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Is the Earth special?
Planetary habitability
and Genesis 1

“God with”

Jesus calls ordinary
people to do an extra-
ordinary work



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CONTENTS



IS THE EARTH SPECIAL? PLANETARY HABITABILITY AND GENESIS 1

We live in a universe where the Earth is habitable—and there is life on it. That is the most amazing fact confirmed every day by empirical, observational science. You and I are part of that miracle.

by Ronny Nalin



“GOD WITH”

“God with” is known both in the Old and New Testaments. The idea of “God with” is applied to Jesus as Immanuel, and Jesus also uses it when speaking of the Holy Spirit.

by Kenneth Bergland



JESUS CALLS ORDINARY PEOPLE TO DO AN EXTRA- ORDINARY WORK

Which of the 12 disciples are you? Jesus chose each of His disciples in spite of knowing their weaknesses and potential for failure.

by Richard Osborn

DEPARTMENTS

3 EDITORIAL

Living with a sense of time
by Hudson Kibuuka

16 LOGOS

Of storms and the
endtime hope
by Dwain N. Esmond

20 FIRST PERSON

Sharing Jesus with university
students through Korean
language classes
by Richard Sabuin

23 REFLECTIONS

Worship: God's great call
by Pavel Semanivsky

26 ACTION REPORT

College in Surat, India, observes
public campus ministry day
by Narlapati Subhakar Prasad

28 PROFILE

Refilwe Nancy Phaswana-Mafuya
Interview by Ella Smith Simmons

31 BOOKS

The heavenly trio
Reviewed by Denis Kaiser

“We aim at nothing less than the
whole world”

Reviewed by Andrew Tompkins

34 FYI

Special General Conference
Session held on January 18, 2022
by Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy

LIVING WITH A SENSE OF TIME

In my house lounge, we have eight or nine working chronometers—wristwatches, screen, wall, and table clocks—such that when I turn in any direction, there is a time machine to tell me the precise time at that instant. Despite that, to my dismay, I often forget to reserve time for appointments and am late completing assignments. All that my time machines can do is to let me know the time at a given moment; they will not perform my task on time or keep me punctual for my appointments. Aligning my activity within the required time is my work, and mine alone!

Have you noticed how fast time seems to move during certain occasions? Time is the same, the occasion is the same, but the movement between the two and the conclusion of the latter may differ, depending upon our attention and application to the job. For example, when I have several activities lined up, time appears to pass faster than usual. Despite the many time machines I have, they can neither reduce nor lengthen the duration of time at my disposal. One day will always be one day, one hour will always be one hour, one second will always be one second. Time neither lengthens nor shortens, regardless of the number of time machines we have. Although it is true that in parts of the world the length of daylight may differ widely from season to season—either shorter or longer—the total time available for human activities remains the same: 24 hours a day.

We have all heard and probably used the expression “time flies” to refer to the quick passage of time or to our failure to accomplish something we wanted to do within a given time limit. But does time really fly? The question often occurs when doing something enjoyable and exciting but not when waiting for something unenjoyable or unappreciable. The latter seems to take longer than desired.

The expression “time flies” was first recorded about 1800, but Shakespeare used a similar phrase earlier—“the swiftest hours, as they flew”; and Alexander Pope used the phrase, “swift fly the years.”¹ So the concept of the shortness of time has been around for a long time. The Bible uses expressions like “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52, NKJV)² to refer to the swift passage of time.

While time appears to fly, we often have a tendency not to keep up with the swiftness with which time moves and accomplish our duties in line with that swiftness; rather, we tend to slow down and procrastinate. Procrastination—the temptation and the tendency to put off important activities and decisions for “later” or “some other time”—abides deep in most of our inner selves, as we tend to desire “comfort” or “leisure” now and to leave the hard work for later. We put off for another day the need to complete the job by the required time, hoping that we can do it tomorrow, next week, sometime later, or that

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the job will either disappear or we will forget its importance. Such neglect or limitless postponement often affects critical decisions and negatively influences our character development and social usefulness. In spiritual matters, the danger is even greater and more far reaching in that we tend to neglect that which is crucial for character development.

The story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–9) uses several terms to refer to time: “immediately,” “today” (twice), “at once,” “here and now.” When Jesus found Zacchaeus in the tree, He commanded him to “come down, for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). Then follows the response of Zacchaeus in terms of time: He “came down at once” (Luke 19:6, NIV). Back at his house, Zacchaeus made a confession and offered to give half of his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:8). Jesus’s response was immediate: “*Today* salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9, italics supplied). This conversation between Jesus and Zacchaeus is a lesson about quick action, urgency, and avoiding delay when it comes to issues of confession and salvation.

The Gospels record other instances where Jesus’ statements connote the same idea of urgency. For example, when Jesus told the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (John 5:8), the man walked immediately. Likewise, when blind Bartimaeus was told of the call of Jesus to rise and walk to the Master, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus, who told him that his faith had healed him, and he received his sight “immediately” (see Mark 10:50–52). Jesus also told the thief on the cross: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Yes, Jesus was conscious of time and mission, and acted with urgency in fulfilling that mission. Jesus also

expected urgent response. The Bible uses words such as “immediately,” “quickly,” “in a moment,” and other similar expressions to signify the urgency of God’s command and our action.

Satan, knowing this attribute of God, and wanting to deviate or destroy many from God’s calling and mission, also acts quickly, as in Mark 4:3 to 7 where he destroyed the seed quickly and in Mark 5:2 where the man with an “unclean spirit” sprang into action quickly as Jesus got out of the boat.

With time being such an important gift God has given to all, the devil knowing this will try to steal it away and to lead God’s followers astray. Jesus, therefore, acts quickly and we should be ready to respond quickly as well. Time lost cannot be retrieved, and often its lost with the accompanying only opportunities for positive action. Every moment counts and needs to be properly used. Otherwise, every wasted moment counts against us. Therefore, the Bible admonishes: “Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesian 5:15, 16, NIV). ☪

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RONNY NALIN

IS THE EARTH SPECIAL?

PLANETARY HABITABILITY AND GENESIS 1

We live in a universe where the Earth is habitable—and there is life on it. That is the most amazing fact confirmed every day by empirical, observational science. You and I are part of that miracle.

Currently, Earth remains the only place in the universe where humans have been able to empirically detect life and its signatures. Why is this so? Is Earth special?

These questions can be addressed from a scientific point of view by comparing our planet and its characteristics with those of other planets. Until the early 1990s, other planets available for this comparison were the planets of the Solar System. However, the discovery of exoplanets (planets outside the Solar System), opened new possibilities for a comparison based on a much larger dataset.

The growing exoplanet census shows ample variability even for basic planetary attributes, such as mass and orbital period.¹ Therefore, Earth-like conditions are not the only possible outcome or even one of a few default outcomes required by a set pathway of planetary formation. The conditions on our planet are one combination among an extensive field of different planetary conditions.²

PLANETARY HABITABILITY: A MIX OF INGREDIENTS

The study of exoplanets has established that our galaxy is populated with a wide array of planets exhibiting different characteristics. Which of these planets would be a good place for complex organisms like us to live on? Astrobiologists who investigate this question try to identify some of the parameters that are necessary for a planet to be considered potentially habitable. There is no single definition of habitability because the specifications chosen as requirements may vary.³ However, what is clear is that habitability is not a function of a single variable but lies at the intersection of multiple factors, all of which must be present for a planet to be habitable. What follows is a brief review of some of the parameters most commonly recognized as important for planetary habitability.

Energy source: For a planet to be habitable, energy must be available to sustain the metabolic activity of living organisms and to maintain water on the surface of the planet in a liquid state, which, as we will see in the next section, is a fundamental requirement for life. Light radiating from a star is the most efficient and relevant source of energy that can accomplish both functions and sustain complex life.

The distance of a planet from the star around which it orbits is one of the factors that controls the possibility of having liquid water on the planet's surface. If the planet is orbiting too close to the star, temperatures will be too high for liquid water to be a stable phase. Conversely, temperatures on a planet will decrease with increasing distance from the star, dropping below the freezing point. The distance range in which temperatures are compatible with the presence of liquid water can be represented as a circular band in an orbital plane around a star, the so-called habitable zone. Earth is obviously located within the habitable zone of the Solar System.

Stars also differ in terms of the activity and instability of their magnetic field and can emit flares of high-energy UV and X-rays with potentially catastrophic consequences for habitability.⁴ Exoplanets located within the habitable zone of highly energetic stars can be exposed to high levels of damaging radiation, lowering their likelihood of being truly habitable.

Liquid water: Liquid water is crucial for the existence of living organisms on Earth. As Chaplin points out, "Liquid water is not a 'bit player' in the theatre of life—it's the headline act."⁵ Liquid water is essential for the folding, structure, stability, and activity of proteins. It plays a part in both proton- and electron-transfer reactions, in the structure of DNA and the recognition of specific DNA sequences by proteins, and in metabolic activity in cells. In other words, liquid water is essential for the biochemistry of life.

Atmosphere: An atmosphere and its properties are essential for the subsistence of terrestrial life forms, which depend on breathing air for aerobic respiration. However, at a more fundamental level, an atmosphere is necessary for stabilizing the presence of liquid water on the surface of a planet and can play an important role in protecting life forms from the damaging effect of high-energy particles and radiation from space. Additionally, an atmosphere controls climate (for example, by trapping and distributing heat), and is an essential component of various geochemical cycles. Therefore, a habitable planet needs both to be able to retain an atmosphere, and for that atmosphere to be of suitable composition and thickness to sustain life.

It is more difficult for a celestial body to retain an atmosphere if its mass is small or if it is located close to a star. Proximity to a star not only can induce atmospheric escape by raising the temperature and kinetic energy of atmospheric gases but can also result in atmospheric erosion because of interaction with charged particles of the stellar wind. However, the latter process can be mitigated by the existence of a planetary magnetic field able to deflect the stellar wind, adding another possible factor of significance for planetary habitability.

The crucial role played by atmospheric composition and thickness in determining very different conditions at the surface of terrestrial planets can be illustrated by a comparison between Venus and Earth. The two planets are relatively similar in mass, distance from the sun, and bulk composition.⁶ However, the atmospheric pressure on the surface of Venus is more than 90 times higher than on Earth, with temperatures in excess of 450°C. Part of the reason for the more extreme Venusian environment is that most of the planet's CO₂ resides in its atmosphere, whereas on Earth, it is dissolved in water and sequestered in carbonate rocks. CO₂ is a powerful greenhouse gas, leading to increased surface temperatures.

Rocky planet: Different types of planets have been defined based on their size and internal composition.⁷

Among these, terrestrial planets, composed mostly of rocks and metals and with a defined outer solid or liquid surface, are considered a primary target for habitability. In addition to providing a solid substrate for land-based organisms, terrestrial planets expose various mineral assemblages on their surfaces, where liquid water also resides. This allows for a variety of biogeochemical reactions and geochemical cycles to take place, some of which act as a buffering system helping to preserve habitable conditions.⁸

Variations in mass and composition of terrestrial planets can result in significant differences in internal structure and geodynamic activity. For example, Earth is the only terrestrial planet of the Solar System characterized by active plate tectonics and an outer liquid core directly responsible for the presence of a global geomagnetic field.⁹ There is no universal consensus yet on plate tectonics and an intrinsic magnetic field as necessary requirements for habitability, but if they were, it would mean that only a subset of terrestrial planets could be considered habitable.

Orbital parameters: The yearly, seasonal, and daily cycles punctuate the rhythm of our lives and can be used to illustrate how orbital parameters are important for habitability. A year is defined as the time it takes a planet to complete a full revolution around a sun. The trajectory of Earth's orbital path is nearly circular, unlike the more eccentric orbits of many of the exoplanets that have been discovered. A highly eccentric orbit could affect habitability by periodically moving a planet out of the habitable zone. Furthermore, all the planets of our Solar System have low eccentricity orbits, ensuring that potentially destabilizing gravitational interactions created by elliptical orbits are avoided. Recent analyses have concluded that low eccentricities are typical of systems with multiple planets, and that only 1 percent of exoplanetary systems have eight or more planets.¹⁰ Therefore, one could say that our Solar System is uncommon not so much because of the low-eccentricity orbits of its planets, but because it has eight planets. This suggests that the overall architecture of a planetary system may be another important factor to consider for habitability.

The seasonal cycle is controlled by the tilt of Earth's rotational axis. Its inclination at about 23.5 degrees allows for a good distribution of insulation over the yearly cycle, even at high latitudes. Lower or higher tilt could result in thermal extremes across latitudes or throughout the year. Moreover, the large mass of the Moon stabilizes Earth's axial tilt over time.¹¹ It is thought that without the Moon, Earth's tilt could swing widely with dramatic consequences—affecting, for example, its ability to retain an atmosphere.

A day is defined as the time it takes for the Earth to complete a full rotation around its axis. The period for a full rotation of the Earth (a day) is much shorter than the period for its full revolution around the Sun (a year). It is possible for orbiting objects to attain a condition, known as synchronous tidal locking, where the rotation and revolu-

tion periods are the same. This is well illustrated by the Moon. An observer from Earth always sees the same face of the Moon, because the time it takes to rotate around its axis, about 29.53 days, is the same length of time that the Moon takes to revolve around the Earth. A planet in synchronous tidal locking with its star would have one hemisphere always exposed to the light of the star and the other always in darkness, with the potential for dramatic temperature contrasts. Studies have shown that a state of tidal locking “is possible for most planets in the habitable zones of GKM dwarf stars.”¹²

PLANETARY HABITABILITY AND GENESIS 1

The account of Genesis 1 invites interaction with the wealth of scientific information acquired in the study of planetary habitability.

At its most fundamental level, we can affirm that Genesis 1 is extremely modern in its understanding of the connection between environmental prerequisites for life (i.e., habitability) and life itself. In the text, the initial conditions of Planet Earth are presented as *tohu–bohu* or “unformed and unfilled” (Genesis 1:2), followed by a symmetric account of the organization of different spaces and their filling with living creatures.¹³ Therefore, Genesis 1 articulates the *forming* of the planet as essential and integrally connected to its *filling*.

The text is also exceptionally relatable to the modern understanding of habitability in presenting the sequence of steps God took to make the planet habitable. The first days of Creation could very well provide the chapter index for a textbook on planetary habitability, starting with light (the energy source), liquid water and atmosphere, the terrestrial nature of our planet and the emergence of dry land, and the establishment of orbital parameters that control the yearly, seasonal, and daily cycles.

There are, however, also areas of tension between the Genesis account and alternative cosmological models accounting for planetary habitability. The biblical text adamantly portrays our world as the result of God's intentional plan and direct intervention. However, mechanistic accounts of origins tend to characterize natural processes as either undirected or coincidental. In speaking of planetary habitability, sometimes a language of “chance” is used that excludes the involvement of any foresight. Other times, habitability is presented almost as a statistical inevitability among the many possible configurations in a very large universe.

Another area of tension has to do with time. Current modeling and observations of many astrophysical and geological processes related to planetary formation involve time scales that are orders of magnitude greater than the biblical timeline of a recent creation week. One possible way to alleviate this time discrepancy is to adopt a passive-gap or “two-stage creation” interpretation of Genesis 1.¹⁴ This view suggests that the Earth was already present, in an unformed and unfilled state, before creation week,

potentially experiencing physical processes over a preceding undetermined amount of time. However, this interpretative approach does not solve all the issues, because the creation week account still includes significant planetary reorganization in the matter of a few days.

For someone like me, who fully accepts the revelation of Scripture that God recently fashioned the Earth and filled it with life in six days, resting on the seventh, there remains an important question: How do we relate with modeling and observations that reconstruct the origin of our planet from a long-chronology perspective? Should we avoid getting involved in areas of study that appear to challenge our biblical understanding of origins?

Although dealing with tension is often hard, believers who seek God's guidance in every aspect of their life will benefit from engaging more deeply with these complex subjects, for several reasons: (1) because models of planetary formation may accurately describe what is happening in the cosmos now, irrespective of its past history; (2) because the scientific process of hypothesis testing spurs acquisition of new data, making us better acquainted with nature and its facts. Continual discovery and increase in knowledge teach us humbleness and can lead to awe and reverence for the Creator of the universe; (3) because we learn to better evaluate the nature of data and their limitations, with the potential to help develop alternative models that ease some of the tension; (4) because we gain a better understanding of the secular mindset and learn how to engage effectively with it; and (5) because faith is truly tested when we do not have all the answers.

CONCLUSION

Is Earth special? Perhaps, from a numerical perspective, it's too early to say. Recent published estimates¹⁵ suggest that the probability for a type-G star like the Sun to have an Earth-sized rocky planet orbiting within its habitable zone is less than 18 percent, which would translate into a maximum of about six billion planets in the Milky Way Galaxy. However, there is much more to habitability than just planetary radius, distance from a star, and type of star, so that truly Earth-like planets would be just a tiny fraction of this upper probability limit. Many or few, what truly matters is that we live in a universe where the Earth is habitable—and there is life on it. That is the most amazing fact confirmed every day by empirical, observational science. You and I are part of that miracle.

Scientific insight helps us open the black box of planetary habitability and appreciate the beauty and complexity of life and how, among a myriad of possible combinations, this is a marvelously suitable space for us to live our lives.

The Bible cuts through the noise and reveals in straightforward terms why this is so: because God wanted it and did it. The Lord created the heavens; He fashioned and made the Earth, He founded it; He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited (see Isaiah 45:18). ☞

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“GOD WITH”

KENNETH BERGLAND

“God with” is known both in the Old and New Testaments. The idea of “God with” is applied to Jesus as Immanuel, and Jesus also uses it when speaking of the Holy Spirit.

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What does the Bible mean when it speaks of “God with”? The preposition *with* is translated from two Hebrew prepositions *’et* and *’im*. That these two prepositions might be used interchangeably indicates that we should not get hung up on single words, but rather try to grasp the general idea both convey. That they are also common words used in all types of contexts implies that there is not something magical in the words themselves. There are several texts speaking of humans being with God.

First, *with* is part of the covenant language. In Genesis 6:18, God speaks to Noah saying: “But I will establish My covenant with [*’et*] you.”¹ We find the same in the story about Abra(ha)m in Genesis 15:18: “On the same day the LORD made a covenant with [*’et*] Abram.” And again, when God is establishing the covenant with Isaac the same formulation is used: “I will be with [*’im*] you and bless you” (Genesis 26:3). And Exodus 34:27 expresses the same idea: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you [*’et*] and with [*’et*] Israel.’” It is the covenant and the covenant relationship—not His spatial proximity—that is central when the Bible speaks of God being with Israel.

“God with” is used to describe both a direct encounter, in a theophany (e.g., Genesis 35:13–15), and more generally about a constant relationship (e.g., Genesis 21:20). It therefore contains both the possibility of a face-to-face encounter, but also the idea that God and humans can walk parallel and side by side (Genesis 5:22, 24; 6:9).

God’s presence is often seen as implying a static favor and blessing from God’s side. In Genesis 21:22 we see that “God with” can also imply progress. Abimelech and Phichol say to Abraham: “God is with [*’im*] you in all that you do.” Isaiah 54:7 and 8 expresses how God’s pathos, His vast love and kindness will be “with” His people. But it is also important to see how “God with” is used when the context is not only blessings, but also curses. God is with His people in pathos, in this case with wrath. Allowing God the full spectrum of emotions, not only those that are comfortable to us, also presents a more robust and dynamic God.

Leviticus 26:44 emphasizes that when God sends curses and punishments it does not mean that He has broken the covenant. Rather, it is in covenant faithfulness He sends them to bring His people back: “Yet,

for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them, and break My covenant with [et] them: for I am the LORD their God.” The covenant contains the double possibilities of blessings and curses. If God chooses to curse and correct, it implies that the covenant is still valid and that He is still “with” them. Deuteronomy 28 gives the blessings and curses, and 29:1 sums them up: “These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with [et] the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with [et] them in Horeb” (cf. vs. 12). Both blessings and curses are part of the covenant “with” God.

The hidden God of Isaiah 45:15 is followed in verse 17 with the thought that God is with His people through an “everlasting salvation.” The repeated “Yet you have not returned to Me” in Amos 4:6 to 12, as a response to God sending the covenant curses, clearly shows the corrective intention with the curses. Jeremiah 30:11 is possibly the verse that most clearly expresses how “God with” can imply both punishment and salvation: ““For I am with you,” says the Lord, “to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you. Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice and will not let you go altogether unpunished.””

THE CONCEPT OF GOD’S PRESENCE

Hosea 11:4 expresses this thought in a beautiful way. God is described as a peasant who with loving bonds leads us with all our burdens, as if we were a pack of donkeys. Then He takes off our bridle and the harness in order to feed us, His people: “I led them with cords of a man, with ropes of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; And I bent down and fed them” (NASB).

This verse offers consolation for all those who have not felt the concept of God’s presence as it is commonly presented. Some have lost their faith over it. I almost did. If we do not experience God’s presence, then the idea immediately arises whether God is absent and has even rejected us. The biblical usage of “God with” breaks away from this logic. God can be with us even when everything goes wrong. And if we don’t experience blessings, it does not mean that God is cursing us. It might simply mean that He is silent because of His own good reasons. God seems less concerned about discomfort than we often are. If He sees that challenges and trials, or simply His silence, will do us good, and will bring us closer to Him, then He might let us experience them. That is not to say that He has a mean temper. Rather, in

If He sees that challenges and trials, or simply His silence, will do us good, and will bring us closer to Him, then He might let us experience them.

His desire to bring us close to Him, He might see that showering us with blessings might not be the best for us. Have you wondered why God said to Adam after his fall that “Cursed is the ground for your sake” (Genesis 3:17)? Is it possibly because God saw that it was not “the best possible of worlds,”² as Leibniz and Voltaire put it, for sinful human beings to live in Eden?³

Jeremiah can be an example. In one way, Jeremiah’s life can be described as a series of resistance and unachieved goals. His life could be said to have been a complete failure. Still, God was with Him. In Jeremiah 20:11 he wrote: “But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced” (NIV). God was with Jeremiah in that God was able to complete His will with him. God was able to communicate His message to the people through Jeremiah, even if the people in the end rejected it.

The above can therefore be summed up as follows: First, the “God with” relation is based on the covenant relationship. Second, God does not have to be present in person in order to act. Third, God is “with” both through blessings and curses, depending on what He sees His covenant people need the most. Fourth, God is “with” through pathos. Fifth, “God with” can be experienced both directly in a face-to-face encounter, but also through the non-eventful persistent relation with Him—again, depending on what He sees is best.

HISTORICAL RELATION OF GOD

In Exodus 3:14 we read: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ [Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh]. And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM [Ehyeh] has sent me to you.’”⁴ Is it correct to understand this verse as it has been done in classic theology, as communicating God as being mystical, unchangeable, self-referential, and timelessly floating around in an ethereal reality? The Septuagint, for example, renders it as: “I am THE BEING.”

More recent studies, being freer from Greek influence in interpreting this verse, have emphasized how it rather seems to describe the historical relation of God to His covenant people.⁴ The verb *‘ehyeh*, is the common way

to describe future actions, although the biblical authors can also use this form to describe habitual or iterative actions. It is the context that determines precisely in what way we are to take the verb. In these verses, the context focuses on the future: Exodus 3:12 speaks of the sign as that God will let the people worship Him in the future on the very mountain where Moses found the burning bush;⁵ Exodus 3:15 also speaks of a future conversation between Moses and the people, and 3:15b is about the eternal name of God. This implies that all of 3:12 to 15 is inclined toward what is still to be completed. Instead of “I am” we should therefore probably choose the future “I will be.”

It is possible to see a parallelism, a well-known literary style, in Exodus 3:14, 15a:⁶

a1	and Elohim said	b1		c1	to Moses	d1	I will be the one I will be	e1	
a2	and He said	b2	This you shall say	c2	to the sons of Israel	d2	I will be	e2	sent me to you
a3	and Elohim said again	b3		c3	to Moses	d3		e3	
a4		b4	This you shall say	c4	to the sons of Israel	d4	YHWH the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob	e4	sent me to you

On this basis we see a close connection between the statement “I will be the one I will be” in Exodus 3:14 (NJPS) and the God of the covenant. YHWH (3:15a) is the same as the one who made the covenant with the forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Exodus 3:12 further helps us see what God is really saying in these verses, for we face the verb *‘ehyeh* (“I will be”) four times in Exodus 3:12 and 14—once in 3:12 and thrice in 3:14. But it is in 3:12 the meaning becomes clearest.⁷ Exodus 3:11 to 14 gives us two questions and two answers:

QUESTION 1 (3:11)	“WHO AM I?”
ANSWER 1 (3:12)	“I WILL CERTAINLY BE WITH YOU”
QUESTION 2 (3:13)	“WHAT IS HIS NAME?”
ANSWER 2 (3:14)	I WILL BE THE ONE I WILL BE

“I will be” is connected with the idea of “God with” in “I will be with you.”⁸ Moses’ first question is about who he himself is, what capacities and resources he has at his disposal to complete the assignment. The answer is the profound “I will be with you.” This is his credentials. Moses’ identity is the one God is with. It is therefore consistency among all these revelations about who God is in Exodus 3:11 to 15. It can be summarized as follows: YHWH, who made the covenant “with” the forefathers individually, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will now be “with” Moses, and Moses shall present Him for the people as the God of the covenant that in the future will be with His people in liberating them from Egypt.⁹ He will be known by that He will be with the people. When Moses and the people worship at this

very mountain in the future, and can look back upon how God has led in the past, then they will know the “I will be with” and “I will be the one I will be.”

GOD: ONE WITH HIS PEOPLE

It is with this background that Matthew 1:22 and 23 makes such a deep impression: “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Matthew is here quoting from Isaiah 7:14 and is interpreting the prophecy as pointing to Christ.¹⁰ The God-man Jesus was going to be known as “God is with us.”¹¹ In the context we understand that Isaiah 7 is speaking of God’s faithfulness toward His faithless covenant people. It is the same idea expressed in Matthew 1:21: “She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Just as Moses led the covenant people out of slavery in Egypt, so Jesus called “Immanuel” will now lead the covenant people out from the slavery of sin. In both cases,

the idea of God with His covenant people is central. Further, in both cases it is in this name God chooses to reveal Himself by, as the One who is with His people. Matthew begins his Gospel by referring to the promise of Immanuel, “God is with us,” and he ends with the same thought: “[L]o I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). In this way he frames the gospel of Christ with the idea of “God is with us.” Thus “God with” becomes the central name by which God is known both in Old and New Testaments.

The idea of “God with” is, however, not simply applied to Jesus. Jesus also used it when speaking of the Holy Spirit: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with [meth] you forever” (John 14:16). And in John 14:23 a similar idea is used to describe the Father and the Son: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with [para] him.”¹²

HOW CAN GOD BE WITH US?

The concept of whether and how God can be with us is much more than an academic foray for me. For many years, I sought for but failed to find God’s presence. I had to choose. Either I had to center my life in God coming and disclosing Himself or around meaninglessness. For close to eight years I sought a certain foundation for my faith without finding it. Nothing extraordinary happened. The only real alternative I could see was to give up on faith and God, and become an involuntary but wholehearted nihilist.

When I was about to lay the Son on the altar, like Abraham, something shouted from within: “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him” (Genesis 22:12). As I stood on the brink of the abyss and saw no other alternatives than to jump, I knew that the leap also implied rejecting Christ “fully, not in parts and pieces.”¹³ In the same moment I realized the impossibility of it. This love which simply is beyond, the righteousness, goodness, wisdom, and holiness of His character and in His relations to others had grasped me. Only through a lie would I be able to reject and deny Him. I saw that He had made such an impression upon me that He simply could not be erased. Christ stands without comparison. He is one of a category. He is more than simply the good man many claim He is. Who among us will compare ourselves with Him?

The quest for God’s presence as the basis for faith had come to a dead end. I could not become a consistent nihilist. The only thing I could do fully was resign, resign to God. While I had been seeking God’s presence outside of myself, I now realized that He was already

with me. When I had exhausted my attempts to find God, when I started sinking with a last cry for help, then I could recognize the strong hand stretched out toward me in the middle of the storm. When I saw that I was not able to find God, then I could see that I was found by Him. When I understood that I would not be able to grasp Him, then I discovered that I was grasped by Him. I was found. ☩

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3. Cf. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 25.
4. Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1987), 320. Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner have even argued that the translation in the LXX might not have been intended to communicate the idea of the “Being,” but that it is simply a nominal participle “the one being” (Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Robert W. Funk, trans [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961], 79).
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6. Cf. Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason*, 340.
7. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Israel Abrahams, trans. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1997), 37.
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10. Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1983), 61.
11. The nominal clause ‘immānū ’ēl in Isaiah 7:14 should be read as containing the *is* so it reads “God is with us,” instead of simply as “God with us.” The Greek of LXX, and later Matthew, simply translate this verbatim as “God with us.”
12. Cf. John 16:32; Acts 11:16; Romans 6:3–9; 1 Corinthians 6:17; Hebrews 2:4; 10:16; Revelation 3:20. Note also how Paul ends his letters by praying that God’s grace or something similar will be with the reader. See, for example, Philippians 4:23.
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JESUS CALLS ORDINARY PEOPLE TO DO AN EXTRA-ORDINARY WORK

RICHARD OSBORN

Which of the 12 disciples are you? Jesus chose each of His disciples in spite of knowing their weaknesses and potential for failure.

Before Jesus chose His disciples, He “continued all night in prayer” (Luke 6:12, NKJV).¹ He selected 12 ordinary men, some of whom He knew would abandon or betray Him. That simple fact alone gives me hope. If Jesus could have chosen such people to be His disciples, I have hope when I fail. Consider briefly the Twelve that Jesus chose.

ANDREW AND SIMON

There was Andrew. Today we would call him a networker, someone who had a lot of friends. He was a disciple of John the Baptist who, in turn, pointed him to Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother and bring him to Jesus (John 1:40, 41). Do you know people who can talk to anyone about anything in complete comfort? Can't you see Andrew striking up a conversation with a little boy who had five loaves and two fishes not knowing what was to come? He had an interest in becoming everyone's friend, regardless of age. That's how Andrew even knew the little boy had the lunch bag.



Andrew is always mentioned with someone else—not alone by himself—because he wasn't an individualist. He was a quiet teamworker, a friend who showed interest in other persons regardless of their station in life. Andrew is around all of us; we just don't notice him because he goes about his tasks without a need for recognition, attention, or power.

In contrast, Simon was impulsive, dynamic, ardent, self-confident, independent, impetuous, and an extrovert. He would speak without thinking and was ready to correct others before he knew what he was going to say. Do any of you have mood swings? Simon represents you. But Simon had no question when his brother Andrew asked him to follow Jesus. Simon was an adventurer and explorer for God.

THE BOLD SONS OF ZEBEDEE

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were known as the "Sons of Thunder." Even though they were fishermen, they came from a higher social status; their father hired servants for them. They must have had a hot temper, as they were called "Sons of Thunder." Recall how they wanted to call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritan village. When they were fishing, can't you hear their taunts of boastfulness to those who didn't catch as much?

Like James and John, some have mothers who think their children are special. It can be embarrassing as these mothers brag about their children's accomplishments and try to promote their status. Salome, the mother of James and John, did just this and went to Jesus with a plea: "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom" (Matthew 20:21).

THE MAN FROM BETHSAIDA AND A RACIST

Philip grew up in Bethsaida, a town on the north side of Galilee, where many traders would pass through. With his Greek name, he probably was very knowledgeable in world news brought from around the world by the traders. When a multitude of people needed to be fed, he showed a very practical yet skeptical business perspective when he asked how they could possibly feed so many people. While these traits are more associated with another disciple, Philip was also cautious, demanding clear and logical explanations. Every church needs a Philip or two.

Bartholomew and Nathanael refer to the same person. He would have probably been known as a racist. When Philip called Nathanael to follow Jesus, he asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). He generalized the bad reputation of this town to anyone from that area. When I sometimes harbor feelings of racism, superiority, elitism, or sexism, I become Bartholomew. Yet he came to Jesus with an open mind, and Jesus immediately said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" (John 1:47).

THE TERRORIST AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Did you know that Jesus picked a terrorist to be a disciple? Simon, the Cananite, belonged to the Zealots, a violent nationalistic party who would give their lives fighting to get rid of the Romans. When Jesus lived, they used assassination and secret murder to get their way. They refused to pay taxes because that would be a recognition of submission to Rome and a repudiation of God. They considered themselves the most "patriotic" of all Jews. In A.D. 73 they were the Jews who died in mass suicide at Masada—an event still celebrated today by Jews. And yet Jesus picked Simon, the Zealot, to be a disciple.

It made no sense to call Matthew to be a disciple if Simon the Zealot were part of the group. Matthew had accepted an office from the Romans to collect taxes, a sign that he had betrayed his nation. He was seen as an apostate and the vilest of society. Matthew collected taxes from all who brought goods into the city. Scribes and Pharisees so despised tax collectors that they would walk on the other side of the road to avoid looking in the same direction. Even though the tax collectors could be rich, their money was not accepted at the synagogue. They were seen as being so dishonest they couldn't even testify in court. And yet, when Jesus saw him sitting at the gate collecting taxes, He said to him, "Follow me," Matthew immediately left his lucrative job to follow Jesus. If Simon, the Zealot, had met him alone before following Jesus, he might have struck a dagger in his heart. And yet, Jesus called a Zealot and a hated tax collector to be two of the 12—as unlikely a pair as one can imagine.

THE CIPHERS

Having grown up abroad, I felt nearly invisible when I moved to third culture in my teen years, rather like the two disciples whom we virtually know nothing about. There is some inkling that James, the son of Alphaeus, in contrast to the James we mentioned earlier, was a very short man who went about life without fanfare or publicity. As for Thaddaeus, also known as Judas, the son of James, not Iscariot, all we know is that he asked Jesus, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:22).

A QUESTIONING DISCIPLE

The disciple who would have been most comfortable on a university campus would have been Thomas. We disparagingly call him "doubting Thomas," but he's the one who was willing to ask the difficult questions. A science teacher at Pacific Union College once suggested that Thomas is the "patron saint" of all scientists. Thomas was constantly probing, not accepting the word of others, just as an academic is never comfortable with easy answers until he or she has explored all options. This is the Thomas who said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

“Unless I see in His hands. . . I will not believe.” And yet this is the same Thomas, who when all the disciples didn’t want Jesus to go to Jerusalem after the raising of Lazarus for fear they would be killed, said with courage, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (John 11:16). Because Thomas was so sincere in his exploration of truth, Jesus never condemned him for his questions. The questions he asked were a steppingstone to belief.

THE ONE WHO BETRAYED HIM

And finally, we come to Judas Iscariot, a man who saw Jesus as a failure because we know how the story turns out. However, let’s not forget that he was the well-respected administrator of the group. In a corporation, Jesus would have been the chair of the board, and Judas would have been the president. He may have had the sharpest intellect of all the disciples. Judas knew how to care for money. He was the only disciple who was not a Galilean. When he followed Jesus, he was shut out from all his friends, which meant he lost his influence. He felt Jesus was going to restore the throne of David, and thrust himself to become a disciple. And yet Jesus knew from the very beginning that Judas would betray Him. Why would He pick him if He knew what was going to happen? Even when Judas betrayed Him, Jesus still called him “Friend” (Matthew 26:50).

So we have 12 unlikely men who needed to be built into a team. Of course, they had the greatest Teacher ever to live with so it shouldn’t have been a hard job. Dr. Harry Leonard from Newbold College in England analyzed Jesus as a teacher. He described Jesus as the kind that a chair of an Education Department would have wanted to hire to teach methods classes because Jesus was terrific in one-to-one tutorials, group seminars, lectures, and practical sessions. Yet, as Dr. Leonard points out, Jesus taught the disciples for three years, almost the time needed to get a bachelor’s degree, and they still didn’t understand what He meant.

Jesus was the perfect Teacher from whom a group could have received instruction, and yet they betrayed Him, slept, or ran off in fear.

What’s more, we may suggest that all of them received an “F,” a failing mark in the classes Jesus had been teaching them for three years. Is there anything worse than being a witness to a potential murder and running from the scene? And yet He knew this would be the outcome. In spite of that knowledge, Jesus hand-picked them. Likewise, He picks you and me although He knows we’ll also receive a few “F’s.” Eleven of the 12 disciples retook their exams and passed with honors. So can we.

TRANSFORMED DISCIPLES

After His resurrection, Jesus continued to build on what He had taught them earlier. Except for one, all experienced a transformation the effect of which has lasted until today, which may be the best evidence of the risen Jesus.

Earlier, Jesus had renamed Simon as Peter, meaning “a stone or rock.” After Peter had denied being a disciple, he

came back to Jesus and received His grace and forgiveness, eventually taking the message of a risen Jesus to the world. His first sermon yielded a baptism of 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost. According to tradition, he was martyred in Rome by death on the cross. Jesus turned Simon into Peter, the sinner into the saint, and He can do the same for us.²

James, called the Son of Thunder, was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa I. His martyrdom proved his long-term commitment to serving his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He passed the final exam with distinction.

John, the other Son of Thunder, became the disciple whom Jesus loved the most. Of him, Ellen White wrote: “In the life of the disciple John true sanctification is exemplified. During the years of his close association with Christ, he was often warned and cautioned by the Savior; and these reproofs he accepted. . . . He yielded his ambitious temper to the molding power of Christ, and divine love wrought in him a transformation of character.”³

Bartholomew gave up his racist attitudes and became a follower of Jesus.

Matthew, the tax collector, and Simon, the Zealot, ended up loving each other because of their love for Jesus.

When Thomas finally saw Jesus after the resurrection, he proclaimed, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28) and became the evangelist of the frontier. He is believed to have spread the gospel all the way to the southern part of India.

After the ascension of Jesus Christ, these same disciples who fled in fear now showed strength preaching the gospel and going to jail. In Acts 4:13 we read, “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

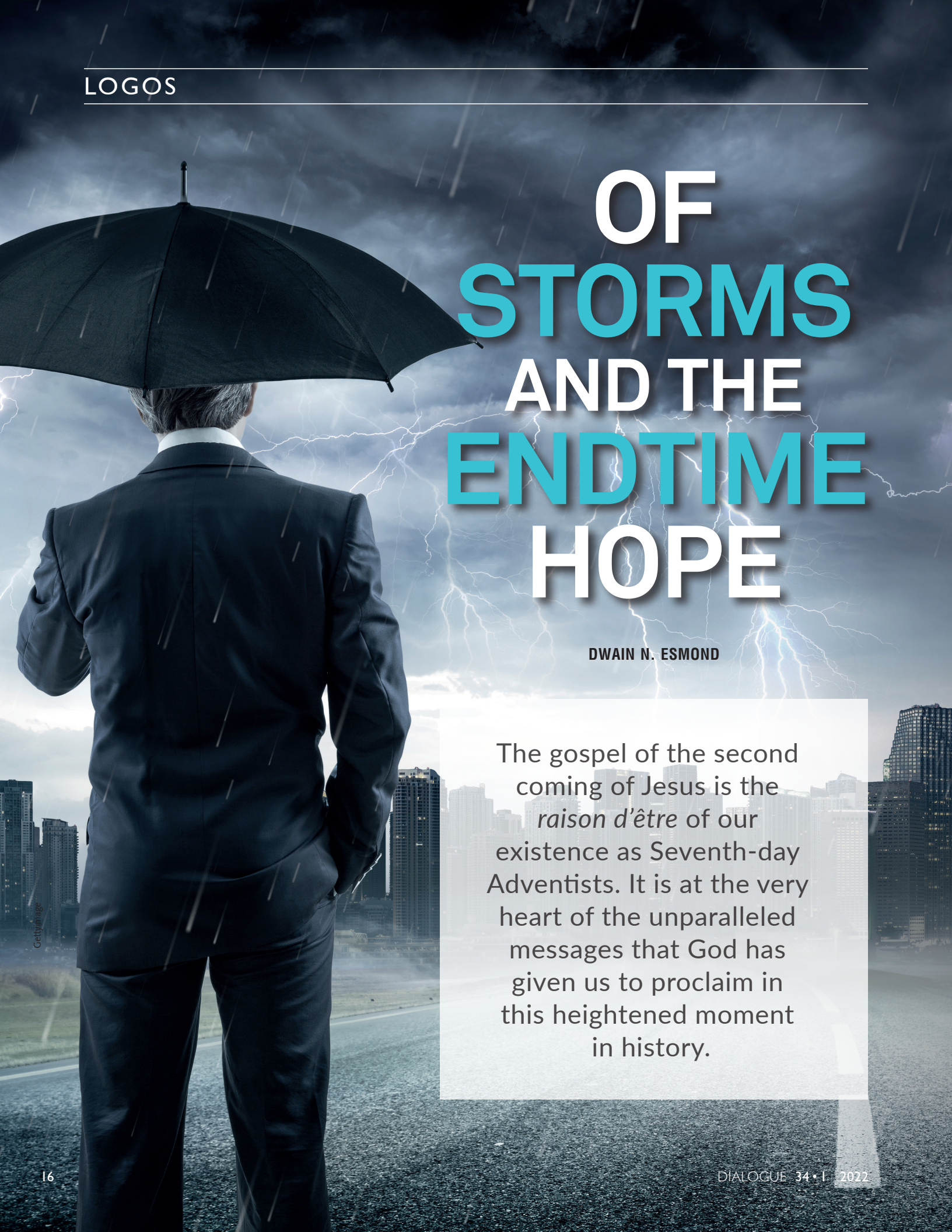
Which of the 12 disciples are you? Jesus chose each of His disciples in spite of knowing their weaknesses and potential for failure. When you experience failure, remember that Jesus called His disciples—12 ordinary men who failed Him on occasion. He still calls ordinary people like you and me to be His followers today. He calls each of us to the extraordinary task of service to others and furthering His mission until He returns. ☪

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OF STORMS AND THE ENDTIME HOPE

DWAIN N. ESMOND

The gospel of the second coming of Jesus is the *raison d'être* of our existence as Seventh-day Adventists. It is at the very heart of the unparalleled messages that God has given us to proclaim in this heightened moment in history.



The scenes were positively devastating. Seventeen inches of rain fell in less than 24 hours on Saturday, August 21, 2021, shattering the Tennessee record for a one-day rainfall by more than 3 inches.¹ Homes were washed off their foundations, wrecked cars were strewn across the county, businesses demolished, and fallen powerlines dangled dangerously on the ground and in the air. One neighbor saw two little girls, one clutching a puppy, holding onto a board as the swift-moving current swept them away. When the rains stopped, at least 22 people were dead, and more than 50 were missing.²

As I saw the scenes of devastation broadcast, sorrow gripped my heart. But soon the media would move on and forget the people affected by the tragedy. At the time, I had no idea that a dear friend of mine was in the middle of this catastrophe. I just happened to reach out to her, and she recounted the trauma she endured, her voice still breaking and almost in tears.

“Dwain, it was a nightmare. To this day I begin to shake if I see a rain cloud in the sky. I can’t sleep when it rains anymore. My nerves are shot.”

Could you blame her? After all, on that Saturday, huddled with her pets, she watched in horror as the creek near her house overflowed and washed away the only bridge she had to safety.

A WORLD IN CRISIS

Tragedies such as this are reported all around the globe. We who carry the prophetic lens of Scripture know well the events that will precede the second coming of Jesus. “After this,” wrote John the Revelator, “I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ‘Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God’” (Revelation 7:1–3, NIV).³

God has dispatched four angels to restrain demonic forces too powerful to comprehend, con-

flicts too frightening to contemplate, and natural disasters too devastating to consider. As the great day of the Lord nears, these mighty sentinels begin to loosen their grip on pent-up demonic forces bent on death and destruction. God lifts the restraint and exposes the true reality, the dark underside of cosmic rebellion.

STORMS TO COME

The stormy winds currently blowing are but minor reverberations of deadly storms to come. As we near the end, we will witness disasters by air, land, and sea. But more than that, in Matthew 24 Jesus predicted the *cyclone of deception*, adding: “Watch out that no one deceives you” (vs. 4). He warned disciples then and now: “[M]any will come in my name, claiming ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many” (vs. 5). Jesus spoke of the thunderstorm of war: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (vs. 7).

In Matthew 24:9 and 10 Jesus described the *firestorm of persecution*: “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other.” Verse 11 predicts of false prophets and conspiracy theorists who work with those with itching ears, those who will not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3). In verse 12, Jesus tells of the *ice storm that invades the hearts of those who turn from the faith*, their love waxing cold. Daniel saw in vision “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” (Daniel 12:1, NKJV).

A RAY OF HOPE

As if to give disciples then and now a ray of sunshine before the storms to come, Jesus promised in Matthew 24:13: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (NKJV). And Jesus didn’t stop there. In the very next verse, He added this seminal, foundational truth that has characterized and energized the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from its inception to the present day: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the whole world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (NKJV).

Which gospel? This gospel of the kingdom! This gospel of the all-surpassing, all-consuming, all-transforming love of God. This gospel that reaches to the least of these and those who think they have no needs. This gospel of the kingdom, this gospel of grace, this gospel of hope, this gospel of the Savior of the world!

This gospel is the *raison d'être* of our existence as a Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is at the very heart of the unparalleled messages that God has given us to proclaim in this heightened moment in history. Amid pandemics and peril, corruption and carnage, murder and mayhem, God attacks the lion—Satan—with a flock of lambs. Perhaps you've heard it before, but may I remind you of our marching orders as Seventh-day Adventists, as outlined by Ellen White:

"In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."⁴

We proclaim the message of the first angel, "having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 14:6, NKJV), urging all to fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and springs of water (vs. 7). These verses remind us that humanity's origin is divine, not evolutionary. Also, we are not called to give a new gospel. We possess the "everlasting gospel"—timely and timeless, essential and eternal, needful and never-ending! The Old Testament prophets looked forward to it, the disciples conquered the world with it, the early Christian Church gave witness to it, and we will help save the lost with it!

We proclaim the message of the second angel of Revelation 14:8, "Babylon is fallen." This message calls all worshipers of the true God to reject all humanly originated forms of worship and beliefs that are not based fully on God's Word. It calls us away from randomly assembled beliefs, from the religiosity that says you can have God your way! Come out of Babylon that you will not share in her sins and will not receive any of her plagues, the angel of Revelation 18:4 would later command! This sacred message is a call to stand apart, to come aside, from false worship in any form.

THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE

While the first two messages are powerful, Ellen White said something quite startling about the message of the third angel: "The power of the proclamation of the first and second angels' messages is to be concentrated in the third."⁵

Why is it concentrated? Because it captures the everlasting gospel of the first and its call to worship God! It embraces the second angel's call of separation from false worship and all that is unlike God. But the proclamation of this message is unlike the first two in that it delivers a fearsome warning: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation" (Revelation 14:9, NKJV). And while the message identifies the marked-up beast worshipers, it also reveals the sealed-up God-worshippers!

"Here is the patience of the saints, here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12, NKJV). Of this message Ellen White further noted, "[I]t is present truth. This message is to go forth with great distinctness and power. It is not to be clouded by human theories and sophistries. The Sabbath is to be proclaimed as God's memorial of creation."⁶ This is the message for our time!

Earlier I told you of my friend, caught in the storms that devastated Tennessee. I told you that she huddled with her pets in tears as the rains poured, and the floods rose up around her. I told you that the bridge that would take her to safety had been washed out. All hope seemed lost. But then that night she heard a loud knock at her door.

Startled and afraid, she hesitated for a minute, but the person knocked even harder. In tears, she rushed to the door and opened it. There she saw a police officer.

"Ma'am," he began, "you have to leave now!" The officer's voice was authoritative and unflinching.

"OK," she muttered, relieved. "Let me grab a few things."

"Ma'am," the officer insisted, "May I help you. You really need to leave now!" With that the officer came in to help her grab a few belongings before placing her and her pets in his vehicle and taking them to safety.

Friends, my Bible tells me that one day soon, when the enemy's storms have blotted out the sun, when the fires of persecution are burning, when the icy blast of hatemongers is freezing, when the thunderstorm

of war is shaking, and the snowstorm of false religion covers enveloping, we will not hear a knock at the door. But sometime around the midnight of our experience, the endtime hope of the world will break through the clouds! He whom we have loved, He whom we have proclaimed, He whom we have followed, will greet us saying: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). He lifts us up, puts us in the retinue of the redeemed, and takes us all to our eternal home. He who told His disciples then and Seventh-day Adventist disciples now, “see . . . that you are not alarmed” (Matthew 24:6) by the storms that will precede His coming, calls us to be true to our calling. We have a message to share, a world to win, a people to love, and a hope to give! That hope is Jesus! ☪

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General Conference Session 2022
Virtual Exhibition Experience



SHARING JESUS WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THROUGH KOREAN LANGUAGE CLASSES

RICHARD SABUIN



Courtesy of NSD Adventist Mission Department

As told to Richard Sabuin by Kwon Soon Beom and Huang Luxian

Pastor Kwon Soon Beom is a Pioneer Mission Movement (PMM) missionary for the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD). He and his family were sent to Taiwan in 2015, where he was assigned to grow the church in Beitun, Taichung. They came with great dreams to serve, but with very limited knowledge about what to do, especially because they did not speak Chinese.

Pastor Kwon decided to hold prayer meetings every Tuesday evening. Only one person joined the first meeting. Two months later, the attendance had jumped to 15. The pastor asked himself: "What more can I do?" Kwon visited the public university campus nearby and distributed brochures inviting students for a free Korean class that he planned to conduct in the Beitun church.

Although the university authorities did not welcome Kwon's visits, the pastor kept going, and God rewarded his efforts with 10 students turning up for studies at his church. The students were from the National Taichung

University of Science and Technology, in Taichung, and they came to Beitun church not so much to take Kwon's Bible studies but to learn better Korean. Soon the group grew to 25, consisting of university students, office workers, and housewives. Pastor Kwon and his wife taught them the Korean language four to five times a week. Each Friday evening, the pastor shared the gospel with his audience.

About seven months later, Kwon conducted the first series of evangelistic meetings in the Beitun church. He spent his own money—more than one-month's salary—to prepare for the meetings. Every evening, about 80 people, mostly university students, attended the meeting in the small church building. Students from Sahmyook University in Seoul, Korea, joined to help in the evangelistic campaign.

When the meetings ended, a church member delivered a painful blow to Pastor Kwon: "You have spent so much money and time, but not a single baptism." The

pastor felt the pain, but went to the only place where he knew he would find understanding and encouragement: the throne of God. He sought God for wisdom and courage, help, and direction.

Two months later, Pastor Kwon conducted another evangelistic meeting, and this time two university students requested baptism! The mother of a student later came to Pastor Kwon and thanked him that, because of his programs, her daughter was now coming to church. She wanted to see her daughter become an Adventist. After four series of evangelistic meetings, a total of eight university students were baptized.

In 2018, Pastor Kwon took 10 of his Korean class students to Korea to visit tourist attractions. Every morning and evening, they had a Bible study. As a result, another student was baptized. The newly baptized student told him: "I am so happy, I want to do something for you, Pastor. What can I do?" Pastor Kwon immediately responded: "I want to preach the gospel at your school, the National Taichung University of Science and Technology."

After praying together, they decided to start a Korean language club and class at the university. Eight Japanese students interested in the Korean language responded, and a language club was soon organized. Pastor Kwon was informed that about 22 students were planning to attend the first meeting. A surprise, however, awaited him: When he opened the first class, he was surprised to see 88 students, the largest club at the university. Twice

a month, about 60 students would take a 20-minute bus ride to church and join its activities. Church attendance increased, and the church was open every day for student meetings.

In 2019, the church received a Public Campus Ministry (PCM) missionary from the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. With this help, two evangelistic meetings have been organized on the campus annually since then. As a result, an average of five students have been baptized every year. Kwon testifies: "I really tried to give something to God, but in reality, the Lord has given me more over the past five years."

One of those baptized was Huang Luxian, a senior in the Department of International Trade at the university. Now an active member of Beitun church, he shares his journey of faith:

"I went to the second floor of my university building in 2019 to participate in a Korean language club where I got to know my teacher, Pastor Kwon. I took Korean classes at school every week and went to Beitun church once a month for Korean cooking classes, which is how I became familiar with the church.



Courtesy of NSD Adventist Mission Department

“During the week, I attended a lunch prayer group, a ‘Lunch Box of Love’ with the pastor, PCM missionary, and friends. In addition to a delicious lunch, I listened to a message from the Bible. The short messages given at the prayer group made me think about the direction of my life. I was drawn to attend the Beitun evangelistic series in 2019. I experienced a warm welcome from youth group and church members. In particular, we came together to study the Gospel of John.

“I had lot of doubts about the Bible. Like Thomas, I said to myself: ‘How can I believe in the existence of Jesus without seeing Him?’ But although we cannot face Jesus in person now, I have gained great confidence that we can experience Jesus in His Word. The church pastor and the PCM missionary told us great stories of God’s love, from Genesis to Revelation.

“In July 2020, I was baptized. I am very excited to study the Word of God. I heard that Taiwan does not have many Han Chinese pastors. After graduating from college, I want to study theology, I would like to become a pastor to preach the gospel to the Thomases

who are suspicious like I was. I haven’t seen Jesus, but I’m experiencing Jesus’ love through pastors, missionaries, and our church members.”

Beitun church in Taiwan is an example of how a local church can reach out and touch the lives of many. If Beitun church has done it, your church can do it, too—particularly if you have a college or university nearby where young people are filled with questions, and God has given you the answers to share. Share your faith now. 🙏

Richard Sabuin

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Pastor Kwon is still serving as the church pastor of Beitun Seventh-day Adventist Church in Taichung city, Taiwan. Huang Luxian studied at the Department of International Trade at the National University of Taichung Science and Technology, Taiwan. In July 2020, he was a senior student.



Courtesy of NSD Adventist Mission Department

WORSHIP: GOD'S GREAT CALL

PAVEL SEMANIVSKY

“Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!”
(1 Chronicles 16:29, NKJV).¹

One of God's great calls to His creatures is to worship Him, with all holiness and wholeness, without any reservation, and without anyone or anything coming between the worshiper and God. The Bible urges us as God's followers to worship Him exclusively, without any vacillation or hesitation. Such exclusive and intimate worship involves a close and obedient relationship with God and is essential to wholesome living. When worship loses its primary role in our existence, our lives lose their meaning, and we stand deprived of our link with our Creator. An absence of worship and prayer creates an emptiness in life, and such a life can be useful neither for God nor for humans.

This article will consider seven essential aspects of true worship.

GOD SEEKS WORSHIPERS.

“For the Father is seeking such [true worshipers] to worship Him” (John 4:23).

When we lose something of value and interest, we set out on a desperate search. The inference is that we have lost something very precious either in currency value or in the value of its personal or emotional worth. When we experience an intimate and priceless loss, we launch a search without any limit in time or space or emotions or cost. The apostle John wrote that God is on a search; He is

looking; He is seeking. What is the rationale behind His search? Didn't God know where Adam was? Doesn't God know where I am?

The reason for God's search is to bring the wandering home. His love and willingness are ever extended to restore a broken relationship, originally designed for and commanded in the worship of the Creator. Ellen White described God's eternally pursuing search for His people: “To restore in man the image of His maker, to bring Him back to the perfection in which He was created, to promote the development of the body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. . . . the great object of life.”²

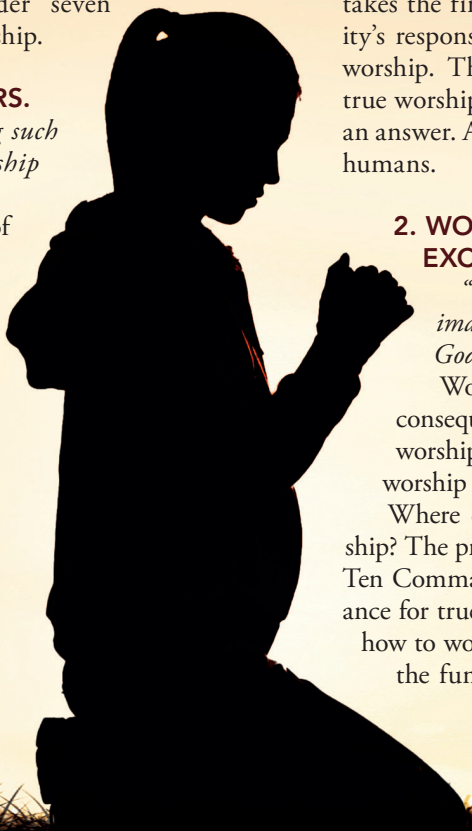
In the divine initiative with humans, God always takes the first step. That divine initiative and humanity's response constitute the two constant elements in worship. Thus, God is searching for worshipers and true worship. He takes the initiative, expecting to find an answer. And He waits for a response of worship from humans.

2. WORSHIP IMPLIES A RELATION OF EXCLUSIVENESS WITH GOD.

“[Y]ou shall not bow down to them [carved images] nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5).

Worship, depending on its nature, has different consequences: rejection and God's enmity when the worship is false; mercy and acceptance when the worship is true and acceptable.

Where can we find God's guidance for true worship? The principles of true worship can be found in the Ten Commandments. The Law provides genuine guidance for true worship, revealing why, whom, when, and how to worship. The first four commandments tell us the fundamental reasons—the why—for worship-



ing the true God: (A) God is the Deliverer. He delivers us from all the evil that possesses us, just as He freed Israel from Egyptian bondage. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,” and therefore “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:2, 3). (B) God is merciful and jealous. Out of His mercy He delivered Israel from bondage to freedom. No image, no idol, and no other god can become a substitute for true worship. (C) God’s name is not to be taken in vain. (D) God’s attitude toward worship is mentioned in terms of jealousy, a powerful feeling that arises as a reaction to unfaithfulness. It is a word used in the third commandment (Exodus 20:5) to declare God’s attitude toward unfaithful worship. (E) Further, worship is so important for God that He set apart the seventh day of the week as a perpetual reminder for human beings to worship Him as the Creator and Redeemer.

3. WORSHIP IS RELATED TO SALVATION.

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7).

The three angels’ messages in Revelation 14 constitute God’s last call to the final generation. This observance of true worship, placed in the heart of the Book of Revelation, is God’s message to those who live just before the second coming of Jesus. It reveals a state foreseen by God, and is reflected in the conflict regarding worship. On one side are those who are faithful and worship God “who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” On the other side are those condemned to die who worship “the beast and his image.”

Decisions made on the object of worship—God or the beast—affect the eternal destiny of the worshipers. In the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6 to 12, there is no third party. Thus, true worship is a fundamental choice that distinguishes the saved from the unsaved.

4. WORSHIP IS A SOURCE OF REVIVAL AND REFORMATION.

“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. . . . ‘Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me!’” (Isaiah 6:5-8).

Consider the following questions within the context of what Isaiah said. Is it possible to have an effect without a cause? Is it possible to repent without realizing one’s sinfulness? Is it possible to admit we have sinned without considering holiness? Is it possible to accomplish the mission of salvation without repenting and

accepting forgiveness? Is it possible to accomplish one’s mission without getting to know God in the first place?

Isaiah 6 shows us the process of transformation, reformation, and revival that precedes mission. Before Isaiah responded, he contemplated the holiness of God in a moment of worship. When he found himself in God’s presence, he became aware of his sinfulness. There, in a state of adoration, he was granted God’s forgiveness through a live coal from the altar that touched his lips. Once forgiven, Isaiah offered himself to God in service: “Here am I! Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

Isaiah’s experience makes it clear that the decision to engage in mission is grounded in worship. Worship is the cause of a new beginning, the source of spiritual revival and reformation, and the spot where mission starts. And mission itself leads to worshipping God. “For all nations shall come and worship before You. For Your judgments have been manifested” (Revelation 15:4).

5. WORSHIP CONTINUES FOR ETERNITY.

“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord” (Isaiah 66:22, 23, NRSV).

The Holy Spirit through the prophet affirms that worship and Sabbath observance will continue throughout eternity. Likewise, the first of the three angels’ messages (Revelation 14:6–12) issues a universal call urging all humans to worship the Creator—“Him who made heavens and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (vs. 7). The reference to worship and the Creator undoubtedly provides a strong pointer: one without the other is meaningless; the two together lift the kneeling one to the heavenly throne. Thus, the Sabbath is both a memorial of God’s creation (Exodus 20:11) and a symbol of His saving activity (Matthew 12:8–13). In Deuteronomy 5, where the Ten Commandments are repeated, the Sabbath is referred to as a sign of deliverance and freedom (vs. 15), and a sign of the covenant, which points to two great acts of God in history: creation and redemption.

These two divine activities—creation and redemption—are also the foundation of worship in heaven as described by John in Revelation where heavenly beings worship God because He is the Creator and the Redeemer (Revelation 4:10, 11; 5:8–12).

Thus, the day of rest and the pattern of heavenly worship have the same foundation and are based on two acts of God in history: creation and redemption. Worship is an event of praise and adoration that is not limited by time; it existed before creation, and it transcends history to continue for eternity.

6. WORSHIP IS A GOD-FOCUSED MINISTRY.

““Worship the Lord your God and serve him only””
(Luke 4:8, NIV).

If God is looking for worship, and if He is jealous about it, warns, regulates, purifies, and restores worshipers, then, what should be our response?

First, adoration, which implies God is the sole Person worthy of our worship. The first four commandments of the Decalogue reveal the centrality of God in our adoration and worship. There is none else!

In his article titled, “On the Christ-centered Nature of Our Sermons,” Yuri Drumi says, “Unfortunately, a podium where Christ has not been admitted is not very surprising in the life of many congregations. In our worship, people often hear a lot on the humanist’s moral, the rabbi’s allegories, the agnostic’s philosophy, the master teacher’s lectures, the preacher’s autobiography, but not about God’s living Word.”³

Of course, not all churches follow this model, and the temptation to stray away from Christ-centeredness and a biblical emphasis can be strong. The preacher’s interests may become the center, to the detriment of an exaltation and glorification of Jesus. Even though the preacher may find a proper quotation from the Bible and write a thematic sermon on any topic, quoting the Bible does not lead to worship. True worship in spirit and in truth is not an action directed from the pulpit or performed on the church’s platform. Rather, it is our heart’s inmost response to the divine call to “worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29, NIV). The quietness that marks the congregation, the music and singing that uplift the Name beyond all names, the giving that expresses our thankfulness to the One who gave us everything, the prayers that uplift the human heart to the divine, the Word that is read and preached, and every minute spent in His holy presence should express the longing of the human heart to link with the divine. Such a worship experience links a person’s spirit with God’s Spirit, and the truth made flesh in Christ guides the worshiper’s conscience to find its center in God and Him alone. That is true worship.

7. WORSHIP IS A REFLECTION OF KNOWING GOD.

“In righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness” (Psalm 17:15).

Worship is knowing who God is. On one hand, God introduces Himself as Father, a loving Lord, willing to sacrifice what is dearest and most precious to Him—His Son Jesus—that through His death on the Cross we sinners may be saved. God also introduces Himself as the One who is holy, high, and exalted, who “is in

his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before Him” (Habakkuk 2:20).

CONCLUSION

As we close this brief study on worship, two significant questions need to be asked again: What is worship? Why should we worship?

In a multicultural and worldwide denomination such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, worship anywhere in the world should be based on the same principles. We may differ in language, in the form and style of music, and even in leadership and participation in preaching, but there is one singular element on which there can be no compromise or neglect. That focus is the centrality of the Word of God in all preaching, the total focus on God in whom our worship and praise must rest, and the absolute commitment of the entire church as a witnessing body to the saving and soon-coming Lord Jesus. Accepting Jesus as the Lord of the church to which we belong and in which we worship, and witnessing for Jesus as the Savior of the community in which we live ought to be the calling of our life and the priority of our existence.

Current circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic have produced significant changes in the worldwide church. Instead of the regular worship service at church, most church members follow online services. How shall we worship God while watching a screen? Which are the worship principles and their unchangeable elements that go beyond historical ages, generations, and circumstances? If God is looking for worship, He demands that He be its exclusive object, and He still seeks to enter into a relationship with humanity through worship. He offers forgiveness and revival to participants and will accept worship for eternity. “Seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29). ☪

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COLLEGE IN SURAT, INDIA, OBSERVES PUBLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY DAY

Courtesy of NSD Adventist Mission Department



NARLAPATI SUBHAKAR PRASAD

“**I**n all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6, NKJV).

Solomon’s counsel has been foundational to the establishment and function of the Seventh-day Adventist institutions in the western India city of Surat. The church currently operates, under the generic name of Medical Educational Trust Association of Surat (METAS). In addition, METAS also runs a College of Management across India (with BCom, BBA, and MBA programs), and a general nursing program.

While the college focuses on educational opportunities with an Adventist emphasis and Christian imperatives, the institution and its faculty never fail to zero in on the central purpose of Adventist institutions: to lead students to understand that the aim of Adventist education is not simply to impart the ABC’s of learning, but to train students in the way they should go so that “when they are old, they will not turn away from it” (Proverbs 22:6, NIRV). The Surat institutions are committed to making God first. They know that from

Him the fountain of knowledge and experience flows.

One way we keep the Adventist focus at Surat is by stressing what true education is all about—physical, mental, social, and spiritual development. The spiritual dimension has always been the way METAS ventures into any assignment it undertakes. During the current school year, the institution fully involved itself in the church’s worldwide program of Public Campus Ministries (PCM), which zeroes in on spiritual development and Adventist witness. On the special PCM day (October 16, 2021), METAS invited all students, including non-Adventists, from public and private schools, colleges, and universities in Surat to join the Adventist educational family in celebration of the value and meaning of education. In addition, many international Adventist students, studying in public campuses, mainly from Africa, also joined in. METAS’s public campus ministry enabled these foreign students to once again embrace Adventist fellowship in our schools and in the larger Adventist community in Surat.



THE SABBATH PROGRAM

New Adventist students at the host institution were assigned to lead in the Sabbath school program. They received guidance and orientation from the college chaplain responsible for PCM. In addition, the speakers for the divine service and other participants in the all-day spiritual meetings spoke about the primary mission of METAS, and what the institution does both within and outside the classroom to develop and train ambassadors for Christ. Such a focus was much needed and well appreciated because of the urgency created by the COVID-19 pandemic in Surat. METAS took every opportunity to provide the “balm in Gilead” (Jeremiah 8:22, NKJV) to the community hit by the fears of the pandemic.

The Sabbath afternoon program was in two parts, the youth first met in the college conference hall to study the theme of being ambassadors for Christ. The lively program featured energetic singing, conference-wide prayer

sessions, panel discussions, special songs, and above all a meaningful commitment on the part of both students and staff. The entire congregation prayerfully repeated the Gospel Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20) and committed themselves to be active witnesses during the coming year. The commitment was followed by moving testimonies of how the Lord had been working in the lives of several participants. A young nurse from northeast India told us about how she left her high-paying government job

for the sake of following her Lord to keep the Sabbath. A young government teacher told us about his giving up his job in order to keep the Sabbath; God rewarded his faithfulness by helping him find his current job, where he has full Sabbath privileges.

After these two moving testimonies, five other young people testified of how they were used by God as ambassadors to people of diverse faiths and challenging lifestyles.

For the second part of the afternoon program, the group gathered at the Dumas beach on the Arabian Sea, not far from the college. There the focus of discussion and prayer was on the concept of each student a sermon for Christ. While the waves gently pounded the shores and the afternoon cool breeze was therapeutic to all participants, the youth had one-to-one discussions on what it means to live a Christian life.

After the discussions and a walk on the beach, appreciating God’s creation and nature, an ecumenical opportunity opened up. All of the participants met in the Church of North India (CNI) for the day’s closing program of praise and prayer. Though it was the end of a long and busy day, the vigor and zest of the youth remained fresh as evidenced by their enthusiastic singing, prayers, and participation in Bible study. The day was concluded by all the youth adopting the personal goal that Solomon discovered long ago: “Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10, NKJV). 🙏

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Courtesy of NSD Adventist Mission Department

REFILWE NANCY PHASWANA-MAFUYA

Dialogue with a professor of epidemiology and public health in South Africa



INTERVIEW BY ELLA SMITH SIMMONS

Dr. Refilwe Nancy Phaswana-Mafuya is a much-celebrated professor of epidemiology and public health at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. She also serves as a guest lecturer in epidemiology at the Pan African University of Life and Earth Sciences at Ibadan, Nigeria. While serving as chief research manager and research director at the university (2005-2017), she led the HIV/AIDS/STI/TB research program of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa and received an award for her quality research and contributions to the strategic objectives of the National Science Council. From 2009-2017, Phaswana-Mafuya also served as director of SAHARA (Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance), and as editor-in-chief of the internationally accredited publication, *Sahara-J: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*.

Phaswana-Mafuya is a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), and a Fellow in the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD). When she received the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) 2016/2017 award for significant contributions to science, she was introduced as a “world changer and protector and generator of new knowledge.”¹

Phaswana-Mafuya values opportunities to save lives in real time and to advance community development over time, while simultaneously contributing to the world’s scientific knowledge base. In addition to the scientific and professional life she leads, she enjoys her family life with her husband of 16 years, Pastor Mlondolozzi Mafuya, and their four children, two of whom are adults serving in science professions.

■ *The book, Holding the Knife’s Edge: Journeys of Black Female Scientists, features you among 14 award-winning black female scientists. It says about you: “To be born in a developing country is like competing in a race with your arms tied behind your back; to be born a female is to compete with your arms tied behind your back and blindfolded.” This makes you a least-likely candidate for a rich career in science. So, let’s begin with your beginning. In what family and societal context did you grow up?*

I was born in the village of Eisleben, Matoks, Ga-Ramokgopa, Limpopo Province of South Africa. My

father stopped school at grade 7 at the age of 12 to become breadwinner for his family after his father’s death. My mother stopped school at grade 5. I was the second of their six children. Both my parents are Seventh-day Adventists and hardworking social entrepreneurs and community builders. I learned early in life to work with them in the Adventist initiative, Meals on Wheels Community Services, which served meals to elderly people and children. This experience helped me develop humility, resilience, and hard work—attributes that made me who I am today under God’s guidance.

■ *In grade school, you loved science but were dissuaded from science aspirations. How did you come back to science, and what helped you to move toward an internationally acclaimed career in epidemiology?*

Early recognition of my potential by men and women that God placed in my life connected me with resources and networks, and strategically positioned me for success in education and a career in science.

I chose epidemiology because of the shortage of trained professionals in epidemics and pandemics on the African continent. In South Africa, it is a “scarce skills” discipline that is needed to close the gap for qualified epidemiologists. Out of 480 applicants from 26 African countries for the Africa London Nagasaki Fellowship to study epidemiology, five were selected, and I was one of that five. That was the key to my professional development and growth. I was further privileged to study for the Master of Science and Postgraduate Diploma in epidemiology at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine at the University of London. Becoming an epidemiologist set my vision of impacting, changing, and improving lives through the development of a generation of robust scientific epidemiologists who helped combat epidemics and pandemics, and eventually reducing disease and death.

■ *During the current COVID crisis, pandemic epidemiologists are in high demand. Within that context, what is your research agenda and contribution?*

I am a primary investigator and collaborator on essential multi-year, multi-national, and multi-million-dollar studies that have informed the world’s response to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis—and lately, COVID-19. When COVID-19 hit, my colleagues and I applied our knowledge and experience of HIV pandemic impact mitigation and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have collaborated with the World Health Organization in groundbreaking research that changed views on health and produced numerous publications and citations in leading scientific journals. In addition, our collaboration with Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Harvard University, University of Toronto, University of Saint Andrews (Scotland), Karolinska Institutet (Sweden), University of Malaya (Malaysia), and South African Medical Research Council have yielded some significant results, including:

1. “The Utility of 2009 H1N1 Pandemic Data in Understanding the Transmission Potential and Estimating the Burden of COVID-19 in South Africa to Guide Mitigation Strategies”³;
2. “Understanding the Differential Impacts of COVID-19 Among Hospitalized Patients in South Africa for Equitable Response”⁴;

3. Understanding whether COVID-19 vaccine passports will harm economic recovery and sustainable development⁵;
4. Study of “The Relationship Between the Global Burden of Influenza From 2017 to 2019 and COVID-19: Descriptive Epidemiological Assessment”⁶;
5. Study of “COVID-19 Across Africa: Epidemiologic Heterogeneity and Necessity of Contextually Relevant Transmission Models and Intervention Strategies”⁷;
6. A scoping review of “Competing Health Risks Associated With the COVID-19 Pandemic and Response.”⁸

■ *You are quite active in service to your discipline and the broader academic community. How do you accomplish all this?*

It is a challenging experience to serve science, community, and society. I believe in science for society; hence, I go to schools and communities doing science engagements that are very much a part of my responsibilities as a scientist. My strategies are perspective and skills I have learned that help: (a) prioritization of activities for maximum output; (b) time management with clear schedules and strict deadlines; (c) delegating tasks to others; (d) having the right team with the right motivation; (e) shared vision to enhance team performance; (f) doing things right, not just the right things to ensure efficiency; (g) utilizing preferred working styles; and (h) investing in mentorship to transfer skills and knowledge that extend across and beyond individual projects. It is a phenomenal experience to serve science, community, and society.

■ *Your daughter is a registered environmental health practitioner with the Health Professions Council of South Africa, specializing in health, safety, and environmental management. She says of you: “I was raised by a phenomenal woman, a devoted mother. She is a gift from God. I have watched her wake up at 3:00, sending e-mails, writing research proposals and reports, reviewing Master’s and doctoral dissertations, and working on campaigns for the most parts of my childhood, up to today.” How do your husband and children handle the collateral sacrifices of your demanding public career?*

My husband is a great help. He is “a product of Adventist education.” He was not born into an Adventist family. He had all his elementary and secondary education in Adventist schools, and it is this education that led him to become an Adventist. He earned a theology degree at Bethel College and accounting degrees with

honors in public universities. Today he is chief auditor for the Cape Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa. Both of us, and our children, share the same passion for education, Adventism, and for the end goal of serving God and humanity.

■ *As a scientist, what challenges to your faith have you encountered, and how do you balance being a practicing Seventh-day Adventist and a practicing scientist?*

Scientists are analytic and seek precise answers to questions or problems. They find it difficult to believe what they cannot prove. They work from hypotheses that must be true or false—accepted or rejected. Everything is viewed in probable terms from probability theory. When it comes to spiritual life, spiritual things are spiritually discerned. I do not debate my spiritual life. Faith is faith. By faith I believe and accept what I have not seen or even what I cannot make sense. I do not have absolute knowledge about everything around me, and still, I accept them, and life goes on. Such are matters that concern the spirit. Only God has absolute knowledge.

My parents raised me by Deuteronomy 6:4 to 7: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. . . . You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (NKJV).⁹ My parents talked to us about these words at home, when we left for school or anywhere, and every time we faced an apparently impossible task. They reminded us to pray every morning and every night and to choose the narrow road in life. They raised us to know that God can solve any problem, that our heavenly Father loves us, and that we can trust God in every area of our lives, including the study of science.

■ *One of your mentees, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Johannesburg, Dr. Edith Phalane, once said: “Rising from a village girl who fetched water by carrying on her head a 20-litre bucketful of water, went to the mountain to fetch wood and washed clothes in a nearby river to a scientist with great potential to impact the world through my passion for science, I can testify that indeed God is alive and has a purpose for my life.” She calls you her “destiny helper.” What advice would you give Christians who are interested in a public career in science? What special advice do you have for girls who are overlooked or boys who do not have access to opportunities in science?*

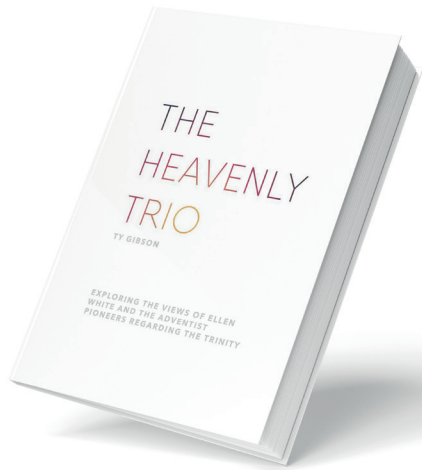
Science is not “genderized” or gender-based; girls and boys are equally competent. Science is not confined to any religion; anyone who has passion for it can do it. Science is not anti-God or anti-godliness. Those having interest in science, but lacking opportunities, should not wait for such breaks but should seek resources and resource persons who can provide the needed guidance. They must put themselves out there; work hard and get good grades consistently. They must be involved in school activities to demonstrate potential. My goal is to inspire science diversity, motivation, passion, excellence, visibility, impact, reach, and success by God’s grace. ☸

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THE HEAVENLY TRIO: EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF ELLEN WHITE AND THE ADVENTIST PIONEERS REGARDING THE TRINITY

Ty Gibson (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2020), hardback, 285 pages.

Reviewed by Denis Kaiser

Since the mid-2010s the Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced a dramatic increase in antitrinitarian sentiments. The partial or complete rejection of the church’s Fundamental Beliefs numbers 2–5 (Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is making inroads into many local congregations. Regardless of the insights on the doctrine of God that the church has gained in the past 130 years through its study of the Bible, modern-day antitrinitarian Adventists would want to see the church return to its antitrinitarian beginnings. This situation has illustrated the need to better understand doctrinal development throughout the history of the church. In an attempt to meet this urgent need, Ty Gibson’s book *The Heavenly Trio* offers a well-articulated response that has long been overdue. The book is a follow-up to his *The Sonship of Christ*, although the new work addresses primarily a Seventh-day Adventist readership.

The book consists of 10 chapters. Chapter 1 directs the book’s preview with the “one question to rule them all”—whether “love” or “power” defines the character of God. Chapter 2 does not simply outline the early Adventist pioneers’ opposition to the Trinity but also identifies their core concern for the relationship between distinct divine personalities and their opposition to the extreme of modalistic Trinitarianism (one being manifested through various persons). Chapter 3 traces Ellen White’s personal journey, from her early silence on the antitrinitarian sentiments of her fellow Adventist pioneers to her later articulation of a rich trinitarian perspective of God, which was based on the covenantal relationship between three distinct divine personalities. Chapter 4 describes how most belief systems may be classes as either Hebrew (relational, free, open, dynamic, empathic) or Greek (solitary, fixed, closed, absolute) thinking, and how antitrinitarian perceptions may serve as a gate to pantheism. Chapter 5 traces the picture that the Old Testament paints of God, which Gibson describes as covenantal Trinitarianism. Chapter 6 focuses on two Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 30 and Proverbs 8) and how they describe God’s activity prior to Jesus’ incarnation in communicating in love to all human beings. Chapter 7 explores a number of Old Testament passages that present two Yahwehs, one invisible to human sight and in heaven; the other one visibly and actively engaged on earth. Chapter 8 explains that whether one believes God to be “an indivisible social unit” or “a solitary self” has tremendous implications for the nature of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross: Either it was the ultimate manifestation of God’s self-sacrificing, other-centered love, or it is evidence for His inability or unwillingness to sacrifice Himself for His creatures. Chapter 9 shows how antitrinitarianism presupposes a hierarchical perception of relationships, often resulting in hierarchical human relationships modelled on a belief that a hierarchy exists among the divine persons. Chapter 10 is a concluding reflection on the church as “the covenantal community” whose view of God inevitably influences its view of the church’s nature, identity, and mission.

The Heavenly Trio is a superb study of the doctrine of God as it was perceived by Ellen White and early Adventists, sensitive to their real concern for God as a distinct relational being, in contrast to theological views that either negated such a relationship (modalism) or dissolved the unity and harmony between them (tritheism). Gibson appropriately portrays how diligent

Bible study moved Adventists past various philosophical pitfalls and took them to a truly biblical perspective regarding the heavenly trio. This sequel to *The Sonship of Christ* is a call for Adventists to comprehend and experience divine relational, covenantal dynamics.

A few points of critique may be mentioned here:

Although it is true that Adventists have traditionally defined Kellogg's spiritualistic teachings about God as *pantheism*, it was actually a form of *panentheism*. While *pantheism* suggests that God is the universe, implying that one may worship nature/God, *panentheism* suggests instead that God is everywhere present in the universe, denying that God is synonymous with the universe, and objecting to the worship of creation. Gibson fails to distinguish between the two, and as a result simplifies the issues at stake. Modern readers may be surprised why any serious Adventist would fall prey to pantheism, yet Kellogg's views were actually an exaggeration of the immanence of God, implying that God (or the Holy Spirit) is present in every person, including wicked people, and all creatures, such as spiders, ants, snakes, etc. This view is very different from Ellen White's perspective of God's creative power in the universe, which to the careless observer may look similar to Kellogg's *panentheism*. Ellen White did not say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, individually or collectively, were present in every animate being. By blurring the distinction between *pantheism* and *panentheism*, one may not realize the real danger of Kellogg's spiritualistic views, even for modern Adventists.

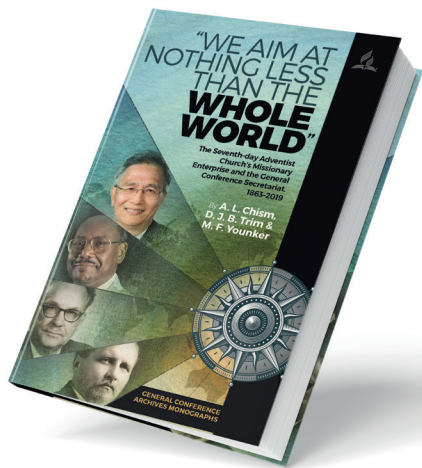
Besides his failure to distinguish between those philosophical perspectives, Gibson also fails to distinguish properly between Arianism and semi-Arianism. In describing the teachings of Arius (A.D. 256-336), he states that Arius believed in the begottenness of the Son from the Father, implying that the Son held an inferior divine status. However, this is neither an accurate description of Arius's view nor of Arianism. Arius likely taught that Christ was a created being who was granted by God an exalted position ("Son" is a title) but that He was not a divine being, to which Athanasius and the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) replied that He was "begotten, not made"

and, as a result, He was "God from God" (modern translation). The early Adventist pioneers generally objected to the first view and would have endorsed the second view, except for its philosophical assumptions—since God is timeless and immaterial, the Son is (continually/eternally) begotten in the eternal present—that were not expressly stated in the Nicene Creed but implied by those drafting it. Since the Adventist pioneers generally agreed with the idea of the Son's divine begottenness but reasoned that this referred to a one-time event in the past rather than a continually occurring event (implying that He had a beginning/origin in time); they were technically semi-Arians, not Arians. Regardless, Gibson is correct in his observation that the Adventist pioneers inadvertently maintained some aspects of the Greek philosophical assumptions.

While not every reader may be convinced by the links that Gibson attempts to outline between antitrinitarianism and pantheism, most readers will leave the reading of the book with a deeper understanding of the developments in early Adventist history on the subject, a better perception of the real issues at stake in the antitrinitarian conflicts that are currently ravaging congregations, and a greater appreciation for the self-sacrificing, other-centered love of God. The book may be commended to readers as one of the most relatable and beautiful treatments of the Adventist doctrine of the Trinity. ☪

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“WE AIM AT NOTHING LESS THAN THE WHOLE WORLD”: THE SEVENTH-DAY-ADVENTIST CHURCH’S MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT, 1863-2019

By A. L. Chism, D. J. B. Trim, and M. F. Younker (Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.: Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2021), paperback, 312 pages.

Reviewed by Andrew Tompkins

The collaboration of three scholars on the organizational impact of the General Conference headquarters, the office of the Secretariat in particular, is a well-researched and welcome addition to the Seventh-day Adventist record of mission history. The book demonstrates painstaking hours of research and contains numerous references to primary documents that shed much light on the sending of missionaries by the official Seventh-day Adventist organization for almost 150 years.

The book is divided into two major sections. The first section comprises two chapters of introduction. The first chapter briefly details the authors’ definition of mission; the second chapter gives a detailed statistical report on the number of missionaries the church had sent through the decades. Chapter 2 is especially valuable because of the wealth of statistically based information it provides.

Chapters 3 to 7 present a chronological study of the evolving structure of the General Conference and how this structure has impacted the sending of missionaries. The major

organizational overhauls of 1901 and 1903 are at the heart of the structure, as they allowed for greater focus of time and resources by the General Conference administrators toward the world outside of North America. This resulted in a rapidly increasing number of missionaries serving the church, with the high-water mark coming in the 1960s. The office of the Secretariat, which fulfilled multiple functions, became the center of oversight for recruiting and sending missionaries. However, as time progressed, the authors argue, the Secretariat’s other duties, namely management of the church’s working policy, led to mission drift and, in some ways, a sidelining of the General Conference’s focus on sending missionaries to new territories.

The historical data is hard to refute, as the authors have done a careful job of defending their arguments with primary sources. Church leaders interested in having a better grasp of the history of Adventist emphasis on worldwide mission and how the organization got to where it is today will greatly benefit from the book. Organization and mission have a long history among Adventists and all Christian missionary-sending groups.

At times, the book falls into a tone of apologetics. It comes across that the authors are simply trying to defend an existing organizational reality, the Secretariat, by demonstrating how many fewer missionaries are currently sent out today. While this is an important point for discussion, one must be careful to recognize that there are numerous factors that impact how many missionaries are sent out, why they are or are not sent out, etc. Times have changed, and with those changes, views on mission and the sending of missionaries have gone through numerous critiques that demonstrate that the issue is far more complex than merely adjusting organizational structures. The book argues that good mission primarily hinges on the organizational structure. Rarely is the work of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the book as it relates to mission. Yet, from a biblical standpoint, it is the work of the Spirit that drives organizational development and change, not the other way around as is clearly shown in the Book of Acts.

Overall, this is a welcome addition for researchers in Adventist mission history. I commend the authors for their excellent work. Church administrators, mission-studies scholars, and others interested in the worldwide focus and work of the Adventist Church should take time to delve into the many insights contained in this volume. ☞

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SPECIAL GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION APPROVES CONSTITUTIONAL AMMENDMENT FOR VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION

LISA M. BEARDSLEY-HARDY



A few months before the 2020 General Conference (GC) session was to convene in Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A., it was postponed and rescheduled for 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The session was postponed again in 2021 because of ongoing public-health risks, travel constraints, quarantine requirements and costs, pandemic-related visa restrictions, and restrictions on public meetings.

The General Conference constitution has a provision for postponing a GC session for up to two years. Accordingly, most of those in elected positions at the General Conference continued to serve, although a number retired or took up other responsibilities.

Local church services, many working meetings, and the GC Executive Committee spring meetings and annual councils of 2020 and 2021 moved online or to hybrid formats during the pandemic. But the GC constitution did not include a provision for a General Conference session to meet virtually—it required delegates to meet and vote onsite and in person. Without a quorum that could participate and vote in person, the business of a GC session could

not take place, including the elections of those who would serve the world church (including division presidents).

However, the situation was different for other division appointments. The GC Executive Committee reaffirmed on January 12, 2021, that based on Article XI of the General Conference Bylaws and GC *Working Policy* (B 20 15), divisions may by action of their executive committee make an exception to such working policy provisions and appoint associate officers, field secretaries, departmental directors/secretaries, and associates at a date and time (other than the GC session) that is selected by the division executive committee. People elected in this manner will serve for the balance of the quinquennium ending in 2025.

After the second postponement, in consultation with the GC Office of General Counsel, the GC Executive Committee voted to hold a special General Conference session on January 18, 2022, to amend the GC constitution to authorize remote participation and voting by delegates. As allowed by the GC constitution, the GC Executive Committee also voted a reduced number of delegates for the special GC session, and set that number at 400. Each

division of the General Conference was asked to appoint delegates who live in close proximity to the GC headquarters who could participate and vote in person on a single agenda item. No financial provision was made for travel, accommodation, required COVID-19 testing, or any other expenses associated with the special GC session. The names of the delegates were voted by the GC Executive Committee on September 16, 2021.

The proposed amendment to the GC constitution was circulated to each union and division executive committee, with the request that they support the proposed language. However, each delegate was given the right to vote according to his or her conscience. The delegates were asked to pray about the decision, evaluate the proposal, and make what they considered to be the best decision for the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The special GC session took place at the church's world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A., on January 18, 2022, and was broadcast live.¹ After a devotional and introductory statements, the session was declared open for business at 8:25 a.m. with 247 delegates present in person, constituting a quorum (the minimum number for a quorum was one-third, or 134 delegates). The proposed wording for the amendment to the GC constitution, Article V, was read at 8:40, to add a new Section 4 to allow for electronic participation during GC sessions. The amendment, underlined to indicate new language, read as follows:

Sec. 4. Generally, regular or specially called General Conference Sessions are to be held in person and onsite. However, delegates when requested by the General Conference Executive Committee may participate by means of an electronic conference or similar communications by which all persons participating can hear each other at the same time, and participation by such means shall constitute presence in person and attendance at such a meeting. Votes cast remotely shall have the same validity as if the delegates met and voted onsite.

It was a short business meeting (28 minutes). A number of delegates spoke to the motion, primarily offering editorial recommendations, but there was no substantive opposition to the intent of the motion. The amendment to the GC constitution was voted unanimously as presented,² with a total of 290 registered delegates by the end. From the morning devotion to the final closing prayer, the special GC session took 59 minutes.

Pursuant to the above amendment, on January 27, 2022, the General Conference Executive Committee met virtually

and unanimously voted to hold the postponed 2020 General Conference session as a hybrid meeting with authorization for onsite and electronic attendance when the session convenes in St Louis, Missouri, on June 6-11, 2022.³ The anticipated 2,713 delegates are “encouraged to attend in person” onsite but if unable to do so, will be able to use electronic technologies to conduct the business of the session and to elect personnel for the remaining three years of the quinquennium ending in 2025. Even if COVID-19 or any other unforeseen future circumstance impedes travel or the size of onsite meetings, this makes participation possible by delegates at the most remote frontiers of ministry in the islands of the seas or in countries where travel and religious freedoms are restricted. The amendment positions the church to function in the future when religious freedom will become more restricted, as Revelation 13:16 and 17 tells us will eventually be so.

ORGANIZED FOR MISSION

In 1863, 21 delegates met at Battle Creek, Michigan, to decide what direction their small group should take, and how they should proceed after what appeared to be a disastrous disappointment in 1844. Discerning God's leading and, “For the purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor, and promoting the general interests of the cause of present truth, and of perfecting the organization of the Seventh-day Adventists, we, the delegates . . . hereby proceed to organize a General Conference, and adopt the following constitution.”⁴

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized for the purpose of mission. The amendment of its constitution by the special General Conference session of January 18, 2022, enables the church to be even more resilient and better organized in the future to carry out the mission entrusted to it, which is to proclaim the soon return of Christ. ☪

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. “Special General Conference Session Delegates Approve Constitutional Amendment,” *ANN*, January 19, 2022: <https://adventist.news/news/special-general-conference-session-delegates-approve-constitutional-amendment>.
3. “General Conference Executive Committee Votes to Allow for Hybrid 2022 GC Session,” *Adventist Review* and *ANN*, January 27, 2022: <https://adventist.news/news/general-conference-executive-committee-votes-to-allow-for-hybrid-2022-gc-session>.
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PUBLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY DAY



I WILL BE THE Church

A small, stylized illustration of a white church building with a steeple and a cross on top, positioned to the right of the main text.

15 OCTOBER
2022

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