

# MINISTRY<sup>®</sup>

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A man with dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt, is shown from the chest up. He has his eyes closed and his hands clasped together in a prayerful gesture over an open Bible. The background is a textured, blue-green color. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of his skin and the pages of the Bible.

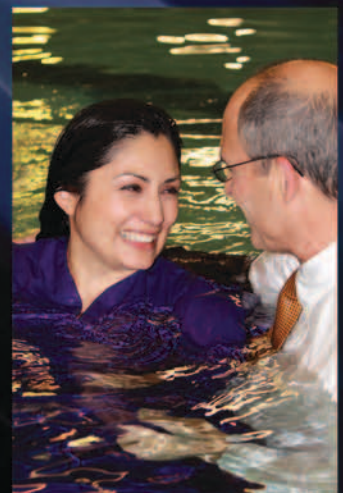
## **Biblical spirituality:**

Rediscovering our  
biblical roots or  
embracing  
the East?



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# “THE CROSS OF CALVARY STILL REMAINS THE GREATEST ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF THE TRUTH THAT THE LAW OF GOD IS STILL IN FORCE AND WILL REMAIN SO FOREVER.”

## A better reward

Regarding the article by Younis Masih (“Sin of Action and Sin of Silence,” June 2012) and the death of Moses and Aaron, there’s another wonderful act that shows our loving God before the story ends. Moses received something better than going to the Promised Land with the Israelites. After being told that he couldn’t go with them, he gathered the people together and gave a wonderful tribute to the God he had trusted all these years (see Deut. 32). Then he climbed the mountain and was laid to rest. But it was the resurrected Moses that God sent with Elijah to be with Jesus on another mountain, the mount of transfiguration, to comfort and strengthen Him for the days ahead while having to deal with the people for whom He was giving His life to save.

Moses had given up being ruler of Egypt and devoted his life to delivering ungrateful people from slavery; and though every angel would have wished for the privilege of comforting Jesus, Moses and Elijah, who could personally understand His experiences, were

chosen. A great God, who, with justice, has forgiveness, understanding, and love!

—Helen Fearing, Mount Vernon, Washington, United States

## Reflection on Galatians

I read with dismay the book review by Rollin Shoemaker in the April 2012 issue of *Ministry* (Galatians, by Thomas R. Schreiner), for I totally disagree with Schreiner on his exegesis of Galatians 2:11–14 and 3:13; and some of Shoemaker’s comments may give the appearance that he agrees with Schreiner (“Schreiner gives a readable and understandable interpretation of the text and makes cogent arguments for his particular views”), although he also stated that he does “not always find his arguments, claims, and observations convincing.”

If Paul had rebuked Peter for not only eating with the Gentiles but for also eating unclean food as well, then it seems Paul himself was also guilty of the same offense since both Paul and Peter had been eating with the Gentiles prior to the visit of the officers from Jerusalem.

Peter’s action of dissembling himself from the Gentiles for fear of the Jews has the capacity to destroy the influence of the gospel that Paul and Peter, in their writings, were trying to establish. That was why Paul rebuked his actions. But to infer that Peter was, as well, eating unclean food is not fair. Such assumption would negate what the Scriptures recorded about Peter’s dietary habit. In Acts 10:13, while in vision, Peter was commanded to “kill and eat” every abominable thing in the sheet let down from heaven. “But Peter said ‘Not so Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’ ” His response to this command runs contrary to and underscores what Schreiner wrote regarding Peter’s dietary habit.

Although misunderstanding God’s intent, Peter’s answer settles the matter that God’s people, before and after the Cross, recognize the difference God placed between clean and unclean foods and Peter stood not guilty of the charge. Schreiner assumes in chapter 3:13 that because Christ has redeemed

Continued on page 29 ►



# Examine everything carefully

The apostle Paul gave important advice to Christians living in Thessalonica and also to each one of us today: “Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21, NASB).

This composes particularly timely counsel when considering the topic of spirituality. I learned that lesson the hard way. More than 25 years ago, I embraced the “spiritual formation” movement. In retrospect, I must confess that I was somewhat careless and naïve. I had good intentions but lacked wisdom. I soon realized that not everything promoted under the umbrella of spiritual formation was Christian or in harmony with the Scriptures. I regret any confusion that I caused during those early years of ministry. I would have saved myself and others much heartache if I had heeded the inspired counsel of Paul to “Examine everything carefully.”

I had started teaching a class called “Spiritual Formation.” As I came to a clearer realization that some were advocating nonbiblical teachings under the umbrella of spiritual formation, I made every effort to base all of my instruction on the Bible. Over time, I realized that even the use of the term *spiritual formation* created confusion. I finally changed the name of the class to “Christian Spirituality,” which more accurately described its contents.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, I have become more and more convicted that we need a firm biblical foundation as we seek a more intimate relationship with God. This special issue of *Ministry* is devoted to that same objective. We must examine everything carefully and hold fast to that which is good.

For example, prayer is vitally important. But not all prayer

promoted today is in harmony with the teachings of Scripture. Some suggest the use of Christian mantras or breath prayers, like the continued repetition of the name “Jesus” or short phrases like “Peace be still.”<sup>2</sup> However, Jesus taught that prayer should not be a *vain repetition* (Matt. 6:7). Prayer should have intelligible content and progression of thought (see vv. 6:9–13) rather than an emptying of the mind to encounter the God who lives within.


The Scriptures encourage meditation. But not all meditation promoted today is in harmony with the Word of God. One author makes this suggestion: “You may want to picture in your mind’s eye the coming of Jesus across the field or over the lake’s waves or entering the place you picture yourself in. As Jesus comes to you, hear Him speak words of welcome and love for you.”<sup>3</sup> I heard similar words when I first began to explore spiritual formation many years ago. But soon I was impressed to ask a vitally important question: *How do you know that Jesus is speaking?* In these experiences with visual imagery, there is no mention of parameters set by the inspired testimony of Scripture. New Age mystics engage in visual imagery but they receive instruction from spirit guides. We must not fall into the same delusion; our meditation must always be based on Scripture. The biblical teaching concerning meditation involves a focusing of the mind on the Word of God (Ps. 119:15, 48, 99, 148; Phil. 4:8), and all lessons learned must be tested by the Scriptures.

While false teachings regarding spirituality are prevalent, we must be careful not to reject or criticize genuine expressions of biblical spirituality. For example, in some cultures

everyone stands when someone offers public prayer. In other cultural settings, people bow down or kneel to pray. One approach may not be necessarily right and the other wrong. Where the Bible does not offer definite instruction, we need to allow room for individual expression. But where the inspired teaching of

## WE NEED A FIRM BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Scripture is clear, we must hold fast to that which is good and turn away from that which is not in harmony with the Word of God.

Mark Finley’s article, “Christian Spirituality: Rediscovering our Biblical Roots or Embracing the East?”; the position paper by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on biblical spirituality; and the articles by Fitzgerald, Guerrero, and Patterson, all reaffirm the importance of a solid biblical foundation for spiritual life. It is my prayer that this special issue on biblical spirituality will be helpful as you seek a closer relationship with God in harmony with His Word.<sup>4</sup> 

1 You can request a copy of the Christian Spirituality syllabus at [feedback@ministrymagazine.org](mailto:feedback@ministrymagazine.org).

2 [www.thechristianmeditator.com/mantra\\_meditation.html](http://www.thechristianmeditator.com/mantra_meditation.html); Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 134, 135.

3 Michael W. Foss, *Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2007), 31.

4 For a video presentation that further develops the concepts presented in this editorial, go to <http://www.afcoe.org/resource-center/video-library/id/372/derek-morris-afcoe-to-go-session.aspx>.

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# Biblical spirituality: Rediscovering our biblical roots or embracing the East?

During a question and answer period at a spiritual convocation on the West Coast of the United States, a man stood up and asked, “What do you think of contemplative spirituality, spiritual formation, and meditation?” In some circles, these terms have become lightning rods; they engender heated discussions and sometimes more heat than light. There are those who believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has become cold, formal, legalistic, and spiritually lifeless; and its members desperately need to experience a fresh breath of spiritual newness. They are convinced that the way to reach postmoderns is through experience, not doctrine. To them, the answer lies in contemplative spirituality. For others, contemplative spirituality is no more than Eastern mysticism clothed in Christian terms—the devil’s deception. This group believes that contemplative spirituality leads unsuspecting church members into a counterfeit religious experience based on subjective feelings and emotions rather than scriptural truth.

This entire issue leads us to some vitally important questions. What is Christian meditation? How does the Bible define it and how does it differ from Eastern mysticism? What are contemplative and centering prayers? Are there dangers in these approaches to prayer? Is the concept of spiritual formation biblical? Where can we find answers for the Laodicean complacency, spiritual barrenness, and cold formality common in too many of our lives?

## Christian meditation

Throughout Scripture, meditation stays always active, never passive, and always has an object. The goal of Christian meditation comprises filling the mind with the Word and works of God. Meditating upon His greatness and matchless love, we are changed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). In Christian meditation, we look out of ourselves to Him. Jesus is the object of our thoughts, the supreme focus of our attention (Isa. 45:22; Heb. 12:1, 2). We recognize that the heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked, and that in us there is no good thing (Jer. 17:9;

Isa. 53:6; Rom. 7:18). Our hope is in Him. Our mind is fixed upon Him. Our attention is focused upon Him, and when meditating upon Him, we are transformed into His likeness (Col. 3:1, 2). The psalmist speaks of meditating on God’s Word, His law, His testimonies, and His works (Ps. 119:97, 99, 104). He also meditates upon God’s precepts and contemplates His ways (Ps. 119:15). Christian meditation thus focuses our thoughts on the grandeur and greatness of God, lifting us from what is around us and within us to what is above us.

Ellen White uses the terms *meditate* and *meditation* 569 times. Speaking of Enoch, she declares, “The infinite, unfathomable love of God through Christ became the subject of his meditation day and night; and with all the fervor of his soul he sought to reveal that love to the people among whom he dwelt.”<sup>1</sup> Describing the importance of filling our minds with the Word of God in active meditation, she states, “We must be constantly meditating upon the word, eating it, digesting it, and by practice, assimilating it, so that it

is taken into the life current."<sup>2</sup> The significant factor in both the biblical and Ellen White's counsel is that meditation is always rooted in God's word, His works, and His ways, and anchored in His character, majesty, love, and power. Meditation's goal is not to enter into the "silence of the soul" and somehow mystically "dwell in His presence," but to actively

moments. "When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Psalm 46:10. This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life's intense activities, he who is thus refreshed, will

contemplating God's Word, God's works, and God's providence. Here are just a few examples:

"The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God's Word and with what earnestness we would search its precepts. The reading and contemplation of



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engage the mind in focusing upon the matchless charms of His love and the amazing wonders of His grace.

In the high technological, frantic pace of our twenty-first century living, genuine Christian meditation may become a lost art. The prophet Isaiah reminds us, "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength' " (Isa. 30:15).<sup>3</sup> Thoughtfully opening God's Word, reading a few verses, meditating upon His love, contemplating His character, and reflecting upon His greatness are life changing. The Holy Spirit speaks to us in these quiet

be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men's hearts."<sup>4</sup>

### Contemplating Jesus

The word *contemplative* simply means attentive, pensive, reflective, or thoughtful. A person who is contemplating is musing or pondering, reflecting or thinking. Ellen White uses the word *contemplation* 580 times. Her usage of the word is very similar to the way she uses the word *meditation*. She speaks of

the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One."<sup>5</sup>

"In the Bible a boundless field is opened for the imagination. The student will come from a contemplation of its grand themes, from association with its lofty imagery, more pure and elevated in thought and feeling than if he had spent the time reading any work of mere human origin, to say nothing of those of a trifling character."<sup>6</sup>

Probably the most well-known Ellen White statement on the value of genuine Christian contemplation is this: "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ.

We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”<sup>7</sup>

Contemplating the Cross draws us into an intimate relationship with Jesus, providing a solid foundation for our faith. Neither Ellen White nor the Bible writers speak of an aimless or mindless contemplation in which the mind resides in some sort of neutral trancelike state of oneness with God. In Scripture, the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible, speaks through the divinely inspired Word to transform our lives as we prayerfully meditate upon its passages. Jesus stated this plainly when He declared, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”

(John 6:63, NKJV). The apostle Peter adds, “By which have been given to us exceeding great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). James declares, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and the overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). Our characters are transformed as we actively meditate on God’s Word. The Bible writers also describe the life-changing power of contemplating God’s creative works (Pss.19:1–6; 32:6–12). The point of these divinely inspired writers is the same: Christian meditation does not seek to empty the mind but seeks to fill the mind. It does not seek oneness with a mystical god within, but seeks to understand more deeply the nature of God who created and redeemed us, and we then more fully reflect His character.

### Understanding centering and contemplative prayer

In *centering prayer*, the individual chooses a common word and continually repeats it to center his or her thoughts. This exercise purportedly prepares the worshiper to enter a contemplative state in which all distractions cease. The goal involves a journey to the center of one’s being to enter into a state of oneness with the divine presence within. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written by an anonymous fourteenth century author, includes practical principles of contemplative prayer. It instructs those interested in experiencing this form of prayer to “Take just a little word, of one syllable rather than of two. With this word strike down every kind of thought under the cloud of forgetting.”

*Centering and contemplative prayer* have been taught by Roman Catholic monks in monasteries for centuries. More recently Thomas

## ERWIN GANE

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# TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET



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Merton, Thomas Keating, and Basil Pennington, as well as Quaker Richard Foster have advocated it and conducted retreats for thousands of people on contemplative spirituality. Their books have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Most of the advocates of contemplative spirituality see real value in learning from the techniques of Eastern meditation. They often draw from the teaching and writings of medieval mystics, as well as Hindu and Buddhist spiritual teachers. Basil Pennington, one of the well-known proponents of the centering prayer technique, has delineated four guidelines for centering prayer.

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, relax, and quiet yourself. Be in love and have faith in God.

2. Choose a sacred word that best supports your sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine action within you ("Jesus," "Lord," "God," "Savior," "Abba," "Divine," "Shalom," "Spirit," "Love," etc.).

3. Let that word be gently present as your symbol of your sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine action within you.

4. Whenever you become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations, etc.), simply return to your sacred word, your anchor.

Pennington's guidelines for entering into centering prayer are deeply influenced by a group of monks called the Desert Fathers in the Middle Ages. These men lived a monastic lives of prayer and meditation in the deserts of the Middle East. The whole concept of looking to the Desert Fathers and the monastics for a deeper spirituality is seriously flawed. Jesus declared that His followers were to be in the world but not of the world (John 17:15). They were to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13, 14). Paul affirms this truth by declaring that followers of Christ should shine as "lights" in the midst

of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). Jesus and the disciples lived their lives between the mountain and the multitude. They spent time with God but did not neglect spending time with people. Their lives were dedicated to devotion, but they were focused on service. True genuine spirituality involves both a relationship with God and loving service to God's children and can never be truly lived by choosing to live a life of isolation. The One whom we serve "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matt. 9:35). Daniel Goleman's comments should give every Christian pause before entering into contemplative spirituality. "The meditation practices and rules for living of these earliest monks bear strong similarity to those of their Hindu and Buddhist renunciate brethren several kingdoms to the East."<sup>8</sup>



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The concept of *centering prayer* raises serious questions for followers of Christ. The use of a sacred word to center ones thoughts seems strangely similar to the mantras of the East. Is centering prayer Eastern mysticism in Christian garments? Jesus is very clear when He admonishes, “‘When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do’” (Matt. 6:7). Does not the constant repetition of a “sacred word” violate Christ’s clear instruction? Why is there such a conspicuous absence of anything like centering prayer in the Bible? The Old Testament prophets,

Christian doctrine. Neither should we. The New Testament believers did not seek to get “in touch” with the divine presence within. They looked to their crucified, resurrected, and returning Lord, and their lives were transformed.

Thomas Merton describes the goal of centering prayer in these terms: “At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth. . . . This little point . . . is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.”<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Keating adds these

and leads us to depend on a subjective, mystical experience as the measure of genuine spirituality? Mysticism is purely subjective. It does not rely upon biblical truth as the measure of spirituality but shifts the emphasis to our own experience. Yet, the Word of God has been given to us for the very purpose of establishing our faith. Jesus’ own words are too plain to be misunderstood; “‘Sanctify them by your truth, Your Word is truth’” (John 17:17). What we know about God is based on the truth of His Word. Trusting in experiential knowledge over the biblical

## THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMPRISES FILLING THE MIND WITH THE WORD AND WORKS OF GOD.

the New Testament believers, and Jesus never give even the slightest hint of continuously using a sacred word to center their thoughts in prayer. This should give us serious pause before we experiment with something that may open the door for satanic delusions. Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington state, “We should not hesitate to take the fruit of the age old wisdom of the East and ‘capture’ it for Christ. Indeed those of us who are in ministry should make the necessary effort to acquaint ourselves with as many of these Eastern techniques as possible.”<sup>9</sup> This counsel would sound very strange to Peter who proclaimed, “‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:12). The New Testament believers did not “turn the world upside down” with a gospel that blended Eastern philosophy with

thoughts, “Contemplative prayer is not so much the absence of thoughts as detachment from them. It is the opening of mind and heart, body and emotions—our whole being to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond words, thoughts and emotions.”<sup>11</sup> It is well to note these phrases in the above quotes, “point of nothingness,” “and the glory of God in us which is in everybody.” This sounds strangely like Buddhism. The idea of “the god within” comes directly from Eastern mysticism. Keating’s expression, “beyond words, thoughts and emotions” calls into question the nature of genuine spirituality. Can it be defined as a mystical experience or a relationship with God based on truth and fact that is life changing?

The biblical declaration that we are created in the image of God reinforces our ability to think and reason. Should we not be exceedingly cautious of any approach to spirituality that bypasses the mind

record takes a person outside of the standard of all truth—the Bible. Encountering God in His Word leads us to a genuine Christian experience. When our subjective experiences, feelings, and emotions do not lead us to the Word, beware!

### Spiritual formation

Another concept that has generated a great deal of discussion is *spiritual formation*. Words have meaning in the way they are defined and who defines them. Is the concept of spiritual formation biblical? If we define spiritual formation as being formed into the image of Christ as we meditate upon God’s Word, seek Him in prayer, and open our minds to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, certainly it is biblical. The apostle Paul admonishes believers at Rome “not [to] be conformed to this world but [to] be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).


He urges the Philippians to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). To the Colossians, he says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above” (Col. 3:1, 2). Ellen White expresses the idea of our characters being formed in the image of Christ beautifully: “In Jesus is manifested the character of the Father, and the sight of him attracts. It softens and subdues, and ceases not to transform the character, until Christ is formed within, the hope of glory. The human heart that has learned to behold the character of God may become, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, like a sacred harp, sending forth divine melody.”<sup>12</sup>

When the term *spiritual formation* is used to describe contemplative spirituality, centering prayer, and a religious experience based on a mystical involvement, however sincere its proponents may be, it is

certainly not biblical. If by spiritual formation we mean blending the meditative techniques of priests and monks or non-Christian religions with biblical ideas to achieve some sort of spiritual oneness with the so-called spark of divine within us, this is not biblical at all.

### Adventism’s uniqueness

Adventism’s uniqueness lies in our understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In contrast to an ever-deepening knowledge of Christ through His Word and an ever-closer relationship with Him, Satan will offer a counterfeit spiritual experience. Seventh-day Adventists believe that in the final conflict over the law of God, His people, saved by His grace, and transformed by His love, will reveal His compassionate character before a waiting world and watching universe. God will have an end-time people who desire to be like the One they most admire, a people who long for something much deeper than a mystical experience based on

subjective feelings, on the one hand, or cold, legalistic formalism based on an intellectual assent to doctrinal truth, on the other. The words of the apostle John will beat fervently in their hearts, “Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). 

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), 28.
- 2 White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), 89.
- 3 All Bible references are quoted from the New King James Version.
- 4 White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 58.
- 5 White, “Our Great Treasure-House,” *Signs of the Times*, April 4, 1906.
- 6 White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1954), 507.
- 7 White, *The Desire of Age* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 83.
- 8 Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind* (Los Angeles: Tarcher/Putnam Inc., 1988), 53.
- 9 Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington, *Finding Grace at the Gate* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Pub., 1978), 5, 6.
- 10 Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1989), 157, 158.
- 11 See Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group), 18–23.
- 12 White, “Christ Our Hope,” *Signs of the Times*, August 24, 1891.

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## Revived for and through mission

On his 90th birthday, Alec Holden went down to his local “bookie” and bet £100 that he would live to 100. Ten years later, he returned to the bookie and collected £25,000. The media asked Mr. Holden for the secret of his longevity. I am sure there was a twinkle in his eye when he replied, “I keep breathing. If you stop breathing, you’re in real trouble.”

This is also good advice for our spiritual lives. We must keep spiritually breathing—otherwise we are in real trouble. We need the spiritual life-giving oxygen that

comes only from Jesus—through prayer, Bible study, and service.

I like the slogan “Revival for Mission.” But in an important sense, revival also comes through mission. Ellen White tells of a man who collapsed in the snow, ready to die. But as he lay there he heard the moans of a nearby fellow traveler. Immediately, he reached out and began chafing the man’s frozen limbs, trying to restore life.

Mrs. White says that the man discovered something profound: “in saving his neighbor, he had saved himself.” By ministering to his

neighbor, he kept the blood flowing in his own veins, and revived himself.\* Solomon summarized it well: “Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (Prov. 11:25, NIV).

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\* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 319.



# A statement on biblical spirituality

**“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).<sup>1</sup>**

**“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).**

**“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).**

**“The attributes of God are goodness, mercy, love, long-suffering, and patience, and his followers are to possess the same attributes of character, representing Christ in true spirituality.”<sup>2</sup>**

**“Train your thoughts so that it will be easy for them to dwell upon pure and holy things. Cultivate a love for spirituality and true godliness.”<sup>3</sup>**

## Introduction

We believe that the greatest and most urgent of all our needs is a revival of true godliness, which is true biblical spirituality, or having Christ formed in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:27). Such spirituality is not natural to the sinful person who regards it as foolishness: “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14).

A vital part of discipleship and the training of gospel workers at the

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary is to enable them to cultivate genuine biblical spirituality through justification and the process of sanctification, for it is impossible for them to give others what they themselves do not have (Acts 4:13; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:2).

As in all matters of faith, Christians of the twenty-first century need to safeguard their beliefs and practices about spirituality to ensure that they do not depart from biblical principles. In today’s

postmodern, pluralistic world, with its multiple influences from Eastern non-Christian religions, animism, New Age, and other sources, the meanings of concepts related to “spirituality” and “spiritual formation” have become ambiguous and conflicted. Some terms once used freely by Adventists have become controversial. For example, the term *spiritual* is now used by some in today’s culture as a generic, all-inclusive word for sensory emotional, physical, intellectual, or relational experiences intended to build a positive relationship with a nebulous “higher power” either inside or outside of the self. Sometimes spirituality is associated with nonbiblical practices such as “centering prayer,” or “prayer labyrinth.” Part of the challenge is that some words used to convey biblically faithful meanings can also be used to convey biblically unacceptable meanings.

## Principles of biblical spirituality

Biblical spirituality can be defined as the process of the divine restoration and healing of the broken relation between the Triune God and humanity. As such, biblical spirituality is the response of a repentant human heart and mind to the loving heart and mind of God (1 Cor. 2:12,

13; Rom. 8:14). God created us in His image with the capacity to communicate with Him in a personal relationship. This capacity and relationship were fatally distorted by sin (Gen. 1:27; 3:1–9). It is God who calls us to Himself, vivifies the lifeless spiritual capacities of the sinful human heart, and leads us to know, love, depend upon, and obey God (Gen. 3:9; John 17:3; Col. 1:21–23; Eph. 1:17–19; 2 Pet. 1:2, 3). Initiated by God, biblical spirituality is a conscious walk with God in which we enjoy His awesome presence, and live in dependence upon Him. The Holy Spirit, through the Holy Scriptures, reveals to us the deep

this world (1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 4:3) to lose its influence and power upon us (Rom. 6:11–13; 8:10; Eph. 2:1–10; Gal. 6:14). Concerning this, Ellen White states, “As we meditate upon the perfections of the Saviour, we shall desire to be wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, self is crucified with Christ and Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20). The repentant sinner experiences blessedness and joy (Pss. 1:1, 2; 32:1, 2; Rom. 4:7; Phil. 4:4), peace with God (Rom. 5:1), assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:1), no fear of judgment before God (Isa. 35:4; Dan. 7:22; Luke 1:74, 75; John 5:24; 1 John 2:28; 4:17,

live is Christ (Phil. 1:21), and there is reason to boast in His cross alone (Gal. 6:14; Jer. 9:23, 24). All of life is lived in the blessed hope and anticipation of Christ’s soon return (1 John 3:3; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:11–14; Rev. 22:10–15).

In sum, a divinely effected spiritual life stands in direct opposition to living according to the flesh (John 3:6; Rom. 8:5–14; 1 Cor. 2:12–14; Gal. 5:16–6:1). Biblical spirituality means to be born of God (John 1:12, 13; 3:5–8; 1 John 4:7), be changed by the grace of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1, 2), surrendered and obedient to the Spirit, living according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4–11), and

## CHRIST’S PRESENCE WITH US AND IN US IS REALIZED BY THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD.

things of God (1 Cor. 2:9, 10; Eph. 3:14–20; 4:13), our sinfulness and lostness, and our need for the Savior Jesus Christ who took upon Himself our sins and died in our place (John 3:16, 17; 16:8–11).

Biblical spirituality is further deepened as the Holy Spirit prompts spiritual desires and leads us to consider and accept instruction from God’s Written Word (1 Cor. 2:13; Ezek. 37:4–6; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 3:7; 4:12; 6:4, 5; 2 Pet. 1:21), and to behold and experience God’s character of love (Exod. 34:6, 7; Rom. 5:5; 1 John 4:16). By beholding the attributes of God (1 Chron. 29:9–13; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jude 20; Rev. 1:4–6), we are inwardly changed (2 Cor. 3:18), transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1, 2), where our vision of God causes the spirit of

18), and love for one another (John 13:35). Upon invitation, the Holy Spirit causes a spiritual person to walk in all the commandments of the Lord (Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 14:15), which otherwise are impossible to observe (Josh. 24:19). Spiritual growth results in the presence of the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit for service to others (Gal. 5:22, 23; 1 Cor. 12; Col. 3:12–15; 2 Pet. 1:4–11).

This dynamic spiritual life, born of God, gives victory over the powers of darkness (2 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 6:10–18; 1 John 4:4). It springs into a desire to surrender self to God in faithful obedience, heartfelt worship, and unselfish service to others (Isa. 6:1–8; Matt. 25:31–46). Repentance, confession, and consecration become an integral part of our enduring connection with God (Ps. 32:1, 2; Joel 2:12–18). To

consequently empowered by the Spirit to draw others to find life in the Spirit. This is the process of sanctification concerning which Ellen White writes, “The sanctification of the soul by the working of the Holy Spirit is the implanting of Christ’s nature in humanity.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, biblical spirituality both reflects and engenders a worldview about the holy, gracious, and attractive Triune God in relation to the human self in which the true restoration and healing of the broken relationship between God and humanity is vitally experienced in the context of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, good and evil.

### Personal practices of biblical spirituality

In our study of personal practices of spirituality at the Seventh-day

Adventist Theological Seminary, we uphold biblical principles and reject nonbiblical concepts.

1. *We affirm* the priority of Scripture to guide our lives. The Word of God is the medium through which God communicates with the minds and hearts of individual humans and is foundational to any genuine spirituality. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). It is through the Word that we are sanctified (John 5:39; 17:17).

2. *We affirm* the love of God for a lost world. Scripture states that God's love for humanity is the basis of His attempts to establish a relationship with us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8–10; Gen. 3:9). The more clearly

surrender, cleansing of the heart, and renewal are part of one's new life, as well as radical transformation of life—we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who lived and died for us (Gal. 2:20).

5. *We affirm* the work of the Holy Spirit. Biblical spirituality is not possible except at the initiation of God through the Holy Spirit (John 3:6–8; 16:8–11; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Titus 3:5–7). He is the One who brings life, mediates, and illuminates the Word of God to our minds, taking our innermost groanings to God (Eccles. 3:11; John 14:26; 16:13; Rom. 8:22–27), helps us to discern spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14), and leads us in our spiritual journey (John

12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 2:10–13; Phil. 2:5; Ps. 1:2; John 7:17).

8. *We affirm* the role of the physical human body. That the human being is a living soul rather than having a separable soul is key in understanding the nature of biblical spirituality. The mind and the body form an integral unity that cannot be divided (Gen. 2:7). The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

9. *We affirm* the positive role of human feelings and experience in biblical spirituality as represented in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). As noted, we believe all human experience is to be tested and evaluated by Scripture (Isa. 8:19, 20; 2 Tim. 3:16).

## BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY ... REFERS TO A LIFE OF DISCIPLESHIP INTENTIONALLY LIVED IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

we perceive the love and character of God, the more we love and worship Him and love and respect our fellow humans.

3. *We affirm* the preeminence of Christ. Scripture states that there is no fullness of coming to God without Christ who is the fullest revelation of God's character and life (John 14:9–11), and who is the way, the truth, and the life (v. 6). While ministering for us in the heavenly sanctuary, Christ imparts His life, merit, and grace to our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 2:1, 2; Heb. 2:9–11; 8:1, 2).

4. *We affirm* the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Biblical spirituality revolves around one's need for a Savior who died for us on the cross (Rom. 3:24, 25; 1 John 3:16). Elements of repentance, confession,

16; Rom. 8:14). We live, pray, and come to victorious life in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25; Jude 20).

6. *We affirm* that communion with God takes place at His initiation through His revelation to us in Jesus Christ. Christ's presence with us and in us is realized by the influence of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:10–13) as well as through providential workings of His grace and thought impressions (Eph. 1:17, 18). All such influences, however, are to be tested by the Word (2 Tim. 3:16).

7. *We affirm* the role of the human mind in Christian spirituality. Biblical spirituality results from our renewed mind coming into contact with the mind of God through Scripture and the Holy Spirit as we meditate on and accept the Word of God (Rom.

10. *We affirm* the proper appreciation of the good things in nature that God has given to us as witnesses of His kindness and other attributes (Pss. 19:1, 2; 139:13–18; Rom. 1:19–21; Acts 14:17), which prompt us to worship Him as our living and loving Creator (Rev. 14:7).

11. *We affirm* the healing power of Christ (Matt. 9:35) from sin and the results of sin (Ps. 147:2; Isa. 51:3; 1 Cor. 1:3, 4). His healing power continues to be manifested through the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6), proper lifestyle, godly physicians, ministers, and mental health professionals, as well as human families as they express God's love to one another (2 Cor. 1:3; Matt. 10:1). God also works through miracles of healing as He wills (James 5:14, 15; Acts 3:3–10; Mark 16:17–19).

12. *We deny* that all study of the Word of God, all prayer, and all behaviors of service and devotion are performed under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Sinful humanity has the ability outwardly to do some of these good things, but for the wrong motives or sometimes in a routine fashion devoid of meaning. It is easy for the unrenowned human mind to become blinded by human learning and service and not be actuated by the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:20–25).

13. *We reject* methods of seeking to “experience” God by an emptying of the mind or an altered state of consciousness.

14. *We deny* that humans have a soul that connects with God apart from our physical brains and bodies.

15. *We reject* all varieties of so-called spiritual practices that are inconsistent with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. Following is an illustrative list of practices we reject: invoking ancestral and other types of “spirits” and various “deities” like the “goddess mother” (Rom. 1:21–23; 2 Thess. 2:10–12); invoking cosmic powers, sun, moon, stars, and other things such as rivers, oceans, mountains, trees, and animals; the idolatrous use of objects for worship or contemplation (Exod. 20:3–6); the veneration or worship of humans, living or deceased (Acts 14:12–15); prayer labyrinths, mantras, tantric rituals, prayer wheels, or yoga contemplations; magic, fetishes, or spiritualistic séances; practices that intend to manipulate or coerce God to reveal the future, solve human problems, heal illness, or provide benefits.

## Dynamics of biblical spirituality

In our understanding of the dynamics of spirituality, we uphold biblical examples and teachings and reject nonbiblical concepts.

1. *We affirm* biblical devotional practices. The Bible speaks of regular patterns of personal spiritual disciplines such as prayer (Matt. 6:4–15), reading and meditating on God’s Word (Matt. 4:4; Luke

10:26), personal and corporate worship (Luke 4:31), and fasting (Matt. 6:16–18; 17:21). Prayer is central to the spiritual life of the believer (Eph. 6:18). It is the pouring out of the heart before a loving heavenly Father, in confident expectation, and yet humble submission. Spiritual practices also include matters of stewardship (faithful giving of tithe and offerings—Matthew 23:23; 6:2–4; how we relate to finances and the things of this world—Acts 20:35; 1 Tim. 6:7–10) and Sabbath keeping (worship of God the Creator, service, rest, and celebration—Exod. 31:13; Luke 4:16; Mark 2:27, 28; Matt. 12:9–14; Acts 16:13; Heb. 4:9, 10).

2. *We affirm* the importance of following the example of Jesus in one’s daily life and in the practice of spiritual disciplines (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:15, 31; 1 John 2:6). Other key biblical patterns of spirituality include, but are not limited to Daniel (Dan. 6:10; 9:3), David (Ps. 119:97), Elijah (1 Kings 19:9–18), and other prophets in Israel (2 Kings 19:1, 2).

3. *We affirm* the role of service in the development of a Christian’s spiritual life. For some there is a disconnect between their views of service and spirituality. Yet service is an integral part of spiritual growth and some of the greatest truths about ourselves and God are experienced in the context of service (2 Tim. 2:21). Service is about having the mind of Christ for a lost world, for the hurting and brokenhearted. It is a willingness to spend and be spent for the sake of others and the gospel (2 Cor. 12:15), driven by an inner desire to share Christ (Matt. 25:31–46). The sharing of Christ includes regular involvement in all aspects of the mission of the church such as studying the Scriptures with others and preaching the good news. According to Ellen White, receiving the mind of Christ develops a spiritual condition in the Christian in which “duty becomes a delight and sacrifice a pleasure.”<sup>6</sup>

4. *We affirm* the role of community. Spirituality today is often seen as individualistic rather than

communal, thus one assumes that one can be spiritual but not religious; spiritual, and not part of a faith community. But biblically the community is the context for spiritual growth, nurture, accountability, expressing our spiritual gifts, service, and learning tolerance and unity. Corporate worship is also an integral part of our spiritual growth (Acts 2:44–47; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11–15; Heb. 10:25).

5. *We affirm* an end-time context to spirituality. The biblical teaching about the time of the end frames biblical spirituality in such a way that Christians can experience now a fellowship with God and yet at the same time sense an incompleteness to such a relationship with God. Furthermore, there is an apocalyptic dimension to biblical spirituality that heightens one’s experience with God and life lived in the world (1 Pet. 4:7). There is an urgency of experience that is ours because of our view of the return of Jesus—we long to see Jesus and the nearness of His coming heightens our expectation (Titus 2:11–14). At the same time, we are warned to be aware of false spiritual revivals (Matt. 24:23–26; 2 Thess. 2:9–12).

6. *We deny* that spiritual practices earn us any increased standing with God. Our salvation is through the sacrifice of Christ alone, by His grace accepted through faith (Eph. 2:8–10).

## Conclusion

Biblical spirituality, at its core, refers to a life of discipleship intentionally lived in personal relationship with God through Christ by the Spirit. The life lived with God is such that “we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74, 75). Thus, biblical spirituality includes conversion, justification, and sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11). It is about everything that we are and do in life, because even the common things reflect our spiritual orientation.

The biblical teaching regarding spirituality emphasizes God's initiative in establishing a relationship with humanity and provides multiple examples of how one can grow spiritually until "we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Thus, a spiritual person is one who has been converted to God, accepting from Him new life; who seeks to live continuously in the presence of God; who is grateful for His gifts; who loves truth, justice, and service; who is nurtured by spiritual disciplines; and who is humbly mindful of his or her weakness and ignorance (Mic. 6:8; Matt. 25:35, 36).

Biblical spirituality in terms of walking with God implies being in relationship with God as were Enoch and Noah (Gen. 5:22; 6:9)—conversing with Him, believing in and actively seeking His companionship in all the valleys, mountains, and plateaus of life. We do not have to

go anywhere special or do anything exceptional to seek God. He is seeking us through His Holy Spirit, and we are responding to His love continuously drawing us. We respond to Him in faith (Heb. 11:6), by talking with Him as a friend (John 15:15) in formal and informal prayer, reading, and meditating on His Word as did David (Ps. 119:97), confessing our sin and accepting His cleansing (Ps. 51), praising Him (Ps. 146:2), and assembling with His people (Matt. 18:20; Heb. 10:25); and serving God and humanity (James 1:27; 2 Pet. 2:11, 12; 1 John 3:16–19).

### Seminary faculty affirmation

While voted by the seminary faculty, this statement makes no claim to finality. Nonetheless, it offers us an opportunity to exalt our heavenly Father, to uplift our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, and to marvel at the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We experience a renewed sense of our dependence on God in

these end times, and a deepening desire to be used of God to facilitate biblical spirituality in the lives of our seminary students.

### For further study

Seventh-day Adventists value the insights Ellen White provides on the subject of biblical spirituality. Some of the best material on various spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth is found in the following books: *Education*, pp. 250–261; *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 121; *Steps to Christ*, pp. 85–101; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 315; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 102–122. ❑

- 1 All Bible texts are quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible.
- 2 Ellen G. White, "Blessed are the Meek," *Signs of the Times*, August 22, 1895.
- 3 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 315.
- 4 White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 88, 89.
- 5 White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 384.
- 6 White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 297.

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## Half a Christian

Our cell phone contacts can reveal one of two things—reformation or hypocrisy. While scrolling through my list of contacts in the spring of 2008, the Holy Spirit showed me my hypocrisy. I could not name a single non-Christian on my cell phone with whom I shared my life on a regular basis. This gap between my public proclamation and personal practice made me a missional hypocrite. Or, to use the contradiction in terms, "half a Christian."

I loved spending time with Jesus and His people but not with the

very ones who still needed to accept His salvation. Through the grace of God, however, I found repentance and a changed cell phone list as God ordained and doors opened. Cell phones do not lie.

In order to become a mission-shaped church, we need not only revival, "a resurrection from spiritual death," but reformation, "a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices."\* Reformation is the fruit of a converted heart as we embrace a prayerful lifestyle with Jesus and His Word. And yet, if we are not coming

close to those whom the mission has been designed to reach, we might not be as spiritually mature as we think.

Does your leadership include meaningful engagement with the lost? If not, what "habits and practices" might you need to reform?

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\* Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 128.



Revival  
and  
REFORMATION



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# My quest for biblical spirituality

During the fall of 2009, I attended a morning chapel service at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and noticed the printed program included no preacher. Just music—good music mixed with an occasional scripture reading and short testimonies. The singing included hymns and praise songs that focused on the power, love, and majesty of God. I love preaching and I love to preach, but on this day it did not happen—just music, testimony, and the Word. In this simple context, I found myself drawn in a powerful way into a personal encounter with my God.

I did not go into the service expecting revival, nor did I fully understand why it happened even though I have been a Christian for many years. I have served as a pastor, local conference leader and administrator, and now as a seminary professor only a few years from retirement, and found myself overwhelmed with a sense of God's presence and my need for renewal of my relationship with Him. So it was that in the silence of a couple hundred voices joined in praise and hymns, I recommitted my heart and life while trying to keep my tears to myself.

I wish to be clear regarding the purpose of writing this recollection. It is not to extol the advantages of the simple service or the value of the absence of preaching as a method. I want to share my 37-year journey and struggle to maintain an authentic biblical spirituality. What happened during the 50 minutes that I sang and prayed and listened? There was no touching appeal from a skilled preacher nor was there a prophetic call or encounter with truth that gripped me with a knowledge of my sinfulness—just music, testimonies, and the Word.

Or was it? Might it be that the declaration of Jesus regarding true worshipers in John 4 found resonance in my soul on that fall morning? Spirit and Truth! I believe that the *Spirit* part of that description discovered me that day through a group of seminary students ministering in song, testimony, and the Word. It was not merely a cognitive experience of *Truth*. The Holy Spirit pressed upon me and became more than a subject I study or a title I invoke at a marriage or baptism. The Spirit was the presence of God ministering to me that day and reminding me of the essential element of spirituality that must daily drive me forward even as Jesus was cast (Mark 1:12) by that

same presence into the wilderness as He began His ministry.

## The Spirit as my Motivator

The Christian life and professional ministry, in particular, require motivation. For years, I served the church as a member of a small team that sought out the best people to serve as pastors in the churches we served. I am shamed at the memory of how many times I repeated the quality *self-starter* as a dimension we desired in a spiritual leader. How can one be a self-starter and qualify as spiritual? Self for me is what has always gotten in the way. Actually, the motivation of the Spirit presses me forward from my bed to effective ministry each day as I lead in the name of Jesus. This has nothing to do with self. That same deep and almost visceral stirring that separated me from another vocation to follow the call of ministry is the internal motivation that has propelled me on through a lifetime of service that would have otherwise worn and crushed my spirit with the weight it brings.

My renewal experience on that fall day in the seminary chapel was not, I must admit, the first renewal I have experienced in my 37 years of professional ministry. The temptation

to lean on the arm of flesh seems like a siren's song that constantly beckoned me away from the Spirit as my strength. The wonder of it all is that same Spirit keeps calling me back to the foundation upon which pastoral ministry is built—a deep and abiding spiritual relationship with God.

A necessary discipline exists in the life of every Christian and is critically important in the life and leadership of the pastor. The following quote highlights this discipline in the life and ministry of Jesus: “Christ knew that He must strengthen His

someone else or meet someone else's expectations but to protect that powerful sense of the presence of God I experienced that morning.

My inner self has always resisted the maintenance of my spiritual life even as Paul the apostle confessed his struggle to do what he knew to be best and right. “The law is spiritual, but I am carnal” (Rom. 7:14, NKJV). So the internal force to resist the Spirit is and has been my primary challenge to live and lead in a spiritual manner. But there have also been external forces present in

as the primary driving force in his or her life and service. I served that role and was entrusted with the stewardship of pastors and their families for nearly half of my years in ministry. At this point in my life, I find myself asking what I did to strengthen the discipline of biblical spirituality in the life of the pastors whose care I was charged with. I think of all the fresh-faced, energized young leaders who came into ministry under my watch—short on experience but with hearts full of commitment to serve God and His people in a manner

THE MANAGEMENT OF PASTORS OFTEN INVOLVES THE ORGANIZATION'S EFFORT TO DO *FOR* THE PASTOR WHAT THE SPIRIT HAS PROMISED TO DO *THROUGH* THE PASTOR.

humanity by prayer. In order to be a blessing to men, He must commune with God, pleading for energy, perseverance, and steadfastness. Thus He showed His disciples where His strength lay. Without this daily communion with God, no human being can gain power for service.”<sup>1</sup> The model of Jesus as a “daily” practice has been a challenge for me as agendas and responsibilities so easily provided an excuse to pursue the urgent and neglect the necessary. The nurture to sustain spiritual power can be accessed only through relational discourse with the Source of spiritual power. My spiritual renewal on that fall day placed a craving in my heart to cling to that experience and provided an internal motivation to strengthen my commitment to that daily discipline—not to please

my life that reflection has revealed as having a negative impact on my efforts to embrace the Spirit as my motivating force. Especially as a young pastor, I, too, often focused on meeting the expectations imposed upon me by others. My efforts to find acceptance from those in authority over me by doing more, accomplishing more, and being successful muffled the voice of the Spirit in my life as I reached competitively for numerical goals and embraced the creative products of others to be seen as successful.

### Leadership and spirituality

A discussion of this subject requires me to confess that those who direct and support the work of the pastor have a role to play in sustaining the spirituality of the pastor

that would grow His kingdom. Are they still energized? Are they still propelled from bed each morning by the Spirit with a heart and mind committed to the goals that brightened their eyes as interns? Did I pressure them through a *command and control approach* that turned their eyes and ears from the Spirit who had promised to work His will in and through them?

The world has influenced our leadership behaviors, and I fear that unwittingly some of us have not always supported the nourishing of that internal Spirit that makes the pastor a spiritual leader. How many times have we, as leaders, contributed encouragement through external or extrinsic rewards as a means of boosting “productivity” in pastors? The quantitative valuing of pastors

by celebrating numerical success in a way that compares each with his or her colleagues leads to the adoption of competitive behavior that dampens spiritual motivation. In adopting a business or sales model in the context of spiritual ministry, we risk replacing the Spirit-driven model introduced at Pentecost with a management model replete with the necessary coercive structures (rewards and punishments) that are familiar in the corporate and commercial world. The church was designed to function on a relational model, wherein each child of God was to be gifted for ministry competency (Rom. 12:4–6; 1 Cor. 12:1ff; Eph. 4:7–13), transformed to bear fruit by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), and motivated and empowered by the indwelling Spirit of God (John 14:17; Acts 19:1ff; Eph. 3:20) to accomplish His will. The church is not a business!

The tendency that has emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century to refer to pastors as employees has tempted us to treat them as such. The managing of the pastor as though he or she was a salesperson with quotas creates the “hireling” (John 10:12) of whom Jesus warned us. When treated and related to as an employee, the natural progression is for the “employee” to migrate toward transactional behavior—minimal contribution, marginal commitment, and low creativity. Contribution and commitment are replaced with compliance in the race to satisfy the expectations of others. For this reason, the “hireling” will not die for the sheep because there is no sense of ownership to spark commitment. The Good Shepherd dies for the sheep because they are His (John 10:11)! When we objectify the pastor as an employee, we strip the ownership element away.

It seems to me that we have forgotten that the pastor is paid subsistence for spiritual leadership service rather than remuneration from the church to fulfill a transactional commitment. The pastor

doesn't work for money—the pastor is given money so he can work! When the pastoral salary is extended as payment for services, we encourage the hireling mentality that limits the risk and dedication the pastor owes to the high calling of gospel ministry. The fostering of a management relationship between pastor and church organization unintentionally contributes to the suffocation of the Spirit as a motivating influence on pastoral effectiveness.

The management of pastors often involves the organization's effort to do *for* the pastor what the Spirit has promised to do *through* the pastor. The pastor's creativity is replaced by the creative product of experts who plan and devise means of ministry *for* the pastor. This has a choking effect on the spirituality of the leader. Often the pastor's schedule or agenda will be so filled with work created for him or her to carry out that there is little time left for local creativity. We must remember that the authority offered by Jesus (Matt. 28:18–20) is distributed at the member level where the pastor serves. This is not the sole possession of positional leaders who would think to know best what the pastor or church needs. The word *authority* expects the one holding it to “author” or create in a generative manner.

Note the following counsel: “Leading men should place responsibilities upon others, and allow them to plan and devise and execute. . . . Do not educate them to rely upon your judgment. Young men must be trained up to be thinkers.”<sup>2</sup> Ellen White gave this advice a little over one hundred years ago, and though oft ignored it remains a powerful statement of support for allowing the Holy Spirit to directly influence the work of the pastor in terms of creativity and planning. In fact, she follows this statement with the warning that “There are men who today might be men of breadth of thought, might be wise men, men to be depended upon, who are not such, because they have been educated to follow another man's plan. They have

allowed others to tell them precisely what to do, and they have become dwarfed in intellect. Their minds are narrow, and they cannot comprehend the needs of the work.”<sup>3</sup>

The nurturing and honoring of the Spirit of God in my life is essential, as it is in the life and work of every pastor. We cannot lead in a direction that will accomplish God's will on this planet if we apply methods and means that sidestep the Holy Spirit. My own renewal and maintenance of the gift of biblical spirituality that is my inheritance as a child of God is my primary responsibility. The honoring and nurturing of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of those I serve in this church comprises the most important work I have before me. I am called to make disciples who will become the spiritual leaders of our faith community.

## Spirituality must be nurtured

It would be nice if I could awaken some fine morning and discover that the work of the Spirit was no longer resisted by the internal force of my fallen nature. It would be a relief on that day to know that every external force that encourages me to turn to the expediency of the arm of flesh had disappeared from my life's context. But both such wishes are not apt to find a place in my reality. Nurturing my spirituality is likely a task that will occupy me for the rest of my life. Should I be discouraged by that prospect? I think not. The Spirit that unexpectedly shook me from my reverie of self on that fall morning in 2009 will likely have to shake me awake again. For that I give my God thanks. Praise Him for His vigilance in reminding me of my need for Him! “If we [I] live in the Spirit, let us [me] also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25, NKJV). ❏

1 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 423.

2 White, *Christian Leadership* (Washington, DC: The White Estate, 1985), 43.

3 White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), 303.

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# Where does the time go?

## Finding **time** for **God**

I was invited to lead a seminar called “Challenges for the Adventist Pastor.” Some attendees prepared to take notes, though one participant seemed disappointed when my first item appeared on the screen: “Challenge One: Struggling to Spend Time With God.”

Spending time with God is not a challenge for pastors, is it?

### Analogy

I have always worked in libraries while pursuing my degrees, but never had time to read books when on duty. During my undergraduate studies, my student job description included helping patrons locate books. I knew where to find various genres of publications, books, periodicals, dissertations, and more. Often, while I was relocating books and periodicals, I would come across interesting titles and write them down to read “later,” though I rarely did.

While pursuing my master’s degree, I was hired as a student worker at Andrews University’s library in the acquisitions section. My supervisor would regularly give me a list of hundreds of books to order. I would again get excited about a recent publication and make a note to read it, though it almost never happened. One day,

I could not take it anymore, so I talked to my supervisor. He told me a story of a lady applying for a job at the library. When asked why she wanted the job, she said that she loved reading. The interview team members laughed at the obvious: a library worker does not have time to read books.

### No time for God

In a similar way, pastors may struggle to make time for God. Is it not obvious that pastors spend their entire work day praying with people, reading and teaching the Scriptures, and leading spiritual meetings? Yes, but a reality check will show that ministry gets hectic, and we may end up so busy doing God’s work that we forget about the God for whom we work.

Jonathan,<sup>1</sup> after 19 years of ministry, acknowledges that in the various positions he served, “one of the biggest obstacles I find is making room for God in my daily schedule.” Another pastor confessed, “The burdens of ministry are great. I’m preacher, counselor, secretary, and sometimes maintenance man at our small church. I carry a heavy burden for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of my flock. Satan continually attacks in one way or

another. Sometimes I don’t have the energy to fight the battle anymore.”<sup>2</sup>

Are these pastors alone? Not really. Many pastors find that ministry can be overwhelming, which makes it hard for them to take time for God.

A survey of 1,050 pastors in 2005 and 2006 found that 72 percent said they studied the Bible only when preparing sermons or lessons. In other words, only 38 percent of the surveyed pastors read the Bible for devotions and personal study.<sup>3</sup> Another survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors, in 2009, indicated that 65 percent work at least 50 hours a week. Some said they work at least 70 hours per week. According to the source, “meetings and electronic correspondence consume large amounts of time for many ministers, while counseling, visitation, family time, prayer, and personal devotions suffer in too many cases.” Concretely, the source argues that “the amount of time spent in prayer and personal devotions raises questions about the vitality of many pastors’ spiritual lives. While 52 percent report spending one to six hours in prayer each week, five percent say they spend no time at all in prayer. Furthermore, while 52 percent say they spend two to five hours a week in personal devotions unrelated to teaching preparation,

14 percent indicate they spend an hour or less in personal devotions each week.”<sup>4</sup>

### Personal account

When I read an interesting biblical text, I find it very hard not to think that it will make a good sermon. A regular church member would probably look at that text and, if it impresses him or her, would think something like, *Wow, what a wonderful message God is giving me!* There is nothing wrong with taking note on a potential preaching idea during your devotional time, but we cannot be derailed from our

### Extremes

Daniel Dennett and Linda LaScola confidentially interviewed five Protestant pastors<sup>6</sup> still engaged with parishes but who *don't believe in God*. Three were from “liberal” denominations, two from “more conservative” traditions.<sup>7</sup>

“I remember standing with an umbrella outside in a thunderstorm,” said Adam, one of the five. “It was lightning. I prayed to God that He would take my life before I lost my faith.” From his perspective of eternity, Adam argued that if God foresaw he was going to lose his faith and would have to banish him to hell

with many there was no special burden to get near to the Lord.” Ellen White adds that “while some of the ministers were brokenly calling upon the Lord, and were weighted down as a cart beneath sheaves, the hearts of many were untouched.”<sup>9</sup>

Adolph, an ordained Seventh-day Adventist pastor for 12 years, shared some of his story. “Very often, church members in the congregations I lead ask me to pray for them. When I visit somebody in the hospital, I have to pray. In almost every meeting I attend—from church potlucks to small group meetings and church board meetings—somebody asks

“WE MAY END UP SO BUSY DOING GOD'S  
WORK THAT WE FORGET ABOUT THE GOD  
FOR WHOM WE WORK.”

devotional life to pursue sermon preparation. Yes, praise God for the opportunity He gives me to preach, but if I think about a text only from the perspective of a pastor, I might fail to receive the message God sends me as His child.

Ellen White once warned, “Overburdened, a minister is often so hurried that he scarcely finds time to examine himself, whether he be in the faith. He finds very little time to meditate and pray. Christ in His ministry united prayer with work. Night after night He spent wholly in prayer. . . . Ministers must seek God for His Holy Spirit, in order that they may present the truth aright.”<sup>5</sup>

Those involved in pastoral ministry face the temptation of praying for others while neglecting personal prayer time; we find it easy to spend a lot of time studying the Word in order to preach it to others, but we find no room for personal time with God's Word.

forever, “it seemed like the most loving thing He could do was to take my life while I still believed, and I honestly prayed that. And of course, nothing happened.” His final argument was that, because nothing happened, God was either “so loving He's going to keep giving me more chances or you know, He's really not there.” Adam concluded that God does not exist.<sup>8</sup>

As extreme as this example may be, it illustrates the danger of overlooking the importance of our relationship with God. We may not necessarily end up giving up our faith in God, but if disconnected from Him, we are in a dangerous situation.

Read this testimony sent directly to Adventist pastors: “In visions of the night I was in a company where our ministers were assembled. A few were humbling themselves before God and confessing their sins. They were weeping, and pleading with God to spare his people and to give not his heritage to reproach. But

me to be the one who prays because I am the pastor. Young people usually ask me to pray for their particular issues, and adults request prayer for their finances, their marriage, and a thousand other things. However, I am rarely able to spend some unrushed time with God on my own when I'm not on duty as a pastor.”

Roberto, another pastor, confessed, “We are very skilled professionals in God's Word and in prayer but applying all of that to our walk with God is another story.”

Abdullah converted to Christianity from Islam. Some years later, he became a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. When I talked with him about this issue, he looked at me like somebody who longs for better times and said, “I was actually more prayerful before becoming a pastor.” Although he was honoring his title—“God's servant”—by traveling to many countries and preaching the gospel in various languages, he had

somehow forgotten this aspect of his own relationship with God.

Joo-Chan, a Korean Seventh-day Adventist pastor, puts it this way, "Prayer is the key for success in ministry. And it has been the key for my personal life too. How in the world could a pastor survive without prayer?"

### What can we do?


I believe that, as pastors, we need to be intentional in taking time for God. And our plans need to distinguish clearly between the time we will spend working for God and the time we spend being with Him. Whatever our other duties, we cannot let our time with God slowly and unintentionally shift to the back seat of our priorities.

Ellen White tells us that "there is too little prayer among the ministers of Christ";<sup>10</sup> "there is too little time spent in secret prayer and in sacred meditation. The cry of God's servants should be for the holy unction and to be clothed with salvation, that what they preach may reach hearts."<sup>11</sup> She urged ministers to go before God in prayer, "confessing their sins, and with all the simplicity of a little child ask for the blessings that they need."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus, our sinless Savior, made devotion a daily habit. One day, after Jesus fed thousands, He "made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray" (Matt. 14:22, 23, NIV).

Now it is not that we are going to put aside our pastoral duties and pray all day. Ellen White suggests that our life must be like Christ's life, "between the mountain and the multitude"; she adds that "he who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine."<sup>13</sup> Besides working for God, we need to find time to pray and read the Bible in order to fortify our minds with the truths of the

Bible, so that we can stand through the last great conflict.<sup>14</sup>

It's good to watch God do miracles around us, but it is much better and more enjoyable to watch Him do miracles in our own lives as well. If we are too busy to be in close communion with the Lord, we are too busy to be Adventist ministers! 

- 1 Pastors' names have been changed for confidentiality.
- 2 H. B. London, "Personal Devotions," Focus on the Family: Pastoral Ministries. Broadcast Audio File, 2007, <http://fofocd.networks.net/pastoral/p2p/p2p089/p2p-089-complete.mp3> (accessed June 23, 2011).
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- 5 Ellen White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 91.
- 6 Daniel C. Dennett and Linda LaScola report that the denominations represented are Southern Baptist, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Church of Christ.
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- 8 CBC Radio, "Preachers Who Don't Believe in God," <http://www.cbc.ca/video/news/audioplayer.html?clipid=1822271360> (accessed June 23, 2011).
- 9 White, *Spalding and Magan Collection* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), 437.
- 10 White, *Evangelism*, 641.
- 11 White, *The Voice in Speech and Song* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1988), 219.
- 12 White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), 153.
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- 14 White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2005), 593, 594.

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# Steeped in God's Word: Engaging children in the study of Scripture

At a Bible conference in Wales, I invited a group of believers to see me make a cup of tea. I held up a glass mug of hot water and dangled a tea bag in the water for a second or two, then removed it, declaring, "That was easy—we now have tea!" The gathered tea-making specialists chuckled but patiently suggested, "You have to leave it in the water longer."

I placed the tea bag back in the water and let it remain for a few more seconds, then moved to lift the bag out of the water again, but the protest erupted more intensely, "You have to leave the bag in the water to steep!"

"Steep?" I asked feigning innocence.

A woman kindly suggested, "Yes, it has to steep. You must let the water get into the bag so that what is in the bag can flavor the water."

Steep instead of a quick dip. Bible study is the same: get into the Word in such a way that the Word gets into you!

Asaph would agree:

O my people, hear my teaching;  
listen to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in parables,  
I will utter hidden things, things  
from of old—  
what we have heard and known,  
what our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their  
children;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,  
his power, and the wonders he  
has done  
(Ps. 78:1–4).\*

As a pastor and parent, I share Asaph's earnest hope to see children connect intimately in a relationship with God, their Creator and Savior. Notice how he longs to engage the next generation to know God: listen, utter, hear, tell.

In Asaph's day, "The Word" or "Scripture" was not a leather-covered book with gold-leaf edges but statements and stories told to listeners from memory. Over the seasons, the printed Word replaced the spoken Word and now, in a similar way, digital media challenges the need for books. Even though times change, the Bible still stands as the primary resource to inform and compel humanity to come to

the Son of God for life (John 5:39; 20:30, 31).

Today, many are comfortable communicating with sound bites and cryptic text messages that simply sprinkle information about with very little interaction. This current format tends to minimize not only the way we communicate, but also what we choose to talk about. Today, we need a seismic shift from a "quick dip" of our children in the Scriptures (indirect and superficial knowledge) to steeping them in the Word of God (deep and purposeful).

Getting young people into God's Word involves three enduring principles: (1) an environmental challenge, (2) an experiential task, and (3) a forum for expression.

## Cultivate an environment of conversation with God's Word

The environmental challenge means creating a proactive attitude and atmosphere about the Word of God. Consider the advice given by Moses to the Israelites on the brink of entering the Promised Land: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with

all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut. 6:5-9).

"The words" were to be upon their hearts (steeped)—not just once a week or occasionally, if time permitted, but always. After urging parents and leaders to immerse children continually in the ways of God, the day would come when such an approach would no longer suffice. Moses forecasted the inevitable day when children would move from concrete faith experience to abstract questions that emerge as they mature into adolescence. What then?

Moses answers, "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?' tell him, 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand'" (vv. 6:20, 21).

Tell the story about how slaves became free. We can memorize the list of commands and raise our hands in agreement to a set of beliefs, but eventually "what is true" needs to become "true for me."

Some might say, "Yes, easier said than done! Those people saw the plagues fall and the Red Sea part. How do I create that kind of atmosphere today when our environment differs so much from those on the way to Canaan?" We must understand the importance of remembering that the book of Deuteronomy was not given primarily to those who had experienced the deliverance from Egypt but to those who were born in the desert. They had never known Egypt. Even though they were second-generation believers, the children of Israel were commanded to tell the story as though they experienced it firsthand. For that we need storytellers.

In addition to building the right atmosphere, there is the work of getting them to learn to do what Scripture says.

### Foster an experiential expectation with God's Word

The experiential task of Scripture involves engaging young people in a conversation with God by "hearing and doing." As we teach children, we need to do so expecting to put the Word of God into practice.

Paul noted that when people expect "the word of God" to actually be from God, they tend to be more attentive to the message. Notice the experiential language the apostle uses: "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

The believers Paul refers to expected the message to be "from God" and "at work" in them. Clearly, the Word of God was alive in them. Learning must include action, otherwise it is not only incomplete, it is not really learning (James 1:22; Matt. 7:24-26; Ps. 119:9). Furthermore, having an expectation about the way we learn assumes that the action has been repeated in such a way that it becomes "normal." Parents, teachers, and leaders must begin to model an action-oriented response to Scripture as a way of life. When a parent forgives an enemy or leader and expresses compassion to broken people, as a matter of practice and pattern, children can count on God speaking to us as though it were a real, interactive conversation. For children to expect this level of interaction with God's Word in our lives, it must begin with one action at a time, over time.

Occasionally, I simply prayed to God loudly in front of my son about the little things that happened during the day. Sometimes after lunch I would say, "What a wonderful meal, Father! Thank You so much!"

Another time our family was traveling, and we handed a meal and some money to someone who held a cardboard sign that read, "My family and I have not eaten." As we left, my wife said out loud, "Jesus, please be close to that family." So, I was not surprised when my son Morgan and I were raking leaves in the yard, and he raised his eyes heavenward and shouted, "See God, I'm doing a really good job!" Earlier we had read, "Whatever we do, do to the glory of God." On another occasion, my wife informed me that when I would come home from work I brought into the house a stressful urgency to "get things done" that adversely affected the family. I thought of just trying to be more loving, but just thinking about it was not enough. I walked to the hardware store and purchased a doormat for the front porch that read, "Bless This Home." This was not a prayer to God as much as a reminder for me to go beyond just hearing a message from God, but doing it.

### Create opportunities to express God's Word to others

Thirdly, young people need to express what they experience in God's Word. When children share what they learn, it has a way of cementing the truths they study. When Jesus healed the demoniac, He urged the young man clinging to Him in the boat, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). He did. Not only did the Word of God spread throughout the region, it also spread throughout every fiber of the one who was healed.

Earlier I mentioned Asaph's passion to pass on the story, but a few psalms earlier he becomes disillusioned to the point of despair, making statements like, "my feet had almost slipped" (Ps. 73:2) or "surely in vain have I kept my heart pure" (v. 13). Nevertheless, Asaph catches himself before he allows his cynicism to overrun his heart. Asaph confessed, "If I had said, 'I will speak



thus, 'I would have betrayed your children" (v. 15). When we "speak it," our learning is deeper than if we just think it.

Consider how verbalizing our thoughts impacts our memories. Reading aloud enhances comprehension. People who try to remember someone else's name might say it often in a conversation, sometimes awkwardly, but the more often they say it, the deeper the name sticks in their memories. Memorizing lines for a play out loud is far more effective than simply reading the lines quietly to yourself. Some who pray out loud to God, testify of a deeper experience than praying silently. Addicts are often taught to resist temptation by saying it out loud, "No. I will not." Many times, the result is a great resolve. Teachers frequently say that the most effective way to learn something includes having to teach it to others. We need to encourage our kids to speak, share, declare, confess, profess, instruct, and testify.

Somehow, the expressing of what you discover in Scripture embeds itself in you more fully.

### Activities

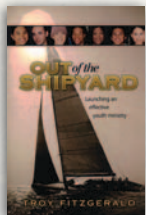
Here are some activities that have proven to be effective in my ministry. Hopefully, these suggestions will encourage more creativity and experimentation among leaders to develop their own methods. Most of all, remember, methods and resources are not the teaching tools—people are. Prayerful. Thoughtful. Flexible. Humble. Such people are the instruments of God, who must model these principles and practice them in order for our children to embrace them. With that said, consider a few activities that have worked well with young people.

*Paraphrase.* Invite young people to paraphrase scripture. The challenge is to get children to read a verse or section of the Bible and put it into their own words. All too often they simply reorder the same words.

So, I assign a simple rule: "Rewrite this passage in your own words, without using any of the words in the Bible, except the essential connecting words, such as, is, to, and, the, and so on."

This activity seems difficult even for adults, but it forces those who try it to think about the meaning of the words they read. Not only will children grow in their understanding of God's Word, but they will also have written examples of their insight to reflect upon later. One of the best places to start is with the most popular verse in the Bible. Read here a sample paraphrase of John 3:16 from a 12-year-old: "The Creator of the Universe said, 'These people are mine and I care about them so much that I can't just let them die.' So, the Creator became Jesus, the human, and decided to pay for our sin Himself, and if we think it is true and start to feel it is true, then we don't have to die like sinners. We get to live with Him always!"

## BOOKS by TROY FITZGERALD

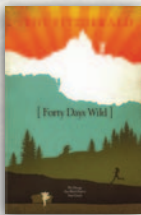


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Over the course of a year, a family, class, or entire church family might choose to paraphrase one of the Gospels and end with a celebration of a public reading of their writings.

*Chain reference (sequential-tactile-visual).* Teach children to highlight and link the passages of Scripture together on any given topic. Start by choosing a question, topic, or person to start your search. Show them how to use a concordance and choose at least five verses to mark. At the front of their Bibles, they can write the topic and the first verse, for example, "Forgiveness—1 John 1:9." Go to that verse and, after marking that passage, write the next verse in the margin or wherever there is room. Continue to link each verse together in this way to make a topical chain.

Not only have they done a Bible study, but now they have a well-thought out resource in their Bible. As children continue to study this way, the tangible reminders of pages marked will foster confidence about their study.

*Memorialize.* Strengthen memory by helping children create tangible symbols of God's Word. Remember the story where "Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far has the LORD helped us'" (1 Sam. 7:12). The rock reminded them of a story. Bible study includes using your creativity to connect everyday items to actual truths in God's Word.

After reading that the Bible is compared to a "two-edged sword" in Hebrews 4:12, my family and I carved and sanded a sword from an old tree we had to cut down but left the stump sticking out of the evergreen bushes in our backyard. Some light candles to bring in the Sabbath or bake challah bread as a tradition. To link creative expressions that are physical to our beliefs fosters the idea that God's Word continually and meaningfully shapes our daily lives.

*Conversational journal.* Reading Bible stories and writing letters to God in a journal creates a conversational way while they are learning. Again, these journals can be a way to show children, as they grow, that they are in fact on a journey with God. The conversational journals about the stories of Scripture can become markers in their walk with God.

Help young people respond by giving them journaling prompts, if they need direction, such as, "Dear God," "I noticed in this story that . . ." "I believe that You are trying to teach me . . ." "I want to learn how to . . ." "Thank You for giving me this message so I can . . ."

*Dramatize.* The use of reader's theater works well for getting children to read, memorize, and dramatically recite scripture publicly in worship. The idea is to recite scripture combined with anthems and interruptions of conversation that expand or explain the message. The ideal would be to get four or five children to memorize their parts and practice, which deepens the message in their own hearts as well as edifies the congregation.

*Ask thought/heart questions.* The four Gospels have more than 270 questions that Jesus asked. Good questions can stir the thoughts and direct young people to meaningful responses. Consider the tone and style of the following questions:

Why do you think John chose to tell this story?

When you read this story of Joseph, what portion do you think we should talk about? Or think about more? Why?

What story or person in the Bible does this verse about forgiveness remind you of? Why did you choose that story?

Of all the passages you read, which verse speaks to you the most today? Why?

Good questions encourage children to think and share as well as develop a confidence in their ability to interact with God's Word.

## Putting it all together

The encounter Jesus had with the expert of the law is a textbook demonstration of a few of these principles and practices. "On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?'" (Luke 10:25, 26).

Not only did Jesus inquire about content ("What is written in the Law?"), but the Savior was keenly interested in the way he perceived its meaning. The student in this story chooses to answer the question by quoting the ancient summary of the law found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and connecting it with another phrase clipped from Leviticus 19:18, that adds a responsibility to "'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Consider the response of Jesus: "'You have answered correctly,'" Jesus replied. "'Do this and you will live'" (Luke 10:28). The Lord follows the expert's next question about who is my neighbor with a penetrating story—the parable of the good samaritan. At the end of the story Jesus asks, "'Which of the three was a neighbor?'" (v. 36). The response indicates real, higher level learning: "'The one who showed mercy.'" And finally, Jesus leaves no room for only a theoretical or cognitive understanding of mercy. He extends the lesson into real learning by urging the student to "'go and do likewise.'"

Granted, the above example clearly occurs in the learning experience of an adult. However, the teaching methods Jesus used translate to all age levels. Ultimately, our desire is for children to not only know their Bibles, but know God personally. As parents and leaders, we would do well to model these practices and share them with our kids so that we will see a generation of young people steeped in God's Word. **M**

\* All Bible references are quoted from the New International Version.

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## Science, Creation and the Bible: Reconciling Rival Theories of Origins

by Richard F. Carlson and Tremper Longman III, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

To compress the processes of origins science into a few thousand years is as hard as to extend the fiat of origins theology to billions of years. Seventh-day Adventist members would like science to confirm the Bible's origins story as nicely as inspiration has often confirmed our health message, but that likely will not happen because a fiat creation is not an ongoing process amenable to scientific inquiry. Richard F. Carlson and Tremper Longman try to deal with the conflict and, although their progression of thought does not always seem obvious, here you will find one way of organizing it:

First, readers will appreciate the authors' respect for the Bible. Theology tells of God and love; life after death; the eschaton and ultimate destiny; and human value, purpose, and responsibilities. The book's primary emphasis centers on theology—a systematic Bible hermeneutic and celebration of God's wisdom, power, care, and faithfulness with each new scientific discovery.

The authors note both fiat and process throughout the Bible. Isaiah 40 uses both as comfort for the Babylonian exiles. The Psalms speak of God's power and creation's regularity. John speaks of the Word at

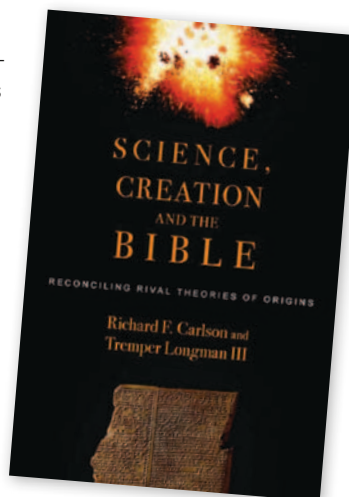
Creation and in continuing action. Colossians 1:15–20 and Hebrews 1:1–4 glorify Christ as Creator and Sustainer. Romans 1:18–20 and 8:19–23 speak of the Genesis curse and the redemption story for the entire creation.

Unfortunately, the book hardly deals with the problem of evil where some of the best clues come from an understanding of origins: God is not the source of evil, He created humans with freedom, is just, feels the evil with us, and limits evil in time.

Revelation may need to be reinterpreted. Some have done this in accepting science's long-age processes for development of the universe, solar system, and earth itself; however, most would be uncomfortable with these authors' acceptance of such processes for life as well.

The authors limit revelation in that both the Bible and Christ are an incarnational accommodation to humans. Both are beyond normal human understanding and science, for example, God's character, our free will in spite of God's omniscience, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and miracles. Thus, the authors recognize that any reconciliation will be incomplete.

Second, readers would probably agree with this book's respect for nature and the scientific method of studying it, but also its recognition that nature may need reinterpretation and that our human understanding is limited. Due to human limitations, the divine/human Christ presents a




theology paradox, just as the wave/particle theory of light presents a science paradox. Thus, the authors reject a purely human description of God's creative activity and note that even scientific descriptions go beyond normal human experiences for

very large and small sizes and high speeds. When science does describe nature's processes without referring to God, this is not necessarily godless, for it uses methodological naturalism without necessarily espousing metaphysical naturalism.

Third, the book tries to reconcile revelation and nature by rejecting either an anti-God or antisience position, and instead suggests that theology tells *why* and science tells *how*. This attempt at reconciliation has major problems, as does any attempt, so the authors refer not only to the simple creation wisdom of Proverbs 3 and 8, but also the complex creation of Job 38–41. For Job, God's direct response is better than having all the answers.

Fourth, the authors attempt to remove barriers for presenting the gospel to people. Although the attempt will not be useful to many, it may be helpful in encouraging faith among some in the poorly reached people group of the educated.

—Reviewed by Ben Clausen, PhD, associate director, Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, United States. 

## Internet conference focuses on denominational integration

For church Web professionals attending an annual Internet conference, the real work got done at breakfast where advice was exchanged and conference speeches dissected as attendees chatted. "That's where the real networking gets done," said **Andrew King**, Web manager for the Adventist world church's Communication department.

About 160 participants from around the world gathered for the eighth annual forum. This year's event was held in Hong Kong, May 23–27, 2012. The forum is held in a different world region each year to better accommodate local church administrators and members.

Presentations this year underscored the need for simplicity and focus in Web design and interaction. In separate speeches, both King and Adventist Risk Management marketing and communication manager, **David Fournier**, outlined advantages of ridding a site of historical baggage. "The more information you have the more careful you have to be about organizing it," said Fournier, who was one of several participants urging a greater commitment to effective information architecture on denominational Web sites.

King said that new initiatives are notorious for making officials think that their organization needs a new Web site. "I can almost guarantee that the top stakeholders in the organization have not asked themselves, 'Have market trends and the needs of our customers shifted, and should our current Web site be adjusted accordingly?'" King said, and instead recommended that new



Andrew King, Photo credit: Ansel Oliver.

initiatives be incorporated into an organization's existing site.

Others offered tips on facilitating better user experiences on the Web. During a sideline discussion, **Jesse**

**Johnson**, president of netAserve, which provides technology support to the Adventist Church, said links on a Web page do not help the organization because it pushes away users. "Instead, incorporate another organization's content on your Web site, especially if it's a local church Web site," Johnson advised. "Users will enjoy the content and will feel stronger about your site and are more likely to visit your church."

**Daniel Jiao**, communications director for the Chinese Union Mission, said people are increasingly using mobile devices to access the Internet. Indeed, at the end of 2011, there were an estimated six billion mobile subscribers, representing 87 percent of the world's population, according to a December report by the International Telecommunication Union.

Other leaders advocated for church communication and Web managers to design their Web sites for mobile usage. "It may end up being a more simple site," said King, "but if you design for mobile first, you're reaching all of whom your audience might be."

Several participants offered evening presentations highlighting mass Internet evangelism projects in their own territories. The Adventist Church in Germany and Austria last

year held the Faith.Simple project, an eight-week outreach series to postmoderns. **Klaus Popa**, who co-led the series, said hundreds of discussion groups were held in



homes and churches throughout German-speaking areas of Europe.

Adventist leaders in South America continue to tweak mass media evangelism events, finding that interactive campaigns with interactive components have proven better online response rates compared to events that are just streamed. For an increasing number of outreach events, respondents sign up on the outreach Web site or Facebook to complete a Bible study. The challenge is making sure local pastors or members can follow up with the 4,000 responses from a recent event, a media manager said. "If pastors or church members don't contact

them, they are less likely to join the church," said **Rogério Ferraz**, a project manager for the South



Daniel Jiao, photo credit: Daryl Gungadoo.

American Division, based in Brasilia, Brazil. "People need that personal contact."

In the Trans-European Division, based outside of London, communication department leaders have established LIFEconnect, an online community where people can meet, share their life experiences, and offer spiritual support.

**Williams Costa Jr.**, the Adventist Church's communication director and forum organizer, affirmed Adventist technologists, saying, "You are not just dealing with Web sites and platforms, you're an important part of the church. Today, making easy content, stories, and testimonies can be

used by the Holy Spirit." —Ansel Oliver, with additional reporting by Penny Brink and Darryl Thompson.

## LETTERS



Continued from page 4 ▶

us from the curse of the law, the Sabbath is no longer binding on God's people. The question is, *What is the curse of the law?* Whatever it may be, the truth remains that both the ceremonial and moral law were never a curse to the people of God, for both emanated from God and were meant for the good of His people. If the Sabbath is no longer binding according to Schreiner, then what is the purpose of the Cross? The Cross of Calvary still remains the greatest argument in

favor of the truth that the law of God is still in force and will remain so forever.

—Herbert E. N. Odinkemere, pastor, Nigeria

### God's commandments are also promises

What a lovely presentation of God's Ten Commandments as promises in the *Ministry* issue of June 2012, by Vara Prasad Deepati ("The Ten Commandments: A Law to Be Obeyed or Promises to Be Celebrated?"). It comes to us in

a very timely fashion as a further reminder that God's promises are the foundation of our faith and are given to lead us to have faith in Him.

I believe that God's character and love are revealed in His ten holy precepts, and there is nothing negative in that law—that by obeying it we are protected from spiritual evils. I hope and pray that all the world may see and know God's love, perfectly expressed in the Decalogue.

—Cliff Drieberg, retired pastor, Osoyoos, British Columbia, Canada

Jerry N. Page, MDiv, is ministerial association secretary, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



# Strategies for a false teaching

A pastor friend of mine once confessed, “I do some of my worst sinning when I am right!” I have found this insightful comment to be all too true at times in my life. Often during my personal time with Jesus, He has had to reprove me for the way I have treated someone as I tried to correct his or her wrong behavior or beliefs. He lets me know that, while I may have been right about the facts, I was wrong in the un-Christlike spirit and tone

there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).<sup>1</sup> God has promised the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

**2. Overreaction to the false teaching.** A secondary strategy accompanying the false teaching is one that can lead an even larger group of conscientious believers astray. They become so afraid of the false that they miss the great truths being counterfeited that are essential to their spiritual growth in the Lord. As they seek to intensely warn others of the false, they lead others to miss the vital truths God wishes to share with them. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

**3. A harmful approach in warning about false teachings.** “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Even if we are right about the facts, if we are wrong in spirit, we can cause great harm as we warn others of a false teaching. Ellen White presents a needed balance:

Precious truth must be presented in its native force. The deceptive errors that are widespread, and that are leading the world captive, are to be unveiled. Every effort possible is being made to ensnare souls with subtle reasonings, to turn them from the truth to fables, and to prepare them to be deceived by strong delusions. But while these deceived souls turn from the truth to error, do not speak to them one word of censure. Seek to show these poor, deluded souls their danger, and to reveal to them how

grievous is their course of action toward Jesus Christ; but let it all be done in pitying tenderness. By a proper manner of labor some of the souls who are ensnared by Satan may be recovered from his power. But do not blame and condemn them. To ridicule the position held by those who are in error, will not open their blind eyes, nor attract them to the truth.

When men lose sight of Christ’s example, and do not pattern after His manner of teaching, they become self-sufficient, and go forth to meet Satan with his own manner of weapons.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Bearing false witness about false teachers.** In our zeal to expose false teachings, many of us break the ninth commandment (Exod. 20:16). Many find it easy to pass along the latest rumor or supposed fact that labels someone as a false teacher when we have not followed the counsel of Matthew 18 and gone to the source first.

**5. Playing it safe by not speaking up.** Whenever a false teaching is sent, one danger is for all of us to shy away from speaking up about it because of the controversy and because we don’t want to be labeled or attacked. However, it remains our responsibility as Christians, and especially as pastoral leaders, to love our people enough to warn them of the dangers that could ruin their souls.

Christ will help us warn of false teachings—but always with His agape love. ❏

“I DO SOME OF MY WORST SINNING WHEN I AM RIGHT!”

of my warnings or the way I spread rumors without checking with the source to ensure the facts were true.

When Satan sends a false teaching into the midst of God’s people, he has several strategies to lead us outside of the Lord’s will.

**1. The false teaching.** Satan’s first strategy is to mislead people with the teaching itself. It is often a close counterfeit, designed with much truth but it includes a devastating error. Our only safety is not to trust other’s opinions but to prayerfully study the inspired writings for ourselves. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the New King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), 62.

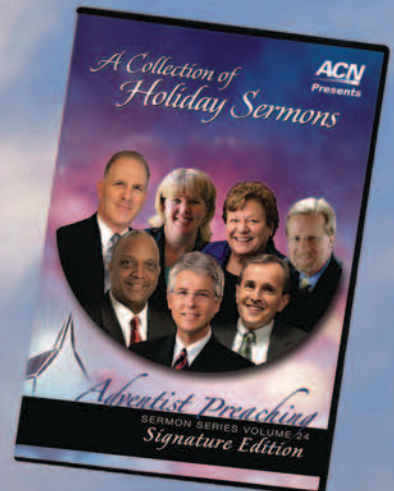
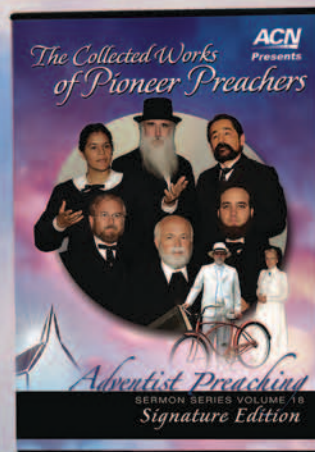
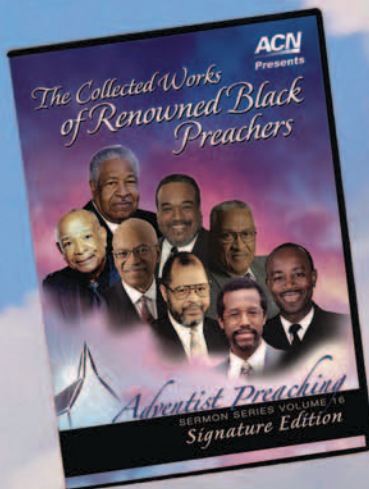
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