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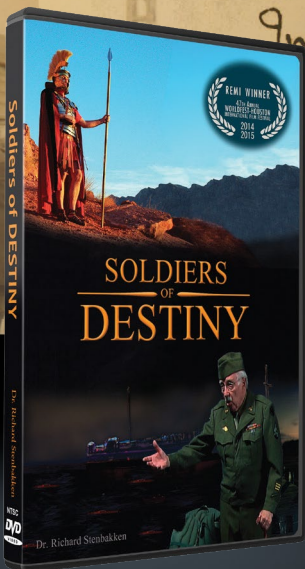
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# “What I especially appreciated was the biblical and theological wrestling and anchoring of all your articles. Your writings challenged me with Scripture, not simply with someone’s opinion.”

I wish to begin by thanking you for over three decades of *Ministry* magazine. I do not remember when or how I received my first issue; you probably have that in your records. I retired two years ago, after 41 years of ordained ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in Canada and the United States. I read a lot and have subscribed to any number of magazines over the years. Usually for a few years each. *Ministry* magazine has been the only one that I read cover to cover almost every time. What I especially appreciated was the biblical and theological wrestling and anchoring of all your articles. Your writings challenged me with Scripture, not simply with someone’s opinion. Since I am now retired, I was going to write a letter of thanks and ask you to discontinue your gift to me. But as I sat down to write, the article on “Emotional Intelligence for Effective Ministry” by Lori Ciccarelli Stotko caught my eye (March 2020). Excellent!

Keep up the good work! I look forward to your next issue!  
—Philip Stel, retired, Leighton Christian Reformed Church, Leighton, Iowa, United States

The article by Shaun Brooks, “Making Room for Those With Special Needs,” in the March 2020 issue of *Ministry* is excellent. He has personal expertise and describes children with special needs and their families well. Part of my professional life as a pediatrician involved diagnosing and designing plans for children with autism and other developmental

disabilities. In my church life (pastor’s wife), I participated with other teachers to include children with special needs in Kindergarten and Primary Sabbath School. Creativity, flexibility, and adaptation are always needed for young children, but sometimes an extra bit is needed for a child who is at a different learning stage from the other children. I appreciate that the church I now attend practices what the author encourages. Individuals with different abilities are welcomed and included in the worship service. As Pastor Brooks stated, the church is a family where we have opportunity to include, with love, tolerance, and patience, all members as we worship together. He makes a strong case for our congregations to be supportive and inclusive of individuals with special needs.

—Arleen L. Downing, MD, F.A.A.P., medical director, retired, San Luis Obispo, California, United States







# Get off the bank

**W**e used to play a game at church socials called “In the River, on the Bank.” One side of a dividing line was the “river” and the other side was the “bank.” When the leader shouted, “In the river,” we would jump forward into the river. When the leader shouted, “On the bank,” we would jump backward to the bank.

What disturbed your flow was when the leader shouted, “On the bank,” then, “On the bank.” If you jumped when you should stay—or stayed when you should jump—you were disqualified. The key was to listen to the voice of the leader and be in the right spot at the right time.

## Learning on the bank

Much has happened while we were on the bank. Millions have been affected by the deaths from an unknown disease, and millions have been impacted by the deaths of unarmed African Americans. Our leaders, civic and religious, have alternated between staying on the bank for personal health and jumping into the river for community healing. Should we be in the river or on the bank?

Sometimes it’s difficult to discern the voice of the Leader. The disciples stayed on the bank, obeying the voice of the Leader (Acts 1:4). David stayed on the bank, disobeying the voice of the Leader (2 Sam. 11:1). Neither the river nor the bank is intrinsically bad. The key is to do the right thing at the right time.

On the bank, there will be *condemnation*. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency stated, “George Floyd did not deserve to die. Ahmaud Arbery did not deserve to die. Breonna Taylor did not deserve to die. . . . The United States was founded on Christian beliefs but built on the backs of slaves. That paradox disgraces us to this day and shames all who do not speak out on behalf of equality and justice.”<sup>1</sup>

On the bank, there will be *confrontation*. The National Council on Family Relations acknowledge, “Now is a time to listen—to actively listen—and reflect. We must listen and learn from our Black, Brown, and other racial minoritized colleagues, students, and families we serve. And with listening and learning, we must strive to more deeply understand the complex issues of racism and inequality that systematically prevent

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racial minoritized families from enjoying the same freedoms and opportunities as other families.”<sup>2</sup>

## Leaving for the river

When the Spirit comes—when learning has taken root—it’s time to get off the bank. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18, NKJV).

In the river, there will be *compensation*. Ellen White stated, “The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past. Those who have taken no active part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement.”<sup>3</sup>

AdventHealth declared, “We must be humble enough to learn how to best equip our organization, and change our behavior, in order to meet needs. This morning, we started . . . listening to some of our organization’s African American leaders. . . . It is no longer good enough to personally acknowledge that we are not racist. We must become anti-racist advocates. Let us loose the chains of injustice, together.”<sup>4</sup> They acknowledged it was a beginning.

Paul testified, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27, NKJV). You can be disqualified by oppressive conduct in the river. You can also be disqualified by inactive conduct on the bank.



- 1 “Denouncing Racial Inequality in the United States,” ADRA, accessed June 16, 2020, <https://adra.org/denouncingracialinequality>.
- 2 “A Response to the Death of George Floyd and a Call to Action From the NCFR Board of Directors,” NCFR, June 4, 2020, <https://www.ncfr.org/news/response-death-george-floyd-and-call-action-ncfr-board-directors>.
- 3 Ellen G. White, “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 21, 1896.
- 4 Terry Shaw, “Silence is NOT an Option,” *Adventist Review*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story14999-silence-is-not-an-option>.



# Less can be more!

## Finding positive opportunities in hard financial times

**T**his crisis time can be our “book of Acts” moment! Those early believers had little money, no church buildings, few pastors, and no big institutions, and they were being persecuted. But God turned the world upside down through them as they answered the call of Jesus in Acts 1:8, praying and seeking the Holy Spirit until the baptism fell on them. We do not want to return to “normal” if that normal is Laodicea! What can He do through us in this crucial time of earth’s history?

### A great disappointment

I was shocked and embarrassed; I could not believe what had just happened! I had overdrawn my checking account by \$1,700, and my last check had been returned to the individual who attempted to cash it, marked “insufficient funds.” After reviewing my entries, I found that I had mistakenly added \$2,000 that I should have subtracted. My account held several thousand dollars less than I thought!

As a young pastoral family, we had realized in recent months that we were overextended. With the amount of our house payments escalating, we had more expenses every month than income, and our savings were nearly gone.

I thought I had the Lord figured out. Pray, work hard as a pastor, be faithful with tithes and offerings, and when you sell your home, He will bless you and help you build up financial security for the future. I had asked God for much help in buying and selling our first two homes and had made some money on each.

But as we moved to Denver, Colorado, I had prayed less and trusted more to my own experience as a home buyer. I really liked a home, paid more for it than was wise, and the amount of the

**Jerry Page** is the ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



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payments escalated over time. As my wife Janet and I wanted her to stay home with our children, we realized we were in real financial trouble.

We decided to sell our home and prayed a lot. Sure enough, a buyer came along and made an offer from which we would make a little money. This offer gave me courage as I realized the checkbook error that day. However, when I arrived home, the buyer had left a message that the deal was off because he could not get a loan. My heart sank. “Help us, Lord!” I prayed.

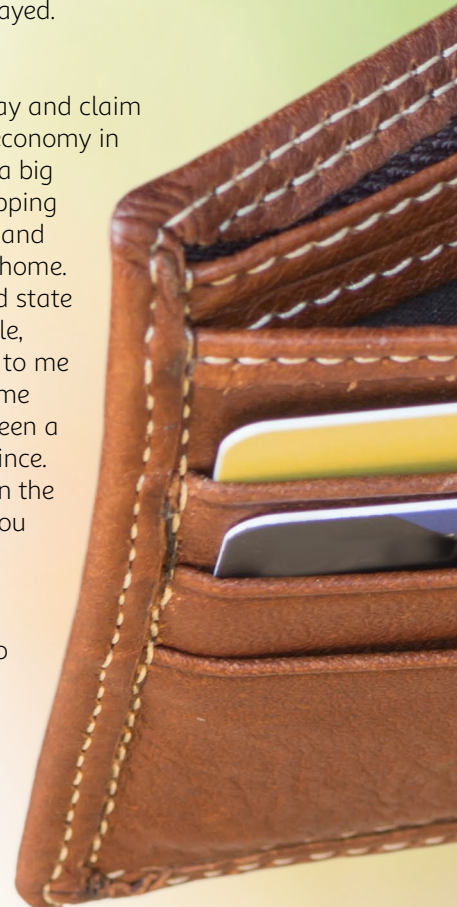
### Why, Lord?

We began to really pray and claim Bible promises. But, the economy in that area had just taken a big hit, and houses were dropping in value. Months passed, and the Lord did not sell our home. One day, in a discouraged state of mind, I opened my Bible, asking the Lord to speak to me personally. The Lord led me to Psalm 37, and it has been a touchstone for me ever since.

“Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (v. 4).<sup>1</sup>

“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret [worry] because of him who prospers in his way” (v. 7).

“But those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (v. 9).







# TRULIST



"A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked" (v. 16).

"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful and lends; and his descendants are blessed" (vv. 25, 26).

"The Lord knows the days of the upright. . . . They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied" (vv. 18, 19).

I began to praise the Lord, thinking He was telling me He was going to sell our home soon, for a good price, and we would be OK. But that is not how it worked out. Instead, our home did not sell for nearly two years!

"Why aren't You answering and saving us from losing all our savings and going into debt?" I cried out to God. Finally, I prayed, "It's all Your money, and I surrender it all to You. I don't want to run my finances anymore. Help us soon!"

After seven years in Colorado, I received a call to the Pennsylvania Conference office as executive secretary and ministerial secretary. After much prayer and learning more about the conference needs there, we felt strongly that the Lord was calling us to move.

We rented a home there. That meant we had two house payments—we were in a financial hole for sure! However, we believed that God was leading us that way. We have found that often the way He leads when we really pray and claim His promises is not always the most humanly

sensible, but He has His own plans and "a thousand ways to provide for us."<sup>2</sup>

## Less can be more!

The week we finished packing and the truck was coming to move us, our house sold—but at the exact price we paid for it. It did not cover the expenses of selling it either. This outcome was a great disappointment to our little family! We had prayed so much and yet were now without savings and even more deeply in debt. It seemed that Jesus had not answered our prayers.

Yet, the timing of the sale was our precious Lord Jesus showing us He was with us and working things out for good eventually. All my life, He has shown up clearly for me just when the way seemed darkest!

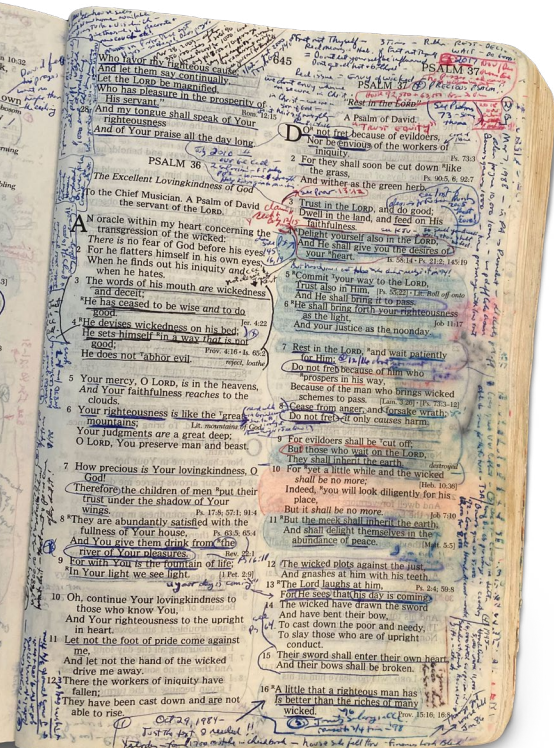
This wonderful promise in the book *The Ministry of Healing* has become one of my favorites: "In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings."<sup>3</sup>

Looking back over my life with all the trials, earnest prayer requests, and the ways He has worked things out in our financial challenges, I am filled with joy and praise!

From that day forward I began making brief miracle entries by Psalm 37 in the margins of my Bible (pictured below left): the cars people gave us, the money the Lord impressed friends to give us just when it was needed, the wonderful homes the Lord let us live in—often in beautiful rural places—the miracles in our conference financial crises, and more.

Our Lord is faithful! And He loves to have us learn to trust Him. Financial challenges can be great aids to our relationship with Jesus. I would much rather have this "faith equity" over the years, noted in Psalm 37 in my Bible, than great amounts of money in the bank!

**"Jerry, in my experience with Jesus, I have found that when God's people have the least resources, He gets the most glory!" . . . He can surprise us with His creative ways that leave us just praising Him.**



## God's presence brings peace

The Lord really blessed me again when I became president of the Pennsylvania Conference. Mo Pelley was our treasurer. He loved Jesus with all his heart, was wise about finances and leadership, and had gained much experience as a missionary pilot in Africa for many years.

One day when our conference finances were looking especially bleak, he said to me in his wise and comforting way, "Jerry, in my experience with Jesus, I have found that when God's people have the least resources, He gets the most glory!"

When we stop trusting ourselves, throw ourselves on Jesus in desperation, put God in the center, and call on His name in prayer, He will meet our every need in Jesus (Phil. 4:19). He can surprise us with His creative ways that leave us just praising Him. Over and over, I have found that to be so true!

Mo and I found ourselves facing another round of major cuts and difficult financial challenges because the downward turn of the economy caused tithe and offerings to drop drastically. Things had already been "cut to the bone," so any further budget reductions would be very painful.

## God spoke to me

Early Sabbath morning on March 17, I awakened with knots in my stomach. I was overcome by anxiety because of the massive financial challenges. I could imagine people blaming this young conference president. I was worried about myself as well as the church!

My tossing and turning woke up Janet. Learning the problem, she said, "Let's pray together." We began to claim God's promises in prayer. I was encouraged, and faith began to replace my anxiety. Then my older son Tyson woke up sick to his stomach, and it was clear that my family would not be able to join me at church that Sabbath, which was disappointing.

Our younger son, Zac, feeling the anxiety in the house, urged us to have morning worship together. I believe it was the Holy Spirit. So, I went to the bookcase to get the junior devotional book for the year. But as I did, I thought, *You know, the book this year is written more for kids older than Zac*, so I grabbed the previous year's devotional book and opened it to March 17, and we began to read it.

As we began to read, tears came to my eyes as the Lord spoke to me. It was a story about a boy named Alan and his dad who saw an old man, nearly blind, tapping his cane on the street

near the post office as he tried to mail a letter. They began to talk to him, offered him help, and discovered he was on his way to commit suicide. His wife had just ordered him out of the house, and his brother had disowned him over his drinking problem. He had been a respected state senator, but his life had fallen apart.

They took him and found him a place to stay, and eventually, he studied the Bible and was baptized. Wonderful story! However, the story itself was not what inspired me the most. God had taken me to the prior year's devotional book, to March 17, and showed me a story I had heard from my family all my years growing up, about how my brother Alan and our dad had met old Senator Prunty on his way to commit suicide! I did not know it was printed anywhere, but that day Jesus said to me, "Jerry, I know you, your brother, and Dad, and while I cannot tell you just now all the ways I will fix the problems of Pennsylvania Conference, I am here with you and care infinitely for you and the conference." I went to church filled with joy to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God performed so many miracles over the next few years in our conference by providing extra resources and taking our mission to higher growth than in many past years. He can do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we can ever ask or think! To be at peace, we just need to know He is with us and promises to meet our real needs.

## When money gets tight

It has often been said, "When money gets tight, the family will fight!" However, as Scripture reveals, there is often a "**But God** . . ." when He intervenes. That has even been true in the church, and it is true for Christian families too!

I have found that the family or church that genuinely, earnestly prays together will stay together. Moreover, if they put Jesus at the center of their financial challenges, their true needs will be met, and they will thrive in finances and relationships. At first, it may be strange that I tie relationships to finances. But, as many of us can attest to, relationships often are greatly strained when financial challenges arise. " 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible' " (Matt. 19:26).

In 1995, Janet and I were called to the Central California Conference. I was to be president. Later she became the Prayer and Women's Ministries leader. We discovered many wonderful people and



very good things happening there but also great financial, relational, and missional challenges.

All we knew to do was to urge all of God's people to see every difficulty, need, and financial impossibility as a call to prayer. These were not just a few prayers for a short time but many prayer partners praying for months and even years over specific needs. I will just briefly list some of the major challenges:

- ▶ Monterey Bay boarding academy was \$2 million in debt and in danger of closing. **But God**, after much prayer, led us to the right leadership, and in less than five years, it was all paid off through their spiritual leadership and Christian principles of debt and interest reduction.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ The conference voted to close Sequel Camp Meeting and place the large grounds up for sale. **But God** led us to reverse those decisions, leading to it becoming a major engine of spiritual and financial growth. One answered prayer was the miracle of the camp-meeting evangelism offering going from \$100,000 to well over \$1 million a year for the next decade.
- ▶ Camp Wawona in Yosemite National Park was zoned wrongly and under threat of being lost due to strong opposition from neighbors and private and governmental organizations. **But God** miraculously defeated those opposing forces, and now the camp is expanding and being redeveloped for even better ministries.
- ▶ All of the facilities mentioned above also needed major renovations, and our schools needed educational scholarships. However, there was no money for those needs. **But God** led us to develop an organization of volunteers and a conference capital campaign, which led to members giving untold days of service and about \$11 million. Through years of consistent prayer, the conference experienced uncounted miracles. Money kept coming from members and church friends.
- ▶ Our family was led by God to give in faith nearly half of our income to tithe, offerings, and outreaches when it seemed humanly impossible with a son in college and one in academy. **But God** blessed us in amazing ways to meet all our needs for the future. Even now, we cannot praise God enough for so many blessings, His continual care, and our sons and their families that live in sacrificial stewardship ways—that is worth more than any material blessings!

## Forward in faith

The list could go on and on of miracles in personnel, relationships, ministries, outreach, and finances, and the uncounted blessings we have seen around the world in the last ten years as we have traveled, teaching and ministering for the General Conference Ministerial Association. He works the same way all over the world when His people call much on His name and follow His leading!

“The means in our possession may not seem to be sufficient for the work; but if we will move forward in faith, believing in the all sufficient power of God, abundant resources will open before us. If the work is of God, He Himself will provide the means for its accomplishment. . . . If we go to the Source of all strength, with our hands of faith outstretched to receive, we shall be sustained in our work, even under the most forbidding circumstances, and shall be enabled to give to others the bread of life.”<sup>5</sup>

This crisis time can surely be our “book of Acts” moment to move into the last great explosion of Spirit-led revival and reformation leading to Christ's second coming! As we face the upcoming financial challenges, instead of being anxious and depending on human methods and conventional wisdom, we need to follow the process they did over and over in the book of Acts.

In each challenge, persecution, or obstacle, the first Christians would gather together, pray, and fast. The Holy Spirit showed up, and the Word of God went forth in power. Some were converted, and others rejected the message. Nevertheless, the church grew dramatically, and the first Christians took the gospel to the whole world in about 25 years! Even though they had little money, no churches, few pastors, no institutions, and little education, God gave them all they needed and more, plus He got all the glory!

God is calling us to help Him write the last chapter of the book of Acts as He prepares for His coming so very soon. He is always able to make less become more!



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), 481.
- 3 White, *Ministry of Healing*, 474.
- 4 The financial help materials of both Larry Burkett and later Dave Ramsey were invaluable.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 371.



# The holy ground of confinement

**T**hese are strange and unusual days we are living in, days where our freedom has been greatly curtailed. For some, isolation can be exceedingly difficult psychologically and emotionally, causing them to feel lonely and disconnected, especially if they are living by themselves. When our emotions are overcome with negativity, it is difficult to maintain a spiritual perspective, causing us to think that God is distant, not in control, or does not love us. How can we remain spiritually and emotionally faithful to God when we feel that Providence has locked our doors, curtailed our freedom, disrupted our plans, and changed the world as we know it?

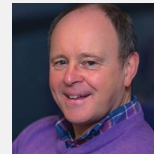
## Room for God

There is no easy answer to that question. However, I do think that Paul's response to his incarceration, chains, and containment is very helpful: "I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident . . . that my chains are in Christ" (Phil. 1:12, 13, NKJV). The place of his containment became holy ground, a sacred place that had been set apart for God's purposes. His chains became as holy as the instruments the priests used in the temple when they served God. In his small area of confinement, he made room for God. And this attitude was what enabled him to continually reach beyond the four walls of his confinement.

Making room for God in your confinement needs to be a deliberate choice that you initiate. But what does it look like?

First, *consider your confinement in isolation an opportunity to deepen your relationship with God.* There are so many good resources that we could use at this time to help sustain us.<sup>1</sup> Set yourself small, achievable goals for each day. You never know; by the time this is all over, you may have developed new habits that will help shape your life for the future.

**Alan Wilson, DMin,** is a professor in the Irish Baptist College, pastor, and church planter residing in Cloughey, County Down, Northern Ireland.



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Second, *view this as an opportunity to encourage others.* When you read Paul's words, "Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord" (Phil. 1:14, NIV), you begin to wonder whether Paul was in control of all his faculties. His thinking appears to be slightly crazy. He does not dispense with confidence in spite of his chains. Paul declares that others become confident *because of* his chains.

Paul sees this as an opportunity to encourage others. How did he accomplish this? The secret is found just a few verses later: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21, NIV). Paul's heart and life were filled with Jesus' presence through the Holy Spirit. He had peace with God no matter the circumstances and was confident in his purpose to serve his beloved Savior to the end. Through this connection with Christ, he was able to have this attitude and courage. As a result, he chose to see the encouragement of others as a productive use of his time during his personal "lockdown."

We need to share Paul's attitude. What kind of encouragement will you emit? On the holy ground of confinement, God longs to meet with us and use us to continue blessing others.

I know what I am talking about. I have some experience in this matter.

I have a disability requiring me to remain at home during the mandated period of isolation. One of the consequences of my disability, cerebral palsy, is a speech impediment that often makes it difficult for others to understand what I am trying to say. So, I like to write. I wrote this article to encourage my fellow believers. I hope this will be a blessing to you.

God's presence with us in our place of confinement makes this one of the most significant times in our lives and a key to our future fellowship with Him.



<sup>1</sup> For a wealth of resources, visit the Revival and Reformation resources page at <https://revivalandreformation.org/resources>.



# Lessons from Peter on **ministry crisis management**





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**T**he coronavirus crisis has affected ministry in profound ways. Churches and ministries accustomed to functioning in predictable and stable environments now find themselves forced to adjust to new realities. A growing consensus is that the post-COVID-19 church will emerge significantly altered.

In addition, we have seen another crisis erupt all around the world, with people of every hue rising to support equality for all people. “Pictures and video show people in London, Toronto, Berlin and more holding signs that say ‘Black Lives Matter’ and chanting the same lines heard in cities across the United States. Though sparked by [George] Floyd’s death, the protests in these countries also focused on systemic issues of racism seen there.”<sup>1</sup>

A sense of helplessness has enveloped both crises, with the church crying out with Jehoshaphat, “O our God, . . . we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:12).<sup>2</sup> I believe Peter’s example of addressing crises faced by the early church provides us with a strategy for responding to challenges posed by crises of all kinds.

### Prayer “fetches” an angel

The contextual background of Acts 12 presents a growing and dynamic church suffering relentless pursuit and merciless persecution from persons of authority. Herod Agrippa had executed the apostle James, to the delight of a Jewish establishment menaced by the growing influence of the Christian sect. From the slaughter of babes in Bethlehem to the beheading of John the Baptist, the Herodian dynasty seems to have had murder encoded in its genes. Political expediency now forges an alliance of convenience between Agrippa and the Jewish leadership, whose aim is to kill the apostle Peter.

Despite the schemes of man, Heaven dictates a stay of execution for Peter. An angel, no less, is commissioned to miraculously usher him out

of prison. Following his deliverance, the apostle appears at Mary’s house, where the church has interceded for him. The fervent prayers of a righteous church availed much. Centuries later, the Puritan preacher Thomas Watson would declare, “The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel.”<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the believers deem his deliverance as too good to be true, but once inside, he unveils his strategy for surviving the crisis. A meticulous reading of Acts 12:17 reveals the steps of Peter’s management strategy for deliverance in a crisis.

### 1. Be still and . . .

“*But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent . . .*” (Acts 12:17). Peter was delivered, but he was still a fugitive. He knew his presence could place every individual in Mary’s house in jeopardy. He knew that joy can quickly turn to anxiety when authorities show up at your house.

One news anchor stated, “There are two major crises in this country tonight, two deadly viruses killing Americans: Covid-19 and racism.”<sup>4</sup> The validity of both crises has been questioned by some. While theories of conspiracy abound, the political discourse continues to degenerate, with those of polar extremes living in alternate realities. Spiritual leadership must de-escalate the tension by asserting that God is still in control. He declares, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10)!

Both crises have involved grief that has manifested itself in fear, blame, and anger. Scripture admonishes, “BE ANGRY [at sin—at immorality, at injustice, at ungodly behavior], YET DO NOT SIN” (Eph. 4:26, AMP). Ellen White acknowledges, “It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin.”<sup>5</sup>

In times of crisis, spiritual leadership must (1) validate anxiety and outrage, (2) calm tense environments, and (3) be as “the sons of Issachar



who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32).

## 2. Tell your story

*"He declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison"* (Acts 12:17). Rather than denying his bondage, Peter displayed it and testified to his divine deliverance. I see the believers being spellbound as Peter told them that an angel woke him up, told them that chains and handcuffs fell from him, and told them that closed doors opened for him. During a crisis, share your story. No one can argue about what God has done for you.

It is wonderful when colleagues from the majority culture invite us to tell our story. Then necessary confrontation is accompanied by welcome collaboration. Organizational development consultant Kathy Obear recommends "a weekly check-in for people you manage or coworkers you are genuinely close to. It can be as simple as asking: 'How are you doing? Given the pandemic, [given] the national uprisings going on—how are you personally impacted and how can we support you?'"<sup>6</sup> Few will refute your testimony.

Telling your story also encourages the faith of others. In a public setting, I shared my personal struggle with COVID-19. I, along with two of my children, had been stricken with the virus. By the grace of God, we overcame our illness. By going public, I wanted to send a message that contracting the virus was not a cause for shame or stigma but rather an occasion for mutual support. I heard from several individuals stating that my story helped them navigate their own struggle openly without shame.

## 3. Submit to spiritual leaders

*"And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren'"* (Acts 12:17). Peter asks that someone take the news of his deliverance to James and other church leaders. This particular James was the older brother of Jesus who would go on to write the New Testament epistle of James. The early church referred to him as James the Just. Many assume that Peter was the absolute leader of the primitive church. But the nominating committee made James the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He chaired the Jerusalem Council, with Peter in attendance (Acts 15).

Peter understood that, even in the midst of that specific crisis, the church of God has structure and discipline. As a result, he was intentional about working within its framework.

Before departing Mary's house, he submitted to duly established church authority by sending a message about his status to James. In essence, he was saying, "Go tell my pastor that I have been delivered."

A leadership vacuum during a crisis may prompt some to act independently of and without accountability to the church body. "Followers of Jesus Christ will not act independently one of another. Our strength must be in God, and it must be husbanded, to be put forth in noble, concentrated action. It must not be wasted in meaningless movements."<sup>7</sup> In acknowledging James's leadership, Peter demonstrated that he was no loose cannon and thus affirmed spiritual leadership.

"And to the brethren" highlights that we cannot survive without mentors, advocates, and allies. No one individual can defeat the virus of racism. Peter was not ashamed to reach out to the brethren. The brethren may live in a different place, operate on a different level, or be of a different color, but such partnerships are formidable. Patrick Lencioni comments, "Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare."<sup>8</sup> Times of crisis demand that we turn to each other, not on each other.

## 4. Reinvent your ministry

*"And he departed and went to another place"* (Acts 12:17). The ongoing persecution in Jerusalem made it impossible for Peter to continue ministering there. However, he did not give up ministry. Rather, he decided to do it elsewhere. Peter chose to remain occupied in God's work in another sphere until it was safe to return. The crisis required a recalibration or reinvention of ministry.

Theologians disagree about where Peter went. Catholic tradition says that he preached to the Jewish Christian community in Rome. Another view is that, like Paul, Peter embarked on a missionary voyage to establish churches in unentered areas. His first epistle tends to support this view as it lists greetings to Christians in various cities in Greece (1 Pet. 1:1). His salutation appears as the words of a spiritual father writing to churches that he may have founded. The point remains that when the crisis made it impossible for him to function in Jerusalem, God opened doors for him to serve in other spheres.

COVID-19 has paralyzed traditional ministry and forced many to adapt to new realities.

I heard from several individuals stating that my story helped them navigate their own struggle openly without shame.



Resiliency requires adaptation and reinvention. Contrary to expectations, churches continue to thrive through a variety of changes ranging from remote services to online giving. Many individuals unable to work in their regular employment have found time to volunteer in humanitarian service.

In a time of economic uncertainty, fear of layoffs, or cuts in benefits, we have assured our workers that faithful labor to bring all the tithes into the storehouse will not go unrewarded. We asked every church to register for online giving and have adapted the way tithes get remitted to the conference. During weekly remote pastoral meetings, we provide financial updates. The shared report includes lists of congregations that are late, as a means of accountability. No pastor wants to see his or her church on the list. One would expect a precipitous drop in tithe in the epicenter of the pandemic, and yet God's people have remained faithful to their covenant. They instinctively understand that He promises His faithfulness and protection to those who remain faithful to Him.

If contemporary crises have frustrated your vocational calling, don't despair. If it's creativity you need, pray and ask God for guidance in reinventing your ministry. Maybe He will inspire you to lead telephonic Bible study or conduct internet evangelism. He may ask you to don protective equipment and serve in a food pantry. If it's forgiveness, love, or hope you need, cry out with the psalmist, "Deliver me from the workers of iniquity and save me from bloodthirsty men" (Ps. 59:2). God may whisper to you to organize a prayer vigil or a peaceful protest. Whatever it is, God still has a ministry avenue especially for you.

## From crisis to victory

Peter's response to a crisis mutually benefited him and the church. God's cause strengthened as the early church continued to grow despite persecution. The apostle's ministry prospered through expansion and recalibration. He went on to serve God's church for several additional decades until his ultimate martyrdom. As we face crises never before witnessed in our lifetime, following Peter's crisis-management strategy will expand our ministry and, from crises of global and catastrophic proportions, we will emerge victorious.



- 1 Peter Aitken, "Protests Sparked by George Floyd's Death Get Support From Around the World," Fox News, May 31, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/protests-spread-across-globe-george-floyd>.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 3 Thomas Watson as stated in Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook Communications, 2007), 362.
- 4 Lysette Voytko, "America's 'Two Deadly Viruses'—Racism and Covid-19—Go Viral Among Outraged Twitter Users," *Forbes*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lysettevoytko/2020/05/31/americas-two-deadly-virusesracism-and-covid-19-go-viral-among-outraged-twitter-users/#64ebe0c65ae3>.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 310.
- 6 Soo Youn, "How You Can Be a Better Coworker to Your Black Colleagues Right Now," *The Lily*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.thelily.com/how-you-can-be-a-better-coworker-or-manager-to-your-black-colleagues-right-now/>.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1882), 535.
- 8 Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), vii.



I have kept a diary record of an event, which began early in 2016, the seventeenth year of my husband's deterioration from the rare neurological, terminal disease known as multiple system atrophy. He was a strong, godly man, lifelong vegetarian, church pastor, missionary, and denominational administrator who walked or jogged daily. During retirement, it was heart-breaking to see his diminishing health. As his physical condition indicated that he was nearing final sleep, I grew close to exhaustion from years of care. I felt I could do no more. The good-byes of soul mates in Christian service, though filled with hope, are both difficult and sad.

### The strange occurrences

By February 2016, the unusual event had become so established that I began diary entries about it. What was this reoccurring event? If I woke in the night, I clearly heard music in my mind. I heard words and sacred melodies of faith and comfort before I fell asleep again. My first diary entry was on the morning of February 21, when I wrote

what I had heard that night: "Jesus, the very thought of thee, with sweetness fills my breast, but sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest."<sup>1</sup>

Diary entries confirm that the event persisted frequently throughout that year, 2016, until death in November finally separated my husband from me until Jesus comes again.

Was the sacred music to comfort me only through those stressful months of final care? No. In 2020, the music continues to sustain me in widowhood and solitude, though with less frequency. I consider them "songs in the night" (Job 35:10).<sup>2</sup> Sometimes now, by the next morning, I have quite forgotten the details, but I know that I am not alone. I can face the day and know that I am alive for a purpose.

# Songs in the night



## The power of our Friend

As Christians, we often talk about answered prayers, the wonder of grace, forgiveness, and God's leading in our lives. These are all reminders of the power of the divine Counselor, Comforter, Teacher, Friend. He is the Third Person of the Trinity, who is watching over us on earth while Jesus is our Mediator in heaven.

After a disclosure in 2017 about my songs in the night, two women came to me, separately and alone, to quietly tell of clearly hearing Christian songs in their minds, and during the night too. It had happened regularly when they were going through terrible trials. Both believed their promptings were of the Lord, via the Holy Spirit. I have since met another Christian who has experienced a similar blessing. Recently I heard the interesting testimony of a regular viewer of the televised program Hope Sabbath School. She said that songs from the Hope Channel were in her heart when she woke in the morning.

The prophet Zephaniah affirmed: "The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you *with singing*" (Zeph. 3:17).

Elihu, the younger and most helpful friend of Job, testified that "people cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful. But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night . . . ?'" (Job 35:9, 10). Elihu's memorable words are set out in the largely poetic form of the book of Job. As poetry, they might be interpreted as symbols of protective care during dark experiences. However, in chapter 35, Elihu is talking about reality. He is a realist who does not suddenly diverge into symbolism.

The great psalm writer, King David, disclosed his own experience: "On my bed I remember you; I think of you through *the watches of the night*. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me" (Ps. 63:6–8).

Isaiah says, "The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and *my song*;<sup>3</sup> he has become my salvation" (Isa. 12:2).

## A greater outpouring

The human mind may be likened to a database or library catalog. It is not surprising, then, if stored data—Bible texts, hymns, or significant memories, such as baptism or answered prayers—are implanted or drawn on by the omniscient Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Friend.

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In the apostle Peter's address at Pentecost, he referred to the prophet Joel, saying: " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" ' " (Acts 2:16–18; cf. Joel 2:27, 28).

## Since day one

Those already in fellowship with the Lord will not be surprised when the greater outpouring of the Spirit occurs "in the last days." Ever since "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2), the Third Person of the Godhead has been an active presence in the story of humankind.

Indeed, He has been present throughout the Bible and in unfolding history, even today. He is a true and reliable Counselor and Comforter, One who is with me and in me and never leaves me alone nor without assurance. The Holy Spirit helps believers remember Christ's instruction, whether in parables and sermons or in deeds (John 14). As an Adventist fundamental belief says of the Holy Spirit: "He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth."<sup>4</sup>

And, in my case (and in others), He, the Third Person of the Godhead, gives, yes, songs in the night.



- 1 Edward Caswall, "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee," 1849, public domain.
- 2 Scripture is from the New International Version. All italics added.
- 3 Marginal reading.
- 4 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrine*, 3rd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association/Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2018), 69.



# Struggling to trust:

Why I raised my Promise percentage



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**H**ave you ever struggled with how much offering to give? After a personal struggle, I finally decided to raise the percentage of my “Promise,” my regular and systematic offering. However, I am *not* proud of my struggle with it. As a minister, I am supposed to be an example and give out of pure love for God and His work. But, the reality is not that beautiful. I still struggle with an extremely strong inclination toward materialism, consumerism, and the love of this world. For me, what is tangible is far more attractive than what is intangible, which makes it difficult to develop trust and faith in God.

Abraham’s story of sacrificing Isaac upon the altar shows not only how painful it may be to develop trust in God but also how much the Lord values that trust. God says, “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:12).<sup>1</sup> Of course, Christians should be ready to sacrifice everything, but it seems that the experience of self-denial is especially painful for those who, like me, have a propensity to worldliness.

### The work of trust

I became a promisor—someone who has proposed to give God a percentage of every income or increase as a regular and systematic offering—for the first time at age 11, answering what I believed to be a call from God through my local church pastor, Josino Campos, in Brazil. When the Lord gave me my first job, I doubled that (very small) percentage for the offering and then increased it a little again (to 5 percent) when I married Mari and started to work as a minister. Ten years later, after a mighty act of God (He almost literally delivered me from the grave), my wife and I felt compelled to double that percentage—even though she had to leave her job because we had just been called to a different field.

In my new position as the Santa Catarina Conference Stewardship director (Brazil), I felt it my duty to annually invite all pastors of that conference to sacrifice something by increasing

their Promise percentages. But, then, should I not also increase my percentage again and again? Peter suggests that we need to be “*examples* to the flock,” modeling what we yearn to see in those we lead (1 Pet. 5:2-4; emphasis added). So, on different occasions, the percentage of my Promise was, again, increased.

Finally, in 2003, while working in another conference, my wife and I were led to commit as Promise what to us was a particularly challenging percentage of our income. It would require a miracle for us to survive every month until the next paycheck. However, my whole family experienced amazing miracles as the Lord took care of us in remarkable ways! I believe that experiences like that deeply influenced our children’s decision for Christ because they saw God and prayer in very real ways. On the other hand, if we did not give, or if we still had too much left with us, the chances would have been higher of fostering a lack of commitment in our children.

### The move to North America

At the end of 2015, the call to move to the United States brought some great economic challenges. First, Mari had to leave her job again. Then, just after we sold everything and before exchanging our money for US dollars, the Brazilian currency lost a significant part of its value. On top of that, our two daughters told us that they would both marry in the same year, and



MARCOS FAIOCK BOMFIM

## ***Increasing the percentage of your Promise will not necessarily decrease your standard of living. However, it does mean that you will need to increase your standard of prayer.***

we decided to provide some financial help for the weddings and the beginning of their married lives.

Now, with the money left, it seemed impossible for us to purchase a house, a car, and everything else we would need in the new country. Besides that, how would we meet other important needs, such as building an emergency fund, saving for retirement, or providing for Mari in case I died?

At that time, it seemed that fear was stronger than trust because I decided to decrease the percentage of my Promise to a third of what I had been giving. (I still wonder whether lack of faith sometimes does not disguise itself as prudence, leading us to miss some precious experiences of trust that we could have had otherwise.) However, only three months later, God's care was so evident that we decided to increase that percentage again, now to two-thirds of what it had been previously.

Even though I then felt much better, my impression was that I was sometimes living more by sight than by faith. Was I failing to trust more completely in the Lord, depend more on Him, and pray more?

### **The need for prayer**

When giving is based on a call from God, rather than the desire to be recognized as a philanthropist (a totally different kind of giving), it becomes a humbling exercise of trust in God. Sometimes, by allowing more trials, the Lord is urging us to pray and commune with Him more. Other times, that same invitation for more time

with God may come via an encouragement to give more. If you give more, you have less, and you need to pray more. If you pray more, you worry less—you trust more, you live by faith, and your eyes are diverted from this world and fixed on coming realities (Col. 3:1–3).

Increasing the percentage of your Promise will not necessarily decrease your standard of living. However, it does mean that you will need to increase your standard of prayer. At the same time, it will require you to learn from Jesus how to find real delight in a simpler lifestyle, which is an extremely useful skill in these end times that bring new economic realities. You also need to pray for wisdom about how to use the remaining resources more efficiently. You need to pray for a pure heart to keep the way open to receive that guidance, and you need to pray that you will find the same products or services at a better price.

With that experience in view, author Ellen White suggests that “every faithful steward” should be more eager “to *enlarge the proportion* of gifts . . . than to *decrease* his offering one jot or tittle.”<sup>2</sup> This quotation is not saying that it is a sin to decrease the proportion (or percentage) of what we are giving. It is saying that our aim should be to enlarge it because it will also enlarge our experience of trust.

On the other hand, she also says that when we retain more, we do not necessarily have more: “They have thought it gain to rob God by retaining all, or a *selfish proportion*, of His gifts. . . . But they meet with loss instead of gain. Their course results in the withdrawal of mercies and blessings.”<sup>3</sup> These two quotations constantly remind me about the importance of “enlarging the proportion” as an act of faith.

### **Three “ifs”**

In 2019, I proposed a deal with the Lord, including three “ifs” as disclaimers. I would increase the percentage of my Promise again, to the same proportion it was before the end of 2015, “if” He would provide an income for Mari, “if” her income would be at least a specific amount (very unlikely to happen), and “if” Mari would agree on moving in that direction (I always include her in such decisions). After all, by choosing that percentage, my salary would cover only tithe, Promise, mortgage, car payment, insurance, and taxes. All the rest would inescapably be her part.

After a little while, the Lord fulfilled the first “if” by giving her a job, which she loves. However, the second “if” was not fulfilled (her income was

much lower than what I proposed), so for a while, I thought that I was released from my deal. Then, it was as if a sweet Voice was constantly inviting me: “Don’t you believe that even with your wife’s smaller income that I am *able to supply all your need in Christ Jesus?*” (Phil. 4:19). I was unable to avoid the Voice.

So, after struggling for three months against that thought, I finally decided to talk to Mari about the plan. Part of me was hoping that her rejection of the idea would bring my feet back to “safer” ground. She instantly agreed to it. I was left with no other choice than to move back to that challenging percentage that was in place before the end of 2015. When the next paycheck arrived and I started to fulfill the vow, I experienced an indescribable peace of mind.

### Trusting in the unseen

I still do not know the end of this story—it is an ongoing experiment. What will the Lord lead us to do with our percentages if, in the future, for instance, Mari is no longer able to retain that job? I do not know. But so far, I am not looking back. To live in that different kind of stability, one

that depends not on what is seen but on unseen realities, has been a privilege for a man who, at his core, loves the things that are seen.<sup>4</sup>



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1940), 200; emphasis added.
- 3 White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 90; emphasis added.
- 4 A version of this article was originally published as “Struggling to Trust,” *Dynamic Steward* 23, no. 2 (April–June 2020): 9–11, <https://stewardship.adventist.org/struggling-to-trust>. For more information, see Marcos Faiock Bomfim, “What Is ‘Promise?’,” *Dynamic Steward* 23, no. 1 (January–March 2020): 12, 13, <https://stewardship.adventist.org/what-is-promise>. A pastor once wrote, “Kay and I became reverse tithers. We now give 90 percent away and live on 10 percent of our income.” That pastor was Rick Warren (see Richard Abanes, *Rick Warren and the Purpose That Drives Him* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005], 20). Some will say it’s easy to do that when you have Rick Warren’s income. Yet how much to give in offering can be a challenge for the rich and the not-so-rich. “‘Test me please in this,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour forth for you an overflowing blessing’” (Mal. 3:10, LEB, emphasis included. See Malachi 3:8–11). Pastor Wintley Phipps says, “God is a gentleman. If you give Him too much, He’ll give it back to you.” If you have an experience where maintaining your “Promise” offering to God in difficult times, or even increasing it, has led to “an overflowing blessing,” we’d love to hear from you! Contact us at [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org)—*The Editors*.

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# Four things to do before you decide to walk away

**S**erving in pastoral ministry is hard. Psychologist Richard Blackmon states, “Pastors are the single most occupationally frustrated group in America.”<sup>1</sup> This article is not about those thinking about transitioning to another congregation but rather for those thinking about walking away from pastoral ministry altogether.

## Fact versus fiction

Every month hundreds, if not thousands, of pastors resign their positions. For most of them, ministry was not what they expected. Contemporary media fuels expectations that you will automatically be a successful pastor, preaching to thousands every week. The truth, however, is quite different. When our expectations of what ministry should be do not pan out, we feel defeated. A youth pastor once told me that he graduated with 25 other students in youth pastor training. Within five years, 24 of them had left the ministry.

We learn that ministry is not all glamour and lights. I know many pastors who spend their day preparing for board meetings, dealing with constant complaints, and trying to please every person who walks through their doors. This quickly leads to exhaustion. I was once a part of a district with more than 70 churches. One year, more than 30 of them did not report a single conversion or baptism. That was heartbreaking. Many pastors, consumed with things that really do not matter, find themselves unfulfilled in serving and just want to escape.

Often, we look at other pastors and get caught up in comparing ourselves to them. Viewing their posts on social media, we realize that our ministry does not measure up to theirs. Naturally, we can then feel defeated.

## Most pastors struggle

When we get caught up in false expectations, overwhelming exhaustion, and falling into the trap of comparing ourselves with others, it makes us want to quit. Let me first give you some good news. Most, if not all, pastors struggle. Solomon talks about life’s different seasons. The same is true for pastors. We all have seasons of encouragement and winning and ones of discouragement and losing. Let me remind you that you are not alone. Many pastors wrestle with the same things you do.

## Tools for reconsideration

If you are feeling discouraged and on the verge of quitting ministry, let me give you four action steps you can take immediately to reconsider walking away.

*1. Reset the bar with faithfulness.* Redefine the standard and the expectation for what God seeks from you in ministry. Your first and foremost calling is to be faithful, not just successful. When we think of success we tend to focus on numbers, and if they do not reach the bar we have set for ourselves, then we feel like failures. Disappointed and frustrated, we want to run away. However, the bar just needs to be set at us being and remaining faithful to God. As you read the book of Acts and explore the life of Paul, you will notice that he constantly struggled with persecution, criticism, and problems with the churches that he planted. But I love the fact that Paul just kept being faithful! He could not escape the constant stream of troubles that seemed to follow him. But Paul just stayed faithful. We, too, must do the same.

But we must be faithful in the right ways. We need to be faithful in reaching new people for Christ, discipleship, and biblical preaching. Maybe

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SCAN FOR AUDIO





we should repent of being faithful in the wrong areas and start being faithful in the right ones. I know many pastors who are faithful in showing up and putting in their office hours, but I wonder how faithful they are in real kingdom matters. Above everything else, we must be faithful in the right areas of ministry.

Maybe you are on the verge of quitting because you are not as successful as you thought you should be. Or you want to quit because you have not reached the goals you set for yourself. But stop for a moment and just ask yourself if you are being faithful. Let this be your new standard for being effective in ministry. Seek to be faithful in the right things.

*2. Invest in your gifts and passion for ministry.* I love to preach and win people to Christ. My passion lies in these two areas. When I am not doing well at them, I begin to feel like a failure. As I look back on my ministry, I realize that I have spent much of my time preparing for meetings, working on a building project, or resolving conflict with fighting church members, leading me to neglect my true passion. This leaves me drained. While we should not ignore our duties as people serving in ministry, we must continually work within the gifting and passion that God has given us.

Perhaps your gift is teaching. Consumed with everything else, you have quit investing in your passion. Teaching may have driven you into ministry. Invest more in your gifts and passions. I am not saying this is easy, but you have to be intentional about it. Spend the majority of your days preparing

and praying for your gifts. Learn to delegate other tasks and focus on your passions and gifts.

Whatever your God-given gifts, be intentional about investing yourself in them. When you do this, you will find yourself refueled! Ephesians 4 says that we all have specific gifts! Spend the most time on yours. Do not waste your time in areas that drain you.

*3. Check your spiritual devotions.* We can easily hide behind our titles in ministry, pretending that we have everything together. We can even play the “super pastor card.” But let’s stop acting and address some serious questions. How is your prayer life? How is your secret life? How much time are you spending in the Word?

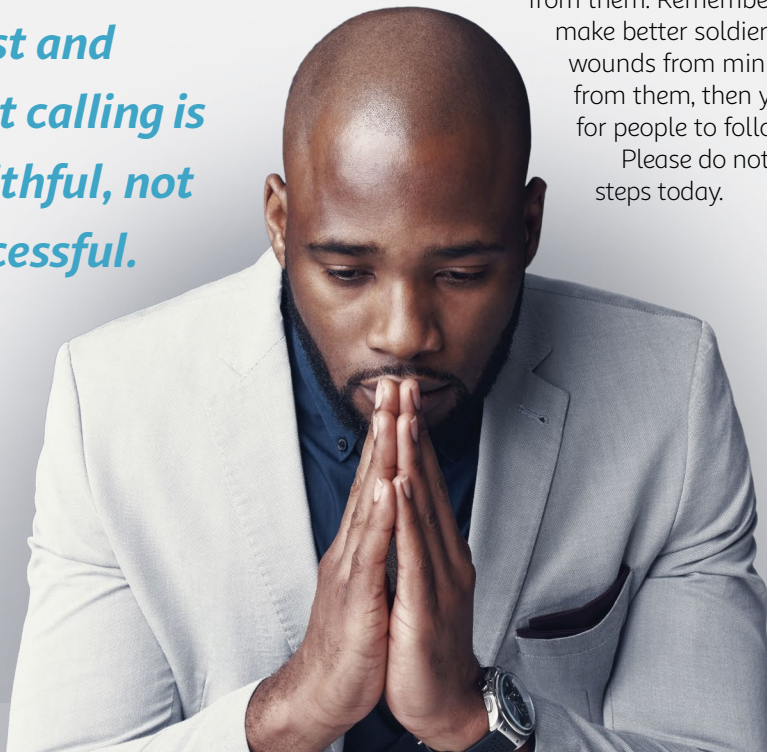
Ministry can consume us so much that we often neglect the most important areas of our life. Examine your life and see what you are neglecting. I firmly believe that it is a strong devotional life that provides the spiritual backbone necessary for us to stay in ministry and not quit. When we neglect this, we are bound to be tempted with the constant desire to walk away from ministry. Get back on track and do the things you know you are supposed to be doing.

*4. Grow from your failures, do not run from them.* All of us have had failures in ministry. When that happens, we often want to quit. Do not do this. Just look back and ask yourself, “What has this experience taught me and how can I prevent it from happening again?”

I want to challenge you to examine your failures and, instead of fleeing from them, learn from them. Remember, experienced soldiers make better soldiers. If you have some wounds from ministry and have learned from them, then you are the ideal leader for people to follow.

Please do not quit—apply these four steps today.

**Your first and foremost calling is to be faithful, not just successful.**



**M** 1 Richard Blackmon, quoted in Gary D. Kinnaman and Alfred H. Ells, *Leaders That Last: How Covenant Friendships Can Help Pastors Thrive* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 14, 15.



# Web church in Denmark reaches out as never before

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

The coronavirus in Denmark has encouraged an entire rethink of web church. Yes, several churches had been live streaming their services, but the closure of all church buildings led to the idea of something more intentional.

When churches closed, the Seventh-day Adventist Danish Union website, [Adventist.dk](http://Adventist.dk), streamed a countrywide service. However, following positive feedback from outside the church, church leaders decided to search the web for a general domain and, to their amazement, discovered that [webkirke.dk](http://webkirke.dk) ([webchurch.dk](http://webchurch.dk)) was available.

The union leadership bought weekly adverts on the front page of *Kristeligt Dagblad*, a national Christian daily newspaper. Personal Ministries and Sabbath School director **Henrik Jørgensen** leads out in the weekly Bible study. **Lisbeth Nielsen**, the pastor of the Silkeborg Church, is the principal organizer for compiling the main worship service, which includes a children's story, music, and the sermon. As in many countries, this is accomplished remotely. "It is a challenge," Nielson says, "but so far we have been quite successful."

"What we are doing here is making the road as we drive," says **Jan-Gunnar Wold**, Communication director for the Danish Union of Churches. "With the shutdown, people are in their homes, glued to their screens, looking for something worthwhile to

On March 13, 2020, the World Health Organization declared Europe to be the world's COVID-19 pandemic epicenter. We follow four stories of courage in the midst of crises.—The Editors



watch. This made us rush to get resources together quickly for this new effort."

One inspired church member concurs: "My age makes it difficult to attend church service. We can often see sermons online, but I have missed a 'Sabbath School class.' I have now with great interest followed the Sabbath School and service online. This means a lot to me." [Jan-Gunnar Wold, TED News Network]

# Adventist Church in Italy delivers 5,000 masks to doctors

FORLÌ, ITALY

On April 9, the first 1,000 FFP2 certified masks for general practitioners were delivered to

Dr. **Marco Ragazzini**, the secretary of the Italian Federation of General Practitioners (FIMMG) in the province of Forlì-Cesena. The remaining 4,000 were scheduled to arrive immediately after Easter.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church purchased the masks in conjunction with the provincial FIMMG, along with a contribution of 15,000 euros from the 8x1000 fund (a special fund from





the citizen taxes granted to the Italian humanitarian entities). They were purchases specifically to distribute to family doctors. This decision originates from the reality that the procurement of individual protection devices (DPI) is critical in Italy, as in the rest of the world. While the country's first supplies were distributed to doctors and hospital staff, family doctors were often left without.

Like many organizations engaged in social work, the Adventist Church, through ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) Italy and in collaboration with the Municipality of Cesena, has also activated a home-delivery service, enlisting eight volunteers who assist 13 families with purchasing food and various products.

Furthermore, the Adventist Church has set up a free psychological support telephone service. Thirty psychologists and psychotherapists

PHOTO: HOPE MEDIA ITALIA

Adventist Social Work coordinator Giuseppe Cupertino (left), hands over the first box of N95 masks the Seventh-day Adventist Church purchased and imported from Hong Kong to support physicians across the Forli-Cesena province. Marco Ragazzini (right), secretary of the Italian General Practitioners Federation in the province, accepted the protective equipment on behalf of his colleagues.



belonging to various professional organizations have made themselves available, as volunteers, to answer the available number. [G. Cupertino, CD-EUDNews]

## Tired of Zoom? Try drive-in church

LILLEHAMMER, NORWAY

**A**fter six Sabbaths of meeting by Zoom, the congregation of Lillehammer, Norway, longed for a more personal worship experience during the lockdown. As with all other churches in Norway, the building was shut due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their simple solution was drive-in church.

Between 40 and 50 members pulled up in the church parking lot, pointing their cars toward a temporary platform constructed outside the building. Members stayed in their cars but tuned their radios to 88.1 FM. With the assistance of technically

competent persons in the congregation, worship proceeded without a hitch. Leaders and keyboard pianists led the sing-along, for which lyrics had been sent to the congregation in advance.

Pastor **Joachim Fosse** shared both a children's story and a fine sermon on the most relevant of all topics: the fear of the uncertain and unknown. Fosse was a little worried that



PHOTO: BENT JORO / ADAMS

only a few would show up for the service because not many had signed up via Facebook. However, he was delighted to see the members' desire to meet, albeit from their vehicles. "This was a very positive experience in every way,"

Fosse reported afterward. After weeks in isolated worship, it was wonderful to see an alternative solution and opportunity emerge, encouraging members that they are not alone. [Edel Krøll, TED News Network]

## Abuse in lockdown— Pastors train to help

ST ALBANS, ENGLAND

Lockdown has brought with it all kinds of relational challenges, including extreme loneliness, getting on each other's nerves, and figuring out how to do work, homeschool, and family life in the small space within four walls. For some people, the biggest challenge is finding themselves trapped in their own home, 24 hours a day, with an abusive relative.

"As the Family Ministries director at the Trans-European Division, I don't often receive calls and emails about how to deal with domestic abuse," said **Karen Holford**. "But, when I received several queries in one week, I realized that we needed to respond by offering some training to our union Ministerial directors."

The amount of training that pastors receive to help them respond well to incidences of domestic abuse varies widely across the division, and so does the level of national and local support for victims. None of them had ever received training in managing cases of domestic abuse in a pandemic lockdown context.

Refuge, the largest UK charity helping domestic abuse victims, reported a 700 percent increase in visits to its website and a 120 percent increase in direct calls for information and advice. This increase stimulated a range of creative responses to the problem.

"I was learning alongside the workers on the ground," admits Holford. "Most had never experienced domestic-abuse situations before, so we were helping each other learn how to manage this challenge. One pastor had the creative idea to create an online Google document to share information about domestic abuse with an abused

person in her home. Her abuser had access to her phone several times a day, so it wasn't safe to send her messages. And she couldn't search online for helpful advice unless the website had a rapid escape button that cleared the history."


The Google document was used for sharing ideas, "chatting," checking that she was still safe, and telling her to gather her vital documents, financial information, passport, clothes, and significant possessions in a safe place in case she needed to leave in a hurry. Through the pastor's concern for her and the victim's courage to speak out, this story had a happy ending. [TED News Network] 



PHOTO: UNSPLASH / MILADA VIGEROVA





# Pastoral self-care in isolating times

**M**inistry has shifted—and ministry is strained. Congregational care, at the best of times, has always been important. During a pandemic, congregational care is essential. As congregational needs have increased, traditional means of support have crumbled. Pastoral care has had to take place in environments where we cannot meet or gather as congregations.

The anxiety and the expressed unknown of an odorless, colorless, tasteless, and sightless contagion have caused enormous pressure on health-care systems and stress on global economic systems. The church has not gone unscathed. The uncertainty has brought ministry pressure to the church. Ministering in unprecedented times requires a particular ministry.

Intentional pastoral care to families, which includes seniors who may be more isolated, parents working from home, and youth and children out of school and at home every day, requires more creativity and strategic vision.

***If you fail at self-care, you certainly will not be effective while caring for others.***

In many ways, ministry served out of the pastor's house for days or weeks using technology requires more intentionality, time, and planning. Coaching married couples, planning worship services, verifying congregational news, meeting with ministry leaders, and providing spiritual care can defy the clock and deplete all energy. Only deliberate self-care will yield effectiveness over the long haul of ministry for the pastor.

To care for others consistently requires care for oneself. If a person is not well, it is pretty hard

to care for others. Quite frankly, a person cannot give what they do not have. Thank God, we are not alone in our struggle. Trauma counselor Karen Nicola states, "I try to imagine how my pastor struggles to attend to the needs of us, while learning new technology and attempting to keep us close as a church community when being together is not an option. I wonder how his needs for self-care are being met in this unprecedented time of collective change, trauma, and loss."<sup>1</sup>

Airlines figured out long ago the importance of establishing guidelines for a depleted oxygen environment that direct parents to take care of themselves first by donning their oxygen masks before taking care of their children. Self-care is not selfish. It is wise. Even our Lord Jesus encouraged His disciples to get away to a quiet place to rest awhile when the ministry was so busy that they did not even take time to eat (see Mark 6:31).

In years past, the mere mention of self-care evoked misunderstanding and the label of not giving all. Early on in pastoral ministry, I remember hearing senior leaders brag about the last time they had a vacation as if it were a badge of honor. I wonder today how their families felt about it. Chek and Sally Phoon admonish "pastors need to be reminded that one of the greatest contributions they can make to God's kingdom is to nurture their own families as a testimony to the power of God in loving relationships."<sup>2</sup>

Self-care can bring clarity to help nurture a spiritual discipline that establishes a relationship with God. We may feel that we have had so much theology educationally that we do not need to study, pray, or take it seriously anymore. However, this goes beyond theology. Intimacy with Christ can be faked only for a season. The secret to any authentic, viable ministry is to know the living Lord personally and intimately.

Self-care can also be experienced through a change of pace, resting, meditating, praying, and taking time out for physical exercise. Self-care is the replenishing of the depleted resources exhausted mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and socially in ministry.<sup>3</sup> Amazingly, these

**Ivan L. Williams Sr., DMin**, is the director of the North American Division Ministerial Association.



were the exact attributes of our Lord Jesus as He grew into a man (see Luke 2:52). Understanding the complex role of contemporary pastors gives insight into the necessity for spiritual connection, emotional care, and physical awareness. All are essential and important to life balance in the professional journey of Adventist pastors.

Finally, because of the rise in the need for congregational care during these times, more attention should be given to self-care in pastoral ministry. In fact, “to pastor is to care.” Caring is more about who we are as persons, and that caring yields through what we do. Caring through feeding, equipping, leading, and serving are all a part of the biblical role and calling of a pastor. The higher the demand from the congregation and community, the more focus should be given to the question, How am I doing?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, faithful, caregiving pastors are needed more than ever. If you fail at self-care, you certainly will not be effective while caring for others. I pray you will take care of yourselves along the journey of pastoral ministry, to be the best caregivers, especially during this pandemic.



- 1 Karen Nicola, “Put Your Oxygen Mask on First,” *North American Division Best Practices*, April 26, 2020, <https://www.nadministerial.com/stories/put-your-oxygen-mask-on-first>.
- 2 Chek Yat Phoon and Sally Lam-Phoon, “The Pastor as a Person,” in *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2009), 26.
- 3 See Ivan L. Williams Sr., *Keep the Flame Burning in Your Ministry: Addressing Passion, Burnout, and Renewal in Pastoral Ministry* (Sacramento, CA: Brighter Hope Ministries, 2004), 103.

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**Omar Miranda** is an author, lay pastor, and youth counselor residing in Plainville, Georgia, United States.



# The Gospel of Sex: Dating, Relating, and Mating

by Dustin Hall, Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2018.

**T**he *Gospel of Sex: Dating, Relating, and Mating* is one of the clearest, most balanced, and practical books on the subject of dating, sex, and relationships.

Author Dustin Hall does a masterful job of applying just the right balance between common sense and logic to the often difficult topic of sex, dating, and relationships. He then follows up with a well-reasoned plea that is solidly biblical but not guilt-inducing.

In his introduction, he is straightforward and unapologetic about why he wrote the book: “Christianity as a whole has been hitting and missing on this topic for far too long. And it’s getting much worse, as we’ll discover together in this book. But that’s why I’m writing—it is time for believers to make a stand and present the lifestyle that Christ wants all of us to live, including young people like you” (7). Hall couches his core message of abstinence in two core ideas:

1. A teen’s abstinence should be based on a simple but profound response of obedience, which comes from thankfulness and gratefulness for God’s gift of salvation toward them.
2. A teen’s abstinence should be based on the logical premise that sex before or after marriage (with anyone other than their spouse) is simply not in their own best interest (nor in others’ best interest). It only serves to complicate their lives and the lives of others in compounded and unimaginable ways. To put it in terms that a teenager can understand: “If you choose to have sex now, you won’t be able to live your best life now!”

Hall does a masterful job of writing with a successful and effective recipe that mixes Bible

verses, relevant quotes, and actual teen vignettes narratives. He also has a unique and wonderful way of weaving everything together in a lively and quick-paced writing style. Hall describes and explains very difficult topics, such as the emotional consequences of premarital sex, the brain chemistry changes involved in sexual activity, and associated clinical research. But what I appreciate most about his writing style is that he then takes the next [needed and crucial] step and effectively “connects the dots,” so to speak, for the reader and applies what he is writing about to how it will affect (either positively or negatively) the reader.

Last, the chapters are clean, direct, and short. Hall does not shy away from both describing and discussing sexually transmitted diseases—along with statistics (something I rarely see in a Christian book on this topic)—and talking directly to the parents of teens!

I wish Pastor Hall would have included more true-life testimonials and stories of youth who made both good and bad decisions related to this topic—and of what the consequences were. Testimonials—especially for teenagers—are a powerful and effective teaching tool.

However, overall, this is an amazing, well-researched, and well-written book. As both a trained and certified sex educator and mental health counselor, I will require this book to be read by all my teen clients—and their parents!

The author discusses real issues in a straightforward but compassionate way. The book covers goals, being the light, love, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual bonding, lies, starting over, sex and marriage, straight talk, and straight talk to parents.

I highly recommend this book and look forward to further books from the author.

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