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Prayer:
The key to church growth

PAGE 6

14

THE NEW NORMAL AND
STEWARDSHIP

18

LAODICEA AND
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24

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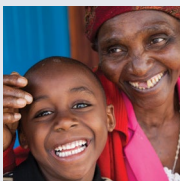


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06

Prayer: The key to church growth

NELSON MERCADO

We all know that prayer is a component of church growth, but how important is it, and why?



5 | EDITORIAL



17 | RESOURCES



27 | DATELINE



29 | LETTERS



30 | PRACTICAL POINTERS

10

Who is God? What the Bible says about the Trinity

IGOR LORENCIN

If the word *Trinity* is not used in the Bible, how do we learn its biblical definition? Find out what the author says.

14

The new normal and stewardship

MICHAEL HARPE

True stewardship transforms your relationship with God. Find out how.

18

Laodicea and Adventist eschatology

CLINTON WAHLEN

We all know that the church in Laodicea in Revelation can be viewed in more than one way, but how do these different views come together to show a perfect picture of God in His mercy?

24

Social justice and the role of young Adventist activists

GARY BLANCHARD

Should we, as Christians, get angry about social injustice? What does the Bible say?

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Joy to the world

The whole program is negative. Always. Yet, I watch it. Every feature is pessimistic. Almost. Yet, I listen to it. What is this program? It's called the nightly news.

I use the term *almost* because the National Broadcasting Company ends each episode with a story called *Inspiring America*. Some terrible events are covered during each nearly half-hour episode—but it always ends with joy.

One evening, it featured the story of a group of black Chicago high schoolers led by Arshay Cooper. In the midst of crime, poverty, drug use, and discrimination, they formed a rowing team. It was revolutionary. But they did more.

In an environment where, as one teammate said, “I felt that God existed everywhere but here,” they invited members of rival gangs to sit together in the same boat. They became America’s first all-black high school rowing team. This was unprecedented. But they went further.

At their 20-year reunion, they invited white Chicago police officers to train with them. The police gladly accepted. Picture these black men from the hood (inner city) sitting side by side with white police, teaching them how to row. They made a documentary about it—*A Most Beautiful Thing*.¹ This was joy.

World of joy

“Joy to the World”—a hymn penned by pastor and writer Isaac Watts—was inspired by Psalm 98. Verse 9 reads, “He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with fairness” (NLT). Best-selling author Pete Scazzero states, “This commitment to racial reconciliation and justice is a way of life, not a short-term project. So do the ministry in such a way that you will remain faithful over the next thirty or forty years.”²

The joy of the racial reconciliation in Chicago stemmed from the actions of high schoolers who remained faithful for twenty years. Perhaps that’s why Jesus said, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, unless you repent [that is, change your inner self—your old way of thinking, live changed lives] and become like children [trusting, humble, and forgiving], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3, AMP).

Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is the associate editor of *Ministry*.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Thank God for children. Pattiejean and I are blessed to have our two-year-old granddaughter, Charlotte Anne, living with us. We understand why Walter Wangerin Jr. said, “Let the children laugh and be glad. O my dear, they haven’t long before the world assaults them. . . . So give your children (your grandchildren, your nieces and nephews, the dear ones, children of your neighbors and your community)—give them golden days. . . . Give them laughter.”³

Tears of joy

These high schoolers knew all too well what being assaulted meant. But one of Arshay’s teammates commented, “Once they [the police] came out of their uniforms, they were just regular human beings.” One of the police officers stated, “The world would be a lot better place if there were more Arshays in the world.”

Film director and former US Olympic rower Mary Mazzio said, “I nearly cried behind the camera at the extraordinary kindness that Arshay and the guys showed these officers, patiently teaching them how to row, hands on hands, working together shoulder to shoulder. . . . It was as if time and space stood still for two hours.”⁴

I understand one day time will stand still in heaven, “about the space of half an hour” (Rev. 8:1, KJV). I think I know what I’ll be doing. Watching and listening to the news. This time it will all be good news. Until then—as we near the end of earth’s tragic news cycle—let’s row side by side. Let’s replicate *A Most Beautiful Thing*. Because the song says, “Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.”



- 1 Dave Caldwell, “America’s First All-Black Rowing Team Find Their Message Is More Relevant Than Ever,” *Guardian*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/aug/26/a-most-beautiful-thing-rowing-film-chicago>.
- 2 Pete Scazzero, “Race, Justice, and Emotionally Healthy Discipleship,” *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, June 5, 2020, <http://emotionallyhealthy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Race-Justice-and-Emotionally-Healthy-Discipleship-FINAL.pdf>.
- 3 Walter Wangerin Jr., *Little Lamb, Who Made Thee? A Book About Children and Parents* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 12.
- 4 Caldwell, “All-Black Rowing Team.”

Prayer:

The key to church growth

The 2019 statistics have emerged for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the end of year 2019, there was a total of 163,745 organized congregations. We had a total of 1,321,047 accessions but, after taking into consideration deaths, transfers, missing, and adjusted out, we had only a 142,058 net gain.¹

These numbers are certainly grim, but they get worse. Stephen Ross compiled the world's population statistics at the beginning of 2014. His findings revealed that the world population was estimated to be 7,171,061,698, with world birth to death ratios of 360,000 births versus 151,600 deaths per day. Therefore, every day we fall behind in reaching the whole world with the gospel by 208,400 people.²

So, how will we reach the whole world? Since the church belongs to God, as church leaders we should seek Him in prayer to find the methods that will work with our churches, and it has to start with church leaders. What do I mean?

My experience

I have been pastoring for eight years and have conducted eight evangelistic campaigns. Prayer was obviously an important component as people gave their lives to Jesus. But as a new pastor and evangelist, my first two campaigns were conducted without emphasizing prayer by the church. To be sure, I prayed; but I didn't have the church members actively praying. The results were minimal.

I observed other pastors come to the same territory and experience fruitfulness and this led me on a path of soul-searching

and study on the subject of evangelism. I had the privilege of witnessing how some pastors and evangelists made prayer by the membership intentional and central their campaigns. I decided to try it. I created teams of church members whose sole campaign function was to pray for the convicting presence of the Holy Spirit on our campaign. These teams were also in charge of the campaign prayer each night. I did this in the



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

United States and repeated the pattern in Europe (Moldova), Central America (Guatemala), the Caribbean (Cuba), and South America (two campaigns in Colombia). In each of these campaigns, God blessed us with great fruitfulness, and I had the privilege of entering into the pool and baptizing the candidates myself.

Church growth in the early church

While some may argue that today's world is much different and more difficult, the best example we could follow in the area of church growth is that of the early church. The task assigned to them was no less easy. The apostles were commissioned to be Christ's global witnesses (Acts 1:8). The apostles were subsequently arrested for preaching the gospel of Jesus. The apostles were then charged by the high priest with disobeying an order to cease and desist. "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" (Acts 5:28, NKJV). Missions strategist Ed Silvoso asks, "How much time elapsed between Acts 1:8 and Acts 5:28? Just a few weeks! In a matter of weeks, the Church went from the Upper Room to every living room in Jerusalem."³

How was it possible for 12 ordinary persons to reach an entire city with the gospel in a matter of weeks? Acts tells what they did. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . And the Lord added to the

church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42–47). While

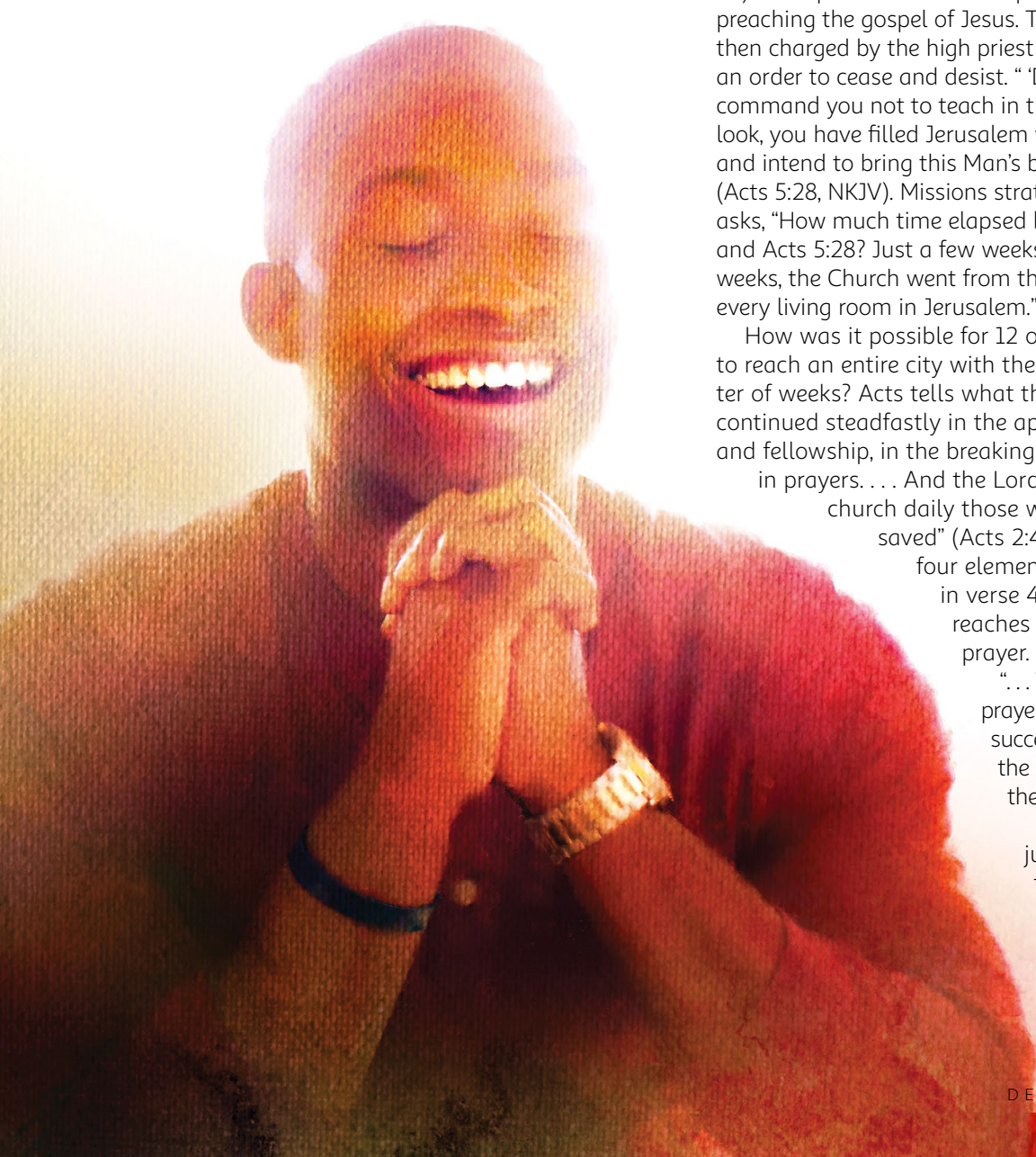
four elements are mentioned

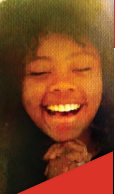
in verse 42, "only one . . .

reaches beyond the group: prayer. . . .

" . . . This kind of prayer—is *the* key to the successful fulfillment of the Great Commission, then and now."⁴

Churches do not just need methods to grow, they need power: God's power. The disciples prayed, and God gave them





the Holy Spirit, who empowered them to witness, resulting in church growth. “The early church did not grow because of programs or talents; they grew because of prayer and the Holy Spirit.”⁵ Will He not do the same today if the church prays as the apostles did?

Prayer, the Holy Spirit, and church growth

Joseph Kidder sees prayer as part of his “big four” of church growth principles (effective and empowering leadership, passionate and authentic spirituality, committed and active laity, and God-exalting worship).⁶ He maintains that we must prioritize spirituality, highlighting Ellen White’s passion for revival: “A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer. While the people are so destitute of God’s Holy Spirit, they cannot appreciate the preaching of the Word, but when the Spirit’s power touches their hearts, then the discourses given will not be without effect.”⁷

Silvoso says that “revival must have as its focus the glory of God and, as its result, the evangelization of the lost. . . .

“ . . . A revival that fails to bring the lost to Jesus is a self-serving revival, centered on man’s needs and wants, and not on God’s glory.”⁸ Thus, revival and evangelization of the lost go hand in hand. A revival will result in church growth. Therefore, we can conclude that church growth needs to be expected only in answer to prayer.

Yet, it seems that it is much easier for church pastors and leaders to rely on step-by-step methods than to depend on prayer. As a church leader, I know that it is easy to feel that dedicating time to prayer will take away from the time needed to implement methods. This is a sad reality. In 1994, Thom S. Rainer reflected, “Pastors, church leaders, let us get painfully honest with each other and with God. Most of us have so many demands on our lives that prayer takes a back seat to everything else. Recent studies have shown that the average American pastor spends from fifteen to twenty-two minutes daily in prayer. And one of four pastors spends less than ten minutes daily in prayer.”⁹

If the absence of the Holy Spirit makes the gospel ministry powerless, then how shall we be possessed of the Holy Spirit? Here’s where prayer—as a basic, fundamental link with God whereby we ask God, and He gives—becomes crucial to experience the power of God and the Holy Spirit. That power can move the mountains, and church growth becomes the work of the Holy Spirit—and not ours to worry over. That is why I

believe prayer is so important when it comes to church growth.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, but He did not give Him to the church so that Christians would feel excitement and prove that they were Christians. He gave the Holy Spirit to the church to empower them for the task at hand. Church growth expert Russell Burrill agrees with this when he says, “In this initial endowment of the Holy Spirit, we discover its purpose: empowerment for the accomplishment of the mission. The Holy Spirit is poured out for action—for the accomplishment of the task of Christ. . . . That’s why we cannot finish the work without the Holy Spirit. The spirit cannot be poured out unless there are people willing to be filled with power, enabling them to share Christ with the world around them.”¹⁰

While Burrill emphasizes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a result of prayer and that the Spirit was given for the purpose of ministry, he also points out that prayer is an essential church growth principle, the others being creating a culture of evangelism, natural church development, and reaching friends for Jesus, church visitors, and discipleship.¹¹

Pentecost and church growth

The events at Pentecost can teach us all we need to know about church growth. Former church administrator Jay Gallimore stated, “While we may discover many church growth principles, when it comes to spiritual growth that really works, Pentecost leaves us with three nonnegotiables: prayer, repentance, and the Holy Spirit.”¹² These three are the ingredients for revival and, consequently, for church growth to take place.

It cannot be overemphasized that revival and reformation lead to church growth. Therefore, if pastors and leaders want to see their churches growing, they need to start by getting on their knees and asking God for the Holy Spirit, and God will add to the church those who will be saved. Prayer is the key to success in church growth.

In his book *User Friendly Churches*,¹³ George Barna studied some rapidly growing churches in America. He found that prayer was key to such rapid growth. He found four areas in which prayer was emphasized:

1. *The congregation was exposed to biblical teaching about the role of prayer in the Christian life.* This was done from the pulpit as well as other church forums.
2. *Church leaders (staff and laity) modeled prayer as normal and significant behavior in all aspects*

- of their Christian life. Large segments of time were devoted to prayer despite busy schedules.
3. *These churches had learned to celebrate the fruits of prayer.* They learned that prayer really is effective as they heard about many answered prayers.
 4. *The congregation was held accountable for prayer.* The prayer life of members and leaders was regularly presented to the church.

As mentioned at the outset, the membership in the Adventist Church is declining relative to population growth. Jay Gallimore mused, “While pastors are getting doctorates in church growth, churches are scrambling to find pastors who will make them grow.”¹⁴ The issue is not education or even church growth; it is simply increasing our dependence upon the Holy Spirit—shifting our emphasis from finding methods in books to seeking God in prayer.

The role of church growth methods

It may seem a bit simplistic and perhaps naïve to say, “Just pray, and the churches will grow.” Leaders must have a vision and a plan tied to prayer. “As we pray to God for a vision for our churches, He will miraculously open our eyes to possibilities.”¹⁵ Unless the plan comes from God through prayer, our plans, regardless of how good, will never receive the blessing and the success needed. Joshua never may have designed the plan he executed to capture Jericho. The strategy came from God; therefore, he could expect God’s blessing on that strategy.

Speaking about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, Ellen White says: “For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his petition to God. Companies of Christian workers should gather to ask for special help, for heavenly wisdom, *that they may know how to plan and execute wisely.*”¹⁶

From this, we can conclude that Christian workers must not only have plans but also must seek heavenly wisdom to know which way to proceed. “Unless the members of God’s church today have a living connection with the Source of all spiritual growth, they will not be ready for the time of reaping.”¹⁷ Church methods have their place and are important—but only as an answer to prayer.

Unprecedented

God knows what our communities need and, when we seek Him in prayer, He will direct us to

the method that He knows will work in our community. Ellen White stated, “Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. . . . The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness.”¹⁸

Unprecedented for us—but not for God. Scripture has already given us models: the early church and, certainly, the life of Jesus. The method is simple: pray, and the Holy Spirit will be given. He will then guide us into methods that will help our churches grow because ultimately, it is God who adds to the church daily those that are being saved.



- 1 See “Advance Release of Membership Statistics by Division for 2019,” *2020 Annual Statistical Report*, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2020).
- 2 Stephen Ross, “The Harvest Fields: Statistics 2014,” Wholesome Words, accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/greatc.html>.
- 3 Ed Silvano, *That None Should Perish: How to Reach Entire Cities for Christ Through Prayer Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994), 60.
- 4 Silvano, 64.
- 5 S. Joseph Kidder, “Reflections on the Future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America: The Long View of Church Growth (Part 2 of 2),” *Ministry*, February 2011, 14.
- 6 S. Joseph Kidder, *The Big Four: Secrets to a Thriving Church Family* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2011), 13.
- 7 Kidder, “Reflections,” 14. See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 121.
- 8 Silvano, *That None Should Perish*, 70.
- 9 Thom S. Rainer, *Eating the Elephant: Bite-Sized Steps to Achieve Long-Term Growth in Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 23.
- 10 Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church: Unleashing the Awesome Power of Lay Ministry* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center), 16.
- 11 Russell Burrill, *How to Grow an Adventist Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books), 17–107.
- 12 Jay Gallimore, “Church Growth—Its Missing Power,” *Ministry*, December 1986, 12.
- 13 George Barna, *User Friendly Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books), 116–119.
- 14 Gallimore, “Church Growth,” 12.
- 15 Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (N.p.: B & H Publishing Group, 1993), 178.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 50; emphasis added.
- 17 White, 55.
- 18 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), 300.



WHO IS GOD?

What the Bible says about the Trinity

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Why did the writers of the Bible not start with a definition of the Godhead? We want to know who God is! When we approach the Bible with a desire to find out who God is, we will search in vain for a definition. If we look for a definition of the Godhead, the closest we may find is in the first commandment of the Decalogue: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exod. 20:2).¹ What do we learn from this “definition”? Who is God? He is the one who acts! The Bible defines God by His deeds on behalf of humanity.

It is interesting that the first pages of the Bible offer no definition of the Godhead but rather describe God’s first great deed in the history of our world—Creation. While a definition may remain just words on a piece of paper, God’s deeds have long-term effects and constantly testify to who He is. Creation is the first deed of God in our planet’s history, and with that deed, He introduced Himself as our Creator. Humans came at the end of the six-day Creation week, and God planned the seventh-day Sabbath for a special connection with them. The Sabbath day is a celebration of Creation and a reminder of who God is.

When God made Himself known to Abraham, again, that revelation did not contain a definition of the Godhead but testified about the deeds that God had planned for the future: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:2, 3). The God of Abraham showed who He was through what He did. He wanted a relationship with Abraham, and He proved Himself to be faithful, consistent, full of love and care—the One who would keep His promises and fulfill them on behalf of Abraham and his offspring.

Revelation of God

Later, when God disclosed Himself to Moses in the desert in a bush that did not burn up, He simply said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exod. 3:6). What kind of definition of the Godhead is that? God

revealed Himself to the patriarchs through His deeds, was faithful to His promises, and blessed them. Now that same God proclaimed Himself to Moses. When Moses finally asked what he should tell others about who had sent him, God responded: “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exod. 3:14).

God is the living God whom we learn about through His deeds. From His revelation to Moses comes the Old Testament name for God—Yahweh. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the one who works for His people. The God who works, the One that is, the Living God, would complete with Moses and the Israelites one of the greatest deeds in the Old Testament—the exodus from Egyptian slavery. He would free them from bondage and lead them through the desert, feed them with manna from heaven, give them water from rocks, live among them in the sanctuary, and have a constant relationship with them. Finally, Yahweh would bring them into the land of milk and honey. The blessings promised to Abraham continued during the history of the nation of Israel, and the Old Testament deeds of God testify about them.

Later, in the time of the Israelite prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, people started to forget about God’s deeds in the past. The Israelites did not respond to His faithfulness anymore, and they ended up in Babylonian captivity. Realizing what they had done and knowing where to find what they desperately needed, they pled with God for help in establishing a relationship with Him once again. Yahweh heard their pain and rescued them from the Babylonian exile. God again brought them into the Promised Land, where life started all over again and blessings accompanied them. God had once more shown through this deed that He is faithful. If a definition could encompass Him, then it must contain His deeds.

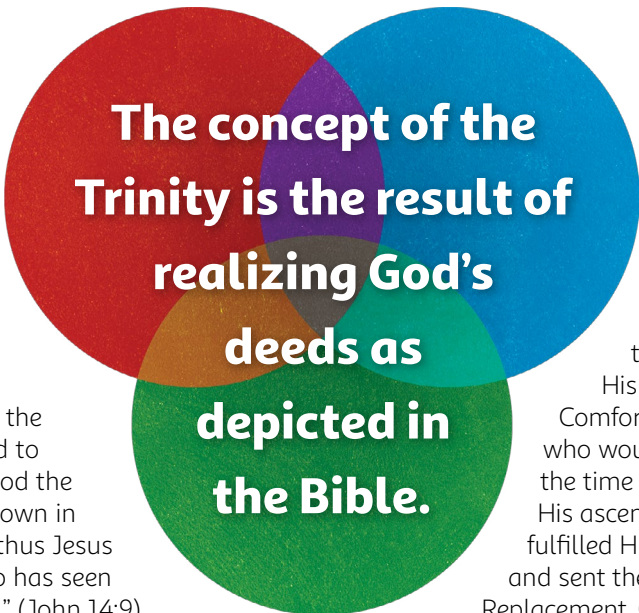
Jesus reveals God

Later, as history continued, the nation of Israel went its own way by entering into religious traditionalism, which left little space for God’s deeds. So, God the Father sent His Son Jesus Christ from heaven to live among people (John 1:14). By His deeds, Jesus was to reveal God Himself (Matt. 4:24). When John

the Baptist sent a delegation to Jesus to ask Him if He was the One to come, Jesus responded with His deeds: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Matt. 11:5). God the Father made Himself known in the deeds of Jesus, and thus Jesus could say: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Who God is can best be shown to fallen human beings in the deeds of Jesus (Heb. 1:1, 2). The blessings promised to Abraham continued in the ministry of Jesus.

The biggest deed of God in the history of humanity is the Cross. On the cross, He displayed the beauty of His character in all fullness. There He demonstrated that He is the One who chose to suffer for people. He gave His life for them—even though most humans were not going to be thankful for that sacrifice. If the Bible emphasizes the deeds of God, what should we stress in our speech about Him? Early Christians in their preaching clearly emphasized God’s deeds (e.g., Stephen in Acts 7:1–53). Luke reported in the Acts of the Apostles the history of early Christianity and transmitted to us a number of early Christian sermons (Peter in Acts 2:14–36; 3:12–26; 10:34–43; Paul in Acts 13:16–41; 17:22–31; 28:20–28). All of those apostolic sermons proclaimed the deeds of God and culminated with that of the Cross.

The last deed of God described in the Bible, after Jesus’ second coming and the final deliverance of humanity from the bondage of sin, is the new creation (Revelation 22). The whole Bible, from cover to cover, testifies about divine acts. In the Bible, God does not reveal Himself through definitions but through His living deeds, which have the purpose of creating a permanent relationship with humanity. That is why the focus of our language about God also needs to be on His deeds. A sermon that does not proclaim God’s deeds in its core is not a sermon at all, since preaching, in reality, means proclaiming His divine actions. In the same way, a definition of the Godhead that does not focus on God’s deeds is not trustworthy.



The concept of the Trinity is the result of realizing God’s deeds as depicted in the Bible.

The acts of the Spirit

In the Bible, God revealed Himself through the Father, who sent His Son to our world. After finishing His deeds on the earth, Jesus promised His followers another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who would stay with them all the time (John 14:16, 17). After His ascension, at Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled His promise (Acts 2:1–4) and sent the Holy Spirit as His Replacement, One who would always work for His faithful people as a continuation of the blessings promised to Abraham (Eph. 4:30). Since that time, the Holy Spirit has globally represented the Godhead on earth (Rev. 5:6), while Jesus in heaven guides earth’s history to its culmination and prepares Himself to come and get His faithful people (Rev. 19:11–16).

The book of Acts testifies about the deeds of the Holy Spirit, who led and directed the apostles in their mission (e.g., Acts 5:32; 11:12; 13:2; 15:28). The Three Persons of the Godhead complement each other with their deeds in the biblical accounts, working together in the plan of salvation for humanity (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3–6). Ellen G. White connects the whole biblical revelation when she claims: “Of all His infinite resources, God gave the whole. The three representative powers of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, were pledged to carry out God’s plan for the salvation of the lost race. Thus fully did the Lord engage the heavenly universe in the work of redemption.”²

Deeds that Yahweh did in the Old Testament, Jesus then did in the Gospels. As Yahweh fed the Israelites in the desert with manna and gave them water from rocks, so Jesus fed multitudes with bread (e.g., John 6:1–13) and offered them the Water of Life (e.g., John 4:5–14). Living water is actually a symbol for the Spirit that refreshes the faithful (John 7:38, 39).

After Jesus’ ascension, the Holy Spirit would continue the deeds of Jesus on earth, guiding the faithful (John 16:13) and connecting heaven with earth. That is why the faithful pray to God the Father (Matt. 6:9) for the power of the Spirit in their lives (Acts 8:15) in the name of Jesus (John 14:13, 14). A believer prays in the name of Jesus

since He has defeated the powers of darkness on the cross and with that victory has received all authority (Matt. 28:18). Since His ascension, Jesus has occupied His place next to His Father on the throne of heaven (Mark 16:19), and thus He has all authority to send help to His faithful and work great deeds for them through the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity acting in the plan of salvation

The term *Trinity* is a human attempt to summarize, in one word, God's deeds and to define God, who fulfills His plan of salvation for humankind through the Three Persons of the Godhead. Why does the Bible not use the term *Trinity*? It is because definitions of the Godhead are not its focus—but God's living deeds are. *Trinity* is a human term that comprehensively testifies about God's efforts in the plan of salvation. God is One, but He reveals Himself in the pages of the Bible as Triune, Three Persons who together contribute to the same goal. To reduce God to less than the Bible reveals would be to demote His workings among us. But to say in our definition of the Godhead more than what Scripture has revealed would be to put our human intellect above the biblical

revelation. The God of the Bible presents Himself in His deeds, and it is our task to proclaim the deeds of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The concept of the Trinity is the result of realizing God's deeds as depicted in the Bible. The Trinity could be refuted, but such efforts decrease God's plan of salvation and efforts for humanity. At its core, the Trinity is a practical concept because it testifies about God's praxis in the plan of salvation. Finally, we are not saved through theories but through divine actions. Thus, the next time you find yourself tempted to emphasize theories of the Godhead, just open the Bible and read about God's practical deeds. Then look into your own life and testify about His deeds in your own history.

As believers, we recognize God's practical deeds in the actions of the Trinity. God works among us through the Holy Spirit while we await the appearance of Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven, who will take us to an eternity in which the Godhead will be both closer and clearer to us.



- 1 Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, "A Call to Consecration," Manuscript 139, June 18, 1907, par. 10.

10 DAYS OF PRAYER

January 6–16, 2021

WWW.TENDAYSOFPRAAYER.ORG

SEEKING REVIVAL

DAY 1

Jesus' Most Precious Gift

DAY 2

Grasping the Gift

DAY 3

Surrender Is the Key

DAY 4

Putting Revival Into Practice

DAY 5

Spiritual or Carnal: What's the Difference?

DAY 6

God's Solution to Our Struggle

DAY 7

Praying God's Promises

DAY 8

Obedience Through Jesus

DAY 9

Do I Work for God –Or Does He Work Through Me?

DAY 10

Seeking Revival Together

SABBATH CELEBRATION

Seeking Revival From the Holy Spirit

With COVID-19 have come a new normal and new terminology: social distancing, PPE (personal protective equipment), PPP (Paycheck Protection Program), N95 (the better face mask), contact tracing, and more.

We rely more than ever on our mobile devices, computers, and internet providers to comply with work-from-home directives. We have experienced product shortages, businesses have closed or filed bankruptcy, and unemployment has disrupted family finances. Worst of all, as of the first week of October 2020, the deaths of more than one million people worldwide have been attributed to the virus.

The pandemic has affected the church through fatalities, physical and mental illnesses, and losses in tithe and offerings, forcing cutbacks. When faced with difficult financial challenges, many must choose whether to feed the family or support the gospel through returning tithes and giving offerings. Many consider that a prudent course of stewardship would be to put aside that money to care for the family through these tough times. What to do?

What do you choose?

The word *stewardship* has too often acquired a negative reputation. Perhaps unintentionally, the focus of stewardship has become transactional (financially skewed) instead of transformational (spiritually balanced). Many of us are introduced to stewardship as a tithe-and-offering break in

the worship experience. Yet I would suggest that stewardship *is* worship, just as much as any other act of worship. Worship means giving our all lovingly to the One who lovingly gave His all for us. It is part of the everlasting gospel that we must preach to the world. “Worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev 14:7, NKJV).

Worshiping God should be joyous. After all, the Father is the supreme Giver. Jesus is the Greatest Gift (John 3:16, 17) and our Example. The Holy Spirit is our ultimate Guide. God’s generosity is both revolutionary and relational. Because of our relationship with Him, we will delight to partner with Him in His mission—taking the everlasting gospel to the world.

“God imparts His gifts to us that we also may give, and thus make known His character to the world. Under the Jewish economy, gifts and offerings formed an essential part of God’s worship. The Israelites were taught to devote a tithe of all their income to the service of the sanctuary. Besides this, they were to bring sin offerings, free-will gifts, and offerings of gratitude. These were the means for supporting the ministry of the gospel for that time. God expects no less from us than He expected from His people anciently. The great work for the salvation of souls must be carried forward. In the tithe, with gifts and offerings, He has made provisions for this work.”¹

Hence, stewardship is essentially first about relationship! “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,



The **NEW NORMAL** and **stewardship**

and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33, KJV). Stewardship highlights the relationship between steward (life manager) and Creator (Owner). Emphasizing relational generosity must become the new normal for those who have not viewed stewardship in this light.

Revolutionary generosity

Revolutionary generosity demands that we change our perspective. How does real generosity act, look, and feel in the context of our current reality? I suggest that the focus shift from the financial to the faithful.

When thinking of generosity, many people focus on the size of the gift or the nobility of the cause. But Jesus measures generosity by the condition of the giver’s heart. “‘For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’” (Matt. 6:21, NIV). Being a matter of the heart, stewardship goes deeper than the value of a dollar. It is a spiritual matter of emulating Him and faithfully managing the resources He has placed at our disposal. Giving it all to Jesus is worship. And worship is a lifestyle. This spirit of generosity correctly exemplifies the principles of biblical stewardship.

We may categorize life management (stewardship) into seven basic stewardship lifestyle philosophies.

1. *Time*. Spiritual: relationship-building time with God through prayer and Bible study. Practical: organizational time planning present and future schedules for oneself and family.
2. *Temple*—body. Spiritual: “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 6:19, KJV). My body is God’s property. Practical: body-health management.
 - a. *Talent*—gifts from God. Spiritual: God endows individuals with skills to do His work. Practical: God gives individuals talents to sustain gainful employment.
 - b. *Terra*. We place care of the planet (terra firma—earth) under talents. God has given humans the ability to take care of every aspect of the planet (stewards of the earth, Gen. 2:15).
3. *Treasure*. Spiritual: relationship with God through tithes and offerings. Practical: personal finance/money management/debt relief.
4. *Trust* in God. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).
5. *Theology*. Biblical foundations and study of stewardship lifestyle principles.
6. *Testimony*. Verbalizing what God did, does, and will do.

Stewardship (life management) for the believer refers to two areas: (1) the member’s personal life and (2) church life, the organization, and



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

institution. It involves relationship building, vision casting, budgeting, returning tithes and offerings, capital campaigning, fundraising, entrepreneurship, and more. Stewardship extends to all the church's ministries at all levels and is a central biblical teaching, recognized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a fundamental belief.

Charles E. Bradford, former North American Division president, observed that stewardship “embraces and connects many of the great doctrines [teachings, principles] of the church and becomes an organizing principle of understanding Scripture. The . . . [biblical teachings of] creation, humanity, redemption and restoration; the . . . [principle of the] Sabbath . . . and the church are inextricably bound up with the idea of stewardship. Stewardship is . . . the root of mission, the basis of sharing the gospel with the world.”²

So, let's start a new normal—a complete revolution of generosity among God's people that will lead them to become faithful stewards. “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2, NKJV).

What did you do with it?

Many are experiencing financial hardships through the duration of the coronavirus pandemic. Difficult decisions have to be made: (1) limit all nonessential spending; (2) attempt to save even a little each paycheck; (3) downsize where possible; (4) dialogue with the bill collectors regarding options available as a result of COVID-19; (5) utilize a local food pantry or church giveaway that may provide for you or your neighbor. If you are in a position to aid these organizations financially (for example, Adventist Community Services or ADRA), then do so.

The burning question on God's heart is not What do you have? but What are you doing with what you have? This transports us to a higher level in our love relationship with God and our fellow human beings. When stewardship becomes a matter of the heart, it helps me become a cheerful giver.

In the parable of the talents, “the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them” (Matt. 25:19, NKJV). He found that two of his three servants had faithfully invested the funds he had left with them. “Well done,” he declared. This idea of settling accounts is similar to the activity involved in the investigative judgment occurring in our day. God simply asks those who manage His goods an obvious question: What did you do with what I left with you? I told you I was

coming back. I left you to care for your family and your environment, I allowed you to manage your health and your wealth, have you taken care of these things to My glory or to yours?

This same Jesus

We stared at our empty cabinets. Funds were low and fees were high. As newlyweds at college, we rejoiced almost uncontrollably when meager funds came in. We would reserve God's portion (tithe and offering), pay the utilities, and then pray over what remained. Food was scarce, but once or twice the doorbell would ring, and boxes of food would be on the doorstep. We sang songs of joy as we filled bare cabinets, put food in the fridge, and shared with others in our student housing community.

COVID-19 has changed most things, but it hasn't changed everything. God supplied our needs then, and in God we trust today. The virus may have impacted your health or taken away your business or job, but Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider, will open other ways to survive. God did not promise to deliver the Hebrew boys from the fire, He would sure enough show up in the fire. Restoration may not come in this life, so wear the things of earth loosely. God uses circumstances to develop character—and character transcends this life to the earth made new.

This is stewardship at its best. It is tested in life's fiery furnaces. “Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams” (Mal. 3:10, *The Message*). It begins with having a love relationship with God—a relationship demonstrated not by flowery words but by faithful action.

The church is a living, breathing, and growing organism—and it is resilient. It will experience challenges, as it has in the past, and it will undergo adjustments, as it has in the past. Followers of Jesus know that they will face tough times—but not alone times. “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5, NKJV). The current pandemic will pass, but God is looking for faithfulness both during and after the storm. That's the new normal that God wants us to experience now.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 300.
- 2 Charles E. Bradford, “On Stewardship,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12 of the Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 651–674.



Following the Spirit: Disciple-Making, Church-Planting, and Movement-Building Today

By Peter Roennfeldt, Warburton, Australia: Signs Publishing, 2018.

In *Following the Spirit*, discipleship specialist Peter Roennfeldt attempts to rediscover the true meaning of church. He maintains that the church must follow the work of the Spirit in “disciple-making,” “church planting,” and “movement building.” These activities of the Spirit are demonstrated throughout the New Testament and significantly exemplified in the book of Acts. In this commentary on the book of Acts, the author followed a devotional format. He dissected Acts into smaller units and then provided pastoral comments, including historical and cultural backgrounds and practical insights based on research and personal knowledge. Toward the end of each chapter, a helpful application section is included.

The profound words of Scripture fall useless unless they are applied to the life of the individual and the church, so Roennfeldt suggests five fundamental questions in his biblical application process: What is new to us? What surprises us? What do we not understand? What will we each obey and apply to our lives this week? What might we share with another—and with whom? (2). Wrestling with these questions is strongly encouraged by the author to help some discover Jesus and others rediscover the mission of making disciples.

Apart from the personal application and transformation, the preaching of the gospel can also change society today. Transformation by the Spirit is the preparation needed by the church because “Jesus’ kingdom is spread by Spirit-empowered witnesses” (25). Once Spirit-led preparation is accomplished, gospel proclamation must follow. This proclamation of “the good news of God’s kingdom . . . is foundational for disciple-making movements” (59). These movements must then be “baptized and empowered by the Holy Spirit; devoted to prayer, [and] obedient to God’s kingdom agenda and word” (79).

Roennfeldt also strongly urges churches to become movements instead of mere institutions. Movements require member participation because “it is just not possible to develop resilience as disciples without participating in the mission of Christ—making disciples” (107). When Christ’s

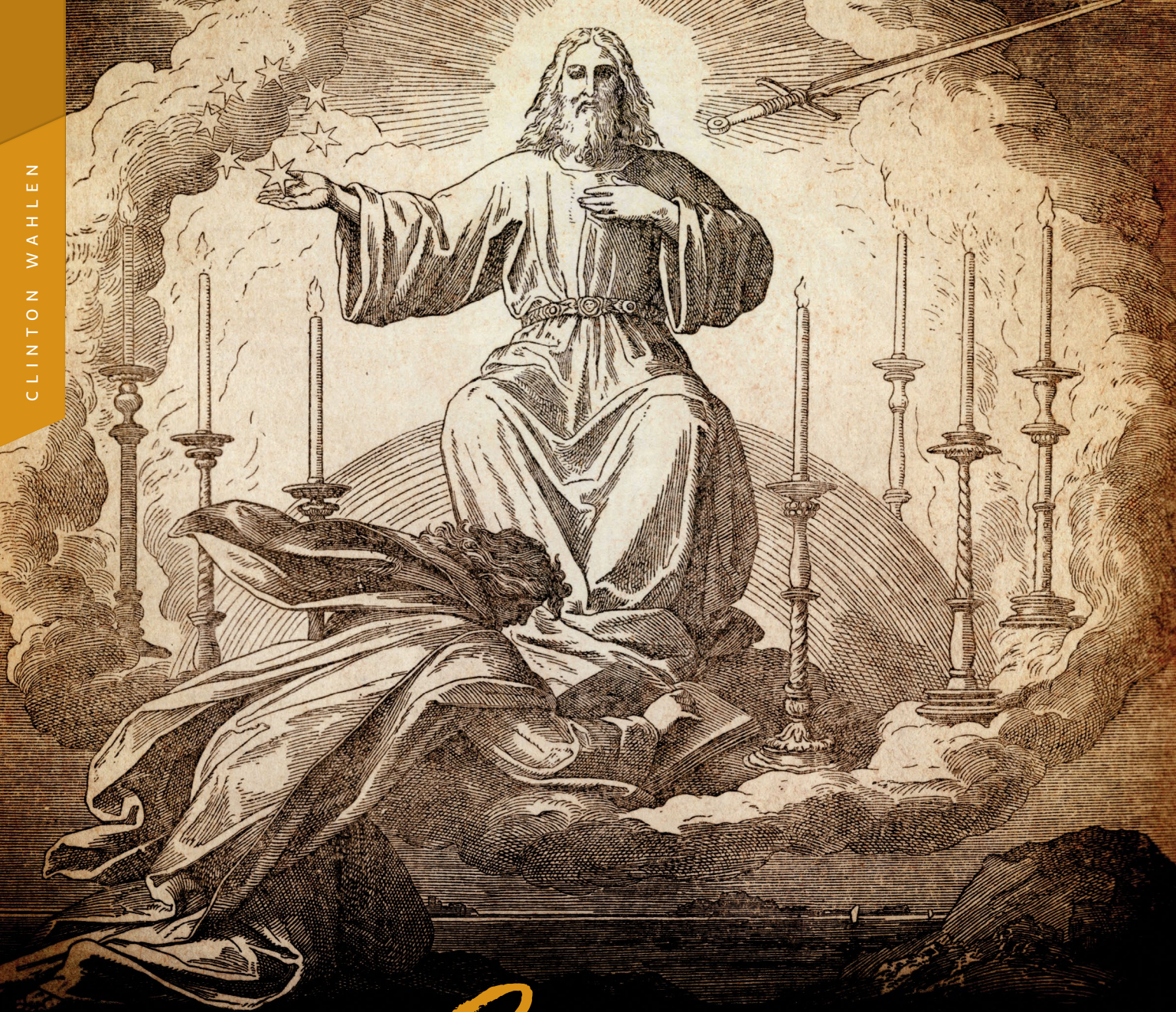
followers are involved in making disciples, multiplication (church planting) will follow. Similar to the New Testament church, multiplication must happen through “relational streams” (131–192). The author also suggests that churches implement Steve Addison’s five traits of successful movements: “white hot faith, commitment to a cause, contagious relationships, rapid mobilization, and adaptive methods” (161). These principles can make movements effective and efficient.

The New Testament church was movement-oriented, and the church today will do well to adapt the movement model illustrated in Scripture. Returning to movement philosophy, however, calls for “radical change.” A major challenge is that many churches are not thoroughly equipped to make the essential change. Consequently, the author devoted 56 pages in his appendix to explain practical methods churches today can use to become movements. These practical suggestions added strength to the book. However, these suggestions also highlight the book’s frailties. The inclusion of examples from successful contemporary movements would have made the book more relevant to the contemporary reader and the author’s arguments more convincing.

This element does not impact the book’s integrity. Roennfeldt’s main themes regarding “following the Spirit” are well-developed and soundly exposed. In this book, the academic community will appreciate the author’s thorough research, preachers will discover rich resources for sermon preparation, and Bible students will find the author’s expositions useful, especially when applied correctly. In particular, church leaders will encounter valuable leadership principles to equip themselves and the churches they lead. This is a very timely book.

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Laodicea
and
**Adventist
eschatology**

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

The letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 have traditionally been understood by Seventh-day Adventists as prophetic of seven periods of church history.¹ Recent Adventist commentators, though not totally excluding the possibility of a secondary prophetic application, have tended to interpret them like other New Testament letters, focusing on the local, first-century context of these seven cities as *primarily* in view.² This new approach has been critiqued by comparing the genre, structure, and content of these letters to the overall structure of the book of Revelation, and the prophetic application of these letters to church history received only brief discussion in previous studies.³ The present study, by examining the letter to Laodicea as a test case, is an attempt to establish whether an exegetical approach will further support a prophetic interpretation for these seven letters.

Following a brief summary of the most salient points from that article, it will be argued that literary, historical, and archaeological information combined may be useful for understanding the prophetic application of a given letter.

Overview of the seven letters

The letters to the seven churches should be seen within the larger structure of the book and, more particularly, in connection with the specific time references in Revelation 1:19 and 4:1, which indicate that these letters concern (from a first-century viewpoint) both present circumstances and the future, while that which follows Revelation 4:1 primarily concerns the future.⁴ Furthermore, the fact that these letters are from Jesus Himself; that they use apocalyptic imagery from the vision of Revelation 1:9–20 and exhibit a fixed structure, symmetry, and chiasmic arrangement; that they address universal concerns, not just matters of local interest; and that they represent the first of the four septets of the book—suggest that, like the rest of Revelation, they were meant primarily to be understood prophetically.

Comparing the seven letters with Christian history, we find that they seem to fit the condition of the church in successive periods well, beginning as they do with a “first love” experience, reminiscent of the apostolic era but waning in John’s time, and concluding with a description of materialistic abundance that fits the modern-day church. The progressive depiction of church history in these letters from the second century onward was outlined previously as follows:

“The persecution described in connection with Smyrna fits well Rome’s persecution of Christians in the early centuries which was followed by the assimilation of the pagan Roman culture into Christianity evidently reflected in the syncretistic tendencies plaguing Pergamum and Thyatira. . . . The letter to Thyatira is notable for its length, which fits well the long period of church dominance during the Middle Ages. . . . [It is also where] we first hear of ‘faith’ and ‘love’ and that Thyatira’s *last* works are said to exceed the first ones—a description that fits well the onset of the Reformation (2:19). . . . By the time of Sardis, reforms have stalled and appear near death. Finally, the appellations with which Jesus describes himself to the Philadelphian and Laodicean churches, rather than pointing backward to chapter one, point forward to judgment and the second advent.”⁵

This last sentence, especially in reference to the letter to Laodicea, will be elaborated upon in this study. As will become evident, it is not just the initial appellations of Jesus but also several other indicators in the letter that suggest an application to the time of the judgment and the Second Advent.

A closer look at Laodicea

The placement of the letter to Laodicea as the seventh of the sequence mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 suggests completeness.⁶ Being the *last* church of the seven, like the seventh item of the other septets, also suggests finality. This thought is further underscored by the appellation of Jesus as

“the Amen” (Rev. 3:14), a word used in four of the remaining seven occurrences in Revelation, as in the New Testament more generally,⁷ to conclude a statement as its last word.⁸ In the three remaining instances, it affirms the truthfulness of what has just been said.⁹ This is also how Jesus uses the word in the Gospels, except that there it refers to what He *is about to say*.¹⁰ The word is also associated with oaths in legal contexts¹¹ and probably alludes to the “God of truth [κρητήρ],” who creates new heavens and a new earth in Isaiah 65:16, 17,¹² a passage that connects the appellation with the *eschaton* as it is presented in Revelation 21 and 22.

The reference to Jesus as “the faithful and true witness” (Rev. 3:14) appears in an almost identical form as a title of Jesus in Revelation 19:11, where it depicts His second advent and coming to execute judgment.¹³ By contrast, the last appellation in Revelation 3:14, “the *beginning* [or origin, ἀρχή] of God’s creation,” seems to have no connection whatsoever with the end. One might see this appellation in light of similar divine titles in Revelation (“the Alpha and the Omega,” “the First and the Last,” “the Beginning [ἀρχή] and the End”),¹⁴ except that then we might expect this title to be listed first and “the Amen” last. As it is, the opposite order is striking: the title that refers to the beginning is at the end, and the title that refers to the end is at the beginning.

Another possibility is that this third title, despite the explicit reference to Jesus as the Origin¹⁵ of God’s creation (κτίσις, used only here in Revelation), may, in fact, also be connected with the *eschaton*. Apart from the song of the elders in Revelation 4:11, the only other use of κτίσις is in Revelation 10:6, which emphasizes the nearness of the end.¹⁶ Creation is also referred to in the final proclamation before the coming of Jesus (Rev. 14:7; cf. vv. 14–16). Seemingly, Creation becomes an issue at the end, an idea also suggested in 2 Peter 3:5. In Revelation 13 and 14, the final test connected with the mark of the beast hinges on true versus false worship. There even seems to be an attempt by the second beast to imitate creative power by giving “breath” (πνεῦμα) to the image of the beast so that it appears to be alive (Rev. 13:15; cf. Gen 2:7). It is this issue surrounding true worship of the Creator with which the messages of all three angels in Revelation 14:6–12 are ultimately concerned and which is already hinted at as an issue at the end by referring to Jesus as the ἀρχή of creation.

With its mention of the commandments, and the Sabbath commandment of Exodus 20:11 in

particular, this latter passage suggests that connected with this call to worship the Creator, there is a renewed emphasis on the Sabbath as the outward sign of loyalty to Him. The importance of obedience is especially stressed in this section of the book (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). Therefore, it is probably no accident that the *seventh* church is called by the Creator to enjoy a closer relationship with Him,¹⁷ symbolized with eschatological overtones¹⁸ by eating together (3:20),¹⁹ at the time when a general call to worship on the *seventh* day is to be given to the world. The timing of this call, which began in the mid-1800s, is remarkable in light of modern challenges to the Genesis Creation account, which began about the same time.

Another important emphasis of both the letter to Laodicea and Revelation 14 is the gospel message (Rev. 3:17–19; 14:6, 7). While the call to repentance is present in many of the letters to the churches (but not all),²⁰ references to works, whether explicitly or implicitly, are in all of them.²¹ However, the need for forgiveness or cleansing is rarely even implied, although the introduction to the book and scattered references elsewhere clearly refer to the sacrifice of Christ (Rev. 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 14:3, 4; 19:8; 22:14). The only explicit reference to the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) or the preaching of it (εὐαγγελίζω), other than Revelation 14:6 (in which both the noun and the verb occur), is in Revelation 10:7, which is also an end-time context.

The ancient city

Assuming these seven churches have symbolic significance,²² a comparison of this letter with the ancient city of Laodicea reveals some striking contrasts. While the city was famous for its *black* woolen garments,²³ the church needs *white* raiment, which, based on usage of the word ἱμάτιον earlier in this chapter, refers to the development of Christian character (Rev. 3:4, 5; cf. 19:8).²⁴ At the same time, those who are ultimately victorious have made their garments white by washing them in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14; cf. 22:14), suggesting the necessity of both justification and sanctification. Without these white garments, Laodicea’s current condition of nakedness will leave her unready for the return of Christ, who will come like a thief (Rev. 16:15).

The other two needs of Laodicea likewise stress the nearness of the end. Although the ancient city was so prosperous that it needed no assistance from Rome to rebuild following a devastating earthquake new normal in AD 60²⁵ and the church itself boasts of its wealth, Jesus says it is poor²⁶

While some of the other letters contain references to the Second Advent, the letter to Laodicea has the most urgent reference, with Jesus Himself standing at the door, knocking and waiting.

and in need of “gold tried by fire,” which represents a faith proven through trial (1 Pet. 1:7; cf. Luke 18:8)²⁷ and alludes to the testing that will occur in connection with the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:10; cf. Dan. 3:17, 18, 25).

The anointing (ἐνχρίω) with eye salve symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27; cf. Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38),²⁸ which “destroys self-deception and restores spiritual vision.”²⁹ In an end-time context, it may refer to a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, the fact that the word translated “eyesalve” (κολλ[ο]ύριον) also refers to that which could be “stamped with the physician’s seal” as well as to the “fine clay on which a seal can be impressed”³⁰ may be significant. The seal of God, given to God’s faithful, end-time remnant of “Israel” (Rev. 7:2–8), stands as the positive counterpart to the mark of the beast given to those who participate in false worship. The faithful ones are later shown singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb, a song of their Exodus-like experience of deliverance.³¹

Christ’s soon coming

There appears to be an intensification of the warnings of Christ’s soon coming in the letters to the seven churches.³² The first clear references are general ones to “hold fast” given to Thyatira (Rev. 2:25) and the warning of Jesus’ coming “like a thief” given to Sardis (Rev. 3:3). But, in the larger context of these letters, the time of His coming remains indefinite and still seems to be clearly future. Sardis is also admonished to wake up because although there are “a few” whose garments are pure,³³ the church as a whole is dying. To the church at Philadelphia, Jesus promises that His coming is “soon” (ταχύ, v. 11).³⁴ And to

the Laodiceans, Jesus is already standing at the door (v. 20), emphasizing that His return is now soon indeed (cf. James 5:9) and that the heavenly banquet is just about ready to begin (Rev. 3:20).³⁵

This invitation to sup (δειπνέω) with Christ in verse 20 points “to eschatological union with the Friend who is welcomed in, the Lord of the *parousia*.”³⁶ It also clarifies who is waiting for whom—that Jesus is waiting for each individual (shown by the use of the singular) to open the “door” to a more intimate fellowship with Him.³⁷ The cognate noun δεῖπνον appears only twice, and both of these occurrences are in Revelation 19, which describes the Second Advent. One refers to the judgment of the wicked, where the birds feed on their corpses at “the supper of the great God” (Rev. 19:17). The other instance describes “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (vv. 7–9). Here, as in Jesus’ parable of the marriage supper (Matt. 22:11, 12), the requirement of wearing the wedding garment is emphasized, pointing to an end-time judgment that assesses the readiness of God’s people who have been invited to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb.³⁸

Another image connected with eating that links holiness and judgment is Jesus’ threat to vomit out Laodicea because of its lukewarm, noncommittal attitude (Rev. 3:16). A significant intertext for this passage is found in the so-called “holiness code” of Leviticus 17–26. Israel is called to holiness so that the land to which they are journeying will not vomit them out as it did the Canaanites, who were before them (Lev. 18:28; 20:22). Obviously, in the case of Laodicea, any such negative judgment must occur before entering the heavenly Canaan, since Revelation pictures paradise as being free not only from sin

and sinners (Rev. 21:8, 27) but also from sorrow, pain, and death (v. 4). The pre-Advent timing of this judgment is confirmed in the book's final chapter when, following the ominous pronouncement that those who are evil and those who are righteous should remain thus, Jesus promises to recompense all for what they have done at His coming (Rev. 22:11, 12).

Even the final promise that those who are victorious in Laodicea will sit with Jesus on His throne points to the end times. The only other place in Revelation where redeemed individuals are described as sitting on thrones with Christ is in the millennial judgment scene of Revelation 20.³⁹ This special privilege is theirs apparently because, in the final test, they refused the mark of the beast and thus received the seal of God (Rev. 20:4).⁴⁰

Eschatological imagery

The letters to the seven churches prepare readers for understanding the later chapters of the book of Revelation so that when read together, they are mutually interpretative. The present study has identified numerous terminological and literary connections in the letter to Laodicea to the book's eschatological portions.

The appellations of Christ in Revelation 3:14 point to issues connected with the reception of the seal of God for worshiping God as the Creator in contrast with those who receive the mark of the beast. In this end-time context, the references to those who keep God's commandments are

especially pertinent. The prerequisite for this obedience is the proclamation of the gospel, which is implicit in the symbols employed in the counsel to Laodicea but explicitly announced by the angels in Revelation 10 and 14. While some of the other letters contain references to the Second Advent, the letter to Laodicea has the most urgent reference, with Jesus Himself standing at the door, knocking and waiting. In a single brilliant stroke, the invitation to sup anticipates the two alternative destinies, represented by the two suppers of Revelation 19, based on each individual's response to Jesus. The threatened judgment recalls the warning given to Israel as they prepared to enter Canaan, while the promised reward refers directly to the unique privilege of sharing in Christ's work of judgment granted only to those who are victorious in the last great contest over the beast and his image.

While occasional glimpses of the end time can be seen in some of the other letters, the message to Laodicea is unique in terms of its sustained and consistent clustering of eschatological images. In particular, no other letter is so closely tied to the crucial central chapters of Revelation 12–14 and the climactic suppers of Revelation 19. These are also the primary contexts of the book that describe the Second Advent in detail. Judging from this test case, at least, the prior study, which suggested a prophetic interpretation for these seven letters (applying to successive periods in the history of the Christian church), appears to be confirmed.



- 1 Cf. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 of the Commentary Reference Series (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), 737 and elsewhere; Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1972), 329; Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation: Evangelistic Studies for Public Presentation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1961), 7, 8.
- 2 Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part One," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14 (2003): 15–43, esp. 39n123; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), also generally uses noncommittal language in discussing the application of Revelation 2, 3 to church history (e.g., "One may observe" or "might also aptly apply," 121, 142; cf. 88), a view he essentially argues against on exegetical grounds, saying that "the context does not indicate that the seven messages were intended to be the prophetic outline of the history of the Christian church" (87). Taking an eclectic approach, interpreting the letters as prophetic, as well as historical and symbolic, is Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2002), 28, 29, and elsewhere.

- 3 Clinton Wahlen, "Heaven's View of the Church in Revelation 2–3," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9, no. 2 (2006): 145–156; cf. Clinton Wahlen, "Letters to the Seven Churches: Historical or Prophetic?" *Ministry*, November 2007, 12–15. On the broader question of using a historicist approach to the book as a whole, see Richard A. Sabuin, "Historicism: The Adventist Approach? A Response to the Challenges to Historicism," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 11, no. 2 (2008): 159–174.
- 4 Cf. Sabuin, 170. Whether or not the first *kaí* in 1:19 should be read epeexegetically (Sabuin, 170n60) does not affect the larger conclusion that the letters also have a prophetic application. Cf. Wahlen, "Heaven's View," 147–149.
- 5 Wahlen, 155; Cf. Edwin Reynolds, "Now Is the Time! The Eschatology of the New Testament," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 2 (1999): 85–93, esp. 91.
- 6 Use of the number seven to signify completeness, found also in Babylonian, Assyrian, and Ugaritic traditions, conforms to the number's significance in the Old Testament (E. Otto, "שבַּע *šeba'*;" "שַׁבְּוֹת וְיָמֵי שַׁבְּוֹת" *šabū'ôt*," in G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. Douglas W. Stott [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 14:351). The use of seven not only in connection with divinity (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)

- but also in connection with anti-God imagery (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 9, 11) seems to suggest the completeness of divine perfection on the one hand and of evil and imitation of the divine on the other (Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “ἐπτά κτλ,” in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964], 2:632).
- 7 Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; 6:18; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11; Jude 25.
 - 8 These include a doxology (Rev. 1:6), a solemn affirmation (v. 7), and a prayer (Rev. 7:12); also Rev. 5:14, concluding the doxology in the preceding verse. Cf. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John With Introduction, Notes, and Indices also the Greek Text and English Translation*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, [1920]), 1:19.
 - 9 Rev. 7:12; 19:4; 22:20 (also perhaps 5:14); cf. use of *καὶ* in Jer. 11:5; 28:6; Ps. 106:48; Neh. 8:6.
 - 10 It occurs a total of 25 times in John, where it is always doubled: “Amen, Amen” (e.g., John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24, 25); a single “Amen” is used by Jesus similarly in Matthew (31 times), Mark (13 times), and Luke (6 times).
 - 11 Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:15–26; 1 Kings 1:36; Neh. 5:13; Jer. 11:5; cf. 1QS I, 20; 2:10, 18, etc.
 - 12 E.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 298–300; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 203.
 - 13 The word *witness*, which appears in Revelation in connection with the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:5; cf. v. 2, 9), is absent but unnecessary here as the additional title “The Word of God” appears at the end of the description (Rev. 19:13).
 - 14 Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13.
 - 15 So the NRSV translates it; cf. Charles, *Revelation*, 1:94 (“origin” or “primary source”); similarly, Osborne, *Revelation*, 205. Intertextual connections with ἀρχή include John 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–18; Heb. 1:10.
 - 16 The *eschaton* is in view regardless of whether the pronouncement is translated “There should be time no longer” (KJV and KJ21) or “There will be no more delay” (NRSV).
 - 17 See Wahlen, “Heaven’s View,” 151.
 - 18 Frequently observed include allusions to the “door” in connection with judgment (Matt. 24:33; James 5:9) and the Messianic banquet (e.g., Matt. 8:11; Luke 12:35–38; Rev. 19:9).
 - 19 Shared meals feature prominently in Jesus’ ministry (Mark 2:15–17; 6:41–42; 14:22–25; Acts 1:4) and worship in the early Christian church (Acts 2:42, 46; Jude 12). See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 600–601; Tim Wiarda, “Revelation 3:20: Imagery and Literary Context,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 203–212.
 - 20 The letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia are glowingly positive with no mention of repentance.
 - 21 Most occurrences of ἔργον in Revelation (12 of 20) are found in these letters. Even “love, faith, service, and patient endurance” are classed as “works” (Rev. 2:19).
 - 22 See Wahlen, “Heaven’s View,” 154 and 154n34; Wahlen, “Seven Churches,” 13.
 - 23 W. M. Ramsey, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), 429. See Strabo, *Geography*, 12.8.16; Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, 8.3.14.
 - 24 Various words are used for clothing in Revelation. In John’s initial vision, Jesus is clothed in the priestly ποδήρης (Rev. 1:13). Those who are vindicated in the judgment and victorious are clothed in long white robes (στολαί, Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13–14; 22:14). Fine linen clothing (βύσσινος) is associated with both Babylon (Rev. 18:12, 16) and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 19:8), as well as the heavenly armies (v. 14), but only in the latter two instances is this clothing called “pure” (καθαρός). Similarly, the angels who pour out the seven last plagues are clothed in pure linen (λίνον καθαρόν, Rev. 15:6).
 - 25 See Tacitus, *The Histories and The Annals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 14.27; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 160.
 - 26 For David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 1:259, this tension suggests the need for a figurative interpretation.
 - 27 So also Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text With Introduction Notes and Indices*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Macmillan, 1907), 74; Wilfred J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 75.
 - 28 So Ekkehardt Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, Adventistica 11 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 136; Oral Edmond Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus: An Introduction, Analysis, and Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 97 (pointing to 2 Cor 2:6–16; 4:4).
 - 29 Swete, *Apocalypse*, 63, referring to the ἐλεγγός of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8–11.
 - 30 Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 972.
 - 31 The 144,000 are the only ones who receive this end-time seal (Rev. 7:4; 14:1, 3). Those Laodiceans who “buy” these gifts; that is, they accept Jesus’ counsel, are “bought,” or redeemed, from the earth at last (Rev. 14:3, 4).
 - 32 Apart from the book’s introductory reference to the Second Coming (Rev. 1:7), two early references to Jesus’ “coming” are figurative references to Christ’s judgment of His people (Rev. 2:5, 16). Like the promises to the overcomers, it is assumed that the outcomes of the judgment will be dispensed at the Parousia (Rev. 22:12).
 - 33 The term *few* (ὀλίγος) is sometimes used in the Gospels in the sense of a remnant (Clinton Wahlen, “Remnant in the Gospels,” in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez [Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009]), which, together with the use of λουτός in Rev. 2:24; 3:2, may suggest that a remnant is beginning to form, becoming more fully manifest in the churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea (cf. Rev. 12:17).
 - 34 At the same time, the letters give no more specific time indication as to how soon that “soon” might be (Rev. 2:5, 16, 22–23; 3:3, 11).
 - 35 So also Swete, *Apocalypse*, 63–64, referring to Luke 12:36 and (by way of contrast) 13:25.
 - 36 Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:34.
 - 37 That the timing of the Second Advent is to some extent contingent on the activity and/or readiness of the church is also suggested elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 24:14; 2 Pet. 3:9, 12).
 - 38 While the New Jerusalem is called the “bride” (Rev. 21:2, 9, 10), it is only thus when populated with the redeemed. City and people are an inseparable image in the Old Testament antecedent prophecies alluded to here (Isaiah 54; 62:1–4). This observation helps to explain why God’s people are only “guests” to the wedding in Matt. 22:10, 11.
 - 39 Those “beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God” (Rev. 20:4, ESV) may allude specifically to those slain by Babylon in the end time (Rev. 17:6; cf. 13:15). In a broader sense, those who are raised in the first resurrection are also said to reign with Christ in the sense that, like Him, they have been victorious over the grave and the second death has no power over them (Rev. 20:6).
 - 40 Cf. Wahlen, “Heaven’s View,” 153.

Social justice and the role of young Adventist activists

With the choking death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the shooting death of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, both at the hands of police, many pastors and youth leaders are finding that their young people, of all colors, are feeling moved to do something. But what? How should they respond?

What follows is some guidance for a younger generation that deeply respects the Word of God and wants to walk in His Spirit while seeking to beat back the forces of racism, injustice, and violence. This guidance offers three revolutionary challenges from God's Word, along with practical and spiritual ways to apply them.

1. Get warmer, not colder

Jesus warned, in Matthew 24:12, that as this world nears its end, "the love of most people will grow cold."¹ In verse 13, He encouraged the church not to follow this trend but to "endure" in love to the end. Jesus is calling Adventist youth to get warmer, not colder. The greatest litmus test of a true follower of Jesus is whether they "have love and unselfish concern for one another" (John 13:35).

In what practical ways can we get warmer? This love is supernatural and happens only when the Holy Spirit is poured out in response to prayer. Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been abundantly poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Luke 3:21, 22 tells us that while Jesus was praying, "the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove."

God is calling the young people in your church to join in small groups of two or more to pray for love to motivate their actions. Many have skipped this only to discover that their activism

accomplishes little or even makes matters worse. Why? Because it lacks the supernatural power of God. Prayer, therefore, is not just preparation for action; it is the most important part of our action.

Action step 1. Form a small action group and meet regularly in person or online to pray for supernatural love through the Holy Spirit. As you pray, as the disciples did in Acts 1 and 2, God will fill you with the attributes of Jesus, the "fruit of the Spirit," found in Galatians 5. Someone once said that we are the nail on which God hangs His portrait. It's time for God's people to stand out in stark contrast to the evil around them.

2. Get angry, not evil

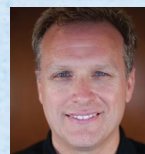
Are you angry right now? God says, "Be angry [at sin—at immorality, at injustice, at ungodly behavior], yet do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). Ellen White says, "It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin."²

Anger is an emotion that God feels, too, so it is right for us to be angry when we see or experience evil. But what are we doing with our anger? God desires that all young Adventist activists channel their anger toward positive and righteous ends. The Bible teaches us to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). In other words, we can never overcome injustice with more injustice or violence with more violence or racism with more racism. Many have tried and ultimately failed. Young Adventist activists can use only the tools that God uses—righteousness, peace, truth, and love.

Didn't Jesus endorse destroying property? Jesus did overturn the tables of the money changers



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

(Matt. 21:12), but He did not steal their money, burn down their temple, destroy their property, beat up people, or kill anyone. Unlike Jesus, have you allowed anger to lead you into sin? If so, you are not alone. Even Christ's disciples were tempted to call fire down from heaven when their Savior was the target of Samaritan racism (see Luke 9). Although patient, Jesus warned them that they were being manipulated by the wrong spirit (v. 55)—a warning no doubt for us today, as well.

Should Adventists march in protest? Protesting is a right, and peacefully speaking out against evil is our sacred responsibility (Eph. 5:11). Some say we should pray but not protest, because morality is a matter of the heart. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "It may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless."³

We should ask ourselves three questions to guide our actions: (1) What is the protest about, and are these values in line with the Bible? (2) Who are the leaders in this protest, and while they may not share my Christian beliefs, do they embrace my values? (3) What kind of spirit is motivating this protest, and is it a positive one? In John 18, a mob, motivated by Satan, came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. They were carrying torches and swords. Their bad spirit was so contagious that Peter committed violence (v. 10). Jesus rebuked him and everyone else being influenced by prevailing evil.

Protect yourself by avoiding all protests that display or start to display hateful, illegal, or un-Christian behavior, recognizing that retaliatory protests are comprised of instigators of violence. Ellen White stated, "I am so wearied and tired out with the heartless manner in which human, erring man treats his brother, who may be just as

much beloved of God as he himself is. . . . There is no excuse for this manner of dealing, and in the name of the Lord I protest against it."⁴

Aren't sympathy, empathy, and prayer enough? Young Adventist activists need to do more than just verbally protest. It is not enough for us to be sympathetic or empathetic toward those in need of our help. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16, NIV). True love, as modeled by Jesus on Calvary, includes selfless action. "Little children (believers, dear ones), let us not love [merely in theory] with word or with tongue [giving lip service to compassion], but in action and in truth [in practice and in sincerity, because practical acts of love are more than words]" (v. 18).

In the name of Jesus and under His banner, we need to help the suffering. On their way to the temple, Peter and John saw a lame man begging (Acts 3). They did not tell the man they would pray for him or that they were sorry for him; instead, Peter and John helped him up in the name of Jesus (v. 6) and brought him into the church. If you want to make a difference against evil, then do all your acts of love in Christ's name and under His banner alone.

Action step 2. In your small group, ask God to give you a plan to implement right away. As Jesus gave Joshua a plan to tear down the "impregnable" walls of Jericho (Joshua 5; 6), God will give your prayer team a strategy to successfully tear down the walls of racism, injustice, and violence. Nehemiah, one of the greatest leaders in the Old Testament, brought his concerns for his oppressed people before the Lord (Nehemiah 1; 2). God impressed him with a bold and righteous plan that would build up his city,

not tear it down. God also miraculously provided the resources Nehemiah needed to achieve God's plan. Nehemiah used his position as the king's cupbearer to make things happen.

Here are several questions your action group can discuss:

1. Which evil is most prevalent in our community—violence, racism, injustice, poverty, privilege, disease, drugs, prostitution, abuse, white-collar or blue-collar crime, or other issues? Which evil do we feel most passionately against and which are we most equipped to fight?
2. What opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus are in front of us as a group? What doors are being opened in response to our prayers? Do we need to create a ministry to meet the need or simply help a ministry that already exists?
3. What influential platforms do we have (jobs, titles, town hall meetings, or others) that can be leveraged, and whom do we know who can help us push back against evil and minister to the suffering?
4. What can we do right now? What action steps must we take, and who will be responsible for what on our team?
5. Are these plans that God would approve of? Will they lead to both temporal and eternal benefit? Do our plans harmonize with God's Word and rightly reflect His character? How will our plans give glory to God and lead people to a saving knowledge of Jesus?

3. Get louder, not softer

Now is not the time to be silent, especially as it pertains to our message. The Adventist movement has been called by God to take the three angels' messages to the world, which needs this truth now more than ever. Adventists are not better than other Christians, but we most certainly have been given a greater responsibility—"to whom much has been given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

The three angels' messages of Revelation 14 highlight the fact that God cares more about justice than we do. "Fear God [with awe and reverence], and give Him glory [and honor and praise in worship], because the hour of His judgment has come" (v. 7). In fact, the conclusion of the messages describes God's eradication of evil once and for all (vv. 17–20).

Nobody will, ultimately, get away with racism, violence, and injustice. The Lord will soon bring

justice, and so we must not be discouraged at how eerily resilient evil remains. We are still behind enemy lines, but, praise God, Jesus is coming, and we must get louder, not softer, regarding this good news.

Action step 3. Maybe you, too, are convicted of your own need to get right with the coming Judge. Perhaps in your own heart, you have discovered racism, bigotry, hatred, injustice, violence, lust, and evil in its various forms. If so, I encourage you to go by faith in private, or with your small group, to the bloodstained cross of Jesus. Confess your sins and lay the heavy burden of your guilt, regret, fear, and condemnation on His shoulders. Jesus will forgive you and give you His spirit of grace, love, and forgiveness. Now, with this gospel in your heart, use your group's action plan to lift up Jesus as you minister to human needs. Warn those who participate in evil of the coming judgment, but with grace in your heart, point repentant sinners to the Cross, where you found grace.

Joy to the world

Every Christmas, Christians love to sing the hymn "Joy to the World." Most think it was written to celebrate the first coming of Jesus. However, the inspiration for this song came from Psalm 98, which concerns the second coming of Jesus, not the first. The composer, Isaac Watts, wanted God's people to be encouraged by the joyful news of the soon return of Jesus!

How does the Second Coming bring joy to the world? Notice how Psalm 98 answers this question clearly and relevantly in its last few verses: "Let the sea thunder and roar, and all the things it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains sing together for joy and delight before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with fairness" (vv. 7–9).

The tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are symptoms of an evil world into which we are called to bring joy. By God's grace—and by following His methods—we can do just that.



- 1 Scripture is from the Amplified Bible, except where noted.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 310.
- 3 Martin Luther King Jr. "The Hearts and Habits of Men: MLK on Law and Morality," <https://www.letterstotheexiles.com/hearts-habits-men-mlk-law-morality>
- 4 Ellen G. White, Letter 50, March 12, 1897, par. 34.



Pastor and Bible worker launch a center of influence

NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

In country towns like Bourke in northwest New South Wales, unemployment sits at around 25 percent. Lower incomes, droughts, and a lack of resources mean it's difficult for many people to make ends meet. Twelve months ago, Pastor **Shaun Hepworth** from the Bourke and Coonamble churches teamed up with Bible worker **Albert Peter** and both of their wives to make a difference. They opened Treasure Trove.

"We've spent the past twelve months renovating the shop and café," explained Pastor Hepworth. "There's a little café and ministry area out the back where we held five Bible studies—mostly with contacts that Albert has made—in just the opening week."

Open every weekday, the shop is filled with a wide range of second-hand items: refrigerators, freezers, electrical appliances, beds, bedroom furniture, TV units, linens, and pictures. And it is becoming a very popular place to shop.

"We want to be a center of influence and a useful presence in town. We want to provide a service that isn't being done by anyone else. . . . The Adventist church is on the outskirts of town and hasn't really been working. We decided we needed a 'front door' for the community, so we assessed the need, and I made an application to the conference. They accepted it and bought two shops in the main street," Pastor Hepworth said.

"The motivation at the end of the day is to share Christ and the hope that we have. There are not many people out here, and little Adventist presence. God wants to have an Adventist presence in these places. He does the hard work, and we've just stepped out," he said. [Maryellen Fairfax, *Adventist Record*].



Former shaman among the baptized

MADISON, WISCONSIN, UNITED STATES

On Sabbath, September 12, 2020, about 50 people gathered to celebrate the baptism of eight new members into the Milwaukee/Madison Hmong Seventh-day Adventist congregation. Among the group baptized by lay

pastor **Chanchai Kiatyanyong** and Wisconsin Conference president **Mike Edge** was a former shaman named **Pa Chia**.

Pa Chia, who grew up with the name Kau Fa, was born and raised in a small village in Laos. Her family was animist, and her father was a shaman. In 1993, Chia and her family immigrated to California as Hmong refugees, and she became a US citizen.

In 2010, Pa Chia's father died. Her experience with the animist world was that his spirits came



into her and told her she would now be a shaman as her father had been. She was not happy about this. The spirits were very controlling, requiring her to do many things she did not want to do. Curses and fears are part of animist belief, and whenever people are sick or are seeking relief from a curse, they come to a shaman to sacrifice to the spirits for them.

Chia became ill. Since shamans cannot offer sacrifices for themselves, she needed to find help. She saw a medical doctor and, although he recognized her symptoms were real, he found nothing wrong with her. His advice was, "You need to see a pastor."

Walking down the sidewalk near her home, she met a neighbor and, during their visit, told her what the doctor had suggested. "I know my pastor would be very happy to visit you," her neighbor said. The neighbor, **Maitha Thao**, was a Seventh-day Adventist, and she arranged for lay Pastor Chanchai to visit and pray for her.

Chanchai had a firsthand understanding of the animist religion because his father was also a shaman. He came to Chia's home and prayed with her, and her illness immediately disappeared. She was impressed with the superior power of this Christian God over the spirits she knew

about. She asked Chanchai to help her learn to be a Christian and study the Adventist faith.

In the fall of 2019, she began attending the Hmong Adventist group in Milwaukee and expressed a desire to leave spirit worship behind. On December 29, 2019, a group of about 10 people from the Milwaukee Adventist Hmong group came to her house with Chanchai and Edge to cleanse her home of the spirits and dedicate her home to Jesus.

While part of the group kept up a steady chorus of hymn singing, the rest of the group burned the shrine, cut up bamboo poles and boards, and hauled out carpet and anything connected to spirit worship. Then they went to the basement to pray as well.

Since Chia cannot read, Chanchai and his wife began to meet in her home every evening to study the Bible and Adventist beliefs through the spoken Word and used the picture roll to help her understand the Scriptures.

"Since coming to the Adventist Church, I have found so much happiness," she explained. "I'm so happy, I don't have words to express [it]. I am so grateful that even though I am very old, Jesus still wants to help me." [Juanita Edge, *Lake Union Herald*]



Photo: Lake Union Herald

Judge's baptism highlights Adventist Lawyers' online evangelism

DAVAO COITY, PHILIPPINES

Adventist Lawyers of the Philippines concluded an online evangelism campaign with the baptism of judge **Ofelia Puerto Cabahug** and her two children.


Entitled *Law and Prophecy*, the two-week evangelism series was born out of the desire of a group of Seventh-day Adventists in the law field to take an active role in the church's mission to make disciples and prepare them for Jesus' coming, said coordinators behind the initiative.

During the *Law and Prophecy* series, Cabahug was invited by her sister-in-law, attorney **Gizelle Cabahug-Fugoso**, current president of Adventist Lawyers of the Philippines, to watch the nightly meetings through Hope Channel.

"I found the presentation and analogies in the *Law and Prophecy* series logical, direct, and to the point," Ofelia Cabahug said. "My questions on the doctrines in the Bible were further clarified."

Cabahug is married to **Gibb Andrew Cabahug**, a Seventh-day Adventist who opened God's Word to her. As a family, they said, they have also learned about Bible truth from Amazing Facts broadcasts.

Adventist Lawyers of the Philippines has a long history of supporting the Adventist Church's mission.

"We seek to be involved in church ministries, particularly in the Enditnow campaign against violence, and in stewardship, legal and public affairs, and religious liberty initiatives," they said. [*Southern Asia-Pacific Division News*] 

At left, Judge Ofelia Puerto Cabahug




Photo: Cabahug family



LETTERS

Thanks so much for the article from Anne Fergusson, "Understanding Childhood Spiritual Abuse," in the August 2020 edition of *Ministry*. More understanding on this topic is needed. Most of us realize that the extreme cases of abuse are wrong, but more attention needs

to be drawn to the fact that unintentional abuse is also a problem. Not understanding that children are not small adults causes an enormous amount of harm. Small children cannot understand the abstract concept that we are all sinners deserving of death, but Jesus was crucified

for us, so we don't have to die. It is scary to kids and doesn't help them love Jesus more. I appreciate Fergusson's article and am looking forward to seeing more from her. 

—Ron Hessel, pastor, Summit Northwest Ministries, Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



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The need for mindful worship

Thinking should be an integral part of planning and leading a worship service. Jesus tells us, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ ” (Matt. 22:37, NIV). Ellen White commented, “God requires the training of the mental faculties. . . . He is displeased with those who are too careless or too indolent to become efficient, well-informed workers.”¹

When we gather in corporate worship, we should do so with our minds engaged. Those who lead out should think carefully about each part of the service. Through the years, I have observed words and practices that might benefit from some extra care.

Care with words

Dignity. More and more, “You guys” has become an accepted, second-person plural form of address. Aside from the fact that we are not all “guys,” the phrase lacks the dignity appropriate to the pulpit. We can be serious without being stuffy.

Clarity. One morning at my church, one of the pastors said, regarding a vote on church officers, “All in favor, indicate by saying ‘Amen.’ Those opposed, by the same sign.” Do we really want members to say “Amen” when they are against something?

Consistency. A Week of Prayer speaker at our university church began his sermon, titled simply “Jesus,” by saying, “Let us first communicate with the subject of our sermon: Our heavenly Father. . . .” I thought the subject was Jesus.

Addressee. One seminary student prayed publicly, “Our heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus, . . . In Your name we pray. Amen.” To whom are we praying, and in whose name? We could be praying to the Father, in Jesus’ name, or simply to Jesus.

Accuracy. Someone offered the following invocation to begin a service: “And give us strength, not only for now but for all eternity, until we see You coming in the clouds of glory.” Will eternity bring great hardships that will require extra stamina?

Mastery. If you are unsure of the pronunciation of a name when announcing a person’s death, illness, or other need for prayer, make an inquiry

ahead of time. A cavalier attitude toward the names of people may leave an impression of not caring—especially regarding persons with whom the pastor should be acquainted.

Care with practices

Specificity. There is a practice of asking anyone who has a special prayer concern or a special thanks to come forward for the pastoral prayer. One cannot live a whole week as a Christian without thinking of some special burden or something to be thankful for. How “special” does it need to be to bring us up front? And how would a church like mine, with nearly 3,500 members, accommodate the crowd if everyone did press forward?

Entreaty. Another routine sounds like this: “Good morning. Oh, come on, you can do better than that; good morning! Ah, that’s better.” In a public setting, many people accept a formal welcome without responding individually. When you go to a concert or a lecture, and the sponsoring organization’s representative approaches the microphone and says, “Good evening. We’re glad you could join us tonight,” a response is neither expected nor required. “Let’s hear an amen” often feels manipulative to me, but I realize it is enjoyed by many!

God’s representative

I used to work in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Sometimes mistakes I saw on exams or heard in chapel presentations concerned me as I reflected that souls may be won or lost based on the use or misuse of language. Yet the Holy Spirit does sometimes close the ears of hearers who might be affected.

Thinking ahead would go a long way toward giving our services both theological accuracy and appropriate dignity. That includes properly preparing others who are to take part. It is an awesome responsibility to speak to God on behalf of a whole congregation—or to speak to that congregation on His behalf.



1 Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 333.

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