



JANUARY 2023

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

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JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

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NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER

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## All to Jesus I surrender— really, all?

**N**ew years often bring new resolutions. But our present need may not be for a new resolution but a new commitment. In these days of uncertainty, I believe God is calling pastors first to *a new commitment to His Word*. Not to study as a duty or study for a sermon but because of a thirst to know more of Him.

Second, I believe God is calling pastors to *a new commitment to service*. When He comes, He will not say, “Good servant, you went faithfully to church and preached from your pulpit.” He will say, “I was poor, naked, and hungry, and you took care of Me; come into My inheritance” (Matt. 25:34–36).

Third I believe God is calling pastors to *a new commitment to prayer*. Not prayer as a routine or in crisis but prayer without ceasing—prayer as a way of life. A new and total commitment involving absolute surrender because it is much easier to complete things for God than to commit self to God.

### **He awakens me**

Jesus woke up early and started the day with prayer, often praying the whole night. If Jesus

needed prayer, how much more do we need prayer? Not prayer just to seek His help but prayer just to know His heart (John 17:3). When I was young, I asked my prayer-warrior father, “How do I wake up in the morning when God wants me to wake up?” He replied, “He awakens Me morning by morning, / He awakens My ear / To hear as the learned” (Isa. 50:4, NKJV). So I made it a habit of asking God to wake me up each morning when He wanted me to awake.

At the end of my last year of construction engineering studies, the most important exam that decided my passing or failing arrived. But the night before, I stayed up late talking with friends. Before I fell asleep, I did not ask God to wake me up because I was afraid He would wake me up too early. I woke up 30 minutes before the final was to start! I read a very short verse and said a quick 10-word prayer. When I ran to the door to leave, God reminded me, “Seek first the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). Then came my father’s words: “You need to fully surrender all daily.”



**Pavel Goia, DMin,** is the editor of *Ministry*.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

So I turned around and opened my Bible, which opened to “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8, NIV). Uh, was I supposed to consider my school year a loss?

Then I opened another book I was studying and read, “Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ’s loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work.”<sup>1</sup>

### All to Jesus

I decided right then to recommit my life to Jesus and make Him above all things at any price, even my year of schooling. I took time to pray and study the Word; two hours went quickly.

I finished worship and then wondered, *Should I even go to school? The exam will be over by the time I get there.* But I felt I should go, so I went

to school. When I entered the classroom, the students were sitting there, waiting.

One said, “Pavel, how did you know the teacher would not show up?”

“I didn’t,” I replied.

“The teacher was caught in a very bad traffic jam and told us he would be here soon.”

The teacher came after that; I took the exam and passed with flying colors. I did not lose my school year; rather, I experienced God’s faithfulness.

God is calling pastors to a new commitment in the study of God’s Word, involvement in Christian service, and faithfulness in prayer. God wants our thirst to find Jesus to exceed our burden to preach Jesus.

God is faithful! He can do His work much better through you than you could ever do it on your own. Trust in His promises and believe that all other things will be provided.



<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), 260.



# The Bible alone is the answer to our questions



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

**F**ive hundred years ago, in September 1522, Martin Luther published his translation of the New Testament. It was not the first German Bible translation; nearly 20 others had appeared before his. But his translation was radically different because he had translated it from Greek into the common German language.

Instead of translating the New Testament from the Latin, a common practice at that time, Luther used Desiderius Erasmus's published collection of ancient Greek manuscripts that had made the Greek New Testament possible. Luther, an effective communicator, also translated into the most widely understood German, for at that time, there existed numerous dialects. His translation was not only of monumental importance to the religious world but also a historic literary achievement.

Luther's translation inspired others to provide the Bible in their own languages. Today, the overwhelming majority of the world's population has the Bible in their languages. But the Bible's availability is not the primary challenge we face today. Rather, it has to do with its authority. Is the Bible the standard for our theology? Do we accept it and the Lord of the Bible as the foundational authority for our faith? And if we do, how do we implement that in our ministry?

### **The authority of the Bible**

In 1936, a time when a ruthless dictator and his followers challenged God, the church, and the Bible, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his brother-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher: "First of all I will confess quite simply—I believe that the Bible alone is the answer to all our questions, and that we need only to ask repeatedly and a little humbly, in order to receive this answer. One cannot simply *read* the Bible, like other books. One must be

prepared really to enquire of it. Only thus will it reveal itself."<sup>1</sup>

The "Bible alone," as Bonhoeffer indicates, was an affront to a godless regime. Today, the secular culture that knows neither the Bible nor the Lord of the Bible also resists Scripture.

What about the future of the Bible? Church administrator Ted N. C. Wilson writes, "One of the biggest battles we will ever face is over the authority of the Word of God."<sup>2</sup> That challenge has already started and, in fact, has existed for some years and continues to intensify.

The Bible, the preacher, and God Himself seem to be in deep trouble. Theologian Raoul Dederen, however, is more optimistic when he writes, "All down the ages Christianity has considered itself to be a revealed religion. And divine revelation was formally defined as the supernatural communication of truths in propositional form."<sup>3</sup>

Has the Bible lost its authority, or do we accept the positions taken by Bonhoeffer and Dederen? If we accept their positive views of Scripture and God's supernatural communication of truths, how do we communicate that to our congregations, let alone those not part of the church? Are preachers still defenders of the Bible? More importantly, does the Bible need defenders?

### **Present the Bible—God will explain it**

How do we present the Bible to a world that does not recognize it as a message from God? Even churchgoers, all too often, do not study the Bible on a regular basis. To present it effectively, preachers and teachers of the Bible must have a deep knowledge of it. The acceptance of the message, however, is the role of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the mind of the reader or hearer and helps the person understand and accept the message.

I was holding public lectures in a city auditorium where those coming were mostly individuals who did not attend church or regularly read the Bible. In order to introduce them to the Bible, we had a supply of them for the attendees. After several days, I noticed a pattern—each night a significant number of the audience came early, checked out their Bible, and read it in the poorly lit auditorium (an ongoing military conflict limited the availability of electricity). I asked some of them why they arrived early to read the Bible. Their responses:

“I have never read anything like this.”

“I find it fascinating.”

“Very interesting.”

“I enjoy reading it.”

It surprised me that individuals who had not read the Bible up to that point (and they had not!) had such positive attitudes toward it. Was it my lectures that created their response to the Bible? Hopefully, the lectures *helped*, but their reaction was much deeper. Why did the messages in the Bible so captivate them? I believe that was the work of the Holy Spirit. John C. Brunt shares how the Holy Spirit assists us when we read the Bible:

“First, the Spirit helps us open our minds and be objective. Look at what Luke says that Jesus did for His disciples after the resurrection:

“‘Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures’ (Luke 24:45).”<sup>4</sup>

“A second way the Holy Spirit helps in our Bible reading has to do with our hearts. God’s purpose in giving us the Bible is not just to provide information but also to transform our hearts and minds.” Brunt then quotes Romans 12:2.<sup>5</sup>

“Third, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to act on what we find in the Bible.”<sup>6</sup>

Once we present the Bible, we need to trust that the Holy Spirit will open the mind, transform the heart, and give courage to each hearer or reader to respond. Those who present the Word of God have a critical part to play, but the Holy Spirit and *only* the Spirit has the lifesaving role of opening the heart and mind of the reader or hearer.

### What about church attendees?

I have described an approach for those who are not regular worshippers or Bible readers. But what about those who do attend worship services? What should preachers do to help them hear and apply the Word of God?

How much of a standard is the Bible for those who attend church? We know that the general

population is reading the Bible less and less.<sup>7</sup> Only about 30 percent of Protestant churchgoers in the United States, for example, read the Bible every day.<sup>8</sup> Bible reading among Roman Catholics seems to be even lower.<sup>9</sup>

Such trends should challenge preachers and teachers to creatively plan the worship service, keeping in mind that a significant number of those present do not regularly read the Bible. We can declare that the Bible and the Bible alone is our standard for belief and practice, but if it is not central in the lives of the worshippers, such a proclamation is of little value. However, I will share two ways that preachers and churches can make the Bible central.

First, the preacher must make the Bible the foundation of the sermon. That may seem like an unnecessary point, but all too often, sermons seem to be discourses searching for a biblical passage. The speaker must resist the temptation of inserting a message into the biblical passage. The message *must* come from the Bible directly.

One time in a homiletics class I was teaching, the students pointed out to one of their colleagues that the message he had just presented did not appear in the biblical passage selected. The student responded, “But that is what I want to tell the congregation.” The student preacher had *imposed* a personal view on the biblical passage. Some experienced preachers are also guilty of such abuses of the Bible.

To ensure faithfulness to the Scripture sermon, the preacher must follow a disciplined approach to sermon preparation. A fruitful method is to study the passage, outline its inherent message, develop a sermon outline or manuscript faithful to the text, and then deliver the sermon.

The second way to make the Bible the standard of our beliefs and practices is to incorporate Bible reading into the worship service. Some denominations have prescribed Scripture readings or lectionaries, but others leave it up to each congregation. It seems as if many congregations choose minimal or no use of Scripture as part of their worship. That is unfortunate, especially since Bible reading, in general, is on the decline.

Incorporating Bible reading into worship involves more members in worship, and for some, it may be the only Bible passage they hear that week. Be creative in selecting those who read the biblical passages—use families, children, seniors, and others not normally on the platform. In other words, use a variety of individuals. The



congregation will not only be blessed but also hear the Word of God.

### Sole source

Scripture proclaims the depth and breadth of its authority: “All Scripture is God-breathed and

is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). Author Ellen G. White commented, “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Scripture must be the source of our preaching and worship.



- 1 Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2020), 136; emphasis in the original.
- 2 Ted N. C. Wilson, “Our Sure Foundation: The Solid Word of God,” *Adventist World*, January 2, 2020, 16.
- 3 Raoul Dederen, “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation—Inspiration,” (paper, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists Bible Conferences, 1974), 3.
- 4 John Brunt, *Enjoying Your Bible: Finding Delight in the Word* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak & Acorn, 2020), 3.
- 5 Brunt, 5.
- 6 Brunt, 5.
- 7 Ryan Foley, “American Bible Society Survey Finds ‘Unprecedented Drop’ in Bible Reading,” *Christian Post*, April 7, 2022, [https://www](https://www.christianpost.com/news/american-bible-society-finds-unprecedented-drop-in-bible-users-report.html)

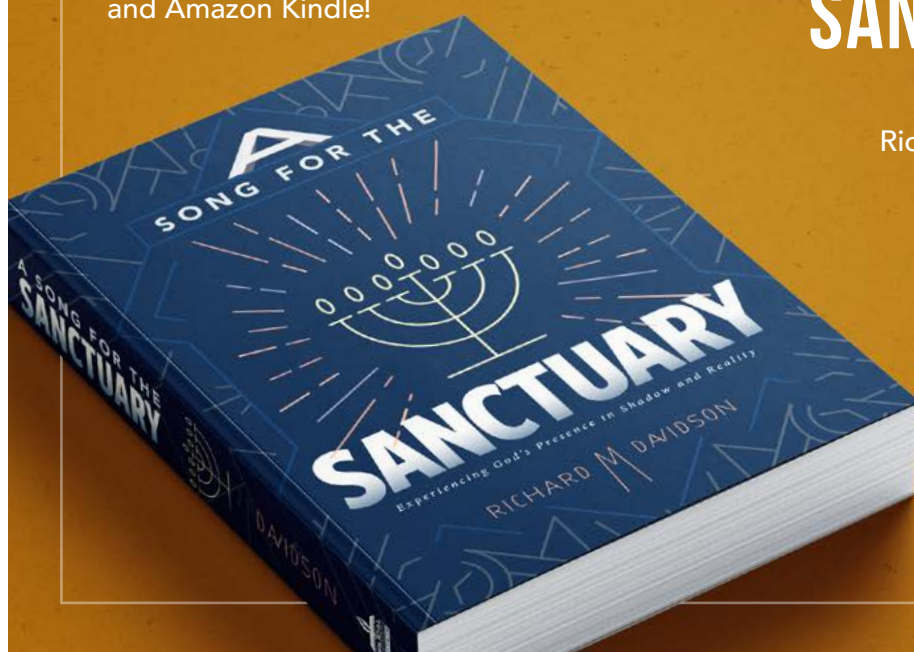
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- 8 Aaron Earls, “Few Protestant Churchgoers Read the Bible Daily,” Lifeway Research, July 2, 2019, <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/07/02/few-protestant-churchgoers-read-the-bible-daily/>.
- 9 “Do Catholics Read the Bible? (Percentages Explained),” Christianity FAQ, accessed November 28, 2022, <https://christianityfaq.com/do-catholics-read-the-bible/>.
- 10 Ellen G. White, “A Missionary Appeal,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 15, 1885, 2.

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# A SONG FOR THE SANCTUARY

Written by  
Richard M. Davidson  
930 pages



**B**eing a pastor is, perhaps, the most satisfying work ever. At the same time, it often poses great spiritual challenges.

Why?

It is challenging because we are paid to study the Word of God and then pass on to others what we learn. We can share life-changing insights and train others to learn, love, and practice the wisdom and beauty of God's Written Word. Through our study and engagement with the Bible, we encounter the Living God of Scripture. What can be more satisfying than that? What can be more meaningful?

Where, then, is the problem?

It is here: our great privilege is also our great danger.<sup>1</sup> The constant contact with divine things can pose a real challenge. As they say, familiarity breeds contempt.<sup>2</sup> The holy can easily become common when we deal with it daily. The extraordinary work can become routine.

expertise; it is just part of your work. And this is where the danger lurks.

### Strange distance

This professional, even academic, handling of the Word of God often produces a strange distance between the personal application of the Word and the scientific analysis of it. This challenge is connected with another trial that many pastors nowadays face: with the astonishing multiplication of knowledge over the last two centuries, there have been fewer and fewer "universal thinkers," people who are competent and integrative across numerous fields but who also know their Bible from beginning to end. Instead, we have become so specialized in certain aspects of pastoral work that we become silent on other parts. We can be specialists in prophetic interpretation and end-time events, we may master biblical principles of counseling, we may be successful in evangelism, and we may

# The

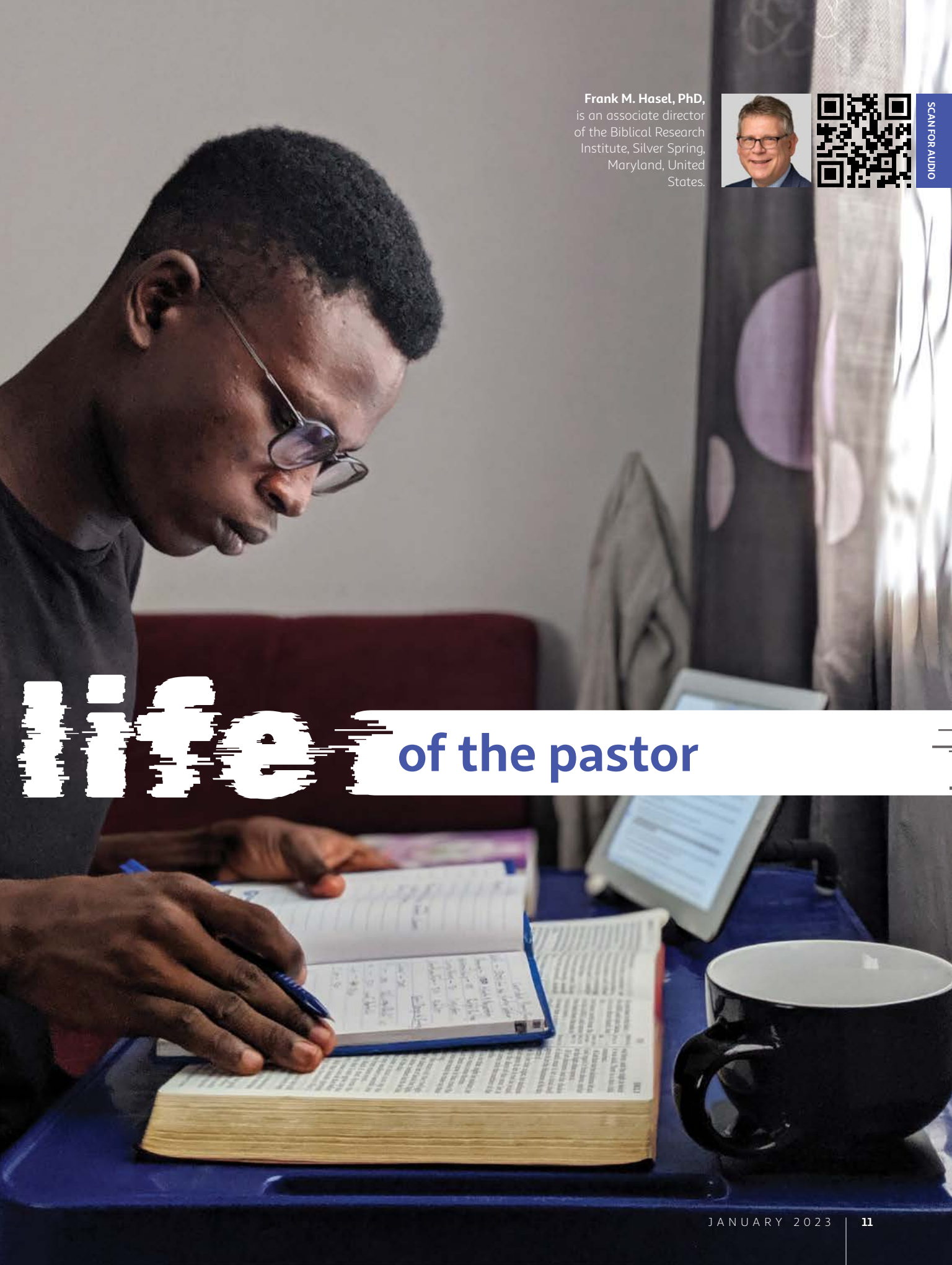
# spiritual

The words of the Bible, which tell us of God, His majesty, His goodness, and His love, can quickly become mere words for us—Hebrew and Greek nouns and verbs—with etymologies, inflections, and connections in sentences and their cultural settings but no further significance for us than their logical and grammatical conclusiveness. Scriptural truth may become a mere series of detached historical facts that do not affect our personal lives anymore. You realize, suddenly, that you do not enjoy reading the Bible just for the pleasure of reading it. You read and study the Bible because it is part of your pastoral

be experts about "the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12). All this is fine, except that the result is that we rarely read and study the whole Bible anymore.<sup>3</sup>

How ironic that we learn more and more but become experts about less and less.

When this specialized "learning" is steeped in and influenced by more critical approaches to Scripture, it easily leads to a further distancing from the biblical text, where the text is academically analyzed but loses its power to convict and change lives. A purely academic study of the Bible often decreases its spiritual impact on our lives. Such critical distancing from the text



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

# life of the pastor



quickly produces doubts; it does not foster faith nor lead to assurance. Consequently, many can no longer affirm what the Bible teaches but only what it does not.

## Daily devotions

As pastors, we must plead with God to help us find ways to integrate knowing what the biblical text means with making us willing to obey its teachings. We need to know, for instance, what Scripture says about forgiveness and practice it ourselves. We need to understand what the Bible teaches about holiness and love and then actually become holier and more loving. Unless our study of the Word of God is integrated with faith, obedience, godliness, prayer, and a growing love for God and others, we are abusing the texts themselves.

Pastors have a significant influence on the theological and spiritual future of the church. Therefore, through God's grace, let us seek to have a living relationship with the Source of our faith. The most important devotional exercise is still daily time spent alone with God in reflection on Scripture and in prayer. "The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power."<sup>4</sup> The mark of true spiritual growth and growth in the study of Scripture is not so much that we become masters of the text but that we are mastered by the text.<sup>5</sup>

But what can I do when I have lost that initial fascination with Scripture and no longer practice enjoyable time with the Word of God? Be honest with God, and pray for a spirit of expectancy where God grants you, once more, a new perspective on the beauty of the Word. "Open my eyes that I may see / wonderful things in your law" (Ps. 119:18, NIV). Let us remember that God is not limited by our frailty and failure. Our need is His great opportunity. Our helplessness is our greatest asset in prayer.

## Our spiritual digestive system

At the same time, we need to continue the art of reflecting on the biblical text, giving attention to details that are often overlooked. This way, the words of Scripture can create fresh biblical images and thoughts that lead to biblically sound action. The secret of this practice is to

take time to give Scripture its full effect in our lives. We might be able to assimilate a lot of material mentally, but we often cannot digest it spiritually. The rush of life and the hurry of our work makes this time for reflection even more crucial. You cannot hasten spiritual insights.

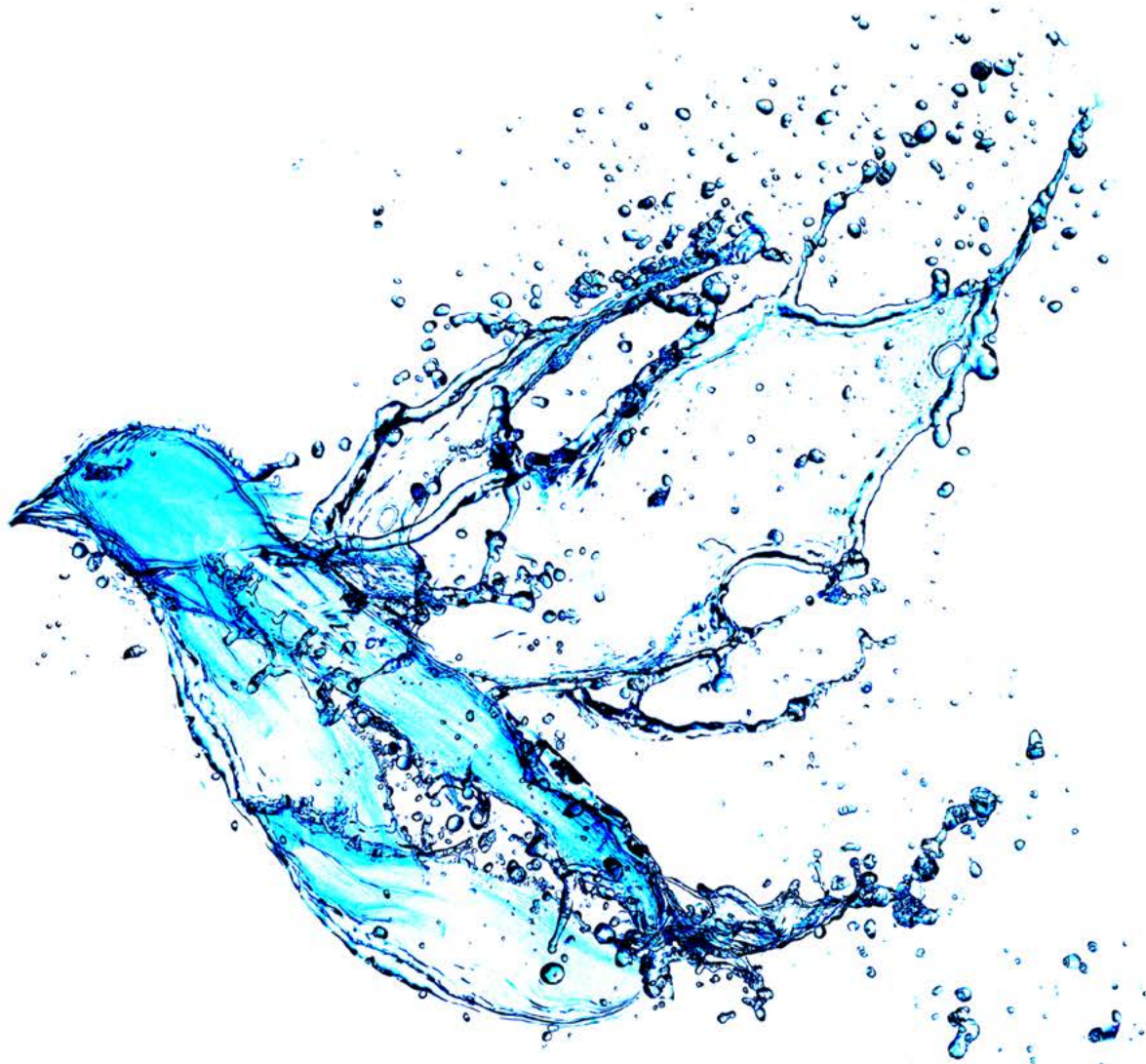
"Our bodies are not supported by merely taking food into the mouth." The process that really supplies our muscles, nerves, and bones is digestion. "It is by digestion that the outer food becomes assimilated with the inner life" and lets us live. Similarly, we are not nourished by merely reading or hearing biblical texts. Hearing, reading, and learning all require undisturbed time for digestion to complete their usefulness.<sup>6</sup> This inward digestion of the biblical truth is connected in significant ways with undisturbed time devoted to reading and applying the Word of God to our lives. This must be accompanied by prayer.<sup>7</sup>

Pastors, we cannot lead others spiritually higher than where we ourselves stand. Let us not be afraid to admit our struggles and share our joys in this process. Only if we are authentic and honest can God begin to open up new spiritual life in us. Then we can become inspiring examples for the people we serve. What a privilege we have. But again, let us not be blind to the dangers that come with it.



- 1 Benjamin Warfield, "The Spiritual Life of Theology Students," in *The Trials of Theology: Becoming a "Proven Worker" in a Dangerous Business*, ed. Andrew J. B. Cameron and Brian S. Rosner (Glasgow, UK: Christian Focus, 2010), 56, 57.
- 2 David Cupples, *The Devotional Life of a Theological Student* (Leicester, UK: Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship, 1987), 16.
- 3 This has been aptly pointed out by D. A. Carson, "The Trials of Biblical Studies," in Cameron and Rosner, *The Trials of Theology*, 110–113.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1958), 203.
- 5 Carson, "Trials of Biblical Studies," 117.
- 6 See Charles Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning* (New York, NY: Sheldon and Co., 1866), 286, morning devotional reading for October 12.
- 7 For some practical suggestions for a meaningful and fulfilled prayer life, see Frank M. Hasel, *Longing for God: A Prayer and Bible Journal* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2018).

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# POWER TO HEAL HEALTH SUMMIT 2023

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"The power of the Lord was with Jesus, enabling him to heal." Luke 5:17



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The pastor sat wearily at his desk, face drained and eyes burning. He felt as if he were in a constant spin cycle—resolving conflicts, managing programs, preparing sermons, giving Bible studies, and running all week to meet the needs of church members—yet so spiritually depleted himself.

Reflecting on the past few weeks, he realized that as the shepherd of his congregations, he was trying to feed his people without spiritually nourishing himself. He had prayed on the run, read the Bible while preparing for his sermons, and had not received daily bread for his own soul for a long time. No wonder he felt so spiritually dry.

His shoulders slouched as he dropped to his knees beside his desk chair. “Lord,” he prayed, “forgive me! I have been too busy for You. Yet You are the absolute source of my strength. You are everything to me. But here I am, running to and fro, doing Your work in my own strength. I am tired. I have nothing left. My soul is dry. I need You to carry these burdens. I need Your Spirit to fall afresh upon me. Please, Father, through Your Living Word, speak a message I need to hear today. You know what I am lacking. You know what needs to be shaped in my character. Here I am, Lord. Please share Your words with me now.”

Then he opened his Bible to 1 Corinthians 3 and read these words: “God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. . . .

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building” (vv. 6, 7, 9).<sup>1</sup>

It could not have been a more direct message. After reading the words again, he copied them into his journal. It felt as though God had placed them in the Bible just for him. As he wrote, he began to see a very personal message—and a rebuke. Words of repentance and surrender flowed from his lips as he asked for God’s grace to cover him.

At this moment, the pastor was not rushed, not focused on the seemingly urgent matters of the day before him. Shut in with the Lord, nothing else mattered. God was refining something in him, and he knew he needed it. Tears flowed, and his soul was at peace as he claimed Psalm 138:8 as his personal prayer to God: “The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; / Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; / Do not forsake the works of Your hands.”

## Living words

Perhaps you can relate to this pastor. You have seen God’s Living Word, the Bible, transform the minds and hearts of the people you shepherd. And

you have witnessed it in your life, too, and perhaps that is why you accepted the call to pastoral ministry. Indeed, “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

But the question is: Do you *still* allow this living, powerful, sharp Word to pierce your own soul, or are you going through the motions of pastoring without allowing it to shape your thinking and character daily? God is waiting, wanting to draw you to Himself through His loving Word.

But to be drawn into a closer relationship with God, to know His will and way for your life and for the church you pastor, you must abide in His Word. So what does that look like? Do you need to be intentional about carving out more time in prayer and Bible study<sup>2</sup> to deepen and enrich your own walk with God? Indeed, you cannot help others to grow unless you are abiding in the Vine (John 15).

In Job 22:22, we read an appeal from one of Job’s friends. Although Job was blameless and the appeal may not have been well-founded, it still can speak to us: “Receive, please, instruction from His mouth, / And lay up His words in your heart.”

To receive instruction from God’s mouth (His words), we must spend quality time in His Word. To “lay up His words in your heart” means that we must allow them to fall on our hearts (as well as our minds) in a way that they will be retained and preserved. The words need to mean something to us and impact us in some way beyond just an intellectual exercise. When we truly receive instruction from God’s mouth and lay up His words in our hearts, they always prompt a response from us.

What might such a response to reading God’s Word look like in your life? Consider the following:

*A drawing-close response.* The Bible teaches us about God’s heart and His good intentions toward us. It is like a love letter or a long text message from God. If you read it with an open heart, the Holy Spirit will bring you into an even closer relationship with Jesus Christ. No matter the passage or story you read, you can see Jesus when you look for Him because He desires to draw us to Himself: “‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; / Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (Jer. 31:3). *When did I last feel this drawing close to God?*



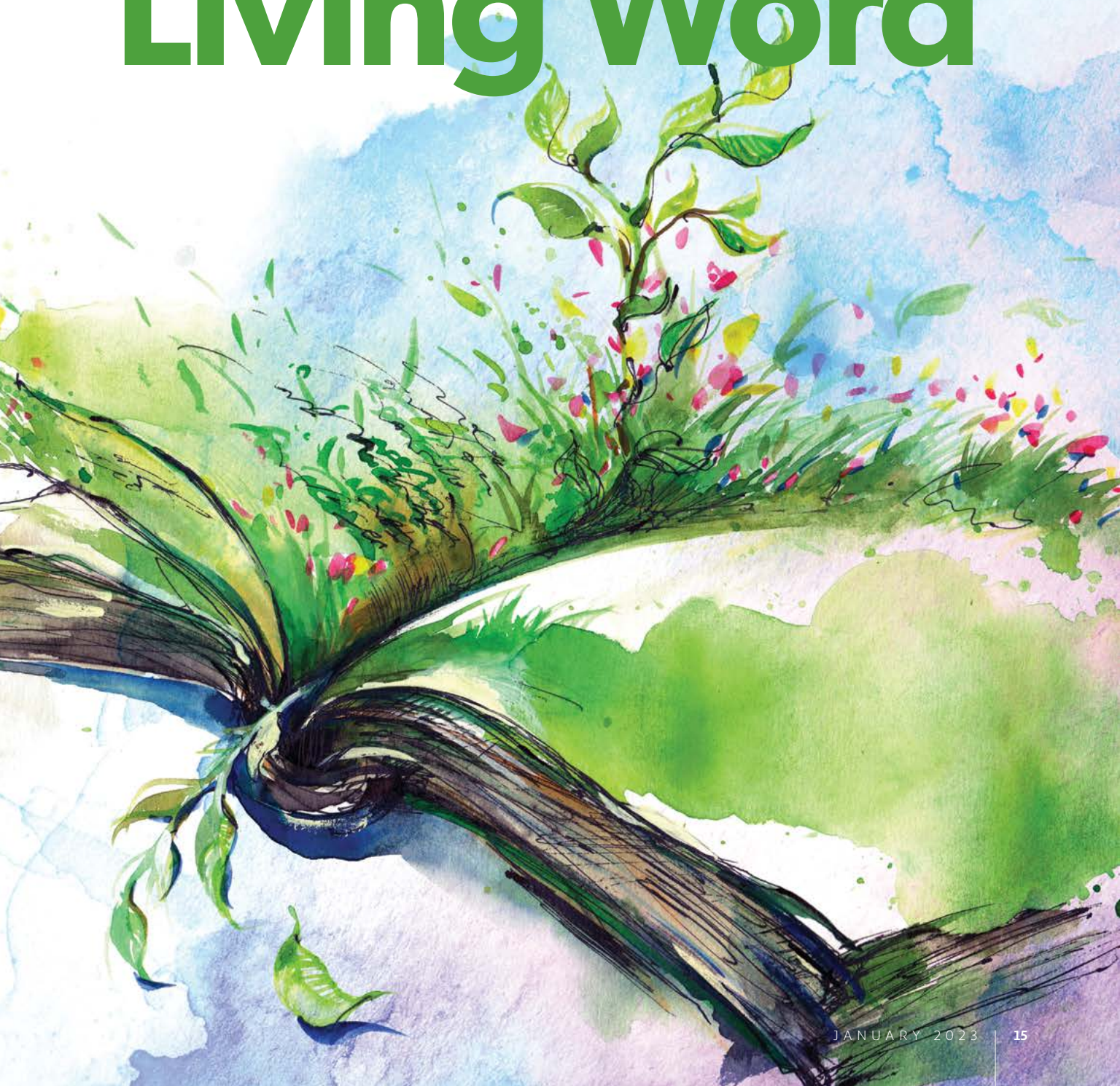


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# Coming back to the **Living Word**



*A personal-conviction response.* When we spend unrushed time in God's Word, we will always find both new and renewed messages of truth in the pages we read because God's "word is truth" (John 17:17). The Bible can be foundational in shaping our worldview when we humbly and openly search for and accept its messages into our thought patterns. As we dig for its treasures, we see how beautifully connected and how deep and wide God's truth really is. We will stand in awe of a God who still loves to communicate with us (Rev. 3:20). As we lead people to know God through His Word, it is important to keep alive our own convictions of the Bible's power. *When was I last convicted of something I read in God's Word?*<sup>3</sup>

*A character response.* When we humbly and prayerfully look for God's messages in His Word, He does a special work in us. We realize how weak and sinful we are, and we are led to repentance, confession, and a shift in our thinking, along with an openness to learn from the Source of all truth. Shaping our characters is the work of a lifetime and comes from the grace of our Savior. As we infuse the messages of the Bible into our lives, we grow in His knowledge, love, and grace. *What will change in or around my life because of what I've read?*<sup>4</sup>

*A sharing response.* When we taste and see the power and profound relevance of the Bible in our lives, we will be compelled to show and tell others about it. It is as though we will want to say to others, "Taste and see that the LORD is good. / Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!" (Ps. 34:8, NLT). Witnessing will not be about simply adding numbers to our churches but rather wanting people to taste and see for themselves God's incredible, beautiful, true character and what He has done for each person. The outflowing of our love for Jesus will be manifested in natural, joyful conversations about what God has done and is doing for us—and what He longs to do for everyone! *Are my daily conversations infused with Jesus' love and with an organic sharing of this love toward others?*<sup>5</sup>

## A living connection

The Bible is a timeless, inspired Book that continues to give any humble reader clear wisdom on whatever he or she may be facing in life. God extends an invitation to everyone to live in an abiding relationship with Him (John 15:1–16; 10:10). He has called you to help guide those in your spiritual care toward this goal. It is not enough just to talk about God and His truths, although

that is important; your love and relationship with Him should also be lived and breathed into the lifeblood of your church.

How often do you candidly speak about your own walk with God and what He has been teaching you through His Word? What would happen if you spontaneously shared what God has been teaching you and your church members in His Word during your daily devotional time? This will allow you, as the church's leader, to model that you have a living connection and that the Bible speaks to your daily needs. It will also show your congregation how vital that is for every believer.

## A challenge

This week, I challenge you to try this: declare what God has been teaching you personally in His Word, perhaps at the beginning of your sermon or in a private conversation or Bible study with a church member or seeker. It will require you to be authentic and open, and while there will be certain aspects you may not disclose to others, there will always be something you can share about how God has been teaching you in His Word. For truly,

"The Lord GOD has given Me  
The tongue of the learned,  
That I should know how to speak  
A word in season to him who is weary.  
He awakens Me morning by morning,  
He awakens My ear  
To hear as the learned" (Isa. 50:4).

So today, sit down with God, and open your Bible. Pray for His Word once again to pierce your soul. Ask Him to reveal the beauty and holiness of His wonderful character. Invite Him to shape your character. And then request that He open opportunities for you to declare His goodness to those around you. "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; / I will sing and give praise" (Ps. 57:7).



- 1 Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 See "Ways to Study Your Bible," in Nina Atcheson, *As Light Lingers: Basking in the Word of God* (Madrid, Spain: Editorial Safeliz, 2018), 63–86.
- 3 See Isaiah 50:5.
- 4 See James 1:21.
- 5 See 1 Corinthians 8:3.

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# Dr. Gardner C. Taylor Visits Revelation, the Seven Churches, and Adventists

by Mervyn A. Warren, with Charles E. Bradford, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2021.

**D**r. Gardner C. Taylor was an iconic pastor whose preaching prowess is legendary. Taylor led the Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, for over 50 years, retiring from that vaulted pulpit after preaching a series of sermons from Revelation, a book of the Bible that Seventh-day Adventists hold near and dear. Intrigued that a non-Adventist pastor would seek to unpack what is inarguably a complex book, Drs Mervyn Warren and Charles Bradford sought to discover what motivated and guided Taylor to do so. The result is this helpful volume, which bulges with profound insights that professional preachers and the public should find beneficial.

Mervyn Warren and Charles Bradford, both retired from Seventh-day Adventist denominational service, are eminently qualified to write this book. Mervyn Warren was a renowned professor of preaching at Oakwood University and published extensively on the subject.

Charles Bradford, preeminent church administrator, got to know Gardner Taylor when they both pastored in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, remaining friends throughout their lives. Their friendship was strengthened by their deep love for expounding the Word of God, not to mention their palpable respect for each other.

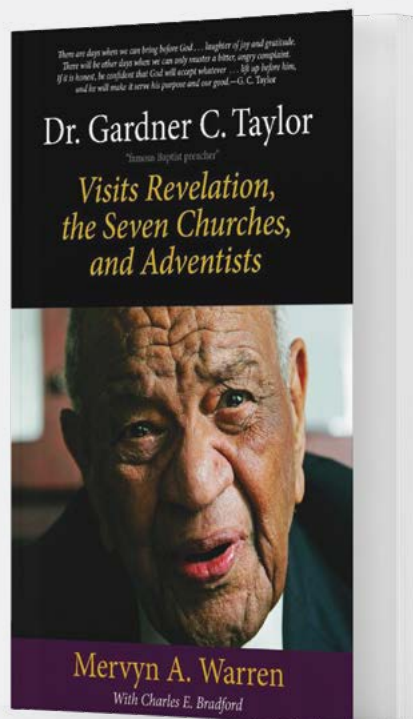
This slender volume consists of three chapters. The first unveils what motivated

Taylor to preach 81 sermons from Revelation, the second briefly examines the lifelong relationship between Taylor and Bradford, and the third is a review of three of Taylor's sermons from Revelation. Three appendices follow. The first is an interview of Taylor by Warren, and the second is a complete listing of the 81 sermon titles, texts, and dates on which the sermons were preached. Appendix C is "Selected Readings in Homiletics and Preaching." Sandwiched between the chapters and appendices are a couple of pictures of Taylor and African American Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders.

Adventists pastors often frequented Concord Baptist to hear the "Dean of Black Preaching," and one or two shared Ellen G. White books with Taylor, who publicly acknowledged receiving and using them in his preaching. Whenever Bradford preached in New York City, Taylor adjusted his schedule to be able to listen to his dear friend in person.

Preachers of every race, culture, and denomination will find this book instructive. One strength lies in the authenticity that permeates the book.

Taylor shines forth as consummately genuine and a preacher who was more interested in lifting up Jesus than anything else. Indeed, he bemoaned the lack of Christ-centeredness that characterizes preaching these days, saying, "Preaching might be something very nice, very comforting, very encouraging, maybe very helpful, but it falls short of the saving gospel without Jesus Christ" (58). The picture of Taylor on the cover of the book tells his story. Taylor's knitted brow and piercing eyes reflect the fervor and passion of this giant of a preacher, who, quite fittingly, passed to his rest on Easter Sunday 2015. 🕊

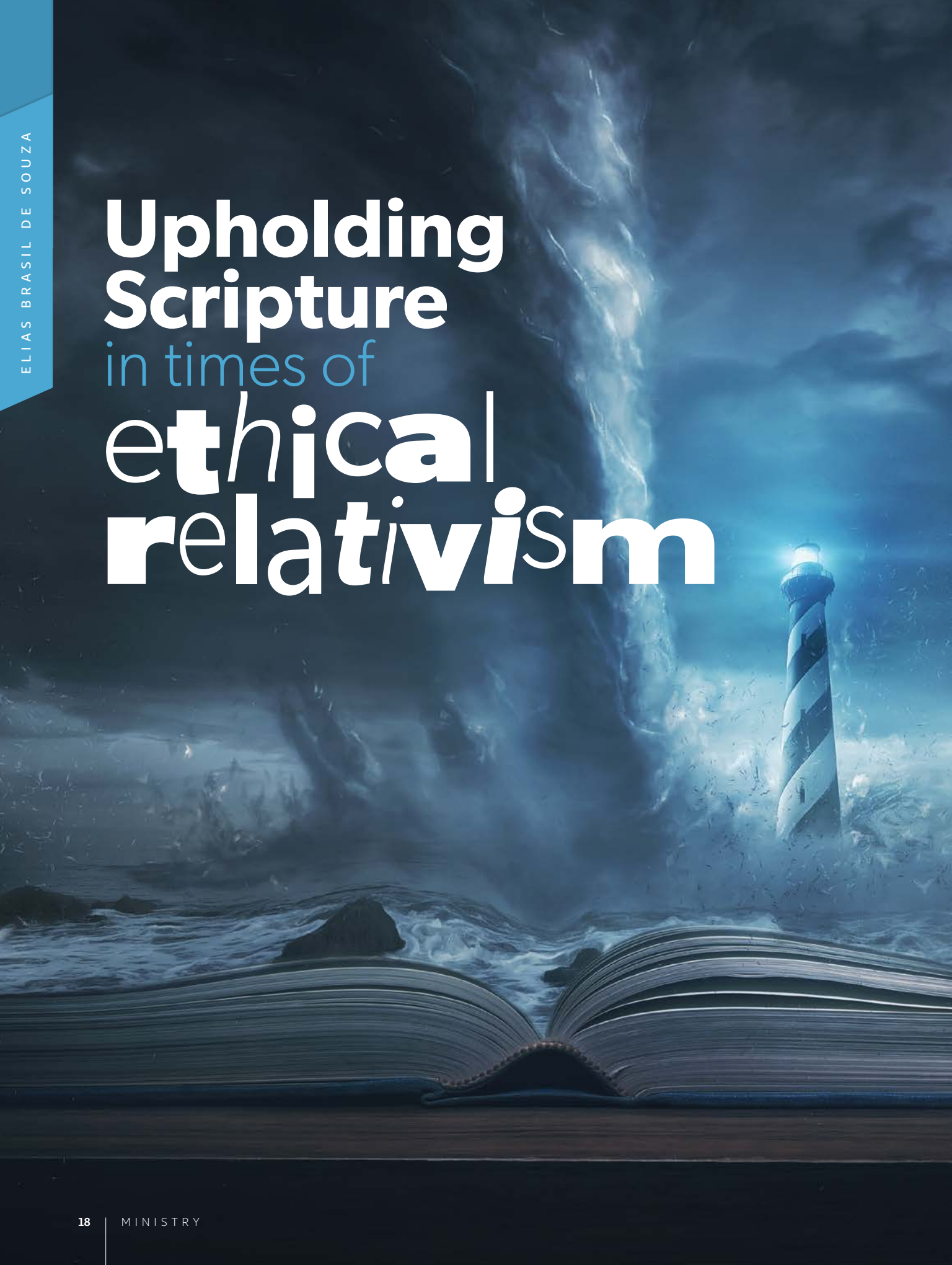




# Upholding Scripture

in times of

# ethical relativism



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

## Nature of the Bible

Though composed of 66 books written by many authors across many centuries, cultures, and geographic settings, the Bible stands as a unified work, recounting a single story spanning Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and new creation. Scripture itself claims its divine origin. While Paul says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16),<sup>1</sup> Peter recognizes that the biblical prophets “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Its major importance lies in that it records truthfully, though not exhaustively, the origins (Gen. 1; 2) and destiny (Rev. 21; 22) of the human race in the context of the great conflict.

As author Ellen White says: “The Bible is the most ancient and the most comprehensive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research in vain seeks to penetrate. In God’s word only do we behold the power that laid the foundations of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of nations. Here only is given a history of our race unsullied by human pride or prejudice.”<sup>2</sup>

The words written down by Moses, Isaiah, and Matthew are the Word of God. This affirmation means that what Scripture says, God says. As the letter to the Hebrews summarizes, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of

all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1, 2).

Having its ultimate origin in God Himself, the Bible is sufficient and clear. It is sufficient because it reveals everything we need to know for salvation. As David expressed,

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.  
The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:7–10).

What David affirms about the Law (*Torah*) holds true for Scripture as a whole. Thus, according to David, God’s Word is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, enduring, true, and righteous. Thus, it is “sufficient for reviving the soul, giving wisdom, and bringing joy. We should value it more than we do gold or chocolate—that is, honey, which was the chocolate of the ancient world.”<sup>3</sup>

This truth does not mean that there are no difficult passages in Scripture. After all, Peter said that Paul wrote some difficult things that some people were twisting for their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15, 16).

Author Ellen White acknowledges that “[s]ome passages of Scripture will never be perfectly comprehended until in the future life Christ shall explain them. There are mysteries to be unraveled, statements that human minds cannot harmonize.”<sup>4</sup>

However, when Scripture itself makes clear that when it comes to our relationship with God, the Christian life, and the future hope, the Bible expects us to understand it and thus presupposes its clarity. Jesus, for example, expected people to understand Him when He communicated God’s Word to them (Matt. 15:10; 12:3–5). On the way to Emmaus, the Lord chastened the discouraged disciples: “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!’” (Luke 24:25). With his assertion, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3), John presupposes that the audience of the book of Revelation would be capable of understanding and applying the message of the book. Thus, “all things we need for life and godliness are clear in the Bible.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Bible does not endorse the current epistemological skepticism that views Scripture as an obscure and irrelevant book. If approached with the proper attitude and determination, the Bible provides everything we need for life, godliness, and a relationship with Jesus.

## Purpose of the Bible

In this brief section on the purpose of the Bible, four points deserve attention. First, according to the locus classicus of biblical inspiration, Scripture’s purpose is to make us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Scripture also conveys “doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15, 16). Although Scripture has a bearing on political activism for the construction of a better society, its primary purpose is to reveal Jesus (John 14:6; cf. John 5:39).

Second, in addition to bringing people into a saving relationship with Jesus, the Bible conveys divine teaching and strengthens our future hope. As Paul stated, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The eschatological message of the Bible, especially

the books of Daniel and Revelation, reveals that God is guiding history to its consummation.

Third, Scripture provides sustenance and guidance for the Christian way of life. Jesus confronted Satan by saying: “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4, quoting Deut. 8:3). As daily bread maintains our physical life, so God’s Word sustains our spiritual life. In a similar vein, Peter writes to his church: “[A]s newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). “The ‘pure spiritual milk’ in this context must refer to the Word of God about which Peter has been speaking (see 1 Peter 1:23–25). The Bible, then, is necessary for maintaining spiritual life and for growth in the Christian life.”<sup>6</sup> It bears noting that the Christian lifestyle<sup>7</sup> recommended by Scripture centers its doctrinal content on Jesus. Without Christian doctrine, the Christian way of life makes no sense.<sup>8</sup>

Fourth, Scripture also has a missional purpose in providing the foundation, content, and goal for mission. God’s special revelation in Scripture forms the biblical basis of mission. After all, the Bible is the record of the missionary activity of God through His people (Gen. 3:15; 12:1–3; Isa. 53:1–12; Matt. 1:20, 21). During His earthly ministry, Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach that “‘the kingdom of heaven [is] near’” (Luke 10:9). After His death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins became the heart of their message.

Although the gospel message has social and cultural implications, at its core, it consists of an offer of forgiveness and restoration based on what God has accomplished through Jesus’ death on the cross. As Jesus Himself stated: “‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:46, 47; cf. John 3:16). Thus, according to Scripture, mission involves going into all the world to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit to persuade people to become disciples of Jesus and lead them to become faithful members of God’s remnant church so that they can worship the Lord and obey His commandments to the glory of God (Matt. 28:18–20; Rev. 14:6–12).

## “Thus saith the Lord”

It has become clear that the current social and cultural climate poses significant challenges



to the authority and interpretation of Scripture. Unfortunately, as one scholar put it, “Christians are often living more as an extension of the secular world today than as a distinct light to it.”<sup>9</sup> To confront the current erosion of biblical authority, we must uphold a high view of Scripture with a clear understanding of its nature and purpose. As a result, our pulpits will grow stronger, and our parishioners will be better equipped to understand and apply Scripture to their Christian lives.

Given our solemn responsibility, this statement by author Ellen White offers an apt conclusion: “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creed or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”<sup>10</sup>



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), 173.
- 3 Kenneth Berding, *Bible Revival: Recommitting Ourselves to One Book* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013), 35.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 312.
- 5 Berding, *Bible Revival*, 32.
- 6 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 141.
- 7 Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *A Christian Lifestyle: Biblical Foundation and Praxis* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020).
- 8 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, new ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 18.
- 9 Natasha Crain, *Faithfully Different: Regaining Biblical Clarity in a Secular Culture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2022), 17.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 595.

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# “How can I have what she has, God?”

In 2012, I looked over the early morning bustle of Jakarta, Indonesia, from the rooftop of the hotel where I was speaking at a convention.<sup>1</sup> From a nearby mosque, an imam's call to worship soared across the neighborhood. I listened as I waited for those I had invited to join me.

Sometime later, several dozen delegates from multiple countries met with me to pray. I read Scripture, and then we all scattered across the roof to pray. Bowing my head, I closed my eyes and began praying comfortably to the God I knew.

## **Intense and intimate**

After a few minutes, the sound of quiet weeping startled me. Opening my eyes, I saw a believer from a distant country with little religious freedom praying. What I witnessed I will never forget.

There, kneeling in the gravel on the roof, the Scriptures resting on a ledge beside her, hands grasping for the sky, was a woman deep in prayer. As she wept, she appeared to be asking something of God. Her prayers had an intensity, an intimacy. I had no doubt that she knew she was communicating directly with God Himself and that He heard her.

Then I thought about how I prayed casual, comfortable prayers. I knew that the believer I had just witnessed in prayer had a relationship with God far beyond what I had ever experienced. *How can I have what she has with God?* I wondered.

## **Thirsty for more**

That night in my hotel room, I asked God how I could have a much deeper relationship with Him.

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SCAN FOR AUDIO





I was thirsty for much more! But I had no clue where to begin.

As I prayed, God impressed me to read Isaiah 50:4:

The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples,  
So that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.  
He awakens Me morning by morning,  
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple  
(NASB).

Then God told me that He would awaken me every morning if I invited Him each night to do so. But I was skeptical. Would God really awaken me to spend time with Him? What if I overslept? Doubts and uncertainties plagued my mind.

Again and again, I read Isaiah 50:4. Although I believed it was God's Word and that what He had done in the past He is able to do again today, it was so hard to surrender my alarm clock and trust God to wake me up.

### **No different from a demon's belief**

Then I realized that saying I believe God's Word and acting on it are two very different things. Scripture says, "The demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19, NASB). When I declare that I believe in God but do not act on His Word, my belief is no different from a demon's. Very sobering!

Reaching over to the nightstand, I flicked off the alarm on my clock. With the lights out, I lay on my back, wondering whether God would do for me what His Word said He could do. But I chose to believe and fell asleep.

A few hours later, I awoke. *Why am I awake?* I sleepily asked myself. Glancing at the clock, I groaned. It was barely past midnight. Then I remembered that I had asked God to awaken me as early or as late as He wanted so that I could have more time with Him in His Word and in prayer.

Climbing out of bed, I knelt in prayer. It was a bit awkward doing so outside of my "normal" time to pray. Although I understood that I was not in charge of this time, I was not sure what I should say to God. I prayed for a few minutes and jumped back in bed for some much-needed sleep.

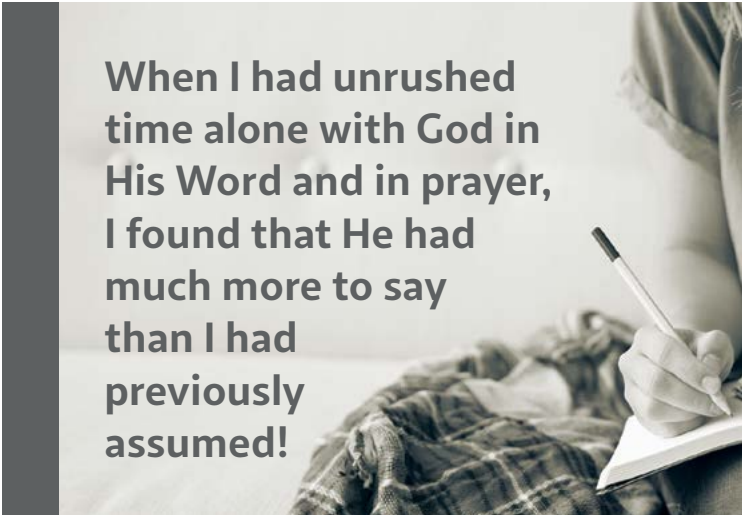
Very early in the morning, I again awakened from a deep sleep. Groggily, I looked at the clock.

It was hours earlier than I usually woke up. I was just getting ready to sleep some more when God whispered to my heart, "Didn't you ask Me to get you up?"

I prayed for God to send the Holy Spirit to teach me as I read Scripture. Then I read and read and read. Occasionally, I checked the time, for I was used to always being rushed in my time alone with God. As I prayed about what I read, I waited on God to see what the Holy Spirit would say to my mind and my heart.

### **A shocking discovery**

Soon, I made a shocking discovery! When I had unrushed time alone with God in His Word and in prayer, I found that He had much more



**When I had unrushed time alone with God in His Word and in prayer, I found that He had much more to say than I had previously assumed!**

to say than I had previously assumed! So began the adventure of asking God each night to be in charge of awakening me, according to how much time He wanted to spend teaching me.

A decade has flown by since I began asking God to awaken me each morning. Morning by morning, He has done so, whether I am in Cambodia, Brazil, Canada, or a host of places in between. I am amazed that He awakens me to have unrushed time with Him in His Word and in prayer, regardless of whether I am 4, 10, or even 16 hours ahead of my home time zone!

God has awakened me each morning without an alarm clock for more than 10 years. In those times, He calls me into His presence to be in His Word and live in awe of His majesty, power, and unfathomable love. We must stand first in the awesome presence of God. Only then will we not be overawed by anything or anybody else.

# Heart challenge— Cherishing the treasure of Christ and His Word!

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**H**ow do we truly cherish Christ and His Word? As a pastor or someone who spends his or her life in full-time ministry and studying the Bible to prepare for sermons, it can be easy to become so busy doing the Lord's work that you forget the Lord of the work. Perhaps you have lost the sweet intimacy in your walk with the Lord in which

He brings you to Himself through prayer and deep unrushed meditation of His Word. Or perhaps you never had that intimate experience to start with.

As you consider God's call for you to have a deeper experience with Him, take some unrushed time to drink deeply in the Word. As you reflect on heart-challenging questions, allow God's Word to speak to your heart. Then, as you go forward from this day, do not settle any longer

for a superficial experience with Jesus. Pray daily, "More of You, sweet Jesus! Take me deeper into Your Word! I want to know more of You!"

- Isa. 50:4—If you feel like you cannot get up any earlier to start your busy day, what promise can you claim?
- Ps. 81:10; Isa. 44:3—What will God do if you simply come to Him with all your hunger and thirst and need?
- Jer. 15:16; John 14:23—How can you delight in and worship God through His Word?
- Ps. 63:5–7—Think about the times when God's Word has brought joy to your heart. Share that experience with someone today. If you have not experienced such joy recently, how could you experience it again?
- Matt. 6:19–21—Where is your treasure; where is your heart?

- Ps. 51:1–10—If your heart is not in the right place with Jesus now but you long for it to be again, what should you do?
- Ezek. 36:22–36—What will happen when God changes your heart and puts His Spirit within you? Would you like that "Garden of Eden" experience again?
- 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17—Why is God's Word so powerful and life changing?
- 2 Tim. 2:15; John 5:39; 15:3; 17:17—What do these passages teach you about the importance of consistent, deep, and diligent study?
- Ps. 119—As you read this psalm, write down all the times it mentions the "Word" and the blessing associated with it. (This chapter is packed!)
- Deut. 8:1–10—What is God's promise for the future? Could you receive this blessing even now?

While preparing sermons, do not forget to take time to know the true Sermon—Jesus. While finding cross-references in Bible study is exciting, do not forget the power of the Cross! And while looking up a bunch of chain references, may we never lose sight of the One who gave all His blood that our chains might be broken and we might be set free.

Author Ellen G. White wrote, "You should search the Bible; for it tells you of Jesus. As you read the Bible, you will see the matchless charms of Jesus. You will fall in love with the Man of Calvary, and at every step you can say to the world, 'His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace.'"<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is a treasure map—and Jesus is our greatest Treasure. Enjoy that Treasure today!



- 1 Adapted from Don MacLafferty, *Live Like Elijah: A Call to Live by Faith in God* (Apison, TN: In Discipleship, 2021), 9–13.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), 293.

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## Adventist archaeologists participate in historic find

TEL LACHISH, ISRAEL

Until recently, no meaningful Canaanite inscriptions had been discovered in the Land of Israel, save only two or three words here and there,” the press release from Hebrew University states. “Now an amazing discovery presents an entire sentence in Canaanite, dating to about 1700 B.C.E. It is engraved on a small ivory comb and includes a spell against lice.”

Published in the Hebrew University’s *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology*, this new inscription is detailed in a research paper titled “A Canaanite’s Wish to Eradicate Lice on an Inscribed Ivory Comb From Lachish.” The paper presents the discovery of the ivory elephant-tusk head-lice comb, first uncovered in 2016. What was *not* realized until a closer study in December of 2021 was that this comb bore an etched inscription across its surface.

The artifact was unearthed at Tel Lachish in 2016 by a team of archaeologists from Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HU) and Southern Adventist University in Tennessee under the direction of professors **Yosef Garfinkel**, **Michael Hasel**, and **Martin Klingbeil**. The inscription, with 17 letters measuring just two to three millimeters, was engraved in a very shallow manner, thus contributing to the fact that even though the comb was excavated in 2016 the letters were not noticed until subsequent postprocessing in 2021 by **Madeleine Mumcuoglu**, a research associate at HU’s Institute of Archaeology.

The inscription was deciphered by Semitic epigraphist **Daniel Vainstub** at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba. The ivory was tested by **Rivka Rabinovich** and **Yuval Goren** and found to originate from an elephant tusk.

The script on this comb notably constitutes “the very earliest stage of the alphabet’s development,” dating most likely to sometime during the later part of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1700–1550 B.C.E.). The 17-letter proto-Semitic inscription on the comb reads (rather humorously): “May this tusk root out the lice of the hair and the beard.”

Lice were pervasive and insufferable enough to be listed as the third of the 10 plagues of Egypt. (The Hebrew word *kînnîm* used in Exodus 8:16 can mean “lice,” “fleas,” or “gnats.”) The discovery of the 3,700-year-old comb with the inscription shed light not only on the experience of dealing with lice in biblical times but also on levels of literacy in ancient times.

Researchers in Tel Lachish, Israel, stated that the inscription features the first complete sentence ever found written in the Canaanite dialect.







## Study linking faith and health reveals unsuspected benefits

OSLO, NORWAY

Participants at the Nordic Health Congress in Oslo, Norway, could hardly believe their ears when researcher **Niels Christian Hvidt** informed them that Adventist and Baptist males in Denmark have a 97 percent lower risk of dying in a traffic accident compared with the general population.

In a presentation titled “Can Faith Move Mountains?” Dr. Hvidt shared evidence supporting how faith significantly contributes to good health, drawing from various studies, including the Danish religious societies’ health study.

Dr. Hvidt, professor of spiritual care at the University of Southern Denmark, and his research partner, **Christoffer Johansen**, research head at the Department of Oncology at Rigshospitalet, the largest and most specialized hospital in Denmark, conducted a unique study to discover how religious belief influences health. The sample comprised

5,000 Baptist participants and 7,000 Adventists who had been members of their respective denominations between 1920 and 2005.

The study, which began in 2004, matched these participants with their official public health records. By comparing the prevalence of various diseases in the sample with the general population, the researchers found that religious individuals have a significantly lower risk for various chronic diseases such as cancer and diabetes. Their findings were peer-reviewed and published in several scientific journals.

The researchers believed that Adventists would have a 20 percent lower risk of various types of cancer—in line with similar studies on vegetarians. However, the study showed that Adventists had a 37 percent lower risk of developing cancer; that shows an added benefit on top of what their dietary choices may account for.

Adventists in the sample also had a 30 percent lower risk of diabetes than the general Danish population. The risk of developing liver cirrhosis proved to be 68 percent lower than in the general population. With the Adventist stance on abstinence from alcoholic beverages, that benefit is expected.



The risk of dying from suicide was found to be 92 percent lower for male and 89 percent lower for female believers compared with the general population.

Even though some health benefits for believers were as expected, it was totally unexpected to find that the risk of dying in a traffic accident was 92 percent lower for women and 97 percent lower for men. The finding is so unexpected that it made headlines in the Danish press.

Dr. Hvidt's understanding of Scripture helped shape this research approach. He reflected, "The healing miracles of Jesus are deeply integral to the Gospel account of who Jesus was."

Critiquing excessive compartmentalization in health and care providers, Dr. Hvidt added, "Doctors, psychologists, and pastors have their clearly defined roles, and while specialization is good, it is important to remember that humans are not distinct parts; we are whole beings.

"There is ample data which shows that patients become insecure and frustrated when we look at them merely as a bad knee or a broken leg. Similarly, health and care professionals become frustrated when there is no time to care for the whole being. We need to bring back the holistic view of man," Dr. Hvidt concluded.

[Tor Tjeransen, *tedNEWS*]

## Local church, global impact

OXFORD, MAINE, UNITED STATES

Adults at the Oxford, Maine, Seventh-day Adventist Church began organizing missions in support of communities in underprivileged countries. The adults had no idea how the examples they were setting would rub off on the younger people. At first, the Youth Sabbath School class assisted their church in raising funds for a water well in Africa, but then decided to take on their own mission projects: raising money to save girls, buy livestock, and purchase medical supplies for third world countries; raising money for the local pet shelter and food pantry; and providing Christmas presents and a holiday dinner to residents of the local women's homeless shelter. Their projects helped people around the world, from Africa, France, and Norway, to their own backyard.

Then the class discussed taking on **Kristene's** project, their largest mission project ever. Kristene is a disabled, elderly resident in their community. She was invited to the Sabbath School class by teacher, **Sue Proctor** to share portions of her life story, from moving in with her parents to care for them while still working full-time, to her struggles with making ends meet after a broken elbow and having to sell items to pay her bills. Now her pre-1978 mobile home is no longer safe therefore needs replacement.

The kids listened attentively to Kristene's story. Despite these trials, they could tell that she was continuing to hold firm to her faith that God will continue to watch over her and meet her daily needs. So, the Youth class decided that if they could have as much faith as Kristene, and simply dip their feet into the river by faith, then God would provide.

So far, they have had a successful bake sale, ongoing bottle/can drive, and a holiday pie sale, and have other plans to gain community and conference-wide support. They pray daily for God's guidance and know that He will touch hearts and help this mission to be successful. These youth have a passion for sharing Jesus' love with others, letting God work through them to take on these outreach projects, no matter the size. 🇺🇸



Youth with their good friend Kristene.



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## When pastors need help

**H**ave you ever had a problem you thought you could solve yourself, only to discover it was beyond you? A few years ago, I was dealing with an ingrown toenail. It was painful. I tried to fix the problem by cutting it out but only made it worse. My toe started bleeding. After many tries, I decided to see a doctor. After careful examination, the doctor said, "This was beyond you. You could not have taken care of this problem by yourself. Only a doctor could solve it because it requires surgery."

Aubrey Hoepfner serves in her church's high school ministry in Illinois. She acknowledges, "Sometimes we avoid asking for help out of fear that it admits failure. We think, *I should be able to handle this on my own; I'm supposed to succeed. I just need to push through.*"

"But the truth is that God created us with a need for help. Asking for help isn't admitting failure, but recognizing the way God made us."<sup>1</sup>

We are pastors—but we have a problem. We are sinful creatures with depraved minds and selfish hearts, desperately in need of help. The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we were dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of the world and following the prince of the flesh and the mind (Eph. 2:1–5). How can one be justified before God? Paul answers, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (vv. 4, 5, NKJV).

How are people justified before God? This question propelled the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther studied Scripture and discovered that we are "justified by faith" (Rom. 3:28, KJV). The church received the idea of *sola fide*, by faith alone, from the Protestant Reformation. The powerful idea is that we are judged righteous in the sight of God based on our faith in Jesus Christ.

God's final message to the world proclaims "the commandments of God" and the "faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, KJV). But what is the faith of Jesus? It is faith in the ability and power of Jesus to save us from our sins. It is to trust that He took our sins so that we might take His righteousness.

God promised to solve the problem of sin in our lives through Jesus Christ, our Righteousness. In the book of Jeremiah, God promises,

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;  
A King shall reign and prosper,  
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

In His days Judah will be saved,  
And Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this is His name by which He will be called:  
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:5, 6, NKJV).

As ministers of the gospel, we are called to preach this final, most precious message revealing Christ's character of love and mercy. Christ our Righteousness is the beautiful gospel that energizes the soul and brings joy to the heart. God dresses you in Christ's pure and holy robe of righteousness. The fact is that no matter what you have done in life, in Christ Jesus, God will consider you as if you have never sinned.

But this is the truth the devil does not want people to understand. Ellen G. White writes, "The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes we try to resolve the problem of sin ourselves but get discouraged when we discover that we cannot. Hoepfner says, "Take freedom in this: *God has designed us to need help, and we honor him in asking for it.*"<sup>3</sup> The issue of corruption is beyond us. It requires surgery of the heart and of the mind. It requires a doctor. Only Doctor Jesus can do it. Preach that.



- 1 Aubrey Hoepfner, "Three Reasons Why Asking for Help Is Honoring God," *Open the Bible*, October 1, 2015, <https://openthebible.org/article/three-reasons-why-asking-for-help-is-honoring-to-god/>.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 161.
- 3 Hoepfner, "Three Reasons Why."





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## Sprinkling pastor dust

**W**hen I began pastoral ministry, I met Todd,<sup>1</sup> a crusty old pastor, close to retirement, who had an overdose of the saints of Israel. I think they called it “church member fatigue.” His view of life and the ministry had become somewhat tainted, and he wore his skepticism like his threadbare polyester suit which he wore to every occasion and visit. As we went from home visits to social functions, his favorite phrase was, “Well, we sprinkled some pastor dust there!”

What I think he was saying in his own cryptic way was that the minister is supposed to carry some type of holiness, sanctity, or spiritual presence into every meeting. I could never put my finger on what exactly we were bringing to each living room as we sat and visited. Was it some type of piety or holiness that implied that God was now here?

Over the years of my ministry, I have struggled with this concept of “pastor dust.” What is it that the presence of a minister brings to a crisis—a hospital bed, a family, or a marriage? As a pastor, why am I there? What is my role? As Jesus traveled from town to town and city to city, His presence brought not only physical healing but joy and happiness through His very persona. But is that not the role of every Christian—to sprinkle the “dust of heaven”?

I must admit that there are moments of discouragement that are almost overwhelming. Satan’s favorite tool with pastors is twofold: “You are not fit for the job,” and the clincher, “You are a terrible example.”

I am not a pastor by choice. My alternate self is a gentleman farmer, perhaps with a little counseling, and a lot of business ventures. I have tried all of them. In the west, where I pastored, when the fields turned to gold and the combines rolled into the fields, a strange power took possession of me. I would lose perspective, want to abandon pastoring, and long to sprinkle grain dust instead of pastor dust. With farming, you

see concrete results as streams of rich wheat arc through the air, pausing to fall into waiting trucks. But God called me to march to the beat of a different drummer; why, I do not know. If I were not convinced that the call to be a minister was from God, I could not, would not, carry on. My theology professor once told me, “Don’t be a pastor unless you cannot, not be one.”

It is easy to measure the tangible: baptisms, church growth, successful church leadership, organizational leadership, compelling sermons, Bible studies, and ceremonies. But for the majority of time, the role of a pastor is hidden from view and from measurement.

You see, there is a miracle that takes place on a regular basis. With all my shortcomings and inadequacies, when I walk into that emergency room where the family is waiting to hear news of their loved one, there is often a sigh of relief: “Oh good, the pastor is here.” There is a presence a pastor brings that fills me with a sense of wonder. I have concluded that what I bring to the role of ministry is the presence of comfort, a sense of the nearness of God, and an assurance that He has not forsaken people during trial or sorrow or even joy. My called role is to instruct, counsel, encourage, rebuke, guide, shepherd, love, and show Heaven’s grace to the flock. I am not the presence of God, but I represent grace and caring, forgiveness and comfort.

Is it difficult? Is it challenging? Am I adequate for the task? Yes, yes, and no. But that is what makes it such a humbling, awe-filled vocation—to experience and to understand the awareness of the Holy Spirit at work through such a sinful instrument is one of the gracious gifts of heaven.

You go, pastor! You are called to sprinkle the dust of heaven on your flock. Do it with humility but assurance that you are called to this task.



<sup>1</sup> Not his real name.



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