

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

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## Focus, Pastor!

Looking out of my home office window, I often see red-tailed hawks swooping down from the huge 300-hundred-foot-tall electrical towers to the field below. I watch them catch rodents or snakes for a meal. They look down intensely while perching or flying. They peer down eagerly for movement of any kind. They swoop down purposefully for a successful mission.

Such an operation requires keen eyesight and unblurred vision. If the hawk cannot hunt, it won't eat. If the hawk loses its focus, it will die. A raptor's focus is a matter of life and death—and so is ours. If any profession requires unflinching focus, it is pastoral ministry. Richard Krejcir, from the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, states, "We [pastors] are perhaps the single most stressful and frustrating working profession, more than medical doctors, lawyers, or politicians."<sup>1</sup>

Focus is the ability to view goals or purposes with a single eye. Ministry is full of disruptions, distractions, and detours that cause us to lose our

focus. Amid so many choices and voices, the loss of leadership focus can be perilous for pastors and members. It can be detrimental to spiritual momentum for congregations to wander aimlessly on a journey without a focused goal or a focused leader.

Elijah teaches us that pastors can lose their focus. When fatigue, isolation, and fear are compounded by the pandemic, ministry can lose its focus. Our struggles are the same. It was Jezebel yesterday; it is Babylon today. Jezebel was powerful in her day, but she would fall; so would Babylon. "Babylon the Great has fallen! . . . Come out of her, My people" (Rev. 18:2, 4, HCSB). Theologians affirm, "It seems fairly obvious that the text invites the readers to consider 'Jezebel' in connection with 'Babylon' in the Apocalypse."<sup>2</sup>

While Babylon embodies false teachings and worldly practices that can cause us to avert our gaze and abandon our mission, God's shepherds are called to remain focused on delivering God's eternal gospel.<sup>3</sup> Here are some suggestions for staying focused:

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## 1. Pray for God's intervention

*"And he [Elijah] prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough'" (1 Kings 19:4, NKJV).* Be honest with God. Prayer is the key component for staying focused. Much prayer can awaken our God-given sense of urgency for His biddings and keep us in tune with God's will and purpose. No loss of focus can last against the continual onslaught of prayer.

## 2. Develop a clear plan of action

*"Suddenly, a voice came to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kings 19:13, NKJV).* A pastor's focus can be blurred without the investment of preparation and planning for the task at hand. The great yield of accomplishment is only realized when the deposit of time and effort are spent in the planning stage.

## 3. Remove the clutter and distractions

*"I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Hosts'" (1 Kings 19:14, NKJV).* Focus is lost when

the busyness of life drowns out the passion for servant leadership. To remain focused in this unfocused world, pastors should learn the value of setting boundaries and removing the clutter that causes distractions. It may mean getting up earlier or turning off the phone, but whatever it takes, protect your focus.

Be encouraged—you can stay focused in a blurry, unfocused world. When it comes to the tasks of ministry, our vision can be renewed. Unlike the hawk, a pastor's focus, if lost, can be restored.



- 1 Richard J. Krejcir, "What Is Going on With the Pastors in America?" Schaeffer Institute, 2007, <http://intothyword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=36562&columnid=3958>.
- 2 Peter Leithart, "Jezebel and Babylon," *Theopolis*, November 11, 2016, [https://theopolisinstitute.com/leithart\\_post/jezebel-and-babylon/](https://theopolisinstitute.com/leithart_post/jezebel-and-babylon/).
- 3 See Glenn Townend, "Three Angels' Messages," *Adventist Record*, February 13, 2020.



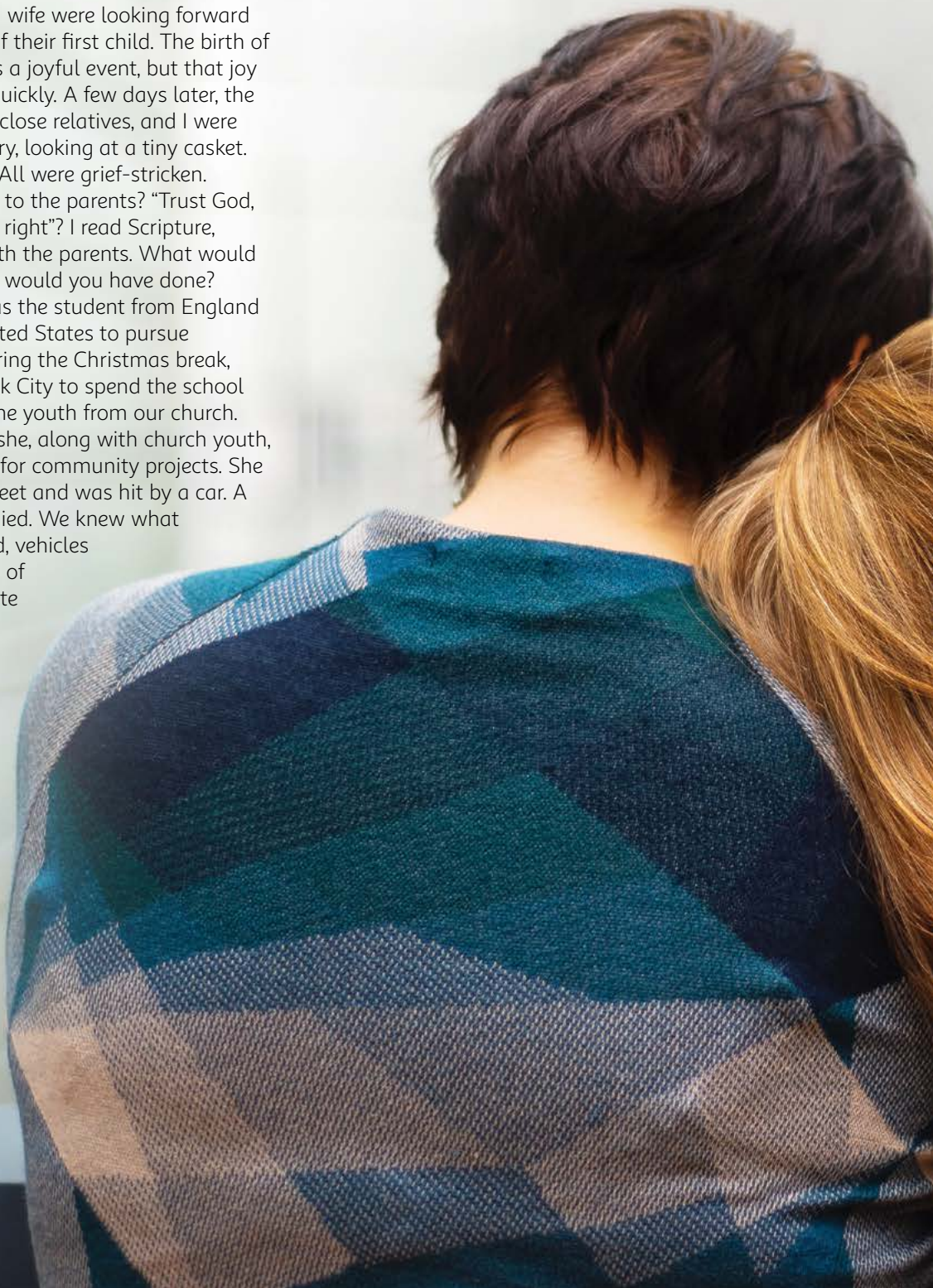
# Ministering to the **HURTING FLOCK**

**A** husband and wife were looking forward to the birth of their first child. The birth of the baby was a joyful event, but that joy evaporated quickly. A few days later, the father, mother, a few close relatives, and I were standing in a cemetery, looking at a tiny casket. Their baby had died. All were grief-stricken.

What was I to say to the parents? “Trust God, everything will be all right”? I read Scripture, prayed, and stood with the parents. What would you have said? What would you have done?

And then there was the student from England who came to the United States to pursue graduate studies. During the Christmas break, she came to New York City to spend the school break with some of the youth from our church. One Saturday night, she, along with church youth, was collecting funds for community projects. She started crossing a street and was hit by a car. A few hours later, she died. We knew what happened. In England, vehicles travel on the left side of the road—the opposite of the United States’ system. Tragically, she looked in the wrong direction—an easy-to-make mistake but, in her case, deadly.

Several days later, we had her funeral. This was my first year of ministry and may have been the first funeral I participated in as a pastor. While I was reading a





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SCAN FOR AUDIO

biblical passage, the grief-stricken mother, with tears flowing, came forward and knelt by the casket. I stopped reading and stood next to the mother.

What was I to say to the mother? “Trust God, everything will be all right”? I did not say anything—I stood by her. What would you have done? Would you have said something?

Since that day, whenever I am in London, I stop before I cross the street. I make certain I look in the correct direction. I think of that student; I think of her mother, and I still do not have anything to say. I accept the reality of her death

and anticipate the resurrection, but I do not understand why it happened.

Yet, a pastor cannot escape the biblical passage that proclaims, “My God, in You I trust” (Ps. 25:2, NASB). What does it mean to trust in God? How do we trust God when pain overwhelms us? How do we encourage others to trust God when we, ourselves, are struggling to do so?

### **Realize your limitations**

Words are an essential tool for ministers, and we often feel compelled to say something—anything may seem better than silence. How do we minister to those who are experiencing deep pain? What do we say to them? How do we help them to trust God when God seems to be far away? At times, we may feel the urge to speak, even when we should not. We need to avoid saying words that will not help and may even hurt.

*Avoid worthless words.* The book of Job opens with a list of unbelievable disasters. Job is devastated. He opened “his mouth and

cursed the day of his birth" (Job 3:1).<sup>1</sup> He ends his lament with, "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (v. 26).

His friends felt the need to say something—anything, they thought, would be better than silence! Eliphaz speaks first and, among other things, tells Job, "Consider now: Who being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?" (Job 4:7).

Eliphaz felt compelled to speak—he did his part, but what did he accomplish? Did those words bring comfort to Job? Paul T. Gibbs writes, "Eliphaz attempts to build a castle of consolation for Job."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, this is a sandcastle that collapses immediately. Or, as Edwin and Margaret Thiele state, "Eliphaz, the prototype of the hospital visitor who means well but says the wrong words, has been waiting impatiently for the chance to tell Job why all this happened."<sup>3</sup> Eliphaz probably felt better because he did *something*—saying something, he may have reasoned, was better than silence. For Job, however, the words from Eliphaz only brought more pain.

The New Testament also illustrates the influence of words. The transfiguration, as described by the Gospel writers, was an extraordinary event for the three disciples who were with Jesus. Two of the disciples were speechless, but as Tom Wright translates, "Peter just had to say something" (Matt. 17:4, NTE). Or, as Luke writes, "He [Peter] did not know what he was saying" (Luke 9:33). When we are with someone who is going through a painful experience, our well-intentioned words do not always help. When we do not know what to say, it is best to keep silent. If we have to say something, perhaps saying "I am very sorry" is what is needed.

*Do not tell them you know what they are experiencing.* Pastors want to identify with the person who is suffering or going through a painful experience. It is tempting to tell the individual that we have gone through similar painful experiences, but we need to realize that each experience is unique. The individual may have told us only a part of the story because other details are too painful or they do not know us well enough to tell us everything.

*Do not try to explain.* We are tempted to try to explain why something happened or why someone has major health issues or other personal disasters. What do you tell the parents of a child born with serious medical conditions? Or say to parents whose child died right after birth? Will you tell them that it is because of evil or sin in the world? While that is true, it does not answer

the deep questions, nor does it make the pain go away. Whatever answer we give, other questions are waiting to be asked. Our explanations often bring more questions.

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, our fellow Sufferer, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 24:26). That is how Jesus felt at that moment, and that is why He used the words from David in Psalm 22:1. We are tempted to tell the one crying out, "It will be all right"—and, eventually, it will be. But at that moment of despair, feeling forsaken is stronger than experiencing trust. That is how Jesus felt. That is how others may feel in their despair.

## Listen and share

While it is important to not do or say certain things, we must minister to people. Situations and persons are different, and each pastor is different—nevertheless, we need to minister to individuals experiencing pain. Here are some suggestions:

*Develop a relationship of trust.* There was a man who was a radio personality, and his face was on advertising billboards around New York City. Several years previously, he successfully completed the stop-smoking program at our church. He often came back to encourage new groups in the program. He and I regularly spoke about issues. He imagined God to be an impersonal "perfect mathematical equation." I understood God to be Someone who, among other characteristics, cared for us. One evening, this man told me that his wife was facing major surgery and that his image of an impersonal God was not sufficient for the crisis. By now, our relationship had developed so that I felt comfortable suggesting that we pray—and we did. After the prayer, he said that he wanted to ask me to pray but just did not know how to say it. It was only because of the relationship we had developed that I was able to suggest prayer.

Our ministry is more effective when we take the time to develop relationships with those to whom we minister. That is why visitation and other contacts are important. Because of those contacts, members and visitors develop trust in us. Through that relationship, we can help them trust God.

*Listen.* Listening is crucial, and that involves more than just listening to words. Be aware of their stance, facial expressions, eye movements, actions, and reactions as well.

I was asked to return to a church I had pastored some years before and conduct the funeral for the head elder. When I arrived at the funeral



home, I saw the elder's wife seated near the casket. What should I say to her? I sat next to her, and neither of us said anything. After a prolonged period, she said, "What will I do without him?" Silence can be a powerful communicator, and then she was ready to talk.

*Acknowledge the reality of the pain.* Telling a person going through a marriage crisis, "I'm very sorry you are going through this," is more effective than telling that individual, "I know what you are going through." Whether it is divorce, the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or other personal crisis, the pastor cannot experience the pain as the person experiences it. Pain is a personal experience.

*Share Scripture.* The Bible acknowledges the reality of the struggles we face and gives us hope. Individuals going through a struggle will find comfort in the Bible, and we should share with them biblical words of encouragement. What the Bible does not do, however, is answer all the questions we have. What answer does it give to a parent whose newborn baby just died? Yes, we can point to biblical passages that tell us it is because of evil in the world. But why the evil? We can point to other passages, but each answer only brings another "Why?" Understandably, we focus on "why." The Bible focuses on "how"—how God rescues us.

The Bible does not answer every question we have. It is more like a rescue or survival manual. In other words, it accepts the existence of evil and pain. It tells us to recognize that reality and that, at the same time, God provides a rescue plan. Once the universe is restored to its original state, God will answer our questions, and then, and only then, will we understand. Until then, we trust God's plan. That is the message we need to share.

*Pray with and for them.* Take the time to ask grieving people whether you can pray with them and let them know that they will be in your prayers. Hopefully, this will bring comfort to them and give the Lord an opportunity in your prayers to let you know if there is anything He wants you to do for them.

## Disturbed but not destroyed

William Miller, who early in his life did not believe in a personal God, became a student of the Bible and follower of Jesus. He preached many sermons inviting people to accept Jesus Christ. His appeal was to "fly, fly for succor [help] to the ark of God, to Jesus Christ, the Lamb that once was slain."<sup>4</sup>

Because of his preaching and the preaching of other colleagues, large numbers of people also

**WE ARE TEMPTED TO TELL THE ONE CRYING OUT, "IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT"—AND, EVENTUALLY, IT WILL BE. BUT AT THAT MOMENT OF DESPAIR, FEELING FORSAKEN IS STRONGER THAN EXPERIENCING TRUST.**

believed in the literal return of Jesus Christ. But Jesus did not come when they expected. Many people, including Miller, were devastated. Some abandoned their faith and no longer trusted God. Miller's faith, however, was not destroyed. He still trusted God and expressed that deep trust by building a chapel next to his house—a chapel still standing today—where he, his family, and some friends worshiped. On the wall behind the pulpit of that chapel are these words: "For at the time appointed, the end shall be." Miller's trust in God was tested, but it was not destroyed. He still believed in God's promise.

When we have such a relationship with God, we can minister to others and encourage them to trust God. It is then that those to whom we minister will "trust God as a child trusts a loving parent."<sup>5</sup> Trust is stronger than the calamities we experience. Trust does not provide all the answers, but it enables us to move forward and be there for those who need us.



- 1 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 2 Paul T. Gibbs, *Job and the Mysteries of Wisdom* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1967), 79.
- 3 Edwin and Margaret Thiele, *Job and the Devil* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1988), 43.
- 4 William Miller, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ: About The Year 1843; Exhibited in a Course of Lectures* (Boston, MA: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 174. Miller is usually credited with preaching the literal return of Christ, while others preached about an earthly millennium of peace starting about the same time. Foundational to Miller's preaching is an appeal to accept Jesus Christ as Savior, a theme that is often ignored.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 101.



Photo: Jared Thurmon

# A pastoral mission:

## An interview with Roy and June Jamieson

**Pavel Goia (PG):** Roy and June, for some time now we have been hearing of the incredible outreach you have made to pastors and people in the community, wherever you have been assigned. How long have you been doing this?

**Roy Jamieson (RJ):** For over fifty years. I retired as a local pastor in 2006, and worked part-time after that. Now, as a local elder in my church, I'm still involved in ministry. I preach and still belong to the local ministerial association.

**Anthony Kent (AK):** I see the number 9,993 in my notes here. What does it mean?

**June Jamieson (JJ):** That's the number of door-to-door visits Roy made in Fort McMurray, Canada.

**AK:** That's a city of 50,000 people. And during a four-year period, Roy, you visited every

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**Anthony Kent,**  
PhD, is editor  
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home there—9,993 homes. Often you made contact with them at a social or community event, visited their home, subscribed them to *Signs of the Times*, and returned to pray for their family. That takes some courage!

**RJ:** Well, when I was young, I was shy and used to stammer. I thank the Lord that He helped me overcome and I feel that if He's done this for me, I should keep speaking for Him as long as I can. I don't feel pressured in preaching, making hospital calls, or associating with ministers of other denominations. I just enjoy it.

**PG:** So, what's your strategy for building bridges with people?

**RJ:** Early in my ministry, it involved making some unannounced visits, but usually I was just following up *Voice of Prophecy* or *It Is Written* media interests, where people were desiring Bible studies. Other times, a church member would point someone out and say, "I've been talking to that person. They might appreciate a visit." I would follow it up.

**PG:** So that was when you began. How did it mushroom?

**RJ:** When I got to Fort McMurray church [in Alberta, Canada], I found myself in a district with three small churches. Looking through storage in one of the church basements, I found a stack of three or four hundred books.

**PG:** What kind of books?

**RJ:** Books that were explaining our doctrinal beliefs, probably excerpted from *Bible Readings for the Home*. I thought, *If I give these out, I'll clear the basement, and they may do some good!* I distributed them and thought, *Hey, with some more material, maybe I could cover the whole city!* I distributed a few more inexpensive books and

then started handing out *Signs of the Times* with a card with my name and contact information. If someone seemed interested, I would visit them again in six months. It took four years, but I covered my whole territory.

**PG:** How many households did you reach?

**RJ:** Well, nine thousand. Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-three to be exact. That was in Fort McMurray. Lac La Biche would be about three or four hundred, and there was a small community with a few little towns close by—probably another two hundred and fifty there.

**PG:** So, more than ten thousand. June, I know you helped!

**JJ:** Well, besides running the home, I worked as a legal secretary. During that time, we had to resole Roy's shoes twice because he wore right through them from his visiting! Roy, do you remember that wonderful Muslim person that we visited?

**RJ:** Oh, yes. Twenty percent of Lac La Biche was Muslim, higher than any other city or town in North America at the time. During one visit, a man said, "My dad, Willy, is interested in the Christian faith. He'd like a visit with you." So, I took Willy the book *Steps to Christ*. Later, he phoned and told me how much he appreciated the book and wanted another visit. The next time I came down for the local ministerial association meeting, a Pentecostal minister, who had been visiting him as well, announced, "We have a funeral today."

I said, "Who?"

"Willy. He was killed in a car accident." So, he and I went to the Muslim funeral. When we saw the family afterward, they told me they had always appreciated my visits.

**JJ:** We still sponsor a *Signs of the Times* subscription to his son—the one who initially told Roy to visit his father.



**PG:** Do you also distribute *Ministry* magazine?

**RJ:** In my districts, every minister receives *Ministry* magazine, unless they choose to cancel. Only two to three percent have said they're not interested in it.

**PG:** What kind of reactions have you received?

**RJ:** At one ministerial association, one of the pastors commented, "There's a good article in *Ministry*. I'd like a good discussion about it." Ministers who had recently joined the organization said, "We don't know anything about the magazine." As the first pastor continued to talk about the article, a sheet of paper was passed around and one by one ministers provided their names and addresses to subscribe.

**PG:** So, you were given the opportunity to sign up more pastors.

**RJ:** Right. And when a Baptist said, "Fellows, this is something you need to read," he had a greater impact than if I had said, "This is my church, and I think you should know what I believe."

**AK:** If a pastor moves into a district, how would you suggest that they make sure that all the pastors in that area get *Ministry*?

**JJ:** Attend community ministerial association meetings and share that this is a complimentary subscription from your friends, the Adventists.

**AK:** So, your suggestion would be to meet with them, become friends with them. Did you ever go to their churches and meet with them?

**RJ:** I have preached for some of their congregations and attended some of their special programs.

One time, a member of a Pentecostal church phoned me and said, "We're having a special program this weekend, Saturday night and Sunday." I was able to go to the Sunday service and sat in the back. The pastor stood to welcome everybody and then announced, "After the hymn, Pastor Jamieson from the Seventh-day Adventist Church will come up and have our opening prayer." I looked at him, nodded, and went up. We were close enough friends that he felt free enough to ask me spontaneously.

**JJ:** We also invite community people, such as church choirs, to perform at some of our special church events. We advertise them in the local paper, then have light refreshments where people can mingle afterward. Health programs are also popular.

**PG:** What impresses me is the quantity and quality of the relationships—friendships—that you have created with pastors, communities, and families because without such relationships, trust, and friendship, you can never reach people.

**RJ:** I've had the opportunity to study with a few of these ministers. One asked me, "Roy, I need to know what to believe about death, resurrection, and hell." We both were very open since we knew each other very well and trusted each other. We had sadly lost a son in a car accident, and he had lost an older sister when he was a teenager. We both knew the reality of death. We went through the study together. After it was over, he said, "You know, I can't say I agree with you, but you've given me a lot to think about." We knelt together for prayer in his office before I left.

**AK:** People accept the Bible truths easier when you build a relationship with them, listen to them, and pray for them.

**RJ:** Yes. Before I moved to Fort McMurray, a woman began taking Bible studies with one of my church members. She had also been studying with another minister of the Evangelical faith who had really led her to accepting Christ as her Savior. As she studied, she thought that maybe she should follow the Adventists. As a result, on his final visit, the Evangelical minister left material on why a person should not be an Adventist.

When I visited next, I glanced through the material and said, "We won't worry about that. We'll just go on with the study." A couple of studies later, she made her commitment for baptism.

At our next local ministerial association meeting, I invited the other ministers to come to the church to witness the baptism. The Evangelical minister who had been studying with her said, "I don't think I'll come. I'm busy."

I replied, "Oh, you ought to come over."

"Did you see the material I left?" he asked.

"I glanced through it. I've read it before."

"What did you think of it?"

"I told her what I thought of you." He immediately tensed right up.

“What did you tell her?” he asked.

“I said, you’re a colleague of mine, and I never knock a colleague, even though they look at things differently. He’s still my friend and colleague.”

He looked at me and said, “Thank you for saying that.”

He was one of the first ones at the church—for Sabbath School, not just the worship service. “You know, I’ve never been inside your church,” he explained. “Since I got an invitation, I might as well come for the whole service, hear what your program is, see what the baptism is like.”

**AK:** Praise the Lord. So, basically, you show an interest in families, pray for them, and build a friendship. You are willing to take the initiative, to step out and meet people. At times we may hold back, looking for a reason or excuse before we do something. You don’t need one.

**PG:** And you enjoy it; you care for people. How did the *Ministry* magazine project expand to the point where it enveloped the whole conference?

**RJ:** I was in the ministry in 1977 when they began the project of sending *Ministry* every second month to members and clergy of other faiths [PREACH]. I submitted the names of pastors in my district, but not as many names came in as we had expected. Not every pastor belongs to ministerial associations, nor does every Adventist minister look at it as a way to reach across the aisle to pastors, I guess. But this is something I just feel that we need to promote.

The first few months after the ministers started receiving *Ministry*, letters came in from ministers of other faiths, thanking us for what we were doing.

**JJ:** Another way that we get names is when we go on vacation. We drive into little towns, see churches with their signs, and write down their

Photo: Jared Thurmon



names, the town, and the pastor's names if they are mentioned. When we go home, we check the computer for their mailing address.

**RJ:** And another providential thing—June worked for a real estate office, selling farmland, and they would get the local newspapers from all over the province. Local newspapers always have lists of local churches and the pastors' names. When she brought them home, I'd clip them. We got a lot of names that way.

**PG:** This is a big project; did anyone in the conference help you?

**RJ:** I have found that no single individual can promote it on their own. You need somebody to back you up. So, I talked to a colleague minister who was also acquainted with their area clergy and said, "You know, I think we should do a little promoting in our Saskatoon area and get a speaker in."

We had different speakers come in, including Rex Edwards, who spoke on one aspect of preaching. One man lectured on grief; another lecture was on Creation from the Geoscience Research Institute. There would be a good turnout, fifty ministers, when we advertised. We would always meet in a neutral place so everyone would feel comfortable.

**PG:** Fifty ministers, what an impact! Praise the Lord.

**RJ:** Yes, and we were careful too. We didn't want to burn bridges with other denominations who might assume that we just want to make Adventists of them. That would be offensive. We respected them and became genuine friends.

**PG:** May your example encourage pastors around the world to build genuine relationships with leaders in their community, including pastors of other denominations. Thank you for sharing our magazine and thank you for showing God's love. 🙏



## RESOURCES

### *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges and Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation*

By Thom S. Rainer, Carol Stream, IL:  
Tyndale Momentum, 2020.

**C**COVID-19 has impacted practically every church around the world. In this book, *The Post-Quarantine Church*, Thom Rainer looks at what our church may look like after the pandemic. He offers six urgent challenges and opportunities that may help a church to determine the kind of future it will have.

The first challenge Rainer suggests is that the church should gather differently and better, find innovative ways to use the church facility, and be ready to think of creative ways to reach people currently not being reached (11).

The second challenge involves seizing the opportunity to reach the digital world by designing the most effective social media plan for the church right now. Beware of jeopardizing the church by being digitally busy while having no effectiveness. It is better to simplify the content being shared (25).

The third challenge is to reconnect with the neighborhood. Be a church in and for the community by having a clear purpose and mission and by being a positive influence on those in the vicinity (39).

The fourth challenge is to pray. Take prayer to a powerful, new level by praying regularly and asking members, as well as the community, to join in this challenge. Prayer can happen in an



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empty church building, via technology, basically anywhere (55).

The fifth challenge reminds churches that after the quarantine, they can practically begin with a “new slate” and serve their communities in ways never done before. This would be a good time to partner with new organizations and groups (69).

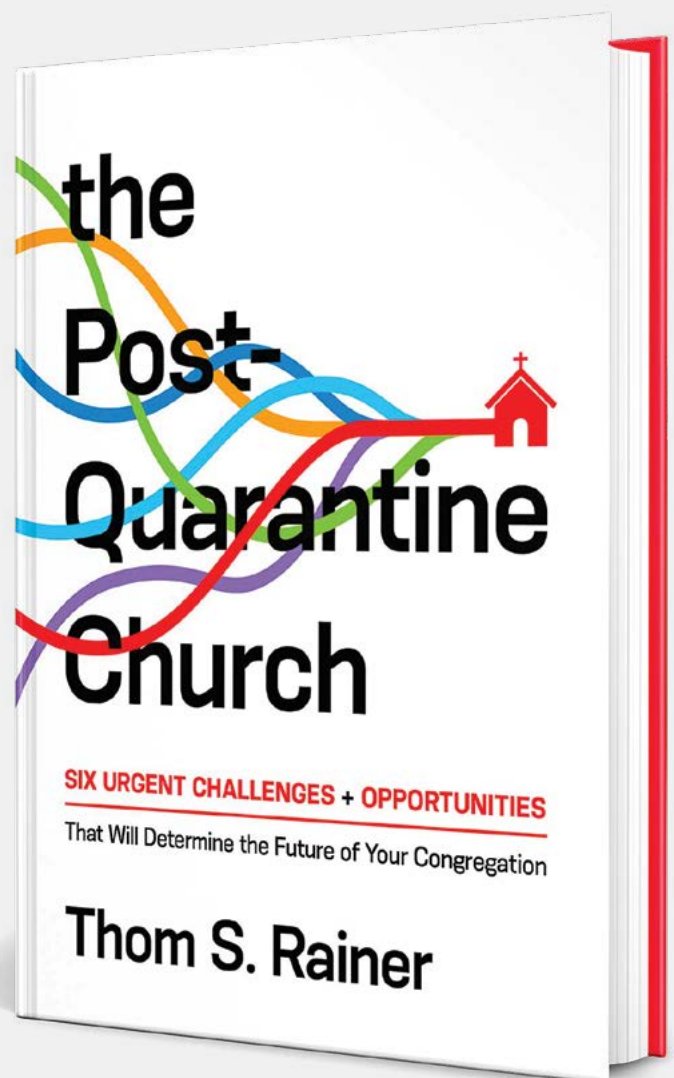
The sixth challenge involves encouraging churches to consider making lasting changes that will make a difference. Think strategically and reevaluate ministry objectives, committee budgets, job descriptions, and other aspects of the organization to position the church for success after the quarantine (85).

The final chapter in this book states that challenges faced by the church can also be opportunities. The author lists nine key changes for the post-quarantine church that also reinforce the six challenges provided earlier:

1. Simplicity will be vitally important.
2. Only outwardly focused churches will survive.
3. Worship-service gatherings will be smaller.
4. “Multi” will multiply.
5. Staff and leadership realignment will focus more on digital proficiency.
6. “Stragglers” will become a subject of outreach and focus.
7. Digital worship services will be newly proposed.
8. Ministry training will change dramatically.
9. Pastors will leave their lead positions for second-chair roles.

Rainer concludes by articulating that “the post-quarantine era may prove to be one of the most challenging seasons for churches and their leaders. The opportunity to lead change is likely greater than at any other point in our lifetimes” (110). The pandemic has changed the world and the way we are used to doing church, yet there is a great opportunity in that we are practically given a blank slate—an opportunity to rethink, re-create, and revamp church.

I recommend this easy-to-read book to those who may be unsure about whether the church is being truly effective in the mission during these uncertain times, those who need help in rethinking what church should look like after quarantine, those whose church may be struggling because of COVID-19, and those who are ready to begin to think outside of what is normal. As we enter this new “normal,” we cannot forget that Jesus promises that no matter what we go through, even if it be a pandemic, He is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19, 20). ♡



# “The man nobody knows”<sup>1</sup>

NORMAN H. YOUNG







**Norman H. Young, PhD,** is a retired pastor and senior lecturer at Avondale University College, Cooranbong, Australia.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**C**hris Barker, titled an imperial wizard with the Ku Klux Klan, relied upon the ethnic specificity of Leviticus 19:18 when he violently protested, during an interview with Ilia Calderón, a Latino-African American journalist, that the text was not inclusive.

“No! Wrong!” he declared. “Leviticus 19:18 is what you say, ‘Love thy neighbor.’ See, you’re taught this, but I’m telling you Leviticus 19:18 ‘Love thy neighbor’ says ‘Love thy neighbor of *thy* people.’ My people are white; your people are black.”<sup>2</sup>

Is Barker correct? Let us read the verse in context:

“You shall not go around as a slanderer among *your people*, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

“You shall not hate in your heart anyone of *your kin*; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of *your people*, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:16–18; emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>

The presence of the qualifiers “your people,” “your kin,” and again “your people” demonstrates that the term “neighbor” is used here with a specific reference to fellow Israelites. Even verses 33, 34, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself,” is limited to foreigners within the land of Israel.

What is the truth here? During this time of heightened racial tensions, this topic is especially crucial. Are we to love only our kinsmen, as Barker insists, or does the Bible, even in these texts from Leviticus, teach us something much broader?

## To love your neighbor as yourself

Paul, James (the brother of Jesus), and Jesus Himself all quote Leviticus 19:18, but it is in the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke where Jesus uses Leviticus 19:18 with the most telling force.<sup>4</sup> This text sits at the center of Jesus’ dialogue with an expert interpreter of the Mosaic Law (Luke 10:25–37). Barker, a self-proclaimed Christian, makes a creative shift from “your Israelite kin” to “my fellow white supremacists,” but this fallacious racist view is powerfully exposed in the course of Jesus’ verbal duel with the expert in the Mosaic Law.

The dialogue between Jesus and the expert interpreter began innocently enough with his query about the requirements for gaining eternal life. The expert, when given the opportunity to answer his own question, appealed to Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’” Jesus approved of the expert’s reply: “‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live [forever]’” (Luke 10:27, 28).

The second part (v. 27) of the expert’s reply is quite elliptical: “and your neighbor as yourself.” Clearly, a verb is implied and, in context, that is the future indicative of “to love,” as in verse 27b, which many take to mean “you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.”<sup>5</sup> However, “self-love” seems out of character with Jesus’ teachings. I suggest it be taken to mean “you shall love your neighbor as if loving your own person.” Ephesians 5:28 provides an excellent parallel: “husbands ought to love their own wives as if loving their own bodies (persons)” (author’s translation). In other words, treat the other as if you were in his or her place.<sup>6</sup> “Love” is not an



emotion here but a principle; it is doing good, acting graciously to the other, as if to yourself (Luke 6:31).

### Who is my neighbor?

The exchange between the Law expert and Jesus would have taken place in public. Therefore, to save face for asking a question the answer to which he knew, the expert was obliged to ask a further question, indeed, his real concern: “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). One would have thought that the text was clear enough—fellow Israelites and all other people, regardless of nation or ethnic group, or resident alien status (Leviticus 19:18, 33). The Law expert would likely have excluded such Jews as prostitutes (for servicing the occupying mercenary Roman troops) and tax collectors (for gathering the detested Roman taxes), and even non-tithe-paying Jewish peasants and others.<sup>7</sup> So his question really amounts to asking, “Which Jews and resident aliens should I treat as my neighbor?”

As previously (Luke 10:26), Jesus elects to respond to the expert’s question (v. 29) with His own query (v. 36). However, before asking it, He prepares the ground with the story of the merciful Samaritan (vv. 30–35). While traveling between Jerusalem and Jericho, a certain man was assaulted by thieves who left him naked and half dead. A priest and then a Levite happened to come by; they saw (vv. 31, 32) him, but each in turn passed by on the opposite side of the road.

A certain Samaritan also came upon the wounded man, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion (v. 33). He tended the assaulted man’s wounds, transported him to an inn, where he cared for him further (v. 34), and the next day, he left a good fee with the host to cover expenses. Furthermore, he gave the innkeeper his personal guarantee that on his return, he would cover any additional costs (v. 35). This was an extraordinary act of kindness that no one, including the Jewish Law expert, could deny.

### A shift in the debate

Jesus’ second question now disturbingly enters the discussion: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (v. 36). The parable permits only one reply, and so the Law expert had no choice but to say, “The one who showed [the one doing] him mercy,” to which Jesus replied, “Go and do likewise” (v. 37). Thus, the participle used in the expert’s original question (“after doing,” v.

25) appears now in his final answer (“the one doing,” v. 37a), forming an *inclusio*. Likewise, in Jesus’ final admonition, Luke repeats the imperative he used in the first exchange between Jesus and the Law expert (“do this,” v. 28, and v. 37b “do likewise”).

The parable of the good Samaritan is carefully integrated with Jesus’ dialogue with the Law expert, but there is a point of difference that Joachim Jeremias nicely points out: “While the scribe’s question (v. 29) concerned the object of the love (Whom must I treat as a friend?), Jesus, in v. 36, asks about the subject of the love (Who acted as a friend?).”<sup>8</sup> The term *neighbor* has a strong reciprocal aspect within the culture of the time.<sup>9</sup> So the Law expert’s query could mean either “Whom am I to recognize as a neighbor?” or “How am I to act as a neighbor?”<sup>10</sup> The expert intended the former, but Jesus *intentionally* chose the latter, which radically alters the discussion, as we shall see.<sup>11</sup>

### “The man nobody knows”

Who was the man whom the robbers beat up? Was he rich or poor? We do not know. Was he black or brown, yellow or white? Jesus does not say. Was he a person with status and learning or deemed to be of no significance? We are not told. Was he a merchant or a farmer? Was he a Jew, a Gentile, or of mixed race? Again, we have no idea.<sup>12</sup> We know nothing about him other than that he was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when ambushed and robbed.<sup>13</sup>

The explanation regarding this paucity of information about the wounded man’s identity appears to be clear and intentional—that is, the identity of the person is irrelevant, even wrong-headed, in defining one’s neighbor. Jesus consciously applies the term *neighbor* according to what the benefactor *does* and not according to whom it is done. The Law expert kept the word *neighbor* as a noun, but Jesus read it as a verb. I am the neighbor and what I do to or for the other irrespective of their identity (color, creed, culture, or condition) confirms my status as a neighbor.

It is often asked whether Jesus abolishes any part of the Law (for example: divorce, vows);<sup>14</sup> in the present case, He does not abolish it, but He stands Leviticus 19:18 on its head. What was ethnically specific in the Law is now universally applied by making the subject’s action, and not the object’s identity, the criterion for being a neighbor. Barker’s interpretation, which limits

the term *neighbor* to his group, is exposed as abhorrent and opposed to Jesus' understanding of *neighbor*.

## Why a Samaritan?

In contrast to giving virtually no information about the man beaten half to death, Jesus informs us that the benefactor was a Samaritan. It is important to note that the hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans was ethnic, religious, and intense.<sup>15</sup> The choice of a hated Samaritan as the benevolent hero rather than the two Jewish representatives was socially adept because it would not have been expected and, thus, would have been a shock to Jesus' Jewish audience. Even more important is the fact that the schism between the Jews and the Samaritans was over whose priesthood and temple were legitimate—that of the Jews or that of the Samaritans (see John 4:20).

So, each of the three in the sequence—priest, Levite, Samaritan—is associated with a temple and its laws. Richard Bauckham states, “But a Samaritan can feature in such a parable because a Samaritan acknowledges and claims to obey the Mosaic law.”<sup>16</sup> Bauckham adds, “His compassion is not some kind of alternative to legalism; it is what the commandment to love one's neighbor requires of him.”<sup>17</sup> The priest and the Levite chose to observe the purity laws against corpse contamination, but the Samaritan saw the love commandment as of such importance that it overrode others, such as purity laws.<sup>18</sup>

Stating the benefactor's nationality, though relevant in Jesus' social context, does not mean that the identity of the subject sets the bounds of “neighbor” any more than does the identity of the object. The Law expert might have stormed off angrily muttering, “To whom? To whom? That was my question, and He hasn't answered it.” However, it is more likely that he quietly slipped away, wondering what he would do if he met a wounded Samaritan.

## Radical, not exclusive

Contrary to Barker, Leviticus 19:18, as interpreted by Jesus, is not the exclusive your-neighbor-is-your-own-kin-only meme. The good Samaritan parable is about as far removed from white supremacist ideology as possible.<sup>19</sup>

Let all of us who take the name of Jesus, no matter our culture, creed, or color, heed His radical reinterpretation of Leviticus 19:18. Indeed, let us all practice it.

- 1 Apologies to Bruce Barton, who gave this title to his little 1925 book about Jesus as a Teacher of business principles. Bernard Scott uses the term *anonymous* for the victim that was left half dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 194.
- 2 “‘I'm Not a Racist,’ the Answer a KKK Leader Gave to Ilia Calderon,” Univision, August 15, 2017, <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/united-states/im-not-a-racist-the-answer-a-kkk-leader-gave-to-ilia-calderon-video>.
- 3 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version.
- 4 Rom. 13:9, 10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8; Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27.
- 5 Sharon Ringe personalizes it as “‘Who is my neighbor’ whom I am to love as I love myself?” Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 157.
- 6 “Think of the sufferer, put yourself in his place.” Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, rev. ed. (London, UK: SCM, 1963), 205.
- 7 For further examples of excluded persons, see Jeremias, 132, 202, 203.
- 8 Jeremias, 205.
- 9 Jeremias, 205; Mark A. Proctor, “‘Who Is My Neighbor?’ Recontextualizing Luke's Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138 (2019): 211–219.
- 10 The syntactical form of the two questions is virtually identical: “Who is neighbor of me?” (Luke 10:29). “Who was neighbor of the one who fell?” (v. 36).
- 11 On the basis of the tension between Luke 10:29 and v. 36, J. D. Crossan argues that “the parable of the Good Samaritan in 10:30–36 was originally independent of its present context.” J. D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992), 61. This to my mind is unnecessary because the syntax allows (see note 10) both the expert's intended meaning and the one Jesus chose.
- 12 Some scholars think that it can be inferred that the half-dead man was a Jew. That is probably true, but Luke purposefully leaves the man's ethnicity blank—“a certain man” (*anthrōpos tis*).
- 13 According to Arland Hultgren, it is a distance of some 17 miles (27.4 kilometers) with a drop of 3,500 feet (1,067 meters). Arland Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 95.
- 14 Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 28 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 146–159, 191–196.
- 15 For details of the conflict, see Eta Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition* (London, UK: SPCK, 1966), 53, 54, and Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 345–347.
- 16 Richard Bauckham, “The Scrupulous Priest and the Good Samaritan: Jesus' Parabolic Interpretation of the Law of Moses,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 486, 487.
- 17 Bauckham, 486.
- 18 Bauckham, 489.
- 19 *Neighbor* “has no reference to race, color, or class distinction.” Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 376.

# “PLEASE PROTECT US!”

Providing safe havens for our youth





**Tina Whiteman** is an author, worship leader, and stay-at-home mother residing in Clovis, New Mexico, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**Editor's note:** *When it happens, sexual abuse in the church needs to be properly and promptly addressed. This is not an exhaustive paper giving all the necessary tools to deal with abuse; it is a personal story. Pastoral leaders are encouraged to become as informed and active as possible on this life-and-death subject.<sup>1</sup>*

I am a 33-year-old woman who grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I was raised to be in the pew on Sabbath; wield a giant push vacuum to help clean the church on Friday; and seal envelopes for mass mailings for every event, whatever the day.

I seem, now, to be creating the same atmosphere for my children. They attend every practice, service, and event with their father and me. The way that they run free-range around the empty halls as I serve in various areas around the building warms my heart.

But it also gives me pause. And I have a good reason why it does.

When I was 15, an older peer in our youth group began to “groom” me. It became a horrifying, painful cycle of emotional; physical; and, ultimately, sexual abuse. I bore all of the wounds and damage that a sexually abused child takes into adulthood.

Back then, though needing and seeking help, I was counseled by people around me who loved me—yet had no tools to heal me. They were clueless about what to do for me and what I needed!

For instance, our youth leader at the time of my abuse was 25 years old. He had no prior training, aside from what an education at a Christian college afforded. He was not a counselor. He had no formal training in sexual abuse, much less emotional abuse. None of the pastors or elders in my church knew what to look for or how to help me either.

So, instead of being shielded from harm, I was an outcast; publicly shamed; forced to stand up in front of our entire youth group and admit my own fault; and, ultimately, scarred in irreparable ways by people who truly, deeply, loved me and wanted to help. What I experienced, no one else ever should. Ever.

So, I say this to youth leaders in our church today because I know how much you love and want to help the kids that you are leading. I know that you want them to form lifelong bonds with their Lord and Savior. I know that you want to do the right thing even if you might be ill-equipped to know what the right thing is when a young person makes a claim about having been sexually abused.

From having had a firsthand, terrible experience with being sexually abused, here are some steps I found helpful to handle it:

### **First, seek wise counsel**

Find people who are older than you. I know pride or ignorance tells you that you have answers, but more often than not, you are too young and inexperienced to offer more than your opinion. Find help. Professional help. Call the counselor in your congregation or on staff, ask the elder who used to be the high-school principal. Call someone who has more experience with minors dealing with assault if you suspect or hear anything. Find professional help. Right away.

### **Second, know the signs**

So many public entities are now required to go through training courses that, frankly, did not exist when I was young. Find out what the warning signs are for your specific student demographic. Look for the kids who suddenly change what they wear or who they hang out with or how sexual they become or how loud or quiet they suddenly make themselves seem or if they come to church at all.

As far as the predators go—do not be fooled by age, gender, charisma, or popularity. Predators have no definite make-up, no sign to tell you who they are. It may be the most charming of young men or the most trustworthy of young women. It may be one of your seemingly kindest and wisest leaders.

It may be a parent eager to serve. Be aware, know what to look for, and do not just assume everything is OK, especially if you have suspicions.

### Third, do not try to handle it in-house

I know your church is a wonderful place, but report any and all abuse. Report the hint of abuse. If you are wrong, that will be slightly uncomfortable. If you are right, you will save a child a lifetime of pain.

Now, I know it's hard. Sometimes people you love will be hurt by your action of reporting. Sometimes it's families you are close to. Sometimes it's kids who are a delight. Sometimes it's people who "could never." Report it anyway. Do not sit down with them and a group of elders and try to pray them through abusing someone. It will not work—and it may also be illegal.<sup>2</sup> Report someone you suspect of predatory behavior. You are morally and legally obliged to do so.

### Fourth, do not try to solve it yourself

Victims of abuse need professional care. Send them to a professional. Tell the parents to send

them to a professional. If a kid had a broken leg, you would not fix it yourself. Sexual abuse is much more serious. So how can you think you can fix the damage? You cannot. You are wonderful and kind and want to help, but you must send them to someone who is trained in trauma care and can offer them everything they need.

I know that many youth leaders have the best of intentions. But, please, take these words to heart. Jesus wants to capture the hearts of these children, and He asks us to be wise and never prideful. As we win kids to the Lord, let us be their safe place by protecting them from harm. It is your moral, spiritual, and legal responsibility, as church leaders, to do so—and anything less can make a bad situation infinitely worse.




- 1 For resources, see <https://women.adventist.org/enditnow-initiative>.
- 2 See Child Welfare Information Gateway, "Clergy as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect." <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/clergymandated.pdf>.

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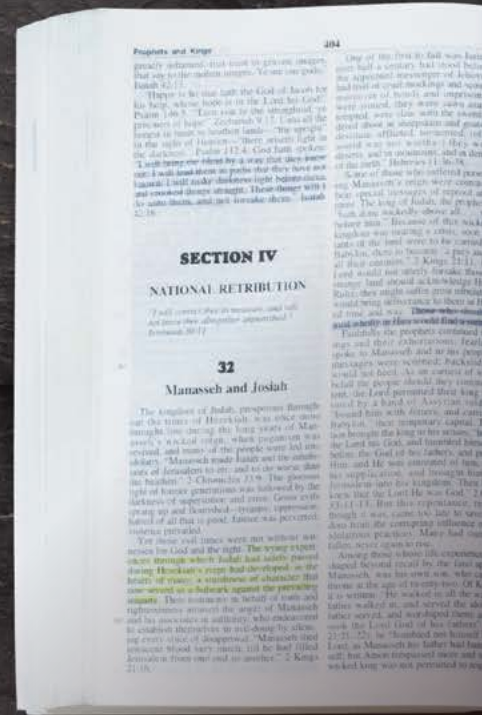
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**Gabriel Adu-Acheampong** serves as a district pastor in the South Central Ghana Conference, Kumasi, Ghana.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

# The dilemma of choosing leaders

**T**here was a dilemma among Jesus' disciples concerning ministry. "Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest" (Luke 9:46).<sup>1</sup> Jesus attempted to draw their attention away from a position of greatness and power and toward an attitude of service and humility. But there is still a dispute among the disciples of Jesus.

Some in the church prefer to be anonymous, inactive spectators, while others want to focus more on position than on the main reason for their calling. While neither approach is commendable, our focus here will be on the second.

## Spiritual or political

The attitude of wanting influential positions has long characterized some followers of Christ. Jesus consistently condemned that mindset and drew attention to service with integrity and humility. Church leader and educator John Fowler writes, "Choosing leaders from local to General Conference levels is an exciting passion for many and a boring occasion for some. Those elected attribute the working of the nominating committee to the guidance of Holy Spirit, and those disappointed would suggest that the whole process is political, pushed by influential lobbying."<sup>2</sup> This is applicable to all church institutions, including conferences, unions, divisions, and church schools; universities; and hospitals.

But is there something wrong with desiring broader responsibilities to serve the church? Was it not the

apostle Paul who affirmed, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1)?

Church leader Nevins Harlan once said, “Sometimes in the process of electing the officers for the new year the charge is made that a clique is controlling the election.”<sup>3</sup> In one place, some individuals manipulated the procedure to secure the election of a team of leaders of their choosing. Even though normal procedures appeared to have been followed, individuals campaigned behind closed doors to make sure they had their team on the nominating committee. They subsequently succeeded in appointing to key leadership positions persons of their own choosing.

While most nominations go through a spiritual and diligent process, the isolated cases create negative views that affect the church; those situations need to be addressed. It has concerned me that the church’s name is put into disrepute by the way some of us have allowed ourselves to be intentionally or unintentionally manipulated. We need to remind ourselves of Biblical criteria for selecting leaders for the gospel work.

### Criteria for selection

Israel was a “church” because it was a nation chosen by God to showcase His love to the world. Moses was in charge of all of the judgments, which was wearing on him. Advice from his father-in-law, Jethro, prevented exhaustion from being replaced with extinction. “Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, *such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness*; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exod. 18:21; emphasis added).

Men of truth who fear God and hate covetousness were recommended to lead. In every leadership position of the church, these characteristics are needed to oil the wheels of progress. Moses added to this criteria, “Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you” (Deut. 1:13). In these passages, leaders did not influence or participate in their own selection, rather they were chosen based on qualities pertaining to godliness.

In the pastoral epistle to Titus, Paul gave characteristics befitting a leader in the church of God: “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good,

sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:7–9).

In the book of Acts, Luke expands on the required standards for church office: “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3, 4; emphasis added).

Ellen White contributes this comment, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” 1 Corinthians 14:33. He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church with church, the human instrumentality co-operating with the divine, every agency subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of the grace of God.”<sup>4</sup>

### Affirming the gift

Every pastor is a leader, but a pastor cannot serve in every position. We are given different ministry gifts (1 Cor. 12:7–12). Julius Soyinka said, “God equips those He calls. God will use the way He designed people and their spiritual gifting to steer them into what type of leader they should be.”<sup>5</sup> Nominating committee recommendations should therefore be in accordance with a person’s spiritual giftedness.

In many cases within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a pastor would apply to a conference in order to be employed. Such an application process is considered to be a response to the call of ministry, showing a readiness for ministry that has been affirmed by persons in the body of Christ.

David’s call received affirmation. “Saul said to his servants, ‘Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me.’

“Then one of the servants answered and said, ‘Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the LORD is with him.’

“Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, ‘Send me your son David, who is with the sheep’” (1 Sam. 16:17–20).



There was the need to get someone to do the work. A recommendation was made. David did not have any hand in his selection apart from the skills he had that made him the outstanding candidate for the work. By the Holy Spirit's guidance, members of the nominating committee will base their selections on the person's spiritual gifts, while pastors focus on their primary functions—teaching, preaching, visiting—which expose the love of Jesus to others.

### **What it means to serve**

Why do some pastors want some positions? Those who campaign to be elected might covet benefits they will get when elected; others might want the recognition a position might bring. But looking at the biblical rationale behind service, those who desire to be elected with the motive to gain are not the leaders Christ Jesus is looking for.

The greatest and most vital qualities are humility, dedication to service, cultivating a spiritual life, and seeing results in ministry. Other aspects should also play into the election process, such as experience and education.

If a minister does not have a hand in his or her election to office, that minister's focus will be on the work, whatever benefits may or may not come.

### **Be a Christian before becoming a pastor**

Christ is an example for every minister to follow. Before becoming a pastor, the individual should be a Christian. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). A Christian is someone who follows in the footsteps of Christ Jesus, who drew the attention of the ministry to service rather than just focusing on position.

Lucifer fought for a position in heaven; that was his downfall. Solomon stated, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Those who want to fight and lobby for a position in church leadership should repent, lest they similarly fall.

Jesus displayed His humility before His name was lifted above every name in the universe. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil.

2:5–8). We should display such humility and not crave church positions, believing that "A man's gift makes room for him" (Prov. 18:16).

Serving in church leadership means being part

*If a minister does not have a hand in his or her election to office, that minister's focus will be on the work, whatever benefits may or may not come.*

of God's movement at an appropriate time, for an appropriate place, and in an appropriate manner. Positions are not for personal benefit or self-glorification but for the glory of God. Positions are not the possession of the receiver but the Giver.

A wise administrator once said, "Wear your new assignment like a loose coat because one day you may be asked to take it off." Every session involves appointments and disappointments, therefore we would do well to use the words of a patriarch, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 John M. Fowler, "Choosing Leaders," *Ministry*, June 1995, 5.
- 3 Nevins M. Harlan, "A Plan for Church Elections," *Ministry*, October 1951, 25.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 96.
- 5 Julius Soyinka, "Effective Christian Leadership Ephesians 2:10-2:10 Introduction: 'We are . . .,'" Faithlife Sermons, 2013, <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/121833-effective-christian-leadership-ephesians-2:10-2:10-introduction:-we-are>.



## Prime minister opens Vanuatu Adventists' 24th quinquennial session

PORT VILA, VANUATU

Vanuatu's prime minister, **Bob Loughman**, congratulated the regional Seventh-day Adventist Church for training up national leaders in his opening address at Vanuatu Mission's 24th quinquennial session in the capital city of Port Vila on January 20, 2021.

Newly appointed Vanuatu Mission (VM) president **Charlie Jimmy** presented Loughman with two books—a family Bible and *Food as Medicine* by Sue Radd—as a token of appreciation for attending the session opening. Loughman said that his office is working with churches to address secularism in the country.

"Session is a time [for] the church [to] listen to reports, re-think, dialogue, re-focus, and plan for the next five years," read a post on the VM Facebook page.



Photo: Jean Pierre Nipik

Trans-Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) president **Maveni Kaufononga** congratulated VM's newly appointed officers: president, Charlie Jimmy; secretary, **Kaio Timothy**; and chief financial officer, **Tom Noka**.

A highlight of the meeting was Timothy's report, which stated that membership has grown to more than 29,000 members. In 2020, the "Year of Youth in Evangelism," more than 2,000 youth preached at 246 meeting sites, resulting in the baptism of 1,700 people by October 2020. [Maryellen Hacko, *Adventist Record*]

## New pioneer missionaries trained in South Korea

JEJU, SOUTH KOREA

**D**rs. **Lisa** and **Ron Clouzet** were the main educators training new Pioneer Missionary Movement (PMM) missionaries destined for Taiwan. This training took place in Jeju. Ron gave two presentations on urban evangelism and two on planting new churches. Lisa spoke twice about marriage and family in a different culture and one more time about raising third-culture kids.



The three new PMM missionary couples will be planting churches in the Taipei area. They are strong in faith and eager to partner with God to engage the challenging world of Buddhist Taiwan. [NSD church ministry newsletter, January 2021]

## Church leader calls gender-based violence “shame of our humanity”

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

When we talk about the status and treatment of women worldwide, we are not just indulging in “academic speculation about rights in the abstract,” said **Ganoune Diop**, director for Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the secretary-general of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), during a January 26, 2021 keynote address to more than a thousand attendees drawn from both the United Nations (UN) community and many faith-based organizations.

“Women are often the prime targets and victims of wars, genocides, human trafficking, domestic servitude, and slavery,” he said, “all adding to the toll of insecurities prompted by the multifaceted reality of gender inequality.”

Diop cited a list of statistics highlighting the lopsided impact on women of many social inequalities and harms—from denial of access to education to the prevalence of child marriage and sexual abuse to different forms of economic marginalization.

A key to addressing these tragic realities, Diop said, is to recognize that within many social and cultural contexts, women have long been denied recognition of their full humanity. This denial has led to what Diop called one of the “overarching and deepest obstacles” to improving the plight of women worldwide—the legitimization of gender-based violence.

“Domestic violence, societal violence, the horrors of human trafficking, all disproportionately affect women and girls and reveal the dark side of humanity,” Diop said.

The UN event was the seventh annual symposium in a series intended to amplify the voice of faith groups within the international community and foster greater collaboration on shared goals. Although usually held in person at the UN building in New York, the symposium

this year took place virtually. It attracted participants from North America and across Europe, Asia-Pacific regions, Africa, and the Middle East.

In an interview following the symposium, Diop said that it’s important for Adventist voices and perspectives to be heard within the international community. “Events such as these, undertaken in cooperation with other organizations, are not about negating differences between groups,” Diop said. “Instead, it’s a chance to highlight the unique contributions the Adventist Church brings to the table; how our biblical convictions about the innate dignity and worth of every person—as sons and daughters of the Creator God—drive our global advocacy for fundamental human rights.”

Diop also noted that the theme of this year’s symposium paralleled the tasks facing the Adventist Church — through health care, education, humanitarian care, and spiritual witness — to elevate the status and treatment of women around the world. [Bettina Krause/*Adventist Review*]







Igor Lorencin, PhD, is an associate professor of New Testament Studies at Friedensau Adventist University, Friedensau, Germany.



## Rejecting conspiracies, living with God

**W**ebster's Dictionary defines a conspiracy theory as "a theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful conspirators."<sup>1</sup> These theories promote some secret knowledge; tend to blind people with half-truths, that is, unconfirmed information that no one can prove; and lead one to look for someone else to blame.

Should a Christian use or advocate conspiracy theories, half-truths, or unconfirmed information? The Christian has no other mandate except to believe in and preach Jesus Christ, for "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).<sup>2</sup> The Bible is the ultimate authority for Christian faith and life.

### Conspiracies in the Bible

The Bible often speaks of conspiracies, mainly with the meaning of secret plotting. In these conspiracies, God often makes them work together for good, when it comes to His people. Joseph was sold into slavery, but God made him a top Egyptian leader who helped preserve the identity of Israel. God turned Saul, who conspired to persecute Christians, into His greatest missionary. Pharisees conspired to end the life of Jesus on the cross, but God turned the cross of shame into an instrument of victory over sin.

God has trampled every conspiracy from Eden to our own times. God is ever the Victor and promises victory to all who believe in Him and come to Him. "This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). Thus, when we compare conspiracy theories with what the Bible presents, we can conclude that conspiracy theories have the exact opposite agenda from the Bible.

### Today's conspiracies

Some see a conspiracy in unusual places. I have been asked, rather seriously, two questions: Are vaccines conspiracies? Do they have something to do with the mark of the beast? To answer

the first, we know that vaccines have saved many lives in our times. Regarding the second, we know that the mark of the beast stands in opposition to the seal of God. The mark identifies one's spiritual allegiance to the antichrist beast power and the seal signifies allegiance and loyalty to Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain for our sins.

What is the distinguishing characteristic of those who receive the mark of the beast? According to the Bible, it is not a vaccine, a chip, or a bar code but people thinking and acting in subversive and oppressive ways. They unite with the beast, pay allegiance to him, and join forces to spread evil and malign the great name and accomplishments of Christ. Thus, they are in league with Satan. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44).

On the other hand, what are the distinguishing marks of those who are on God's side? They are in a saving relationship with Jesus and live according to His testimonies.<sup>3</sup> Of them, the final testimony of earth's history will be proclaimed: "They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11).

The book of Revelation reveals the heavenly Jesus who comes at the end to gather His people to spend eternity with Him (Rev. 22:20). His people are not saved through some special, secret knowledge related to conspiracies but through the saving act of Jesus Christ alone. A living relationship with Jesus is the best protection from a world filled with all kinds of conspiracies, fake news, and evil workings. God calls His end-time people to be connected to Jesus and remain faithful. Nothing else matters.



1 Merriam-Webster, s.v. "conspiracy theory (n.)," accessed March 2, 2021, <https://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/collegiate/conspiracy%20theory>.

2 Scripture is from the New King James Version.

3 See Gerhard Pfandl, "The Testimony of Jesus," *Adventist World*, October 1, 2018, <https://www.adventistworld.org/the-testimony-of-jesus/>.

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