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The Crippling Problem the Church Faces Today

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ELDER'S DIGEST



**THE MYSTERY
OF THE GODHEAD**

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EVIDENCES OF A SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN

“AND THE DISCIPLES WERE FILLED WITH JOY AND WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT”
ACTS 13:52

The work of the Holy Spirit is immeasurably great, but what are the evidences of a Christian who is Spirit-filled? Supernatural powers? A magnetic personality? No, not really. Being a Spirit-filled Christian is not spooky or even supernatural.

Walking in the Spirit, to be Spirit-filled, is a mental exercise that puts your thoughts, hopes, and desires in God’s hands. Notice the following passage of Scripture: “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:5-8).

Notice how many times the word “mind” appears. Walking in the Spirit and thus to be Spirit-filled is about where your mind is. So here are some of the evidences of a Spirit-filled Christian:

- A constant prayerful contact with God (1 Thess. 5:17)
- Evident fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)
- Does not feel at odds with God (Rom. 8:6-7)
- A grateful and humble heart (Eph. 5:18-21)
- A strong desire to share God’s message (Acts 13:47-52)

These are the basic evidences of a Spirit-filled Christian. As Christians, we often look for the supernatural, not realizing that the quality of our lives is determined not by the power we wield but by how much the Spirit of God has filled every aspect of our lives. Ellen G. White also says: “Those who are imbued with His Spirit will have an intense love for everyone for whom He died, and will work earnestly to bring into the heavenly garner a harvest of souls. Filled with His Spirit, men and women will be animated with the same desire to save sinners that animated Christ in His lifework as a missionary sent of God.”¹

You need to be in constant contact with God throughout the day. Do not just say your prayers, read a verse or two, and then dismiss God until the next day. If that is all you ever do, then God occupies only a tiny fraction of your life. There is no way you are filled with the Spirit.

Remember, the most important aspect of the Christian life is your relationship with God. Being Spirit-filled is not determined by your position in the church, how well you keep the rules, to what degree people recognize your spirituality, or how much influence you wield over others. Being Spirit-filled means that your daily life is filled with God!

ED

¹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 18:110.



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

VISION, PLANS, AND RESOURCES



Jerry Page,

General Conference ministerial secretary, and his wife, Janet, ministerial associate for Shepherdess International, are a couple passionate about knowing Jesus,

prayer, and reaching people for Him. As a previous president for Pennsylvania and Central California conferences in North America, Jerry witnessed firsthand the power of God's people believing His inspired writings and unitedly calling on Him in prayer. As prayer and women's ministries director for those two conferences, Janet has seen God work to change lives in miraculous ways when His people come together in prayer. The Pages believe that in this great controversy, the united petitions of believers praying God's Word make an eternal difference. Jerry and Janet have shared their experiences at retreats, camp meetings, leadership meetings, and religious television programs in North America and around the world. They are the parents of two grown sons, who are both married, and the grandparents of two young boys.

HOW DO YOU FEEL BEING THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF THE PASTORS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH ELDERS FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WORLDWIDE CHURCH?

It is such an awesome challenge and responsibility that my feelings vary from sometimes feeling inadequate or overwhelmed, to the excited optimism and confidence of knowing all of God's callings are enablings. Jesus said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). It drives me to seek that abiding intimate connection with God promised in John 15, every moment of every day!

WHAT ARE YOUR VISION AND MAJOR PLANS YOU HAVE FOR THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION IN THIS QUINQUENNIAL?

The Lord has given us a powerful team in Ministerial and we are one in heart and purpose. We spent a prayer and strategic planning week together plus listening to the field leadership in advisories. We assessed all previous programs and activities and have prioritized what we feel the Lord is calling us to do. We will continue to do many of the previous programs of training and providing resources for excellence for the pastors, their spouses, and elders as well as their division, union, and local conference leaders. We are improving delivery systems for these resources by developing a new weekly TV program for Hope Channel, "Ministry in Motion," which will highlight extremely practical training from expert guests both in the 30-minute program format broken down into 8-minute segments to be archived for later study on the Internet. We are also continuing to archive the 30 years of *Ministry* magazine articles by subject for easy access on the Internet.

We have also been asked to lead out in several major initiatives by our GC leadership. Revival and reformation is our greatest need in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are producing materials and seeking to nurture this in all our leaders and members. We also have been asked to help lead out in the "Mission to the Cities" initiative that will lead to comprehensive evangelistic thrusts in a major city in every division,

union, and local conferences by 2015 (over 600 cities). We have also been asked to take on leadership of prayer ministries for the world church family. The list goes on, but the spiritual life of our team and all the leaders we serve is our top priority!

YOU WORK WITH A TALENTED TEAM, ALONG WITH YOUR WIFE. WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES SHE HOLDS AS PART OF THE GC MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION?

Janet is an associate secretary of the Ministerial Association, along with several other associates. All of them travel the world field training and speaking as needed by the fields. Her specific responsibilities include resourcing pastors' spouses, and a new ministry for pastors' children is being developed as well. She has recently been assigned to lead Prayer Ministries for the world church. She is editor of *The Journal—A Shepherdess International Resource for Ministry Spouses*.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MAIN PASSION OF YOUR MINISTRY?

To lead people to experience a revival of true godliness, discipling and equipping them to know Jesus so they naturally grow into His mission to seek and save those who are lost. Prayer experience and ministry are what the Lord has especially called Janet and me to lead out in during recent years.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF PASTORS AND ELDERS?

Following the example of Jesus, to prioritize enough quality time to be able to develop an intimate and practical knowledge of and relationship with the Lord. This happens practically by much time in His inspired writings, communing with Him often in prayer privately, and in united prayer with others. This leads to such a vibrant walk with Him that active ministry for others is a natural and powerful outgrowth.

FROM YOUR PRESENT PERSPECTIVE, HOW IMPORTANT IS THE WORK OF THE ELDERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH?

The work of local church elders is crucial to the health and growth of the church and its members. When the local church is functioning as the Word of God says it should, the elder's role in leading, discipling, and nurturing will be extremely vital.

IN WHICH WAYS CAN THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION SUPPORT THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH ELDERS?

Elder's Digest is a tremendously helpful and practical resource for the work of elders. Many additional resources

have been produced for training, helping organize preaching and worship services, and administering some of the organizational needs of the local church. Several Ministerial Websites, such as eldersdigest.org, ministrymagazine.org, and revivalandreformation.org, can be excellent supports. The new weekly television program, "Ministry in Motion," will have practical training segments too. Our associates often bring training events to local fields as another help.

WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT WAYS THE PASTOR AND THE ELDER CAN SUPPORT EACH OTHER?

Spending quality time praying together over the specific needs of their church and the outreach needs to their community is one of the most effective means. "It is in the order of God that those who bear responsibilities should often meet together to counsel with one another and pray earnestly for that wisdom which He alone can impart. Unitedly make known your troubles to God. Talk less: much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally" (1 Testimonies p. 624).

Another very important support is to follow the gospel order of Matthew 18:15-17 and Ephesians 4:29-32, in not criticizing one another and to make sure they are not listening to criticisms about each other from other members without using the principles of the Word of God as to how that is processed.

THE CHURCH WORLDWIDE IS EMPHASIZING THE THEME OF "REVIVAL AND REFORMATION." HOW CAN A LOCAL ELDER SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT INITIATIVE?

First, make sure you are having a vibrant living experience with the Lord yourself! Nothing else will motivate the church members more than a godly leader who reflects Jesus! Another resource to give helpful ideas and share worldwide initiatives about prayer, Bible study, and witness is the Website, revivalandreformation.org. Leading out in and encouraging these three components of revival can be a great help.

WHAT ADVICE COULD YOU GIVE TO THE LOCAL ELDERS IN THESE END TIMES?

As Elder H.M.S. Richards said privately to me in the minute he had with me just before he led in my ordination, "Never lose your time with Jesus!" Christ's own counsel in John 15 is the answer to the life of a Spirit-filled and effective elder. Stay connected to Him and you will bear fruit to the glory of the Father; you will be able to ask anything in His name and He will do it; your joy will be full and you will be an obedient productive leader! But if you are too busy and become disconnected, He said, "Without me you can do nothing."

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THE MYSTERY OF THE GODHEAD

>PART 1

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD IS SOMETIMES CALLED “THEOLOGY PROPER.” SINCE THE TERM “THEOLOGY” (STUDY OF GOD) MAY ALSO REFER TO THE INVESTIGATION OF A WIDE SPECTRUM OF BIBLICAL SUBJECTS (SIN, SALVATION, THE STATE OF THE DEAD, ETC.), THEOLOGY PROPER IS THE DESIGNATION USED BY SCHOLARS SPEAKING SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE STUDY OF GOD.

Two aspects about God stand out in our quest to know Him: God is knowable, yet He is mysteriously incomprehensible. Both of the seemingly antithetical aspects of God are in fact essential and complementary to a biblical perspective of the Godhead.

THE MYSTERY OF KNOWING

God is the greatest mystery that can engage the human mind (Col. 2:1-3); there is nothing that can even begin to parallel this privilege (Jer. 9:23, 24). God reveals Himself in nature (Ps. 19:1-3), through the prophets, and in many other ways (Heb. 1:1); ultimately, however, God reveals Himself through Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit (John 5:39; 14:7; 15-21; 1 John 5:20). But our knowledge of God is limited by how much He chooses to share with us (Deut. 29:29). His wisdom, eternity, omnipotence, and omniscience stand in stark contrast to our human frailty and finiteness (Ps. 90:1-12). No human being will be able to fully comprehend infinity (Job 11:7; Isa. 40:18), not in this life or in the life to come. If we were able to fully know God, then He would not be God at all. For us to understand God, His love, and His character is not only an awesome and unimaginable privilege but also the outcome of a saving relationship with Jesus (John 17:3). The mystery concerning God and His plan of salvation will be the focus and contemplation throughout eternity.

NO TIME FOR COMPLACENCY

Every child of God must be on alert 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. There is no room for complac-

ency. Even some who sincerely profess to love God have been deceived into believing a lie about Him. One deception about the nature of God is *tritheism*. This heresy upholds the concept of three distinct and powerful gods who are sometimes related, but only in loose association with each other.

Tritheism abandons the biblical oneness of God and undermines the unity within the Trinity, consequently resulting in a polytheistic view of God.¹

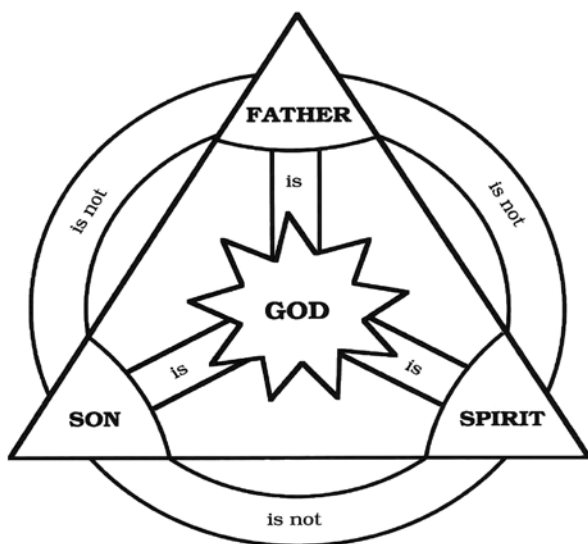
Another dangerous lie about God is *modalism*. Sabellius (A.D. 200), the person who introduced this teaching, argued that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit never all exist at the same time, only one after another. God first revealed Himself as the Father in the Old Testament. He then returned as the Son in the New Testament. After the ascension, the same God manifested Himself as the Holy Spirit. Present-day groups that hold to forms of this error are the United Pentecostal and United Apostolic Churches.²

Both heresies represent the misguided attempts to offer a rational explanation to the existing tension between the unity and trinity of the Godhead. They undermine the integrity of Jesus Christ and inadvertently destroy the assurance of salvation offered by His dual nature.

TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE

Although the term “Trinity” is not found in Scripture, it is a biblical concept. Around the second century A.D., the term was coined by Tertulian to assert the three-part personality of God and to signify their coexistent, coequal, and coeternal natures.³ Some time ago, I came across what may be con-

sidered one of the best versions of the “Shield of the Trinity” or *Scutum Fidei* diagram traditionally used by Christians to illustrate the concept of the Trinity.⁴



The diagram is self-explanatory, and the gist is clear. There is plurality, unity, and equality among the members of the Godhead. This vital concept is supported by numerous references in Scripture. The following table includes only a few examples:

PLURALITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Among others, four Old Testament passages implicitly support the biblical concept of the Trinity (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8).

1. “Then *God* [plural *elohim*] said, ‘Let *us* [plural pronoun] make man in *our* [plural pronoun] image, in *our* [plural pronoun] likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Gen. 1:26, emphasis supplied). Here the idea of plurality is used in connection with the very nature, or “likeness,” of God.

2. After the entrance of sin, “the Lord *God* [plural *elohim*] said, ‘The man has now become like one of *us* [plural pronoun], knowing good and evil’” (Gen. 3:22, emphasis supplied). The plural pronoun here implies that the divine *council* of the Godhead is made up of more than a single person.

3. At a later time, in counsel to frustrate the building project of Babel, God said, “Come, let *us* [plural pronoun] go down and *confuse* [plural form of *bala*] their language so they will not understand each other” (Gen. 11:7, emphasis supplied). Again, as implied in the previous references, the plurality of the Godhead was a collective unity of plan, objective, and purpose.

4. In the vision of God’s throne room, Isaiah hears God saying, “‘Whom shall *I* [singular pronoun] send? And who will go for *us* [plural pronoun]?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isa. 6:8, emphasis supplied). Both the singular and

ATTRIBUTES OF THE TRINITY

Characteristics	God the Father	God the Son	God the Holy Spirit
God	2 Timothy 1:2	Hebrews 1:8; Philippians 2:11; John 1:1, 18	Acts 5:3, 4; Isaiah 40:13-18
Eternal	1 Timothy 1:17	Isaiah 9:6	Hebrews 9:14
Love	1 John 4:8	John 15:9; Romans 15:30	John 15:9; Romans 15:30
Creator	Isaiah 64:8	John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15, 16; Hebrews 1:3	Job 33:4; 26:13
Dwell in believers	2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 4:6; 1 John 2:23; 2 John 1:9	Revelation 3:20; Colossians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 13:5	John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 6:19
All knowing	1 John 3:20	John 16:30	1 Corinthians 2:10, 11
Sanctifies	1 Thessalonians 5:23	1 Corinthians 1:30; Hebrews 2:11; 10:10	1 Peter 1:2
Gives life	Genesis 2:7	John 1:3; 5:21	John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6
Is everywhere	1 Kings 8:27	Matthew 28:20	Psalm 139:7
Other examples	Isaiah 48:16; Matthew 3:16, 17; 28:18-20; Luke 3:21, 22; John 14:26; 16:13-15; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:18; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 5:7		

plural pronouns are used by God in the same sentence in reference to Himself. It also hints at a plurality of persons in the Godhead.

While all of these examples may not be conclusive proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, they do, however, suggest (as in the case of many other references in the Old Testament) a plurality of the Godhead by the speaker, who in all of these references is the Lord God Himself.

PLURALITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Trinitarian concepts are more explicitly laid out in the New Testament. Perhaps the most striking manifestation was the baptism of Jesus. There the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove from heaven and lighted upon Him. Then God the Father declared from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16, 17). There are other passages where we see all three persons of the Godhead referenced together yet distinct from each other (Titus 3:4-6; John 14:16, 17, 21; 1 John 5:6, 7).

Jesus Himself also affirmed the plurality of the Godhead. In His teachings, He insisted that all men must respect both the Father and the Son (John 5:23). Anyone who has seen the Son has seen the Father (John 14:9). Failing to know the Son results in not knowing the Father either (John 8:19). In like manner, Jesus also emphasized the essential role of the third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—in the plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is God and should not be grieved (Eph. 4:30). Thus persistent failure to heed the promptings of the Holy Spirit eventually leads down the path of unforgiveness and eternal doom (Matt. 12:31, 32).

UNITY IN THE PLAN OF SALVATION

While the Bible teaches plurality in the Godhead, all members of the Trinity were united in their eternal purpose of salvation. The plan of salvation was the insurance policy put in place by the Godhead for the redemption of the human race should humankind rebel against Him (Eph. 1:4). When man fell into sin, the divine initiative was put into effect. It then became necessary for Jesus to be temporarily “made a little lower than the angels” in order for Him to suffer or “taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:7, 9, KJV). For God could not die as a “ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45) unless He incarnated as a man (1 Tim. 6:16). And upon the completion of His mission on earth, Jesus returned to the Father and occupied the same position He had left (Rev. 22:1, 3). Now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Eph. 1:20), Jesus is receiving the same honor and glory from the same inhabitants of the universe as the Father (Rev. 5:13). Undoubtedly, there was unity and cooperation between God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in sending Jesus Christ into the world as the Redeemer of the human race (1 John 4:14). What a fascinating mystery!



* Unless otherwise stated, all Scriptural references are taken from the New International Version.

¹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Tritheists.” Retrieved online on March 1, 2010, from <http://www.newadvent.org>.

² *Theopedia: An Encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity*, s.v. “Modalism.” Retrieved online on March 1, 2010, from <http://www.theopedia.com/Modalism>.

³ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 122.

⁴ Copyright for the *Scutum Fidei* has been released into the public domain: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Shield-Trinity-Scutum-Fidei-variations.png>.

Dr. Limoni Manu O’Uiha currently lives in Palmerston North and pastors the Wanganui and Masterton Adventist churches in the North New Zealand Conference.



STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

WHAT IS THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONCEPT FOR STEWARDSHIP?

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; Matt. 23:23; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; Rom. 15:26, 27.)

BECAUSE OUR PASTOR DIVIDES HIS TIME BETWEEN VARIOUS CHURCHES IN HIS DISTRICT, HE SPENDS VERY LITTLE TIME AT THE LOCAL CHURCH. SINCE SOME OF HIS WORK IS PERFORMED BY LOCAL MEMBERS, SHOULD HE RECEIVE SALARY FROM THE TITHE?

The Levites and even the priests from Aaron's family dedicated much less time to the Tabernacle or Temple than a pastor dedicates to the church today, and that did not take away their right to the tithe. If it's based on the time dedicated to the service of the church, the pastor's dedication is much greater than that of the Levites. On the other hand, the pastor ministers to several churches and does not get a salary from each one of them; he receives one salary to take care of all. As for the working time of the Levites, even when they were still a small tribe, they totaled thousands of members (Num. 4:47-49; 1 Chron. 23:1-4), who lived in their "cities of refuge" (Num. 35) and only went to work in the service of the temple following a schedule system that did not include working every day or every week. Not all had priestly duties. Thousands served as judges, administrators, and other officials. Some would serve throughout their entire life as gatekeepers, wood providers, musicians, keepers of parts of the sanctuary, etc. (See 1 Chron. 23:4 and read to chapter 25.) They worked for 25 years but received wages from the tithe all their life—before and after they reached 50 years of age, when they would become counselors of the younger generation (Num. 8:24, 25). In fact, they were paid based not on what they did in the temple but on their total and exclusive dedication as ministers for life. They would teach, administer, and represent their God before the people—they were doctrine-keepers. This is the type of ministry God expects as described in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy. Despite its imperfections, that is how the Adventist ministry is. It cannot be measured using the same criteria for other common duties.

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 eldersdigest@gc.adventist.org.

BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS > PART 1

BLAMELESS

THE APOSTLE PAUL BEGINS THE LIST OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR AN ELDER WITH A GENERAL REQUIREMENT, FOLLOWED BY SPECIFIC AREAS IN WHICH THE OVERSEER MUST BE “BLAMELESS.”

In Scripture the word “overseer” refers to both ruling and teaching elders. In other words, the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 (KJV) apply to ministers of the Word as well as to the other elders who shepherd the flock under their care. The word “must” means that these qualifications are essential; they are not helpful guidelines. All of these qualifications are mandatory. They are requirements which God has established for the office of elder in His church. No man may be an elder in God’s church unless he meets all these qualifications. We confess that Christ is Head of the church. This means that the rules for the church which Christ sets down in His Word must be followed. It is the church’s God-given duty to keep all unqualified men from becoming ruling and teaching elders. Should a man already in office show himself to be unqualified for the position, the church must be diligent in removing him from that office. In so doing, the church will uphold the honor of Christ and insure that the church is edified unto greater peace, purity, and unity.

By “blameless,” the Scripture does not mean that a man must be sinless to be an overseer in the church of God. To be blameless is to be irreproachable. To be blameless does not mean that one is able to evade accusation or conviction. Rather, a man is blameless or above reproach when his words and conduct conform to the holy commandments of God in Scripture so that he cannot justly be accused or convicted of any sin. No one should be able to lay a charge against an overseer and make it stick.

The Scripture says that Job was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). The people of God should be able to say the same about every elder in the church. The overseer’s reputation should be above reproach. An overseer must have and maintain a good name. There should be no question as to his integrity or upright character.

John Calvin explains it this way: An elder “ought not to be marked by any disgrace that would detract from his authority. There will certainly not be found a man who is free from every fault, but it is one thing to be burdened with ordinary faults that do not hurt a man’s reputation, because the most excellent men share them, but quite another to have a name that is held in infamy and besmirched by some scandalous disgrace. Thus, in order that the bishops may not lack authority, he gives charge that those who are chosen should be of good and honorable reputation, and free of any extraordinary fault. Also, he is not merely directing Timothy as to the sort of men he should choose, but he is reminding all who aspire to the office that they should carefully examine their own life.”¹

CONCLUSIONS

1. Every minister of the Word and every ruling elder must be a man of mature character and integrity before God and men so that he is irreproachable.
2. Only a man of such maturity, character, and integrity can be a godly example to those under his care in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity (see 1 Tim. 5:12).
3. Any man who has an uncleared stain upon his character or does not live a consistent, godly life does not meet this qualification and should not be an elder.
4. A man in the office of elder whose character and reputation are not above reproach, or whose authority is undermined by a recurring pattern of sinful behavior in his life, ought to be removed from office.

¹ Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:2.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

IMPACTS SOCIAL CHANGE

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

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

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

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

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TAKE YOUR EYES OFF YOURSELF AND LEAD

His arrival to this world was bad timing. He was born during a hostile time. His birth was not welcomed. He went straight into the royal family. He learned the ways of Egypt. He was educated among the best.

But the day came when Moses could not put up with the oppression and took matters into his own hands. It all went downhill for Moses. From royalty to runaway. From the palace to the desert.

But at what seemed to be the lowest point of his life, Moses met the King of kings. Taking off his sandals showed his dirty feet, but more important, that meeting with God revealed Moses' deep heart issues. For when God called him, Moses made the following excuses, paraphrased for clarity.

"Who am I?" Ex. 3:11. Overwhelmed by God's calling, Moses turned his eyes upon himself. He correctly realized that he was incapable of fulfilling the task given to him. God told him, "I am with you." When fear paralyzes you, don't look at yourself. Instead, remember that God is with you.

"Who are you?" Ex. 3:13. God introduced Himself as "I am who I am." God is who we are not. He is hope when it seems that our ministry is failing. He is wisdom when we don't know what to do. He is strong when we are weak. God is all we are not—and God's vision for your ministry will be fulfilled because of who He is.

"What if?" Ex. 4:1. Why take the risk? Why go after God's vision if there is no guarantee of success? God replied by asking Moses, "What is that in your hand?" In other words, let me show you that a piece of dead wood is enough for me! God is not dependent upon our abilities. His glory will be revealed in our weaknesses. Go dependent. Go by faith.

"I am not good enough!" Ex. 4:10. God's vision sounded impossible. God replied, "Now go! I will be with you as you speak." When you stand in front of your church, cast your God-given vision for your church on His authority.

"I'm scared—send someone else" Ex. 4:13. God said, "Better yet, you will go with someone else." God sent Aaron with Moses, a man who had the right gifts to help and encourage him. Ask for the same in your ministry.

"It's only bringing trouble!" Ex. 5:22. God was leading—and the enemy never likes that. God's vision brought trouble to the people. He was leading them out of a painful



situation, but also out of their comfort zone and into a life of faith. He told Moses, "Now you will see what I can do!" Ex. 6:1. So don't panic if your God-given vision arouses the enemy. Expect it.

"I can't do it" Ex. 6:13. Things got worse before they got better. After meeting with Pharaoh and, it seemed, failing, Moses again went back to looking at himself. This time, God's answer was a command to action: "Lead the people of Israel out of Egypt."

What are your excuses for not leading? God has called you. He will equip you. He will protect you. He will guide you. He will give you success. Just be faithful. Lead the people by being led by God.



Harold Altamirano, Mosaic Adventist Church, Oregon, USA.

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THE ORIGIN OF SYSTEMATIC BENEVOLENCE


One of the growing church's most important decisions was made in 1859. The Three Angels' message, the truth about the sanctuary, and the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath constituted a teaching treasure that was different from what other Protestant churches were preaching. In 1857, an economic crisis had affected the believers' incomes. In spite of that, the desire to know more about the teachings of God caused the members to ask for pastoral help. At the time, the few existing pastors were dedicating only weekends to visiting churches; during the week, they dedicated themselves to different work in order to provide sustenance for their families. This meant that groups of believers received only one or two pastoral visits per month. So it was that a commission, presided over by J. N. Andrews, met on January 29, 1859, in Battle Creek, Michigan, to present its report to the church. The commission recommended the practice of systematic benevolence—weekly donations to the church.

It has been more than 150 years since that historic decision; the question, however, is this: What did they really find, and what did they recommend? The Protestant churches highlighted the study of the New Testament because they believed that the books of the Old Testament indicated more of a Jewish economy in contrast to a Christian church that had a fresh, new, and different message. Thus, the pioneers initially concentrated on the New Testament and on what the apostle Paul had recommended to the churches located in the Roman province of Galatia and to the church in Corinth. He said, "Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collection will have to be made" (1 Cor. 16:1, 2, NIV). The pioneers discovered several significant principles in these texts:

- They noticed that Paul indicated a principle of regularity ("the first day of every week"). Why the first day of the week? At the time (A.D. 57), Rome was the governing power. Its pagan religion recognized Sunday as the day of the sun, an important day for religion and commerce.
- In the text, they noticed that Paul also indicated the principle of participation ("each one of you"). Even though

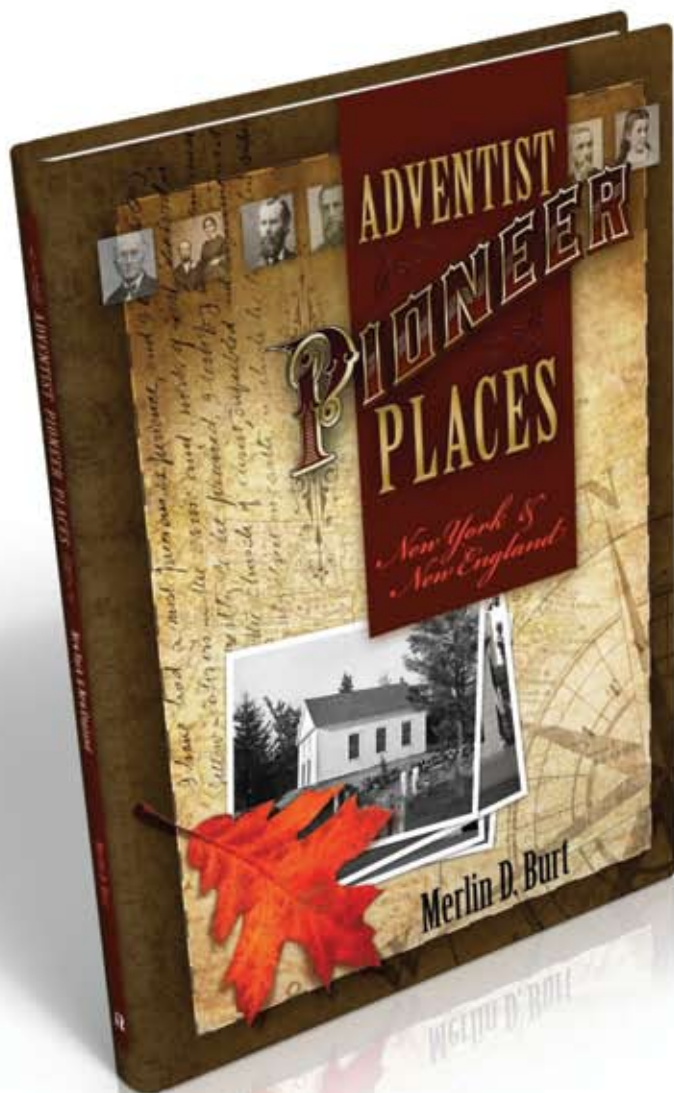
IT WAS SOMETHING THAT WAS TO BE CONSIDERED AT HOME AND SET ASIDE ACCORDING TO THE DICTATES OF A BELIEVER'S HEART.

- The fourth principle was the principle of proportion ("in keeping with his income"). Everyone was not expected to give the same amount because all did not receive the same amount. Thus, it was logical that those who received more were able to contribute more. It was not fair to require the poor to give the same amount as those who had more resources.
- The fifth principle was the principle of promotion. How frequently and how intensely should promotion be done? Compared to Bible study and the preaching of the Word, how much time should be dedicated to promotion? Paul was clear in his recommendation: The service should be dedicated principally to worship and spiritual development. Thus, the apostle indicates, "When I come no collection will have to be made."

Today, more than 150 years after the historic decision of the early Adventist church in 1859, we see a world church that uses modern means of communication to proclaim the Three Angel's message to every nation, tribe, and people, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The principles discovered by the Adventist pioneers are valid, practical, and applicable to us today. The church must be careful to preserve not only this historical inheritance of Bible study and the proclamation of the message but also the practice of these vital principles of systematic benevolence. 

Mario Niño is associate director of the General Conference Stewardship Ministries Department.

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Review & Herald

GREAT COMMISSION OR GREAT OMISSION?

Matthew 28:18-20

Before His ascension, Jesus issued what has come to be called The Great Commission. A commission is “an authoritative command; a directive; a command.” The disciples took the Lord’s command seriously. They went into the world and shared the gospel of Jesus; thousands upon thousands were saved by the grace of God. The disciples’ message was so powerful and their witness so effective that their critics accused them of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, NKJV).

That was then, and this is now! What was given as The Great Commission has turned into what some have labeled The Great Omission. When something is omitted, it is “left out, undone, neglected.” Instead of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth as the Lord commanded, some churches won’t even take the gospel to the end of the street.

We are satisfied with our spiritual condition, but we are not motivated to see others come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Has The Great Commission become The Great Omission in your life and mine? Are we as a church doing everything we can to find inroads of outreach in the world around us?

I want to share four facts from these verses that give us much-needed insight into The Great Commission.

I. WE HAVE A DIVINE MANDATE (verse 19)

The mandate of The Great Commission is to “go.” “Go” is a word of action! We cannot “go” if we are sitting still. We cannot “go” if we stay where we are. We cannot “go” if we do not make a move.

This verb literally means “as you go.” As we pass through this world, we are to carry the gospel message with us, sharing it with everyone we meet along the way. There are two ways we can do this.

1. *It involves our lifestyle* (Matt. 5:13-16). Like salt, our lives should create in people a thirst for the Lord. Our joy, our peace, and our difference from the world should cause them to want to know why we are like we are.

2. *It involves our lips*. We are told to “teach.” That word has the idea of making disciples or to instruct. We are to live the right kind of lives, but we are also told to share our faith. We are to tell a lost world what Jesus did for

us when He saved us and what He can do for them if they will trust Him as we did. It is not enough to just show it—we must also say it!

Mark 16:15 says this: “Go into all the world, and preach the good news to all creation.” The word “preach” comes from a word that means “to herald.” The word “preach” is a present-tense, active-voice, imperative-mood verb. An imperative is a command. Active voice means that you are to be involved in carrying out this command. The present tense means that it is something we are supposed to be doing all the time.

II. WE HAVE A DIVINE MESSAGE (verse 20)

Jesus tells His followers to share a specific message: “. . . to obey everything I have commanded you . . .” As we go and tell the world about Jesus, the message we are to share is very clear: We are to share the gospel.

Jesus came to this world to make the gospel a reality. He came to this world to die on a cross, rise from the dead, and open a way of eternal salvation for all who will receive Him into their hearts. Jesus came to this world as *the Savior of men* (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45; John 14:6). He came to make a way for lost sinners to get to God.

Our message is not about our church or our denomination. It is not about our style of worship. All of those are important, but none of them can save a lost soul. Our message is a simple message: hope to the hurting, life to the dead, peace to the tormented. It is a message that every person in the world needs to hear. It is a message that is universal in its application. It is a message that has the potential to change every life (John 1:11, 12).

There is no other message that God will use to draw sinners to Himself, and there is no other message He will use to save lost souls!

III. WE HAVE A DIVINE MISSION (verse 19)

Jesus tells us that we are to “go . . . and teach all nations” (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). Our mission is to every person in the world; our mission field is the entire world.

While He may never call you to go to a foreign land to tell the story of salvation, Jesus expects you to share the gospel where you live. He expects us to reach out to all people without re-

gard to their ethnic heritage, race, past, lifestyle, economic standing, etc. If they are sinners, they need to hear the message of the cross. If they are lost, they need a Savior. If they do not know Him, they need Him, and we have been authorized and commanded to reach them!

What are we doing to reach the world around us? Are we active in our Jerusalem? Are we fulfilling The Great Commission? Or are we guilty of committing The Great Omission?


IV. WE HAVE A DIVINE MENTOR (verse 20)

Jesus doesn’t send us into this lost world without any resources. He doesn’t expect us to accomplish this Great Commission in our own power. In fact, these verses give us two of the greatest resources we have as witnesses of the gospel.

1. *We are promised His presence*. “I am with you always . . .” When you are sharing the gospel with a friend, a family member, even a total stranger, the Lord Himself is right there with you. He will help you, enable you, embolden you, and use you if you will simply obey Him and share the gospel with others.

2. *We are promised His power* (Acts 1:8). When we share His gospel message, we can be confident that God will use His message for His glory. He will take our feeble words and attach power to them. The Spirit of God will take our efforts and use the words we share to convict the hearts of the lost (John 16:7, 8).

CONCLUSION

I do not want to hurt anyone’s feelings, but here are the facts: We have become more concerned about buildings than about people. We are more interested in having meetings than we are in fulfilling our mission. We are more interested in our personal comfort than about who is drowning in the sea of sin just beyond our walls. We are more concerned about the color of a man’s skin than we are the condition of his soul. We want to see people come into church as long as they are the “right” kind of people. I am afraid that for many of us, The Great Commission has become The Great Omission. That can change—it *must* change! It will change only when we come to the Lord and ask Him to change our own hearts! 

General Conference Ministerial Association

GROWING UP—IN OUTREACH

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

With these words, Paul calls those in Corinth to remember the days when they first came to Jesus Christ. Paul was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth. Many in Corinth came to Jesus through the words of Paul. But, according to Acts 19:1, Apollos spent some time in Corinth, too. Surely, some of the Corinthians came to faith through his words as well.

Many believers were loyal to Paul, because he was the one who led them to Jesus. Other believers were loyal to Apollos, because he was the one who had a great impact upon them. But, Paul set things straight, saying that he and Apollos were “only servants, through whom you came to believe.” Paul didn’t lift himself up as some mighty apostle who deserved undivided attention. Nor did he lift Apollos up as someone special, either. Instead, Paul told the people that he and Apollos were servants of Christ who brought the message of the gospel to Corinth, and the people believed.

I. WE ARE SERVANTS OF THE GOSPEL (VERSE 5)

That’s all we are: We are servants through whom others may come to faith. In this way, we are like Paul. In this way, we are like Apollos. As believers in Christ, we are the tools that God uses to bring people to Himself. And this is by design.

When Jesus left the earth, He gave His disciples a mission. He said it many times in many different ways, but His aim was clear: We are His servants, entrusted to share His gospel with others. We can read it at the end of every gospel account (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 22:46, 47; John 20:21).

God doesn’t simply use the leaders in the church; He uses us all. And all of us have a responsibility to share the gospel. Some—with giftedness, opportunity, and God’s blessing—have more fruitfulness, but all of us have the responsibility to be servants of the gospel.

There are people in your life who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ from you! Perhaps it is in your workplace, in your neighborhood, or in your family. You may be the only voice in their world who has the gospel to share with them.

So, let’s be servants of the gospel. When you have an opportunity to serve those outside the kingdom, jump at the chance.

"WE DO NOT BELONG TO CHRIST UNLESS WE ARE HIS WHOLLY."

Ellen G. White,
Christ Object Lessons, 50.

II. WE PLANT AND WATER (VERSES 6, 7)

This gives us a great perspective of our duties to the unbelieving world around us. We are to plant and water. It’s not our responsibility to convert people—that’s God’s job. I would encourage you to find ways to plant and water the gospel. It takes work. It takes effort. It takes intentionality. It’s not just going to happen; you have to plan and carry out the plan.

Church family, we have people outside and right here in our midst who need to be reached. Reach out to them and plant and water the gospel! People come in and visit the church. Meet them and greet them. Reach out to them. It’s a fearful thing to come to a new church, so when you see a visitor, do what you can to help make him or her feel comfortable at church.

III. GOD CAUSES GROWTH (VERSE 7)

For those who think that evangelism is a partnership where we do our part and God does His part, verse 7 puts it straight. We plant and water. God causes the growth, which is everything. God uses us to accomplish His work. He does everything.

Throughout the entire New Testament, it is clear that God is the One who changes people. First Peter 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope.” God causes us to be born again.

When speaking with Nicodemus, Jesus never commanded him to be born again. If you look carefully in the text in John 3, you hear words like this: “No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again” (verse 3). “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit”


(verse 5). “You must be born again” (verse 7). Jesus is merely putting before Nicodemus the requirement of entering into the kingdom—the new birth! But Jesus never commanded Nicodemus to “be born again” by himself, as if he had the ability to do this. Rather, Jesus emphasized the necessity of being born again to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Ellen G. White comments, “Nicodemus was converted as the result of this interview. In that night conference with Jesus, the convicted man stood before the Saviour under the softening, subduing influence of the truth that was shining into the chambers of his mind and impressing his heart. . . . Jesus told Nicodemus not only that he must have a new heart in order to see the kingdom of heaven, but how to obtain this new heart” (Letter 54, 1895).

Just as you had no say in being born the first time, neither do you have control of being born the second time. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going; so it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). There is no controlling over the wind. There is no controlling over the Spirit. But when the Spirit comes and changes a soul, it’s like being born all over again! And God is the one who does it. He opens the eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). He opens the heart to believe (Acts 16:14). He opens the mind to believe (1 Cor. 2:14). That’s why Paul says that it is “by His doing that you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:30).

CONCLUSION

God converts. God causes growth. What does that mean? It means that we need to pray. It means that we need to plead with God to give life to those who are apart from Christ. Plead that God will move in their lives. As Charles Spurgeon said so well, “The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you.”

It is God’s plan to cause growth in the church. He moves us to have a heart to reach out to others. We need to grow in outreach. May God give us the strength to do so. May God give the growth. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

BE HOLY

Leviticus talks about sacrifices, priests, foods that are clean, and foods that are unclean. Leviticus talks about dealing with leprosy and impurities from bodily discharges. Leviticus talks about festival days, feasts, articles of the tabernacle, and much more. But these things are merely shadows of a greater reality. They may look like sacrifices and priests and ceremonial days—and indeed they are—but the apostle Paul tells us that they are shadows. Consider Colossians 2:16, 17.

By these words, Paul is simply saying that the things in the Levitical law (like food and drink and feasts and festivals) are simply shadows upon the wall of a cave, which are being cast from the original form of Jesus Himself.

On several other occasions, the New Testament uses similar language (Hebrews 8:4, 5 and 10:1). When you put these passages together, you begin to see that the book of Leviticus has an ultimate reality which is not contained in the book of Leviticus. The reality behind the book of Leviticus is Jesus Christ. These things in Leviticus are shadows of Jesus.

Leviticus 19:2 says, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” There are two points: (1) God is Holy, and (2) you need to be holy.

I. GOD IS HOLY

We see this fact affirmed in other texts (Lev. 11:44, 45; 20:26; 21:8). This is repeated throughout the Scriptures. Throughout biblical history, men and women alike affirmed that the Lord was holy. From Job (Job 6:10) to Joshua (Joshua 24:19) to Jeremiah (Jer. 50:29); from Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:2), to the whole city of Bethshemesh (1 Sam. 6:20); from King David (Psalm 22:3) to the psalmist Asaph (Ps. 78:41) to the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 1:4)—all made explicit statements affirming the holiness of God. God’s holiness is also proclaimed in heaven. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty” is what the angelic beings never cease to say (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8).

The word “holy” in the Hebrew text is the word *Qadosh*, which means to be separated or apart or sacred or consecrated. Something that is set apart and dedicated for use

in the service of the Lord is considered to be holy. Throughout the book of Leviticus, many things are described as being “holy.” The priests were a group of people who were “set apart” to serve the Lord in the temple. The garments of the priests were “set apart” for only the priests to wear. Certain places in the temple were designated as “holy places” (Lev. 6:26; 16:2). What made them holy is that they were “set apart” for specific duties that the priests would perform.

But when you apply the word “holy” to God, the word gets a whole new meaning. In this context, we aren’t talking about things being “set apart” for the use in the service of God; rather, we are talking about God Himself being set apart from us. The character of God is so high above us and so far beyond us that we can’t quite fully grasp it.

R. C. Sproul said, “When the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute [of God]. The word is used as a synonym for His deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is.” In other words, God’s holiness is His essence. God is entirely different than we are, especially in His purity. Whenever there are encounters between a man and God, we find the man on his face, bowing to the holy Lord, entirely aware of his own sin. This was the case with Isaiah the prophet, a righteous man.

There is a great illustration of this in Leviticus 10:1-3. In the first three verses of this chapter, we read about two men who had just been ordained to the priesthood. They were Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. Read and consider the text.

This is what it means for God to be holy (Lev. 19:2). It means that He is so different than we are that we must approach Him as His holiness deserves. We need to tremble before the enthroned one (Ps. 99:1). We are to exalt Him as great and exalted in Zion (Ps. 99:2). We need to worship at His footstool (verse 3). It’s at the feet of God that we belong, bowed prostrate before Him, knowing our sinfulness and knowing His holiness. Nadab and Abihu learned this lesson the hard way. They died before the presence of the Lord because they weren’t approaching Him as His holiness deserved. May we learn from their example.

II. YOU NEED TO BE HOLY

This is what the book of Leviticus is all about. If you learn anything from the book of Leviticus, you learn that nothing unclean can enter into the presence of God. The first 10 chapters of the book of Leviticus give highly detailed instructions regarding the sacrifices that were to be offered up to the Lord. The sacrifices had to be done exactly as the Lord had commanded. The priests had to do exactly as the Lord had commanded. The reason for doing so was to obtain forgiveness from the Lord for sins that had been committed. Only when the people obtained forgiveness were they acceptable before the Lord.

We need to be cleansed from all our impurities. We need to be forgiven for all our sins. We need to be freed from all our guilt. As we come to God, we will be clean in His sight.

When your sins are forgiven by God, your life will change. God will transform you to walk in a holy manner. God works in you to bring about a practical holiness that pleases Him.

CONCLUSION

You need to be holy. I need to be holy. The writer to the Hebrews says it clearly: “Pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Read and consider 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. These verses clearly identify some behaviors that will disqualify you from the kingdom of God. Should you prove to be a fornicator or an idolater or an adulterer, you will not inherit the kingdom. We aren’t talking about earning anything. We aren’t talking about meriting the kingdom. We are talking about sons and daughters submitting themselves to the will of their Father. The good news is that there are many who used to be like this and who have been transformed by the power of the gospel to inherit the kingdom. We know this because of the very next verse that Paul writes: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). When we come to Christ, God will transform us and change us.

Are you holy?



General Conference Ministerial Association

GIVING TO GOD

Psalm 50:7-15 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

In many countries today, there is a stigma with religious leaders asking for money. Many religious leaders have given the church of Jesus Christ a horrible reputation. We have seen religious leaders fall due to financial scandals in their organizations.

Peter warned of the false prophets: "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories" (2 Peter 2:3). He said that these false prophets are "experts in greed" (verse 14). Paul was accused of being greedy while he was with the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:5), an accusation which he forcefully denied. Jude warns of those who will "flatter others for their own advantage" (Jude 16). The stigma of greedy religious leaders isn't a new phenomenon.

For that reason, we must be very careful about how we handle the matter of giving to the church. Let's look at a few principles that relate to this whole matter of giving.

I. GOD DOESN'T NEED OUR MONEY (PS. 50:7-13)

Let's enter into God's courtroom. Israel is on trial. God is both the Judge (verse 6) and the prosecuting attorney. We will pick up the prosecution's argument, beginning with verse 7: "Listen, my people, and I will speak; I will testify against you, Israel: I am God, your God."

God is going to speak against Israel, who thought that their religiosity was going to save them. They thought that God needed the sacrifices they offered to Him.

In verse 8, God first admits that they were a religious people. He says that their sacrifices are "ever before me." They were correct in their external obedience to the Lord to offer to Him the continual sacrifices which He required. Their repeated offerings according to the law were correct and commendable. Their religious activity wasn't their problem.

As we shall see, their problem was that they thought God needed their sacrifices to thrive. Their theology was simply that of the pagan gods all around them, who supposedly thrived on the sacrifices offered to them. They naturally thought that God needed them and their sacrifices. But He doesn't. God is not like this.

In verse 9, God is basically saying, "I will not accept your sacrifices. If you think I need your sacrifices, I don't want them. I won't have them. Take them back." Then He puts forth his reasons in verses 10-13.

We only give to God what He has first given to us. David expressed this thought nicely when he had received offerings to build the temple. He prayed (1 Chron. 29:12, 14, 16).

When giving to the church, we need to realize that God is not a beggar who needs what we have to accomplish His work on this earth. The beggar asks because he has no resources to meet his need, but God has all resources at His disposal and will accomplish His plan upon the earth—whether we give from our resources or not (Isa. 46:10). When Jesus came into Jerusalem and the religious leaders scolded Him for receiving the praise of the people, He responded, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40). God will accomplish His purposes using His own resources. He illustrates this in Psalm 50:12, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you." God wouldn't tell us because He can satisfy His hunger by Himself. God doesn't need us to satisfy His hunger.

We need to realize that God doesn't need our money. He is entirely self-sufficient. He doesn't need us in any way (Acts 17:24, 25).

When you give to the church, you need to realize that you are not giving to help God accomplish His purpose. God doesn't need what you have. God was saying, "Those sacrifices that you are offering? I don't want them! . . . But there is something that you can give me." Look at Psalm 50:14, "Sacrifice thank offerings." The same thing is repeated in verse 23: "He who sacrifices thank offering honors me."

Much of it comes down to our motives in giving. Does God need us to give to Him? No. Does God want us to give to Him? Yes, if our motives are proper.

II. GOD WANTS US TO GIVE WITH PROPER MOTIVES (PS. 50:14, 15; 2 COR. 9:6-8)

The Bible tells us what motives should be present in our giving. We should give:

1. *Thankfully* (Ps. 50:14, 15). The motive here is the key. Israel's problem was that they were sacrificing out of a sense of obligation. Externally, they were doing all the right things (see verse 8), but apparently, their attitude was wrong. Verse 12 seems to indicate to us that they were sacrificing to sustain God. They didn't understand why God wanted their sacrifice. But God says, "Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving."

God delights when we give out of gratitude. God disapproves when we give out of duty (as

the Israelites were doing). The remainder of verses 14 and 15 are merely descriptions of those who worship God with thankful and dependent hearts.

2. *Generously* (2 Cor. 9:6). In this chapter, Paul is requesting that the Corinthians give financially to the "support of the saints" (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1). He is raising money to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem, not to fund the church. Proverbs 11:25 says, "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

3. *Purposefully* (2 Cor. 9:7). Literally, this means "chosen beforehand." The picture of giving here is that of a well-planned exercise. It has been thought about, deliberated, discussed, and reasoned ahead of time. The choice of what to give has been made at home in one's right mind. It has been "purposed in his heart." In other words, your giving to the church needs to be a willful and deliberate act.

4. *Joyfully* (2 Cor. 9:7b). Paul says that our giving isn't to be done from any negative motive. You shouldn't give out of obligation, guilt, pressure, or constraint. You shouldn't give because you are forced to give or coerced to give. We shouldn't even give because it is our duty to give.

CONCLUSION

God has prepared good works for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10). Our resources to fulfill all of these good deeds are not found in ourselves! This is great news! We don't need to provide everything by ourselves; we can look to Him who is able to provide it for us. But God doesn't only provide the resources; He "abounds" in His provision to us.

When you think of giving to the church, do you think of God as a drain, sucking up all of your resources? Or do you think of God as a fountain, refreshing what we may give away?

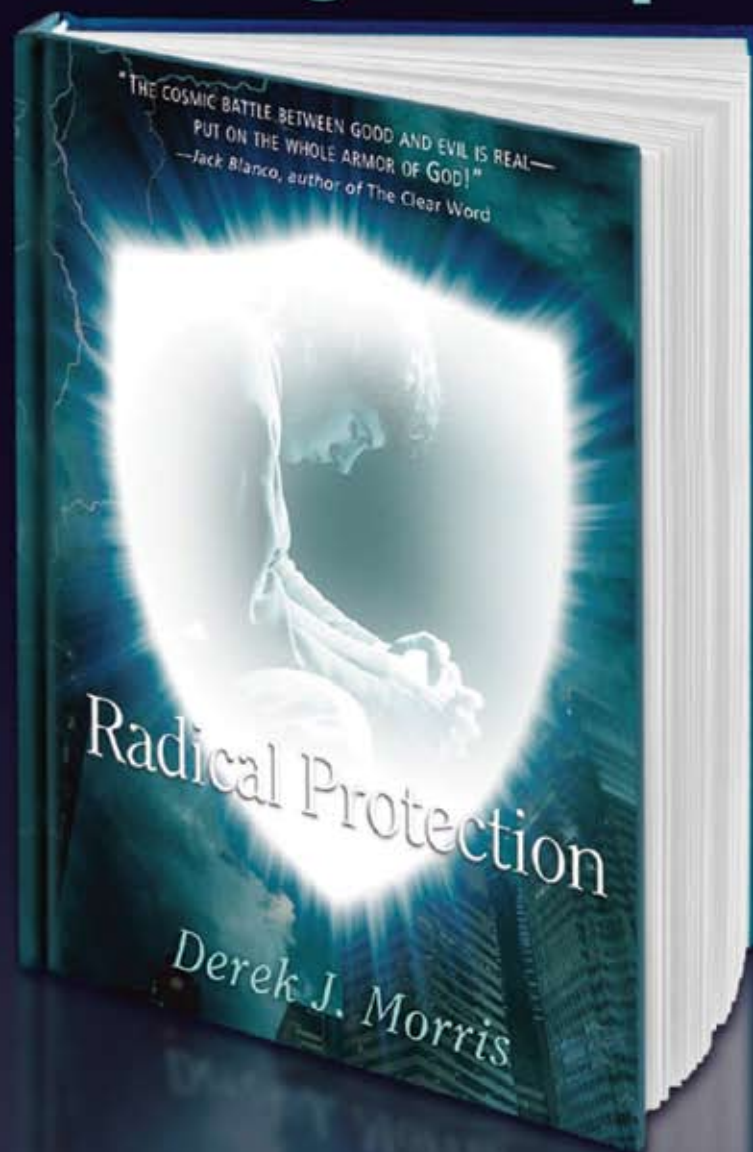
Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). We might say it like this: "Where your checkbook is, there will your heart be also." Hearts are difficult to discern, but treasures indicate what the heart is like.

May God give us hearts to give to His kingdom and glory with motives that are pleasing to Him.



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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONTENT

OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A COMMON QUESTION THAT OFTEN ARISES IN CHURCH CIRCLES IS: WHAT PRIMORDIAL MESSAGE SHOULD THE CHURCH BE PREACHING BEFORE CHRIST'S SECOND RETURN?

Through time, I have observed that the responses to this question take one of two positions. The first position is that the mission of the church was and will always be to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ—His life, death, and resurrection. Such an answer becomes even more accentuated by the fact that the content of this message is directly related to the discipleship of “all peoples” as the text of Matthew 28:18-20 asserts. The second position emphasizes the eschatological nature of the content of the mission, focusing on the end-time factor of its proclamation. For those that hold this position, the content of preaching should be the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. So who is right? Is such a question bound to divide Seventh-day Adventism altogether?

THE CONTENT OF MISSION THROUGHOUT THE STORY OF REDEMPTION

Throughout the history of redemption, God has always had a faithful group of people on earth. The faithfulness of these people was always in direct relation not only to their mission but also the content of this mission, which God Himself gave them. Some examples of the revealed “content” of mission in different stages of the story of redemption are: Enoch and God’s judgment (Jude 14, 15); Noah and God’s response to human wickedness (Gen. 6, 7); and Abraham and God’s blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:3). Yet just as there are several stages of divine revelation to the patriarchs and the community of Israel throughout time, so

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION, GOD HAS ALWAYS HAD A FAITHFUL GROUP OF PEOPLE ON EARTH.

there are several stages in the content of mission. In other words, through time, the content of mission is widened.

THE CONTENT OF MISSION: PROCLAMATION OF TORAH

When the book of Revelation was written, the vast content of divine revelation was called “the everlasting Gospel” (Rev. 14:6). Yet what is the first stage of this “everlasting gospel”? Where does the “everlasting gospel” begin? What is the first content of mission given to God’s people as a community on earth? The answer is given in Isaiah 2:3: “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” The content of the mission of God’s people in the past was first and foremost the proclamation of God’s law from Jerusalem. This “law,” which the text of Isaiah refers to, is the Hebrew *Torah*, meaning “the instruction” or “the way.” The *Torah* comprises a revelation from God that outlines His dealings with humanity in the past, from the creation of the world (Gen. 1, 2) to the proclamation of the coming Messiah (Gen. 3:15 and many other “messianic” texts in the Pentateuch). It is also significant to notice that the focus or object of such proclamation in Isaiah 2, like the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28, is on “the nations,” and “many peoples” (Isa. 2:4). This way, the content of mission of God’s faithful community on earth was first the proclamation of the *Torah*, what God did in the past, and had its object of “all nations.”

THE CONTENT OF MISSION: PROCLAMATION OF WHAT JESUS DID

Knowing that the leaders of Israel failed in guiding their own to the fulfillment of their mission, especially by their disregard to the content of the mission itself, God found within

Israel a new group of faithful followers that were to proclaim a new message to the world, a message that did not contradict the *Torah* but assumed it was a legitimate revelation of God in the past and expanded its content based on what God was doing in the present. What kind of expansion was this? The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christ to whom the *Torah* pointed. The content of the mission of God's faithful people on earth was now both the *Torah* (what God had done in the past) and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (what God was doing in their time). Notice how the content of the preaching of God's faithful always had a direct connection to what God was doing during "their time." Furthermore, just as Isaiah 2 had a focus on the "nations" and "many peoples," the Great Commission is also focused on "all nations," once again emphasizing the seriousness and scope of such a missionary message. It is no wonder that the imagery of the "coming Elijah" in the book of Malachi joins both of these proclamations:

1. The emphasis on *Torah*: "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel" (Mal. 4:4).

2. The emphasis on Christ: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:5, 6).

In the book *Mystery of Israel*, Dr. Jacques Doukhan sees that in the imagery of this "coming Elijah," the Adventist

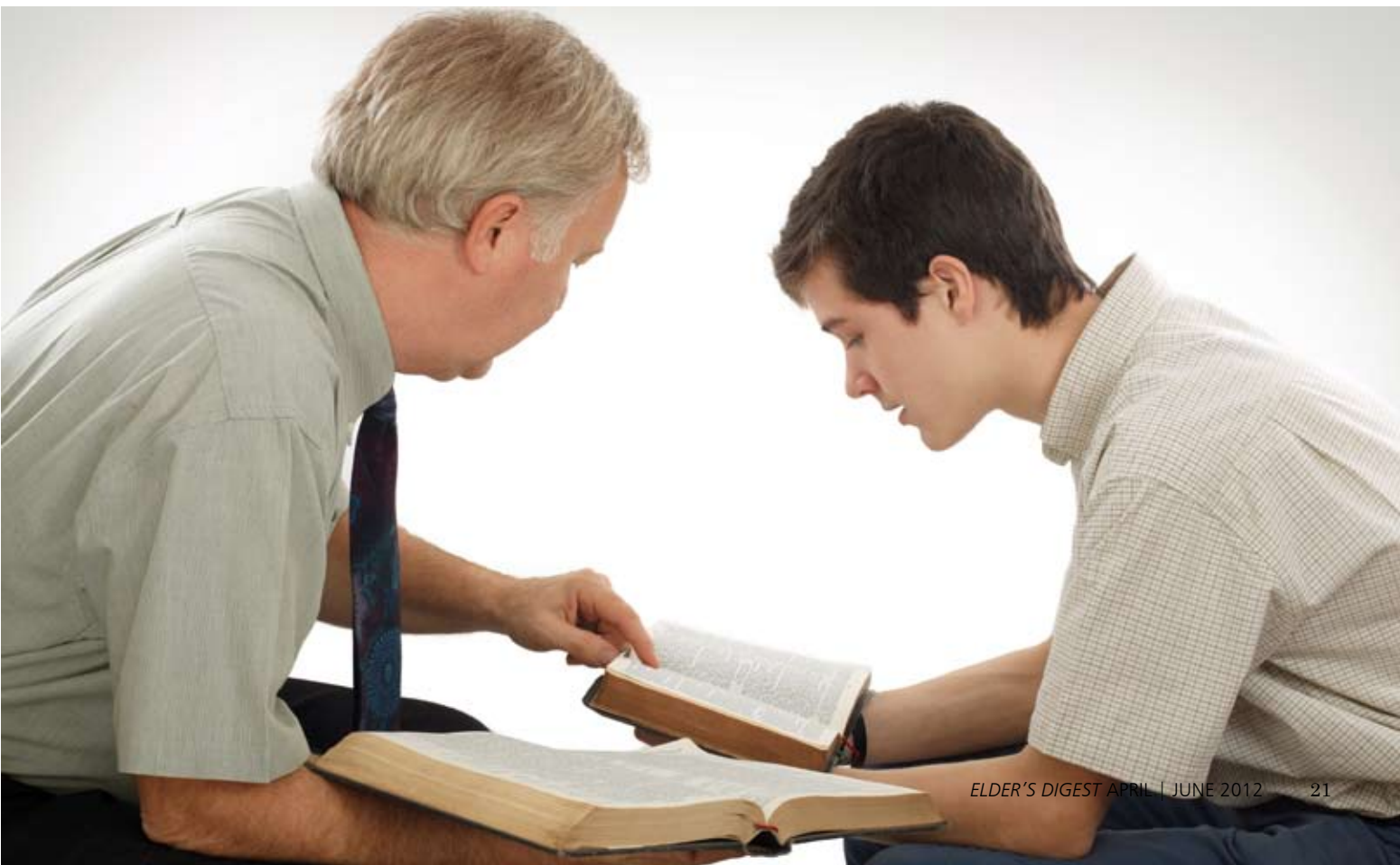
THE MESSAGE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO PROCLAIM TO THE WORLD DOES NOT END WITH CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION TO HEAVEN.

church joins, in its very essence, both the proclamation of the *Torah* and the preaching of Jesus Christ, bringing about a reconciliation of fathers to their sons. Yet there is still more to the content of mission! The message for God's people to proclaim to the world does not end with Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven; it begins a new development of the content to be proclaimed to the world!

THE CONTENT OF MISSION: PROCLAMATION OF WHAT JESUS DOES

The final stage of divine revelation that directly influences the content of mission and preaching of God's faithful people in the world is connected with the last "time prophecy" of the Bible and its relation to the last book of the Bible, namely, Daniel 8:14 and Revelation 14. The prophecy of Daniel 8:14 points to a period in the last days when God would begin the final stage in the plan of redemption, and Revelation 14 announces the time of its fulfillment. Once again, this message, at its very essence, is nothing more and nothing less than the announcement of what God is doing now, in our time period, in heaven! To any serious follower of Christ, belief

church joins, in its very essence, both the proclamation of the *Torah* and the preaching of Jesus Christ, bringing about a reconciliation of fathers to their sons. Yet there is still more to the content of mission! The message for God's people to proclaim to the world does not end with Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven; it begins a new development of the content to be proclaimed to the world!



begs the question: If Christ created the world, if He came to this world and lived, died, and was resurrected, where is He now? The end time prophecy in the Bible, indicating what Christ is doing now in heaven and how it affects our life in this world, is the last stage of divine revelation and content for His faithful to proclaim to the world. According to John, this message is to be proclaimed, as in previous stages, “unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” This message, of course, is not isolated from the *Torah* or from the proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; rather, it is an expansion and culmination of the revelation of what God did and is now doing in heaven. The Christ of the *Torah* is the Christ who came to the world, died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven, and is the Christ who began a period of judgment in heaven “in favor of the saints” (Dan. 7:22).

THE CONTENT OF MISSION: THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL AND THE ENTIRETY OF SCRIPTURE

The content of mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is comprehensive and logical. It does not overlook or ignore any of the portions of Scripture that do not fit into a pre-established conception of what the church should preach now. It is faithful not only to what God has ordained us to proclaim now; it is also faithful to the entire context of revelation that has led up to it from Genesis to Revelation. This way, the content of mission of the church is indeed the “everlasting gospel,” a gospel that proclaims the actions of

God in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in the present time. No wonder Paul understood that the “gospel of God” was first announced to the prophets as he writes: “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, *which He promised beforehand through his prophets* in the holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:1, 2, emphasis added) or even in Galatians 3:8, where he writes: “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham.” This way, the gospel—the “gospel of God,” the “everlasting gospel”—was preached since the beginning, was preached in the coming of Christ, and reaches its climax in what Christ is doing today. Let us not be tempted to narrow down such a high calling by focusing only on the portions of the message that we see best (either the four Gospels only, or Daniel and Revelation only, or even the Old Testament only), for there is danger in extremes. Let us proclaim the everlasting gospel, the content of our mission in the world, in its fullness, the entirety of the gospel in all of Scripture, so that “all nations” might see that indeed God is still at work for humanity, and that, indeed, there is hope for us after all. The Christ of the Old Testament is the Christ of the Gospels and Paul. The Christ of Daniel and Revelation is the same Christ who is the center of our message and mission as seen in the entirety of Scripture. ED

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The preacher should endeavor to carry the understanding and sympathies of the people with them. Do not soar too high, where they cannot follow, but give the truth point after point, slowly and distinctly, making a few essential points, then it will be as a nail fastened in a sure place by the Master of assemblies. If you stop when you should, giving them no more at once than they can comprehend and profit by, they will be eager to hear more, and thus the interest will be sustained.

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This article is excerpted from the book *Evangelism*, pages 177-179, by Ellen G. White.



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EVANGELISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS:

A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR CHURCHES

The book of Acts, written by Luke, records the experience of the apostles and the early church. This book contains a biblical model of church evangelism. The evangelistic success that the New Testament church experienced was due to a great degree to the model of evangelism that the church adopted. This model focused on the pre-evangelistic, evangelistic, and post-evangelistic campaigns. In this article we will examine this biblical method of evangelism as presented in the book of Acts, along with some of the evangelistic methods of the early church.

PRE-EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN

The first segment in the biblical model of evangelism is called the *pre-evangelistic campaign*, which covers the preparation that occurs before an evangelistic campaign. Prior to His ascension, Jesus told His disciples that they should wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4), thus indicating that Jesus knew the importance of the mission that was before them. He gave them this injunction so that they would make the necessary preparation needed to receive the promise of the Father. Jesus' command led them to the upper room, where they had a prayer meeting, that prepared them for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In the upper room, the believers were gathered for prayer so that the Lord would strengthen them. This gathering served as the preparatory ground for Pentecost (evangelistic campaign). "... They [the disciples] were engaged in prayer and heart searching. This act illustrates that there needs to be a time of spiritual preparation among the church members before launching out on an evangelistic mission."¹ In the pre-evangelistic campaign, preparation of the speaker, the church, and the community is undertaken.² These three areas are of utmost importance to the success of the evangelistic campaign. The speaker should take time for his/her own spiritual preparation and for the writing and prayerful consideration of sermons. Church preparation is as important as preacher preparation. Church leaders may choose to hold 40 days of prayer and fasting, revivals, and a "learning to love" seminar.

Community preparation is just as crucial. Programs that address the social needs of the neighborhood bridge the gap between the church and community. They are extremely important in the pre-evangelistic campaign. These programs may include a health expo, soup kitchen, and community service endeavors, which are geared toward helping the needy in the community. The pre-evangelistic campaign is the first step in the evangelistic process and is the foundation of the biblical model of evangelism outlined in the book of Acts.

EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN

The next segment in the biblical model is the *evangelistic campaign* (public evangelism). This is where a number of people gather together in one place to hear the message of salvation (healing). Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was presented to a public audience, comprising about 18 different people groups. In this sermon, Peter preached the risen Christ, and he emphasized that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. At the end of Peter's sermon, 3,000 souls were baptized. "Paul too, as an itinerant preacher, spoke in the public setting of synagogue worship,"³ thus his sermon in Acts 13 was very empowering, and the Gentiles asked him to return the next Sabbath. "Like Jesus, the early church also conducted open air evangelism [public evangelism]. . . . In other words, the apostolic witnesses adopted methods that were relevant to their times . . ."⁴ It is obvious that a model for successful evangelism is outlined in the book of Acts.

POST-EVANGELISM CAMPAIGN

Post-evangelism (follow-up) is intricately linked to the biblical model of evangelism for churches. It focuses on nurturing new believers, thus making them into disciples. It is worth noting that evangelism is not finished after new converts are brought into the church. Nurturing is an upfront event that must take precedence before an evangelistic campaign begins and should lay out plans for how new believers will be nurtured after the campaign ends. It was this motive that led the apostolic church to use several evangelistic meth-

ods to nurture and disciple the new believers. Let's look at some of these evangelistic methods.

Small-group ministry is one of the predominant evangelistic methods in the book of Acts. "A small group is an intentional gathering of three to twelve people who commit themselves to work together to become better disciples of Jesus Christ."⁵ Acts 2:42-47 speaks about the life of the believers after the day of Pentecost. It declares that the believers continued to meet in small groups, breaking bread from house to house, fellowshiping, and praying for each other. This experience contributed to an increase in church membership, in that believers were added to the church daily. The usual meeting was in the home, and many houses became gathering places for small groups. In this relaxed setting, believers lived out their faith. This atmosphere promoted learning, and believers shared in each person's burden. What better place for believers to experience the closeness of their love?⁶ In this way, the apostolic church was set on fire for Jesus.

Acts 12 describes a small-group gathering that was held in the house of Mary, John Mark's mother. Believers were gathered to pray for Peter, who was in prison awaiting execution. "People met in their homes to break bread together and to encourage each other to live out their faith. . . . These were homes for prayer meeting like the one held while Peter was in prison . . ."⁷ Small-group ministry (house meeting) is a very effective means through which new believers can be nurtured and integrated into the local church.

Personal (one-on-one) evangelism is highly emphasized in the book of Acts. Cameron defines it as "one person talking to another about his/her need of Jesus, with the view to bring

"A SMALL GROUP IS AN INTENTIONAL GATHERING OF THREE TO TWELVE PEOPLE WHO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO WORK TOGETHER TO BECOME BETTER DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST."

that person to a decision."⁸ The encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is an example of this method. The two men talked about the life, suffering, and Messiahship of Jesus. After the eunuch understood that Jesus was the Christ, he immediately asked Philip to baptize him. "Personal evangelism is extremely essential because not everyone will be able to attend public meetings. Due to social customs and other difficulties, some people will

not be able attend evangelistic meetings."⁹ The stories of Peter and Cornelius and of Paul and the Philippian jailer (Acts 10 and 16 respectively) demonstrate the effectiveness of personal evangelism.

Welfare (social) ministry is significant to the book of Acts. "Social ministry includes feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and prisoners."¹⁰ In Acts 6, the apostolic church encountered a situation in which some Gentile believers were neglected by the Jewish believers in the daily distribution of food. This situation produced a murmuring among the Gentile believers, which gave birth to an organized welfare ministry. Seven deacons were chosen by the people to oversee the daily distribution of food. It is worth noting that prior to the



organization of welfare ministry, believers were added to the church daily. But after the organization of this ministry, Luke's language changed because of the importance he placed on this ministry for winning and nurturing souls. Before Acts 5, there is no written record that any of the priests accepted the gospel. Luke brought home the point when he said, "A great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

The story of Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42) also demonstrates the effectiveness of this method to influence people for God. Dorcas' death was devastating to those she served. In deep grief, the people summoned Peter; he prayed, and Dorcas was brought back to life. When the people saw what had happened, they proclaimed the news throughout Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. Welfare ministry is a very effective evangelistic tool, and the apostolic church used it successfully.

Health ministry is another evangelistic method that enabled the early church to experience explosive membership growth. This ministry cares for the sick and suffering. People will respond to Jesus because they will come in contact with Jesus through the love and compassion of their caregivers. The story of the man crippled from birth at the "Gate of Beautiful" (Acts 3:1-9) illustrates the effectiveness of health ministry. After Peter healed him, the man praised God for the healing. This healing provided an opportunity for Peter and John to preach Jesus to the people. Ellen G. White supported this method when she wrote: "Allow no opportunity to pass unimproved. Visit the sick and suffering, and show a kindly interest in them. If possible, do something to make them more comfortable. Through this means you can reach their hearts, and speak words for Christ. Eternity alone will reveal how far-reaching such a line of labor can be."¹¹

This quotation harmonizes with the healing of Aeneas in Acts 9:33-35. After Aeneas was healed, all the people of Lydda and Sharon accepted the Lord. Health evangelism is an important tool for church growth.

Finally, the biblical model of evangelism founded in the book of Acts focuses on the pre-evangelistic, evangelistic, and the post-evangelistic campaigns. When this biblical model is followed, success is guaranteed. This model shows us that evangelism is a process, not an event. The many evangelistic methods that are found in the book of Acts will certainly produce healthy, growing churches.

People will not be led to adapt the same organization of procedure. Variety is the very structure of the universe, and any method that God is pleased to use is a good method, though this does not exclude the possibility of improvement.

**PEOPLE WILL
RESPOND TO
JESUS BECAUSE
THEY WILL COME
IN CONTACT WITH
JESUS THROUGH
THE LOVE AND
COMPASSION
OF THEIR
CAREGIVERS.**

The Master gives us an outline to follow, but He expects us to work out the details according to local circumstances.¹²

We can see that the biblical model of evangelism found in the book of Acts, along with the methods of evangelism described therein, will enhance the soul-winning and nurturing process of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. ED

¹ Earl P. W. Cameron, *Evangelism in Today's World* (Oshawa, ON: Miracle Press, 1996), 55.

² Ibid.

³ Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 55.

⁴ Vassell Kerr, *The Fields are Ripe* (Mandeville, Jamaica: Northern Caribbean University Press, 2004), 47.

⁵ Jeffery Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 18.

⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan on Discipleship* (Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 68, 69.

⁷ Arnold, 18.

⁸ Cameron, 21, 22.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Complete Evangelism: The Luke-Acts Model* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1997), 130.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1947), 128.

¹² Coleman, 18.

Marlon Robinson earned a BA in Religion and a Master of Divinity from Northern Caribbean University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, in 2007 and 2010 respectively. Currently, he is pursuing a Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas, USA.

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TWO SIMPLE TIPS

TO CURB STRESS AND IMPROVE MOOD



Research has shown that prolonged exposure to stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide. Chronic stress has been called “the silent killer” and can lead to high blood pressure, chest pain, an irregular heartbeat, and an increased risk for strokes. It also can lead to hair loss, weight gain, or weight loss. It affects sleep, causes headaches, and is related to 90 percent of all doctor visits. Over time, our reaction to prolonged stress can turn into serious disorders that include severe depression, skin disorders, alcoholism, substance abuse, uncontrollable anger, heartburn, and other stomach and digestive syndromes, diabetes, sexual dysfunction, and many of the so-called “lifestyle” disorders and symptoms.¹ Prolonged exposure to passive stress (where we are exposed to stressors but cannot respond to them) can weaken the immune system and allow other diseases to develop more easily.²

Sounds pretty bad, doesn't it? Here are two simple ways to control the negative effects of stress.

Spend time outdoors in nature

Studies have shown that being in a natural, outdoor environment is one of the best ways to improve health and reduce stress. When we are surrounded by plants, trees, soothing sounds, and fresh air, we experience a mood lift, are better able to think positively, and are able to experience feelings of internal calm. How does this happen?

- Serotonin levels are increased and mood is enhanced. In one study, runners who regularly exercised outdoors were less anxious and depressed than people who ran indoors on a treadmill, and they had higher levels of post-exercise endorphins—the feel-good brain chemicals associated with “runner’s high.”
- Exposure to nature reduces pain and illness and speeds recovery time. In a study of post-operative patients, those who had rooms overlooking natural surroundings needed less pain medication and spent fewer days in the hospital than those who looked out onto a brick wall.
- The scent of grass has a significant calming effect on out-of-control drivers.

An attitude of gratitude


We know that gratitude has a positive effect on our health and well-being. How can we integrate thankfulness into our daily lives?

- Practice thoughts of gratitude. In a study, people who were deliberately thankful appeared to be more optimistic, pleased with their lives, and connected to others when compared to those who reflected on daily hassles or on everyday events. The traits mentioned above, such as optimism and a connection with others, are often found in people who are resilient.³
- As you grow in years, learn to thank God for everything—the good and the bad. Sometimes God’s best gifts come wrapped in unattractive paper. One study conducted on older adults concluded that the effects of stress on health were reduced for those who felt more grateful to God.⁴

Why not decide to spend more time outdoors in physical activity and peaceful contemplation

while practicing thoughts of gratitude? Need reasons to be grateful? Here are six of them:

1. Scripture tells us *we are unique and wonderfully made!* (Ps. 139:13-18).
2. No matter what occurs in life, we need not be afraid because *God is with us* (Ps. 118:6).
3. *God’s love for us overflows* and is demonstrated for us through Christ (John 3:16).
4. *We are forgiven*, and that knowledge brings healing (Ps. 103:3, 12).
5. Feeling grateful and expressing our appreciation brings healing from daily life stressors (Ps. 57:7-11; 107:1, 8, 9; Prov. 16:24).
6. *God will reveal truths to you in your daily struggles* that otherwise would never have come your way.

So, let God’s presence in nature and His Spirit, in an attitude of gratitude, abide in you, and you will draw comfort, strength, and hope as you face challenges and live each day of this new year. 

¹ “41 Random Facts About Stress,” <http://facts.randomhistory.com/stress-facts.html>.

² Neil Nedley, *The Lost Art of Thinking*, 118, 119.

³ R. A. Emmons and M. E. McCullough, “Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2003), 84(2): 377-389.2.

⁴ N. Krause, *Research on Aging*, University of Michigan, vol. 28, no. 2, Sage Publications, 2006.



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CHILD DEDICATION

THE CHILD DEDICATION CEREMONY HAS FULL BIBLICAL AUTHORIZATION AND MAY BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REFLECTION AND COMMITMENT FOR CHURCH MEMBERS. WHEN IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR THE PASTOR TO BE PRESENT, AN ELDER MAY PERFORM THE CEREMONY.



Here are a few suggestions and ideas to enrich this special service.

According to the *Elder's Handbook*, the ceremony should be organized in such a way that it focuses on four basic objectives:

1. Thank God for the miracle of life;
2. Lead parents and family to commit themselves to raise the child in the ways of the Lord;
3. Lead the congregation to commit themselves to support the family in this task; and
4. Bless the child, dedicating him or her to God. (For more information, read chapter 8 of the *Elder's Handbook*).

Ideally, the child dedication is part of the worship service on Sabbath morning; however, there is nothing wrong with performing a separate service during the week. When the ceremony takes place on Sabbath, it could be sched-

uled during the children's story, and the children of the church can be invited to go forward and participate in this important moment. Some Bible texts—Deuteronomy 6:4-7; 1 Samuel 1:27, 28; Proverbs 3:1-18; and Ephesians 6:4—may be used in the ceremony.

BEGINNING OF THE CEREMONY

Following is a sample of what a pastor or elder might say during the ceremony:

"It is my privilege at this time to participate in the dedication of (child's full name), born on (date and place). I would like to invite the parents (mention their names) of the child to come forward for this important moment in the life of this family and of the church.

"Following the example of devoted biblical parents, you have expressed the desire to dedicate this child to the Lord.



“This dedication may not ask for the sacrifice required from Abraham, who was called to dedicate his son at the altar, or Hannah, who left her son Samuel to serve the Lord at the temple with Eli, the high priest. However, it is a great privilege and responsibility for you to come before the church and make a public commitment that you will do all you can to raise your child in the ways of the Lord. Jesus showed His love and care for children when He said: ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. . . . And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them’” (Mark 10:14-16).

In every child dedication there are certain responsibilities we need to share.

The parents’ responsibility. “The first responsibility for the care of this child (mention child’s name) certainly belongs to the parents. The Bible says: ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it’ (Prov. 22:6). Parents, before we dedicate this child, I invite you to make a covenant with God:

- “Is it your desire to dedicate this precious soul to God?”
- “Do you promise to raise this child in the ways of the Lord?”
- “Do you understand that it is your responsibility to educate this child not only for this life but also for eternity?”
- “Do you promise to do everything you can so that one day he/she accepts Jesus as his/her personal Savior?”
- “Do you promise to be examples of true and genuine Christians for him/her?”

The family’s responsibility. “This child also needs to be positively influenced by other members of the family rep-

resented here. It is your responsibility and privilege to be a part of this mission. I would like to invite all family members present to stand and make a commitment with God:

- “Do you promise to provide spiritual counsel and pray for this child and his/her parents?”
- “Do you promise to participate in the physical, mental, and spiritual growth of this child?”

The church’s responsibility. “There is another agent of influence represented here today: the church. At this time I would like to invite all church members to stand, demonstrating your acceptance as part of this commitment and responsibility:

- “As church members, do you promise to pray for this child?”
- “Do you promise to provide an environment that will foster his/her spiritual growth?”
- “Do you promise to show kindness, love, and affection?”

Commitment and prayer. The father may say a short prayer, and then the pastor or elder takes the child in his/her arms and prays. The four objectives of the child dedication ceremony outlined above should be mentioned in the prayer.

When the ceremony is over, the child is returned to his/her mother, a certificate is given to the child’s parents, and the church may congratulate the family by clapping or with some other appropriate gesture. Make this moment an occasion of joy and inspiration for all.



Jonas Arrais is the editor of *Elder’s Digest* magazine.

WELCOME



Alfredo Garcia-Marenko is editorial assistant for the *Elder’s Digest* magazine—a new position in our editorial office. Alfredo is an ordained minister and has served as Youth director of the Inter-American Division (IAD) and associate director of the General Conference (GC) Youth Ministries Department.

His editorial portfolio includes, editorial assistant for the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines, editor of the *Youth Ministry Accent* magazine, and associate editor of the *College and University Dialogue* magazine of the General Conference. He was also editor of the IAD Youth Leadership magazine.

His wife, Raquel, works at the GC White Estate. They have two young adult married children who are fifth-generation Adventists. His working agenda intentionally includes exalting Jesus and teaching Christian values to new generations.

We welcome Alfredo to the GC Ministerial Association team!

BEYOND ATLANTA

The fifty-ninth General Conference session in Atlanta is now history. The high point of the session was Elder Ted Wilson's sermon on the last Sabbath of the conference. In the presence of about 70,000 members he delivered a programmatic and impressive sermon titled "Go Forward Not Backward" in which he addressed some of the important issues and challenges facing the church, including a reaffirmation of our doctrine of the remnant.


From the beginning, the idea that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy has been important to our identity as Adventists. The rise of the Advent movement has been seen as the fulfillment of the prophesied remnant in Revelation 12:17, "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." (KJV). Of course, this identification of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the remnant does not mean that only Adventists will be saved. God has his children in all Christian churches. Therefore, at the end of time, the call will go forth, "Come out of her [Babylon], my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev 18:4). Any charge of exclusivism is, therefore, completely misplaced.

Not long ago, the Biblical Research Institute published a book that explores further the biblical and theological concept of the remnant.¹ Written by a number of authors, it takes a thoughtful and comprehensive look at this very vital subject.

As a church, we have never taught that only Adventists will be saved. Just as Israel's election was not an election to be an exclusive people of saved individuals but an election to service, so the remnant church is not an exclusive club of saved individuals, but a church with a specific mission. We believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's visible end-time church that is charged with the task of pro-

claiming the *Three Angels' Messages* to a dying world and preparing it for the Second Coming.

If we are only part of the remnant, as some believe, the question needs to be asked, how do the signs of the remnant church in Revelation 12:17—keeping the commandments and having the testimony of Jesus—fit any other Christian church? Which of the other churches keep all the commandments and have the genuine prophetic gift in their church? I do not know of any other church.

To reinterpret Revelation 12:17, in the way that some translations do, making the text say that the remnant "keep God's commandments and maintain *their* testimony for Jesus" (NLT, italics mine) is highly problematic exegetically, as a thorough examination of the text itself² and a comparison with most other English translations show. There is an ample exegetical basis for our traditional view of this passage, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not come into existence by accident or through human effort, but is the prophetically foreseen remnant church of Revelation 12:17, raised up by God to proclaim the "everlasting gospel" in these last days as Heaven's final appeal before Christ's return. In spite of criticism from within and without, this understanding will continue to be held and proclaimed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church beyond Atlanta. 

¹Ángel M. Rodríguez, ed., *Toward a Theology of the Remnant* (Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology 1; Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 2009).

²See Gerhard Pfandl, "The Remnant Church and the Spirit of Prophecy" in *Symposium on Revelation—Book II* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; DARCOM 7; Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 295-333.

Gerhard Pfandl is associate director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference. This article has been reprinted, by permission, from *Reflections*, the BRI Newsletter, edited by Clinton Wahlen.



THE CRIPPLING PROBLEM

THE CHURCH FACES TODAY

A crippling problem that most churches face today is a lack of leadership. There are not enough people who will volunteer to do ministries. The church grows in proportion to the number of ministries it has: the more ministries a church has, the more likely it is to grow. However, all ministries depend on a leader that God has inspired and gifted. Therefore, every minister and leader should pray and seek earnestly to train new leaders. The base of ministry will never grow unless the base of leadership increases.

Let's explore a two-pronged definition of leadership. A leader is someone who has a strong relationship with God and a passion to touch the lives of other people and bring them to Jesus Christ. A leader is also intentional about building other leaders so that there will be other people changing the world with them.

I am often asked, "How do you find new leaders in the church?" My answer is to pray about it and claim God's promise. One of the most neglected leadership promises in Scripture is found in Matthew 9:35-38. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (verses 37, 38).

Jesus' method of selecting leaders was through prayer. He stressed that the harvest is plentiful. Lost people, needy people, hurting people, and sick people are all around us, but the workers are few. We need to pray that God will send the right people to work with these groups and needs. The traditional way of finding leaders is to take whomever is willing or outspoken or can be talked into accepting this responsibility. God would prefer that we pray and ask Him to lead us to His choice, someone who is filled with the Spirit of God, wisdom, and has the favor of people. God's choice will come with His passion to minister. God will birth in their hearts the ministry for which they are best suited.

Jesus demonstrated this model to us when He selected the apostles. He spent the whole night in prayer so God the Father would lead Him to the right people. One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose 12 of them whom He also designated apostles (Luke 6:12, 13).

The Book of Acts adds the insight that when the church prays for a new generation of leaders, God will lead them to men and women who are filled with faith, the Holy Spirit, and wisdom; people who are of good reputation in the church and in the community (Acts 6:1-6).

In one of the churches that I was pastoring, there was a desperate need for a youth pastor. To persuade the conference to send us a youth pastor, the church leadership sent me to the conference office armed with charts and statistics chronicling the growth of our church. But because of lack of funds, the conference was unable to fulfill our request. A few days later, as I was having my devotions, I came across Matthew 9, and for the first time it hit me: Finding new leaders in the church is about serious prayer and pleading with God. So I started to pray and got the church to pray with me and claim the promise in Matthew.

About six months later, I got a call from one of our students who was attending Walla Walla College and preparing for the ministry. He asked to meet with me that weekend. The next Sunday, we met in a restaurant. After a pleasant meal, he said that he had been thinking seriously about coming back home for a year to build up our youth ministry. He ended up giving two years of his life to build a fantastic youth ministry and made sure that we would have strong leaders to carry the torch after he left. Through this experience, I saw vividly how the promise in Matthew 9 works.

After a few months of waiting, we had been tempted to give up and to think that God hadn't heard our prayers. The temptation to settle for *anyone* who might be willing or adequate was always there. But at exactly the right time, God answered our prayers and sent us someone who wasn't simply adequate—he was excellent!

This experience was so powerful that it shaped the way we did business in our church. Our ministry placement committee became a prayer meeting. Our leadership and board meetings became an opportunity to pray and seek God's direction, wisdom, and leaders. When you need new leaders, start with prayer, claim Jesus' promise of Matthew 9, and wait patiently for God to answer your prayers.



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