

quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2015

ELDER'S DIGEST



A UNIQUE
PROPHETIC
MOVEMENT

Interview with President
Ted N. C. Wilson

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THE IMPORTANCE OF APPRECIATION

Each of us has probably, at some time or another, felt the effects of appreciation in our lives. Appreciation generates a good feeling of self-worth and creates a human connection to others that encourages us to build more collaborative relationships.

As spiritual leaders in the church, we must remember how important it is to give appreciation, especially to those who are working with us as fellow volunteers. Appreciation enhances self-esteem for both the giver and the receiver and creates a human connection.

In his book *The Success Principles*, Jack Canfield says, “A state of appreciation is one of the highest vibrational emotional states possible.”

Sadly, while appreciation is a wonderful thing to receive, how often do we give it back to others and practice it ourselves?

Appreciation is having admiration for others and communicating your approval to them. It is taking time to make people feel welcome and special. It is a form of valuing others; it takes the focus off of you and places it on God’s purpose and direction. It is fueled from our heartfelt thanks to God for what we have and for what He has done, and it is a lifestyle of worship and adoration. This allows us to give to and value


others with respect and honor (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 5:12-18; 1 Tim. 5:17; 6:1; 1 Pet. 2:17).

Appreciation is honoring others while also being grateful for what we have. It is being thankful and glad for other people—friends, family, and co-workers. The world is full of people who live to discourage others; very few people live to build others up. However, these Scriptures point out how valuable it is to God that we take the time to honor others.

How can we be more appreciative leaders in our church? We can do so by voicing sincere compliments, taking the time to write a thank-you note, celebrating victories, and honestly showing our delight so that others feel special.

Showing appreciation also helps us to realize what we have and to be grateful for the relationships, opportunities, and blessings God gives us. Appreciation helps us accept that the difficulties and trials of life are part of God’s loving provision and care that leads to our learning and growth for a greater good and maturity (James 1:2-8).

As a spiritual leader, you can set an example for others by expressing your own appreciation. People thrive when they are valued. Take time to show and tell those who are working with you in the church that you value the contribution they make to the church.

Appreciation is essential for showing God’s love, and it is proof of His blessings flowing through you! May we value human dignity so we can appreciate others. 



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

WORLDWIDE CHURCH

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES



Ted N. C. Wilson was elected as president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church in July 2010 during the General Conference session in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Pastor Wilson holds a doctor of philosophy degree in religious education from New York University, a master of divinity degree from Andrews University, and a master of science degree in public health from the Loma Linda University School of Public Health. In addition to English, he speaks French and some Russian. He is married to Nancy and they have three married daughters and nine wonderful grandchildren. He served the church in many places and capacities including the Africa-Indian Ocean Division as a departmental

director and later as executive secretary. He served as an associate secretary at the General Conference and subsequently, he was elected as president of the Euro-Asia Division in Moscow, Russia. Pastor Wilson returned to the United States to serve as president of the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland, until his election as an Adventist world church vice president in 2000.

AS PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE, HOW DO YOU SEE THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD TODAY?

The worldwide Adventist family, found in approximately 215 countries and areas, is an incredible testimony to the power of God's Word and the work of the Holy Spirit to keep a world church together through our common focus on the precious biblical truth that the Lord has given to us and the hope of Christ's soon coming. As Nancy and I travel around the world, we see the direct results of the Holy Spirit's leading in today's end-time setting. So, I am very encouraged with what I see around the world.

At the same time, the Adventist Church faces some real problems. People are often frustrated, and sometimes they engage in internal struggles that become challenging for the local church. These issues tend to detract from the church's mission. But, for the most part, the evangelistic outreach of the church is fulfilling our mission by proclaiming the three angels' messages.

I am encouraged by God's great power demonstrated in His church. If I get discouraged, I just lean on the Lord and say, "Lord, this is your Church, and it is that which God has

the greater regard for." Then I just rest comfortably and praise God.

AS WE COME TO THE END OF THIS QUINQUENNium, WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE THE CHURCH HAS ACCOMPLISHED?

First, we want to give God glory for everything that has been accomplished—every good thing comes from Him. And we are so grateful for how the Lord has used creative minds on all levels; the Holy Spirit has used them to accomplish much more than we might have imagined from the General Conference or Division levels alone. Some of the initiatives for this quinquennium include:

- *Revival and Reformation*: One of the most far-reaching initiatives has been the call for revival and reformation. This seems to have penetrated just about every local church around the world. We know we're living at the end of prophetic time; we're living in the last tips of the toes of the statue described in Daniel 2. The next big event will be Christ's return, and I think people all over the world sense that and are getting excited. So, the call for revival and reformation is certainly not something which originated with the church or its admin-

istration; the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy call us back to a humble understanding of who we are as God's people and the task that has been given to us. So, the call for revival and reformation has certainly been one of the most pervasive calls and has reached just about every local place.

- *Revived by His Word and 777*: Undergirding all of that have been certain spiritual programs created by the Revival and Reformation Committee, which has been an enormous blessing to our church members personally. *Revived by His Word* is a church-wide initiative to read a chapter a day in the Scriptures. All over the world, people are reading the Word! I read the assigned chapter today, and it's exciting to know that the worldwide church is reading the same Bible passages together. The 777 initiative means that, 7 days a week at 7 o'clock, Seventh-day Adventists are praying earnestly for the outpouring of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. These two programs are really helping us to be prepared for the tremendous outreach that God has entrusted to our church.

- *Mission to the Cities*: Did you know that more than 50 percent of the world's population lives in large metropolitan areas? This has confronted our church in such a way that people say, "This is one of our biggest priorities because we need to go where the people are." So, the Lord has really inspired people to do creative things in a contextualized way all over the world to reach souls in the big cities. And because the cities are only going to grow bigger, this initiative will continue until the end of time. The Spirit of Prophecy indicates that one of the best things we can do to reach the cities is to use medical missionary work or, as we call it, *Comprehensive Health Ministry*. Over the last two years or so, this has caught the attention of many administrators and church leaders. Church members are now becoming enthused about the practical way in which we can reach individuals through an understanding of better health, which can lead them closer to spiritual health. We're so grateful that the Lord is blessing people enormously in this area of outreach and witness.

- *International Bible and Mission Conference*: During this quinquennium, almost 60 Bible and Mission Conferences have been held all over the world, with thousands of pastors being strengthened by the study of our fundamental beliefs, which are centered in Jesus Christ.

- *The Great Controversy*: This project has resulted in approximately 140 million copies of *The Great Controversy* being distributed worldwide. We have shared the full classic book, the smaller abridged version, and other versions, including about 25 million downloads from the Internet. And we have other great publishing outreach resources: in 2014, we dis-

tributed a book about Creation entitled *Beyond Imagination*, and in 2015, we are sharing another book entitled *Health and Wellness*. All of these books have been wonderful blessings, and Publishing Ministries, along with our media and other departments, has been tremendous in their participation.

- *Creation Project*: For the *Creation Project*, we asked every local church to share a beautiful film produced by the General Conference Communication Department and others. We wanted to bring to the forefront the very basic understanding that we were created in God's image in six literal days and that on the seventh day, God blessed the Sabbath. That's why we "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." God created human beings on the sixth day, and the *Creation Project* amplifies that and helps people to fully understand who we are as Seventh-day Adventists and where we are going. If you take the Creation story out of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, you have basically eliminated almost every beautiful doctrine that we appreciate.

- *One Year in Mission*, evangelistic outreach by young people as volunteers for one year. Many other initiatives are also taking place, including a very strong emphasis on media and outreach, which is a coordinated approach through the Hope Channel, Adventist World Radio, and many other avenues, including the Internet. Many of these communication and media outreach activities are going to become even more important as we look to the future. So there are many things that have happened this quinquennium. But, as we focus upon using biblical principles and the Spirit of Prophecy to approach our mission in a practical manner, we can see God's blessing.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THE CHURCH FACED DURING THIS QUINQUENNIUM?

The Church always faces challenges because the devil is trying to stop the onward proclamation of the three angels' messages. It is the devil's studied purpose to distract God's church and to neutralize the efforts of faithful Seventh-day Adventist members.

In political and war-torn settings, our church has been forced to adapt and to do the best it can. We have seen an increase in natural disasters, which we know will happen in the end-time, and Adventists continue to be willing to serve in these areas. We've seen internal frustration in the church when people disagree on certain fundamental understandings, whether it is something doctrinal or something that's perceived as an approach to help people function as church members. In all of these challenges, I've seen God working

in an unusually dramatic way. The Lord promises to take us through these challenges. We're also told in the Spirit of Prophecy that some of these problems will be allowed to come to us so that the Lord can demonstrate His power. And I've seen clear indications of that.

So, the closer we come to the Lord, the closer we will come to each other because Christ is the great center that draws us into close communion. I believe the Lord will return very soon, so these challenges only fortify our opportunity to lean on Him and see His power demonstrated.

THE 2014 GENERAL CONFERENCE ANNUAL COUNCIL VOTED THE GLOBAL STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE YEARS 2015–2020 UNDER THE BANNER “REACH THE WORLD.” HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS BE ENGAGED IN THIS PLAN?

The “Reach the World” plan for 2015 and beyond is not some special administrative construct that is only to be a strategic plan for church leaders. It involves every single member of the church, and it can take the form of many creative ideas that people might have, as well as some of the big themes we already discussed—Mission to the Cities, Comprehensive Health Ministry—but everyone has to find where God wants them to fit into this particular initiative or some evangelistic outreach.

I am more and more convinced that this big “Reach the World” program, which will focus on many of the initiatives we've talked about, will succeed only when we humble ourselves before the Lord, ask for the power of the Holy Spirit, and work together with the power of church members who are working closely with the church on outreach. In *Testimonies to the Church*, volume 9, page 117, we read: “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.” To me, this is the biggest key to the future of God's expansion in this world.

So, “Reach the World” is just that. It will not be done simply through mechanical aspects or through some kind of remote control, or only by television, radio, or the Internet. All of these things will work together, but the personal element is the most important. So, we look forward to having every church member involved in every aspect of outreach through our “Reach the World” initiative.

DURING THE UPCOMING 60TH GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, USA, WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT AGENDA ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED BY THE DELEGATES?



We have a tremendous program of mission outreach planned for the General Conference session, beginning with an evangelistic meeting that will take place in San Antonio prior to the General Conference session. In fact, it will be a privilege for me to participate in that along with many others. Mark Finley and Robert Costa from the GC Ministerial Association will be helping to organize this outreach effort through the North American Division and the Southwestern Union. This evangelistic meeting will help to lay a foundation, so that when people arrive in San Antonio, they will understand that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just in town to carry out some business activities, but that we are there for evangelistic purposes.

We will have a baptism at the session itself resulting from those who accept the Lord at the evangelistic meetings. We will focus on evangelistic outreach all over the world. We will hear reports from every world division. We will focus on the Bible and have a special emphasis on the Spirit of Prophecy each evening. We will have outreach reporting and activities for the future regarding young people, education—all kinds of departmental areas of emphasis.

Expanding on the *Revived by His Word* initiative, we will introduce a new initiative called “*Believe His Prophets*.” According to 2 Chronicles 20:20, if you believe God's prophets, you will prosper. This will be a very practical, spiritual foundation that will create a great enthusiasm for the mission of the church—that is, to continue reading the Bible every day and to add specific readings from the Spirit of Prophecy, so that over a five-year period, we will read the entire Conflict of the Ages series, a couple of pages a day, reading a chapter from Scripture—it will be a powerful spiritual emphasis.

We also plan to emphasize the strong evangelistic outreach for the cities and all of the things we have already outlined. And we will have a very strong emphasis on media and the spiritual preparation that is needed for the accomplish-

ment of the last-day proclamation of the three angels' messages. Mission is going to be a primary focus for our entire General Conference session. We will also hold regular business sessions and discuss proposed updates to the *Church Manual*. We will review proposed changes to our Fundamental Beliefs—not to change any beliefs but to define them more carefully. We will look at the subject of ordination and dedicate considerable time to that, but the greatest emphasis will be on the outreach of the Church because, as our theme for the General Conference session indicates, “Arise, Shine, Jesus is Coming!” What else is there that can capture our attention and our reason for being except that the Lord wants to use us to Reach the World—as we have been talking about—to prepare the world for the Lord’s soon return? So the General Conference session will have an enormous emphasis on mission.

CONSIDERING THE SPECIAL TIME IN HISTORY THAT WE LIVE IN TODAY, WHAT WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT CAN YOU SHARE WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WORLD-WIDE CHURCH?

I would urge every leader and every church member at every level—everyone—to understand why Seventh-day Adventists were called and what the purpose for our movement is. It is larger than just a church. It is an Advent movement that was meant to finish God’s work on this earth.

I suppose one of the biggest challenges that I face as an administrator and as a leader in God’s precious church is to help our church members remember who they are and why they are here. It’s so easy to get caught up in the laborious activity of just living or to be so distracted by the things around us that we forget why God entrusted us with this incredible message.

So, I think one of the greatest appeals that I can make to church leaders everywhere is to first—and I include myself in this—humble ourselves before the Lord and recognize that we are all sinners saved by the grace of Jesus Christ. His righteousness alone provides our eternal life. The Lord has asked us to accept His all-encompassing righteousness, justification and sanctification, and to allow Him to work through us to accomplish what He wants His church to accomplish. And that’s the reason the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists: to proclaim God’s precious last-day messages to the world. He could have entrusted this task to the angels, but He decided to give it to human beings. And what a privilege it is to be part of this incredible outreach to a planet that needs to hear the last-day message of hope—hope in the coming of the Lord, hope not only for the future but, as Jesus said, hope that “I have come to give them life more abundantly” here on this earth and for the future. And as Seventh-day Adventists, it’s

our happy privilege to be part of something much bigger than ourselves, to see the big picture and to understand that soon the Lord will return so we can be with Him forever.

FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU ENVISION FOR THE CHURCH IN THE COMING YEARS?

Only the Lord knows exactly what will happen, but as I look to the future, I see church members becoming much more involved in local mission outreach. I see young people becoming much more energized by simple Bible study and an understanding of God’s plan for the church as they review His instructions in the Spirit of Prophecy.

I see a much greater mobilization of church members, including young people, for expansion of God’s Church. I also see an enormous increase in the use of media, social media, the Internet, television, and radio in proclaiming to an increasingly interconnected and interactive population the precious messages of truth. I see the church becoming more faithful in its commitment to stewardship and the blessings that can come when people are totally committed to using the resources God has given to them in many ways for the final proclamation.

I see the church recognizing that we are living in a very momentous time. When everything around us seems to be falling apart—politically, economically, socially—and when we see ecumenical movements moving toward what we know to be the final results of trying to force people against their conscience to accept certain beliefs, we can see that the world is coming to a climax. I also see the church becoming much more conscious and excited about why we are here as God’s special remnant church to proclaim a message for all people.

I see many people coming closer to the Lord. Unfortunately, the Scripture tells us and the Spirit of Prophecy indicates that some people will go in the other direction and succumb to the allurements of the world. There will be a shaking and a parting of ways as some people focus on Scripture and other people take a superficial approach. I pray that all people—myself included—will humbly submit before the King of kings.

One of my favorite texts is Joel 2:21. When you are discouraged and frustrated because you can’t see how God is working in your life, just insert your name into this text and claim this promise. The text says, “Fear not, oh land”—fear not, Jonas; fear not, Ted—“Be glad and rejoice for the Lord will do great things.” I have full confidence in this Advent movement and, most importantly, in the One leading this Advent movement—Jesus Christ, our great Savior, King of kings and our best Friend.

ED

A UNIQUE PROPHETIC MOVEMENT



If Adventists were asked to define the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, doubtless the answers would be quite varied. Some might see the church's uniqueness in the way members worship on Saturday (Sabbath) rather than Sunday. Others might mention the understanding of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary or the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. Still others might point to lifestyle issues, such as refraining from certain kinds of foods, amusements, or styles of dress and adornment. In one sense all these answers would be at least partially correct.

But there is another way to define Adventism, and that is as a prophetic movement. When one does so, Adventism is seen to be unique because of three distinct characteristics. No other church claims these identifying characteristics, but Adventists saw them as defining the church even before its official founding in 1863.

Those three defining characteristics describe Adventists as the only people who find their:

1. *Prophetic roots, or history*, predicted in Revelation 10.
2. *Prophetic identity* defined in Revelation 12.
3. *Prophetic message and mission* given in Revelation 14.

Adventists do not make these claims with any attitude of religious exclusiveness or boasting. The issue is not that Seventh-day Adventists are "better than," but rather "different from" other churches.

PROPHETIC ROOTS IN REVELATION 10

The apostle John in Revelation 10:1-10 depicts events that interest Adventists as they look for the prophetic roots, or history, of Adventism. Adventists understand the "little book" mentioned in verses 2, 8, 9, and 10 to refer to the book of Daniel. Although Daniel's prophecy was primarily a time message, when he asked the meaning of the time that had been revealed to him, he was told to "shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). The message was not for Daniel to comprehend then, but at the time of the end, what for ages had been sealed, would be understood.

The period of time that Daniel wanted to understand was the 2300 days, at the end of which the sanctuary would be cleansed. That was the only sealed message in the book of Daniel. Many centuries later on the Isle of Patmos—in vision—John was shown a time in the future when a mighty angel would

descend to earth, having in his hand a little book—open. Not closed. Not sealed. But open.

From our vantage point of history, we can see that it was near the end of the 2300-day prophecy in 1844 that this angel with the open book of Daniel did just as John was shown. At the precise time predicted, the angel's prophetic message embraced the whole earth. As predicted in John's vision, prophetic time had reached its climax.

Around the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, people began studying the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. In so doing, many came to the conclusion that the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 would end in the 1840s. Thinking that the cleansing of the sanctuary described by Daniel referred to the cleansing of the earth by fire at the second coming of Christ, they concluded that Jesus would return then. That exciting news was soon preached throughout the world.

For Seventh-day Adventists in particular, 1844 and the years immediately preceding it evoke the name William Miller. But he was only one of many during that time who preached the soon return of Jesus. People such as Manuel Lacunza, Joseph Wolff, Henry Drummond, Edward Irving, Hugh M'Neile, and the child preachers of Sweden were also proclaiming the fact that the great time prophecies were about to meet their fulfillment, and then—as they understood it—Jesus would return.

And it wasn't just in America or Europe that people were making this proclamation. The message was circling the globe. Wolff preached in the Middle East and North Africa (from Egypt to Afghanistan and England to India). In 1837 he even visited the United States, where he also preached. Out in India, Daniel Wilson, Episcopal bishop of Calcutta, preached and wrote pamphlets specifically on the prophecies of Daniel.¹ In Adelaide, Australia, the message of a soon-coming Savior was preached by Thomas Playford.² Crowds there became so immense that his followers had to build a larger church for him.

At the end of prophetic time, precisely as the apostle John had been shown, and at the very time predicted by Daniel more than 2300 years in advance, the message was proclaimed with a loud voice around the world. No wonder the Adventist pioneers were excited when they realized that they were fulfilling prophecy!

Revelation 10:10 reads: "Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter."

There could be no better summary of what happened next in Adventist Church history than those prophetic words. The church founders had all been Millerites—that is, followers of William Miller, an American Baptist farmer-turned-preacher who proclaimed that Christ would return about 1843 or 1844—at the end of the 2300-day prophecy, as he understood

it. For Adventists living today some 165 years after that event, it is hard to imagine how precious was the experience of those Millerites as they approached October 22, 1844, the date they determined from their study was the end of Daniel's long-time prophecy. Their experience was especially sweet during the last few weeks and days prior to October 22. By reading some of their accounts, we catch a glimpse into their happy, yet sober, feelings.

Joseph Bates, describing the Exeter, New Hampshire, Camp Meeting held in August 1844, when the October date was first preached, later recalled:

"When that meeting closed, the granite hills of New Hampshire were ringing with the mighty cry, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.' As the loaded wagons, stages, and railroad cars rolled away through the different states, cities, and villages of New England, the cry was still resounding, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh.' Time is short! Get ready! Get ready!"³

"Like a tidal wave," Ellen White wrote, "the movement swept over the land. From city to city, from village to village, and into the remote country places it went, until the waiting people of God were fully aroused."⁴

The great day finally arrived. William Miller observed that, "even the wicked scoffers stood mute"⁵ that day. But he went on to say, "it passed. And the next day it seemed as though all the demons from the bottomless pit were let loose upon us. The same ones . . . who were crying for mercy . . . before were now . . . mocking, scoffing, and threatening in a most blasphemous manner."⁶

The experience that had been so sweet in their mouths, as foretold by the apostle John, now turned nauseatingly bitter in their stomachs. Even as none of us can fully realize the experience they went through in anticipating Christ's return on that long-ago Tuesday, neither can we fully comprehend their heart-wrenching disappointment in the days and weeks that followed October 22.

Hiram Edson probably summarized their experience as graphically as anyone: "We looked for our coming Lord until the clock tolled 12 at midnight. The day had then passed and our disappointment became a certainty. Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. . . . We wept, and wept, till the day dawn."⁷

But Revelation, chapter 10, still has one more verse: "And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev. 10:11, KJV).

Admittedly, in their disappointment the Adventist pioneers did not fully comprehend this verse, especially the part about prophesying "again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." The worldwide work being assigned



them would only gradually dawn upon their minds. And so also the expanded message that they were to preach—including the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, the health message, and so forth.

Even this brief overview, however, reminds us why Adventists see their prophetic history foretold in Revelation 10. But this is only the first of the three prophetically identified characteristics.

PROPHETIC IDENTITY IN REVELATION 12

Revelation 12 covers more historical time than does any other single chapter in the Bible: from the fall of Lucifer to A.D. 1798. In the chapter's final verse, 17, we find God's true church emerging from its "wilderness" experience; and there comes to view a "remnant" (KJV) people identified by two characteristics:

1. They "keep the commandments of God"—all 10 of them, including the fourth, or Sabbath, commandment.
2. They possess the "testimony of Jesus," which in Revelation 19:10 in the King James Version is defined as the "spirit of prophecy"—a renewed bestowal of the divinely inspired gift of prophecy.

While a few other churches keep the seventh-day Sabbath, and others claim the prophetic gift in their midst, not one of them fits both identifying characteristics given here. Consequently, Seventh-day Adventists find their prophetic identity in the two characteristics given in Revelation 12:17.

It was upon a now unknown day in the month of December in 1844 that a 17-year-old, Ellen Harmon, while praying with four other women, experienced the Holy Spirit resting upon her as she never had before. God had done it again—another prophetic messenger had been commissioned! Just as He had done at so many other crucial junctions in salvation history, such as Noah before the flood and John the Baptist before the

ministry of Christ, God now sent another prophetic messenger. Another crucial beacon light in prophetic history had arrived—the great time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were coming to their end; and just as predicted, the gift of prophecy was restored to God's remnant people.

In 1846, Ellen Harmon married James White. Her ministry would:

1. Extend for a period of 70 years—from 1844 until her death in 1915;
2. Include an estimated 2,000 visions; and
3. Incorporate her authoring more than 5,000 periodical articles and 24 books (plus two unpublished manuscripts) before her death.

Now, after more than 150 years to observe the fruit of her work, it can be demonstrated that the counsels God gave the church through Ellen White are sound—they have stood the test of time. Any candid appraisal of the denomination's history reveals that the church has prospered when it has followed God's leading through the Spirit of Prophecy, and faltered on those occasions when it has not.

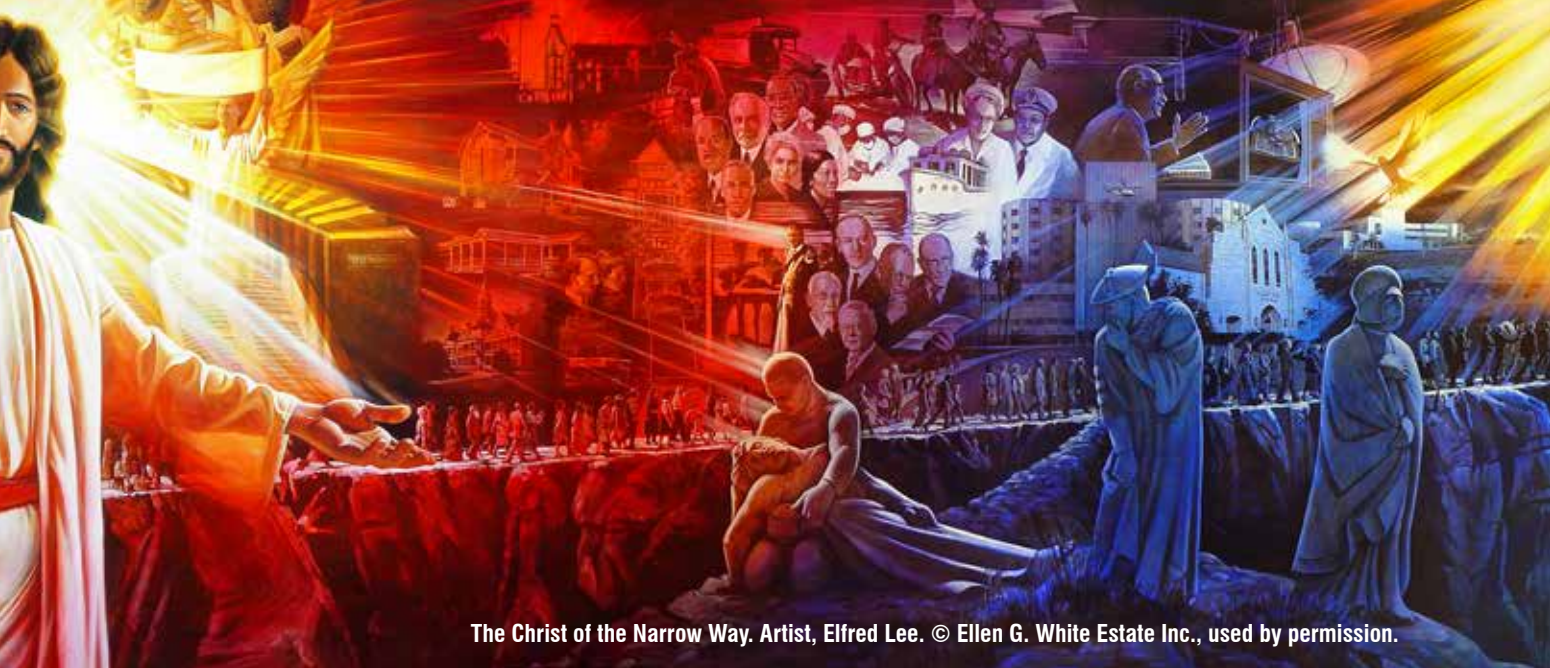
This brings us to the third characteristic.

PROPHETIC MESSAGE AND MISSION IN REVELATION 14

Seventh-day Adventists believe they have a message for the world found in Revelation 14:6-12. To the best of my knowledge, no other church today is proclaiming the "three angels' messages" in its totality.

It is worth noting that when translating the Bible into contemporary English for Roman Catholics, Monsignor Ronald Knox included an interesting footnote quoted below for Revelation 14:6 in his Knox translation.⁸

1. In Revelation 14:6, the King James Version in English identifies the three angels' messages as the "everlasting gospel."



The Christ of the Narrow Way. Artist, Alfred Lee. © Ellen G. White Estate Inc., used by permission.

2. In his translation, Knox translates it as “a final gospel.” He then adds the following footnote: “‘Final’; literally ‘eternal.’ It is not clear,” Knox says, “why the ‘gospel’ preached by the angel is so described; but the context suggests that it is the last call to repentance which will be offered to men this side of eternity.”⁹

Regarding this very point, many years earlier Ellen White wrote: “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 19).

For more than 160 years Adventists have been proclaiming the three angels’ messages. The first two—the preaching of the “everlasting,” or “final,” gospel in the setting of the judgment-hour message, and the call to come out of Babylon—were both first sounded by the Millerites. It would take those disappointed Millerites who eventually founded our church some time before they determined the significance of the third angel’s message. But after discovering the obligation and privilege of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, they soon also came to realize its theological and prophetic significance in relation to the third angel’s message.

Ellen White wrote: “Every feature of the third angel’s message is to be proclaimed in all parts of the world. This is a much greater work than many realize” (*The Upward Look*, p. 277).

A UNIQUE PROPHETIC PEOPLE

Yes, at the end of time there will be a faithful, command-keeping group of individuals here on earth who are dis-

tinguished from all other religious bodies in three unique ways.

Only Seventh-day Adventists fit this description exactly. The fact that Adventists have been called to say something unique just before Christ’s second coming is nothing to boast about. After all, the message is not the church’s message, but God’s.

That being so, Adventist Church members need to be living differently, acting differently, and preaching differently. Many other churches are doing a good work, but none is preaching the “everlasting,” or “final,” gospel in the setting of the final judgment-hour message. This should give Adventists a sense of urgency about their preaching.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a special end-time work to do. God forbid that Adventists ever lose their sense of prophetic focus and mission, but rather again experience the excitement and commitment of the church pioneers who realized that God wanted to work through them to finish His work here on earth. May that same sense of wonder and dedication be the experience of each member of the Adventist Church today. ED

¹ L. E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 3, pp. 617-622.

² M. E. Olsen, *Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 103.

³ Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps*, 1847, pp. 30, 31.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 1911 ed., p. 400.

⁵ William Miller manuscript letter to J. O. Orr, M.D., December 13, 1844, cited in F. D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 250 (CHL ed., p. 266).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Hiram Edson, undated autobiographical manuscript fragment located in the Andrews University Library, pp. 8a, 9.

⁸ Msgr. Ronald A. Knox, *The Holy Bible*, 1944, 1948, 1950.

⁹ Msgr. Ronald A. Knox, *The Holy Bible*, Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York, 1956, p. 270, footnote on Revelation 14:6.

Special thanks to Roger Coon for concepts used in this article.

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IS THERE ANY DOCUMENT
IN OUR CHURCH
REGARDING MARRIAGE
OF A PERSON WHO
HAS EXPERIENCED SEX
CHANGE?

**MARRIAGE OF PERSONS WHO
HAVE EXPERIENCED SEX CHANGE
SURGERY - A CURRENT POSITION
BRI Ethics Committee, October 2014**

The question whether marriage should be considered by transgender people, who have experienced sex change surgery,¹ or whether it should be discouraged by the Adventist Church is a delicate question.² Oftentimes the affected persons have suffered emotionally and spiritually due to their feeling of gender incongruity and rejection by others. So they need all our love and respect.

However, if marriage of transgender persons is being considered, a few considerations are in order.

(1) The Bible teaches clearly that according to God's plan and design only one male and one female are joined together in marriage. In strongest term Jesus upheld heterosexual marriage and ruled out polygamy as well as sexual relations of homosexuals. These biblical norms are binding for humanity at all times and under all circumstances. Therefore, they need to be adhered to when pondering marriage of transgender people.

(2) The Biblical Research Institute Ethics Committee currently works with the assumption that a male to female surgically changed transgender person should be considered female and a female to male surgically changed transgender person male, even though the new state is not perfect as constant dependence on hormone therapy indicates. If a transgender person has not had a sex change surgery,

the committee would consider that person to be male or female according to his/her biological sex, even if that person has adopted a first name associated with the sex opposite of his/her biological sex.

(3) This would mean that a marriage between a non-transgender male and a transgender male or between a non-transgender female and a transgender female would be understood as a homosexual relationship,³ prohibited by Scripture.

(4) A transgender person may be attracted to the same sex but may dislike sexual relations, for instance, as a male with another male and therefore may seek sex change surgery, which would open the way to have sex with a male now as a female. Such behavior appears to be a sophisticated form of homosexual behavior that would also militate against the biblical perspective of homosexuality.


(5) Regarding the question of whether a surgically changed transgender person should attempt to have reversed the prior surgery, we do not expect persons who have undergone sex-change surgery to attempt to revert to their former state, because presently sex-change surgery is irreversible. Under this assumption it would theoretically be possible for a transgender female to marry a male and a transgender male a female, unless the sex-change surgery was undertaken for homosexual desires. Yet even if marriage would be potentially possible, we believe that transgender persons that have had a sex change surgery should abstain from seeking it.

(6) A marriage between a transgender person and a non-transgender person can be a tremendous challenge, especially if total transparency is lacking. The non-transgender partner would need to know that the future spouse originally had the same biological sex that the other partner still has. Some partners might be able to live with such a situation, while others may find it challenging or impossible to live in a marriage relationship with a transgender person. In addition, the issues of sexual relations and having children would need to be raised between the partners

that want to marry. For instance, a male to female transgender cannot bear children naturally.

(7) Even if both partners were transgender persons, reasons for getting married, issues of sexuality, having children, forming a family, etc. would militate against such a marriage.

(8) As much as heterosexual marriage of non-transgender partners is a blessing, it also means work and adjustment of the partners to each other. This does not end after an initial period of a few months or even several years but continues as long as a marriage exists. Today some heterosexual marriages are ending in divorce even after thirty or forty years, because the spouses can no longer stand each other's idiosyncrasies and standard behavioral attitudes. If this is true for marriages that are entered in by persons who have not had their gender identities compromised in any way, this is even a greater challenge for persons that come to a marriage relationship with strong psychological burdens as a consequence of feeling trapped in the body of the other sex. Marriage is not a way to bring psychological healing to individuals struggling with gender identity issues.

For these reasons we would strongly caution people against a transgender marriage. However, even if the Church would not approve of a couple's choice to marry, the local pastor should still minister to those entrusted to his care. 

¹Other designations are sex reassignment surgery, gender reassignment surgery, sex affirmation surgery, gender confirmation surgery or sex realignment surgery.

²For the question whether the BRI Ethics Committee would recommend or discourage same sex surgery see the statement on sex change surgery.

³See the two official statements of the Adventist Church on homosexuality: <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/0/homosexuality/vitality/service/> and <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/0/same-sex-unions/beliefs/en/>.

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.

STATEMENTS ON AIDS

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and associated conditions are spreading rapidly around the world. On the basis of statistical studies it is estimated that in the near future, in many countries of the world, every church congregation numbering 100 or more will include at least one member who has a friend or relative with AIDS.

AIDS is transmitted through two major sources: sexual intimacy with an infected person, and introduction of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) contaminated blood into the body either through injections with unsterile needles and syringes or through contaminated blood products. AIDS can be prevented by avoiding sexual contact before marriage and maintaining a faithful monogamous relationship with an uninfected person in marriage, and by avoiding the use of unsterile needles for injections and assuring the safety of blood products.

Adventists are committed to education for prevention of AIDS. For many years Adventists have fought against the circulation, sale, and use of drugs, and continue to do so. Adventist support sex education that includes the concept that human sexuality is God's gift to humanity. Biblical sexuality clearly limits sexual relationships to one's spouse and excludes promiscuous and all other sexual relationships and the consequent increased exposure to HIV.

The Christlike response to AIDS must be personal—compassionate, helpful, and redemptive. Just as Jesus cared about those with leprosy, the feared communicable disease of His day, His followers today will care for those with AIDS. James advised, "What good is there in your saying to them, 'God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!'—if you don't give them the necessities of life?" (James 2:16, TEV).

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference session in Indianapolis, Indiana.



AND DRUGS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church urges every individual and every nation to cooperate in stamping out the worldwide drug epidemic that undermines the social structure of nations and on the individual level often kills its victims or leads them into lives of crime.

Seventh-day Adventists believe the Bible teaches that each human body is a "temple of the living God," which should be cared for intelligently (2 Cor. 6:15-17).

The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 22 states, "Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible. . . . Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them. . . . Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness."

For vibrant living, Seventh-day Adventists urge everyone to follow a lifestyle that avoids tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, and the misuse of drugs.



This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, June 1985, at the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Connect as a world church family

By sharing your church's news stories with your conference or union, we as the Seventh-day Adventist family feel more connected to each other, both in our local regions as well as worldwide.

To do this, regularly send news updates to your conference or union office. From there, reports are shared with a wider audience, sometimes even to the world church.

First, contact your conference or union Communication director to understand their needs and deadlines. Then develop a list of stories that your church Communication director can plan to write or delegate to other writers in your congregation. Some possible stories to report include:

- New methods of outreach.
- Features about interesting ministries and personalities.
- New personnel at your church or school.
- Religious liberty developments in your region.
- How your church has responded to a social issue.
- Deaths of leaders and prominent members.
- Significant actions of committees, boards or constituency meetings.
- Members who won awards.

In addition to sending stories to the conference or union office, keep your members informed by sharing the stories on your church website and through social media.

Be aware that an editor may change some of your text before the article gets published. This will happen regardless of your level of experience.

Also, remember that news is new, so send reports soon after the event happened.

As a leader of a local congregation, make sure to let the Seventh-day Adventist world church family know how God is blessing and moving in the life of your church.



MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES

Joshua 24:14-28

We make decisions every day. But if we never learn how to make good decisions, we will go through life unhappy, uncertain, and wondering what went wrong. I wish someone had spoken to me a long time ago about making the right choices. How do you make the right choices? I believe God's Word has all the answers and principles we need.

Many years ago, there was someone who knew how to make the right choices, and he was found making a decision in Joshua 24:14,15. You know who it is, and you may remember what he said when he talked about serving the Lord: ". . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua made a decision, and he made the right decision.

Let's be honest: We've all made some bad decisions. We tend to try to cover up our bad decisions or try to make the results come out right even when we have made a bad choice. What we need to do is admit that we made a mistake and ask the Lord to teach us how to make the right choices from now on. And that is what the Lord does in His Word. Through the life of His servant Joshua, God has given us some principles that we must always apply.

I. THE SPIRITUAL OVER THE CARNAL (VERSE 14)

Joshua and those he influenced chose this. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." The context of this verse is "priorities"—what was first in these folks' lives and what choices they were making.

Many people choose the carnal, the physical, the clothing, the food, the shelter, or anything that is not spiritual. This doesn't mean you can't have material things, but it does mean that if it comes to a decision between the spiritual and the carnal, the right choice is the spiritual.

The reason many Christians are unhappy is because they fail to apply this principle.

II. THE ETERNAL OVER THE TEMPORAL (VERSES 14, 17)

Joshua chose to serve the eternal God rather than have the pleasures of sin for a season (like his predecessor Moses). Read

in Matthew 16:21-26 about when Jesus told Peter that he cared not about the things of God but only about the things of men. Jesus went on to say that a man's soul was more important than gaining the whole world.

That is difficult for a worldly-minded person to understand. We are so interested in what we can get out of life right now that we forget there is an eternity out there much longer than the here and now. But making the right choices takes a heavenly-minded person.

Temporal decisions are just that—temporary. I have known men who refused a higher-paying job in an area where there was not a good church; their priority was to keep their families in a high-quality spiritual atmosphere that would produce eternal rewards.

Some have trouble making a decision because of the conflict here. One young man said that God wanted him to go to the mission field, but he knew he could make more money as a lawyer. True, but that's the wrong choice. Money is temporary, but God's will is eternal. As a lawyer, you may get some folks out of jail, but wouldn't it be better as a missionary to get some folks out of hell?

III. GOD'S WILL OVER MAN'S WILL (VERSE 15)

Joshua knew the previous generation in Egypt had succumbed to manmade gods and had influenced the present generation. A choice had to be made between God's will and man's will. Joshua made the right choice and led the people to do the same.

When Saul was saved on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:6), he had been making decisions based on what men wanted him to do. The Jewish leaders wanted him to round up all the Christians and put them to death, and he was doing just that.

Then he met the Lord and, after he was saved, his first statement was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Everyone who claims the name of Jesus should be asking, "Lord, what is it you want me to do?" instead of "Peers, what is it you want me to do?" We should be more interested in pleasing God than in pleasing our peers.

God's will never goes against His Word. It doesn't matter how man rationalizes something; if it goes against God's Word, it

is wrong. It is the wrong choice. Don't be influenced when you know God's will.

In John 8:29, Jesus said, ". . . for I do always those things that please him." And God will reveal the decision that pleases Him (Ps. 32:8), but sometimes He is the last one we ask. He is the only one we need to please, so He ought to be the first one we ask.

IV. COMMITMENT OVER CONVENIENCE (VERSES 19-23)

In verse 19, Joshua implied that the people couldn't serve the Lord because it wasn't convenient for them. Is God too holy for your lifestyle? You see, there is a cost in serving the Lord. But we need to make decisions based on our commitment to the Lord and His Word rather than on whether or not it is convenient to obey.

Rivers are crooked because they take the path of least resistance. That's why a lot of Christians are crooked in their spirituality—because they take the path of least resistance instead of standing up straight and saying, "I'm going by the Book."

CONCLUSION

In his younger days, my dad helped start some youth camps. Before long some worldly people got involved and wanted to throw out some of the biblical standards that the camps were founded on. Dad took a stand and others followed, but not for long. Several months later, when my dad was absent, these people voted out some of the rules of modesty and clean living.

Dad asked one of his friends why he didn't speak up. The preacher said, "Who am I?" Dad said, "It doesn't matter who you are; what matters is who you stand for." Dad went out and bought his own youth camp, which, to this day, stands on the principles of God's holy Word.

Making the right choices is not difficult when we follow God's biblical principles. Always choose the spiritual over the carnal, the eternal over the temporal, God's will over man's will, and commitment over convenience. Oh, how we need more Christians making the right choices.

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

Have you ever faced an impossible situation? I have been in seemingly impossible situations. Every person, if honest, will likely admit that he or she has faced incredible challenges that, from a human perspective, appear impossible.

I. THE CHALLENGE OF SUFFERING

The children of Israel faced an impossible situation in their exodus from Egypt. After 400 years of bondage, they were in desperate need of revival and reformation. Exodus 13 records an epic struggle between God and Pharaoh. Moses and Aaron convey the divine message: “Let my people go so that they may go and worship me” (Ex. 8:1). Then God leads them into the wilderness.

The Bible says that “[w]hen Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near” (Ex. 13:17, ESV). Because God had an agenda for the children of Israel, He had them take the long way—through the wilderness. The Israelites left Egypt prepared for battle (verse 18); they expected Pharaoh to come after them. The Israelites were ready to fight in their own strength. Little did they realize how unprepared they were.

II. DIVINE DEPENDENCE

Sure enough, Pharaoh had second thoughts. The children of Israel were scared (read Ex. 13:19, 20). God prophetically told them through Moses what would happen (14:1-4). The children of Israel stepped out in faith. They listened to God as they went in the “wrong” direction. Yet, as they continued, they had doubts. One thing was clear: they were very unhappy with their leadership, specifically with Moses. They did not like what Moses had to say. They were upset.

Yet God desired to teach them, but He could not do so until He placed them in an impossible situation. As the children of Israel headed in the wrong direction—toward the Red Sea—God used their situation as a teachable moment. God’s agenda was to test and, ultimately, build their faith.

As the Egyptian army drew near, the Israelites’ worst fears were realized. They were trapped! Yet God intervened with a cloud of shade by day and a pillar of light by night. God came between them and the Egyptian army. Moses reassured them: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you

shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Ex. 14:13, 14).

Moses lifted his rod over the sea, and the Lord intervened so “the waters were divided” (Ex. 14:21). All through the night, thanks to the pillar of light, the Israelites crossed the sea on dry ground. The next morning, the “Egyptians pursued them into the midst of the sea” and were destroyed (verse 23).

“Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore . . . and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses” (Ex. 14:31). It was not until the Israelites were in an impossible situation that God could truly test and teach them. As the apostle Paul later observed, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

True revival and reformation begins when we recognize our need for divine dependence. When we find ourselves in a situation that looks impossible from a human perspective, that is when God can work in our lives individually and as a church family.

III. LESSONS FOR MODERN ISRAEL

The dominant watchword of nineteenth-century America under Andrew Jackson’s leadership was “forward”—variations of “go ahead,” “go forward,” and the general idea of forward motion. This was an era of progress, as a nation of immigrants spread westward across the United States. As America grew, a young prophetess named Ellen G. White had a different idea of what moving forward was all about.

In her book *Testimonies for the Church*, Ellen G. White admonished early Adventists with the chapter entitled “Go Forward.” Here she recounted the story of the ancient Israelites. “The history of the children of Israel,” she wrote, “is written for the instruction and admonition of all Christians.” She also noted that it had particular application for God’s people waiting for Christ’s return at the end of time. “God’s cause is onward, and He will open a path before His people.”¹

“The Lord is now dealing with His people who believe present truth,” Ellen White wrote. “He designs to bring about momentous results, and while in His providence He is working toward this end, He says to His people: ‘Go forward.’ True, the path is not yet opened; but when they move on in the strength of faith and courage, God will make the way plain before their eyes.”²

I love our worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. I see God doing amazing things. At the same time, especially in the 10/40 window, I am also cognizant of just how daunting the challenge is to share the Adventist hope. At times, as I reflect on a recent Annual Council initiative for “Mission to the Cities,” the task seems almost impossible. Many of the world’s largest cities need to hear the good news of the gospel, and sometimes this challenge seems overwhelming.

Yet the message of the Exodus for modern Israel remains the same: “Go forward.” God is at His finest when we find ourselves in situations that look impossible from a human perspective. As Ellen G. White concludes, “‘Go forward’ should be the Christian’s watchword.”³

CONCLUSION

Here is an additional quotation from the Spirit of Prophecy: “God in His providence brought the Hebrews into the mountain fastnesses before the sea, that He might manifest His power in their deliverance and signally humble the pride of their oppressors. He might have saved them in any other way, but He chose this method in order to test their faith and strengthen their trust in Him. The people were weary and terrified, yet if they had held back when Moses bade them advance, God would never have opened the path for them. It was ‘by faith’ that ‘they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.’ Hebrews 11:29. In marching down to the very water, they showed that they believed the word of God as spoken by Moses. They did all that was in their power to do, and then the Mighty One of Israel divided the sea to make a path for their feet.”⁴

God brings us through seemingly impossible situations so that our faith will be strengthened. Although these experiences are difficult at the time, God takes us the long way because He has an agenda. The challenge for you and for me is to have faith. Have faith in God and move forward in faith!



¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:25.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 290.

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JESUS OUR SAVIOR

John 8:3-11

There is a Savior who loves sinners and who understands and sympathizes with us. John speaks about Jesus as One who loves sinners and reaches out to them in grace, forgiveness, and love.

I. THE SINFUL WOMAN (VERSE 3)

A. *Her sin.* This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. She was guilty before the Lord and before the world. Now, adultery is a vile sin, but it is no worse than any other sin (James 2:10). In fact, even if we never committed a sin with our bodies or our minds, we would still be guilty before the Lord (Rom. 3:10, 23; Gal. 3:22). We are all as guilty as this woman; our problem is that we simply won't admit it (Prov. 28:13).

B. *Her shame.* In their haste to bring this woman before Jesus, her accusers probably didn't give her time to get properly dressed before they hauled her into public. She was certainly humiliated by the public accusations and the disclosure of her sin.

Sin is a shameful thing! No matter how skillfully it is hidden from the eyes of those around us, Jesus knows all about it, and one day it will be revealed to all (Luke 12:3).

C. *Her sentence.* Her accusers were absolutely correct! According to the law, this woman deserved to die (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). But there was one small problem: Where was her partner? Both were supposed to die for this sin! The man may have been part of this scheme to attack Jesus. He may have been allowed to slip away. Nevertheless, this woman was guilty, and she deserved to die.

II. THE SCHEMING CRITICS (VERSES 3-9)

A. *Their plan.* These men had used this woman to trap Jesus. If Jesus simply let the woman go, He would be seen as being soft on sin and could have been arrested for being in violation of the law. However, if He gave permission for the woman to be killed, He could then be accused before Rome as an upstart and a seditionist, and He would have destroyed His reputation as being the "friend of publicans and sinners." The critics felt that no matter what Jesus said, He had no wiggle room.

B. *Their problems.* The plan might have succeeded with an ordinary man, but these

men were dealing with Jesus Christ, and He refused to play by their rules! When they tried to stump Jesus, they discovered that they had met their match. Notice how He responded to their arguments.

1. *They were ignored.* As the critics were waiting for Jesus to respond, He knelt down and began to write on the ground. He had no use for their pettiness and lack of love for sinners. What did Jesus write?

In the book *The Desire of Ages*, page 461, Ellen G. White says, "But as their eyes, following those of Jesus, fell upon the pavement at His feet, their countenances changed. There, traced before them, were the guilty secrets of their own lives."

Whatever the Lord wrote on the ground, His writing surely got their attention.

2. *They were exposed.* When Jesus did speak, He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the first stone." Jesus wasn't requiring that any judge be sinless. If that were the case, no human would ever be able to render judgment in any matter, even in a court. I think that Jesus was saying to these hypocrites, "He that is free from this particular sin, let him first cast a stone at her." You see, adultery can be committed with the head and the heart just as surely as it can be committed with the body! At this point, all the shouting stopped, and all that could be heard was the sound of rocks dropping to the ground and the shuffle of sandals as the men slipped quietly away. You see, these men had been exposed before their fellowman, the accused lady, and, most importantly, before the Lord.

III. THE SYMPATHETIC SAVIOR (VERSES 9B-11)

A. *He faced her.* Only Jesus could have cleared the Temple in that fashion, and when the last rock hit the temple floor, Jesus stood up and faced this sinful woman. As He stood before her, He was the only One the world has ever known who was qualified to take up the first stone, as well as the rest, and stone her to death. When she faced Jesus, she faced the ultimate judge!

She had reached a place in her life where it was just her and Jesus. It always comes down to that. Eventually, somewhere, someday you are going to have to face Jesus, too.

B. *He forgave her.* The only One quali-

fied to throw a stone refused to do so! Jesus dealt with this woman on the basis of compassion. The religious men had condemned her and considered her as good as dead; however, Jesus saw someone who was worthy of His love and salvation. When this woman came to Jesus, she received two great blessings that forever changed her life. These same blessings are the gift of God to all who receive Jesus as their Savior. Thus, she got the following:

1. *A new Lord.* Through her faith and her simple confession of Christ as Lord, salvation became hers. And that is all we need to do to be saved (Rom. 10:9). It doesn't get any easier than that! Even small children can comprehend that truth and make it real in their lives. What about you? Have you taken this step of faith? Anyone who wants to be saved can be saved through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:17; John 3:16; 6:37).

2. *A new life.* All of her life, this woman had been a prisoner of her own lusts and desires (Eph. 2:1-3). Jesus, however, came and unlocked the shackles that bound her in sin. He set her free! Imagine for a minute what happened the next time she saw her lover!

Every person who comes to Jesus for salvation receives this new lease on life (2 Cor. 5:17). We get a chance to begin again, and this time, we actually have a chance of making something out of our lives (1 Peter 1:23).

CONCLUSION

In the same book Ellen G. White adds: "In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save."

Maybe, like this woman, your life has been wrecked and ruined by sin. Maybe religious people have hurt you. Maybe you are looking for a compassionate Savior, One who will make everything right. I invite you to come to Jesus. He loves you just as you are. He cares about you and wants to save you.



General Conference Ministerial Association

LIGHT THE WORLD

Ephesians 5:8-15

When Paul wrote to the young church in Ephesus, he knew they were an island of light in a city of darkness. How could that tiny band of believers make a difference in the cosmopolitan metropolis that was home to the world-famous Temple of Artemis? In Ephesians 5:8-14, Paul gives us his answer: “You are the light of God. Live like it. Let your light shine. It will dispel the darkness. Some people won’t like that. Shine your light anyway.”

What worked in the first century still works today. In our passage, we see three remarkable things that happen when the light of God enters a dark world.

I. LIGHT TRANSFORMS (VERSES 8-10).

Here we have a beautiful picture of conversion.

A. Coming to Christ is like walking from the darkness into a room filled with blazing light. But once you come out of the darkness, you see things you never saw before. When you lived in darkness, you did whatever you wanted to do. But now, in the light, you must put off the deeds of darkness and put on a lifestyle befitting the children of the light.

Verse 9 spells this out for us: “For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.” Goodness touches how we deal with others. Righteousness involves a new commitment to obey God’s commands. Truth demands a deep commitment to live with integrity.

We now have a new goal: “Find out what pleases the Lord” (verse 10).

B. We are no longer agents of darkness. Christians believe something stupendous that the world does not understand at all. We believe there is a God in heaven who has spoken, and we should find out “what is acceptable to the Lord” (verse 10).

C. The world finds this strange. When it comes to things like morality, we believe that God has spoken clearly—that fornication, homosexual behavior, and adultery are always wrong. In short, we believe something the world rejects—that there is a God in heaven who has spoken and whose words about sexuality should be obeyed.

D. If we truly want to please the Lord, we will find a way to do it. However, no matter how many times we fall short, God will help us if we truly want to please Him.

II. LIGHT EXPOSES (VERSES 11-13)

Some things shouldn’t be mentioned in public. No doubt Paul is referring to the various rituals associated with the Temple of Artemis (also called Diana), located in Ephesus. Considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, it drew worshipers and tourists from many distant lands. Temple rituals combined overt idolatry with every sort of sexual excess. When Paul speaks of things done in secret, he is referring to a vile form of evil that goes beyond ordinary acts of rebellion. It describes evil that is gross, unnatural, and perverted. Certainly this applied to various acts of sexual immorality associated with idol worship at the Temple of Artemis.

A. The light of the gospel exposes evil for what it really is. If you are planning to buy an expensive diamond, you will want to view it in the brightest light possible before you make your purchase because light will expose the hidden flaws in the stone. Shadows hide flaws, but light reveals them. Similarly, when the gospel enters a family, hidden secrets will be revealed (verse 13). When the gospel invades a community, corruption will come to light.

Verse 13 describes the result of the ministry of reproof: “But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light” (verse 13). The Bible puts it very simply: “Light exposes the true character of everything.”

We shouldn’t be surprised when some people resent us for shining the light of God’s truth. “Who are you to judge me?” I have no standing to judge anyone. But God calls us to shine the light of His truth and let it judge the human heart.

B. Truth will hurt you before it heals you. Darkness can only produce more darkness. But light can turn the darkness into light.

When God turns on the light in someone’s life, the darkness is gone, and as Christians, we have the responsibility to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (verse 15).

III. LIGHT AWAKENS (VERSE 14)

Verse 14 calls for something impossible when it says to “rise from the dead.” After all, Paul himself had already stated in Ephesians 2:1, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

A. So how can a dead man rise from the dead? Isn’t that like talking to a corpse and commanding it to stand up? Imagine how you would react if a man walked into a mortuary and started telling the dead people, “Wake up! You’ve been dead long enough!”

When the light of the gospel comes in, it wakes up those who are spiritually dead and draws them to Jesus. That’s conversion. That’s salvation. That’s the new birth. That’s the life-transforming power of the gospel when Jesus Christ comes into a life.

This passage shows us what happens when God’s light begins to shine in the world.


1. *The light shines on us and transforms us from darkness into light.* In the process, that same light purifies us on the inside so that we seek to please God in everything.

2. *The light shining through us chases away the darkness and exposes evil.* Because men love darkness and resist light (John 3:19), they often fight against the light of God. But when the light does its work thoroughly, it contains a healing power. Because the light comes from God, it can take the darkness and turn it into light. We know this is true because that’s what happened to us.

3. *The light awakens those who are asleep and raises them from the dead.* This is why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. This is why he boldly preached in the very heart of the ancient world—in Corinth and Ephesus and Athens and Rome. Paul knew that when the gospel shines on a society, its light will expose some people and make them angry, but that same light will awaken others to their need of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In the book *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 19, Ellen G. White says, “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God.”

The darker the night, the brighter the light shines. It is precisely when the world is at its worst that the people of God should be at their best. Let no one be deceived. It will not be easy. The world doesn’t want the light, but it desperately needs it. Let’s light the world! 

General Conference Ministerial Association

100 DAYS OF PRAYER

Imagine millions of Seventh-day Adventists all around the world praying for 100 days for the same thing! Praying for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to be fully experienced by our church members during the General Conference session, July 2-11, 2015 in San Antonio, Texas.

Imagine what our Lord can do to bring the promised breakthroughs for this last day movement so Jesus can come! However, if we want Him to do the work, we are responsible for our part to prepare the way.

After the 1901 General Conference session, Ellen White had a vision revealing “What Might Have Been.” She witnessed those in the meetings responding to the Holy Spirit to be reconciled through humility, confession of sins, and removal of barriers between each other.

This was followed by earnest prayer, songs of praise and the evident presence of the Holy Spirit which created the miracle of unity. All came together accepting the warnings and promises to the Laodicean church. The work of deep spiritual renewal and changed lives so desperately needed was accomplished by our God (see *Testimonies*, Vol. 8, pp. 104-106).

When she woke from the vision, Mrs. White realized this breakthrough had not happened as God intended. Hardhearted participants prevented the unity God so desired. Deeply disappointed, she understood that the *Lord could have come* back in the lifetime of those members. But His people could not or would not surrender their thoughts and opinions to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

A 100 Days of Prayer is planned preceding the Session beginning March 25 thru July 11, 2015. Resources can be found at www.100daysofprayer.org. A 16-minute video reenactment of the vision will also be available prior to the beginning of the 100 Days of Prayer so you can show it to your members.

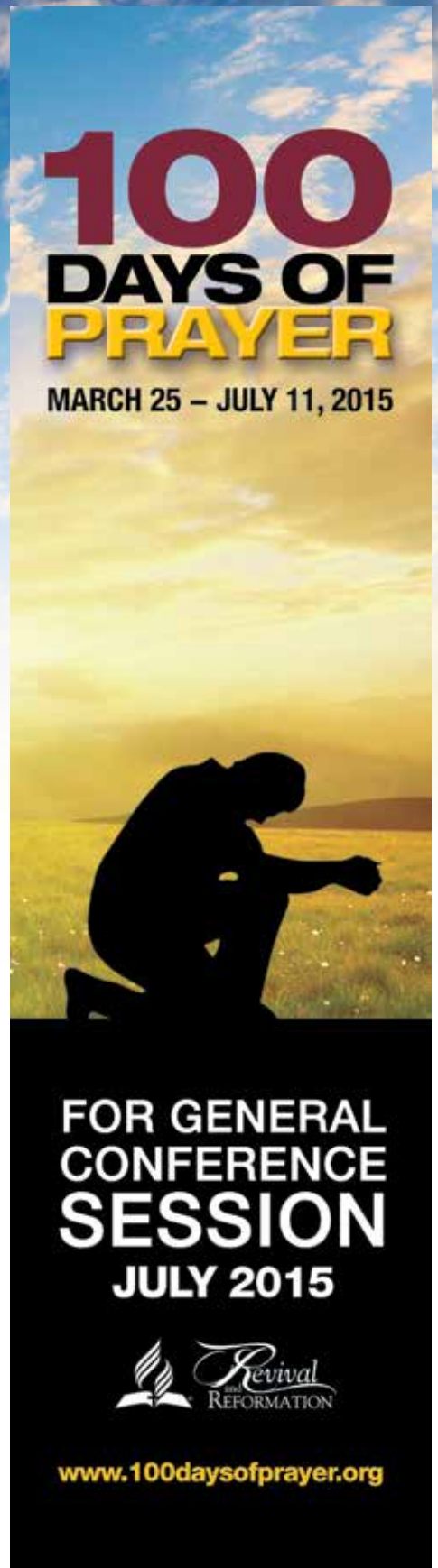
Jesus invites us to come together, united in His will, praying for His power to break through, and usher in His second coming. We all realize there are major decisions to be made and different opinions to be heard. We are praying that these vital meetings will be a time when God breaks through in the hearts of individuals and, as in the book of Acts, ignites the passion for saving His children.

Will you please invite your church members to join in the 100 Days of Prayer seeking God’s will for the General Conference session? Visit our website at www.100daysofprayer.org for more information. Let’s pray that we are the generation which ushers in Jesus’ second coming.

Imagine being part of the last-day generation, to have the privilege of reflecting Jesus’ character to the world, to live the proof that Jesus is real. “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, NKJV).

ED


Jerry Page is the General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary.



**100
DAYS OF
PRAYER**

MARCH 25 – JULY 11, 2015

**FOR GENERAL
CONFERENCE
SESSION
JULY 2015**


Revival
and
Reformation

www.100daysofprayer.org

REAP THEM AND KEEP THEM!

“HOW TO BE A GOOD FARMER—EVEN IN A CITY: CREATING A COMMUNITY-BASED MINISTRY” APPEARED IN THE JANUARY – MARCH 2011 *ELDER’S DIGEST*. THIS ARTICLE PROPOSED “TEN FARMING COMMANDMENTS” WHICH SYSTEMATIZED JESUS’ MINISTRY METHOD INTO 10 INTENTIONAL ACTION STEPS FOR OUR TIME¹ AND SERVED AS AN INTRODUCTION TO A SERIES OF *ELDER’S DIGEST* ARTICLES IN THE COMING MONTHS THAT WOULD UNPACK THESE 10 COMMANDMENTS IN MORE DETAIL.² BELOW IS THE NINTH AND FINAL ARTICLE IN THE SERIES³. THIS ARTICLE WILL FOCUS ON THE ELEVENTH “FARMING COMMANDMENT.”

Why are we talking about an 11th Commandment in a series on “10 Farming Commandments?” Because “farming” leads to something equally important—*reaping* and *keeping*. It’s obvious that reaping where you have farmed is necessary—just like farming before you reap is common sense (or is it that common—in ministry?). Here is the 11th Commandment: “Thou shalt not ignore commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to reap where thou hast farmed and keep what [who] thou doest reap (disciple—preserve the harvest)!”

SEOUL JOONG-ANG GOSPEL CENTER

Let’s “visit” a sample church that demonstrates the whole cycle of evangelism: farming, reaping, and keeping. The Seoul Joong-ang Gospel Center in Seoul, Korea, is in the business district of Seoul. Years ago, when Pastor Kim, Dae Sung was the pastor of this Adventist congregation he caught an idea from Ellen White’s writings to have a vegetarian restaurant in his church’s neighborhood. However, first he chose to interview community leaders in his territory to determine if *they* felt that this idea would meet a real need, and, if so, would they support it.

Pastor Kim, Dae Sung visited the businesses around the church and explained his idea, asking for their input. From these interviews he acquired pledges of support and money from them to start the restaurant, for they indicated that it would meet a real need. The neighborhood had many Buddhists and needed good vegetarian restaurants for employees to have a place to eat during their noon hour. The Buddhist temple across the street also wanted the restaurant and they pledged their support and donated money.

Members of Seoul Joong-ang Gospel Center started the requested vegetarian restaurant in their church building in 2002. The restaurant is open from Monday to Friday, and an ongoing goal is that it will continuously provide an opportunity for the church to connect with their community. One hundred fifty to 200 people continue to eat at the restaurant each day.



The church uses the income from the restaurant to support the neighborhood. The customers know that and are happy. In addition to the good food, comprehensive health (physical, mental, spiritual) resources such as books and healthy foods are available for the customers to buy.

Through this restaurant, the church has demonstrated the process of Gospel farming: preparing the soil, planting seeds, and cultivating the resulting crop. The reaping part is especially illustrated in another of Seoul Joong-ang Gospel Center’s community-based ministries—their ministry to senior citizens.

The church has two separate worship services—one for seniors (downstairs) – with approximately 300 attendees—



and one for regular church members (upstairs) with approximately 300 attendees. An associate pastor of the church is in charge of the senior citizen congregation.

On Sabbaths the senior ministry looks like this: During Sabbath School time a generic program is presented—generally an educational video on health. Worship service is from 10-11:00 am. From 11-11:30 four different kinds of activities are offered: (1) Bible Study, (2) Singing time – Gospel music, (3) English class, and (4) Health class. Then the seniors enjoy a delicious lunch in the vegetarian restaurant. In addition, on the first Sabbath of each month there are free medical services (visits with a physician, etc.), free oriental treatments, and beauty services (free haircuts, etc.). On the third Sabbath of each month the church provides free shots (injections).

Two times per year the church holds reaping meetings for those to whom they minister. The meetings are held after lunch four Sabbaths in a row during the reaping times, with a baptism on the fifth Sabbath. There are an average of 90 baptisms per year at Seoul Joong-ang Gospel Center—approximately 80 of which are from the senior citizens group. The growing congregation for senior citizens continues to disciple the seniors who were baptized. They have a Bible study class for new members.

HOW ABOUT YOUR CHURCH?

Church leaders, is your church following the whole cycle of “Gospel Farming?” Do you prepare the soil, plant seeds, cultivate/nurture the “crops” (people) with ministries that connect with the community and meet *their* felt needs? In so doing, do you help those whom you serve to discover that they have another need they might not have felt before—Jesus? Holding regular reaping meetings will provide intentional opportunities for those whom you serve to follow Jesus.

Keeping whom you reap needs as much intentionality as the farming and reaping.⁴ Small groups are an effective way to preserve your harvest. Actually, small groups are also an important part of the farming process of planting seeds

and cultivating, as well as preserving the harvest. In small groups, deeper relationships can be formed with the Family of God before decisions to follow Jesus are actually made.

There are various types of small groups:

Small groups for general Bible study for people who you meet via community outreach programs - Gerson Santos,⁵ who has had much experience with discipling through small groups, suggests a process for developing small groups from the people who are not Adventists who attend our community outreach programs: (1) Winsomely invite them to study the Bible to meet their spiritual needs. (2) Hold these groups at convenient times, such as during lunch hour. (3) Do not teach a doctrinal series in these small groups—for a person may join later and come for the first time during a study on the Mark of the Beast. Rather, do more generic Bible studies, such as the life of Jesus, etc. The *Serendipity Bible*⁶ is an example of a useful tool for leading general small groups. Small group activities, icebreakers and discussion questions are included with the words of Scripture. (4) If someone in the group asks questions about Bible doctrines the group leader can say that after the program we can make an appointment for another day to study that issue with some Bible texts that deal with this subject. (5) There are many options for doctrinal Bible study lessons, such as *Discover, Amazing Facts*, etc. What is the best lesson series? Gerson Santos says, “The best Bible study series is the one you use.” (6) Those who are baptized should join a small group within your church. If you don’t already have small groups organized in your church, a good place to start is Sabbath School classes, which are built-in small groups that already exist in your church.

New members’ Sabbath School class - The *New Members’ Bible Study Guide*, entitled *In Step With Jesus*, has been prepared by the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department to assist in the task of making disciples. This series contains 52 lessons, and is a valuable resource for assisting new members to connect

with church members and with God. It will help them understand and follow God's Word, will demonstrate how to minister to others, and will equip them for discipleship during that all important first year of church membership.

Regular Sabbath School Classes – If your classes are large, you may want to consider dividing them into smaller groups. Each class should not only study the Bible, but have a care coordinator who organizes care and follow up for missing class members. Also each class should have a community outreach project.

Your neighborhood/community is waiting for your church to make a difference in their lives. Go and farm, reap, and keep, using Christ's ministry method, for His method never fails!

ED

¹ The 10 Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus' ministry method and pray for...; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a Social Action Leadership Team (SALT); (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them; (8) Thou shalt earn "Social Capital;" (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the resources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate.... AND an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore commandments 1-10,

and thou shalt remember to Reap where thou hast farmed and keep what thou doest reap (disciple–preserve the harvest)!

² So far, these follow-up articles have appeared in *Elder's Digest*: (1) "Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand..." (Oct.-Dec. 2011); (2) "Our Community Does Not Know Us..." (Jan.-March 2012); (3) "Help, Lord! I've Been Asked to Plant a Church!" (July-Sept. 2012); (4) "As I Walked Around and Looked Carefully..." (Jan.-March 2013); (5) "You're the First Church That Ever Asked..." (July-Sept. 2013); and (6) "We Can't Afford Not to Have Someone Like This in Our Community..." (Oct.-Dec. 2013); (7) "Strategic Ministry Planning So Your Church Will Make a Difference" (Jan.-March 2014); and (8) "Where Is God Already Active in Your Community?" (Oct.-Dec. 2014). To access these articles online, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org. Click on Adventist Community Services, and "Articles & Media." To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on "Resources" and "IICM Community Services & Urban Ministry Certification Program Curriculum." For a direct link, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acs_iicm

³ Some of the articles in the series covered more than one "Farming Commandment."

⁴ To access effective tools for discipling whom you reap, go to: www.growingfruitfuldisciples.com.

⁵ Gerson Santos is Director of the Global Mission Urban Mission Center for General Conference Office of Adventist Mission.

⁶ The *Serendipity Bible* can be ordered online.

May-Ellen Colón is assistant director of the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department and director of Adventist Community Services International.

Contagious Adventist

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This nine-session seminar is designed to introduce Seventh-day Adventist church members to the art of being contagious Adventists. Participants will learn how to convert routine, everyday experiences into spiritual conversations that will help others want to learn more about Jesus.

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PROPER USE OF THE VOICE



HEALTH PRINCIPLES

The proper use of the vocal organs will bring benefit to the physical health and increase the usefulness and influence [of Christ's followers]. It is through falling into bad habits of speech that people become tedious readers and speakers, but those who are looked upon as intelligent enough to become missionary workers or to transact business ought to have intelligence enough to reform in their manner of speaking. By judicious exercise they may expand the chest and strengthen the muscles. By giving heed to proper instruction, by following health principles in regard to the expansion of the lungs and the culture of the voice, our young men and women may become speakers who can be heard; and the exercise necessary for this accomplishment will prolong life.

DEEP BREATHING


If those who have defects in their manner of utterance will submit to criticism and correction, they may overcome these defects. They should perseveringly practice speaking in a low, distinct tone, exercising the abdominal muscles in deep breathing, and making the throat the channel of communication. Many speak in a rapid way, and in a high, unnatural key. Such a practice will injure the throat and lungs. As a result of continual abuse, the weak, inflamed organs will become diseased, and consumption [tuberculosis] may result.

RIGHT USE OF ABDOMINAL MUSCLES

Voice culture is a subject that has much to do with the health of students. The youth should be taught how to breathe properly, and how to read in such a way that no unnatural strain shall come on the throat and lungs, but that the work shall be shared by the abdominal muscles. Speaking from the throat, letting the sound come from the upper part of the vocal organs, impairs

the health of these organs and decreases their efficiency. The abdominal muscles are to do the heaviest part of the labor, the throat being used as a channel. Many have died who might have lived had they been taught how to use the voice correctly. The right use of the abdominal muscles in reading and speaking will prove a remedy for many voice and chest difficulties, and the means of prolonging life.

PRESERVATION OF STRENGTH IN PRAYER

I saw that some of our ministers do not understand how to preserve their strength so as to be able to perform the greatest amount of labor without exhaustion. Ministers should not pray so loud and long as to exhaust their strength. It is not necessary to weary the throat and lungs in prayer. God's ear is ever open to hear the heartfelt petitions of His humble servants, and He does not require them to wear out the organs of speech in addressing Him. It is the perfect trust, the firm reliance, the steady claiming of the promises of God, the simple faith that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him, that prevails with God. 

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 195, 196 by Ellen G. White.

DON'T BE A FRIENDLY CHURCH

THE DIFFERENCE WILL SURPRISE YOU.



Friendly churches are warm and happy. Their members greet one another on Sabbath mornings and enjoy potluck dinners together after church. Often church members visit in one another's homes and have church socials. What is wrong with being friendly?

Just ask Russell Burrill. In his book *How to Grow an Adventist Church*¹ he relates the story of his first visit to a certain "friendly" Adventist church. Once the service was over, he managed to find his way to the fellowship hall for potluck. He scanned the room looking for a seat. All around him were

groups of friends enjoying one another's company. Since all the chairs at the inhabited tables were filled, he pulled out a chair from an empty table and sat down. He then noticed a young couple approaching his lonely corner.

"Are these seats taken?" they asked.

Glad for the company, he replied that the chairs were available, but instead of joining him, they picked up the chairs and took them away.

Burrill never returned to that church. It wasn't because of a boring sermon or an ugly carpet. It wasn't even for lack of a greeter to smile and hand him a bulletin. It was because

“WE WORK SO HARD TO INVITE PEOPLE TO OUR CHURCHES, BUT WHEN GOD BRINGS THEM, WE PRETTY MUCH IGNORE THEM.”

none of the members took the time to get to know him. They had been so busy fellowshiping with one another that they didn't notice that Burrill was all alone. During the entire potluck the only people who talked to him were fellow visitors.

NOT THE ONLY ONE

Burrill isn't the only one who has felt awkward at a friendly church. Kerry, a returning Adventist, wanted his wife, Chiare, to embrace the Adventist faith. When they moved to a

new town, they visited several congregations, but no one connected with them. In fact, aside from the greeters, no one had said *anything* to them. The contrast between the warm fellowship they were accustomed to at a previous church and the cold reception they received at the Adventist churches was painful. They were nearly ready to give up when they decided to give Adventists one last try.

“We work so hard to invite people to our churches, but when God brings them, **we pretty much ignore them.**”

The next Sabbath, as they sat in the parking lot of yet another Adventist church, Kerry, Chiare, and their daughter bowed their heads and prayed, “Lord, direct us home.” The threesome then walked through the church doors and slowly navigated the long hallway, brushing past chattering clumps of happy people all around them. Just before they reached the sanctuary they hesitated awkwardly. As they were wondering whether this church would be like all the others, a woman introduced herself and spent time getting acquainted. The next week the family was invited over for dinner. Kerry and his family found what they were searching for. They just needed people to welcome them and make them feel wanted.

OUTSIDE OUR COMFORT ZONE

We don't always realize how nervous some people are when they visit a church for the first time. Mary² had been watching 3ABN and taking online Bible studies for some time when she decided to check out an Adventist church.

She drove half of the 45-minute trip to the Norfolk Seventh-day Adventist Church before turning around and returning home. The next week she got as far as the parking lot. Finally, on her third Sabbath, she managed to get out of her car—but then she froze, clutching her Bible. Somehow, though, she found herself walking toward the door. Once she got inside, church members warmly welcomed her and invited her to sit with them. She says, “It's a good thing,

too, because I was feeling pretty lost!”

Today Mary is an active member of the Norfolk church because the members made her comfortable. Her pastor, Adrian Atkins, adds, “If someone comes to our door and we can't gather them in, there's something wrong with us. . . . If we can't love them as family, we have no business calling them out of the world!”

WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHURCH?

Would a guest go unwelcomed at your church? Bible worker and author Karen Lewis³ believes that we miss many opportunities to make people feel welcome. She explains, “We work so hard to invite people to our churches, but when God brings them, we pretty much ignore them.”

How can we make sure that guests aren't being ignored? The greeters should take care of that, right? While greeters give the all-essential bulletin, smile, and handshake, they alone cannot make guests feel welcome. Visitors need to feel wanted by the congregation, and a relaxed conversation means a lot more than a dutiful handshake. Every member should take an active role in welcoming guests.

Making a guest feel welcome is not as hard as you might think. Here are a few tips:

Be aware. Watch for new faces, and when you spot someone you don't recognize, introduce yourself.

Be confident. Extend your hand, look the person in the eye, and say, “I don't think I've met you yet.”

Be interested. Learn the person's hobbies and find out where they work.

Be a host. Give visitors a tour of the church, show them the children's Sabbath school rooms, and ask them to sit with you at potluck.

Be courteous. Introduce the visitor to your friends.

Be encouraging. Get visitors' contact information, and invite them back the next week.

As nice as it is to be friendly with our church friends, we need to include visitors in our fellowship. Friendliness is a great quality to have, but in order to truly welcome visitors we must go deeper. If we make our guests a priority, they will feel at home in our churches.



¹ Russell Burrill, *How to Grow an Adventist Church* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2009).

² Bobby Davis, “Divine Paradox,” *3ABN World*, December 2012, pp. 20-23.

³ Karen Lewis, “Bible Studies Made Easy,” Sept. 30, 2012; retrieved from www.audioverse.org/english/sermons/recordings/4322/bible-studies-made-easy.html.

Nathan Sarli was a high school senior living in southeastern Tennessee when he wrote this article originally published in the August 28, 2014 issue of the *Adventist Review*. Used by permission.

CHRISTIAN AND THE CHURCH



TODAY, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE JUST CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR OWN WELLBEING WITHOUT CARING MUCH ABOUT SOCIETY, FAMILY, OR OTHER GROUPS OF PEOPLE. THIS MAY ALSO INFLUENCE CHRISTIANS AND THEIR RELATION TO THE CHURCH. ON THE OTHER HAND, PEOPLE LIKE TO MEET IN CLUBS, PUBS, AT SPORTING EVENTS, ETC. BECAUSE HUMANS ARE SOCIABLE BEINGS. BUT IS IT NECESSARY TO ATTEND CHURCH?

I. JESUS AND HIS CHURCH

- Luke 4:18 At the time of Jesus, Jews met every Sabbath in the synagogue for worship (Acts 15:21). It was Jesus' custom to go to "church" regularly on Sabbath.
- Matt 16:18 Jesus established the church. The church is a group of believers that follows Jesus, believes what Jesus believed, and does things together.
- John 10:16 Christians are also called His "flock." This term implies that Jesus' disciples are not only isolated believers but form a group that meets, listens to God's Word, prays, proclaims the gospel, etc. Without meeting, sharing a common message, and being involved in a common task, there is no "flock" or church.
- Matt 18:20 Sometimes the local congregations may be small, but where two or three are assembled in the name of Jesus, He has promised to be with them.

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

II. THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

- Acts 1:15 After Jesus' ascension to heaven, the believers met in Jerusalem.
- Acts 2:1 While together, they experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 2:41; 5:14 Those who accepted the gospel were baptized and added to the church. Baptism involves living with the community and family of Christ—His church.
- Acts 2:42, 46 They enjoyed regular fellowship.
- Acts 12:5 While Peter was imprisoned, the church was praying for him and a miracle occurred.

III. PAUL AND THE CHURCH

- Acts 13:14, 42 Paul went to the synagogue on Sabbath.
- Acts 16:13 On Sabbath, Paul and his companions were looking for an outdoor gathering place for communal prayer.
- Acts 17:2 It was Paul's custom to attend worship services on Sabbath.
- Acts 18:4 This was also an opportunity to discuss and teach Christian beliefs.
- Heb 10:25 This text contains a clear admonition to meet together. Christians cannot be people who live in isolation, unless they find themselves in a place with no other believers. To meet is necessary in order to encourage, comfort, and strengthen

each other; learn from each other; be more and more grounded in the Lord and His message; and be prepared to do what He calls His disciples to do.

IV. CHRISTIANS MEETING OVER THE CENTURIES

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

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


V. ADVENTISTS AND THEIR MEETINGS

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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CHOICES FOR LIFE:

SAYING “NO” TO SITTING DISEASE

What in the world is “sitting disease”? If you’re wondering, you’re not alone. Because this term is fairly new, many people have never heard it before. It describes the fact that the act of sitting for too long can be dangerous and has as negative an impact as a disease. According to recent scientific studies, sitting for long periods of time is one of the most dangerous things someone can do.

Why? Here are the conclusions of some recent studies at the Mayo Clinic:

- People who sit for more than 11 hours a day are 40 percent more likely to die than those who sit for 4 hours a day or less.
- People with desk jobs have two times the rate of heart disease than those with active jobs.
- For every hour you spend sitting, you decrease your lifespan by two hours.

Isn’t this alarming? And you thought heart disease, the number one cause of death in the world, was caused by smoking or a fatty high sugar! It is true that smoking and an unhealthy diet can increase your risk for heart disease; however, Martha Grogan, a cardiologist at the Mayo Clinic, points out that “for people who sit most of the day, their risk of heart attack is about the same as someone who smokes.” It is something to carefully consider, isn’t it?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we pride ourselves on being vegetarians or not smoking. But do we take time to get up from our chairs during long meetings with the church board or the constituency or even during an all-day Sabbath program? Do we intentionally plan for walking or stretching breaks when we coordinate church-related programs? How about those of us who sit in an office all day?

During Bible times, church leaders (priests and prophets) would walk several miles a day or would minister while standing in the sanctuary. So did the early Adventist pioneers, who often walked and stood at meetings—and the wooden seats back then were not as comfortable as the ones we have today!


What about you? What are you doing to prevent “sitting disease”? If you are like the average church leader or elder,



your risk for sitting disease is very high. But don’t despair! Here are some things you can do to reduce your risk:

- Whenever possible, take a 3-5-minute stretching break for every hour you are sitting at work or in a meeting.
- Learn some simple stretching exercises that can be done in an office setting (see www.AdventistsInStepforLife.org for a video showing short, five-minute desk/chair exercises).
- When planning for a meeting at church or in the office, allow time for walking breaks and encourage people to get up and move by leading them in a stretching activity.
- If you spend most of your day in front of the computer, consider investing in a standing desk at work or at home.
- Plan to hold “walking” meetings as often as you can. If you are visiting someone as an elder, suggest a walk in the park as you discuss the issues he or she cares about. Walking meetings can be very productive as you oxygenate the brain.
- If you’re on a plane, get up every hour and take a five-minute walk whenever possible.

We have a mission to accomplish, and, in the words of Paul, God reminds us that “a large crowd of witnesses is all around us! So we must get rid of everything that slows us down [like disease or risk of early death] . . . and we must run with endurance the race that is ahead of us” (Heb. 12:1, NKJV). To run with endurance, Paul shared, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27, CEB).

By following these tips, you will not only reduce your risk for “sitting disease” and heart disease; you will also be more productive in your ministry for God. 



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

HOW TO HANDLE CHURCH CONFLICT

> PART 2

Conflict is a fact of life in all organizations, including Christian ones. When facts, means/methods, goals/ends, and values do not align, conflict is the natural by-product. Most people prefer to look the other way rather than deal with conflict, which causes conflicts to spiral out of control. Let's strive to understand the basis of conflict and explore helpful ways to manage it.

CONSTRUCTIVE VS. DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

Destructive conflict engulfs personalities, emotions, and divisive actions of the past. It tears away at the fabric of the church, leaving broken relationships and lost productivity in its wake. It siphons off valuable energy that could otherwise be put toward mission. When might conquers right in an organization (i.e., committee leaders aggressively dominating proceedings) or when the focus is on personalities rather than on issues, conflict is sure to be destructive. The signs are unmistakable: frustration, noncooperation, aggression, and withdrawal.

Constructive conflict centers on differences of opinion, goals, and operating styles. Conflict can have a constructive impact when it prompts team members to clarify their purpose and mission and when it uncovers hidden agendas that have blocked team progress. Sometimes conflict is what finally prompts people to be honest with one another about a festering misunderstanding. It brings to a head unproductive circumstances in a church and enables people to build new bridges.

THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT

Although church conflict appears in diverse forms, most conflicts can be traced to one of three root causes: (1) lack of goal ownership; (2) unwillingness to suboptimize; and (3) personal immaturity.

Churches are quick to set goals but slow to proactively sell them on a grass-roots level. When goal ownership is not shared, people develop their own personal agendas, which often conflict, instead of directing their energies toward a common purpose (i.e., mission, evangelism, etc.)

Conflict can erupt even when ministry teams have bought into goals but are unwilling to suboptimize. Suboptimization occurs when a ministry group is willing to sacrifice some of its goals on behalf of larger goals. Sometimes groups refuse to make any short-term sacrifices to enhance the ultimate well-being of the church (i.e., a Sabbath School class giving up its room for the growing youth program).

Finally, many conflicts grow from personal immaturities: inflexibility, maverick independence, abrasiveness, mistrust, and so on. These attitudes squelch the crucial teamwork necessary for a volunteer organization.

THREE RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

The way people respond to conflict determines its destructive or constructive potential. Even though conflict can't be completely avoided in the church, it can be fruitfully managed if the right approach is used. There are three main responses to conflict:

1. *Avoidance*: Stick your head in the sand and hope the conflict goes away. Sometimes it does, but often it gets worse. Avoidance is a constructive response only when the timing is not right for addressing the conflict.

2. *Control*: The person in charge strives to win the confrontation and have his or her way. Even when the leader is in the right, control-oriented tactics create resentment and invite retaliation.

3. *Collaboration*: The feuding parties earnestly seek to find a creative win-win solution. Both parties emphasize what they have in common and the interests they share. The collaborative approach has constructive potential in practically every situation. It elevates principles above politics, ends above means, and the group above the individual. This approach assumes that people can and will commit themselves to ideals bigger than any one person.

SMART STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT CONSTRUCTIVELY

Here are some proven strategies for resolving church conflict constructively:

1. *Choose an appropriate time to deal with the conflict*, preferably after people have had a chance to calm down and look at the facts more objectively.

2. *Create a supportive environment for resolving the conflict*. For example, hold a special meeting so people have a chance to be heard and allocate plenty of time so people won't feel rushed.

3. *Emphasize listening over talking*. Stipulate that no one can be interrupted while he or she is speaking.

4. *Focus on issues rather than on personalities*. Conflict is much easier to deal with when people's feelings don't get trampled on.

5. *Seek to understand and try not to judge*. Have each side express how it appreciates and cares about the other.

6. *Build bridges* by focusing on what you have in common rather than on your differences.

7. *Break the conflict into smaller pieces* that can be dealt with individually.

8. *Don't seek a premature resolution*; it's better to move slowly and cautiously toward a solution that will stand the test of time.

9. *Invite a neutral third party* to listen, counsel, and play a peace-keeping role if necessary.

10. *Pray with and for one another* as a reminder that in the final analysis, we're all on God's side.

Let's not fear conflict. Instead, let's recognize its potential as a catalyst for beneficial change. Church conflict can glorify God when it ultimately repairs relationships, renews commitment to vision, and strengthens our dependence on God and each other.



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ENTERING THE LAND OF THE DRAGON



The kingdom of Bhutan is tucked into a corner of the eastern Himalayas, between China and India. Known in the local language as Land of the Dragon, the country was closed to foreign visitors until the mid-70s, and television sets only arrived in 1999. Today, Bhutan draws attention for coining the term *Gross National Happiness* and possessing national wonders such as the cliffside monastery Tiger's Nest, among others.

Although the population is small—less than 750,000 people—it encompasses 16 ethnic groups. Buddhism is deeply ingrained, and an anti-conversion law strictly limits Christians' ability to worship openly. There are more than a dozen small Adventist congregations in Bhutan, but they must meet discreetly in homes or isolated areas.

The Adventist leader assigned to the territory lives in another country, and makes short trips across the border to minister to the members. Many times, he must walk 10 hours "up the riverbanks" at enormous peril to reach believers and people living along the river. He also does his best to avoid suspicious border guards, who are always on the lookout for familiar faces seen crossing frequently at the country's check points.

"We have long wanted to start producing programs for Bhutan, but were unable to find someone who spoke the language and who could be trained to be a radio speaker," says Adventist World Radio (AWR) president Dowell Chow. "The conditions in the region are tenuous, to say the least. Workers labor in very dire conditions, surrounded with violence and unrest. Sharing the gospel freely through radio to the people of Bhutan is a classic illustration of AWR's slogan, 'No walls – no borders – no limits.'"

After a long search, a group of potential producers was finally assembled. Out of a dozen volunteer producers and

technicians, two are native-born Bhutanese who speak Dzongkha, one of the official national languages widely used in the area. Others are Hindi- or Nepali-speaking gospel workers. Some live in Bhutan itself, while others reside in nearby locations.

AWR provided all of the studio equipment, installation, and training for the young team members, most of whom are in their 20s and 30s. During the intensive training course, each new producer prepared a short script for radio. All of them were required to sit before a microphone and record a short speech – a new experience for almost all of them. With some ongoing training and much practice, they all will be ready to start full production very soon. Luckily, they will be able to draw on a large collection of scripts already prepared by a seasoned producer in Nepal, and once translated and recorded into Dzongkha, their fledgling programs will be broadcast through shortwave and online in the near future.

"These very young people have an interest in radio because they feel that it's a tremendous way to reach into Bhutan, which they cannot do from the inside," Chow says. "There is an enormous need for family-life topics, advice on marital relations, child rearing, health, all kinds of social topics, and obviously religious and devotional talks. I am incredibly encouraged by this breakthrough."

Surachet Insom, AWR's Asia/Pacific region director, adds, "God loves and cares for the Bhutanese, even though they are small in number and despite Satan's obstruction. Please remember the new Bhutanese studio in your prayers."

ED

Shelley Nolan Freesland is Adventist World Radio communication director at the General Conference world headquarters.



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