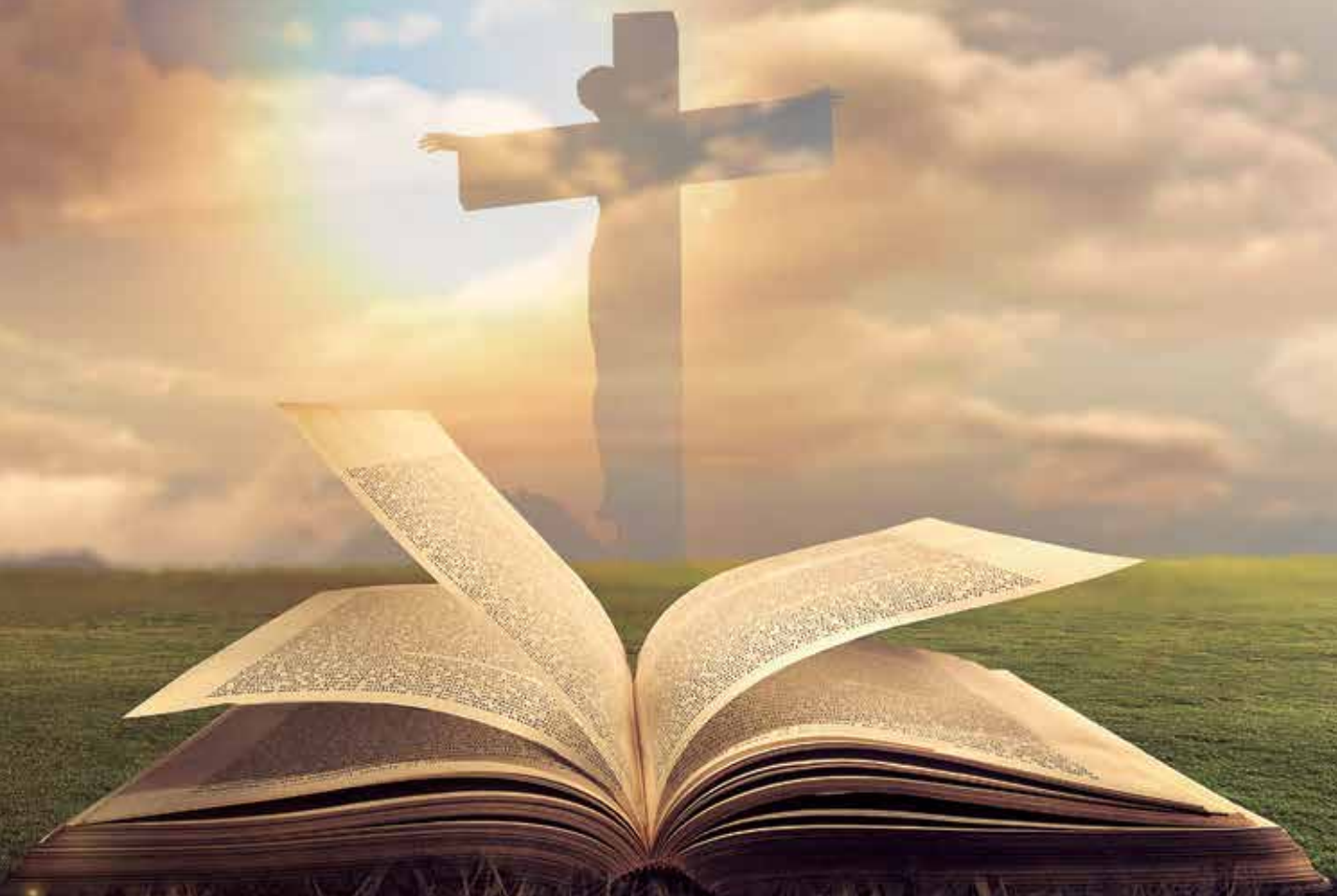


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ELDER'S DIGEST



**THEOLOGICAL
UNITY** IN A GROWING WORLD CHURCH

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DESIGNER: Erika Miike - erika@emiike.com.br



THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY

Unity is essential for any kind of achievement. It's needed in families; to have a happy family you must have unity. It's needed in business; employees must learn to get along. Unity is needed in government if anything is to be accomplished. On any sport team, players have to be unified in order to win.

But especially in the church, there must be unity for God to be able to work and for the church to become all that God wants it to be. Unity is a key theme in the Bible. It is up to each member to help safeguard the church's unity. Churches are made up of people, and, believe it or not, there are no perfect people, so they get into conflict with each other. Everyone must learn how to deal with conflict and become united. Why is unity so important in the church?

Jesus prayed about it. Just before Jesus was crucified, He prayed for His followers. In this prayer, Jesus prayed for the unity of the church (John 17:20-24). How would our churches change if we joined Jesus in His prayer for unity? What if churches were actually operating in unity? What if members were striving together constantly to fulfill God's mission? We might see God move in ways none of us has ever seen.

We are commanded to make unity the top priority.

Unity was a top priority for Jesus and for His church, and it should be our top priority as well. The Bible commands us: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bonds of peace" (Eph. 4:3). One of our primary jobs as Christians is to maintain unity and promote peace—whatever it takes!

It is a witness to the world. In John 13:34, 35, Jesus said: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." When church members love each other, there is unity and harmony. Guests will walk into the church and say, "There's something going on in here that I want."

A unified church is blessed. Acts 2:46, 47 says: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

As church leaders, I challenge you to preach on unity. I don't mean mentioning unity on occasion or talking about it during the Lord's Supper. I don't even mean bringing it up when you know of a disagreement in the body. I mean preach on unity regularly, emphasizing why no church will accomplish God's mission without it. I also challenge you to model it. You cannot lead your church to be unified if there are broken relationships in your own life. What you live, people learn. People expect the church leaders to model the behavior of a fully mature disciple. This seems clear in Paul's challenge to "follow me as I follow Christ."



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

THEOLOGICAL UNITY IN A GROWING WORLD CHURCH: A CALL TO OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD AND HIS WORD

A. PREAMBLE

Some years ago, Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders from around the world gathered to reflect on our doctrinal heritage and trends within our movement. They were privileged to do so in the lands of Greece and Turkey, where the apostle Paul labored and the Christian church took root. Their deliberations in this setting, so rich in history, reminded them of our heritage based on the Scriptures, and we give all praise and glory to Jesus, who is Lord of the church and the Word of God incarnate.

The focus of this meeting was on subjects critical to the identity and mission of the church as reflected in the call to

unity found in Section B. Several factors demand that not only we but the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church give serious attention to theological integrity at this time.

1. Under the good hand of the Lord, our movement is experiencing unparalleled growth. From humble origins, we are now a world family of more than 18 million baptized members, with another million or more added every year. More than half of our present family have been members for less than 10 years. We rejoice in these accessions, but we recognize that our Lord's commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is not merely to baptize but to make disciples. It is imperative that the new members swelling the church be thoroughly in-



structured in doctrine and nurtured to grow up into the stature of Jesus Christ.

2. An aggressive atheism and agnosticism, as well as a secular mindset, is gaining ground in many areas of the world. Adventists must be thoroughly grounded in the Bible for their own spiritual welfare and witness.

3. The spirit of the age seeks to blur doctrinal distinctions and even differences between right and wrong. It argues that all is relative; there are no absolutes. The spirit of the age emphasizes individual feelings and experiences as the ultimate values. We Seventh-day Adventists have been against such ideas; we must continue to be a people of the Word, with the Word as the source and standard of our teachings and the test of experience.

4. Tendencies to theological divergence and dissidence are also apparent among us. Such tendencies are not new, but the large size and complexity of the church today, together with its rapid growth, demand that we be sensitive and alert to these tendencies toward theological polarity and that we know how to meet them.

B. A CALL TO THEOLOGICAL UNITY

We have been impressed that the Lord is calling us to theological integrity through our message as articulated in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs and other commonly-shared biblical understandings. Specifically, the findings of this conference are moving us to work toward shared faith and action in the following areas:

1. To make the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, the basis for our proclamation, life, and witness, so that Seventh-day Adventists may once again be truly the “people of the Book.”

2. To uphold and follow the counsels that the Lord has graciously given us through the writings of Ellen G. White while making sure our church members, especially our youth, treasure this wonderful gift.

3. To make Jesus and His atonement the only source of our salvation and of a life of obedience lived in loving response to His grace.

4. To set forth our identity as the church which bears the characteristics of the remnant humbly, gratefully, and clearly as a people entrusted by God with His message to a dying world.

5. To boldly teach and proclaim that we are in the last days of earth’s history and that Jesus is coming again soon to bring an end to this world’s misery.

6. To worship God as Creator of heaven and earth who brought all things into being by His Word, thereby acknowledging that theistic evolution and progressive creation fall short of appreciating fully both the fact of creation and salvation as found in Christ.

7. To value the church as the bride of Christ, who is honored as we live and work together in love but is dishonored by dissension and division, shunning whatever hinders the unity of the church and promoting whatever fosters it.

C. A CALL TO ALL LEADERS

While the call to theological unity comes to every Seventh-day Adventist, it comes with particular force to leaders of the church, whether ministerial or laity:

1. *Preaching:* We call on all who preach to ensure that the Word of God is the foundation of their preparation and proclamation. Biblical preaching includes expounding on the message entrusted to the church in a meaningful way.

2. *Teaching:* We call on all who teach to be men and women of integrity, who know the Word and live it, and whose instruction is grounded in God’s Word and supports the message as understood by our church.

3. *Writing:* We call on all who write for church publications to leave no doubt that the Word informs, guides, and tests their ideas, and to make a positive contribution affirming that for which the church stands.


4. *Discipling:* Without diminishing our emphasis on evangelism, we call for evangelists and administrators to ensure that candidates for baptism are carefully prepared and understand and accept the baptismal vow, and that proper means are set in place for their spiritual development—at a minimum, spiritual leadership and a place of worship.

5. *Administering the church:* We call on all leaders to be people of the Word, to give priority to the Word of God, and to be intentional in promoting and safeguarding the theological unity of the church. We call on them to make the business of executive committees and boards spiritually focused and mission-driven.

6. *Leading the youth:* We call on all Adventist youth to be true to our heritage and take up the torch, and we call on youth leaders to inspire the youth with a vision of our message and mission.

7. *Administering institutions:* We call on all leaders and workers in all Adventist institutions—schools, publishing houses, health care centers, food-production facilities—to live, work, and instruct so that each institution will have an identity and mission that is clearly Adventist.

We are an extremely diverse and far-flung church, but the Lord has kept us together thus far. Only He can keep us together as we face the days ahead. But we have a part to play: diligent and, above all, in close touch with the Lord day by day. As we earnestly seek His guidance and His power, He will enable us to be faithful to the wonderful heritage of truth entrusted to us.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:3-6). 

This article was first published in BRI Newsletter: *Reflections*, January 2003. It has been lightly edited for *Elder’s Digest*.

5 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE YOUTH IN TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT


1. Encourage youth to develop a personal relationship with Jesus through daily time in the Word, time in prayer, and through active witnessing and evangelism. Show them by your own example what true faith, authentic Christianity, and discipleship look like as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to seek even higher ideals for God's honor and glory. Time is short. Let's put away all spiritual pretense. Young people long to see godly, sincere Christianity being lived out in today's world. They long to know that the God we serve is real, and able to do far abundantly above and beyond all we ask or think.

2. Encourage youth to be creative as they seek to follow Biblical principles in finding ways to be part of Total Member Involvement. In fact, Ellen White writes, "Never, never feel the slightest disturbance because the Lord is raising up youth to lift and carry the heavier burdens and proclaim the message of truth" (*Letter 14, Dec. 11, 1891*). The work before us is large, and it can't be completed by church leadership alone. All must be involved: Leaders, laity, old, and young ... especially our youth! Remember, youth aren't inhibited by the same limitations that we often see as adults. Because of this, they dream big, pray big, and plan big! We need this energy, enthusiasm, and passion of our young people to help in sharing the everlasting gospel as centered in the three angels' messages. Then true revival and reformation will sweep our globe, and Jesus will finally return.

3. While we should mentor our young people, as long as what they are doing is biblical, and is producing good fruit (Matt. 7:17, Is. 8:20, 1 Thess. 5:21, Phil. 4:8), don't try to control them too tightly or hold them back from moving forward with enthusiasm for the sake of the gospel. Give them freedom to work and rally others together for God's glory. Support them and encourage them in their efforts. This is God's work. It's bigger than we are! It's bigger than our church. And if their work is truly of God, He is fully capable of taking care of His work! As we get closer to the end of time, the Spirit will be the one controlling the work. In fact,

God will use simple means that we don't expect to accomplish His great purposes. Ellen White writes: "God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness" (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 300). Therefore, let's not discourage our youth as they are seeking to do great things for God!

4. Look for active ways to encourage youth in their many different endeavors to be involved and lead out. Look for ways to give them greater responsibilities by getting them involved in making decisions, in leading out in evangelism, preaching, and in rallying the support of their fellow youth in sharing the great commission. Encourage them when they form prayer groups, when they lead out in Bible studies, and when they work to see the good news shared far and wide. Again Inspiration tells us, "Make [the youth] feel that they are expected to do something. The Lord chooses them because they are strong" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 279). We far underestimate what truly dedicated godly young people can accomplish for God's glory!

5. Finally, pray with youth and encourage them to pray for one another and for their local churches. Encourage them to pray that those who have left the church can be re-claimed, that unbelievers would find the truth, and that the proclamation of the three angels' messages can go forward with power, opening the way for the outpouring of the latter rain. Let every member, every adult, every young person, be involved. This is what Total Member Involvement is all about! This is what Total Youth Involvement is all about! "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world" (*Education*, p. 271). Let's get ready! Jesus is coming soon! 

Ted N.C. Wilson is the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

SERVING THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

DEACONS AND DEACONESSES SOLVING CONFLICTS AND NURTURING MEMBERS

Some may find it surprising that one of the roles of deacons and deaconesses is to solve conflicts that arise in the church. Gary Straub and James Trader II ask, “Did you notice that the office of deacon arose out of a conflict?”¹ Diana Davis states, “There was trouble in the church. There were rumblings that some of the widows weren’t receiving a fair portion in the daily distribution of food. Conflict.”² Davis indicates that the seven deacons were not called to serve the church as a board of directors or administrators; they were called to solve church problems.³

In her letter to Elder A. T. Jones, Ellen G. White was emphatic about whose role it is to help the women of the church solve their problems. In September 1902, she wrote:

“The sixth chapter of Acts means much to you and to all who preach the word of God. Read this chapter, and take in its meaning. ‘It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables,’ the twelve apostles declared. ‘Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.’ It is time, my dear brother, that you looked at these matters in a right light. You have been called away from the word of God to serve tables. When a woman comes to you with her troubles, tell her plainly to go to her sisters, to tell her troubles to the deaconesses of the church. Tell her that she is out of place in opening her troubles to any man, for men are easily beguiled and tempted. Tell the one who has thrown her case upon you that God has not placed this burden upon any man. You are not wise to take these burdens upon yourself. It is not your appointed work.”⁴

According to the *Apostolic Constitution in Church Discipline, Doctrine, and Worship*, “she [the deaconess] was referred to as the assistant to the deacon, and was to be present at all interviews between women and the priest, bishop, or deacon.”⁵

It is therefore important that pastors and elders recognize their limitations, as did the apostles of the early church, and empower deacons and deaconesses to fulfill this vital role. They need to be trained to provide counseling for “family problems arising from domestic violence, financial crises,

marriage or family relationship problems, parent/child problems, pre-marital counseling, as well as the need for spiritual advice.”⁶ It is also important that deacons and deaconesses recognize their limitations in counseling. They should identify professional counselors in the church and community to whom they can refer cases too difficult for them to handle. They should also consult with their pastor in these matters.

In *The Story of Redemption*, Ellen G. White described the role of the seven deacons and stated, “It is necessary that the same order and system should be maintained in the church now as in the days of the apostles.”⁷ Therefore, the implications for today’s deacons and deaconesses are that they:

1. Relate to the various groups that make up the church membership.
2. Quiet the dissatisfaction and murmuring in the church.
3. Instruct in the truth, have self-control, and deal with members who are difficult.
4. Free the pastor and elders so they can have time to meditate, pray, and study.
5. Only bring issues to the pastor or church board when they cannot be resolved otherwise.
6. Nurture and strengthen the membership so it can grow spiritually and numerically.



¹ Gary Straub and James Trader II, *Your Calling as a Deacon* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 27.

² Diana Davis, *Deacon Wives: Fresh Ideas to Encourage Your Husband and the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 89, 90.

³ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴ Ellen G. White, “Letter to A.T. Jones,” in *Manuscript Releases* 21, MR no. 1520, 97, 98.

⁵ Maurice Riley, *The Deaconess: Walking in the Newness of Life*, 2nd ed. (Newark, NJ: Christian Associates Publications, 1993), 1.

⁶ Thomas R. Burns, *Basic Counseling for Deacons: A Guide for Interviewing* (Rio Rancho, NM: Thomas Burns, 2008), 58.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, 260.

Vincent E. White, Sr., D.Min., is a retired pastor and author of *The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting the Biblical Model*; *The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting the Biblical Model Workbook*; and *Problem Solvers and Soul Winners: A Handbook for Deacons and Deaconesses*. www.avasbookpublishers.com.

GREAT HYMNS OF THE CHURCH >PART 2

SINGING WITH UNDERSTANDING: HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SONG-LEADING IN WORSHIP

Sadly, the responsibility for singing without understanding belongs to those who determine what will be sung, and who, too often, are just not prepared for the ministry of singing.

DANGERS TO AVOID

- One's understanding of a song is often hindered by a "cafeteria" approach to hymn-singing: picking just one or two stanzas each from randomly-selected songs.
- Another strategy is to delete stanzas for no reason other than to "save time," thus removing the pivotal element in the message of a hymn.
- The worst offense is to use hymns primarily for non-religious purposes, such as exiting children or changing seats. We should not wonder that people fail to see the meaning in what we sing.
- Some song-leaders become ringmasters presiding over a worship circus, thus cheapening the gospel. "Sing as if you really mean it" usually means "sing louder," as if there is some correlation between volume and spiritual vitality.

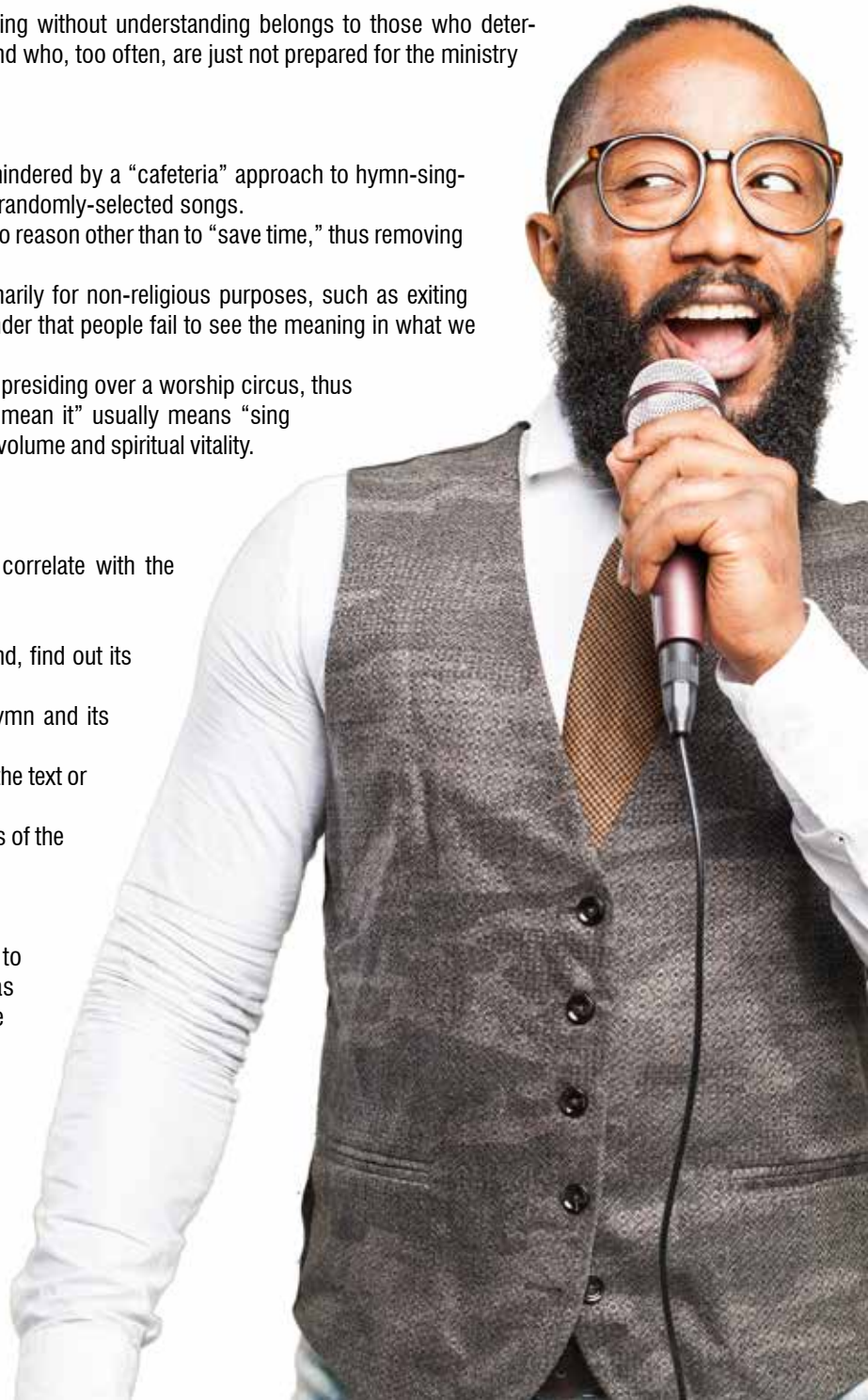
STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE

- Take time for preparation.
- Select hymns in advance so that they correlate with the theme of the sermon.
- Study the hymns and relate them to life.
- If there is something you don't understand, find out its meaning, such as "Ebenezer."
- Know the primary significance of the hymn and its background.
- If a stanza is doctrinally awry, either alter the text or eliminate it. Know your theology.
- Sing all stanzas to preserve the wholeness of the hymn's message.
- Pray for sensitivity and insight.

Christians have a responsibility not only to sing what they believe but to understand it as well. It does matter what we sing. Let us make sounds unto the Lord that are not only joyful but true.

Enjoy the story of the following hymns of praise.

Rex D. Edwards is a former vice president for religious studies at Griggs University.



FOUR HYMNS OF PRAISE

PRAISE TO THE LORD, THE ALMIGHTY by Joachim Neander (1630–1680)

The author of this hymn has been called the greatest of all German-Calvinist Reformed hymn-writers. “Praise to the Lord, The Almighty” is a free paraphrase of Psalm 103:1-6 and was written when Neander was a schoolmaster at Dusseldorf in the German Rhineland. He had a contentious relationship with the minister and elders of the Reformed Church who controlled the school. He was criticized for starting separate prayer meetings and for not coming to the parish Holy Communion; as a result, he was suspended for 14 days, after which he was reinstated.

In these difficult situations, he would walk up the lovely Neanderthal down which flows by the little river Dussel. There he would retreat into a cave and write his poems. He died at the early age of 30 after having written 60 poems, most of which were widely circulated as hymns in German hymnals.

The hymn “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” first appeared in a German hymnbook in 1665. The translator of the text, Catherine Winkworth, helped to make German hymns popular in England and America during the nineteenth century. This hymn is a memorial to the Almighty God who strengthened a man who used praise in the face of adversity.

PRAISE MY SOUL THE KING OF HEAVEN by Henry F. Lyte (1792–1847)

Based on Psalm 103, this stately hymn of praise has probably begun more solemn ceremonies than any hymn in the English language. It was the requested processional for the wedding of Queen Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey on November 20, 1947, exactly 100 years after author Henry Lyte’s death. This hymn first appeared in Lyte’s collection of new paraphrases of the psalms, published in 1833, and captures the measure of the psalm in unforgettable verses. It has time, eternity, God, and man all locked in its embrace, and its last verse has the soaring quality of high religion. In one grand sweep, the writer brings the whole created universe into the act of praise.

The story of Lyte’s hymn-writing began in Cornwall, where he came from Dublin in 1823. For the next 24 years, he served as the curate in Brixham, a Devon fishing port. At the age of 25, he had a deep religious experience after the death of a fellow clergyman. He confessed that the death of his friend, “who died happy in the thought that there was One who would atone for his delinquencies,” led him to drastically change his Bible study habits and preaching style. In this village, most of his 81 hymns, including “Abide With Me,” were written. While pastoring the rough men whose fishing grounds were the stormy waters of the Atlantic, he also supervised a Sunday School of 70 teachers with nearly 800 children. Under all the stress, his health failed, and he died of tuberculosis at the age of 54.

O WORSHIP THE LORD

by John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811–1875)

“O Worship the Lord” was written by John Monsell in the summer of 1861 in commemoration of the visit of the wise men to the baby Jesus. In the hymn, the gifts of the wise men—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—are shown to have their counterparts in the Christian’s offering of the “gold of obedience,” “incense of lowliness,” and “burden of carefulness.” That last phrase is also expressed as sorrows and represented by the bitter myrrh. Such gifts will be accepted as precious as the gifts of the Magi in our worship of the Lord.


Monsell was born in Londonderry, Ireland; educated at Trinity College in Dublin; and served as a minister in several Irish parishes before going to Surrey in England and becoming a rector at St. Nicholas, Guilford, in 1870. Five years later, he died when he fell from a roof during the reconstruction of his church.

He wrote more than 300 hymns, which were published in 11 volumes of his poetry. His hymns revived congregational singing, which, he urged, should be sung with joy and fervor. He said: “We are too distant and reserved in our praises; we sing, not as we should sing to Him who is Chief among ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely.” “On Our Way Rejoicing” is another example of the joyful spirit which characterized his hymns.

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE by Henry van Dyke (1852–1933)

While gazing at the magnificent Berkshire mountains of Massachusetts, Henry van Dyke described in “Joyful, Joyful” the many aspects of life that should bring joy to the Christian. He insisted that his text, written in 1911, be sung to the music of “Hymn to Joy” from Beethoven’s “Ninth Symphony.” This combination of words and great music makes “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” one of the most joyous expressions of any hymn in the English language.

One of the forceful ideas expressed by van Dyke is that God’s gracious love for us should create a greater “brotherly love” for our fellowman. With God’s help, we can become victorious over strife and be “lifted to the joy divine” as we daily show more love to others.

Henry van Dyke was a distinguished Presbyterian minister who served as a moderator of his denomination for a time and as a Navy chaplain in World War I. Later, he was the ambassador to Holland and Luxembourg under President Woodrow Wilson. He also served as a professor of literature at Princeton University. High honors came to him for his many devotional writings, the most famous of which was *The Other Wise Man*. 

STARTING SMALL

More than 130 years ago, something happened that changed mission for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At this time, the Church was recognizing its wider calling to carry the Adventist message to the world. In 1885, a group of Adventists, led by S. N. Haskell sailed from San Francisco to establish Adventist work in Australia. That same year, the Sabbath school in Oakland, California, changed the landscape of mission when they decided to give their Sabbath school offerings to help start the Australian Mission.

Since then, it seems mission and Sabbath schools have been inextricably linked. In 1920, Sabbath schools in North America had a goal of 25 cents a week per church member. The goal was raised in 1923 to 30 cents, then to 40 cents (1951), and 50 cents (1953)¹. Although that may not seem like much, the regular commitment would make a tremendous difference in taking our message to the world.

In 2012, a small Adventist church in Arkansas started focusing on mission. According to Jim Morris, head elder and former treasurer of the Mountain Home Seventh-day Adventist Church, church leaders made an effort to promote mission and the Thirteenth Sabbath offerings with regular, almost weekly, mission reports and appeals.

Myrta Beem, one of the Sabbath school superintendents at the time, says, “I remember starting out once a month promoting mission. I used the Mission Spotlight videos—they are excellent. They are so well done and help you to visualize what is going on around the world and the needs in the different areas.” But it wasn’t long before Myrta saw another opportunity to share what was happening in mission.

“Later, I started promoting mission between Sabbath school and second service. I ended up doing it almost every Sabbath. I enjoyed doing it at that time because I had a larger audience—much larger than when we started Sabbath school. I promoted anything that dealt with mission: Thirteenth Sabbath, ADRA, *It Is Written with the Eyes for India* program, \$10 Church, AWR...”

She also used information from the *Mission* quarterly to make a PowerPoint slideshow, and handed out bags or boxes so members could collect their offerings throughout the quarter and bring them in on Thirteenth Sabbath.

“Many times I used the children to collect the bags/boxes. The adults love to see the children involved,” says Myrta. By the next quarter, mission giving increased seven times what it had been. Over the next several years, mission giving increased dramatically, ranging from four to ten times higher.

Although Myrta and her husband have moved to another state, they still actively support various mission projects and



programs. This year the couple plans to go on a Maranatha trip despite being older.

As for the Mountain Home church? “We are still promoting missions at least three times per month,” says Morris, “using either the Mission Spotlight videos or Mission stories and some Sabbaths, both!”

The Atholton Seventh-day Adventist Church in Columbia, Maryland, is another church where focusing on mission dramatically changed mission offering giving. When she began as Sabbath school Superintendent, Linda Elliott began showing Mission Spotlight videos once a quarter, put a Thirteenth Sabbath offering insert in the bulletin, and created a PowerPoint presentation. She encouraged Sabbath school classes to adopt a group project either in the local community or overseas. She featured student missionaries from Atholton, shared where they were serving and what they were doing, and asked them for a project Sabbath school classes could support.

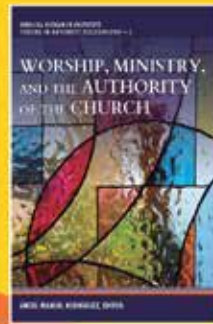
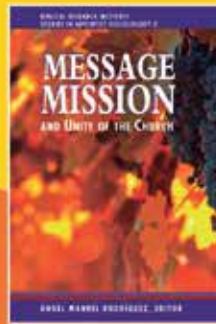
Again, the focus on mission was dramatic. Within six months, mission offerings had doubled and Thirteenth Sabbath offerings increased 60 percent, and this was in addition to the special projects.

“I have never had the desire to ‘go’ be a missionary,” Linda says. “But ever since I was in Kindergarten Sabbath school and sang the song ‘Five little missionaries standing in a row...’ I wondered why someone who stayed home and promoted and supported missions was not considered a missionary. I guess that is why I had missions as one of my main Sabbath school goals for seven years.”

“Why did mission matter to me? Because of the Great Commission,” says Myrta. “I couldn’t go to Africa, India, China to spread the gospel, but my offerings could help someone fulfill this. I have talked to the Lord and said, ‘Lord, when we are on the New Earth, I want You to introduce me to those who got to know You and accepted You as Lord and Savior because of the little bit I was able to give.’ I know He will do it. That will be a fun experience. I can’t wait for His Coming!”

¹ *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Rick Kajiura is the communication director for Adventist Mission at the General Conference.



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A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

God has woven music into the very fabric of His creation. When He made all things “the morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The book of Revelation portrays heaven as a place of ceaseless praise, with songs of adoration to God and the Lamb resounding from all (Rev. 4:9-11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 12:10-12; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-8).

Because God made humans in His image, we share a love and appreciation for music with all His created beings. In fact, music can touch and move us with a power that goes beyond words or most other types of communication.¹ At its purest and best, music lifts our beings into the very presence of God where angels and unfallen beings worship Him in song.

“MUSIC, WHEN NOT ABUSED, IS A GREAT BLESSING; BUT WHEN IT IS PUT TO A WRONG USE, IT IS A TERRIBLE CURSE”

But sin has cast blight over the Creation. The divine image has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; in all aspects this world and God’s gifts come to us with a mingling of good and evil. Music is not morally and spiritually neutral. Some may move us to the most exalted human experience, some may be used by the prince of evil to debase and degrade us, to stir up lust, passion, despair, anger, and hatred.

The Lord’s messenger, Ellen G. White, continually counsels us to raise our sights in music. She tells us, “Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when it is put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse.”² “Rightly employed, . . . [music] is a precious gift of God, designed to uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the souls.”³

Of the power of song, she writes: “It is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard-pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God’s,—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song,—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! . . . As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. . . . As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.”⁴

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe and preach that Jesus is coming again soon. In our worldwide proclamation of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 we call all peoples to accept the everlasting gospel, to worship God the Creator, and to prepare to meet our soon-returning Lord. We challenge all to choose the good and not the bad, to "say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13).

We believe that the gospel impacts all areas of life. We therefore hold that, given the vast potential of music for good or ill, we cannot be indifferent to it. While realizing that tastes in music vary greatly from individual to individual, we believe that the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G White suggest principles that can inform our choices.

In this document the phrase "sacred music"—sometimes referred to as religious music—designates music that focuses on God and on biblical and Christian themes. In most cases, it is music composed and intended for worship service, evangelistic meetings, or private devotion and may be both vocal and instrumental music. However, not all sacred/religious music may be acceptable for an Adventist. Sacred music should not evoke secular associations or invite conformity to worldly behavioral patterns of thinking or acting.

"Secular music" is music composed for settings other than the worship service or private devotion. It speaks to the common issues of life and basic human emotions. It comes out of our very being, expressing the human spirit's reaction to life, love, and the world in which the Lord has placed us. It can be morally uplifting or degrading. Although it does not directly praise and adore God, nevertheless it could have a legitimate place in the life of the Christian. In its selection the principles discussed in this document should be followed.

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE CHRISTIAN

The music that Christians enjoy should be regulated by the following principles:

1. All music the Christian listens to, performs or composes, whether sacred or secular, will glorify God: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). This is the over-riding biblical principle. Anything that cannot meet this high standard will weaken our experience with the Lord.

2. All music the Christian listens to, performs or composes, whether sacred or secular, should be the noblest and the best: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is right, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). As followers of Jesus Christ who hope and expect to join the heavenly choirs, we view life on this earth as a preparation for, and foretaste of, the life to come.

On these two foundations—glorifying God in all things and choosing the noblest and the best—depend the other

principles listed below for the selection of music by Christians.

3. It is characterized by quality, balance, appropriateness, and authenticity. Music fosters our spiritual, psychological, and social sensitivity, and our intellectual growth.

4. It appeals to both the intellect and the emotions and impacts the body in a positive way. It is wholistic.

5. Music reveals creativity in that it draws from quality melodies. If harmonized,⁵ it uses harmonies in an interesting and artistic way, and employs rhythm that complements them.

6. Vocal music employs lyrics that positively stimulate intellectual abilities as well as our emotions and our will power. Good lyrics are creative, rich in content, and of good composition. They focus on the positive and reflect moral values; they educate and uplift; and they correspond with sound biblical theology.

7. Musical and lyrical elements should work together harmoniously to influence thinking and behavior in harmony with biblical values.

8. It maintains a judicious balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements.

9. We should recognize and acknowledge the contribution of different cultures in worshiping God. Musical forms and instruments vary greatly in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, and music drawn from one culture may sound strange to someone from a different culture.

Seventh-day Adventist music-making means to choose the best and above all to draw close to our Creator and Lord and glorify Him. Let us rise to the challenge of a viable alternative musical vision and, as part of our wholistic and prophetic message, make a unique Adventist musical contribution as a witness to the world regarding a people awaiting Christ's soon coming.



¹ "It [music] is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth" (*Education*, p. 168).

² *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 497. She also states that in the future, "just before the close of probation," "there will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never reveals itself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise. This is an invention of Satan to cover up his ingenious methods for making of none effect the pure, sincere, elevating, ennobling, sanctifying truth for this time" (II SM 36).

³ *Education*, p. 167.

⁴ *Education*, p. 168.

⁵ We acknowledge that in some cultures harmonies are not as important as in other cultures.

These guidelines were voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Annual Council on October 13, 2004.

NO HARSH WORDS NOR DEBATING SPIRIT

>PART 3

NO SIGN OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Speak no word, do no deed, that will confirm any in unbelief. If anyone shall seek to draw the workers into debate or controversy on political or other questions, take no heed to either persuasion or challenge. Carry forward the work of God firmly and strongly, but in the meekness of Christ and as quietly as possible. Let no human boasting be heard. Let no sign of self-sufficiency be made. Let it be seen that God has called us to handle sacred trusts; preach the Word, be diligent, earnest, and fervent.

DEBATING MINISTERS NOT GOOD SHEPHERDS

Some ministers who have been long in the work of preaching present truth have made great failures in their labors. They have educated themselves as combatants. They have studied out argumentative subjects for the object of discussion, and these subjects which they have prepared they love to use. The truth of God is plain, clear, and conclusive. It is harmonious and, in contrast with error, shines with clearness and beauty. Its consistency commends it to the judgment of every heart that is not filled with prejudice. Our preachers present the arguments upon the truth, which have been made ready for them, and, if there are no hindrances, the truth bears away the victory. But I was shown that in many cases the poor instrument takes the credit of the victory gained, and the people, who are more earthly than spiritual, praise and honor the instrument, while the truth of God is not exalted by the victory it gained.

Those who love to engage in discussion generally lose their spirituality. They do not trust in God as they should. They have the theory of the truth prepared to whip an opponent. The feelings of their own unsanctified hearts have prepared many sharp, close things to use as a snap to their whip to irritate and provoke their opponent. The Spirit of Christ has no part in this. While furnished with conclusive arguments, the debater soon thinks that he is strong enough to triumph over his opponent, and God is left out of the matter. Some of our ministers have made discussion their principal business. When in the midst of the excitement raised by discussion, they seem nerved up, and feel strong and talk strong; and in the excitement many things pass with the

people as all right, which in themselves are decidedly wrong and a shame to him who was guilty of uttering words so unbecoming a Christian minister.

These things have a bad influence on ministers who are handling sacred, elevated truths, truths which are to prove as a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death, to those who hear them. Generally, the influence of discussions upon our ministers is to make them self-sufficient and exalted in their own estimation. This is not all. Those who love to debate are unfitted for being pastors to the flock. They have trained their minds to meet opponents and to say sarcastic things, and they cannot come down to meet hearts that are sorrowing and need to be comforted.

They have also dwelt so much upon the argumentative that they have neglected the practical subjects that the flock of God need. They have but little knowledge of the sermons of Christ, which enter into the everyday life of the Christian, and they have but little disposition to study them. They have risen above the simplicity of the work. When they were little in their own eyes, God helped them; angels of God ministered unto them and made their labors highly successful in convincing men and women of the truth. But in the training of their minds for discussion they frequently become coarse and rough. They lose the interest and tender sympathy which should ever attend the efforts of a shepherd of Christ.

Debating ministers are generally disqualified to help the flock where they most need help. Having neglected practical religion in their own hearts and lives, they cannot teach it to the flock. Unless there is an excitement, they do not know how to labor; they seem shorn of their strength. If they try to speak, they do not seem to know how to present a subject that is proper for the occasion. When they should present a subject which will feed the flock of God, and which will reach and melt hearts, they go back to some of the old stereotyped matter and go through the arranged arguments, which are dry and uninteresting. Thus, instead of light and life, they bring darkness to the flock and also to their own souls.



This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 243-245 by Ellen G. White.

WHAT IS OF MOST VALUE

Matthew 21:28-32

A. Someone once asked me, “What is of most value to our spiritual life: the doctrinal aspects or its practice?”

B. For many people, religion is simply a creed of faith or a list of liturgical rituals without a corresponding practice to accompany it.

C. One of Christ’s methods to teach religion was through parables (Ps. 78:2; Matt. 13:34, 35).

I. A MEANINGFUL PARABLE

A. The parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32). Ellen G. White wrote: “This parable was spoken at Christ’s last visit to Jerusalem. . . . In this parable the father represents God; the vineyard, the church. By the two sons are represented two classes of people.”¹

B. During this visit, He made an appeal for the Jewish nation to repent (read Matt. 23:37-39).

C. In the parable, Christ did not mention the reasons why the first son did not fulfill his promise or why the second son changed his mind; however, in the story, He introduced an element that makes all the difference: repentance.

1. The word “repentance” is related to the Hebrew term *Naham*. It indicates disposition or change of heart, mind, purpose, and/or personal conduct. Sometimes it refers to God (see Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14), but it also has human connotations.

2. The New Testament uses the Greek term *Metanoeo*, which, in turn, indicates a change of mind and purpose as a result of deep reflection.²

D. In this parable, the first son, who promised with much enthusiasm to work in his father’s vineyard as soon as he was ordered to do so but ultimately never did, is equivalent to those who profess to be religious but whose own justice prevents them from responding well to any call to repentance. The second son, who refused to go but then changed his mind and went, corresponds to the publicans and sinners who, although initially were far from being fair, repented as a result of John the Baptist’s preaching.³

1. John the Baptist began his ministry by emphasizing the need for repentance (see Matt. 3:2).

2. Ellen G. White asserts: “John was to go forth as Jehovah’s messenger, to bring to men the light of God. He must give a new direction to their thoughts. . . . John proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, and called the people to repentance. As a symbol of cleansing from sin, he baptized them in the waters of the Jordan.”⁴

E. Through this parable, reported in Matthew 21:28-32, Christ sought to rescue and value the practical aspect of religion.

II. THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION

A. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel said: “We will do everything the Lord has said” (Ex. 19:8).

B. History shows the opposite. The religion of Israel became extremely ritualistic without a practical imprint (see Is. 1:10-15; 58:2-5; Matt. 23).

C. As a church, we are inserted into a society that needs to see the gospel in practice (see Matt. 25:31-40; James 1:26, 27).

1. Ellen G. White affirms: “Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”⁵

2. We disappoint others when we don’t practice what we believe. A young couple got married and went out on their honeymoon. They were driving on a dark road at night when the car swerved off the road and crashed in a ditch. The groom awoke from the accident to find his beloved bride bleeding and unconscious. In desperation, he gathered her into his arms and began looking around frantically for help. Suddenly, the young man looked up and saw a light shining from the porch of a house on the hill. Knowing that his bride wouldn’t live long in her condition, he carried her there. As he came close to the house, he got very excited because there was a sign hanging on the porch that said, “John Smith, M.D.” The young groom began knocking excitedly. An elderly gentleman came to the door, looked out into the darkness, and asked, “May I help you?” The groom answered: “Sir, my

bride has been hurt in an accident and is dying! Please save her!” But the old man drew back and said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t help you. I stopped practicing medicine 20 years ago.” Stunned, the desperate groom looked at the old man and said, “Sir, your sign says you’re a doctor. Either help my bride right now or take down that sign!”⁶

D. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are called by God to live our faith in a practical way. This is what God expects from His church; otherwise, it’s better for the church to take down the sign.

CONCLUSION

A. “Words are of no value unless they are accompanied with appropriate deeds. This is the lesson taught in the parable of the two sons.”⁷

B. Doing God’s will is what counts in the Christian life (read Ps. 40:8; 1 John 2:17). “It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.”⁸

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 273, 275, 276.

² See *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, 45, 415.

³ See R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 161, 162.

⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 100, 104.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁶ Extracted from *God’s Glorious Church*, by Tony Evans.

⁷ White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 272.

⁸ _____, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51.

Nerivan Silva is an editor at the Brazil Publishing House headquartered in Tatui, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Sermon Notes:

RADICAL CHANGE

A. Humanity needs a radical spiritual transformation. God proposes to accomplish this transformation by giving each of us a new heart and a new spirit. He will do this for anyone who submits to His will.

B. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God makes this promise to the people.

I. THE PROMISE OF A NEW HEART

A. Read Ezekiel 11:19. God promised the people that they would live a transformative experience through the actions of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Ellen G. White wrote: “The dark years of destruction and death marking the end of the kingdom of Judah would have brought despair to the stoutest heart had it not been for the encouragements in the prophetic utterances of God’s messengers. Through Jeremiah in Jerusalem, through Daniel in the court of Babylon, through Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar, the Lord in mercy made clear His eternal purpose and gave assurance of His willingness to fulfill to His chosen people the promises recorded in the writings of Moses. That which He had said He would do for those who should prove true to Him, He would surely bring to pass.”¹

B. Israel’s tragic Babylonian exile was a consequence of having broken the covenant with God (see Jer. 21:10; 22:7-9).

1. Samuel Schultz wrote: “Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. The temple was reduced to ashes, and the Jews were taken into captivity. The territory known as the kingdom of Judah was invaded by the Edomites, on the south, and by the Babylonian province of Samaria, on the north. Demolished and desolate, Jerusalem became a proverb among the nations.”²

2. In the midst of Israel’s suffering in exile, God promised that, through His grace and power, He would act in changing the hearts of the people. “The heart, in its moral significance in the Old Testament, includes the emotions, the reason, and the will.”³

II. THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

A. The suffering of the people during captivity aroused the need for repentance in sincere hearts. John B. Taylor said: “The preparation for God’s work in man was to be man’s willingness to repent and to take practical steps to demonstrate his repentance. This does not mean that human beings have to clean up their lives in readiness for God to enter them, but it

does mean that God can do nothing for the man who will not recognize his sins and turn from them.”⁴

B. In 600 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah foresaw the Babylonian invasion in Jerusalem and urged Israel to repent and reform (see Jer. 3:14, 15).

C. The most important feature of this national restoration was spiritual revival (see Ezek. 36:26, 27).

D. The process of restoring the nation of Israel to its former condition involved the restoration of its land (see Ezek. 11:17).

III. THE CHANGE IN OUR LIVES

A. Human nature is sinful and powerless to seek a changed life on its own (see Ps. 51:5).

Ellen G. White declares: “It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. ‘Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.’ ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness.”⁵

B. God’s promise to Israel and to us is that every repentant sinner has the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts to enable him or her to walk within the Lord’s teachings (see Ezek. 36:27).

Ellen G. White made the following comment: “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing.”⁶

CONCLUSION

A. God’s promise of a new heart for Israel—and also for us—is the dawn of a new period in our lives.

B. May this be our prayer: “Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unChristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.”⁷



¹ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 464.

² Samuel Schultz, *The History of Israel*, 219.

³ *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, 509.

⁴ John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 113.

⁵ White, *Steps to Christ*, 18.

⁶ ———, *True Revival*, 9.

⁷ ———, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 159.

Nerivan Silva is an editor at the Brazil Publishing House headquartered in Tatui, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

ADDITIONAL QUOTE FROM ELLEN G. WHITE

“Man, who has defaced the image of God in his soul by a corrupt life, cannot, by mere human effort, effect a radical change in himself. He must accept the provisions of the gospel; he must be reconciled to God through obedience to His law and faith in Jesus Christ. His life from thenceforth must be governed by a new principle.... He must face the mirror, God’s law, discern the defects in his moral character, and put away his sins, washing his robe of character in the blood of the Lamb....The influence of a gospel hope will not lead the sinner to look upon the salvation of Christ as a matter of free grace, while he continues to live in transgression of the law of God. When the light of truth dawns upon his mind and he fully understands the requirements of God and realizes the extent of his transgressions, he will reform his ways, become loyal to God through the strength obtained from His Saviour, and lead a new and purer life” (*God’s Amazing Grace*, page 144).

Sermon Notes:

I AM WITH YOU

Isaiah 41:8-10

A. The context of the message is the restoration of Israel. God pities His people and makes promises to them.

B. God communicates with the people of Israel through words of encouragement and promises of salvation.

C. His words are characterized by the tenderness and affection of the mercy and love that are inherent in Him.

I. INTERPRETING THE MESSAGE

A. God calls and chooses His people (read Is. 41:8, 9).

1. When God called Abraham, He made a promise to him that extended down to his descendants (see Gen. 12:1, 7; 2 Chr. 20:7).

2. The covenant God made with Israel involved people being obedient to divine requirements (Ex. 19:5).

3. In the call that God makes to His people, the renewal of the covenant that had been broken is implicit (see Jer. 22:8, 9).

4. God also extends the divine call to us (see 1 Pet. 2:9; Acts 2:39).

B. God is with His people (see Is. 41:10).

1. God manifested His presence among His people through the ritual of the sanctuary (see Ex. 25:8).

2. When He came to the world, Christ became the visible presence of God among humanity (see Is. 40:5; Job 2:11; 1:14).

3. The concept of Immanuel, "God with us," is present in God's relationship with people (Matt. 1:23).

4. God's presence in our day-to-day lives is real (see Ex. 13:21, 22; Ps. 91:15; Matt. 28:20).

C. This is summarized by the expression "I am your God" (Is. 41:10).

1. Through His presence, God renews the covenant with His people (see Lev. 26:11, 12; Jer. 31:33; 30:22).

2. At this point, God establishes His relationship with Israel.

3. This relationship is maintained in different ways:

- a. Father-son relationship (see Is. 63:16; Hos. 1:10).
- b. Husband-wife relationship (see Jer. 3:14).
- c. Shepherd-sheep relationship (see Ps. 100:3).

II. TRIPLE PROMISE

A. "I will strengthen you" (Is. 41:10).

1. God encourages us along the way (see Is. 40:29).

a. In this world, God's people have faced many challenges.

b. Different situations have been presented before the church, especially during history's final days.

c. When King Asa was going through a difficult time, God sent an encouraging message to him (see 2 Chron. 15:7, 8).

2. God also encourages us by pointing us toward the glorious end. "One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in the 'region and shadow of death' [Matt. 4:16], a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life' [John 11:25], to 'bring home again His banished' [2 Sam. 14:13]."¹

3. Let's believe in His promise. In a small town in the Netherlands, a group of students decided to participate in a race that was organized by the school where they studied. The winner was a student no one expected to win, an "inexpressive" teenager who was in the mix of the group. When asked to what he attributed his victory, he replied: "My father told me the challenges would be enormous but that I had the ability to overcome them. I believed him and tried to run with his words in my mind."

4. Throughout our journey in this world, God, as our Father, sends us messages of faith, motivation, and hope (see Job 16:33; Rom. 8:31, 32).

B. "I will . . . help you" (Is. 41:10).

1. God helps us carry our burdens (see Matt. 11:28-30).

2. Modern life has brought many heavy burdens to God's children.

- a. Unemployment, economic crisis, unbalanced government systems, and other factors have caused difficulty in the lives of many of God's children.
- b. In many countries, political systems have hindered the practice of religious freedom.
- c. Family and ideological conflicts have led to great persecution against individuals and communities.

3. God fulfills the promises made to His people (see Josh. 21:43-45). "Let us hope in God, trust in Him, and rest in His promises, whether we feel happy or not. A good feeling is not proof that we are children of God, nor are feelings of restlessness, trouble, and perplexity evidence that we are not. Let us look to the Scriptures and intelligently seek God in His Word. Let us fulfill the requirements and believe that He will accept us as His children. Let us not be nonbelievers, but believers."²

C. "I will uphold you" (Is. 41:10).

1. God always sustains us and cares for us (see Ps. 63:8; 119:116).

2. One direct evidence of God's care for His children is Israel's experience in the desert. Psalm 78 describes how God led and sustained His people during difficult moments.

3. God also sustains us through this desert that is our world. "Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet."³

CONCLUSION

A. The message of faith and hope that Isaiah sent to the Jewish people in 800 B.C. also applies to us.

B. Throughout our worldly journey, God takes us by the hand and strengthens us, helps us, and sustains us.



¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 299.

² ———, *Letter 52*, 1888.

³ ———, *The Ministry of Healing*, 481.

Nerivan Silva is an editor at the Brazil Publishing House headquartered in Tatui, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Sermon Notes:

RESOURCES

WHERE CAN I FIND THE ADDRESSES OF IMPORTANT WEBSITES AND APPS WITH THE SDA CHURCH INITIATIVES OR PROGRAMS?

There are a number of helpful sites and apps, depending on what your needs are.

Adventist.org is the flagship website of the church, and has a wealth of information ranging from our fundamental beliefs to various statements on social issues, a list of special days, church history, and news. You can also download the **Adventist News Network app** to stay in touch with Adventist news from around the world.

RevivalAndReformation.org is one of the premier initiatives of the church. On this website, you may sign up for the official Bible reading plan of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This year, you may also receive a daily reading from the book *Conflict and Courage* by Ellen White. You can also read inspirational stories of answered prayer and personal transformation, and find a number of helpful resources to support your spiritual vitality and that of your family, your church, and your community.

TenDaysofPrayer.org is another important initiative that seeks to engage churches in a powerful corporate prayer experience. While the dates for the program are always in January, the materials are accessible throughout the year, so you can implement the program during a timeframe that works for your church. Don't minimize this program for its power in educating a church in the spiritual discipline of corporate prayer.

The Ministerial Association has a number of helpful sites and apps which include **MinistryMagazine.org**, **EldersDigest.org**, and Shepherdess's Journal for Ministry Spouses, which is hosted at **MinisterialAssociation.org/Spouses**. On these sites, you can find every issue of these journals that has ever been published! These are excellent resources for developing sermons, sharpening your skills, and helping you

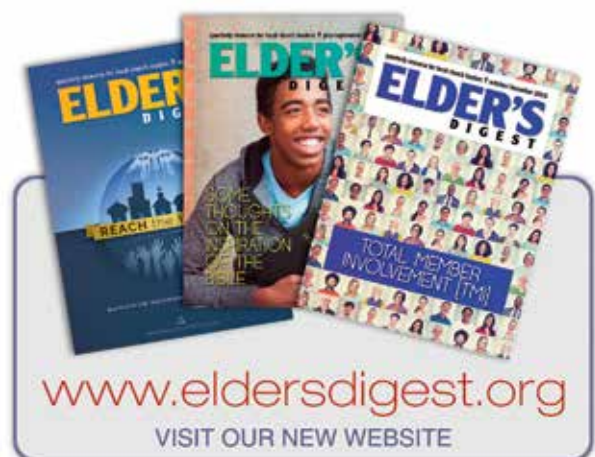
grow in your ministry. *Ministry Magazine* and *Elder's Digest* also provide apps for you to easily access back issues from your mobile device. **MinistryinMotion.tv** also provides information and inspiration through interviews with ministry professionals from around the world. The show is produced for The Hope Channel, but access is available on-demand through the website and YouTube.

AdventistArchives.org contains a tremendous number of different resources if you are interested in historical research and church history. The church also makes available a large number of past issues of various papers, magazines, and journals which are all searchable. You can also find data on specific studies that the church has conducted of various trends and membership issues and attitudes.

EllenWhite.org is an official website of the Ellen G White Estate, which has been entrusted to manage the writings of Mrs. White. Here you can search an online database of her writings for free, and gain clarity on the statements of her critics and how to respond to them. You can also get information on programs with databases of material written by Ellen White that you can install on Mac or Windows, or on your iOS or Android handset. Ellen White apps in a wide variety of languages can be found through the app store on your smartphone. EO

General Conference Ministerial Association

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.



GLOBAL HEALTH ISSUES: CHILD ABUSE

One of the greatest concerns and priorities in the world today continues to be the health and wellbeing of children. Children are vulnerable beings often dependent on parents or caretakers to ensure their safety and health. Yet, those that are in charge to protect children often become the perpetrators of acts that impact a child's health and wellbeing into adulthood.

According to INSPIRE, a global report by the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 billion children around the world suffer from inflicted violence.¹ Most violence against children involves at least one of the following six main types of traumatic events that can occur in childhood (defined as 0-18 years of age): 1) child maltreatment (e.g. general term that includes physical, emotional, or sexual abuse); 2) bullying (e.g. online or in person); 3) youth violence (e.g. using weapons or guns); 4) intimate partner violence (e.g. forced child marriage, or dating violence); 5) emotional violence (e.g. denigration, ridicule, threats, intimidation, discrimination, rejection); 6) sexual violence (non-consensual sexual contact, sexual harassment, sexual trafficking of someone who cannot consent, online exploitation). When targeted to either boys or girls, any of these six types of abuse is also considered gender-based violence.

Such violence against children is prevalent in all countries of the world. It happens regardless of social status, race, ethnicity, gender or religious affiliation. Sadly, in some cases faith communities can have higher rates of child abuse than in the general population, including in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

In one study, researchers examined rates of child abuse among 10,283 Seventh-day Adventist adults in North America ages 39-103.² Among these, 67% reported experiencing one or more of 5 types of child abuse before age 18—physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child neglect, and/or witnessed parental abuse.

Surprisingly, this child abuse rate was higher than in the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study of the general population in North America (52%). Not only that. For each type of abuse, the rates were also higher among Adventists compared to the ACE study (38 versus 10.8 % for physical abuse, 38 versus 11.1 % for emotional abuse, 23 versus 22 % for sexual abuse, 28 versus 12.5 % for witnessed parental abuse).


Although we cannot generalize this finding to all Adventists around the world, it is very likely that these results hold true elsewhere. Why is this important?



First, research suggests that child abuse is associated with worse chronic mental and physical health for survivors, such as depression, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity—to name a few. In fact, among participants of the Adventist Health Study-2, those who were exposed to child abuse had worse mental and physical health despite healthy lifestyle choices of participants like exercise and fresh fruit intake. The scars carried by survivors are often unseen, however the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health impact is significant and long lasting. Furthermore, the third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations focuses on reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by 2030. In order to meet that goal raising awareness and reducing child abuse is critical.

But perhaps even more pressing, this is important because we have a biblical moral imperative. The Bible says “Children are a heritage of the Lord,” precious, valuable, and in need of nurture and protection (Ps. 127:3-5). Leaders and members must recognize warning signs, respond, and refer people for help to facilitate healing.

As an elder you have an important role to play in helping your church become involved. You may choose one of the upcoming global health calendar days (April 7 is World Health Day, June 4 is International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression, and the fourth Sabbath in August is Enditnow Sabbath) to include sermons, messages, and outreach efforts that address this issue. This is a sacred trust.

We have the responsibility to help create a safer environment for children at home, in our schools and churches, but also to promote emotional and spiritual healing for survivors. In the end we will hear Jesus' words, “whatever you did for one of the least of these... you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). 

¹ World Health Organization (2016). http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/



² Reinert, K. et al (September, 2016) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4969318/>

Katia Reinert is associate director of the Health Ministries Department for the General Conference.

WELL-BEING AND VALUE OF CHILDREN

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the right of every child to a happy and stable home environment, and the freedom and support to grow up to be the person God intended. In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the fundamental importance of children by voting the “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” In harmony with many of these lofty principles, and considering the value Jesus placed on children when He said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt 19:14, NIV), we seek to aid children who suffer from the following destructive influences:

Poverty—Poverty impacts children’s development, robbing them of necessary food, clothing, and shelter, and adversely affecting their health and education.

Illiteracy—Illiteracy makes it difficult for the parents to earn wages or care for their family or for the child to reach his or her potential.

Poor health care—Millions of children have no access to health care because they lack the proper insurance coverage or they live where medical care is unavailable.

Exploitation and vulnerability—Children are corrupted and exploited when they are used for cheap labor, sweat shops, armed conflict, and the perverted sexual pleasure of

adult predators, and are exposed to sexually explicit materials in the mass media and on the Internet.

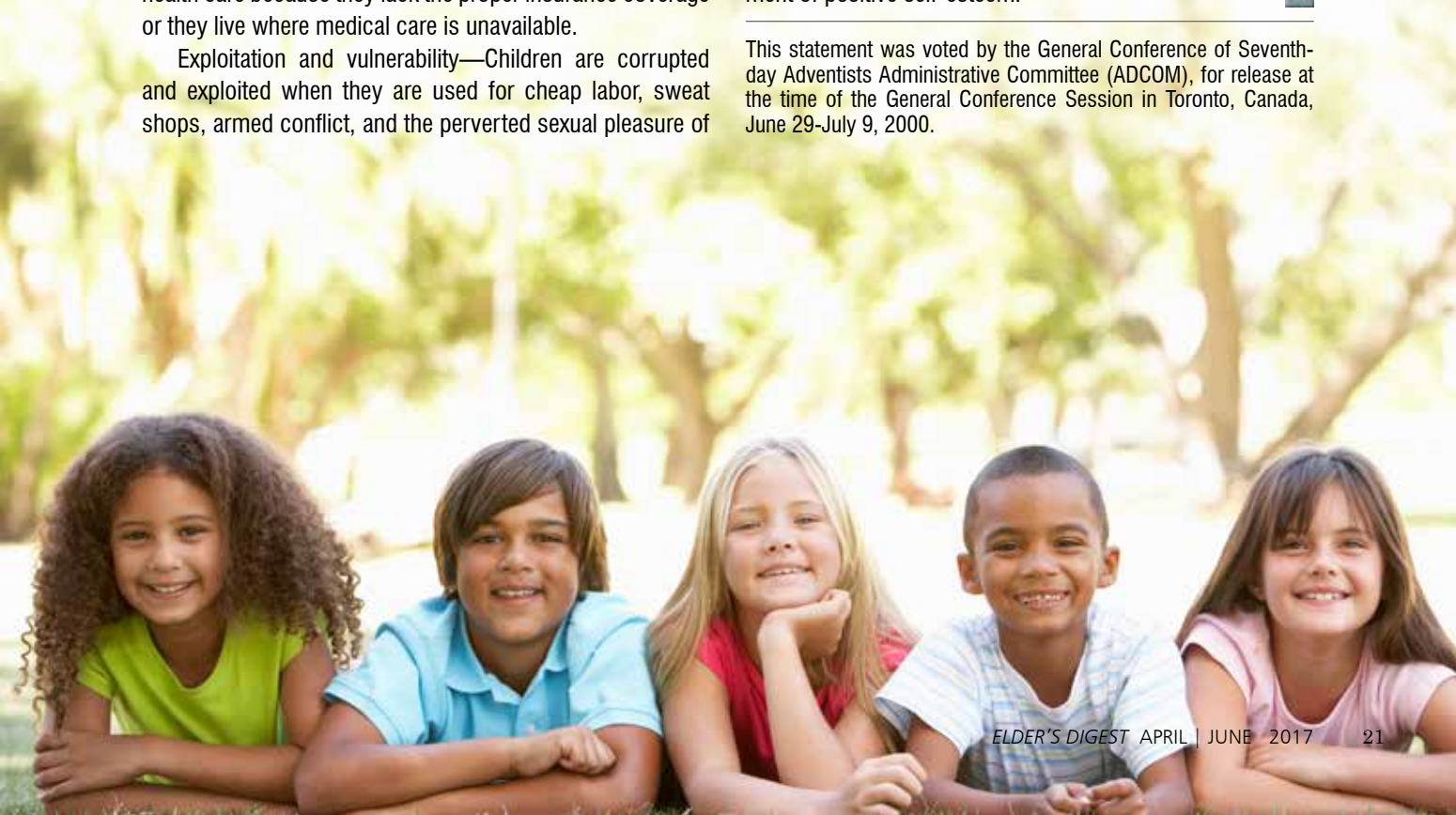
Violence—Every year many children die violent deaths. The vast majority of individuals who suffer in armed conflicts are women and children. Children bear deep physical and psychological scars, even after the fighting stops.

In response to the above issues and needs, Seventh-day Adventists stand for the following rights of children:

1. The right to a loving and stable home where there is safety and freedom from abuse.
2. The right to adequate food, clothing, and shelter.
3. The right to proper health/medical care.
4. The right to an education that prepares children for a positive role in society by developing their personal potential and giving them earning capacity.
5. The right to a religious and moral education in the home and church.
6. The right to freedom from discrimination and exploitation.
7. The right to personhood, respect, and the development of positive self-esteem.

ED

This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.



STOPPING A WATERY GRAVE-BAPTISMAL TANK SAFETY

Do you remember the day you were baptized? On my baptism day, I was nervous as I climbed into the baptismal tank. The cold water enveloped me, as I searched the audience to spot my family. The baptism service can be a very meaningful moment on one's Christian journey. It certainly was for me.

In addition to being memorable and meaningful, the baptismal service carries some inherent risks. Here is how to remove some of the hazards surrounding the use of the baptistry.

BAPTISMAL TANK DANGERS

1. **Slips and Falls** – Wet surfaces are slippery surfaces. Water splashed around can make getting into and out of your baptismal tank hazardous. Install handrails and non-stick surfaces on steps leading into and out of your baptismal tanks to prevent slips, trips, and falls in your church.

2. **Electrocution** – Using a sound system or electric heating device near water can be deadly. Always test any heating devices before use and turn them off before the baptismal service. Additionally, only use wireless microphones that are attached near the baptismal tanks to prevent electrocution.

3. **Drowning** – Unsupervised children can fall into baptismal tanks and drown. Never leave a filled baptismal tank unattended. Properly drain the tank and secure it following a baptism service.

4. **Burns** – Burns can result from water that is heated too hot. Check the temperature of your tank 90 minutes and right before services to be sure the temperature is safe. A temperature of 83°-90° Fahrenheit (28°-32° C) is a suggested temperature range for baptistry pool water.

5. **Contaminated Water** – Water left sitting in baptismal tanks for days or longer can breed bacteria and mold, creating a dangerous environment for anyone who enters your church. Be sure your tank is drained completely and cleaned out after the service.

6. **Water Damage** - Over time water pipes may leak or burst under floors or behind walls. Moisture can also seep in and damage the tank itself or the surrounding area. Have your church safety officer check your baptism tank annually as part of your seasonal maintenance program.

BAPTISMAL TANK SAFETY

Protect your members and church equipment by following these baptismal tank safety measures.

BEFORE THE SERVICE

- Outfit the baptismal tank with an overflow drain. The

drain prevents water damage to any equipment and cuts down on slippery surfaces.

- Ensure steps into the tank and the tank bottom have non-slip treads or slip resistant surfaces.
- Install handrails along the steps into the baptistry.
- Test all water heating devices before use.
- Monitor the tank filling process to ensure it fills properly, does not overflow, and to avoid slippery surfaces or water damage.
- Check the water temperature 90 minutes before and again right before use.
- Assign church deacons or elders to guard the tank to ensure no one falls into the baptistry.

During the Service

- Keep microphones and other electrical equipment from touching anyone in the baptistry. Only use wireless microphones.
- Have towels ready for participants to dry off, thus avoiding a trail of water.
- Prevent slips and falls on wet flooring by having towels ready to mop up wet floors immediately after the baptism.


AFTER THE SERVICE

- Immediately drain the tank after use.
- Turn off water heating device after the baptism.
- Lock doors between the church common areas and baptismal tank to prevent unsupervised children from playing in the baptismal tank area.

BETWEEN BAPTISM SERVICES

- Check faucets for water leaking into the baptismal tank. Don't allow sitting water, which breeds bacteria.
- Clean and sanitize the tank based on the manufacturer's recommendations.

ARM CARES

The ministry of Adventist Risk Management, Inc. is to protect your ministry. Get free safety resources for protecting your church online at our website, www.adventistrisk.org. 

References: <http://www.churchproducts.com/how-to-heat-baptistry-water.html>

Anna Bartlett, Writer and Education Specialist at Adventist Risk Management, Inc. Used with permission by Adventist Risk Management, Inc. Originally published in the *Solutions* newsletter on February 1, 2017.



Adventist Risk
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PREACHING POWERFULLY: IS IT POSSIBLE? >PART 5 OF 6



Part 4 of this series explained the various types of sermons the elder-preacher has available, and once he or she has settled on the subject, the series explained how best to organize and prepare it for use in the pulpit. Part 5 deals with preaching styles and delivery and how to prepare for the sermon, including the importance of dress, what can affect the effectiveness of the sermon, where to find sermon material, and when to start preparing for it.

PREACHING STYLES

Evangelistic—In this style, the ring of the preacher's voice is usually more dramatic. However, it often includes a series of doctrinal sermons in a special location and behooves the speaker to be more active in the pulpit. It also includes the use of graphics in some form, especially since graphics are becoming more and more common with some pastors, primarily because today's society is more visually oriented.

Pastoral—This style usually exudes less movement, is more personal, and utilizes sermons adapted to the needs of the congregation.

Conversational—In this style, the preacher talks as if he or she is having a personal conversation with someone. In other words, there's no formality in the presentation.

Didactical—This type of delivery is more like a professor teaching a class: straightforward, with the ring and tone of a classroom teacher.

FACTORS WHICH AFFECT PREACHING STYLE

Distance from the congregation—Some preachers feel intimidated if they're too close to the audience and thus can't deliver their sermons as well. Others feel at ease at any distance. Self-confidence is an important factor, because when you have it, you can preach with greater power, since fear keeps you from being able to concentrate adequately on your sermon.

Congregational mix:

- *Adolescents*—You would obviously talk differently to adolescents than to an older congregation. Some of your terms would be different—you would use language that they understand better within their age group, and you would speak in a more casual, friendlier tone and would perhaps use illustrations more adapted to their age group. Some appropriate humor can be beneficial.

- *Young adults*—The manner with this group wouldn't change much, except you would be a little more serious and use illustrations appropriate for them.

- *Traditional elderly*—With this age group, you have to be more serious, although some humor can be acceptable, but your illustrations must meet their expectations.

- *Erudites*—These are professors, academics, scientists, and researchers who are receptive to the gospel but expect a serious, knowledgeable, precise presentation with the facts correct.

Presence or non-presence of PA system—Some preachers can't wax eloquent without it, especially if the audience is large and distant from the pulpit. Some preachers don't like to hold a microphone; others do. I once knew an evangelist who could hardly perform without a microphone.

Preaching aids (according to the type of sermon). Some preachers feel weakened in their delivery if they don't have graphics such as PowerPoint or some other type of visual display.

FACTORS WHICH AFFECT PREACHING DELIVERY

- *Spiritual preparation*—A good preacher will spend lots of time on his or her knees, pleading for the Holy Spirit to instill humility, direction, power, good concentration, and a spirit of love, both in preparation and in delivery. When you feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, and especially as you go into the pulpit, you will definitely deliver your best.

• *Theme preparation*—Selecting an appropriate topic is important but, to do this, you must know your congregation well. When you feel like you have a really good, appropriate topic, you will deliver better and with more power.

• *Dress*—As one of my parishioners once told me, “Pastor, when you dress good, you feel good.” And from experience, I know that when you feel good, you do indeed, deliver better.

• *Health*—How you feel physically will definitely affect your delivery. Don’t go to the pulpit when you are sick, unless the circumstances absolutely demand it.

• *Self-confidence*—It goes without saying that the more self-confidence you have, the more powerful your delivery will be.

• *Temperature*—If you are shaking with cold or burning up with heat, your delivery will be weakened.

• *Attitude:*

- Well-being with spouse and family.
- Well-being with professional superiors.
- Well-being with church members.

• *How you stand and what you do with your hands*—You must be conscious of any bad physical habits you have, conscious or unconscious, like scratching yourself, using the same gesture over and over, throwing your head back, licking your lips, tapping your foot, and the like. These habits will affect your audience, and if you become aware of such a habit while preaching, it will distract you.

• *How you personally behave yourself*—In a nutshell, remember to be yourself. Pretending to be something you aren’t will clearly be seen by the congregation, and it will diminish the impact of your sermon.

HOW TO DRESS FOR THE PULPIT

How you dress may affect you and can affect your listeners as well:

• *Not sporty*—In today’s society, the members in some of our churches attend very casually dressed. In those churches, you can probably dress without a tie, but in traditional churches, this would be out of place.

• *Clothes and ties which are not too bright*—A preacher is viewed as a representative of God, and the general view of God is as someone who would be dressed conservatively, so your best bet is to dress so your members see God.

• *Always clean, with hair combed and shoes shined*—Neat and tidy is always impressive.

• As a preacher, it’s nice to keep *one set of clothes*—or your best—just for the pulpit, if you can afford it.

• *Be bodily clean and use deodorant* (of course, always be clean). A bad body odor will turn off many in your congregation.

• *Wear colors that match.* Women in particular will notice if you wear mismatched colors.

• *Be shaved,* unless the style is definitely bushy and the congregation is accustomed to such.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE DELIVERY OF YOUR SERMON

• *Review your notes/outline/manuscript* enough times to feel you have it securely in your memory.

• *Practice verbally* in a mock pulpit with an imaginary congregation.

• *Mark your notes* with one or more word guidelines such as: smile, pause, emphasize vocally, lower your voice, look intently at congregation, etc. Some preachers are rather stoic, and to break this habit, it’s good practice to write reminders in your sermon notes.

• *Carry out the above exercises at night before you sleep*—This stamps your notes more deeply in your memory.

WHEN TO START PREPARING YOUR SERMON

• *As soon as you can.*

• Usually *at least one week before*—some preachers are working on several sermons at the same time.

• *Long enough ahead of time* so you can have it comfortably ready and feel confident about presenting it to the congregation.

• *Not the night before*—but many do so.

WHERE TO FIND SERMON MATERIAL

• *From your parishioners* through visitation. If you visit your parishioners regularly, you will find problems that need to be addressed.

• *From reading:*

- a. The Bible. You should spend more time with the Bible than with any other book. H.M.S. Richards usually found most of his sermons in the Bible.
- b. The *SDA Bible Commentaries*
- c. Other Bible commentaries
- d. Ellen G. White material
- e. Biographies
- f. Other pastors’ sermons
- g. Original languages
- h. Newspapers
- i. News magazines
- j. History books
- k. *The Almanac*
- l. Christian literature
- m. *Ministry* magazine
- n. *Adventist Review*
- o. Internet (see “Expository Sermons”)

• *From your spouse.*

• *From other pastors.*

(To be continued)



Lamar Phillips is a retired minister and church administrator who served for 39 years in six world divisions.

LESSONS FROM DANIEL 9

WHEN EMPLOYEES WANT TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING WITH THEIR SUPERVISORS, THEY HAVE A NUMBER OF OPTIONS: FILE A PETITION, COLLECT SIGNATURES, CURRY FAVOR WITH THE SUPERVISORS, OR EVEN THREATEN OR BRIBE THEM. DANIEL USES A DIFFERENT APPROACH WITH GOD. HE PRAYS. HE SPEAKS OPENLY WITH THE LORD.

I. STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTER

- *Prologue* (v. 1).
- *Daniel's Study of Scripture* (v. 2).
- *Daniel's Prayer* (vv. 3–19).
 - * Confession of sins (vv. 3–14).
 - * Request for restoration of Jerusalem and the temple (vv. 15–19).
- *God's Reaction* (vv. 20–27).
 - * Gabriel's appearance (vv. 20–22a).
 - * Gabriel's speech (vv. 22b–27).
 - Connection to the previous chapter (v. 22b).
 - Appreciation of Daniel as a person (v. 23).
 - The seventy weeks for Israel (vv. 24–27).

II. SURVEY OF THE CHAPTER

While the chapter is cast in a narrative framework and contains insights into the practical life of a believer—specifically about how to relate to God—it also contains one of the most fascinating biblical prophecies.

III. DISCUSSION OF THE CHAPTER

A. Prologue

Verse 1: With Daniel 9 we have come to the time of the Medes and Persians. For years Daniel had thought about the previous chapter (Dan 8), especially the time element that he could not understand.

B. Daniel's Study of Scripture and Prayer

Verses 2, 3: People choose different ways to find answers to important questions regarding life and the future. They may read the horoscope, consult astrology, get involved in occultism and spiritualism, look for scientific explanations, consult with friends and experts, or turn to God through prayer and the study of His Word. Daniel chooses the best option: he studies Scripture. When the prophet Jeremiah talked about the Babylonian exile of the Southern Kingdom (Judah), he referred to the exile's duration of seventy literal years (Jer 29:10). This period was coming to an end, and the disobedience of the people of God may have had Daniel wondering whether this time would be prolonged by the

2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14. So he fasts and prays for clarification and understanding from God.

Verses 4–14: The first part of the prayer consists of a request for forgiveness of sin.

Which sins are mentioned?

- Apostasy from the true God.
- Disobedience vis-à-vis God's commandments.
- Disobedience vis-à-vis God's messengers.
- No confession of sins and turning toward God.
- Disregard of the truth.

Sin needs to be taken seriously because typically the consequences are unavoidable. Daniel includes himself with his people in this prayer and does not distance himself from them—although he is not portrayed in Scripture as being disobedient and having turned away from God. He does not consider himself better than others, knowing that all people are sinners and dependent on God's grace.

How is God presented in Daniel's prayer?

- God is great and awesome.
- In His love He maintains His covenant with His people, including promises (blessings or curses).
- He is just and righteous.
- He is merciful and ready to forgive sins.

Verses 15–19: Daniel turns to God with his petition for the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. He appeals to God's honor and reputation ("for your own sake"). Verse 18b sounds very much like Paul (Rom 3:23–24; Eph 2:8–9), stressing that there is no human merit that can gain favor with God, only God's grace. We are sinners (Rom 3:10–12) and are saved by Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12), if we believe in Him.

C. God's Reaction

1. The Appearance of Gabriel

Verses 20–22:

How does God answer prayers (according to the Bible)?

- God may answer immediately, as in this case.
- The fulfillment of our request may not be seen easily and directly (e.g., Job).

- God may not answer as we have asked Him (e.g., Paul's thorn in the flesh).
- In any case, God appreciates our prayers.
- He always reacts, but in the way He deems best, because He loves us (e.g., Moses is not allowed to enter the promised land, but is taken to heaven after his death).

2. Gabriel's Speech

Verse 23: God loves Daniel, and He loves us. He listens to our prayers and is gracious and merciful. The vision mentioned in Daniel 9:21 is the vision of Daniel 8. Gabriel now helps Daniel understand the time element of Daniel 8, the 2,300 evenings and mornings (see also v. 23).

Verse 24: Seventy weeks are weeks of years (490 years). They refer to God's people of old. The end of transgression and sin, the atonement for iniquity, the bringing of everlasting righteousness, and the anointment of the most holy place refer to the fulfillment of the plan of salvation as brought about by Jesus towards the end of the seventy weeks.

Verse 25: The time of the beginning of the 490 years is linked to the command to rebuild Jerusalem. There were three such commands (520 BC, 537 BC, 457 BC), but the third, issued by King Artaxerxes, was the most comprehensive one and granted Jews some kind of autonomy. The anointed one is without doubt the Messiah, Jesus. He would appear after seven plus sixty-two weeks—that is, after 483 years, in the year AD 27. In this year Jesus was baptized and began his public ministry.

Verse 26: Sometime after the sixty-nine weeks the Messiah would die. Verse 27 provides further information. The rest of the verse relates to the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Regarding the "flood," see Isaiah 8:7–8.

Verse 27: Jesus would strengthen the covenant that God had established with His people. He would even bring about the new covenant (Heb 10:16–17), a continuation of the old covenant. In the middle of the last week (the seventieth week)—that is, after three and one half years, the sacrificial system would come to an end. The curtain of the temple would be torn (Matt 27:51) and the system of prefiguration ended. The "abomination of desolation" points to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus mentions this fact in Matthew 24:15–21. The seventy weeks (490 years) would end in AD 34. At this time Stephen would die as the first Christian martyr.

3. The Relation to Daniel 8

Verses 21 and 23 have established a relation between Daniel 9 and Daniel 8 with its unexplained time element (linguistic and conceptual links). Therefore, the 490 years must be connected with the 2,300 years and this in such a way that the 490 years are a part of the 2,300 years and that the 490 years, whose starting point can be calculated, help establish dates for the 2,300 years. This is only possible if the seventy weeks and the 2,300 evenings and mornings have the same starting point. The 490 years stretch from 457 BC to AD 34 and the 2,300 years from 457 BC to AD 1844, the time of the end (Dan 8:17, 19, 26).

Beginning with AD 1844 the heavenly sanctuary would be vindicated and cleansed. Jesus would begin the second

phase of His high priestly ministry. This includes a special work of judgment in favor of the saints (Dan 7 and 8). When this ministry comes to an end, Jesus will come again and establish His kingdom.

IV. APPLICATION

Daniel 9 particularly addresses prayer and the revelation of the coming of the Messiah, providing exact dates. This concerns us.

- Praying can be a meaningless repetition of words. It also can be a wonderful conversation with God. This includes humility, respect, honesty, openness, and confession of sins. In prayer we can bring to God our praise, gratitude, and requests.
- However, sometimes there are problems with prayer. First, we may not pray enough. We may bring to God our petitions but run away. We may only pray in times of distress. However, our heavenly Father delights in daily conversation with us. Second, sometimes God does not seem to react to our prayers. Most Christians have experienced these "desert" times. But in these times God is especially close to us.
- God hears prayers. Daniel is an example of God answering a human being. We too experience God's interventions.
- God has a specific plan of salvation. He even had a specific time in mind for when His Son would come to save us (Gal 4:4). Daniel 9 is a unique chapter, focusing on Jesus and His ministry. It provides the precise date for the public appearance of the Messiah. While the Old Testament contains many messianic prophecies that help identify the Messiah, the one in Daniel 9 is of specific importance. Taking seriously this unique prophecy, it is impossible to talk about the appearance of the God-sent Messiah before or after the first century AD. The Messiah had to come in AD 27—no sooner and no later. With the other characteristics added, there is no other way than to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. But Daniel 9 also solves the conundrum of the time prophecy in Daniel 9. Again it is associated with Jesus. In 1844 Jesus as heavenly High Priest began a phase of His ministry that would restore the heavenly sanctuary and bring to an end the sin problem. God gave us time prophecies that were exactly fulfilled. We can trust Him and His Word. Evil will finally be defeated and His kingdom of eternal peace be established.

V. CONCLUSION

God and His word are trustworthy, being fulfilled in astonishing ways. We rely on Him. In prayer we turn to the Lord who hears us.



Ekkehardt Mueller is an associate director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference World Headquarters. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI Newsletter.

THE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE WE LONG FOR: THE PLACE OF PRAISE

In Psalm 103:1, David calls himself to a deep expression of worship. “Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”¹ Praise is a part of worship that the Bible invites us to engage in continually. However, it’s easy to relegate it to a small part of our worship services, usually the singing. In the previous articles, we explored the contours of the why and how of worship. The purpose of this article is to help us live a life of continual praise.

WHY PRAISE?

Praise, though similar to thanksgiving, is rooted in who God is and what He does apart from the immediate gifts He has given us. God is so great, so good, and so amazing that He is inherently worthy of our adoration. But, when Psalm 103 commands us to “praise the Lord,” it brings up another question concerning why we should praise God.

Is it because God needs it? No, it is not that God needs our praises, but He knows that we need to praise Him! Humans are wired for praise, and it brings a certain kind of fulfillment. Some channel their praise to sports teams, actors, musicians, children, and so on, but this praise is ultimately hollow and leaves us unfulfilled. God has instructed us to praise Him not for some ego trip but for our own good. One of the beautiful aspects of God’s kingdom is that He makes arrangements to give back to us whatever we give to Him—with dividends! The more we praise Him, the more we experience His blessing and fulfillment.

Another amazing and beneficial characteristic of praise is that there is power in praise. When we stop trying to fight our battles and begin to praise the God who has said He will fight for us, God is free to release His power and provisions on our behalf. Praise will bring victory, power, deliverance, and blessing. When Israel was surrounded by the enemy, the first thing Jehoshaphat did was to get the choir to sing praises to God (2 Chron. 20). Praise was the conduit God used to defeat the enemy.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO PRAISE?

There are many ways to praise the Lord, but the following list is a good place to start.

Pray through the names and characteristics of God. Old Testament praise centered on the names of God. “I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good” (Ps. 54:6). “Oh, magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together” (Ps. 34:3). The Hebrews praised God’s name because a person’s name was indicative of his or her character. In Exodus 15:26, the Lord said, “You can call me ‘Jehovah-Raphah’ because I am the Lord who heals you!” In Genesis 22, God revealed Himself as “Jehovah-Jireh” when He wanted to show that He would provide for His people. God once gave His name as “Jehovah-Shammah,” which means “the Lord is there” (Ezek. 48:35). God was revealing His omnipresence—He will never leave us or forsake us! When we pray to God, we can focus on the characteristics and names we find most relevant to us and beautiful about Him.

Sing about the glories of God. Throughout Scripture, singing is an integral part of praise. The psalmist invites us to “sing to the Lord a new song” (Ps. 96:1). Singing is prominent throughout Revelation (5:9; 14:3; 15:3), but singing isn’t the only music we can make to praise God. The book of Psalms speaks of many musical expressions of praise. Psalm 150:3-5 invites the listener to praise God with trum-



pets, harp, lyre, tymbrel, dancing, strings, pipe, and cymbal. Music is a powerful instrument for praising God.

Share with others what has been done by God. We can praise God by telling others what He has done for us. As we share what God has done, people start to notice. They are drawn to God and His beauty as He is uplifted through our praise. Psalm 66:5 depicts a praise invitation to the peoples of the earth: “Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind!”

Consecrate yourself to God. We can praise Him not only in words but by consecrating all that we are and have to Him. Our whole lives can be, as Paul puts it in Romans 12:1, “a living sacrifice.” Each day we can dedicate our plans, family, work, art, studies, and our entire existence as praise to God.

WHEN SHOULD WE PRAISE?

When we fully realize the amazing nature of God, the question of when to praise starts to become clear. As the last point showed, our whole lives can be praise when we intentionally seek to honor God with all we are and all we do. However, if you are anything like me, you are starting to ask some practical questions: “What about the hard times? How can you praise when everything is going wrong?” Habakkuk gives us his remedy for times when everything is going wrong: “Though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut

off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17b, 18).

Although we, like Job, may be tempted in times like these to curse God and wish to die (Job 2:9), we can focus on the goodness of the God who saves us. In Jesus, we have a reason for hope that outshines all hardship. When we praise Him, sometimes our circumstances will be changed, but even when they are not, our perspective will as God gives us strength to live through our pain.

George was nearly blind and deaf, but he never missed a worship service. I once asked, “George, why do you come to church? You can’t hear or see anything.” He replied enthusiastically, “I don’t need to hear and see to praise the Lord, serve Him, and tell the whole universe that I am on God’s side. My heart is full of the things of God, and they spill over in praise, adoration, and thanksgiving.” We don’t need a tongue to praise the Lord, although it is helpful. What we need is a heart full of the things of God. ED

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations come from the New International Version.

S. Joseph Kidder is a professor of church growth and leadership at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

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I ONLY WANT TO WITNESS

“FM is the Facebook for rural folk,” says Catherine Nyameino, communication director of the East Kenya Union Conference. “If it’s not on, they’re not alive.”

A few short hours after driving away from the hustle and bustle of Nairobi and into Kitui County, one can see why. The paved highway gives way to jarring dirt tracks. Crude roadside tables display small piles of forlorn produce. Yellow plastic jerry cans—used for hauling precious water—are everywhere, carried by donkeys, emaciated cows, youngsters pushing loaded bicycles, and many, many women ... some of whom carefully balance the heavy containers on their heads.

Here, people’s entire lives are spent within a very small radius. They will likely never have electricity, TV, or the Internet, so radio is a lifeline. It delivers news from near and far, provides entertainment, creates community ... and is the sole source of the gospel for hundreds of thousands of listeners.

AWR affiliate Wikwatyo FM 105.3, based in the small city of Kitui, is blanketing central Kenya with the vital message of God’s saving love. Listeners here take their radio seriously: they listen intently, often make notes on the programs, and frequently call the station to question doctrinal points. They also take their religion very seriously, and are committed to sharing their newfound beliefs.

In the market town of Kengo, Francis Mutunga Mbiti is one such listener. He says, “I heard the word of God through Wikwatyo FM. That word touched me, and I saw something that was lacking in my life. That missing point was the Sabbath, the true day of worship, the Sabbath of the Lord. I took my time to learn and pray about what I heard. Finally, I decided to follow the Sabbath as it is in the Bible.”

Francis’ wife, Angeline, was a bit slower to commit to the new beliefs. “At first I was not very interested,” she says, “but later we started reading the Bible together, and I listened to what my husband was hearing on the radio. That way I became convinced about the true Sabbath. From that time, we began resting on the seventh day, so that we could show others the way.”

Francis felt an obligation to share what he had learned, so he began talking to his neighbors. But he was constantly thinking, “If I tell them and they believe the truth, where shall I take them? Who will take care of us?” There was no Seventh-day Adventist church for miles around, and Francis and Angeline had been worshipping with their four children under a tree.

They decided, “God has blessed us with a lot of things, so we want to build a house of God.” They began setting aside a portion of their modest income, until they had saved enough to buy several iron sheets for a roof. Some elders who had heard the gospel message and were interested in it provided sticks and helped build a small structure out of mud bricks.

The next thing they needed was a preacher. Francis recalls, “I said, ‘If there will be no pastor to come over and preach to us, I will take the chance and do the preaching.’ So now I am the one preaching. Through God’s grace, I can testify that many people have joined us.”

Barely a year after Francis and Angeline began worshipping under a tree, 10 people were baptized.

Angeline says, “I want to thank God, because this structure has helped many people who listen to the word of God to come in and worship with us. We are very happy for what God has done through us.”

“That is how it works in this part of the country,” Nyameino says. “What pastor is going to want to bring his family out here to live in such a hard place? How can people out here get Sabbath school quarterlies or other material? Only a few people are literate, so they read and try to share with others.”

Francis says simply, “I only want to witness what I have heard.”

ED

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

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