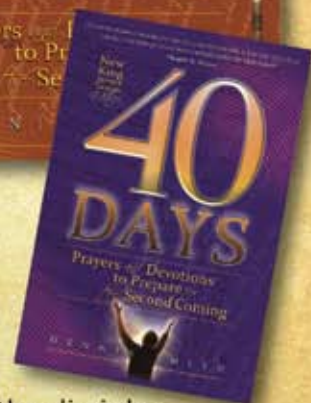
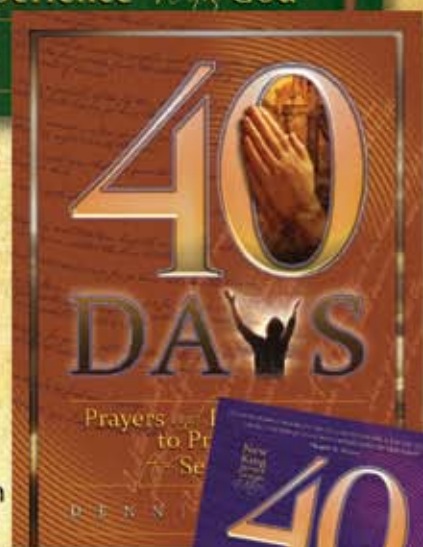
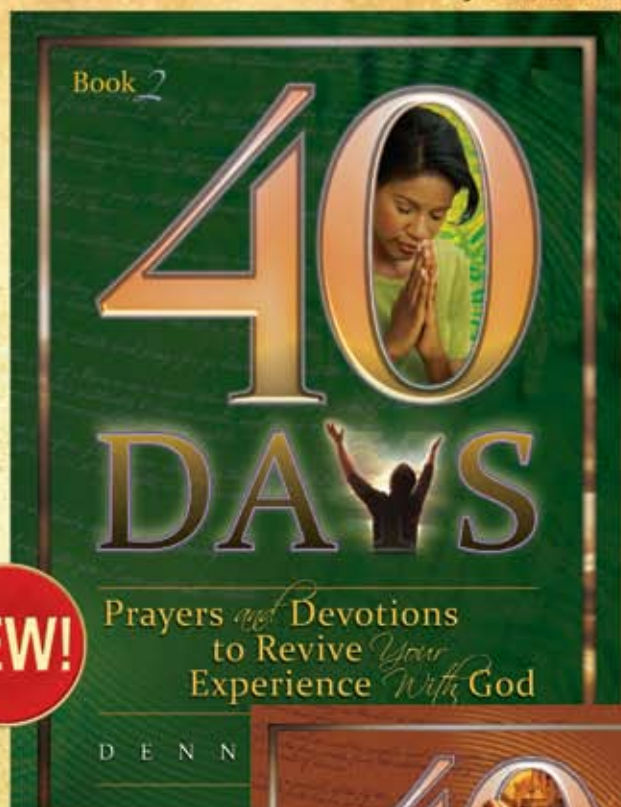
- Rain fell for 40 days during the Flood.
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IF NOT IN THE CHURCH, WHERE WILL THE WORLD FIND GRACE?

We don't live in a grace-filled world. Think about it:

- Sports: You play well, you get paid. Endorsements, applause and recognition go to the winner.
- Work: You work well, you get the bonus, promotions, accolades, the corner office and a raise.
- School: Those who study hard get on the dean's list, receive scholarships, and graduate summa cum laude with a parchment paper to hang on the wall that says to everyone "I earned this".

Our world is ruled by works. From the supermarket to the information superhighway, the principle is the same. It's impossible to buy a car by grace, or a house, or a computer. You get what you work for - sometimes less.

So where can we find grace?

In the church.

I contend that church is the hope of the world. It's the only place people can see love for the sinner, hate for the sin. It's the only place a person can come just as they are and leave bet-

ter. With all its imperfections, church, rightly done, can be the vehicle that God uses to help us learn about grace.

The problem is, when people get there, will they find grace?

As a lifelong church member, I can remember being taught that if you want to be a good Christian (and by implication, attain eternal life) then you:

- Must not cut your hair, if you are a woman. Must not leave hair long, if you are a man.
- Must always kneel when you pray.
- Must not celebrate Christmas. Or Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day or any day. You must not celebrate, period.
- Must not wear pants or sing praise songs.
- Must not move the chairs from the platform, unless you are an ordained elder or deacon.
- Must have the doxology before the invocation. Always!
- Must not go up front if you have your period. (Really? Yes. Really.)
- Must watch out for Catholics,

evangelicals and Jesuits teaching in our colleges.

- Must watch out for Pentecostal influences.
- Must be ready for persecution.

I was 22 years old, a theology student, a 3rd generation Adventist Christian and did not know Jesus! As long as I behaved well and looked the part, everything was OK. I do not remember even once having a conversation with an adult who inquired whether I knew Jesus as my personal Savior.

The wonderful thing about knowing Jesus is that with Him in the picture, the Adventist message makes the Christian experience deeper, and makes the walk with God a delight, not chore. Church can be enjoyed, not endured. It's you *want* to, not you *ought* to Christianity.

And it's all because of grace. 

Roger Hernandez is the Hispanic Ministries Coordinator of Oregon Conference.

This was originally published in the "Best Practices," a free email newsletter from North American Division Church Resource Center.

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THE NECESSITY OF DOING OUR BEST

Ministers and teachers should give special attention to the voice, and learn the art of speaking, not in a nervous, hurried manner, but in a slow, clear, distinct manner, preserving the music of the voice. The Saviour was the greatest teacher the world ever knew, and his voice was as music to the ears of those who had been accustomed to hear the monotonous, spiritless preaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. He spoke slowly and impressively, emphasizing those words to which he wished them to give special attention.

Jesus' manner of teaching was beautiful and attractive, and it was ever characterized by simplicity. He unfolded the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven through the use of figures and symbols with which his hearers were familiar, and the common people heard him gladly; for they could comprehend his words. There were no high-sounding words used, to understand which it was necessary to consult a dictionary. He illustrated the glories of the kingdom of God by the use of the experiences and occurrences of earth. In compassionate love and tenderness he cheered and comforted and instructed all who heard him; for grace was poured upon his lips that he might convey to men in the most attractive way the treasures of truth.



This is the manner in which he would have us present his truth to others. The power of speech is of great value, and the voice should be cultivated for the blessing of those with whom we come in contact. I am pained when I see how little this precious gift is appreciated. In reading the Bible, in engaging in prayer, in bearing testimony, how necessary is clear, distinct utterance. How much is lost in family worship when the one offering prayer bows the face down, and speaks in a low, feeble voice, as though just recovering from a long sickness. But as soon as family worship is over, those who could not speak loud enough to be heard in prayer, can speak in clear, distinct tones, and there is no difficulty in hearing what is said. Prayer that is thus uttered is appropriate for the closet, but not suitable for public worship; for unless those assembled with them can hear what is said, they cannot say Amen.

Nearly all persons can speak loud enough to be heard in ordinary conversation, and why should not the same voice and talent be used when they are called upon to bear testimony or offer prayer? When speaking of heavenly and divine things, why not speak in distinct tones, in a manner that will make it manifest that you know what you are talking about, and are not ashamed to show your colors? Why not pray as though you had a conscience void of offense, and could come to the throne of grace in humility and yet with holy boldness, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting? Do not bow down and cover up your face as if there were something that you desired to conceal; but lift up your eyes toward the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ your Mediator stands before the Father to present your prayers as fragrant incense, mingled with his own merit and spotless righteousness. You are invited to come, to ask, to seek, to knock, and you are assured that you will not come in vain.

ED

This article is excerpted from the book *Christian Education*, pp 126-129, by Ellen G. White.

ADVENTIST WORLD RADIO: SERVING A “NEW CONTINENT”

Today's world can be described as both shrinking and expanding. On the one hand, tools such as affordable air travel, video phone calls, and instant messaging have made far-flung locations and people accessible to us on a daily basis. At the same time, many of us find ourselves living our lives thousands of miles from our birthplace and deeply missing daily contact with cherished family members. This relocation can happen for any number of reasons: a company transfer, a search for migrant work opportunities, a need to seek refugee status in another country, or even finding love with someone from a far-off land.

NEW WITNESSING OPPORTUNITIES

As challenging as these transitions can be, Seventh-day Adventist church leaders recognize that there is also a bright window of opportunity for witnessing, particularly through mass media. “When people are living far from their homelands, they are especially anxious to hear messages in their mother tongues,” says Ben Schoun, General Con-

ference vice president and chair of Adventist World Radio's board of directors. “And while they enjoy listening to their language [on the radio or television], they are also hearing the gospel.”

With this in mind, Adventist World Radio has developed a comprehensive podcasting service that now makes all of its radio programs – in dozens and dozens of languages – simultaneously available online as podcasts. Now, rather than broadcasting on the radio to selected target areas, this system enables AWR to connect with listeners around the world all at once. AWR global resource engineer Daryl Gungadoo describes this new worldwide audience as the “new continent” of the digital world.

It has not taken long for listeners to respond. AWR received a message from a businessman from Ethiopia, who had taken a job in the United States and moved his family to Dallas, Texas. But his wife, mother, and children spoke only Amharic, one of the dozens of indigenous languages of Ethiopia. One day, they stumbled across an Internet podcast from AWR in their own language.

Delighted, they quickly wrote to AWR:

“Selam: I was excited to find the Amharic program of AWR the other day. I have been listening to it almost every day . . . I guess, birk honebign meselegn! As well, my mother has been enjoying the program. She would like to pass her humble greetings, yakibrot selamta lemalet new! She appreciates all your programs, for they are the best one can find. Anyway, thank you for the well planned and articulated programs that you present every day. Keep up the good work.”

A NEW WITNESSING TOOL

Besides serving as a voice of hope inside listeners' homes, these podcasts can also be a valuable aid for local churches and members:

- Church pastors and elders can share the podcasts with members of their congregations or visitors who may not be fluent in the local language.

Online listeners can hear AWR's programs on demand at awr.org—or subscribe to podcasts through iTunes and other podcatchers. (Search for “AWR” or “Adventist World Radio.”)



- Small-group leaders can use podcasts in their chosen language as supplementary material for their discussions.
- Individual members who do not understand the language of their neighbors or other acquaintances can invite them to learn about the Seventh-day Adventist faith through AWR's programs, by printing and sharing one of AWR's "neighbor invitations," available in multiple languages at awr.org.

CONTENT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

AWR works with production partners who come from the same language and cultural groups as its listeners. These producers create "contextualized" programs that are unique to each country, region, or language group, and are designed to be relevant to non-Christian listeners.

The programs encourage listeners to grow into a personal relationship with Jesus; segments include short sermons, Bible lessons, interviews, and dramas. AWR also airs programming that addresses other aspects of listeners' lives, such as features for children, medical advice forums, discussions on family matters, musical presentations, and more.

Messages of God's love have been heard around the world through AWR for 40 years. In addition to pod-

casts, programs can be heard on AM, FM, and short-wave radio. These broadcasts bypass political, cultural, and geographic barriers, bringing a voice of hope to people in some of the most challenging places on earth, such as North Korea, Myanmar, Somalia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and more.

An organization called Open Doors publishes a list of countries every year where Christians are facing the highest intensity of persecution. Out of the 50 countries on the most recent list, AWR has been broadcasting programs to 40 of them through the radio. With AWR's podcasts, the church now has a voice in all of these countries.

Gungadoo says, "I'm overjoyed to see that for the Arabic language, the majority of our podcasting audience is coming from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Egypt. That's a key target area for AWR, as it is not easy to get radio broadcasts into the Middle East, not to mention trying to develop other avenues of evangelism."

With its new web presence, AWR hopes that millions of new listeners will discover the comfort found in Jesus, as this listener experienced: "Alone in the dark, I heard your voice. Even though I cannot see you, I can feel you near and also feel God's presence very near. Thank you for your loving and caring program." ED

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

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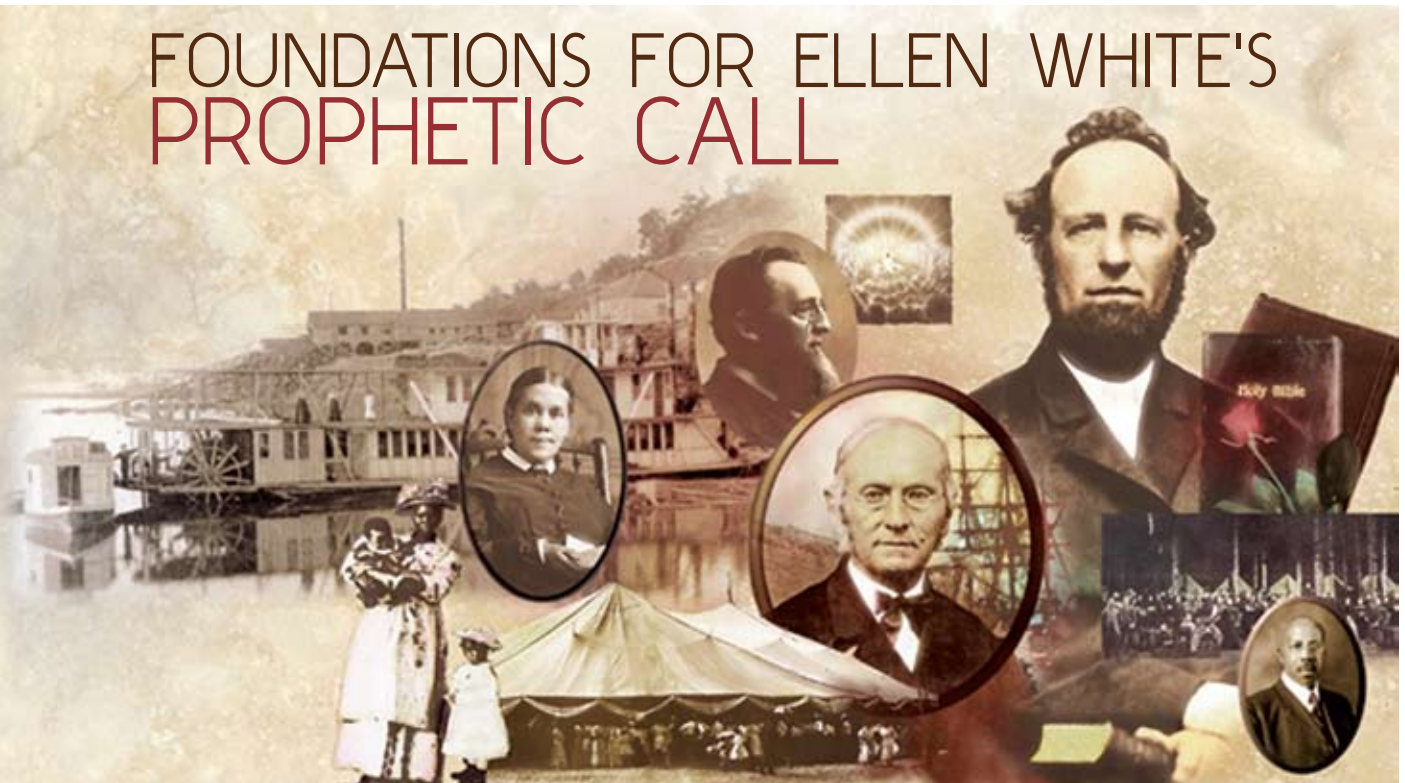


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FOUNDATIONS FOR ELLEN WHITE'S PROPHETIC CALL



“ When the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent. ”

Jer. 28:9, NASB

From the beginning the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church referred to themselves as the remnant. One of their earliest publications, issued in 1846, was a little pamphlet titled *To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad*; and in 1849 Joseph Bates used Revelation 12:17 to identify the small group of Advent believers as the remnant.¹

One of the identifying marks of the remnant in Revelation 12:17 is “the testimony of Jesus.” This phrase occurs six times in the book of Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 [twice]; 20:4). In Revelation 1:2 we are told that John bore witness to “the word of God” and to “the testimony of Jesus.” “The word of God” is commonly understood to refer to what God says; and “the testimony of Jesus” in parallel to “the Word of God” must therefore mean the testimony which Jesus Himself gives. How did Jesus testify? While here on earth, He testified in person to the people in Palestine. After His ascension, He spoke through His prophets. In Revelation 19:10, therefore, John explains that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

WHAT IS THE “SPIRIT OF PROPHECY”?

The term “spirit of prophecy” occurs only once in the

Bible, only in Revelation 19:10; but the readers in John’s day knew exactly what John meant by this phrase. They were familiar with this expression, which was frequently used in the Aramaic translation of the Old Testament. Thus, for example, Genesis 41:38 in the Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament text says, “Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find a man like this in whom there is *the spirit of prophecy from the Lord?*’”² And in Numbers 27:18 the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man who has within himself the *spirit of prophecy*, and lay your hand on him.”³

For the early Christians the “spirit of prophecy” was a reference to the Holy Spirit, who imparts the prophetic gift to God’s messengers. This also becomes evident when we compare Revelation 19:10 with 22:8, 9. 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him, But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of **your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus**. Worship God for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

As compared to 22:8, 9, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, “See that you do not do that! For I am your fellow servant, and of **your brethren the**

prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

The situation in both passages is the same. John falls at the feet of the angel to worship him. The words of the angel’s response are almost identical, yet the difference is significant. In Revelation 19:10 the brethren are identified by the phrase, “who have the testimony of Jesus.” In Revelation 22:9 these brethren are simply called “prophets.”

According to the principle of interpreting Scripture with Scripture, this leads to the conclusion that “the spirit of prophecy” in 19:10 is not the possession of church members in general, but only of those who have been called by God to be prophets. That this is not purely an Adventist interpretation can be seen from the writings of other scholars. The Lutheran scholar Hermann Strathmann, for example, says concerning the phrase “testimony of Jesus” in 19:10: “According to the parallel in 22:9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general, but the prophets. . . . This is the point of verse 10c. If they have the *marturia Iesou* [the testimony of Jesus], they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets, like the angel, who simply stand in the service of *marturia Iesou*.”⁴

In summary, we can say that one of the identifying signs of the remnant church, which according to prophecy exists after the 1,260-day period, i.e., after 1798, is the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, from its very beginning, has believed that in fulfillment of Revelation 12:17 the spirit of prophecy was manifested in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

TESTING A PROPHET

How do we know that the prophetic gift in Ellen White’s case was genuine and not a counterfeit? The Bible provides several guidelines for testing the prophetic gift.

1. Dreams and Visions—Numbers 12:6. In Scripture, genuine prophets received prophetic dreams and visions. During her 70-year ministry from 1844 to 1915, Ellen G. White received approximately 2,000 visions and prophetic dreams.

2. Agreement With the Bible—Isaiah 8:20. What a prophet claims to have received from God must be in harmony with the rest of God’s Word, because God does not contradict Himself (Ps. 15:4; Mal. 3:6). Although Ellen G. White was not a trained theologian, her messages are in harmony with Scripture.

3. The Witness to Jesus—1 John 4:1, 2. Anyone familiar with the writings of Ellen White, such as the books *The Desire of Ages* or *Steps to Christ*, will have to admit that she not only accepted all that the Bible teaches about Jesus, but that she continually pointed people to Him as their Lord and Savior.

4. Fulfilled Prophecy—Jeremiah 28:9. The proof of a true prophet lies, in part, in the fulfillment of their predic-

tions. Although Ellen White’s work did not primarily consist of predicting the future, she did make a number of predictions that have been fulfilled in a remarkable way.⁵

5. The Orchard Test—Matthew 7:20. The orchard test takes time. Ellen White lived and worked for 70 years under the critical eyes of millions of people, largely skeptical, doubtful, suspicious, and in some cases openly hostile. Any fault or inconsistency was and still is exposed with great satisfaction by her opponents. Nevertheless, the fruit of her life and labor attests to her sincerity, zeal, and Christian piety.

While counterfeit prophets may pass one or two of these tests, a true prophet will pass them all. Ellen White certainly did. God’s gracious guidance through the prophetic gift of Ellen White should make us more aware of the responsibility we, as the remnant church, have; and it should spur us on to finish the work God has given us to do. ED

¹ Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God* (New Bedford, Mass., 1849), pp. 45, 46.

² Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, ed. Martin McNamara (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1988), p. 138.

³ *Ibid.*, *Targum Onqelos to Numbers*, p. 145.

⁴ Hermann Strathmann, “*martu*” “*ktl.*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 4:501.

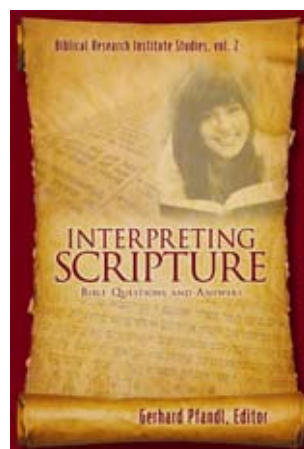
⁵ See Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger to the Lord* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1998), pp. 158-163.

Gerhard Pfandl is an associate director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

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INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

is written for all church members who, at times, struggle to understand certain verses and who would appreciate some assistance, but is also helpful for pastors, elders and Bible teachers as it represents an important reference for understanding some of the most difficult biblical passages.



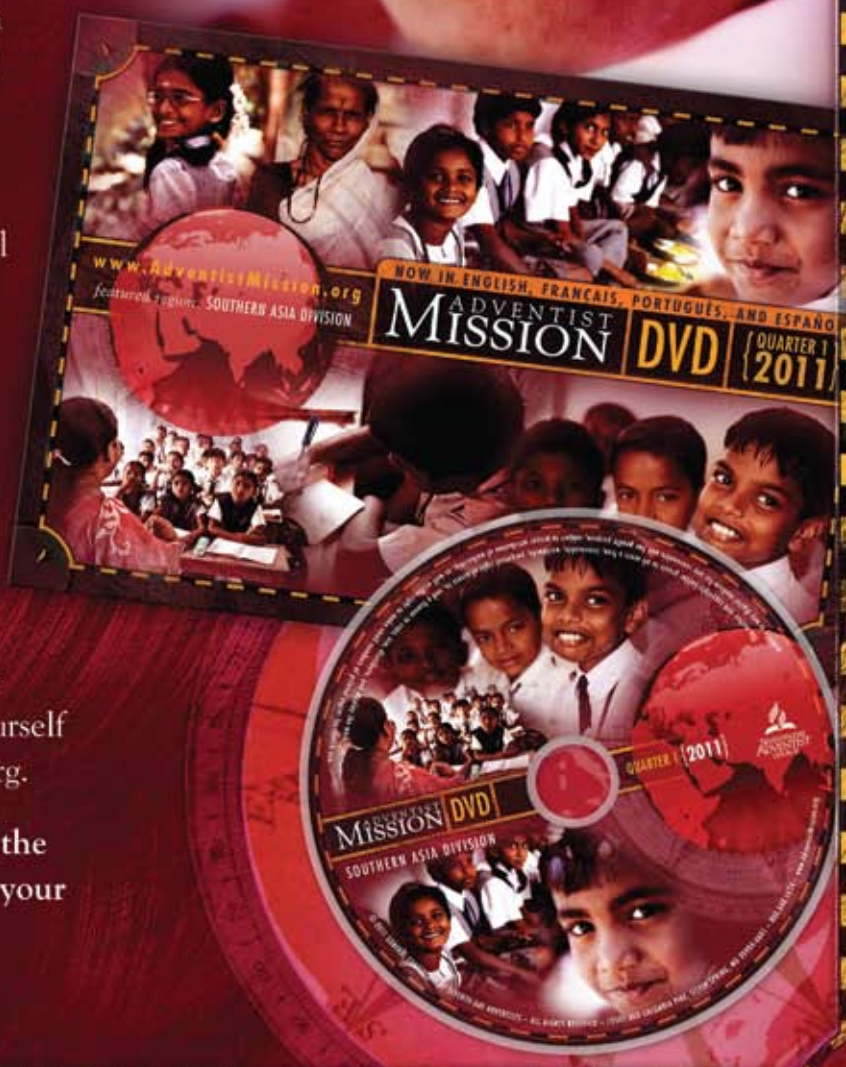
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HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS

MAKING HEALTH MINISTRY COME ALIVE

WHAT ELDERS CAN DO



In previous issues of *Elder's Digest*, we reviewed seven tips for living long, productive lives for God. Now the question is: How can you, as an elder and spiritual leader in your congregation, be a positive influence on other leaders and members of your church and encourage them to practice these principles? In this article and in future issues of *Elder's Digest*, we will share some practical suggestions and ideas for motivating church leaders and members to improve their health and engage the community around their church.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if your church were known in the community as a center for health, healing, and wholeness? What if your church was a place where people could go to find solid health information and lifestyle "coaches" who could assist them with their physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual needs? This was exactly what Jesus did in His ministry: He cared for peoples' needs and then asked them to follow Him. His method is the only one that will bring success to our gospel outreach today.¹

We must start first with ourselves and our congregations. An inspired quote regarding the health message says, "The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted [regarding the message of health] and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?"² This message comes as a strong reminder that we need to reconsider the importance of the health message in our own lives so that we can be a positive influence upon those the Lord will "bring to the truth."

An initiative that can truly change the physical and spiritual lives of our church members is a basic "walking club." As we discussed in a previous issue, one of the predictors for a long and healthy life is physical activity, so motivating people to begin the journey is one of the first things we can do. Walking programs such as In Step for Life have proved successful in helping people create the habit of exercise, allowing them to experience improved physical health—with a reduction in blood pressure, weight, and cholesterol—as

well as mental and emotional well-being, with less depression, insomnia, and stress.

Here are some things you can do:


1. *Lead by example and begin walking* or engage in another type of daily physical activity.

2. If your church currently has a health ministries leader or team but does not have a physical activity initiative, *share your experience and suggest that people get involved in a walking club*. If you do not have a health ministries leader or team, talk to your pastor, ask God to send someone to your church who has a passion for health ministry, or volunteer to introduce the initiative yourself!

3. *Begin by giving pedometers to people* to use when walking with a buddy or on their own. Encourage them to log their physical-activity miles daily (use the log/mile chart found at www.instepforlife.com), and give certificates/prizes every quarter to people who participate. Encourage the church as a whole to walk at least 1,000 miles every month.

4. *Encourage people to share their stories* during a "health minute" between Sabbath School and the church service. These stories will motivate others. Why do this during the Sabbath program? People need to be re-educated and reminded about the importance of whole health and its relationship to the spiritual journey, and you will have a captive audience during the church service. Caring for our bodies is also an act of worship to God.

5. *Invite the community*. Many people know they need to exercise, but they do not know how to start. Your church can help to meet this need. Encourage church members to invite their neighbors to be their walking buddies and to participate in the walking club.

The counsel we have received is, "All who can possibly do so ought to walk in the open air every day, summer and winter. A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe."³ Science has confirmed that exercise is the best medicine. This is not only a matter of being physically healthy; our bodies—the temples of the Holy Spirit—and our minds will be more in tune to hearing His voice when our brains are oxygenated and our bodies energized. This is another way of "glorifying God in our body" (1 Cor. 6:20). 

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 143.

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:370.

³ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, 52.



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



SOUL-WINNING ELDERS

There are a number of “departments” in the organizational structure of the local church. At election time we call them “church offices,” and tend to keep them separate, letting the leaders in each office or department carry out their own obligations. This is good in itself, and actually is necessary if each is to do effective work for the church. No one can do everything.

But when it comes to soul winning, departmental lines break down. The leaders and teachers of the children’s Sabbath schools are to be soul winners; also the community services department, deacons, youth groups, and elders—everyone in the church, office or no office. Have we to some degree separated departments when it comes to soul winning and deposited the responsibility on the lay activities leaders, who in turn must appeal to all other officers and members to join them in soul winning? As soon as we have said this, it savors of something that isn’t quite correct in terms of who is to finish the spreading of the gospel message.

To put it in another way, the church elder has their work to do—on the platform, in the board meeting, in visitation of members, in assistance with church problems—and thus they could feel justified in permitting the soul-winning call of the lay activities leader to go unanswered, since their own office demands too much of them and their time.

There is, however, great danger in this attitude. Why? Because “witness” in its Biblical sense, does not necessarily take place when I give out fifteen truth-filled tracts in my neighborhood. I could do that simply in order to no longer feel guilty for not doing it. I may feel better afterwards if I go out and give Bible studies for the same reason. It might be nothing more than the fulfilling of an obligation rather than witness.

As elders, we may fulfill our office by visiting a newly baptized family and inviting them home for dinner, thus strengthening them in their new-found faith. Or we may visit a backslidden person and attempt to reclaim him and restore him to the fold. We may even visit a sick member in the hospital, and leave an encouraging tract with someone in the next bed. So many good things are done to which we attach the word witness, but we may have done these acts only to fulfill a responsibility placed upon us, which we have taken to be a part of our official duties.

You ask, Are not the items just mentioned—tract distribution, Bible studies, visitation of new members, backsliders, the sick—all witness? They may or may not be! We have already hinted at the difference. If we do them because our intense love for God must be shared—it is witness. If we do them only because we feel obligated to our office, or because we are members of the church and should do such

things, it is not witness at all. They are then probably being done as an attempt to gain the acceptance of God by our own works.

Actually, a church member who has not yet formed a personal love relationship with Christ cannot witness. He can do missionary work, but such is not witness. When we accept Christ genuinely, the very act necessitates that we become witnesses for Him. We do not then witness to gain acceptance or reward. We genuinely witness about the Lord who loves all men as He loves us. Christ in us spills over, just like a glass sitting under the running water faucet. It is not difficult to tell others about the One we love. So many try to witness without a lifelong "first love" to tell about. In doing so they find only a trying and painful obligation.

One of the clearest Bible examples of real witness can be found in Christ's counsel to the demoniac "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19). Luke adds this: "Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him." That man went everywhere telling everyone.

Ellen White makes the same truth clear: "Strive to arouse men and women from their spiritual insensibility. Tell them how you found Jesus, and how blessed you have been since you gained an experience in His service. Tell them what blessing comes to you as you sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn precious lessons from His Word." (*Evangelism*, p. 486)

You may now be asking, Is witness confined to the act of talking to others about Christ and our love for Him? Is witness when you tell others about the commandments, the Sabbath, the nature of man, healthful living, the remnant,

and the three angels' messages? Are we not diminishing our emphasis on the great doctrinal truths today in favor of just talking about Christ?

Yes, witness is confined to the act of talking to others about Christ! But that includes presenting Christ in all of the great Bible teachings as we show others what the Christian life is all about. Think this through carefully—if we show that the commandments reveal love relationships, that the Sabbath is to be devoted to further learning about Christ, that healthful living serves to give us clearer minds in order that we might more fully understand God, His love and His way so that we might grow more like Him, that the three angels messages teach us how to truly worship Him and escape deceptions about Him—we then are witnessing about Christ as we should be, regardless of the particular phase of the Christian life that is being discussed. Sadly, many have never learned this vital point about genuine witness as they should have done, in spite of the abundant counsel given us.

Of course, the church must have departments and specialists and the church elder should be one of these specialists in their work. But departments cannot be compartments, locked off and separated from one another when it comes to soul-winning. The lay activities leader is not to be the only one who speaks out for help in the soul-winning program of the church. Rather, it is his work to specialize in organizing a church full of soul winners, made so by rebirth, into the most effective team possible. The church elder must be the one who leads the way. ED

Carl Coffman was chair of the Department of Religion at Andrews University when he wrote this article.

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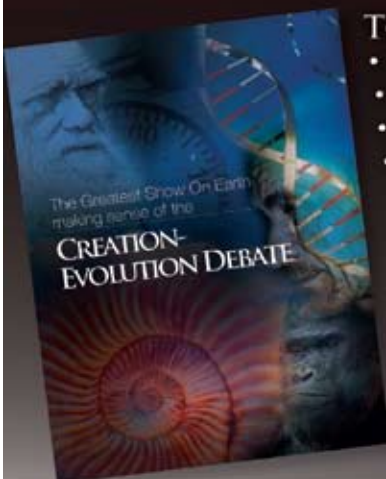
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INTIMACY WITH THE ALMIGHTY



How do you view prayer in general? What is the purpose of prayer? Is it simply to draw up one's list of requests, petitions and problems and present them in an acceptable fashion to God? God doesn't instruct us to pray without ceasing just so He can be the genie that fulfills all of our wants and needs.

The purpose of prayer goes deeper than that. Prayer is a way to maintain constant and meaningful communion with God. Prayer is about knowing God, worshiping Him, loving Him, adoring Him, and having a deep, passionate and intense relationship with Him. Prayer is being aware of God, aware of the presence of God, aware of His activities, aware of His grace, aware of everything that has to do with our Heavenly Father.

Prayer is about glorifying God by demonstrating utter dependence on Him. It is about experiencing God's presence, forgiveness, power, wisdom, joy, love, compassion, and confidence together.

Let's look more closely at prayer and its role in worship.

God always has a hunger and desire to be with us. Creation is about God being with us. The sanctuary is about God being with us. Jesus is Immanuel, which means "God with us." When Jesus went to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us. The Second Coming

is the ultimate example of God's presence with His people. God wants and desires to be with us.

Going to the Bible, I discovered that throughout recorded history God has taken pain to let His people know of His presence among them. After leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert on their way to the Promised Land, God knew they would feel frightened and alone. They had no armies and no walls to protect them from enemy attack. They didn't even know the way to the Promised Land.

In their heads, they knew they were God's people and He had promised to protect them. But it was hard to feel His presence. And so God, wanting to convince them that He was with them wherever they went, gave them a visible sign of His presence. "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night" (Exod 3:21).

If ever the people began to wonder if their journey was headed in the right direction, all they had to do was look up and see the pillar of cloud. If ever they grew frightened, all they had to do was look at the pillar of fire casting its glow over the whole camp. God made sure that they could feel His presence in their midst.

The New Testament begins with God offering us His presence in the person of Jesus Christ, His Son.

The promised baby was to be called Immanuel, “God with us” (Matt 1:23). John explains the significance of Jesus’ birth: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). God’s presence through Jesus was powerful. It transformed ordinary, sinful people into apostles who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, KJV). Even unbelieving leaders recognized what it was that made the difference in these men: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13 NIV).

But, as powerful as God’s presence in Christ was, it still lacked something. Jesus’ ministry on earth lasted only about three and a half years. He never left Palestine. Only a relatively small number of people ever met Him personally. The vast majority of people who have lived on earth have never come in direct contact with Him. That is why Jesus promised His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17 NIV).

Shortly after Jesus ascended to the Father, that promise was fulfilled. On the day of Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence in the lives of believers.

Ever since Pentecost, all believers have had a strong sign of God’s presence with them. The moment you bow to Christ and become His, God cleanses you of your sin and simultaneously fills you with His Holy Spirit. Over a period of time, you grow to realize you are never alone. God’s presence is real. You can feel it. It’s with you wherever you go.

When you practice being aware of God’s presence, you pick up His signals all through the day. At work, at home, in your car, or wherever you are, you begin to dialogue with the Lord. You share your heart with Him, and you know He’s listening. It has nothing to do with being in a church building or on your knees. It has to do with God’s presence in and around you—“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27 NIV).

I have been a Christian all my life, but only recently have I started to practice God’s presence in my own life. I learned that in my car, on the job, at home, while working out, while helping somebody move, while lying in bed at night, anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance, I could commune meaningfully with the Lord. God is near me and wants to enjoy a friendship with me.

If Jesus were to talk to me personally, He would say, “I want to relate to you as your forgiver and Lord, but I also want to be your best friend. I want our conversations to bring you comfort, peace and joy. I want to shadow you all day long. And I’d like for you

to think about Me all day long. I want you to know you’re never alone. Wherever you go and whatever you do, I will be by your side. I want you to discover My presence in your daily life. I am going to be your companion.” That is what we mean when we say prayer is being aware of the presence of God.

I have learned that prayer is more of an attitude than a posture or a form of expression. It is an attitude of practicing the presence of God all day long, in all circumstances. Our whole life, when it is lived to the glory of God, can be a form of prayer. We learn to lean on Jesus every day, for help to live a supernatural life in a tough, worldly environment. It is praying “without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17, KJV).

I challenge you to respond to God, to get to know Him. It’s going to take some work. You may need to get up a little earlier so you can spend time in His Word and on your knees. You need to spend time in His presence and time with His people, because our great God deserves a response.



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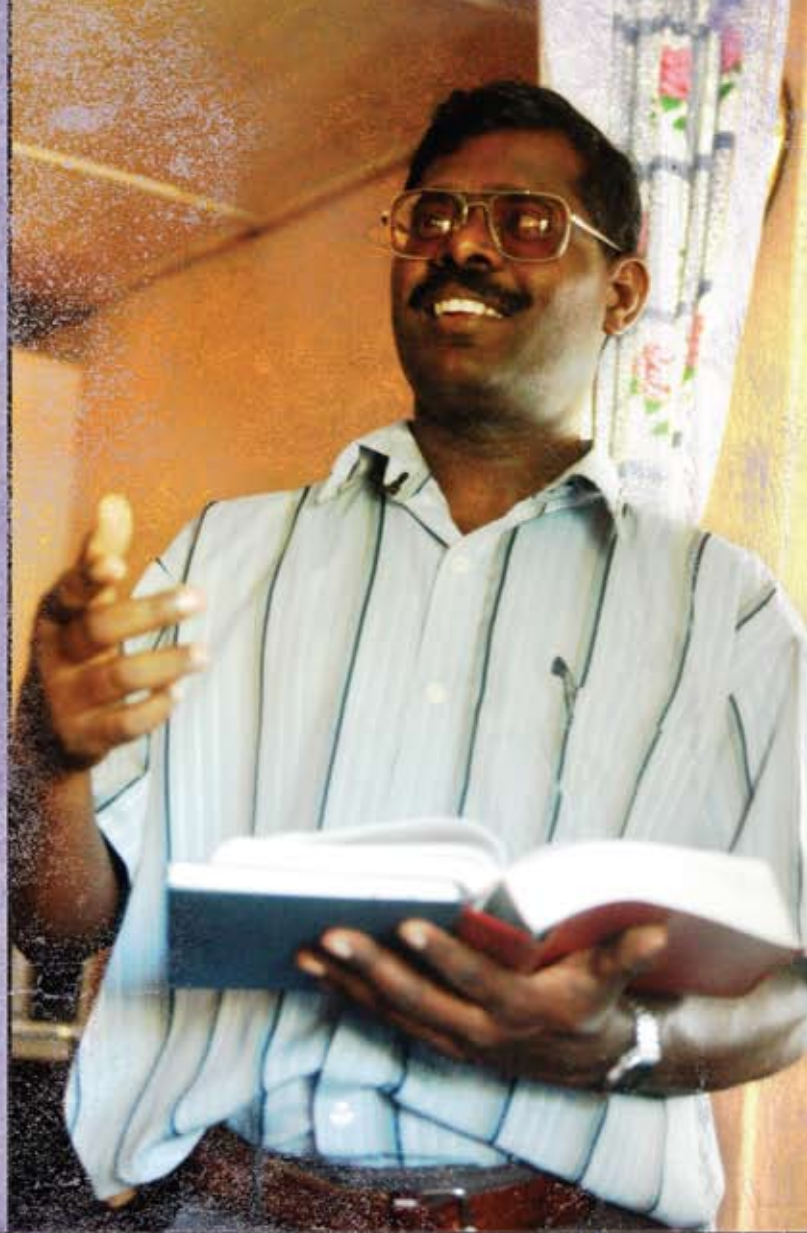


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