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MUSIC MATTERS IN THE CHURCH



“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (Ps. 100:2).

“Music should have beauty, pathos, and power. Let the voices be lifted in songs of praise and devotion. Call to your aid, if practicable, instrumental music, and let the glorious harmony ascend to God, an acceptable offering” (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 505).

Few subjects have generated more conflict than the kinds of music one should listen to or the kind of music best suited for church. The old saying among pastors is that the music department in the church is often referred to as the war department because, well, that’s where some of the epic church fights take place.

I’m not going to pick sides on the “hymns vs. choruses” debate. I’m not going to debate acoustic vs. electronic. I’m not even going to bring up the various music styles. Those things are irrelevant for why music matters.

Here’s why music matters: *Music matters because it can transform us.* It can change and strengthen our thinking, our beliefs, our values, and, ultimately, our actions. It can change a person, a group, a church, and a community. Here’s an example: In one congregation, the members were singing a song that says: “Heal my heart and make it clean / Open my eyes to the things unseen / Show me how to love like You have loved me / Break my heart for what breaks Yours / Everything I am for Your kingdom’s cause / As I walk from earth into eternity.”

It doesn’t matter what your preferred style of music is. What matters is whether you can sing those words and actually make them your honest prayer. The phrase I can’t get out of my head is, “Break my heart for what breaks Yours.” Do I know what breaks God’s heart? Do you? It’s actually a sign of maturity to be able to understand another’s heart. It requires us to think beyond our own concerns and consider the concerns of someone else. That’s why adults often get upset with their teenage children; they want them to think about someone beside themselves.

If you had to make a list of the top five things that break God’s heart, what would be on your list? And once you had compiled your list, would any of those things break your heart, too? If so, what would you do about it? That’s what it means to give everything you are for His kingdom’s cause. And that’s why music matters. It opens up a crack in the busy shell of our lives and drives home the character and heart of God long after the music dies down.

This is a great reason to be seated in the sanctuary when the music starts each week. You never know how God is going to use the gift of music to change your life and your world.

May this new series of articles about music be a blessing in your life and in your church family.



CORRECTION: *Incorrect concepts were used in the sermon “The Perfection of the Holy Scriptures” on page 15 in the July/September 2017 issue of Elder’s Digest. It was printed that there are no contradictions in the Bible, that the words and not the writers are inspired, and that the Bible is inerrant. The correct words are, The Bible is reliable and trustworthy. In the center column, also, was included a quotation taken from the book A Survey of Bible Doctrine by Charles C. Ryrie that reveals a Protestant point of view, but it oversights the Adventist point of view previously published on pages 4-6 in the July/September 2016 issue of Elder’s Digest in the article entitled, “Some Thoughts on the Inspiration of the Bible,” by Dr. Gerhard Pfandl. He includes there a quotation taken from the book Selected Messages, volume 1, p. 21, by Ellen G. White that we want to reemphasize as the Adventist point of view sustained by Elder’s Digest. Our apologies for this oversight.—Editor*



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES >PART 1



In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the Apostle Paul presented the qualifications of deacons. He wrote,

“Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (KJV).

The word “grave” comes from the Greek word *σεμνός*, which means to be “worthy of honor,” or “dignified.”¹ The implication of this for today’s deacons and deaconesses is that they are to carry themselves in such a way that they earn the respect of others—including church members, residents of their community, their co-workers, their colleagues in ministry, and members of their own family. By gaining the respect of others, these officers will be in a better position to minister to them and influence them to accept the Christian faith.

To be doubletongued means “saying a thing to one person and giving a different view of it to another.”² Being doubletongued is the result of being unstable and double minded. According to James 1:8, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” In her Beatitudes for deacons, Maurice Riley says, “Blessed is the deacon who is not ‘double-tongued’ and will not engage in gossip. Cheap talk will defile you. Shun unsavory conversations. Talk your Church and Pastor Up, and not Down, and always protect their image, for righteousness sake.”³ Howard Foshee, quotes Walter A. Bennett, Jr., a pastor and denominational leader who said, “Church activities are much more successful when deacons give them verbal endorsement and active participation. One deacon with an indifferent attitude toward a revival or visitation campaign can weaken the effectiveness of his entire group.”⁴

Paul’s injunction to be “not given to much wine” can be rather difficult to understand whether we believe Paul was referring to unfermented wine (grape juice) or fermented wine (intoxicating beverage). The *SDA Bible Commentary* presents the dilemma as following:

Some hold that Paul here speaks of unfermented wine—grape juice—because for him to speak otherwise would place him in conflict with his declaration against defiling the body (see I Cor. 6:19; 10:31), “and contrary to the general teaching of the Bible regarding intoxicating drink (see on Prov. 20:1; 23:29-32; John 2:9). Others hold that Paul here permits a temperate use of ordinary wine. They declare that if he were speaking of grape juice he would not need to warn the deacons against drinking ‘much’ of it, and would have no valid basis for forbidding the elders to drink it at all. The passage is admittedly difficult.”⁵

The difficulty in understanding this injunction is lessened, however, by translating the Greek phrase μή οἶνω πολλῶ προσέχοντας to mean, “be not addicted to much wine” instead of “be not given to much wine.” This translation places the emphasis or warning against being addicted to wine (alcoholism) rather than a warning about the amount of wine that one can consume. If Paul was instructing deacons not to be addicted to wine, then the only sure way to prevent addiction is abstinence, which is in harmony with his declaration against defiling the body, and with the general teaching of the Bible regarding intoxicating drink. Anne M. Fletcher quotes a woman she refers to as Karen M. who said, “It’s not so much the frequency of drinking but how it affects your life when you do.” Therefore, to be consistent, “be not addicted to much wine,” is the better translation.

Thus, the apostle Paul was advocating abstinence from fermented wine.

The next qualification listed for deacons is that they be “not greedy of filthy lucre.” They are not to accept ill gotten gain, bribes, or show favor to individuals or group(s) in the church for personal gain. They are to remain fair and objective in carrying out their responsibilities, otherwise they will forfeit the trust of those whom they are called to serve. This command also warned against taking advantage of people. The implication of this for today’s deacons and deaconesses is that they see the importance of gaining and maintaining the respect and trust of church members in a post-modern era when everyone and everything is suspect. ED

¹ “Grave,” *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:299.

² W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1952), s.v. “Doubletongued.”

³ Maurice Riley, *The Deaconess: Walking in the Newness of Life*, 2nd ed. (Newark, NJ: Christian Associates Publications, 1993), 145.

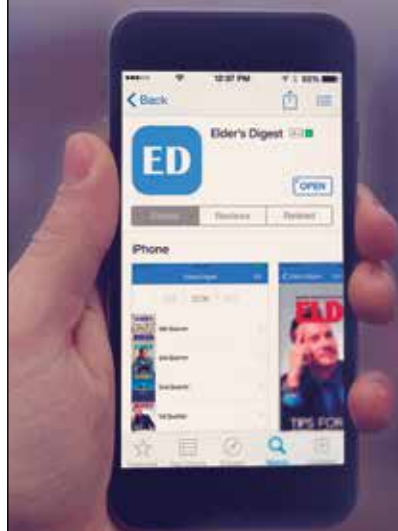
⁴ Howard B. Foshee, *Now That You’re a Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1975), 51.

⁵ *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:299.

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*.

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Elder's Digest Editor

ADDING MEMBERS THROUGH STUDIES:

HOW YOU CAN ACHIEVE IT

>PART 1 OF 8



Giving Bible studies is one of the most spiritually fulfilling satisfactions that a child of God can experience. And when the student accepts Christ in his or her life and willingly decides to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there is no greater feeling of accomplishment than that which is felt in the heart of the teacher when such a decision is made. Why? Because the Holy Spirit, likewise delighted in the decision, pours out His spirit in abundance in the teacher's heart. Together, there is great rejoicing. Once you, the elder or deacon or deaconess, have won a soul to Christ, you will be hooked into doing it over and over, at every opportunity that arises. Though it may seem daunting if you have never done it before, rest assured that, through trial and error and with the following pointers to guide you, you can become highly successful.

BACKGROUND

The primary desire of the committed Christian should be to share the gospel with family, friends, and others with whom he or she may come in contact. We can easily see that, during Christ's life, this was His great objective. Everywhere He went, He taught people, healed them of their diseases, and restored several to life. Thousands became His followers. Just before His ascension to heaven, Jesus gave His great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19, 20).

A careful reading of these verses reveals that Jesus was referring to two steps that His disciples must share with all potential new believers: (1) bring them to conversion through the aid of the Holy Spirit and (2) instruct (disciple

them in the teachings (doctrines) of Jesus. Thus, these are the two important steps: conversion and receiving a sound theological foundation. Can one be saved without this foundation? Yes, but, without deep roots, one cannot grow to his or her spiritual potential, because almost all the doctrines are Christ-centered; that is, they lead to a fuller understanding of Christ's loving nature and a deeper appreciation of His great gift to us—His grace—which, through faith, can bring eternal salvation.

Historically, Seventh-day Adventism has required that prospective members receive a thorough teaching of church doctrines before being baptized. History has shown that when these studies are not given, the apostasy rate is much higher. Hence, the cutting-edge elder will become theologically proficient and capable of presenting the 28 beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists to interested persons. The most efficient method of internalizing these beliefs and delivering them systematically to those interested in spiritual things is to give Bible studies, to learn by doing. Before this, however, it is necessary to personally acquaint oneself with each doctrine to the point of understanding and organizing the studies into a useful series that can be delivered without faltering.

Of course, many studies are already available. There are studies for Protestants, evangelicals, Hindus, Muslims, and others. The studies must be selected according to the beliefs (or non-beliefs) of the interested party. Once you know the person's spiritual background, the appropriate studies can be selected. Then you are ready to begin your studies, but the key is to first know what you yourself believe, and, as an elder (or deacon or deaconess), to have an adequate understanding of these beliefs. Thus, the purpose of these articles is to explain how to give a Bible study to almost anyone, regardless of his or her beliefs.

OUR CHURCH IS IN A HURRY TO EVANGELIZE THE WORLD AND COMPLETE THE GOSPEL COMMISSION ASSIGNED DIRECTLY BY JESUS CHRIST JUST BEFORE HIS ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN.

BIBLE STUDY PHILOSOPHY

It is important to understand what a Bible study is. The best answer can be summed up in the following way: A Bible study is *the systematic search for the meaning of a given theological issue*. Samples of a theological issue are: the nature of Christ and the Godhead, the origin of life on earth, the way to salvation, the nature of death, the place and length of hell, the correct day of worship, the second coming of Christ, and others. These issues are usually referred to as doctrines but are more commonly referred to today as teachings. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has 28 teachings, which it regards as the essential Bible-

based beliefs that comprise the Church and make it distinctive from other religious denominations. Therefore, it should be clear that those who choose to belong to the Seventh-day Adventist Church would subscribe to these teachings insofar as they are intellectually capable of grasping them.

Traditionally, Adventist evangelism has required that new converts be acquainted with the Church's teachings before baptism. This is not the case with most other Protestant and evangelical churches who usually baptize candidates who have simply accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. In all fairness, however, it should be acknowledged that these newly-baptized members receive at least some basic theological understanding through various teaching methods later on at the church they attend. Since most non-Adventist churches have at least three teachings in common—Sunday-keeping, the immortality of the soul, and eternal burning hell fire—most members understand these issues.

Seventh-day Adventists have historically believed it essential to have as complete an understanding as possible of its teachings before baptism for four reasons:

1. Understanding the doctrines is conducive to having a clearer picture of the Godhead, the plan of salvation, the saving role of Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life.
2. Understanding the doctrines allows one to recognize the difference between Adventism and other denominations.
3. The doctrines influence the lifestyle in a way that will provoke a change in the life if fully understood.
4. Knowing the doctrines arms the member to share that knowledge with others.

At this point, we should then ask: What *isn't* a Bible study? A Bible study is not simply reading through a specific book of the Bible with your student(s), or starting at Genesis and reading through the Old Testament, or starting at Matthew and reading through all the books of the New

Testament one after the other. If we remember our definition of a Bible study—the *systematic* search for the meaning of a given theological issue—we can see that sequential reading doesn't lend itself to *quickly and systematically* discovering the meaning of a given theological issue. For good or for ill, the Bible is not an organized composition of theological treatises. You cannot find any book of the Bible that specifically, exclusively, and exhaustively deals with any one of the Adventist Church's 28 doctrines.¹ God did not design the Bible this way. Instead, in His wisdom, He intended that those interested in spiritual things would search the Scriptures (see Acts 17:11, 12² and Is. 28:9, 10³) for the verses that lead to salvation, and, in so doing, discover the marvelous glories of God, which in turn would move the soul to surrender the life to Jesus Christ. However, even though one can ultimately find the Church's doctrines through this method, the process is long, complex, and laborious. Remember that it took our church decades to culminate its doctrines into the current 28. Actually, the twenty-eighth doctrine was added at the General Conference Session in 2005.

Why do most countries of the world have an organized educational system? It is because it allows children and youth to learn quickly and rigorously what the government feels is essential to make them knowledgeable, well-rounded, useful, and peaceful citizens. So it is with the Adventist Church. It wants its members to be spiritually knowledgeable, well-rounded, and capable of using and sharing their knowledge (as the case may require) with their society; thus, every member, elder, deacon, deaconess, and pastor should be a teacher and share with others the same theological knowledge in as short a time as reasonably possible so that, in turn, new believers, once baptized, can do the same thing with others. Our church is in a hurry to evangelize the world and complete the Gospel Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) assigned directly by Jesus Christ just before His ascension into heaven. And all this has to do with proper teaching methods.

Thus, choosing and applying a series of organized Bible studies is the preferred and recommended methodology for teaching potential candidates for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and, consequently, for the kingdom of God.

(To be continued)



¹ The one exception may be the book of Hebrews, which primarily gives a thorough explanation of the sanctuary system, the one doctrine unique to Seventh-day Adventists.

² "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so; therefore, many of them believed and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men."

³ "Whom will he teach knowledge? And who will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little."

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



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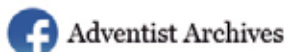
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PEACE



One of the great political and ethical issues of our day is the question of war and peace. It is both complicated and convoluted. Despair hovers around hearts and minds, for millions expect a nuclear holocaust without the basic hope of afterlife or eternal life.


Today there is a new situation, unparalleled in history. Human beings have developed the means of humanity's own destruction, means that are becoming more and more "effective" and "perfected"—although these are hardly the right words. Since World War II, civilians are no longer just occasionally or incidentally harmed; they have become the target.

Christians believe that war is the result of sin. Since the Fall of man, strife has been a perennial fact of human existence. "Satan delights in war. . . . It is his object to incite nations to war against one another."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 589. It is a diversionary tactic to interfere with the gospel task. While global conflict has been prevented during the past forty years, there have been perhaps 150 wars between nations and within nations, with millions perishing in these conflicts.

Today virtually every government claims it is working for disarmament and peace. Often the known facts appear to point in a different direction. Nations spend a huge portion of their financial resources to stockpile nuclear and other war materials, sufficient to destroy civilization as it is known today. News reports focus on the millions of men and women and children who suffer and die in wars and civil unrest and have to live in squalor and poverty. The arms race, with its colossal waste of human funds and resources, is one of the most obvious obscenities of our day.

It is therefore right and proper for Christians to promote peace. The Seventh-day Adventist Church urges every nation to beat its "swords into plowshares" and its "spears into pruninghooks" (Is. 2:4). The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 7 states that men and women were "created for the glory of God" and were "called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment," not to destroy or hurt one another. Christ Himself said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9)

While peace cannot be found in official church pronouncements, the authentic Christian church is to work for peace between the first and second advents of Christ. However, hope in the Second Coming must not live in a social vacuum. The Adventist hope must manifest and translate itself into deep concern for the well-being of every member of the human family. True, Christian action today and tomorrow will not of itself usher in the coming kingdom of peace; God alone brings this kingdom by the return of His son.

In a world filled with hate and struggle, a world of ideological strife and of military conflicts, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as peacemakers and work for worldwide justice and peace under Christ as the head of a new humanity. 

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.



MUSIC MATTERS > PART 2

IS MUSIC MORALLY NEUTRAL?

In the first article of this series, we explored the significance of music and other artistic pursuits in God's economy. Do they really matter? Are they important or are they nice but inconsequential decorations for life? The answer from Scripture is clearly a resounding YES, they do matter. They are not superfluous, frivolous life ornaments. In fact, God asks us specifically to think about "the lovely" and "the admirable" and understand the "beauty of holiness." In His Word, God provides insights and clues regarding the importance of the aesthetic realm because He does have decided views on this subject.

This article, and the one following it, will probe the question of whether this is a moral matter of right and wrong, particularly with reference to music. As disciples of Christ, do we need to make moral decisions about music or is music a morally neutral arena guided by aesthetic norms and criteria? The next two articles in this series will seek to illuminate the question of whether or not Seventh-day Adventists should maintain so-called "music standards" as a component of a Christian lifestyle commitment. We will also consider if music is merely an issue of cultural taste and preference that is purely relative and subjective for each individual.

Henry Edward Krehbiel, a musician and teacher, once quipped, "Of all the arts, music is practiced most and thought about least."¹ Indeed, into today's postmodern world, many people are convinced that music is to be felt and experienced, not thought about and analyzed. Because feelings are very subjective, the common view is that music means different things to different people; hence, its usage must be considered a matter of culturally-conditioned taste and preference. The notion that music is somehow governed by morality, or that musical expressions could or should be evaluated as right/wrong or appropriate/inappropriate according to external norms, is considered preposterous. Witness the almost irate statement that Maurice Zam, former director of the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music, made in a *Chicago Tribune* column to Ann Landers in 1993: "Let us emancipate ourselves from the myth that music has anything to do with morals. Music is as amoral as the sound of the babbling brook or the whistling wind. The tones E, D, and C can be sung to the words, 'I love you,' 'I hate you,' or 'three blind mice.'"²

At face value, this illustration seems to hold, so people accept the premise as well. In fact, there are many today who would agree with Zam, including a large percentage of Christians.

Whether overwhelmed with the complexity of the issues or simply ambivalent, many Christians question whether or not decisions for Christ need to be made regarding music. A growing number feel that, as long as the lyrics are acceptable, the music itself is not really an issue either for worship or everyday use. For them, music is simply a medium and, as such, morally neutral.

This view is forcefully presented in Dana Key's book *Don't Stop the Music*. A Christian rock musician, Key openly states that "sound is not the important issue. It's meaning. It's what the song is saying—and the lyrics of a song are what gives us that meaning." He goes on to assert: "I believe that music (particularly instrumental music) is absolutely void of moral qualities for either good or evil. This is not to say that there is not good instrumental music or bad instrumental music. Instrumental music can be good or bad, but that isn't a theological issue—it's an artistic one. The 'goodness' or 'badness' of instrumental music is based on the performers' competence and skill. If the music is played without skill, it is bad. If it is performed skillfully, it is good."³

Thomas Dorsey, the famous gospel musician, came to the same conclusion. He said: "The message is not in the music but in the words of the song. It matters not what kind of movement it has; if the words are Jesus, Heaven, Faith, and Life, then you have a song with which God is pleased, regardless of what critics and some church folk say."⁴

Michael Tomlinson took a similar stance: "I believe music itself is without moral qualities either for good or evil. The question has more to do with what the music is employed to say or do than with the music per se."⁵

Even classically trained Christian musicians go along with these ideas. In his book *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, Harold Best (Wheaton College) took the position that "with certain exceptions, art and especially music are morally relative. . . ." Harold

B. Hannum, well-known and respected Seventh-day Adventist musician and scholar, also maintained that “moral matters have to do with human actions and relations to others, not with the notes of a composition.”⁷ Later in the same work, he affirmed that “moral and religious values should be kept separate from purely aesthetic ones.”⁸

The evident strength and assurance in these statements seems to suggest a consensus. So, why can't the issue be laid to rest once and for all? Perhaps the indignant suggestion that conservative religionists and other “self-appointed guardians of morals” (as Zam termed them) keep their interfering noses out of it and let others get on with using and enjoying music according to their tastes and preferences is valid? Or is it? Is there another side to this issue?

Now, just to clarify, it should be said that it is legitimate to affirm that aesthetic values are distinct from moral values. Aesthetic criteria such as “unity, variety, balance, climax, integrity, logic, and a feeling of inevitability”⁹ are rightfully used in evaluating both musical compositions and performances. However, before dismissing all evaluation as simply a matter of assessing these parameters according to culturally-conditioned taste and preference without reference to any moral dimension, let's review the following considerations.

AN HISTORICAL CONSIDERATION

In contemporary Western culture, music has come to be viewed almost exclusively as a form of harmless entertainment intended to provide pleasure and create congenial atmospheres with individuals consulting their likes and dislikes as the basis for usage. This was not so, however, in earlier times. For example, two and a half millennia ago, music was considered to be such a potent and influential force in society that leading philosophers and politicians advocated its control by the nation's constitution. This was the case in Athens and Sparta, city-states of ancient Greece.

In the third century AD, Japan's imperial office of music (the *Gagaku-ryo*) was established to control musical activities.¹⁰ Other ancient cultures, including those of Egypt, India, and China, evidenced similar concerns. Legislation or governmental censorship of this kind is considered almost unthinkable today.¹¹ But, even during the twentieth century, Communist, Fascist, and Islamic regimes voiced concerns about and implemented laws within their borders to control music.

Why all the fuss? What was the problem? For the ancients, the problem was clear. They believed music affected the will, which, in turn, influenced character and conduct. For example, consider what Aristotle and Plato taught: “Music . . . directly imitates (that is, represents) the passions or states of the soul—gentleness, anger, courage, temperance, and their opposites and other qualities; hence, when one listens to music that amadous a certain passion, he becomes imbued with the same passion; and if over a long time he habitually listens to the kind of music that arouses ignoble passions, his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form. In short, if one listens to the wrong kind of person, he will become the wrong kind of person; but, conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music, he will tend to become the right kind of person.”¹²

There is no mistaking the clear relationship between music and morality in this understanding. Half a world away, in China, Confucius expressed a very similar understanding: “If one should

desire to know whether a kingdom is well-governed, if its morals are good or bad, the quality of its music will furnish the answer. . . . Character is the backbone of our human culture, and music is the flowering of character.”¹³

The Greeks and Chinese were not alone in their view. The idea that music has moral influence is evident among early Christian writers,¹⁴ the Roman writer Boethius,¹⁵ and many others. Even the statement of a prominent contemporary cultural anthropologist, Alan P. Merriam, has strong implications for the connection between music and morality. He wrote: “There is probably no other human cultural activity which is so all-pervasive and which reaches into, shapes, and often controls so much of human behavior.”¹⁶ If it can control human behavior, there is inevitably a moral component to the discussion.

So what do we make of this? Clearly, there is wide historical support apart from recent religious writers¹⁷ that music and morality are intimately connected. Is this notion a relic of ancient superstition or does it have some validity? One thing is clear: while some think that music is neutral, many others historically believed the very opposite. Obviously, it would be risky to decide the issue simply by a present-day popular vote without looking at some further evidence.

A THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION

From the Christian standpoint, there is a significant theological issue that influences the debate. Clyde S. Kilby framed the core concern in the form of a question: “A man may tie his shoe laces or brush his teeth amorally, but can he create anything apart from some degree of moral involvement?”¹⁸ There are a good number of Christians who feel somewhat uneasy about the idea that, on a sin-infested planet, products of human artistic creativity (which originate from deep within) are somehow undefiled and not subject to moral evaluation. As Kilby observed, common tasks or utilitarian artifacts (a chair, for example) may possibly be adjudged as amoral. But, can we really make that assessment of a product of human artistic creativity in the fine arts such as a painting, a novel, or a piece of music? There is general consensus that song lyrics need to be evaluated as either compatible or incompatible, right or wrong, in relation to Christian faith and outlook. But what about the music itself? Doesn't it need similar assessment? Unquestionably, if we respond in the affirmative, we enter a difficult arena with another raft of perplexing issues to confront. However, why should that challenge manipulate us into a default acceptance that music is a neutral island?

Given the strong Christian belief in a moral universe, the question could well be asked: Why, then, have so few Christians grappled with this problem? Furthermore, why have so many argued for the moral neutrality of music—and the arts as a whole, for that matter? Frank E. Gaebelein makes the following perceptive observation which throws considerable light on this: “The bulk of the work being done in the field of Christian aesthetics represents Roman and Anglo-Catholic thought. Its roots go deep into sacramental theology, Thomism, Greek philosophy, and such great writers as Dante.”¹⁹

The dominance of Roman and Anglo-Catholic thought in the field of Christian aesthetics is highly significant. During the Middle Ages of Western cultural history, when this stream of theological thought was the prevailing influence, human creativity came to be

seen as an aspect of humanity that was not touched by the fall of Adam into sin; rather, it was considered a pristine remnant of the original *imago dei*. This proved to be a consequential pre-supposition that still persists.²⁰ It meant that, in evaluating the arts, appeal was made to aesthetic criticism to ensure good-quality art, but moral accountability was never an issue because the creative impulse was considered to be essentially pure and innocent. Even the immoral life of an artist was considered of little concern as long as he or she produced aesthetically superior art. And, given that only the best was good enough for God, the best was equated with aesthetic excellence. So it was that during the time when the church dominated Western society, aesthetic excellence also came to be identified with the religiously acceptable.

Hence, aesthetic evaluation came into prominence in Christian thinking about the arts to the point that it eclipsed moral considerations. However, as the church lost its hold over society and the culture became more secular, multiple worldviews surfaced, and aesthetic pluralism also emerged.²¹ As aesthetic excellence and the development of good taste continued to be upheld as the only way to evaluate music, so-called good-quality expressions of various styles including Rock, Techno, Classical, Jazz, Country-Western, Soul, and a host of other genres, each with their own individual aesthetic standards, inevitably became acceptable forms of musical expression, even in worship contexts.

While this may bring some understanding to developments within the Roman and Anglo-Catholic traditions, particularly since Vatican II, for many thoughtful Protestants, this paradigm does not take into account the “radical distortion” that sin has wrought in every field of human endeavour. Building on a concept of Emil Brunner, Gaebelein suggested that “those areas of thought and activity that are closest to our humanness and our relation to God are most severely twisted by the bentness in us.”²² He went on to explain how he understood this to work out in life as follows: “. . . in the more objective fields like physics and chemistry, they are less affected, until, in mathematics, the distortion approaches zero. By such an estimate, the arts, which speak so subjectively and so very personally regarding who and what we are in relation to our Maker, are very vulnerable to the distortion that sin has brought into the world. This means that Christian artists and all of us for whom the arts are an essential part of life and culture must constantly be keeping our eyes open to the marks of the Fall in them and in us also.”²³

For Gaebelein, this does not mean that humanity is totally worthless, and neither is the image of God utterly wiped out. By the exercise of God’s common grace, “humanity has been in the past and can still be today wonderfully creative to His glory.”²⁴ However, we cannot be thoughtlessly *laissez faire* here.

If Gaebelein’s logic is correct, then Christians of evangelical Protestant persuasion, including Seventh-day Adventists, have no option but to explore meaningful and legitimate ways to evaluate music, not only to determine what is beautiful and genuinely skillful but also to establish what is morally compatible with the worldview we espouse. This in no way supports cavalier, simplistic assessments that lack integrity and are spawned through ignorance. What I am suggesting is no easy task, or perhaps many would have already successfully tackled it. In the next article, “Music Matters (Part 3),” I will offer two suggestions as a beginning. They both grow out of the fact that belief in the moral neutrality of music is untenable.

¹ An aphorism quoted in *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 27 (October 1980):12.

² Maurice Zam in a letter to Ann Landers, *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1993.

³ Dana Key with Steve Rabey, *Don’t Stop the Music* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 69. This is very similar to Oscar Wilde’s view about literature: “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all” (Oscar Wilde, quoted in James L. Jarrett, *The Quest for Beauty* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1957], 216.)

⁴ Thomas A. Dorsey quoted in Oral L. Moses, “The Nineteenth-Century Spiritual Text: A Source for Modern Gospel,” in *Feel the Spirit: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Music*, George R. Keck and Sherrill V. Martin, eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 50.

⁵ Michael Tomlinson, “Contemporary Christian Music is Christian Music,” in *Ministry* 69 (September 1996):26.

⁶ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 42.

⁷ Harold Byron Hannum, *Christian Search for Beauty* (Nashville Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰ Ivan Vador, “The Role of Music in the Education of Man: Orient and Occident,” in *The World of Music* 22 (1980):13.

¹¹ An evidence of this is the furor caused in the United States, when, in the mid-1980s, it was suggested that popular music recordings should carry some kind of warning label regarding explicit, pornographic, and violent lyrics—let alone music.

¹² Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, rev. wd. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1973), 7.

¹³ Confucius in *The Wisdom of Confucius*, Lin Yutang, ed. (New York: Random House, 1938), 251-272.

¹⁴ See, for example, the writings of the early church fathers such as Basil, John Chrysostom, and Jerome in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965), 64-72.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79-86.

¹⁶ Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 218.

¹⁷ For example, Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:653.

¹⁸ Clyde S. Kilby, *Christianity and Aesthetics* (Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 1961), 24.

¹⁹ Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Christian, the Arts and Truth: Regaining the Vision of Greatness*, D. Bruce Lockerbie, ed. (Portland Oreg.: Multnomah Press, 1985), 56.

²⁰ This view is still strongly presented in Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Bollingen Series XXXV, no. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 374-376; John W. Dixon, Jr., *Nature and Grace in Art* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 61, 70, 73, 76, and 200; Winfried Kurzschinkel, *Die Theologische Bestimmung der Musik* (Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 1971), 328-334. The subject has been discussed in detail in Wolfgang Stefani, “Artistic Creativity and the Fall: With Special Reference to Musical Creativity,” unpublished paper (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich.: 1987).

²¹ Roger Sessions alluded to this general problem at the outset of a chapter on aesthetic criteria in his classic book *Questions About Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 124.

²² Gaebelein, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth*, 74.

²³ *Ibid.*, 74, 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

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EFFECT OF DRY WORDS

Many make a mistake in their preaching in not stopping while the interest is up. They go on speechifying until the interest that had risen in the minds of the hearers dies out and the people are really wearied with words of no special weight or interest. Stop before you get there. Stop when you have nothing of special importance to say. Do not go on with dry words that only excite prejudice and do not soften the heart. You want to be so united to Christ that your words will melt and burn their way to the soul. Mere prosy talk is insufficient for this time. Arguments are good, but there may be too much of the argumentative and too little of the spirit and life of God.

BETTER PREPARATION, SHORTER DISCOURSES

The discourses given upon present truth are full of important matter, and if these discourses are carefully considered before being presented to the people, if they are condensed and do not cover too much ground, if the Spirit of the Master goes with the utterances, no one will be left in darkness, no one will have cause to complain of being un-fed. The preparation, both in preacher and hearer, has very much to do with the result.

I will here quote a few words that have come under my notice just now: "I always know by the length of Cannon's sermon whether he has been much from home during the week," said one of his flock. "When carefully studied, his discourses are of a moderate length, but it is almost impossible for his hearers to forget the teachings conveyed in them. When he has had no time for preparation, his sermons are unreasonably long, and it is equally impossible to get anything out of them which will stick to the memory."

STOP WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO SAY.

Another able minister was asked how long he was accustomed to preach. "When I prepare thoroughly, half an hour; when only partially, an hour; but when I enter the pulpit without previous preparation, I go on for any length of time you like; in fact, I never know when to stop."

Here is another forcible statement: "A good shepherd," says a writer, "should always have abundance of bread in his scrip, and his dog under command. The dog is his zeal, which he must lead, order, and moderate. His scrip full of bread is his mind full of useful knowledge, and he should ever be in readiness to give nourishment to his flock."

NEEDLESS EXPENDITURE OF VITALITY

Some pray too long and too loud, which greatly exhausts their feeble strength and needlessly expends their vitality; others frequently make their discourses one-third or one-half longer than they should. In so doing they become excessively weary, the interest of the people decreases before the discourse closes, and much is lost to them, for they cannot retain it. One-half that was said would have been better than more. Although all the matter may be important, the success would be much greater were the praying and talking less lengthy. The result would be reached without so great weariness. They are needlessly using up their strength and vitality, which, for the good of the cause, it is so necessary to retain. It is the long-protracted effort, after laboring to the point of weariness, which wears and breaks.

ED

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp 251-253, by Ellen G. White.

ANOTHER YEAR FOR THEE

Another year has sped by at amazing speed. Time certainly flies—more so as I get older (and the more I fly!). Early October already marks the introduction of Christmas decorations in malls and shopping outlets, yet most of the world hurries on, forgetting that “Jesus is the reason for the season.” How is it with you and me?

As busy health workers, we are totally occupied and engrossed as we daily encounter the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people. We are so deeply engaged that we ourselves become physically and emotionally exhausted, even spiritually jaded. Jesus foresaw this scenario; this is why He invited the disciples to “come ye yourselves apart

and rest awhile.” We should strive to do this daily as we rest from our works and are immersed in His righteousness and healing. My prayer is that you will make such an opportunity every day: before, during, and after any festive season.

I would like to thank you for your untiring ministry to a world in need. Thank you for being His hands to touch lives and alleviate suffering. The recipients of your care and efforts are drawn into a tangible understanding of the love of Jesus through your life. As you move into 2018, with its uncharted terrain, challenges, and your personal resolutions, may you be ever encouraged by God’s promises. He has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5, NIV) and “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (verse 8).

On behalf of the General Conference Adventist Health Ministries team, I pray for each one of you what is summarized in this beautiful hymn:

“Another year is dawning, dear Father, let it be / In working or in waiting, another year with Thee; / Another year of progress, another year of praise, / Another year of proving thy presence all the days.

“Another year of mercies, of faithfulness and grace, / another year of gladness in the shining of Thy face; / Another year of leaning upon Thy loving breast; / Another year of trusting, of quiet, happy rest.

“Another year of service, of witness for Thy love, / Another year of training for holier work above; / Another year is dawning, dear Father, let it be / On earth, or else in Heaven, another year for Thee.”¹

Let us move forward in confidence, and, empowered by His Spirit, embrace the world’s brokenness through comprehensive health ministry, sharing wholeness, serving all, and with every member engaged and involved. The intensity and frequency of daily events and catastrophes, not to mention the relentless thrust to exclude God from government and society, leave us in no doubt that we are indeed living in “grand and awful times.” But we have hope, “hope in the coming of the Lord.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



¹ Frances Ridley Havergal, “Another Year is Dawning,” 1874.

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WE CAN TRUST HIS WORD

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

The God who spoke to reveal Himself and His ways promised a Savior, a promise He fulfilled through Jesus Christ. As we submit our lives to Christ in repentance and faith for salvation, we also submit to the authority of God's Word. We show our trust in God and His Word as we: (1) acknowledge that it is from Him; (2) allow God to transform our lives by it; and, (3) serve in His mission as He equips us to live our lives for His glory.

In this message, the focus is on a major event in the life of Stephen. In Acts 7, we see the fruit of the Word of God in Stephen's life. He believed God's Word. He allowed God's Word to change him. And, he proclaimed God's Word boldly. In our passage from 2 Timothy 3, we will see that God's Word should cause the same effects in our lives.

I. WE CAN TRUST GOD'S WORD TO BE TRUE (VERSE 16A)

Paul uses the Greek word *theopneustos* ("God-breathed" or "God-exhaled") to describe the nature of Scripture, God's Word. God's Word, like God Himself, is unique. God is eternal, and His Word stands forever (Is. 40:8). God does not change, nor does His Word. Because it comes from God (see 2 Pet. 1:20, 21), who Himself is truth, the Word of God is true.

As stated in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Is. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21)."

Because we can trust the God of the Word to be true, we can trust the Word of God to be true as well. The words of men are just that—the words of men. We can trust that God—and, therefore, God's Word—is true.

For every occurrence in our lives, big or small, positive or negative, there is no shortage of counsel available to us. Television hosts, radio personalities, friends, and family members all

weigh in, giving us their perspective on what we should do or how we should respond. Do you demonstrate your trust in God by trusting that His Word is the one true source you can count on to direct you according to His will and ways?

II. WE CAN TRUST GOD'S WORD TO AFFECT OUR LIVES (VERSE 16B)

Paul says that God's Word is not only trustworthy but also "profitable." What kind of profit does God's Word bring? As Bible teacher and commentator Warren Wiersbe puts it, "[God's Word is] profitable for doctrine [what is right], for reproof [what is not right], for correction [how to get right], and for instruction in righteousness [how to stay right]."

It is not just part of the Word of God that is profitable but all of it. We tend to focus only on the parts of Scripture that are familiar and/or comfortable to us. This passage should compel us to give ourselves to studying the entire God's Word, knowing that God will use it to accomplish these objectives (doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness) in our lives. Ultimately, we know that God is working by the power of His Spirit, through His Word, to further conform us into the image of His Son.

Do you read the Word of God simply for information or do you read it for life transformation, allowing God to use it to teach, correct, reprove, and instruct you? Is God's Word affecting your life? If not, would you ask God to help you read His Word toward that end?

III. WE CAN TRUST GOD'S WORD TO PREPARE US FOR MISSION (VERSE 17)

Paul says that the Word of God bringing about this "profit" in our lives serves a purpose. That purpose is to ensure that the "man of God" (and, by extension, the people of God) is both "complete" (some translations say "perfect") and "equipped." Both of these words, "complete" and "equipped" (meaning "lacking nothing that is needed"), carry the idea of being prepared for service or action (i.e., "every good work").

Perhaps our greatest "good work" for which God equips us as His followers is to obey the command of Christ to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20). This command encompasses everything from growing in our own walk with Christ to proclaiming the message of Christ in our own communities and to the ends of the earth. We seek to live as growing disciples


"There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's Word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose rarely seen in these times."

Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 90

ourselves as we make disciples of others, including sharing the gospel and, for those who trust Christ, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded. Because we trust God and believe that His Word is true, we not only allow His Word to work in our lives; we also take that Word to the ends of the earth, calling for others likewise to hear the Word of God and to submit to the God of the Word in repentance and faith in Christ.

Wiersbe says, "The ultimate purpose [of the Word of God] is the equipping of the believers who read it. It is the Word of God that equips God's people to do the work of God." Have you simply been asking God to teach you from His Word, or are you asking God to equip you by His Word so that you can more effectively serve Him in His mission for His glory?

CONCLUSION

If you have never repented of your sin and trusted Christ as the only Savior and Lord, that is your greatest need. You will never fully submit to the Word of God if you do not first repent and trust the God of the Word. If you are a follower of Christ, will you today demonstrate your trust in God and His Word, not simply saying that you believe it is true but also allowing God to transform your life by it, fully equipping you for serving faithfully in His mission for His glory? 

General Conference Ministerial Association

WE MUST OBEY HIS WORD

We are under the authority of the Word of God because we are under the authority of the God who gave it. One day, every knee will bow in acknowledgement of God's supreme rule and reign over all. As followers of Christ, we can show our submission to God by our submission to His Word, not only by acknowledging its truthfulness but by walking in obedience to the truth it teaches.

In today's message, we will consider how our submission to God demands not only our acknowledgement of the truth of His Word but also our obedience to all it teaches.

I. OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD BEGINS WITH ACTIVE HEARING (VERSES 19, 20)

After getting his hearers' attention with "Know this," James follows with a present imperative (a command calling for continuous action), which, if over-translated, could read, "Let every person keep on being quick to hear . . ." The two other actions they are to avoid—talking too much and reacting harshly in anger—impair one's ability to hear clearly. Further, they are to "receive with meekness the implanted word" (a command), in part by "putting away" (a participle) all filthiness and wickedness. Doing this is similar to having their spiritual ears cleaned, making sure they are actively leaving the vestiges of their old sinful lifestyle that would hinder their hearing of the Word of God.

James is not implying that his readers can work toward sinless perfection, causing them to hear the Word of God in a manner that is completely unhindered by their sinful nature. He is, however, making clear that they will be better prepared to hear and receive the truth of the Word if they are active both in listening to the Word and in removing any known spiritual hindrances.

Do you regularly position yourself to hear the Word of God clearly? Do you allow the Word of God to speak to your heart rather than simply talking or reacting in anger? Do you walk away from those practices that keep you from hearing?

II. OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD REQUIRES ONGOING ACTION (VERSES 22-24)

James gives another command at the beginning of verse 22: "keep on being doers of the word." A person can listen to the best pulpитеers, the best radio teachers, and the best Bible study leaders every week and still dishonor God by dis-

obeying the truth he or she has heard. The end of such a practice, James says, is self-deception. As one commentator so aptly put it, "The growing numbers of sermon-sippers who flit from one doctrinal dessert to another like helpless hummingbirds are deceiving themselves." How frequently you listen to the "Sermons" playlist on your iPod is not the measure of your submission to God and His Word.

Ultimately, our true submission to God and His Word is not demonstrated by the amount of time we spend listening to or reading God's truth, but by the degree to which we live in obedience to it. God has given us His Word as a mirror that shows us an accurate reflection of who we are. Our response to seeing that reflection, having responded in repentance and faith to Christ, should be gratitude for God's grace and obedient submission to His rule. Jesus said those who are truly in relationship with Him and who truly love Him will obey what He commands (John 14:15).

Perhaps you have heard the equation: Stated Belief + Actual Practice = Actual Belief. If that is true, what does your current obedience to God's Word say about the degree to which you believe it? Does the way you live your life demonstrate consistent, active submission to God and His Word through a lifestyle of ongoing obedience?

III. OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD RESULTS IN PROMISED BLESSING (VERSE 25)

Will an occasional glance into God's Word and a half-hearted attempt at living in obedience to what little we have read suffice for a life submitted to God? Certainly not! James says his hearers should "look into" the law of God, suggesting the idea of "stooping down to get a close look." They are to look into the "perfect law, the law of liberty." God's law does not bring oppression; it brings true freedom, true liberty. Freedom under God's law is not freedom to do what I want but a freedom to do what I ought, having been set free from the bondage of sin (see Rom. 6). There is no greater freedom than man, God's creation, living in obedience to God's will and plan. To do so is to live according to the purpose for which we were created.

So what is this promised "blessing" that comes as a result of obedience? Does our obedience to God's Word promise material blessing and prosperity? No! In fact, read Job. Read the New Testament accounts of faithful Christ-

"The word of God often comes in collision with man's hereditary and cultivated traits of character and his habits of life. But the good-ground hearer, in receiving the word, accepts all its conditions and requirements. His habits, customs, and practices are brought into submission to God's Word. In his view, the commands of finite, erring man sink into insignificance beside the word of the infinite God. With the whole heart, with undivided purpose, he is seeking the life eternal, and at the cost of loss, persecution, or death itself, he will obey the truth."

Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, 60

followers who suffered persecution for their obedience rather than receiving material blessings. So, then, what is the blessing? The greatest blessing of obedience is the delight a child experiences knowing that his or her obedience has resulted in the honor and joy of a delighted parent. Our blessing is the honor God receives through our obedience.

Do you find delight and "blessing" in knowing that God is honored and glorified through your obedience to Him? To do so is a mark of true submission to God.

CONCLUSION

For the one who has not trusted Christ as his or her Savior, the first act of submission is to repent and, by faith, trust in Christ as the only Savior. For those who are Christ-followers, we show our submission to God by obeying His Word and experiencing the blessing of honoring our Father.



General Conference Ministerial Association

RIGHTLY INTERPRETING GOD'S WORD

God speaks to His people by His Spirit through His Word. To understand God's Word rightly, we must interpret it appropriately. Doing so requires us to understand the different types of literature (genres) used in the Bible and read each type accordingly.

In today's message, we want to focus on reading God's Word rightly so that we may understand His message clearly. We must have a clear understanding of God's Word before we can correctly apply it to our lives. Recognizing the different genres used in Scripture and reading each type accordingly will help us interpret God's Word rightly, understand it clearly, and apply it correctly.

I. INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE RIGHTLY REQUIRES A RIGHT HEART (VERSE 15A)

Paul is writing to Timothy, his son in the faith and the young pastor of the church in Ephesus. Paul begins his admonition to Timothy by telling him to "be diligent" (strive) to present himself to God as one who is "approved" (that is, one who has been tested and found to be pure, like tested metal). If he lives in such a manner, he will have no reason to be "ashamed." There were those around the young Timothy who had reason to be ashamed. They had been tested and found lacking. Some were self-serving. Others had been caught up in doctrinal error and/or arguments. Some would simply tell people what they wanted to hear.

Timothy's commitment to Christ was to be rooted in his faith in Him, as ours must be. When that is the case, the trials of life serve only to demonstrate that our faith is grounded in Christ. When we strive to walk by faith in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, our lives will be "approved" unto God, and we will not need to be ashamed. This will be evidenced, at least in part, as we will see in a moment, by the fact that we rightly interpret and apply God's Word.

Do you have a heart that is prepared to interpret the Scripture rightly? Do you have a heart that is fully surrendered to Christ and walking in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit? He is the One who not only gave us the Word of God but who also leads us to understand its truth.

II. INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE RIGHTLY REQUIRES A RIGHT APPROACH (VERSE 15B)

Because others in Ephesus were not interpreting and/or using Scripture appropriately, Paul

admonished Timothy to "rightly divide the Word of Truth." The word translated "rightly divide" literally means "to cut a straight road." It is used only here in the New Testament and only once in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in Proverbs 3:6, where God is said to "cut a straight path" for those who walk faithfully in His ways. So, how can we "rightly divide" the Word of Truth? Obviously, the greatest requirement for doing so is to depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth. But, what are some practical steps we can employ as we seek the Spirit's leadership and guidance?

A. *Consider the context.* One of the most important issues in interpreting the Bible correctly is that of context. There are several factors to consider here. What is the immediate context? What is happening in this verse and in the surrounding verses? What is this passage's context in light of the book in which it is found? Where does this passage—and the book in which it is found—fit into the larger picture of the grand story of Scripture? For example, Deuteronomy 30 must be read not only in light of the rest of Deuteronomy but in light of where it fits in the Pentateuch and in light of the whole Bible.

B. *Consider the genre.* What type of literature are you reading? Is it a historical narrative, telling a story? Is it prophecy, where the prophet of God is either foretelling a future event or sharing God's message to His people? Is it wisdom literature, giving general principles that are usually true but which should not be read as promises that always come true? Is it a letter, written to a particular people at a particular time but with theological implications for us today? Or, is it apocalyptic literature (like sections of Daniel or the book of Revelation), describing what will happen at the end-time? While the Bible is one unified book telling one consistent story (from creation to re-creation), we must read each of these literary types appropriately to understand them correctly.

C. *Consider the meaning.* Any given passage of Scripture can have only one meaning: the meaning God the Holy Spirit intended when He inspired men to write it down. When we consider the words in a passage in their context, according to the literary type (genre) and guided by the Holy Spirit, we can discover their meaning. While some passages are admittedly more difficult to understand than others, we believe in the perspicuity of Scripture—that the Bible is suffi-

“When the word of God is opened without reverence and without prayer; when the thoughts and affections are not fixed upon God, or in harmony with His will, the mind is clouded with doubts; and in the very study of the Bible, skepticism strengthens. The enemy takes control of the thoughts, and he suggests interpretations that are not correct. . . . Those who look to the Scriptures to find discrepancies have not spiritual insight. With distorted vision they will see many causes for doubt and unbelief in things that are really plain and simple.”


Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 110

ciently clear for us to understand the meaning God intended and its implications for our lives. A good rule of thumb for difficult passages is to interpret them in light of ones that are clearer.

D. *Consider the application.* While passages of Scripture have only one interpretation, they can have multiple applications for how they should be applied. Are you reading simply to understand the meaning or are you reading so that, understanding it rightly, you may obey it fully?

The question is not "Can we 'rightly divide' the Word of Truth?" The question is, "Will we do the hard work of presenting ourselves to God as those who have been tried and tested, unashamed, because we have handled His Word well, both understanding it and living it out?"

CONCLUSION

Our first understanding of the Word of God should be coming to an awareness of our own sin and our need for a Savior. After that, we must seek to understand God's Word rightly and live it out faithfully and obediently, by the power of His Spirit, for the sake of His glory. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

GOD'S WORD GUIDES US

Acts 6:1-7

God speaks, and He does so through His Word. God uses His Word to teach, rebuke, correct, and instruct His people (2 Tim. 3:16). The preaching of God's Word, therefore, should have a central place among the people of God wherein they receive His Word, share His Word, and live out His Word together.

It is good to remember that God's Word, like God Himself, is eternal. His Word is also trustworthy, just as He is. In this text, we will see how God's Word is central to the life and ministry of the people of God and how it guides us as we live in biblical community.

I. GOD'S WORD MUST BE PROCLAIMED TO GOD'S PEOPLE (VERSES 1, 2)

In this passage, the Greek-speaking widows were being neglected in the distribution of resources (perhaps food, but more likely financial resources). As a result, the apostles were seeking to assist with this need, to the detriment of their ministry of proclaiming the Word. This was of major concern to the apostles, as they recognized the centrality of the Word of God and the necessity of its proclamation. They did not want to ignore the obvious need of these widows, thereby disobeying the Word they would proclaim. More importantly, they did not want to neglect their responsibility for preaching.

It seems that today, at least in many churches, this would not have been much of an issue. Some today would gladly lay aside the proclamation of the Word in favor of meeting practical needs. But the reaction of the apostles and the teaching of God's Word will not permit such a response. While God's people should meet practical needs, as we will see in a moment, the proclamation of God's Word must remain central. By its proclamation, God's Word will guide God's people and give direction for service that will honor and glorify Him.

Do you give priority to hearing God's Word when it is proclaimed to God's people? Do you go to corporate worship with a sense of anticipation that God will speak to His people through His Word by His Spirit? It is important for us to hear God's Word together, for it reminds us that there is one God who has brought us together as one people by His one Spirit for the one purpose of living lives—individually and together—that honor and glorify Him.

II. GOD'S WORD MUST BE APPLIED BY GOD'S PEOPLE (VERSES 3-6)

When the problem arose regarding the distribution to widows, how would the people of God respond? They would apply the teaching of God's Word to the situation. They knew they were commanded to care for one another, particularly those who could not care for themselves. The Old Testament (particularly the prophets) is replete with examples of God rebuking His people for overlooking those in need among them. They also knew, however, that they must not overlook the proclamation of the Word. Therefore, they selected men who had a good testimony, were wise, and were full of the Spirit. We see the whole gathering affirming this plan.

The division of labor as noted should not be read as if the apostles were too good to take on menial tasks. Rather, it is a matter of calling and roles. Every believer is called to minister to one another. The apostles, however, had the additional responsibilities of preaching and leading the people in prayer. Because they were spending so much time assisting the widows, they were neglecting their God-given responsibilities of prayer and proclamation.

Are you allowing God's Word to impact every aspect of your life—how you worship, serve, work, and minister to others? One of the reasons we hear the Word of God proclaimed together is so we can encourage one another to live out the truth of the Word in our lives, our families, our churches, and our communities.

III. GOD'S WORD WILL BE MULTIPLIED AMONG HIS PEOPLE (VERSE 7)

What was the result of the apostles' commitment to proclaim the Word of God boldly, faithfully, and consistently? The Word of God "continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly . . ." As the Word was faithfully proclaimed, God used it to impact the lives of these Christ-followers, sending them out—either willingly or by means of scattering through persecution—to make disciples of all nations. As the number of disciples continued to multiply, the impact of their lives and ministry spread. In Acts 17, we read that the expanding ministry of these early followers of Christ had such an impact that they were known as "these men who have turned the world upside down."

We do not always know the specific ways that God's Word will impact His people and, by extension, those around them. What we do know, however, is that God's Word is living, powerful,


“Every one should feel that he is responsible to God for all the talent He has given him, and that he should use these entrusted talents to God’s glory. Every true Christian is a missionary. While in this world, we are to consider ourselves in active service for the Master; and we should make this message of present truth which God has sent into our world of the highest importance. There are those who have an understanding of the Scriptures theoretically, and yet the religious meetings under their charge are spiritless and of no vital interest to the worshipers. God has given us tact; and if we have any power of influence, let us bring this power into active service for Him.”

Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,
July 26, 1887, par. 3

and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). We also know that God's Word will not return to Him void but will be effective for accomplishing that for which He sends it (Isa. 55:11).

Do you seek to hear and apply the truth of God's Word in community with other followers of Christ? Do you watch to see what God will do as you live in faith and obedience to Him? Do you pray that God will multiply the effects of His Word through His people, touching the lives of those who do not yet know Christ?

CONCLUSION

For someone who does not know Christ, the Word of God stands as a testament to that person's sinfulness and need of a Savior—the only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. For the people of God, the Word of God teaches, rebukes, corrects, and instructs, forming them into the image of Christ, preparing them as His Bride, and equipping them as God's people to live for God's glory. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

AN ACT OF WORSHIP

I AM EXPLORING SEVERAL ISSUES RELATED TO WORSHIP. WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF KNEELING TO PRAY? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

This is a topic that will become more relevant as we approach the return of our Lord (Rev. 14:6, 7). The marketing of religion to increase church attendance, as well as the invasion of psychology and sociology into the realm of church services, is slowly displacing God from the center of worship, making it more human-centered. Emotionalism is taking over in an attempt to quiet dissatisfaction with the generally weak condition of our spiritual lives. Humans prefer listening to prophets of peace to listening to the Word of the Lord. But I digress.

Kneeling is a wonderful posture for believers.

One of the more common words in the Old Testament for kneeling down is *karac*, which means “to bend one’s knee, to bow down, to kneel down.” In nonreligious contexts, it is associated with the position of a woman during childbirth (1 Sam. 4:19) and with sexual activity (Job 31:10). Among the more specialized usages are the following:

1. *An expression of honor and submission.* Fearing for his life, one of the captains sent by King Ahaziah to arrest Elijah “went up and fell on his knees” before the prophet, saying, “Man of God . . . please have respect for my life and the life of these fifty men” (2 Kings 1:13).^{*} He was showing respect and submission to the prophet. When Xerxes promoted Haman, the officers working under Haman were to show respect and submission by bowing/kneeling before him (Esther 3:2).

2. *A symbol of defeat.* When individuals were mortally

wounded, they collapsed on bended knees, falling and dying (Judg. 5:27; 2 Kings 9:24). The psalmist praises the Lord because his adversaries “bow at my feet” (Ps. 18:39). The prayer of the righteous is that God may cause the adversary to bow/kneel down defeated, by the Lord (Ps. 17:13). The idea of defeat is clearly expressed in Psalm 20:7, 8: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.”

3. *An expression of adoration:* Prayer to God is most often made standing, but there are cases in which people knelt to pray and to worship the Lord (2 Chron. 7:3; 29:29; Ezra 9:5; Eph. 3:14). Kneeling before the Lord is a voluntary act of honor, submission, and adoration. The psalmist invites us to “bow down in worship,” to “kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Ps. 95:6). The reason for kneeling before Him is that He is the Creator. The Lord pointed to a glorious future when every knee will bow, recognizing that salvation comes only from Him (Is. 45:22, 23; cf. Phil. 2:10). However, the Lord will cause rebellious sinners to bow down to die (Is. 65:12).

In the context of worship, kneeling is the “ritual” expression of a deep personal conviction that controls the daily life of the worshiper. Those who fall on their knees are going down to the ground, to the dust (cf. Ps. 72:9). We were taken from the dust, and it is our fate to return to it (Gen. 3:19). Our return to the dust is not usually a voluntary act; it is, in fact, something human nature tends to resist.

But, in worship, something wonderful happens. By kneeling down, we are, in fact, voluntarily returning our lives to the Lord, acknowledging Him to be the very source and ground of our being, the Creator (cf. Acts 7:59, 60). This acted-out ritual of self-surrendering is the outward manifestation of the inner commitment of yielding the totality of our lives to the Lord. We are saying, “You are my Creator and Redeemer; and in gratitude of love I am voluntarily handing my whole life to You. You do not have to wait until I die to receive it back. Today I am releasing it to You.” It is through self-renunciation that our life is preserved and enriched for service (cf. Luke 5:9-11).

Next time you kneel in worship, you are, in fact, making a nonverbal statement: “Lord, here is my life; it is Yours. Take it and use me as You please.”

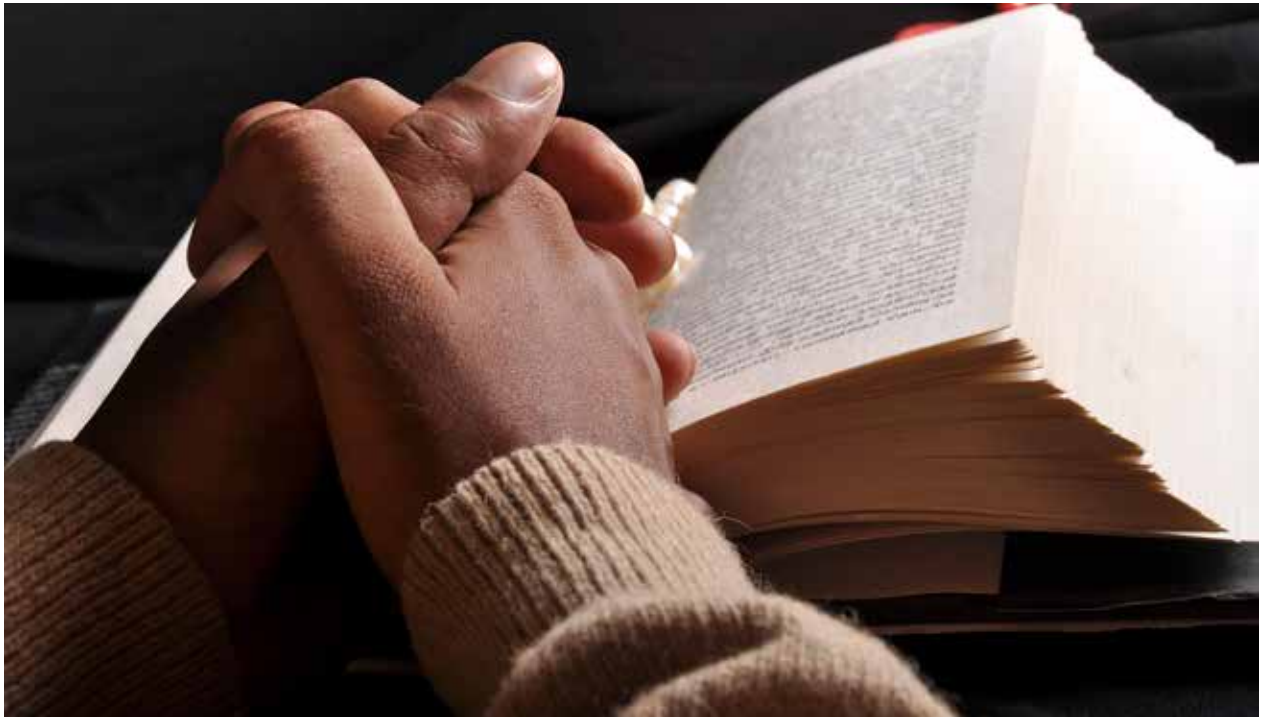
Shall we kneel?



^{*} Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version.

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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.



MISSIONAL PRAYER

Prayer is a big part of our ministry—at least that's what our people think. They come to us and say, "Would you pray for me? Could you please pray about my finals, my work, my friend, my kids, etc.?"

If we are not careful, our prayers can take on a professional polish that lacks substance. If we let it happen, our prayers can become little more than a professional duty. What's more, our prayers can become so intertwined with our performance as pastors or elders that our prayers have nothing more going for them than the desire to make us look good, appear better, and simulate success.

So, what needs to go into our prayer ministry for others? Let's take a look at Jesus' prayer: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23).

Can you see what Jesus is praying for in these verses? The praxis of His ministry is shaped by the content of His prayer. He is praying for mission. For conversions. For a

growing number of dying people coming to life in the community of Christ. Jesus prayed:

1. For people to come into the community of believers.
2. For people to enter into a relationship with heaven.
3. For the world to come to believe through those who already believe.
4. That His glory would shine upon the ministry of those who already believe.
5. For people to experience the love of God for them.

Jesus prays as One sent—sent on a mission. And He prays for those who will put their faith in Him to become men and women who are sent as well. Missional prayer filled Jesus' heart with joy.

Let me ask you: Is your ministry becoming more and more difficult, more and more burdensome? If so, I invite you into a life of missional prayer. When you pray as one who is sent, God will hear your prayers. He will be reminded that you are one who has been sent, that you are pressing hard into the mission, and that you are depending upon Him to pour out His Spirit on those for whom you are praying. Missional prayer will save your ministry, and it will open the doors for more and more people to experience the saving hug of Christ.



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THE LORD'S SUPPER: A COMMEMORATION AND ITS SECRET

It is good to remember certain events that took place in the past, for instance, one's childhood and family, one's wedding, the birth of one's children, and one's baptism. It is easier to remember an event, if a symbol is connected to it or if certain feasts are celebrated. Therefore, we celebrate, for example, Mother's Day, anniversaries, birthdays, or have a class reunion. Christians partake of the Lord's Supper to remember what Jesus has done for them, when He died on the cross.

I. THE FOOT WASHING

Closely connected to the Lord's Supper is the ordinance of the Foot washing. The Lord's Supper is explicitly mentioned by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul but not by John. On the other hand, the foot washing is explicitly mentioned by John but not by the other Gospels. Nevertheless, they belong together (John 13:1-16, 26, 27).

In connection with the Lord's Supper there was a dispute among the disciples about which of them was to be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24-27).

Jesus instituted the foot washing indicating that before God all humans are equal. The foot washing was and is an expression of humility and fellowship with Jesus and each other (John 13:1-17).

These verses contain Jesus' clear command to practice foot washing (John 13:14, 15). Jesus promises that those will be blessed who practice foot washing (John 13:17).

The foot washing is not a meritorious work but points to humility and love among Christians, indicating that they are willing to serve one another. Foot washing means participation in and fellowship with Christ and each other. It points to cleansing from sin and equality among the people of God without denying that there are different functions including leadership.

II. THE LORD'S SUPPER

Preparation for Passover (cf. Ex. 12) which is the festival of salvation (Luke 22:7-13).

Transformation of the Passover to the Lord's Supper by Jesus and its duration (Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:14-20). Jesus is the true Passover (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

1. *The Lord's Supper a Non-Bloody Sacrifice?*

- Christ's sacrifice is unrepeatable (Heb. 9:27-28).
- Non-bloody sacrifices do not bring about forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22-26).



- Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is sufficient (Heb. 10:12, 14-18).

2. *The Meaning of the Lord's Supper*

A commemoration of what Jesus did for us, a sign of the new covenant between God and us, proclamation pointing from Jesus' death to His Second Coming (1 Cor. 11:17-29).

Partaking of the Lord's Supper means fellowship with Christ and His people. We accept Christ's sacrifice personally (1 Cor. 10:16, 17).

3. *"This is" or "This Means?"*

- Matthews 26:26 - "This is my blood" (Mark 14:24; cf. John 6:35, 48, 51, 54, 56).
- Luke 22:20 - "This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus says about Himself: I am the light, the door, the vine. These texts indicate that a symbolic understanding is required. The same is true for the emblems of the Lord's Supper (John 8:12; 10:9; 15:1).

The Lord's Supper was instituted prior to Jesus' death. The bread and wine that He held in His hands were not His actual body and blood. Paul makes it clear that the Lord's Supper is taken in remembrance to what Jesus has done for us. With the Lord's Supper we receive a wonderful blessing and count on the special presence of the Holy Spirit. We are also looking forward to the time when we will take it in Jesus' direct presence. ED

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GREAT HYMNS OF THE CHURCH >PART 5

HYMN SINGING NEW TESTAMENT STYLE I

EPHESIANS 5:15-20

While Scripture abounds in references to music, it nowhere gives us a carefully reasoned discourse on the use of music in worship. The Old Testament Psalms record the poetic prayer and praise of Jewish worship, and remain a beautiful source for Christian song. The New Testament alludes briefly to music in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles, and the Apocalypse vibrates with a great eternal psalm to the Creator-Redeemer Lord.

In this two-part series we will examine two New Testament instructions for hymn singing: Ephesians 5:15-20 and Colossians 3:12-17.

PART ONE: EPHESIANS 5:15-20

In this chapter, Paul encourages believers to live their beliefs, with all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. They must make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil, and “*understand what the Lord’s will is.*” They are not to get drunk with wine, but instead be filled with the Spirit.

The apostle’s musical exhortation follows in verses 19 and 20:

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul here encourages believers to communicate spiritually with each other in poetic and musical modes—probably in settings that were spoken as well as sung.

The Greek text uses three different terms for “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Their meanings and uses overlap, however, so no distinction should be pressed too far. *Psalmōn* (“psalm”) means a song of praise, originally with plucked instrument accompaniment. It may refer to the Old Testament Psalms, but the Greek term does not specifically say so. Similarly, *hymnōn* (“hymn”) signifies a song of praise, but its use suggests no precise kind of text or music.

The Greek for “spiritual song” is *pneumatikos ode*, an ode or lyric voicing spiritual adoration and aspiration, perhaps even personal testimony or exhortation. In Greek culture the ode demonstrated nobility of feeling and dignity of style. Poetically gifted believers may have composed and

sung spiritual odes. These may have been spontaneous lyric effusions, and the term may imply both solo and corporate musical expression.

The three terms for “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” have one important trait in common: they connote upward praise and adoration of God in Christ for who He is and what He has done. And this praise includes minimal personal reference. How exhilarating is this objectivity of focus upon God!

The verb “sing” in verse 19 means to “sing an ode;” to “make music” (or melody) literally means to “psalm.” Perhaps Paul here uses “odeing” for the lyrics and “psalming” for the tune. In any case, he indicates that the song should involve both larynx and heart; in other words, the entire personality. Singing is both an outward act and an inward disposition, and the focus of our song is upward worship of the Lord. This singing to the Lord also becomes communication with one another; our praise to God can and should edify our fellow believers.

The paragraph concludes with a favorite Pauline thrust: “. . . always giving thanks to the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Greek for “giving thanks,” *eucharisteo*, suggests gratitude for grace bestowed. The same word describes Jesus’ giving of thanks as He instituted the Lord’s Supper, the Communion. The whole motive, mood, theme, and aim of Christian song is gratitude, thanksgiving to God.

Little wonder, “the father of the symphony,” Franz Joseph Haydn, who began his musical career as a chorister at St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna and taught Beethoven, whose compositions include 108 symphonies and 88 choral works, said: “A religion without thanksgiving, praise, and joy is like a flower without perfume, tint or nectar. There may be such a flower, but surely no one would pluck it.” Asked why his church music was filled with gratitude and cheer, he replied, “I cannot make it otherwise. When I think of God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap.”

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

HYMNS OF CHRISTIAN ACTION [THE NEW YEAR]

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS by Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

This hymn was written “in great haste, likely in less than 15 minutes” in 1864 for an annual children’s procession from one Yorkshire village to another. The new village clergy, Pastor Sabine Baring-Gould, wanted the children to sing while marching, could find no music that was suitable. He finally chose one of Haydn’s tunes, but it was not until 1871 that Arthur Seymour Sullivan composed this now famous marching tune.

This hymn has been sung on many important occasions. For example, on the Sunday morning of August 10, 1941 Winston Churchill was standing with Franklin Roosevelt on the deck of the British battleship *Prince of Wales* anchored in Placentia Bay Newfoundland. On her quarter-deck a group of British and American sailors had gathered for church parade singing heartily with the sailors, “Onward Christian Soldiers.” On returning to England, Churchill broadcast to the British people: “When I looked upon that densely packed congregation of fighting men . . . of the same faith, . . . of the same ideals . . . I also saw in the words of this hymn the only hope of saving the world from measureless degradation.”

The words of this famous hymn written for marching children still inspire Christians to be an aggressive, unified body in advancing the mission of the Church.

O, FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES by Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Soon after their graduation from Oxford University, England, John and Charles Wesley sailed to America. In the new world they ministered to the rough colonists under General Oglethorpe in Georgia as well as evangelizing the Indians. The Wesleys soon became disillusioned with the situation and returned to England.

As they crossed the Atlantic, John and Charles were greatly impressed with the piety, vitality, and missionary zeal of a group of devout Moravians. When they returned to London they continued their association with them in the Aldersgate Hall. Here in May, 1738, both brothers had a spiritual “heart-warming experience.” They realized that despite their zealous religious activity, neither had personally known the real joy of God’s forgiveness. Thereafter, their ministry manifested a spiritual power previously unknown.

“O, For a Thousand Tongues” was written by Charles in 1749 on the 11th anniversary of the Aldersgate conversion experience. It was inspired by a chance comment by an influential Moravian leader named Peter Bohler, who expressed his spiritual joy in this remark, “Oh, Brother Wesley, the Lord has done so much for my life. Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise Christ Jesus with every one of them” (See Ps. 150:6).

SOLDIERS OF CHRIST ARISE by Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

This hymn is another of Wesley’s thousands of hymns first published in 1749. It was originally titled “The Whole Armor of God-Ephesians VI” with 16 stanzas, which later was divided into three separate hymns by his brother John. The Christian’s armor described by the Apostle Paul includes 6 important pieces—the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, sandals of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. It is no wonder then that this hymn has often been referred to as “the Christian’s bugle blast” for its strong call to arms.

Charles Wesley knew much about the Christian life as warfare. Many times both John and Charles were physically abused for their evangelical ministers. However, armed with Paul’s vivid description of the Christian’s spiritual weapons, they faced every situation with prayer and recognized that ultimately the battle is not man’s but God’s (2 Chr. 20:15).

The hymn is a musical encouragement to be “Strong in the Lord of hosts, and in His mighty power, who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror.”

WORK FOR THE NIGHT IS COMING by Annie L. Coghill (1836-1907)

This hymn, which emphasizes the joy and dignity of Christian service, was written in 1854 by 18 year-old Annie Louise Walker. A year earlier she emigrated from England to Canada, and thirty years later in 1883 she married a wealthy merchant, Harry Coghill. The words of the hymn are an enlargement and emphasis on the words of the disciples, “The night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). Her poem was first published in a Canadian newspaper and later in her own book, *Leaves from the Back Woods*. Mrs Coghill eventually attained prominence as a poet and author, producing several volumes which enjoyed wide circulation. She later returned to England and died in Bath, Somerset, on July 7, 1907 at age 71.

John Wesley once said, “Never be unemployed, and never be triflingly employed.” See your work as a sacred trust from God. Use this hymn as a musical reminder—“work when the day grows brighter” and “work in the glowing sun.”



LEADERSHIP CHOICES



We have been created and designed to make choices. We usually understand this to mean to have the ability to make decisions regarding actions, but actions are the results of our thought choices. Leadership choices are not so much about actions and results; rather, they are the choices about thoughts and the interpretation of our destiny and purpose. We also exercise choices when it comes to the interpretation of our past experiences and the stories we have picked up along the way.

Given the fact that we delete, distort, or generalize most of the information to which we are exposed, we are by definition making choices as to how we construct our views and opinions. We have to make a choice about which view will give us the best chance of creating the future we desire. Here are some questions to wrestle with:

How do I interpret the past? What events and experiences do I allow to limit my future impact? Is there an interpretation that will serve me better? Am I conveniently deleting, distorting, or generalizing what I “know” about past experiences and events to the point that I have become the victim or the prisoner of the past? Is being a “victim” convenient for me—because as a victim of my past, I am no longer responsible and, therefore, no longer accountable? How would my past look if I were to walk through that past

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Revival & REFORMATION

holding the hands of Jesus and listening to what He is saying as we observe and absorb what we see? What would He be saying to me? Am I hearing it? It is precisely because Jesus never allowed Himself to become a victim that He was able to become the Savior of the world. He did not even allow His life to be taken: He *gave* His life; it was His choice. Is there something that needs reinterpreting from your past so you can become a better leader today?

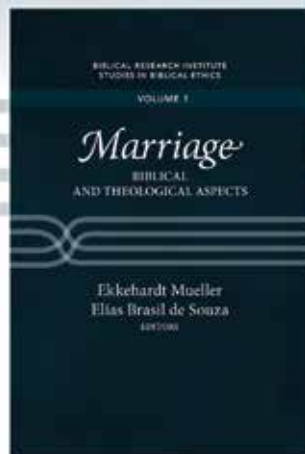
How do I interpret the present? What do I see or think that I see? If my interpretation of the present is only filtering in the negative views and perceptions and filtering out the many positive things that surround me, I am limiting my leadership impact. Instead of being a leader, I will become a toxic influence. I have a choice as to how I interpret the present, and that choice will open some doors and close others. If I choose to filter in positive experiences, if I see the world through the lens of opportunity and possibility, I will be opening the doors to specific outcomes (and, consequently, closing the doors to opposite options). So, if we want “success,” our choice is not to be successful but to orient our views and thoughts to that which will produce the results we want. To use a gardening analogy, we are not in control of the fruit that grows, and we cannot make it grow, but we do have a choice about whether we believe the fruit will emerge, whether we prepare the soil, whether we plant

the correct seed and look after it by watering it and providing an environment where the fruit will have the best chance of flourishing. Even in the spiritual realm, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, patience, peace, etc.) is the result of our relationship with God and our focus on Him, rather than the focus on the “fruit” itself.

How do I interpret the future? What kind of future do I see ahead? As a leader, am I convinced that the best years are ahead of or behind me? Do I see more opportunities or obstacles ahead? If I am influenced more by news headlines and conspiracy theories, complemented by office politics and distrust, the future looks bleak. Nevertheless, if I interpret the future as an unprecedented opportunity to make a difference and serve others, if I choose to believe that the future will be better than the present, then my leadership will grow exponentially and my influence will be infinitely more positive.

What I choose to believe about the past and the present and what I allow my view of the future to be will definitely color the kind of leader I am. The great news is this: I have a choice, and if I choose wisely, my leadership legacy will impact and serve many. ED

Branimir Schubert is the director of mission and culture at Adventist HealthCare Limited, which includes the Sydney Adventist Hospital.



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SOON AVAILABLE ON



OUTRAGEOUS FORGIVENESS, UNPAYABLE DEBT

Why should I forgive people who have hurt me deeply? How can I let go of those wounds that have scarred my life? What is forgiveness? What do we actually do when we forgive? What are the stages of forgiveness?

In this issue and in the next several, we are going to deal with various aspects of forgiveness, such as God's forgiveness toward us, our forgiveness of other people, and forgiveness of ourselves.

One day, Peter comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21).

The concern behind Peter's question has been felt by everyone who has ever been hurt. Why should I forgive? What if the other person doesn't deserve it? I might get hurt again!

Jesus tells him, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (verse 22).

Then Jesus goes on to tell a story about a servant who owed his master 10,000 talents but was unable to pay the debt. He begged for forgiveness. The master had compassion upon him and released him from his debt. Then the servant went outside and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii. He insisted on collecting the debt. When his fellow servant was not able to pay it, he put him in jail. The master heard what the servant did and changed his mind; he put the servant in jail until he was able to pay his debt (Matt. 18:23-35).

Now, in our culture, we don't know much about talents, so we may miss the enormity of this debt. But a talent was the equivalent of 15 years of wages, so the servant owed his master 150,000 years of wages, or the equivalent of 55 million days of wages. That debt is impossible to pay off.

Just like the servant, what we owe God is an unpayable debt. David said, "I was born in iniquity" (Ps. 51:5, KJV). We sin from the moment we are born. Many times, we look at sin in terms of the act, but, in God's eyes, even our sinful desires, thoughts, and motives are sin.

For instance, Jesus defined adultery as the act itself to the contemplation of the act when He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already

committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27, 28).

He also defined murder as the physical act of killing someone by being angry at that person. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:21, 22a).

Then He moved the act of love from just loving the people who love us to the people who hate us and are our enemies. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:44, 45a).

The Bible has many words for sin, with meanings such as missing the mark, transgression, and going astray. One word, "awah" in Hebrew, means to distort, to make crooked, and to pervert, and includes sin and its consequences. It is manifested in thought, word, and deed as we show the twisting of our souls (Job 33:27; Ps. 106:43; Is. 30:13).¹

We live in a state of sin. Even the good things we want to do might have mixed motives. For example, we want to help someone, but we also want recognition. We often love just so we can be loved. We worship God for His blessings and not for who He is.



You and I are the debtors. Every one of us has sinned and failed to live up to God's ideal for us, and, in a very real sense, that puts us in debt. We owe something that we cannot pay. We are hopelessly bankrupt.

Jesus' story, however, shows us that God is willing to forgive us completely. David defines forgiveness as follows: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit (Ps. 32:1, 2)."² The Living Bible says: "What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record."

He is willing to wipe the slate clean. He accepts us. He doesn't say, "We will work out an installment plan so you can pay back the debt." He doesn't say, "We will lower the debt so you have to pay only a part of it." No. He says, "I forgive you totally. The debt is canceled. You are free." When we grasp the enormity of the gift of forgiveness that has come to us in Jesus Christ, it makes a difference. The meaning and reality of that gift, when we understand it, enables us to forgive those who have wronged us.

The servant in Jesus' story never really comprehended the gift of grace that he had received. You can tell that from his response to the king: "I will pay back everything." As if

he ever could! Our debt of sin is far too great for us ever to atone for it, but, on the cross, Jesus Christ carried it for us. There's no way to measure what He has given us.

When we realize that we have been forgiven an impossible debt, it's hard for us to get terribly excited about the debt somebody owes us. This doesn't mean that we will ignore wrongs and injustices, but we will view fellow sinners from a different perspective when we realize what God has forgiven us.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:12, 13).

In the next two issues of *Elder's Digest*, we will study forgiveness to those who have wronged us. EO

¹ Colin Brown, editor, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 3*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1971), 573-587. Also see, <http://www.biblestudy-tools.com/dictionary/sin/>, Accessed June 14, 2017.

² Paul quotes David in Romans 4:6.

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TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT AND LITERATURE DISTRIBUTION

Since 1849, when the first issue of *The Present Truth* was published, the Adventist movement understood the importance of literature distribution for sharing the three angels' messages throughout the world. Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church is present in more than 200 countries and uses more than 800 languages to communicate the message.

In the twenty-first century, books still remain an effective evangelistic method, which led the General Conference to create the Missionary Book of the Year project, with results already exceeding 400 million books distributed around the world within 10 years.

Is it worth the effort and investment?

Consider the following points:

1. Literature distribution was the first missionary strategy undertaken by the Adventist movement, even before it became an organized Church.

2. In about 80 percent of the countries where the Adventist Church is present today, colporteurs and/or books have come before pastors.

3. With the advent of mass media such as radio, television, and the internet, the distribution of the printed page continues to fulfill its role as an ally to spoken preaching. One method complements the other.

4. While evangelism through radio and television involves a small number of preachers, book distribution challenges all Adventists to participate, which brings evangelistic dynamism to the Church.

5. When the Church distributes books in an organized way, it multiplies the potential of its impact on the community.

6. Books motivate readers to seek more information about the Church.

7. Giving a book is an act of sympathy and courtesy.

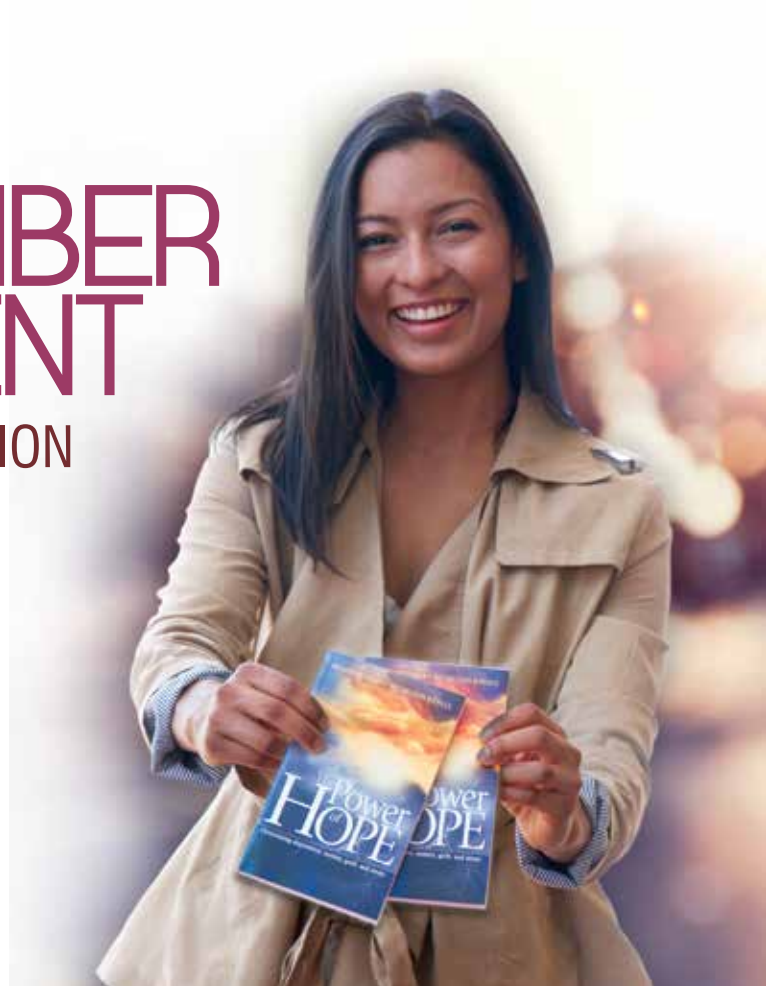
8. Books explain the message in simple, direct ways. They can be re-read, studied, underlined, and consulted at any time.

9. A single book can reach several people and remain "preaching" for generations.

10. As soon as a paragraph is read, the Holy Spirit begins the work of persuasion and conversion.

THE WORLD CHURCH AND THE MISSIONARY BOOKS

In addition to being a strategy to reach territories and people, the distribution of books is the missionary activity with the greatest potential for engagement. As Ellen G. White wrote,



"Here is missionary work for all to engage in" (*Counsels on Health*, p. 466).

Steps to promote literature distribution:

1. Set an Impact Day for a massive book distribution program.

2. Challenge all members in your church to engage in the distribution.

3. Involve all departments in your church on Impact Day.

4. Hold a missionary book dedication ceremony in your church.

5. Ask each member to participate by paying for books to distribute on Impact Day.

6. Inspire, motivate, plan, and organize your church for a territorial distribution in which all households receive a book.

RESULTS

Although we know many conversion stories, the purpose of book distribution is sowing. The Greek philosopher Hermogenes said:

"When I said to the orange seed that a whole orange grove was sleeping inside, it looked at me stupidly incredulous."

In this vision we place our trust. No page containing the message will stop producing fruit. The Church's task is to continue sowing, believing in the principle of investment. The more seeds, the more fruit.

ED

Almir M. Marroni is the director for the Publishing Ministries at the General Conference World Headquarters.

Start the year right—light their fire for mission!

“Dear Lord, we want to be good stewards. Help us to be faithful in our giving to the world mission offerings to help send missionaries and support the work of hospitals, clinics, schools, and churches. Amen.”

“...for the prosperity of the home work depends largely, under God, upon the reflex influence of the evangelical work done in countries afar off.”

—*Gospel Workers*, 465, 466.

Here are three ways to let your members know how their offerings are making an impact around the world and how they can become more deeply involved with the Gospel commission:

- ▶ Share mission stories from AdventistMission.org
- ▶ Show mission videos from MissionSpotlight.org
- ▶ Watch M360.tv



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