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“IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS THAT SOMETHING IS MISSING IN OUR PREACHING AND TEACHING.”

The Holy Spirit

What a warm and inviting Person, this Friend of ours, the Holy Spirit! Jan Paulsen’s outline (“The Holy Spirit—So What?” April 2012) of guiding principles and personal testimony validated and challenged the experience of this reader. We can seek the Spirit’s company and be humbly confident of His presence and power in us every day. Thank you, Pastor Paulsen, for sharing your Friend with such winning words and gentle appeal.

—Ken Lockwood, email

In his article on “The Holy Spirit and Biblical Interpretation” (April 2012), E. Edward Zinke quoted John 16:13, 14. Here Jesus says that while He is away the Spirit will guide disciples “into all the truth.” In so doing, the Spirit will glorify no one but Jesus Himself.

But verse 12 was sitting right in front of Zinke, and he left it out. “‘I have many things to say to you,’ ” Jesus said, “ ‘but you cannot bear them now.’ ” To invoke a phrase from Ellen White, “the truth as it is in Jesus” involves matters the original disciples themselves were not ready to grasp. To invoke another “present truth” may advance upon even what Scripture says, so long as the advance reflects the essential meaning of the Jesus story.

Adventists would be less hostile to one another if we all knew that doctrinal growth is to be expected.

—Charles Scriven, Oakwood, Ohio, United States

The need for revival

Thank you for Derek Morris’s inspiring interview with Lee Venden (“A Passion for Revival: An Interview With Lee Venden,” February 2012) about his revival program, with the emphasis on Jesus. However, I found the statistics for Adventists in North America shocking. I suspect they could be extrapolated to the church worldwide.

It should trouble us greatly to know that

- Less than 25 percent of members, who attend church, spend any personal time in daily Bible study and prayer.
- Only about 40 percent of Adventists, currently on church books, attend church even once a month.
- For every Adventist who regularly attends church, five have either left or no longer attend.
- While those joining the church see our doctrines as biblical, they don’t see Jesus as the core of each. Too many come to church but don’t come to Jesus.
- The majority of Adventists lack assurance of salvation.

- The vast majority of our church members openly admit that they don’t have a daily walk with Christ.

I find these statistics to be disturbing! It should be obvious that something is missing in our preaching and teaching. Venden says “We have discovered that Adventists everywhere are hungering for Jesus and the know-how to have a personal friendship with Him that is tangible and life changing. . . . It is the lack of this understanding that leads members to backsliding.”

Ellen G. White says, “Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world.” She adds, “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths center.” Furthermore, “The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken” (*Gospel Workers*, 156, 315, 161).

Has Satan stolen a march on us here?

—Errol Webster, retired pastor, Bathurst New South Wales, Australia



The 10/40 Window: Far away and next door

In recent years we have heard a great deal from Christian missiologists about the 10/40 Window. The term was originally coined in 1990 by Luis Bush when referring to the territory in the Eastern Hemisphere located between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north of the equator. An estimated two billion Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists live in this region. Undoubtedly, Christians need to be intentional about building bridges of love and understanding with this large sector of the world's population.

Christopher Sorensen has devoted his entire ministry to sharing the love of God and the truth about Jesus Christ with Buddhists. While still single, he took a break from university to serve for three years in Cambodia. After completing his undergraduate degree, he returned with his wife, Shannon, to serve in Thailand. I asked Christopher to share the most important lessons he has learned in the past decade about sharing Jesus with Buddhists. Here are just a few of his powerful insights:

- To know and love Jesus personally and supremely is essential. Buddhists have good moral teachings but lack a personal relationship with a living, loving Savior.
- Rice is not sown and harvested in the same day. Nor will the grain wait on the stalk forever.
- Without background knowledge of the stories of the great controversy between good and evil as revealed in the Bible, a propositional gospel presentation is, at best, incomprehensible to a Buddhist.
- A personal encounter with Jesus—be it a vision, dream,

miracle or answered prayer—opens a window of opportunity during which we must work and pray hard. Supernatural encounters are not enough.

I asked Christopher's permission to share these lessons with you. His testimony has inspired and motivated me to share the love of God and the truth about Jesus Christ with those around me. Many of us may never live in the 10/40 Window, but, if we look carefully, we may discover this challenge is a present reality in our own neighborhoods. Perhaps you have a Buddhist neighbor or a Muslim work associate. Your son or daughter might be bringing a Hindu classmate to your church youth group. We need to understand how to connect with our non-Christian neighbors in ways that extend the unconditional love of our Father in heaven.


This idea of the 10/40 Window existing nearer to us than we might realize became more personal for me when my cousin embraced a religion different from my own. He met a classmate from Malaysia while attending graduate school and their friendship grew into a marriage relationship. As part of that journey, my cousin converted to Islam, the faith of his wife. Another member of my family expressed a strong attraction toward Buddhism. I quickly realized that I had much to learn about connecting in meaningful ways with those who have a very different worldview from my own.

In this issue of *Ministry*, Scott Griswold gives special attention to the challenge and opportunity we have in sharing Jesus with Buddhists. Scott and his family accepted a long-term assignment to serve in a country where most of the people are

Buddhists and has devoted much time and energy to studying Buddhism with the goal of understanding the Buddhist worldview and learning how to share Jesus with them. We hope that this article will act as a

HIS TESTIMONY HAS INSPIRED AND MOTIVATED ME TO SHARE THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS CHRIST WITH THOSE AROUND ME.

catalyst to promote healthy dialogue. As always, we welcome your feedback and constructive suggestions at feedback@ministrymagazine.org. We also welcome your manuscripts on building bridges of love and understanding with members of other world religions. You can submit your manuscript via our Web site, www.ministrymagazine.org.

One thing is certain: whether living in the 10/40 Window or ministering to our non-Christian neighbors, Christopher Sorensen was right in his assertion "to know and love Jesus personally and supremely is essential." 

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Sharing Jesus with Buddhists

The comment of my Cambodian friend startled me: “When I was fleeing during the war, I ran into a Catholic church. There I saw the figure of Jesus twisted on the cross, and I was shocked to learn that Christians worship this man. How could they even respect someone who obviously had such terrible karma?”

My friend looked at Jesus through Buddhist eyes, assuming His suffering was from something bad He’d done in a previous life. This one man’s confusion points us to the millions of Buddhists who either don’t know anything about Jesus or have serious misunderstandings about Him.

Tens of thousands of men shave their heads, don orange robes, and devote themselves as monks to the Buddhist path of good deeds and meditation. They hope, someday, to escape the cycle of suffering and rebirth. Millions of laypeople join in varying degrees. In many Asian countries Buddhism is reviving and growing, and in the West, people are turning to Buddhism in unprecedented numbers.

Would you like to know how to share Jesus in a way that Buddhists can understand, appreciate, and come to believe in Him?

Barriers to Buddhists believing

First, it’s important to know what makes it difficult for Buddhists to believe in Jesus. One major barrier is the belief system of Buddhists. While Buddhism has many good moral teachings, at its core lies the belief that one can be saved by one’s own works. The teaching of an eternal, supreme, personal, and loving God, such as the Bible presents, is left out. Concepts about life, death, and personhood defined in terms of karma, rebirth, and nirvana add to the confusion that makes it difficult to understand who Jesus is and why He is needed.

Another barrier includes the reality that many Buddhists live in countries where all their family members and neighbors are Buddhists. Becoming a Christian can feel like a betrayal of family and country.

Often Buddhists are prejudiced against Christianity. They see it as a religion that is less moral and less spiritual than Buddhism, and sometimes this happens because of Christians nearby whose lives do not represent Jesus. Other times it is because Buddhists associate Christianity with the West, including its politics and seemingly selfish materialism or even the immorality and violence of the movies produced there.

Christian witnesses among Buddhists must often face the challenge of freezing, rugged mountains, congested cities, difficult languages, or repressive governments. Christians have not taken this mission field seriously enough and so the sin and laziness of God’s people is another barrier to the gospel reaching Buddhists.

Beyond all of this, evil spirits fight against the knowledge of God, and the natural human heart is simply not inclined towards Jesus.

So how can we get past these barriers and better present Jesus Christ to Buddhists? Jesus clearly answers our question in His promise of the Holy Spirit as the means for taking His gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This is not a simplistic statement that ends in a quick prayer for the Holy Spirit and a return to searching elsewhere for some special method for reaching Buddhists. We must search the Bible to know the Holy Spirit’s ways and apply them to Buddhist people. Here are some principles I found helpful in reaching Buddhists for Jesus.

The power of the Holy Spirit and prayer

The Bible clearly teaches that a miracle of the Holy Spirit is

necessary for anyone (including a Buddhist) to come to trust in Jesus as the only eternal and divine Savior (Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2:11–16).

If we truly believe that God alone can reveal Jesus to Buddhists, then prayer will be our greatest priority and method. By prayer and dependence on His Father, Jesus did His works of ministry, and after the disciples prayed, the Holy Spirit came and thousands were led to Christ.

To be truly effective in presenting Christ to Buddhists, we must pray for a miracle of revelation by the Holy Spirit in every attempt to witness. Prayers of dependence will permeate every other method.

The Christlike character of the messenger

The admirable character of Jesus attracted many people. Kindness and generosity, justice and mercy, peacefulness and devotion were combined in a very attractive balance. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, they had “favor with all the people,” “gladness and simplicity of heart,” and shared whatever they had with those in need (Acts 2:44–47, NKJV). Buddhists will be drawn to Jesus as His character is seen in true Christians.

Part of the attraction for Buddhists is that many Christian qualities match the values their religion teaches. Compassion and moral purity are significant aspects in the character of Buddha. The sacrifice of position and power is a major part of Buddha’s story and demonstrated by monks who give up marriage, personal possessions, and entertainment to live a simple life seeking enlightenment. Many lay Buddhists give generously of their time and money to various causes. Millions of Buddha images portray Buddha in various positions of complete calm. Serious Buddhists discipline themselves, not to be controlled by any desire or situation.

All of these qualities can be vividly seen in Jesus and will be

attractive to the searching Buddhist. This is especially true when the ones telling the Jesus story live that story and exemplify His life. Jesus, in particular, highlighted loving unity as a quality by which the world would know He was the special One sent by God (John 17:21, 23).

This was further verified by a study of many young people who attended the Christian school Chiang Mai Adventist Academy in Thailand. Buddhist students who became Christians reported that they came to believe in Jesus primarily through contact with various caring Christians, especially their teachers. Christlike character was a significant reason for their attraction to Jesus.¹ We should seek to demonstrate Christ’s love in our attitudes, words, and compassionate deeds.

Victory through Jesus

Many Buddhists seek for spiritual power. Shrines and idols, including Buddha images, Hindu gods, and local spirits can be often seen in the homes and towns of Buddhists. Encounters with ghosts and spirits are commonly reported. These beliefs and experiences of the supernatural mean that many Buddhists are open to a similar possibility in relation to Jesus through His miracles.

One of the first ways Jesus revealed Himself was through miracles of healing or deliverance from evil spirits. A survey of the book of Acts also reveals that the Holy Spirit often moved the gospel forward through such miracles.

We can pray for and expect miracles from God in order to reach Buddhists today. Christians in many places are seeing Buddhists converted as they pray for their problems and teach them to ask God for help. One study of 259 people, primarily from Buddhist backgrounds, showed that “the majority, 48.4 percent, of Buddhists who have become Christians indicated that their personal experience with God was the main factor for their decision to accept Christ as their Savior.”²

God gives miracles in many forms. He protects, heals, sends dreams, gives victory over spirits and temptations, provides jobs, and solves family conflicts. Every time I offer to pray for Buddhists, I find they eagerly agree. Buddhists are searching for power and we have the privilege of helping them see Jesus through stories and present-day experiences of His miracles.

Unveiling truth progressively

As witnesses for Jesus, we have much to say. We know Jesus as a Teacher, Healer, Exorcist, a compassionate Friend, radical Reformer, Prophet, the Savior from sin, a mediating Priest, Creator, and the eternal God. We cannot say all this at once and so we must choose what to reveal and when. One of the Holy Spirit’s methods is to present truth progressively, starting with what the audience can appreciate and moving towards the more difficult to understand or believe. Jesus stated it like this, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12, 13, NKJV).

The Gospel of Mark demonstrates this when it introduces Jesus, bit by bit, showing Him preaching, casting out evil spirits, and healing the sick (Mark 1). Jesus does not announce His identity as the Son of God and the Christ. In fact, when evil spirits say that He is the Son of God, He makes them be quiet (3:11, 12). When the disciples declare Jesus as the Christ, He warns them not to tell anyone (8:29, 30).

By the end of Mark, Jesus’ identity as the Son of God and Savior is clear. The Father Himself declares that Jesus is His beloved Son (9:7). The centurion could see the same even when Jesus was on the cross (15:39). According to Mark’s presentation, Jesus revealed His identity progressively.

Below is a progression I have found to be logical to some Buddhists I have worked with:

1. Jesus as Miracle-Worker
2. Jesus as Teacher of Morality
3. Jesus and His Admirable Character
4. Jesus as Teacher Regarding the Living God
5. Jesus as Creator
6. Jesus as Judge
7. Jesus as Savior

Buddhists can quite easily understand and appreciate many of Jesus' character qualities, actions, and teachings that are familiar to their values (steps 1–3). Some examples include His purity and compassion in dealing with the woman caught in adultery, His calm in the face of persecution and storms, and His self-sacrifice at the cross.

Parables of Jesus that have some similar emphases to Buddhism are the seed and the four soils, the wheat and the tares, hidden treasure, the pearl of great price (all in Matt. 13), the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), and the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25).

Focusing on these areas first makes it easier for Buddhists to believe the truths about His divinity and saving power (steps 4–7).

While emphasizing what is familiar to them, we must steadily help them move to a fuller understanding of Christ's completely unique ability to save. Jesus was not another Buddha seeking enlightenment in His incarnation and that must become clear. This will happen as we share the fuller story and as we pray for the Holy Spirit to open minds and hearts to understanding and belief.

Proclaiming the Word with power and love

Some Buddhists simply view Jesus as a good man. Other Buddhists see Him as another Buddha, or a Bodhisattva—an enlightened being who has power to help people. In general, Buddhists are likely to be very inclusive in their beliefs. They may put up a statue or picture of Jesus along with their Buddha image and a Hindu god. They are likely to be surprised or even offended to hear a

Christian declare Jesus to be the only way for salvation.

When we meet a Buddhist who has an incorrect view of Jesus we must care enough to tell him the truth. We know that a time of final deception regarding Jesus will come. Satan himself will appear as Christ and deceive many. Like Peter, Paul, and others, we must be ready to defend the truth about Jesus based on the solid evidence of prophecies, history, and transformed lives (Acts 2:14–39; 3:12–26; 4:8–12, 19, 20; 5:29–32).

At the same time, we must recognize that good apologetics and explanations are not sufficient to generate faith. For this, God has promised the Holy Spirit to empower the proclamation of the Word (1 Cor. 2:4; Matt. 10:19, 20). Our confidence must never be in our logic but in what the Holy Spirit can do. In all our answers to Buddhists, we must have a prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit empowers preaching, the words are spoken not only with boldness, but with deep love.³ Paul said, "Remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31, NKJV).

This means that in answering Buddhists' questions, we should be in earnest while determinedly avoiding a proud, combative spirit. Most Buddhists are taught to have a calm, peaceful spirit and can easily be turned away by heated speeches. Many dissertations have been written to show the value of approaching Buddhists with a meek spirit.⁴

True Christian compassion will seek to answer one's needs rather than just intellectual questions. One of the most effective ways I have found for, confidently yet gently, helping Buddhists believe is by sharing stories of what God has done for me in areas that are relevant to their struggles.⁵

Lifting Jesus on the cross

Through various means the Holy Spirit draws Buddhists to Christ. Take

conversion, for example. This is also the work of the Holy Spirit.

The biblical records show that Jesus' death and resurrection were seen by the majority only after they knew Him as miraculous Healer, Teacher, and as a compassionate Person. So also, we find it easier to share Jesus as Savior with Buddhists once they've come to appreciate His teachings, power, and character. If we will share His life of perfection and communicate clearly who He was before His incarnation, it will be easier for them to understand that Jesus died for the sins of others, not His own bad karma.

However, the story of the Cross itself truly does have a great drawing power for Buddhists (John 12:32). I was visiting a layman in a Buddhist temple in Thailand. He was very humble and had committed himself totally to Buddhism. I wanted very much to share Jesus with him, but my Thai language was too limited. Imagine my surprise, when he, seeing my attempt, began to speak about Jesus on the cross. "Whenever I'm angry at someone," he said, "I think of Jesus on the cross. As I contemplate the way He did not get angry at the soldiers, but instead forgave them, all my anger melts away."

We should tell the story of the cross to Buddhists by emphasizing Jesus' character, connecting it to characteristics they highly value. His compassion can be seen in how He treated the sorrowing women and the dying thief. His self-control and patience can be seen in His silence and peacefulness under the verbal attacks of the religious leaders and the physical torture. His care for His mother while He was in pain will also be significant to those who highly value honoring their parents. His complete sacrifice of self will be especially appealing.

We must also focus on grace and forgiveness. Though this may be intellectually difficult for a Buddhist to accept, real spiritual and emotional need can open the door to understanding. One weekend I met a Buddhist man who had come

for the first time to church. He had experienced a stroke and was partly paralyzed. I watched the tears stream down his face as he heard about Jesus' death and how He could forgive any sin. This man had been involved in terrible crimes, in particular the trafficking of children into prostitution. He felt that his paralysis was because of his sins and eagerly grasped at the hope of forgiveness through Jesus' mercy. Likewise, many other Buddhists have found hope and eternal life through the presentation of Jesus as our Substitute.

However, many Buddhists think that the idea of the forgiveness of sins is too easy, even immoral. They see many Christians glibly continuing on in a lifestyle of sin while claiming God's forgiveness. We must share the full gospel that includes repentance and transformation. Baptism is a death of self and a rising to new life (Rom. 6, Gal. 2:20, and 2 Cor. 5:14–21). These deep truths of the Cross will speak to Buddhists,


who are seeking to die to selfishness and achieve purity.

In general, the story of Jesus on the cross is an attractive story for Buddhists. We should tell it often, weaving the various parts of the story in ways that will speak to the interests and needs of the Buddhists to whom we are talking. We must invite them to ask God for forgiveness and a new life. Jesus can be known as Savior among them as we rely on the Holy Spirit and move forward to share the wonderful story.

Conclusion

So much beauty exists in the person of Jesus that is extremely special and necessary for Buddhists. There are many connections to Buddhist values through which they can come to appreciate Him, and so much resides in Jesus that Buddhists are searching for.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can earnestly pray, seek to show His character in our lives and

churches, then boldly and lovingly tell the truth about our Teacher, Miracle-Worker, God, and Savior. The Holy Spirit will surely reveal Jesus as their Christ, resulting in salvation for many Buddhists. 

- 1 Surachet Insom, "A Comparative Study Between the Teaching and Compassion Model of Jesus With Buddhists in Thailand" (PhD thesis, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2008).
- 2 Khamsay Petchareun, "Presenting the Gospel Message in Thailand" (PhD thesis, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, U.S.A., June 2005), 96.
- 3 "After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were so filled with love for Him and for those for whom He died, that hearts were melted by the words they spoke and the prayers they offered. They spoke in the power of the Spirit; and under the influence of that power, thousands were converted." Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 22.
- 4 Nantachai Meajudhon, *Meekness: A New Approach to Christian Witness to the Thai People* (DMiss Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1997); Ubolwan Mejudhon, *The Way of Meekness: Being Christian and Thai in the Thai Way* (DMiss dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1997).
- 5 "Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience.... These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 347.

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The role of repentance in revival and reformation

Often we find it hard to see our own condition when we are hiding in our comfort zone. King Zedekiah wanted to heed the counsel of Jeremiah, but he was too concerned with how his officials looked at him to make any change in his life (see Jer. 38; 39).

Change is inevitable. The world we live in changes rapidly, and the same can be said about our lives. The problem for most of us is realizing that we need change and finding the power to make that change.

One change we all desperately need comes as a result of repentance. Ministers can do all the right things and run successful church programs, yet deep down in their hearts, they know they lack spiritual vitality, and they long to be revived.

Repentance comes from the realization that no matter who we are and what we do, without a deep relationship with our Creator, we are no better than an unbeliever. When we humbly come before God, we will be moved to open ourselves to Him and allow Him to see our innermost

thoughts. When we are willing to surrender and invite Him to change us, repentance will occur.

We must realize, however, that repentance is a painful process, especially if we have not had a genuine spirit of repentance for a while. But isn't that what revival and reformation is really about—a changed heart and changed life?

— DANIEL JIAO WRITES FROM HONG KONG.

Revival
and
REFORMATION

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Coping with antagonists in the church

Pastor, that was the worst sermon I have ever heard you preach.” Have you ever experienced this kind of discouraging comment or something similar? Because individuals who operate under an “antagonistic” flag seem to exist in the majority of church groups, pastors who are anxious to learn ways to handle these awkward situations, induced by persons with strong opinions, will need assistance. Author Kenneth C. Haugk defines antagonists as “individuals who on the basis of nonsubstantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others.”¹

Any pastor who has served for several years in pastoral ministry understands the trauma of living in the atmosphere of these kinds of contenders. Most pastors would not ordinarily ask for more of these antagonists in their congregations, although these members may, surprisingly, have good intentions. I was told, in a pastoral administration class, to create conflicts once in a while because when the dust eventually settles, there will be greater peace in the congregation. This should not be confused with destructive conflicts often generated by different shades of antagonists.

I believe strongly that such works as Kenneth C. Haugk’s classic *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal With Destructive Conflict* and G. Lloyd Rediger’s *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* will assist pastors and other church leaders who are challenged with this bitter, but unavoidable, pill in pastoral ministry. These materials are recommended for those who want to understand the underpinnings of antagonists, how these individuals could be understood and dealt with, and the incidences reduced to a minimum.

My interactions with a few of these “suspected” antagonists, in my more than 15 years in pastoral ministry, have taught me some enduring and endearing lessons. Beyond the occasional relational bumps and brushes with them, there are some religious values to be gained. In this article, I will focus primarily on my interactions with some of these antagonists, the lessons learned from their activities, and how pastors have dealt with problems especially from the African perspective.

Origin of antagonists

The first antagonist can be identified as the devil prior to his fall. He exhibited one of the qualities

mentioned by Haugk when he went out of his way to make insatiable demands and then attacked the person and the person’s performance. In this case, the person was God.

Ellen White portrays how Jesus had to plead with Lucifer to drop his agenda of trying to torpedo the congregation of heaven. But, like many antagonists, all the overtures of Christ did not stop Lucifer. Author Al Maxey confirmed this when he posited that “most psychologists will readily acknowledge that the majority of aggressive antagonists are so obsessed with their cause that attempts to reason with them generally prove futile. They are right, and you are wrong . . . Period.”² For the hard-core antagonists,³ which I believe Lucifer was, Haugk believes that they “cannot be reasoned with because they lack the emotional stability to understand.”⁴ Maxey suggests that these antagonists are “Satan’s most effective workers!”⁵

Description of antagonists

Twenty “red flags” that identify a potential antagonist are listed in Haugk’s book. Those that have played out clearly in my ministry are the following: *nameless other* flag, *predecessor downer* flag, *church*

hopper flag, *note taker* flag, and the *flashing money* flag.

The *nameless other* flag refers to a situation where a potential antagonist expresses an ill opinion about a pastor, tells the leader that “some other” (unnamed) people also have the same opinion about him or her but will not give you their names.

The *predecessor downer* flag refers to those individuals who will come to you as the new pastor who has just moved into a congregation and begin a litany of the predecessor’s shortcomings, whitewashing you with praises that you are not like your predecessor. This kind of flag tries to malign and destroy your predecessor and, in turn, adjudge you as the maverick who will fix things in the interest of all.

The *church hopper* flag refers to members who hop from church to church. They are never content to stay in any one church for a definite and lengthy period of time. This composes one of the most easily observed flags of a potential church antagonist.

Naturally, the *note taker* flag includes those who are always taking notes even at a time when people may be relaxing or listening to a discussion. Usually, they believe that such documents will assist them when they decide to nail the victim some day. In our contemporary high-tech world, such potential antagonists may use their mobile phones to record discussions among people just to have “some evidence” for ditching the pastor.

The *flashing money* flag deals with members who give publicly in the church or for other needs that may have been promoted in the church or other places. This flag gets very close to ministers when they accept financial benefits from such people. In fact, beyond the possibility of an antagonist’s attack on pastors when the member has given some financial aid to them, there lies the possibility of gagging their mouths.

Given the possible volatile confrontations with antagonists, those

who deal with them must be as wise as the serpent and as gentle as the dove. Christ displayed this wisdom often, knowing that to antagonize was but to harden, and thus He refrained from direct conflict.⁶ For example, Jesus did not want to confront Judas publicly, though His utterances notified Judas that he was the one whom Christ had just talked about. At another time, in order “to avoid useless conflict with the leaders at Jerusalem, He had restricted His labors to Galilee.”⁷

Lessons from the activities of church antagonists

Although antagonists cause untold pain and heartache in many churches, we can learn some veritable life-impacting lessons from their activities and presence. I will describe these lessons with four *Ps*, namely, *prayer*, *preparation*, *patience*, and *persistence*.

Prayer. Reality indicates that we draw closer to God in prayer when we are assailed and confronted with various shades of perils and discomforts. Thus, the possibility that an antagonist may be waiting for me in today’s church service or board meeting should propel me to spend more time with God in prayer for the necessary grace to cope with and handle what may surface. In this connection, we would agree with Jesus when He counseled us to pray for “our enemies” while we have the innate assurance that God, who sees our innermost beings, will shield us from any danger. According to Alfred Tennyson, “more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”⁸ Really, when we “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens” us (Phil. 4:13, NKJV), including patiently bearing with a potential antagonist.

As we observed earlier, the need to “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44) cannot

be overemphasized. An Igbo proverb says that he who is carrying nothing on his head does not break anything. Put differently, it doesn’t matter how much an antagonist will harass you, if your hands are clean, you will come out unscathed. In this way, prayer prepares us to show a high level of tolerance and also prepares our hearts to handle any nonsense that may come from a potential rival. But, however we may look at it, we will concede that dealing with an antagonist becomes dangerous, and, as such, we should be very prayerful.

In his book, *The Incredible Power of Prayer*, Roger Morneau⁹ perceptively notes that every problem is a call for prayer: marriage breakdown, deviant children, lull in business, unbridled consumption of liquor, poor financial management, and the possible attack of an antagonist. I agree fully with Ellen White that “without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path.”¹⁰ I think that we can all be grateful to antagonists if the possibility of their attack will help us to be constantly on our knees.

Preparation. In my very first pastoral experience after graduation, I encountered someone whom I considered as a potential antagonist. Because of his constant prying and tricky questions aimed at tripping me, I learned the wisdom of preparing very well before my church business and board meetings—to read my presentations over and over, making sure that figures were agreeing and congruent with the mandate of the church body. During this time, I could easily tell how various sections of the *Church Manual* relate to church situations. A natural outgrowth of my adequate preparation was the fact that I bid farewell to a greenhorn’s administrative phobia. That translated into confidence, a quality I consider very important for a good leader. In that sense, I could say thank you to that perceived antagonist in that semiurban church where I began my ministry.

Patience. One day, a perceived antagonist pestered me so much with a needless question that I found my patience was being stretched to its limits. The more I tried to answer, the more he insisted, “that is not what I mean,” and I actually got exasperated enough to make a couple of unpleasant remarks. An antagonist will be pleased to achieve that kind of response. At such times, when potential antagonists want to upset you with their antics, remember that patience and calmness in your responses can make the difference.

These kinds of antagonists actually wait for you to make some careless or unpastoral comments on which they want to capitalize to legitimize their arguments. Antagonists look forward to any day when they have the opportunity to discredit a pastor publicly. Ellen G. White recommended silence or singing when “the patience of the most patient” is severely tested, and we are tempted to respond harshly to nasty comments about us. In context, she was speaking about a husband or wife who may “utter words that are liable to provoke a hasty reply.” She counseled, “Let the one who is spoken to keep silent.”¹¹ A great deal of patience will be needed to accomplish this. Someone has observed that anger could be defined as *one letter short of danger*.

Moses has been considered to be the meekest man who ever lived. However, we must not forget that during the wilderness journeys, following the exodus from Egypt, his patience was severely tested by his brethren and his own siblings. In one of those times, his siblings, Miriam and Aaron, “spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married” (Num. 12:1). Beyond the accusation above, they also accused Moses of thinking too much of himself: “Has the Lord indeed spoken only to

Moses? Has He not spoken by us? And the Lord heard it” (v. 2).

This kind of antagonism is typical of practicing antagonists today. Did Moses not have the right to marry the woman of his choice? Did he make himself to be the spokesperson of God? The definition of antagonists by Kenneth C. Haugk is instructive here: “individuals who on the basis of *nonsubstantive evidence*, go out of their way to make *insatiable demands*, usually *attacking the person or performance of others*.”¹²


Sometimes the way we respond to antagonists will assist a great deal in protecting other parishioners who must also face the frequent scathing remarks of antagonists.

Persistence. The presence of antagonists in the church prompts a pastor to persist against all the odds. I was once harassed by an antagonist because I had made some alterations to the program format of most of our meetings and church services. Because of my persistence to what I considered was right, I won the hearts of many in the church who saw the bickering as unnecessary and baseless. And with them on my side, God helped me to accomplish more in that church because I did not back down from the issue at hand. Good ministerial training becomes vital for the overall success of a pastor in the face of antagonists’ attacks. The essence of such training is brought out clearer when an interaction between a pastor and a potential contender occurs. My argument then is that the presence of an antagonist, while it may tend to frustrate the efforts of a pastor, will eventually make the minister come out burnished like gold that has gone through the fire process.

Conclusion

Often when we see a practicing antagonist in our board or business meetings, our hearts tend to jump into our mouths, and we begin to

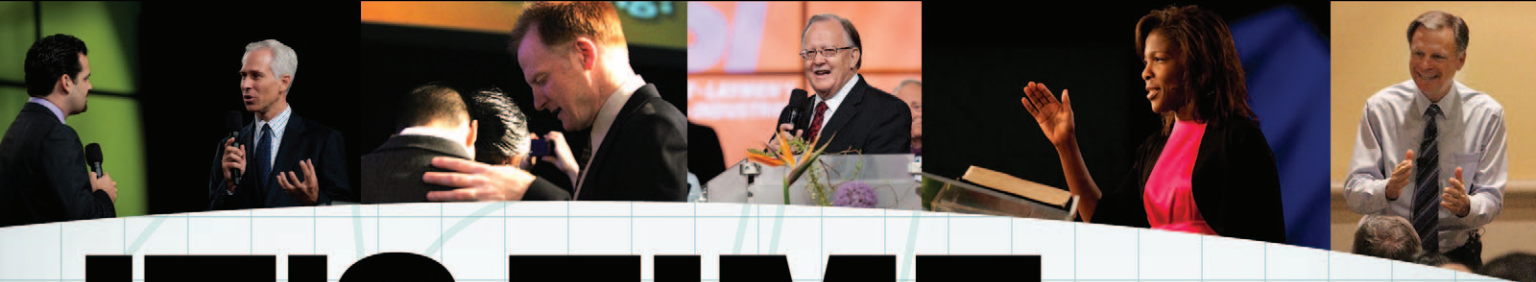
gripe and whine, wondering why the “pest” is here again. Whereas I dreaded these potential and practicing antagonists before, and whereas these were not the best moments for me or any pastor, nonetheless we can gain some virtues from those interactions. In my ministry, antagonists have propelled me to be more prayerful, helped me to prepare well before coming to meetings, exhibit more patience in ministry, and become more persistent in maintaining what is biblically right. An added benefit has been that antagonists have aided me to be more professional and awakened me to the realization that I have to protect other parishioners from their destructive tendencies.

Therefore, the next time you identify antagonists among your congregation, while you agonizingly cope with them, you will realize that they have helped you to develop some qualities that you previously did not have. Antagonists can really, and do normally, aggravate people in a faith community, but we can be grateful to antagonists in the midst of their often cantankerous attitudes, for they have helped us to realize that this world does not qualify as our home after all. 

- 1 Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal With Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 21, 22.
- 2 See Al Maxey’s *Murmuring Members* article at http://www.gracecentered.com/murmuring_church_members.htm (accessed August 15, 2010).
- 3 Kenneth Haugk, has divided antagonists into three categories, namely hard-core, major, and moderate. In his words, hard-core antagonists “tend to have incredible tenacity and an unbelievable desire to make trouble.” The major antagonists essentially are those who refuse to be reasoned with, while the moderate antagonists are those who are not willing to make trouble. This group also lacks the perseverance of the other two.
- 4 Haugk, 29.
- 5 Maxey.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Education*, 92.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 450.
- 8 See *Dictionary of Quotations* (Scotland: Geddes & Grosset), 222.
- 9 Roger Morneau, *The Incredible Power of Prayer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1997), 74–81.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *A Call to Stand Apart*, 27.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, 442.
- 12 Haugk, 21, 22.

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Planting churches that multiply: Six biblical steps

At the end of my first year in ministry, my conference president looked at the vast geographic territory assigned to me and suggested I “start a new church in one of the unentered towns.” With the involvement of members from the two existing churches in my district, we planted another. Forty years later, having planted more than 20 Adventist churches and equipped hundreds of planting teams around the world, I have learned to follow a six-step process for planting churches that multiply. This process is based on Jesus’ final commission (Matt. 28) and His kingdom parables (Mark 4) that provide models for equipping disciples (Luke 10), His injunction to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1), and His humility and sacrifice as the Model for life and church (Phil. 2).

When Jesus commanded His disciples to “ ‘make disciples of all nations’ ” (Matt. 28:18–20, NIV), He was speaking not only of *nations* as we define them today, but also of the multiple relational streams found in every society. In today’s world, there are diverse relational streams, including work and social networks. While the parable of the four soils affirms that *good soil* produces a *multiplying crop* (Mark 4:8), the parable of the

fields of *growing seed* suggests process (vv. 4:26–29).

The empty field becomes the seeded field; the growing field sprouts, the crop grows “all by itself,” until it becomes the harvest field. At harvest times, Middle Eastern farmers gathered the crop for food and market, but kept the best seeds

to sow and multiply in the next season. Together with the principles enunciated in Luke 10:1–24, the fields suggest a six-step process to plant new churches that multiply (figure 1).¹

The six-step process² begins with entering an *empty field*, maybe a new community, a new neighborhood, an

Figure 1: The six-step process to plant multiplying churches



unentered city, family members not connected to God, or friends disconnected from church. In an Adventist context, the wise planter consults with the local conference president, outlining plans and seeking counsel.

Step 1: Pray for the harvest and workers

Jesus instructed disciples to work in teams. Teams provide encouragement, protect reputations, negate individualism, and represent our God whose fellowship we seek to introduce.

The first step includes learning to pray regularly and naturally, for focused and passionate prayer opens us to God's intentions and activity in the harvest. While seeking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, engaged in prayer, and walking and listening in the community (on the streets, in shopping centers and homes), we become aware of the potential harvest and the need for more harvesters. Reading through the book of Acts together will inspire the team and encourage them to invite unchurched friends to participate.

Step 2: Connect with key people in relational stream

The second step involves some preparation. How would you describe the *empty field* God has called you to work? Who are the people you wish to reach? Demographic census data, research, visitation, or interviews will identify community needs and key people receptive to the Holy Spirit. Jesus described these as *persons of peace* (Luke 10:5–7), hospitable and receptive people with reputation (good or bad), and influence.

Jesus said to connect to such people. "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (Luke 10:8, 9, NIV). Jesus connected by relating to the wants and needs of people. Today this may involve community dinners, meals for dislocated people, safe homes for at-risk girls or women, children's fun activities, health workshops,

fitness activities, walking groups, drug or alcohol rehabilitation support programs, or Bible seminars—which will each appeal to some.

The wisdom of eating the food of others cannot be underestimated. Sharing food helps develop trust, explores varied cultures, forges new relationships, and discerns new experiences. Around food, the deepest hurts are disclosed, giving opportunities for healing through listening, appropriate touch and prayer, and using nonreligious, everyday language. At this point you are able to communicate with others, taking into account their worldview in terms of the reality of God. Jesus said, "And as you heal . . . tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (Luke 10:9, NLT). In the language of His time, this was a call to repentance.

The choice of seed and how the sowing takes place is critical in the process of church planting. Of the four verses on the parable of *growing seed*, two deal with how the seed grows: "Night and day, whether he [the sower] sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head" (Mark 4:27, 28, NIV).

How can the seed be sown to ensure that we do not interfere in the spiritual growth of those with whom we share the gospel? How can we share so that people do not become dependent upon us? The steps the church planting core team takes at this point will impact the type of harvest gathered as well as whether the new church multiplies or becomes a burden, demanding the resources of the denomination. The next three steps in planting relate to these *sowing, growing, and harvesting* fields.

Step 3: Sow to grow and multiply

If we act as expert teachers, the *students* may become dependent, waiting to be fed information. The

perception is conveyed that years of instruction are needed before they can share their faith. However, if they experience how to read and discover God's Word for themselves under the instruction of the Holy Spirit, they are equipped to share and multiply this good news into their relational streams, even before they make a full commitment as Christ's followers!

If the *persons of peace* already know about Jesus Christ and are ready to explore the basic beliefs of the Christian faith, reading the Gospel of John and using discussion questions is an excellent starting point. However, many today know little or nothing about Jesus, and in such cases, it has been found that the Gospel of Mark opens the way for them to learn of Jesus and share His story with their relational streams.

Building relationships with *persons of peace* to the point where you can invite them to begin reading one of the Gospels may not take long. In fact, experience shows it is best to sow early in the relationship. Begin by doing the following:

1. Showing the places or sites where they could buy or download a Bible.
2. Revealing the value of reading together with their friends or family.
3. Reading one story or chapter at a time.
4. Using simple discussion questions in a bookmark form or on their mobile devices.

Such group reading should lead to the discovery of the following:

- What is new to us?
- What do we not like?
- What do we not understand?
- What will we apply to our lives?
- Who will we share with, and what will we share?

Indicate that you will be in touch to find out what they are discovering and to read other stories about Jesus. You should recognize the importance

of not imposing yourself or trying to control them. The seed is the story of Jesus, and you are following a process by which the Holy Spirit can cultivate growth “all by itself” whether you are awake or asleep!

Step 4: Grow people by entrusting them to the Holy Spirit

Unless in a country or place where it is extremely difficult to buy or download a Bible, give people the freedom and responsibility to do this themselves. Remember, *persons of peace* usually take the initiative and they could be key to reaching and planting a church within their relational streams. Mentor and encourage these key people, even before they come to Jesus. Call, visit, and spend time eating and sharing life with them. Learn of their progress and model Bible reading, spiritual discovery, and personal application but do not take over as the expert teacher, making them dependent.

Here is an approach that has proved effective. When you visit,

- Ask how their Bible reading of the Gospel of Mark is going. What have they discovered that they have applied to life or shared with another? How are those in their circle of influence reacting to their journey of spiritual discovery?
- Sow more gospel seed by reading another story about Jesus. Explain that the Bible says there are “elementary teachings about Christ” (Heb. 6:1–3)—repentance, faith, baptisms, “laying on of hands,” resurrection, and judgment; and you would like to read stories that explore these. For example, at your first visit, you could read the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) or the woman of Samaria (John 4:1–42) to discuss *repentance*—the first elementary teaching.

Again follow a discovery rather than academic-study approach.

Invite one person to read the story or chapter. Then have another re-read the whole story, maybe from another translation if one is available. This can be followed by one of the group re-telling the story in his or her words and sharing what he or she has discovered. Finally, ask one question: What does this tell you about repentance (or the elementary teaching being explored in that visit)? Almost no comment is needed from you, and the visit can end with simple prayer in conversational language.

Week by week the group will read the Gospel and you will visit to explore stories from the life of Jesus and whole chapters as they relate to the elementary teachings of Jesus Christ. As they grow, you could suggest other chapters on prayer (Luke 11:1–13), receiving the Holy Spirit (John 14:1–23), the second coming of Jesus (Matt. 24), or His relationship to the Sabbath (John 5 or 9; 10). Be sure to inquire about their relationship to Jesus. Discuss regularly as to how the story of Jesus is impacting their lives and that of their friends. It may not take long for the Holy Spirit to convict them to follow Jesus—usually at about this stage in their journey people ask to be baptized.

When they are ready to explore the Bible doctrines of Adventism, suggest they read the Gospel of John since it covers all the fundamentals. Small group Bible classes or evangelistic seminars will assist new believers with answers to specific questions, clarifying concerns, and allaying fears. While all care must be taken to ensure that new believers are not made dependent, such programs of teaching have been found to help gather new believers into new churches, especially when scheduled for times when they plan for the new group of believers to gather as a church.

Step 5: Gather people within their relational streams

As disciples grow, they seek to gather. This is the meaning of

the word *church*—gathering of disciples. Involve everyone (core team members, *persons of peace*, and unchurched friends) in discussing what this gathering may look like. Explore what Jesus said about giving “the keys of the kingdom” to His church (Matt. 16:15–19). Discuss the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37), the beginnings of the Antioch church (Acts 11:19–26), and Paul’s desire for participatory worship in Corinth (1 Cor. 14:26).

Together, determine the place of food, fellowship, participation, conversation, encouragement, reading, and discussion of the Word of God, prayer, praise, care, healing, witness, and growth. These are key elements for a simple multiplying gathering or church. The place where people gather will also impact significantly who will be involved and whether a church multiplies. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of continuing to meet in one of the homes where groups have been forming up until now. What about other homes? What about outdoors? Are there other convenient community facilities that could be used for group meetings at little or no cost? Could a local café be used for prayer and planning meetings?

Determining functional structures together provides further opportunities for equipping. How will legal and ethical responsibilities for safe places, working with children, and insurance be processed? Who will take responsibility for funds, including tithes and offerings, being returned to the conference? Will *conversational leadership* continue to serve the gathering church well?

Of course, none of the journey in planting a new Adventist church takes place in isolation. Wise conference leaders and the pastor or key leaders from a supporting “grandparent” church take opportunities to be with the core team in connecting with *persons of peace* and those coming to faith. They will not come to casually look but, as Christian leaders, affirm the journey of spiritual growth and encourage

a growing movement of new faith communities or church plants. The core team will also invite their friends to appropriate events sponsored by the local conference or union. Regional worship days, annual Bible conventions (like camp meetings), church planting summits, or equipping events provide particularly dynamic environments for networking with the wider church family and connecting with the “sisterhood” of Adventist churches.

All planters are encouraged to know how the local conference organizes new plants and churches. Because most church plants are not *isolated believers*, conferences may not use what is called *company status*; but at the appropriate time arrange for the plant to move direct to *organized church* status within the “sisterhood” of conference churches. However, this process differs according to the decisions of local conference leaders and executive committees.


Step 6: Multiply quickly through reproducible processes

Harvest leads to planting again, in order to reap an additional harvest. This is not a haphazard process. Healthy churches intentionally multiply. They identify and foster simple, organic, and reproducible processes. The new believers are connected with new *relational streams* into which the gospel can be sown.

New churches are tempted to want to grow larger, to become like *other churches*. However, getting bigger does not equate with being healthy. The time is ripe for this new gathering of believers to read the book of Acts again. Let the story of the Antioch church becoming a multiplying movement reveal God’s desire for all churches (Acts 13:1–4). Discuss how the apostle Paul planted two churches in Philippi within weeks (Acts 16:6–34) and multiple churches in Corinth (Acts 18:1–18; cf. Rom. 16:1). Consider

how Paul multiplied leaders and faith communities right across the Roman province of Asia from the church in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–22), and apply these principles.

A picture of God

The church is *the body* of Christ. Church plants are to reflect His heart and attitude. Because Jesus was “in very nature God,” He chose a path of humiliation and death for He considered the interests of others above His own so that God would be exalted. Those “united with Christ” and in “fellowship with the Spirit” will share this same “attitude” (NIV) or “mind” (RSV) (see Phil. 2:1–11). This *master story* provides the ultimate frame for how new churches will relate, serve, organize, structure, worship, fellowship—and multiply. 

- 1 For the concept of the Four Fields I am indebted to Nathan and Kari Shank, *Reproducing Churches Using Simple Tools*, 2007.
- 2 For a more detailed description of these steps, see Peter Roennfeldt, *Planting Churches That Multiply*, www.newchurchlife.com, 2011.

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A revival in relationships

In the upper room, just before the Crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34, 35, NKJV).

Revival and reformation will elude us unless we internalize the new commandment of love that draws its power and clarity from Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. This power will transform our relationships with our spouses, children, neighbors, and coworkers, demonstrating to the

world that we are the people of God.

According to the Greek philosopher Socrates, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” What in our lives do we need to reexamine today? Are our relationships able to pass the test of the New Testament ethic of love? Do we love unconditionally like Jesus? Will our spouses and children, neighbors and coworkers reflect on Jesus when they think about us?

Ellen White declares, “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work” (*Christian Service*, 41).

Revival and reformation will make a difference only as we experience the transforming power of the Spirit of God. This reality will be observed in stronger and healthier relationships that bring honor and glory to God and help hasten the coming of Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray for this kind of revival today!

— WILLIE OLIVER, PHD, AND ELAINE OLIVER, MA, SERVE AS FAMILY LIFE DIRECTORS FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES.





The Ten Commandments: A law to be obeyed or promises to be celebrated?

In my 40-year Christian journey that includes 20 years of Bible teaching and pastoral ministry, the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3–17) have always challenged me, despite being the only Scripture portion written by God Himself (Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15, 16; 34:1, 4, 28; Deut. 5:22; 10:4). Raised in an Adventist home and educated in Adventist schools, I always believed the importance of obedience to God's law. However, the question that haunted me was, "Do I really keep the commandments according to God's will?" Further, the biblical assertion that God's people delighted in His commandments deeply troubled me, for "If I don't delight in God's law, I am not worthy to be called a Christian?" As I cried to the Lord from such a state of restlessness, He opened my eyes to see a few wondrous things in His commandments that have brought healing to my soul.

My eyes were opened by a statement of Ellen White: "The Ten Commandments are ten promises."¹ This article provides several compelling scriptural evidences to show that the Ten Commandments are indeed ten promises.

Context of the Decalogue

Perhaps one of the major reasons for failing to understand the promise-base of the Decalogue is a failure to comprehend and study it within its larger and immediate context. Umberto Cassuto presents well the pre- and postcontext of the Decalogue: "Exodus 1-19 is but a preparation for the activity at Sinai and all that follows is either a result of or a supplement to it."² The immediate context leaves us without any doubt as to God's motive for giving the law. "And God spoke all these words [of the Decalogue], saying: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'" (Exod. 20:1, 2, NKJV). The Ten Commandments did not arise out of any arbitrary notion of God, but rather as a personal, tender reminder of "the LORD your God" who has redeemed Israel from Egypt. A recovery from bondage, a symbol of redemption, lies at the foundation of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the Decalogue is not a legalistic code given to Israel, but a redemptive tie that defines the relationship of love that should exist between Israel and their mighty God. This

might and this love surround the Ten Commandments, as Cassuto points out.

Thus, the Ten Commandments were not given to Israel that they may obey them in order to be saved but rather they were given to those who have already been redeemed. In other words, they are not a means to salvation but promises of the covenant relationship God wants to have with His people.

A careful investigation of the chapters before and after the giving of the law reveals these covenant-redemption-promise characteristics of the law and the Law-Giver:

1. *God fulfills His promises.* Israel's deliverance from slavery was a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:13, 14; cf. Exod. 12:40, 41).
2. *No power can prevent God from accomplishing His purposes.* Despite Pharaoh's oppression of Israel, ordering their newborn boys to be killed at birth, God raised His servant Moses right in Pharaoh's palace (Exod. 1:9–2:9).
3. *The God of Moses is more powerful than the gods of Egypt.* This

The ten plagues (chaps. 7–11) “were directed against specific Egyptian deities to reveal their impotence”³ and “show that Jehovah is the true God.”⁴ Pharaoh himself, on several occasions, asked Moses and Aaron to pray for him (8:8, 28; 9:27, 28; 10:16, 17).

4. *The God of Moses is more powerful than the forces of nature.* God divided the sea for Israel to walk through (14:1–22).
5. *God heals His people.* Bitter water at Marah became sweet as Moses threw a tree into it at God’s command (15:22–26).
6. *God provides for His people.* Manna from the sky and water from the rocks for more than 600,000 people were God’s provisions (12:37; 16; 17:1–6).
7. *God fights the battles for His people.* Mere raising of Moses’ hands brought victory for Israel over the Amalekites (17:8–14).
8. The pillars of cloud and fire (13:21, 22), in which Israel’s invisible Leader⁵ was present, reveals God in two ways. While the pillar of cloud protected Israel from the day’s desert heat, the pillar of fire provided light in the darkness and protected them from the chilling cold.
9. *God’s presence abides with His people always.* That their God was in the pillars of fire and cloud (Exod. 13:21, 22) and leading them gently must have amazed Israel who might not have heard such a thing in Egypt.
10. *God delivers His people and invites them into a relationship with Him.* God gave His commandments to Israel after delivering them from slavery and bringing them to Himself (19:4). The preamble of the Decalogue, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage” (20:2, NKJV), provides a reason for Israel’s obedience—God delivered them from slavery; in order to enter the Promised Land, they must show their allegiance to God.

Certainly, the purpose of all that God did for Israel (Deut. 26:8) was to inspire them to enter into a covenant relationship with Him (Exod. 14:31; cf. Num. 20:12; Deut. 9:23) in which, by listening to His voice they will be His peculiar treasure—a holy nation and a royal priesthood (Exod. 19:5). In this relationship, for example, they will never steal (eighth commandment) because He, as their Husband (Jer. 31:32), provides for them (cf. Matt. 7:7; James 4:2); they will honor their parents (fifth commandment) because placing them in His stead⁶ God accomplishes His purposes through them. In this sense, the Ten Commandments, though, seem to be negative prohibitions, “you shall not,” . . . may be statements of assurance, “you will never . . .”

Terminology: “The Ten Commandments”

The expression “the Ten Commandments” is unknown to the original Hebrew Bible, though it appears three times in the English Bible (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). Deliberately, in these three occurrences, Moses employed a derivative of *dabar*, “word,” rather than *mitsvah*, “commandment,” which, and its derivatives, he used extensively in the Pentateuch. In fact, the Ten Commandments are introduced as words—“And God spoke all these words” (Exod. 20:1; cf. Deut. 5:22; 10:2). This shows that God did not give Ten Commandments; He gave “ten words,” that is, the *decalogue*.

The word *dabar* is rendered “promise” in many places in the English Bible.⁷ Moreover, its verbal form, “he spoke,” is rendered “he promised.”⁸ This suggests that God’s words may be understood as promises, hence, “ten words” as “ten promises.”

The grammatical structure

The grammatical structure of the Ten Commandments, “you shall not” (a negative particle + second person of imperfect form of the verb), communicates not only an “emphatic form of prohibition”⁹ or “the strongest expectation of

obedience”¹⁰ but also a “definite expectation that something will not happen.”¹¹ Statements that have the same grammatical structure such as, “You shall not die”¹² (Judg. 6:23; cf. 2 Sam. 12:13; 19:23; Jer. 34:4; 38:24), “You shall not lack [anything]” (Deut. 8:9),¹³ “You shall not be afraid” (7:18; cf. 20:1; 31:18; Ps. 91:5; Ezek. 3:9) are undoubtedly promises.¹⁴ Richard Davidson observes that the concept that the Ten Commandments may be understood as ten promises “is embedded in the very grammatical structure of the Decalogue.”¹⁵ This shows that the Ten Words of God contain two intricately intertwined facets, namely, a prohibition and an assurance or promise.¹⁶

The big picture

The Bible records numerous commands and instructions of God. To suggest all of them, particularly those that are given to His people, are promises or statements of assurance may seem to be overstating. However, an overall picture of the Scriptures reveals it is indeed so.

A simple idea of a promise conveys the notion of “I do,” while a command/instruction conveys “you do.” If the doer of the action is the determining factor to know whether a statement contains a promise or a command, the Bible shows little distinction between them. In both cases, first, God is the doer of the action; second, the obedient are the recipients of the action. The difference is a promise is God’s action *for* the obedient while a command is God’s action *through* the obedient. This phenomenon remains consistent in the Bible. For example, God instructed/commanded Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 3:10; cf. 7:6, 10). Yet, it is God who did it—“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (20:1, NKJV).¹⁷ Jesus promised His disciples, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV). However, the promise was given anticipating their obedience to His command/instruction—“Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples”

(v. 19). Human obedience is crucial for the reception of either a command or a promise of God. In fact, to the willing, the divine promises and commands are not different—for in both of them God is.

Further, the English word *command*, generally meaning “order, demand, decree, control,” often connoting a restriction of free will, does not represent the Hebrew “command” (Heb. *tsavah*) that has a wide range of meanings including, “direct, appoint, give charge, ordain,”¹⁸ indicating no compulsion or force. On the other hand, the Bible shows that God operates with humans in the context of their free will: “choose you this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:15); “‘whoever believes in Him will . . . have everlasting life’” (John 3:16, NKJV). Relating to this, White notes, “Let it be made plain that the way of God’s commandments is the way of life. God has established the laws of nature, but His laws are not arbitrary exactions. Every ‘Thou shalt not,’ whether in physical or in moral law, implies a promise. If we obey it, blessing will attend our steps. God never forces us to do right, but He seeks to save us from the evil and lead us to the good.”¹⁹ She also says, “In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command.”²⁰

Hence, the phrase God “commanded” Noah (Gen. 6:22) and Joshua (Josh. 1:9, 16) may be understood as “gave direction/commission/charge.”

Thus, it may be stated that either the promise or the command of God is His invitation to His people to cooperate with Him. The result remains beyond human understanding. White comments, “As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”²¹ She further states, “His command is a promise; and behind it is the same power that fed the multitude beside the sea.”²²


Conclusion

In view of our nature, abilities, experiences, for example, keeping the Ten Commandments may appear impossible. However, we must remember “it is His grace that gives man power to obey the laws of God. It is this that enables him to break the bondage of evil habit. This is the only power that can make him and keep him steadfast in the right path.”²³ Consequently, every instruction/command of God is a statement of assurance or promise, as White notes, “The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God.”²⁴

Jesus clarified that no one can obey God unless they remain in Him or connected to Him—“Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b). To summarize:

1. The purpose of the Decalogue assures Israel of God’s ever-abiding presence and inspires faith in Him both of which are crucial to obey Him.
2. The description of the Ten Commandments—“the Ten Words”—indicates that they may be understood as ten statements of assurance or ten promises.
3. The grammatical structure of the Ten Commandments reveals that they may be understood as promises, not prohibitions necessarily.
4. The overall understanding of the Bible reveals that all God’s commands or instructions to His people may be viewed as His promises.

For those who do not know God as the Lord of love and promises, the Ten Commandments may be burdensome—arbitrary exactions, impossibilities. But for those who know God, they are promises and statements of assurance. Therefore,

His people rejoice in them more than one rejoices in gold (Ps. 119:127). 

- 1 Ellen G. White, MS 41, 1896; White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), 56.
- 2 Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magness, 1967, 1974), 256.
- 3 Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), 132. See also Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977, reprint 1985), 56, for the corresponding gods of the ten plagues.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913), 282. Further, White says, “The Son of God, enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, was the leader of the children of Israel, overseeing every phase of their experience.” *The Upward Look* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982), 341.
- 6 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 308.
- 7 For example, Solomon praises God that none of His promises (Heb. *dabar*) has failed (1 Kings 8:56); Solomon prays to God that His promise to David may be established (2 Chron. 1:9). This phenomenon, *dabar* understood as promise, may also be seen in Neh. 5:12, 13; Ps. 102:42. See also Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius (1979).
- 8 For example, in his instruction to the elders regarding the celebration of Passover, Moses assures the elders that God will give the land to live and the privilege to serve as “He promised” (Heb. *dabar*). This phenomenon appears through out the Hebrew Bible, Deut. 1:11; 6:3; 9:28; Josh. 9:21; 22:4; 23:5; 2 Sam. 7:28; 1 Kings 2:24; 1 Chron. 17:26; Jer. 32:42.
- 9 E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, rev. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910, 1990), 317.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid. See also Vara Prasad Deepati, “Sem YHWH and Its Being Taken in Vain in Exodus 20:7” (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2009), 123–125.
- 12 Herbert Wolf, “Judges,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 420. The NIV renders it as “You are not going to die.” See also, Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures, vol. 6, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 264; Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 235.
- 13 Wright, 126, 119; See also Anderson, 657.
- 14 Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary, ed. Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 126. See also Arnold A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, part 2, New Century Bible Commentary, vol. 19 (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1952), 657.
- 15 Richard M. Davidson, *A Love Song for the Sabbath* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1988), 36.
- 16 Ibid., 124.
- 17 Cf. Exod. 3:11; Deut. 8:14–20; Ps. 81:10; Dan. 9:15; Amos 2:10; Mic. 6:4, etc.
- 18 Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*.
- 19 White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 114.
- 20 White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1955), 76.
- 21 White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 333.
- 22 White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 362.
- 23 White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 115.
- 24 White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 126.

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Healing psalms

What do you do when you feel abandoned by God? Where do you go when a life of nurturing the flock leaves you spiritually hungry and tired? How would you counsel someone in your church who feels that God hasn't been keeping His promises? Must we always silently and unquestioningly endure every trial we face?

While it may be admirable to submissively accept everything from God's hand, the Psalms contain many prayers where someone in distress appears to question God, even challenge His character. I have observed three principles in these prayers that can be applied in our own times of distress. I will show how pouring out the heart, petitioning, and praising can bring help and healing to the souls of both pastor and congregation.

A look at the text

Let's start with Psalm 13. This song can be conveniently divided into three sections, each comprising two verses. The first section, verses 1 and 2, lists David's trials and asks why God seems distant:

1. How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?*

2. How long shall I take counsel in my soul, [having] sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

Though a leader and shepherd for God's people, David still experienced moments of hopelessness. He

does not hesitate to honestly express his feelings. He's not afraid to accuse God of forgetting him.

3. Consider [and] answer me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the [sleep of] death,

4. And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," [and] my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.

Here David moves beyond complaining about his situation and petitions God for help. The next section may be especially surprising but also the most healing:

5. But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.

6. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me.

David concludes the psalm with two verses of unbroken praise. He remembers how he has trusted God in the past and proclaims that he will continue to sing God's praises.

This prayer, then, contains three parts: pouring, petitioning, and praising. We can talk about these as the three *Ps* of healing prayer.

Psalm 13 isn't the only psalm to use this structure. Psalms 22, 31, 35, 69, 89, 109, and others follow a similar pattern. Psalm 22, for example, contains *pouring* in verses 1 and 2; *petitioning* in verses 19–21; and *deep, intense praise* from verses 22–31. Often the longer psalms, like 22 and 69, will have lengthier sections of praise at the end. Sometimes the pouring and petitioning can be intermingled and praise can flow throughout the psalm, but these

three elements are almost always present.

Pouring

So what do passages like Psalm 13 teach us about how to pray? First, we should pray and, when we do, we can be open and honest with God about our pain. Even if we feel the need to challenge God's character, we can freely do so. He loves us just as He loved David, who accused God of forgetting Him, which of course was wrong (Isa. 49:15), but David did it anyway because that's how he felt at the time.

If you are a pastor who's discouraged because church size continues to decrease and conflicts continue to increase, take these concerns to the Lord. The honest expressing of hopelessness and discouragement in prayer makes the heart available to the comforting and healing presence of God.

If these conflicts involve people who have turned against you, you can lay those feelings out before the Lord. David, in Psalm 13, mentions enemies that have risen against him. Sometimes I have had to spend hours pouring out my painful feelings in prayer. I'd always feel a sense of God's comfort, even if not right away. After being open with God about my anger toward those who have hurt me, I've been more able to forgive them. It would definitely be much wiser for a pastor to share frustrations with God than to lose control and say things that might hurt someone else.

We must allow others space for this type of honesty as well. Someone may say in a prayer meeting that God has forgotten him or her. The tendency may be for us to jump up quickly and say, “Oh, no, God hasn’t forgotten you.” This person instead needs to feel heard by us and by God. Often it takes time to work through these feelings of spiritual abandonment. Maybe we should simply empathize with the individual during the meeting and offer to pray with him or her afterward.

On one occasion, I was counseling a lady over the telephone. She

the busy demands of the church crowd out necessary time with family. According to the model set forth in Psalm 13, you can feel free to pray deeply, expressing your concerns. The prayer, though, should eventually take the shape of asking the Almighty for strength, wisdom, and even simply more time to spend with family.

When visiting with a struggling member, we must gently guide the person to move from mere complaining and blaming to asking for help. This lifts the thoughts to the hope that God will answer and bring relief.

Once I had misplaced a twenty-

If it’s hard to find the words to praise God, you may find help by just reading one of these psalms of distress and pray as though the prayer were your own. This might be like someone dedicating a favorite song to a loved one.

You may have just learned that your teenage daughter is pregnant or maybe you have just been served divorce papers. Whatever course of action you take, Psalm 13 tells how you can pray about it. You can pour out your feelings, you can petition—but you still must also praise God for His goodness. You can recount how

REMEMBERING GOD’S PROVIDENCE IN THE PAST HELPS YOU TO KEEP YOUR THOUGHTS FOCUSED ON GOD’S POWER AND PROVIDENCE.

kept talking about how distant she felt from God. She had survived cancer only to have to work extremely hard without help to support her family. She kept saying how she didn’t understand how God could allow her and her family to face such difficulties. I finally recommended she just tell those feelings to God, openly and honestly. She was not instantly healed of her trials, but she did begin to find a new sense of strength. Opening up to God, she sensed more and more of His presence. I have recommended many others to pray this way as well, with similar results.

Petitioning

We must not, however, allow ourselves to stay at the level of blaming God and complaining. As David moved from pouring to petitioning, we must also move on to petitioning God. In asking God for help, David admitted that some part of him still clung to the knowledge that God was reachable. Maybe you feel discouraged because

dollar bill. Though I was upset, my wife suggested we pray. She took my hands, and we prayed. As soon as we were done, we found the money. It may not always happen this way, but if we don’t move to petitioning, we may never know how many blessings we could have.

Praise

Finally—and this can sometimes be the hardest step of all—we must include unbroken praise to God. It seems that if a psalmist more intensely challenges God’s character, the praise afterward should be also more intense. This could be like saying, “God, it seems that You’re treating me unfairly, but I will keep praising You and trusting You, for You’re all I’ve got.”

This praise does not necessarily need to be at the beginning of the prayer, as we have often been taught. Sometimes, as with David, the pain of our problems becomes so great that we simply need to let it out first.

God has delivered you from past trials and declare that one day you will tell how God resolved this seemingly impossible situation. Remembering God’s providence in the past helps you to keep your thoughts focused on God’s power and providence. Our unchanging God did for us what was needed in the past, and He continues to do this today. Promising to praise God after the trial keeps the eyes of faith looking ahead to blessings yet to come.

When counseling someone who is hurting, you might do well to just read a psalm of praise for the person. However this is done, praise must be a central part of our cries of distress. In fact, it wasn’t until Job moved from complaining to praising that his time of trials ended (Job 42).

Once I was counseling a gentleman who struggled with bouts of deep discouragement. I felt impressed to encourage him to start each day by reading a psalm of praise, something from Psalms

113–118 or 145–150. I suggested that his wife read a psalm to him if he didn't feel strong enough. As with the lady I counseled, there was no instant and miraculous solution, but he did feel stronger and more able to face his trials.

Praising God is an essential part of life. The psalmist is especially displeased with the idea of dying, noting that the dead don't praise the Lord (Psalm 115:117). The Hebrew name in the Bible for the book of Psalms is *Tehilim*, or "praises." Every psalm, whatever its content, is considered praise. This is why, whenever I pray with someone, I insist that no matter how discouraging life is, the person must think of something for which to praise God.

On a personal note

Near the end of my doctoral studies in Hebrew Scriptures, I entered a phase of great spiritual tumult. My dissertation was taking longer and longer to finish, and it didn't appear I'd have a reasonable chance for employment when done. As a blind person, I saw little prospect for work outside of my direct field of training.

In the midst of my spiritual darkness, God impressed me to go to the light of His Word, particularly to memorize the book of Psalms in the original Hebrew. I would recite and pray from these psalms every day, strengthening my knowledge of biblical languages, and, more importantly, finding a most healing and

revolutionary way to pray. When I was done reviewing how the psalmists prayed, I'd make my own prayers according to the principles I learned from theirs. I would pour out my heart as they did, asking why God seemed so distant and why He'd led me thus far with little prospects. I'd petition Him for guidance and solutions to my dilemma. I would simply praise Him for all His goodness. I began to feel a peace I hadn't experienced before. This peace can also be yours. And, as you discover it, you can share it with your congregations. God has provided comfort and healing for all of our woes. 📖

* All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.

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Sample prayers

Here are some sample prayers that follow the method expressed in the article. These can serve as examples of how this model for prayer can be easily used in any situation.

Here's a prayer that a discouraged pastor might pray:

Dear God,

Sometimes I wonder if You really called me. My church seems to be shrinking, not growing. My children are always in trouble at school. Did You bring me here just to leave me? How can I lead Your flock if I don't even know where to go?

O Lord, give me wisdom now, wisdom and healing. Strengthen this broken heart so I can continue to serve You.

I will always remember Your goodness and faithfulness. Soon I will preach a sermon on how You get us out of situations like this. I will tell the church how wonderful You've been to me.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

A pastor counseling someone in the midst of a divorce might encourage the person to pray like this:

Dear God,

My wife just served me divorce papers. Why, Lord, did You allow me to get into this situation? Where are You right now?

Oh, comfort me with the healing of Your love. Show me how to carry on and what would be best for the children.

O God, You have always been there for me. I will forever praise You. When You give me the strength again to stand, I will tell others of Your grace.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Here's a prayer that could work for a church member who just lost her job:

Dear God,

I just got laid off today. I've faithfully returned my tithe and done my best to honor You. Why have You gone against Your promises and allowed this to happen?

O Lord, provide for my needs as now I do not know how. Show me how I can find more work.

Forever will I praise Your name. You are ever faithful, ever loving.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.



Sin of action and sin of silence

The remarkable contributions and achievements of Moses and Aaron during the Exodus make them characters worthy of our respect and admiration. Moses was a miracle child (Exod. 6:20), a kind and forgiving brother (Num. 12:11), a miracle maker (Exod. 4:21), and a great leader (Exod. 32:32). God saw him as a faithful friend and a servant (Num. 12:7). Aaron served as God's spokesman for his brother (Exod. 4:16) and as a first high priest before God (Exod. 28:41). However, it comes as a great tragedy that neither of them, nor their sister Miriam, made it to the Promised Land. They were so near to Canaan but were banished from entering into it.

One may ask why such an uncompromising judgment fell on Moses and Aaron. What was so bad about their actions that excluded them from entering into the Promise Land?

Moses' sin

The events in Numbers 20:1–12 took place in the fortieth year after the Exodus. After wandering for almost 39 years, the Israelites had arrived at the desert of Zin and camped at Kadesh. This chapter begins with the death of Miriam and concludes with the bereavement of Aaron; hence, it depicts heart-breaking circumstances

for Moses. In addition to the sorrow caused by the passing of Miriam, the Israelites beleaguered Moses and Aaron with another demanding grumble (v. 2). In their list of complaints people preferred (1) death with the ten spies than life with Moses and Aaron (Numb. 14:36), (2) Egyptian slavery than the free desert, (3) groceries (grains, figs, grapevines, or pomegranates), and (4) water to drink (vv. 3–5). With burdened hearts Moses and Aaron fell facedown to seek for the Lord's help.

The Lord then commanded Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock, and He said that the rock would pour out water.¹ Moses, however, said to the people, "'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?'"² He raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. The water gushed out, communal thirst was quenched, and the problem was resolved.

But, for both brothers, a new problem emerged. The Lord said to them, "'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them'" (vv. 7–12).

Moses and Aaron

God's accusation against Moses and Aaron shows that they did not

trust and honor Him as holy before the children of Israel. The irony of the passage is that they were told to speak to the rock, but Moses spoke to the people. They were prohibited from striking the rock but Moses struck it—twice. Immediately many questions arise: How does double striking of the rock relate to God's accusation against Moses and Aaron? Why was Aaron punished? And, what is so significant about striking the rock twice?

Philip J. Budd lists possible explanations. He states that many biblical scholars define Moses' sin as unbelief, unwillingness, haste or ill-temper, and disobedience. His disobedience is often understood in terms of an action of verse 11 (striking) as compared with the command of verse 8 (speaking). Some propose that the original form of the story has been suppressed.³ Others affirm that Moses forgot God's patience in His dealings with the people, and thus acted as if the murmurings were against him (Moses).⁴

To some extent these proposals do help, but a review of the brothers' past reveals that both committed similar or even more serious mistakes earlier in their dealings with God.⁵ Perhaps more exists in the text than what the above proposals consider.

Aaron's sin of silence

Though the brothers were to work together, Moses alone is seen speaking, striking, and disobeying. However, God said, regarding Aaron's exclusion from the Promised Land, "'Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah'" (20:24). If Moses did the speaking and striking, why was Aaron reckoned as rebellious?

Perhaps Aaron committed the sin of remaining inactive or silent when he saw Moses disobeying,⁶ which stands in contrast to what he was supposed to be and do: speak for Moses and be his prophet (Exod. 4:16; 30; 7:1, 2). Ellen G. White states that, by

the crowd, which was according to God's command. Thus, we have two possible solutions to understand why God held Aaron accountable for the sin at Maribah: First, some events in the narrative are suppressed and we do not know the full story; or, second, perhaps Aaron failed to be God's spokesman (Exod. 4:16) and his silent approval for the wrong of his brother became the cause of his death—the ultimate silence.⁸ Both options cannot be dealt with in detail here, but the second appears to be more biblically acceptable.

The sin of remaining silent in the face of evil is known in the Bible. Ezekiel 33:2–7 records the job description of a watchman who should warn the people about dan-

The term is common nominative in the Old Testament, occurring about 56 times. The word *selā* is interchangeably used with another Hebrew term for the rock, *šūr*. In Hebrew Bible, *selā* is also a name of God (2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 42: 10 [9]). The term symbolizes God's unshakable faithfulness, permanence, protection, care, and provision for His people (Ps. 71:3; 78:16; Isa. 32:2).⁹ "The prophet Isaiah calls Yahweh's Messiah 'a rock that makes [people] fall' (Isa. 8:14). The New Testament identifies this *stone of stumbling* as Jesus of Nazareth, Who breaks and humbles some to repentance and crushes the rebellious in judgment (Matt. 21:42–44; Rom. 9:32–33; 1 Pet. 2:6–8). The apostle Paul understood

WE CANNOT PICK AND CHOOSE THE DETAILS OF THE WORD OF GOD AS THEY SUIT US.

not speaking to the rock, Aaron failed in rendering his priestly duties and representing our great High Priest. "It was the exalted character of that sacred office as representative of our great High Priest that made Aaron's sin at Kadesh of so great magnitude."⁷ In Numbers 20:8, the Hebrew verb translated "You speak," points back to an antecedent subject: Moses and Aaron. The verb in question is *pi'el*, perfect tense, second person plural. The *pi'el* expresses intensification; hence, the verb can be translated as "you (plural) speak repeatedly." The original Hebrew text implies that Aaron was required to speak, but he remained silent. Verse 24 also implies that God reckoned Aaron's silence as an approval of Moses' rebellion against His command at the waters of Meribah. The Hebrew verb *meriytēm*, "rebellion," is plural and points back to an antecedent subject, Aaron and Moses.

Conversely, Numbers 20 shows that Aaron did nothing but gather

ger. If a person heard the warning, but did not abide by it and, as a result, someone died, then the dead person's blood would be on his own head. However, if the watchman saw the danger coming and did not inform the people (but remained silent), and the danger took the life of someone, then God will hold the watchman accountable for that person's blood. In this text, the watchman is viewed as a sinner because of his silence and not informing others (see also Lev. 10:1–3; 19:17; Isa. 58:1; 62:6; Jer. 4:19; Ps. 39:2; 1 Pet. 2:15). Hence, Aaron appears guilty of remaining silent and not doing anything to stop Moses from disobeying God's directives.

Moses' sin of action

Alternatively, Moses was prohibited from entering into the Promised Land, probably because he struck the rock twice (Num. 20:11). The Hebrew word translated *rock* in Numbers. 20:11 is from the root word *selā*.

that rock of provision during the Israelite desert trek to be that same *stone*, pre-incarnate Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:4)."¹⁰

Consequently, if the rock in Exodus 17:1–7 prefigured Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), then one can conclude that the rock in Numbers 20:11 also figuratively pointed to Jesus. Moses' striking of the rock in Exodus 17:1–7 was, then, a prophetic projection of Jesus' crucifixion; but His striking of the rock twice, in Numbers 20:11, ultimately confused that prophetic projection.¹¹

Biblical scholars mostly agree that the striking of the rock in Exodus 17:1–7 prophetically pointed to the death of Christ.¹² Accordingly, by the same line of reasoning, one can implement the similar interpretive formula in order to understand the double striking of the rock in Numbers 20:11 and suggest that it confused the strong prophetic projection by prefiguring the death of Jesus twice. Ellen G. White asserts that "by his rash act Moses took away the force

of the lesson that God purposed to teach. The rock, being a symbol of Christ, had been once smitten, as Christ was to be once offered. The second time it was needful only to speak to the rock, as we have only to ask for blessings in the name of Jesus. By the second smiting of the rock the significance of this beautiful figure of Christ was destroyed.”¹³

Application and conclusion

Thus, most likely, Aaron was excluded from the Promised Land because he remained silent, even when he saw Moses doing wrong. God reckoned Aaron’s silence as *rebellion* (Num. 20:24). Moses was debarred from the Promised Land because he confused the symbol of the Crucifixion. Such conclusion is sustained on the basis of intertextual and linguistic factors.

The narrative plainly outlines the golden rule of application that the particulars of God’s word must be carried out fully. We cannot pick and choose the details of the word of God as they suit us. The commandments and the doctrines of God must be obeyed seriously and accurately, as the sins of both Moses and Aaron so clearly show. ❏

- 1 Forty years before Moses was commanded to strike the rock at Horeb to initiate a flow of water (Exod. 17:1–7).
- 2 Numbers 20:10. All texts in this article are quoted from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.
- 3 Phillip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 5, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glen W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1984), 218.
- 4 “Smote the Rock Twice” (Num 20:11), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1978), 891.
- 5 Exod. 2:14; 4:18–26; Num. 12:11.
- 6 Silence conveys a wide range of emotions, attitudes, and states. For example, it expresses respect and awe (Job 29:21; Hab. 2:20), loyalty (Isa. 36:21), deep thought (Acts 15:12), acceptance of guilt (Job 13:19; Rom. 3:19), fear of saying something wrong (Ps. 39:2), even wisdom (Job 13:5; Prov. 17:28). Negatively, it can convey faithlessness (Esther 4:14), fear (Job 31:34; Acts 18:9), deep pain (Job 2:13; Lam. 2:10),

- rebellion (Ps. 32:2; Mark 3:4). There are times when silence is suitable (Eccles. 3:7), but there are also times when we must not remain silent in the face of evil (Isa. 58:1; 62:6).
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, The Pocket Library: Story of Salvation From Genesis to Revelation, vol. 1 (Harrah, OK: Mission Publishing Inc., 2002), 561.
 - 8 Sons of Eli died because they showed improper behavior towards God’s sacrificial system. The system prefigured Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of the sinners (1 Sam. 2:12–17; 2 Sam. 2:28–34; 4:1–11). See also 2 Sam. 6:6, 7; Ezek. 44:12; Mat. 2:7, 8.
 - 9 Andrew E. Hill, “Sela,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Exegesis* (NIDOTE), ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:267.
 - 10 Andrew E. Hill, “sūr,” *NIDOTE*, 3:793.
 - 11 Joseph T. Lienhard and Ronnie J. Rombs record that according to Augustine the double striking prefigures the two pieces of wood on the cross. Caesarius of Arles agrees with Augustine and states that the rock was struck a second time because two trees were lifted up for the gibbet of the cross: the one stretched out Christ’s sacred hands, and the other spread out his sinless body from head to foot. See Joseph T. Lienhard and Ronnie J. Rombs, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament, vol. 3, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 239.
 - 12 See, H.L. Ellison, *Exodus, The Daily Study Bible Series* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 92. Joseph T. Lienhard and Ronnie J. Rombs, 90. John Wesley, *Wesley’s Notes: Exodus 4:17* (Logos Library System; Wesley’s Notes Albany, 1999). J. Vernon McGee, *The Law: Exodus 1–18, Thru the Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 152.
 - 13 White, 548.

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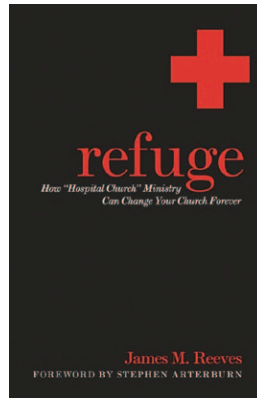


Refuge: How “Hospital Church” Ministry Can Change Your Church Forever

by James M. Reeves.
Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010.

After reading his biography at the beginning of this book, it won't surprise you that James M. Reeves would attempt to resurrect the recovery and refuge movement in a conservative American church. Reeves, now senior pastor of the 1,600 member Celebration Fellowship in Fort Worth, Texas, had, from childhood, held a ringside seat to the most egregious family and religious dysfunction. Fortunately for us, Reeves rolled his personal healing over into the formation of a church of healing, where he allows a stripping away of religious posturing and sanctimony in favor of what he calls the “hospital church.”

The hospital church members, at the starting point, believe that emotional maturity and faith maturity are inseparable. “Your spiritual growth will never go beyond your emotional growth,” he writes. “You can never have a more intimate relationship with God than you are capable of having with other people.” If it is true that psychological development places a cap on spiritual growth, then church should be recognized as the proper place for Christians to work on both. Reeve’s model of the church includes facilitating personal change through the practice of community, transparency, and forgiveness.



REEVE’S MODEL OF THE CHURCH INCLUDES FACILITATING PERSONAL CHANGE THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND FORGIVENESS.

Reeve’s evocation of psychology and recovery in an evangelical context may alarm some, bringing to mind liberal Protestant ministry of the previous century that sometimes seemed bent on replacing biblical theology with psychological theory, pastoring with counseling, and worship with 12-step groups. Those who would place refuge in that category aren’t reading it accurately. Reeves is solidly biblical, making his case for the healing power of fellowship and spiritual intimacy from Scripture and relying upon it as the guide to healing.

The “hospital church” model may be charting a valid biblical direction for an institution that’s having a hard time defining itself in our postmodern era, but what Reeves prescribes won’t happen easily. This kind of book general-principle churchmen and churchwomen will nod an approving “yes, yes” to but (from long habit of sending into exile those with open spiritual wounds) will find it exceedingly painful to see implemented. The average church fellowship is an artfully masked

performance, and stripping that away, as Reeves insists we must, could destroy some congregations were it not resisted (as it would be) in the name of tradition and stability.

Celebration Fellowship’s ministry to sex addicts illustrates the difficulty. Why do sexual addiction recovery groups, though now serving more people in Reeves’s church than those for substance abuse, still reach but a fraction of the afflicted? “It’s almost a badge of honor in our culture to say that you are a recovering alcoholic,” Reeves explains. “But there is no badge of honor that goes with saying you are a recovering sex addict.” That is to say, the latter is not safe to admit to the church. So, how could you hope to find healing there?

Without that level of transparency, though, no hospital church exists. It will only work if we, in Reeves’ words, “practice safe church”—precisely what the church did in Acts 2 and, generally speaking, hasn’t done with consistency since. ❏

—Reviewed by Loren Seibold, DMin

Excellence in Ministry Award

Palm Harbor, Florida, United States—John Sweigart, ministerial secretary of the Kansas-Nebraska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, received the Excellence in Ministry Award from the North American Division (NAD) at the Adventist Ministries Convention held in Palm Harbor, Florida, United States, on January 15–18, 2012.

According to **Ivan Williams**, NAD ministerial director, Sweigart was chosen because of his commitment to evangelism, pastors, and training elders, deacons, and deaconesses.

The award brochure stated, “John Sweigart serves with distinction as ministerial director for the Kansas-Nebraska Conference. Because of his introduction and incorporation into the church

through public evangelism, he has been a strong supporter and promoter of personal and public evangelism.” *[John Treolo]*

Creative use of media makes the difference in Croatia and Slovenia

Zagreb, Croatia—One hundred fifty participants gathered on March 17–18, 2012, in Zagreb, Croatia, for the media conference organized by the Adriatic Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The main purpose of the meeting was to explore the possibilities in social media, photography, writings, and video production. All the participants at the media conference agreed that

media has a power and has already made an impact on the society that creates the values that people follow. Therefore, we, as a church, need to be there and share the ancient values found in the Bible using these media.

The main speaker of the conference was **Miroslav Pujic**, communication and media ministries director of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Trans-European region, based in St. Albans, United Kingdom. He spoke about the power of social media and the paradigm shift that is taking place in our society as the result of the Internet influence. “Internet is the primary medium of the post-modern generation. There is a lot of information there, and, if we are not there, somebody else will be,” says Dr. Pujic. He concluded, “Therefore, our duty is to be there and share the story of what God has done for us, including the biblical values that are very relevant in this time of confusion.”

The participants also had the opportunity to listen to other presenters such as **Robert Zuber**, a TV journalist from Croatia, who explained how to write news and articles for church publications; **Toni Hnojckik**, eminent photographer in Croatia, who explored the topic of “The Power of Image” (photography); and the aspects of public and media relations that would help the church to foster a positive image in society by **Kristina Laco**, the leading public relations expert in Croatia. **Drago Cmok**, an expert in the area of new technology and social media, talked about the mind-set of “digital aborigines.”

“Today, more than ever, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Croatia and Slovenia wants to pursue the strong usage of media in the



John Sweigart (center) receives a ministerial award from Dave Gemmell, associate ministerial director, and Ivan Williams, ministerial director for the North American Division. (Photo by John Treolo)



Internet Ministry initiative, known as LIFEconnect, was explained to the audience by Pujic and Mirjana Kicusic, experts in social media development and marketing. All delegates were invited to join the initiative and become digital missionaries (DMs). LIFEconnect is now available in 17 languages (www.lifeconnect.info).

mission of the church," says **Branko Bistrovic**, president of the Adriatic Union, which includes Croatia and Slovenia. He continues, "Our purpose is to integrate photography, video, audio, music, graphic design, and other creative forms of digital technology into the efforts of the church and to live out our Vision and Mission." [*Darko Kovacevic, tedNEWS*]

Internet ministry impacts church growth in Albania

Tirana, Albania— There were many reasons to give praises and thanks to God as churches and groups throughout Albania convened in Tirana for the "Festival



of Faith" and internet ministry (IM) training on February 25–26, 2012. **Julian Kastrati**, web pastor for Albania, could not hide his enthusiasm as he gave the IM report in front of 200 people present for the event.

Just five years ago, there was virtually no online Adventist presence in the Albanian language. However, 2012 finds the Albanian Mission and ADRA Albania online and actively involved, networking, and building friendships and bridges with the online Albanian-speaking community. Each local church now has its own Web page or blog as well as a strong Facebook presence. Moreover, just a few months after its launch in Albania, the

LIFEconnect Web site now features over 4,100 members in its Facebook group! This large online presence is catered for and networked by over 50 digital missionaries who provide quality content via the newly launched Web site www.lifeconnect.al.

"God has blessed the church in Albania with highly talented, innovative, and high-profile and media savvy members and friends, so it is a privilege as well as fun for me to work together with them," said Kastrati. "Both the Adventist Church and ADRA Albania enjoy a fine reputation and a growing audience among the Albanian public, online as well as offline. In Albania, one in three citizens have a Facebook account, and if we are to make an impact, we need to be where the people are, so we can establish contacts and friendships to be followed by a discipleship path," Kastrati explained.

Already results are seen in Tirana Central Church, as during



the morning program, two new members of Pastor Kastrati's Bible study group shared their touching story of how they got in contact with the church through the Internet.



Pastor **Gentian Thomollari**, a dynamic and prolific networker and radio presenter in Elbasan,

America are invited to submit their best stewardship sermons. Up to ten outstanding sermons will be selected and awarded \$1,000 each.

share their sermons so others can benefit.”



“We know there are many exceptional stewardship sermons and we would like to share them with other ministers and leaders throughout North America,” states **John Mathews**, stewardship director for the North America Division

Tithe, offerings, theology of money, eschatology, and money are just some of the stewardship topics on which sermons may focus. For additional suggestions, and for details about this contest, visit www.iGiveSDA.org/contest or www.nadministerial.com/contest, or contact Lori Bryan at 301-680-6432, lori.bryan@nad.adventist.org. Also on these sites are important contest rules and submission information. Those interested in participating should review the rules before starting the project.

referring to the above mentioned story, showed clearly that Internet ministry brings real and tangible results and has a direct impact on church growth and popularity.

(NAD). Stewardship is a central biblical theme and faithful stewardship by members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church make it possible for the church to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ.

Ministers (active or retired) from the North American Division or graduate ministerial students (such as MDiv or similar) who are studying in North American schools may participate.

The main speaker of the program was **Miroslav Pujic**, internet ministry director at the Trans-European Division, who encouraged and urged all present to be spiritually fit themselves in order to point others to Jesus. He also conducted further training on relevant topics on postmodernism and social media and its impact. Pujic concluded the meetings by challenging the DMs to continue to grow and interact with people, make connections with them, and, most importantly, invite them to get to know and follow Jesus. [tedNEWS]

The project of obtaining quality stewardship sermons is a joint project of the NAD Stewardship and Ministerial departments. **Ivan Williams**, NAD ministerial director, explains why this division-wide effort is being made: “Ministers preach on many topics and each minister has particular areas of emphasis and study. We are asking those who have focused on stewardship to

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For additional suggestions visit www.iGiveSDA.org/contest or www.nadministerial.org/contest

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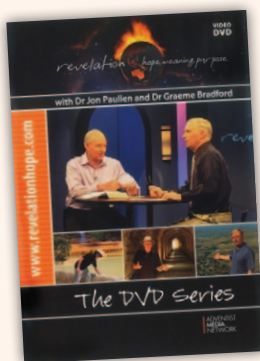
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