

quarterly resource for local church leaders † april/june 2018

ELDER'S DIGEST

**NURTURE
AND RETENTION**



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A BIG CONCERN

As a church leader, you know that each person in your congregation is valuable. You hope that each person will want to grow spiritually as a part of your church family. But you realize that people come and go. Every church will have losses, and it's inevitable that some folk will leave the church despite its best efforts to help them.

Yet, even though you realize that people come and go, you'd like to cut down on the "going" as much as possible. Is your church intentional in its efforts to retain the people who have come through your doors? What can your church

do to reduce the number of baptized members who drift out the back door?

This issue of *Elder's Digest* places special emphasis on nurture and retention. We understand that the church has invested a lot of time and money to gain new members, but now we have to discover creative and consistent ways to keep them in. Why are people leaving the church and what can you do to prevent it?


You may find that the majority of those leaving

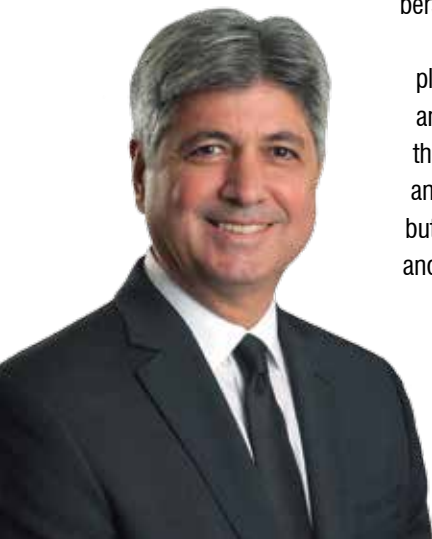
your church are part of a specific demographic. Are you losing young families? Senior adults? Families with teens? Young adults? Knowing where the loss is occurring helps you to understand why the loss is happening, and how you can create the right solution.

Your church could be losing people because of differences in perception between leaders and the people; the two groups might see things very differently! Leaders can lose touch with what people are really experiencing in their church and in their lives. Here are some areas where leader/people disconnects can occur:

- *Vision*: Is leadership casting a clear vision? Are people buying in?
- *Worship*: Are the worship services drawing people together or alienating them?
- *Relevance*: Do people feel that their leaders know their needs and understand their struggles?
- *Spiritual health*: Do leaders know if their people are spiritually healthy?

While any combination of these issues could be involved, knowing whether it is mostly a matter of process, personnel, or perception gives you a place to start in improving retention and nurturing in your church.

May the reading of this magazine help you to discover new ways to nurture and retain people in your church. 



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



EFFECTIVE NEW MEMBERS

RETENTION STRATEGY MUST GO BEYOND PROGRAMS

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE INFLUENCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH ENVIRONMENT ON VISITORS AND NEW MEMBERS

A series of church outreach events and activities is not enough to keep new members coming to church. Instead, our initiatives should focus on transforming the life and the conduct of the local church.

And we need a retention strategy.

A 2007 Adventist News Network (ANN) news story reported that close to 28 Adventists leave the church for every 100 who join. In a related story, ANN reported that between 2000 and 2005 the church baptized more than 5 million people, yet lost nearly 1.4 million. The story quoted several church leaders' suggestions on addressing the challenge. One suggested a shift in focus from converting to retaining new believers. Some even suggested that the church should think about forming a new ministry designed to connect with former Adventists.

It's no doubt that this is an issue of great concern for the church. Church officials continue to research membership retention; some have written dissertations on the issue.

But in the local church, the tendency is to focus on programs. However, unless the local church has been totally transformed, all the programs and strategies will be in vain. Local church members should strive to model the traits they want to see in new members.

The programs that we try to implement often amount to just papering over the cracks. The problem is obviously much

bigger; therefore we need to address the real issue—not so much what the local church is doing in terms of programs, but what it is in terms of the character of its members.

The influence of the local church environment on new members cannot be underestimated. If we view the church as a fish tank, public campaigns and other forms of evangelism equal catching fish to bring them back to our “fish tank.” If the tank is contaminated, it doesn't matter how well we feed the fish or how much we lecture the existing fish to accept the new ones. Our concern is often the most obvious—those fish that die in our tank, or who leave the church. That's just the beginning. We should be as concerned about the fish that don't die but learn to adapt to the contaminated tank.

What is critical and urgent is to address the environment. The church is a powerful and well established spiritual and social organization. It has great influence in the conduct and behavior of new members who are likely to acclimate to existing standards.

New members, like children, learn much more from what they see and experience than from what they have been taught. In the same way, life must be modeled for new believers. Paul puts it well: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). A transformed local church will not just teach new members, but will model the life for the new members.

Here are a few ways:

1. Befriend new members, and old. How can we make friends with new members if we're not already friends among ourselves?

2. Show them love. We can't show what we don't have—if the “tank” is contaminated with strife and hatred, that's all we can offer.

3. Involve them. We can't get them involved unless current members are already involved in church activities.

4. Visit them, but don't forget to visit the old member who lives on the street next door, too.

5. Disciple them, but show discipleship to the rest of the church as well.

6. Expect high standards of living from them, but model that behavior in the church.

The transformation of the local church should be our biggest concern. As Church co-founder Ellen G. White attests, “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs” (*Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887). Without this revival—without this transformation—many of our efforts in evangelism are futile because we are bringing people into a contaminated fish tank.

Moreover, we build and organize churches for ourselves as Adventists and for our comfort. We are very particular about

our seats at the church. The weekly programs are designed to meet our needs; our favorite hymns are sung week after week; we are used to the church processes and procedures and any deviation from the usual is very upsetting to us.

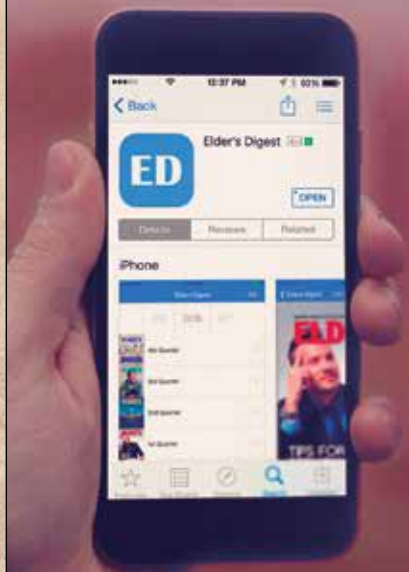
But we need transformation. Our mission as a church demands transformation. Instead of building and organizing churches for Adventists to be comfortable, what if the churches were built and organized for visitors, new members, and non-members so that they can be comfortable? What if we created a place where they feel at home and can participate in the worship experience?

Many people enjoy our public evangelism programs, and this is because at our public events we put our best foot forward. We make the visitors feel good and important. If our mission is more important to us than anything else, then our conduct and behavior in the church must be like our conduct at public events. The church will then be transformed into a never-ending evangelistic program, a warm environment filled with smiling ushers, and loving and caring members. ED

Mashudu Ravhengani is a business owner and director of the Living Power ministry in Pretoria, South Africa. Reprinted from *Adventist News Network* originally published on November 1, 2010. Used with permission.

| ELDER'S DIGEST NEWS

TECHNOLOGICAL GENERATION



I have good news for you!

I am pleased to announce that *Elder's Digest* is launching its first app ever. Why is this important resource for local church leaders being made available in this format? People are accessing information digitally more than any other way. We spend much of our time using apps on mobile devices. And, it is not any different for our church leaders. Since apps are becoming the dominant form of digital communication, we felt compelled to make *Elder's Digest* available on the two major digital platforms.

Now you can have access to all available files of the ED magazines in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French at your fingertips. This initiative will help more

church leaders to access this resource for free. Certainly, our subscribers will continue to receive the magazine in paper. More than 220,000 copies in 15 different languages will continue to be printed and delivered each quarter. All readers are very important and valuable to us, but it is our intention to make a digital version available to those who are not yet receiving it.

To download the app, search for “Elder's Digest” in the Apple App Store and Google Play for Android devices. And please share this resource via social media to other local church leaders.

We hope you enjoy this digital initiative!

Elder's Digest Editor

AM I MY SISTER'S KEEPER?

RECLAIMING FORMER AND INACTIVE MEMBERS



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Questions to ask yourself

1. What are the reasons you are considering a Reclaiming Ministry?
 - Do you honestly miss the inactive and former members, or is it merely that the church needs financial support for a special project?
 - Consider why you attend church. Remember, when you invite women to join you in church again, it is because you want them to benefit from this same community.
2. Is your church a safe, healthy place to invite inactive and former members to come back to?
 - Do the members and pastor work together toward agreed-upon goals?
 - Is there a power struggle in the church?
 - Are the members friendly and welcoming to everyone, or only to those who look and act like “good” Seventh-day Adventist Christians?
 - Are there opportunities in the church for involvement of returning members, or are church offices “owned” by individuals or cliques in the church?
3. How is your own connection with God?
 - The women you wish to reclaim need to see Jesus in you.
4. Can you offer genuine friendship and love to those who no longer attend church?
 - Missing members can tell right away if you truly care about them.

WHY DO WOMEN STOP ATTENDING CHURCH?

Before you begin a Reclaiming Ministry, consider some of the reasons women stop attending church. This will help you as you consider reaching out to them.

Women may stop attending due to...

- Discouragement, either in their spiritual lives or because of something that has nothing at all to do with the church.
- Disputes with other members or with the pastor.
- Disagreements over doctrine, church standards, or worship styles.
- Hurt feelings.
- Divorce or separation from spouse.
- Transition to a new stage of life, such as marriage or a new job.
- Move to another town with no follow-up between churches.
- Their children don't like church.
- Lengthy illness, either themselves or a loved one.
- Lack of involvement in the church.



HOW TO BEGIN A RECLAIMING MINISTRY

Basic steps:

- Make a list of women who are missing from church.
- Pray over the list.
- Ask God to direct you to the women He wants you to reach out to.
- Talk it over with the pastor and enlist his or her support.
- Obtain church board approval.
- Present the plan of a Reclaiming Ministry to the church

“SUPPOSE ONE OF YOU HAS A HUNDRED SHEEP AND LOSES ONE OF THEM. DOES HE NOT LEAVE THE NINETY-NINE IN THE OPEN COUNTRY AND GO AFTER THE LOST SHEEP UNTIL HE FINDS IT?”

Luke 15:4

single missing *person* is to God. Don't allow yourself to be sidetracked from making a connection with the woman you commit to befriending.



REACH OUT TO THE WOMEN TO BE RECLAIMED

Things to remember as you contact the women you wish to reclaim:

- For the initial contact, send or take a small gift such as the General Conference Women's Ministries devotional book or another gift.
- Smile often and let her know you've missed her.
- After the first contact, follow up regularly by phone, email, social media, text message, or greeting card. Invite her to lunch at your home or a restaurant.
- Be genuinely interested in her and everything that is important to her, especially her family.
- Be a good listener. Allow her to talk about herself.
- The church's Women's Ministries department or the Reclaiming Ministry team should plan social events and small group studies to invite the non-attending women to. The first social event should be away from the church to keep anyone from being uncomfortable.
- Your job is to love your friend and accept her unconditionally.

body so they will be supportive and will be prepared to see missing members back in church.

- Form a committee to organize and oversee the ministry. Some of the team members, called Mentors, are each responsible for contacting and befriending a woman on the list.
- Reach out to the women on your list in friendship and love.
- Remember: The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15 illustrates how important a

- Never lecture your friend about her lifestyle or appearance. Remember, lectures will repel; love will win them.
- Do not betray her confidences.
- If she is angry at the church or someone in church, don't try to defend anyone. Instead, allow her to vent her anger.
- If she has been hurt, let her know you're sorry. Never try to pretend the offense didn't occur or suggest that she is overreacting. This will invalidate her feelings.
- Avoid arguing about church doctrines, standards, or *anything*.
- Invite her to participate in community outreach projects and other ministry events.
- Give your friend to God. It is your job to love her. It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict.



RENEWED COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Things to remember when your friend is ready to come back to church:

1. Offer to pick her up and take her to church.
2. Train church greeters to welcome former and inactive members warmly without questioning them about why they've been absent so long.
3. Invite her to join your Sabbath School class.
4. Sit with her in church.
5. Introduce her to other women who will welcome her and befriend her too.
6. Invite her and her family to your home for Sabbath dinner.
7. Pray for your friend daily and stay in touch with her during the week to keep her encouraged.

Are YOU your SISTER'S keeper?

You ARE your sister's keeper.

WE are OUR sister's keeper!

Women's Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The content of this article is available in a brochure format at www.adventistwomensministries.org.

NURTURE AND RETENTION

IDENTITY AND MISSION IMPLEMENTATION

Called by God, guided by the Bible, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists, wherever we live in the world, devote ourselves to:

- **Christ-Like Living:** Illustrating the lordship of Jesus in our lives by moral, ethical, and social behaviors that are consistent with the teachings and example of Jesus.

- **Christ-Like Communicating:** Realizing that all are called to active witness, we share through personal conversation, preaching, publishing, and the arts, the Bible's message about God and the hope and salvation offered through the life, ministry, atoning death, resurrection, and high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

- **Christ-Like Discipling:** Affirming the vital importance of continued spiritual growth and development among all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we nurture and instruct each other in righteous living, provide training for effective witness, and encourage responsive obedience to God's will.

- **Christ-Like Teaching:** Acknowledging that development of mind and character is essential to God's redemptive plan, we promote the growth of a mature understanding of and relationship to God, His Word, and the created universe.

- **Christ-Like Healing:** Affirming the biblical principles of the wellbeing of the whole person, we make healthful living and the healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration.

- **Christ-Like Serving:** Following the example of Jesus we commit ourselves to humble service, ministering to individuals and populations most affected by poverty, tragedy, hopelessness, and disease.

REACH THE WORLD

Strategic Plan 2015-2020 focuses on the mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and our identity and implementation of our mission.

By examining the strategic issues that emerged from global research carried out from 2011 to 2013, specific objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were developed to provide vision and direction in carrying out the church's special mission.

Over a two-year period, beginning 2011, five major research projects took place globally. Almost 41,000 church members and nearly 1,000 former church members were interviewed or received and completed questionnaires about their

beliefs, attitudes, experiences in the church, and spiritual-life practices. These included 4,260 pastors, almost 1,200 young people (recent graduates of Adventist colleges and universities in North America), and over 35,000 other church members.

This unprecedented survey of the world church was carried out to provide a basis for strategic planning. In addition, each division and each General Conference department provided its assessment of the strategic priorities facing them in their part of the world or line of work, and each division proposed items that need to be addressed by the denomination as a whole.

Finally, research undertaken for and presented at two global conferences held at the world headquarters ("It's Time: Refocusing Adventist Urban Mission for the 21st Century" and "Summit on Nurture and Retention: Discipling, Retaining and Reclaiming") was taken into account. This global analysis highlighted a number of positives as well as a number of areas of concern; the most important are summarized here. The Strategic Plan is founded on this research.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

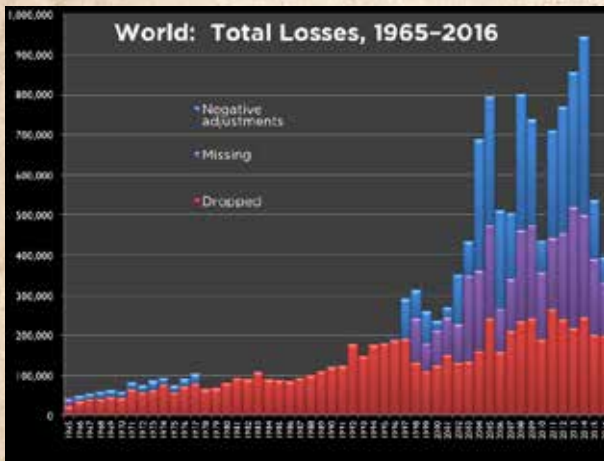
Among the strategic issues emerging from global research (2011-2013), we can see a theme that is repeated several times—the need to strengthen the faith and maturity of our members to become disciples, to provide nurture and care, to increase retention rate. These are some of the issues:

- Sabbath School emerges as a powerful positive in church life around the world. It is a strength on which the church should build (Strategic Issue #1).

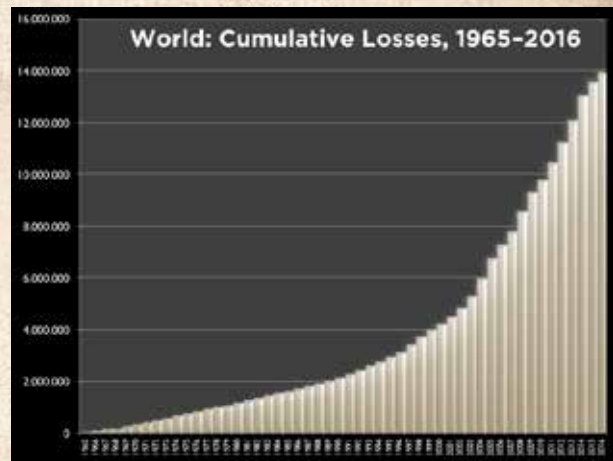
- Less than half of all Seventh-day Adventists worldwide have experienced any denominational education, and many pastors have limited Adventist education. This may be a factor in less than satisfactory retention and an arising variety of views concerning key doctrines (Strategic Issue #2).

- Many local churches lack robust mechanisms for member care—especially for those who are at risk of leaving the church. Local churches need pastors to equip elders and members collectively to provide pastoral care for each other (Strategic Issue #3).

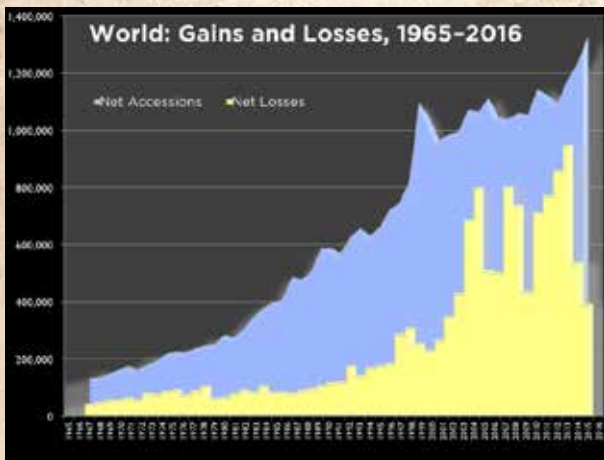
- As well as improving retention rates, there is also a need to instill lifelong commitment to membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. World discipleship programs should be greatly strengthened, with baptism being seen as the beginning of a life as a fruitful disciple of Jesus Christ (Strategic Issue #4).



Different types of losses in the SDA Church, 1965-2016.



Cumulative losses year after year until 2016.



Comparative chart between gains and losses affecting the real church growth.

- There is a decline in most divisions of personal commitment to participation in vital personal, familial, and corporate spiritual practices—especially in personal Bible study and family worship (Strategic Issue #6).
- There is also a significant degree of variation in belief in other landmark Adventist doctrines. Instruction in doctrine should not be restricted to baptismal candidates; active discipleship should ideally include lifelong learning about the biblical basis for Adventist doctrines and how they give a fuller understanding of Christ and salvation (Strategic Issue #8).
- Adventist media’s impact within the church is varied; despite some successes, its influence is limited in many areas. Although it is probably a significant factor in bringing people into the denomination, it makes less of an impact on those already in the church. A very large percentage of young people gave low ratings to Adventist social media. Denominational media has unrealized potential for impacting current Seventh-day Adventists (Strategic Issue #10).
- The spread of mobile devices, especially smartphones, making access to the Internet ever more widely available, provides extraordinary opportunities both for widening evange-

lism and witness and for responding to the issues identified above: promoting and enriching Bible study, disseminating Ellen White’s writings, and energizing and equipping church members for service (Strategic Issue #11).

While the number of church members has grown significantly over the past fifty years, in the same period, four out of ten of all members have left. There is an evident need for comprehensive member-care strategies to enhance the experience in the local church family and thus improve membership retention patterns.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF NURTURE & RETENTION SUMMIT 2013

1. Each division and union to have a designated N&R coordinator and an N&R committee that should include at least one officer and the departmental directors.
2. Each division to have an overall plan to improve the audited membership retention rate, the percentage to be selected by each division and then communicated to the General Conference.
3. Each division to implement regular attendance counts to supplement membership audits and to help pastors and elders to identify active disciples and those who are inactive and/or in danger of slipping away.
4. Each division and union to have and implement an active discipleship plan, along the lines of the “Growing Fruitful Disciples” model.
5. General Conference Departments, in collaboration with one another and consultation with divisions leaders, to create materials that meet expressed needs in the areas of nurture, retention and discipling, avoiding multiplicity of initiatives and approaches.
6. Each division to hold conferences on nurture, retention, and discipling: one involving administrators and academics (along the lines of the global summit), then further conferences sharing data and good practice with pastors and elders.
7. Comprehensive, widespread and practical training in conflict resolution and reconciliation to be implemented throughout the worldwide Church.

8. Specific training in nurture/retention/discipling, as well as evangelism, to be a part of every ministerial/theological training program.

9. A new section to be added to the *Church Manual* on discipleship at the local church level (the *Minister's Handbook* and *Elder's Handbook* subsequently to be amended appropriately).

2013 SUMMIT STATEMENT

RECOMMITTING, RECONNECTING AND RECONCILING:

The mission of God is “to seek and to save the lost!” (Luke 19:10, NKJV). Jesus commissioned His followers as instruments of God’s mission, charging us to “Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NRSV).

While God calls on the Church to seek the lost and to baptize the converted, He desires that the lost be saved and He commanded us to make disciples. The follower of Jesus is to become a member of an active community (e.g., Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35), be fruitful (John 15:1-8), attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12), and be part of the “people of God,” foretold in the third angel’s message, “who keep His commands and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Creating disciples is thus central to God’s plan and vision for restoring humanity.

Tragically, since the mid-1960s, while an extraordinary number of people joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a third of those baptized have left the Church, including a disproportionately large number of young adults. We acknowledge the findings of the research presented at the Summit on Nurture and Retention (2013) that, while most converts are convicted by distinctive Adventist doctrines, a large majority of those who separate from the church do so because of personal factors, rather than doctrinal reasons, and frequently without deliberate rejection of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We recognize that Christ’s love for the Church also needs to be manifested within the Church by His followers. True discipleship entails not only biblical teaching (Matt. 28:20), but also a passionate commitment to loving our fellow believers unconditionally. This was the heart of Christ’s message to His disciples as He faced the cross (John 15:9-13). Christ’s command to them applies to us: that we “love one another.” Ellen White’s powerful insight into this historical scene is still vital for us: “This love is the evidence of their discipleship” (DA 677, 678).

We recognize that, for pastors and church members, it is often easier to instruct others in doctrine than to nurture and mentor them in a personal, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that, in consequence, the church has prioritized persuading people to be baptized over the equally essential task of discipling. We affirm that all believers need to be continually nurtured and mentored in the journey of faith, and that though this task is not easily quantified, it is essential.

We also recognize that the example of the Shepherd, who actively seeks the lost, must be emulated by His Remnant people. Reaching out to those who have lost their way, who have lost connection with the body of Christ, who have been bruised by fellow believers, will align us with the mission of God; welcoming them with open arms will make us participants in the joy of heaven over everyone who is lost and is found (Luke 15:7, 10, 32).

We affirm that:

1. The purpose of the Church as the body of Christ is to intentionally disciple members, so that they continue in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ and His Church.
2. Discipleship is based on an ongoing, lifelong relationship with Jesus—the believer commits to “abiding in Christ” (John 15:8) and to being fruitful and sharing Him with others.
3. Responsibility for ensuring that every church member remains part of the body of Christ, and for reconnecting and reconciling with those who do not, is mutually shared by the Church at large, each congregation, and every church member.

We therefore affirm that building loving and Christ-like relationships within the local church must be an urgent necessity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We recommit ourselves to God’s vision of mission, which is founded on discipling, believing that this will enable us better to fulfill the prophetic mission of the Remnant Church. ED

This document was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the 2017 Annual Council held in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.



Comparison between members who left and members who stayed from 1965 to 2016 .

RECOMMITTING, RECONNECTING, AND RECONCILING:

REVIVING DISCIPLESHIP, NURTURING BELIEVERS,
AND REUNITING WITH THE MISSING

The mission of God is “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10 NKJV). Jesus commissioned His followers as instruments of God’s mission, charging us to “Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20 NRSV). While God calls on the Church to seek the lost and to baptize the converted, He desires that the lost be saved and He commanded us to make disciples. The follower of Jesus is to become a member of an active community (e.g., Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35), be fruitful (John 15:1-8), attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12), and be part of the “people of God,” foretold in the third angel’s message, “who keep His commands and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). Creating disciples is thus central to God’s plan and vision for restoring humanity.

Tragically, since the mid-1960s, while an extraordinary number of people joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a third of those baptized have left the Church, including a disproportionately large number of young adults. We acknowledge the findings of the research presented at the Summit on Nurture and Retention (2013) that, while most converts are convicted by distinctive Adventist doctrines, a large majority of those who separate from the church do so because of personal factors, rather than doctrinal reasons, and frequently without deliberate rejection of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.


We recognize that Christ’s love for the Church also needs to be manifested within the Church by His followers. True discipleship entails not only biblical teaching (Matt. 28:20), but also a passionate commitment to loving our fellow believers unconditionally. This was the heart of Christ’s message to His disciples as He faced the cross (John 15:9-13). Christ’s command to them applies to us: that we “love one another.” Ellen White’s powerful insight into this historical scene is still vital for us: “This love is the evidence of their discipleship” (DA 677, 678).

We recognize that, for pastors and church members, it is often easier to instruct others in doctrine than to nurture and mentor them in a personal, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that, in consequence, the church has prioritized persuading people to be baptized over the equally essential task of discipling. We affirm that all believers need to be continually nurtured and mentored in the journey of faith, and that though this task is not easily quantified, it is essential.

We also recognize that the example of the Shepherd, who actively seeks the lost, must be emulated by His Remnant people. Reaching out to those who have lost their way, who have lost connection with the body of Christ, who have been bruised by fellow believers, will align us with the mission of God; welcoming them with open arms will make us participants in the joy of heaven over everyone who is lost and is found (Luke 15:7, 10, 32).

WE AFFIRM THAT:

1. The purpose of the Church as the body of Christ is to intentionally disciple members, so that they continue in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ and His Church.
2. Discipleship is based on an ongoing, lifelong relationship with Jesus—the believer commits to “abiding in Christ” (John 15:8) and to being fruitful and sharing Him with others.
3. Responsibility for ensuring that every church member remains part of the body of Christ, and for reconnecting and reconciling with those who do not, is mutually shared by the Church at large, each congregation, and every church member.

We therefore affirm that building loving and Christ-like relationships within the local church must be an urgent necessity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We recommit ourselves to God’s vision of mission, which is founded on discipling, believing that this will enable us better to fulfill the prophetic mission of the Remnant Church. 

2013 General Conference Nurture and Retention Summit Statement.

CONSERVING MEMBERSHIP GAINS

Recommended: To approve the following appeal to the world Church regarding membership retention and the reclaiming of former members; and further,

To encourage widespread circulation of this appeal to church leaders and local congregations.

CONSERVING MEMBERSHIP GAINS—AN APPEAL

Seventh-day Adventists around the world rejoice in the rapid membership growth of recent years. The Church views this as evidence of Holy Spirit-led movements and a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. (Matthew 24:14, Revelation 14:6, 7) Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized over 5 million people from 2000 - 2005, membership losses during that time equaled nearly 1.4 million. Current indications are that annual membership losses, for reasons other than death, equal approximately 28% of membership accessions. Some membership loss occurs among recent converts, however, this tragic outcome is not limited to new members.

Members leave the Seventh-day Adventist fellowship for a variety of reasons. It is unrealistic to expect that the Church will reach a point where the membership retention rate is 100%. This, however, should not excuse the Church from consciously creating and maintaining a nurturing environment for all members. Research on why members leave Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship suggests that social and relational factors are much more significant than disagreement with denominational teachings. In fact, many who leave denominational fellowship remain supportive of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and even maintain church practices for some time following their departure.

The reasons most frequently cited by persons who leave local church fellowship are found in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission. Therefore, the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable.

Seventh-day Adventists understand that last-day events will be accompanied by multiplied thousands turning to God, seeking spiritual foundations for life, and identifying with a community of believers that holds fast to biblical teaching. Church members and leaders around the world continue to place a great emphasis on evangelism and church growth

EVERY MEMBER, WHETHER OR NOT RECENTLY BAPTIZED, SHOULD BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH TO GROW SPIRITUALLY. . .

believing that even greater and more rapid membership growth lies just ahead.

To prepare the Church for this large influx of new members, to reclaim members who have left, and to prevent current membership losses, the General Conference Executive Committee voices an appeal for members and leaders everywhere to give renewed emphasis to the matter of membership retention and reclamation. This involves understanding the reasons for membership loss in each local church and focusing on how to develop the capacity of the church to attract, reclaim, retain, and engage its mem-

bers in the mission of the church.

While the specific response to this appeal will vary from place to place and reflect cultural diversity that is so evident in the global Church family, certain specifics are universal. For example, an individual's spiritual life must be fed through Bible study and prayer. We also know that to retain new members, the following factors are essential. If one of these factors is missing, the member is weakened, but may survive. If two factors are absent, they almost certainly will leave the fellowship of Church members.

1. They must be able to articulate their beliefs.
2. They must have friends within the congregation.
3. They must engage in a personally-meaningful ministry.

Every member, whether or not recently baptized, should be able to experience an atmosphere in which to grow spiritually, to know a sense of belonging and identity, and to use their spiritual gifts in the advancement of mission. Creating such an environment requires more than a program. It necessitates the creation of a loving atmosphere with each member taking a personal interest in others.

Persons who join the Seventh-day Adventist Church come from widely varied backgrounds and experiences. All members are not at the same point of spiritual development. But all should find within church fellowship a place to continue their growth. Peter urges, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one

another, without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." 1 Peter 4:8-10 (NIV)

The following actions will help to bring this into reality.

1. Along with their annual planning and budgeting for evangelism, executive committees and local church boards should assess the membership retention capacity in their territory. This will require careful review of membership care measures along with accession and loss patterns. Analysis of the situation should be followed by deliberate steps to address the circumstances that lie within the church's ability to change.

2. Repeated instructions of basic Bible teaching should be provided for all newly-baptized members in an intentionally-designed follow-up for a period of months after their baptism.

3. Ensuring that the outreach methods used by the Church take into consideration how new members will become integrated into the life of the church family and advance in the pathway of discipleship. Such planning should include the formation of friendships, fellowship in small groups, active participation in witnessing, and recruitment into specific roles and responsibilities as a member of the local congregation.

4. Designing ministry that addresses the developmental and spiritual needs of children, youth, and young adults, af-

firming their value to the Church by training them for, and entrusting them with, responsibility.

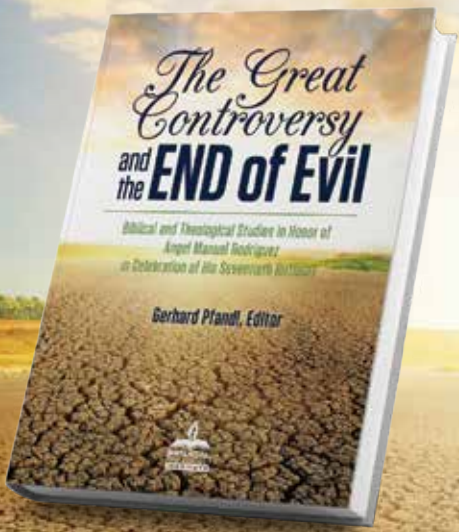
5. Making certain that the provision of adequate places of worship is an integral part of the evangelistic initiative which brings people into church fellowship. No programs should be permitted that do not honor this essential requirement.

6. Training members in how to re-connect with those who have discontinued church fellowship. In many cases, the return to fellowship of former members is more challenging to the congregation than the acceptance of new converts. Careful attention is needed to facilitate the healing of relationships and the realization, between persons, of the reconciliation that flows from the forgiveness and acceptance received through Jesus Christ.

The General Conference Executive Committee praises God for the rapid growth that is taking place in many areas. Evangelism is the mission of the Church. Leaders and members are commended for making this the priority in planning and budgeting. This we must continue and, while so doing, demonstrate the loving concern of the Good Shepherd for His sheep who may have strayed.

ED

This Appeal was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Spring Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA, April 10, 2007.




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BREVITY

>PART 4

LONG PRAYERS NOT A PART OF THE GOSPEL

The long prayers made by some ministers have been a great failure. Praying to great length, as some do, is all out of place. They injure the throat and vocal organs, and then they talk of breaking down by their hard labor. They injure themselves when it is not called for. Many feel that praying injures their vocal organs more than talking. This is in consequence of the unnatural position of the body, and the manner of holding the head. They can stand and talk, and not feel injured. The position in prayer should be perfectly natural. Long praying wearies, and is not in accordance with the gospel of Christ. Half or even quarter of an hour is altogether too long. A few minutes' time is long enough to bring your case before God and tell Him what you want; and you can take the people with you and not weary them out and lessen their interest in devotion and prayer. They may be refreshed and strengthened, instead of exhausted.

A mistake has been made by many in their religious exercises in long praying and long preaching, upon a high key, with a forced voice, in an unnatural strain and an unnatural tone. The minister has needlessly wearied himself and really distressed the people by hard, labored exercise, which is all unnecessary. Ministers should speak in a manner to reach and impress the people. The teachings of Christ were impressive and solemn; His voice was melodious. And should not we, as well as Christ, study to have melody in our voices?

SPECIFIC NATURE OF PUBLIC PRAYER

The prayers offered by ministers previous to their discourses are frequently long and inappropriate. They embrace a whole round of subjects that have no reference to the necessities of the occasion or the wants of the people. Such prayers are suitable for the closet, but should not be offered in public. The hearers become weary and long for the minister to close. Brethren, carry the people with you in your prayers. Go to your Saviour in faith, tell Him what you need on that occasion. Let the soul go out after God with intense longing for the blessing needed at that time.

LONGER SECRET PRAYERS, SHORT PUBLIC PRAYERS

Long prayers are tiring to those who hear, and do not prepare the people to listen to the instruction that is to follow.

It is often because secret prayer is neglected that long, tedious prayers are offered in public. Let not ministers go



A FEW MINUTES' TIME IS LONG ENOUGH TO BRING YOUR CASE BEFORE GOD AND TELL HIM WHAT YOU WANT; AND YOU CAN TAKE THE PEOPLE WITH YOU AND NOT WEARY THEM OUT AND LESSEN THEIR INTEREST IN DEVOTION AND PRAYER. . .

over in their petitions a week of neglected duties, hoping to atone for their neglect and to pacify conscience. Such prayers frequently result in bringing others down to a low level of spirituality.

FOR CHILDREN, FREQUENCY BETTER THAN LENGTH

Those who instruct children should avoid tedious remarks. Short remarks and to the point will have a happy influence. If much is to be said, make up for briefness by frequency. A few words of interest now and then will be more beneficial than to have it all at once. Long speeches burden the small minds of children. Too much talk will lead them to loathe even spiritual instruction, just as overeating burdens the stomach and lessens the appetite, leading even to a loathing of food. The minds of the people may be glutted with too much speechifying. Labor for the church, but especially for the youth, should be line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Give minds time to digest the truths you feed them. Children must be drawn toward heaven, not rashly, but very gently. EQ

This article is excerpted from the book *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp 254-256, by Ellen G. White.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

When people come to Jesus for salvation, they receive spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit so that God might use them for His glory (1 Cor. 12:7). We each have been gifted in a special, unique fashion by the Holy Spirit.

The greatest, most essential gift that God gave His church is the gift of His love working in us and through us.

- His love was placed within us when we were saved by His grace (Rom. 5:1-5).
- His love, working in us and displayed one to another, is the greatest testimony we have to a lost world (John 13:35).

I. LOVE'S DISTINCTION (VERSES 1-3)

The whole idea of these verses is that love is distinct from and superior to anything we can be or do! Whatever we do, if it is not infused with and carried out through the love of God, it is a colossal waste of time.

A. *Love is higher than the sensational* (verse 1). You may be a great speaker, but that is no substitute for love. No matter how great your oratory, how beautiful your speech, or how brilliant your rhetoric, without love, you are simply a clanging cymbal.

B. *Love is higher than the spectacular* (verse 2). This verse mentions several spectacular abilities. But, even if we are able to do all of these things and do not have the love of God in our hearts, we are nothing!

C. *Love is higher than the sacrificial* (verse 3). We can give away everything we own. We can even give up our bodies on the altar of martyrdom, but if we do so without love in our hearts, it is a waste of time and it does not profit us one bit.

II. LOVE'S DESCRIPTION (VERSES 4-12, KJV)

In these verses, Paul gives an in-depth description of love; he reveals all of its characteristics to us. These are truths that we need to be reminded of continually.

A. *Love's features* (verses 4-6): Paul shows us the many sides of true, godly love. As if love were a great and brilliant diamond, he holds it up before us and reveals its many facets. As he does, the Person of God is revealed in each gleam of light from the surface of love.

1. *Suffereth long* (verse 4): This word means "patient endurance under provocation." The literal meaning of the word is "long-tem-

pered." This characteristic of love reveals the truth that love does not retaliate!

2. *Is kind* (verse 4): This word refers to "active goodness that goes forth on behalf of others." Genuine love is never hateful or mean; rather, it respects others and reaches out to them.

3. *Envieth not* (verse 4): True love is "not jealous" over the abilities, successes, or possessions of others. Instead of being jealous when others prosper or excel, love is pleased when they do well.

4. *Vaunteth not itself* (verse 4): Literally, this phrase means "does not make a parade." Love does not brag! It does not draw attention to itself or to what it is doing.

5. *Not puffed up* (verse 4): Love is "not arrogant or proud." No matter how great our talents or how spectacular our gifts, everything we are is the result of divine grace.

6. *Not behave itself unseemly* (verse 5): Love is never rude; it always treats others with compassion, consideration, and respect! Love controls the emotions. It is not friendly one day and rude the next.

7. *Seeketh not her own* (verse 5): True love is "never selfish and self-centered;" it is actively interested in what will profit others. It never looks at itself first but always considers another ahead of itself.

8. *Is not easily provoked* (verse 5): True love "keeps no record of evils done to it" but willingly endures all slights and injuries. This characteristic of love reminds us that love does not demand its own rights! It is willing to yield to the will of another.

9. *Thinketh no evil* (verse 5): Love "takes no worthless inventory." Two thoughts come to mind here. First, genuine love does not attribute evil motives to people. Second, genuine love does not dwell on what others may have done.

10. *Rejoiceth not in iniquity* (verse 6): Love does not rejoice in sin, whether it is its own sin or the sin of others. Love hates sin! Love does not rejoice when another falls into sin!

11. *Rejoiceth in the truth* (verse 6): It rejoices when truth is proclaimed and when truth wins the victory. Love is glad for the truth, even when the truth hurts. Love is glad when truth wins the day!

B. *Love's fortitude* (verses 7-12). These verses tell us of love's staying power. Love is a remarkable thing that never waivers or fails!

1. *Beareth all things* (verse 7): Love patiently endures and overlooks the faults in others. The

word "beareth" literally means "to cover." This is how God loves us (Rom. 5:8).

2. *Believeth all things* (verse 7): Love always places the best possible interpretation on everything that happens. It does not always seek the most negative answer but believes that good will triumph in any situation.

3. *Hopeth all things* (verse 7): Love always expects the best possible outcome. Love refuses to accept failure. Love is the eternal optimist!

4. *Endureth all things* (verse 7): This is a military term and means that "love does not give up the fort"! It stands its ground and continues in spite of everything that is thrown against it.

5. *Charity never faileth* (verses 8-12): When everything else in this world has passed away, when everything that we hold in high esteem is gone, when knowledge and spiritual gifts no longer matter, love will still exist.

III. LOVE'S DURABILITY (VERSE 13)


The Bible says that three things abide: faith, hope, and love. Yet, faith and hope are encompassed inside of love (verse 7). Therefore, the greatest of all things a believer can possess is love! If our love is right, faith is no problem! If our love is right, then our hope is in the right place. When our love is right, we are right!

What makes love so great? Well, love is the defining characteristic of who God is (1 John 4:8). When the Bible wanted to describe God in one sentence, it said, "God is love."

To be like God, we must learn to love like God. When we can do this, our world will be altered for His glory.

CONCLUSION

For just a moment, take all the things you value today and lay them aside. Forget about your talents, your intelligence, your gifts, your potential, your achievements, and anything else you want to mention. Now, forgetting all those other things, how well do you love?

Is there room for improvement in your "love life" or have you figured it all out? If you need to talk to Jesus about how you love, do it now. Ask Him to help you love like He loves. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

God called Abraham for a special reason: to be the father of a great nation (see Gen. 12:2).

The fulfillment of this purpose was directly related to Abraham's domestic life in an educational context (see Gen. 18:19).

Abraham's main responsibility was to lead his children in a consistent and wise manner. The lifestyle of his descendants would be directly related to the philosophy of education he would give to his children.

Let's consider the following:

I. THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A. Russell Champlin, a North American theologian and specialist in New Testament theology, wrote: "Education is the systematic development and cultivation of natural capacities, through education, example, and practice. It includes both theoretical knowledge and practical experience in developing various skills."¹ In this definition, there are three relevant aspects: education, example, and practice.

B. The secular concept of education seeks to reach only the intellectual aspect of man. Thus, a person is informed but not transformed. Ellen G. White wrote: "Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man."² True education is that which transforms human beings in all dimensions.

II. TRINOMIAL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: FAMILY, CHURCH, SCHOOL

A. Family

1. The educational process begins within the family.

2. Ellen G. White wrote: "It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life—lessons of respect, obedience, reverence, self-control. The educational influences of the home are a decided power for good or for evil. They are in many respects silent and gradual, but if exerted on the right side, they become a far-reaching power for truth and righteousness."³

3. Family is the setting in which religious, moral, intellectual, and social values are developed and cultivated.

B. Church

1. Church is an educational center. The worship service, in its liturgy, contributes to knowing God as a Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

2. Ellen G. White states: "The song of praise, the prayer, the words spoken by Christ's representatives, are God's appointed agencies to prepare a people for the church above, for that loftier worship into which there can enter nothing that defileth."⁴

3. Parents should instruct their children in all aspects of spiritual life.

C. School

1. Currently, society promotes a purely academic education that is fueled by competition in the job market.

2. From the divine perspective, the education that transforms human beings goes beyond the academic aspect.

3. God had this in mind when He advised the establishment of the schools of prophets: "These schools were intended to serve as a barrier against the wide-spreading corruption, to provide for the mental and spiritual welfare of the youth, and to promote the prosperity of the nation by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders and counselors. To this end, Samuel gathered companies of young men who were pious, intelligent, and studious. These were called the sons of the prophets. As they studied the Word and the works of God, His life-giving power quickened the energies of mind and soul, and the students received wisdom from above. The instructors were not only versed in divine truth, but had themselves enjoyed communion with God, and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. They had the respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and for piety."⁵

III. RESULTS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A. Through moral and spiritual principles based on the Bible, Christian education:

1. Enables a person for good conduct (see 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

2. Transforms a person's sense of value, transferring him or her from what is temporary to what is permanent (see Phil. 3:7, 8; Heb. 11:24-27).

3. Develops in the learner an awareness to exercise his or her citizenship with rights and duties in the society in which he or she is inserted (see Matt. 22:21; Luke 2:1-4).

4. Shows that statutes and divine guidance upheld in human life have an effect on social life (see Deut. 6:6, 7; Dan. 1:8; Rom. 13:1-7).

CONCLUSION

A. The meaning behind God's call to Abraham was associated with the education Abraham would give to his children.

B. Among the three educational institutions (family, church, school), home is the one that plays a key role. Ellen G. White concludes: "Society is composed of families. . . . Out of the heart are 'the issues of life' (Prov. 4:23), and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences."⁶

"In planning for the education of their children outside the home, parents should realize that it is no longer safe to send them to the public school, and should endeavor to send them to schools where they will obtain an education based on a Scriptural foundation. Upon every Christian parent there rests the solemn obligation of giving to his children an education that will lead them to gain a knowledge of the Lord and to become partakers of the divine nature through obedience to God's will and way."

Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, 304

¹ *Bible, Theology, and Philosophy Encyclopedia* 2:268 (source in Portuguese).

² Ellen G. White, *Education*, 13.

³ ———, *Child Guidance*, 17.

⁴ ———, *Testimonies for the Church* 5:491.

⁵ ———, *Education*, 46.

⁶ ———, *The Adventist Home*, 15.

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GOD'S PATTERN FOR HIS CHURCH

Acts 2:22-47

The Day of Pentecost was an amazing day! On that day, the Holy Spirit was given to the church in a very special way. The church that came into existence that day was a sight to behold. It was a church operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a church on a mission, taking the gospel to a lost world. It was a church excited about its Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a church committed to holiness, obedience to the Word of God, and to worship. It was a church steadfast in the face of horrible persecution. It was a church that was growing, as God added to it daily. It was a church that enjoyed the presence and power of God.

Today's church, the church with which we are all familiar, is far removed from what that church was. The church in Acts was united (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-37). The people loved one another. The people in the church rallied together, sold their possessions, and gave to meet the needs of other believers.

The church in Acts was committed. We are told that "they continued daily" (Acts 2:46). They were so committed to their worship of the Savior that they came together every day to worship and honor the Lord.

The church in Acts was powerful. The early church enjoyed the power of God in their midst. They saw people saved on a daily basis (Acts 2:47). They witnessed miraculous conversions.

The church in Acts was militant. They carried the gospel to everyone they met. They sent out missionaries to carry the gospel to the world. They witnessed where they lived and everywhere they went.

The modern church is so fractured that there can be little cooperation on issues that matter. Denominations, doctrines, problems real and perceived—all combine to divide the church into small, isolated groups that refuse to accept those who are different.

There is no real commitment to the mission of the church, the worship of the church, the outreach of the church, or the needs of the church. Members' commitment to the church is conditional, dependent on schedules, routines, convenience, and the whims of the moment.

In many cases, the people in the pews are not so different from the lost people in the world around them. Church members give little attention to prayer, daily worship and devotion, and personal holiness. The church today is doing everything in its power to make itself more attractive to the lost world.

The book of Acts reveals God's pattern for His church. It speaks about the characteristics that should be the distinguishing marks of God's church.

I. HIS CHURCH PREACHED THE RIGHT MESSAGE

A. *What it says about the Savior* (verses 22-37): This message affirms that Jesus is God in the flesh. It affirms His crucifixion and resurrection.

B. *What it says about sin* (verses 23, 36): This message is crystal-clear regarding sin. It exposes the terrible nature of sin (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23). It warns sinners to turn from their sins (verse 40). It is a plain message that confronts sinners where they live (verses 23, 26).

C. *What it says about salvation* (verses 38-40): This church points a lost world to Jesus Christ and to Him alone. It does not preach salvation through religion or ritual (Eph. 2:8, 9). It holds Jesus up as the final and only solution to the problem of sin (John 14:6; Acts 16:31). It preaches a transcendent message that speaks to all social classes, races, and sinners (verses 5-12).

D. *What it says about sovereignty* (verse 39): This church understands and proclaims that God is sovereign in salvation. God is the author and finisher of salvation.

II. GOD'S CHURCH WAS MADE UP OF THE RIGHT PEOPLE

A. *Its members are saved* (verses 37, 40, 41). This church is made up of people who have had a "new birth" experience with Jesus Christ (John 3:3, 7).

B. *Its members are separated* (verse 42). This church walked in "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." They broke off all ties to their old lives. They came to Jesus Christ by faith and were transformed by the grace of God (2 Cor. 5:17).

C. *Its members are steadfast* (verse 42). They were faithful! They showed up when it was time for worship. They each did their individual part for the common good and for the glory of God!

D. *Its members are servants* (verses 44, 45). This church was marked by selflessness. The members cared about the needs of others, and they did everything in their power to meet the needs of their fellow believers.

III. HIS CHURCH FOLLOWED THE RIGHT PROGRAM

A. *They worship together as a family* (verses 42, 46, 47). This church met together for prayer, for instruction in the Word of God, and for worship. Their common goal was to grow in faith and to praise and worship the Lord.

B. *They work together as a team* (verses 44, 45). The goal of this church was the common good. They worked to benefit the group. God has not called us to sit by and do nothing (Eph. 2:10; James 2:18).

C. *They walk together as friends* (verses 42, 46). This church enjoyed "fellowship," "breaking of bread," and "singleness of heart." A church is not a social club, but few things create a bond like good Christian fellowship.

D. *They witness together as saints* (verse 47). This church was not ashamed of its message, and its members all worked to spread the message to a lost world. The Lord still desires that for His people (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19, 20).

IV. HIS CHURCH OBEYED THE RIGHT LORD

A. *Their Lord is powerful* (verses 41, 43, 47). This church was made up of the right kind of people carrying out the right kind of ministry. Thus, they enjoyed God's blessings on their efforts. He "added" to their number daily. He manifested His power through "wonders and signs."

B. *Their Lord is personal* (verse 47). This church didn't worship an abstract, unknowable God. They worshiped a Lord who personally redeemed them from their sins. They were in a powerful, saving relationship with Him (see Rev. 2:1-7; Matt. 22:37-39; John 13:35).

CONCLUSION

How well does our church fit this pattern? Are we the kind of church God can use and bless for His glory?

I challenge you to look inside yourself right now as part of His church.

Have you surrendered to the Lord? Are you faithful to the church? Are you committed to the ministries of the church? Are you a servant of the Lord and His church? If you are in a position of leadership, are you doing what you need to be doing?



General Conference Ministerial Association

SPIRIT-FILLED PRAYING

Ephesians 6:18-24

I think most people really don't believe that we are engaged in battle with an unseen yet very powerful enemy. Satan, the enemy of God, is also the enemy of God's people. His desire is to defeat us, destroy us, and devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). But God has equipped us with everything we need to stand against the devil and his attacks. That is God's promise in Ephesians 6:13.

We can consider the pieces of armor that are listed in Ephesians 6:14-17. But, today, we will move beyond the armor to the final—and perhaps greatest—provision we have been given by the Lord: the provision of prayer.

Paul does not put forth prayer as a weapon; rather, he speaks of it as the means for utilizing the armor. Prayer is how we put on “the whole armor of God.” I want to point out three issues from this text:

I. THE CONCEPT OF PRAYER

As is clear from the context, this passage is about prayer. Specifically, it is about how we are to utilize prayer in our daily lives and in the context of spiritual warfare.

The dictionary defines prayer as “a request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God.” The word used here speaks of “general requests made to God.” So, if we take that definition (and I think it's pretty good), prayer is simply “talking to God.”

I would define prayer as “the breath of a re-deemed soul, exhaling its needs and its worship toward God.” The idea of prayer being the breath of the soul was in Martin Luther's mind when he said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

Anytime we turn our attention toward God and speak to Him, we are praying. Our prayers can take many forms:

- We pray in private and in public; we pray in loud voices or in a whisper. Sometimes we pray in silence.
- We pray in all types of positions and postures: we sit, we stand, we kneel, we lie down. We pray when we walk, when we drive, and when we rest.
- We pray at home, at church, at work, or on vacation.

The Bible talks about many forms of prayer, places of prayer, postures for prayer, and circumstances of prayer. Yet, the Bible does not exalt any form, place, posture, or circumstance for prayer above another.

As for when we should pray, Paul says that we should be “praying always.” The word “always” carries the idea of “at all times, in all seasons, at every opportunity.” The Jews in Paul's day had set times each day when they prayed. The Muslims in our day have five specific times for prayer every day.

Christianity also has a specific, set time for prayer. Our time for prayer is “always.” The Bible speaks of this in several places (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17).

There is no time when we do not need to pray. There is no time when we cannot pray. There is no time when God will not be listening and when He will not hear us.

To pray “always” means that we live in a constant awareness of God and His presence. To pray “always” means that the soul is ever reaching up toward God. It also means that we see everything and every experience as a kind of prayer to God.

When we are tempted, we call on Him and ask for His help. When we see something beautiful, we give thanks to God for that. When we enter a time of trouble, we look to God for help and deliverance. When we are happy, we lift our hearts to God in thanksgiving.

II. THE CONTENT OF PRAYER

This text tells us some of the things that should fill our prayers. Paul divides our prayer experience into two parts.

A. *He mentions “prayers.”* This refers to prayer that is general in scope. Paul calls this kind of praying “all prayer.” That literally means “all kinds of prayer.”

It is the kind of praying we do that is sometimes non-specific. For instance, there are times when we pray for missionaries. We pray for our church leaders and members.

We don't necessarily call out all the names, places, and needs involved, but we pray for those people and situations in a general way. I believe God hears those prayers, and I believe He answers them. He knows our hearts, and He knows the specific needs far better than we do.

B. *Paul also mentions “supplication.”* This word refers to prayers that are very specific in nature. In these verses, Paul mentions some specific areas that should occupy our praying (Eph. 6:18). Remember, “supplication” refers to “specific requests.”

If you have a sickness, I can pray specifically about that. If you have lost family members, I can pray specifically about that. If you have a financial need, I can pray specifically about that. Jesus repeatedly calls on us to pray specifically (John 14:13; 15:16).

III. THE CONTEXT OF PRAYER

Paul says that all of our praying should be done “in the Spirit.” Just as the Christian life is to be lived in the Spirit (Eph. 5:18, Gal. 5:16), all prayer is to be prayed “in the Spirit.” When we speak of living “in the Spirit” and “walking in the Spirit,” we are referring to living in a way that is “controlled” by the Spirit. When the Spirit controls our lives, He reveals His control by producing “the fruit of the Spirit” in us (Gal. 5:22, 23).

When we offer “prayer” and make “supplication” “in the Spirit,” He will make His control of our prayer lives evident as well. What does it mean to pray “in the Spirit”?

A. *It means that we pray in the “name of Jesus.”* That is how the Lord commanded us to pray (John 14:13, 14). When we pray “in Jesus' name,” we ask for the things He would ask for, which means we pray for things that would glorify the Father.

B. *It means that we pray according to the will of God and the nature of God.* We read what the Lord said about Himself in the Word of God, and we pray about the things He says He wants. In other words, we allow His Word to shape our prayers.

C. *It means that we pray in cooperation with the Spirit of God within our hearts* (Rom. 8:26, 27).

CONCLUSION

Prayer is a valuable resource, and it should be one of the top priorities of our lives. To be in contact with the Lord and to know that He hears and answers our prayers is a blessing beyond belief.

Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with a prayer for grace, love, and peace for all the saints of God. As Paul prayed in verse 22, God has truly “comforted my heart” by teaching me who I am and what I possess in Jesus Christ.

Now, “grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”



General Conference Ministerial Association

QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES >PART 2

In the previous article, “Qualifications of Deacons and Deaconesses (Part 1),” the first four qualifications listed by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:8 were presented: deacons and deaconesses are to be “grave” (carry themselves in such a way that they earn the respect of others); “not doubletongued,” “saying a thing to one person and giving a different view of it to another;”¹ “not given to much wine” (best translated as “not addicted to wine,”² i.e., advocating abstinence from fermented wine); and “not greedy of filthy lucre” (not accepting ill-gotten gain, bribes, or showing favor to individuals or groups in the church for personal gain).

This article will focus on the next two qualifications on Paul’s list in verses 9 and 10: “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.”

According to W. E. Vine, the Greek word for mystery, *μυστήριον*, means “that which is known to the initiated. In the New Testament, it denotes not the mysterious [as with the English word] but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit.”³ This implies that deacons and deaconesses are to have such a connection with God that He will give them divine revelations about His Word as they spend quality time in prayer and study; therefore, they will be faithful in word and action.

One of Maurice Riley’s beatitudes for deacons states: “Blessed is the deacon who considers it not robbery to sacrifice time to study God’s Word. He too needs to be able to ‘rightly divide the Word of Truth.’ Attending [Sabbath] Church School or teaching a [Sabbath] School Class will not only sharpen his own spiritual knowledge but will enhance his role as a Bible-believing church leader. He should also better prepare himself for this ever-challenging role, by keeping abreast with other good spiritual informative literature.”⁴


Paul continued his list by stating, “Let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10). Evidently, prospective deacons were scrutinized by the church to see if they possessed

godly characters, sound judgment, and had the potential to develop all of the qualifications required.

D. Edmond Hiebert observes: “In 1 Timothy 3:10, Paul mentioned the testing of persons for appointment to the office of deacon. The meaning is not that they should be given a trial appointment as deacon, but rather that the church should constantly be examining and testing the members of the congregation, so that whenever the need for selecting deacons arises, they will know what members are qualified for appointment.”⁵

By adding the phrase, “being found blameless,” Paul was not advocating perfectionism. He was simply indicating that deacons and deaconesses are to be justified or converted.

Serious thought and prayer must take place before putting a person in this office. Also, those who feel that they are being rushed into office before they are ready should decline. They may even request to be placed in a training capacity until they are confident that God is directing them to serve in this office.

Ellen G. White warned, “It would be well for all our ministers to give heed to these words and not to hurry men into office without due consideration and much prayer that God would designate by His Holy Spirit whom He will accept.”⁶ Although Ellen White directed her comment to the election of elders, the same principle is applicable when electing deacons and deaconesses. 

¹ W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1952), s.v. “Doubletongued.”

² Jay P. Green, Sr., gen. ed. and trans., *The Interlinear Bible*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986).

³ Vine, s.v. “Mystery.”

⁴ Maurice Riley, *The Deaconess: Walking in the Newness of Life*, 2nd ed. (Newark, NJ: Christian Associates Publications, 1993), 144-145.

⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, “Behind the Word ‘Deacon’: A New Testament Study,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (April-June 1983): 154.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 617.

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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND NUTRITION


The Seventh-day Adventist Church encourages a balanced vegetarian diet. “The diet God ordained in the Garden of Eden—the vegetarian diet—is the ideal, but sometimes we cannot have the ideal. In those circumstances, in any given situation or locale, those who wish to stay in optimum health will eat the best food that they can obtain.”¹

There are different types of vegetarian diets, including total (vegan; animal-free), lacto-ovo (the most widely-followed in the Adventist church), and pesco (vegetarian with a little fish added). For those who live where there is an abundance of fortified food products, a healthy, totally vegetarian diet may be the ideal with the following considerations:

- Choose ample whole grains, vegetables, legumes, fruits, nuts, seeds, and berries.
- Avoid replacing animal foods with refined, sweet, fatty commercial products, even if these are made from plant sources.
- Take a regular supplement of vitamin B12 (remember, deficiency symptoms may take 4-6 years to appear).
- Obtain adequate sunlight, emphasize high-calcium vegetables, and/or supplement your diet with calcium and Vitamin D.
- Consider the use of ground flax and or chia seeds or supplements high in omega-3 fatty acids, especially during reproductive years.
- Assure adequate dietary zinc, especially for young and adolescent boys.

Remember: one diet does not necessarily fit all. The Seventh-day Adventist Church promotes the avoidance of flesh foods wherever possible. The best diet will vary, depending on factors such as geographic location, economics, specific health/medical conditions, knowledge, and food availability. The Adventist Church is a global church, and, as such, leaves the decisions regarding specific healthful diets to the choice of each member.

Let us heed the words of Paul: “. . . those who don’t eat certain foods must not condemn those who do . . . let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up. Don’t tear apart the work of God over what you eat” (Rom. 14:1-3).

The General Conference Nutrition Council is a global committee of nutrition professionals who are available to respond to the nutrition questions you or your constituents may have. We are currently updating our fact sheets and soon will have many topics available on the healthministries.com website. 

¹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 286.

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ALL ABOUT COSMETICS

DOES THE BIBLE SAY ANYTHING ABOUT COSMETICS?

I presume that you want to know what the Bible says about cosmetics to see how it applies to your own life. But before I mention the few texts that mention them directly, some background information concerning ancient practices could be useful.

1. Cosmetics in the Ancient World: It has been suggested that makeup originated in magical beliefs and in the concern for personal protection. It was probably seen as a way of hiding one's identity in order to be protected from evil spirits. But evidence also points to two main reasons for using cosmetics: hygienic or medical, and beautification. Hygiene was probably the primary one. That seems to have been the case in Egypt, where painting the eyelids offered protection from eye diseases. The makeup repelled flies that produced eye inflammation and protected the skin from the heat of the sun that otherwise would have dried it. Makeup was almost a natural disinfectant.

Painting the eyelids and cheeks was soon perceived to be a way of enhancing a person's appearance. In the case of the eyes, the eyebrows and the upper eyelids were painted one color and the lower line of the eye was painted with a different color. This type of makeup framed the eyes and gave the illusion that they were larger than they were. The colors were usually black and green, although other combinations are known. Egyptians and Babylonians used makeup on their cheeks and lips. The pastes were commonly made from roots, flowers, berries, and minerals, and were used by both men and women.

Preparation for a wedding included a beautification process of cleansing and adornment including making up the eyes as the last element in the process. Facial treatments were particularly common in Egypt, Greece, and Rome. We have recipes from Egypt for ointments that supposedly removed wrinkles and other signs of aging (anyone interested?). Greek women put on a beauty mask before going to bed and used milk to remove it in the morning. The emphasis on makeup as a means of beautification was sometimes associated with

seduction and, when exaggerated, was considered a characteristic of prostitutes.

2. Biblical Materials: There is very little evidence related to the use of cosmetics in Israel. We know that Israelites used cosmetics, because archeologists have found utensils associated with the production and application of cosmetics. It is impossible to say how widespread the practice was, but it is logical to conclude that it was at least common among Israel's upper classes. The three biblical passages in which makeup is mentioned provide little information. In preparation to meet Jehu, Jezebel "painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window" (2 Kings 9:30).^{*} Her specific purpose for this beautification is not clear. Was she trying to seduce him? Was she using the makeup to protect herself from evil? The text implies that she dressed and adorned herself as a queen to confront her enemy. Her beauty did not save her.

Makeup is associated with seduction in Jeremiah 4:30, where Israel is described as a woman to whom the Lord asks: "Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain. Your lovers despise you." Enhanced beauty through makeup would not deliver her from her enemies. The same ideas are expressed in Ezekiel 23:40. The tone of both passages is negative. Those three texts imply that makeup was known and used by Israelite women, that it contributed to the beautification of the woman, and that there were limits to its value.

3. Makeup Today: Makeup is very common among women and is becoming so among men. The fundamental purposes continue to be hygienic and aesthetic. The Bible does not give any specific guidelines concerning its use, but biblical principles should guide us in its use. First, the Bible does not deny the value of a good appearance and a concern for health. Second, the Bible places the emphasis on inner beauty over physical beauty. Finally, modesty should be the norm when addressing this particular issue. Modesty describes a demeanor that expresses itself in self-respect, discretion, and the avoidance of extremes, based on the fact that we are children of God and representatives of our Lord.



^{*}Texts in this column are quoted 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.



MUSIC MATTERS > PART 3

IS THERE A MESSAGE IN THE MEDIUM?

In the previous article we began to explore the question of whether or not “the lovely” and “the admirable,” as mentioned in Philippians 4:8, have a moral dimension? Simply put: Is music morally neutral or is it subject to moral evaluation? Is it an issue of right and wrong, and ethical congruity with certain principles or merely a matter of subjective taste? We noted that there is fascinating historical evidence of the moral evaluation of music in a variety of cultures. Whether or not all their reasoning is valid from a Christian perspective, does not detract from the fact that music was historically considered to be part of a moral understanding of life. We also noted that the Western Christian tendency to evaluate music aesthetically rather than morally derives from an Anglo-Roman Catholic theological perspective developed in the Middle Ages. It centres around the understanding of whether or not humanity’s fall into sin affected our creativity. Christians of a Protestant heritage have no option but to explore ways of evaluating music for moral compatibility with the worldview we espouse. The next two articles will suggest two starting points in that endeavour.

Speaking at the Second International Symposium on Music in Medicine at Ludenscheid, West Germany, in 1984, Manfred Clynes (a neurophysiologist, researcher, inventor, and acclaimed pianist) made the following statement:

Music in fact is an organisation created to dictate feelings to the listener. The composer is an unrelenting dictator and we choose to subject ourselves to him, when we listen to his music.¹

What does this prominent scientist mean when he says music “dictates feelings?” How can music do this? One simple way to understand how this happens is to tune into a movie soundtrack, bypassing the picture for a while. How much can you determine about the film’s action simply by listening to the background music? Often quite a lot! Imagine a scene in a sci-fi horror movie in which a lethal monster spider is creeping up on an innocent, unsuspecting child. You can almost “hear” the creepy background music, can’t you? But, it is right here that we need to stop and ask a question: Why do film producers use music to accompany such scenes, especially when some would have us believe that words, not music, actually communicate meaning? And how do producers decide what music to dub with the scene? Why isn’t “approaching monster music” dubbed onto a movie scene of a birthday party or a baby nursery? If lyrics such as “sleep baby sleep” were set to “approaching monster music” would it become a lullaby? Or would addition of the text “Jesus loves me this I know” render it suitable for a worship context? In this last example, would we only want to make sure that the “approaching monster music” was composed creatively and performed skilfully, or would we evaluate the music as intrinsically inappropriate, even wrong, in that context?

While this may be an obvious example, several salient points about the nature of music are highlighted here and they must not be lost to our discussion. First, music apart from lyrics does carry a message. Music is not a neutral medium. Words are not required in order for music to have meaning. Film producers make decisions about music, not lyrics, in background music applications.

Second, while some may argue that music means different things to different people and that its affect is really only a matter of conditioned response, this does not account for the validity of certain major assumptions made by film producers. For example, incorporating music on a film soundtrack takes for granted that music impacts all people similarly. Indeed, if this were not the case a music soundtrack would be pointless. Even when a film is released internationally only language tracks are changed. The musical sound track that “dictates the feelings,” as Clynes put it, stays the same. The underlying belief is that background music will communicate the same basic message to all viewers, even across cultural boundaries.

Third, while it cannot be denied that with the rise of globalized mass media some mass conditioning regarding musical associations may have occurred, it is also clear that music’s impact is not only a matter of conditioning. Even before mass conditioning could be said to be a factor, producers seemed to be able to predict very accurately what music fitted with specific scenes or sequences. It has never been a hit-and-miss venture. Composers intentionally write specific scores for specific movies to achieve specific emotional responses.

Research over the last fifty years or so has verified that the way music is constructed and performed embodies certain inherent characteristics that have long provided intuitive clues to its meaning. That’s precisely why the secular industry makes informed decisions about the music it uses quite apart from lyrics that may or may not be present. Sadly, the “children of this world” seem to be wiser than the “children of light”² in some of these things.

In the relatively recently established discipline of *Sentics* there is one example of how a growing body of documentary evidence is deciphering how human emotion is expressed and perceived, and how music is, in fact, a form of emotion communication. Indeed, respected contemporary thinkers about music have continued to affirm the conclusions of the Greeks about music representing the passions or states of the soul. For example, Susanne Langer wrote:

The tonal structures we call ‘music’ bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling. . . . The pattern of music is that . . . form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life.³

In similar vein, Gordon Epperson maintained: “Music is the expression . . . of the emotions; an aural image of how feelings feel, how they operate.”⁴

In the development of *Sentics*, Clynes has merely begun to show how music does this. Having demonstrated that the expression of emotion occurs through certain predictable forms (which he termed *essentic forms*⁵), Clynes has gone on to show how musicians can manipulate the pitch and loudness of individual tones to embody *essentic forms* in a melody line. This is achieved much the same way tone of voice is modulated to make a sentence meaningful. He describes it thus:

In producing a melody, a composer places the notes so that they in effect fit the outline of the appropriate *essentic form*. . . . Musical tones are placed at suitable points along the path of an *essentic form* so that internally they can act as markers in the generation of the form. That is to say, the musical tones engender internally the motor pattern of *essentic form* corresponding also to program points of a touch expression of the same quality.⁶

When composers construct well and performers read and en flesh their compositions accurately, powerful communications can take place. Indeed, when an *essentic form* is expressed well “a melody has direct access to engender the emotional quality in the listener without the need of auxiliary symbolism.”⁷ As Clynes elaborated:

. . . it can touch the heart as directly as can a physical touch. A caress or an exclamation of joy in music needs not to be consciously translated into a touch caress or a physical ‘jump for joy’ to be perceived as of such a quality. It does so directly through perception of *essentic form*.⁸

Besides using the tones of a melody line, further embodiment of emotional communication can be demonstrated in the structure of the rhythmic pulse.⁹

Of course, all this brings Maurice Zam’s illustration, quoted in the introduction to Part 2 of this series of articles, into perspective. Actually, I am sure Zam was aware that the tones E, D and C never exist in clinical isolation in a piece of music. The surrounding harmonies, rhythms, phrasing, accentuation etc. make those three tones take on a variety of emotional colourations. Any composer setting Zam’s three sets of lyrics (“I love you” “I hate you,” and “three blind mice”) to music would not compose identically in each case.¹⁰ This is precisely where Zam’s “throw away line” and logic breaks down.

Without trying to be comprehensive at this point, enough has been provided to substantiate that a body of research now exists that demonstrates that music does communicate meaningfully in a way that can and ought to be evaluated for appropriateness, and even rightness or wrongness in a given context.

From a Christian viewpoint, emotions like anger, hate, fear, love, or joy are not intrinsically good or bad. However, to present the lyric, “Jesus loves me this I know” with an

accompanying musical/emotional message of fear and suspense would not simply be a harmless mismatch of cognitive and affective communication. According to Christian belief it would surely be crass misrepresentation of the Gospel (especially in light of 1 John 4:18) and hence, morally wrong, not merely aesthetically poor. The same would be true if lyrics about Jesus' love for humanity were presented accompanied by music portraying anger, violence, and aggression. Such mixed messages provide a confused communication of truth that is morally reprehensible, not just a matter of taste.

This last scenerio is not merely an idle, hypothetical example. Even in the late 1980s and 1990s, an extension of so-called heavy-metal rock music emerged and became known as Thrash or Speed Metal. The violence and aggression in the music was suitably acted out in the accompanying moshing pit where fans gyrated to the music in frenzied thrashing movements, sometimes even breaking limbs in the process. This type of music continued to be popular and was much in evidence at the 1999 Woodstock Music Festival. In an essay in *Time*, August 9, 1999, Lance Morrow described the arson, pillaging, and free-lance mayhem that “was much in the spirit of the music” at the festival.¹¹ A crowd the size of Rochester, NY in hot conditions and under the influence of drugs and “vehemently moronic music” became a riot. He summed it up in the words: “Garbage in, garbage out.”¹²

When this form of music first emerged, however, some Christian churches in Los Angeles sponsored concerts and developed worship services around a “Christian form” of this music to cater for enthusiasts. Even *Contemporary Christian Music* magazine was in two minds whether to support or condemn this new phenomenon.¹³ While the older, maturer commentators tried to weigh up the pros and cons of violence in a Christian context, arguing about the end perhaps justifying the means etc., a letter from a young person to the editor of the April 1989 issue of the same magazine seemed to cut through the confusion. Alisa Williams from Chicago wrote:


What's with this “Moshing for the Master” crap?! [Feb. '89] Some of those thrash people have their heads screwed up. I see absolutely nothing Christian about diving into an audience on top of people or running around like maniacs, risking being trampled to death! This kind of violence has no place in a Christian concert. No violence at all should be involved!

Now as for their “thrash” sound—it's a bit too wild. I know we all have different musical tastes, but once you over step a certain point it's just unbearable.

I know you mean well—You want to bring those headbanging unbelievers to Christ—but I think you've taken it a bit far. God bless you anyway!

By the way, this letter is not from an old granny. I'm 15 years-old!¹⁴

What this young person saw so clearly highlights the hypocrisy of allowing the popular market to dictate music

choice. Despite the recognized meaning of this music, some considered it acceptable simply because it was popular. If we have no external moral yardstick by which to evaluate our music, the market forces of the secular music industry will become the moral rudder by default. Ironically, within a Christian music context, this means that you end up with those knowing least about the Gospel determining most about its expression. No wonder we are often left with a plethora of mixed and confused musical messages in much of the contemporary Christian music scene today. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we need to decide whether or not that is an appropriate fountain of inspiration for our musicians and our personal tastes to draw from and acclimatise to. Of course, that is in itself, a moral choice we each have to make. 

¹ Manfred Clynes, “On Music and Healing” in *Music in Medicine: Proceedings Second International Symposium on Music in Medicine*, Ludenscheid, West Germany, ed. J. Steffens (R. Spintge and R. Droh, 1985), 4.

² Luke 16:8

³ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 27.

⁴ Gordon Epperson, *The Musical Symbol: An Exploration in Aesthetics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990), 75.

⁵ Manfred Clynes, *Sentics: The Touch of the Emotions* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 26-41.

⁶ Manfred Clynes, “When Time is Music,” in *Rhythm in Psychological, Linguistic and Musical Processes* ed. James R. Evans and Manfred Clynes (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1986), 184-5.

⁷ *Ibid*, 185.

⁸ *Ibid*. It is unfortunate that in an article of this nature that all this cannot be practically illustrated. When presented in seminar form with musical examples it proves very persuasive.

⁹ See, for example, Manfred Clynes, *Expressive Microstructure in Music, Linked to Living Qualities in Studies of Music Performance* ed. Johan Sundberg (Royal Swedish Academy of Music, Stockholm, No. 39, 1983), 120-122.

¹⁰ Perhaps a comparison could be drawn with the use of the word “no” said in different settings. (For example, in anger, in disbelief, in fear, and in defiance.) Although the same word is used, the colorations of the voice communicate the very diverse meanings and emotions.

¹¹ Lance Morrow, “The Madness of Crowds,” *Time* (August 9, 1999), 64.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ See Doug van Pelt, “Moshing for the Master?” *Contemporary Christian Music* (February 1989), 20, 21.

¹⁴ *Contemporary Christian Music*, (April 1989), 4.

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WHY BAPTISM?

When people love each other, wanting to spend the rest of their lives together, and are committed to each other, they get married. In the same manner, when people love Jesus, wanting to follow Him as His disciples, and are committed to Him, they get baptized.

I. THE MEANING OF BIBLICAL BAPTISM

Ceremonial washing occurred in the Old Testament. John the Baptist introduced a baptism of repentance (see Matt. 3) which was also accepted by Jesus and practiced by His disciples.

- Baptism has to do with repentance of sins and with dedicating one's life to Jesus (Matt. 3:2, 5, 6, 11; Acts 2:38).
- Baptism has therefore to do with cleansing and is a sign of accepting forgiveness and salvation (John 13:10; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:11).
- Baptism is by water and the Holy Spirit, depicting death to sin and bringing about newness of life (John 3:3, 5; Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- Baptism is a public act of confessing Christ and believing in Him (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16).
- Baptism has to do with discipleship and allows Jesus to live His life in His followers (Matt. 28:19; Gal. 2:20).

II. JESUS AND BAPTISM

Christian baptism is rooted in baptize Jesus who Himself was baptized and who gave the commission to those who desire to become God's children. However, His own baptism was not a baptism of repentance; He was baptized as our example.

- Jesus' baptism is the example that we should follow. What happened at His baptism indirectly happens with any person who is serious about following Christ and who is being baptized (Matt. 3:13-17).
- Jesus through His disciples baptized people (John 3:22; 4:2).
- Jesus wants people to be baptized (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16).

III. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. *The Mode of Baptism*

Baptism is by immersion.

- The Greek verb *baptizō* and other words of the same family are used in the New Testament to denote baptism by immersion.
- That people went into the water and came up out of the water again supports immersion (Matt. 3:16; Acts 8:38, 39).
- Baptism is a symbol of being buried with Christ. A burial is a complete and not just a partial interment (Col. 2:12).

2. *Prerequisites for Baptism*

The Book of Acts continuously stresses the sequence of hearing the proclamation of the gospel, believing in Jesus, and being baptized. Exceptions confirm the rule and are due to special circumstances. Nevertheless, hearing and believing always precede baptism.

- Hearing, believing, repenting, being baptized, receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-41).
- Hearing, believing, being baptized (Acts 8:12).
- Hearing, believing, being baptized (Acts 8:34-39).
- Hearing, receiving the Holy Spirit, being baptized (Acts 10:44-48).
- Hearing, believing, being baptized (Acts 18:8).

Believing in Jesus includes the entire gospel. Therefore, people were baptized in the name of Jesus after they had heard the proclamation of the message and accepted it. This is not possible with infants.

- Renewed baptism because the first was inadequate (Acts 19:1-7).

3. *Entrance into the Church by Baptism*

Although people are baptized because they believe in Jesus, they are also joined to "His body" which is the church.

- Those who were baptized were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 42, 46, 47).
- They form one body (1 Cor. 12:13). One cannot be a Christian in isolation (Heb. 10:24, 25).

IV. BENEFITS OF BAPTISM AND RESPONSIBILITIES


Benefits are described, for instance, in Acts 2:38, 39; Matthew 3:11, 16, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:7-13.

- Belonging and relationship: Beloved sons and daughters of God.
- Members of the community of Christ.
- Forgiveness of sins, salvation, eternal life.
- Receiving the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

Benefits lead also to responsibilities. They include:

- The use of one's natural and spiritual gifts for Christ's cause.
- Becoming active in a local church.
- Fulfilling the missionary task given by the Lord.

V. BAPTISM AND I

We are challenged as Paul was when he met Jesus: "And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). We decide to follow Christ's example. 

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

GREAT HYMNS OF THE CHURCH >PART 6

HYMN SINGING NEW TESTAMENT STYLE 2

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Like the Ephesian passage, Paul discusses hymn-singing in Colossians 3:12-17 after an opening doctrinal discourse. The context for his specific exhortation in verse 16 regarding hymn singing, is the whole chain of Christian graces to be found among God's chosen people, especially their culmination in love, unity, peace, and thankfulness. What a setting for musical advice! Imagine what a mutuality of these graces among believers could do for the music in our churches!

Verse 16 begins: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and counsel one another with all wisdom . . ." The results of the rich indwelling Word are teaching and counseling. Perhaps the teaching involves mostly doctrinal content, and the counseling, practical exhortation.

Paul goes on to translate this wise teaching and counseling into musical expression. The NIV and RSV read, "and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude ['thanksgiving,' RSV] in your hearts to God." This makes the clause parallel to "as you teach and counsel," and both clauses signify ways through which the indwelling Word may be expressed. The ASV, however, renders the passage, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God." I naturally prefer this translation. In any case, the context implies a close connection, and Paul's parallel paragraph in Ephesians verifies it. Here is doctrinal teaching and spiritual counseling in song.

The major ideas of verse 16 are (1) the rich indwelling of the Word of Christ; and (2) the teaching, counseling and singing. Which is cause and which is effect? The most obvious answer seems to be that the rich indwelling Word produces teaching and singing. But a complementary interpretation is also possible: Teaching/counseling with wisdom and singing with gratitude are natural ways to let the Word indwell in us richly.

Reflecting upon this great passage raises some searching questions:

- How faithful to the Word is a particular hymn?
- How richly indwelt by the Word am I as a hymn singer or accompanist? How fully does a certain gospel song reflect the Word or my response to the Word?

- Should the church consider using hymns for doctrinal instruction or spiritual encouragement of the young and for newborn believers? Is this expecting too much of a hymn?

In verse 17, Paul summarizes his thought in one comprehensive ethical principle: Do all on the basis of your relationship to God through Christ, with thanksgiving. For the third time in three verses, the apostle emphasizes gratitude to God. We are moved again to ask certain personal questions:

- Does this hymn or gospel song reflect a scriptural understanding of God's grace and my Christian response of gratitude?
- Am I singing (in the congregation or choir or as a soloist) with genuine thanks, based on a fresh appreciation of God's grace?
- Should one of the qualifications for church musicians (choirs, choir directors, organists, soloists) be a thankful spirit? What would an attitude of grace and gratitude do for the music problems in our churches?

SUMMARY OF NEW TESTAMENT HYMN-SINGING

Paul's two paragraphs on hymn-singing emphasize four basic points:

1. Hymn-singing has a twofold inspiration: the believer's continuous filling by the Holy Spirit and the rich indwelling of the Word in his or her heart.
2. Paul discusses the attitude and motivation of the singers and the spiritual content of their hymns, but he says nothing about musical styles, forms, or accompaniment.
3. Paul sees hymn-singing primarily as a joyous, thankful response to God's grace: its basic movement is upward praise to God. Only secondarily does it flow outward to fellow believers for edification.
4. One feels in these verses a kind of "musical *koinonia*," a sense of sharing and active participation by the congregation. The privilege of singing belongs to the whole Christian community, not an elite few.

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HYMNS ON THE RESURRECTION [EASTER]

JESUS, YOUR BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS by Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760)

Count Zinzendorf wrote his first of some 2,000 hymns at age 12. His story nearly duplicates that of Francis of Assisi. Both came from wealthy, titled homes, and each renounced the favors of nobility to provide for others. Zinzendorf's life made an abrupt turn after he viewed a picture of the thorn-crowned Christ, underneath which were the words "What hast thou done for Me?" He called his religion "Christianity of the heart" and practiced it by building a village on his beautiful estate called "Herrnhut"—the "Lord's Shelter"—providing asylum for persecuted Christians. The number of refugees he cared for grew to 600 in less than a decade.

Though he studied law at the University of Wittenberg, he became a preacher and was consecrated as a bishop of the Moravian Brethren in 1737. However, the Lutherans accused him of teaching false doctrine, and he was banned from their pulpits. Undeterred, he traveled widely, preaching and establishing Moravian colonies in Germany, Holland, England, and America. When the ban was lifted, he returned to his estate, using his wealth for religious work. He died a poor man.

"Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness" was written in 1739, after he returned to Saxony from a missionary journey in the West Indies. Originally, it had 33 verses, was translated into English by John Wesley, and the tune composed by William Gardiner was adapted from great composers like Haydn and Beethoven. It has become a stirring testimony of "Christ Jesus" [who] "lived and died for me."

CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY by Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

This triumphant hymn of Charles Wesley was written just one year after his "heart-warming" experience at the Aldersgate Hall in London in 1738. The first Wesleyan Chapel in London was a deserted iron foundry. It became known as the Foundry Meeting House, and this hymn was written for the first service in that chapel and originally had 11 verses.

Following his conversion in Aldersgate, Charles began writing numerous hymns on every phase of the Christian experience. It has been said that the hymns of Charles Wesley clothed Christ in flesh and blood and gave converts a belief they could easily grasp, embrace with personal faith, and die for.

The hymn was published by John Walsh, an Irishman who established himself in London, publishing, among others, the works of George Frederick Handel. The message of this Easter hymn is to personally experience the transforming power of the living Christ, who will "raise your joys and triumphs high."

THERE IS A GREEN HILL FAR AWAY by Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895)

The author of this hymn, Cecil Frances Alexander [nee Humphreys], wrote 400 hymns and was one of England's finest hymn writers. She was active in the Sunday School Movement before she married William Alexander, archbishop and primate of the Anglican Church for all of Ireland. As a devout Anglican Sunday School teacher, Mrs. Alexander was intent on making the Apostles' Creed understandable to children, and she believed that the most effective way to explain spiritual truths was through hymns. So, in 1848, she decided to put the details of Christ's suffering and death on the cross, expressed in the Creed as "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried," into a song. No doubt the grass-covered hills of Londonderry reminded her of the hill of Calvary and inspired the writing of the hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful."

Actually, the tune was composed by a Londoner, William Horsley, in 1844. Horsley was not only a friend of Mendelssohn but also was one of the founders of the London Philharmonic Society. As you sing this hymn, may the truth of God's great love motivate you to "try His works to do."

THINE IS THE GLORY by Edmund Louis Budry (1854–1932)

This hymn combines a remarkable blend of French, English, and German influences. It was written by Edmund Budry, who was educated in Lusanne as a minister of the National Reformed Church and pastored in Cully for eight years before going to the Free Church in Vevey, Switzerland, where he ministered for 35 years. During that time, he wrote more than 60 hymns, some of which were translated into Latin, German, and English.

The translator of "Thine Is the Glory" was from Lancashire, England, and, though reared in a Methodist home, was ordained a Baptist minister. He served various churches and, for two years (1934–1936), taught Systematic Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He died in England in 1939.

The tune comes from a famous Handel oratorio celebrating the life of the Jewish hero Judas Maccabeus and made for "See the Conquering Hero Comes." Though made at the request of Frederick, Prince of Wales, to celebrate the victory of his brother, the hymn is a fitting, triumphant promise of a soon-coming celebration with the saints of all ages in honor of our victorious Lord.



FORGIVENESS: WHAT IT IS NOT

There is a story about a man who was bitten by a dog that was discovered to have rabies. The man was rushed to the hospital, and tests revealed that he, too, had contracted the dreaded disease. The doctor came in to see the man and said, "I am sorry to say you have rabies. Your situation is incurable and terminal. All I can suggest is that you get affairs together as quickly as possible." Well, the man was stunned. Finally, after a few moments, he summoned the strength to ask for a piece of paper and a pen, and he began to write furiously. About an hour later, the doctor came back to check on his patient. The man was still writing. The doctor said, "Well, I'm glad to see you're getting your will together." The man looked up and said, "Doc, this ain't no will. It's a list of all the people I'm going to bite before I die."

Our natural reaction is to act like this man. When people wrong, hurt, betray, and destroy us, we want to get even with them and believe we are justified in doing so. But is that the right thing to do? At what cost to ourselves are we willing to pay to get even?

In the previous article, we looked at the unpayable debt we owe Jesus for our salvation. In this article, we will study what forgiveness is not. In the next one, we will look at what forgiveness is.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

Forgiving is not the same thing as excusing. Forgiving

does not mean tolerating bad behavior or pretending that what someone did was not so bad. Forgiving someone who breaks our trust does not mean that we give him his position back, such as a job. Forgivers are not doormats; to forgive a person is not a signal that we are willing to put up with what others throw at us.¹

God did not excuse Moses when he struck the rock of Kadesh (when he was told to speak to it; Num. 20:1-13), but still, He forgave him.

Forgiving is not forgetting. Scripture writers sometimes use the language of "forgetting" to describe how God deals with our sin: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17, KJV; see also Ps. 103:12). This doesn't mean that God has a memory-retrieval problem. It means that He does not bring up our past sins and hold them against us. John MacArthur makes the observation that God does not forget our sins. He is omnipotent. He chooses not to remember our sins and does not use them against us.² The Bible says that love "does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:5, NIV). Forgiving is what's required precisely when we *can't* forget. Forgiving is not a way to avoid or forget pain but to heal pain.³

Forgiving is not the same thing as reconciling. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two separate things. Forgiveness takes place within the heart of one human being. It can be

granted even if the other person does not ask for it or deserve it. When we wait for someone to repent before we forgive, we are surrendering our future to the person who wronged us.

Reconciliation requires that the offender still be alive and be sincerely repentant for the wrong he or she committed. Reconciliation requires the rebuilding of trust, and that means good faith on the part of *both* parties.

Even though King Saul tried to destroy David, David responded with kindness and forgiveness to Saul's household. When David became king, he showed kindness to Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth. He restored to him and his family the land owned by the former king and paid to have the land cared for and farmed. David also made a place for Mephibosheth at his own table so that he was accepted as part of the king's family (2 Sam. 9). David forgave Saul without ever reconciling with Saul himself.

If you live on this earth for any period of time, you will have your own list of people you want to bite and get even with before you die! Perhaps there's a fellow church member who relentlessly criticizes you or a coworker who constantly berates you. Maybe a close friend betrays you. You cannot control the offenses that come into your life, but you can control what you do with those offenses. You can hold on to them until they metastasize into a tumor of bitterness and

destroy you and your family, or you can make the choice to let go of those offenses and forgive. I personally believe that the single greatest choice we as Christians make is whether or not to forgive those who wrong us.

The apostle Paul says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:31, 32, NIV).

This is only possible when God makes us into new men and women by giving us new desires and attitudes toward people (Eph. 4:31, 32). EO

¹ <https://billygraham.org/answer/forgiveness-does-not-mean-excusing-wrongdoing/>, Accessed June 14, 2017.

² John F. MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998), 189.

³ Leroy T. Howe, *Guilt: Helping God's People Find Healing and Forgiveness*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 89.

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Adventist World Radio has many avenues for distributing programs today, from traditional shortwave radio broadcasts that continue to serve listeners in closed countries, to online communities built around popular social media platforms. Some of the best ideas for outreach come from our local production teams. In China, special audio players that we call “godpods” are being manufactured locally. Radio volunteers and church members personally present these players to listeners. Three days later, they return and ask the listeners, “Have you tried the player yet? If not, I must take it back and give to someone who will listen.” That personal approach is proving to be highly motivational, and it has taken very little time for the listener testimonies to start pouring in. Here we share a small sample of the letters that have touched our hearts.

TESTIMONY 1

“I would like to sincerely thank the person who donates the players. I am a lady in my 70s. When I was young, I did not go to school, so I was not well educated. I spent most of my time taking care of children and housework. While getting old, I did not go out for recreational activities, even when I was staying idly inside.

“Usually, young men are reluctant to come into contact with an old woman like me, but one day, a young man spoke to me on the road, saying that he can deliver the gospel to me if I believe in God.

“Although I have not yet formally entered the church, I am interested in faith. Recently, this young man gave me a solar Bible player carrying poetry, Bible stories, and religious books, and told me how to use it.

“I am very grateful, because it solves my vacuity, loneliness, and boredom; I want to listen to the contents of the player more, as it can enrich my spiritual life in old age. I would like to have more contact with this young man, and believe in God with him.”

TESTIMONY 2

“I am an unrepentant Christian, who does not even participate in gatherings. But since the church gave me a player recently, I have been listening to it every day.

“I like the poems of praise very much. I liked singing when I was young, and now I have the chance to listen to the songs and Bible stories whenever and wherever possible. Thank God for His great grace and love, and not leaving me behind! I would like to believe in God and aspire to be a repentant Christian.

“My husband has been listening to the Bible since we got the player, and he is now very fond of religious beliefs and willing to go to the gatherings with me. Thank God for bringing so much grace to our family through the player!”

TESTIMONY 3

“I was a devout Buddhist, but also a childless elderly wretch. My son died because of work. When my husband and I were in great sorrow, we met my friend, W. She told my husband and me to believe in God. So my husband and I agreed to take the Buddhas away from our house and stop serving them. So the elders and brothers and sisters of the Adventist church came to our house to pray. Later, I was given a player to listen to the Bible whenever and wherever. My husband and I feel a lot better, and we opened ourselves and put down a lot. Thank you for the church. Thank you for the people sending the player.”

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

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