

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

“YOUR FACE,  
LORD, I WILL  
SEEK”



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SHOWING THE  
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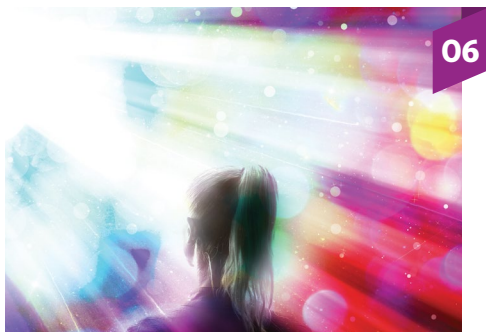
January 6-16, 2021

“Not by might, nor  
by power, but by  
My Spirit, says the  
Lord of hosts.”

**ZECHARIAH 4:6, ESV**

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### Ministry

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## Rebooted: Reclaiming Youth Ministry for the Long Haul—a Biblical Framework

by Tim Gough, Downers Grove, IL:  
InterVarsity Press, 2018.

I work with youth for a living and have done so for almost 30 years! Because of that, I have read many books on youth and youth ministry. This book is rare in that it is one of only two to three that I can remember where the author provides a detailed and specific *biblical* framework for understanding and applying youth ministry.

Many books talk about youth ministry within social, emotional, or even political contexts. This book rightly places the context squarely within the Bible. While other aspects are important to discuss, study, and learn about, youth ministry tends often to be trend-driven (as with other ministries, I suppose) and the application of the Bible to daily living tends to get left behind.

Tim Gough, in his introduction, writes: “The Bible is like a large cavern filled with gold coins, jewels and priceless valuables, and we, as Christians, have been given shovels, wheelbarrows and JCB excavators in order to mine its depths and take home its treasures. Every time we delve into the Bible, we are the richer for it” (2).

Although this book is not a primer on youth ministry, the author helpfully offers a brief summary of the history of the main youth ministry models. But what I love most about this book is that it brings the reader’s focus front and center on teaching the Bible!

The author breaks the Bible down into eight different mandates and assigns books or groups of books of the Bible to them:

1. Teach everything (Pentateuch)
2. Disciple everyone (History books)
3. Connect authentically (Wisdom literature)
4. Cultivate people (Psalms)
5. Prioritize participation (Prophets)

6. Focus on Jesus (Gospels)
7. Be missional (Acts)
8. Love always (Epistles)


Additionally, within each chapter, the author gives an easy-to-remember acrostic that acts as a framework from which the reader can begin to logically organize the information shared. What I appreciated most about this book was that the author spoke transparently about many of his own failings during a long career in youth ministry and shared his thoughts on the future of youth ministry.

Of extreme helpfulness is the conclusion, titled “Youth Ministry for the Long Haul.” In my opinion, this information is worth the price of the entire book! In this section, the author masterfully ties the previous eight chapters of the book together and helps the reader to make sense of not only the information but also, most important, how to use it to more effectively teach youth the Bible and help them live it out in their own lives.

The book ends with a brief and painfully honest open letter to youth workers from a teenager, in which the teenager *pleads* with youth workers to make teaching God’s Word, the Bible, central in their youth ministry.

The letter was great to read, but I would have loved to see several more—maybe from youth of different ages. Additionally, I would have loved to have read testimonials from young adults and adults (from those who stayed “in the house” and from the prodigals who left) about their own experiences and perspectives on what the Bible means to them.

This book reminds the reader that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NIV).

In a world of books for youth workers filled with references to popular music, movies, TV, and video games—and maybe a Bible verse thrown in near the end—this book is a breath of fresh air. 

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## What has God's grace done for you?

**C**orrie ten Boom, author of the well-known book *The Hiding Place*, knew what it meant to suffer. She spent ten terrifying months in Germany's brutal concentration camps—all for the crime of concealing Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

While Corrie was eventually released, her sister Betsie, as well as other family members, died. Corrie, along with siblings Nollie and Willem, survived the brutal ordeal and went home to the Netherlands.

Instead of harboring bitterness, Corrie determined to spend the rest of her life sharing the love and mercy of Jesus. In 1947, three years after her release, Corrie returned to Germany with the message that God forgives.

One night, when she had finished enthusiastically sharing how God casts our sins into the depths of the sea when we confess, she was shocked to see a former prison guard pressing his way through the crowd. Her blood turned cold as horrible memories came flooding back. She remembered this cruel man!

Finally standing in front of her, he thrust out his hand. "A fine message, *fräulein!* How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

Corrie fumbled in her pocketbook rather than take his hand. He continued, telling Corrie he used to be a guard in the prison she spoke of and he had done many horrible things there. "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me . . . , but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. *Fräulein*, . . . will you forgive me?" Again, his hand came out.<sup>1</sup>

### Receiving God's forgiveness

It seemed like an eternity to Corrie. Her emotions struggled inside of her. God's forgiveness of her own sins was given on the condition that she would also forgive those who had wounded her. Breathing a prayer, she understood that forgiveness is not an emotion of the sinful heart but an act of the sanctified will. She offered her hand.

"I forgive you, brother!" Corrie cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment, the two grasped each other's hands. Corrie later shared, "I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."<sup>2</sup>

Corrie's testimony reminds me of what is possible through Jesus. Our world is afflicted with hurt and pain, but Jesus did not fight battles as the world fights battles. His Word contains a radical message of love and forgiveness, encompassing both oppressor and oppressed, perpetrator and victim (Matt. 5:38–44; Luke 6:28–36).

### Revealing God's love

John 13:35 tells us, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (NKJV). In *Christ's Object Lessons*, we read, "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."<sup>3</sup>

Tell me, pastor friends and leaders in ministry, is "who is my neighbor" love sometimes difficult for you (Luke 10:25–37, NIV)? Is "for they know not what they do" forgiveness sometimes a challenge for you (Luke 23:34, KJV)? Then ask, what has God's grace done for me? How have I experienced His mercy in my own life?

The days ahead are not going to be easy. We need this spirit of grace and mercy as never before. As you read this edition of *Ministry*, it is our hope and prayer that you will experience God's forgiveness afresh and embody His love abundantly for a world in need.

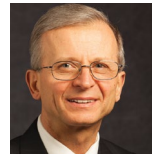


- 1 Corrie ten Boom, "I'm Still Learning to Forgive," in *The "Guideposts" Pocket Book of Inspiration*, ed. Norman Vincent Peale (Carmel, NY: Guideposts Associates, 1972), 22, 23.
- 2 Ten Boom, "I'm Still Learning to Forgive," 24.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 415, 416.

# “YOUR FACE, LORD, I WILL SEEK”:

Toward the  
theology  
of the face  
of God

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

**A**t the center of Psalm 27, David responds to God's appeal, "Seek my face" (v. 8, ESV), by promising, "Your face, LORD, I will seek" (v. 8).<sup>1</sup> David's firm decision puts the notion of God's face at the heart of the chiasmic literary structure of this psalm.<sup>2</sup> He explains why he desires to look at God's face: "To gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him" (v. 4) and to "see the goodness of the LORD" (v. 13).

Ancient philosophers have long attested that beauty, truth, and goodness form the foundational triad of human life; they are basic qualities of our existence. David could not imagine life without God, and so he asks the Lord, "Do not hide your face from me" (v. 9). The apex of his prayer is connected to his personal trust in God:

The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid? (v. 1, ESV).

David's words lead us to this fundamental question: What is so significant in David seeking or seeing the face of God? The short answer is that he wants to see the beauty of God's character—the truth about Him and His goodness.

## The face of God

The Hebrew term *panim* (always plural) has two main meanings in the context of our study: (1) "face" and (2) "presence,"<sup>3</sup> which explain why translators render the same biblical text differently. Some speak about God's presence, and others translate it more literally as God's face. The word *panim* comes with a plethora of additional meanings, such as "before," "in front of," "surface," "person,"<sup>4</sup> and appears 2,140 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>5</sup> The Greek equivalent is *prosopon*, occurring 76 times in the New Testament; it also has the same two basic meanings.<sup>6</sup>

The biblical narrative of the creation of Adam contains implied imagery of God's face, which suggests the first thing that Adam saw when he opened his eyes was the face of God (Gen. 2:7). Adam was in the presence of God—in a close relationship with a divine Person. Adam's existence began by seeing the face of God; it was a face-to-face encounter. The warmth of the imagery alludes to the loving relationship between them.

For us, too, seeing God's face should be an integral part of our walk with the Lord because humans were created to live in close relationship with Him and in dependence on Him (Gen. 1:26–2:3). But sin broke this relationship, and instead, fear, guilt, and shame followed. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve hid and fled from God's presence (Gen. 3:7–10).

In the priestly Aaronic blessing, God's face is mentioned twice. It was the most desirable thing:

“ ‘ ‘The LORD bless you . . .  
the LORD make his face shine on you . . .  
the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace’ ” (Num. 6:24–26).

God's shining and turning His face toward His people expresses joy and shows acceptance, favor, respect, and forgiveness.

Many psalms attest to the same fundamental truth: “Let the light of your face shine on us” (Ps. 4:6). In the New Living Translation, this verse states: “Let your face smile on us, LORD.” We need this smile of God because God's smile on us enables us to smile on each other. David could not imagine life without this favor: “How long will you hide your face from me?” (Ps. 13:1, ESV) In Psalm 11, he culminates his thought with the affirmation that “the upright shall behold his [the LORD's] face” (v. 7, ESV). God said to Solomon: “ ‘If my people . . . humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin’ ” (2 Chron. 7:14, ESV).

To seek God's face means to search for His favor and gracious intervention: “Now there was a famine. . . . David sought the face of the LORD” (2 Sam. 21:1, ESV). In this search, repentance, petitions, fasting, and praises are included (Joel 2:12–15; Phil. 4:6) because seeking God's face must go hand in hand with total dedication to God. To appear before God's face points to visiting the sanctuary (Deut. 31:11; Isa. 1:12), but “ ‘no one is to appear before me [lit. see my face] empty-handed’ ” (Exod. 23:15; 34:20). Thus, the face of God appears in the context of expectations and hopes that God will be with His people, change their situation, and bless them.

### Jacob, Esau, and God's face

The story of Jacob wrestling with a stranger and then meeting with his brother, Esau, is very illuminating because the whole narrative of Genesis 32 and 33 is composed around the key word *face*. The

Hebrew text literally states that Jacob was fleeing from the face of his brother, Esau (Gen. 35:1); thus, “the face” means a person here. The image of Esau haunted Jacob for 20 years; during this time, he never visited his native lands, his parents, or reconciled with Esau. But before Jacob could meet with his brother, he needed to meet with his God. Before he saw the face of his brother again, he had to see the face of God.

The word *face* appears in these two chapters in crucial places, testifying to its significance. This expression appears four times in just one verse, yet English translations usually do not catch the textual interplay with this word. A literal translation highlights Jacob's thoughts: *I will cover his face with these gifts that go before my face, and afterward, when I will see his face, perhaps he will lift up my face* (Gen. 32:20). Jacob wanted to blind—that is, appease, pacify, or calm—Esau's anger, thus literally covering Esau's face with extravagant gifts so that Esau would not see and remember the wrong that Jacob did to him. The many presents were his attempt to change Esau's attitude toward him. The idiomatic phrase *to lift up one's face* means “to favorably accept,” “to be kind,” “to forgive,” “to be friendly,” “to receive another person.”

Jacob then wrestled with “a man” (Gen. 32:24) in whom he recognized a divine Person (from a Christian perspective, this Person is identified with the preincarnated Christ).<sup>7</sup> This is why he calls the place “Peniel,” which means the “Face of God” in Hebrew, and reasoned: “ ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared’ ” (v. 30). What did Jacob read in the face of God? God gave him a new name and blessed him (vv. 26–29).

Later that morning, as his brother was approaching him, Jacob went forward to meet him by bowing down before Esau seven times (Gen. 33:3). Because Jacob first humbled himself before God, he was now able to humble himself before his brother, and Esau graciously accepted him. In that moment of reconciliation (v. 4), Jacob burst into a special recognition. According to Genesis 33:10, Jacob confesses that he sees God's face in Esau: “ ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God.’ ” What was Jacob reading in the face of his brother? The same expressions of love, compassion, forgiveness, and grace that he saw in the face of God earlier. God's smile on Jacob is reflected in Esau's acceptance of his returning brother. What do people read in our faces when they interact with us?



## Why do we need to seek God's face?

1. The face of God gives assurance of His presence (Gen. 28:15; Matt. 28:20; Acts 18:10).
2. The face of God provides emotional stability and balance in a world of loneliness, anxiety, and fear. Someone loves, cares for, and protects me (John 14:27; Phil. 4:7).<sup>8</sup>
3. The face of God leads and guides (Exod. 33:15).
4. The face of God brings intellectual strength because we can rely on God's infinite wisdom and counsel (Ps. 73:23, 24; Prov. 3:5–7).
5. God's presence brings prosperity and success for accomplishing His will, mission, and purpose. He enables His people to be His faithful witnesses (Acts 1:8; cf. Phil. 2:13).
6. Seeing the face of God by the inner sight of faith is the key to a victorious life (Ps. 16:8).
7. The face of God brings endurance and perseverance (Heb. 11:27; Rev. 14:12).
8. The face of God gives us a sense of identity (Isa. 6:1–8; 43:1; Gal. 3:26–29; 4:5; 1 John 3:1).
9. The face of God means that He watches over us, speaks to us, and hears our prayers (Pss. 32:8; 33:18).
10. Seeing the face of God transforms lives (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2).

Jesus proclaimed, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8). The redeemed, as the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, will delight in seeing God's face. True believers will constantly behold His countenance, and this face-to-face encounter will be their highest and ultimate experience. John describes it in celebratory language: “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3, 4, NKJV).

This promise of seeing God's face is the most fascinating picture regarding the closeness of the redeemed with God. They will live forever and rejoice in His presence. His presence will be permanently with them, so they will not need to seek His face. They will gaze upon the splendor and majesty of the Lord—His full glory. And the more they know their King and Lord, the more they will be thrilled to serve, obey, and worship Him. Each day throughout all eternity will bring new discoveries of God's goodness, brilliance, and the grandeur of His character of love.



- 1 Scripture is from the New International Version, unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Psalm 27 is written in a very symmetric chiasmic structure:
  - (A) the LORD is the strength of my life (v. 1–3);
  - (B) the beauty and truth of the LORD (v. 4);
  - (C) my enemies (v. 5, 6);
  - (D) three positive petitions (v. 7);
  - (E) Seek My face (v. 8);
  - (D') three negative petitions (v. 9, 10);
  - (C') my enemies (v. 11, 12);
  - (B') the goodness of the LORD (v. 13);
  - (A') He shall strengthen your heart (v. 14).
- 3 See F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), 815, 816; William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 293, 294.
- 4 For details, see Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 815–819.
- 5 Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Old Testament: Using the Hebrew and Aramaic Text*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1990), 949–952.
- 6 John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Goodrick, and James A. Swanson, *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 861, 862.
- 7 Jacques B. Doukhan, *Genesis*, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2016), 368, 372.
- 8 Life without God is lonely. This aspect is especially underlined by Roger Scruton, *The Face of God* (London, UK: Continuum, 2012), 153–178.

What do  
people read  
in our faces  
when they  
interact  
with us?

# Extending the boundaries of family ministry

**W**hen did you last hear about our obligation to preach the Elijah message? Do we know what the Elijah message is? Do we know that it is a message that should be proclaimed in the last days “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” and that it “will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:5, 6).<sup>1</sup>

The Elijah message embraces a twofold revival: a spiritual revival, turning the hearts of God’s children to their heavenly Father, and a family-life revival, turning the hearts of children to their human parents.

Like the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12, the Elijah message calls God’s children to reject false worship and embrace true worship. The call of Elijah—“If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21)—is a call to reject Baal worship, which, at Elijah’s time, constituted a focused assault on Israel’s spiritual life and calling.

Israel’s King Ahab was married to Jezebel, a Baal worshiper, under whom the prophets of Israel were persecuted and rejected. Elijah

emerged to defend the faith of Israel and call God’s children to the worship of the true God of Israel. Elijah had to confront Baal worshipers on two fronts. First, the prophet



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called for the true Creator—Instead of worshipping Jehovah Creator, Israel was misled and misdirected to worship Baal, a

worship of the God, Jehovah. shipping the

Canaanite god of storm and thunder, who was the opposite of the personal Creator-Redeemer God of Israel. Second, Baal worship was an assault on Israel's family life. Baal worship perverted the sanctity of marriage and allowed for child sacrifices (Num. 25:1–3; Jer. 19:5). Elijah's message was an appeal against these perversions of true religion, a plea for spiritual revival, and a call for family-life renewal.

In our time, we are called to proclaim the Elijah message. How can we extend the boundaries of our mission to families? How can we go beyond the usual church events or occasional family-life activities and enlarge the scope of our family ministry?

### **A family-life experiment**

Here is how we did it in our territory of churches. Our goal was to improve the quality of family life for every church member. Our focus was to empower every family to deal with the everyday issues they face in their homes in



biblical and spiritual ways. We chose to use the following program of family-life education.

First, we identified specific family needs, and addressed them one by one. A survey was completed by all the members to identify these needs.<sup>2</sup>

Second, we created a syllabus to study topics, such as the foundations of marriage, communications, conflict resolution, sexuality, family finances, abuse prevention, singleness, and parenting. For each topic, we developed a PowerPoint presentation, a presenter's script, a participant's worksheet, and group activities.

Third, we obtained the support of local pastors. To receive this support, we held regional retreats for pastors and their spouses and walked them through the seminars. Pastors were encouraged to host a Family Life Day at least once a quarter in each church and conduct the presentation during the worship service when all were present, using a seminar format instead of a sermon. Since most of these leaders had multichurch districts, some could reproduce the workshop in their other churches with the help of trained elders and family-life personnel from their congregations.

### The results

The benefits were twofold. First, as pastors and their spouses participated in the seminars, their own family lives were impacted. The retreats allowed the clergy couples to take time off from ministering to focus on their own families, enriching their own family life. Second, many church members received a rich blessing from the practical, transformational information they received. As a result, the participating churches experienced family-life revivals.

You may not have the resources to formulate such a comprehensive strategy. But you do have the ability to create your own customized plan of action! You can evaluate the local needs, produce resources, present the materials, and evaluate the results. As a pastor, you are aware that most of the problems your members bring to you are family issues. Some come to us when it is too late and, unfortunately, others do not come at all. If we can empower church

members, they will be able to deal with their own challenges as they arise. And instead of waiting for them to come to us, family-life education will allow us to go to them.

### The Elijah message: Beyond our walls

As a church, we have a mandate to proclaim the Elijah message not only to the families in our own congregations but also to the families in our communities. It is a message for the world! How do we know that? First of all, we declare that God created two institutions in Eden. On the sixth day, He established the family, and on the seventh day, He instituted the Sabbath. In these last days, the church's mandate is to be the "Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In" (Isa. 58:12). Thus, we need to be champions not only for the restoration of the Sabbath but also for the restoration of the family! When people come to our evangelistic meetings, they should be challenged to observe the Sabbath and also be inspired to strengthen their family's lives.

Throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, the family is one of God's favorite targets to reach. When Abraham was called to sacrifice his son Isaac, and Abraham's response and Isaac's obedience were motivated by their faith that "God will provide for Himself the lamb" (Gen. 22:8), was not God teaching us the plan of salvation in a parable of faith and obedience? Three books of the Bible—Hosea, Ruth, and Song of Solomon—teach us that the family is God's parable. Jeremiah and Ezekiel also picture God as the loving husband and Israel as His wayward wife. Then there are Jesus' wedding parables and the immortal story of the prodigal son.

Finally, the Bible closes with



the marriage supper of the Lamb and the picture of the “bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 19:6–10; Rev. 21:2).

If the family has been God’s effective way to teach truth, should it not be ours also?

## Family models

How can we conduct family-life education while we are proclaiming the gospel? Here are three models we have used.

1. *The dating model.* We begin with a series of family-life seminars in preparation for a regular evangelistic series. The community is invited to seminars on such topics as conflict resolution, abuse prevention, family finances, and parenting. With each event, we are creating relationships and building our list of interests. Finally, these prospects are invited to the evangelistic campaign. The hope is that the earlier “dates” will result in these people becoming part of God’s family.

2. *The courtship model.* In this strategy, two elements sit side by side. In each evangelistic meeting, there is a family nugget and a Bible presentation. The two may or may not be related conceptually, but they are sitting closely in the same space, looking lovingly at each other. There is the hope that their “courtship” will inspire interested people to become part of God’s family.

3. *The marriage model.* Here each family issue is married to a conceptually compatible Bible doctrine. Each presentation deals with both family and doctrine, and there is a loving interaction between these two “spouses.” For example, to benefit young people, true love is related to Christ’s love at Calvary. To benefit parents, helping one’s child to obey is related to obedience to our heavenly Father.

Regardless of which model is used, family ministry is done for the community!

And everyone can benefit. Whether the attendees are married or not, they can learn how to deal with conflicts, children, and managing money. With these presentations, even if attendees do not accept the Bible’s truths, they have received vital information to improve their homes. And we have lifted the quality of family life in the community.

## Why get involved in family outreach?

Why should we invest our time and effort to conduct family-life outreach? It is sound theology! It is one successful model to teach truth! But, more important, this outreach opens the possibility of helping people to find fulfillment in the most meaningful and the most intimate aspect of life: family. Where family life is fulfilling, there is joy in the family, true intimacy between spouses, and full opportunity for all family members to achieve their felt needs. In achieving a fulfilled life as a family, we also exhibit to others the true meaning of Christian discipleship: we are one with each other, and together we are one in Christ. We are working as Christ worked. We are taking the Elijah message to all around us—rejecting all perversions of false religion, affirming spiritual revival, and calling for family renewal.



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 This instrument was created and analyzed by Dr. Colwick Wilson, then professor and chair of the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences, Loma Linda University, and Dr. Leon Wilson, then professor and chair of the Department of Sociology, Wayne State University. The data has since been used in various professional conferences, scholarly papers, and PhD dissertations.



# The doorknob of heaven:

## A fresh look at money and spirituality

**S**eesaws or teeter-totters—long planks of wood with a child seated on each end and a tipping point in the middle—are common in playgrounds around the world. When one child goes up, the other child goes down, and vice versa.<sup>1</sup>

The seesaw is an either-or, a “this or that,” mechanical device. You can have only one side at the top at any given time—never both. Is that how it is with money and spirituality? Can we only ever have money *or* spirituality but never both? Or do only *great* spirituality and *great* wealth tend to seesaw?<sup>2</sup>

### A wealthy people

According to recent reports, my homeland of Australia is one of the most affluent nations on Earth. Credit Suisse studies the world’s economies, and its *Global Wealth Databook*<sup>3</sup> often shows that Australian adults are among the wealthiest of any adults and their wealth is relatively evenly spread. In light of God’s teachings on prosperity, we must ask, What impact has Australia’s prosperity had on the spirituality of its people? Has wealth led us nearer to God and to greater faith, or has it turned our eyes from Him? Or are finances completely unrelated to faith?

In 2009, the North American analytics company Gallup surveyed adults in more than 100 countries and asked, “Is religion an important part of your daily life?”<sup>4</sup> Participants could respond either “Yes” or “No.” Gallup also researched each country’s per-capita income levels and then made correlations between the two (see table 1).<sup>5</sup>

The seesaw effect is clear from the data. The *lower* the per-capita income of a nation, the *higher* the role of religion in the daily lives of its

people. And vice versa, the *higher* the per-capita income of a nation, the *lower* the role of religion. As a general rule, the richer a nation is, the less religious its citizens are.

Most of the traditionally Christian nations in Europe, North America, and Australia are seeing the clear fulfillment of a 1789 statement by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church. Wesley wrote, “Wherever true Christianity spreads, it must cause diligence and frugality, which, in the natural course of things, must beget riches. And riches naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity.”<sup>6</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The fact is, the moment that financial stability is assured,

TABLE 1

### Gallup: “Is religion an important part of your daily life?”

Median responses among countries at each per-capita income level.

Per-capita income	Yes	No
\$0–\$2,000	95%	5%
\$2,001–\$5,000	92%	7%
\$5,001–\$12,500	82%	17%
\$12,501–\$25,000	70%	28%
\$25,001+	47%	52%

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

*When Christ knocks on the door of my materially blessed heart, the sound of His knocking is muffled. Even when I do hear it, I struggle to climb over all of my blessings to reach out and open the door.*

spiritual bankruptcy is also assured.”<sup>7</sup> Gandhi seemed to be reflecting Jesus’ words: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25).<sup>8</sup>

### The dangers of money

I know from personal experience that when people are financially blessed, they are in the most spiritually dangerous stage of their lives. For some, the higher our prosperity rises, the less we feel our need for God on a day-to-day basis. For many, in their deepest hearts, they are frustrated with life. They feel as if they are being forced to live a life focused on earthly priorities when they know that *true* satisfaction and fulfillment *only* come from eternal things.

I came to the realization that I had allowed God’s material blessings to actually become a curse in my spiritual life.

Jesus knocks at the door of my heart every day. He wants to come in and spend the day with me, but it is always my choice as to whether I open the door to Him. I find that when I allow God’s material blessings—money, holidays, homes, and investments—to fill my heart, I cannot open my heart’s door to Jesus. And that is a curse.

When speaking of opening our heart’s door to Christ, evangelist Billy Sunday used to say, “A man can slip into hell with his hand on the door-knob of heaven.”<sup>9</sup>

The Bible is full of examples where the mistreatment of God’s blessings led to curses. One of the simplest is in Deuteronomy 6, where Moses is talking to the children of Israel just before they cross into the Promised Land. Moses tells them that they are about to enter a “land flowing with milk and honey” (v. 3). It is a lucky country, like the richest countries of today, but then Moses adds the punch line when he says, “When you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the LORD” (vv. 11, 12). Prosperous lives and a full stomachs can make us very sleepy.

### Christ at the door

Whenever I fill my heart with God’s gifts instead of God, my faith falls. When Christ knocks on the door of my materially blessed heart, the sound of His knocking is muffled. Even when I do hear it, I struggle to climb over all of my blessings to reach out and open the door.

Ellen G. White, the most translated female nonfiction author in history, referred to this

crowded-heart syndrome when she wrote, “The heavenly Guest is standing at your door, while you are piling up obstructions to bar his entrance. Jesus is knocking through the prosperity he gives you. He loads you with blessings to test your fidelity, that they may flow out from you to others. Will you permit your selfishness to triumph? Will you squander God’s talents, and lose your soul through idolatrous love of the blessings he has given?”<sup>10</sup>

In speaking of his own conversion, Anglican leader John Stott described our challenge as follows:

Here, then, is the crucial question which we have been leading up to. Have we ever opened our door to Christ? Have we ever invited him in? This was exactly the question which I needed to have put to me. For, intellectually speaking, I had believed in Jesus all my life, on the other side of the door. I had regularly struggled to say my prayers through the key-hole. I had even pushed pennies under the door in a vain attempt to pacify him. I had been baptized, yes and confirmed as well. I went to church, read my Bible, had high ideals, and tried to be good and do good. But all the time, often without realising it, I was holding Christ at arm’s length, and keeping him outside. I knew that to open the door might have momentous consequences. I am profoundly grateful to him for enabling me to open the door. Looking back now over more than fifty years, I realise that that simple step has changed the entire direction, course and quality of my life.<sup>11</sup>

### The love of money

The world teaches us to pursue wealth and pleasure, leaving Christ standing outside. It is this love of money, rather than money itself, that Scripture warns us about. The mantra “he who dies with the most toys wins” is attractively woven into the advertising with which we are bombarded. But temporary experiences and temporary things can never give permanent satisfaction. Learning to manage money must supersede yearning to acquire it.

Those who love money and live for pleasure never have enough of either one (Eccles. 5:10). Theologian Scott Redd states, “Ultimately, without the grace of God showered on us as a result of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, by which our sins are forgiven and we are indwelt by the



Holy Spirit, a person's wealth provides little more than false reward. For those who are in Christ, however, the gifts we are given provide us with an opportunity to serve the Lord freely and joyfully to the degree that we are gifted, without the crippling force of covetousness or anxiety."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus summarized this problem clearly with a simple question: "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26a). Boiled down to its simplest form, living for money or pleasure is living for self, and any life that is centered on self leads to dissatisfaction in this life and the tragic loss of eternal life. We cannot live for pleasure and for God. King Solomon experienced every pleasure that his eyes desired, yet at the end of his life, he concluded that the best thing for us to do is "fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Eccles. 12:13).

This is very challenging territory, and it begs the question, Does our spirituality *always* need to decrease as our prosperity rises? Is the faith-versus-finance seesaw an unchangeable, universal principle? Can we be comfortable and be Christian?

## Breaking the seesaw

Our only hope, whether rich or poor, is in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We find Him when we are on our knees, opening our heart's door. As our prosperity goes *up*, our knees must go *down* more and more regularly, in fervent, heart-searching prayer.

Most Christians are riding on the money-versus-spirituality seesaw. We live in a world that requires money for survival, but we also need to understand that when a person prospers, either God gains a partner or the person loses his or her soul.

God offers a painful yet incredibly beautiful experience for those who realize that their busy, money-driven lifestyles are damaging their spiritual lives—a heart attack! Not a cardiac arrest, we need to have a *spiritual* heart attack and a *spiritual* heart transplant. God tells us that He wants to give us a new heart; a loving heart of flesh to replace our materialistic heart of stone. "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and

you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezek. 36:25–27).

Our relationship with money ultimately comes down to one of the great themes of Scripture. It is a choice that we each need to make every day: will we live for ourselves or for God? Serving self is our natural inclination—the desire that we are born with—but God invites us to a higher, truly satisfying way of life. It is a life where self is renounced and crucified, and we are raised up to live a totally abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Helen Lemmel's classic hymn says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."<sup>13</sup> When we recognize the folly of living for money, we will realize the deep satisfaction that comes from opening our heart's door to Jesus and acknowledge—we do not need to live on the seesaw.



- 1 A version of this article was published as "Faith Versus Finance: Does Affluence Effect Spirituality?" in *Adventist World* (March 2015), 20, 21.
- 2 For more information on this topic, please see Julian Arthur, *Help! I've Been Blessed! How to Stop God's Blessings From Becoming Curses* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son, 2014).
- 3 The Credit Suisse *Global Wealth Databook* is published annually and can be accessed online: <https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us/en/reports-research/global-wealth-report.html>.
- 4 Steve Crabtree, "Religiosity Highest in World's Poorest Nations," Gallup, August 31, 2010, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>.
- 5 Crabtree, "Religiosity Highest in World's Poorest Nations."
- 6 John Wesley, "Sermon 116: Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," in *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 3 (London, UK: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1864), 277. (This sermon was given in Dublin, on July 2, 1789.)
- 7 Mahatma Gandhi, *Harijan*, December 10 and 24, 1938, quoted in John S. Hoyland, "Gandhi's Satyāgraha and the Way of the Cross," in *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan, Routledge Revival ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 126.
- 8 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 9 Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday: The Life and Work of Rev. William Ashley Sunday, D.D.* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 172.
- 10 Ellen G. White, "Hold Fast and Repent," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 2, 1886, 673.
- 11 Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 95.
- 12 Scott Redd, "Why wealth is both a blessing and a temptation." The Institute for Faith, Works, and Economics, Aug. 27, 2018. <https://tifwe.org/why-wealth-is-both-a-blessing-and-a-temptation>.
- 13 Helen Lemmel, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), hymn no. 290.



# SHOWING THE LOVE OF JESUS:

How God works through ability diversity

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

**H**ow can a blind person handle the rigors of pastoral ministry? The challenges of ministry are difficult enough for a normal person—but for one deprived of eyesight? Tough, challenging, and arduous. Nevertheless, there are visually impaired and blind individuals who have accepted God's call to ministry, and they have been bold proclaimers of His Word and caring shepherds of God's flock. God has clearly used them in significant ways.

Meet two of these amazing persons of faith, bold proclaimers of God's Word, and confident conveyors of God's caring ministry. Blindness may have erected certain obvious obstacles in their lives, but these pastors have learned, by God's power, to overcome such hurdles and become effective ministers of the gospel.

### **Finding one's potential in Christ**

First, meet Matthew Baker. He pastors two churches in St. Paul, Minnesota—the First Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Eastside Seventh-day Adventist Church. For Pastor Baker, pastoral ministry is “centered on having people realize that they have a potential in Jesus Christ and [nurturing] them to realize that potential to its fullest in Jesus Christ.” Baker's concept of ministry is that it works from the ground up, as the *laos* (people) of God are lifted higher and higher to see His holiness and reflect His character.

Pastor Baker has been listed as legally blind since his diagnosis in 1983 when he left the United States military. He is unable to drive. He reads print with magnifying equipment. He can see faces but cannot recognize someone by face.

He felt called to ministry in 2001 when, at the age of 40, he was converted to the Advent message. One of the great themes he first found when he accepted the Adventist message is the soon coming of Jesus and each person's responsibility to be ready to meet Jesus and spread that good news to others. When he found that the spreading of the gospel was such a central theme

and a commanding responsibility in the Bible, he knew he had to be an integral part of that work.

At the age of 48, he began serving in a nursing home. There he found opportunities to lead in Bible studies and share his faith personally, and eventually, he established a church. The more involved he was in sharing his faith, the more he felt that he needed greater preparation. So he left his work and went to college to begin formal training in ministry. Some people, such as the pastor in the church where he was baptized, thought it would be difficult for a legally blind person to be a pastor. But Baker persevered and got his training, and the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists employed him as a pastor.

Pastor Baker has never regretted his decision to join the ministry. His life is filled with joyful and memorable experiences in ministry—events that make his life rich, relevant, and meaningful. One day Baker was visiting a hospital to comfort and pray with a man who had a second heart attack. The pastor was able to interact with the sick man, viewing him not so much as a sick individual but as a friend, and shared with him the assurance of hope and the comfort of God's watchful care. Baker prayed with the man and shared God's love and care for both him and his family. As a pastor with a cross to bear himself, Baker was able to share the grace that flows from the cross of Christ with this sick individual. Ministry occurs when there is total identification and empathy.

Such is Pastor Baker's work. Not so long ago, five people were baptized through his ministry.

Pastor Baker's day-to-day work has many obstacles. He has discovered many helpful ways to face them. For a sight-impaired person, transportation can be a tough issue. Baker relies on his wife and volunteers from his churches. He has mastered the streets well, and there are friends with helpful spirits who can lead him to public transit services. Effective preaching requires good

eye contact, and Baker has mastered this technique well by utilizing the latent vision that he still commands so that he is able to simulate eye contact while preaching. Gesturing is not difficult, and whether preaching or engaging in one-on-one interactions, he often reminds people to verbally communicate their feelings to him since he is not able to recognize facial expressions.

Baker finds his blindness an asset for ministry in many ways. He believes that having a limitation keeps him humble and helps him to identify with others in their struggles. The process of asking for and receiving assistance gives him opportunities to interact with people and minister to them. He finds that working in spite of a disability can inspire others to attempt the same.



**Baker finds his blindness an asset for ministry in many ways. He believes that having a limitation keeps him humble and helps him to identify with others in their struggles.**

### **A long voyage and then ministry**

The second minister, visually impaired though he may be, finds in the pastoral calling the greatest honor this side of heaven. He sees it enhances his spiritual gift to be able to form connections with varied people in various situations. In the joy of serving God and appreciating the privilege of sharing His Word with His people, this pastor's diminished eyesight enables him to see the Lord without any distractions and see His people without any prejudice.

Meet Pastor Brandon Grady of the Black Rock Church of the Brethren in Glenville, Pennsylvania. Brandon's journey began as a baby, when normal vision for him became a delusion and he was left to be cared for at Mother Teresa's home in Kolkata, India. As he grew up, he studied music but became disenchanted with how competitive the environment was. Even so, he persisted and went to a seminary to study music ministry. There, during a ten-week stint as an intern in 2007, he preached three sermons. As a result of this experience, he was convinced of his calling to be a pastor.

But the path to professional ministry was not so easy. Grady faced much opposition and many difficulties in his path to professional ministry, but he was able to persevere by being up front and clear about his visual handicap and showed how God can turn even a disability into an asset. While he encountered many who approached him with condescension because of his handicap, others genuinely expressed their joy as he managed to do the things he has done. For

him, there was only one explanation: the words of Jesus when He said, " 'With God all things are possible' " (Matt. 19:26).<sup>1</sup>

Brandon Grady's most memorable experience as a minister was when he was installed as the pastor of the Black Rock Church of the Brethren, with 175 rejoicing members in attendance. Thus, began Pastor Grady's joyful movement from being the director of caregiving to leading in professional pastoral ministry.

Pastor Grady has developed his own ways of handling obstacles. He is single, and his ministry reaches singles, families, and anyone seeking the comfort and blessings of the gospel ministry. He cannot drive but carefully plans his visitation schedule and pastoral appointments with the help of ride-sharing apps and a network of friends who drive him. He is most comfortable preaching behind a pulpit and faces different directions so as to create the possibility of face contact with the entire congregation. He uses gestures when he can, but often his hands are busy feeling the dots on his portable computer's Braille readout. He sometimes has to remind people not to point to something they want him to know about. If he is not sure how someone understood something he said, he is not afraid to ask. He finds that if he handles himself in a way to "command respect," people will respect him and take him seriously.

Pastor Grady finds his blindness to be a special gift—an extraordinary asset to his ministry through which God's name can be

glorified. In fact, he believes this so strongly that his blindness is discussed quite frankly and positively on his church's website. He believes that his blindness enables him to appreciate music, an important aspect of worship, in a special way. His need to have assistance requires him to develop connections and relationships that might not otherwise happen. He uses these relational assets as ministry opportunities. He discusses difficult issues, such as loneliness, more freely with people. He has clearly been through struggles. Hence, people feel more comfortable having him enter their homes. Indeed, he sees his blindness as an "invisible lens God has given him to see His work."

### **From the blind, what we can see**

What can we learn from the inspiring stories of these two pastors who are sight impaired but have become instruments of God's ministry—who share God's Word and are the eyes through which their congregations see God's grace and mercy?

Well, three lessons.

First, every blind or sight-impaired person is different. This is true for anyone in any disabled group and must be remembered when working with the disabled. Some blind persons learn techniques that others do not learn. Everyone with a disability comes to situations with a different skill set. This means that persons with

physical deficiencies who wish to be involved in ministry should be considered as unique people with unique abilities, and the Holy Spirit will turn limitations into opportunities. As a blind person myself, I know this personally. I have learned skills that many other blind people do not have, and other blind people have skills I do not have.

Second, as time advances, the world is getting more—not less—accessible for blind and other physically impaired persons. Technology and skill-training methods are constantly improving. In the 1980s, one of the most significant advances for blind accessibility was the advent of scanning equipment that could read printed books with a synthesized voice.

In the last few years, a major development for blind people seeking ministry positions has been the work to make biblical language materials available in Braille formats. Those who hire pastors should be aware that what might seem to be a difficulty now could become less of an issue as technology develops.

Finally, it must be remembered that the One who calls is the One who enables. "He who has begun a good work . . . will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).



1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.

## **Useful Links**

### ***Bartimaeus Alliance of the Blind.* <http://bartimaeus.us/>**

This website allows one who is blind or visually impaired to download various texts that are useful for ministry. This site includes biblical language materials, various Bible translations, and other helpful ministry tools. These are provided free in the United States under the Chafee Amendment to US copyright law.

### ***Black Rock Church of the Brethren.* <https://blackrockchurch.org/>**

A website for the church where Pastor Brandon Grady ministers. There have been posts on this website about how Pastor Grady's blindness has turned into an asset and a gift that helps him serve the Lord.

### ***Christian Record Services for the Blind.* <https://christianrecord.org/>**

This site offers many blind-accessible resources to Christians. One can find the weekly Sabbath School lesson in a special Braille format for electronic devices that support Braille files. One can also borrow numerous audiobooks for the blind.

### ***Optasia Ministry.* <http://www.optasiaministry.org/>**

Here one who is blind or visually impaired can receive a DVD-ROM of useful resources for pastors, including biblical language texts, pastoral care guides, and books on marriage and the family. These are provided for free under the Chafee Amendment.

**T**he International Children's Bible renders James 1:27 in this way: "Religion that God the Father accepts is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help; and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence. This is the kind of religion that God accepts as pure and good." I saw such religion on display at a church—when church was almost over and hope was almost gone.

It was 5:30 A.M., and dawn was just starting to break across the highway. I was heading south to Columbus, Ohio, to speak at a United Methodist church. I was responsible for foster care programs for abused children in different parts of Ohio. We always had a scarcity of foster homes. So, every weekend I was up early, on the road to whatever church would let me present the need. I arrived around 9:30 A.M. for a 10:00 A.M. service. It was an old church—with nobody in it. By ten, there were 20 congregants, including the pastor. Most were older people. By that, I mean well over 60. *So many miles—so few people*, I thought to myself.

I saw only one person who appeared to be under 40—and she appeared to be single. But there I was, so at the pastor's invitation, I presented the need and told the people that I would be around after the service to talk with anyone interested.

The service ended, the congregation of 20 people shuffled out, and the single

lady stopped to talk with me. She was very interested but said she needed to speak with her husband. I discovered that not only was she married, but she also was a parent. I gave her the information and took hers. "I'll call," I told Pat, "in a few days, after you have had a chance to talk with Chris." That was how it worked typically and, usually, the result was that the husband was not interested. *Another Sunday wasted*, I thought to myself as I left.

A few days later I called Pat. Yes! She had discussed it with Chris. They were interested! I asked if I could visit with them, try to answer any questions, and see if they were ready, begin the process. Again, yes! I reflected on that old, almost-empty church and confessed the reality, "Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7, CSB).

### **Beginning the process**

The visit took just two hours. Their questions were answered. The Bell family wanted to start official procedures for licensing! I was relieved but realistic. The process can be quite an ordeal. Family members must have a physical to ensure they have no communicable diseases. Family members must have their fingerprints run through FBI, state, and local police records as well as statewide Child Protective Services files, to ascertain

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

# WHERE IS GOD LEADING?

You never know

their involvement with those agencies. Family members must have three references. Finally, family members must have 36 hours of preservice training.

The fastest that the process can be completed in Ohio is 90 days—the average is closer to 150 days. Three to five months—a lot can happen in that time. People change their minds. Couples get divorced. Wives become pregnant and back out because they do not want to foster with a newborn in the house. Others grow frustrated and just quit. The Bells persevered—and became licensed. “‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:24, NKJV).

After licensing, the most important thing is matching the right child to the right family. The agency worked with them, through ongoing training and support, to broaden and refine the population they could serve. The Bells had two elementary school-aged children, so they wanted children without too many problems who were near the age of their own. Many families say the same.

The Bells’ first placement was Mic—a rebellious teenager who did not receive the structure he needed in his biological home. The Bells provided positive support for Mic, but when he turned 18, he ran away; no one from the state went looking for him, and Pat and Chris chose tough love. Pat says, “Mic . . . opted out at eighteen . . . and when he was homeless, [he] wanted to come back. We had to say no. As a side note, I have watched two of his daughters graduate now, and the kids call us Grandma and Grandpa.”

Their second placement was a neglected sibling group of three, ages four through nine. They stayed with the Bell family for about six months before returning home. The Bells made these children feel safe, loved, and wanted. They also coordinated with the biological family to ensure a smooth return home. But these children were just warm-ups for what was to come.

## Loving the children

During one of our training sessions on AIDS, we talked about the need for homes for children born HIV positive. One day, while I was conducting a case visit in their home, Pat informed me, “We would like to work with a child who is HIV positive.”

“You have two young children of your own,” I stated. “Are you sure you want to do this?”

“We have talked to our children. They are aware of what HIV is, how they can be infected,

as well as how to avoid infection, and both of them, as well as Chris and I, are prepared for the risk.” This was now beyond the usual level of care. I had asked God to open their hearts. God was again asking me to open my eyes. “‘I will not leave you without help as children without parents. I will come to you’” (John 14:18, NLV).

The Bells lived three blocks from the Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, home to one of the country’s best pediatric AIDS programs. Characteristically, Pat informed me, “I have already met with the program directors and I know what supports are available. I have signed our family up for the training provided by the hospital.”

So, we agreed to identify a child who was HIV positive for placement in their home. Erie County, Ohio, called us with a referral of a two-year-old boy who not only was HIV positive but also had full-blown AIDS. The child had contracted the disease from his mother as he passed through the birth canal. Rex’s mother had been inconsistent in giving him his medicine and keeping his doctor’s appointments. He was sinking fast. Survival rates were not hopeful. Pat and Chris said, “Sure, bring him here. We would love to work with him.”

“We picked him up at the hospital,” Pat remembers, “and to this day, it amazes me that he walked out of there holding our hands. You would never have known that was the first time he met us.” The couple took extraordinarily good care of him, making him feel loved and wanted.

## Going the distance

During the placement arrangements, someone told Pat, “Do not expect him to make it to kindergarten. All you can do is give him as happy a life as possible while he is with you.” I would often visit Rex in their home, sometimes with my son, who was just a few months older. I remember leaving there one night with tears in my eyes, knowing my son would grow up and this boy would not.

On another visit, Pat said, “I want you to taste this medicine, so you know what Rex has to deal with. He has to take it twice a day.” It was horrible! That taste stayed on my tongue for two days. Pat wanted everyone who worked with Rex to experience, as much as possible, what it was like for him. Eventually, he went from oral medicine to ports, so the situation improved somewhat.

Rex thought that everyone who came to the house was there for him. Most of the time, it was true. He had daily visiting nurses, doctors, court-appointed special advocates, and social



workers from the hospital and other agencies. Such attention resulted in Rex becoming very spoiled. I remember telling Pat, “You are spoiling him. He needs more discipline.”

“What difference does it make?” she answered. “He won’t be in kindergarten, so he should enjoy all he can while he is here!”

The family made sure Rex got every treatment possible. Pat became involved in the parent-support group at the hospital and fundraising efforts for HIV research, in addition to learning all about the disease. One day, while playing on the couch in the front room, Rex fell and cut his head. Such head wounds bleed a lot. Contact with infected blood is one way that HIV spreads and is of most concern in a family setting. The Bells’ children, Christine and David, had learned not to touch blood, so they ran to Pat, shouting, “Blood, blood! Rex hurt his head.” Pat donned her rubber gloves, always used when dealing with bodily fluids, and cleaned up Rex. After a stitch or two, he was back to normal.

The Bells incorporated Rex’s biological mother into the process. They made a scrapbook of his life for her so that she could see him grow. They transported him from Columbus to Sandusky, Ohio, for visits. They treated his mother with respect and encouraged Rex to be happy to see his mom and siblings. It took five years, including a meeting with a US representative, to terminate parental rights. Rex became adoptable, the Bells adopted him, and they maintained contact with his biological mother until her death in 2016.

The love and care from the Bells and their extended family enabled Rex to attend elementary school. While persons there had issues surrounding his presence, Pat was at all the

**What often appears fruitless and happenstance is, in fact, God leading us to open doors.**



meetings, educating teachers and parents about HIV, and advocating that Rex had all the rights of any other student. Rex made it through elementary school into middle school—then into high school. By the time he was in high school, new treatments led to him being pronounced virus free. The little boy who would not live to enter kindergarten graduated from high school and then from Ohio State University. Today he is a proud officer in the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

### **Opening a door**

Chuck Swindoll says that all children are special, but some are extra special. “Some children, because of unusual circumstances during the prenatal period or at birth—or afterward—are marked off by the Lord as extremely special gifts: the unplanned child, the adopted child, the disabled child, the gifted child, the hyperactive child, and the one-parent child.”<sup>1</sup>

Pat and her family opened their home and hearts to children in need of care, discipline and, most of all, love. They touched the lives of five extra-special children and their families, transforming them. But Pat observed, “That meeting changed *our* lives.”

One never knows what God may do in and through our lives. An early morning drive, a providential meeting, a willingness to open one’s family to opportunity, and lives are touched, and the kingdom of God grows. Nothing is meaningless or by chance with God. What often appears fruitless and happenstance is, in fact, God leading us to open doors.



<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *You and Your Child* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1984), 36.



## God delights to answer specific prayers

Six months after finally surrendering to God's persistent love, I found myself selling Christian literature in a summer student canvassing program. During these intensely difficult, refining, and glorious weeks, I learned the cornerstones of walking with Christ. I would drag my battered and exhausted body out of bed an hour early to study the Bible. Through those mornings and conversations with mentors, I grew to love studying the Bible.

### What about prayer?

But another essential—prayer—eluded me. I would go through the motions, but I still did not sense God's presence. I was still learning about His love, so to believe that the Author of humanity cared about my day seemed too incredible to believe.

The program leaders kept emphasizing praying for specific things. I always shied away from this, which shielded me from being disappointed. But I did not know that it also kept me from intense blessings.

As the last two weeks of the program began, I decided to give prayer a try. I prayed that on my very last door of the summer I would meet someone who was struggling with overwhelming discouragement and darkness and that I could bring this person the light of Jesus and a piece of truth that would produce joy. This prayer request became my sole focus those last two weeks. I even fasted for 48 hours; something I had never done. Although I still felt a little unsure, my faith and courage grew as the days passed.

### The final day

The final day came. I sprinted to each new house, determined to find my answered prayer. Instead, it seemed as though every rude person in the world lived on my assigned streets. Barely any books left my hands that day. And as the sun set, so did my hopes. I had been so convinced, but I was more confused than sad. Had I prayed incorrectly?

The next morning, our leader had a surprise for us: we were going to work one more day at a random location for a few hours on our way back. My hopes hesitantly rose. *Is Jesus really going to answer this prayer? In a random town?*

We each chose random streets, although we prayed as we did. Hours passed. I knocked at my next house. An older man opened the door; his eyes were red and swollen. It looked like he had been crying for weeks. I started to share about our books but asked him what was wrong instead. He shared that his wife of decades had suddenly died, not even a month ago. He told me about her—her hobbies, her laugh, and her love of cooking. Then he seemed to suddenly remember why I had knocked on his door and asked me if I had any books about heaven.

"Not specifically. Why?" I asked.

At this, his eyes filled with fresh tears. "The Bible says there's no marriage in heaven. So does . . . does that mean I can't love my wife anymore?" I did not know what to say. But suddenly, as Jesus promises, the words came.

"Actually, you will be able to love her. When she was here, even on your best days, you loved her with an imperfect love. But in heaven, your love will be made perfect. You'll be able to love her even more."

His sad eyes suddenly lit up with excitement. "I'll be able to love her more!" He kept repeating this truth, now crying tears of relief and joy.

We talked for a while. I shared Bible verses, literature, and a prayer where we both cried. As I turned to leave his house, my leader was waiting for me. Jesus even answered the smallest detail: that man's home was my last house.

I sometimes still struggle to believe that my prayers reach the ears of God. But this experience, and others like it, are too incredible to be forgotten or ignored. God delights to hear from us, and He is only waiting for us to ask for wonderful gifts. He can barely wait to give them to us. ❧





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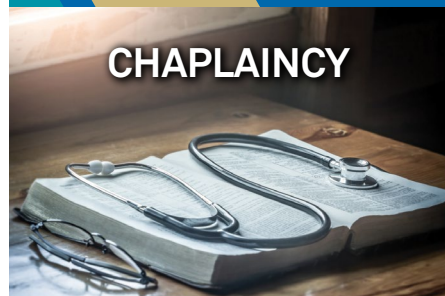
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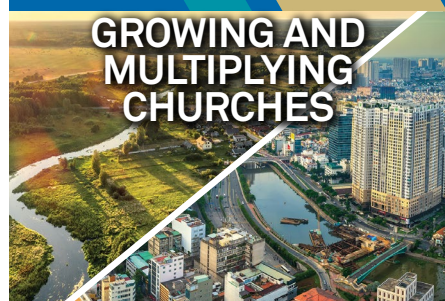
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## Adventist Development and Relief Agency supplies humanitarian aid at Ground Zero

BEIRUT, LEBANON

**A**dventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) response teams in Lebanon are providing essential emergency supplies to recovery workers and survivors of the massive explosion in Beirut's port. The huge blast that struck Lebanon's capital city on August 4, killed at least 190 people, wounded more than 6,500 people, and left more than 300,000 people homeless.

"Responders say they have never seen anything like this before. The images look like a war zone. The first dispatched ambulance teams were killed by the explosion. We are delivering water and essential equipment to firefighters and civil defense workers," said **Gunther Wallauer**, ADRA regional director for the Middle East and North Africa. "We are providing bedding supplies, so they have a place to rest; they need cots, tents, generators for lights since electricity is out in most of the city. We know there's devastation in several neighborhoods close to the epicenter. Our teams on the ground are quickly assessing the situation to provide immediate aid to children and families."

ADRA teams are assisting at least five neighborhoods, including schools surrounding the blast zone, deploying humanitarian support, including water and food, to victims.

"Our prayers are with the Lebanese nation, especially the children and families affected by this catastrophe and all who lost loved ones and

are injured. We have been on the ground since the coronavirus outbreak helping the Lebanese community cope with the health and economic challenges of the pandemic and are ready to provide additional support during this added crisis," said ADRA's president **Michael Kruger**. "We are committed to increasing our emergency response activities to provide life-saving essentials to those in need of assistance."

ADRA is working with church volunteers, local authorities, and partners in Beirut to coordinate the relief and recovery operations. To assist with ADRA's emergency response in Lebanon, please visit <https://ADRA.org/disasters>. [ADRA]



Photo: ADRA in Lebanon

ADRA worker near the epicenter provides water to first responders.

## Adventist Health rapid response aids in California wildfires

ROSEVILLE, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES

**S**tatewide emergencies are in effect along the west coast of the United States as multiple wildfires rage across the states of California, Oregon,

and Washington. These fires are a result of record-high temperatures, electrical storms, and sustained high winds, combined with carelessness and malice. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to evacuate. Over 50 persons have been killed and dozens of people are unaccounted for.

Residents living on and near the campus of Seventh-day Adventist institution Pacific Union College have been evacuated and Adventist Health St. Helena has evacuated hospital patients to

nearby medical facilities. Adventist Health is providing emergency assistance to health associates in need, and the Adventist Health Rapid Response fund helps associates and communities with devastating disasters and emergencies. “Together, we can ensure our team of healthcare heroes receives the critical support they need,” officials added.

“At this time, we ask our brothers and sisters in Christ to join us as we pray for the continued protection of all, including those on the frontlines who are battling the wildfires,” said Northern California Conference president **Marc Woodson**.

“We claim the promise in Deuteronomy 31:8, ‘The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged’ ” (NIV).

Sadly, **Tom Duffy**, 40, a firefighting pilot and beloved Seventh-day Adventist lay leader from Montana, was killed in a helicopter crash on August 24 while helping to fight a wildfire in Oregon’s Mount Hood National Forest. Our sincere prayers are extended for his wife, Robyn, and their three children. [Kimberly Luste Maran, *Adventist Review*/Jay Wintermeyer, *Gleaner Now*]

## The Holy Spirit inspires breath of life ministry to COVID patients in Peru

LIBERTAD AREA, PERU

**W**hen local pastor **Rolando Quinteros Zuñiga** hosted an initiative in Peru, titled “40 Days With the Holy Spirit,” little did he know that it would be the inspiration for literal breath to be administered to persons suffering from COVID-19.

**Amir Cotrina Sánchez**, a taxi driver and member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had, as a result of COVID-19, experienced weakness, chills, and tiredness and felt a sudden lack of oxygen. Worried, his family members had given him a portable oxygen canister so he could recover. He found that he did not need to use it, and his health was restored by taking medication.

Hearing that many people were dying from a lack of oxygen in Trujillo, Sánchez took along the canister he had not used to help people when necessary while driving his taxi. This led the company where his relatives had purchased his oxygen canister to send him a package of portable canisters to share with his passengers in case of need.

“A passenger got into the taxi with breathing problems, but at the nearest hospital, she was told they couldn’t take care of her,” Sánchez shared. “On the way to another hospital, the young woman began to cough and choke. I told her, ‘Please use this oxygen canister.’ And she managed to quiet down and make it to the hospital.”


So far, Sánchez has managed to help almost 40 people. Some fellow taxi drivers also call him when they need his help, which he gives without asking for anything in return. As he gets acquainted with his colleagues who do not feel well, he prays that they recover quickly. [Margiory Salinas, South American Division, and *Adventist Review*] 



Photo: Hector Sukari, South American Division News



**James Hoffer, MA in New Testament**, is a retired pastor living in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, United States.



## Practical tips for effective home visitation

In my 40-plus years of ministry, I have always been known as a pastor who visits—a lot. When I assumed the pastorate of a 500-member church, I made it my goal, as far as feasible, to visit every home as soon as possible, so my wife and I covered them all in a year and a half. Doing this endears one to the congregation and results in great blessings and spiritual dividends.

In light of Christ's example, I can hardly imagine a pastor who does not engage in home visitation. Jesus knew His flock (John 10:27, 28). And more important, they knew *Him*, which is why they followed Him. Furthermore, He sent His disciples out two by two to visit and minister to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus is our stellar Example of a home visitor.

### The dynamics

Various dynamics come into play in pastoral visitation. Should I call before arriving? Sometimes this depends on the people to be visited, whether they are retired or working—or according to their perceived receptivity. There are those few who do not want to be visited, but the important, overall principle is connectivity.

In addition to routine visits, there are crisis visits involving serious illness, death, or some other critical situation. Learning to be sensitive and respectful of people's time and needs is extremely important. Such learning can often only be gained through experience.

### Helpful tips

Here are a few practical tips:

1. Organize your visits geographically as much as possible. In the United States, always look up a person's zip code on the US Postal Service's website. I suggest entering the names and addresses into a spreadsheet and sorting them by the person's full nine-digit zip code. Using those extra four digits in the zip code places them neatly in geographical order, saving time and gasoline. Using the GPS on my cell phone,

I easily move from place to place and cover several visits in an afternoon or evening.

2. Keep the address list up-to-date and with you when on visitation to indicate who you visited and when.

3. Keep members and interests connected through a monthly newsletter. Include the postal endorsement "Change Service Requested" under the church's return address. The modest cost of receiving corrected addresses is well worth it.

4. Maintain a commercial account with WhitePages.com. I have often discovered missing members through WhitePages.com and find that the small monthly cost is worth it. It could be considered a business expense for your income taxes.

5. In your car, carry magazines and pamphlets to share, copies of your most recent church bulletin, and even offering envelopes.

6. It is not necessary to visit in a suit and tie. Business casual will make people more at ease.

7. Visit people over the phone if they live far away. In most cases, they will appreciate it.

8. Solicit the help of your church clerk or secretary to make phone calls where necessary to ascertain updated addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses for each family member.

The blessings and benefits of visitation can include becoming aware of situations that you did not know about or understanding needs or concerns that can be addressed in a sermon (without revealing sources or giving away personal information).

As you visit in your members' homes, be humble and teachable, listen a lot, and pray earnestly with them, holding hands in a circle if appropriate. A good visit, bathed in prayer and the presence of the Holy Spirit, will warm their hearts and yours and make you friends for time and eternity. Now you will not be preaching to strangers! Visiting will enhance your preaching and give you more credibility in the eyes of your people. Jesus is asking you, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?" (Jer. 13:20, KJV). 📌

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