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COMMANDS

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Empty-headed ministry

Billy Sunday, the famous American evangelist of the 1900s, was a colorful character. He once said: “If I had a million dollars, I’d give \$999,999 to the church and \$1 to education.” Sunday made no pretense of being a learned man. On another occasion, he boasted: “Billy Sunday does not know any more about theology than a jack-rabbit knows about ping pong.”

Billy Sunday had an impactful ministry, largely due to his undeniable charisma, great organizational skills, and entertaining preaching style—yet he downplayed education and theology.¹ One may ask whether Sunday’s sneering at the life of the mind is not being emulated by some pastors today. The reality is that there are ministers who consider learning to be incompatible with a Spirit-led ministry and theology to be irrelevant to the needs of the congregation.

In an ideological climate that thrives on sentimentality while disavowing mental rigor, many are tempted to equate fiery zeal with authentic spirituality and link reflection and thought to cold, dead religion. To make matters worse, today’s obsession with entertainment and the spectacle can prompt ministers to focus more on style than content, reducing the ministry to a performance rather than an act of service.

This opposition between the life of the mind and the life of action is unbiblical and unhealthy. It presupposes that the acquirement of knowledge is detrimental to spirituality and that willful ignorance is equivalent to Christian humility. If it is true that unsanctified knowledge leads to intellectual arrogance, it is equally true that God’s sovereignty in any form of Christian service is no substitute for a sloppy mind. The Reformers, for instance, never assumed that robust thinking about the Word and the world was antagonistic to true worship and service. Ellen G. White, a contemporary of Billy Sunday, made it absolutely clear: “God does not want us to be content with lazy, undisciplined minds, dull thoughts, and loose memories.”²

Don’t get me wrong! I am not promoting intellectual elitism in the pulpit. I am simply arguing that thought, affection, and action need to blend harmoniously in ministry because God calls us to

fully love Him with heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37). I submit that both heedless activists and dry intellectuals do a great disservice to the body of Christ. Unmindful activists turn church life into a series of programs, while ivory-tower theologians find pleasure only in abstract thinking, often to the detriment of those who sit in the pews. The truth is that zeal needs to be according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2)—both fire and reason, zeal and thought are necessary. Zeal needs to be intellectually nourished, and the intellect needs to be constantly set on fire by truth under the lordship of Christ.

How can this be done? I want to suggest that we first put reason in its right perspective; we should neither deify nor despise it. Second, we need to understand that all truth is God’s truth. Acknowledging God as the Source of all truth, the cultivation of the mind necessarily takes place in total dependence upon Him. Third, we must cherish a spirit of humility, recognizing that, in fact, we know very little about anything. How can we go about this quest in practical terms? We should start by keeping the Bible foundational and central to all study, reminding ourselves that the Word of God enlightens the mind, broadens the imagination, and softens the heart for service. In addition, we must develop a healthy habit of cultivating our minds. Good books are more available than ever before, and online platforms can also give easy access to excellent resources. Last the fruitful exchange of ideas with fellow ministers and other conversational partners can be an excellent avenue to sharpening our thinking and fulfilling our calling.

Dear readers, mental culture is important to an effective ministry. May the publication you have in your hands be a great way to cultivate your mind for greater service.



1 See Robert F. Martin, *Hero of the Heartland: Billy Sunday and the Transformation of American Society, 1862–1935* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

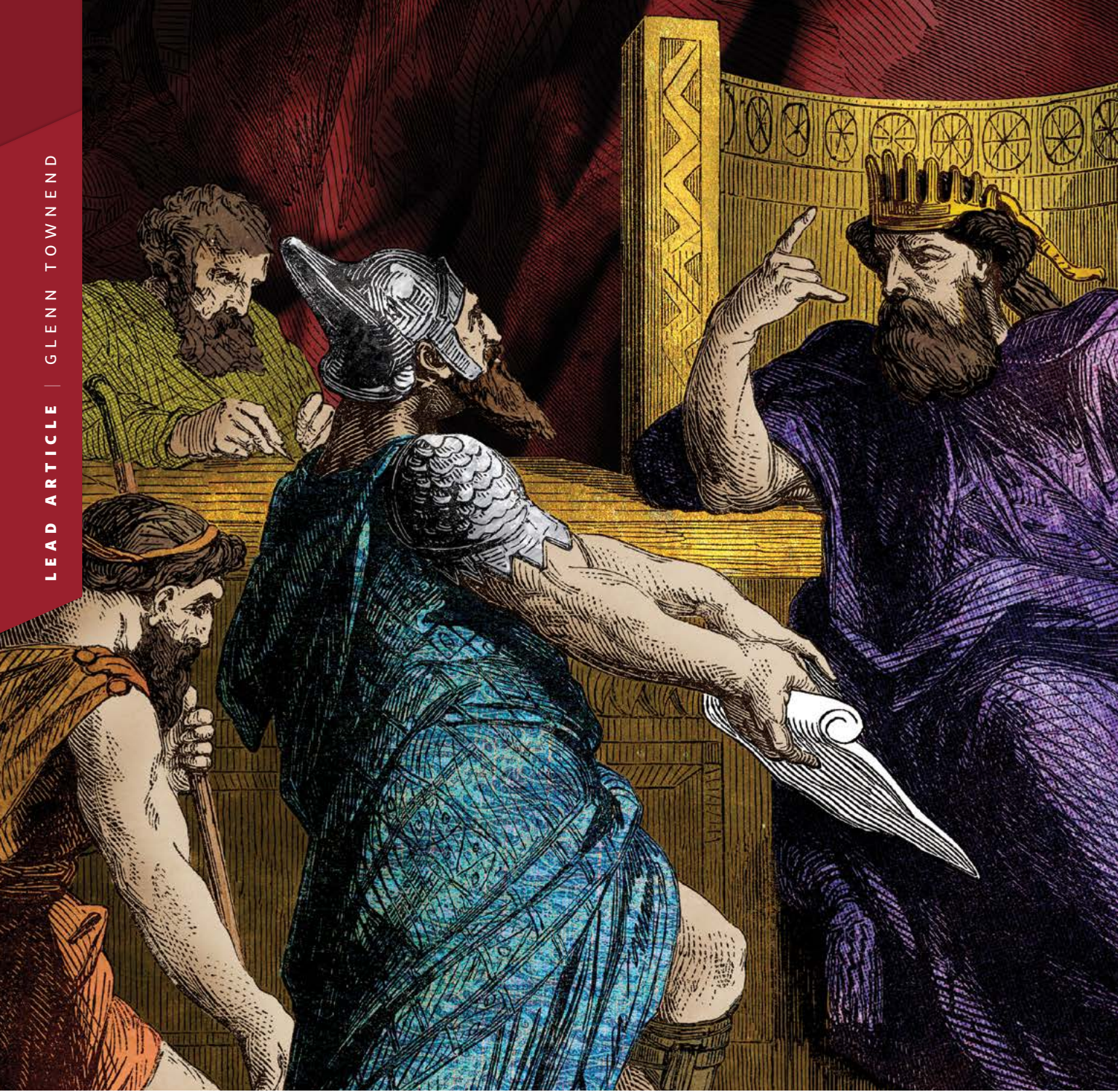
2 Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2002), 224.

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SCAN FOR AUDIO





WORKING WITH OTHER STRONG

Lessons from David and Joab



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Steve's story

Steve is a great youth pastor who has dynamic preaching and storytelling skills. His messages connect with children and young adults. He is also very relational, someone who listens, affirms, and helps. A model of biblical servant leadership and popular with the entire congregation, Steve is also liked by the senior pastor, who values what he contributes to the church. However, Steve often oversteps boundaries. He communicates confidential board matters and promises finances and personnel for unapproved projects. The senior pastor has raised the matters with him, but though Steve commits to change, his behavior does not. What can the senior pastor do?

Melanie's story

An experienced pastor, Melanie is now the secretary of a conference. She excels at meeting organization, minutes, policy, compliance, and communication with a strong pastoral focus. Most people perceive her to be effective and efficient in all her work. However, the conference secretarial team has two people not performing well. One is always late with poor quality reports; the other is continually rude to people within the office and in the churches she communicates with. Unfortunately, Melanie excuses both. The conference president has raised the personnel issues with her but, very protective of her staff, Melanie says that she runs her office and does not need input from another officer. What can the conference president do?

The issue

Most leaders want competent people with different skills, strengths, and personalities to create a balanced and effective team. But leaders also know that their team members have weaknesses (just as they themselves do). Such weaknesses can hamper the function of the team and create blind spots. They can subtly undermine leadership as well.



How, then, do pastors and church leaders effectively deal with the deficiencies of the otherwise strong leaders? King David's complicated relationship with Joab, Israel's army commander, offers valuable lessons in dealing with other strong leaders with both good and bad characteristics.

The Joab factor: The good side

Joab was David's nephew (2 Sam. 2:18; 1 Chron. 2:15, 16), a great warrior, and a loyal servant. When Joab had beaten Ammon into submission, he asked David to come for the final battle so that the king could take credit for the victory (2 Sam. 12:26–29). When David wanted Uriah the Hittite eliminated, David trusted Joab to carry out the murderous plan (2 Sam. 11:14–25). And when Absalom, David's eldest son, rebelled and claimed the throne of Israel, with support from all tribes, Joab remained faithful to David, commanding the loyal troops against the rest of Israel (2 Sam. 18:2). Later in David's reign, he asked Joab to conduct a census of all Israel, a decision contrary to the Torah (Exod. 30:11–16). Joab knew that such a census was not God's will and protested, but eventually, he obeyed David's orders. Although Joab missed counting two tribes (2 Sam. 24:1–9; 1 Chron. 21:1–7), he exhibited loyalty.

Joab also had a keen insight into human nature. When David's eldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar, David did nothing. Absalom, Tamar's brother, was indignant and took justice into his own hands by killing Amnon before fleeing to Geshur, outside of Israel. As David mourned the loss of two sons (2 Sam. 13), Joab noticed David's mood and convinced a wise woman from Tekoa to tell David a story that would incite his sense of justice and then encourage him to bring Absalom back. Even though David realized that Joab was behind the plan, David invited Absalom back to Israel (2 Sam. 14:1–23). Later, when David's forces returned after defeating Israel's troops during Absalom's rebellion, they marched back into the city with David weeping at the death of his son Absalom. The soldiers felt that their victory did not mean as much to David as the loss of his rebellious son. Joab told David that he must congratulate his troops or they would desert him (2 Sam. 19:1–8). Joab was right, and his discernment, as much as his military prowess, saved David's kingship.

In short, Joab was a strong, loyal military commander, willing to take risks while wanting the best for his leader. He was someone whom many would like on their team.

The Joab factor: The bad side

At the same time, Joab was jealous, violent, and vengeful. Not present when Abner discussed making David king of all Israel, Joab sent messengers to ask Abner to return; such was his influence. When Abner did so without David's knowledge, Joab stabbed him—payback for his brother Asahel's death in battle (2 Sam. 3).

Incensed, David mourned for Abner and cursed Joab. Aware that the murder could further split the kingdom, David ordered Joab and the army to pay their respects to Abner, which they duly did. Also, after Joab killed Absalom, David promised that Amasa, another one of David's nephews, would become army chief (2 Sam. 19:13). Amasa was late on his first assignment of curbing another rebellion, and Abishai had to assume leadership of the army. Then, when Amasa did join them, Joab stabbed him and continued as Israel's military commander (2 Sam. 20:1–13, 22, 23). In each instance, Joab undermined David's leadership. While the king disapproved of Joab's behavior, the man still remained army chief.

Why could David not just dismiss Joab and move on with new leadership? Scripture does not say. Ellen White notes that though Joab knew the grace and law of God, he was a rude and unscrupulous soldier.¹ "Why was it that David clung to Joab, knowing that he was not a man that loved or feared God? Because Joab bound himself up with David, as a man of unswerving fidelity, ready to do just what David said! But was he the man approved of God? No."²

Joab remained on the team for David's entire life. As the king grew old, speculation increased as to who would be the next ruler. Joab characteristically made his own independent choice and backed Adonijah as king (1 Kings 1:5–7). But Adonijah was not David's choice as his successor, having promised that position to Bathsheba's son, Solomon (v. 13). Quickly installing Solomon as king, David thwarted Adonijah's coup. During David's handover to Solomon, the first request he made was for Solomon to deal with Joab (1 Kings 2:5, 6), which he did (vv. 28–35).

David and Joab

How, then, did David manage Joab, the strong man?

David's major management strategy was to keep Joab working in his area of strength—leading the army. Perhaps that is why the king opted out of participating in the war with Ammon

which, unfortunately, led to his adulterous affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1).

Also, David built a strong and loyal team around him (2 Sam. 8:15–18; 20:23–26). Joab was not the only powerful personality. The king had other military leaders, not just those related to him (2 Sam. 23:8–39). In addition, he had good advisors, priests, and administrators. Having other strong and loyal leaders on his team helped balance the influence of individuals such as Joab.

Principles to take away

What can pastoral leaders do when working with strong personalities in their leadership teams? Like David, they can

1. keep them working in their area of strength and affirm them for it,
2. confront and show disapproval for bad behavior, and
3. get other strong leaders to balance out the team and not allow any one person to dominate.

In his article “How Do You Manage Employees With Dominant Personalities?” Channele Carlin points out that strong leaders, in a crisis, can handle heavy workloads, stay focused on their tasks, and are willing to take on new challenges and risks.³ Joab certainly displayed such characteristics. To bring the best out of such individuals and minimize any negativity, a leader can assign challenging work, let them chart their own course (rather than micromanage them), respect their opinions, and speak directly to specific issues while encouraging teamwork. Personality testing as a team is valuable (a tool probably not available to David). David, it appears, used most of these ideas, although Scripture records no discussion between him and Joab, just directions from one to the other.

Steve and Melanie?

So, what advice could we give Steve’s senior pastor? The pastor has already affirmed Steve for the good things and confronted him about specific negative behaviors. If done repeatedly with no resulting change, the senior pastor needs to draw on his or her support network. He or she has two alternatives. First, the pastor could confide in the local church elders and, if they agree, they could talk with Steve together. Second, the pastor could meet with the ministerial secretary and/or conference president, and one of

them could discuss the issues with Steve. Then it is important that they follow through with an agreed-on solution involving accountability. However, if Steve does not change, termination of employment could be appropriate.

How about Melanie’s fellow officer and conference president? In the Seventh-day Adventist church structural system, all officers (president, secretary, and treasurer) are equal and do not have executive authority. The executive authority rests in the executive committee, which all officers are responsible to—even the president as chair of that committee. The president could speak with the treasurer about the issue; if both are agreed, together they could caringly confront Melanie. If that does not work, the president would have no alternative but to ask the executive committee or the union leaders to work it through. The executive or the union leaders should advise the president on any involvement in the process and agreed-on solution.⁴

Pastoral leaders can have their hands full with a growing church, as David did with his growing kingdom and with colleagues who, like Joab, are highly skilled and loyal, yet unpredictable and obstinate. No easy answers exist when it comes to dealing with other strong leaders. However, we have discussed some suggestions and ideas that can be implemented to help maintain good teamwork. Everyone is valuable despite their weaknesses. We all have unique gifts and talents to help further God’s purposes. To be effective, leaders need to be strong and caring enough to confront their colleagues and work through specific issues involving destructive patterns of behavior. After all, the best leaders do not lead followers but lead other leaders.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), 728, 743, 749.
- 2 Ellen G. White to O. A. Olsen, Letter 65, 1895.
- 3 Channele Carlin, “How Do You Manage Employees With Dominant Personalities?” Linked In, April 7, 2015, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-do-you-manage-employees-dominant-personalities-carlin-m-a->.
- 4 The solutions for both Steve and Melanie follow Jesus’ principles of resolution involving conflict in the church recorded in Matthew 18:15–20.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

The background of the page features three angelic figures with large, feathered wings, rendered in a golden, glowing silhouette style. They are positioned against a bright, sun-like light source that creates a lens flare effect. The lower portion of the image transitions into a dark blue, textured background that resembles a sky or a deep sea.

The three angels' messages:

Antiquated messages or relevant
present truth?

Mark A. Finley, DDiv, is an assistant to the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

In the 1840s, social, political, scientific, and religious revolutions began changing the world. Charles Darwin wrote his first draft of *On the Origin of Species* in 1842 but hesitated to publish his ideas. But by 1859, his thoughts had developed enough that he was willing to reveal them. Discussing the influence of *On the Origin of Species*, one prominent writer said, “Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, remains one of history’s most influential and talked about scientific papers. It introduced the theory that populations evolve over the course of generations through a process of natural selection, a theory that became the backbone of modern biology.”¹

The impact of evolutionary thought on science, philosophy, psychology, and religion is incalculable. If we are only products of fortuitous chance and nothing more than a collection of genes and chromosomes, life has little meaning. The reckless pursuit of personal happiness becomes our ultimate purpose. Life has little or no meaning if human beings are merely enlarged protein molecules.

Simultaneously with the development of evolutionary thought, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels rocked the world with *Communist Manifesto*, first published in London, then translated into various languages throughout the world. Extreme socialism combined with Marx’s oft-quoted statement that “religion is the opiate of the people,” along with the centralization of all power to a select few who considered workers, or the proletariat, as nothing more than building blocks in the wall of the state, further led to the dehumanization of human beings. Such social, political, scientific, and ideological movements placed an extremely low estimate on all human life, dismissing the concept of a personal God as Creator of the universe.

An enduring purpose

But God would not allow the world to remain without a witness to Him. It was also in the 1840s that God raised up a divine movement to proclaim His last-day message to a world longing to discover meaning and purpose. A group of Bible-believing Christians from multiple faith backgrounds began studying the ancient prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. There they discovered a message tailor-made for the times—one able to answer the great questions of an end-time generation. The heart of that message appears in Revelation 14:6–12. In a vision, Jesus visited the last of the living apostles, John, on the island of Patmos to reveal it to the world.

The three angels’ messages that appear in Revelation 14 lift us from the narrowness of the claustrophobic confines of our own self-inflated importance to focus us on an enduring purpose for existence. They give us an ever-widening reason for our being. Rightly understood, they speak to the fundamental moral and spiritual issues of the twenty-first century.

Revelation 14 divides into three parts. The first five verses of the chapter describe the redeemed people of God, now seen far above the trials of earth and with Jesus forever in heaven. The last eight verses of the chapter depict the second coming of Christ and earth’s final harvest. Revelation 14:6–12, strategically placed between the two events, contains God’s final directive to prepare earth’s inhabitants for the return of our Lord.

The everlasting gospel

With this background in mind, we are ready to consider Revelation 14:6–12. The first aspect

that we notice in verse 6 is that it is of heavenly origin. It is an urgent communication of eternal significance for an end-time generation. John declares, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell upon the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (NKJV).

The gospel is the incredibly “good news” that Jesus delivers us from sin’s penalty. By faith in His shed blood and resurrection, we are delivered from the guilt and grip of sin. Although we may fail at times in our humanness, we are yet no longer under sin’s domain. Its hold on us has been broken. Christ’s plan to deliver us from the power of sin was not an afterthought. The apostle Peter describes it this way: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:18–20, NIV). Ellen White adds, “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Romans 16:25, R. V.”²

The everlasting gospel, the good news of redemption, is based on God’s loving-kindness, boundless grace, infinite wisdom, and eternal justice. The gospel speaks of His true nature. It is at the very heart of His last-day message to the world.

God’s end-time mission

The next phrase in verse 6 reports that the angel has the “everlasting gospel” to proclaim to every kindred, tongue, and nation. Here is a mission so great, so challenging, that it demands our all. The three angels’ messages give us a purpose to live for something bigger than ourselves. They lead us from the narrow confines of our selfish hearts to the joy of service in God’s eternal kingdom.

Our lifestyle

Let’s consider the expression, “Fear God and give glory to Him.” The Greek New Testament word for “fear” in verse 7 is *phobeo*.

It is used here not in the sense of being afraid of God but of an attitude of reverence, awe, and respect. Above all, it seeks to convey the thought

of absolute loyalty to God and full surrender to His will.

Such fear is God-centered rather than self-centered, the opposite of Lucifer’s attitude of pride and arrogance as outlined in Isaiah 14:12–14. The essence of the great controversy revolves around submission to God. Self-centered Lucifer refused to yield to any authority except his own.

The first angel’s message calls us to make God the focus of our lives. In an age of materialism and consumerism, when secular values have made self the center, heaven’s appeal is to turn from the tyranny of self-centeredness and the bondage of self-inflated importance to place God at the core of our lives.

Sanctification

Fearing God reveals our attitudes and giving glory to Him speaks of our actions. Thus, fearing God has to do with what we think, while giving glory to Him involves what we do. Furthermore, fearing God deals with the inner commitment to make Him the center of our lives, and giving glory to Him reveals how our inner convictions translate into a lifestyle that honors the Lord in everything we do. The apostle Paul explains what it means to give God glory: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31, NKJV). When God is the center of our lives, our one desire is to glorify Him in every aspect of our existence, whether that has to do with our diet, the things we wear, or our entertainment. We give glory to God as we reveal His character of love to the world through lives committed to doing His will.

God’s justice

Revelation 14:7 continues, “‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come’” (NKJV). The issues in the great controversy between good and evil will be finally settled. The universe will, at last, see that God is loving and righteous, compassionate and fair. The judgment reveals that God has done everything He possibly can to save every human being. The judgment sweeps aside the curtain and reveals the cosmic drama in the great conflict between good and evil. It contrasts God’s character of self-sacrificing love with Satan’s totally selfish ambition.

Revelation 14:7 is a divine commentary on Daniel 7:13, 14, 26, and 27. Before a waiting world and a watching universe, God demonstrates in heaven’s eternal judgment that He has done absolutely everything possible to save all

humanity. Judgment passes in favor of the people of God (v. 22). His grace is sufficient so that no one needs to be lost. Those who are lost are not doomed because of an arbitrary act on God's part. Their fate results from their own rebellious choices. They have spurned God's love and rejected His grace. The judgment reveals to the entire universe His untiring, continuous, heartfelt attempts to save every person on our planet.

The judgment will make all wrongs right. Righteousness will triumph over evil, defeating the powers of hell. Injustice will not have the last word—God will.

Creation

Nothing ever catches God by surprise. For centuries, Satan had been planning his attack on the biblical teaching of Creation. Revelation 14:7 ends with an appeal to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (NKJV). Here is a clarion call to worship the Creator at a time when most of the scientific world and much of the religious world have accepted the theory of Darwinian evolution.

Creation speaks of our value in God's sight. We are not alone in the universe, some speck of cosmic dust. Nor are we a genetic accident. Instead, He created us. Creation is at the heart of all true worship. The Sabbath speaks of a Creator's care and Redeemer's love. God's holy rest day points us to a Creator who made us for a magnificent purpose and loved us too much to abandon us when we drifted from that goal. Every week, the Sabbath reminds us of the One who has provided all good things for us. Rather than an arbitrary legalistic requirement, it reveals that true rest from righteousness by works is found only in Him, a God who has achieved so that we can rest in His achievements.

True Sabbath rest is the eternal link between the perfection of Eden in the past and the glory of the new heavens and the new earth in the future.

Religious confusion

What about the second and third angels' messages? What is the meaning of the phrase “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” and the expression “the mark of the beast”? Although scholars have written volumes on both topics, here is the essence of their meaning. Both expressions speak of self-centered arrogance and human pride rather than self-sacrificial love.

Babylon represented humanity's proud achievements. It was a symbol of human works,

not God's grace, of human traditions instead of God's commands. In the book of Revelation, spiritual Babylon represents the confused teachings of all religious bodies. Spiritual Babylon downplays and marginalizes the authority of Scripture, substituting human authority for it.

At its very heart, the mark of the beast exalts the human above the divine. Elevating humanity's word above God's, it replaces His commandments with human decrees. We see this especially in the change of the Bible Sabbath to a day of a church's choosing. The mark of the beast becomes a symbol of loyalty to a church-state unit in contrast to the Sabbath that is a sign of loyalty to the Creator of the universe.

God's last-day message comes to a climax in Revelation 14:12 when the apostle John in prophetic vision describes a group of grace-filled end-time believers who “keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.”

Saved by grace, their hearts are filled with the faith of Jesus. His faith motivates and transforms them. It frees them from the guilt of the past, delivers them from the bondage of sin in the present, and fills their hearts with hope for the future. They can do nothing else but through His power give Him their allegiance and serve and obey Him forever.

God's end-time movement

End-time believers filled with the faith of Jesus will go through the greatest time of trouble in the history of our world. But through His grace and by His power, they will emerge victorious. The three angels' messages will be proclaimed in every city, town, village, and neighborhood. Tens of thousands of people will accept God's last-day message. God will finish His work on earth. Every person will make their final, irrevocable decision for or against Christ, and Jesus will come in power and glory to take His people home.



- 1 “First Draft of Darwin's *Origin of Species* Goes Online,” CBC News, April 17, 2008, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/first-draft-of-darwin-s-origin-of-species-goes-online-1.766695>.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 22.

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Restoration

for a traumatized world

This last year has been difficult, to say the least. Amid a pandemic, isolation, social justice concerns, and societal uneasiness, along with the pressure of leading a church through all of this, perhaps you have felt an emotional weight begin to overtake you. You are not alone. Symptoms of anxiety and depression have drastically increased, with one survey in the United States showing that the number of people with these symptoms has doubled from a previous survey just a few years ago.²

In the first months of the global pandemic, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk—a renowned trauma researcher and psychiatrist—identified the coronavirus and its effect upon the world as a “pre-traumatic condition.” “The stage is set for people to really be very vulnerable to trauma,” van der Kolk explained in an interview. “It in [and] of itself is, for most people, not a trauma, but there’s two conditions. One is you’re immobilized, so you cannot move around. And immobilization is one of the core preconditions for getting traumatized. And the other one is that you don’t know what is going to happen. So, you cannot say tomorrow will be a different day or the day after. And so when the world’s unpredictable and you cannot move, then the vulnerability to become traumatized is very great.”³

Immobility and unpredictability are a perilous combination. The stage has been set for many to experience trauma.

The reaches of trauma

But what is trauma, and why should pastors, in particular, be concerned about it? Emotional trauma can have many different causes, but the result is that the individual feels helpless, unsafe, or unable to cope in the wake of a distressing and overwhelming experience. In the last few decades, scientists have discovered that significant trauma can drastically affect a person’s brain and body. When faced with something perceived as physically or emotionally threatening, our body naturally goes into its stress response. This means that our executive functioning, which allows us to make calculated decisions, is shut off. Stress hormones are released to allow self-preservation instinct to kick in, resulting in a flight, fight, or freeze reaction: we may run from the threat, attempt to overpower it, or simply halt to allow it to pass us by.

This is a God-given and life-saving response. When an animal jumps in front of your car, you are grateful for your stress response swerving you out of the way. But trouble comes when the stress response works in overdrive—hypervigilance and activated stress hormones begin to wear on the body and brain. This is what scientists are concerned about right now because research points to some troubling symptoms of trauma.

In the 1990s, a ground-breaking study was conducted by the CDC in conjunction with Kaiser Permanente.⁴ This study sought to determine whether there was any correlation between

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common health problems and a number of traumatizing events experienced in childhood—called adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These ACEs included experiences such as homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, divorce, and more. What was found was absolutely shocking.

The more ACEs a person experienced before the age of 18, the greater risk they had for a myriad of health problems. For example, compared to someone with 0 ACEs, someone with 4 ACEs is twice as likely to contract heart disease, 4.5 times as likely to develop depression, 7 times as likely to become an alcoholic, and 12 times as likely to attempt suicide. The ACE study demonstrated that the traumatic experiences of youth can have shaping and pervasive effects for the rest of a person's life—emotionally; physically; and, consequently, spiritually.

This is why what our world and the members of our congregations are experiencing now is so significant for the future as well. The door is open for overwhelming struggles for years to come. Given this foreboding horizon, what is a pastor to do?

A God of restoration

Thankfully, God loves us too much to let us stay weighed down by our traumas. In fact, He had a plan of salvation right from the start. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to *save* the world through him” (John 3:16, 17, emphasis added).⁵

In the original Greek, this word, which is most commonly translated as “to save,” has a pretty big meaning. This word, *sōzō* (σῶζω), is used when discussing the topic of salvation in the New Testament. We are *saved* from our sins. But other translations should be added to our understanding of the word *sōzō*. It means to restore, to heal, to make whole; to take something that is broken and mend it. For example, James 5:15 states that the prayer of faith will *sōzō* the one who is sick, speaking of physical healing. In Luke 8, Jesus casts the legion of demons out of a man and into a nearby herd of pigs. The crowd is amazed at how Jesus has healed the man, saying that he had been *sōzō*-ed (v. 36). You see, when God says that He will “save” us, what He is saying is He wants to *completely restore* us from sickness of the body, of the mind, of the soul. All this brokenness that weighs upon us as a result of sin,

God wishes to mend. It is His desire to restore us completely.

The weight of emotional trauma can certainly feel overwhelming. But the wonderful fact is that we serve a God of restoration. God desires to *sōzō* His children today. He also wants to use us to bring His saving power into the lives of those who need it most. That is part of the calling for ministers of the gospel.

God's tools for healing

Throughout Scripture, we can see God demonstrating ways to bring restoration to traumatized people. The incredible thing is that the tactics God uses to reach and restore the traumatized match perfectly with what modern science and psychology are recommending. God provided methods for healing even before humanity knew what the problem of trauma even was. As we seek to shepherd and minister to those in need, we can follow God's methods for gently working with those wrestling with the weight of trauma. We must, of course, remember that God has gifted some with the ability to work with mental health crises and disorders. In addition to the following tools, as you minister to others, be sure to provide mental health referrals to those in need that they may receive the best support possible.

1. Calmness. As the Israelites stood at the bank of the Red Sea, crying out in desperation, fear, anger, and panic, what did God tell them? “Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.’” (Exod. 14:13, 14). You need only be still. God is calling for quietness and calmness. He says you do not even need to fear because you are about to see your salvation. God is calling for His people to fix their eyes on Him and put their trust fully in Him.

One of the greatest tools we all have to combat the effects of trauma is our God-given breath—the very first gift God gave to mankind (Gen. 2:7). When someone feels overwhelming emotions rise and their stress response begins inappropriately kicking in, simply taking a few slow, deep breaths can help relax the mind and body. For best results, researchers suggest breathing in through the nose and then exhaling through the mouth for twice the amount of time it took to inhale.⁶ This intentional stillness that God calls us to is something we can easily teach and share with our church members, especially

those we can identify as struggling to regulate their feelings of anxiety and stress. It is a tool available to everyone, and science proves its immediate benefits.⁷

2. *Connection.* In John 8, a woman who was caught in adultery was thrown at the feet of Jesus, her accusers demanding a response from the Messiah. It is true that the story ends with Jesus telling the woman to “go now and leave your life of sin” (v. 11), but He does not speak this correction into her life until after He establishes a caring relationship with her. He defends her against her accusers and tells her that He does not condemn her. Only after showing this love does He tell her to sin no more.

Invariably, when ministering to traumatized people, there will be behaviors or attitudes that we would like to see changed: perhaps they are self-destructive or tend to lash out at others. Before rebuking and correcting, be sure to establish a caring relationship. The adulterous woman’s accusers also told her what she was doing was wrong, but it was the love of Jesus that stirred a real change in her heart. Like Jesus, we must first seek to establish a loving connection.

3. *Consistency.* All throughout Scripture, we see people who have been traumatized as a result of sin in this broken world, and each person seems to interact with God differently. When Elijah was alone and being hunted for his life, he was filled with depression, believing God had nothing else left for him but his destruction (1 Kings 19:4). But when Job sat upon his pile of ashes, covered in boils, he still refused to doubt God and curse Him (Job 2:10). And when the recently freed Israelites saw God’s miracles in the wilderness, they still grumbled and complained against their Savior (Exod. 15:23, 24; 16:2, 3). Still, throughout every story, for each individual and for humanity in every generation, God has remained the same (Heb. 13:8). God’s love and care are consistent, no matter our response to Him. “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (Jer. 31:3).

While we are human and far from the perfect love of God, we have been called to love with His same consistency. For everyone, but especially those who have experienced trauma, consistent relationships are key. They need to know that they are safe in a relationship with you and that you will support them. As mentioned above, this does not mean simply allowing them to stay amid poor decisions. It means that your love and care for them do not depend upon their deeds or

actions. Your church members should know that they are seen and safely cared for within your relationship.

Confronting trauma with love

This is perhaps the most challenging task we have been given as conduits of God’s restoration in the world; but as ministers of the gospel and followers of Christ, this is what we have been called to do. “A new command I give you,” Jesus has told us. “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34, 35).

In the history of the world, there has always been trauma. It has left angry scars across countless hearts. Today, we know that this will only increase. As Christ’s disciples, we must take up the love of God and boldly go forth to minister to broken hearts. God seeks to *sōzō* each and every one of us. May we seek to see His kingdom of restoration increase.



- 1 The International Center for Trauma Education and Care seeks to help facilitate long-term healing from trauma through awareness by educating and supporting healing in organizations, churches, and communities across the world. It is dedicated to equipping people to meet trauma with the powerful message of restoration. <https://www.andrews.edu/cas/socialwork/traumacare>.
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Anxiety and Depression: 2020 Household Pulse Survey,” last reviewed May 5, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>.
- 3 Alex McOwen and Peter Biello, “Lifelines: How COVID-19 Creates ‘Pre-Traumatic Conditions’ in the Brain,” New Hampshire Public Radio, May 4, 2020, <https://www.nhpr.org/post/lifelines-how-covid-19-creates-pre-traumatic-conditions-brain#stream/0>.
- 4 Vincent J. Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading causes of Death in Adults,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (May 1998): 245–258, [https://www.doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://www.doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8).
- 5 Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 6 Pratibha Pradip Pandekar and Poovishnu Devi Thangavelu, “Effect of 4-7-8 Breathing Technique on Anxiety and Depression in Moderate Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Patients,” *International Journal of Health Sciences and Research* 9, no. 5 (May 2019): 209–217.
- 7 Andrea Zaccaro et al., “How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life: A Systematic Review on Psycho-Physiological Correlates of Slow Breathing,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 12, September 7, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2018.00353>.

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THE DIVINE “GO” COMMANDS:

Embracing the biblical model of disciple making

The focus for the 2020–2025 strategic plan of the Seventh-day Adventist world church is “I Will Go.” The “strategic plan is rooted in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28, which calls for Jesus’ followers to go and make disciples of all nations.”¹ However, to truly obey the “go and make disciples” command, the church has to emphasize two other “go” directives from Jesus Christ. So what are they, and how are they related to the directive to make disciples?

Go and worship God

Jesus pronounced the first “go” command in His sermon on the mount when He denounced the Pharisees’ hypocritical prayer posture and admonished His disciples to take a different route. He said, “‘But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you’” (Matt. 6:6, NRSV).

Here Jesus directed His disciples to spend quality time with God, have personal communion with their heavenly Father, and build an intimate relationship with Him. Since true prayer is two-way communication, it is essential to go into our rooms with the Bible and let God speak to us through His Word. In doing so, it is beneficial to pray what John Piper calls the IOUS prayer:

“Incline [our] heart[s] to your testimonies” (Ps. 119:36, ESV);

“open [our] eyes that [we] may behold wondrous things out of your law” (v. 18, ESV);

“unite [our] heart[s] to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11, ESV); and

“satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Ps. 90:14, ESV).²

Indeed, true worship is a constant growth in our ability to love God with all our hearts. It does not glorify God when we honor Him with our



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lips while our hearts are far from Him. God wants us to surrender ourselves and let Him be our all in all. A case in point here is the narrative about Abraham where the Hebrew emphatic imperative, *lĕk lĕkĕ*, “go yourself,” occurs twice (Gen. 12:1; 22:2). By obeying the first “go” command, he surrendered all his past to God and started on a journey to follow Him by faith. When Abraham obeyed the second “go” command, he surrendered all his future and offered the promised son on the altar as a sacrifice. We also need to have this attitude of surrender when we obey the command of Jesus Christ, our Master, to go and worship.

In the same vein, author Ellen White urged us to pray the following: “Lord, take my heart; for I can not keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristianlike self. Mould me, fashion me, raise me into a pure, holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.” Then she emphasized the importance of praying such a prayer often: “It is

not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of self is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. All our good works are dependent on a power outside of ourselves. Therefore there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a continual, earnest, heart-breaking confession of sin, and humbling of the soul before Him. Only by a constant renunciation of self and dependence on Christ can we walk safely.”³

Thus, as the Seventh-day Adventist world church echoes the watchword “I will go,” the response should be connected to the command, “Go and pray, worship, surrender all to God!” Each member should say, “I will go into my room and surrender all to God.” Local churches should proclaim, “I will go and make my church a house of prayer, make Jesus the center of everything, and consecrate all ministries to God’s glory.” Only when we take this worship posture can we position ourselves to obey the other “go” commands.

Go and fellowship

Jesus also commanded His disciples to make every effort to reflect His love through their fellowship. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23, 24, NIV).

A similar command appears in Matthew 18:15: “If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother” (HCSB). Both commands have the imperative to go. Jesus extended a call to make every effort to keep unity among the family of God. While the first command urges the offender to seek restitution, the second admonishes the offended person to settle the matter with the person who wronged him or her. Indeed, the unity of His children is God’s priority. Christ placed love as the distinguishing mark of His disciples. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35, NIV).

It is pathetic to see unresolved conflicts in the church today spoiling what was once a sweet fellowship among the followers of Christ. When we pay little or no attention to such situations and new members join our churches, they will encounter the indifference to the conflicts and will leave the church through the back door.

A survey, “Why Some Seventh-day Adventist Members Leave the Church, and Why Some Come Back,” reported that “perceived hypocrisy in other members” is the top reason for leaving the church.⁴ This dismal reality depicts the urgency of our need to obey the second “go” command of Jesus—to go and make every effort to love one another as He loved us.

Ellen White makes the following alarming comment regarding this second command: “Let us take heed that while we confess Christ with our lips, we do not deny him in our actions, and thus lead souls in the way of rebellion. . . .

“Without love one for another we do not keep the commandments of God, and all our profession is mere pretension, and ‘as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.’ Whatever is contrary to love, humility, and faith, denies Christ.”⁵

White also wrote the following observation: “There is counterfeit Christianity in the world as well as genuine Christianity. The true spirit of a man is manifested by the way in which he deals with his fellow-man. We may ask the question,

Does he represent the character of Christ in spirit and action, or simply manifest the natural, selfish traits of character that belong to the people of this world? Profession weighs nothing with God. Before it is everlastingly too late for wrongs to be righted, let each one ask himself, ‘What am I?’ It depends upon ourselves as to whether we shall form such characters as will constitute us members of God’s royal family above.”⁶

Because of this, Paul exhorted the Ephesians to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3, NIV). In fact, he employed the Greek word *allemelon*, “one another,” more than 30 times and told believers to perform certain acts of love and service toward one another. As a community of disciples, we need to go and foster authentic fellowship by giving heed to these exhortations. And “our daily prayer should be, ‘Help us to help each other, Lord; each other’s woes to bear.’”⁷

It is important to remember, then, when we say “I will go,” we should encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11), bear with one another (Eph. 4:2), regard one another as more important (Phil. 2:3), greet one another (Rom. 16:16), pray for one another (James 5:16), serve one another (Gal. 5:13), accept one another (Rom. 15:7), admonish one another (Col. 3:16), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), and love one another (1 John 3:11).

Go and make disciples

So far, we have addressed the first two crucial “go” commands of Jesus—go worship and go fellowship. They underline our vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationship with others. Only when these two aspects are in order can we go and reach others effectually.

The third command mentioned at the beginning of this article occurs in Matthew 28:18–20: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (NIV).

Jonah received the divine command to go and proclaim God’s message to the people of Nineveh. Although God accomplished His purpose through the reluctant prophet’s ministry, Jonah’s failure to grow in loving God and His creation robbed him of the joy of making disciples. Although he knew the greatness of God’s love, he did not let that

love transform his heart. It is a personal experience of God's grace and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that kindle and fan the fire of mission in the bones of His true disciples. Concurring with this, Preston Sprinkle writes, "It's fruitless to talk about discipleship without first talking about grace. Grace is the foundation and structure of discipleship. By grace God creates disciples. By grace God cultivates disciples. And it's by God's grace that we are transformed into Christlikeness. Grace enables us to be like Jesus, forgives us when we fail to act like Jesus, and empowers us to cling to Jesus in the midst of our brokenness. Jesus, not you or I, is the center of discipleship."⁸

In short, one has to be a disciple and grow in loving God and others to be an effective witness and make other disciples of Jesus.

The interconnectedness of the commands

As shown above, the three commands of Jesus—to go worship, fellowship, and make disciples—are interconnected. If we do not go and worship God, if we do not experience His love and grow in loving Him, then we cannot love one another as He loved us. And if we do not love God and one another, we cannot go with power and be His faithful witnesses. So, as we obey the command to go and worship God in truth and spirit and go and forge and foster a vibrant fellowship, we will be empowered to go and be faithful witnesses of God.

As recorded in the book of Acts, the life of the first Christian church portrays their love to God and one another as the source of their success in making disciples: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46, 47; NIV).

This brief biblical report clearly shows us how they obeyed the commands to go worship and go fellowship and how, as a result, their obedience to go and make disciples met with great success.

In conclusion, let us remember that the first disciples were able to achieve evangelistic success because they were obedient to the three "go" commands of Jesus: go worship, go fellowship, and go make disciples. Let us take these three "go" commands seriously and embrace them all when we respond and say "I will go."

ONE HAS TO BE A DISCIPLE AND GROW IN LOVING GOD AND OTHERS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE WITNESS AND MAKE OTHER DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

Let us say: "I will go and worship God. I will set aside time every day to commune with Him and surrender myself to Christ."

Let us say: "I will go and fellowship with my brothers and sisters and make every effort to keep the unity of spirit."

Let us say: "I will go and witness in the power of God's Spirit."

When we do so, we will embrace the biblical model of disciple making.



- 1 *I Will Go: Strategic Focus 2020–2025*, 4, https://iwillgo2020.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IWG_A4_English.pdf.
- 2 John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 151, 152.
- 3 Ellen White, "Consecration," *Signs of the Times*, January 6, 1904, 2.
- 4 Anthony Kent, *Leaving the Church: Why Some Seventh-day Adventist Members Leave the Church, and Why Some Come Back*, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/why-did-they-leave.pdf>.
- 5 Ellen G. White, "Love the Test of Discipleship," *Youth's Instructor*, December 2, 1897.
- 6 Ellen G. White, "Are We Genuine Christians?" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 9, 1895, 1.
- 7 Ellen G. White, "Home Missionary Work," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 31, 189, 19.
- 8 Preston M. Sprinkle, *Go: Returning Discipleship to the Front Lines of Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), 25.

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Conversion, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and New Testament religious practices

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How are conversion and the gift of the Holy Spirit related to baptism and the laying on of hands? Is either of these religious practices necessary to receive the Holy Spirit? This brief consideration of the New Testament evidence attempts to answer these questions.¹

Origin and nature of Christian baptism

Christian baptism has its origins in John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Acts 13:24).² Being baptized by John signaled one's repentance in response to John's preaching, just as Christian baptism shows a positive response to the similar proclamation of Jesus and His disciples (Luke 5:32; Acts 2:38). Jesus' submitting to John's baptism shows that Christian baptism should not be distinguished too sharply from that of John.³

Jesus' baptism, however, is unique in several aspects. First, He needed no repentance because He never sinned. Second, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His unique Messianic role in the fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 10:38). Third, His baptism prefigured His death and resurrection (Luke 12:50; John 2:19–21) and set an example for believers to follow.

Christ's baptism is also instructive because it shows the close connection between Christian

baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus indicates, receiving the Holy Spirit is just as essential as being baptized (John 3:5). So extraordinary is the transformation made by the Spirit in a person's life that Jesus describes it as being "born from above" (John 3:3, marg.). Paul identifies baptism as symbolic of the death and resurrection of Jesus *and* of a life-changing experience. It marks one's death to sin, burial with Christ, and resurrection to a new life (Rom. 6:1–7; cf. Titus 3:5). Baptism, which biblically is by immersion in water,⁴ is also the means whereby a person is united to the church (1 Cor. 12:12–14).

While baptism and conversion are closely associated, nowhere in Scripture is baptism said to *cause* this inner change. Repentance must come first (Acts 2:38). Baptism is the outward sign of an inwardly repentant heart (1 Pet. 3:21; Col. 2:11, 12). This inner change is also described as being "sealed" by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Important as baptism is, it is not a means of salvation but the person's public witness to the Holy Spirit's work in his or her life (Acts 10:47, 48).

The laying on of hands and the gift of the Spirit

Turning to another New Testament religious practice, both Jesus and the apostles are described as laying their hands on people in various settings and for a variety of reasons. Often it had no necessary connection with inward change and no obvious relation to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Laying on of hands (sometimes together with prayer) relates to

- the healing of disease by Jesus (Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40) and His followers (Acts 28:8),

- › Jesus' blessing of children (Matt. 19:13–15),
- › the apostles ordaining of seven individuals for the work of ministering to people's material needs (Acts 6:1–6),⁵
- › the church in Antioch ordaining Paul and Barnabas as missionaries and sending them on their missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3), and
- › Paul's instruction on selecting elders: not to lay hands on anyone hastily (1 Tim. 5:22).

Only three New Testament passages connect the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17, 18; 9:17; 19:6). As a close examination of the larger context of these verses will make clear, these were unique, exceptional, and unrepeatable cases that necessitated the laying on of hands and should not be used as a model for ministry today.⁶

1. *Acts 8:17, 18.* Philip's preaching of the gospel in Samaria led many to believe and be baptized, including Simon Magus (Acts 8:5–13). When word reached Jerusalem that "Samaria had received the word of God," Peter and John were sent to help and follow up the work being done by Philip (v. 14).⁷ As the text indicates, the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized (v. 16).⁸ So the apostles "laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). No explanation for this action is given, but there are some hints as to the reason.

First, the preaching of the gospel in Samaria represents a major mission advance by the early church in harmony with the instructions given by Jesus (Acts 1:8). In addition, the text uses unusual language to describe the fact that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit: "for he had not yet fallen on any of them" (Acts 8:16). The word "fallen" (Gk. *epiptō*) refers to the giving of the Holy Spirit on only three occasions, with this being the first. The second is in reference to the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles who gathered at Cornelius's house to hear Peter's preaching (Acts 10:44). The third is contained in Peter's description of this event to some in the Jerusalem church—that "the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15; emphasis added)—referring to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–8). In other words, the three stages in preaching the gospel to the world indicated in Acts 1:8—first to Jews; then to Samaritans; and, finally, to Gentiles—are marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁹ This outpouring on Samaritans occurred sometime after they were baptized. In the case of the Gentiles,

however, the Holy Spirit was poured out beforehand (Acts 10:44).

2. *Acts 9:17.* Following his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was brought into connection with the early church through the ministry of Ananias, who had been instructed in a vision to go to him (vv. 10–16). As with the Samaritans' conversion, the seal of Christ's church was to be placed on his conversion and baptism. "Laying his hands on him," Ananias said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). As a result, "something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized" (v. 18). The text is unclear as to whether the act of Ananias in laying his hands on Paul effected the regaining of sight, being filled with the Holy Spirit, or both. From verse 12, it might be concluded that it only accomplished Paul's healing. Notice Ellen White's description: "In Christ's stead Ananias touches the eyes of Saul, that they may receive sight. In Christ's stead he places his hands upon him, and, as he prays in Christ's name, Saul receives the Holy Ghost."¹⁰ Even though it coincides with the laying on of hands, it seems that the reception of the Spirit came in response to prayer.

3. *Acts 19:1–7.* Acts 19 describes the gospel being brought by Paul to Ephesus, where he stayed more than two years during his third missionary journey (vv. 8, 10). Almost immediately, he met "some disciples" (*tinai mathētas*, v. 1), about twelve in number (v. 7). When not further qualified, the term *disciples* normally refers to baptized Christian believers, especially in Acts.¹¹ Given the context and the very general phraseology, these Ephesians were, at best, "believers with partial knowledge."¹² This would help explain why Luke interrupts Paul's travel narrative at this point. In fact, Paul seems to recognize their instruction and experience were inadequate because he asks: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (v. 2). As we have seen, ordinarily, the reception of the Holy Spirit coincides with believing, so this should have been assumed. But their reply—that they had not yet "even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (v. 2)—is hardly reassuring. Although John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the One who would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7, 8), these disciples from Ephesus may not have heard this remark. Thus, Paul explained how John had urged people to believe in "the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus" (Acts 19:4).

Clearly, these men had been led by the Spirit up to this point; Paul brought them to a fuller understanding of the gospel of Christ. Their rebaptism by Paul “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5) set a seal on their Christian commitment. It also provides an important example for believers today—in two different ways. First, because baptism into Christ constitutes one’s formal acceptance of Him as Savior and entry into the Christian church, it should not normally be repeated any more than a married couple would repeat their wedding ceremony.¹³ On the other hand, if a person has fallen away from Christ by living a life out of harmony with Scripture and the baptismal vows they made, rebaptism would be appropriate. Thus, public confession is made of a return to Christ and reconsecration of one’s life to Him. A second reason a person may want to consider rebaptism is upon seeing and embracing a whole new paradigm of truth, as the disciples of John did, which leads to such a dramatic life change that rebaptism is deemed appropriate to mark this “new life.”¹⁴

Acts 19 also indicates that they received the Holy Spirit through Paul’s laying on of hands. This was for outreach because “they began speaking in tongues and prophesying” (v. 6), just as the apostles had experienced for evangelizing the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–8, 16–21), and the Gentiles for a similar witness (Acts 10:44–48). The gift of the Spirit in Acts 19 was likewise strategic. The gospel could now spread more rapidly in Ephesus, which, as a major Roman port and center of trade for East and West, was the most important city of Asia Minor.¹⁵

Ask and receive

In preparing people for baptism and church membership, care should be taken to ensure that they have been thoroughly instructed and show evidence of conversion and the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives.¹⁶ The New Testament consistently associates receiving the Spirit with repentance, conversion, and baptism. The conversions of Paul, the Samaritans, Cornelius and his household, and other Gentile believers were unique. We find no biblical authorization for a minister to lay hands on individuals in order that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Spirit is normally bestowed on a person as soon as he or she understands and believes the gospel and is willing to receive this gift.



- 1 For further study, see, e.g., Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London, UK: SCM, 1950); G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962); Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 83–198; Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “Baptismal Instruction in the New Testament and Other Related Issues,” accessed October 8, 2020, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/church/baptismal-instruction-new-testament-and-other-related-issues>.
- 2 Scripture is from the English Standard Version.
- 3 See Wilson Paroschi, “Acts 19:1–7 Reconsidered in Light of Paul’s Theology of Baptism,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 47, no. 1 (2009): 94, 95, describing the distinctiveness of the post-Pentecost Christian baptism as introducing “an important ecclesiological emphasis” that includes “baptism in the name of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
- 4 This is indicated not only by the basic meaning of the verbal root *baptō* (Albrecht Oepke, “βάπτω, βαπτίζω κτλ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964], 529–546) but also by “much water” being required for baptisms to take place (John 3:23; Acts 8:38). Describing early Christian baptism, Ferguson states: “The Christian literary sources, backed by secular word usage and Jewish religious immersions, give an overwhelming support for full immersion as the normal action.” Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 891.
- 5 It is natural to connect the actions of praying and laying hands on the seven with the nearest subject, namely, “the apostles,” thereby providing confirmation by the leadership of the seven chosen by the congregation.
- 6 Similarly, “The few cases where it was performed are very peculiar and should not be used to universalize the practice.” Rodríguez, “Baptismal Instruction.”
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 106, 107.
- 8 The exceptional nature of the situation is underscored by the words “not yet” (*oudēpō*) and “only” (*monon*).
- 9 Cf. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 383: “We may say that there is a Jewish Pentecost, a Samaritan Pentecost, and a Gentile Pentecost.”
- 10 White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 122.
- 11 See, e.g., Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:10, 19.
- 12 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues: Biblical Speaking in Tongues and Contemporary Glossolalia* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1991), 99.
- 13 Cf. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2016), 50: “A member whose spiritual experience has become cold needs a spirit of repentance which leads to revival and reformation. This experience will be followed by participation in the communion service to signify renewed cleansing and fellowship in the body of Christ, making rebaptism unnecessary.”
- 14 *Church Manual*, 49. Rebaptism in no way impugns the significance of one’s prior baptism.
- 15 Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), and by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, churches were well established throughout the western part of Asia Minor (see Rev. 2; 3).
- 16 See *Church Manual*, 44.

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Adventist leaders elect church president for the South American Division

Stanley Arco, an experienced leader in both Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking regions of the South American Division (SAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was elected as the new president of that 2.5-million-member division on April 22, 2021.

The Executive Committee of the General Conference (GC EXCOM) voted to accept the SAD Executive Committee (SAD EXCOM) recommendation of Arco for the top leadership position during a special virtual session. He will replace **Erton Köhler**, who was recently elected secretary of the General Conference.

During the April 16 session, SAD EXCOM members also thanked Köhler for his years serving the Adventist Church in the region. It was an emotional moment for Köhler, who emphasized that he is confident about the future and Arco's leadership across the region.

"Pastor Stanley Arco is an experienced and balanced leader with a wide-ranging vision of the [Adventist] Church in South America," Köhler told the *Adventist Review*. "He is a man



Photo: Gustavo Leighton, South American Division News

of prayer, biblically sound, and well-grounded in the guidance of the Spirit of Prophecy," he said, referencing the writings of Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White. "He is a leader open to dialogue, respectful, conciliatory, and notably focused on mission."

Elbert Kuhn, an associate secretary of the General Conference, also highlighted Arco's collaborative spirit. "He is someone who can

work with a support group around him, and that is very necessary for the times we are living in."

Arco was born in southern Brazil. In addition to being a church pastor in Brazil, he served as a youth ministries leader across several church regions for 17 years. He also worked as the secretary of the South Parana Conference in southern Brazil and later as assistant to the SAD president. In August 2020, he was elected vice president of SAD.

"This assignment is a joy, a privilege, and a huge responsibility," Arco stated. "I ask

for the prayers of every member, of every person wishing for Jesus to come soon. Please pray for me, for all leaders, and for the mission of the Adventist Church in South America and around the world."

[Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*; Felipe Lemons, Jefferson Paradello, *SAD News*; Márcio Tonetti, *Revista Adventista Brazil*]

South Pacific Division records highest baptism figure during pandemic year

The South Pacific Division (SPD) experienced a significant increase in baptisms in 2020, the only division of the Seventh-day Adventist

General Conference to do so during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While many countries in the South Pacific region have been sheltered from the impact of COVID-19, the 40 percent growth in Trans-Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) and 30 percent in Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM) is noteworthy as a higher-than-normal growth rate.

“When countries in these unions experienced lockdown, they were still able to meet in groups of between 50 and 100,” said SPD president **Glenn Townsend**.

“Both of these unions [TPUM and PNGUM] have focused on the harvest cycle of disciple-making. Many people were able to lead groups, share their faith, and give basic Bible studies to people and allow the fellowship of the people and the Holy Spirit to bring about the transforming life change in Jesus. These groups increased the involvement of many people and were not pastor dependent.”

“We have been too comfortable in our church building,” said TPUM president **Maveni Kaufononga**. “COVID-19 closed [the churches] and forced us outside of our comfort zone. The Spirit of God has provided so many ways for us.”

“Prior to COVID-19, we dedicated 2020 as a year of our young people,” said Pastor Kaufononga. “We had a plan; COVID-19 came and adjusted our plan, but [at least] there was a plan for evangelism. We must be intentional about evangelism and have a plan. Circumstances may change, but with a plan in place, it will guide us.”



According to Pastor Kaufononga, one factor that may have increased the church's visibility in Fiji during 2020 is that many more people tuned in to watch evangelistic TV programs while locked down at home. Most of the countries in the Pacific have a strong Adventist presence through local Hope Channel TV or FM radio stations.

“The Holy Spirit is working in many different ways; we just need to join Him. With this theme of ‘I Will Go,’ our people are committed to go! We must not allow COVID-19 to stop us.” [Jarrod Stackelroth, *Adventist Record*]

A new strategic framework for Trans-European Division

Trans-European Division (TED) leaders have formulated plans for mission from now until the 2025 General Conference Session and beyond.

TED president **Raafat Kamal** says that the new strategic framework “is intended to help Adventists within the TED territory to renew our Adventist identity that speaks to the challenges of the twenty-first-century world, and to renew, in this century, the passion for mission of past generations.”

The 26-page document develops a framework in 11 key areas, stretching from mission, identity,

and evangelism to spiritual growth, leadership development, and disciple making to issues of diversity and the appropriate training of pastors and leaders in the context of European culture and its spiritual needs. It is based upon the General Conference (GC) strategic plan “I Will Go” and contextualized for Europe.

Marius Radosh, a lay representative from Poland, notes that “each organization is tested in times of crisis.” He adds, “Being well prepared and adapted to the new pandemic and post-pandemic situation, strategy helps us go through difficult times as a winner.”

Newbold College of Higher Education has redesigned its structure and curriculum to highlight discipleship and mission-focused



training. It will also reflect the diversity of the church across the entire division. **Ivo Kläsk**, president of the Baltic Union, stated, “I find it most helpful that we are working with a renewed focus on training pastors for our fields and that we are working together towards influencing the understanding of the role of a pastor,” he said.

Christine Burt, a lay representative from the British Union Conference (BUC), notes that “young people are crucial for church growth and, during COVID, church engagement has often been challenging. The media, online ministry, and church of refuge areas of the plan contain many suggestions for engaging the youth.”

Hilde Huru, a lay member from north Norway, noted the important emphasis on rooting out any cultural or racial biases from the church. “It is not enough for leaders not to be racist or nationalist or biased in any way, but . . . we need to be purposefully anti-racist and have systems in place to make us override our unconscious biases.” This includes the hiring process, where she recommends ensuring that “TED ethical employment policies are established and used as standard practice in all units of denominational structure and institutions.”

Having spent ten years as president of the British Union Conference, **Ian Sweeney** agrees but notes that in the diversity issue we need to look at our external mission as much as mission within our church community. With the BUC probably having the most diverse membership in Europe, he says that “the recommendations would allow our church to share and celebrate our internal diversity and consequently be better equipped to reach our diverse communities and neighborhoods.”

The TED is committed to helping see the church in Europe move forward even amid both recent and historic challenges. As Kamal says, “Most important is the guidance by the power of the Holy Spirit and our choice, *I will go*, that lies in our hands, our response to the challenges, and what view we take of our situation.” [Victor Hulbert, *tedNEWS*]



8 Secrets to a Mission-Driven Church: Understanding the Impact of Strategic Thinking and Deliberate Action

by Dan Day, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2019.

Dan Day contributes to church leadership by offering a strategy for mission that translates into a greater level of success. His book *8 Secrets to a Mission-Driven Church* beckons to leaders practicing traditional methods of mission to take the reins in leading the movement on a path that not only challenges the status quo but also, more importantly, enables us “to become more efficient, more comprehensive, and especially, more able to reach contemporary audiences with a strategic approach” (23). Simultaneously, this approach advocates “the formation of habits that lead to better organizational health” (23). Transformations like these result in a mission-driven church.

Transforming an organization into a mission-driven one involves several key elements that Day itemizes into eight aspects. These steps, derived from both Scripture and business strategies, involve conversations and collaborations to bridge the various gaps based on geography, generation, political polarization, and idealism and move the organization forward toward mission success. Bridging these gaps generates relationships, and “leadership success is always relational” (33).

For an organization to become more mission-driven, it has to learn how to effectively market its product. Many strategies fail because of gimmicky marketing strategies that manipulate consumers to buy something they do not want or

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need. In the context of a church, its product is its message. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a distinctive message. How is that message being delivered? With many churches in North America struggling to maintain membership, let alone grow, “we need to be telling a far more cohesive, positive story than we are now telling” (65). Has our focus shifted away from Christ on the cross to our distinctive beliefs that make us different from other denominations? Effective marketing in a church setting will present a message that is relevant, compelling, timely, and honest.

Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists have delivered a message paired with “all the bells and whistles” (121), expecting great results. There was a time when this was highly effective, and there is still a need for it. Yet, there is another element that should be included when sharing our message. It involves gaining a better understanding of “what motivates and resonates with the various audiences we are trying to reach” (123).

Mission-driven organizations have grit, an essential ingredient of success. Though founded on a biblical message, the Seventh-day Adventist Church used grit to bring it into existence, organize it, and advance it into a worldwide denomination. Grit provides the endurance and “determination to complete the mission God has given us” (80).

While focused on drive and mission, this book does not ignore the importance of organizational health. Health is often measured by quantifiable categories, such as member growth, financial increase, and attendance. Teamwork, collaboration, and systems that encourage partnerships



are benchmarks of organizational health that cannot be calculated that way. However, “a dynamic people-focused model ignites passion in agile organizations” (106). When the church brings younger and older generations together in the conversation, each learns from the other, and the passion and motivation to carry out mission effectively pass from one generation to the next, creating a picture of “individual and organizational health . . . so attractive that people say, ‘I want some of that’ ” (107).

This book calls for each leader to take a deeper look into the organization, recognize its current condition, and be willing to explore concepts and strategies that may take us out of our comfort zones. With intentionality, open minds, and an effective strategy, our churches can stand out in the community as being relational, relevant, and valuable. “In asking us to become more mission driven, He is only inviting us to share the blessing. We do not *have* to do this, but rather we *get* to do it” (168).

I highly recommend this book to any leader or potential leader who seeks to reignite the flame of mission in their organization. The principles discussed translate across the threshold dividing the religious and secular and suggest a method of mission that removes the anchors holding any organization back from achieving success. Its refreshing emphasis on people-oriented leadership, collaboration, organizational health, and strategy generates its own spark within the reader. Plainly put, *8 Secrets to a Mission-Driven Church* lays out a system to put “the *move* back into *movement*” (148). 📖



Help for the brokenhearted

Have you ever experienced brokenheartedness? Perhaps through the loss of someone or something significant to you or the loss of a relationship? It is an intense sorrow.

Having recently experienced heartbreak when my mother suddenly died, I would describe it as an ache that impacts every organ in your body. After the initial shock, I began to look at what I was experiencing, through the lens of God's Word and found some concepts that started to bring healing to me during this time:

1. God is near to those who are brokenhearted (Ps. 34:18).

2. God is active; "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3, KJV).

3. God is effective; He is personally familiar with brokenheartedness. "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness" (Ps. 69:20, NKJV).

4. God enters into my brokenheartedness. "Surely He has borne [my] griefs and carried [my] sorrows" (Isa. 53:4, NKJV).¹

5. God sheds tears because of human pain. I like the thought that a friend sent me about when Jesus wept for Lazarus (John 11:35). Carlos Rodriguez states, "Jesus knew Lazarus would rise again. Still, he wept. Because embracing pain is not negating faith. It's actually part of being in the likeness of God. So have hope, but don't deny your emotions. Pay attention to them. Feel what you feel. And enjoy the coming resurrection."² So join the long line of those who wept. Jeremiah wept until the tears no longer would come (Lam. 2:11), David wept because of Absalom, his son (2 Sam. 18:33), and Hannah wept because of barrenness (1 Sam. 1:10).

So, it's OK to weep—in fact, it's godly!

6. God takes note of your every tear. "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" (Ps. 56:8, ESV).

7. The word "near" used in Psalm 34:18 literally means "to sew together" like a surgeon. He stitches our broken hearts back together one piece at a time. And after He stitches them back together, he "binds" them up (Ps. 147:3)—puts a bandage around them.

8. Christ has a body (His *ecclesia*—those who are called out) whom He works through in His healing activity (Prov. 31:8; James 1:27; 2 Cor. 1:3–11; Mark 2:1–12).

I have experienced the heart surgery of Christ's body in my own church and the touching comments from hundreds on social media. Each experience is another stitch!

9. As God heals our broken hearts, we can then testify of the truth of Christ's own promise. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4, KJV). As they sense His healing power, they will want to promote the Christ who promised to "heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4:18–21).

10. God brings healing as we praise Him. My father, a minister for 65-plus years, said, "Don, we are called in this time to believe what we have preached to others. We are called to believe—and I do believe. Look [at] what God is doing for us. Look at how His people are caring for this. We have much to praise God for." So let us praise, knowing that He "inhabits the praises of His people" (Ps. 22:3).

I can still see my mother singing hymns from memory. As I sing those hymns, it gives me great comfort that she sang the same hymns, and we are, in a sense, still connected in our common faith in the God of the resurrection (2 Tim. 1:1–7).

Several weeks before my mother died, she talked with our minister of music, asking him to play a song that was meaningful to her through the years. It is called "Lo, What a Glorious Sight Appears." Part of the song says, "His own soft hand shall wipe the tears / From every weeping eye; / And pains, and groans, and griefs, and fears / And death itself shall die!"³ Praise God. We will never part again!

The powerful preacher Charles Spurgeon, when preaching on brokenheartedness, told the story of a dog whose broken leg was set by a veterinarian. The dog was so overjoyed with the healing of his leg that he started to lead other injured dogs to the doctor. Spurgeon observed that if a dog can point people to the doctor who healed them, can we not do the same? Can we not point people to Christ the Healer?

May God bless you and me on our healing journey!

Don Mackintosh is a professor and chaplain at Weimar Institute, Weimar, California, United States.



1 See also Isaiah 57:15 and Isaiah 63:9.

2 Carlos A. Rodriguez, "Therapy is God's Work Too," Marriagetrac, <https://www.marriagetrac.com/therapy-is-gods-work-too/>.

3 Isaac Watts, "Lo, What a Glorious Sight Appears," *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), no. 446.

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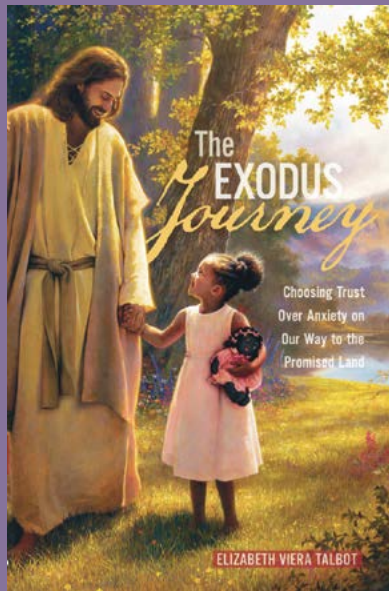
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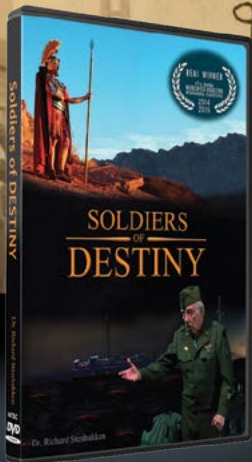
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