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Look beyond the flames

The Roman Empire during the first century AD was ruled by emperors who demanded absolute loyalty and worship. As a gesture of fidelity, citizens were required to burn incense before the Greek gods, such as Poseidon, Artemis, and Demetrius. Roman guards kept watch at the marketplace, making sure all citizens complied. But the early Christian church refused to participate in this idolatry, and many paid for it with their lives.

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John and an elder in the church of Smyrna. One night, Roman officials arrested him in a house outside the city. He knew why they were there, and he knew what happened to Christians who refused to worship the emperor—many were tortured and put to death either at the stake or torn apart by animals. Yet Polycarp received these officers with surprising joy. He even invited them to sit down and eat. Then he asked for one hour to pray without interruption.

They agreed, and when the time was up, Polycarp went willingly with the soldiers, who

took him to the city coliseum. The huge crowd roared when he entered, and before a large pile of firewood, Polycarp was given one last chance to renounce Christ and pay homage to the emperor.

“Take the oath; I will let you go. Just revile Christ!” the proconsul declared.

Polycarp addressed him serenely: “For eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then, can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Throughout his ordeal, witnesses were amazed at Polycarp’s confidence and even joy. They said he was “enlightened by grace.”

Polycarp wasn’t seeing just the bloodthirsty crowd in the coliseum or the firewood waiting to be lit. He was looking with the eyes of faith to a different horizon.

When it was announced that Polycarp had confessed to being a Christian and refused to renounce Christ, the frenzied crowd shouted: “May he be burned alive!”

The soldiers moved to tie Polycarp to the stake, but he said there was no need, he would remain there. Then he thanked God for judging

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

him worthy of the honor of testifying for his faith. The executioner lit the fire, and flames quickly engulfed Polycarp. He had spoken confidently to the very end. Polycarp spoke of the resurrection and of eternal life. The horror of his trial could not kill him. He looked past it to heaven's horizon.

God can grant us that kind of confidence in order to witness for Him. He will help us look beyond the flames, beyond the shouts of an angry crowd, beyond the pain and discouragement. He can keep us firm to the very end.

What is the common denominator in the story of Polycarp and in the stories of the martyrs throughout the ages, from Abel to our days? Their love for God and for others. Those eternal principles of God's law that He wishes to engrave in our minds and hearts (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). Love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind (Matt. 22:37–40).

What led Jesus to descend to our level and sacrifice Himself to rescue us? The very same principle (John 3:16). In the life of Jesus and in the lives of believers, there are two verbs that are

conjugated together: to *love* and to *give*. To love God, the Divine, the Righteous One, is to willingly and joyfully sacrifice anything, including self, for Him. And we consider it a privilege to sacrifice everything, including our life for Him because we love Him.

One of my favorite authors said it best: "Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. 'Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.' Philippians 1:29. And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor."¹

Someone once said that we are never more like God than when we give—and giving up our lives for Christ is the highest honor.



1 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1949), 224.

After 12 years in the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association and nearly 50 years in pastoral leadership, I am moving toward retirement this June. I want to open my heart and share what I feel is one of the most important needs and opportunities that church leaders have around the world.

Just after the walls had come down in the former Soviet Union, my wife, Janet, was invited to Russia for a few weeks to participate in many training events around the country with other women on having a meaningful personal relationship with Jesus. Janet asked me whether she should accept the lengthy assignment. I told her she should.

“What about our two sons?” she asked. “Who will take care of them?”

I said, “Oh, I can do it!”

She said, “OK.” After making us some food and other preparations, Janet left.

I did fairly well—for about two weeks. Then it hit me. Failing to balance work and home, I became tired and irritable, and I was not getting enough time with Jesus. My sons and I were sitting at the table one evening eating spaghetti. My youngest son, Zac, was playing airplane by “flying” his spaghetti-laden fork around in the air before eating the bite. Tyson and Zac thought this was funny. I didn’t. I was irritable and upset.

“Zac, will you scoot up to the table and eat right?” It was more of an order than a request. “Do

you want to spill spaghetti sauce on yourself and have us wash your pants again?” Zac immediately became silent. So did Tyson.

I put the spaghetti sauce—in its glass jar—into the microwave. I did not realize how hot the glass would be when I took it out. My fingers started to burn; I dropped the jar on the floor, and the glass shattered. Spaghetti sauce was sprayed all over the kitchen, painting the cupboards and floor. I have never heard my boys laugh so hard in all their lives!

“Daddy tells Zac to eat right so he won’t spill sauce, and then he paints the whole kitchen with it!” they shrieked. I had to chuckle along with them. I love the Lord! When I am arrogant, sure I am right, harshly criticizing and correcting others, God has ways of humbling me and reminding me that I am not so perfect either! I need humility in my life regularly.

God’s love and humility

The great apostle Paul, sitting in prison awaiting execution, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes these powerful words in Philippians 2: “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same (*agape*) love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (vv. 2–5).¹

No limits!

The power and joys of unselfish ministry



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Then he goes on to give those amazing descriptions of Jesus. He is fully God but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant Man, humbling Himself to be obedient to the point of death, even the cursed death of the cross (vv. 6–8). Praise God for His amazing love and humility! What a seemingly impossible character ideal we are called to. We cannot do it! But we can let Him develop it in us. And Paul tells us how: “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (v. 13).

Self rising up

Self has been my biggest challenge and problem all my life; I have been much too interested in commendation, applause, and what people think of me. I have struggled with self-indulgences, feeling offended or disrespected, defending my precious self and reputation, and subtly promoting myself to look good. Being self-centered seems too often to rise up, creating conflicts, blunting mission, and keeping me from the Lord’s fullest ministry plans, joys, and effectiveness for me—and the church. I am sure you never have those same problems, do you? How can we practically live out those challenging words of Philippians 2 more fully?

This statement from a beautiful book, *The Ministry of Healing*, gives me so much hope!

“There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his [or her] heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God”² “The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in mind and heart. Through the grace given us we may achieve victories that because of our own erroneous and preconceived opinions, our defects of character, our smallness of faith, have seemed impossible.”³

Spiritual and “successful”

After my conversion,⁴ God called me to be a pastor. I was thrust into leadership right away, and my spiritual leadership journey began. The Lord blessed me from the beginning, and I appeared very successful. I wanted to humbly serve Jesus, but over time, I began to depend on my abilities and the methods that had worked in the past.

I finished seminary well and then became a popular youth minister. Then I planted a church in a rural district before moving to another district where I began to involve lay members with a lot of “success.” At 30 years old, I was called to work

in a conference training others. By 36, I was asked to be a conference president in North America. I was very young for that leadership position and seemingly very spiritual and “successful.”

Only one little problem. Janet was struggling in her spiritual life after many years of attempting to develop a relationship with Jesus. She just silently kept doing pastoral wife duties and taking the kids to church, looking good on the outside but dying on the inside.

The day I was elected president was a high day for me, but Janet was home praying it would not happen! Here is where my “self” problem became visible again. I had my own devotional time and tried to be a spiritual leader for my members. But while I was so focused on ministry and trying to be “good” at it, I was very insensitive to my wife’s situation. A focus on your own life and ministry can be a self-trap for you in lots of ways if you do not have the mind of Jesus and true unselfish love for others.

Our wonderful Lord came to our rescue again, calling members in our new conference to commit to pray daily for the baptism of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Over the next two years, with all that prayer support, Janet was reconverted, built up her relationship with Jesus, and became a powerful person of prayer and leader for Jesus! She and other ladies prayed for us men, too, and I had a needed renewal. God led us to realize we cannot do anything unselfish and of value for eternity without a continual abiding relationship with Him! (See John 15:4–11.) We began to learn the power of prayer!

Grace to the humble

As the Lord said to Solomon, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). When we begin to spend a lot of time with Jesus, looking at Him, His sacrifice, and incredible love, it will lead us to humility and to put self aside. Then the power can begin to flow without limit!

One day I was out of town, and Janet received a call that our 17-year-old son, Zac, had been suspended from our church high school and was on his way home. Janet was shocked! Why would Zac do what he had done? We had raised him better than that. What would she say to him? She did what we always should do. She began to talk to God about it. “Why, Lord, would he do that? What should I say to him?”

The Lord seemed to impress Janet to ask Him what she had done that might have given Zac the idea that what he did at school wasn't really that wrong. "Lord, I have never done anything like that," she protested but then gave Him permission to share anything with her. He brought to her mind something she had done through the years that might have led Zac to feel that what he did was all right. She was devastated but repented and asked forgiveness.

When Zac arrived home, he had a bit of an attitude. Janet said, "Zac, come sit down; I want to talk with you." He sat down, expecting to be scolded. Instead, she said, "Zac, I went to the Lord in prayer, and He convicted me that I needed to ask you to forgive me for something I have done that may have influenced you to do what you did. Zac, will you forgive me for that?"

Zac couldn't believe what he was hearing. Tears began to well up in his eyes. This approach to our 17-year-old son, who was at a vulnerable point in his life, softened his heart and drew him closer to his mom! Some of our relationships can be healed and reconciled if we humble ourselves before God and ask Him what we might need to ask forgiveness for from others, even if they were largely in the wrong.

Spending time with the Lord is key to everything in our ministry. We must have the humility to see our part in many of the issues that come up or at least not act in a way that will make things worse. Time with Jesus changes selfish hearts to be like His!

James says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:6-10). I have seen this over and over throughout my ministry.

As Jesus humbled Himself more than any other, He is now lifted higher than any other forever! If we are vulnerable and let God keep us humble, we will be lifted up in due time, as He sees best. Reject the temptations to seek power, position, praise, promotion, perks, or pleasing others, and watch God bless you in an unlimited way! Seek to please only God Himself.

Just five minutes

One of my staff members was at it again. He was spreading false rumors about another couple on our conference team. I had warned him before about his tendency to gossip. Extremely annoyed, I set an appointment with him for the next Tuesday. I planned to go over a list of his wrongdoings, watch him squirm in embarrassment, and then make it clear his behavior must change.

I mentioned to Janet what I was planning to do the next day. She was gentle in giving me counsel and said, "Well, spend a lot of time with Jesus before you do it."

Feeling self-confident, I replied, "OK, sure."

The next morning, I asked the Lord in my time with Him to speak clearly to me from His Word anything I needed to understand. The appointment with my staff member was not on my mind, but it was on God's mind!

Reject the temptations to seek power, position, praise, promotion, perks, or pleasing others, and watch God bless you in an unlimited way!



For more information on this topic, read W. Clarence Schilt and Stephen Schilt, *A Life To Die For: Discover the Secret of Christ's Transforming Power* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2009).



Verses from Proverbs chapter 12 began to practically jump off the page at me. “A fool’s wrath is known at once.” “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.” “A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness” (vv. 16, 18, 23).

“I hear You, Lord,” I prayed. “I am right about the facts but so wrong in spirit.” Galatians 6:1 came to my mind: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” I asked the Lord to help me have His spirit of wisdom and kindness and show me how to approach this man in His way.

God led me to start my visit by telling the staff member that I sometimes talked about people negatively behind their back and wanted to stop doing that. Then I shared a little bit of what I knew he had been doing (but did not dump it all on him) and asked him to join me in praying for us both to be more like Jesus. He got the point, and we ended up on our knees, tears in our eyes, praying for each other. It was a much better ending to our visit and had better results for changing his behavior.

Later that evening, a pastor called me. He was very angry with his elders for going around behind his back and sharing false gossip about him. He said he was going to sit them down the next day and really straighten them out. Isn’t our Lord wonderful! He had worked me over in my worship that morning so I could help a hurting pastor that evening to slow down and spare a bigger conflict. A wise person said, “If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.”⁵

Total dependence on God

The temptation so often is to cut short or skip our time with the Lord and move on to “getting something practical done.” More and more, I am realizing that if I prioritize truly connecting in my relationship with Jesus, abiding through prayer and the Word, He can accomplish so much more through me. Without that priority in place, I am really moving forward in my own strength, separated from Him, and living in self-dependence, which never turns out well.

So many great persons of faith did amazing things when they were in a close relationship with God, totally depending on Him, but then suffered humiliating defeats when they opted to depend on

themselves. Examples such as David with Goliath and then David with Bathsheba. Joshua at Jericho and then at Ai. Peter walking on water and then denying his Lord. Their being listed as some of His great people of faith encourages us when we fail in self-dependence, and it shows us that repentance and reconnecting can restore us too.

I believe this statement to be so true:

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this.”⁶

When we truly let God live His unselfish love through us, there will be limitless forward progress of His mission to reach those who do not know Jesus, just as in the book of Acts.

He will

Jesus is about to come! Thank you, pastors, for all you are doing unselfishly for our Lord. Now is the time for all of us as His leaders to connect in love more deeply with Him! When we allow the Holy Spirit to give us the mind of Jesus, then, as Paul wrote in Philippians, we can do all things (Phil. 4:13). He will meet all of our needs (v. 19) and complete the work He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6). When He humbles and uses us, there are no limits to what He will do through us! Hallelujah!



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), 159.
- 3 White, 159.
- 4 For my conversion story, see “Sleepwalkers, Awake!” *Ministry* (January 2011), 20–22.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1882), 119.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1909), 189, 190.

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Dying to self

When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely set at naught and you don't sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is still happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and your best intentions misinterpreted and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself but rather take it all in patient, loving silence, knowing that Christ alone is your defender,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

When you patiently bear annoyance, disorder, inconvenience, irregularity, and even impunctuality from others, when you feel your time has been wasted and you've been treated harshly and unfairly and yet you still respond in love, maintaining your peace and enduring these things with meekness as Jesus endured,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

When you are unruffled with less-than-desirable accommodations, uncomplaining with meager food, difficult climates, or rearranged travel schedules, when you maintain cheerfulness even though others are grumpy, when you are loving, kind, and attentive even to those who can do you no benefit by their association, when you remain calm despite interruptions to your agenda and plans by the will of God,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

When you don't care to refer to yourself in conversation, when you don't feel the need to boast of your accomplishments and record every good deed you do for the world to see, when you don't itch after commendation and applause, when you don't mind when others are acknowledged and your name is ignored, when you're more concerned with being faithful to God's call, when you are OK to be unknown,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

When you see your brother prospering, when you see him succeeding with a project that you contributed to and yet you can honestly rejoice with him in spirit, being happy to remain behind the scenes, not questioning God, but being grateful that the work is being accomplished so that God is glorified,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart,
THAT IS DYING TO SELF

In these last days, the Spirit must bring us to the Cross if we would be saved. And once we die on the Cross, we will not respond to any slights against our human flesh any longer because dead people don't move.

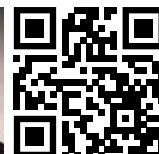
"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20, KJV). ☩



What do you treasure?

A reflection on self-sacrifice

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Ministry.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

What was He to do with these men who had walked with Him, laughed with Him, listened to Him day and night for years, and watched how He treated others? The disciples had lived and breathed Jesus day after day, yet they still failed to see that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24)¹. The disciples could never bring life to others until they brought death to themselves.

Jesus, out of heartfelt love and heartbroken disappointment called out His disciples for chatting about who could be the best and who could have the best (Mark 9:33–35). Yet in the very next chapter, James and John unashamedly ask Jesus for the best seats in the house (Mark 10:36–45). The displeasure of their colleagues related more to their competitiveness than their conversion.

Luke records, “Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest” (Luke 22:24). Where did they get this idea that they could rank themselves? Certainly not from the teachings of Jesus. And this fight was happening while they were eating the last meal they would ever have on earth with Jesus!

In that same conversation, Jesus tells Simon Peter that He’s praying for him (vv. 31, 32), and Simon declares that he’s already ready to stand up for Christ (v. 33). All of the disciples echoed the same sentiment (Matt. 26:35). Jesus knew different.

Their self-confidence took a beating from that night to the next morning. All talk of standing by their Lord turned to silence as they ran, lied, hid, and shook, in fear that any second the Roman soldiers would break down the door and kill them, as they had Jesus.

What made them exchange courage for fear and self-sacrifice for self-preservation?

Up close and personal

My father prayed for God’s will daily. “Lord, open my eyes to see people around me, my ears to hear Your voice; tell me how to serve; show me Your plans. Help me forget self and be a blessing to others. Help me be like Jesus.”

Under communism, it was against the law to bring Bibles into the country, build a church, or do many other things for the church, but my father risked his freedom and life and did it anyway. Our church building was old and too small for our needs. At that time, we had a wonderful, dedicated, hardworking pastor. My father, an elder in the church, talked to him and proposed that we build a new church. Doing so could easily mean prison for the leaders of the project. Yet they presented the proposal to the board. With much prayer, they decided to go ahead in faith.

Everyone came to work, young and old—children, men, and women. We worked at night for obscurity, without lights or power tools. We demolished the old church except for the front wall and built the new building hiding it behind the wall. In about three months, the new church was taller than the old front wall.

One night, the police approached.

“Open the gates!” My dad asked if they had a warrant. They didn’t.

“Not until you have a warrant.”

“You will pay for it!” retorted the police, as they turned and stomped off.

They returned a few months later. The church was now completed. My father told the pastor, “You are young and dedicated. God still has work for you. Take your wife and go away for a few days. There’s no reason for both you and me to be arrested.”

The pastor argued. He was willing to be interrogated, arrested, and even imprisoned. My father convinced him there was no benefit in that. He left my father to talk to the officers.

“Who led this project?”

“I did,” my father said.

They took him to the station. “We warned you time and again to stop bringing in Bibles, and now you have built a church. We will confiscate your salary!”

“Well, there is nothing to take. I joyfully give it all to the church each month. I keep very little.”

“Then, we will fire you from your job.”

“That is indeed good news. I will have more time to serve God then.”

Frustrated, an officer put a pistol to my father's chest.

My father said, "Let me unbutton my shirt, and then you can shoot me."

Confused, the officer said, "Why? Bullets go through shirts."

"I know," said my father. "But there are many poor people without a shirt. Let's not ruin it. Give it to someone else after you shoot me. To live is Jesus, and to die is an honor. He died for me; shouldn't I be happy to die for Him?"

The officer called the chief of police. The chief called the mayor of the city. The mayor gave the order for my father to be killed. Feeling a little bad now, the officer hung up, turned to my father, and apologized, "I am sorry, but I have clear orders."

My father said, "Let me pray first."

"Well, even if you pray, no one will save you."

"My friend, I have no intention to pray for myself. I want to pray for you." My father put his arm around the officer's shoulder and prayed for his salvation. Then he said, "I am ready."

At that moment, the telephone rang. The deputy of the city, the person under the mayor, called. "Do not touch this man! After the mayor gave the orders to kill him, he left in his car, and a drunk driver in a big truck hit the car and killed him. Let this man go home."

I asked my father later, "Did you know God would intervene to save your life?"

"Son, I did not, and that is not important," he answered. "I am not focused on my life but on God and His service. He shall increase, and I shall decrease. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and the one who is willing to lose his life for God will save it. You cannot and will never be a Christian, you will never experience God's power in your life, unless you love Him to the degree that you daily surrender and sacrifice all, including self."

The absolute requirement

Paul said that he considered *all* things a loss for the price of knowing Jesus (Phil. 3:8). Twenty-nine years after his conversion, Paul still wanted to know Jesus. For him, it was a lifetime quest to know Jesus, with daily surrender and self-sacrifice. He says, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). Dying to self is the absolute requirement to be a disciple, to follow Jesus. Nothing else can substitute for that. And it is not a one-time event at baptism but a lifelong process that must happen daily. Even as pastors with higher-education degrees and a

commitment to be shepherds of God's sheep on earth, we cannot live with Jesus eternally unless we die with Him daily.

The reason we have little power, little influence to save others around us, and minimal success with spiritual victory and church growth is that we need to sacrifice self. Jesus says in John 12 that unless a grain dies, it will never produce any fruit (v. 24). Unless we fully and daily surrender all, we cannot experience Jesus' power in our lives. There is no way to have a car with two drivers in full control. You cannot have both Jesus and self in control. Either you are in control, or Jesus is. Can you do that, Pastor? Can you fully let go of the steering wheel?

What do you love more than Him?

Jesus calls His followers His *martures*—His witnesses (Acts 1:8). From this word, we get the English word *martyr*. Jesus says, "You are My martyrs." If you love Him more than anything, you have no problem sacrificing everything, including self. Whatever you cannot sacrifice, that's what you love more than Him; that's your god. Wherever your treasure is, that's where your heart is.

Daniel and Esther left their people. Joseph and Ruth left their family. All persons of faith have sacrificed everything, including self. They didn't expect a blessing; they became blessings. Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than

When they started to see the cross, to grasp the infinite enormousness of the sacrifice, they committed themselves to God and His service without reservation. They knew they might pay with their lives for their preaching, yet they still did it joyfully.

Me is not worthy of Me . . . He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt. 10:37–39).

Real religion is to love God with everything you have and love your neighbor just as you love yourself. The acid test of Christianity is your love for others. If you want to know whether you love God, to the degree that you love others—even those that hate you—to that very degree, you love God. When you love God, you forget self and joyfully live for others. You serve and you save.

Author Ellen White asks a poignant question, “Have you so deep an appreciation of the sacrifice made on Calvary that you are willing to make every other interest subordinate to the work of saving souls? The same intensity of desire to save sinners that marked the life of the Saviour marks the life of His true follower. The Christian has no desire to live for self. He delights to consecrate all that he has and is to the Master’s service. He is moved by an inexpressible desire to win souls to Christ. Those who have nothing of this desire might better be concerned for their own salvation.”²

Jesus gave us many visuals of this. Here’s one: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44). This man is willing to sell, to sacrifice, to lose literally everything to get the treasure. Are you like this man, serious about the treasure, serious about complete self-sacrifice? We sing, “All to Jesus I surrender,”³ but it is a lot easier to sing it than do it. How do you do that? How do you fully renounce self and fully surrender; how do you make Christ and His service your focus and priority?

How is it done?

Remember the scared disciples we were discussing? They were in the upper room after having spent some glorious days with the risen Savior. Jesus commanded them to preach the gospel, the good news, to the whole world. But they were just a few people, with no means, no media, and they were being pursued. They knew they could not evangelize even their city or country, much less the whole world. So, they prayed for the promise of the Holy Spirit to enable them to do their mission. They not only prayed but also repeated Jesus’ teachings and the prophecies.

As the disciples focused on Jesus, His teaching, and the prophecies and prayed for the Holy Spirit, they started to understand the Cross and the plan of salvation, the gospel, what God had done

for them. “They [the disciples] realized the greatness of their debt to heaven and the responsibility of their work. Strengthened by the endowment of the Holy Spirit, they went forth filled with zeal to extend the triumphs of the cross. . . . They had consecrated their lives to Him for service, and their very features bore evidence to the surrender they had made.”⁴ The disciples finally internalized what it meant that the Holy One came down, suffered, was crucified, and became sin for them, for you and me.

That realization was so overwhelming that it transformed them. When they started to see the cross, to grasp the infinite enormity of the sacrifice, they committed themselves to God and His service without reservation. They knew they might pay with their lives for their preaching, yet they still did it joyfully.

Second nature

Jesus was clear when He shared in Matthew 25:31–46 what happens when we have given up self, sold all we have, and taken His gift. It comes as second nature, so we don’t even know we do it. “Lord, when did we see You hungry . . . a stranger . . . naked . . . sick . . . in prison?” (vv. 37–39). Lord, when? With love in His eyes, He’ll tell you, “My child, when you invited the young boy who just lost his father on a picnic with your family, when you and your spouse gave of your time to take a meal over and spend time with Mrs. Abraham who just lost her husband of 55 years, when you and your head deacon went to the county jail regularly and gave Bible studies, you may not have recognized Me, but that was Me.”

When you really see the Cross for what it is, when you understand and digest the gospel, then you will fully surrender to Christ and allow Him to use you, to make you a blessing for those around you. You will then pray and look for opportunities to serve, to bless, to save, to possibly give your life for another. You will do it joyfully—and consider it a privilege.



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1902), 10.
- 3 J. W. VanDeVenter, “I Surrender All” (1896).
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 46.

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Forsaking self for a relationship

My friend, Bill,¹ became quite upset in a church board meeting one night. He was mad because a vote had not gone his way. Those who witnessed the outburst later talked with me about it. Bill was a well-respected, influential leader in the church I pastored, so I was quite concerned about this incident and its effect on his credibility. I was also concerned about his feelings and perception of the church's love for him.

I decided to follow the advice of Galatians 6:1, which says, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (NIV). So, I wanted to kindly show him his error and the need to change. What I thought would be a reasonable conversation turned into a very difficult one.

It did not go well

Bill got very defensive, feeling I had unfairly singled him out. He named others in the church, including me (I wasn't practicing what I preached), who erred more frequently than he, yet they were not called out. I was seeing a demonstration of Proverbs 18:19: "An offended

brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and his disputes are like the bars of a fortress" (ISV). Bill was twice offended—first, when he displayed displeasure with things not going his way and then again when I challenged him regarding his mistake.

When I suggested that his show of emotion was self rising and it was prideful, he referred to the intense emotion of Jesus when He tossed the money changers out of the temple, implying that His display of emotion was not sinful. I never cease to be amazed at how people can find excuses for what they do or even defend their expressions of anger by referring to this incident in the life of Jesus.

I have learned that when I care enough to get hurt or upset about what is happening to others, it may be Christ living through me on behalf of them. However, when I get upset because of something that is not going *my* way, that is virtually always self life.

My agenda in approaching Bill was to try to gently point out his mistake and lead him to apologize to those who had witnessed it. However, when the conversation was over, the



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

message I got was that I was a bigger sinner than he, and I was the bad guy!

At one point, he did apologize to me; however, it was the kind that went, "I apologize but . . ." Then 90 percent of the exchange followed the "but." There was no contrite spirit, remorse, or sense of repentance. The next day, Bill also sent a note of apology to the others, but his apology touched only the tip of the iceberg and did not address the core issue of his sin. He apologized, yet he also blamed others for the problem, somehow excusing himself.

The challenge

When we talked, I tried to show him his mistake, but I just had to listen, realizing he was on such a roll and self was so alive that he would not even hear me. I made a few attempts to be heard but without success. Bill had a different perspective on our talk. He felt so positive that he emailed me the next morning saying, "We are good." The problem was I did not feel good at all. But he did not know this. I did not agree with him; he did not listen; he was not ready to hear it or acknowledge it. Now I had a challenge.

Bill and I are good friends, and I highly value his friendship, so I did not want anything coming between us. Yet, rightly or wrongly, I believed that if I returned to the subject, he would still be unable to hear me, and I might seriously damage the relationship and further reinforce self in him. I asked myself, "What do I do? This type of situation can ruin a good relationship."

The healing

God led me to four spiritual approaches. First, He reminded me that Jesus has forgiven me in depth and frequency far more than I needed to forgive Bill. Moreover, I was not in a place to judge Bill or hold a grudge against him.

Second, God showed me that I did not approach this issue in the wisest way. Instead of talking to him when he was still emotional about it, I should have waited until things cooled down a little. Moreover, instead of trying to show him his mistake, I should have acknowledged my own error first, made myself vulnerable, and expressed my conviction that I first need God's changing grace and help. Then I should have shown that I appreciate him for so many things.

Only after that should I suggest that it is better to speak calmly regardless of whether he was right or wrong.

Also, everyone should always be ready to accept the board's decision regardless of whether it goes our way or in a totally different direction. I could have shared with him times when votes did not go my way and that I understood what he was going through. I could have found a way to listen and understand, love and appreciate. We do not need to agree with a mistake, but we do need to love the one who erred. We need to be patient, wise, tactful, humble, and patient. The golden rule of doing unto others definitely applied here.

Third, God led me to sing a song. I usually find that singing songs that apply to life situations helps me in a big way. The songs help move the message from my head to my heart. They bring peace and comfort. The song I sang rather frequently was the first stanza of the old hymn "I Surrender All." Singing not only calmed my emotions but also moved me deeper into truly dying to self. I understood that I was frustrated because I, too, needed to die to self; I needed to give up the feeling that I was right and should correct others. Rather, I needed to love them and pray for them.

The fourth thing God led me to was a huge breakthrough and a new insight for me. God had me imagine the horrible treatment Jesus went through in the hours before the cross and then on the cross. He led me to pray one of Jesus' prayers on the cross: "Father, forgive Bill, for he knows not what he did." I realized that if Jesus could love and pray for forgiveness for those who persecuted Him, who was I not to do the same?

Of these four activities, this last one of prayer was the most important avenue God used to heal me. Until then, I had rarely, if ever, prayed like this. It was just not a regular part of my prayer life. As soon as I started to pray this prayer for my friend, I realized I needed to pray it for me too. I needed God's forgiveness and grace; I, too, had to surrender and experience growth. I had to learn to die to self and work with my friend in such a way as to help him. I had to focus on him, love him, and be willing to forget self.

The blessings

Although I felt hurt in my interaction with Bill, God truly healed me. I was all right with the fact that, for that moment, things were not the way I wanted. I had to learn patience; I had to forgive and love.

After doing this, I could hardly believe how sunny the skies were between us. It was as if the event had never happened. I was overwhelmed with praise and gratitude for God's amazing grace in doing this for me.

A second blessing excited me beyond belief. It was the insight that God's grace can keep relationships rich and beautiful even if they do not get fixed right away or the way I would imagine. When we join Jesus on the cross (Gal. 2:20) and fully surrender self, it is as if the event that brought clouds between us never happened.

Me first

As you well know, people are firmly entrenched on one side or the other with many issues. Until the event with Bill, I had no idea how to "fix" the interpersonal pain and conflict hovering below the surface in our church family. I have been so hungry to see things fixed when I thought I was right. I wanted to see unity and love among us so that Jesus' words in John 13:34, 35, and 17:21–26 could be fulfilled.

I had to stop and realize—me first. God is calling me first to give up self for Him and others. I must set the example of confessing, asking for forgiveness, giving all to God, and letting Him lead. We, as pastors, cannot expect our members to give up self if we are not first willing to be examples and do the same.²

Seeing how God can heal situations and relationships that we sometimes struggle with has been an amazing gift. I have learned that things do not always need to be fixed right away or my way! There are extreme situations, such as abuse, that what I am saying does not fit, and special wisdom must be used. But normal tensions and conflicts arise all too frequently because self is so easily offended and readily offends others. Self must die; Christ must be raised up.

You may be wondering how this insight has impacted our church. It's still so new that I do not know yet. Time will tell.



1 Pseudonym.

2 See W. Clarence Schilt and Stephen Schilt, *A Life To Die For: Discover the Secret of Christ's Transforming Power* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2009).

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The Sabbath in the Old Testament and the Intertestamental Period: Implications for Christians in the Twenty-First Century

edited by Daniel Bediako and Ekkehardt Mueller (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2021).

The book *The Sabbath in the Old Testament and the Intertestamental*

Period, edited by Daniel Bediako and Ekkehardt Mueller, is written by scholars who address their topics with thoroughness. *Ministry* readers will recognize many of the editors and writers (Daniel K. Bediako, Lael O. Caesar, Richard M. Davidson, Mathilde Frey, Roy Gane, Laurentiu G. Ionescu, Gerald A. Klingbeil, Ekkehardt Mueller, Daegeuk Nam, Gerhard Pfandl, Martin Proebstle, Teresa Reeve, Michael Sokupa, and Elias Brasil de Souza) because most of them have been published in this journal.

The book is divided into three sections.

The first section, “Exegetical Perspectives,” deals with the numerous Old Testament Sabbath passages.

The second section, “Thematic Perspectives,” addresses topics such as the origin of the Sabbath, the Sabbath at Creation, the new covenant, rest and worship, festival and Sabbath, and dimensions of Sabbath rest.

In an otherwise helpful chapter, “Torah’s Seven Vibrant Dimensions of Sabbath Rest” (325ff), the following statement is made without adequate support: “Whereas Seventh-day Adventists often see the Sabbath commandment in a negative way—‘Don’t work on the Sabbath!’—Jewish Sabbath-keepers regularly viewed it positively: ‘I don’t have to work on the Sabbath!’” (330). Recently, nearly 170 Seventh-day Adventists,



in a forthcoming book, chose to present their Sabbath experiences in a positive light.¹ It appears that Adventists have a more positive view of the Sabbath than the above quote assumes.

The Third section, “Intertestamental Literature” (387–395), focuses on the Sabbath in often

ignored writings between the events of the

protocanonical books and the New Testament, including the deuterocanonical books, pseudepigraphal works, the Biblical apocrypha, the Jewish apocrypha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. “The last

major scholarly study of the Sabbath

by Adventist scholars was published

in 1982.” (1), referring to a book edited

by Kenneth A. Strand.² Perhaps it was an

oversight, but a book by Sigve K. Tonstad,

published in 2009, is more recent and should

have been mentioned.³ The Tonstad book dedicates about 160 pages to the Sabbath in the Old Testament, the focus of the book being reviewed.

This book is a scholarly publication, and the reader needs to realize that reading it requires close attention. The writers provide extensive documentation, and to understand the material, the reader will need to look at the footnotes, which are helpful but, at times, very detailed.

The editors provide an extensive (14 pages!) Scripture index, a valuable resource for sermon preparation or other studies. There is also an index of extrabiblical writings, such as the Qumran scrolls. A subject index would have been beneficial, but the two indexes provided are helpful. A bibliography would also have been valuable.

This book is a valuable study of the Sabbath that will help readers more fully understand the grounding of the Sabbath in the Scripture.



1 Nikolaus Satelmajer et al., *The Gift: What the Sabbath Means to Me* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2022).

2 Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982).

3 Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009). Also deserving attention is Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007).

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

“PASTOR, I NEED YOUR HELP!”

Giving care when in need of CARE

Several times, individuals have sought my pastoral and spiritual care when I was suffering deep emotional pain. In their need for help, people will often go to pastors who are themselves burdened with their own struggles. To compound the problem, some church members with mental-health challenges may feel safer in the care of their pastors than they would with mental-health professionals. Unfortunately, pastors “are not usually equipped to do psychological triage and diagnosis.”¹ While pastors may not have psychiatric training, they still often function “as frontline mental health workers.”² By default, they become emotional-health first responders.

The mounting economic hardships, civil unrest, domestic violence, and other circumstances that affect families around the world all contribute to the increasing mental-health burden, making the need for spiritual care and its collaboration with psychiatric healthcare indispensable. Globally, studies estimate that in 2017, 792 million people (10.7 percent of the world population) had a mental-health disorder.³ According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in 2020, 21 percent of United States citizens dealt with some form of mental health challenge.⁴

In 2014, the same percentage was true of clergy members,⁵ indicating that they are not immune to the problem. The number is likely slightly higher because some of them may not have sought help for themselves for two reasons: (1) the fear of being stigmatized as lacking religious faith and (2) what Edward Wimberly describes as the myth of self-sufficiency, in which ministers decide to avoid those who may offer help because they think that they do not need assistance from anyone.⁶

To give spiritual or pastoral care requires that clergy take time to care for themselves lest they suffer from compassion fatigue, in which they become insensitive and detached from the pain of other individuals. I have organized four self-care strategies around the acronym *CARE* that can aid ministers in their pastoral counseling.

C: Connect with one’s personal narrative

The best place to begin providing care is to ensure that one’s own baggage does not hinder the healing process. Depending on how we view our personal narratives of pain, they can become tools that enhance the skill of caring or can turn us into attention-seeking, pity-party persons.

Instead of bringing emotional liberation to those in need, we may make them even more wounded. We should never allow our hurts to distract those we minister to but, rather, use our narratives as internal tools for providing care.

For a pastor to project personal pain on those facing difficult situations is to run the risk of the pastor trying to solve their own problems by advising the care seeker. But connecting to one's personal narrative and understanding its nature will minimize the temptation to be the expert on the counselee's unfolding narrative.

A: Avoid being cared for by the care seeker

When pastors fail to deal with their personal pain, they may seek therapy from those who need their care. In such a case, what we call countertransference will likely occur. A minister's past woundedness will unconsciously shape the response to the care seeker's situation. It may take the form of excessive self-disclosure to the client. The pastor may begin to share issues in their own life as a way of helping. However, this type of sharing may indicate that they are hoping for therapy from the one seeking care. It is even more complicated when the emotional bond becomes unhealthy and the cleric becomes the "solution."

People may assume that pastors are oblivious to their personal hurts. Members expect them to be strong and may never tolerate any emotional weakness or breakdown on the pastor's part. Again, that can cause the pastor to seek therapy from the church members instead of the other way around. To avoid that danger, ministers must learn to get in touch with their personal feelings. Seeking professional counseling is a good way to do that.

R: Release pent-up emotions

Some church members will assume that the pastor should never have any emotional burdens. If he or she does, the members may perceive it as a lack of religious faith. However, pastors are human beings with the same kinds of challenges faced by their flock.

Statistics provided by Pastoral Care, Inc., report that 57 percent of clergy members experience discouragement, stress, and fatigue, yet they claim to be fulfilled. Statistics show that 70 percent of pastors who had started out with high regard for themselves eventually felt a loss of self-worth.⁷ A recent study that sampled pastors revealed that increased occupational distress was

associated with chronic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression.⁸

We must get in touch with our feelings so that we can become effective spiritual caregivers. Ignoring our feelings can make us vulnerable to wanting sympathy from those we should be helping. Journaling is a good way for pastors to recognize and spell out their feelings.⁹

Personal experience has taught me the need for counseling services. As I delivered God's Word, did bedside ministry, and met face-to-face with those who sought my care, I felt empty inside. I could not come to terms with why God uses me as a childless pastor whose wife is always in physical and emotional pain. When providing spiritual care to hospital patients, I noticed that I was not only excessively emotional but also becoming ineffective.

As my grief mounted, I dreaded going to therapy. When I finally decided to drag my emotionally drained body there, two thoughts ran through my mind. First, in my part of the world, society expects that a pastor should not succumb to life's problems. Second, in my culture, a man must not cry. Nonetheless, I am grateful that I decided to go in for counseling because I was heading toward clinical depression. Counseling services enabled me slowly to climb out of the pit of despair to the pinnacle of hope. It helped me realize that the need to release pent-up emotions may require seeking professional help.

E: Emulate the Savior

Christ is the Pastor par excellence who set a rich example that those providing spiritual care need to emulate. The Savior experienced physical exhaustion. When He was walking us out of the entanglement of sin, He experienced such great emotional anguish that He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (Mark 14:34)¹⁰. If the Master endured pain, His ministers are not exempt from it. They may find it helpful to follow His example:

He rose early in the morning and went to pray (Mark 1:35). Heaven is a storehouse full of treasure for our benefit. Surrendering the outcome of events to God has a soothing effect. It displays trust in divine providences. During testing times, it may be hard to pray. However, "every difficulty [should be seen as] a call to prayer."¹¹ Starting the day with prayer is helpful because what one does in the morning may set the tone for the whole day.

He took a break. After Jesus received the disturbing news of John's death, He needed some quiet

Christ is the Pastor par excellence who set a rich example that those providing spiritual care need to emulate.

time. He said to His disciples, “Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:31). Being on call day and night, ministers may fail to find time to rest. Taking a vacation, blocking out time for leave, and having a family day once a week will help refresh us.

He built a caring support system of disciples. When Jesus was facing crucifixion, He took His disciples with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). Ministers need other humans to help them carry their personal burdens.

He used referrals. After Jesus had completed the process of healing the lepers, He referred them to the priests (Matt. 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14; 17:14), who were responsible for assessing the level of infection (Lev. 13:25). The priests not only declared their healed patients clean but also performed ceremonial rituals that made reintegration into society easier (Leviticus 14). This is a good example to follow. Pastoral caregivers need to understand they may not be equipped to do everything and that some of their duties must be absorbed by specialized professions, such as psychiatry. Larry Yeagley underscores that it is important for clergy members to understand appropriate diagnostic criteria for mental challenges to facilitate referrals to mental health professionals.¹² Making appropriate referrals will not only reduce the load on the spiritual caregiver but also minimize compassion fatigue.

He had a caring, compassionate attitude (Matt. 9:36; 15:32; 20:34). When He was dying on the cross, Jesus cared for the beloved disciple and His mother (John 19:26, 27). He entered into their pain and showed genuine love. Psychologists Jack Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin Reimer comment, “By his words and actions Jesus radically defined the meaning of family. The church needs to be a community characterized by family-type relationships.”¹³

CARE to care

Providing spiritual and pastoral care calls for ministers to *connect* to their personal narrative of pain in such a way that self does not hinder the work of care. This will help them *avoid* seeking emotional nourishment from their care seekers. Clergy members should take time to *release* pent-up emotions by seeking professional help themselves and engaging in the productive discipline of journaling. *Emulating* the Savior is key in this exalted work. It is only when a pastor CAREs that they can provide care.



- 1 Larry Yeagley, “Pastoral Counseling: The Art of Referral,” *Ministry*, September 2002, 10.
- 2 Andrew J. Weaver, Kevin J. Flannely, Laura T. Flannely, and Julia E. Oppenheimer, “Collaboration Between Clergy and Mental Health Professionals: A Review of Professional Health Care Journals from 1980 Through 1999,” *Counseling and Values* 47, no. 3 (April 2003): 162.
- 3 Saloni Dattani, Hannah Ritchie, and Max Roser, “Mental Health,” Our World in Data, updated August 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/mental-health>.
- 4 “Mental Health by the Numbers,” National Alliance on Mental Illness, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-by-the-numbers>.
- 5 LifeWay, “Study of Acute Mental Illness and Christian Faith,” accessed February 26, 2020, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Acute-Mental-Illness-and-Christian-Faith-Research-Report-1.pdf>.
- 6 Edward P. Wimberly, *Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 63.
- 7 “Statistics in the Ministry,” Pastoral Care, Inc., <https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>.
- 8 Benjamin L. Webb and Kirstie Chase, “Occupational Distress and Health Among a Sample of Christian Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68 (2019), 331–343, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0844-y>.
- 9 Barnabas Piper, “5 Reasons Every Pastor Should Journal,” *Church Leaders*, October 7, 2020.
- 10 Scripture is from the King James Version.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), 31.
- 12 Yeagley, “Pastoral Counseling,” 10.
- 13 Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 294.

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COACHING

as pastoral care



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Robert¹ texted me a few years ago, asking for my advice. He was at a crossroads of deciding between two job opportunities. Both were attractive, and both had components of ministry connected to them. Shortly after receiving the text, I called him to talk things through with him. Unfortunately, whenever I shared an idea, he had an argument against it. I remember longing to have the right words that might help him make the “right” decision—at least as I saw it. Reflecting on the conversation late that evening, I felt unsatisfied. He ended up not listening to any of my suggestions.

Some pastors always, it seems, know just what to say. Pearls of wisdom flow from their mouths. They are a rare breed. Most of us come away from such conversations knowing we could have done better. Is there another skill pastors can develop that will be helpful in those times? I believe there is—the skill and art of coaching.

What is coaching?

When referring to coaching, I am not speaking about athletic, music, voice, or similar coaching. Coaching is the “art and practice of enabling individuals . . . to move from where they are to where they want to be.”² A more official-sounding definition comes from the International Coaching Federation (ICF) website. Coaching is “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”³ The main idea in these definitions is helping people become who they want to be.

It is important to distinguish between coaching and other pastoral care skills. As a pastor, I have mentored many young adults. A mentor’s role

is to infuse skills and expertise into the mentee. Pastors also engage in discipling. In this role, the pastor has more spiritual maturity than the person being disciplined. When a pastor disciplines others, the aim is to help new converts grasp biblical realities more fully. This is accomplished by teaching, modeling, advising, and guiding.

At times, pastors are biblical counselors. A counselor has specific training that communicates things, such as what good mental health is or how marriages should function, and attempts to move their clients in that direction. These are all important aspects of pastoral care, but they are quite different from coaching.

A primary difference between these roles and coaching is that in each of these models, the pastor is the expert. The pastor *coach* lays aside the *expert* mantle. The aim is to assist the member’s thinking process so that the member uncovers their own solutions.

When to coach

When should a pastor use coaching as opposed to other methods of care? As frequently as possible, given the right conditions. Some of those conditions are when the member

- does not need therapy or spiritual healing,
- has a difficult decision to make,
- is in a holding pattern that necessitates new thinking patterns,
- has a vision for the future but is unclear as to how to realize that vision,
- is struggling with the tension between who they want to be and who they are, or
- faces a challenge that requires action.

Additionally, I have used coaching in board meetings, business meetings, and church planning

sessions to help facilitate member participation and discussion.

The coaching conversation

Pastors have a variety of interesting conversations with members. But are those conversations useful? In contrast, coaching conversations follow a pattern designed to be of the most help to the one being coached.

The first step toward useful conversations is setting the flow of the conversation. Here, the pastor will ask what the congregant has on their mind or what would be helpful for them. This is called “setting the conversation” or “placement.” Its purpose is to help clarify where the conversation is headed. During this phase, many people are unclear about what kind of conversation they are looking for. You might encounter expressions like *What do you think I should do?* or *I really want to . . . but I'm not . . .*, or *I'm not sure what to do next*. These expressions indicate that the person needs help learning how to think clearly.

The pastor also needs to be cautious. Sometimes people come to the pastor for guidance, but what they really want is to vent. They are neither interested in thinking more deeply nor in the hard work of change.

The second step in a coaching conversation is using thoughtful questions. Such questions should be open-ended, ones that cannot be answered with a yes or no. Powerful questions provoke thinking and create insights. Here are some useful questions:

- How can I help you think about this?
- How does this issue fit into your goals and desires?
- Where do your values fit in this situation?
- What would your life look like if you made the changes you are thinking of?
- What would be most helpful for you today?
- How long have you been thinking about this?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, where would you rate this issue in importance?
- How do you feel about this circumstance?
- Where are you feeling it? In your chest, stomach, head?

When asking questions, pay attention to your tendency to jump to conclusions. Try to

suspend your judgment. Instead of thinking of your response, listen to and watch the person speaking. This will help you hear things beyond the words being said. Learn to become comfortable with silence as the member



A MORE HELPFUL WAY TO PROMOTE CHANGE IS TO FACILITATE NEW MOMENTS OF INSIGHT. WHEN SOMEONE GAINS A NEW INSIGHT THROUGH YOUR THOUGHTFUL QUESTION, THE PERSON EXPERIENCES A RELEASE OF ENERGY AND A DESIRE TO MOVE FORWARD.

thinks things through. Try not to stack questions. Rather, ask one and then pause for a response. I find the acronym WAIT useful when I am coaching. I'll often ask myself to WAIT—why am I talking?

One of the difficulties pastors have in learning to ask thoughtful questions is the tendency to feel that we need to have all the answers. Five drivers to social connections that influence our interactions are status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness.⁴ Status shows our relative importance to others and is easily threatened. Let us be transparent. It is part of our status as a pastor to have answers, to be a guide on deeply important matters. However, in coaching, we relinquish this status to enhance the status of the member. The pastor does this by facilitating the member's own discoveries and insights.

The final phase of the coaching conversation is to work with the new insights the congregant gains. The common method for helping others change is giving them advice, solving their problems, and assuming that they think the way we do. A more helpful way to promote change is to facilitate new moments of insight. When someone gains a new insight through your thoughtful question, the person experiences a release of energy and a desire to move forward. Noticing and encouraging these insights is an essential part of a coaching conversation.

When someone has a flash of insight, you can see it in their face. Their eyes brighten as adrenaline, dopamine, and serotonin are released. This reaction is what prompted Archimedes to jump out of the bath, shouting, "Eureka!" Current neuroscience studies suggest that gamma-band waves are given off, which shows increased learning and attention.⁵ At this point, the coach encourages the person being coached to identify and decide to act on the insight.

CREATE

This outline of the coaching conversation can be summed up with the acronym CREATE.⁶ First, the pastor explores the *current reality*, then *explores alternatives* through powerful questions, and finally *taps the energy* that is released through new insights.

Pastors work to help move people toward the kingdom of God. Coaching as pastoral care is an underdeveloped skill that the thoughtful minister can incorporate. It has a unique place in the pastor's tool kit.

A privileged position

The following facts underscore how the pastor coach is in a privileged position while coaching.

First, there is an opportunity to incorporate prayer into the process. While breathing exercises help bring calm to a coaching exchange, prayer brings both calm and a holy influence.

Second, every coach has a worldview. The pastor coach's worldview will include believing that God has a plan for the member's life. It is extremely fulfilling to see a person move into harmony with that plan.

Third, the pastor coach can minister to the entire person, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Finally, the pastor coach has a unique advantage in that a close relationship already exists. The member understands that there are shared traditions and values. This helps facilitate change.

It's different now

It has been several years since my conversation with Robert. We are still good friends and regularly speak about life and its challenges. Our conversations have a different tenor now. They are not only interesting but also useful. When he begins to ask for advice, I ask him questions. It is second nature for me to slide into a coaching conversation rather than trying to be the expert with all the solutions. I am appreciably more curious about what he is thinking and far less concerned about having just the right words. This brings depth to our conversations that would otherwise be impossible to achieve.



- 1 A pseudonym.
- 2 Gary Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 13.
- 3 "What Is Coaching?" International Coaching Federation, Central Florida Charter Chapter, accessed August 29, 2021, <https://www.icf-cf.com/What-is-Coaching>.
- 4 David Rock, "SCARF: A Brain-Based Model for Collaborating With and Influencing Others," *NeuroLeadership Journal* 3, 2008, no. 1, 1–9, <https://schoolguide.casel.org/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/SCARF-NeuroleadershipArticle.pdf>.
- 5 David Rock, *Quiet Leadership* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), Kindle edition, 107, 108.
- 6 Rock, 152.

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Compassion without limits

WARSAWA, POLAND

In the first 12 days of the conflict in Eastern Europe, over 1.2 million refugees crossed the Polish border. The people of Poland, without any hesitation, have opened not only their hearts but also their homes and churches to the refugees crossing into their country.

The Seventh-day Adventist community of about 6,000 has prepared more than 1,200 shelters on church properties and in private homes. Volunteers from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Poland visited several border and reception crossings, where they distributed “start packages”—a set of basic personal hygiene items—for people crossing the border and organized accommodations while learning about people’s most urgent needs.

The Christian charity service *Blisko Serca* (Close to the heart) has allocated two of its centers to receive refugees from Ukraine. The Orion center in Wisła and the Polubie center in Zatonie have hosted more than 70 people.

The Polish Senior College of Theology and Humanities in Podkowa Leśna has welcomed the Ukrainian people, and additional buildings and premises will be made available. A kindergarten for refugee children, operated by volunteers from the local church, will also open on the campus in the coming days.

Younger church members are also engaged in the relief effort. The Adventist Scouting Association (ZHA) and the Pathfinders organized charity collections all over Poland. The response was huge. Sleeping bags, sleeping mats, blankets, pillows, duvets, hygiene products, non-perishable food, flashlights, batteries, diapers, medicines, medical aids, and heating stoves are already on their way. The donations were sent to the western part of Ukraine, in keeping with the migration of people coming from the eastern part of the country.

Ryszard Jankowski, president of the Polish Union Conference of the Adventist Church, and **Tomasz Żelazko**, another minister, visited a border crossing.

“It is impossible to describe the scale of activities that are carried out not only by the Adventist Church through its institutions but also, above all, by individual members of the community and local churches,” church leaders said. “Many local churches have paused organizing Sabbath



Photo: ADRA Poland



Photo: ADRA Poland

Refugee center in Korczowa

services while their premises currently serve as accommodation. A lot of people are not only sacrificing their finances but also, most of all, opening their own homes and welcoming those in need.” [Daniel Kluska, Polish Union Conference, and *Adventist Review*]

Neighboring Bulgaria offers humanitarian aid

BULGARIA

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe is part of the worldwide Adventist response to help those in need through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Bulgaria, a small country bordering the Black Sea, which connects with Ukraine, is participating in relief efforts in solidarity with the Ukrainian refugees.

During the second week of the conflict, workers at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bulgaria gave money, and **Petya Gotseva**, a humanitarian aid coordinator, purchased heavy blankets along with food and drinks for refugees staying in tents at the border.



ADRA van distributing goods to Ukrainian refugees arriving in Bulgaria.

Interestingly, on a Saturday morning, one of the Bulgarian national television channels broadcasting directly from the Romanian-Ukrainian border featured a famous Bulgarian movie star riding in the Adventist Union van, sharing how pleased she was with ADRA's activities.

Bulgarian citizens have exemplified extraordinary compassion toward people in need. [Andreas Mazza, Inter-European Division, and *Adventist Review*]

Churches and ADRA respond to “unprecedented” floods in Australia

After heavy rainfall caused unprecedented flooding in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland, Australia, with estimated damages of over A\$2 billion, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) volunteers and local Seventh-day Adventist church members are joining the efforts of other churches and charities to assist the flood-ravaged communities.

With most floodwaters beginning to recede on Thursday, March 3, 2022, many church members dedicated the weekend to meeting the urgent needs in the community.

One church is running an evacuation center and provides meals, clothing, and bedding items to the community. Other churches have organized community clean-up operations.


On Saturday morning, instead of meeting for church, another church packed and distributed 50 food hampers.

The team received a special thanks from one of the grateful recipients. “Thank you so much! I have nothing to eat and no money to buy any

food. I'm going to church next week!”

In Lismore, NSW, the church—transformed into an

emergency evacuation center—received a full load of nonperishable food items. A team of volunteers helped unload the truck. Other food-shortage responses are being organized. Sanitarium Health Food Company has offered to donate food supplies for 12,000 families, which will be distributed across the affected region of northern NSW.

In Murwillumbah, NSW, on Sabbath, the Seventh-day Adventist church held a shorter Sabbath service where members shared testimonies. At 10:30 A.M., they went to assist the community by delivering food and helping with the clean-up. [Juliana Muniz, *Adventist Record*] 



ADRA volunteers helping with the clean-up efforts in Gympie.



Jill Richardson, DMin, is a pastor at Real Hope Community Church, Oswego, Illinois, United States.



Five ideas for interactive preaching

Since rather inadvertently becoming an interactive preacher (and then intentionally doing my doctoral research on the subject), almost every week, I have both taught and learned from the congregation.

One thing I have especially learned is that interactive preaching disciples better than a monologue. Research bears me out. It's commonly said that we remember as little as 5 percent of what we hear but up to 90 percent of what we do. My research found that only 25 percent of people who listened to monologue preaching felt able to tell someone else what they learned, while 75 percent of those who attended interactive sessions felt they could share what they learned.

What is interactive preaching? It's many things, but the basic idea is a dialog with church attenders. It can be a discussion, a Q and A, hands-on experiments, a few ideas tossed on a whiteboard, and many other things.

Considering interaction can be daunting. Pastors, leaders, and congregations who are used to a monologue might fear such a drastic change. We can, however, start with small steps. Here are a few ideas to jump-start the process.

1. Create questions instead of statements

Where you might usually make a statement about what the Scripture is saying, frame it as a question instead. Try this a couple of times in a sermon, then add more in time.

To compare, in a monologue, you might say, "God offers us green pastures and water in Psalm 23." In interactive preaching, you might ask, "What does rest look like in Psalm 23? What does it feel, sound, taste like?"

2. Get people researching

Recently, I preached on what Scripture teaches us about community, focusing on the "one another" statements in the Bible. I could have said, "There are 59 statements about how to treat one another in the New Testament." Instead, I tried this:

"Get out your phones. Ask Google how many times the phrase 'one another' appears in the New Testament. Yell one verse out." We then

decided the action commanded in that verse and wrote it on a whiteboard.

3. Invite people to ask questions

We can invite people to ask questions in real time, via text, or by soliciting questions ahead of time. What doubts does someone have? What questions have they always wanted to ask? What confuses them about the Bible? What doctrines do they not understand? The pastor can still mostly monologue an answer, but people have the chance to have input. During the sermon, we can ask a few clarifying questions. Does that make sense? Does that answer the question? Does anyone have anything to ask or add? Also—it's OK to say, "I don't know. Let's find out."

4. Make it hands-on

Sometimes, we get our hands dirty. When we talked about fostering creativity as a means to return to normal after the pandemic, I wanted people to understand that God's first act in the Bible was one of creation. That makes creativity important! So, we created. We grabbed play dough and created shapes others had to guess. Another time, we got out giant sheets of paper and designed something useful for ministry: a mural song, garden, robot—whatever. We have planted seeds to learn about the parable of the sower and made marble slides to learn why we need clear, uncluttered paths in our relationship with God.

5. Set aside interaction time with God

Encourage quiet without having to fill space. We are uncomfortable with silence, so we think we need to speak when a hush falls. We don't. In fact, we should be making time for quiet.

Set aside time for people to pray, think, write down goals, or read. Normalize silence. Our greatest time of interaction should be with our God.

Learn and remember

How can you help your members walk out of church feeling closer to the Lord and more apt to remember what they learned? May these examples give you some great ideas on how to expand your repertoire and help your church learn creatively. 📌

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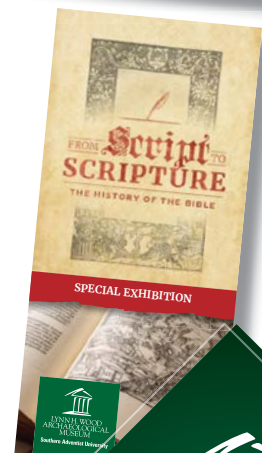
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