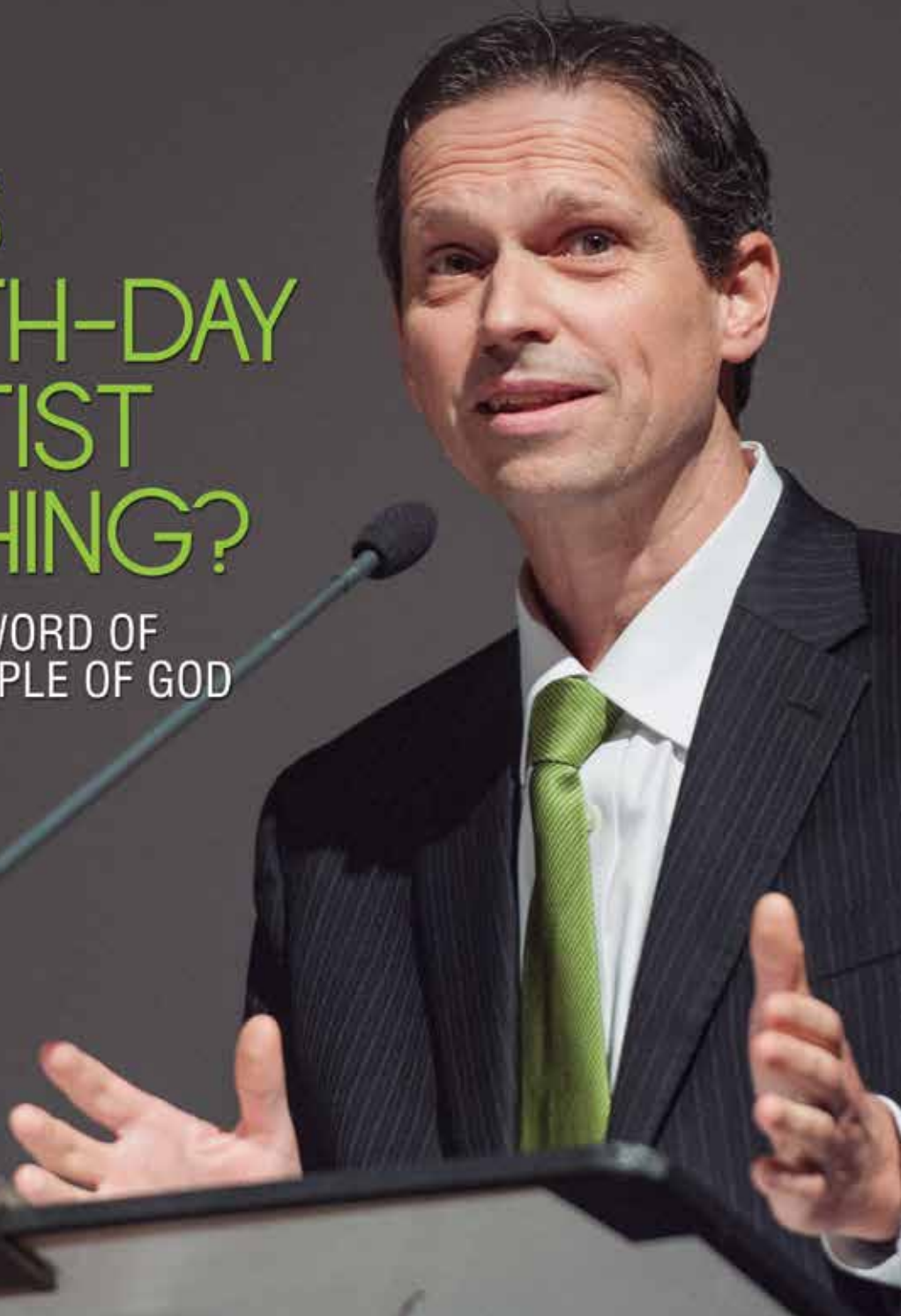


quarterly resource for local church leaders † january/march 2015

ELDER'S DIGEST

WHAT IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PREACHING?

PREACHING THE WORD OF
GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD



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MAKING CHURCH RELEVANT TODAY



When Jesus returned to heaven, He left behind 11 disciples to continue the work He had begun. They were His ambassadors.

Today, we are Christ’s ambassadors. We find ourselves in a socially-complex world. Multitudes are desperately searching for truth, real meaning, and a way forward in life. The question is, How can we significantly impact our world for Him? Of course, for us to achieve this goal, we must be relevant to our culture.

When I talk about the need for the church to be relevant today, I am not talking about changing the message of the gospel to fit with the times. Rather, I am talking about effectively carrying out the charge of our Lord in the culture in which we live.

So let me share some of my thoughts about what needs to be done. First and foremost, our message in the pulpit and in Sabbath School must provide answers to real, tough problems. We can’t do this unless we are attuned to the issues of our day.

There is not one problem any of us face for which we can’t find excellent counsel and victory through the Word of God. The church must become the place where the people of this generation can come for answers and strategies that they can’t find anywhere else.

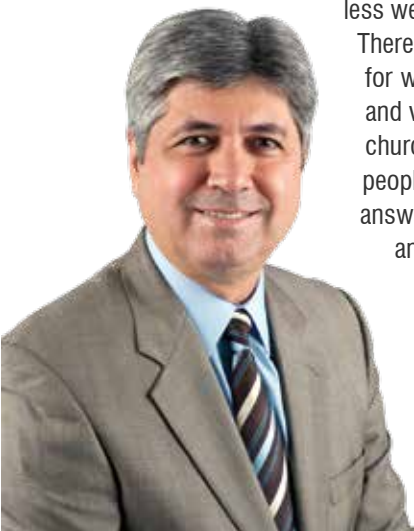
Secondly, to be relevant, the church must go outside the four walls of its building and learn about the community in which God has placed it. We must do more than just place a “Welcome” sign on our door. Each church must

learn to “read” its community. God has placed us on this Earth to impact those around us.

Thirdly, the church must believe in and depend on the work of the Holy Spirit. He wants to work supernaturally through God’s people. We cannot impact this world through strategies and techniques alone. Only the Holy Spirit can break the spirit of this world and the spiritual shackles that hold humanity captive. Only He can draw people to the Father. Only He can change souls from the inside out.

Finally, although I love preaching and teaching the Word of God, Jesus makes it clear that the gospel is more than that. We serve Him by serving others. He said that when we feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and offer shelter to strangers, we have essentially done the same to Him (see Matt. 25:34-40). Moreover, He said, when we neglect to do these things, we have in effect failed to do the same to Him! The bottom line is that we will not be counted relevant if we fail to exercise His ministry of compassion to this hurting world.

I believe that most Christians would agree, at least in principle, that the things I have touched on here are practical strategies that we must implement to become more relevant to our world today. These things cannot be legislated. They go beyond telling church members what the Bible says they need to do. Knowing what needs to be done and actually doing it can be worlds apart. It all boils down to this: To be relevant to our socially-complex world, we must fall in love with Jesus. When we do, we will love the things He loves. His will for us will become our consuming passion, so that as Christ gave His life to save a lost world, we will give ours to reach the lost of today.



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



100TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S DEATH:

CELEBRATING HER MINISTRY AND LEGACY TO THE CHURCH



James Nix is Director of the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference World Headquarters. He has written several books and articles on the history of our church. In 1981 he helped establish, and currently chairs, the board of Adventist Heritage Ministry that operates four Adventist heritage sites, including the Historic Adventist Village in Battle Creek, Michigan, USA. Elder Nix is married to Mindi, a middle-school teacher at Spencerville Adventist Academy in Silver Spring, MD. He has one daughter, Shannon.

WHY IS THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH REMEMBERING THE CENTENNIAL OF ELLEN WHITE'S DEATH IN 2015?

Although the doctrines of our church are based upon the Bible, very early in the history of the Adventist movement God chose to call Ellen G. White to be His special messenger. The pioneers soon realized that God was speaking through her, and that what He showed her helped clarify points of Scripture they were studying while working out the major doctrines of our church. As time passed, the pioneers also discovered that when they followed her counsels, individually and collectively they prospered, but when they ignored or refused to heed the counsels, they found themselves in trouble.

Ellen White died on July 16, 1915. Today, not only can we see the valuable role that Ellen White's ministry filled for our church during the seventy years from her first vision in late 1844 until her death, but we have now had an additional 100 years to experience the value of her counsels—demonstrated in the lives of thousands of Adventists worldwide, as well as in the whole church's ongoing life and ministry during the intervening century. In 2015 the church will not only be highlighting the impact of that legacy, but more importantly,

we will be refocusing on the importance of reading—or better yet, studying—the actual counsels. As a friend of mine recently said, the emphasis will be more on the *messages* than on the *messenger*.¹ And that is exactly how it should be, and how she would have wanted it.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ARE BEING PLANNED FOR 2015?

Adventists worldwide will be blessed by the series of articles to be published in the *Adventist World*. Some will focus on Mrs. White's life story while others will address specific themes that she emphasized during her lifetime. But there will be much more. At the General Conference Session in Texas next July, the final Friday evening program will highlight the ministry of Ellen White, and its impact on our church. World divisions are being encouraged to feature the centennial in various ways appropriate to their local fields. We also hope that pastors or local church elders who are responsible for preaching on Sabbaths will make opportunities during the year to focus not only on the on-going importance of Ellen White's writings today, but also on re-exploring specific biblical prophets and prophecy in general. Likewise, we hope that the teachers in our schools will feature Ellen White's ministry.

The plan is to release the 2016 Ellen White daily devotional book at the General Conference Session next year. In addition, a new book is being published in English in 2015 that features various topics of interest relating to Ellen White and her ministry. We hope that both books will be translated into other languages. To view a list of things that the White Estate Board voted relating to the centennial, go to the main page of the White Estate's website at EllenWhite.org. That list is only the starting point for what is being planned for 2015.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC RESOURCES THAT THE ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE IS MAKING AVAILABLE TO HELP LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS IN 2015?

The most useful single resource is the special section of the White Estate's main website (EllenWhite.org) that was created specifically to be a source for information to access throughout the year. Click on the link to take you to the 2015 "Legacy of Light" Centennial page. We hope that several of the world divisions will develop similar websites to provide helpful resource materials in non-English languages. Among the things on the webpage will be copies of Spirit of Prophecy Day sermons for the past 70 years; short Ellen White quotations for use in church bulletins; stories for the children's feature on any given Sabbath, and much, much more.

HOW CAN A LOCAL CHURCH LEADER BECOME INVOLVED IN THIS COMMEMORATION?

Several suggestions come to mind; let me mention a couple. First, church leaders should find ways to share their own excitement about what Ellen White's writings mean to them personally. Whether in private conversation, or in public, leaders need to let people know how they feel about Ellen White, and why. A good way to do that is to read, or reread, one or more Ellen White books. That way they will have something fresh to share—something that they have just discovered in their reading. Of course, we should already be reading now, but certainly during 2015.

Also, explore ways to encourage church members to read the writings of Ellen White personally. This might be through small groups studying an Ellen White book, or it might be in a sermon, a chapel or worship talk at your church school, or maybe talks to the young people in their Sabbath School or local Pathfinder club. In short, think creatively on how you can help guide your local church members, both young and old, to take seriously the inspired counsels with which God has blessed our church.


WHAT DO YOU THINK WERE ELLEN WHITE'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR CHURCH?

I'm glad you asked about her greatest contributions in the plural and not the singular, because I don't think we can summarize them by listing just one contribution. Foremost, of course, was her continual, consistent uplifting of Christ and the Bible during her entire ministry. Couple that with her insights into the great controversy—the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan, involving every one of us. Her understanding of that war impacts almost everything else that she wrote. In fact, if you stop to think about it, almost everything of importance that our church does today is affected in one way or another by our understanding of the great controversy. Another important contribution has been the unifying impact that her writings have had on our church's theology and organization throughout the years. The fact that we are a single Adventist Church worldwide, rather than many fragmented smaller Adventist churches is due in large part to the impact of Ellen White.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR HELPING SOME WHO ARE HAVING CHALLENGES ACCEPTING ELLEN WHITE'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY?

(Laughing) Let me first suggest what not to do! Don't start an argument with anyone in your church who may not accept Ellen White's prophetic ministry. The centennial is not intended to be controversial. In my experience, the best way to help people accept her gift is to get them to read her writings. I have evangelist friends who tell me that long before they get to the point in their studies where they talk about Ellen White, they have already given attendees one or more of her books to read. Consequently, when the gift of prophecy comes up in their studies, accepting her prophetic ministry generally is not a problem. Admittedly, sometimes people look on the Internet where some become confused by untrue things they find there about Ellen White. However, there are excellent resources available, both on the Internet as well as in print, that not only provide answers to many criticisms, but that also point out the positive impact of Ellen White's writings on the spiritual life of those who read and follow her inspired counsels.

ADVENTISTS HAVE BEEN GIVEN A SPECIAL BLESSING IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN WHITE. I'M GLAD OUR CHURCH IS TAKING TIME IN 2015 TO REMIND OURSELVES OF THAT BLESSING.

I agree. The White Estate hopes that 2015 will be a very special year for all of us. 

¹ Alberto R. Timm, "Centennial of Ellen White's Prophetic Legacy", *Adventist World*, September 2014, 22.



WHAT IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PREACHING?

PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Powerful, Christ-centered, expository preaching is indispensable to Seventh-day Adventism; the Adventist movement cannot survive or thrive without it. The task of preaching the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6), therefore, deserves our most concentrated thought and energetic effort. This article will propose and unpack a working definition of Seventh-day Adventist preaching that I have used in my homiletics classes over the last decade. My desire is to stimulate thought on what Seventh-day Adventist preaching is and should be and to influence its practice.

Seventh-day Adventist preaching, then, is the “spirit-empowered proclamation of a single idea from God’s Word, based on grammatical-theological exegesis and homiletical synthesis, framed in the eschatological setting of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, resulting in cogni-

tive, affective, and behavioral changes, first in the preacher, then in the listeners.”¹

Admittedly, this is a mouthful, and because of its theoretical foundation, it has an academic flavor. But I believe that when put into practice, its impact will be life-changing for both the audience and the preacher. Let us consider the various components in this definition.

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED PROCLAMATION

Ellen White has much to say on the subject of Spirit-empowered preaching. Writing to Seventh-day Adventist ministers, she stressed the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit’s presence during the preaching event: “The preaching of the word is of no avail without the presence and aid of the Holy Spirit, for this Spirit is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit,

will it quicken the conscience or transform the life.”² Preachers have described this experience as the “sacred anointing,” “divine unction,” and “the smile of God.”³

In using the term “proclamation,” I include explanation of the text, but much more. Homiletician Jay Adams distinguishes between the “lecture stance” and “preaching stance.”⁴ The lecture stance is a dry, formal, third-person (he, they) delivery with information but no relevance or application. A preaching stance, however, involves an energetic, vibrant, alive, second-person (you) delivery that resonates with the listeners. Proclamation, therefore, is this “preaching stance”—a sermon with energy and passion, confidence and humility, conviction and clarity. This is what our people long for in the pulpit—a preacher excited about proclaiming the Gospel who does it in the power of the Spirit!

A SINGLE IDEA FROM GOD’S WORD

When an audience hears a sermon that feels like a herd of cats running in every direction, they will tune out and take a mental vacation. Put another way, a sermon with too many unrelated points is like having no point at all; it’s not worth the listener’s time. The principle of centering the sermon on a single dominant idea, therefore, is indispensable to good pulpit preaching.

So important is this principle that homiletician Haddon Robinson argued that if preachers “will not—or cannot” think clearly enough to say what they mean, they “have no business in the pulpit.”⁵ I completely agree with this principle, which any student who sits in my homiletics classes knows quite well. The technical term for this kind of preaching is “ideational” (idea-centered). Robinson thus argues for a “single idea” in every sermon: “A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture.”⁶

It is important to note that this single idea comes from God’s Word, the Holy Bible, which Seventh-day Adventists believe to be the authoritative and inspired Word of God. Expository preaching expounds this Word in its literary and historical context. It is my conviction that if a sermon is not biblical or expository in its origin, production, and delivery, it should be classified as a religious speech rather than as a Christian sermon. Only sermon ideas derived from God’s ideas in God’s Word change lives!

BASED ON GRAMMATICAL-THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS AND HOMILETICAL SYNTHESIS

Seventh-day Adventist preaching should be based, first of all, on exegesis of the text. Here, grammatical-theological exegesis means the grammatical-historical-theological method of interpreting the Scriptures, which takes seriously the divine-human nature of the Bible, honors the principle that the Bible is its own interpreter, and finds expression in detailed analysis of the historical and literary contexts of the preaching passage.

Homiletical synthesis translates exegetical analysis into the popular, contemporary street language of the listeners. Thus, it transports the preacher to the creative side of sermon preparation. Whereas exegetical analysis is more analytical, homiletical synthesis is more creative; exegetical analysis is more piece-oriented while homiletical synthesis is more holistic. As such, homiletical synthesis transforms raw, exegetical data into an organized pattern with unity and focus, rhythm and symmetry, movement and climax. Just as the Spirit of God brooded over the earth at creation (Gen. 1:2), so the expositor allows the same Spirit to brood over the exegetical notes during the creative process of homiletical synthesis (John 14:26).⁷

FRAMED IN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE THREE ANGELS’ MESSAGES OF REVELATION 14:6-12

Up to this point in our discussion, nothing has been unique to Seventh-day Adventism. The homiletical, theological, and hermeneutical theory addressed so far, while representing my own understanding and synthesis, is essentially espoused and practiced in various forms by many preachers and homileticians in other denominations. Revelation 14:6-12, however, provides a unique Christian worldview that, I believe, sets Seventh-day Adventist preaching apart. This unique eschatological setting should provide a frame for every sermon delivered on a given Sabbath day.

Charles E. Bradford stressed this point in his Adventist preaching classic, *Preaching to the Times*: “All true Seventh-day Adventist preaching has Revelation 14:6-12 as its frame of reference” and should “wind up somewhere in the neighborhood of this threefold message.”⁸ More recently, William Johnsson discussed the implications of the three angels’ messages for proclamation in the Adventist pulpit.⁹ He is careful to assert (and rightly so) that Revelation 14 should not “form the basis for every, or most, sermons, for the chapter itself presupposes the body of Christian beliefs, something that preachers dare not take for granted in their audiences.” Thus, apart “from the *content* of the passage itself—something not to be overlooked—we must,” he declares, “catch the *dynamic* of the proclamation.”

This dynamic manifests itself in several characteristics. First is the “note of *certainty* that characterizes the passage.” Johnsson explains: “Certainty that we live in the days just prior to the Second Coming. Certainty that God is calling out a people loyal to Him from every nation and tribe. Certainty that true worship is not to be compromised. Certainty that the Ten Commandments, and the Sabbath in particular, show our loyalty to God.”

Next is the “note of *authority* that marks the passage.” Again, Johnsson strikes at the heart of the matter for preachers: “The Adventist preacher, standing in the pulpit, is fulfilling the prediction of Revelation 14. It is a staggering claim. That claim can lead to pride, presumption, high-handedness, and lovelessness. We need a special measure of humility and grace to live with it. But live with it we must. Our preaching cannot be

of smooth things. It must come with the conviction and win some appeal of the angel messengers of Revelation 14.”

The “*timeliness* of the message” is another characteristic of Revelation 14. “The passage speaks directly to our day, alerting us to the significance of our times in God’s eternal plan.” As such, it “calls us to wake up, to open our eyes, and to see ourselves in light of eternity, to be ready to meet our returning Lord.”

The final characteristic is the “solemn *warning* in which the messages of Revelation 14 are couched.” The “three angels are *urgent* in their summons, for time is short and the fate of the beast-worshippers is too horrible to contemplate.” Adventist preachers are “watchmen on the walls of Zion, and we dare not be delinquent in our responsibilities.” Therefore, we should sound this note of warning, but always, Johnsson adds with emphasis, “in the context of the ‘everlasting gospel.’”

The foundational “everlasting gospel,” which is the same unaltered apostolic gospel centered in the good news of Jesus Christ—His life, atoning death, resurrection, enthronement in heaven, heavenly priesthood, and second coming—should be embedded in the heart of every Seventh-day Adventist sermon. Johnsson says it well: “Jesus, the Man of matchless charms, is to be the center of every sermon. He is the Lamb, and His cross must ever be uplifted before the people. No sermon, no matter what the audience or the occasion, should fail to point the way to hope and healing in Him.”

He concludes on the significance of Revelation 14 for Seventh-day Adventist preachers: “Certainty, authority, warning—these characteristics will link our proclamation with that of the pioneers. Like them, we must be grounded in the Scriptures, daily nurtured by the living Word. That Word will enable us to preach with power so that the three angels will speak mighty voices to the whole world.”¹⁰ It is in this eschatological frame, then, that Seventh-day Adventist preachers must preach across the broad canvas of Scripture, expounding their way through books and sections of the Bible.

This brief discussion provides only the seeds for what I hope will eventually become a full-grown theology of Seventh-day Adventist preaching. The rich theological tapestry of Revelation 14:6-12 deserves our most serious thought and earnest application in relation to preaching. This eschatological worldview should inspire some of the most dynamic, Christ-centered, expository preaching the world has ever known!


COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE, AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGES, FIRST IN THE PREACHER, THEN IN THE LISTENERS

Preached with certainty and urgency, a spirit-empowered, Christ-centered expository sermon should result in the transformation of human beings. This can only happen with specific changes in the three human domains: cognitive (intellect), affective (emotions), and behavioral (actions). Each of these domains describes a type of learning that human beings can achieve. All three domains should be targeted in such a way that results in transformed lives. Generally, one domain, usu-

ally the behavioral one, is dominant. But calling for behavioral changes in listeners without laying a foundation in their thinking and feeling can lead to legalism. All three domains should receive attention in every sermon, even though one is dominant.

Before preachers can do any of the above, however, they must experience the power of the biblical text impacting their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior. They must allow the Word to transform their lives first; then—and only then—can they be used by the Holy Spirit as effective agents for change. So, preacher, apply the Word first to your own life and then to the lives of your listeners.

CONCLUSION

It is my conviction that this definition expresses what Seventh-day Adventist preaching is in theory and should be in practice.¹¹ May we all heed Paul’s imperative, which powerfully captures the eschatological setting of preaching for our day: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (1 Tim. 4:1-2; NIV). 

¹ For a more detailed explanation of this definition with extensive references, see my “Preaching the Word of God for the People of God: A Proposed Definition of Seventh-day Adventist Preaching,” in *The Word of God for the People of God: A Tribute to the Ministry of Jack J. Blanco*, Ron Du Preez, Philip G. Samaan, and Ron E.M. Couzet, eds. (Collegedale, Tenn.: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2004), 467-494.

² Ellen White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Assn.), 284.

³ For a full discussion on this “divine unction” and how to obtain it, see my article, “The Seven Habits of Spirit Empowered Preaching,” <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2005/10/seven-habits-of-spirit-empowered-preaching.html>

⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 42-46.

⁵ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷ For a step-by-step procedure that applies exegetical analysis and homiletical synthesis in sermon preparation, see my article, “Expository Sermon Preparation” at: <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible/expository-sermon-preparation>.

⁸ Charles E. Bradford, *Preaching to the Times* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975), 20.

⁹ William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, book 2, vol. 7, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Frank B. Holbrook, ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 3-40.

¹⁰ All citations from Johnsson are from *ibid.*, 39, 40.

¹¹ Ellen White’s counsel on preaching was moving in this direction; see Jud Lake, “Preaching,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 1048-1049.

This article was first published in *Best Practice*, June, 2014. It has been lightly edited for *Elder’s Digest*.

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Planting a Church With Pancakes

When Mrs. Shin's 13-year-old daughter, Bo Hwa, was lonely because there were no teens at church, Mrs. Shin knew what to do. Getting up before dawn, she handcrafted 2,000 *hotok* (Korean pancakes) and sold them every morning to hungry students near the local high school.

As she befriended her young customers, the young people started coming to the Shin's home and learning about Jesus. Over the past 16 years more than 400 youth have been baptized as a direct result of Mrs. Shin's ministry.

Meeting in a makeshift building, the young members are delighted that their church plant has been chosen to receive part of an upcoming Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Mrs. Shin's church plant is only one of many projects benefited by your generous Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings each quarter. Thank you!

Did you know that you don't have to wait to give your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering? Just go to our secure Web site anytime at giving.adventistmission.org.



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GREAT FOR

- Sabbath School
- Home worship
- School worship
- Pathfinder meetings
- Youth meetings
- Prayer meetings



CENTENNIAL OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S PROPHETIC LEGACY

Ellen G. White (1827–1915) is undoubtedly the most influential Seventh-day Adventist ever. Her prophetic guidance informed the formation and later development of the church. After her death on July 16, 1915, White's writings continued to "provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction."¹ Today she is one of the most translated female writers in the entire history of literature and "the most translated American author of either gender."²

We are approaching the centennial of her death, and many people are asking what the church is planning to do in 2015 in regards to her prophetic legacy. This article highlights a few endeavors at the global, regional, and local levels. All such efforts are aimed at strengthening our confidence in and commitment to God's prophetic guidance in these last days of human history.

Next year's activities will focus not so much on Ellen G. White herself, but on the blessings her writings have brought to our church corporately and to us individually for more than 100 years. In other words, the emphasis is more on the *message* than on the *messenger*.

GLOBAL STRATEGIES

Many significant publications, releases, and projects are being planned and developed for the benefit of the worldwide church. Already we have seen the publication of the 1,465-page *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*³ and the 986-page *Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts with Annotations, Volume 1: 1845-1859*.⁴ Publications by Ellen G. White are now available online in more than 50 languages.⁵

The main Ellen G. White Estate Web site (www.ellenwhite.org) hosts the document "The Ellen G. White Estate Announces Plans for 2015 Centennial Commemoration of Ellen White's Life and Ministry."⁶ This document mentions, for example, the plan to publish online in 2015 all of Ellen White's letters and manuscripts, as well as some of the most significant correspondence she received from other church members and leaders.

At the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, a special centennial commemoration program will take place on July 10, the last Friday evening of that as-

sembly. Also, a major academic symposium on "The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History" will occur at Andrews University on October 15-18, 2015 with attendees from around the world.

REGIONAL PLANS

Our church is an international denomination with a presence in more than 200 countries, each with its own needs and challenges. Sensitive to the condition of their own territories, several of the church's organizational divisions, unions, and local conferences/missions are developing specific plans for 2015 to promote Ellen G. White's writings more effectively within their local fields.

For a low price, some divisions are planning to distribute either the 10-volume "Connecting with Jesus" set (see www.connectingwithjesus.org) or a new set of Ellen G. White's books. Several fields are working with their respective publishing houses to translate and publish specific Ellen White titles not yet available in their own languages. In various places of the world, audio versions of her books are being made accessible for illiterate populations.

Many Adventist universities and colleges worldwide are planning special events for 2015. Those events may include academic symposiums, weeks of prayer, round-table discussions, student contests, dramatizations, etc. Held in academic settings, such events aim to engage as many faculty members and students as possible. The main purpose is to strengthen the Adventist identity of the new generation.

A few divisions have decided to promote the establishment of Ellen G. White Mini-Centers at local Adventist schools and churches in their territories.⁷ Although most of Ellen G. White's writings are now available online, the Mini-Centers can still provide an excellent opportunity for people to come together to study the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White and to research local Adventist history. As a result, those places will become centers of Adventist culture.

LOCAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Several supportive strategies and plans for 2015 are being developed at various levels of the church's organizational

structure. But for them to become truly effective, they must have a positive impact on our local churches, our families, and our own lives. So, the crucial question is: What can be done at the local level to make 2015 a real blessing for all of us?

There are many things that local churches can do. For example, the preaching calendar could include some sermons and perhaps even a week of prayer based on the nature and purpose of the gift of prophecy. Youth programs could feature some dramatizations of specific aspects of Ellen G. White's life and ministry. If the church has an active Ellen G. White Mini-Center, it could promote seminars on the Spirit of Prophecy, followed by round-table discussions.

Creative ideas can also be implemented within the home circle. I once met an Adventist couple who, after giving many toys and other presents to their children, decided to build a personal Ellen White library for each family member. At the evening family worships, they read and discussed together the content of a specific book, each person with his or her copy that could be marked. This would be a good model to follow in 2015!

Regardless of what will take place in our local churches and in our homes, we should develop a personal plan in 2015 for reading and studying the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. Some may even decide to combine them into a single reading plan. Whatever the plan might be, we need

to set apart a daily devotional time. As somebody once said, "not to have time for God means to live a time-wasted life."

In 2015, we should avoid the extremes of venerating Ellen G. White or simply ignoring her. We should always remember that her writings are not an end in themselves; rather, they are a valuable resource to bring us closer to Christ and the Scriptures. EO

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 162.

² Arthur L. White, "Ellen G. White: A Brief Biography," in www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp#who (accessed on June 13, 2014).

³ *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013).

⁴ *The Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts with Annotations*, Volume 1: 1845-1859, Timothy L. Poirier, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014).

⁵ See www.egw writings.org

⁶ See <http://whiteestate.org/estate/2015plans.asp>.

⁷ Details about the Ellen G. White Mini-Center Project are available at www.whiteestate.org.

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ELLEN G. WHITE'S LIFE AND MINISTRY



WHAT IS ELLEN WHITE'S MOST POPULAR BOOK?

Millions consider Ellen White's classic volume on the life of Christ—*The Desire of Ages*—to be their favorite Ellen White book. But her most popular book is *Steps to Christ*, which presents the essentials of basic Christian living. First published in 1892 and since translated into more than 165 languages, tens of millions of copies are in circulation.

DID ELLEN G. WHITE TEACH THAT JESUS WILL RETURN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEVENTH MILLENNIUM?

Ellen White believed the earth's age to be about six thousand years. She also expected to see Jesus return in her day. Thus, when describing future events connected with the end of time, she could write of Satan's ruinous reign having lasted for six thousand years. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 673, for example.) Nowhere in her writings, however, did Ellen White refer to a divine timetable of seven millennia corresponding to the creation week. She consistently opposed any efforts to calculate the date (day or year) of Christ's return. She wrote, "Again and again have I been warned in regard to time setting. There will never again be a message for the people of God that will be based on time" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 188). And, "Anyone who shall start up to proclaim a message to announce the hour, day, or year of Christ's appearing, has taken up a yoke and is proclaiming a message that the Lord has never given him" (*Review and Herald*, September 12, 1893).

HOW MANY CHILDREN DID ELLEN WHITE HAVE?

Four boys were born into the White family. Henry Nichols (1847-1863) was their firstborn. He died of pneumonia at the age of 16. James Edson (1849-1928) became a Seventh-day Adventist minister and is most remembered for his pioneering evangelistic and educational work among African Americans in the Southern United States. William Clarence (1854-1937) also became a Seventh-day Adventist minister. After James's death in 1881, William became his mother's chief editorial assistant and publishing manager. John Herbert (1860) died at the age of three months from erysipelas.

DID ELLEN WHITE BELIEVE THE EARTH TO BE ABOUT 6,000 YEARS OLD?

Ellen White rejected the idea that "the world has existed for tens of thousands of years." She accepted the biblical record that the creation days were seven literal 24-hour periods, believing that the world "is now only about six thousand years old" (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 87.) While Ellen White stated that she was shown in vision that creation week consisted of seven literal days (*ibid.*, p. 85), she did not claim to have received any special revelation regarding the specific age of the earth.

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



SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IMPACTS SOCIAL CHANGE

The very real presence of evil in the world and the sinfulness of human beings, compounded by rapid shifts in education, industry, technology and the economy, continue to embroil our planet in massive societal change. Individuals and families often feel powerless and victimized by systems and circumstances over which they perceive they have no control.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church sees as part of its mission the extending of the ministry of Christ into the world of suffering. His was a ministry of comfort, of empowerment, of liberation, and of reconciliation. Alongside other Christians, we are a healing and stabilizing force in times of change. When all is turbulent about us, the Church provides assurance that there is One who sits above the turmoil of this world who is changeless and whose purposes will ultimately prevail. The Church serves as a watchman in society and as an empowering community, urging individuals and families to evaluate conditions around them, upholding that which is good, and transcending and altering that which is detrimental.

It was said of the early Christians, “Here are they that have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). The gospel of Christ is itself an agent of change. In the gospel there is

compassion for human frailty; and at the same time there is encouragement to form perfect relationships with God and with one another, as was the divine plan at Creation. We believe that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we become new creatures (Eph 4:22-24), we come out of darkness into light (1 Pet 2:9), and we experience now the transforming power of the world to come (Heb 6:5). This spiritual renewal permeates society as salt provides seasoning and as light illumines darkness. The presence of spiritually renewed persons in the community can do a work that political and social initiatives alone cannot accomplish. Christians who have experienced the transforming power of Christ are stabilizing, strengthening pillars in society, and they preserve life-affirming values. They act as agents of change in the face of moral decay. Their active presence in the community provides hope, as individuals and families are ennobled by Christian principles and their lives and relationships impact others around them.



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BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ephesians 5:18

We all want to know more about the Holy Spirit. We know the Holy Spirit is real because the Bible says so. We know that He is working in the world today. We know that He dwells in every believer. We know that He alone can give us the power we need. We would like to know how to receive His power for daily living.

Acts 19 records the story of Paul's first visit to Ephesus, where He met some disciples of John the Baptist. When Paul asked if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, they replied with total honesty, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (verse 2). Many contemporary Christians could say virtually the same thing.

I. THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

I'm not going to talk about most of what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. I want to focus on one very important question: How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? I believe this is one of the most important principles of the spiritual life. Learn this and you will discover a source of supernatural power that can help you every single day.

We all need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Some questions immediately come to mind. What is the filling of the Spirit? What difference does it make? How does it happen? But preeminent above all others is this question: Am I filled with the Spirit? We desperately need the Holy Spirit today.

II. OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TEXT

Ephesians 5:18 can be read in several different translations: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (NIV). The New Living Translation gives a slightly different wording: "Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you." Finally, we have this paraphrase by Eugene Peterson: "Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him" (*The Message*). I especially like the phrase: "Drink the Spirit of God." That's very picturesque, isn't it?

So that we might have the teaching clearly in front of us, let's think about five observations from the text.

A. Note the contrast between wine and the Spirit. This is the most basic point of the verse. There is a direct parallel between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit. What precise-

ly is the point of comparison between wine and the Holy Spirit? The issue is influence or control.

A person under the influence of wine experiences altered behavior. He may say or do things he would not ordinarily say or do. If the person drinks enough wine, his mental processes will be affected and his decision-making ability will be radically altered—almost always with a negative result.

Likewise, the filling of the Holy Spirit produces a change in behavior but with positive results. In the book of Acts, once-timid disciples became on-fire evangelists for Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5:15-21, Paul mentions a number of benefits related to the filling of the Spirit:

- Wisdom for living in this evil age (verses 15, 16).
- Understanding of God's will (verse 17).
- A joyful heart filled with singing to the Lord (verse 19).
- A heart filled with thanksgiving (verse 20).
- An attitude of mutual submission (verse 21).

True submission is vitally important because it contrasts with our desire to be in control of every situation. When we submit from the heart, we are saying, "I don't have to have my way all the time." Only a heart touched by the Holy Spirit can maintain such an attitude in every relationship.

B. This is a command. In the Greek language, this verb is an imperative. This means that the filling of the Spirit isn't an optional part of the Christian life; every Christian is to be filled with the Spirit all the time. If you aren't, you are out of God's will.

C. It is in the present tense. This insight is particularly helpful because the Greek present tense conveys the idea of continual action. It's not a one-time event. We need to be filled again and again. We could legitimately translate this verse in this way: "Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit" or "Be constantly controlled by the Spirit." The filling of the Holy Spirit is supposed to be the normal way of life for the Christian.

D. It is in the passive voice. This is a nuance many people miss. In Greek, as in English, this can be either active or passive. He doesn't say, "Fill yourself with the Spirit" but rather "Be filled with the Spirit."

E. It is a plural command. This command is plural, as if Paul were saying, "Let each and every one of you be filled with the Spirit." On one hand, that means the command is for every

Christian. God intends—and desires—that all His children be filled with the Holy Spirit. I am to be filled with the Spirit—but I am not to be filled alone. When the Holy Spirit fills us one by one, our corporate life will be transformed.

III. APPLICATION TO LIFE

Let's wrap up this message by pointing out two issues related to the filling of the Holy Spirit.

A. The issue of control. Here's my definition of the filling of the Spirit. It's what happens when the Holy Spirit has the controlling interest in your life. Go back to the contrast between wine and the Spirit. Drunken and Spirit-filled people have one thing in common: they are both controlled people.

- If a man is filled with anger, anger controls his life.
- If a man is filled with greed, greed dominates his life.
- If a man is filled with love, love influences all he does.

When the Holy Spirit fills you, He will have the controlling interest in your life. It is "control by consent."

B. The issue of cooperation. I believe that every Christian is filled with the Spirit from the moment of the new birth. This means that the central issue is one of cooperation. Am I going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and let Him lead me? Many of us struggle with this point. We fight with the Lord because we want to do things our way.

CONCLUSION

God is ready, willing, and able to fill you right now. But some Christians are so full of themselves that they have no room for the Holy Spirit. You can't fill a jar that's already full, and you can't fill a jar that is not open.

Let me end by putting this matter in a larger perspective. The Holy Spirit is never given merely for our own personal enjoyment. God sends His Spirit to enable us to live for Christ in the world. Our nation will be better when our churches are better. Our churches will be better when we are better people. We will be better people when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

If we live another day without the Holy Spirit's control in our lives, we have only ourselves to blame. God has made Himself fully available to us. Have we made ourselves fully available to Him?

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

FEAR NOT

We all have our fears, don't we? Fear is a basic human emotion.

God told us to "fear not" because He knew that we would wrestle with fear sooner or later. Hundreds of times in hundreds of ways, God says, "Fear not."

Abraham's story illustrates that truth. When we meet him, he's about 75 years old, which in those days would be considered middle-aged. He is a prosperous businessman, well-known to many people. He and his wife Sarah have no children. God speaks to Abraham (whose name used to be Abram) for the first time in Genesis 12:1-3.

Later God promises to give Abraham descendants "like the dust of the earth" (Gen. 13:16). Ten years quickly pass without any sign of children. Abraham is almost 85 now and not getting younger. Sarah is far past child-bearing age.

I think Abraham's greatest fear stemmed from the fact that God did not seem in a hurry to give him a child. How much longer would He wait? Why had He delayed? If God had promised, why was it taking so long for His promise to be fulfilled? Should Abraham and Sarah go to Plan B?

All these questions were running through Abraham's mind. God knew exactly what His servant was thinking. He saw the doubt. He understood the fear. He assured Abraham that all would be well. The time had not yet come for the child to be born, but it wasn't far off either.

"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward'" (Gen. 15:1).

To all our fears God says, "I am your shield." If God is your shield, fear not!

I. WHY GOD DELAYS HIS ANSWERS

Why did God wait so long to give Abraham a son? Abraham was 75 when God first spoke to him and 100 when Isaac was finally born. He was almost 85 when God came to him and said, "Fear not." After all these years, God still wasn't ready to answer Abraham's prayers. Abraham was old, but he would be older yet when Isaac was finally born.

Of all the questions that plague the people of God, none is so vexing as the question of unanswered prayer. We know God loves us and has a good plan for our lives. So why does

He take so long to answer our deepest, most heartfelt prayers? From Abraham's experience, we may suggest three answers:

A. To develop perseverance in us. To put it simply, it would be too easy if God answered all our prayers the first time we prayed them. Not only would we take God for granted, we would also develop a shallow faith.

B. To ensure that God alone gets the glory. When Paul wrote about Abraham's story, he mentioned this point prominently (Rom. 4:19-21). God often delays His answers so that we will have plenty of opportunity to trust in Him. Only then does God act but, when He does, His actions demonstrate that He alone is responsible for answering our prayers and that He alone must get the glory.

C. To deepen our trust in God. I think that's why Hebrews 11 gives more space to Abraham's story than to any other Old Testament hero. He is the preeminent man of faith in the Bible. If Abraham had to wait, we should not be surprised to learn that we will often have to wait a long time for the fulfillment of our dreams and the answers to our prayers. As with Abraham, waiting is not bad if it causes us to deepen our trust in God and learn more about His character.

II. THE ANSWER IS A PERSON

God's answer to fear is not an argument or a formula; it's a Person. That's why He said to Abraham, "Fear not. I am your shield." God Himself is the final answer to every fear of the human heart.

Have you ever wondered why God called Himself by the name "I AM" in the Old Testament? Above all else, this name means that God is eternally existent; therefore, all creation depends on Him. God stands alone. No one can be compared to Him. He is complete in Himself. God doesn't need us, but we desperately need Him.

Think of it this way. To say that God is the great "I AM" means that when we come to Him, He is everything we need at that moment. It's as if God is saying, "I am your strength. I am your courage. I am your health. I am your hope. I am your supply. I am your defender. I am your deliverer. I am your forgiveness. I am your joy. I am your future."

III. FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Let's wrap up this message by looking at

some principles that will move us from fear to faith.

A. Faith focuses on God, not on your problems. Think of Abraham. The past argued against his ever having a child. So did the present. His only hope lay in the promises of God for the future. As long as he looked back, he would never have faith to believe God. His only hope was to step out into the future, trusting that somehow, in some way, God would keep His promises.

B. Faith trusts in God's timing, not ours. So many of our struggles with fear start right here. Deep down, we fear that God has somehow made a mistake in His dealings with us. Like Abraham, we have waited and waited—sometimes for years. Even though we may have seen many remarkable answers to prayer, the one prayer that means the most to us has not been granted.

Of the many answers that might be given to our prayer, one answer must be that God's timing and ours are often quite different. Sometimes it seems like we live in one time zone and God lives in another.

C. Faith grows by believing in God in spite of your circumstances. Sometimes our circumstances make it easy to believe in God; other times, we have to struggle. No matter what happens to us, we must trust in the Lord. Our faith should rise above circumstances to lay hold of the eternal promises of God.

IV. CAN GOD BE TRUSTED?

If the answer is Yes, then we can face the worst that life has to offer. If the answer is No, then we're no better off than the people who have no faith at all. In fact, if the answer is No or if we're not sure, we really don't have any faith anyway.

Faith is a choice you make. Sometimes you choose to believe because of what you see; often you believe in spite of what you see.

CONCLUSION

Fear not, child of God. No one knows what a day may bring. But our God is faithful to keep every one of His promises. Nothing can happen to us except that it first passes through God's hands. If your way is dark, keep believing. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He cares for you.



General Conference Ministerial Association

WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

Philippians 3:20, 21

Most people would like to know about heaven, and many of them want to go there. Recent polls suggest that nearly 80 percent of all Americans believe there is a place called heaven. I find that statistic encouraging because it tells me that even in this skeptical age, there is something deep inside the human heart that cries out, "There must be something more!"

I. WHERE IS HEAVEN?

A. *Heaven is a real place.* Jesus spoke about it (John 14:1-3). Twice in three verses, Jesus calls heaven a place. He means that heaven ("my Father's house") is a real place, as real as New York, London, or Tokyo. The place called heaven is just as real as the place you call home. It's a real place filled with real people, which is why the Bible sometimes compares heaven to a mansion with many rooms (John 14:1-3) and to an enormous city teeming with people (Rev. 21; 22).

B. *The Bible also tells us that heaven is the dwelling place of God.* His throne is there, the angels are there, and the Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven. "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20,21). Heaven is a real place, and it's where Jesus is right now.

II. WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

The Bible doesn't give us much information. What we have are images and pictures of heaven and comparisons with life on earth.

What is heaven like? Here are some biblical facts about heaven. It is:

- God's dwelling place (Ps. 33:13).
- Where Christ is today (Acts 1:11).
- The Father's house (John 14:2).
- A city designed and built by God (Heb. 11:10).
- A better country (Heb. 11:16).
- Paradise (Luke 23:43).

Most of us have heard that heaven is a place where the streets are paved with gold, the gates are made of pearl, and the walls are made of precious jewels. These images come from Revelation 21 and 22, two chapters which offer us the most extended picture of heaven in the entire Bible.

John wrote about a street paved with gold, and I do not doubt his words. He simply reported what he saw in his vision. Thus, his words are literally true. They are also meant to tell us that the things we value so highly in this life will be used to pave the roads in heaven.

Heaven is a real place for real people. The Bible describes it as a great city filled with all of God's people. What would such a city look like? It would be a city with:

- No pollution, for the skies would always be crystal clear.
- No crime or violence, for criminals would never enter.
- No greedy politicians, no drug pushers, and no child molesters.
- No potholes and no power outages.

It would be filled with parks, rivers, rolling meadows, and flowing streams. Flowers in constant bloom would line the streets, there would be fruit trees of every kind, and every species of plant life would grow free from pestilence and disease.

There is one other thing you won't find in heaven. There are no cemeteries in the city God builds. Why? There are no funerals; in that glad city, no one ever dies.

III. WHAT WILL WE DO IN HEAVEN?

The Bible doesn't tell us everything we would like to know, but we can be sure of this: Heaven won't be boring, and it will be more fun than the best party you've ever attended. I can guarantee you this: No one will be sitting around on a cloud eating grapes and polishing his or her halo. No, we'll all be too busy for that!

Here are five things that will occupy us in heaven. We will:

- Worship without distraction.
- Serve without exhaustion.
- Fellowship without fear.
- Learn without fatigue.
- Rest without boredom.

The best part about heaven will be seeing Jesus face-to-face. We will worship the Son of God and celebrate His great victory over sin while the endless ages of eternity roll on and on. The best music you've ever heard will pale in comparison with the music of heaven. The most awesome worship you've experienced on earth is but a dim reflection of the praise we will render around the throne of God.

IV. HOW CAN I BE SURE I AM GOING TO HEAVEN?

This is the most important question of all. Here is a wonderful truth: God has made it easy for you to go to heaven. He did the hard part when He sent His Son to die on the cross for you. He paid the price for your sins so that you could one day stand before God in heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved" (John 10:9, NASB). Jesus is not only the way to heaven; He is also the door to heaven. If you want to go to heaven, you've got to go through the door marked "Jesus Christ." There is no other entrance.


What we need is solid ground on which to stand. And we have it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One of our most beloved hymns puts it this way: "My hope is built on nothing less / Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; / I dare not trust the sweetest frame, / But wholly lean on Jesus' name. / On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; / All other ground is sinking sand; / All other ground is sinking sand."¹

That song says it all. If you want to go to heaven, you must base your hope on the solid rock of Jesus' blood and righteousness. Are you standing on the Rock today? Are you wholly leaning on Jesus' name?

CONCLUSION

No one goes to heaven by accident. Heaven is God's prepared place for His prepared people. We prepare for heaven, and God prepares heaven for us. I've already told you that most people believe in heaven, and most people think they are going there. But are they on the right road? Are they building their lives on Jesus Christ, the solid Rock? Too many, I fear, are standing on sinking sand and do not know it.

What is your hope for heaven? Mine is Jesus Christ. What about you? Put your trust in Jesus. Run to the cross. Stand with your full weight on the solid Rock of our salvation. May God help you to trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone for your salvation. And may God grant that we will all meet one day in heaven. 

¹ Edward Mote, *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, 522.

General Conference Ministerial Association

BELIEF OR DOUBT?

We all have doubts from time to time. Doubt itself is not sinful or wrong; in fact, doubt can often be the catalyst for spiritual growth. Our doubts tend to fall into three categories.

First, there are *intellectual* doubts. These are doubts most often raised by those outside the Christian faith. Is the Bible the Word of God? Is Jesus the Son of God? Did He really rise from the dead?

Second, there are *spiritual* doubts. These tend to be the doubts of those inside the church. Am I really a Christian? Have I truly believed? Why is it so hard to pray? Why do I still feel guilty?

Third, there are *circumstantial* doubts. This is the largest category because it encompasses all the “whys” of life. Why did my child die? Why did my marriage break up? Why can’t I find a spouse? Why did my friend betray me?

These are the questions we meet at the intersection of biblical faith and the pain of living in a fallen world.

I. THE NATURE OF DOUBT

As we approach this topic, we need to understand several things up front:

A. *Many people think doubt is the opposite of faith, but it isn't. Unbelief is the opposite of faith.* Unbelief refers to a willful refusal to believe, while doubt refers to inner uncertainty.

B. *Many people think doubt is unforgivable, but it isn't.* God doesn't condemn us when we question Him. Both Job and David repeatedly questioned God, but they were not condemned. God is big enough to handle all our doubts and all our questions.

C. *Many people think that struggling with God indicates a lack of faith, but that's not true.* Struggling with God is a sure sign that we truly have faith. If we never struggle, our faith will never grow.

To get a biblical perspective, let's focus on one man who doubted the way Jesus dealt with that doubt.

II. THE DOUBT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Confused and frustrated by his imprisonment, John sent messengers to Jesus with a very pertinent question: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matt. 11:2, 3).

John knew who Jesus was (John 1:29, 34). How could a man who was so certain about Jesus now harbor such doubt?

It is no wonder that John, languishing in prison and not knowing if or when he would be re-

leased, began to doubt. At least he knew enough to ask the right question: “Are you the one sent from heaven, or is there someone else who will be our Savior? Are you really the promised Messiah?” The answer our Lord gives is very instructive. He does not rebuke John or put him down. He simply gives John the evidence he needs to regain his faith. “Go back,” Jesus says to the messengers, “and tell John what you have seen.” Then He lists six evidences:

- The blind see.
- The lame walk.
- The lepers are cured.
- The deaf hear.
- The dead are brought back to life.
- The poor have the gospel preached to them.

Jesus essentially says, “Go back and tell John that in my name, the hurting people of the world are being totally transformed.” It's as if Jesus is saying, “John may doubt Me, but I don't doubt him. He's still my man. He's still on my team. I still believe in him.” Jesus knew that underneath John's doubts was genuine faith. Jesus was saying, “John the Baptist is still my man, doubts and all.” What an incredible reality!

III. TODAY'S DOUBTERS

Above the front door of every church in the world, we should erect a two-word sign: “Doubters Welcome.” This should be the church's message. If you have doubts, come inside. If you have questions, come inside. If you are uncertain, come inside. If you are a skeptic, come inside. If you are searching for truth, come inside.

Doubt does have its uses. Deep doubt is often the prelude to an even deeper faith.

IV. FOUR WAYS TO MOVE FROM DOUBT TO FAITH

Doubt is not sinful, but it can be dangerous, and it can lead to sin. It can also spur enormous spiritual growth. It's what you do with your doubt that matters. Here are four suggestions about how to handle doubt.

A. *Admit your doubts and ask for help.* That's what John the Baptist did. God is not fragile. He can handle your doubts, your fears, your worries, and your unanswered questions. He's a big God. He runs the universe without any help. Your doubts won't upset Him. Tell Him your doubts. Cry out and ask for His help. And don't fight the battle alone. Go to a Christian friend, a pastor, an

elder, a deacon, a deaconess—anyone with a strong faith and godly insight. Ask this person to walk with you as you face your doubts honestly.

B. *Act on your faith, not your doubts.* That's what Noah did when he built the ark. That's what Abraham did when he left Ur of the Chaldees and when he was told to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. That's what Moses did when he marched through the Red Sea on dry ground. That's what David did when he faced Goliath. That's what Joshua did when he marched around Jericho. That's what Daniel did when he was thrown into the lion's den. That's what Nehemiah did when he rebuilt the wall.

Do you think these great heroes of faith had their doubts? Of course they did. They didn't know in advance how everything was going to turn out, but they took a deep breath, decided to trust God, and acted on their faith instead of their doubt. If you will do the same thing, your faith will continually grow stronger.

C. *Doubt your doubts, not your faith.* This simply means that you should not cast away your faith simply because you are in the valley of darkness. All of us walk into that valley from time to time; in fact, some of us spend a great deal of time there. But when you find yourself in that valley where all is uncertain, and you are sorely tempted to give in to your doubts, fears, and worries, remember these two words: Keep walking. Just keep walking—moving forward in faith.

D. *Keep going back to what you know to be true.* For me, this is the most important point. After considering the sufferings of this life and the perils and tribulations of following Christ, Paul triumphantly concludes Romans 8 by declaring, “For I am persuaded.” And he declares that nothing in all the universe can separate us from the love of God. In 2 Timothy 1:12, he says, “I know whom I have believed.”

CONCLUSION

God never turns an honest doubter away. Never. Come to Him with your doubts, your skepticism, your unbelief, your hard questions, and your uncertainties. He welcomes your hardest questions. Doubt is not a sin. It's what you do with your doubt that makes all the difference. Don't let your doubts keep you from Jesus. Come to Him just as you are—and bring your doubts with you. He will not turn you away.



General Conference Ministerial Association

Let the public know what's happening at your church

Have a plan to regularly send out news releases to promote events and create positive publicity. After all, it's our purpose to let people know the message we have to share.

A news release is an announcement written in the style of news. It's essentially a story you would want a news agency or blog to publish word-for-word.

Perhaps you have a church member who works in the media who can help with this important ministry, or you yourself can learn to write and send news releases (the well-meaning amateur will accomplish more than the professional who does nothing).

To start, gather a list of all the news media in your region—TV, radio, newspapers, blogs, etc. Then contact each one and ask, "Hi, I'm calling from the Good Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church. What's the best way to send news releases to you?" From then on, you'll know the best way to reach each outlet.

Then, look at your calendar for the year. Plan to send out a news release on anywhere from at least 4 to 10 events throughout the year.

You can send out news releases on upcoming guest speakers, health expos, international food festivals—anything your church is doing for the community (even if it's just your youth group selling fruit on a Friday afternoon).

Create your news release that includes a title; text that addresses Who, What, When, Where and Why; and a name and contact information. (You can do an Internet search on how to write a news release)

Send out your news releases at least one week in advance of the event.

And it's OK to make follow-up calls to the media a few hours after you send the release. A good follow-up call goes like this: *"Hi, this is [my name] of the Good Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I wanted to make sure you got the press release I sent earlier today about the International Food Festival we're hosting on September 15. Great, because we're going to have 38 countries represented and it starts at 7 p.m. Thank you."* (With this suggested script, you won't waste their time, and you take the opportunity in each sentence to gracefully promote the event).

If each local Adventist church worldwide sent out news releases regularly, imagine the great publicity we could generate, both for our churches and for the message we have to share!



BORN AGAIN:

ANOTHER LOOK AT JOHN 3:1-21

The Gospel of John is the most profound of all the New Testament gospels. It is in this gospel that we find one of the most famous and theologically significant Scripture passages on the theme of salvation: John 3:1-21. Jesus' first statement in this chapter establishes the very basis of the process of salvation: "Truly, truly, I say to you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven" (verse 3, NJKV).

As simple as this sentence is, it has been one of the most misunderstood by Christians through time. Even Nicodemus the Pharisee found it challenging to fully grasp what it meant to be "born again." This article seeks to show what being born again entails, especially based on the context of the Gospel of John.

BORN AGAIN: A SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION (JOHN 3:1-8)

Nicodemus was probably very surprised by Jesus' first statement to him. Seeming to ignore Nicodemus' cordial introduction (John 3:2), Jesus went straight to the heart of the matter. Jesus' statement implied that Nicodemus needed a new divine beginning that guaranteed citizenship in the kingdom of God (verse 3).

As a Pharisee (John 3:1), Nicodemus was quite sure of eternal salvation based on his human birth into the lineage of Abraham and his strict observance of the Jewish Law, especially the Sabbath (John 8:33, 39a; 9:16). Like Paul, who had been a Pharisee, Nicodemus was confident in the flesh (Phil 3:1-8).

But Jesus pointed out that to be a part of God's kingdom, a person needed to be born of the Spirit, not of the flesh (John 3:5, 6). In other words, spiritual rebirth "from above" is the divine qualification for salvation, not fleshly ancestry and law-keeping.

Jesus made a simple but clear distinction between the two kinds of births: human birth in the flesh and divine birth by the Holy Spirit (John 3:6). Paul confirms Jesus' affirmation that humanity can be divided into those whose lives are controlled by their fleshly human nature and those whose lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5; Gal. 5:17). Jesus emphasized again that Nicodemus needed a new divine birth (John 3:7). He needed a spiritual experience which, like the wind, had effects that were evident though inexplicable (John 3:8). Being born again is a spiritual transformation from a life based on sinful lusts

and impulses of the flesh to one that is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

BORN AGAIN: BELIEVING IN JESUS (JOHN 3:9-18)

The conversation continued, transitioning from an emphasis on birth to a focus on the Son. It appears that this change took place because Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying (John 3:10). Jesus stopped talking in symbols (earthly things) and instead introduced Himself and His mission (heavenly things) (John 3:11, 12). At the beginning of that evening interview, Nicodemus addressed Jesus as "teacher from God" (John 3:2); however, Jesus identified Himself as more than that. He was the Son of Man who came from heaven (John 3:13) to be "lifted up," just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (verse 14).

This Old Testament story was familiar to Nicodemus and served as a good earthly illustration to explain the heavenly things Jesus was trying to impress upon this Jewish teacher. Numbers 21 succinctly narrates the tragedy of the Israelites after they were bitten by fiery poisonous serpents, causing many people to die (Num. 21:6-8). God's solution was for Moses to make and "lift up" a bronze serpent so that anyone who looked at it would live and not die (Num. 21:9). The term "lift up" in the Gospel of John is used to describe the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ (John 8:28; 12:32-34).¹ Jesus explained to Nicodemus that His mission on earth was to be "lifted up" in death so that anyone who believed in Him would not perish in condemnation but be saved into eternal life (John 3:15-18; 1 John 5:11-13). This makes the Cross the heart and center of this nighttime talk about being born again. To be born again of God, Nicodemus had to believe and receive Jesus Christ, the "lifted up" Son of God (John 1:12).

From the Jewish perspective, being born again was synonymous with returning to God (*teshuvah*).² It could be said that being born again was the ultimate return to God. From the context of John and the Scriptures, this return is possible only through Jesus Christ, who connects earth to heaven (John 1:51) and offers the only way back to the Father (John 14:6). To Nicodemus, it was clear that believing in Jesus was the great *teshuvah*—the only way to return to God.

It is important to state here that believing in Jesus is not just mental assent; it goes beyond the mere intellectual or

doctrinal belief to a worldview/mindset that encompasses and controls the whole life and person. Other words in the Gospel of John that describe what believing entails include “receive” (John 1:12), “accept” (13:20), “do as I have done” (13:15, 17), “do what I command” (15:14), “listen and follow” (10:27), “love and obey” (14:15, 23; 15:10), and “abide” (15:4, 5, 7, 9). Thus, believing in Jesus is a total acceptance of and surrender to Him as Savior, Messiah, and Lord of one’s life. This is significant because the word “believe” is a key word in the Gospel of John—occurring almost 100 times in the book.³ Its appearance in the present, continuous tense suggests that to believe in Jesus was not to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience but a moment-by-moment and continuous dependence on Him for life—a continual living by faith in Him.

This was challenging for Nicodemus because he knew the attitude of the Pharisees toward Jesus (John 7:31, 32, 45-49; 8:13; 11:47-50, 57; 18:3). Nicodemus was caught between following the Pharisees and believing in Jesus. However, Jesus made it clear that being born again begins with believing in God’s Son.

In addition, the context of the fourth gospel reveals a very significant link between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the agent of divine transformation. The Gospel of John consistently points out that believing in Jesus results in the giving of the Holy Spirit to the believer (John 1:32, 33; 7:37-39; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; 20:22). This makes the new birth possible in the believer. Once again, being born again begins with believing in Jesus.

BORN AGAIN: LIVING IN THE LIGHT (JOHN 3:19-21)

It is significant that this night interview (John 3:2) ends with the subject of light and darkness. Based on the prominent feature of dualism in the Gospel of John,⁴ a clear distinction is made between those who love darkness and those who live in the light (John 3:19-21). Again, Jesus divides humankind into two groups based on their deeds.

This is poignant because Nicodemus appears to belong to the group that loves darkness because he comes to Jesus in the darkness of the night. In reality, Nicodemus probably came to Jesus at this time for fear of the Pharisees (John 12:42, 43). Jesus thus saw him as a representative of the Pharisees—those who love darkness and fear being exposed by the light (John 3:19, 20). By making this distinction between the deeds of light and darkness, Jesus was profoundly asking Nicodemus the question, “To which of these groups do you belong?”

Those who are born again love the light and live in it and by it (John 3:21). Their deeds confirm and testify to the reality of their spiritual change. Because they have been born from above by the Spirit, they exhibit the deeds or fruits of the Spirit, not the deeds or works of the flesh (Gal. 5:17-23). Therefore, living in the light is the result of divine spiri-

tual transformation (Rom. 13:11-14; Eph. 5:8-14; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:8-11)—the result of being born again.

CONCLUSION

Based on the context of John 3:1-21, there are three clear points about what being born again entails. It is a spiritual transformation by the Holy Spirit that begins with believing in Jesus. He gives the Holy Spirit to the believer and, consequently, the Spirit works out a divine change in the believer—a spiritual rebirth. This spiritual transformation becomes evident through the deeds that the believer does, not in the darkness of night but in the light.

Being born again means (1) believing in Jesus, (2) being transformed by the Holy Spirit, and (3) living in the Light. Being born of the Spirit is what it means to be born again, believing in Jesus is how the born-again experience begins, and living in the light is the result of being born again. Being born again does not mean speaking in tongues, barking, or laughing hysterically. It is not an ecstatic experience based on human emotions. It is a significant divine life transformation from above.

Nicodemus finally believed Jesus. After Jesus’ death, Nicodemus came into the light to stand for Jesus by helping to bury Him (John 19:38-40).⁵ His actions proved that he was finally born again.



¹ Judith L. Kovacs, “Now Shall the Ruler of this World Be Driven Out: Jesus’ Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20-36.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 241; Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 128.

² Phil Bova, “Born Again: A Jewish Concept,” in *Ministry*, October 1998, 44-47.

³ The Greek verb *pisteuo* (“to believe”) is used 98 times in the Gospel of John as opposed to 11 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 9 times in Luke, 37 times in Acts, and 54 times in Paul’s writings. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 87-81.

⁴ Dualism is a key feature in the Gospel of John. It can be seen in the contrasts mentioned in the book: heaven/earth, above/below (3:12, 31), light/darkness (3:19-21; 8:12; 9:4, 5), belief/unbelief (3:18, 36), life/death (5:24, 28, 29) Spirit/flesh (3:6; 6:63), and God/human (1:12, 13).

⁵ “For a time, Nicodemus did not publicly acknowledge Christ but he watched His life and pondered His teachings. . . . When at last Jesus was lifted up on the cross Nicodemus remembered the teaching upon Olivet. . . . The light from that secret interview illumined the cross upon Calvary, and Nicodemus saw in Jesus the world’s Redeemer” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 176, 177). “After the Lord’s ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In time of peril, he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus” (*ibid.*, 177).

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STEWARD OR WORSHIPER: WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

Whenever I've encouraged worship leaders to find a Bible passage to accompany their worship set, most turn to the book of Psalms. Some turn to the New Testament. But few, if any, consider Genesis as a resource for worship reading. Yet I have found that there are many golden principles in the book of Genesis.

In the beginning, when God created the world, He designed Adam to be its first worship leader. On the sixth day, God created Adam and gave him dominion (Gen. 1:28). Then God rested and sanctified the seventh day for all of Earth's worship and praise (Gen. 2:2). From the beginning, God intended leadership and worship to be partnered. Adam and Eve walked together in the Garden of Eden in the freedom of holy fellowship.

Now I know that the Bible never mentions Adam playing the harp or bursting into song. But worship leadership is more than mere music. Worship leadership is the purposeful and grateful response of someone who has encountered the magnificence of God and desires to lead others into His presence. Adam's duty was to obey God's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:17). When Eve was tempted and sinned, Adam also fell. Now Adam had to offer an animal sacrifice to engage in open praise.

After the fall, Adam again had to follow God's instructions. I imagine he taught his sons, Cain and Abel, how to build an altar to offer God a sacrifice of praise. But there was trouble in paradise. Cain and Abel had different opinions on how to offer true worship. Although their father had taught them the same way to worship, the brothers brought two very different offerings; Abel brought an animal sacrifice and Cain brought fruit. God rejected Cain's offering, which resulted in a fatal fight between the brothers over which kind of worship was most appropriate.


Many of us believe that Cain's offering of fruit was unacceptable to God solely because it didn't include a blood sacrifice. But the book of Genesis lets us know that God made a deeper distinction. The Bible describes Abel as a keeper of sheep and Cain as a tiller of the ground (Gen. 4:2). A keeper is "a person charged with the responsibility for the preservation and conservation of something valuable."¹ Abel was a *steward*. Abel lived his life understanding that everything he managed belonged first to God.



But the Bible describes Cain differently. Cain was a tiller. The word "tiller" is the Hebrew term *abad*, which means "to work, to serve, keep in bondage, worshiper."² Cain ultimately worshiped the ground given to him by God for his care. Cain was so captivated by his ability to create that he began to worship the fruits of his labor. Cain offered his worship preference instead of seeking God's holy presence. His ability to produce fresh fruits clouded his judgment and his desire to offer God praise.

If someone asked if you were a steward or a worshiper, you would probably choose worshiper. But in true worship, only God is the audience. God is the focus of our praise; therefore, He determines what is acceptable. Sadly, it was Cain's angry, unrepentant mind and heart that convinced him to offer God what he thought was best instead of what God required of him in worship.

In many churches today, the contention between Cain and Abel rages on. We sacrifice an atmosphere of sacredness as we endlessly bicker about music. Some of us have become so engrossed in our talents that we are easily angered or offended when others share opposing beliefs. Worship is not music. If we are not careful, the fight that ended Abel's life will fuel our worship wars and become fatal to church growth.

It is time for us to ask ourselves daily, "Am I a steward like Abel or a worshiper like Cain?" When God's Word guides us, bickering and worship wars will end. We will offer praise as a preview of paradise that reflects our heavenly home. 

¹ *Random House Dictionary Unabridged*, Dictionary.com s.v. "Keeper" (accessed December 7, 2007).

² *The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon*, (accessed December 5, 2007).

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IMPORTANCE OF GENERAL HEALTH

Good Blood, Healthy Lungs—In order to have good blood, we must breathe well. Full, deep inspirations of pure air, which fill the lungs with oxygen, purify the blood. They impart to it a bright color and send it, a life-giving current, to every part of the body. A good respiration soothes the nerves; it stimulates the appetite and renders digestion more perfect; and it induces sound, refreshing sleep.

The lungs should be allowed the greatest freedom possible. Their capacity is developed by free action; it diminishes if they are cramped and compressed. Hence the ill effects of the practice so common, especially in sedentary pursuits, of stooping at one's work. In this position it is impossible to breathe deeply. Superficial breathing soon becomes a habit, and the lungs lose their power to expand. A similar effect is produced by tight lacing. Sufficient room is not given to the lower part of the chest; the abdominal muscles, which were designed to aid in breathing, do not have full play, and the lungs are restricted in their action.

Thus an insufficient supply of oxygen is received. The blood moves sluggishly. The waste, poisonous matter, which should be thrown off in the exhalations from the lungs, is retained, and the blood becomes impure. Not only the lungs, but the stomach, liver, and brain are affected. The skin becomes sallow, digestion is retarded; the heart is depressed; the brain is clouded; the thoughts are confused; gloom settles upon the spirits; the whole system becomes depressed and inactive, and peculiarly susceptible to disease.

Oxygen in the Lungs—It is essential to health that the chest have room to expand to its fullest extent in order that the lungs may be enabled to take full inspiration. When the lungs are restricted, the quantity of oxygen received into them is lessened. The blood is not properly vitalized, and the waste, poisonous matter which should be thrown off through the lungs is retained. In

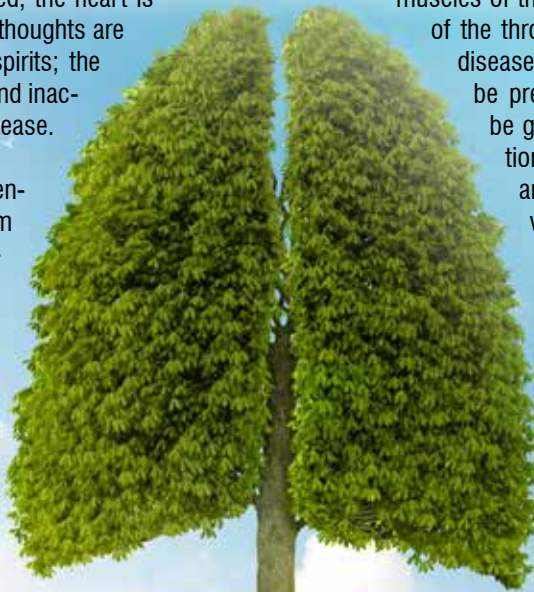
addition to this the circulation is hindered, and the internal organs are so cramped and crowded out of place that they cannot perform their work properly.

Voice Training a Part of Physical Culture—Next in importance to right position are respiration and vocal culture. The one who sits and stands erect is more likely than others to breathe properly. But the teacher should impress upon his pupils the importance of deep breathing. Show how the healthy action of the respiratory organs, assisting the circulation of the blood, invigorates the whole system, excites the appetite, promotes digestion, and induces sound, sweet sleep, thus not only refreshing the body, but soothing and tranquilizing the mind. And while the importance of deep breathing is shown, the practice should be insisted upon. Let exercises be given which will promote this, and see that the habit becomes established.

The training of the voice has an important place in physical culture, since it tends to expand and strengthen the lungs, and thus to ward off disease. To ensure correct delivery in reading and speaking, see that the abdominal muscles have full play in breathing, and that the respiratory organs are unrestricted. Let the strain come on the muscles of the abdomen, rather than on those of the throat. Great weariness and serious disease of the throat and lungs may thus be prevented. Careful attention should be given to securing distinct articulation, smooth, well-modulated tones, and a not-too-rapid delivery. This will not only promote health, but will add greatly to the agreeableness and efficiency of the student's work.



This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 191-193, by Ellen G. White.



THE LAST MESSAGE FOR THIS WORLD

Last messages or last warnings are very important. If one does not take them seriously, one has to count on unpleasant consequences. On the other hand, if they are followed, one can enjoy wonderful benefits. The Bible presents a last message in Rev 14:6-12.

I. THE CONTEXT

1. The Larger Context

Rev 12-14 portrays the final conflict of earth's history. From Rev 15 onward, the last moments of this drama are revealed: God's intervention in favor of His saints in the form of seven plagues. Plagues six and seven depict the collapse of Babylon in the battle of Armageddon. Rev 17 and 18 describe this fall of Babylon in more detail, and Rev 19 pictures the intervention of Jesus with His army as the rider on the white horse. This is followed by the Millennium (Rev 20) and the new heaven and new earth including the New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22). Thus the message of the three angels is the final and universal message addressed to all people in the last time of earth's history.

2. The Context of the Central Vision of Revelation (Rev 12-14)

a. Chapter 12

After a short introduction (Rev 11:19), Rev 12 narrates in symbolic form:

- The birth (coming forth) of the Messiah (the male child) from the true people of God (the woman) and the attempt of Satan (the dragon/serpent) to kill Him (Rev 12:1-5).
- Satan's war against the church throughout the centuries (1260 symbolic days=1260 years) after the ascension of the Messiah to God in order to destroy her (Rev 12:6, 13-16).
- A heavenly battle between Satan and Jesus (Michael), which ended in Satan's defeat but not destruction (Rev 12:7-12).
- Satan's battle at the end time against God's people, called remnant, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12:17).

b. Chapter 13

In two parts, chapter 13 develops how Satan attempts to achieve his goal of the destruction of God's people.

- He uses a beast coming out of the sea (the papacy) to wage war against those who are true to God and to enforce universal worship of the dragon and the beast (Rev 13:1-10).
- In addition, he uses a beast coming out of the earth (fallen Protestantism) to erect an image of the first beast, forcing the world population to worship the



sea beast and to accept the mark of the beast (Rev 13:11-18).

c. Chapter 14

This chapter not only presents the divine counter message to the evil propaganda of the evil powers, but also shows the final outcome of the great controversy.

- First, this chapter portrays those who have withstood the satanic trinity (dragon, sea beast, and earth beast which is later called Babylon) and are with Jesus Christ—the 144,000 (Rev 14:1-5).
- Then follows the last message, the message of the three symbolic angels, which is proclaimed by the remnant (the 144,000) (Rev 14:6-13).
- Next occurs Christ's second coming, described symbolically as the harvest of the earth with two groups involved—the saved and the lost (Rev 14:14-20).

II. GOD'S LAST MESSAGE (REV 14:6-12)

This message comes in three parts proclaimed by three angels. But this message, although sounding like judgment, is nevertheless the great eternal gospel.

1. The First Part of the Message (Rev 14:6-7)

a. The Universal Proclamation of the Eternal Gospel

Revelation shares with the rest of the New Testament the conviction that the gospel must be preached to all nations before the end comes (Mark 13:10; Matt 24:14). The eternal gospel of the last message is by definition good news for those who accept it.

The prologue of the Apocalypse contains a clear description of the gospel—Rev 1:5-7—and we should understand the term “eternal gospel” on this background:

- Jesus loves us.
- Jesus has saved us.
- Jesus has set us in a new state, being a kingdom and priests.
- Jesus comes again.

Therefore, those who die in the Lord have nothing to fear (Rev 14:13). They rest in the Lord until the resurrection day.

b. “Fear God and Give Him Glory”

It is good news that even in this late hour of world history, salvation is still available. People can still make a decision for the Creator God, accepting redemption. They can commit their lives to Him and give glory to Him, that is, repent (Rev 11:13; 16:9) and acknowledge Him as the most important being in the entire universe. Glory is associated with creation (Rev 4:11), but also with salvation (Rev 1:6; 5:12; 19:1).

c. “The Hour of His Judgment Has Come”

The final message is good news because the investigative judgment, also called “pre-advent judgment,” is in progress (e.g., Dan 7). In the heavenly sanctuary, depicted in

many places in Revelation, Christ is still working on our behalf. The decision is being made about who will be accepted to be with Christ at His second coming.

d. “Worship Him”

It is good news because it calls us to worship God instead of demonic or human-made systems (see Rev 13:4, 8, 12-18). These systems are coercive and oppressive, and cannot give peace or a real future. They do not provide meaning in life as the Lord does.

e. “Who Made the Heaven and the Earth and the Sea and the Springs of Water”

The message is good news because the Savior God is also the Creator God. Creation and salvation are clearly linked in the New Testament and in Revelation (e.g., chapters 4-5). We cannot have one without the other. And if there was no creation in the beginning, it does not make much sense to expect re-creation at the end of human history.

At the same time, the phrasing is taken from the fourth commandment; it has in mind the Sabbath commandment. During the last period of earth's history, faith in the Creator God and keeping his commandments—including the Sabbath commandment—will be challenged. The conflict will focus on how we relate to God and His law. Verse 12 will come back to this issue. So apart from our relationship to God, the Sabbath will become a test of loyalty to God for all humankind.

2. The Second Part of the Message (Rev 14:8)

a. “Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great”

The second message proclaims the spiritual fall of Babylon (compare Rev 2:5). This is in some sense good news because people can leave behind deception and come out of Babylon. This message is repeated in Rev 18:2-4 with the call to leave Babylon. On the other hand, the executive phase of the judgment mentioned later assures believers that there will be justice, vindication, and a bright future for them.

b. “She has Made all the Nations Drink From the Wine of Wrath of Her Immorality”

Babylon will try to force all people worldwide to accept a system of worship, which talks about God and yet is opposed to the true God. It is a blasphemous, idolatrous, and therefore, immoral system. But not all will follow Babylon. The 144,000 will follow the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Rev 14:1 and 4).

3. The Third Part of the Message (Rev 14:9-13)

a. False Worshipers “will Drink of the Wine of the Wrath of God” (Rev 14:9-11)

In the third part of God's final message, the angel announces the Lord's final judgment on those who worship the beast or its image and carry the mark of the beast. God responds to the Babylonian wine of wrath with His own wine

of wrath. The followers of the beast—which will also include many professed Christians—have made a decision against Jesus (the Lamb) and have persecuted His people. God intervenes on behalf of His children (Ps 75:9). Again, good news!

b. The Saints and Their Characteristics (Rev 14:12)

Finally, the worshipers of the beast and its image are contrasted with the true worshipers of God and followers of Jesus. Three characteristics are:

- They are patient and persevere. They do not give up.
- They keep God's commandments, especially the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment.
- They have faith in Jesus and have the faith of Jesus. They are saved by grace and live with the Lord day by day. They rely on Him completely (justification of faith by grace). They believe what Jesus believed.

c. Blessing (Rev 14:13)

The blessing that follows in verse 13 points out that, although some may have to pay for their loyalty and their relationship to Jesus with their life or may die during the end time, they are blessed. They may rest until the resurrection.

III. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This is a wonderful message, and it is God's last mes-

sage. We summarize: The first message emphasizes worship of the Creator in contrast to worship of man-made systems and worship of Satan. It accentuates the pre-advent judgment and obedience to God, including the keeping of the biblical Sabbath.

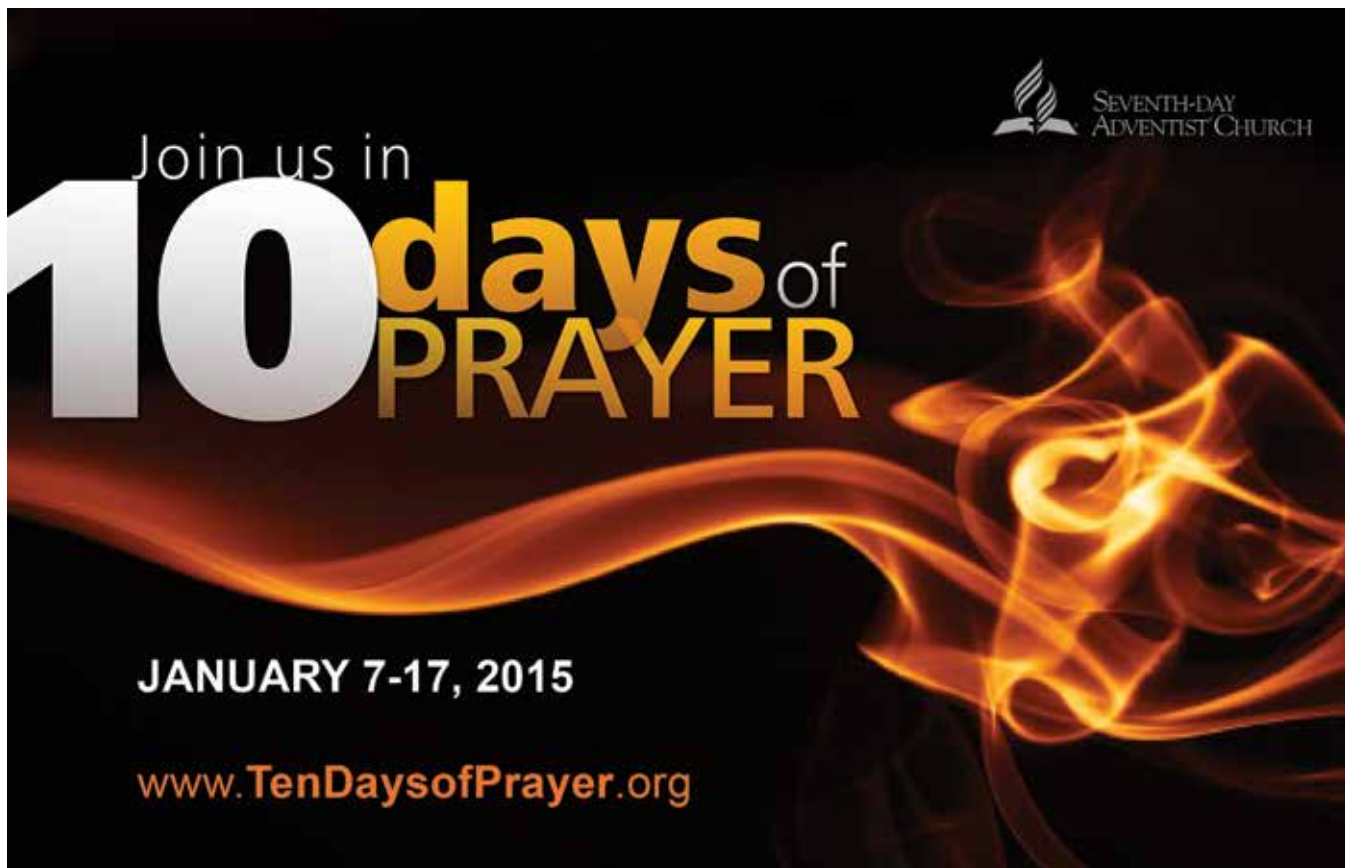
The second message warns us of being associated with Babylon. The ties have to be cut with this apostate power and belief system. God's people are called to come out of Babylon and join the remnant.

The third message does not only depict the judgment on Babylon but also the character, and to some extent the fate, of the faithful ones. It is a group of people who love God and follow Him no matter what.

This last message challenges us: (1) To stop playing around and not taking God and His will seriously—to stop misjudging the enormity of the last conflict that is developing right before our eyes. As those who are saved, we decide to be loyal to the Lord. (2) To pass on this last message to others so that they may be invited to become children of God, be warned of the end-time deception, and be ready to meet the coming Lord Jesus.



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10 POINTS FOR PAPERLESS PREACHING



Through the years, I have admired pastors who can preach without notes. I have marveled at their ability to deliver powerful, heartfelt, life-changing messages without having to be propped up by a stack of papers. Given my personal wiring, I sadly concluded that paperless preaching was forever beyond my reach.

Then one Friday afternoon, as I reviewed my sermon notes, I suddenly realized that the message was so well-written that I could remember it all: the sequence of introduction, points, stories, and applications. The next day, when I stepped out of my pulpit and simply shared the message from my heart, something powerful happened. The freedom, the connection with my congregation, the interactivity, and the authenticity of the witness absolutely hooked me.

Let me share with you 10 points for paperless preaching that have worked well for me since that memorable Sabbath four years ago:

- *Start early.* When a guest speaker is coming on Sabbath or when you recycle a sermon in your second church, use that week to begin working on a new sermon. Study your passage, organize your research, and process your thoughts. Then, on the Monday morning before preaching that new sermon, start writing. Try to complete the manuscript by Tuesday or Wednesday; Thursday and Friday can then be devoted to internalizing your message so that you are free to preach without notes on Sabbath.

- *Begin with the end in mind.* The decision to preach a sermon without notes needs to be made before, not after, the sermon is written. This simple but important step will enable you to think and write in a way that is memorable, both for you and the congregation.

- *Keep it simple.* Operate around a single, central theme. Develop a simple, memorable outline. Craft simple sentence structures. Use no more than five points; you can't remember more than five points, and neither can your listeners.

- *Sleep on it.* As you drift off to sleep on Friday night, review the sermon in your mind. After your wake-up prayer on Sabbath morning, stay in bed long enough to review your sermon again in your head. This is a great way to lock the message into your short-term memory bank.


- *Tell stories.* Jesus' sermons were memorable because He told so many stories. People love stories, so pack them in. I find that my most effective sermons are 30-40 percent story-based. The stories are easy for me to remember and easy for my congregation to remember as I drive the points home.

- *Create a prompt sheet.* Create a bare-bones outline of your message that can fit on a single sheet tucked into your Bible. If you ever get stuck, the trigger points on your prompt sheet will get you going again. Your prompt sheet is also the place to put notable quotes that will need to be read word-for-word.

- *Get the messenger ready.* Preparing the messenger is just as important as preparing the message. Through it all, keep your heart right with God. Go into the Sabbath worship service rested and hydrated. A small high-protein snack may also keep your adrenaline flowing while you are preaching.

- *Relax.* When you relax, the inner springs of thought flow with greater freedom. Take a calming walk around the block before the worship service. Retreat to your church office, put your headset on, and move through some muscle relaxation exercises. Steady your nerves, whisper a prayer, and set your butterflies free to fly in formation.

- *Let it go.* You don't need to memorize every little word and every little detail in your manuscript—just remember the basic ideas and the sequence of materials. Don't sweat it if you forget a few lines or even a whole section of your message. As long as your message flows well, no one will ever know the difference. Your improved ability to connect with people through paperless preaching will more than compensate forgotten pieces of the message.

- *Go for it.* When the time comes to preach, take the leap of faith. Grab the brass bar as it comes flying your way. Your careful preparation and God's faithful empowerment will hold you secure. Your growing success as a paperless preacher will score appreciative "tens" in the changed lives of those you minister to on Sabbath morning and throughout the week. 

Dan Martinella is the editor of *Best Practice*, an electronic newsletter of the North American Division Ministerial Association. This article first appeared in *Best Practice*, March 9, 2014. It has been lightly edited for *Elder's Digest*.

OPEN YOUR BIBLE:

ENTER THE GATEWAY OF GOD

FOUR POINTS TO REMEMBER – PART 2 OF 2

III. THE LORD'S SUPPER

"As we receive the bread and wine symbolizing Christ's broken body and spilled blood, we in imagination join in the scene of Communion in the upper chamber. We seem to be passing through the garden consecrated by the agony of Him who bore the sins of the world. We witness the struggle by which our reconciliation with God was obtained. Christ is set forth crucified among us" (Ellen G. White, Counsels for the Church, 301).

1. The Origin of the Lord's Supper

- (1) Inaugurated by Jesus (Matt. 26:19-30).
- (2) The counsel to "remember" the cost of salvation (1 Cor. 15:2-4).
- (3) The Passover foreshadowed Christ's death (Ex. 12:14; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7).
- (4) The Passover was commemorative and typical (1 Pet. 1:9-11).
 - (a) Commemorative: pointed back to Israel's deliverance from bondage.
 - (b) Typical: pointed forward to Christ's deliverance of man's sin (Luke 22:19).
- (5) The Passover was celebrated on the evening of Israel's deliverance.

The Lord's Supper celebrated on the evening before Christ's death.

2. The Elements of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28).

- (1) Unleavened bread: "leaven" symbolizes sin which is put away by those who receive Christ. He is the "bread of life" (John 6:35, 48) in Whom was no sin.
- (2) Unfermented wine: symbolizes the blood of Christ (John 6:53, 54, 65).

When man partakes he shares His sufferings (Mark 10:39; 13:9; 12, 13).

3. The Significance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:26, 29).

Note: There is no literal bodily presence of Christ in the sacraments (Heb. 10:10).

- (1) It is a commemoration of the past—"the Lord's Death."
- (2) It is a proclamation to the present—"as often as."
- (3) It is a prediction of the future—"till He comes" (Matt. 26:29).

"And thus that dark betrayal night with the last advent we unite by one bright chain of loving rite until He come!"—Anonymous.

4. The Preparation for the Lord's Supper (John 13:1-17).

- (1) Self-examination is to precede this celebration (1 Cor. 11:26).
- (2) The sins of selfishness and pride characterize the last days (2 Tim. 3:2).
- (3) Christ denounced these sins (Matt. 23:8-12; cf. Luke 22:24-26).
- (4) Humility is the test of discipleship (John 13:34, 35).
 - (a) Hindrances to humility (1 Pet. 5:5).
 - (b) The nature of humility—meekness and lowliness (Matt. 5:5; James 3:13).
 - (c) The practical manifestation of humility (John 13:3-5).
- (5) Appropriately, Christians will follow Jesus' example (John 13:14, 15).
- (6) Foot-washing is a symbol of a higher cleansing (John 15:3; Titus 3:5).
- (7) The key to happiness (John 13:17; cf. Gal. 5:13).

"This ordinance is Christ's appointed preparation for the sacramental service. While pride, variance, and strife for supremacy are cherished, the heart cannot enter into fellowship with Christ. We are not prepared to receive the communion of His body and blood" (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, 650).

IV. THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

"One sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the Gospel" (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, 38).

There are 3 ways that human destiny can be sealed for eternity:

- (1) Death:
 - (a) There is no second chance after death (Is. 38:18; Ex. 33:7-9, 14-16).
 - (b) Death is followed by judgment (Heb. 9:28).
- (2) The Close of Human Probation (Rev. 22:11, 12; cf. Heb. 2:1-3):
 - (a) Jesus intercedes on man's behalf now (Heb. 4:14-16).
 - (b) At that time Jesus will no longer be man's mediator (Rev. 15:5, 8; cf. 8:1).
 - (c) The tragedy of the shut door (Luke 13:24-28).
- (3) The Unpardonable sin:
 - (a) John warned of a "sin unto death" which forfeits eternal life (1 John 5:16).

"It is a state of soul in which faith, love and hope, in short, the new life, is extinguished. The chief commandment is faith and love. Therefore, the chief sin is that by which faith and love are destroyed."—Bengal
 - (b) David prayed to be innocent of this sin (Ps. 19:13).
 - (c) God's mercy has its limits (Gen. 6:3).
 - (d) The unpardonable sin is sin unconfessed (1 John 1:9).
 - (e) Jesus warned of this sin (Matt. 12:31-32).

1. The Relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Unpardonable Sin

- (1) The Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8, 9).
- (2) The Holy Spirit creates the new birth (John 3:5).

- (3) The Holy Spirit intercedes for man (Rom. 8:26).
- (4) The Holy Spirit seals human destiny (Eph. 4:30).

The unpardonable sin is a rejection of the Holy Spirit's work without which man has no access to Christ. To resist the Holy Spirit is to reject Jesus and thus preclude salvation.

- (1) His work can be resisted (1 Thess. 5:19; Heb. 10:26).
- (2) Resistance leads to a calloused conscience (1 Tim. 4:1, 2).

2. Manifest examples of those who committed the Unpardonable Sin

- (1) Open defiance to God, His Word, and His servants (Dan. 5:23-31).
- (2) Broken promises made to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-10).
- (3) The sacrilege of claiming things that do not rightfully belong to us (Josh. 7:24-26).
- (4) Betraying Christ (Luke 22:48).
- (5) Self-glorification (Acts 12:22, 23).
- (6) Undermining confidence in leadership ordained of God (1 Cor. 10:6-11).
- (7) The persistent rejection of revealed truth (Matt. 13:15; cf. John 9:41).

3. The Way to Avoid Committing the Unpardonable Sin

- (1) Accept the provisions of grace (Is. 55:6, 7; Heb. 3:7).
- (2) Obey the requirements of God (Matt. 7:21; Rev. 22:14; cf. John 12:35; Gal. 5:16).
- (3) Believe that God desires the salvation of all mankind (2 Pet. 3:9).

"Mercy is like the rainbow which God hath set in the clouds; it never shines after it is night. If we refuse mercy here, we shall have justice in eternity."—Jeremy Taylor

CHOICES FOR LIFE:

A FORGIVING HEART



Many of us know the Lord's Prayer by heart and have recited countless times the phrase "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:9-13, NIV). Forgiveness is an integral part of living a life of faith, and we are called to forgive one another and to accept God's forgiveness in our lives. As it turns out, researchers have examined forgiveness and concluded that its benefits are not only for the ones who are forgiven but especially for those who forgive. In fact, scientific studies suggest that those who readily forgive others experience better mental health and longevity. Here are some examples:

- After analyzing data from more than 1,200 people over the age of 25 who participated in the Religion, Aging, and Health Survey, researchers found that an attitude of forgiveness toward others is associated with a decreased risk for all-cause mortality. People in this group who forgave the most had less chance of dying from any cause compared to those who did not forgive.¹

- In a study of young, middle-aged, and older adults, forgiving oneself was associated with less psychological distress (feeling nervous, restless, hopeless, worthless, and sad); however, this benefit was stronger for older adults (65 years old and older) than for younger ones (younger than 45 years old).

- In the same study, older adults who forgave others had higher scores of self-rated health than younger adults.

- In a study of more than 10,000 Seventh-day Adventists who suffered abuse or neglect as children or who witnessed abuse, those with the highest scores of forgiveness reported better mental health than those with low forgiveness scores.²

These studies tell us that there are age differences when it comes to forgiveness. Younger adults seem to engage in forgiving themselves, and they benefit from it with less psychological distress. Older adults tend to have higher scores in forgiving others and, as a result, they experience better self-rated health and have the strongest effect when compared to younger adults related to forgiving oneself and reduced psychological distress.

It is important to understand what forgiveness means in the above studies. Some people may think it is about reconciling with the offender or excusing someone's bad behav-

ior.³ However, forgiveness does not mean condoning, excusing, reconciling, or forgetting. The definition of forgiveness used by most researchers is "giving up one's right to retribution and releasing or letting go of negative affect directed toward the offender."⁴ When one forgives, one may never forget what happened, and forgiveness will not excuse the other's behavior. Reconciliation is ideal but in some cases may not take place. That is okay. One may still forgive even if the trespasser is no longer alive. The benefits are real no matter what.

Nearly everyone has been hurt by someone else's actions or words. But in holding grudges, we may be the ones who pay most dearly through higher levels of anxiety, hypertension, depression, substance abuse, and so on. On the other hand, "forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, NKJV) is a much healthier response. God will lead you down the path of physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Let's embrace His forgiveness in our lives and offer this gift to others.

ED

¹ L. Toussaint, A. Owen, and A. Cheadle (2012). "Forgive to Live: Forgiveness, Health, and Longevity" in *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 35(4):375-386.

² K. Reinert, et al (in submission). "The Role of Religious Involvement in the Health Outcomes of Adventist Adults Survivors of Early Traumatic Stress" in *Journal of Health Psychology*.

³ T. W. Baskin and R. D. Enright (2004), "Intervention Studies on Forgiveness: A Meta-Analysis" in *Journal of Counseling and Development*. 82:79-90.

⁴ Toussaint, et al (2001). "Forgiveness and Health: Age Differences in a U.S. Probability Sample" in *Journal of Adult Development*, 8(4):249-257.



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THE FOUR TYPES OF CHURCH CONFLICT

> PART 1

Conflict is a serious and pervasive issue for churches today. In the U.S., there are 50 major, scarring church conflicts daily and 19,000 annually!¹ Because of the deep pain that occurs in such a setting that is supposedly characterized by love, church members drop out faster than new members join. Conflict may prompt pastors to become discouraged and quit or be forced to leave the ministry; in fact, 34 percent of pastors serve in congregations that forced their previous pastors to resign due to some form of conflict.² Churches immersed in conflict repel people from coming in to receive the grace and hope of Jesus.

Conflict causes stress, depletes energy and creativity, and diverts the church from its mission. The presence of conflict can be completely overwhelming until you are able to clearly identify what you are dealing with. Only then can you work toward a constructive solution.

This article, the first of two, will help to identify the four types of conflict in the church. The second article will focus on how to handle church conflicts constructively.

FOUR TYPES OF CONFLICT

Substantive conflict can be divided into four types: (1) facts, (2) means/methods, (3) goals/ends, and (4) values. Let's look at these types more closely.

1. *Facts.* Conflict may develop over the facts of a situation. For example, one person may claim that the church budget offering has decreased during the last year, whereas another person may say that it is increasing. This conflict can be settled by checking the treasurer's reports.

2. *Means/methods.* Conflict can also develop over the means or methods for achieving a solution to a problem. We may agree that giving to the church budget has dropped off during the past year, but we may disagree as to what should be done about it. One person believes that a strong preaching series on the subject of stewardship would correct the problem. Another feels that strong preaching has already alienated members and is part of the problem. Or there may be agreement that the church should evangelize the community but contention as to what program of evangelism (i.e., public evangelism, small groups, friendship evangelism, etc.) should be used. Other conflicts over means/methods may result from how to expand the church: a building project, church planting, or starting another worship service.

3. *Goals/ends.* A more difficult conflict to resolve is disagreement over goals or desired results. For example, what is the purpose of a church school? Is it an evangelistic agency that should reach out to community children or is it a sheltered community, a place away from the "world," for "worthy" Adventist children?

Goals are philosophical in nature; means/methods are concrete. Questions such as the following indicate goals: What is the

committee's purpose? What direction do we need to take in this ministry? What is the mission of our church? What is our definition of success? What kind of adults do we want our children to become?


4. *Values.* Values differ from goals in that values form the foundation upon which goals are built. All social systems have a body of common values, beliefs, and sentiments. These are the criteria by which goals and means are selected.

A theological or doctrinal dispute (for example, the ordination of women as pastors or elders) is an obvious conflict over values. The tension between doctrinal values (moral purity, etc.) and relational values (love, acceptance, etc.) is often a source of conflict in the church.

Other conflicts involving values may not be so clear. For example, a conflict involving issues such as going out to eat on Sabbath, wearing jewelry, listening to rock or rap music, or theater attendance may seem to be a conflict over methods. However, the real issue usually involves one's values and belief structure. Therefore, the approach one would use to deal with such conflict would necessarily be different than if the conflict dealt with means/methods.

Here is a list of the top values that divide churches:

- *Music:* hymns vs. contemporary praise songs; drums vs. organ, etc.
- *Worship style:* conservative church vs. contemporary church, value of drama, order or length of service, etc.
- *Food:* Meat-eating, vegetarianism, veganism, etc.
- *Theological extremes:* conservative vs. liberal, perfectionism, grace without expectations, etc.
- *Misplaced loyalties:* feeling obligated to cater to a person of influence; family relationships that blur the ability to act with consistency; when talented people are held less accountable for hurtful behavior; when the person damaging the church is not confronted for fear of retribution; siding with the person who is right but goes about things in the wrong way, etc.³

Conflict will always exist. The more we pray and focus on what Christ has done for us, the less important our differences will become. No matter what the conflict is, when we can understand it, we will be able to deal with it in a healthier way. 

¹ Ken Sande, founder of Peacemaker Ministries, www.peacemakerministries.net (accessed March 11, 2013).

² Ibid.

³ Adapted from Tom Evans, *Steps to Church Planting: From Inception to Launch* (Berrien Springs: North American Division Evangelism Institute), 72-75.

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