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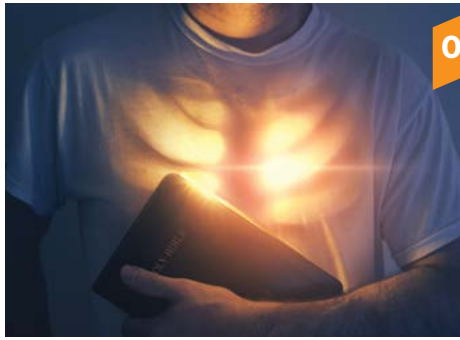


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06

Crises in our world—Christ in our hearts

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Don't forget reformation

Ellen G. White famously urges the need for “revival and reformation.” Of these, revival has been what the church has recently focused on the most, perhaps because it is easy to understand what that is. But what did she mean by *reformation*? It is a term that she used some 1,400 times in her writings during her lifetime.

Reformation is repentance

In approximately 15 percent of Mrs. White's references to *reformation*, she associates it with acknowledging our sins and repenting of them, whether to God or other church members. In a quarter of those instances, she uses the two words together, writing of “repentance and reformation” (or “reformation and repentance”). Such repeated incidence makes it clear that, for Ellen G. White, reformation and repentance go hand in hand.

For example, in *The Great Controversy* (amid many references to the historical Protestant Reformation), she writes: “Let the people of God arouse out of sleep and begin in earnest the work of repentance and reformation.”¹ In *Steps to Christ*, she urges: “Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes

in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away.”²

Reformation is a change of lifestyle

Ellen White, in her writings, often uses *reformation* to mean a change in *lifestyle*—and this is what often distinguishes it from her use of *revival*. She uses *revival* for a renewal of prayer and Bible study and to apply to a change in mind and spirit, which can and should flow from an increased connection to God and His Word. But *reformation* refers to concrete changes in the way we live our lives.

For example, in 1886, Ellen White wrote that Adventists should “not be satisfied with a mere sense of the truth; God calls for a reformation at every step.”³ In other words, *reformation* went beyond the mental or spiritual into the realm of practicalities. In 1888, in an article in the *Signs of the Times*, she encouraged church members that “the grace of Christ will enable you to overcome your perverted appetites, and begin a work of reformation in your life. You are not to follow the customs of the world.”⁴

Ellen White often uses *reformation*, then, to signify that there must be a change not only in our mind-set and approach to God (revival) but also in how we live our lives.



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Individual godliness needs to have real-world manifestation.

Reformation is corporate spiritual change

There is a third sense in which Ellen White used *reformation*: to mean *corporate* spiritual change, distinguishing it from an individual, or even collective, personal revival. And she used it this way when talking to church leaders.

In 1901, for example, talking to delegates to that year's General Conference Session, she admonished: "There should be a general reformation."⁵ In 1903, she affirmed: "In every institution among us there needs to be a reformation. This is the message that at the last General Conference I bore as the word of the Lord."⁶ At the 1901 session, she later explained, "the Lord gave His people evidence that He was calling for reformation. Minds were convicted, and hearts were touched," but unfortunately, it was not a "thorough work," which remained to be done.⁷ Here we see a convergence of reformation being something that has to affect lifestyles and methods of work with reformation as the reform of church organization.

In 1904, she published one of her most powerful testimonies: "Unless the church . . . shall repent and be converted, she will eat of

the fruit of her own doing, until she shall abhor herself. . . .

"The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place. When this reformation begins, the spirit of prayer will actuate every believer and will banish from the church the spirit of discord and strife."⁸

Not enough

Revival is not enough. We also need reformation, in which "the spirit of prayer" actuates every believer. We need a church that is simple, pure, and true to God's Word.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 398.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), 39.
- 3 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 5, 1886.
- 4 Ellen G. White, "Your Reasonable Service," *Signs of the Times*, February 17, 1888, 1, 2.
- 5 Ellen G. White, "An Appeal to Our Ministers: Talk to Ministers by Mrs. E. G. White, April 15, 1901," *General Conference Bulletin Extra*, April 16, 1901, 267.
- 6 Ellen G. White, "Lessons From Josiah's Reign: Talk by Mrs. E. G. White," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 1, 1903, 31.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 97.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 250, 251.

Crises in our world— **CHRIST IN OUR HEARTS**

OLY BIBLE

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Whether in their economic, political, social, or religious aspects, the structures of society are reeling from the severe impact of threats: political conflict, social unrest, wars, economic issues, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change. Accordingly, in his address to the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly on September 21, 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, “I am here to sound the alarm. The world must wake up. We are on the edge of an abyss—and moving in the wrong direction. Our world has never been more threatened. Or more divided. We face the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes.”¹

If the world is seeing a “cascade of crises” that must be solved, Adventists have tended to see them as building up to the “time of trouble.” Indeed, scrutinizing the Vatican and scanning American politics for events or pronouncements that point to the fulfillment of her prophecies has become the preoccupation of many believers. There is a dissonance between the world’s anguished alarm and the church’s prophetic preoccupation. The assertion that the “cascade of crises” will metastasize into the demonic events foretold in *The Great Controversy* and the book of Revelation is not self-evident.

Indeed, the reason the book of Revelation is a *revelation* (Greek *apocalypse*) is that it “reveals” or “unveils” a spiritual reality that is invisible or *not* self-evident. The spiritual meaning of how the great cosmic war between Christ and Satan entwines with human history or events is retrospectively ascertained when prophecy is correlated with history. Again, because Scripture gives apocalyptic prophecy in symbols, they can only be understood when the event (events) *represented* by the symbol actually occurs. We must strictly observe the *a posteriori* hermeneutical rule set by Jesus: “I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe” (John 14:29, KJV).

As for the events themselves, we must remember that we are enmeshed in them as part of the historical process. That robs us of perspective. We are prone to attribute great significance to events that are closest to us or that affect us the most, but which may actually possess minor relevance in the cosmic scheme of things.

Not too long ago, the global war on terror loomed large in our collective consciousness but has since been eclipsed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent events. This may be a lesson for us. Pandemics, wars, or any other “cascades of crises” are still working out their many implications. We must wait for them to fully unfold their political, economic, and social ramifications before we can correlate them with prophecy. Indeed, if Daniel, who saw the visions, did not understand them because they pertained to “the time of the end,” what makes us think we can fully grasp them before the predicted events actually take place?

On this point, a passage from Ellen White is very pertinent. “The light we have received upon the third angel’s message is the true light. The mark of the beast is exactly what it has been proclaimed to be. Not all in regard to this matter is yet understood, nor will it be understood until the unrolling of the scroll; but a most solemn work is to be accomplished in our world.”² We unequivocally proclaim the three angels’ messages, acknowledging that much is understood and much remains a mystery. This is often called dissonance.

While the world is focused on the “cascade of crises” shaking the very foundations of human existence, church members may be preoccupied with the “Sunday law” and what will befall “the remnant” during the “time of trouble.” Some members speak as if world leaders are knowingly working to fulfill the end-time script in *The Great Controversy*. Our concerns are, at best, amiss and, at worst, when not centered on Christ, narcissistic and conspiratorial. White emphasized, “The great center of attraction, Jesus Christ, must not be left out of the third angel’s message.”³ But as it is, “the truths of the third angel’s message have been presented by some as a dry theory; but in this message is to be presented Christ the Living One. He is to be revealed as the first and last, as the I AM.”⁴

The eternal gospel is *all* about Jesus Christ, who “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5, KJV), whose death “brought life and immortality to light” (2 Tim. 1:10, KJV), whose sacrifice, as Hebrews 7 tells us, was all-sufficient and His high priestly ministry completely meets our needs. “And all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. . . . And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Cor. 5:18–20, NIV). But in a world of mutually hostile tribalism, or identity politics,

Our concerns are, at best, amiss and, at worst, when not centered on Christ, narcissistic and conspiratorial.

we recognize that we have too often failed to represent Christ.

Sadly, too often we have found little difference between the church and the world in terms of identity. Unfortunately, we still share with those outside the church their pride, prejudice, hatred, and myths. At worst, we are accomplices in their self-centeredness, hate, and violence. We are curiously blind to the contradiction of Jesus’ call to treat everyone, including our enemies, as He would and our message summons us to minister to “every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev. 14:6, NIV). We too often still pay homage to the gods of nationalism, race, money, and celebrity.

The statement “They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations” (2 Kings 17:33, NIV) could fittingly describe many churchgoers today. As White put it, “The present age is one of idolatry. . . . No outward shrine may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon; yet thousands are following the gods of this world. . . . Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal. Many even of those who claim to be Christians have allied themselves with influences that are unalterably opposed to God and His truth.”⁵ We are warned to avoid being like those of the world around us.

To avert that danger, we desperately need a revival. Only that can prevent us from being like the world. “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.”⁶ Because God is love (1 John 4:8), true godliness is imitating His self-sacrificing love. “As God is, so must His people be. The life of Christ is to be revealed in the lives of His followers.”⁷ Such a revelation will

address one of the central problems of our time—the alienation and identity crisis behind the rise of tribalism, or identity politics, and the resulting political polarization, societal hatred, conflicts, and social fragmentation.

As it is, modern ideologies are bankrupt. They do not answer the questions of identity, social unity, and harmony. *But Christ is the answer.* “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17, NIV). Through the Cross, He reconciled us to God and one another, giving us a “new birth,” or identity. “His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity,” not by obliterating racial, ethnic, and national differences, but by destroying “the dividing wall of hostility.” In His body, the church, we “are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people” (Eph. 2:14,15,19, NIV).

As Paul explained, the creation of a new humanity is “the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations. . . . This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body” (Eph. 3:4–6, NIV). Paul’s special divine commission was “to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery” (v. 9). But its full “administration” was in the future. “The mystery . . . [was] to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:9, 10, NIV).

Revelation 10 majestically presents Christ Himself coming down from heaven to proclaim when “the mystery of God will be accomplished” (v. 7, NIV) and personally commissioning John to “prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (v. 11, NIV). He reveals the full, universal scope of the gospel—namely, God’s promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8).

God’s promise of universal blessing, fulfilled at the cross and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, is the content of the eternal gospel to be proclaimed “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6). As symbolically done by John in Revelation 10:9, our Adventist pioneers ingested the prophetic message. They saw in John’s bittersweet experience after he ate “the little scroll” the symbol, and even the prophecy, of their own experience following the Great Disappointment.⁸

We, however, are far removed from the pioneers and have a prophetic message not animated by personal experience. It has become primarily a matter of the head and not of the

heart, all because we have not “eaten” the eternal gospel and assimilated it into our very being. Indeed, the patient endurance, God’s commandments, and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12) that are supposed to distinguish us as a remnant people are not always visible in our lives, all because we are often devoid of the animating presence and agency of the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot bear a living witness that makes the eternal gospel *present* and relevant to our crisis-riddled world. *Only* the Holy Spirit can “prove the world wrong concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8, NET) and thus “guide [us] into all truth” (v. 13, KJV). Again, *only* the Holy Spirit can enable us to “worship . . . in the Spirit and in truth” (John 3:23, NIV). And worship is at the heart of the three angels’ messages. But thankfully, “a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest.”⁹

In other words, our task is to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus, present the message of the Second Coming, and fulfill our mission and call. Our challenge lies in ensuring that a deeply spiritual revelation is embraced as the prelude to a deeply practical reformation.



- 1 Edith M. Lederer, “The World Must Wake Up: Tasks Daunting as UN Meeting Opens,” Yahoo!News, September 21, 2021, <https://news.yahoo.com/world-leaders-return-un-face-051126665.html>; United Nations Secretary-General, “Solidarity ‘Missing in Action’, Secretary-General Tells General Assembly, Decrying ‘Malady of Mistrust’ While Stressing: ‘We Must Get Serious,’” press release, September 21, 2021, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20918.doc.htm>.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 17.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 383.
- 4 White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, 20.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 177.
- 6 White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 121.
- 7 White, 198.
- 8 Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 340.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 55.

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Entrusted with His treasure

RAY HARTWELL





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SCAN FOR AUDIO

A young boy was walking down the beach, carefully observing various people until he spied a matronly woman sitting under a beach umbrella on the sand. He walked up to her and asked, “Are you a Christian?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Do you read your Bible every day?”

She nodded her head, “Yes.”

“Do you pray often?”

And again, she answered, “Yes.”

After that, with some careful thought, he asked his final question: “Will you hold my lunch money while I go swimming?”

He had decided that she could be entrusted with his treasure.

Our trust

This young boy was looking for someone he could trust with his lunch and ice cream money for his day at the beach. You and I have been handed a trust by God’s people to lead and serve in God’s great work and His mission to reach the world with the joyful message of Christ’s return. To that end, we have also been entrusted with a salary provided by all the faithful members returning God’s tithe. That salary is a sacred trust. It is holy money set aside for a holy purpose. What a privilege it is for each one of us to be welcomed into a vocation with such a foundation of support. As such, we also need to be faithful in returning to God His tithe from our salary. The question to each one of us is, Can God trust us—the spiritual leaders in His church—with His money in our pockets?

Our privilege

When we were called by God, that call was affirmed by the church. Through extending an invitation to serve in a particular ministry or

position, we were granted a great privilege. As you serve and faithfully return God's tithe, you are part of expanding the gospel message and the call to be faithful to Jesus, our soon-coming Savior. We may not have perceived just how awesome this privilege is.

The Seventh-day Adventist church operates in 212 out of 235 countries and areas recognized by the United Nations, making it one of the most widespread Protestant denominations. Over 21,912,161 people are considered members in Seventh-day Adventist churches worldwide.¹ We get to be stewards of this great mission!

Our calling

You and I are called to the gospel ministry by God Himself and by His church. As such, we have a spiritual commitment to be faithful stewards of this calling and His blessings and to return a faithful tithe in worship of the great God who called us. Faithfulness in tithe practice is part of our personal spiritual leadership today. It is one of the ways that we give evidence of integrity in our walk with God and in the leadership with which we have been entrusted.

Forbes, the publisher of *Forbes* business magazine, published this inspiring quote by none other than Ellen White: "The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."²

Herein is stated part of our calling as spiritual leaders: leaders "who will not be bought or sold." Can you and I, even as leaders in God's work, be bought off by keeping God's tithe in our pockets or wallets?

Our integrity

"Men who in their inmost souls are true and honest." Honesty in all things is desperately needed in leadership across our nation and our world today. And the calling is for us, personally, to be honest in all things, not gauging our practice of honesty by what we may see in others. Are we, as leaders in God's work, being honest with God's tithe by returning it through the storehouse to further His work?

When we serve the gospel mission of Christ, God's Word is clear that we are to be financially supported by that ministry.³ In the Adventist Church, pastors, conference leaders and support

staff, and certain academy staff are financially supported 100 percent by the tithe God's faithful members return.

If we are willing to receive our salary from God's tithe, integrity alone would say that we should be faithful in returning God's tithe ourselves.

Our vocation

As servants in God's cause, we have a vocation. A vocation differs from an occupation. An *occupation* is just something that you do or where you are employed. A *vocation* is being drawn into a higher purpose in life that accomplishes much more than fulfilling a role to earn a sum of money. A *vocation* is something that a person is convicted or compelled to do for greater motives than personal gain.

"Men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole." For those of us who are serving in ministry, that service is greater than merely putting in our time and being able to pay our bills. As leaders in God's work, our consciences should compel us to be faithful in returning God's tithe. And our duty is clear, both as taught in God's Word and in the expectation that the Adventist Church has for each person placed in spiritual leadership in the mission of Jesus for these last days.

**If we are willing
to receive our
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tithe, integrity
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be faithful in
returning God's
tithe ourselves.**

Our God

All through Scripture, we see that God is always a great giver: from giving Adam and Eve an amazing garden home and then giving them the promise of salvation through One to come, to giving Noah plans for an ark of safety, to giving Abraham a new home and a son of promise, to giving Israel freedom from slavery in Egypt—all the way down to “unto us a son is given” (Isa. 9:6, KJV)—giving us Immanuel, and finally at the end of Revelation, a new heavens and a new earth. God is consistently a great giver.

On the other hand, Satan is always the great taker. Trace that same route through Scripture, and you will find that while God is always giving to humankind, Satan is always taking from humankind and seeking to ruin God’s great gifts.

The beauty is, just as we were created in God’s image and then re-created through the blood of the sacrifice of Jesus, so we have the heavenly genetic code within us to be great givers ourselves. That is why returning faithful tithes and generous offerings is an inherent part of what it means to be a Christian and a leader in God’s work.

And it brings our heavenly Father joy to see us becoming great givers, just like He is.

Our blessing

Daily we are blessed. Everything we might have comes from the hand of God to benefit us, bring us joy, and sustain us.⁴ In more ways than we may realize, we are preserved, protected, prospered, and provided for. As our employment is directly tied to the gospel and God’s work, our willingness to evidence faithfulness in tithing is an expression of the joy we have in playing a part in advancing God’s work. Accountability becomes a testimony—“I trust God, and I am glad to be on His team in the great controversy.”

You and I are accountable to a whole range of individuals in our life.⁵ We are accountable to our spouses and, in certain ways, to our neighbors, the society at large, and our nation. And there is a basic accountability to the organization that provides our salary. This involves adherence to biblical practices such as moral purity, Sabbath observance, healthy living, and faithful church attendance and participation. Included in these practices must also be faithfulness in returning a tithe in the worship of God.⁶

To return a faithful tithe is to joyfully thank God for His blessings in our lives and to share those blessings so that others may come to know

the joy of Christ’s soon return and the power of His transforming grace. Truly, we are blessed so that we can be a blessing.

Our response

As one of God’s chosen spiritual leaders, what is your response to this great opportunity to enjoy faithfulness in God’s calling of stewardship? If you have had the practice of regularly returning God’s tithe, surely you have experienced the blessings and joy of honoring God and supporting His ministry. But what if you have not been participating in a regular tithe commitment to this point? Maybe this message is God’s voice calling you to consecrated spiritual leadership by making returning a faithful tithe a joyful part of your life.

Decide to prayerfully begin right now to dedicate 10 percent of your income each time you receive it by returning God’s tithe. Try it by faith—experiment by starting with a six-month commitment to let the Lord show you how He will supply your need and bless you sufficiently to make sure that you do not lack.⁷ As you teach your people to walk by faith, join them with your own faith commitment in regard to faithful tithe and see the evidence of His provision. Come experience the joy that millions have found as they have put God first in all aspects of life.



- 1 Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, “Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics 2021,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, updated February 14, 2022, <https://www.adventist.org/statistics/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2021/>.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn, 1903), 57, quoted in “Quotes: Thoughts on the Business of Life,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/quotes/2632/>.
- 3 See 1 Corinthians 9:14: “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (NKJV), and Matthew 10:10: “For a worker is worthy of his food” (NKJV).
- 4 See 1 Chronicles 29:14: “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (NIV).
- 5 See Romans 14:12: “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (NKJV).
- 6 *Working Policy, North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2018–2019 ed. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2018), E 80 20, V 04 08.
- 7 Malachi 3:10, 11.

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Seven unbelievers who positively impacted God's work

In his inaugural speech on January 20, 1989, US president George Bush set forth an ideal for humankind: “To make kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world.” Yet today, we hear of unprovoked hostility toward Asians and Blacks. We hear of anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish synagogues, homes, and businesses. We hear of domestic terrorism targeting schools, shops, and cinemas. Societies are violently divided over who should lead their countries, and heated debates swirl around immigration—whether to open wide the door to those in desperate political and economic situations or build an impenetrable wall, impossible to breach.

I have recently begun asking myself, What is the source, the beginning, of this “us versus them” thinking? True, 2 Timothy 3:1–5 predicts: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of

pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.”¹ But I have also come to believe that labeling an individual or a group that is different from ourselves reduces our humanity. Permit me to employ just one example where we, as followers of Christ, may be contributing to the less-than-human reactions of today.

How do you and I refer to individuals who have not yet encountered that loving relationship with the Lord that we so thoroughly enjoy? Don't we label them unbelievers, sinners, the lost, Gentiles, infidels, and the worldly? Yet the Bible peels back those damaging labels by introducing us to multiple “unbelievers” to whom we, God's followers, owe a debt of gratitude.

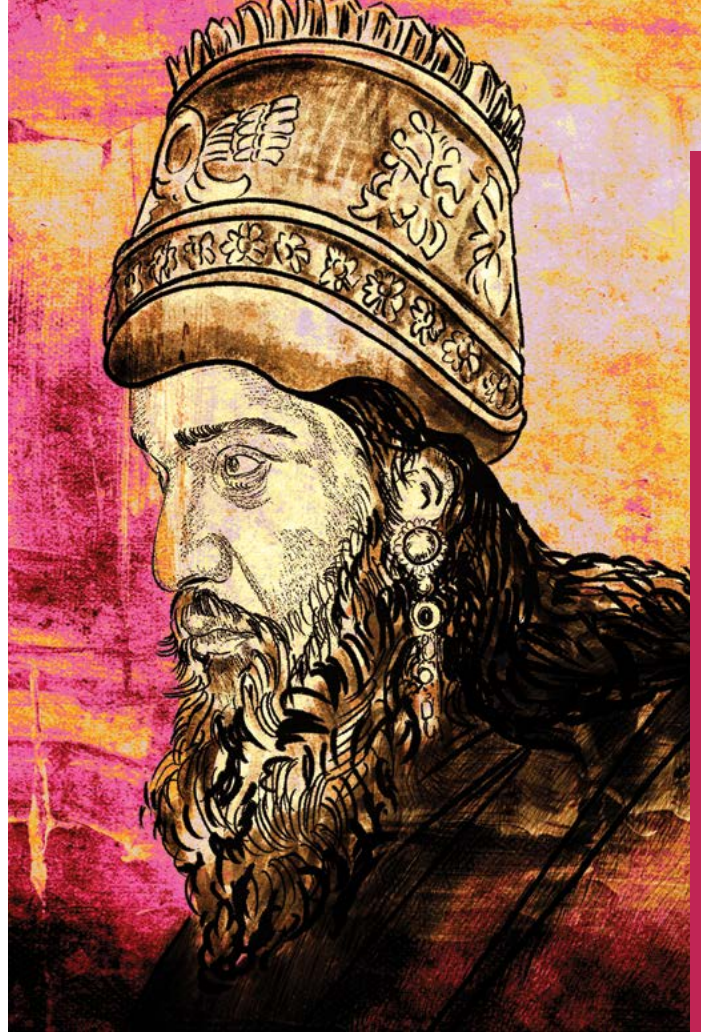
Second Chronicles 9 relates the story of the queen of Sheba traveling a great distance to confirm the many amazing reports she has received regarding Israel. She finds a vibrant, healthy citizenry as a result of their faithfully following the principles set forth by their God. She is equally impressed by these highly educated people, with twelve tribes who cooperate rather than conflict



among themselves. She meets a king who holds the happiness of the people in higher regard than building up his own wealth and ease. She observes reverent and holy worship services to their God, which is absent of the immoral debauchery associated with foreign gods. After months of study, observations, and interviews, this foreign queen, who had not previously been introduced to God, declares, “Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the LORD your God” (v. 8). Now, one would naturally expect such praise from a believer but not from an unbeliever.

We find similar declarations of God’s greatness repeated three times by another world leader: King Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 2, the king extols Daniel’s God for having given Daniel the insight to interpret the king’s dream when the wise men of the kingdom failed to do so. “The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries’” (v. 47). In Daniel 3, we find King Nebuchadnezzar angry with three young Hebrews who refuse to bow down to a golden image constructed by the king in his own image. He mandates them to a blazing hot furnace but is amazed when they appear untouched by the flames. Calling them from the furnace, the king declares, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way” (vv. 28, 29). Finally, having had a personal encounter with the God of heaven and been convinced, King Nebuchadnezzar makes this emphatic declaration in Daniel 4:34: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.” The queen from Sheba and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon were both considered to be unbelievers yet drew attention to the greatness and glory of God.

We find another world leader, King Artaxerxes, not extolling God but rather rendering service to God’s people. The story is recorded in Nehemiah 2. Jerusalem was in rubble. Nehemiah, a trusted member of the palace staff, explains to the king



“Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego!”

how Jerusalem, the sacred city of God, needed to be restored, and no one was stepping forward to undertake the massive project. A discussion ensues, and the king grants Nehemiah a leave of absence so that he can kick-start Jerusalem’s restoration. The king not only grants Nehemiah an extended leave of absence but also offers timber from his personal forest for the reconstruction effort, a military escort, and letters to the leaders of foreign nations through which Nehemiah must pass to reach his destination.

But is this responsibility of guarding God’s work left to the rich and powerful? Consider Elijah being instructed to seek housing from a Gentile, the widow of Zarephath. The prophet was escaping those angered by his prayer to seal up heaven’s rains until the nation came to conviction

of their sins and turned from their destructive and offensive ways. While the story is recorded in 1 Kings 17:9–16, the very best summary of the story is offered by Christ in Luke 4:25, 26. Jesus said to the crowd, “There were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them.”

We cannot forget Rahab, a prostitute by trade, who provided physical protection to the Israelites coming to assess Jericho’s military weak points prior to attacking. Not only did this “lady of the night” shelter the two men, but she advised them how to leave the city undetected and, further, sent them off with this most heartening message: “Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, ‘I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

“When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Josh. 2:8–11).

Another individual whom one might not think to include in this grouping of idol worshipers who nonetheless assumed a vital part of God’s plan to save people and nations is Potiphar. This captain of the guard purchased Joseph from the Ishmaelites and took the 17-year-old youth into his home. During the years that Joseph served in this household, Potiphar taught the lad the Egyptian language, customs, and culture. And due to Potiphar’s governmental position, Joseph was afforded multiple occasions to meet other high-ranking officials. And, of course, Scripture informs us that this young slave became so trusted that he was given ever-increasing administrative responsibilities, all of which would prepare Joseph to someday comfortably assume the position of prime minister.

There are other examples of nonfollowers of God serving respectably in God’s cause. The last individual we will consider is the Ephesian city clerk. Acts 19:23–41 details the worries of the idol makers as the apostle Paul and other members of The Way introduced the city to the One True God. This inflamed Demetrius, a local

silversmith, who inflamed his fellow craftsmen, which ultimately led to a riot, murderous threats to the believers, and a two-hour chant of “great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (v. 34, NIV). The entire city was in an uproar. But eventually, “the city clerk quieted the crowd and said: ‘Men of Ephesus, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.’ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly” (vv. 35–41).

So, from the intervention of these seven “unbelievers,” what might we conclude? First, labeling others is wrong; it is counterproductive; it is un-Christlike. We do not know the hearts of others, nor are we aware of how God might use them to further His work and, in the process, gain their own salvation. Second, the apostle Paul reveals to us a reality that Satan is tirelessly working to hold back unbelievers from advancing in faith (2 Cor. 4:4). So, our prayers on behalf of the least likely are crucial. And finally, the apostle Paul, a specialist in reaching Gentiles with the good news, admonishes us to avoid giving offense to anyone. We are called to embrace, not embarrass; to run to, not run from; to break down walls, not build them up. Paul’s message is to Corinthian and contemporary believers: “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:32, 33).



1 Scripture is from the New International Version.

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Two surprising things about tithing



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

When I was a teenager, the conference Stewardship director preached at my church each year. One of his favorite sermon illustrations was about a tithe-paying farmer who lived in a valley where farmers generally grew wheat. Then a locust plague approached. The farmer took his family outside and read Malachi 3:10, 11 with them, and then they prayed together that God would keep His promise to “rebuke the devourer” (v. 11, KJV). By the time the locusts had passed, every green thing in the valley had been eaten except the wheat and other plants growing on the farmer’s property.

I often heard similar stories. There was the farmer from Western Australia whose cattle were dying in a severe drought.

But when he read Malachi 3:1–12 aloud and prayed, his cattle survived.

Businessmen would tell me about a business about to fail, but when the partners started tithing, it then prospered. Individuals told how they had been encouraged to test God to see whether He would keep His promise and how He did.¹ I even received evidence from farming families in two different states in Australia of tithe-paying farmers whose wheat crops were saved from a locust plague that devoured their neighbors’ crops, just as in the story that the Stewardship director often told.

Since I have heard these stories, the conviction has been growing in me that, in tithing, most church members

clearly see the hand of God in their lives. Thus, as ministers, when you encourage tithing, you are not acting in your own self-interest alone in that the conference gets money for your wages. Rather, you are encouraging your people to be faithful and also enabling them to experience the hand of God in their lives firsthand.

However, when my colleague Steve Currow and I did a survey about the motives for tithing in the church, we got some unexpected results.² And these results are what I want to share.

Survey results

The General Conference funded research into tithing throughout England, the United States, Africa, and Latin America, which I carried out from 2012 to 2014.³ Several questions asked whether people were tithing because they thought that God would bless them if they did.

And here is a surprising result. There is a weak negative relationship between tithing for the purpose of receiving a blessing and actual tithing practice, at least in some of the countries. In fact, in most countries, *the more respondents thought they would tithe because they wished to receive a blessing, the less likely they were to tithe*. Again, the relationship is only a weak one.⁴ On the other hand, there is a very strong positive relationship between tithing practice and the motive of gratitude (typical question: “I contribute tithe because I am often overwhelmed by how good God has been to me.”).

Though there are several other motives that have a strong relationship to tithing behavior,⁵ we can draw this conclusion: it is better to use the motive of gratitude to God as a means of encouraging members to tithe than to use the motive of blessings from God.

It is also interesting to compare the responses of those who tithe and those who don’t tithe when asked whether God will bless them if they tithe. In the survey, respondents were asked to report how much of their income they had returned as tithe in the last year. Somewhat arbitrarily, those that were contributing 8 percent or more of their income were classified as “tither,”



and those less than 8 percent as “nontither.” Table 1 presents the responses of the two different groups for the aggregated data.⁶

Figure 1 shows the difference between the responses of tithers and nontithers, addresses the question as to whether or not they believe God *has* blessed them because they tithe.

These responses enable us to answer the question, Do tithers think that God has blessed them because they tithe? Not everybody who tithes agrees. In fact, 280 out of 3,138 tithers strongly disagree. On the other hand, 2,558 (or 82 percent) of 3,138 tithers either “strongly agree” or “agree more than disagree” that God *had* blessed them because they tithe. Thus, the overwhelming majority of tithers would answer yes to the question.

Why tithe?

But what about those who tithe and do not experience a blessing? This leads me to a letter that I received in 2004 about a faithful tithe-paying farming family who had their crops destroyed by a hailstorm while they were at a camp meeting.

“The next day we visited our neighbors whose farms adjoined our farm to see how much damage they had suffered. We discovered that not a single hail stone had fallen on the farms of these non-tithe paying, non-Adventist, non-church attending neighbors. They probably had never read the book of Malachi. That destructive cloud had remained stationary for an hour above the farm of the

faithful tithe paying elder of the Adventist Church, and there it dumped its entire frozen cargo.

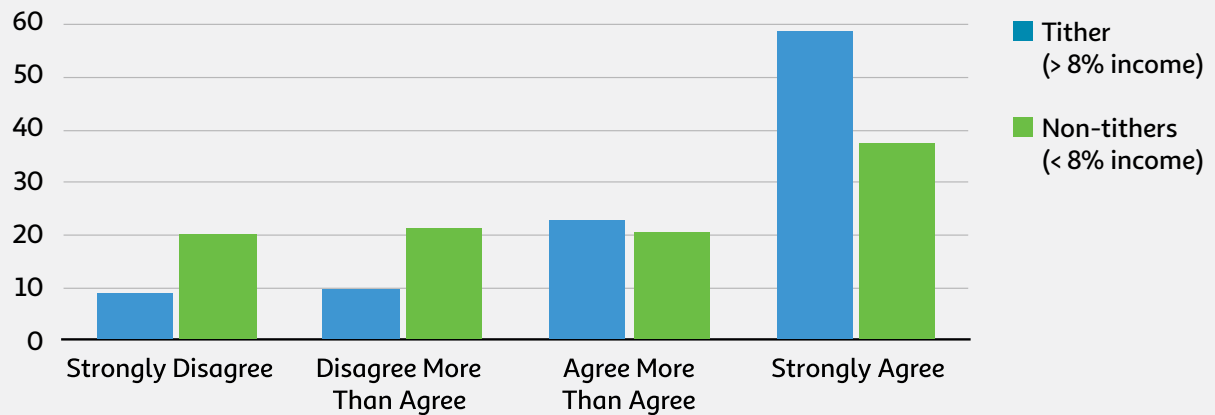
“When Pa and Ma returned from camp meeting, I’m sure they must have been shocked by the devastation they encountered. But amazingly I never heard a word of discouragement coming from their mouths. Pa seemed to understand clearly that the offer in the third chapter of Malachi was not for him. Those words were directed to a bunch of thieves—in fact, thieves of the worst kind, the kind who will even steal from God! My Pa was an honest man, and he wasn’t about to turn into a despicable thief just because a disaster struck his farm. So we all set to work to salvage what could be salvaged, and Pa kept right on returning to God His tithe, even though there wasn’t much to return that year. And we still had our church school that year. And, believe it or not, Marcelle even returned to Enterprise Academy. We rarely had an abundance, never more than our ‘barns’ could hold, but we never lacked good food to eat and adequate clothes to wear, and somehow the bills all got paid. As far as I know, my father was never in debt. And best of all, his children stayed in the church.”

What can I say about this profoundly moving letter? That it caused me to seriously rethink my theology of tithing? It surely did. That the analytical part of my brain was not quite sure how the profound truth of this letter fit with the profound truths of the stories about tithers who were spared such disasters?

Table 1: Responses to “God *has* blessed me because I tithe” from tithers and nontithers

	TITHER (> 8% INCOME)		NONTITHER (< 8% INCOME)	
	Number of respondents	Percentage	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	280	9%	130	20%
Disagree More Than Agree	300	10%	137	21%
Agree More Than Disagree	712	23%	132	21%
Strongly Agree	1,846	59%	240	38%
Subtotals	3,138	100%	639	100%

Figure 1: Percentage responses to “God *has* blessed me because I tithe” from tithers and nontithers



In the end, I found that the statement of the Hebrew worthies about to be thrown into the fiery furnace summed up my conclusions. When told by Nebuchadnezzar, “But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” (Dan. 3:15, NKJV). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego replied, “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (vv. 17, 18, NKJV).

Is the correct attitude to tithing like that? Sure, God will bless us. He is able to rescue our farms from plagues of locusts and our businesses from financial destruction. But should He choose not to do so, we will still worship Him and faithfully return His tithe to Him.

Can God bless us wonderfully because we tithe? Yes. Will He “rebuke the devourer” for us? Yes. Does He always do so? No. Do the vast majority of people who tithe believe that God has blessed them financially because they tithe? Yes. Should we, therefore, promote God’s blessing as a reason church members should tithe? Probably not.

Though we all like to hear stories about God blessing those who have tithed, and we should tell those stories when we can, it is much better to use gratitude to God as a reason to tithe, which should be the main motive for tithing to begin with, whatever financial blessings might, or might not, follow.



- 1 I have recounted these stories in more detail in Robert K. McIver, “What About Those Tithing Stories?” [South Pacific Division] *Record*, September 22, 2001, 8, 9. Cf. Robert K. McIver, “Should I Share These Stories?” *Adventist Review*, February 12, 2004, 25, 28.
- 2 Robert K. McIver, “Report on Survey of Motives for Tithing among Seventh-day Adventists from Four Conferences on Four Continents.” General Conference Future Plans Working Group, October 16, 2015. <https://stewardship.adventist.org/dr.-robert-mciver,-four-country-tithing-survey>
- 3 Robert K. McIver, *Tithing Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists: A Study of Tithe Demographics and Motives in Australia, Brazil, England, Kenya and the United States* (Cooranbong, Australia: Avondale Academic Press, 2016).
- 4 Why this is so is somewhat technical. For the aggregated data, the scale “M2 God will bless” (see McIver, “Survey of Motives,” p. 5), has a beta coefficient of -0.059. For NCC, it is -0.148; for SEC, it is -0.122; for SPC, it is -0.164; and for WAC, it is +0.083. Overall, the effect of the motive is that for every one standard deviation of change in the scale, tithing behavior is affected by less than 6 percent of one standard deviation; although in NCC, it would be 15 percent. As I said, it is rather technical, and many reading this will not have the necessary background in statistics to make sense of those numbers. All that needs to be said, though, is that the relationship between motive “M2 God will bless” and tithing is measurable with statistical significance, but a change in M2 will have only a small effect on actual tithing practice.
- 5 For example, the practice of regular study of the Sabbath School pamphlet and regular prayer were both found to be strongly correlated to tithing.
- 6 The question might be asked, How can a nontither say that God *has* blessed them because they tithe? This is possible because of the definition of *nontither* that was adopted. Some of them “tithe” but return less than 8 percent of their income. Others may not have tithed in the last 12 months but tithed previously. Tables that show responses for each country may be found in McIver, *Tithing Practices*, tables 9.10; 9.11. If a (one-tailed, paired data) t-test is applied to the data in the table as shown, the probability of this result being random is 0.047. In other words, it is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. [N.B. Tither percentage actually adds up to 101 because of rounding.]

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The tests of a prophet

The story made national news. A self-proclaimed seer, or purveyor of end-time prophetic warning, placed an ad in a Tennessee newspaper predicting a nuclear attack on Nashville, Tennessee, USA, on July 18, 2020, claiming he had been inspired by Ellen White. Needless to say, all this prognostication did was embarrass the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which had nothing to do with this prediction or the person who made it.¹

Unfortunately, this is not the only time since the death of Ellen White that people have made all sorts of predictions that have not come true. About 100 individuals within Adventism have claimed the prophetic mantle. Especially during the past decade, from Puerto Rico to Thailand, many self-proclaimed “seers” have made startling claims, including the one mentioned above.

The promise of the true prophetic gift, particularly as predicted in Revelation 14:12 and 19:10, is often claimed by these false prophets. Jesus specifically warned: “Beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15, KJV). Thus, we can expect, along with the true, the false. This reality goes back to December 1844, when Ellen Harmon (later White) received her first vision. At that time, at least 50 other visionaries were claiming the prophetic mantle.

How, then, do we tell the difference between true and false prophets?

New prophets

In 1923, only eight years after Ellen White’s death, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald’s* editor, F. M. Wilcox, reported: “Since the death of Sister E. G. White, a number have claimed to have the spirit of prophecy and to be appointed to take her place. In different sections of the country, we find some man or some woman who claims to have divine revelations.”² Wilcox reminded readers that those claiming the prophetic gift must be tested by what has already been revealed—most importantly, by the Bible.

“We need to be on our guard,” he added. “The Word is our guide.”³

Seven months later, F. M. Wilcox observed that his office continued to receive “many inquiries from the field as to whether any one [*sic*] would succeed to the place that Sister White so long occupied. To all such inquiries we have been compelled to state frankly and unequivocally that we do not know. This is a question which only the Lord Himself can answer, and so far as we know He has not given any one any intimation of His will in the matter.”⁴

I have met several who claim the prophetic gift. The most recent stopped by my office at Southwestern Adventist University to declare not only his prophetic mantle but that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was in apostasy. Upon his denouncement of the Trinity, I pointed out that Ellen White affirmed all Three Members of the Godhead as existing from eternity. He then dismissed Ellen White as a modern-day Jezebel and left, but not before predicting my doom and destruction with fire from heaven.

What these experiences point to is the need to know principles regarding the prophetic gift.

Principle 1: According to Scripture

The most tangible test is to make sure that their message is in harmony with the Bible. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20, KJV). This test offers a guiding principle that has existed throughout salvation history. Among the Old Testament prophets, those who came later were evaluated by those who had come before. Similarly, when Jesus opened on the road to Emmaus things concerning Himself “in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27, NIV), He no doubt was referencing the Old Testament. All later prophetic revelations must be evaluated in this way also. And in this case, the 66 books of the Bible are the primary



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

litmus test of genuine divine revelation.

Though clear that Scripture warns about tampering with or sabotaging the words of Scripture, the Bible is equally clear that in the latter days, “your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28, KJV). In other words, it is because Adventists take the Bible seriously that they also believe that the prophetic gift should be expected as the eschaton draws near.

Principle 2: Prophetic predictions fulfilled

The next most obvious test of a true prophet is whether their prophetic predictions come true. “When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him” (Jer. 28:9, KJV). Examples of fulfilled prophecy include the children of Israel, who were in Egyptian captivity but were led to the Promised Land by the prophet Moses (Exod. 3:7–10; 12:40). Some biblical prophecies, naturally, are conditional, such as when Jonah warned

the Ninevites to repent, which they did, thereby averting judgment (Jon. 1:2; 3:1–10).

Ultimately, the most important prophetic predictions centered on the coming of the Messiah. The great emphasis throughout salvation history

has been the story of Jesus Christ—His birth, His life and ministry, and His death. For example, the Messiah would be born of a woman (Gen. 3:15; Matt. 1:20), in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:4–6), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22, 23; Luke 1:26–31), come from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Luke 3:33; Heb. 7:14), spend time in Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:14, 15), and be rejected by His own people (Ps. 69:8; John 1:11; 7:5).

We should expect this same consistency. While the first advent of Christ was the great hope of the plan of redemption, the second advent of Christ will conclude this earth’s history. Many false prophets will, therefore, concentrate their

efforts on trying to predict the precise moment. Jesus specifically warns: “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it” (Mark 13:21, NIV). Jesus furthermore warns that “no one knows about that day or hour” (Matt. 24:36, NIV). He instead offers a series of signs to show that the end is near (Matt. 24:1–35).

Principle 3: The orchard test

A significant test of a true prophet is that their life should reflect a genuine relationship with Jesus. “By their fruits you will know them” (Matt. 7:20, NKJV). Prophets do not have to be morally perfect, but they should manifest over their lives a self-evident authenticity and genuineness.

In some instances, God can overrule the best intentions of a genuine prophet, and this act does not somehow make the prophet morally suspect. One example is Nathan, who meets with David to hear him share his plans about building a house of worship (2 Sam. 7:2). Initially, Nathan affirms David's plans (v. 3), but later, God corrects these good intentions with a message that He has different plans for the temple (vv. 4–13). Not all intentions, however, are good.

With televangelists and media personalities persuading people to part with hard-earned money and feed their lavish lifestyles, it can be easy to become cynical. The Bible showcases, instead, a prophetic path that often leads in the opposite direction, such as seen in the life of John the Baptist. The biblical depiction of a prophet is not one that takes advantage of others but one who serves and witnesses to others.

Principle 4: Lifting up Jesus

The last and most important test of a prophet is that they should point others to Jesus. “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2, KJV). Through the testimony of the divine-human nature of Christ, the Incarnation itself (which is truly a mystery), we have the God-man, Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of all prophecy. It is Jesus who must be lifted up. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32, KJV).

There is a consistent pattern among false prophets: they love to be the center of attention. They make startling prophecies to draw attention to themselves rather than to Jesus. False prophets like Balaam are more interested in what they get paid than the particular message they are

supposed to give. Yet even in Balaam's case, God was able to overrule so that Balaam could not prophesy against God's people (Num. 22–24).

Prophetic perspective

As the father of two children, I love to see how my children have nourished their own interests and possible careers. When my son was quite young, one day after family worship, he exclaimed: “Dad, I know what I want to be when I grow up! I want to be a prophet!” I had to dissuade him gently of this notion, reminding him that there is no degree for prophecy. A person does not choose to be a prophet; God does the choosing.

To be chosen as God's prophetic messenger is a humbling as well as terrifying experience. The prophet Isaiah, upon meeting the angelic messenger, exclaimed: “Woe to me! . . . ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty’” (Isa. 6:5, NIV). When a person recognizes how truly good God is, it results in a corresponding recognition of our human unworthiness.

A true prophet of God uplifts Scripture, has predictions that come true, lives a genuine Christian life, and most important of all, points people to Jesus. If one tried to “walk in the shoes” of a prophet for just a moment—recognizing just how truly incredible and difficult this role is as shown throughout salvation history—no one would desire such a responsibility. Prophets do not achieve power, wealth, or fame but rather bear forth the Word of the Lord, showing the way to God's kingdom often against the most fervent opposition.



- 1 Bob Smietana, “Tennessean Editor Eeounces ‘Horrific’ Nashville Islam Nuclear Prophecy Advertisement,” Religion News Service, June 21, 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2020/06/21/tennessean-editor-denounces-horrific-nashville-islam-nuclear-prophecy-ad-which-ran-in-its-sunday-edition/>.
- 2 F. M. Wilcox, “Impressions and Dreams,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 15, 1923, 7.
- 3 Wilcox, 7.
- 4 F. M. Wilcox, “Prophetic Succession,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 6, 1923, 3.

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Albanian church celebrates 30th anniversary

TIRANA, ALBANIA

Sabbath, April 23, 2022, was a day of celebration for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Albania as hundreds gathered in Tirana to praise God for the 30th anniversary of the church's establishment there. Leaders from the Albanian Mission and the Adriatic Union were present, and many international guests joined online.

Audrey Andersson, executive secretary of the Trans-European Division (TED), thanked the church in Albania for its commitment to mission and delivered the best wishes of **Raafat Kamal**, TED president. "We'll soon celebrate in heaven, as Jesus is coming back soon," Andersson remarked. Officers of the Adriatic Union Conference (AUC) also thanked church members for their commitment and resilience.

Delmar Reis, Albanian Mission president and organizer of the event, shared a glimpse into the future of the Albanian church, and participants shared touching testimonies, inspiring songs, and heartfelt prayers.

Sali Berisha and religious liberty

The climax of the program was a congratulatory video message by former Albanian president and prime minister **Sali Berisha**. "Thousands of Albanians have been helped by the Adventist Church and by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)," he stated. Berisha, who had seen the birth of the Adventist Church in Albania during his tenure, said that "Adventists are like the good Samaritan in the Gospel"—always ready to rescue and help.

In 2012, Berisha was commended by the Religious Liberty Association for the outstanding and exemplary level of religious liberty and the peaceful coexistence among religions in Albania. The same year, **Bertil Wiklander**, then president of TED, presented Berisha with a plaque in recognition of his unique contribution to religious liberty and the promotion of humanitarian values for the Albanian people.

Berisha recalled how former US president **Jimmy Carter**, a good friend of his, repeatedly



asked him to help and support the mission of Adventists in Albania. "Jimmy Carter visited Albania two times in the nineties," he said. "On those occasions, but also through letters that I've kept, he asked me to [keep] an eye out for the Adventists."

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Albania

Adventism in Albania has much older roots, reaching as far back as 100 years. Albania's Adventist martyr of faith, **Daniel Lewis**, a pharmacist from Boston, returned to his native Albania in the 1930s to share the Advent message. Following World War II and the installment of a Communist regime, Lewis was imprisoned and tortured. He died in prison because of his Scripture-based beliefs, including keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

After studying the Bible with Daniel Lewis in the 1940s, **Meropi Gjika** accepted the Adventist message of Christian hope. When Christian churches were banished from the country by the post-World War II Communist government, Gjika endured more than four decades of religious repression. Despite having no contact with a larger Adventist community, she continued, for 46 years, to put aside tithes and offerings from her small income. In 2001, **Ray Dabrowski**, then communication director of the Adventist Church, called Gjika an enduring "symbol of faith, hope, love, and obedience." [Andreas Mazza, *TED News*]



Sharing books step into the community

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

More than 65,000 copies of a new sharing book were delivered to communities around Australia and New Zealand throughout May 2022 and the succeeding months. *Step Beyond*, a paraphrase of the classic *Steps to Christ* by Ellen White, includes local contact details and special offers to connect with community members who are interested in growing their understanding and experience of faith.

“*Steps to Christ* is a book many of our church members have read at some point,” said **Terry Johnson**, president of the Australian Union Conference (AUC). “This new edition is something that we can be confident in sharing with friends, family, and people in our communities.”

Johnson explained that there is currently 1 Adventist for every

406 people in Australia. “If we believe that God is calling all people, we need resources that we can use to share the gospel widely and effectively,” he reflects. “And I believe this particular book is easily shared and accepted, read and digested.”

“*Step Beyond* is a tangible gift to share Jesus,” said **Brenton Lowe**, Adventist Media Literature Ministry coordinator. “It serves as a reason to visit our neighbors or invite a friend over for dinner to make meaningful connections and give a hope-filled gift. It is sharing Jesus made simple; you can be a friend and let the message of the book transform their life.” [Nathan Brown, *Adventist Record*]



Australian church leaders Darren Garlett, Lyndelle Peterson, Brendan Pratt, and Terry Johnson, receive the first sharing copies of *Step Beyond*.

Church in Southern Africa opens new media-powered radio facilities

PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA

There was joy and jubilation at the Southern Africa–Indian Ocean Division (SID) headquarters in Pretoria, South Africa, on March 6, 2022, when church leaders participated in the long-awaited launching of the Adventist World Radio

(AWR) online radio station powered by SIDmedia. More than 150 people, including leaders and guests, attended the event.

The launch of AWR powered by SIDmedia was a testimony that, indeed, dreams do come true, church leaders said. The guest of honor was AWR Africa regional director **Immanuel Ogwal** from Uganda. He celebrated the historic launch, calling it “a game changer in evangelism.”

Ogwal was one of the first guests to be interviewed live by **Sibongile Lugube**, one of the station’s presenters and producers. “The launch

of this radio station will complement the church's strategic plan of 'I Will Go' as the church intensifies the spreading of the gospel using all forms of media platforms," Ogwal said. Radio is indeed one of those platforms that can reach some of the most remote areas in the territory, church leaders said.

SID president **Solomon Maphosa** commended the media ministry, saying this was "the best news and music to my ears, as the church embraces media evangelism as a tool for spreading the gospel." Maphosa, who is passionate about radio ministry, added, "It gives me great pleasure to be part and parcel of this new vehicle for evangelism. I have worked in radio before, so I know the power of radio. Radio can reach places where some of us as pastors cannot go," he said.

Speaking on the same occasion, SIDmedia board chair **Hopeson Bonya** celebrated the work of SIDmedia in using technology to share the good news of Jesus. "The work being done by SIDmedia is very commendable," Bonya said. "As leaders, we

want to promote media evangelism in all its forms so that we can finish the work ahead of us."

SID executive secretary **Gideon Reyneke** did the honors by cutting the ribbon at the new SIDmedia studios. Taking to the airwaves, AWR SIDmedia station manager **Sipho Kaleni** could not hide his excitement as the station harvested the first fruits of the ministry during the Maranatha Drive show. **Grace Maoka**, who tuned into AWR SIDmedia on the second day of its live broadcast, called the station to say she wanted to give her life to Jesus.

On the first Sabbath after the launch, SIDmedia took the radio station to the people by visiting Mooikloof Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pretoria, South Africa. During this live broadcast activation, eight more people decided to give their lives to Jesus. Leaders believe these first fruits are a sure sign that God's hand is at play. "We give Him all the praise and glory for all this wonderful work," they said. [Noel Sibanda, *Adventist Echo*] ♡



Photo: Mamelesi Yala & Noel Sibanda



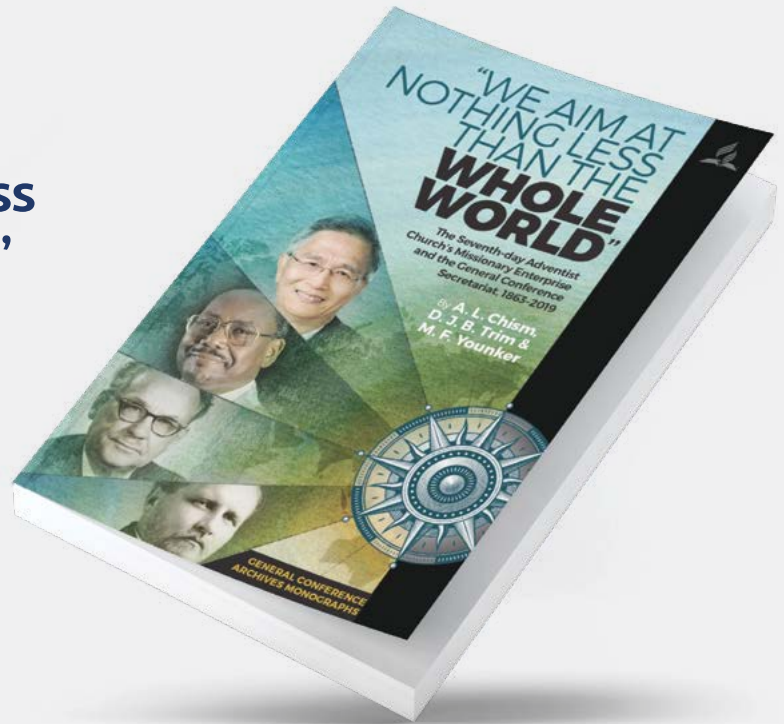
“We Aim at Nothing Less Than the Whole World”

by A. L. Chism, D. J. B. Trim, and M. F. Younker, Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2021.

It is indicative of the growing maturity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, both in years and in self-awareness, that a book with the sweeping scope and global perspective of *“We Aim at Nothing Less Than the Whole World”* has been published by the General Conference itself. It presents a bird’s-eye view of the growth and development but ultimate stagnation and steep decline of the missionary work of the church and calls for corrective action.

This story is told through the eyes of the secretariat, once the engine that drove the church’s foreign mission program but that later became distracted by, and eventually mired in, bureaucratic maintenance activities. With grandparents who served as missionaries to East Africa in the 1920s and parents who served as missionaries to West Africa in the 1960s, I am a firm proponent of Adventist mission, with a large part of my work in secretariat focused on trying to reengineer the expertise of the past to meet the challenges of secularism, postmodernism, and multiculturalism that the church faces today.

Considering the book’s origins within the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, some readers may be surprised to find that the book is very readable. Authors Chism, Trim, and Younker are passionate about their work and have illustrated their meticulous research with easily accessible graphs, tables, and charts, as well as numerous human-interest stories. Together, these take the reader back in time and bring to life characters whose names may be familiar but whose contribution to mission may have been forgotten. Hugely influential in the early drive for foreign missions were William C. White, son of Ellen G

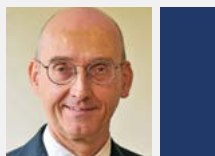


White; Arthur G. Daniells; and William A Spicer. Of these, it was A. G. Daniells who developed the global strategy for Adventist mission, transitioning the early zeal into a golden era of mission for the church.

The different phases of Adventist mission are clearly defined by statistical records, and two figures, in particular, stand out. First, the number of new missionaries sent out per annum per 10,000 members reached a peak of 19 just after the First World War. Second, the total number of new missionaries sent out per annum reached a peak of more than 450 in the late 1960s. These contrast sharply with the third phase of Adventist mission, where currently, there are a mere 3 missionaries in service per 10,000 members, and only 2.2 percent of these are engaged in pastoral or evangelistic work.

The figures alone may paint a bleak picture, but many other factors are considered in the book. The world has changed, and language has changed. Our initial understanding of mission as “foreign” mission no longer applies to the Adventist Church of today, which used to operate out of a North American “home base” but now operates out of many home bases around the world. One hundred years ago, missionary expertise and appetite were concentrated in just a few countries; today, international service employees (ISEs), as missionaries are now known, may be sourced from any of the world divisions. Cultural understanding and

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appreciation have also changed. The early twentieth-century missionary may still have held vestigial paternalistic or colonial views, but those are long gone. In fact, more than 100 years ago, the church was already carefully studying and developing expertise in cross-cultural mission. As early as 1910, the church sent delegates to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, and by 1917, other denominations were coming to the Adventists to ask for their advice.

Despite the many positives that come from this study, the overall conclusion must be that of mission drift. The Adventist Church, once so vibrant in its efforts to reach those of other cultures, predominantly in other lands, with the gospel of Jesus Christ, has, to a large extent, lost its way. Bureaucratization and institutionalization have sapped our energy and stifled our missionary efforts, and if we wish to reclaim our identity as a mission-driven church, something has to change. *“We Aim at Nothing Less Than the Whole World”* is a call for leaders to repent—and reform.

The book concludes with the hope that the process of reform has begun. A reorganization of the secretariat, together with innovative programs, such as Global Mission Pioneers, Waldensian Students, Direct-Contract Workers, and Tentmakers may yet usher in a new era of genuine, strategic, well-organized, and well-funded mission. Whether this era will be as golden as that of the first half of the twentieth century remains to be seen. ❧



PRACTICAL POINTERS

Not in vain

I have had moments of discouragement when I was convinced that my labor has been in vain, and I know every pastor has experienced it:

- Standing by the bedside of the dying, knowing that the only thing you have to offer is your paltry prayers and sympathy.
- Spending endless hours locked in combat with the powers of darkness over a failing marriage in your congregation, yet, in the end, trying to mitigate the pain as the marriage dissolves.
- Spending endless nights in board meetings held hostage by one or two agenda-driven members.
- Sprinkling “pastor dust” on events because your presence and benediction are required there as a formality.

The ministry can be discouraging business, but it is not just pastors who feel the struggle; church members ask the same questions about their own lives and ministry. Week after endless week, they show up at their church, teach the lesson, lead in a children’s division, or read the scripture, all the time wondering whether what they contribute makes a difference to anyone.

Only you know and understand those endless hours invested in shepherding the flock, helping those in need, giving of yourself week after week, only to see those same needs always present, never changing. At times, it feels like it is sucking your life force and bringing seeds of cynicism to your once tender and giving heart.

You work, pray, try to hang on to faith, and endeavor to stay inspired, yet so often, it seems that you are making no significant difference. It feels like you are caught in the crossfire between endless needs and personal inadequacy. You live with the inner whispers—“Am I really making any

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After four decades in ministry, I am convinced of one thing: never, never forget that the work is the Lord's. You and I are not the central players in the great drama of the ages; we are only to play our part.

difference?" "Does any of this really matter to anyone?" "Has it been all in vain?" Oh! But discouragement can be a persistent suitor.

I remember visiting Pastor J. He sat slumped on his couch. "I'm quitting," he stated. "I've taken a job as a carpenter in another state."

"I don't understand," I sputtered. "You are a successful pastor, loved by your congregation, and effective in your realm. This was your life calling; this is what you spent six long years of college preparing for."

"Sorry," he replied. "I just can't see that I have made any difference in anyone's life, and I see no results of all my labors. At least in carpentry, I can see immediate results."

I have a sneaking suspicion that Paul had his moments when he engaged in a little of this self-pity. Paul uses this same terminology of language 19 times, so apparently, Paul spent more time thinking about this than he actually lets on.

After four decades in ministry, I am convinced of one thing: never, never forget that the work is the Lord's. You and I are not the central players in

the great drama of the ages; we are only to play our part.

Ephesians 2:10 states, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand" (NKJV). Our calling is to make a difference in the lives God brings to us without asking about the results. The work we are to do is to be the fragrance of heaven in a world reeling from the stench of sin.

This morning I made a phone call to my favorite aunt. Aunt Marion is an amazing, indomitable lady of 101 years. She is one of those people of rare quality who is always upbeat, positive, and looking at the blessings in life, and I love her for it.

"I don't know why I am still here," she complained (which is highly unusual for her). "I have lost my dear husband, John, the love of my life, and I have buried all five of my children. I am left alone, and I don't know why the Lord keeps me alive."

"For me!" I laughed. "You're all I have to keep me straight in life."

"You know, a strange thing did happen to me this week," she said. "They gave me one of those new young doctors. I've been going to her for about four months, and this week, she announced that she is moving to Oregon. Then she did a strange thing. She stood up and hugged me. She said, 'You have no idea of the positive impact you have had on my life. Someday I hope to rise to a level in life where I can be like you.'"

"Frankly, I was a little flabbergasted," my aunt mused to herself. "I wasn't sure what she was talking about, but tears were streaming down her cheeks."

"I know what she was saying," I said. "You are one of those rare people in life who make a difference in other people's lives. You are a blessing to all who know you, the fragrance of heaven in people's lives. That's what your physician saw."

So, my beloved brother and sister in the faith, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing *your labor is not in vain*" (1 Cor. 15:58, NKJV emphasis added). 📖

A man with short dark hair and glasses is shown in profile, looking down at an open book. He is holding a blue pen over the book, appearing to be taking notes. The book is resting on a blue surface. In the background, there is a laptop and a black mug. The overall scene suggests a quiet time of study or prayer.

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