



FEBRUARY 2022

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

**Go ye therefore,  
to all social  
media**



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EXIT

## The Great Resignation



Most of us are familiar with the Great Commission, the Great Awakening, and even the Great Disappointment, when Baptist preacher William Miller inspired thousands to believe that Jesus' return was imminent. Fewer of us may have heard of the Great Resignation.

"The last several months have seen a tidal wave of resignations, in the U.S. and around the world," stated *Harvard Business Review*.<sup>1</sup> BBC announced, "The Great Resignation is happening across the world, as workers clean out their desks to head for new roles elsewhere."<sup>2</sup>

### Mission impossible?

The word *resignation* can mean giving up in an active sense, such as in giving up a job. It can also refer to giving up in a passive sense, such as in giving up hope of change, a reluctant acceptance of something perceived as inevitable. One of these seeming inevitabilities is a lack of progress in the struggle for racial equality.

All of the blaming, shaming, and name-calling have led many to throw up arms of despair and

quietly retreat, believing the conflict will never be resolved. In the enormity of the struggle, many have resigned to leaving it for Jesus to fix when He returns. Yet Jesus says, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13, KJV). For Jesus' followers, resignation is not ours to choose.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church embraces a comprehensive message of physical healing now, though we know that when Jesus comes, "There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4, NKJV). Similarly, we are called to embrace a comprehensive message of racial healing now, though we know that when Jesus comes, "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2, NIV).

Healing embodies repentance, reconciliation, and restitution. Ellen White states, "The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past. Those who have taken no active part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement."<sup>3</sup>



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Restitution adds conviction to a person's repentance and reconciliation. At the groundbreaking Lucy Byard Recognition Event (see Dateline in this issue, p. 26), Adventist HealthCare's acknowledgment of wrongdoing was accompanied by an immediate pledge of half a million dollars toward scholarships, including an endowment, to close health disparities and economic inequity gaps among people of color.

### Mission accomplished?

Resignation is not an option for the people of God. Ellen White states, "Every church member should feel an interest in all that concerns the human brotherhood and the brotherhood in Christ. We are members one of another; if one member suffers, all the members suffer with him."<sup>4</sup> Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, commented, "The recognition of Lucy Byard is an important step in helping people understand that Seventh-day Adventists, not just the institution, but all of us, must truly follow in the steps

of Christ and understand what it means to offer respect and dignity to all."<sup>5</sup>

While we dare not say "mission accomplished," we rejoice that African American Allegheny East Conference president Pete Palmer can say that the Lucy Byard Recognition Event was the celebration of "a new day dawning in the Adventist Church."<sup>6</sup> Such small celebrations on earth may just be prerequisites for the Great Celebration in heaven.



- 1 Ian Cook, "Who Is Driving the Great Resignation?" *Harvard Business Review*, September 15, 2021, summary, <https://hbr.org/2021/09/who-is-driving-the-great-resignation>.
- 2 Sophia Epstein, "The Benefits of Not Joining the Great Resignation," *BBC Worklife*, November 28, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20211124-why-not-quitting-might-be-great-for-your-career>.
- 3 Ellen G. White, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 21, 1896, 1.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1902), 292.
- 5 Corinne Kuypers-Denlinger, "The Life and Legacy of Lucy Byard Honored at Recognition Event," *Adventist Review*, December 17, 2021.
- 6 Pete Palmer, "Lucy Byard Recognition Event," December 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFK1zAfV3jw>. Listen at 1 hour, 40 min, 15 sec.

# Go ye therefore, to all social media



**B**efore ascending to heaven, Jesus gave what we call the Great Commission to His disciples: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19, 20, KJV).

Based on this, I have presented two live Bible conferences (evangelistic campaigns) on social media during the lockdown period caused by

COVID-19. I organized the first one for 26 days and the second for 14 days. With a team of four people, we live-preached sermons simultaneously on Facebook and YouTube. We left sermons on the two media platforms so that those who did not view the livestream could access the programs at their convenience and viewers who did could watch them again and again. People are also able to share the programs with others. Through these two social media campaigns, many people asked for baptism, even more for more Bible studies, and we were able to proclaim



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the gospel to more than 20,000 people around the world.

How does one organize a Bible live conference (BLC) on social media? First, what exactly is social media? Social media “provides a way for people to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differs from so-called ‘mainstream media’ in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. It can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities.”<sup>1</sup> Online communities have no physical boundaries.

Social media has changed countless aspects of how we live, from how we get our news to how we interact with loved ones. It is inevitable, influential, and here to stay. According to the marketing company Emarsys, “3.2 billion users—which equates to about 42% of the population—log in, peruse, and converse with friends on social media. In fact, people spend more than an hour and a half on social media *every day!*”<sup>2</sup>

The most commonly used social media platforms in the world are Instagram,<sup>3</sup> YouTube, Facebook, and Tik Tok. According to Adobe Spark, YouTube alone averages two billion users each month. “A whopping 73% of US adults report regularly using YouTube, with a heavy concentration in the age range of 15 to 34 years [old].”<sup>4</sup> With nearly 2.5 billion monthly users, Facebook is the largest social media site in the world.

Some years ago, the Adventist Church organized satellite-based evangelistic series that were good but required a lot of financial resources. One person spoke, and all the churches participating invited others to watch with them.

Today, with social media platforms, it is easier to organize a public campaign where one person preaches, and churches with a Facebook and/or YouTube account, internet access, a laptop, smartphone, screen, or a projector, can participate. If each church formed small groups, with everyone getting ready and preparing the ground, a great harvest could result in just two weeks. Such a program would be far less expensive than a satellite-based series.

### *What you need to know*

1. People are on social media.
2. Your audience will extend far beyond where you are.
3. Your sermons may remain on social media for others to listen to or watch after the livestream.

## **Social media amplifies your evangelism program with new and often surprising audiences. It allows us to reach those farther away than we thought possible.**

### *What you need to prepare*

1. A Bible conference team
2. Advertising (digital posters, videos, banners, etc.)
3. Your sermons on PowerPoint
4. A team of digital missionaries
5. A budget for the program

### *What you need to do*

1. Preach as if people are in front of you.
2. Promote the Facebook page where the livestream will take place before, during, and after the sermon.
3. Invite as many people as possible to listen to the program via church members and other means.
4. Invite people to share the programs.
5. Respond to questions and comments every day after the sermon.
6. Continuously pray and leave the program in God’s hands.
7. Connect people who are distant from you with Adventist pastors closer to where they are.

### **A new front line**

Some people will never attend a traditional evangelism program. However, evangelism can meet them where they are. Evangelism on social media is imperative in this age of digitalization based on Christ’s method, which consists of mingling with people where they are, sympathizing with them, meeting their needs, and inviting them to follow Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

Social media amplifies your evangelism program with new and often surprising audiences. It allows us to reach those farther away than we thought possible. People near or far will have a chance to hear about Jesus through your ministry. The possibilities for thus expanding the range of your evangelistic activities through social media are worth exploring for that reason alone.



## By any means necessary

The mission of any disciple of Christ is to spread the gospel message. No other moment in history has offered as many possibilities to touch the lives of people everywhere. Online evangelism may become one of the most common means by which future generations will come to know Christ.

The closing work of evangelism focuses on the proclamation of the gospel to all the world. God has given us the privilege of being partners with Him and partakers in the all-important work of evangelism. Therefore, as part of the Great Commission, we must meet people where they are today; one of the ways to do that is on social media. Each church should embark on spreading the gospel and love of Jesus using all possible means.



- 1 David Meerman Scott, *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use News Releases, Blogs, Podcasting, Viral Marketing, and Online Media to Reach Buyers Directly* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 38.
- 2 Lindsay Tjepkema, "Top 5 Social Media Predictions for 2019," January 3, 2019, <https://emarsys.com/learn/blog/top-5-social-media-predictions-2019>; emphasis in the original.
- 3 Instagram has become one of the most popular social media platforms for teens and young adults, especially in the United States.
- 4 Ryan Robinson, "The 7 Top Social Media Sites You Need to Care About in 2021," Adobe Spark, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://spark.adobe.com/make/learn/top-social-media-sites>.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), 143.

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## LETTERS

### Ministry by Adventists

In Elder Ted Wilson's article, "Practical Aspects of the Proclamation of the Three Angels' Messages" (October 2021), one question made the whole issue worthwhile: "Clearly, we are called to proclaim these life-saving messages, but how do we do so in an angelic way?"

If there is ever an operative question that should have been but never has been in conversations about the three angels messages that I've heard, it is this one. How would an angel deliver these? Spot on question.

—Micheal Goetz, lead pastor, *Campion Seventh-day Adventist Church, Loveland, Colorado, United States*

Thank you for another excellent issue of *Ministry* (October 2021). I especially appreciated the articles by Seth Pierce ("The Passive-Aggressive Pulpit") and Paul Dybdahl ("Three Missional Tendencies Adventism Needs to Avoid"). Praying continued blessings in the name of Jesus.

—Derek Morris, president, *Hope Channel International, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States*

### Ministry for non-Adventists

Over my 40-plus years in ministry I have valued the supportive work of *Ministry* magazine. I felt that this "peer-reviewed" journal was a great gift to the ministerial community at large. While our "in-house" *Adventist Review*

and evangelistic *Signs* speak to ourselves and others about our uniqueness, *Ministry* is one of our few tools to serve pastors of other denominations. I hope it will never lose this outreach. God's work is larger than us, and *Ministry*, for years, has recognized this and sought to be a ministry journal for all those challenged with ministry in the local congregation. So glad our fellow ministerial colleagues receive the odd-month issues and that such a ministry continues. Keep up the good work.

—Andy McDonald, retired pastor, *Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Apopka, Florida, United States*





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# Working together for successful evangelism

**M**y mentoring pastor is from the South Bronx, New York City. He once told me, “If you have Bible studies, you will have baptisms.” So, we began sending out the simple “Something Wonderful” cards from Seminars Unlimited that can be mailed to any specific community. When an interest card returns to us, we respond immediately. As a result, we have baptisms every quarter.

I believe that the well-worn adage “evangelism does not work in today’s postmodern society” is incorrect and unproductive. I would like to share seven criteria that help make evangelism effective.

## 1. The harvest is plentiful

When I first started pastoring, the conference sent me to a district on its distant edges. Every pastor I spoke to made it clear that I was going into an extremely difficult area. But having always loved a challenge, I accepted the new assignment. When I arrived, it was obvious that the local churches were in decline. I started prayer walking, and it became obvious that the town itself was in a depression cycle.

As I pleaded with our Lord for guidance, I felt impressed to pick up the phone book and start making calls. That’s right, phone-book ministry. “Hello, this is the new pastor of the church on the corner of Main Street, next to the Community Hospital,” I said. “I have three Bible study series to offer that are incredible. One on how to create a vibrant and happy home following the principles of Scripture—a six-part series. Another on what the Bible says about the end times, a twelve-part series on the book of Revelation. And one on how

to manage your finances and get out of debt following biblical principles.”

The next day I added this line: “Also, if you just need prayers for yourself, your children, or your relatives and friends or have someone who needs a hospital visit, we are here to serve. May God bless you.” Most of the time, I just left messages on the answering machine. After 200 calls, within the first week, we had 11 Bible studies, 14 home visits for prayer, and 1 hospital visit. The harvest was plentiful.

When you look at your community, what do you see? Do you recognize its potential? The precious individuals who need to come into a relationship with Christ? What you observe makes a big difference. Jesus saw the harvest. As pastors, we need to have the eyes of Jesus.

## 2. The role of the Holy Spirit

Along with having the eyes of Jesus, we need to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit. We can preach our hearts out, but if the Spirit of the Living God is not part of our evangelistic activities, our efforts will not succeed. Why? Without the Holy Spirit, there can be no real increase. The Bible is clear: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6, 7).<sup>1</sup>

Notice that the Holy Spirit worked alongside Paul and Apollos. As ministers of the gospel, we have a role to play with the Holy Spirit. God labors along with His servants.

While we should pray and fast, there always comes a time when we need to walk by faith and move forward with the Holy Spirit to bring

people into a loving relationship with our Savior. I remember when a fellow student at seminary objected to a statement made by a professor that all pastors need to be involved in bringing people to Christ. "That's not my spiritual gift!" my friend protested. Looking at him, I asked one simple question: "Where in the Bible has Jesus told any disciple, any apostle, or any pastor that they are not to be involved in leading people to Christ because it may not be their spiritual gift?" The Holy Ghost can turn a simple gospel presentation by a reluctant apostle into a Holy Ghost revival.

### 3. Sowing the field

The next principle of evangelism is to sow the harvest field, which is your local community. My grandparents were farmers. If they went into their fields and started their harvesting equipment only to find nothing to harvest, the first question my grandfather would ask would be, "Did anyone plant the seeds?" Too often, many people try various methods of evangelism and come up short because there was no preharvest work. It's a simple principle: you can water the soil, but nothing will grow unless you place a seed in it. How do we plant a seed? Pre-evangelism work is key.

Many ways exist to plant seeds in the community. I remember when I first arrived at the Yonkers church after I graduated from seminary. Although I wanted to present a Revelation Seminar, the church board recommended that we first do a *Computer for Dummies* class. While I felt disappointed, they knew the community far better than I did. The computer class was so successful that we had to run two sessions with 30 people each. We then invited those same students to the Revelation Seminar and had great results. The *Computer for Dummies* class was the seed necessary to address the needs of the community.

### 4. A personal touch

Adopting the old adage about never putting all your eggs into one basket, I focus on several areas. The first is the simplest. Every time we have visitors to our congregation, we greet them with a warm handshake or a warm hug. Then we escort them to one of the various Sabbath School classes, which operate as small groups. Our belief is simple: if they come to our church of their own accord, they are searching for not only a congregation to worship with but also a deeper relationship with Christ. Asking the visitor for their name, email address, and cell phone number, we explain that having that information will

enable us to alert them to the various activities coming up.

Every ministry of the church is actually a form of evangelism, including the church greeters, the Sabbath School classes, the club ministries (Adventurers, Pathfinders, Master Guides), the VBX (Vacation Bible Experience), AMM (Adventist Motorcycle Ministry), and the health ministry. All ministries are avenues that will attract people with different interests. One of the dangers, though, is to begin too many ministries at one time. Start with just one or two and develop them well before going on to the next. The quality of each ministry is vital because they are all essential parts of the overall success of growth.

We have evangelistic meetings every year in September with great success. Why? Those involved in each ministry bring their friends to the meetings. Furthermore, each ministry appeals to different people groups in the local community, creating friends and relationships. Thus, each ministry is true evangelism.

### 5. Role of leadership

Every congregation is unique, as is each community. In addition, each leadership team is distinctive. That is why it concerns me when some churches try to duplicate specific programs rather than just following the basic principles that govern successful plans. The Bible explains how each congregation has a diversity of gifts. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:27, 28). Every church has its own leadership mix. As each congregation discovers what that is, they will be able to maximize their strengths to advance the gospel.

One of the tasks of leadership is to have a God-inspired vision that we can share with the entire leadership and congregation. Throughout the Bible, we find that leadership makes or breaks the people's advance. As the senior pastor, I have a vision for the church, one that I first discuss with my associates and gather their input and insights. After we develop a vision for the congregation as a whole, we take it to our elders and, finally, to the church board.

One of our visions includes setting baptismal dates by faith. Only twice have I ever been disappointed; the following week, though, the individual took the step and was baptized. If you have not

tried vision casting in general or setting baptismal dates in particular, take the step of faith.

## 6. Synergism

As already stated, during our evangelism cycle, we schedule public evangelism every year in September. During the series, each church ministry has charge of a different day. Each ministry understands that every year, their particular group will aid on some of the nights because their purpose is evangelism. The various ministries collaborate with each other synergistically. When all the ministries labor for the same goal, it enhances the overall health of the congregation. "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:25, 26).

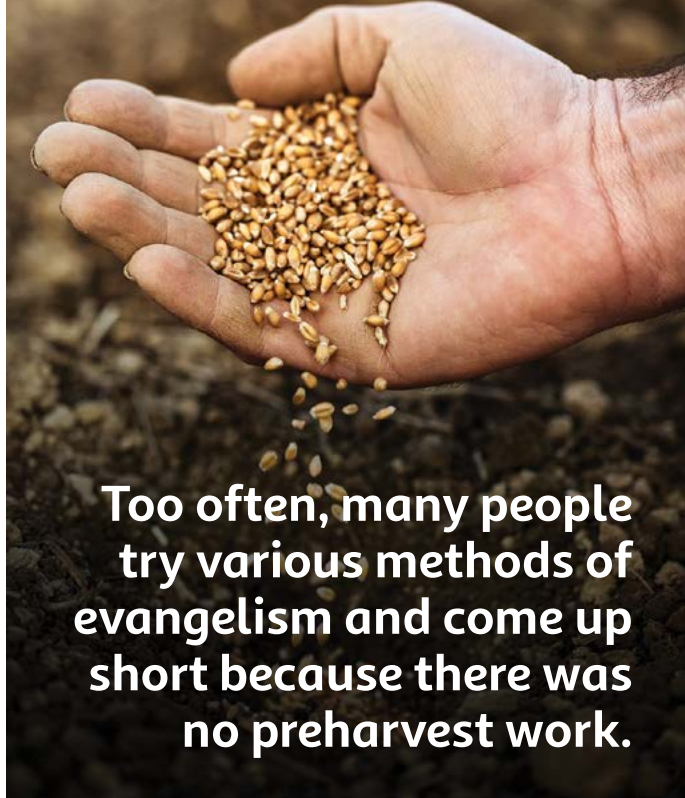
## 7. Appeals help people make decisions for Christ

Every Sabbath, we try to make the service a safe environment for our guests. But with that comes an appeal for them to grow closer to the Lord. Every worship, every gospel presentation, every sermon has an appeal as part of its closing. I remember preaching a weekend series in a congregation that I had been invited to. As I made an appeal and several individuals came forward, I noticed that the church members seemed puzzled that many so people responded. After the service, I asked the pastor about their reaction. It appeared that those who came forward were not baptized. He said, "We thought they were college students coming to our church from other Adventist congregations." During the fellowship meal, I spoke to some of them, as did the pastor, who commented, "We thought you were baptized members. Why did you come forth today?"

"Well, it's simple, Pastor," someone said. "No one asked us before! So, when the appeal was made, we gladly came forward." I have discovered that many don't make decisions simply because they were not asked. Every year, we have new baptisms just because we invite people to accept Christ.<sup>2</sup>

## Community pastoring

Part of having a growing church is accepting the Bible for what it clearly states. Jesus, when He looked at the multitude, saw countless people from many different statuses in life, education, and cultures accepting the gospel. He recognized the potential of His district. For every new district



**Too often, many people try various methods of evangelism and come up short because there was no preharvest work.**

you have the privilege of pastoring, walk the community, visit the various stores, eat in its restaurants, and immerse yourself in its uniqueness. Then pray and look for ways to impact that district for Christ. You are the pastor not just of your church but of your community. As you visit the various segments of the community, pray and ask God how you can reach them.

God has been wonderful to our congregation. In the last four years, we have experienced kingdom growth in our congregation from 468 to 715 members. We have been blessed with 289 baptisms and have helped start three new church plants. I believe in my heart that evangelism does work—especially in a postmodern society.

Strong visions from leadership, dedication from church members, connection with the community, and detailed execution are the keys to successful evangelism. Prepare the field for the seed of God's Word, and be in constant connection with the Lord, begging Him to guide you and your church in the best ways to lead the community to the feet of Jesus.



1 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the King James Version.

2 See Robert E. Costa, "Evangelism, Sabbath-Morning Style," *Ministry*, August 2019, 20, 21.

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# Choosing leadership



**A** thin, impoverished-looking man walked inside an airport with his suitcase. Wherever he went, people looked at him in a put-down manner, trying to avoid sitting near him. When he approached a seat, the person sitting nearby got up and walked away in disgust. The man then walked to a large, open area where a grand piano stood. He sat on the piano stool, remaining motionless for a while. Passersby looked at him suspiciously and scornfully. They could not imagine what he was about to do.

The man began to play a well-known piece by Beethoven. He played so beautifully that the passersby stopped and gave full attention to him. Many began taking videos of him on their cell phones. People who had paid no attention before looked at each other in disbelief and now moved toward the one whom they had moved away from just a few minutes before. That man was there on purpose. He was a part of a social experiment on people's perceptions of others.

Research shows that we tend to believe what we see and run with our first impressions.<sup>1</sup> David Williams, Harvard University sociologist and health ministries associate for the Seventh-day Adventist global church states, "Stereotype-linked bias is an automatic and unconscious process. It occurs even among persons who are not prejudiced."<sup>2</sup> Unlike the pianist—able to assert his remarkable skill, regardless of his appearance—many are not given the time or opportunity to prove themselves.

With limited comprehension, we often use our feelings and perceptions to stereotype people instead of waiting for the promptings of the Holy Spirit to develop a more proper understanding. How do we counter such biases? The story of Saul and David is instructive for our purposes. Israel's experience of demanding a leader made in their own image is one of those biblical accounts that "happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11).<sup>3</sup>

### Performance bias

God had chosen a new leader to replace Saul, king of Israel. Sensing Samuel's sympathy toward Saul, God spoke directly to Samuel: "How long will you mourn for Saul since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16:1). Author Ellen White states, "In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation."<sup>4</sup> New wine is placed in new wineskins. Leadership transitions are seldom smooth, but always necessary.

God knew that, when the nation of Israel had looked over Saul, they would readily accept him as king. They assessed Saul on what he *might* contribute to his people. Dan Liroy, professor at the South African Theological Seminary, says, "Saul's impressive height and good looks would make

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him appear to be a suitable candidate. . . . Saul fit the description of the sort of ruler the Israelites wanted. His striking appearance suggested that he would make a great monarch.”<sup>5</sup> Saul was assessed based on his potential.

When God looked over David, He knew what he *had* contributed to his people. Ellen White states, “Even before he was summoned to the court of Saul, David had distinguished himself by deeds of valor. The officer who brought him to the notice of the king declared him to be ‘a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters,’ and he said, ‘The Lord is with him.’”<sup>6</sup> David was assessed based on his performance.

Performance bias asserts that the “in” group is judged on potential, but the “out” group is judged on performance. Those we prefer are given a competence pass and the opportunity to “grow” into the position. For those whom we hold at arms length, superior accomplishments are often required but rarely relished. Minds are already set, and decisions are already made.

In the story of Saul and David, competence-based hiring holds greater long-term satisfaction than potential-based hiring. Consultant Cameron Herold states, “The old adage of ‘hire for attitude, train for skill’ doesn’t work anymore, if it even ever did. A good attitude can’t overcome a lack of skills no matter how upbeat and charismatic they are.”<sup>7</sup>

## Affinity bias

God had told Samuel that the next king would be one of Jesse’s eight sons. When it was time for choosing, all of David’s brothers were brought before Samuel—but David was not. Samuel was immediately drawn to one son. “When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, ‘Surely this is the man the Lord has chosen!’” (1 Sam. 16:6, TLB). While Samuel was preoccupied with himself choosing a leader for Israel, God was prioritizing a lesson for Samuel. “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (v. 7). It was not for Samuel to impose on God his selection; it was for God to impress on Samuel His volition.

Why was Samuel drawn to Eliab? Eliab seemed the best fit for the next king of Israel because, in the East, a tall stature was greatly valued in a king. Bible commentator Charles

Ellicott says, “There was something in the tall and stately presence of the eldest born of Jesse which reminded the old man of the splendid youth of Saul.”<sup>8</sup> Ellen White states, “Eliab was the eldest, and more nearly resembled Saul for stature and beauty than the others.”<sup>9</sup>

Samuel made his choice based on custom and comfort. That is affinity bias. Affinity bias maintains that we tend to select people who are most like us. Psychologist Jeffrey Davis states, “While this implicit prejudice is a complex issue to unpack, the root of the problem is the simple fact that affinity bias narrows our vision and limits our possibilities. Research has shown that our preference for the safety of the familiar can curb creativity, undermine collaboration, and close our minds to novel ideas and new perspectives.”<sup>10</sup>

Looking favorably at Eliab because of his stature showed that Samuel had not learned his earlier lesson with the selection of Saul, who “was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward” (1 Sam. 10:23, NKJV). This is evidence that affinity bias is both difficult to acknowledge and tough to shake.

## Confirmation bias

Israel knew what the right leader looked like. They had seen the model in the other nations. All of their thinking was not without merit. They asked for “a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:20). They forgot that in Yahweh, they already had a King. “For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory” (Deut. 20:4).

Cultural factors and personal experiences had shaped their perceptions. The problem was not that they accepted wrong perspectives and dismissed right ones; it was that they embraced inappropriate persons and excluded appropriate ones. They were readily accepting information that matched their mindset. They were actively seeking evidence that supported their assumption. This is confirmation bias.

Church consultant Charles Stone states that confirmation bias is “a thinking bias that looks for information that supports our preexisting attitudes, beliefs, and actions. As a result, we spotlight only the information that supports the decision we want to make, to the neglect of other information we need in order to make the best decision. With Google, we can easily search out and find information that confirms almost



any belief or decision. And, research tells us that the confirmation bias is strongest in the religious arena.”<sup>11</sup>

Although a prophet himself, Samuel’s perspectives were not exempt from influence by environment and human nature. While Christian leaders may be guilty of the worst activity, the good news is that we possess the best remedy. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Our only recourse is to repent. “‘If we have set up distinctions within our hearts and minds about one another, even without intending to, God calls us to make it right.’ This quote by Debbie McDaniel speaks volumes to the human condition we know as implicit bias. Ask yourself, ‘Have my hidden biases ever unfairly judged another?’”<sup>12</sup>

## Transition readiness

It is sad to see God’s chosen leaders sometimes fall into the temptations of jealousy, rivalry, and earthly demands. Face value, unfortunately, is often what many care about. Forbes consultant Susan Taylor states, “Although most of us as leaders recognize we have biases, some biases are buried so deep and have been with us for so long, we don’t even realize they’re there. . . . When we are influenced by a bias we don’t even know we have, we can make the wrong decisions.

“Those decisions could result in not hiring or promoting the best people, simply because they don’t fit our perception of an effective leader. We could end up with a department of similar people with similar worldviews who don’t provide the different perspectives needed for innovation. We could make an uninformed business decision because the only research we conducted reinforced things that confirm our preconceptions.”<sup>13</sup>

God calls every single individual to be part of His gospel commission. If He could call you and me, He can call anyone to serve in the same capacities and responsibilities that we are in right now. Any leadership position and field we find ourselves in, we should directly point to God as our Source of blessings, grace, and mercy as He involves us in this divine partnership to carry out the mission of His church. While He calls us according to what is needed at a particular time, God could have executed His mission successfully without us. Veteran pastor Henry Wright asserts that our qualification for ministry is not our gifts, it is our need. God calls us into ministry not just to save others but to save us.<sup>14</sup>

When God asked Samuel, “How long are you going to mourn over Saul?” He wanted Samuel to move beyond his own feelings and perceptions in his search for the next king for Israel. God wishes church leadership selections and transitions to be conducted in a humble spirit that honors Him. In our ministry leadership positions, we are subject to replacement. We may have been obedient in doing God’s will; however, when God needs someone to contribute something new to the ministry, He will have to replace us. In any responsibility, given or taken away, may we adopt the servant attitude of Christ and pray for the Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that we can readily say, “I will go.”

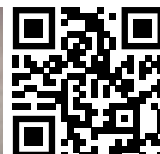


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SCAN FOR AUDIO

# Forceful people entering the kingdom

**J**acob had been on his sickbed for years. With each stroke, his condition worsened. Physicians from his village were unable to help much. Religious teachers from the region could not help, either. They would say, “You are being inflicted with God’s punishment for the sins you have committed.” “When God is punishing you, how can we help you? You are cursed!” Their unkind comments brought him more pain than did the disease.

One day, his childhood friends told him about a great Teacher, Jesus, a wonderful Healer. When he heard about the miraculous cures, his darkened heart began to see a light.

Ever since he had been condemned by the religious teachers, he had focused on his sins. To receive favor from God, he wanted to be fully repentant before Jesus, as well.

“I want to see Jesus,” he said to his friends. “Please, take me to Jesus.”

His friends carried him on a mat to the house where Jesus was. The house was surrounded by such a crowd that they could not enter. They felt it was impossible to see Jesus. Better to go back home. But Jacob thought that there must be a way. When he saw the roof, he begged them to take him up there. They tore up the roof and lowered Jacob down in front of Jesus.

The house was hushed. Jesus saw Jacob, and He said, “‘Son, your sins are forgiven’ ” (Mark 2:5, NIV). And then, “‘Get up, take your mat and go home’ ”

(v. 11, NIV). Jacob knew that he was healed. He got up and went home, thanking the Lord. Jacob was healed because he had faith in Jesus, and Jesus showed him mercy and the power of God.

There were many obstacles in his way to Jesus: he could not move; the house was blocked; the roof needed to be broken up. But Jacob moved forward in faith, no matter what. He was forceful, almost violent in his desire to see Jesus.

Mark (chapter 2) tells this beautiful story with power. The story is saturated with a faith that will not retreat even when confronted by obstacles. What we see here is an example of how, ultimately, salvation comes to those who, determinedly, even forcefully, seek the grace that God offers us all.

## The invaded kingdom?

In Matthew 11:12, Jesus says, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (KJV). What may lend difficulty to the text is the Greek verb *biazō*, translated “suffereth violence.” The form here is *biazetai*, either a passive voice or a middle voice. The KJV takes *biazetai* as a passive. The translation sounds as if the kingdom is under attack by violent and evil people. On the other hand, the 1984 edition of the New International Version (1984 NIV) translates it: “the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.” This

version translates *biazetai* as a middle verb, making it sound as if the kingdom is pushing its way forward. Violent people with negative intentions are transformed into forceful people with positive intentions.

I want to follow the NIV translation in two accounts: Luke 16:16 and John the Baptist.

Let me begin with Luke because a quick connection can be established. The King James Version translates Luke 16:16 as, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” The NIV uses different words but holds the same basic meaning. The NIV translates: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it.”

The NIV translation of Matthew 11:12 seems to reflect Luke 16:16, although the saying of Jesus was put in a different narrative than in Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus, in Luke, is using less ambiguous words. The expression “The kingdom of God is preached” is more straightforward. So, according to the NIV translation, the kingdom of heaven is moving ahead forcefully in the preaching of the gospel.

## Jesus is saying, The kingdom of heaven has been established and is moving forward forcefully, and those who respond forcefully will take it.

### John the Baptist

John’s story seems to support the NIV. John was in prison. Perhaps he was waiting for the Messiah to rescue him, but Jesus did not, and so John began to doubt. Thus, he sent his disciples to ask, “Are You the Messiah?” We can read between the lines. John sounds as if he is asking: *If You are the Messiah, why didn’t You come to rescue me?* Jesus answered his question by summarizing His Messianic ministry, which focused on healing and

restoring humanity—not on a political state for the Jews.

John, and others at that time, had a confused notion of the Messiah’s role, expecting a political, not a spiritual, restoration. For those still under the notion of political messiahship, Jesus was using the verb *biazo*. It is not the political messianic kingdom that should push itself strongly ahead, but instead, the spiritual Messianic kingdom should move forcefully in the preaching of the gospel.

The verb *biazo* could be more properly described as a political movement. In this notion, the Davidic messiah would come with his troops to overturn the Romans and establish the kingdom of the Jews. When Jesus applied this verb to the spiritual movement that He was initiating, He was discouraging His disciples from political restoration as the Messianic goal. In Matthew, Jesus uses the word *biazo* more figuratively and symbolically.

To summarize, Jesus used a verb that belongs to a political movement to describe the movement of the heavenly kingdom. Jesus is saying, The kingdom of heaven has been established and is moving forward forcefully, and those who respond forcefully will take it.

Such was Jacquelyn.

### Jacquelyn

Jacquelyn was extremely feeble. She had had a flow of blood for 12 years! Having wasted all of her money on physicians who were no help, the ailing woman was wishing for death. The end of life would bring her more happiness than living in this horrible condition.

One day, Jacquelyn heard hopeful news that a certain Teacher was healing people—and without charging either. He healed all kinds of ailments and diseases. She wanted to see this Teacher and ask Him to heal her.

When Jacquelyn arrived where Jesus was, He was surrounded by a huge crowd; a wall of humanity was an insurmountable obstacle before her. She did not have the energy or courage to cry out, “Son of David, help me!” Too weak to wade through the multitude, Jacquelyn was disappointed.

Suddenly, the crowd began to move. The wall was crumbling. Jacquelyn pushed her way to Jesus, almost fainting in the process. Happily, she noticed a shift in the crowd’s direction and realized that Jesus was coming closer to her. *If only I could touch the hem of His garment, I would*

be healed, Jacquelyn thought. When Jesus was near, she reached out her hand and, yes, touched the hem.

Suddenly, Jacquelyn felt something was done to her. A warm shock. She knew it worked. Jacquelyn turned and started moving away. Then she was stopped by Jesus, who said, "Who touched Me?" The woman had to confess. And after she explained why she needed that touch, Jesus made it very clear that the healing did not come from the hem but from her faith. Her faith was her response to the kingdom message. Yes, Jacquelyn was one of the invaders of the kingdom. She got it.

### The invaders in the Gospels

Employing the expressions of Jesus, we can define those who came to Jesus for help as the forceful invaders of the kingdom. The list of the invaders would be long because of the many people who came to Jesus for help. All of them responded heartily to the message. They were open to the power of the King who was willing to serve them.

And many had obstacles on their way to Jesus, too, but they moved forward in their faith despite them. They kept moving forward until they could ask Jesus for help.

### Am I one of them?

Even now, the gospel of the kingdom is being preached. It is forcing its way in the world where pain, problems, sickness, and death rule. The Lord of the kingdom is the same as He was 20 centuries ago. Jesus is calling us to be forceful in our faith to come to Him with our burdens, and hear the words, "Son [and daughter], your sins are forgiven." Jesus alone can say and mean those words, just as He did centuries ago. There are many obstacles on our way to Jesus, but we need to move on despite them. Will you be a Jacob or a Jacquelyn and become a forceful person entering the kingdom of God? 🙏

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# Making online evangelistic meetings effective



**W**hen the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it threw every church's evangelism and outreach plans into disarray. We had to get used to lockdowns, restrictions, mandatory masks, and social distancing measures. Worship services and evangelistic outreach had to occur mostly online. Churches found themselves forced to adjust.

It was no different in the Chesapeake Conference. Shortly after the lockdown began, we tried to figure out how we could reach people during a time of crisis and offer them hope—especially since so many were stuck at home and feeling uncertain about the future.

We decided to put together an online evangelistic meeting that people could access and participate in from their homes. We did not know how it would go, but we knew we could not miss the opportunity to reach out to those searching for hope. People were asking questions and the time was right. We couldn't just sit, waiting for the lockdown to end and the virus to subside. If we did that, we would miss a precious opportunity. As a result, we ventured into new territory. Online evangelistic meetings were a new experience for us as well as many other churches.

We planned a two-week series called *Forecasting Hope* to present the prophecies of Scripture in a Christ-centered, positive, and hope-filled way. Except for a media team, we livestreamed it from an empty church. We set up a website through which people could interact with us by live chat, email, or a toll-free number.<sup>1</sup>

The feedback we received was encouraging, leading us to extend the series an extra two weeks at the request of the viewers. In the end, more than 1,400 people registered for the seminar.

We received 56 prayer requests, 57 requests to join an online Bible study group, 226 book requests, and a handful of decisions for baptism.

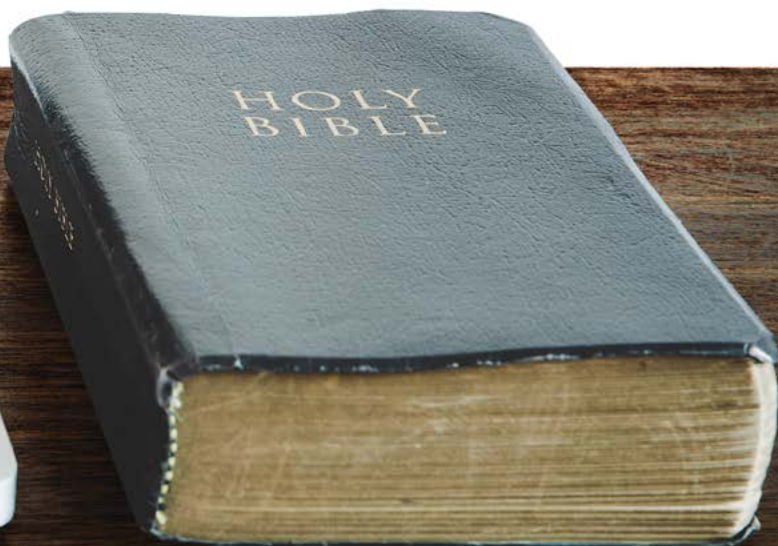
The experience taught us some important lessons about conducting effective online evangelistic meetings. We did some things right and did some things wrong. But here is what we learned.

## **1. Expect online evangelistic meetings to take as much effort as face-to-face evangelistic meetings**

People assume that online evangelistic meetings are less difficult than traditional in-person meetings. They are not. While they may be cheaper, they are not easier. It takes concerted effort to get your church on board, assemble a committed media team, devise an advertising strategy, prepare for the messages, plan how to follow up on interests, and think through how you are going to interact with participants and call for decisions. Crucial to decision-making, interaction with the participants requires concerted effort, intentional strategy, and fervent prayer.

## **2. Make registration easy**

Here is where we messed up a bit. We wanted to track people's attendance each night so that we would know how often they watched and what their level of interest was. That is not a bad idea, but it just ended up complicating things. When a person registered, they received an email with a username and password, which they had to enter each night to access the livestream feed. Because it involved too many steps, we probably lost some viewers. After the first two nights, we did away with the login and stopped trying to track attendance. In fact, our system crashed



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

the first night. Next time we will do it differently. Likely, their email address will be their login. The simpler, the better.

The other thing we discovered is not to ask for too much information on the registration page. Name and email are usually sufficient for online meetings. You can get other contact information, such as their address and/or phone number, by offering free books and resources during the series. Make registration as easy as possible. However, do not skip registration altogether. You need some way to be able to contact people and follow up.

### 3. Advertise on social media

Be intentional about promoting the seminar. If you are going to put in the effort to have a quality event, you want people to attend. To get the word out, advertising on Facebook, Instagram, or some other social media platforms is very inexpensive. If you do not know how, SermonView or any number of advertising companies can do it for you. After all, advertising would be your biggest expense even for a traditional face-to-face seminar. It's just as essential for an online seminar. You can advertise for \$500 or less.

### 4. Create ways for the viewers to interact with you

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of interacting with your online audience. It's the difference between an effective meeting that produces quality interests and an ineffective one that bears no fruit. If you want people to make decisions, you must provide ways for them to connect with you. It's just like visitation in a face-to-face meeting—except that you must find a different way to do it. Decisions do not come from the preaching. While conviction may result from the preaching, decisions come from personal interaction. That is why visitation is so important in a face-to-face evangelistic meeting. So, how do you “visit” in an online meeting? Here are some suggestions:

*A dedicated email.* Create a special email address for the meetings, something easy to do with Gmail or other providers. It allows people to make comments, submit questions, or request any materials you may offer (such as free books). Have someone dedicated to answering all incoming emails within 24 hours. It gives people an easy way to respond and another opportunity for interaction.

*Live chat.* Train members to man a live chat function during the meetings. It allows viewers

to react instantaneously. During the preaching, invite people to go to the live chat where they can speak with a Bible instructor. Ask listeners, How did you hear about the meetings? Do you have any questions? How did you become interested in Bible prophecy (if that's what your meetings focus on)? Is there anything I can pray about for you?

While Facebook Live offers a live chat as you are streaming, it is not private. Everyone can see the comments made, thus inhibiting deep conversation. Plus, many times, members post a lot of church lingo there and use it to greet one another. It would be preferable to have a private live chat function, such as those you see on business websites. SermonView helped us with this.

*A toll-free phone number.* During the preaching, you can keep referring to the toll-free number and inviting people to phone in. You can use the church number if someone mans it during the meetings. You can obtain a Google number and have it forwarded to a trained, trustworthy church member. Or you can partner with AIM (Adventist Information Ministry), which will provide you your own toll-free number during the meetings and take calls for you. They will then pass the information on to you so that you can follow up with a phone call.

*Free book and/or resource offer.* Everyone loves to receive free things. By offering books and resources on some nights, you obtain contact information, including a mailing address or phone number. You then have the options of mailing the book to the viewer or delivering it to them in person. If you choose to mail the item, follow up with a phone call a couple of days later to make sure they received it, which will lead to a conversation. Either way, it's a wonderful opportunity for personal engagement.

*Submitted prayer requests.* Regularly invite people to submit prayer requests. Viewers can do this through email or by calling the phone number. You could also have a prayer request button on the livestream website (or whatever platform you are using) through which people can present their requests. There can also be an option for the person submitting the prayer request to submit their phone number and ask that someone call and personally pray with them. Then you can have a trained church member phone them, pray, and interact with them. While it's true that many people prefer to be anonymous online, some will want contact with a live person. We had several such requests during our meetings.



*Offer online Bible studies.* Give people the opportunity to join an online Bible-study group. They can contact you via email or the toll-free number, or you can have a special button on the livestream website through which they can access and complete a short form to join an online Bible study group. It will give you a great opportunity to follow up after the meetings end.

## 5. Make appeals

It is a little more challenging to get decisions via online or digital evangelistic meetings because of the greater anonymity and less personal interaction. So, make regular appeals by inviting people to respond or engage through the interactive mechanisms we just discussed. For example, if you were going to make an appeal for baptism, you could invite them to email you to share their thoughts about the step, or call and talk with someone who would pray for them or get on the live chat where someone could encourage them. Keep leading the viewer to the interactive components. When they use them, you can make a more personal appeal.

## 6. Follow up with your viewers

Follow up at the end of the series by phone call or email. The conversation could consist of thanking them for watching the program and asking whether they have any questions or inquiring whether they have any prayer requests. It will take the conversation deeper and give you a chance to connect with them. You might even ask them whether they are interested in studying more in an online Bible-study group, if you have one. That would give you regular, future contact with them.

## 7. Do not be satisfied with likes, views, and number of subscribers

Likes, views, and subscriptions do not necessarily translate into decisions. While they might indicate whether people are watching or listening, these statistics do not mean people are making decisions and growing closer to Jesus. Although entertainers care about such statistics, soul winners focus on decisions. Interact with the viewers and lead them to decisions.

## 8. Have a good media team

Media team members do not need to be experts, but they do need to be knowledgeable, committed, and consistent. Poor audio or video, bad camera transitions, or starting late because

someone did not show up sends a message to the viewer that what you are doing is not worth watching. Quality is important.

## 9. Form a committed prayer team

Choose a group of prayer warriors who will pray during the meetings. You can also give them all the prayer requests that come in so that they can continually lift them up in prayer. The team can even phone some of the viewers who submit requests and pray with them. Your people should take notes on their interactions with the viewers. Prayer not only moves mountains but, more important, it also moves hearts.

## Online “Ellen”

Nothing beats being able to meet people one-on-one, but online evangelism can be an effective component of sharing the message. When you combine personal, public, and online evangelism in a master plan, a congregation can cover all the components of sowing, nurturing, and reaping, and reach people—like Ellen.

“Ellen,” was a young adult in her early 30s. A friend had told her about the *Forecasting Hope* meetings, and she began watching regularly. During the meetings, she began emailing us and sharing bits and pieces of her life. Eventually, I called her on the phone to pray with her and let her tell more of her story. She had stopped attending a church more than 13 years before, but watching the meetings online began doing something in her heart. She made her decision to be baptized. It turned out she was actually moving to our area three weeks later. So we made plans to have lunch with my wife and connect Ellen to a local congregation where her desire to be baptized could become a reality.

There are many people just like “Ellen” in the online world who are searching for Jesus and truth but are not ready to walk through the doors of a church—at least not yet. Through online evangelistic meetings, we can reach their hearts and nudge them in the right direction.



1 SermonView partnered with us in creating the website. You can view it at [ForecastingHope.org](http://ForecastingHope.org).

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## Hope and healing at Lucy Byard recognition event

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

**D**ecember 10, 2021, was a momentous day as the life and legacy of **Lucille “Lucy” Byard** were both recognized and honored.

Lucy Byard was a black Seventh-day Adventist from New York who was turned away from getting treatment for liver cancer and cachexia by the Washington Adventist Sanitarium in 1943 because of the color of her skin. She was sent to Freeman’s Hospital in Washington DC, and later died there. Adventist HealthCare and the Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledged the decades-old indignity and pledged to move toward healing and reconciliation by owning the wrong and taking committed action to ensure it never happens again.

**Terry Forde**, president and CEO of Adventist HealthCare (AHC), recounted the history surrounding Lucy Byard’s mistreatment at a Seventh-day Adventist institution, referencing historian **Benjamin Baker**.<sup>\*</sup> Forde’s realization of what happened to Mrs. Byard paved the way on the path to acknowledgment and reconciliation.

**Ted N. C. Wilson**, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, stated, “On behalf of the world church I want . . . to highlight an event that should never have taken place.” Interspersed with texts related to justice, mercy, humility, and reconciliation (Mic. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19), Wilson honored “Lucy Byard, who loved people, who shared her faith, but was denied the very basics of care and dignity from her own church.”

**G. Alexander Bryant**, president of the North American Division of the General Conference, stated, “The Lucy Byard story and her experience have been a stain on us as a church. But the actions of today will go a long way in shaping and molding a better future that is indicative of the God we serve and the principles upon which we stand; that is, in Christ, there is no Jew or Gentile, no free nor bond, no male nor female, that we all stand equal at the foot of the cross.”

**Pete Palmer**, president of Allegheny East Conference, the territory that now includes



Lucille “Lucy” Byard

Photo: Adventist HealthCare

Washington Adventist Hospital, said, “When you read the history of the Allegheny Conference, it is pointed out that the black lay membership did not initially embrace the formation of a regional conference. And that may be in part due to the fact that separate but equal was not the initial request of black leadership in the wake of Lucy Byard’s nontreatment.” But out of pain came progress, and out of grief came growth.

**Simmie Knox**, the first black artist commissioned to paint a portrait of a sitting US president, was chosen to paint Lucy Byard. Knox’s paintings of President William Jefferson Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton hang in the White House. Knox, now 86 years old, stated that he wanted to capture “the church lady,” her piety and her humanity. “I think it’s a moment of healing.”

**Lisa Sweeney Walker**, Lucy Byard’s great-great-grandniece, stated, “I just recently learned of Lucy’s story, and I transported myself back to that time, and I could not imagine the challenges that she faced and what she was going through. From the bottom of my heart and on behalf of my family, I thank all of you for putting this together.”

**Dwayne Leslie**, AHC vice president, stated that AHC pledged \$500,000 in scholarship funds over five years, with the goal of establishing an ongoing endowment. All qualified students are welcome to apply, and priority will be given to people of color pursuing an undergraduate nursing education. In addition, an endowment

will provide perpetual assistance for trainee nurses, with a pregraduation offer to work at an Adventist HealthCare institution.

**Anthony Medley**, the senior pastor of Emmanuel-Brinklow Seventh-day Adventist Church in Maryland stated, “For the black Adventist church, the mistreatment of Lucy Byard by her own Adventist health system was as relevant to us as the Rosa Parks arrest was to the Civil Rights Movement in 1955. Lucy was rejected based upon her race. And this was the last straw of denial of equality for black Adventists in the church. . . . Remembering history is the first step towards reconciliation. . . . Thank you, Adventist HealthCare . . . for embracing diversity and equality throughout your organization. . . . Thank you for committing resources and actions to ensure



Lisa Sweeney Walker

Photo: Adventist HealthCare

the history of Lucy Byard will not be forgotten and its dark past will never be repeated.” [Jeffrey Brown, *Ministry*; Corinne Kuypers-Denlinger, Adventist HealthCare]

\* Benjamin Baker, *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, s.v. “Byard, Lucille (1877–1943),” <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=9CEA>.

## Former rebels baptized in the Philippines

MINDORO, THE PHILIPPINES

Philippine authorities sought for years to strike a peace deal with rebels to end a half-century conflict that has killed thousands of people on Mindoro Island. Then the rebels, holed up in the lush green mountains of Mindoro, began listening to Adventist World Radio (AWR).

A bloodstained chapter of Philippine history that has lasted a half century and claimed 40,000 lives drew to a close on November 13, 2021, when **Ted N. C. Wilson**, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and his wife, **Nancy**, participated in the baptism of 500 former rebels and their leader on Mindoro Island. In all, more than 2,000 people were baptized at the conclusion of island-wide evangelistic meetings.

“This is the amazing work of the Holy Spirit through Adventist World Radio,” Wilson said. “All of us were rebels at one time, not embracing God as closely as we should,” he said. Wilson then directly addressed hundreds of former rebels and their families, listening attentively in special areas marked with signs reading “FRs,” or former rebels.

“Today, by God’s grace, you are no longer former rebels,” he said. “You are now new creatures in Jesus Christ. You are part of God’s great family that is looking forward to Jesus’ soon coming!”



Former rebel leader Ka Martin and his wife (faces pixelated for safety reasons).

Photo: Adventist World Radio



## A warm welcome

AWR president **Duane McKey** described the day as historic, and he warmly welcomed the former rebels into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“Your shirts say, ‘I will go!’” McKey said. “So that is the commission you are accepting from Jesus. ‘I will go!’ Today, leaving the past behind, we accept that commission, that charge, of Jesus to go to your friends and neighbors and tell them about Jesus, that He is coming soon.”

“Thank you to the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” said **General Jose Augusto Villareal**, commander of the 203rd Infantry Brigade, which has operational jurisdiction over Mindoro Island, from the stage in the muddy field.

Wilson led an Adventist delegation to Malacañan Palace in Manila, residence of Philippine president **Rodrigo Duterte**.

Wilson expressed appreciation to Duterte for supporting religious liberty, promoting healthy lifestyle choices, and demonstrating the reconciling ministry of Jesus in granting an amnesty to former rebels who have laid down their arms after hearing the gospel through Adventist World Radio.

“I want to thank you for providing amnesty to the former rebels, who now have had their hearts changed by the powerful broadcasts of Adventist World Radio,” Wilson said at the meeting on the evening of November 10. The radio broadcasts “are touching their hearts and helping them to truly become productive citizens of the great country of the Philippines.”

With Duterte’s consent, Wilson opened a small black Bible and gave a Bible study on Micah 6:8, which says, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (NKJV).

“This is the formula, your excellency, for those who want to help people, to lead,” he said.

Duterte, who initially spoke about his desire to defend children and the impoverished, appeared to grow reflective about spiritual matters after



Right to left: Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte with Seventh-day Adventist General Conference president Ted N. C. Wilson, Nancy Wilson, and Kathy McKey.

Photo: Kent Sharpe/AWR

the Bible study, and he described his faith and prayer life.

“I am not into religious rituals. . . . I do not believe in them,” he said. “But I have a deep, abiding faith.”

At Wilson’s suggestion, Duterte readily stood for a prayer that closed the meeting. The Philippine health minister and a government senator, who also were in attendance, stood as well. Afterward, Wilson presented Duterte with a Bible, Ellen White’s books *The Great Controversy* and *Steps to Christ*, and a pen engraved with the Adventist Church logo, which he told the president could be used to underline verses in the Bible. During the meeting, Wilson told Duterte that his desire, and the desire of every Christian, is simply to share Jesus’ love.

**Samuel Saw**, president of the Adventist Church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division, whose territory includes the Philippines, emphasized that the visit with Duterte was not a “usual courtesy call.”

“It was a visit with a purpose, a visit with a mission,” he said.

AWR is working with the Philippine government and a nongovernmental organization, Adventist Laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI) member Farm Stew, to help the former rebels earn a livelihood through farming. The government has given plots of farmland to the former rebels, and Farm Stew will help teach them how to cultivate it and live healthily.

[Andrew McChesney, Adventist Mission and *Adventist Review*]



# African American Seventh-day Adventist Healers in a Multicultural Society

compiled by Ramona L. Hyman and Andy Lampkin, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2021.

The book *African American Seventh-day Adventist Healers in a Multicultural Society* is a must-read for those seeking to understand the rich history of African Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White wrote, “Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of the slaves in America, who have suffered, who have been . . . oppressed.”<sup>1</sup> God’s people must embrace the totality of the past to appreciate the glorious future that He has promised. This historical and future-oriented book offers such a glimpse!

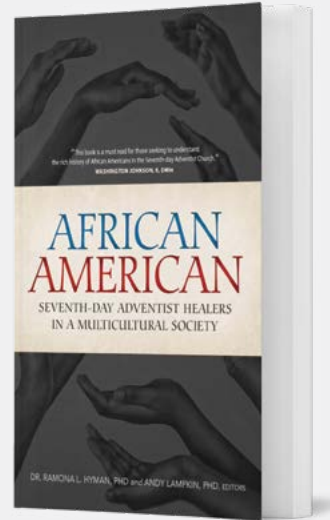
The content, edited by Drs. Ramona Hyman and Andy Lampkin, is guaranteed to create an engaging dialogue on multiple levels regarding the struggles and successes of African American Seventh-day Adventists. This group’s ancestral journey predates Adventism, beginning when 20 African slaves arrived in Jamestown in the colony of Virginia in 1619. This period represented the beginning of an era of inhuman oppression in America, as well as a time of amazing and honorable resilience. In this “new world,” the slaves experienced the horrific effects of slavery: Jim Crow segregation and a magnitude of unimaginable cruelties and injustices. Miraculously, these became a source of healing for future generations. African American Seventh-day Adventists faced experiences similar to their African ancestors, testing their faith to the core as they sought to embrace the precious truths of the gospel in integrated congregational assemblies.

Inspired by the first African American Seventh-day Adventist Healers’ Conference held at Loma Linda University in 2013, the book recounts

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the struggles of African American Seventh-day Adventists and their roles in a multicultural nation as healers. The rich collection of essays measures the far-reaching influence of African American Seventh-day Adventists and the great work that is still needed to inspire hope, healing, and unwavering faith. The essays include “We, Too, Sing America: African American Seventh-day Adventist Women Healers,” by Andrea Trusty King; “To Dream, to Be, to Act: Healing a Sick Society,” by James L. Kyle, MD; and “Healing Shepherds and the Pastoral Care of African American Religioracial Ills,” by Maury Jackson.



Additionally, the book offers insight regarding the growth and development of the ministry of courageous African American men and women who made outstanding contributions within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and beyond. Thematically, the content amplifies faith, hope, resilience, and love for God and humanity. As a bedrock for justice, the book seems to embody the words of Jesus, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, / Because He has anointed Me / To preach the gospel to the poor; / He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, / To proclaim liberty to the captives / And recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18, NKJV), as well as the admonition “Learn to do good; / Seek justice, / Rebuke the oppressor; / Defend the fatherless, / Plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17, NKJV).

During a time when our world is embroiled in a pandemic, threats of war, and multiple social injustice issues, one can find solace and healing from the inspiring and hopeful passages found in this book.



1 Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1901), 42.



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## Resocialization

I remember walking into a Seventh-day Adventist Church for the first time. I had not been in a church for 12 years. As I parked our car, my wife and two daughters were smiling and seemed so happy that Daddy had decided to attend church with them this particular Saturday. As we approached the front door, I was nervous. I felt out of place, thinking to myself, *People like me don't attend church.*

When we got into the foyer, I was approached by a woman smiling from ear to ear who said, "Happy Sabbath" and gave me a bear hug. I was shocked; my arms lay limp at my side. I tried to make eye contact with my wife, hoping she would save me from this woman, but she was busy being hugged by another person. Everybody seemed so happy that I was suspicious immediately. Where I came from, nobody was happy.

I cannot tell you what the sermon was about or name any hymn that was sung. The entire time I sat in that pew, I was thinking about how I could get out of there without being hugged again. Once the service was over, the ushers (deacons) were letting people out of the pews one row at a time. My wife and daughters got up and headed toward the center aisle. I went in the opposite direction and headed toward a door located off to the side of the sanctuary.

As I entered a small hallway, I met a gray-haired woman. She stopped me with a smile that appeared to be genuine and extended her hand. I thought to myself, *She appears safe.* She said, "You must be Teresa's husband. I've been praying for you, and I hope you will come back again." In all honesty, I returned to that church the next Sabbath because I did not want to disappoint that gray-haired woman. It turned out that she played a very important role in my spiritual journey. She and her husband became wonderful friends and mentors to my wife and me.

### Be genuine

In Romans 12, there is a subtitle in the English Standard Version called, "Marks of the True Christian." Then the Bible goes on, in part, to say:

"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (vv. 9–14).

Before Christ came into my life, this kind of behavior would never have crossed my mind. When I stepped into that church on that Sabbath day, I needed resocialization. I needed to learn all over again what was really important in life. I not only had to hear about Christ but also needed to see Him and what He had done in other peoples' lives. That happened in the local church. There is no place on earth as important as the local church. I've heard it said that it is the hope of the world. I believe that with all my heart. The local church taught me what it meant to be a man, husband, and father. They taught me how to pray and read my Bible, seeking life change. It would be a place of encouragement and challenge to my way of thinking and living. It was a place where hope was reborn. The church was the very definition of a "safe place."

### We need each other

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to attend church. So many of us have stayed away from gathering together on Sabbath. We thankfully have many church services online. That is a good thing. But may I send up a serious warning to all of us? We all need resocialization, and we need it every week. We need those genuine smiles and, OK, maybe we need hugs too. I know we need each other. We need to be challenged through God's Word every week. We need to be held accountable through encouragement and prayer. We need to love and respect everyone, beginning with those gray-haired ladies in the church who, so many times through their prayers, kindness, and gentleness, change us hard and bitter men into Christians. Together, we need the local church. 🙏

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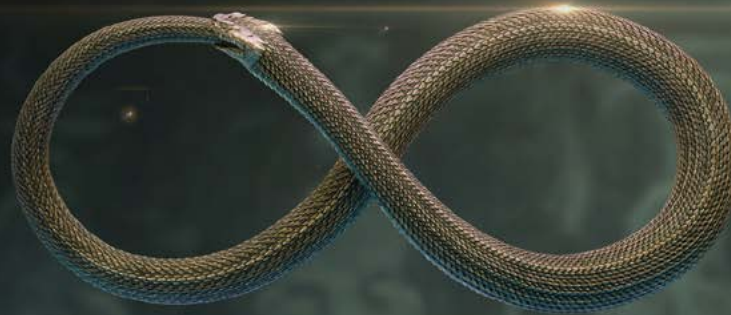
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