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the church before . . .**

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International Journal for Pastors
12501 Old Columbia Pike,
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA
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Vol. 92, No. 6 © 2020

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+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

COVER

316 Creative / Shutterstock

LAYOUT

316 Creative

SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99;
Canada and overseas US\$47.00.
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Ministry® has been published monthly
since 1928 by the Ministerial Association,
General Conference of Seventh-day

Adventists®. Ministry is a peer-reviewed
journal.

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SECRETARIES**

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Printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn.,
1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687

Standard mail postage paid at Nampa,
Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

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To post, or not to post

The apostle James addresses those who consider themselves religious. Using tests that are simple, but not easy, he calls for scrutiny not just of what we preach but what we practice.

To share, or not to share

The first scrutiny test has to do with our words. “With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth! My friends, this can’t go on” (James 3:9, 10).¹

William Barclay’s autobiography contains the story of Sir Hector Hetherington, considered one of Britain’s great university principals. Barclay says, “Few men could handle a difficult team in the way he could handle it. On one occasion one of his more belligerent members of staff, convinced that he had a legitimate grievance that was not getting the attention it deserved, sent to the Principal an extremely angry letter, replete with complaints and threats in equal proportions. The Principal duly received the letter. A day or two afterwards he met the sender. He met him with no ill-will at all. ‘James,’ he said (James was not in fact his name . . .), that was a wonderful letter you wrote to me—but *why did you post it?*”²

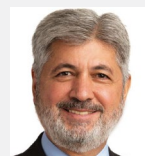
Not every private feeling needs public expression. The religion of those who use their tongues to worship God in one instant and offend people in another, has questionable value.

To act, or not to act

The second scrutiny test has to do with our actions. “Anyone who sets himself up as ‘religious’ by talking a good game is



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Religion should be read and practiced as a verb, as that which we do to others. To practice any other form of religion means that we have left the Word of God and subscribed to the doctrines of men.

self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world” (James 1:26, 27). James says, forget personal purity and defilement. Forget trying to prove our devotion to God by connecting it with the spiritual practices we perform. Biblical revival and reformation have little or nothing to do with knowledge or forms. They have much to do with building lives that care for those around us.

One commentator says, “James is not restricting ‘right religion’ to only literal care for literal widows and orphans. At the time James wrote, these represented society’s most helpless members.”³ It does not have to be literal care, the appeal is for courtesy in all communication. In person, by mail. Telephone, television. Print media, social media. Online or in the line. It does not have to be literal widows and orphans, the call is for kindness to all persons. Rich, poor. White, black. Native, non-native. Married, single. Male, female. Young, old. James, highlighting our tendency, even as pastors, to practice favoritism, calls us out, if not for our prejudice, then for our

preferences; if not for our discrimination, then for our dislikes; if not for our segregation, then for our separation (see 2:2–4).

We are called to condemn the world’s unfair treatment of the vulnerable, not to condone it; to denounce it, not to duplicate it. Treating the vulnerable as Jesus would is the acid test of godly Christianity.

To critique, or not to critique

The Seventh-day Adventist Church began with a radical return to Scripture. Its pioneers embraced the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, insisting that every church doctrine be established under that authority. We have often critiqued other religious groups for the extent to which their practices are based upon Scripture. That spotlight must also fall on us. Religion should be read and practiced as a verb, as that which we do to others. To practice any other form of religion means that we have left the Word of God and subscribed to the doctrines of men. Our passionate spirituality is then considered by God to be in vain (see Matt. 15:1–9).

Posting, in our context, means displaying to the world that what we practice is the mirror image of what we preach. James says, “Listen, dear friends. Isn’t it clear by now that God operates quite differently? He chose the world’s down-and-out as the kingdom’s first citizens, with full rights and privileges” (James 2:5). That’s a message worth modeling and sharing.

If we agree that we should speak to all persons gently and kindly, if we agree that we should treat all persons fairly and equally, and if we agree that we should regard all persons tenderly and respectfully—*then why don’t we post it?*



- 1 Scripture is from *The Message* paraphrase.
- 2 William Barclay, *Testament of Faith* (London, UK: Mowbrays, 1975), 28, emphasis in the original.
- 3 “What Does James 1:27 Mean?” BibleRef, accessed May 1, 2020, bibleref.com/James/1/James-1-27.html.

If we ever needed the church before . . .

Millions are in the grip of tragedy and fear. With global deaths in the tens of thousands, the coronavirus pandemic has swept our world, crippling health, destroying lives, and endangering the economies of nations. **The world truly needs the church as never before. But why?**

The church can make three unique contributions to our world: knowledge of our spiritual past, understanding of our visionary future, and hope in our perilous present. All three qualities have the potential to make the church, in general, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in particular, the most relevant institution in the world today. Why is this? Church leader Glenn Townend maintains, “Humans want to be in a group where they are accepted and valued and can contribute. There is no better place than the church for this.”¹

The question is, are we living up to our mandate? Townend laments, “As Adventists we know we have the last-day message for this world and might be tempted to think we have it all figured out. When we don’t, we pretend.”²

What is our unique calling? And to what extent are we fulfilling it?

Our spiritual past—Everlasting gospel

Elusive antibodies and anticipated vaccinations may engross us, and justified fear and understandable anxiety may engulf us. Still, amid our anguish and uncertainty, the church can offer comfort and hope. This hope is not based upon positive psychology or wishful thinking for the future; it is based upon sacrificial actions of the past. Our hope is rooted in our faith in the voluntary death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Death? Yes. “I lay down My life that I may take it again” (John 10:17).³ Voluntary? Yes. “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself” (v. 18). To some, this may sound selfless—to others, it may sound senseless. What could possibly be achieved by an act of such apparent defeat? John answers, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (vv. 27, 28). What could possibly be achieved that is relevant to our crises? As one songwriter put it, “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.”⁴

This pandemic, with its accompanying lockdowns and curfews, isolations and quarantines, has given all of us an understanding of the psalmist’s sentiment, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death . . .” (Psalm 23:4a). However, in times like this, it takes faith to complete the sentence: “. . . I will fear no evil” (v. 4b). Sickness may overcome the healthiest believer, and death may overtake the most spiritual Christian, but we do not fear. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus allows us to say like Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). We stand as anchors of stability and pillars of hope. We stand on the everlasting gospel, calling the world to trust God and to try

Gary Blanchard is the Youth director for the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



A youth leader calls the church to embrace our message, empower our youth, and evangelize our world.



Him (Rev. 14:6–12), before it is too late. It's what the world needs. It's what the church has to give.

Our visionary future—End-time prophecy

Just recently, I watched a YouTube video in which two women were physically fighting over toilet paper. The store manager had to call the police. I thought to myself, *If people will fight over toilet paper, what will happen when their food and water are threatened?* I am not saying this pandemic is the end of the world. We face a health issue, not a religious liberty issue, at this time. But Revelation 13 shows us that it may be a dress rehearsal for a time when freedom and rights are replaced by fear and restrictions, and travel and trade are replaced by compliance and control.

The message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is this: time is running out. This is not a cry of despair, it is a cry of urgency. Prophecy declares, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12). Our appeal is, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9). Jesus is coming soon. We don't have long. Therefore, “Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould” (Rom. 12:2, *Phillips*). Instead, put your trust in God and “crowd all the good works you possibly can into this life.”⁵

This message is the most important because it blesses those who hear it as well as those who proclaim it. Don't exchange this message for another. Don't give up on this message. “Staying with it—that's what God requires. Stay with it to the end. You won't be sorry, and you'll be saved. All during this time, the good news—the Message of the kingdom—will be preached all over the world, a witness staked out in every country. And then the end will come” (Matt. 24:13, 14, *The Message*). It's what the world needs. It's what the church has to give.

Our hopeful present—Enduring sanctuary

The sanctuary message is a message of enduring health. The message heralded by the church is that our “body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God” (1 Cor. 6:19). One lesson from the sanctuary is that our body is not ours to do with as we like. Perhaps one of the greatest examples of this—and a role model for these last days—is the prophet Daniel.

Exiled in pagan Babylon, Daniel could have taken a stand on many issues, but he chose to take a stand on food and drink (Dan. 1:8). Like Daniel, we are living in a world that youth analyst David Kinnaman describes as “digital Babylon.”⁶ This online world mimics the godless, pagan, proud, perverted, and antichrist environment of Babylon. But, like Daniel, we endorse proper nutrition as the foundation of good health and recovery (v. 12). Like Daniel, we promote whole-food, plant-based vegetarian cuisine (v. 12). Like Daniel, we recognize the link between nutrition and physical and mental health (vv. 15, 20). Despite this Babylonian environment, God will have a people who, like Daniel, refuse to defile His temple and whose health is blessed tenfold.⁷

The sanctuary message is a message of enduring rest. Max Lucado states, “Of the ten declarations carved in the tablets, which one occupies the most space? Murder? Adultery? Stealing? You'd think so. Certainly each is worthy of ample coverage. But curiously, these commands are tributes to brevity. God needed only five English words to condemn adultery and four to denounce thievery and murder.

“But when he came to the topic of rest, one sentence would not suffice.”⁸

For Paul, rest in Jesus is symbolized by the Sabbath, and access to God is symbolized by the sanctuary. Paul therefore urges the continuation of Sabbath worship in the context of the sanctuary. “So let's keep at it and eventually arrive at the place of rest, not drop out through some sort of disobedience. . . . Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers” (Heb. 4:11, 14, *The Message*).

A. J. Jacobs, the secular journalist who spent one year keeping the more than seven hundred rules he had discovered in the Bible, was asked: “What, if any, rules are you still following?” He replied, “I love the Sabbath. There's something I really like about a forced day of rest.”⁹

The sanctuary message is a message of enduring trust. At the heart of the sanctuary is the message of trust in God. “Let us go with complete trust to the throne of God. We will receive His loving-kindness and have His loving-favor to help us whenever we need it” (Heb. 4:16, NIV). Trust in God is a gift leading to right choices, in line with God's directions for our lives, that “will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity” (see Prov. 3:1–6, NIV).

It's what the world needs.
It's what the church has
to give.

It's time

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The world needs not only to hear but also to see this message. How is the church faring? Townend declares, "Research through Natural Church Development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide shows that, of the eight characteristics of a healthy church, loving relationships is typically our lowest scoring.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a nurture and fellowship challenge."¹⁰

That mirrors the church of Laodicea that prophetically describes God's people in the last days. "I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit" (Rev. 3:15, 16, *The Message*). It's time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to go viral on this virus—to preach with power the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 and, more importantly, to live out this everlasting gospel with conviction because there are at least three positive things this pandemic has given to the church.

First, it has given us an urgent incentive to become savvier and more innovative in regard to social media and technology. Seventh-day Adventists need to become experts at invading "digital Babylon" with contagious Christianity.

Second, it has demonstrated the significance of the younger generation in our churches. We desperately need their innovation and leadership now. Most of our youth display incredible facility with social media and technology. Many young people may not have been called forward to lead before. If we ever needed the youth before, we certainly need them now.

Finally, the coronavirus has inadvertently revealed the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the world's most relevant



and needed message. It is a message that says to the family, friends, and neighbors we love, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2). Who would not want such a message? It is a message that invites them to join with us and yearn with us "for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."¹¹

Now is the time to demonstrate to the world that we are more than one denomination among many; we are a people entrusted with a message of present truth for our world's needs. When we live out this message, our joy will be to hear said of us what was said of Esther, "Maybe God put you here for exactly this moment, for just such a time as this."¹²

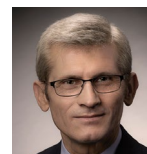
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- 1 Glenn Townend, "Nurture and Fellowship Challenge," *Adventist Record*, March 5, 2020, record.adventistchurch.com/2020/03/05/nurture-and-fellowship-challenge/.
- 2 Townend, "Nurture and Fellowship Challenge."
- 3 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quoted in this article is from the New King James Version.
- 4 Thomas Obediah Chisholm, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," in *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 100.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1925), 85.
- 6 David Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 19.
- 7 See Sandra Blackmer, "Adventists Live Longer, but Not Every Adventist Is the Same," *Adventist Review*, July 12, 2019, adventistreview.org/church-news/story13841-adventists-live-longer-but-not-every-adventist-is-the-same.
- 8 Max Lucado, *Traveling Light: Releasing the Burdens You Were Never Intended to Bear* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 2001), 41, 42.
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- 12 Samuel Wells, "For Such a Time as This: Will You Recognize the Moment in Which You Are Called Upon to Exercise Your Gifts?" *Faith and Leadership*, February 1, 2009, faithandleadership.com/such-time.

WORKING
TOGETHER FOR
GOOD



An editor urges us to cling to the promise that, especially in times of crisis, God is working on our behalf.

Pavel Goia, DMin, is the editor of *Ministry*.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

In Romania, during communism and persecution, any event could have been interpreted as a revolt. During the first weeks of the Romanian Revolution of 1989, thousands were in the streets protesting; the communist regime shot many. Braving the possible consequences, a choir of young Seventh-day Adventists sang together in the streets and prayed with people.

Hearing them sing, the police came to arrest them—and then stopped. After listening, the officers proceeded to take them all to the roof of the tallest building in the center of the city. Praying, the young Adventists were expecting the worst: to be thrown off the roof, as others were before.

When they were all on the roof, the chief police officer said, “What you sing and talk about, everyone needs to hear in this time of crisis.” He then had a public announcement system installed right there and told them to sing and pray from the rooftop. The young people were shocked. During communism, no one was allowed to talk about or listen to anything Christian.

As the young Adventists started to sing and pray from the rooftop, people in the streets stopped, knelt down, and praised God in song and prayer. An absolutely unusual event in communist Romania! Residents and police hugged each other and cried. Through His people, God turned a crisis into a blessing, and helplessness into hope.

No hope

In the midst of a global pandemic, the world is starving for hope. Crisis counselor Drew Martel declared, “For those of us with a history of mental health struggles (and without), this ‘unprecedented’ crisis has presented unique challenges to our well-being: uncertainty, fear, and

a sense of hopelessness. . . . The daily loss of life, the 24-hour news cycle with its constant focus on the pandemic, and a massive economic crisis. . . . Good news is hard to come by.”¹

Where is the good news? Why does God allow His children to go through crises? Scripture simply declares, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).² All things—including crises, challenges, and trials? How is that good news?

The good news is that Jesus is coming soon. As we approach the end, we know that the final events will be marked by an unprecedented crisis. The book of Daniel says, “and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was” (Dan. 12:1, NKJV). The book of Matthew tells us that the trials will increase like the birth pains (Matt. 24:8). The book of Luke informs us that during this final crisis, people will faint for fear (Luke 21:26). Ellen White comments, “Something great and decisive is about to take place . . . the world is on the verge of a great crisis.”³ What are our marching orders?

New direction

If the coronavirus pandemic is only a taste of what will happen in the near future, how should we conduct ourselves? Jeremiah asked rhetorically, “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?” (Jer. 12:5). If we often struggle with regular challenges, how are we to face earth’s greatest challenge?

The Bible says that there is a time for everything (Eccl. 3:1). There is a time to study and a time to implement what we have studied; a time to gather things and a time to use what we have gathered. God allows things for a purpose. He

may be trying to get our attention to tell us that now is the time to move in a different direction.

We are so used to the way we do things that we find it difficult to adapt to new forms. We often worship our worship. Soon there will be a time when worship as we know it will not be allowed, neither will we be able to buy or sell (see Rev. 13:15–17). What steps can we take during this crisis that may help us in the next?

Vital steps

There are some vital activities that we can address now that will help us through present and future crises.

1. Intentional prayer. This time is not leisure time but a time to grow spiritually. Be intentional and dedicated to prayer. We are often so busy working for God that we find ourselves serving Him without His presence and power.

“As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the

merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”⁴

Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through revival (“a resurrection from spiritual death”) and reformation (“a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices”), which is essential for finishing the work.⁵

2. Intense study. Take special time to study the Word and the Spirit of Prophecy more than usual. “None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”⁶

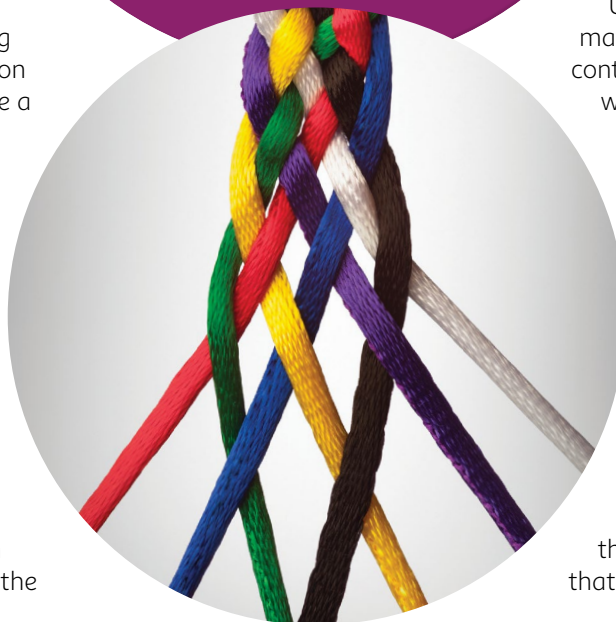
In Matthew 24, Jesus enumerates events that will occur during the final crisis. He talks about catastrophes, wars, pestilence, and so on.

Among them, He also mentions spiritual apostasy, false teachings, false doctrines, false miracles, and false prophets (see Matt.

24:24). “Christians should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise, and this preparation they should make by diligently studying the word of God, and striving to conform their lives to its precepts.”⁷

3. Pertinent preaching. Use this time to assemble material for messages containing present truth that will prepare people for the final events. You are their shepherd. Be the best shepherd you can be by emulating the Great Shepherd. Jesus, in His actions and His words to the disciples, was preparing them for what was about to happen. “By the circumstances of the daily life He is preparing them to act their part upon that wider stage to which

We often worship our worship. Soon there will be a time when worship as we know it will not be allowed, neither will we be able to buy or sell (see Rev. 13:15–17).



His providence has appointed them. It is the issue of the daily test that determines their victory or defeat in life's great crisis."⁸

Will your sheep be like the five wise virgins or the five foolish virgins? Will they have enough oil to see their Bridegroom come?

4. *Renewed relationships.* Often we may be so busy serving the church that we may neglect our families. "If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:5). Take time to be with your spouse and children. Do not feel guilty in doing that; feel guilty when you do not. You are responsible for them. They need to be prepared for the end time like all of your other parishioners.

5. *Wholesome health.* As we serve God, we often find ourselves ignoring our health: sleeping less, eating sporadically, ignoring exercise, and committing other acts of intemperance. "Christ's words of compassion are spoken to His workers today just as surely as they were spoken to His disciples. 'Come ye yourselves apart, . . . and rest awhile,' He says to those who are worn and weary. It is not wise to be always under the strain of work and excitement, even in ministering to men's spiritual needs; for in this way personal piety is neglected, and the powers of mind and soul and body are overtaxed. Self-denial is required of the disciples of Christ, and sacrifices must be made; but care must also be exercised lest through their overzeal Satan take advantage of the weakness of humanity, and the work of God be marred."⁹

6. *Gainful gardening.* Maintain a garden, if possible. Scripture tells us that the time is coming when people cannot buy or sell (Rev. 13:17). It may be difficult to find food. If possible, with prayer and openness to God's timing and leading, have a garden with fruits and vegetables. My wife and I have had the opportunity to minister to hundreds by keeping a garden. Meeting someone's physical needs opens the door to being able to help them with their spiritual needs.

It even brought our congregation together when, one year, we had so many tomatoes that our church had a good old tomato-throwing fight. Great fun was had by all! "The Lord desires His people to move into the country, where they can settle on the land, and raise their own fruit and vegetables, and where their children can be brought in direct contact with the works of God in nature."¹⁰

7. *Unshakable trust.* God does not alter His marching orders because of a crisis. While we continue to pay attention to all details related

to God's work, our vital calling is love to God and humanity. Solomon said, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind" (Eccl. 12:13).

God's requirements of us are the same as they have been through the generations of earth's history: trust and obey. "God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him."¹¹

Intended for good

In a time of crisis, God worked through a church choir that was humble. He has done it before. He will do it again. "God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling. All that He brings upon them in test and trial comes that they may be strong to do and to suffer for Him."¹²

If we are faced with death or betrayal, may we declare with Joseph, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).



1 Drew Martel, "Anxious Times and Anxious Behaviors," Meadowlark Psychiatric Services, accessed May 19, 2020, <https://meadowlarkpsych.com/resources-and-articles/>.

2 Scripture is from the New International Version.

3 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992), 11.

4 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 362.

5 Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1925), 42.

6 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 593, 594.

7 White, *Christian Service*, 41.

8 White, *Desire of Ages*, 382.

9 White, *Desire of Ages*, 362.

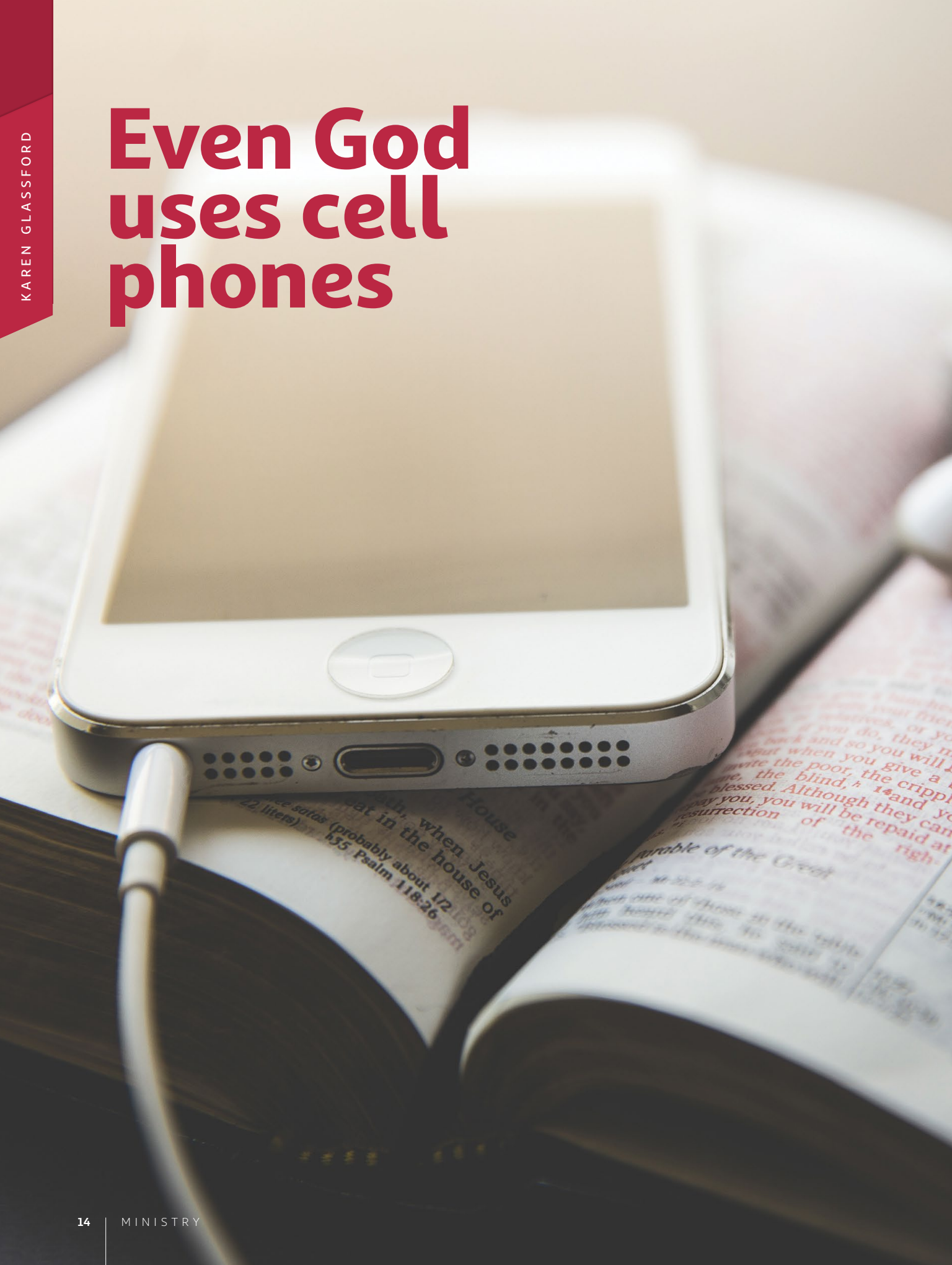
10 Ellen G. White, Letter 182, September 20, 1902.

11 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, Pub. Assn., 1890), 493.

12 Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), 578.

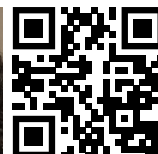
Even God uses cell phones

KAREN GLASSFORD



A digital communicator reaches the unreached by combining innovative evangelism with everyday technology.

Karen Glassford is the global director of Adventist World Radio's centers of digital evangelism, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Many of us are in pain because the coronavirus pandemic has seriously affected us or people we love. As we help people who are hurting in our communities across the globe, the Lord has a way of bringing triumph out of tragedy, life out of death, and victory out of defeat. Ironically, while church buildings have closed, creative ministry has exploded. The everlasting gospel is spreading faster than any virus—even through a cell phone. That was Maria's experience.

Sobbing and hugging her knees to herself, Maria stared at the slammed front door. Her husband had just stormed out, never to return. She was actually OK with that, considering the abusive marriage. Maybe it was true that she wasn't worth anything. Then there was God. Where was He? *Apparently, on vacation*, she thought bitterly. As for church, she was done with it.

Several years went by, and Maria met and married a wonderful police officer who, while not particularly religious, was kind and gentle. Together, they had two children. However, one day her husband successfully confiscated a large cache of drugs. The drug lords tried to bribe Maria's husband to get their contraband back. He refused. They told him he would pay dearly. A few weeks later, returning from his little boy's graduation, Maria's husband, the love of her life, was shot 36 times and died. Completely distraught, Maria sank into deep depression. Life became unbearable.

Can digital connections bring hope?

The gospel meets us at our lowest. It cradles us in our pain. While there is a time to be cheerful, a time to share hope, a time to be positive and upbeat, there is also a time to weep. And there is a time to weep with those who weep and to let them know that, after a while, a better day will come. This was the message of hope that Maria received one day.

The message Maria heard spoke about death and resurrection. It totally shook her. Although she had known better, Maria had been attending séances to connect with her deceased husband. Now, falling on her knees, Maria confessed many things to the Lord. Assured of His forgiveness, she began attending the local Seventh-day Adventist church with her two bewildered, unchurched children in tow. That message Maria heard—was on her cell phone.

The reality is that 3.5 billion people have smartphones. If we are to reach people, we must go where they live for 5 to 12 hours a day—on their phones. The two most prominent searches people make on the internet are for pornography and questions on religion.¹ People worry about the future and wonder whether anyone cares about them. Does their life have a purpose? How will everything end? They are concerned about their own health and the health of the planet. If, perchance, they have heard that God is real, they have little evidence to know whether it is true.

In this digitally connected age, how do we reach the world that God loves? Do we still conduct public evangelism meetings? Yes, indeed. Do we still need to door-to-door ministry? By all means. Do we still need to give Bible studies to those who respond to invitations or request them? Of course. But what about those who do not respond or request? What about those who never step into a church? Do you ever stare at the door of a beautiful home, knowing that behind it is a precious family, and wishing you could connect with them, but you do not know how? Cell phone evangelism may well be for such a time as this. What exactly is it?

The nuts and bolts

Cell phone evangelism is using one's cell phone to send audio messages of hope to persons needing to be reached by the everlasting gospel. Written by a professional evangelist, these messages are recorded and sent automatically by a chatbot (computer) located at the Adventist World Radio (AWR) world headquarters. The recipients access them via SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, or Telegram, with additional platforms being added as quickly as possible. Those who respond become Bible students and are connected with a guide, known as a cell phone evangelist.

The chatbot takes care of the technical details of sending the right presentation to the right student at the right time. It connects the cell phone evangelist and the student to each other. Students control how quickly they want to progress through the presentations. The cell phone evangelist's role and main objective are to become a personal friend to each of his or her students, walking with them on their spiritual journey, helping find answers to their Bible questions, and praying for their prayer requests.

The program is available in numerous languages, with additional languages being added monthly. Each cell phone evangelist is certified

by their pastor. Training, resources, and ongoing support are provided, giving the cell phone evangelist confidence to do this special work.²

Training includes learning principles of social-media advertising, how to work with people tactfully, how to answer difficult Bible questions, and how to encourage people in their walk with the Lord. The program provides tech support and carefully ensures GDPR compliance and accountability.³ This new form of evangelism reaches people directly in their homes, allowing them to respond in their own time. The Holy Spirit is working through this method to reach out to people at critical moments in their lives. How do we know? He reached out to Maria—and through Maria.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive

A few weeks after attending church, Maria read Matthew 6:14, 15: "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (NIV). She prayed, "Well, Lord, I'm glad I have no enemies."

The Lord seemed to say, *What about your first husband?*

Shocked, she burst out, "Some things are unforgivable!"

God impressed her heart that forgiveness simply meant wanting God's best for her abusive ex-husband—for him to find Jesus as his personal Savior. She felt God asking her, *Why not send him those audio messages?*

In time, she decided to text him and offer to send him the same audio presentations that had changed her life. He could not believe he was hearing from Maria. Startled, he accepted the offer. It didn't stop there. God impressed Maria to send the audio messages to the killers of her second husband. That was much more difficult, emotionally and logistically. It took quite a while for Maria to figure out how to do it but, incredibly, prisoners in her country were given limited access to a cell phone. To those who had killed her husband, Maria extended the invitation to receive the messages. Amazingly, they, too, accepted.

Many in our communities have never had the chance to learn about the gospel truths we hold dear. Some of them could never attend an evangelistic meeting because of work duties, family commitments, or even family prohibitions. Others desire to discover the truths for themselves, taking things more slowly so that they can research and digest what they are learning. Still others

live such busy lives that having the flexibility to be able to listen to these presentations at their convenience is of genuine benefit.

Additionally, some church members have free time once children are in bed, papers are graded, or they have a day off from work. Their free periods may vary, but through training as cell phone evangelists, they may help their friends, neighbors, coworkers, and relatives understand the truths of God's Word. Cell phone evangelism is a means by which not only is the gospel preached to persons who may not otherwise receive it, but also those doing the evangelism grow in their relationship with Christ.

Try it out

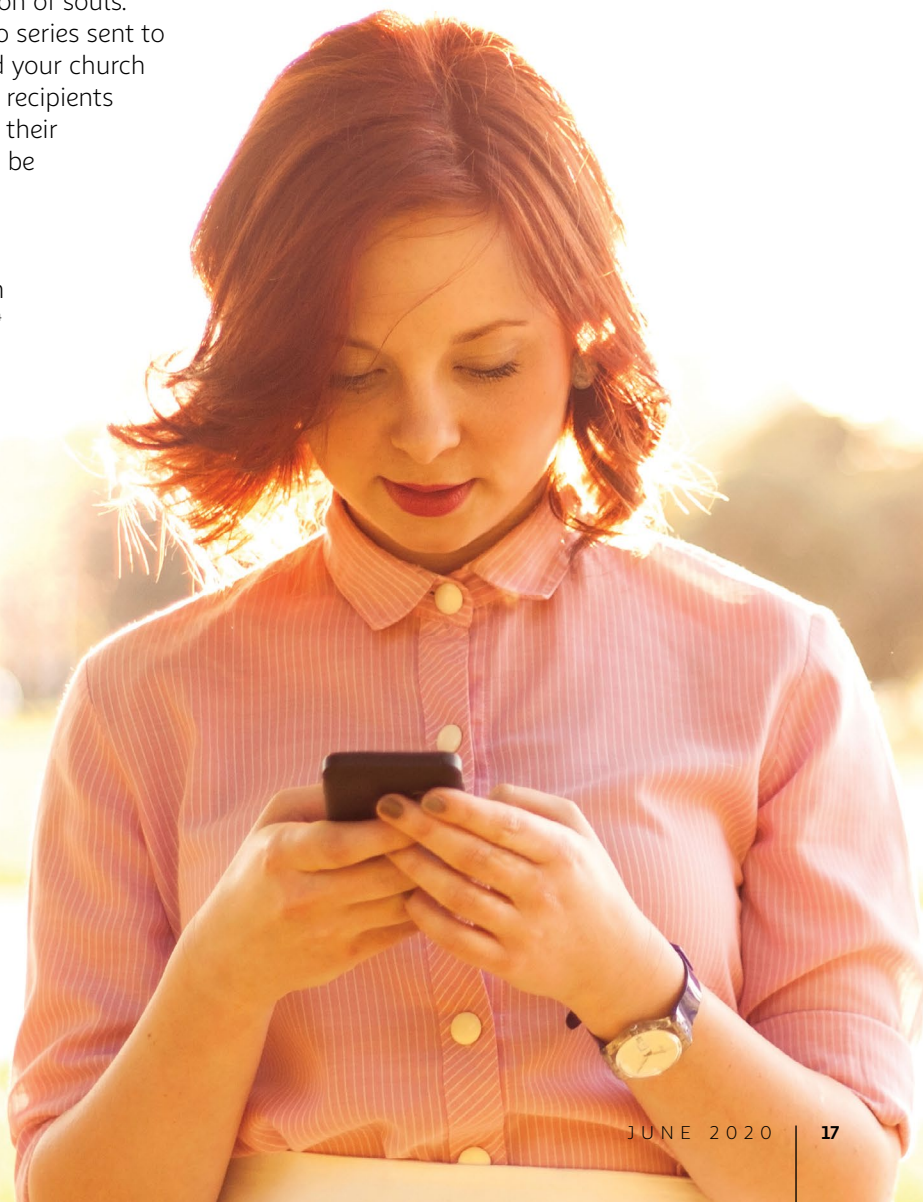
The days in which we now live will stretch our faculties to the utmost. What can you do? God is waiting and wanting to do something new through you. He wants to impact your church and inspire your members to discover the joy of working with God for the salvation of souls. Why not have an evangelistic audio series sent to the phones of those whom you and your church members care about so much? The recipients of these presentations can listen at their convenience, and empty hearts can be filled with God's love and peace.

By doing cell phone evangelism, people can minister to those living right next to them or those living in far-flung places around this globe.⁴ Cell phone evangelism may be a big factor in revitalization, unity, and joyful service for many in your congregation. Take the first step today. It may be a new way for your church to grow, with people like Maria—and her family.

Maria's first husband is now attending an Adventist church where he lives. The killers of her second husband are listening to audio messages that have a profound impact on their lives. Maria's children love Sabbath School, church, and being in Pathfinders.⁵ Maria herself is joyful in her relationship with God. Their lives were rescued because, in bringing hope, comfort, and transforming truths into their lives, God used a cell phone.



- 1 Sam Neves, "Understanding Self-Disclosure in the Context of Online Pastoral Care," (forthcoming PhD diss., Westminster University), Microsoft Word file.
- 2 Training for you and your church members to become involved in this innovative, convenient, and effective form of evangelism can be found on the AWR360° Cell Phone Evangelism Training page at awr.org/training. The online training offers both recorded and live sessions.
- 3 The European Union's (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a regulation designed to give greater data protection to organizations handling the data of EU citizens. "GDPR Certification: Everything You Need to Know," UpCounsel, accessed May 3, 2020, upcounsel.com/gdpr-certification.
- 4 If you would like a personal training session for your church, AWR may be able to coordinate a special live training program for the pastors and laity of your conference or your area so that you can get your questions answered in real time. If you are interested in helping to coordinate such an event, please send your request to cpe@awr.org or call 1-301-680-6294.
- 5 Pathfinders is part of the Youth Ministries department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church working specifically to develop the social and religious education of children and teens. For more information, see the Pathfinders page on the General Conference Youth Ministries website at youth.adventist.org/Ministries/Pathfinders.



When ministry becomes **OVERWHELMING**

Many pastors are valiantly trying to cope with managing the tensions and personal stressors associated with being confined at home with family members. While promoting the spiritual health of your church is important and preserving the social health of the family is necessary, pursuing your own mental health is crucial.

From my assignment as a conference departmental director and my many years as a local pastor, I know what it is like to reach the place where ministry becomes overwhelming. I know the experience of feeling as if you are losing your mind. Allow me to share some experiences I had and, enriched by my training as a chaplain and a mental health therapist, offer some solutions that worked for me.

Stresses on the family

A few days before each sermon delivery date, my wife Joy observed the same thing—I shut down. I would grow less communicative as I mulled over what I was going to say and how I would say it. From Joy's point of view, I had dialed down communication with her. During the early years of pastoring, especially when the children came along, I was not aware of this dynamic. I just felt the pressure of her criticism of my disappearing into my "cave" of contemplation and reflection. For those few days, I was not available to her. She felt as if she were on her own. Our relationship was under threat.

Weekends were my busiest work times—when the rest of the family was relaxing. My downtime came when they were either working or in school. I felt as if I were on my own. True, I had connections with a few other pastor friends. Yet they, like me, were dealing with the challenges of their congregations. We chatted on the phone but rarely were we socially together.


Confidants were few. A gulf existed between the other older ministers and me, and the only ministers I could really trust were my seminary peers. Then, at times, I would hear something distressing or shocking from or about church members. Not only was I unable to share with my wife but, because of matters of distance or issues of confidentiality, I could not share with my fellow ministers. As I locked up these issues in my mind, a mood descended on me like a dark cloud, glaringly visible to those I loved the most.

Stresses from the members

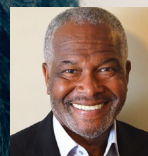
I have held leadership positions in black and white churches, in Europe and in North America. I have observed how a congregation's exuberant passion for church, when managed well, can lead to vibrant growth. I have also seen how this same passion for church, when managed poorly, can lead to mortal friction. Maintaining the balance was often exhausting; so were members' expectations of me. I wanted to be able to meet those expectations. In my early days as a preacher, I would feel terrible if I delivered what I thought was a mediocre message because I knew that the congregation thirsted for a rousing message, served hot and with animation. I desperately wanted to preach like the so-called stars in the denomination. At times, I felt members craved a dynamic pulpiteer. At other times, I felt they wanted a consummate administrator. At all times, they expected a spiritual giant—yea, even a saint.

Members could fuss and use strong language at board meetings, but I could not give myself permission to do the same. If I got agitated or upset, I would be held to a different standard. I had to hide my feelings, stifle my anger, and bottle my resentment.

At one church, I thought that ministry was going well. We added 100 members in my five



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years there. A little more than halfway through my tenure, during a church business meeting, someone criticized the growth we were experiencing. The member downplayed it, describing it pejoratively as “biological” growth, namely, that we were adding only the children of existing members. The person did not believe we were working effectively enough to reach people from the neighborhood.

As I heard a muted murmur of agreement spring up around the room, the comment was like a barb to my soul. I had worked hard. I had been diligent in inspiring the church members to also work hard. The comments seared my mind, and the criticism stung. As on other occasions, I labored to hold in check my passions. I felt resentment at what I perceived was a lack of affirmation, even a personal attack. It left me feeling embarrassed, underrated, and hurt.

On another occasion, one member became upset with the bidding process for remodeling work in the church. He came to my office and berated me. Then, unbelievably, he swore at me, so strongly did he believe in the justness of his cause. It was all I could do to exercise self-control. I told him I was surprised at his conduct and that I did not appreciate his approach. He departed unmoved, leaving me struggling under the pressure of being a saint.

Another member came to my office and told me rather gravely that his wife and others had gone to the conference office to complain about me. I am assuming the conference president redirected them to take their complaint to the local church board first because I never heard anything else about it. But the effect on me was devastating. I felt the impact keenly for a couple of weeks, unable to believe that such a thing could have ever happened to me. What made it worse was that I did not feel I could share what I was going through with my wife. She was a member there, too. I did not want her to view those members differently or get involved in the conflict to protect me.

I realize that we all handle stress differently. What may threaten to overwhelm me

may not trouble you. There are ministers for whom criticism flows like water off a duck's back. I have heard of pastors who took no nonsense from their members and gave as good as they got. You may be one of those. I am not built that way. I grew up in the United Kingdom, where politeness in the face of criticism was met with admiration, and calmness under pressure was considered a virtue. I had to work out how to take care of myself in the face of the challenges of these stressors. So, what worked for me and what may work for you?

Strategies to cope

Although semiretired, I work part-time as a mental health therapist for the First Nations Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada. My present employment encourages us to seek professional counseling supervision to help us keep our heads above water and to work sustainably so that we can avoid burnout. Professional supervision provides a forum to express frustrations and pain and provides for advice on how to deal with them.

Here are some suggestions you may consider.

1. Talk to your spouse. If you are married, maintain open communication with your mate, not about specific details but about identified emotions. When I opened up and expressed my feelings, it had a better effect than when I stubbornly held them inside, allowing them to fester. Letting them build up without release only led to their bubbling out in moodiness or, worse still, erupting like a volcano in exhibitions of frustrated anger. Fortunately, Joy has always been able to listen to my vulnerabilities and has stepped in with loving support.

2. Share with a peer. If ministers are single or have partners unable to give satisfactory levels of empathy, they need to share feelings of hurt, anger, or frustration with fellow clergy that they trust. I have found that even unburdening yourself to fellow ministers in a local ministerium from other denominations can be helpful because they experience many of the same feelings.

3. Find a counselor. Connect with a reputable, qualified Christian counselor. In Canada, this means at least finding a counselor registered with a professional college of, for example, psychology, psychotherapy, or social work.

4. Take care of your body. I discovered that going to the gym weekly and getting a regular dose of exercise was a lifesaver for me. I say "dose," because research suggests that exercise is effective in preventing symptoms of stress, anxiety, panic attacks,¹ and mild to moderate depression.²

Progressive physicians are even prescribing it. I also found an interesting side benefit to going to my local gym and working out regularly while I was employed as a minister. I was able to meet and connect with people who were not members of my local congregation. It was refreshing. I did not have to be on show. They placed no professional demands on me or my time. I could form friendships without the prospect of getting accused of favoritism or partisanship.

5. Take care of your mind. I have heard of ministers who, after graduation from seminary, stop studying and searching Scripture. They no longer keep up with reading what biblical scholars are currently saying about its passages in light of their research of the original language and the history and customs of biblical times. Such diligent research may save you much heartache when approached by questioning members armed with comprehensive knowledge of an issue.

6. Take time off. Self-care includes taking reasonable but regular breaks from the work of ministry. This break is one day when no one can contact you for anything except the direst of circumstances. Delegate to your associate pastor or head elder responsibility for dealing with urgent issues. Let that person know how to contact you for situations, such as a death, that require the minister's prompt and personal attention. It is a day when you can just "chill out" and do something pleasurable. It may include doing something with your partner or children. Monday was my day off, but I found most Mondays were times I spent doing something helpful for me. I have conducted a few funerals on Mondays. But I was clear with my designated person that pretty much everything else could wait until Tuesday.

7. Take a vacation. I found it vitally important to take at least one annual vacation for one week, two weeks, or even more. In my years of interacting with other ministers, we all agreed that getting out of town with your spouse and children is vital. Work has ingenious ways of finding you on a "staycation." When our children were younger and we were getting by on our modest minister's salary, we would simply go camping. We look back on those occasions, preserved digitally or in photographs, as important milestones. They fostered our bonding as a family and helped cement the message that my spouse and children were my main priority, even above the church members.

8. Limit your availability. Making themselves unavailable is anathema to some pastors. They

quote John 5:17, “But Jesus replied, ‘My Father is always working, and so am I’” (NLT). Restricting access is critical. Members have access to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, through emails, texts, and calls to your cell phone. A minister needs to manage this kind of access. My cell phone has a feature that allows me to silence calls or texts after I go to bed. Communicating your availability to your members could mean directing them through your outgoing message to leave a voice-mail for urgent attention the next day or to use local crisis telephone numbers for life-and-death emergencies that cannot wait.

9. *Go easy on yourself.* When members are critical, it is important not to take it personally. Listen to the criticism with an open mind. Sift it, explore it, and consult with others whose counsel has proven wise in the past. Assert your right to be spoken to respectfully. I reminded one church member that I had always been respectful to him and that I expected the same treatment in return.

10. *Do not forget to breathe.* When someone riles me and I get angry, I find myself breathing in quick, shallow breaths. I get hot under the collar and automatically shift into defensive mode, thinking

of sharp rebuttals. At such times, remember to breathe. Using the principles of mindfulness, focus on breathing deeply, getting oxygen to your brain. It will help you keep your wits about you so that you do not react inappropriately. The person before you could be carrying pain, hurt, and frustration from problems at work, unemployment, broken relationships, or pressures at school. You may not want to deal with those underlying hurts at that moment in time but make a mental note to self to gently explore later what is going on in the background, if the member is open to it.

I have found that, if you are conscientious, the work is just as busy and potentially just as overwhelming in a small church as it is in a large one. It is essential for pastors to follow a routine of self-care. Self-care is crucial to avoid being overwhelmed. Jesus practiced it (see Matt. 14:23). My advice would be to follow His example.



- 1 Edmund J. Bourne, *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, 5th ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2010), 105.
- 2 *Mental Health First Aid Canada*, 2nd ed. (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2011), section 3, 13.



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New normal or old habit?

I do not remember ever reading the term *social distancing*—but it has been practiced before.

The island of Molokai in the Hawaiian chain has a leprosy colony that can be visited today. Social distancing was enforced on that island—and for good reasons too. Scripture includes several passages on social distancing, including from individuals with leprosy. “The leprosy person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” (Leviticus 13:45, 46).¹

With the coronavirus disease COVID-19, *social distancing* has taken on a whole new meaning. Allowable group size has been reduced to the point of not having church services. Some are livestreaming from empty churches. If allowed to gather in a small group, we must maintain a six-foot distance between each other. This time is painful. But if we dive deeper into the concept of social distancing, we have actually been practicing

social distancing all along. Let me give you a few examples.

Their meat is not our meat

Some of us have the practice of not accepting invitations to neighbors' barbecues because their meat is not our meat. We did not think to contribute a dish that we, and possibly others, could enjoy. We did not stop to consider how we could have impacted the barbecue by just showing up, being present with the unchurched, listening to their concerns, and being thankful for the invitation. We did not pause to contemplate that our own lives might be enriched by meeting them. We screened them out, and the invites stopped coming. We practice social distancing.

Some of us do not allow our children to attend birthday parties because their cake is not our cake. I have talked to young adults still scarred from such exclusion. We practice social distancing.

Some of us will turn down the opportunity to fellowship with friends at Starbucks—an establishment built on sociability—because their tea is not our tea. But if that's where our culture has

A conference president appeals to us to look at people through Jesus' eyes and put new wine into new wineskins.

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turned for companionship, could we not just get a hot chocolate? A decaf? Even just a bottle of water? We practice social distancing.

Some of us will not show up at the area ministerium Christmas party, because their drink is not our drink. Instead of bringing orange juice (they probably already have it), we prefer to be a no-show. We miss out on opportunities that might be presented only once. We practice social distancing.

Self-destructive

Perhaps long before COVID-19 came on the scene, we were engaged in social distancing. So many times, we have separated ourselves to our peril. The message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is supposed to be a gift for the world. A house of prayer *for all people*. Social distancing, the way some of us have practiced it—being exclusive instead of inclusive—is hurting the soul of who we are.

The North American church—embedded in a culture of personal space and individualism—makes up just 6 percent of the membership of the Seventh-day

Adventist Church worldwide. Now that some state and county laws are reinforcing the practice of social distancing, we hear complaints such as, “How can they make us stay apart?” We have done it for years *when nobody ever made us do it*. Is this the time to do something differently?

Could it be that this time of peril affords us the opportunity to do what the Bible so often encourages us to do—examine ourselves? Are we in the faith? Being honest right now may be the difference between life and death. I am an expert at fooling myself, so the examination has to come from the outside. My heart won't let me see myself for who I really am. “The heart is the most deceitful thing there is, and desperately wicked. No one can really know how bad it is!” (Jer. 17:9, TLB).

The outside examiner must be Scripture. Who am I, according to Scripture? Do I measure up to the gifts granted to those who believe? My spiritual growth is measured by my ability to influence others for Jesus. It is not measured by Bible teaching with prepared lessons or preaching a sermon that I had a month to prepare. It is measured by an everyday kindness to

those we encounter or those in need. It is praying an everyday prayer to introduce someone who is lost, or afraid of what is coming upon this world, to a Lord and Savior who loves them. It is measured, ultimately, by the life of Jesus.

The power of kindness

The religious leaders asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11). Ellen White comments, "The entertainment was given in honor of Jesus, and He did not hesitate to accept the courtesy. He well knew that this would give offense to the Pharisaic party, and would also compromise Him in the eyes of the people. . . . As it was in the days of Christ, so it is now."²

Socializing the way Jesus did will not please everybody. When is the last time we did something for someone just because it was the right thing to do? How about calling someone and asking, "How are you doing in these crazy times?" Then listen, without pretending we have all the answers. How about ringing their bell and leaving on the doorstep of someone in need some of

your chili or freshly baked bread? The power of kindness in a cruel world is priceless.

We have practiced social distancing for way too long. In spite of contemporary laws (which we support) that enforce social distancing, we must still find a way to help others find Jesus. Our journey is not for the faint of heart. I close with a statement familiar to many but now strangely relevant. "The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity she will have to do in a terrible crisis under most discouraging, forbidding circumstances."³

So how should we respond to the phenomena of social distancing? Let's embrace the new normal *and* practice old habits—as long as they are Jesus' habits.



- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the English Standard Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 274, 280.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992), 174.

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No more discrimination

I am writing in response to the editorial by Jeff Brown in *Ministry* magazine, February 2020. I know I am writing about a very hot potato—discrimination—in my church and in churches all over the world, between varying people groups.

Though I am not classed as a person of color, at a very early age, I learned the politics of racial discrimination. I was born in England to a Russian dad who was a strong nationalistic advocate of the old Russian regime before Communism. I was in school during the age of the cold war between Russian communism and the west. If I said that my father was Russian, I was labelled as a Russian spy. So, I learned very early to just say that my mother is Ukrainian. I was classed as a foreigner. That meant I was second class to the English nationals around me. Even in seminary, I observed one student's attitude towards a Native

Christ did not practice racial or social discrimination. When He preached, He backed His preaching up with His works: visiting the poor, the needy, the down-and-out, and sinners like you and me.

American that disturbed me. How do we change these circumstances and this way of life—or can we?

Ministry magazine emphasizes how to be an effective preacher. This is welcome. However, I wish more space was given to how we practice Christianity in our daily life. For example, how many ministers who read *Ministry* magazine have been in contact with the down-and-out: alcoholics, drug addicts, and the homeless on the streets? Perhaps only a small number.

Are we in danger of

practicing social discrimination toward the down-and-out?

Christ did not practice racial or social discrimination. When He preached, He backed His preaching up with His works: visiting the poor, the needy, the down-and-out, and sinners like you and me. A major problem in many churches is that we are not practicing the works of Christ. To get us back on track, we need to spend more time with Christ—not in our offices writing sermons but visiting people from door to door and visiting the hovels and sin-infested places of the city. That's what Jesus did. That is where you find sinners who are crying out for a Christian minister to lead them to Christ. That's what we are called to do.

—Tony Butenko, pastor, Danish Union of Seventh-day Adventists





The fiftieth anniversary of the first black conference in Africa

KUMASI, GHANA

The Central Ghana Conference, the first black Seventh-day Adventist conference in Africa, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in February of this year, bringing together over 50,000 worshippers, lay leaders, ministers, and government and traditional rulers.

The event included a warm courtesy call by the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference president, Pastor **Ted N. C. Wilson**, on President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo** of the Republic of Ghana. The meeting of the two leaders, flanked by their respective associates, painted a beautiful picture of what the wholesome collaboration and cooperation of national and church leadership can produce for their mutual benefit and the well-being of their followers.

These leaders agreed on good governance, religious freedom, justice, and the rule of law. Pastor Wilson's request to pray for the national president was warmly welcomed. Hon. **Kennedy Agyepong**, a parliament member, was honored during the celebration on the Sabbath day. For over a decade, he has opened the doors



Ted and Nancy Wilson flank President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of Ghana.





of his radio stations for the preaching of Adventist messages, which he described as unique and truly biblical. The support of the government for the General Conference president's visit was admirable. God's presence

was felt throughout the program, and we are very thankful to Him. [West-Central Africa Division News, Irineo Koch / Kwame Boakye-Kwanin / Ocran Thomas]

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This evokes emotional memories for me. My first overseas assignment was as a student missionary—to the Central Ghana Conference, a few short years after its creation. Matthew Bediako was the conference president and we were honored with a visit from Neal C. Wilson, father of Ted N. C. Wilson. It was Elder Neal Wilson's first overseas visit as the new*

president of the General Conference. Kwame Boakye-Kwanin, an author of this news piece, was a non-Christian son of a tribal chief, and one of my students at Agona-Ashanti Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School. Dr. Boakye-Kwanin is now president of the North Ghana Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists. To God be the glory.—Jeffrey Brown, associate editor, Ministry.

Baptism in the backyard

UTOLICA, CROATIA

Church worship was not possible, but Pastor **Daniel Purda** decided there must be a way. **Marijan Plačković** had begun studying God's Word before the coronavirus crisis hit. Based on his new knowledge and experience with God, he decided to stand with Christ and publicly express it through baptism. He regularly attended the local church in Sunja and planned to be baptized there. However, the coronavirus pandemic erupted and disrupted those plans, with all churches facing temporary closure.

On Sabbath, while maintaining appropriate social distancing, they created an improvised pool using a large agricultural bin. The pastor then stood beside the bin and, following appropriate protective measures against

infection, baptized the man in the backyard of his home.

Only four people were present, but the baptism brought joy to a much larger number who heard of this event and, as equally, to heaven. The pastor, respecting the pandemic prevention rules, will hold a ceremony of acceptance into the church membership at a later date when church gatherings are allowed to resume. However, he has already welcomed our new brother into the fellowship of God's people.

[TED News Staff: Victor Hulbert, editor; Deana Stojković, associate editor. Translation by Matija Kovačević].





A Passion for Mission

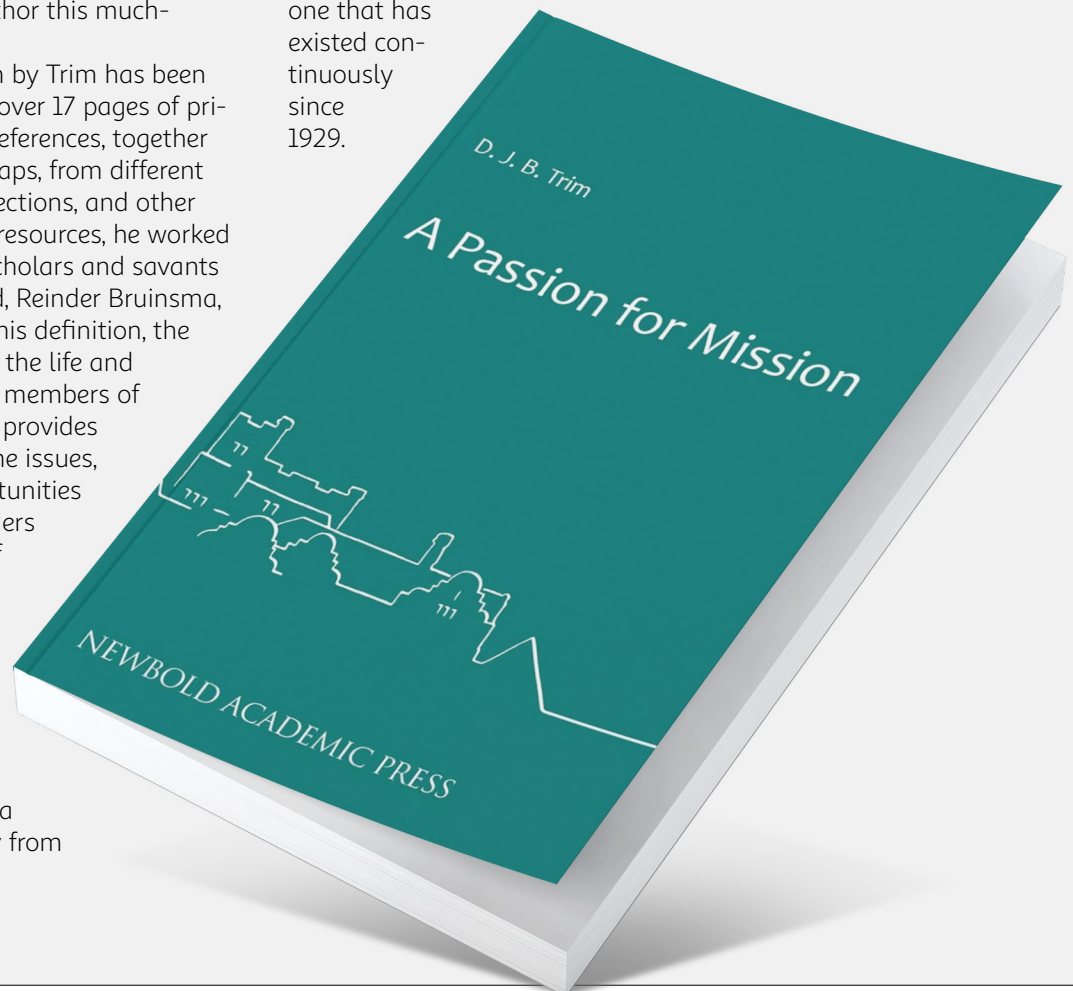
by David Trim (Bracknell, UK: Newbold Academic Press, 2019).

David Trim's *A Passion for Mission* is an illuminating and insightful account of the history of the Trans-European Division (TED). Trim, a graduate of Newbold College of Higher Education and the University of London, taught history in the TED at Newbold College, while it was my privilege to be director of education for the TED. Trim currently serves as the director of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Trim is, therefore, an excellent choice to author this much-needed book.

The approach taken by Trim has been to source and involve over 17 pages of primary and secondary references, together with 28 figures and maps, from different libraries, archives, collections, and other resources. With these resources, he worked collaboratively with scholars and savants such as Harry Leonard, Reinder Bruinsma, and Patrick Boyle. By his definition, the book does not explore the life and witness of the "church members of the division." His book provides us with a history "of the issues, challenges, and opportunities that faced church leaders at the division level; of how they responded to them; and of the initiatives they took to advance the goals and objectives of the division administration." Yet, David Trim chronicles a well-constructed story from

"the perspective of the TED officers and the executive committee actions."

Writing to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the TED, Trim thus covers the period 1929–2019. On January 1, 1929, four new world divisions of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists came into existence. The Northern European Division (NED) was one and, though its name and territory have changed, the Trans-European Division (TED), as it has been named since January 1, 1986, is the only one that has existed continuously since 1929.




... now those mission fields have largely become Christianized while, over time, the homelands have become virtually non-Christian. This trend has had a significant impact in the homelands.

Trim titled the book *A Passion for Mission* because he sees this mission as the unifying thread that binds the extraordinary degree of diversity in the division; diversity bound together by a passion for proclaiming the “everlasting gospel” to those who have not heard it. As a result, he says, “the history of the Trans-European Division is a history of a passion for mission.”

Trim’s main argument is that passion for mission has been the driving force and organizing function of life and existence in the TED. Therefore, from the beginning in 1929, the territory of the division was seen largely as comprising two distinct sections: the Christian homelands and the mission fields. Thus, for most of the 90 years, the direction of “mission passion” was toward the “mission fields,” which were mostly in Africa and West Asia. Accordingly, the flow of resources—manpower, money, and creative energy—was mainly from the homelands to the mission fields. The results have arguably been quite successful, and now those mission fields have largely become Christianized while, over time, the

homelands have become virtually non-Christian. This trend has had a significant impact in the homelands.

One result the author flags is that the concept of “Home mission” had become necessary and required attention, along with “Foreign mission.” Two other developments gently touched on were, first, the passion for mission exhibited by native converts in the mission fields, who became missionaries in countries other than their own; thus, division missionaries included Africans. The second development was church members migrating from the mission fields into churches in the homelands, for example, Caribbean church members to Britain and the Netherlands. In light of the experiences described, I share the author’s view expressed at the end of chapter 9: that intentional pursuit of unity in diversity will have success in enriching the church, even as is now being experienced.

Throughout the book, Trim not only raises thoughtful and critically important questions emerging from the data, the events, and the trends but also ventures to posit thought-provoking perspectives for reflection. For example, at the end of the last chapter, he suggests eight “lessons that could be drawn on in working towards a bright future.” In lesson number 8, Trim asserts that the hope of a bright future will be assured “if the division officers, church officers, and church members in the Trans-European Division now truly focus their energies on being European.” I agree—but only in the mission-passionate sense of 1 Corinthians 9:20. This should be required reading, especially for leaders throughout the TED. 



Arthur Edwin Gibb, retired, served as undersecretary for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He resides in Sandy Spring, Maryland, United States.

It's not over when it's over

I am a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister—and I am 100 years old. Thanks be to God! At the time of retirement, I had some health challenges, so I retired two years early. Being released from the pressure of my work and a change of location helped enormously. Within a year, my health returned to normal.

I made myself available to my local church, conference and union. I soon became very busy as a volunteer. I was elected to many things, but my appointment as chair of the local church school board was one of my most rewarding assignments. We went from 8 students to 59 students, from kindergarten through to ninth grade, in just a few short years. Praise be to God. I realized that while employment may be ended, ministry is not over until God says it's over.

Life in a motor home

The mid-1990s saw the onset of Alzheimer's disease for my wife. Macie would panic when I was out of sight. So, we sold our home, bought a motor coach, and traveled around, visiting our children. We did this for more than 10 years. It was wonderful. When it became evident that it was not safe to continue, my children and I lovingly placed Macie in a caring nursing home. One year later, my Macie passed away.

The community life

I now reside in a large retirement community. We have Catholics; Protestants, Jews; and, from time to time, a Muslim or two. Of course, there are one or two that do not consider themselves religious. As a minister, I began to wonder whether there was a way to reach out to these wonderful persons. It dawned on me that we have something in common—Jews, Christians, and Muslims all base our religion on the foundation of the Old Testament.

I planned a Bible study class, approved by the building administration, using only the Old Testament as our textbook. Almost every resident came—at least, those able to get around. Keep in mind, almost all of our residents are in their 90s!

We began at Genesis chapter one. By this time, they knew I was a Seventh-day Adventist

minister, but we were learning together. Most class members had heard about Creation but were reading for the first time about Creation taking place during seven literal 24-hour days. I asked them whether it would be possible to believe the Bible account of Creation and still accept the theory of evolution. They were in awe.

In Genesis chapters 2 and 3, we learned of the creation of humanity, the Garden of Eden, and God's instruction to Adam and Eve. We also learned that, although they had sinned, God had prepared a plan to redeem them from sin. This whole story was new to my class members.

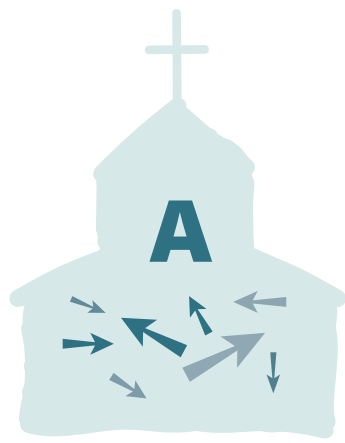
We are now many months into our study. These Bible truths appear so new to them that they are overwhelmed by what they are learning, and there are almost no questions or comments. I am wondering whether they are now ready for the New Testament.

The teaching life

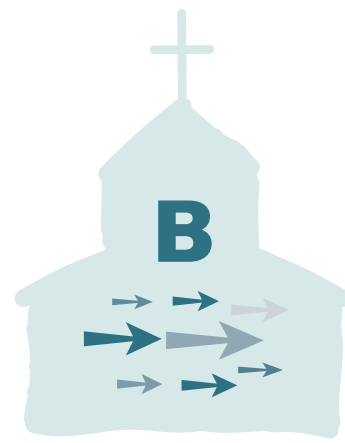
This Bible study has been good for me also. I have read the Bible through many times. I am very familiar with it, but teaching takes a specific kind of preparation. I ask, with each passage, whether there's a message in it for me. I now know what Scripture means when it says, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1, NIV).

Our attendance is steady. I feel that most of them have a greater appreciation of their God and increased faith in the Holy Bible. Time after time, we have seen God's love and grace, but we have all learned that, sometime, there will be a judgment, and at that time, our attitude toward God will determine whether we will have eternal life or death.

As we study, we discover that God has used ordinary men and women through whom He has communicated His will to us. All were born with sinful natures, and yet they followed God's instructions implicitly. Some were men; some were women. Some were trained—many were not. Some were very young; others were very old. God used Noah for 120 years. God has used me for 100! As long as you allow Him, I believe God will use you too. 🙏



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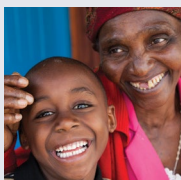


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