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Angels,
 ONE
 Gospel

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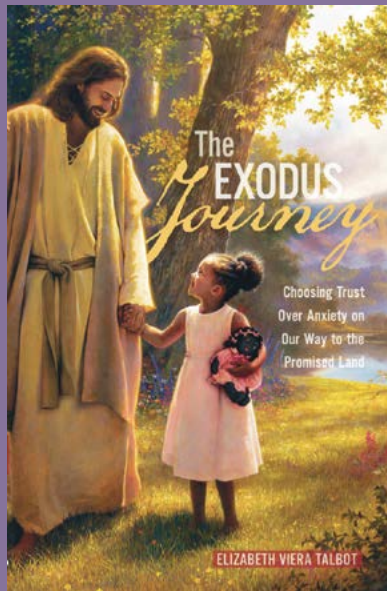
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Three angels, one gospel

ÁNGEL MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ

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The bridge we build

A *mazing. Uplifting. Timely.* These are the words that crashed social media at the conclusion of her message. The inauguration of the 46th president of the United States saw 22-year-old African American youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman deliver her Scripture-laced poem, “The Hill We Climb,” with precision and poise.

The poem excited people of faith and inspired people with hope. It enthralled seasoned writers and electrified popular rappers. It thrilled schoolchildren and challenged university professors. Some believed the author meant one thing; others asserted something else. One art critic helpfully suggests, “Works of literature, such as poems and plays, allow readers the opportunity to find multiple distinct meanings in a single line. This process is not only accepted—it’s a crucial part of what makes literature so pleasurable. Indeed, one reason to revisit a literary text is to discover how its meanings have changed over time, since each reading brings new experiences and perspectives.”¹

There’s another message that’s amazing, uplifting, and timely. It’s an old message, but “each

reading brings new experiences and perspectives.” It’s called the everlasting gospel, epitomized by three angels (Rev. 14:6–13). Many interpretations have been offered regarding this message. Its genius, however, is that it is unfolding, compassionate, and adaptable.

Unfolding: “The third angel’s message reveals the great saving truth for this time. Its truths are constantly unfolding, and it is God’s design that even the children and youth shall understand intelligently what God requires.”²

Compassionate: “The work of beneficence enjoined in this chapter [Isaiah 58] is the work that God requires His people to do at this time. . . . With the work of advocating the commandments of God and repairing the breach that has been made in the law of God, we are to mingle compassion for suffering humanity. . . . The third angel’s message is not to be given a second place in this work, but is to be one with it. . . . This work is to be to the message what the hand is to the body.”³

Adaptable: “Every feature of the third angel’s message is to be proclaimed in all parts of the world. . . . Received into honest hearts, it will



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

prove an antidote for all the world's sins and sorrows. No conditions of climate, of poverty, or ignorance, or of prejudice can hinder its efficiency, or lessen its adaptability to the needs of mankind."⁴

So, we are embroiled in a coronavirus pandemic, economic poverty, political turmoil, and racial unrest. Thank God for an antidote! Thank God for an eternal gospel that adapts itself to human needs. It is not fixed, static, and inflexible. It is dynamic, contemporary, and relevant. It belongs to theologians and millennials, to historians and Generation Z, to the developed world and the developing world. Love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself. Presented aright, our message will appeal to young people who have a passion for God and compassion for the vulnerable. The love of Christ constrains us to repair the breach, restore the paths, and build a bridge. So let's amaze the world with this message.

It is a radical message of love and compassion that bridges earth and heaven and human and human. It is a revolutionary message of healing and deliverance that connects body and

soul and church and community. It is a reconciling message of restoration and redemption that unites parents and children, husbands and wives, Jews and Gentiles, races and ethnicities, young and old, clergy and laity, and men and women, to fulfill the eternal prayer of Jesus, "that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23, KJV). When Jesus sees a people like this, He'll come to take them to be where He is. By our actions, we can delay that day—or we can hasten it.

Amazing. Uplifting. Timely. That's our message. It's the bridge we build.



- 1 "Grades 11–12 Playlist: Multiple Interpretations," Wisewire, accessed April 29, 2021, http://www.wisewire.com/wp-content/uploads/items/4854/Demo_pdf_WN_ELA_0012.pdf.
- 2 Ellen G. White, vol. 9, *Manuscript Releases*, (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 292.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 32, 33.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 292.

THREE Angels, ONE Gospel



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Let us begin with a simple yet perhaps rhetorical question: What are you proclaiming from the pulpit every week? The answer should be obvious: The gospel of salvation through faith in Christ's sacrificial death. His saving work should color and determine the content of any sermon.

An Adventist preacher does not have any other option because at the very core of the biblical passage that summarizes our mission and message is the gospel, namely Revelation 14:6–13—the three angels' messages. I am suggesting that the passage be interpreted from a Christological perspective.¹

Message of the first angel

The three angels “represent those who receive the truth, and with power open the gospel to the world.”² The exegetical foundation for this claim is found in Revelation 14:6–13. The first angel proclaims God's eternal gospel to the human race at the close of the cosmic conflict (v. 6). The passage closes with the blessing of the Holy Spirit on those who have held the law of God and the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ's saving work together (vv. 12, 13). The second angel proclaims the collapse of the false gospel of Babylon (v. 8), and at the heart of the third message is a wonderful reference to the Lamb of God (v. 10).

The angel does not describe the content of the gospel but calls it “an eternal gospel” (v. 6).³ There is no other eternal gospel than the one announcing to the world that salvation comes through Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:14). This gospel is introduced in Revelation 1:5, when John refers to Jesus as the One who “loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.”

The love of God was visibly manifested in the sacrificial death of Jesus. This soteriological language is conveyed throughout the book using

the image of the Lamb that was slain. Heavenly beings proclaim that the Lamb is worthy of worship because “You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). It is Christ as the Lamb who was exalted to the throne of God (Rev. 22:3), who, as a Warrior, defeats the enemy through His sacrificial death (Rev. 17:14) and shares that victory with His people (Rev. 12:11). The figure of the Lamb is an expression of the sacrificial love of God through which we are redeemed.

The proclamation of the gospel is followed by a call to the inhabitants of the earth to fear God (Rev. 14:7). The concept of the fear of God assumes that God is a transcendental and majestic Being who manifests Himself to humans engulfed in radiant and impenetrable light and who causes the earth to tremble (e.g., Exod. 19:16, 18, 19). This majestic Being, the Uncreated One, offers to humans, in an act of love, the privilege of His becoming their God (Deut. 4:20; 5:26, 27; 7:6). Those who acknowledge that He is a loving God show their fear of Him in submission to Him and His will. The first angel summons humans to choose this glorious God as their God.

The phrase *give glory to God* is used in the Bible to express sinners' willingness to acknowledge that they are guilty as charged and that God is righteous in condemning them (Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5; John 9:24; cf. Ps. 51:4). It is at times an expression of contrition and repentance that acknowledges the justice of God (Jer. 13:16; Rev. 11:13). The angel is inviting all, based on God's work of redemption, to repent and admit that God is a loving and righteous God.

The call is urgent because the hour of God's judgment is already here; the final judgment is in progress. In the Bible, the Day of Atonement was a type of the day of judgment. In Revelation 11:19,

John is taken in vision into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary in anticipation of the antitypical day of atonement. Now in Revelation 14:7, we are told the prophetic moment, or “hour,” of the antitypical day of atonement has arrived. One must choose God and repent (cf. Dan. 8:14).

The angelic call invites sinners to worship the Creator (Rev. 14:7), echoing the language of the Sabbath commandment, the sign and seal of God’s sanctifying power. The Sabbath reminds humans of God the Creator and Redeemer and invites us to bow down before the One who created and who, through the Lamb, redeemed us. Worship is a bone of contention in the cosmic conflict, and humans are urged to worship God and not the fallen cherub and his allies (Rev. 14:9). At the time when the Creator and the Sabbath have been rejected or ignored, God insists that all should bow down before their Source of life.

Message of the second angel

The second angel announces the collapse of Babylon, a symbol of human independence from God and the search for self-preservation through human accomplishments (cf. Genesis 11). The descriptions of the intentions of both the fallen cherub and the king of ancient Babylon coincided—they both wanted to occupy the place of God on earth (Isa. 14:3–23)—but the literal Babylon collapsed. At the time of the end,

the dragon will create a mystical Babylon through which he will attempt to occupy the place of God and

receive worship that is due only to God. Babylon is constituted by a false trinity: the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1)—apostate Christianity during the Middle Ages, the beast from the earth (v. 11)—apostate Protestantism as represented by America, and the dragon—Satan’s personal work through spiritualism.

Babylon is the dragon’s attempt to unify apostate Christianity through miraculous events that will aid his endeavor to legitimize his claim to be of divine origin. Babylon offers to the world her corrupted gospel, called her “wine” (Rev. 14:8). Jesus gave wine to His disciples as a symbol of His sacrificial death (Matt. 26:27, 28), and now Babylon offers to humans her own wine—or a way of salvation through submission to the fallen cherub. In these last days, the dragon will change in many ways the religious, political, philosophical, and economic map of the world through the performance of miracles that will persuade many that he is, indeed, God. We should anticipate radical changes in the world, whose magnitude is difficult to imagine.

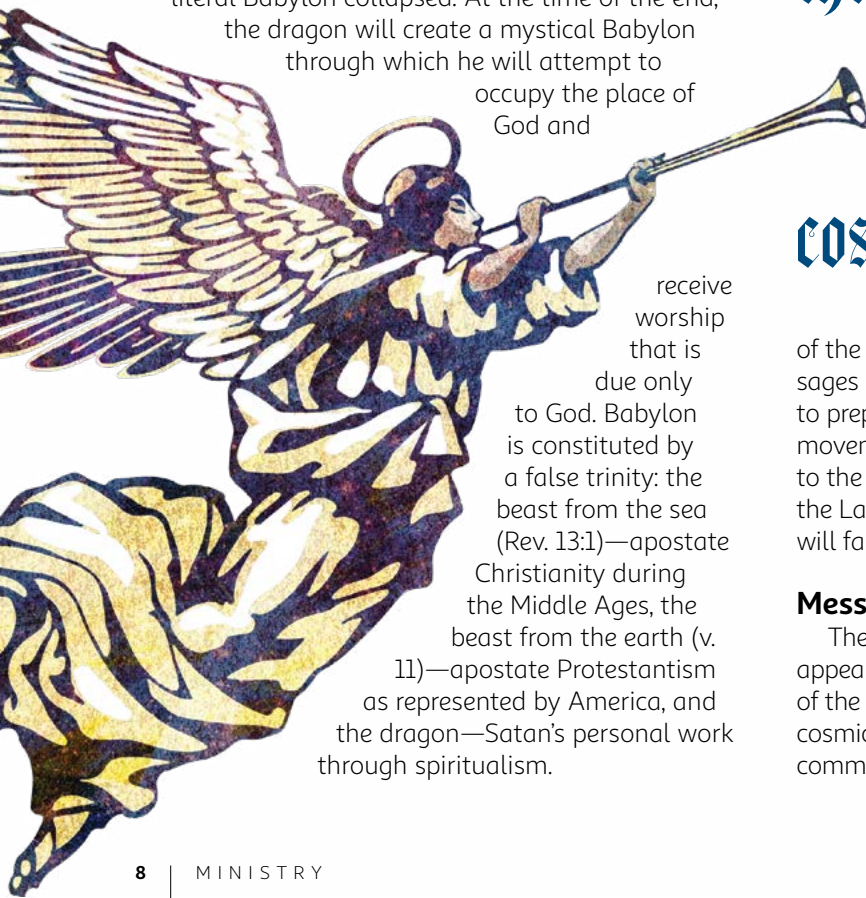
The mystical Babylon is still unfolding. The three demonic spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet will go to the world to unite them for the battle of the day

The three messages are embedded in one message—the eternal gospel—which is powerful enough to save us and to bring the cosmic conflict to an end.

of the Lord (Rev. 16:13, 14). Meanwhile the messages of the three angels are going to the world to prepare us for the coming of the Lord. The two movements will polarize the earth in faithfulness to the Lamb or to the dragon. But the victory of the Lamb, the true gospel, is assured, and Babylon will fall to rise no more (Rev. 16:19; 17:14; 19:20).

Message of the third angel

The message of the third angel is God’s last appeal, in the form of a warning, to the dwellers of the earth to choose the side of the Lamb in the cosmic conflict. It is about loyalties and ultimate commitments. While the dragon announces that



those who will not worship him and who reject the name and the mark of the beast will be exterminated (Rev. 13:15–17), the third angel announces that those who take the side of the dragon will face God’s wrath in the final judgment (Rev. 14:9–11).

Loyalty to the dragon and his allies requires taking the name and the mark of the beast. The wicked will identify themselves with the character and aspirations of the false trinity. Loyalty expresses itself in actions that manifest the nature of the object of loyalty. Appropriating the name and the mark of the beast means that they belong to and supposedly are going to be protected by the dragon. By submitting to the authority of the false trinity, God’s will is irrelevant for the wicked.

The mark of the beast is the counterfeit of God’s seal, the Sabbath. Sunday becomes the symbol of the authority of the dragon over those who follow him—his authority to change God’s law—and that facilitates worshiping him. We worship the Creator on the seventh-day Sabbath, and at the close of the cosmic conflict, the wicked worship the creature through their obedience to Sunday.

The third angel announces that those loyal to the dragon will experience the wrath of God (cf. Rev. 6:16, 17). Then the angel proceeds to explain what God’s wrath is like using the language of wine and of fire and brimstone. According to the angel, divine wrath is like wine that has not been mixed with water but whose intoxicating power has been increased through the addition of certain spices. The point of the metaphor is that God’s eschatological wrath will not be mixed with mercy—there will not be room for repentance. The wicked will fall and will not rise again.

The second metaphor is taken from the experience of a person who has been directly exposed to burning sulfur. The wrath of God is compared to the intense pain that a person feels when burning sulfur falls on their skin; it is extremely painful. There is a second point to this metaphor, namely, that what is burned perishes forever. The wrath of God will result in the eternal death of the wicked.

The intensity of the pain of the wicked in the final judgment is described as a torment—a pain over which the person has no control and that each person will experience over a period of unspecified time (Rev. 14:11). This most painful experience occurs before “the angels and the Lamb.” Scholars have suggested different ways of interpreting this phrase, overlooking the obvious one. The imagery is taken from the coming of Christ with His angels at the parousia. It is the language of a Christophany used here to indicate

that Christ will appear to the wicked during the final judgment. They will stand before the Lamb that was slain! They will be looking at the cross of Jesus where God’s magnificent love was revealed to the cosmos and rejected by them.

This is the best and only evidence that God brings to His cosmic court of law to demonstrate that the fallen angel was wrong and that He is unquestionably a loving and righteous God. In the presence of the Lamb, the wicked see themselves as they really are, miserable sinners with a deep sense of guilt, realizing that they will be eternally separated from this most loving God. The realization of such eternal separation is indeed most painful; a torment. On the cross, Jesus experienced the excruciating pain of separation from the Father so that no one else would have to experience it. However, the wicked disregarded the saving blood of the Lamb that was slain, and they will be tormented by the love they chose to ignore. Paradoxically, the love of God, constituting the joy of the unfallen worlds and awakening the deepest gratitude within the hearts of those redeemed by the Lamb, is a torment for the wicked and Satan and his demons.

The cosmic conflict closes peacefully with the universal recognition and declaration that God is a God of love—the persuasive power of the sacrifice of the Lamb defeats the forces of evil. John anticipated this moment when he wrote: “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever’ ” (Rev. 5:13).

The three messages are embedded in one message—the eternal gospel—which is powerful enough to save us and to bring the cosmic conflict to an end. Perhaps it would be good to ask again, what are you taking to the pulpit next week? Take the Lamb!



- 1 An expansion of this article will appear in “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” to be published in Artur Steele, ed., *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching*, vol. 2 (2021). It includes bibliographical references.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Truth About Angels* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1996), 247.
- 3 Scripture is from the 1995 edition of the New American Standard Bible.

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Reflections on the pandemic and final events

Signs that the end is near (Matt. 24:6–8) include pestilences, such as the 2019 novel coronavirus. Of this set of signs, Jesus said that “ ‘all these are the beginning of sorrows’ ” (v. 8).¹ The end is not yet because, among other reasons, “ ‘the gospel must first be preached to all the nations’ ” (Mark 13:10).

While the COVID-19 pestilence has been mostly a physical health issue, spiritual issues have arisen around it as well. We know that there will be confrontation against the truth as it is in Jesus and against the people who, by following Him, will be blamed for the world’s calamities—all in fulfillment of Jesus’ words: “ ‘And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake’ ” (Mark 13:13).

We have been told that “great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones.”² While the harsh realities detailed by Jesus will surely come (Matt. 24:10–12), the good news is that they will pass quickly. In addition, Jesus will be with us until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). Most important these realities herald the imminence of our salvation: “ ‘When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near’ ” (Luke 21:28).

Semblances of final events

Some situations generated by COVID-19 provide us with portrayals of history’s final events and, therefore, can serve as a preparatory stage for the last scenes of the great controversy.

1. *Quarantine.* This situation foreshadows a time when, having escaped from the great cities (as when Christians left Jerusalem before her fall in AD 70), the children of God will find refuge in towns or smaller population centers. Then, the order of our Lord will be: “Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past” (Isa. 26:20).

It is true that “the season of distress and anguish before us will require a faith that can

endure weariness, delay, and hunger—a faith that will not faint though severely tried.”³ But then—and later, during a time of trouble such as Jacob’s (Jer. 30:7), when the people of God will have to live in small groups or in isolation—God will protect His children and supply their basic needs.⁴

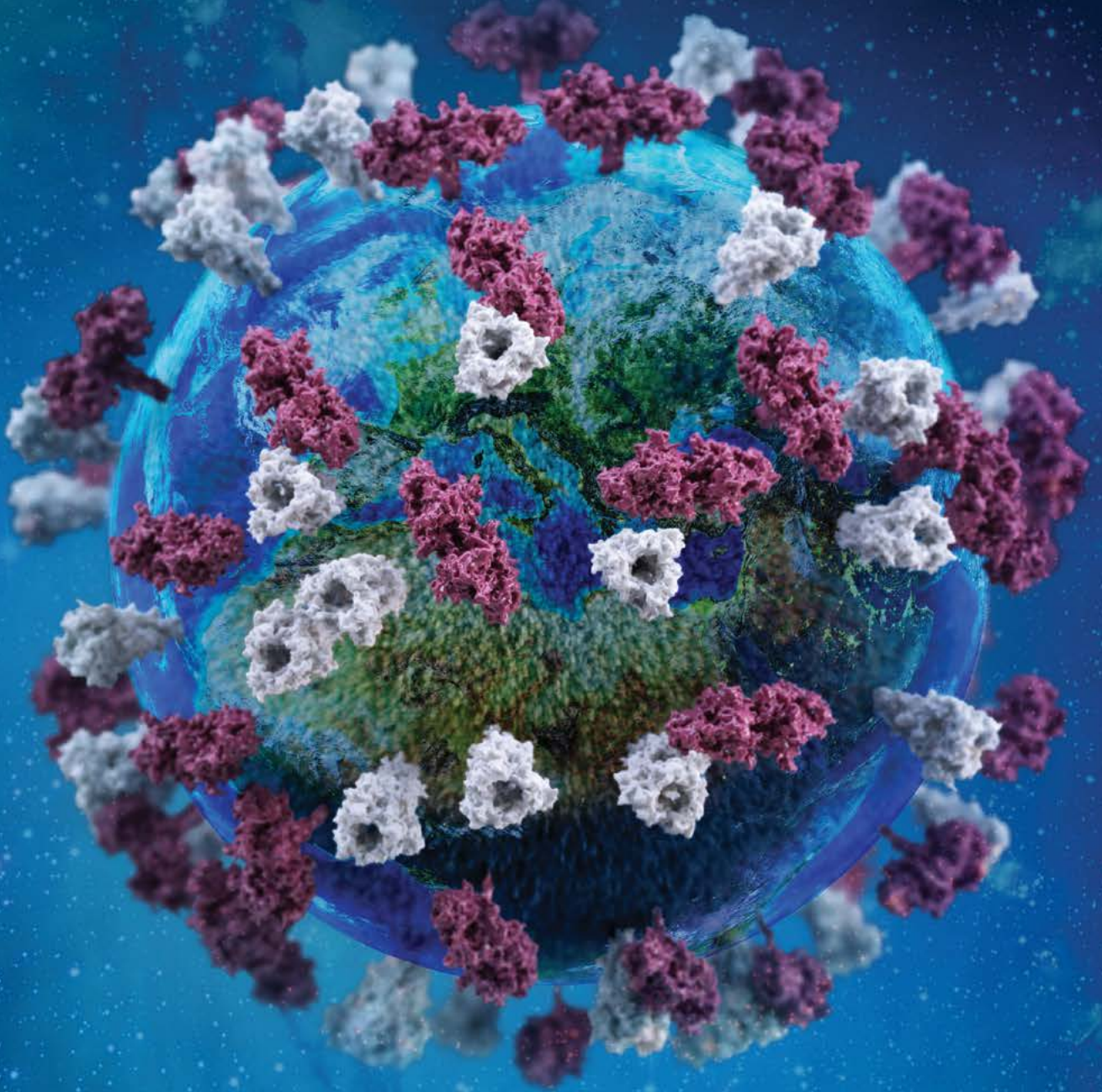
The unexpected situation we are now experiencing could be best improved in preparing ourselves, including our families and congregations, for what lies ahead. Such preparation could include the following:

- ▶ *Time to study the Word*—For our spiritual houses and those of our church members to stay firm, we need to make sure that their foundations rest on solid rock, the words of Jesus (Matt. 7:24–27). What is preventing us and our church members from spending time studying the Word of God more assiduously? We need to answer and solve that question.
- ▶ *Time for personal prayer*—Current circumstances offer us the opportunity to strengthen our direct dependence on God, in ways such as struggling with Him in prayer, as did Jacob (Gen. 32:24–30). In response to the prayer of faith, God will give us what the sleeping virgins lacked (Matthew 25): His Holy Spirit, symbolized by the oil (Luke 11:11–13). He will teach us (1 Cor. 2:10–12), He will guide us in deepening our knowledge of the Scriptures (Jer. 33:3), and He will help us treasure its precious promises (John 14:26).
- ▶ *Faithfulness in little things*—Jesus warned that before the final test, we will be brought before the courts of the land. He has promised to be in tune with those who are in tune with Him (Luke 21:12–15). Keeping in mind the words, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7), we must include in our study “the testimony of Jesus” given to us in “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). If we are faithful in these things which lie within our power, God will do

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Even with a tragedy as terrible as the COVID-19 pandemic, God gives us opportunities, and we should take advantage of them.

for us exceeding, abundantly more than we could ask or think (Luke 16:10; Eph. 3:20).

2. *Government intervention.* The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed us to see governments limit our liberties and individual rights, ideally to achieve a common good. Governments have intervened, among other things, to

- limit the freedom of movement of their citizens;
- limit access to free trade, which affects both sellers and buyers; and
- limit or prevent the entry or exit of certain population groups through country borders.

While the goal of these legal measures is to seek the common good, we can also perceive how, imperceptibly, nations could be preparing themselves for the moment when the governments of the earth, in a coalition, and also invoking a common good, will use their power and force in fulfillment of final events (Revelation 13). Jesus has assured us, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matt. 10:28); and Jesus has promised us, “Not a hair of your head shall be lost” (Luke 21:18).

3. *The global scope of the crisis.* COVID-19 is a pandemic, a word made up of two Greek terms: *pan*, meaning all, and *demos*, meaning people. The pandemic has been declared a “worldwide public health emergency” by the World Health Organization. The global reach of this crisis offers us a semblance of the crisis that *the entire world* will be involved in, and the remnant of God threatened by, at the end of history, when “*all the world*” will marvel and follow the beast (Rev. 13:3). Also, the second beast of Revelation 13 will

cause the whole “earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (v. 12) and will deceive all “those who dwell on the earth” by telling “those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (v. 14).

4. *“An invisible enemy.”* Referring to the COVID-19 virus, civil and medical authorities around the world, have repeatedly stated that “we are fighting an invisible enemy.” Those words are true in another realm, the spiritual, as well. Our fight is not against visible elements with flesh and blood, namely human beings (Eph. 6:12). We fight an invisible enemy, Satan, who hides and acts through the human powers in his fight against the Lamb and His followers (Rev. 17:14).

Victory is ours only by putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:14–17). Satan’s unmasking, defeat, and destruction are assured (Rev. 20:10). That will be the work of God. Ours, even as spiritual leaders, is to humbly acknowledge that Satan’s cunning exceeds our intelligence and ability (2 Cor. 11:14), to submit to God (James 4:7) and to pray in faith and be sober and watching (1 Pet. 5:8, 9).

Readiness

Even with a tragedy as terrible as the COVID-19 pandemic, God gives us opportunities, and we should take advantage of them. Each of us should place our entire dependence on the Lord, sustained by a thorough study of His Word, meditation, and prayer.

These biblically based reflections about the COVID-19 pandemic are not intended to establish any theological position but, instead, to motivate us, as leaders blessed with special light on last-day events, to actions that will allow us and the people whom we love and serve to be ready to meet Jesus on His glorious and imminent return (Heb. 10:23, 24).



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 9:11.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 621.
- 4 See White, *Great Controversy*, chapter 40, “God’s People Delivered” (any edition).

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A high-angle photograph of a person wearing a white lab coat, with their right hand held open and palm up over a wooden desk. On the desk are several sheets of paper, including one that appears to be a medical chart or document. The lighting is soft and focused on the hand and papers.

Making appeals and getting decisions

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I remember a conversation I had with Mike. He had been attending church with his wife for nearly 30 years but had never been baptized. I asked him, “Have you ever thought of being baptized?” He indicated that, at times, he had. “Mike, what’s stopping you from being baptized?” I asked. After a moment of silence, he said, “I don’t know.” When I suggested that he make that decision, he did. He was baptized a couple weeks later. To get that decision, I had to appeal to his heart.

One of the most important aspects of ministry is helping people make decisions for Christ. It involves both personal appeals in informal settings, such as one-on-one conversations, and public ones from the pulpit. One of the biggest factors determining whether a minister (or a layperson) will be a successful soul winner is whether he or she is willing to boldly ask for decisions through Spirit-led appeals.

Why is it necessary to make appeals? Because people do not normally make decisions without prompting. Most do not wake up one morning and announce, “I must decide for Christ today.” It often takes a direct appeal to awaken conviction in hearts and minds.

When we make appeals, we have the opportunity to assist the Holy Spirit in His work of conviction. The idea of aiding the Holy Spirit may sound strange to us. But God did not design for the Holy Spirit to do the work of conviction while the church sits back and does nothing. The Holy Spirit works through people to reach other people. Yes, the Holy Spirit alone does the convicting, but by asking the right question, by making a loving but direct appeal, we can help that person hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and sense conviction in an even stronger way.

Two powerful appeals

Two phrases that I learned early on in ministry can create powerful appeals. The first is: “Have you

ever considered . . . ?” Rather than telling a person what to do, you are simply asking a question that plants a seed in their minds. Most people respond better if you ask them a sincere question that causes them to think on a deeper level.

For example, if I sense that someone is at a point where they are experiencing conviction and should be thinking about baptism, I can ask them, “Have you ever considered being baptized?” That does not come across as threatening or manipulative. I am simply raising a question. But the question is really an appeal that can lead to deeper conversation. Should they reply that they have not thought about it, I can gently inquire why? If they answer that they have thought about it, I can ask them whether something is standing in their way and then move the conversation toward dealing with the obstacle.

A second powerful appeal is the phrase “I’d like to invite you to . . .” (then fill in the blank). Again, you are not telling the person what to do, but you are giving the person an invitation. For example, “I’d like to invite you to think about being baptized” or “I’d like to invite you to consider accepting Jesus as your Savior.” When you give a simple but direct appeal, you are speaking to the heart and causing them to examine what is most important.

Of course, the way you raise the question or make the appeal is essential. If you come across as insincere, harsh, or self-righteous, you will push them away. But if you ask with a gentle but bold spirit, with an attitude of love and concern, it will usually yield beautiful results. People can tell if they are just another number to you or if you truly care about them.

That’s why a relationship is always the first step of soul winning. When you develop connections with people, trust forms. And when trust forms, you can ask the bold question or make the direct appeal.

Personal appeals—the process

Let's take a look at *the process* of making personal appeals.

1. *Ascertain whether the subject is clear to them.* People do not make decisions about things they do not understand. So we need to be sure that things are clear and then give them opportunities to ask questions. When you know they understand the topic or issue, then it's time to make an appeal.

2. *Ascertain whether there is an obstacle.* You might ask, "Is there anything that stands in your way to follow Jesus in this matter (whatever it is)?" As long as there is an obstacle in their path or in their mind, whether perceived or real, they are not likely to risk a decision. Find out what the obstacle is and help them with it. Once their conviction is stronger than the obstacle, they will move forward.

Here is where listening plays a key role. It is a huge part of leading people to make decisions. In fact, it is even more important than talking. Listening helps me know what questions to ask and how better to appeal to them. To best help them, I need to understand what their obstacles are and what they are thinking.

3. *Invite them to make a choice.* You might say, "Would you like to tell Jesus you are willing to follow Him in this matter?" Then let the conversation go deeper. If they say yes, seal the decision with a prayer of commitment together. Invite the person to pray in their own words and verbalize their decision for Jesus. Then follow up with a prayer of blessing, reinforcing their decision and asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them.

Be patient. If they are still not ready to say yes, encourage them to take some time to think and pray about it and let them know you will also be praying for them and are willing to talk whenever they are ready. Continue to pray for them, and then appeal to them again in the near future as the Holy Spirit leads. Remember, a "no" right now does not mean "no forever." A soul winner does not give up. Neither does the Holy Spirit.

4. *Invite them to take a step of action.* It may be an act relevant to the decision made. For example, someone who has just said yes to baptism might set a date for it. Someone who has just chosen to surrender their finances to God might return a faithful tithe for three months and see how God provides. An individual who has just chosen to stop drinking might remove the alcohol from the house or have an anointing service that God will heal them (after all, alcoholism is a

sickness). Confirming a decision by taking some active step strengthens the decision of the heart.

Public appeals—the language

Now, let's consider how to make public appeals from the pulpit. Every sermon should have an appeal. Otherwise, it's just a lecture presenting information. In our sermons, we should unashamedly ask for decisions. If you don't, then why are you preaching?

Before we examine the types of appeals from the pulpit, let's discuss the *language of the appeal*.

1. *Be specific.* What choice are you asking the listener to make? To be baptized? To accept Christ? To have a forgiving heart? If the decision you are requesting is not clear, people will not respond because they will not know what exactly they are responding to.

2. *Be positive, not negative.* Do not concentrate on the negative aspects of the decision—challenges, obstacles, difficulties. Focus on the positive aspects—the blessings that result from that decision, the benefits of following Jesus, the peace that comes from surrendering to Him.

For example, suppose I am making an appeal for baptism. In that case, I do not dwell on what the person may have to give up or the obstacles they may encounter or how family members might think they are crazy. Those things may be a reality, but I do not have to unnecessarily stress them. I emphasize the joy and assurance that results from making that decision.


3. *Give clear directions.* What action are you asking them to take? Are you asking them to come forward? If so, when? While you are talking? During the song? Do you want them to raise their hands? If so, should they do it now while you are talking? Or during the prayer? If you use decision cards, explain exactly what you want them to do with them.

4. *Repeat the appeal.* When making an appeal while you are preaching, you will need to repeat it a few times. People need time to process the appeal and reach a decision. Often, repeating the appeal clarifies it in the listener's mind and strengthens the conviction they feel.

Public appeals—the types

There are usually *four main types of public appeals* that you can use from the pulpit.

1. *Raising the hand or standing.* Most people respond to the very general appeal to raise the hand or stand because it may not be as daunting as coming forward. This is a good way to help an audience become comfortable if they are not used



When we intentionally make appeals in the pulpit, people will respond, and baptisms will increase. In every congregation, there exists someone whose heart is ripe to respond.

to appeals. It is also a good type to begin with for preachers who are not used to making appeals.

2. *Silent prayer in the pew.* Although not employed as often, silent prayer can be very effective for sensitive topics. More of a private decision, it requires very little visible action. You simply invite the congregation to bow their heads and talk to Jesus about what they heard in the sermon. One or two minutes of music in the background will create an atmosphere conducive to prayer. After the music ends, the speaker concludes with a prayer. You may not know what decisions have taken place, but God does.

3. *Altar call.* The strongest of all public appeals, an altar call requires a major step of action: getting out of the seat and walking forward. One of the benefits of the altar call is that it encourages other people when they witness someone making a decision. As more people respond, you can literally sense the Holy Spirit moving. We should use the altar call much more often than we do—even on Sabbath mornings.


When I do an altar call, I usually make the appeal for a specific decision and then repeat it a couple times to make sure that it was clear and

that people understand what I am asking for. After I make the appeal, I let the audience know they can start coming forward as everyone stands and we begin singing the closing song. When the song starts, I step down to the floor. Then I simply wait for the people as the congregation sings. I do it this way for two reasons. First, people are already standing, and that's half the battle. Second, I do not have to keep thinking of things to say. Everybody is singing. So, I sing along and watch the Spirit move.

When the song ends, I speak a few words of encouragement to those who came forward and then have a prayer of blessing with them. I invite them to stay up front for a few minutes after the prayer so that we can get their names and contact information if they are guests. This is very important because you need to follow up with a personal visit to those individuals during the next two days. The visit will solidify the decision.

4. *Decision cards.* Decision cards are not just for evangelistic meetings. You can use them in worship services too. Completing and handing in a card is a major step of action but offers a little more privacy. It gives those who do not want to go up front or draw attention to themselves an opportunity to respond.

Review the decision card with the audience and explain what each line means and the decision you are asking for. You might have soft music playing in the background. Then clarify how you want them to hand in the cards. Make it as easy as possible. Options include passing around an offering plate, passing the cards to the aisle where a deacon or deaconess will collect them, or having the cards collected at the door as people leave. I prefer to have the deacons or deaconesses collect the cards and bring them to me so that I can say a prayer of blessing over them to close the service. Be sure to follow up on those cards during the next couple of days with a phone call or personal visit.

When we intentionally make appeals in the pulpit, people will respond, and baptisms will increase. In every congregation, there exists someone whose heart is ripe to respond. Whether we are making personal appeals in a Bible study or public ones from the pulpit, there is one essential thing the soul winner must remember: to get decisions, you must *ask* for them. 

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SWEET COMMUNION



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Participating in the rite of Communion four weeks in a row is one of the perks of being the wife of a man who pastors four churches. The danger is that the special service can become commonplace. When the kids begin to sigh, “Oh no, not Communion again,” it’s time for a new game plan. That’s why my husband, David, and I decided that when one of our churches had Communion week, I would take the children to another one of our churches. That worked out great—most of the time.

As our children blossomed into the early teen years, their commitments, responsibilities, and social lives sometimes resulted in my driving them to a church different from the one I intended to attend. After missing Communion twice, I realized that something had to change. I did not want to continue to miss the blessings and cleansing that Communion brings and the sweet sense of renewal in Christ it offers.

A plan for Communion

Planning ahead, I told our children that we would all attend the next Communion together as a family. As the special day approached, I felt a refreshing sense of anticipation. Reading the closing scenes of Christ’s life in two different gospels, I prayed that the Holy Spirit would cleanse my soul and grant me the gift of repentance. I thought of the people I would meet at

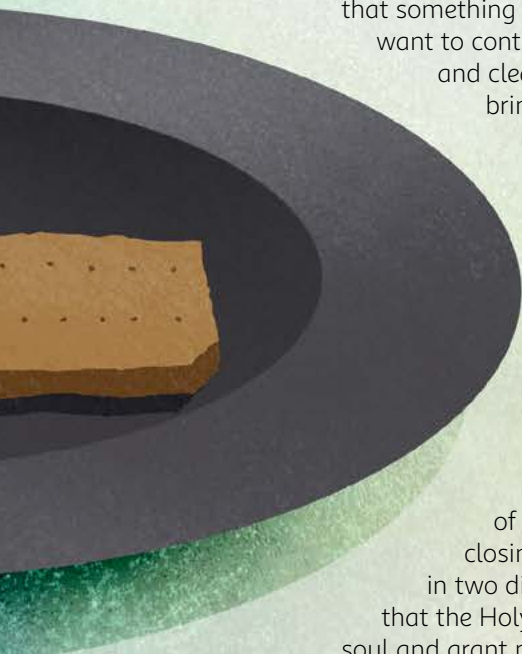
church and prayed that we all would be prepared for the holy time ahead. Finally, I asked God if there was anyone whom I needed to make amends with so that nothing would hinder my prayers.

Gathering the children, I was glad it had not been one of *those* mornings when the hustle and bustle dim even a sunny day. Even our half-hour drive was pleasant, and so was the early class before church. Finally, it was time. After my husband announced where each group would go for footwashing, I met up with an old friend visiting from out of town. As I washed her feet, I remembered a story I had read about a prisoner-of-war who missed partaking in Communion so much that he fashioned a cup from tin foil and saved some of his moldy prison-ration bread to remember Christ’s sacrifice. Tears threatened as my heart whispered a prayer of thanks to God for the privilege of Communion.

After the footwashing, my friend and I prayed together and found our seats. Saliva flooded my mouth as I anticipated the bread. The deaconesses in this church had a good recipe for Communion bread that made you crave more. I know you are not supposed to think about how the bread tastes, but it made my mind consider the symbolism of craving the satisfying Word of God.

The fervent search

Seeing the deacons rise and walk to the front of the sanctuary snapped my thoughts back to the events at hand. I smiled at my friend as we anticipated the service. Suddenly I felt an urgent tap on my shoulder. A forced whisper assaulted my ear: “I need you *now!*” Looking over



my shoulder, I saw a woman quickly exiting the church. Glancing apologetically at my friend, I shrugged as I jumped up to go after the woman. My friend, also a pastor's wife, gave me an understanding nod.

As I followed Sally¹ out the door, she erupted, "I can't believe it. That woman is too much!" Thus began the sad tale of how a well-meaning but misguided older woman—Myrtle²—had taken up a crusade against Sally's daughter, Lisa.³ Dropping to my knees on the concrete, I implored Sally to pray to the True Healer with me. As we prayed, I begged God for wisdom and understanding to know how to communicate with everyone involved and for His loving protection for Lisa. Tears streamed down Sally's cheeks as she expressed concern for her daughter. She told me that Myrtle had decided to use Lisa as an example of dress reform and had actually ordered her to go home to change on a few occasions. Lisa had complied and put on an ankle-length skirt, even though her previous skirt reached her knees, the modesty standard her parents had set. But it was apparently not enough compliance for Myrtle. Her bullying included accusations that Lisa was trying to flirt with the boys and acting "whorishly." Sally told me that her daughter tried to avoid the woman, but it was not working.

Now, on this special Communion day, Myrtle had cornered Lisa and loudly demanded that they be partners in the foot-washing service, so that they could "fix" their relationship. When Lisa said she had no grudge, Myrtle laughed out loud and accused the girl of lying in the presence of all the other women. Grabbing Lisa's hands, Myrtle prayed loudly for God to help Lisa to love others more. Then Myrtle opened her eyes, looked at Lisa, and declared that girl still did not love her and prayed again. Each of the three times Myrtle did this, Lisa told her that she did love her.

Finally, the girl could take no more humiliation and ran from the church in tears. Sally was worried that her daughter might try to harm herself because she had become depressed about the situation. "Help me find her please!" Sally begged. "I don't have the keys to the car, and my husband is up front."

Taking my car, we scoured the area around the church and drove to Sally's home, which was within walking distance of the church, in case Lisa had gone there. My mind reeled in shock as I drove. I had known both of these elder's wives for years and each of their strengths and weaknesses, but I had not imagined Myrtle's cruelty to be so

strong toward a young person such as Lisa. Even though Myrtle may have been trying to seek healing of the relationship, the way that she had approached it left me feeling nauseous on a day that I had planned to be so special.

Finally, with no other ideas of where to look, Sally and I returned to the church. Suddenly, her eyes lit up as she spotted Lisa behind the glass in the mother's room. Letting mother and daughter have a moment of reunion together, I waited in the foyer. Finally, I entered the mother's room and embraced Lisa. "It's OK, it's not your fault," I crooned and held her as I would my own daughter. With a tear-stained face, the adolescent gazed up at me with grateful brown puppy eyes filled with hope. "I know," she said in a broken voice. "Jesus told me she didn't know what she was doing." As I glanced over at a beaming Sally, I saw that the tears of joy pouring from my eyes were met by ones flowing from hers. "Praise God!" she mouthed to me. "Amen," my lips silently replied back. With one last squeeze, I left Lisa in her mother's loving care and returned to my seat.

Stunned by the exhibition of grace I had just witnessed, I did not even realize the Communion service was over until my handsome pastor-husband walked by my row and gave me that special look. Only this time, concern mixed with the twinkle in his eyes as he saw my tears. "Well, I missed the bread and juice, Lord," I prayed, "but it's OK; I have food enough." Sweet Communion!

Another miss

The next week was Communion at one of our other churches, but I was sick. I mused to myself, *Missed it again!*

A Voice prompted in my heart, *Why do you have to miss it?* I looked at myself in my exercise pants and hoodie sweatshirt surrounded by tissues and other props of illness.

Well, I'm not exactly in shape to go! I laughed to myself.

Why not ask the pastor to bring Communion to you, the shut-in? the Voice asked.

I thought about the many times David had brought Communion to hospitals and homes. In spite of having the four churches with all those Communion services, he never failed to offer it to anyone who wanted it. While it was something I admired about my pastor-husband, I was not sure I dared ask for myself. Would he think I was weird? Aware of what had happened the previous week with Sally, he had encouraged me in my ministry to her daughter.

I glanced at my watch and knew that David was already preaching in the pulpit. If I texted him, his phone would vibrate and make the ancient mic ring with feedback. *Do it*, the Voice urged, *text him anyway*. So, I sent the plea, “Do you think you could bring home some bread and juice for me?” I did not expect a reply, yet it did not stop me from nervously awaiting his arrival.

Both kids were at friends’ homes until evening, which intensified the silence in the house as I waited alone. I pondered what my husband might have thought of the text. Would he know I was serious, or would he think I was joking? Did he even have time to read the text since the service would run longer due to Communion? Then there was the greeting period. He might be home before he ever saw the text. My heart fainted at the thought. For some reason, I craved this blessing more than ever.

Blessing from a soda glass

When I heard the garage door open, my heart began to pound. When my husband’s footsteps sounded in the hall, I tried to tidy up my area on the couch and straighten my hair. After all, the pastor was coming over!

As he entered the living room, my husband flashed a big grin as he held up a little baggie and a small container of grape juice. “What can we use for glasses? I forgot those,” he said as he shrugged.

I trudged to the kitchen cupboard. The smallest things I could find were miniature glasses embossed with the name of a popular soda on them. *Will that be an abomination?* I laughed to myself. “Will these work?” I asked tentatively.

“Sure!” David said reassuringly, just as he would to a church member in my situation.

Finally, as we took our places on the couch, he turned to the scriptures read during the Communion service. I had heard him read them many times, but as I looked over at him, I saw him as God must see him. Faithful shepherd, loving the people of God by bringing the ordinance to those who cannot get out to receive it. Tears filled my eyes. Through this man, my husband and pastor, I felt the closeness of Jesus sitting next to me. As David ate the bread with me, joining me in



As David ate the bread with me, joining me in my affliction, I saw a living reflection of the much greater love of my kinsman Redeemer.

my affliction, I saw a living reflection of the much greater love of my kinsman Redeemer.

When all was done in true holiness, the loving pastor and I sang a hymn and left the living room together, just as is the custom at our churches when he says, “And they sang a hymn and went out.” I cherished that the Communion was conducted in a way that reflected God’s love, compassion, acceptance, and infinite grace. After we washed the little cups out, I embraced him and thanked him for his tender ministry to the flock—even the ones scattered abroad. This was another sweet Communion I would never forget.



- 1 Pseudonym.
- 2 Pseudonym.
- 3 Pseudonym.

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If the Cross could speak

I saw a cross at my local mall, made from stainless steel with black Swarovski crystals glued to the cross pieces. It was valued at just under \$100, but if this little cross could talk, it would remind us that its symbolism has infinite value. Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross, and this has changed its function forever. The cross has become a symbol of the power of an almighty God to forgive the human family and defy the forces of death.

Max Lucado writes: "The cross.

"It rests on the time line of history like a compelling diamond. Its tragedy summons all sufferers. Its absurdity attracts all cynics. Its hope lures all searchers. . . .

" . . . History has idolized it and despised it, gold-plated it and burned it, worn and trashed it. History has done everything but ignore it.

"That's the one option that the cross does not offer.

"No one can ignore it! You can't ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history. . . .

" . . . Its bottom line is sobering: if the account is true, it is history's hinge. Period. If not, it is history's hoax.

"That's why the cross is what matters."¹

If the Cross is a hoax, then it is the greatest "fake news" of all time. If, on the other hand, the story of the Cross is true, it is the one event that ensures the survival of the human family. If the Cross could speak, it would share lessons that are both healing and revealing.

1. The Cross exposes the depth of our depravity

I was 16 years old and living in Zurich, Switzerland, when, on July 20, 1969, Neil

Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon.

Armstrong stepped off the lunar module with half a billion people watching, including myself. As I looked at the first color TV I had ever seen, Armstrong uttered those now famous words, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." The achievement indeed symbolized the astounding progress of humankind. We now had what it takes—the technology, the brain power, and the ingenuity, to get to the moon. We passionately believed that humanity was improving, that better knowledge and better education would create a better world. But the Cross tells a different story.

It forces us to recognize that human beings are capable of killing an innocent Person who healed the sick and brought the dead back to life, snuffing out the life of a Person who preached kindness and acceptance, attempting to destroy the Son of God Himself. It lays bare the reality that we human beings are capable of sinking so low as to destroy persons just because we disagree with them. "The depravity of the human heart, the guilt of transgression, the ruin of sin, are all made plain by the cross where Christ has made for us a way of escape."²

2. The Cross reveals the certainty of our salvation

Human beings need saving from themselves. A documentary featuring natural historian David Attenborough highlights the greed of





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Passive

A Slave

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Alienated

SOUND
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MY
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THE LORD

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human beings. “Mapping how steeply the planet’s biodiversity has degenerated before him,” Attenborough muses that, if unchecked, this could lead to the total destruction of the earth’s forests, oceans, atmosphere, and finally human beings themselves.³

Nations are suspicious of the motives of other nations. Those who make attempts at international cooperation constantly struggle to overcome the hurdles of broken promises, shifting alliances, and old feuds. Rivalries tear apart nations. Polarization within nations steadily increases. Opposing sides no longer want to talk to each other, preferring to speak only to those with whom they agree. We not only are capable of self-destruction but also commit terrible crimes and start wars that cause the deaths of innocent men, women, and children. We casually use the term *collateral damage* as if we are talking about a broken pot or a few twisted pipes.

The Cross announces that we need saving from our terrible selves and require more than human help; it then reveals the certainty of that taking place. “And we can see that it was while we were powerless to help ourselves that Christ died for sinful men” (Rom. 5:6, Phillips).

3. The Cross reflects the love of God

The Cross declares that the wretched condition of human beings is surpassed only by the greatness of God’s love. The Cross demonstrates that no matter how bad you and I have been, or how terrible we are right now, Jesus died on the cross for us. E. J. Waggoner states, “He bought you for the very reason that you were not worthy. . . . He bought you, not for what you were then or are now worth, but for what He could make of you.”⁴

The heavens declare God’s righteousness and glory (Pss. 97:6; 19:1), pine trees and cedars of Lebanon speak of judgment on the oppressor (Isa. 14:8), and the wilderness shouts for joy (Isa. 35:1). The Cross also speaks. It offers itself as incontrovertible evidence. “The proof of God’s amazing love is this: that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, Phillips).

In the greatest transaction ever, humanity’s rebellion against God was cancelled. F. W. Faber described God’s love in poetic form:

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There’s a kindness in His justice,

which is more than liberty. . . .
For the love of God is broader,
than the measure of man’s mind,
and the heart of the Eternal,
is most wonderfully kind.⁵

4. The Cross vindicates the character of God

Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 inform us that the heart of the cosmic struggle between good and evil was a vindication of the character of God. Knechtle and Sohlmann comment, “Satan misrepresented the character of God. . . . There developed a crisis in the universe—a lack of confidence in God. . . . He had to find a way to demonstrate to them the real character of the rebel and of his purposes. Only thus could He restore complete confidence in His goodness and love.”⁶ God’s incontrovertible evidence to the universe is to see His people with a passion “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

Some say, “True justice won’t come until Jesus comes. So, why bother to stand against oppression now?” We ‘bother’ because, as Timothy Keller says, “This kind of life reflects the character of God.”⁷ The character of God is not bestowed on us when Jesus comes, it is to be demonstrated now. When we fail to reflect the character of God, we effectively hinder the coming of Jesus (2 Pet. 3:12, 14)

5. The Cross validates the justice of God

The death of Jesus on the cross showed that it is possible for religious leaders to put the wants of the institution above the needs of the people.

As youngsters growing up in the church, we were often taught that we should avoid protests in the community and ‘focus on evangelism’ and trust that injustice will be ended at the second coming of Christ. We often found ourselves wrestling with the concept of justice and the church.

Keller states, “There are valid reasons why many become concerned when they hear Christians talk about ‘doing justice.’ Often that term is just a slogan being used to recruit listeners to jump on some political bandwagon. Nevertheless, if you are trying to live a life in accordance with the Bible, the concept and call to justice are inescapable. . . . It consists of a

While passing through the pain of pandemic and the anguish of global pollution, the Cross teaches us that this world *is* our home and the Cross is our standard for righteousness.

broad range of activities, from simple fair and honest dealings with people in daily life, to regular, radically generous giving of your time and resources, to activism that seeks to end particular forms of injustice, violence, and oppression.”⁸

6. The Cross embodies the righteousness of God

I remember a chorus we used to sing in church: “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passing through.”⁹ I heard that our focus was to be the three angels’ messages. I read that the heart of these messages was righteousness by faith because the Cross demonstrated God’s righteousness, “that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26, NKJV). Then I learned that righteousness, justification, and justice were all members of the same family and were far from being other-worldly (see Amos 5:24).

Christine Erickson states, “We do not have to look far to see that Jesus is our standard of righteousness. Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life, died a sacrificial death and rose again to make right that which was wrong. It is because of Jesus and His work on the Cross that we can be justified and made right with God. And Jesus also demonstrates a beautiful example for us to

follow in the New Testament as one who cared for the outcast and reached out with compassion to help those most often overlooked. Jesus pursued justice. He physically and spiritually rescued those in need.”¹⁰

While passing through the pain of pandemic and the anguish of global pollution, the Cross teaches us that this world *is* our home and the Cross is our standard for righteousness.

7. The Cross affirms the grace of God

Jesus’ death on the cross provided the ultimate free “Get Out of Jail Free” card for anyone who accepts and follows His example. When we see what Jesus suffered, we realize that grace was not cheap. And when He challenges us to take up our cross and follow Him, the sacrifice involved in doing so will not be cheap.

We need to feed our hungry and care for our earth. We need to take the time to understand why people have sympathy for the immigrant and refugee and rise to declare that lives matter. We need to show love and compassion even to those with whom we do not agree. We need to work together for a better society—just as Jesus did. Our actions will not be based on a notion of human betterment but on the prayer for divine grace, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10, KJV).



- 1 Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior: Discover Hope in the Unlikeliest Place* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 34.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979), 96.
- 3 Natalia Winkleman, “‘David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet’ Review: Ruin and Regrowth,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2020.
- 4 E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness* (San Francisco, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), 72.
- 5 Frederick William Faber, “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy,” 1862, public domain.
- 6 Emilio B. Knechtle and Charles J. Sohlmann, *Christ’s Message to the Last Generation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1971), 16, 18.
- 7 Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2012), 18.
- 8 Keller, 18.
- 9 “This World Is Not My Home,” 1924, public domain.
- 10 Christine Erickson, “Biblical Justice and Social Justice,” *Shared Hope International*, June 4, 2018.

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Deep Calling: On Being and Growing Disciples

by Tara J. VinCross, Lincoln, NE:
AdventSource, 2020.

As a pastor, I prayed that someone would ask me about the Sabbath, the state of the dead, or Daniel's twenty-three hundred days. But far more often, the questions were, "Pastor, how can I grow as a Christian?" "What does it mean to grow in Jesus?" "How do I become a disciple of Christ?"

The questions panicked me as a pastor and troubled me as a believer. As a lifelong Seventh-day Adventist, my religious experience was quite cerebral. I was obsessed with sound doctrine while fearing that which was relational; experiential; or, heaven forbid, emotional.

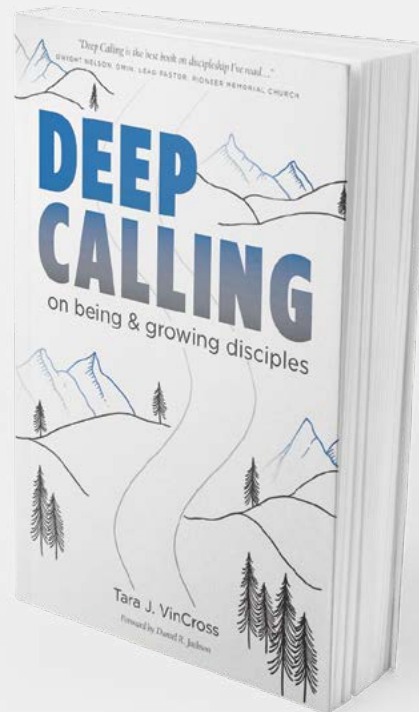
Deep inside, I longed for more. There had to be more to Christian experience than merely "being right"! I began to read anything I could find about discipleship. I didn't want to simply be a "good Adventist"; I wanted to be able to state along with Paul, "But for me to live is Christ."

Most of what I found on the topic was written by Christians who were not members of the Adventist Church, but their biblical knowledge and Christian experience were undeniable. As I continued to read, my heart felt a warmth I had not found in mere doctrine. It was no longer enough to be "right." My reading caused me to begin a spiritual journey that has become my lifelong passion.

Since my own spiritual journey began, I have longed for a quality resource to help church members experience their own growth. Tara J. VinCross has written that book! Her book *Deep Calling* may be the best resource I have found for discipleship. The book is long overdue, but now that it is finally here, it helps fill a gaping hole in Adventist literature.

Few denominations have been more successful than Adventists in attracting new members. Our weakness has been helping these new members

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to grow beyond an acceptance of Adventist beliefs to maturity in Christ. Dr VinCross, with pastoral expertise, addresses this glaring need.

Deep Calling is theologically sound, relationally rich, and spiritually deep. It is the most practical, grace-filled resource for discipleship I have found. The author writes not just from her own experience and education but, quite obviously, from her passion for the topic.

The book begins with a biblical picture of discipleship and then moves to God's callings on the life of every believer. Each chapter gently guides readers and small group participants into deeper spirituality, healthier personal relationships, and inspired service. Every chapter is practical; easy to understand; and, at the same time, deeply challenging.

Readers will be inspired and challenged by this book, but more importantly, they will be changed. I highly recommend *Deep Calling* to everyone who longs to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. I recommend it to pastors and elders whose passion is leading others to genuine discipleship. 



Adventists in Moldova Celebrate Bible Translation on Its Anniversary

KOMRAT, MOLDOVA

Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders and members recently gathered to celebrate the 15th anniversary of a Bible translation feat in Moldova. On March 6, 2021, the Komrat Seventh-day Adventist Church in southern Moldova remembered the first translation of the New Testament to the Gagauz language by Adventist translator **Stepan Bayraktar**.

The first edition of the Gagauz Yeni Baalanta (New Testament) was published in 2006, five years after Bayraktar's death. Bayraktar had been not only a translator but also a preacher of God's Word in that language.



Photo: Euro-Asian Division News

The Gagauz New Testament was published in two formats, one in Cyrillic and the other in Latin characters. It was something, Bayraktar had explained, that helped the text to be friendly not only to the older but also to the younger generations, many of whom are not fluent in Cyrillic reading.

As part of the March 6 ceremony, attendees participated by praying, singing, and reading Scripture in the Gagauz language.

Church leaders celebrated that ethnic Gagauzes can read the New Testament in their native language and highlighted the unchanging and vital role of God's Word.

"We continue to believe that 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16)," they said. [Ruslan Bulgak, EAD News/Adventist Review]

Juice bar is a center of influence in Fiji

NADI, FIJI

Three churches in Fiji's Western division have started what they would have never thought possible—an open bar that sells natural herbal juices to help fight noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

Votualevu, Namaka, and Nadi English Seventh-day Adventist churches teamed up to open Bitu Wellness Bar, or Bitu Bar, as it is commonly known, in the heart of the nation's tourism capital, Nadi.

With rapidly increasing rates of NCDs, Fiji is in the midst of a public health crisis that is closely linked to changing lifestyles. The three churches have taken on the responsibility to fight against

these lifestyle diseases, which have become the number-one killer in the country.

"It is through the message of health that we are sharing God's love to our customers, who are secular or members of other Christian denominations," said **George Kwong**, Bitu Bar founder. Kwong is also the coordinator for the 10,000 Toes health initiative for the Trans-Pacific Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



Photo: Bitu Wellness Bar Facebook account

While herbal juice in Fiji has been used for centuries to cure cuts and illnesses, it has not been widely consumed as a means for improving holistic health. By visiting Bitu Bar, Fijians are encouraged to revisit a more natural, holistic approach to health.

“With the Bible as our main charter, this joint venture has been a direct result of the church’s pillar of comprehensive health. And why look further than our own backyard, where we find everything that God created for our use?” Kwong said.

“[Seventh-day Adventist Church cofounder] Ellen White also encourages us to find simple

remedies all around us. We are seeing these natural remedies [more often], which are now being touted around the globe as superfoods from medical and pharmaceutical experts,” he explained.

“Now medical practitioners and other professionals are lining up at the bar, which is a positive sign that the Fijian population is serious about their health.”

“If other churches would like to open similar bars in their communities, they are welcome to contact us,” Kwong said. “This is an initiative with genuine intentions to build a better and healthier Fiji.” [Isaac Lal, *Adventist Record*]

Pastoral families in Inter-American Division press together

MIAMI, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES

After a year that has been stressful and often tragic, thousands of ministers and their families set apart time to pray, fellowship, and be encouraged. Coined as the Inter-American Division’s Annual Pastoral Family Week of Prayer, the event provided strength to the 4,028 local church pastors and pastors in administrative and departmental leadership positions that oversee more than 3.7 million members in more than 23,000 congregations and institutions across the territory of the Inter-American Division.

Despite church buildings being closed, pastors have continued to shepherd their members and to do the work of reaching out to new believers according to Pastor **Pedro Iglesias**, Family Ministries director of the Inter-American Division. More than 94,000 new members joined the church in 2020, and leaders believe that number will surpass 100,000 as reports continue to come in.

This year’s speaker was Seventh-day Adventist evangelist **Alejandro Bullón**, whose theme was “God Our

Strength” based on Psalm 46. Bullón encouraged families to love their pastoral ministry regardless of the difficulties that they face every day. In addition, he spoke to pastor’s kids and encouraged them to live a life dedicated to God.

“So many pastors, spouses, and family members have passed away during the pandemic,” he said. Inter-American Division president **Elie Henry** prayed for the pastoral families and thanked them for their dedicated service.


“The week was all about stretching the family bonds among the pastoral families throughout Inter-America,” said **Josney Rodríguez**, ministerial association secretary for the Inter-American Division. “It was about praying together, working together, crying together, and moving together toward the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [Libna Stevens, *Inter-American Division News*] 



Photo: Isaac Grimaldo Pérez



From pulpit pastor to church janitor

It is a typical Texas winter day—a little chilly but not extremely cold—a little cloudy. It is the AM. As always, very few drivers are out on the road early on Sabbath morning. But more than that, it's a COVID-19 Sabbath, when there is little or less routine for church service, which makes my Sabbath slow. I make my customary slow drive to the post office and gather the mail. Leisurely taking in good Texas air, I proceed back to the vehicle.

Slowly pulling into empty church parking, the music plays low, and I kill the engine. I look at the church, and the tears just flow . . . and flow . . . and flow. Someone said, “When tears flow, don't stop them; the wellsprings will dry, and the tears will cease when the soul gets good and ready.” So, I grieve and cry.

Looking back

Cloudy weather is perfect for what I am experiencing. What's going on? It's Sabbath, yes. It's my birthday, yes. But it's also my final day in pastoral ministry. I am transitioning into retirement.

It's been a good 40 years—a very long time to spend in small churches—by choice. And I moved only three times, twenty years in one district alone. That's pretty good for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A testimony to my calling to ministry.

To be sure, I have had attractive ministry calls. There was always the temptation to accept pastoral calls to larger congregations on both east and west coasts. But my consistent prayer has been, “God, send me where I will be happiest and most useful.”

In ministry, for years my leadership style has principally been characterized as Christocentric, where I attempted to lead by example. In the early quiet hours of the morning before sunrise, you would find me secluded in my home study having my hour's devotion, reading my Bible supplemented with the writings of Ellen G. White, a habit I maintain to this day. Second, I maintained a healthy vegetarian lifestyle with exercise, swimming one mile two days a week and walking 45 minutes three days a week. Third, Ingrid and I

would vacation the entire month of July, during her summer break, in a different part of the world, embracing various cultures.

Why would I jeopardize our happiness? We deemed ourselves as a team quietly working in one corner of God's vineyard in Texas. While I may here emphasize the contentment I experienced in multi-church districts, I recognize that contentment may also be found in large church settings, complete with added responsibilities. Simply find your happiness in ministry and “do you!”

Looking forward

I exit the car, enter the building, and slow-walk the facility in prayerful thought. Entering the sanctuary, I stand by the pulpit where I have left my preacher's mark then walk back to the newly constructed pastor's office. As I stand glancing around, I notice bits and pieces of workers' sediment left on the floor and proceed to get the broom and sweep it into a pile, later to trash it. A thought grips me. I pause, smile, and chuckle in humility, all by my lonesome, thinking, *This is my local church calling in retirement: to be the local church/school janitor/deacon!*

So, in a lifetime, I've journeyed from pulpit preacher to church janitor/deacon. At Southwestern Adventist University, as a college student, I requested of God a sign of ministerial calling. Now, in retirement, I request of God the same—this time a sign of ministry approval. In response, in a very telling and marked way, God answers.

Sure, I will do other things in retirement: hospice chaplain part-time, more writing, golfing, Scuba diving (I am a saltwater enthusiast), world travel, gardening, having fun driving my roadster, and more, but to work in a cleaning capacity for God is indeed an honor for His faithfulness to me over 40 years of ministry.

So, as I leave, I reflect on the transition my career has taken—from pulpit pastor to church janitor. And, like David, “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked” (Ps. 84:10, NIV). ❧

Winston B. Stanley, PhD, is a retired pastor and author residing in Round Rock, Texas, United States.





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