

Andrews University

From the Selected Works of S. Joseph Kidder

July, 2012

The Heartbeat of the Believer

S. Joseph Kidder, *Andrews University*



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quarterly resource for local church leaders † july/september 2012

ELDER'S DIGEST

REVIVED BY HIS WORD

READING THROUGH THE BIBLE TOGETHER



FEATURES

- 04 WORLDWIDE CHURCH INITIATIVES
- 05 REVIVED BY HIS WORD
- 06 GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR BIBLE
- 07 TEN DAYS OF PRAYER
- 08 777 INPRAYER
- 10 THE MYSTERY OF THE GOD INCARNATE - PART 2
- 12 BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS - PART 2
- 22 STATEMENT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
- 24 WHAT'S YOUR DOMAIN?
- 26 KEEPING "YOUR COOL" DURING HOT COMMITTEE MEETINGS
- 28 HELP, LORD! I'VE BEEN ASKED TO PLANT A CHURCH!
- 30 THREE DAYS TO KATHMANDU



EDITORIAL	3
SERMONS	15
QUESTION & ANSWER	20
THE ART OF SPEECH	21
HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS	25
KIDDER'S COLUMN	31

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REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

THROUGH SCRIPTURE



Is it possible to experience revival and reformation apart from an active relationship with Christ through the words of Scripture? Throughout the history of Israel, as recorded in the Bible, true revival that led to reformation never happened without divine revelation. In fact, the first time the people of Israel “bowed down to worship” God in Scripture was followed by the announcement that God had “visited” the people (Exod. 4:31). Through faith in the Word of God revealed to Moses and spoken by Aaron, people gained new strength and new motivation to join God in His redemptive plan in leading them out of bondage to the Promised Land.

In time Israel failed to faithfully keep their covenant to God and forgot their “first love” toward Him. This was initiated by a neglect concerning what God had revealed in the Torah and, subsequently, what God revealed to them through the prophets. Even in Jesus’ day, true discipleship was birthed in relationship to His Word. He taught that His true

disciples were those that remained in His Word (John 8:31).

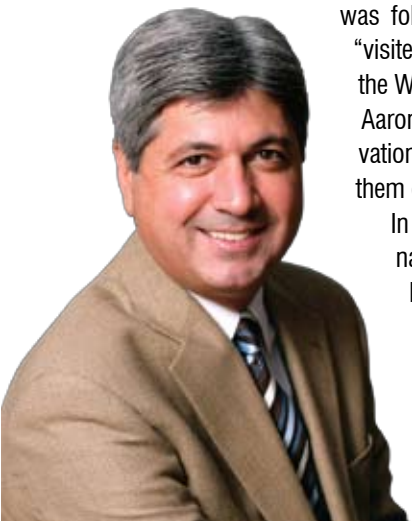
The record of Scripture shows that every spiritual decline in the history of Israel was marked by a neglect toward God’s revelation. If today’s church stumbles on the same mistakes that Israel stumbled upon in the past, there is no hope!

Revival and reformation is always initiated by the God who yearns to revive and reform His people into His image. The way God accomplishes this, in the past and today, is through revelation. And revelation, God’s will for His children, is never heard apart from His Word, the Bible.

So, as we wait and ask and hope for the gift of revival and the blessing of reformation, may we remember the words of Paul in Colossians 3:16: “May the word of Christ richly dwell within you.”

“Revived by His Word” is the main theme of this issue, and for this reason, I challenge you to promote this worldwide church initiative in your local congregation. Blessings on you!

ED



JONAS ARRAIS | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

General Conference
World Headquarters

February 1, 2012

Ministerial Association

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Dear Friends,

We are very excited about the “*Revived by His Word*” Worldwide Bible Reading Plan voted during the 2011 Annual Council to be initiated April 17 at the 2012 Spring Meeting. We are hoping and praying that millions of our fellow Seventh-day Adventist members will join us in reading a chapter a day of God’s Word completing the process together during the General Conference Session in 2015.

Mark Finley and our General Conference Communication Department have put together an excellent PR/Informational kit to alert all our church members of this opportunity to focus on His Word together. This kit includes a poster, brochure, news article, advertisements for journals, et cetera. There are TV spots being produced and social media aspects as well. There will be a daily blog for interactive dialogue and sharing of helpful thoughts on the chapter of the day. The information describes the project as well as our strong need to focus on the Bible for revival and reformation in building momentum through God’s blessing.

We kindly request you to pass this material on to as many different sources for dissemination as soon as possible. Thank you for making sure that all our departmental directors, pastors, educators, publishing and media outlets, and other leaders get the needed materials. We hope all our local church members will have the information to begin this reading project with us as the Division presidents lead us in reading Genesis 1 and 2 during Spring Meeting.

Thank you again for your help in ensuring that our people are *Revived by His Word* as we move toward His second coming! We are praying for all of you as you continue to walk and work with our Lord.

Your Brothers in Christ,

Ted N.C. Wilson
President

Jerry N. Page
Ministerial Secretary

PS.: The following link will allow you to download a basic promotional kit which includes two posters, a brochure and a news article. Please use these materials to spread awareness about the *Revived by His Word* initiative wherever possible.

Basic Promo Kit: <http://bit.ly/revivedbyhiswordbasic> (18Mb)

The following link is for more advanced users and will allow you to download a file containing ads, a brochure, posters, a news article, and more. Please use these materials to promote the *Revived by His Word* initiative in your publications, websites, news outlets, and other media wherever possible. All files are in English, but there are Adobe Photoshop and InDesign files included which can be edited for translation into other languages. Logos and hi-resolution photos are also included if you wish to design your own custom graphics.

Promo Kit for advanced users (very large file): <http://bit.ly/revivedbyhisword> (282Mb)

REVIVED BY HIS WORD

READING THROUGH THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has founded its existence in the Bible. Adventists are a Bible-based, Bible-believing, Bible-reading people. A new Seventh-day Adventist world church initiative titled "Revived by His Word," coordinated by the Revival and Reformation Committee, is aimed at strengthening the spiritual experience of each church member.

"The study of God's Word leading to a life-changing experience with Jesus is at the very heart of revival," Mark Finley, assistant to the world church president for evangelism.

"My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to your Word." (Psalm 119:25)

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through the word of God which lives and abides forever." (1 Peter 1:23)

"And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32)

"There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose rarely seen in these times."

Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pg. 90

"Nothing can possibly replace listening to God speak to us through His Word," Armando Miranda, vice president for the world church. The study of God's Word has three major components leading to revival:

1. It provides a foundation for true revival.
2. It stimulates, fosters and sustains true revival.
3. It counteracts false revivals.

Nothing can replace listening to God speak to us through His Word. Prayerfully meditating on scripture is a primary source of spiritual strength.

The Initiative Summarized

Church members are encouraged to read or listen to one chapter of the Bible each day beginning April 17, 2012, the first day of Spring Meeting.

The reading plan begins with world church President Ted Wilson joining the division presidents in reading Genesis 1 responsively. The presidents will conclude the initiative by reading Revelation 22 during the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas.

During the 1,171 days from Spring Meeting 2012 through the beginning of the General Conference Session on July 2, 2015, participants will cover the 1,189 chapters in the Bible. By reading one chapter each day and two chapters during the General Conference Session, millions of participating members will complete their journey through the Bible. An online component, featured on the Revival and Reformation website and sponsored by the world church's Ministerial Association, allows participants to share devotional thoughts.

United by His Word

"Revived by His Word" will become much larger than reading or listening to one chapter of the Bible each day. It will direct the attention of the entire world church to the importance of knowing Jesus through His Word and encourage families to read the Bible together. In cultures where the Bible is not readily available, this initiative will encourage elders to gather the church family to read the Bible aloud. It is simple, practical and affordable.

"Revived by His Word" can unite the entire church around God's Word and make a difference in millions of lives. It can be a catalyst for regular, systematic Bible study. The goal of "Revived by His Word" is to encourage every church member to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives as they meditate and pray over one chapter of the Bible a day.

"I would like to invite every church member to join the worldwide family of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in reading one chapter of the Bible a day, beginning April 17, 2012, and concluding during the General Conference Session in the summer of 2015. I am confident that this journey through the Bible together will draw us all closer to Jesus. As we prayerfully read and meditate upon God's Word, we each will be led to a renewed experience with the Savior as we look forward to His soon second coming."

Ted N. C. Wilson

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GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR BIBLE



Bible study has largely lost its popularity and centrality in the spiritual life of the believer in the widespread variety of Christian denominations. And it is no different within Adventism. Once a people of the book, yet now a people of . . . ? This question remains to be answered by a new generation of believers. The profound influence of Internet, television, entertainment, has turned the attention of many from the Bible. Amidst this new cultural phenomenon, the church should not lose hope.

In order for faith to be grounded in its true foundation, Bible study must be brought back to its original role. And perhaps one way to restore the significance of Bible study in the mind of the believer is to speak of what Bible study is not. Bible study should not be considered a spiritual burden. It can be pleasant, enjoyable, and incredibly relevant in everyday life. The majority of Christians who do read their Bible on a daily basis, do so out of a sense of duty to either God, sermon preparation, etc. In many cases, they get nothing out of their Bible reading. Yet this reality can be changed.

THE GOAL

The worldwide initiative, “Revived by His Word” promoted by the General Conference and launched April 17, during the 2012 Spring Council, challenges members to read and meditate on one chapter of the Bible each day. The goal is not only to motivate members to spend more time in the Word to experience true revival and reformation but, furthermore, to hear God’s voice speaking out of the Bible every day. Those who didn’t sign online, or didn’t get the information on time, are encouraged to begin at any time and catch up by reading two chapters a day.

READ FOR QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

For some reason, most people get into their heads the idea that they must read a large amount of their Bible each day in order to be spiritual. This is simply not true. Spirituality is not based on schedules. Spirituality is based on the quality time spent with Christ through His word no matter the time of day. The best way to read the Bible is to read slowly and prayerfully. Before the Bible is opened, pray that God would speak in a special way. People often rush through the text and miss many opportunities to see details God tried to communicate in the

reading. Also, keep in mind that God is not a genie in a lamp. He does not speak at our command. And sometimes it takes time to be able to hear the voice of God through the reading of Scripture. Wait for God’s guidance into a journey through His word and in time He will speak clearly. And it is here that true transformation takes place.

MEDITATE ON EACH DAILY CHAPTER

The Bible tells us to meditate on the Word (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2-3). This meditation has nothing to do with having the eyes closed or to hum a single note continually. It has to do with pondering, considering, enjoying the Word of God as a baby enjoys his/her mother’s milk. Ask God to bless with a thirst for the Word and to satisfy this daily thirst in a transformative manner through the Word.

It is the meditation on the Word of God that brings the Bible alive. Without this meditation, there will be a struggle in seeing the relevance of the Scriptures in daily life. Consider “The reading and contemplation of Scripture would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One” (*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, page, 393). What a privilege!

EARS OPEN

The secret to reading the Scriptures is to keep the ears open to that which has happened previously in the text read, and to think how this text speaks of God. It is His example that sets the foundation for transformation, and the way He worked in the life of many erring men and women, transforming them into warriors of faith by His grace. Fit yourself in the story. Learn from their mistakes, rejoice in their victories, and be assured that the Bible reading will never lack relevance.

You don’t have to read a lot of the Word of God for the Bible to become real to you. Each day, God will demonstrate the power and relevancy of His Word to you as you think on and meditate on what He gave you that day in your reading.

We pray that you, as a pastor, elder or local church leader will be “Revived by His Word” as well. We challenge you to promote this initiative in your congregation to motivate church members to be more committed to the Word of God.

ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

TEN DAYS OF PRAYER

A CALL TO PRAY

God poured out His Spirit in Pentecost power after His church spent ten days together, pleading for His promised blessing. He is ready to do it again today! All around the world, Adventist churches are experiencing the renewal of the Holy Spirit by following the disciples' example and participating in Ten Days of Prayer.

The Ten Days of Prayer initiative (formerly called Operation Global Rain) was adopted by the world church in 2010. Churches in over a hundred countries have received rich blessings through Ten Days of Prayer. Reports from 2012 are most encouraging!

"God is faithful! The Ten Days experience can't be quantified. Hearts were surrendered, souls were convicted, and requests for prayer were answered. To God be the glory!"—Veta, Nigeria

"We prayed for members who left to return. The week of Global Rain we challenged every active member to sign up to pray for three or four members in our church. This past Sabbath, we had seven members return to church."—Lisa, New Mexico, USA

"We have never experienced so much spiritual growth and so many answers to prayer in any past event. The daily leader and participant instructions have been WONDERFUL guides to experiencing a revival. The drops of rain are beginning to fall."—Bill, Rhode Island, USA

"On the 10th day one young person who had not been to church for years walked in and testified that they wanted to give their life to Jesus. And he has been coming to church every week since."—Arnold

"The Ten Days of Prayer revived the mid-week and Friday prayer meetings which no longer existed in my church. This 10-day session taught us that the power rests in prayer and brought unity amongst church members and a zeal to work for the Lord."—Luvuyo, South Africa

"We concluded the 10 Days of Prayer with a foot washing and the Lord's Supper on the second Sabbath. We fasted and went out for visitation after divine service. As a result, three non-Adventists who came to the meeting have started taking Bible Studies. The 10 Days of Prayer has changed the lives of the church members, and I believe that it will have an impact in their families and church."—Kelera, Fiji

Church elders, pastors, and lay leaders have led prayer groups of all sizes in homes, schools, churches, online forums, and teleconference. Groups unable to meet during the designated days have chosen an alternate ten days and been just as blessed.

Will you lead your church to join us in Ten Days of Prayer 2013? The dates voted for 2013 are January 9-19 (Wednesday evening through Sabbath evening).

Join us in
10
days
of **PRAYER**

Praying for
GLOBAL RAIN

Jan. 9-19, 2013

777

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Join a global prayer chain of Seventh-day Adventists praying for the Holy Spirit's power and presence on our families, churches, leaders, and communities so Jesus can come soon! Unite together with thousands of others around the world praying 7 days a week at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Praying at any hour on the hour a person will be joining with others in another time zone around the world bringing unified prayer power from our Lord!

"A chain of earnest praying believers should encircle the world . . . to pray for the Holy Spirit."—*Review and Herald*, January 3, 1907

PRAYER AND FASTING SABBATHS

JULY 7, 2012 | OCTOBER 6, 2012

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IS ADDING A NEW DIMENSION



MINISTRYinMOTION will launch this summer as a weekly podcast and television program where we explore best practices for your ministry in the 21st century. Wherever you serve on planet earth, God wants you to be a great

Christian leader. Whether you're a full-time pastor or a lay leader in your Christian fellowship, God wants to use you to impact your world.



Hosts for the program, Anthony Kent and Derek Morris, bring a broad experience in ministry, both as local pastors and pastoral leaders.

As we design future programs for *MINISTRYinMOTION*, we want to hear from you. What are some best practices you are discovering and contextualizing in your pastoral ministry? What are the areas of your greatest need for training and equipping?

Share your thoughts with us at
feedback@MINISTRYinMOTION.TV

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOD INCARNATE

>PART 2

Prior to the Christmas celebrations of 2009 in Auckland, New Zealand, a billboard outside the St. Matthew-in-the-City Anglican Church portrayed Mary and her betrothed, Joseph, together in bed. Above them was the slogan “Poor Joseph. God was a hard act to follow.” The innuendo appeared to portray Jesus as the product of a pre-marital sexual relationship between Mary and Joseph. This incident reminds us afresh of why it is important to understand who Jesus is.

The nature of Jesus as God Incarnate is perhaps the most important of all Christian doctrines. Jesus is everything to us. Without Him, there is no go-between between God and sinful man (1 Tim. 2:5), no hope of finding our way to Him (John 8:12; 10:9; 14:6), no resurrection (John 11:25), and no salvation (John 3:15, 16, 36; Acts 4:12). What we think of Jesus today is crucial in the reckoning of our eternal destiny (Matt. 22:42; 1 John 5:11). Yet, what we now know about the person of Jesus was arrived at only after protracted and violent debate in the history of Christianity.

ERRORS TO WATCH

Three major heresies regarding the nature of Jesus have plagued the Christian church since its inception. All three errors are detrimental to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of the world.

1. *Denying the divinity of Jesus.* This heresy, taught by the Ebionites, an early ascetic Christian sect, rejected the basic tenets of Scripture, such as the pre-existence, divinity, virgin birth, atoning death, and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹ The apostle John doesn’t hold back in condemning those who subscribed to this error (1 John 2:22, 23). Jehovah’s Witnesses today hold aspects of this view about Jesus Christ.
2. *Denying the two natures of Jesus.* This error contradicts the clear teachings of the Bible (John 1:1-4, 14) that Jesus is God, the Word who in the beginning spoke the world into existence—albeit, God Incarnate, who chose to live among us in human form. Monophysiticism, Eutychianism, and Monothelitism all teach that at some point in time, one of Christ’s natures was absorbed into the other. Various forms of this heresy continue in some churches today.²
3. *Denying the humanity of Jesus* (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7). Since apostolic days, this teaching has been the seedbed

for heretical beliefs such as Docetism, Marcionism, Gnosticism, Apollinarianism, Monarchianism, Patripassianism, Sabellianism, Adoptionism, and Dynamic Monarchianism. Present-day groups that hold to forms of this error are the United Pentecostal and United Apostolic Churches.³ The Bible reiterates that these erroneous views of Jesus are indicative of the “anti-Christ (s)” (1 John 2:18, 22; 2 John 1:7), driven by satanic forces to “divide” the theanthropic (God-Man) Jesus Christ!

THE JESUS OF SCRIPTURE

We can be 100 percent certain about one fact regarding Jesus Christ: He was not an imaginary man. He was authentic and real. His life and teachings are well attested-to in Scripture and by writers of antiquity. He denied Himself of the form of God and became a man (Phil. 2:5-11).⁴ Like us, Jesus was born with mental and physical susceptibilities that were affected by thousands of years of sin.⁵ He experienced pain, grief, and suffering (Isa. 53:3). And, like Adam, He stood at the head of the human race, to endure where Adam had failed, so that through His obedience many would be saved (Rom. 5:12, 19).

Yet, while Christ incarnated in a form similar to sinful men, He was not in the absolute sense the same as those He came to save. Scripture confirms that He “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He “did not sin” (1 Peter 2:22). And “in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).⁶ Speaking of the great mystery of godliness, the apostle Paul says, “He [Christ] appeared in a body” (1 Tim. 3:16), yet only in the “likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3).⁷ Sin was not innately His. Taking upon Himself the “likeness of sinful flesh” was something He did voluntarily or vicariously as our Substitute. The union of His divine and human natures is a mystery that far exceeds our human comprehension. Jesus is truly God (Heb. 1:2, 3) and truly man (Heb. 2:5-18).

THE INCARNATION

But was there really no other way for God to deliver us from the predicament of sin? Why go to all that trouble?

1. The Bible makes no apology for emphasizing the essential role of the Incarnation. This step was necessary for Jesus to bridge the chasm created by sin. Like one of us, He took upon Himself flesh and blood (see Heb. 2:9, 10, 18; 5:7, 8; 9:26; 13:12). Like us, He was tempted and tested in every way (Heb. 2:15, 18). But He overcame. While the manner



REFLECTION

You may have heard the saying “It’s in the blood!” This statement simply reiterates the fact of corporate solidarity. As children of Adam, we all inherit his sinful nature. Not one of us is sinless or innocent before God (Rom. 3:23). At some point, we all have disobeyed the commands of God, and we deserve to die (Rom. 6:23). This corporate solidarity makes it impossible for any hope of salvation to take place within ourselves. The only way for us to be saved is by divine intervention. Jesus Christ is the solution. He condescended to this world as our Savior. And, this was made possible only through the Incarnation.

Jesus’ incarnation, humanity, nature, and experiences were all part of the unfolding of a cosmic plan of salvation. Jesus had to be truly man (Heb. 2:17); at the same time, the sacrifice of Himself had to be unblemished of the original corruption with which all of us are born (Heb. 4:15). So, Jesus was like us and also unlike us. He was unique. He was not the product of a premarital sexual relationship between Mary and Joseph, nor was He just any man. He is God incarnate, the Savior of the world. By contrast, our sinful disposition is a constant reminder of our need for Him. Only when we come to that realization will we begin to appreciate the wonder of the Incarnation and catch a glimpse of the tremendous sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Amazing grace!

EO

* Unless otherwise stated, Scriptural references are taken from the New International Version.

and occasions for His testing may have been different than ours, the underlying issues that Jesus faced transcended all times and cultures: allegiance to the will of God or to Satan. Hence, like Jesus, we also may become victors.

2. The incarnation of Jesus also meant that one day He would die. His death played a pivotal role in God’s purpose of saving us (John 3:16; Eph. 1:7-10; Heb. 2:9b). There was absolutely no other way. God could not die. Thus, for Jesus to become our substitute, He had to be made a little lower than the angels and, by dying in our stead, subdue all things under His feet (Heb. 2:7, 9). No angel or man could have accomplished this massive task. By entering Satan’s own turf, Jesus turned the tables on Satan and defeated him (Gen. 3:15). By doing so, Jesus was able to remove the terrors of death from those who accept Him.
3. The Incarnation (Heb. 2:11) qualifies Jesus for His high-priestly ministry on our behalf in heaven (Heb. 4:14, 15). His humanity was a prerequisite for His intercessory work of atonement (Heb. 2:17). But Jesus’ sacrifice had to be sinless. Had Jesus possessed a sinful human nature precisely the same as ours, He would have been in the same predicament as all of humanity: destitute and in need of salvation. The opposite is confirmed by Scripture: “Such a high priest meets our needs—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, [and] exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

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¹ Historically, this view of the nature of Christ was the embryo out of which later heresies such as Arianism, Nestorianism, Socinianism, Liberalism, Humanism, and Unitarianism developed.

² For example, the modern Abyssinian, Armenian, Coptic, and Jacobite churches are all Monophysitic bodies. See “Monophysitism,” Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia. Copyright 1993–1997, Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

³ *Theopedia: An Encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity*, s.v. “Modalism.” Retrieved March 1, 2010, from <http://www.theopedia.com/Modalism>.

⁴ Ellen G. White, “Christ: Man’s Example,” in *Review and Herald*, July 1887, Personal Library Software, Inc., 1994.

⁵ Ellen G. White, “Notes on Travel,” in *Review and Herald*, February 1885, Personal Library Software, Inc., 1994.

⁶ Pilate’s wife cautioned him to “have nothing to do with this just man” (Matt. 27:19). Pilate said, “I find no fault in Him” (Luke 23:14). The angel Gabriel proclaimed Jesus as “that holy thing” (Luke 1:35). Even Satan himself called Jesus “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24).

⁷ Here, the Greek word used by Paul is *sarx*, not *soma*, the word for body. As in 1 Timothy 3:16, *sarx* merely means “enfleshment,” not “sinful.”

BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

> PART 2

An elder must have a good reputation. If a man is dishonest or is known for sin or questionable practices, he should not be considered for eldership until his lifestyle and love for God are evident to the church. Backbiting and false rumors against a man are not how we measure someone's reputation. Jesus warned His disciples that people would speak all manner of evil falsely against them for His sake, so we know the Bible is not warning the church against backbiting. A man should be judged on his own actions. If his actions or beliefs have been questionable, the Bible disqualifies him. People mature and change, but a person must spend time building a godly reputation before he or she is qualified to lead the church.

The Bible commands that an elder be tested before election. This test requires an observable lifestyle that is consistent with Scripture. In many churches, deacons are confused with elders and are given authority that the Bible does not allow. Scripturally, the role of a deacon is one of service. Faithfulness to this area of responsibility is one of the qualifications for becoming an elder.

The qualifications of a bishop or pastor and the qualifications of a deacon are the same. A pastor or bishop is an elder as well. These qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3. If a man is not able to govern his own life, he is not able to provide godly leadership to the church.

ELDERS COORDINATE AND EMPOWER

In the Bible, elders were responsible for coordinating ministry and empowering others to work in ministry. The pastor provides direction and vision for the church; the elders are responsible for equipping and empowering others to bring this vision to completion. The elders do work in ministry, but they also provide leadership to the local body as they engage others in ministry. It is unbiblical to dump all ministry work on the leaders of the church, and it is an injustice to turn ministry into a spectator sport. Each member is a minister with a calling from God. Those who desire to serve will become discontented if they are not empowered to fol-



low God's call in their lives. Discipleship is not being carried out if members who are more passive are never encouraged and invited to serve in ministry as well.

A great leader is not the one who does the most but the one who mentors others and passes his or her vision on to others and nurtures them into service. Anyone can limit themselves to task-oriented business, but true discipleship means inspiring others to reach for God's calling in their own lives (Acts 11:29, 30).

ELDERS GOVERN THE CHURCH AND PREACH

God has given responsibility to the elders to preach the Word and to lead the church (1 Tim. 5:16, 17; 1 Peter 5:1).

ELDERS GUARD CHURCH DOCTRINE

God calls elders to guard the doctrine of the church. In the New Testament, elders worked with the apostles to resolve doctrinal crises within the church. We don't have the apostles today; however, elders and pastors have the Word of God, and any doctrinal questions should be discussed with the Bible as the foundation. The elders should be men of the Word, and they are responsible for resolving disputes within the church as well as addressing violations of Scripture.

God will hold the elders accountable for the protection of His Word within the local church body (Acts 15:2; 16:6).

ELDERS AND PASTORS EXERCISE CHURCH AUTHORITY

Elders should exercise spiritual authority in the church. Remember that the pastor is also an elder. Along with the elders, the pastor provides direction and spiritual authority within the church.

God has entrusted leaders with authority, and He calls on them to use it wisely and with a spirit of servanthood; leaders are not called to be taskmasters or bear the weight of the work by themselves (Acts 15:22).

ELDERS LEAD FINANCIAL AFFAIRS AND PROMOTE STEWARDSHIP

I believe in financial openness in the church. Each member has the right to know what the church budget is and to vote on it. On the other hand, elders are charged with following up on church-budget expenses and making sure the church is financially stable. Elders should also teach, preach, and promote fidelity and generosity among members.

Leadership does not have the right to incur debt and then ask the congregation to pay the cost. Church members should be confident that the money they give is being used biblically, wisely, and in support of the church vision (Acts 11:30).

ELDERS RESOLVE CONFLICTS

Elders are responsible for handling and resolving conflicts or disputes within the church. Disputes should be handled according to biblical principles (Acts 15:6, 22; Matt. 18:15-17).

ELDERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST TO THE WORLD

The Bible charges elders with being diligent in seeing that the testimony of Jesus, which is the Spirit of Prophecy, is presented to the world (Acts 20:17-21; Rev. 19:10).

ELDERS PRAY FOR THE SICK

Elders are called to pray for members of the church by anointing them with oil, praying over them, and by the

laying on of hands. The Bible tells us that the effectual fervent prayers of the righteous avail much. I know of very few churches that pray for their sick as the Bible has commanded. If our church elders are the spiritual leaders they are called to be, God has provided a powerful tool to pray for those in need. Obeying this mandate is an act of faith. Failure to do so is negligence on our part, and we should not expect much of a result.

It is vital for the eldership to have a consistent, obedient walk with Christ so that God can work within the church (James 5:14-16).

ELDERS MUST BE COMMITTED TO PRAYER AND TO GOD'S WORD

Prayer is the lifeblood of the church. Nothing is more important than an effective prayer life founded upon the truth of God's Word. Prayer without truth is worthless. Knowing the Word is incomplete without a relationship with God. If an elder cannot be faithful in this fundamental issue, the church will have no power.

Time must be set aside for the leadership of the church to meet solely for prayer. Almost all churches turn prayer meetings into business meetings. Praying before a church committee or business meeting is critical; however, some time must be dedicated to prayer. Ten minutes of prayer followed by a discussion does not qualify. A church must be diligent to commit time for prayer alone. If a church does not have a prayer life within its leadership, it will not have the power of God. Even a dead church can grow numerically if it has something that creates interest. If a church is to follow a godly vision and fulfill its purpose, prayer must be an integral part of its priorities.

Equally important, an elder must be diligent to maintain an active personal prayer life. A leader who never comes before the throne of grace has removed himself from the power God has provided to every believer. Prayer must be God-focused and purpose-focused. The Bible tells us that whatever we ask according to God's will, He hears. If we are praying for God's will in our lives, we are drawing closer to Him. If we are seeking God's will in the church and in the lives of others, we will see effectual results on our knees.

It is impossible for an elder to pray in God's will without knowing the heart and mind of God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. We cannot know all that God is, but we must be diligent to know what He has revealed. It is impossible to love God without knowing Him and keeping His Word. It is impossible to know Him without knowing His Word (James 5:16b; Acts 6:1-4; Heb. 4:16; 12:4-6; John 14:15, 23, 24; 17:17; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:15; Ps. 119:160).



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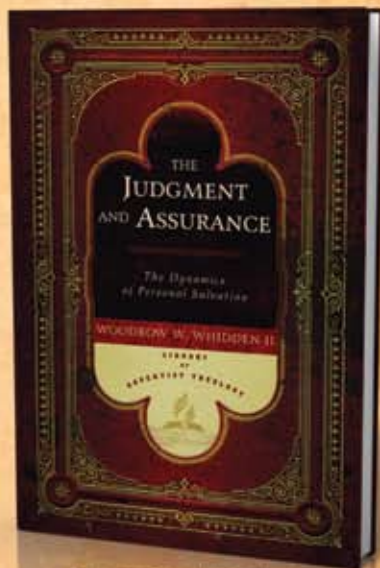
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Review & Herald

PRAYING WITHOUT PRETENSE

Matthew 6:5-8

Of all the privileges God's saints enjoy, perhaps the greatest is the privilege of prayer. To be able to go directly into the presence of the Lord is an honor beyond description (Heb. 4:16). To be able to speak to the God who created and controls the universe and to know that He has promised to hear us and answer us is a blessing too great to comprehend (Jer. 33:3; Isa. 65:24).

What a gift we have been given! What a privilege is ours, to be able to speak to God—knowing He will hear and answer, knowing that He has invited us to be involved with Him in the work He is doing! But, like anything else in life, we humans can even mess up something as profound and beautiful as prayer.

In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus exposes some of the problems in prayer that were rampant in His day. He condemns the pretentious praying of the "hypocrites," the religious elite of that day. Jesus tells us that their prayers will amount to nothing!

Today, I want to preach from these verses on the subject of "praying without pretense." The word *pretense* means "insincere or feigned behavior." Therefore, you and I need to learn how to pray without pretense. Let's look at what Jesus said about this matter.

I. SOME CAUTIONS REGARDING PUBLIC PRAYER (VERSE 5)

In this verse, Jesus refers to several problems. Let's take a quick look:

A. *Prayer had become a ritual.* The Jew prayed, but his prayers were scripted and the form was set. He either quoted verses from memory or read them. Of course, some Jews might have prayed in sincerity, but to most, prayer was simply a ritual.

B. *Predetermined prayers were formulated for every aspect of life.* For every conceivable life event, a prayer had been developed to deal with it. This led to prayer being something that could be recited from the head and not lifted up from the spirit.

C. *Prayer was limited to preset times and occasions.* Instead of praying when they felt led to or when a need arose, the Jews all prayed at set times.

D. *Long prayers were held in high regard.* The Jews believed that the longer and more elaborate the prayer, the more likely it was to

be heard by God. Jesus warned against this practice (Matt. 12:30).

E. *Many prayers were comprised of meaningless repetition.* The Jews were notorious for repeating phrases and adding adjectives to the name of God, thinking they would be heard by Him.

F. *They wanted to be seen and heard by others.* This is the worst offense of all. Rather than being a time of communion with God, prayer had degenerated into an attempt to impress others.

1. *Beware of wrong motives.* God tells us that prayer is not about being seen or heard by others; prayer is a time of personal communion with Him. Jesus was not forbidding public prayers, but He was telling men to beware of who their audience was.

2. *Beware of wrong methods.* The people Jesus called hypocrites were guilty of standing in public places (such as synagogues and busy street corners) and praying loud, long prayers. These people wanted to impress others with their piety and religiosity.

II. SOME ADVICE REGARDING PRIVATE PRAYER (VERSE 6)

In verse 6, Jesus tells them how they should pray. Why the warning and guidelines for prayer? Even in an activity like prayer, there is still the danger of misunderstanding it.

A. *Real prayer is a priority.* Jesus does not say, "If you pray." He says, "When you pray." God expects His people to pray. We are commanded to pray (Luke 18:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-8). Since we are told to pray, we must make prayer a priority. Communion with God should be the highest priority of each day. You will never grow in the Lord beyond the depth of your prayer life!

B. *Real prayer is personal.* Jesus tells His people to go into a private place to pray. There are things that need to be said in prayer that do not need to be said within earshot of others. When we pray in private, we have the freedom to declare our hearts to the Lord. We can humble ourselves before Him. We can be who we really are.

C. *Real prayer is precious.* When Jesus uses the phrase "pray to thy Father which is in secret," He is referring to the very dwelling place of God. Jesus tells us that when we enter into genuine prayer before the Lord, we

are able to enter the "secret place" with Him (Heb. 4:16). We do not need a human priest to stand in for us; through Jesus Christ, we have access to the throne of our Father in heaven.

III. SOME CONDITIONS REGARDING PERSONAL PRAYER (VERSES 7, 8)

A. *Refrain from repetition.* Pagans, as well as many of the Jews, believed that they would be heard by the Lord if they repeated their prayers or the same phrases over and over. An example of this is seen with the Baal prophets (1 Kings 18:26-29) and with the people of Ephesus (Acts 19:24-34). Jesus does not want His people to engage in meaningless repetition. We must remember that it is not the length of our prayers that matters, nor is it the eloquence of our words; even the content of our prayers is not an issue. What matters most is the condition and attitude of the person who is praying and the motive behind the prayer.

B. *Rest in your relationship.* Jesus reminds us that God is our "Father." As such, He knows what we need before we ask, and He is concerned that our needs be met (Matt. 6:24-34; Luke 12:32). Prayer gives God the opportunity to hear His children express their love for Him, their dependence on Him, and their faith in Him. Prayer affords God the opportunity to demonstrate His love, power, glory, providence, sovereignty, and provision for His children.

C. *Rely on His resources.* Since He is God and since He is our Father, we can go to Him in confidence and faith, believing that He has the power to answer us when we call upon Him. Faith in God is essential for prayers being answered (Heb. 11:6; Matt. 21:22; James 1:5-8).

CONCLUSION

I do not want to be a hypocrite in my prayer life! As God is my witness, I don't want to impress you with my prayers. I want to develop my private, personal prayer life until it is everything God would have it to be. I want to avoid pretense in my prayers.

How about you? Is your prayer life all it should be or has the Lord touched a sore spot through His Word? If we will come to the place where our prayer lives honor the Lord, He will bless us in a tremendous way.

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WHO MADE YOU MY JUDGE?

Matthew 7:1-5

Did you know that Matthew 7:1 is quickly replacing John 3:16 as the most memorized and quoted verse in the Bible? For instance, I am going to make a few statements. Let's see if you agree with me:

- Homosexuality is a sin. Homosexuals need to repent of this sin in order to be right with God.
- All pre-marital sex is wrong. Two people living together out of wedlock are living in adultery.
- Abortion is murder. Abortion is the killing of a human being, and doctors who perform abortions are (with rare exceptions) guilty of taking innocent human lives.

When these kinds of statements are made, people immediately trot out their favorite verse in the Bible: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Then they say something like this: "Who made you my judge?"

That brings up this question: Is it ever right to pass judgment on the actions of others? Be careful how you answer! Let's look at what Jesus has to say about this vital matter.

I. THERE IS A CAUTION TO BE HEEDED (VERSES 1, 2)

A. The word *judge* means "to pronounce judgment; expression of strong disapproval or harsh criticism." It refers to "acting the part of a judge; or to passing judgment on the words and deeds of another."

B. Jesus says "Judge not." Does this mean that all judgment is wrong? No! The Bible mentions some occasions where Christians are called on to exercise judgment over others.

- 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 12-23—Here, Paul judges a man guilty of fornication with his father's wife. He condemns the man and his actions and calls on the church to do the same.
- Matthew 7:6—We are told to judge some people as dogs and swine and as being unworthy of the precious treasures of the Word of God.
- Matthew 18:15-18—Sometimes the church must exercise discipline against a wayward member.

So, what is Jesus talking about in Matthew 7? The word *judge* means "to criticize, condemn, censor." Jesus is talking about looking at people and attempting to

judge their motives and their real spiritual condition based on what we see in their lives.

C. The person who sets himself up as the judge of others will himself face judgment someday. The critic forgets that he will also face God in judgment (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Next time you think about judging another person, consider these verses: James 3:1, 2; 2:13; Luke 6:37, 38. When you judge another person, you will eventually reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7).

D. Here is the bottom line: We have no right to judge and criticize the lives of those around us. I say this for several reasons:

1. Don't criticize because you don't know all the facts.
2. Don't criticize because we all fail God and sin (1 John 1:8-10).
3. Don't criticize because you do not know what's in the other person's heart.
4. Don't criticize because, when you do, you are attempting to assume the authority of God (Rom. 14:4; James 4:11, 12).
5. Don't criticize because one day you will face God in judgment yourself (Rom. 14:12).

II. THERE IS A CHALLENGE TO BE HEARD (VERSES 3, 4)

A. Here, Jesus speaks to the real issue: When we judge another person, we always do so from a warped perspective. Jesus uses the humorous image of a man with a log sticking out of his eye trying to remove a little splinter from another person's eye. The word *mote* refers to "a dry twig or a piece of chaff." The word *beam* refers to "a load-bearing beam in a house" or a log. Imagine how impossible that would be!

B. The problem with judging others is that we are often guilty of the same (or worse) sin ourselves (Rom. 2:1). Jesus is saying that the sin of the critic is greater than the sin of the person being judged. When we judge others, we reveal a heart that lacks genuine love for our neighbor (Matt. 22:39). An old poem by G. W. Cooke puts it this way: "There is so much good in the worst of us / And so much bad in the best of us / That it hardly behooves any of us / To talk about the rest of us."

III. THERE IS A COUNSEL TO BE HONORED (VERSE 5)

A. Jesus says that people who judge and criticize others are hypocrites! Then, He offers some valuable counsel to those who fall into this trap from time to time.


B. Jesus tells the would-be judge to first clean up his own life so that he will be in a better position to help his brother. When our own hearts are clean, we are told that we will be able to "see clearly."

1. We will see our own hearts more clearly. We will understand that we ourselves are sinners who are prone to fail.
2. We will see God more clearly and better understand that we will stand in judgment before Him someday.
3. We will more clearly see people's need for love, compassion, and help.

C. When our own hearts have been fixed and our own vision has been cleared up, we will be able to reach out in the right spirit to a fallen brother or a lost sinner. We will not approach them with a spirit of judgment, reproach, and condemnation; rather, we will come to them with a spirit of compassion and restoration. That is the way it should be done (Gal. 6:1-2).

D. It is not wrong to confront a person with his sin. In fact, it is wrong not to (Lev. 19:17; Prov. 27:5; Matt. 18:15; Luke 17:3). Refusing to confront a person about his or her sin is just as wrong as a doctor refusing to confront a patient about his or her sickness. If you want to understand what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, you must also understand what He said in John 7:24: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." That says it all! You cannot judge a tree by its leaves, but you can judge a tree by its fruit. You cannot judge a book by its cover, but you can judge a book by its contents. The key is not to judge by appearance.

CONCLUSION

Let's follow Jesus' advice: "Judge not, that you be not judged . . ." (Matt. 7:1). 

General Conference Ministerial Association

THE POOL AT BETHESDA

John 5:1-15

In Bible times, healing pools and shrines were very common. People believed that the pools or the gods could heal them, but true healing comes only from Jesus. Jesus is greater than gods and cultures, greater than fears and weakness, and greater than our sins—even our pride. Jesus takes us beyond our hurts and fears and truly liberates us.

Jesus performed many miracles. Let's take a closer look at the miracle He performed at the pool of Bethesda.

I. COMMENTARY ON KEY WORDS FROM VARIOUS VERSIONS

First, let's look at some key words and phrases from this passage:

- "Some time later." An unspecific time reference and adage, like saying "a few weeks later" or "a few months later."

- "Feast of the Jews." This could have been one of three feasts: Passover, Pentecost, or Booths (also called Tabernacles). Since this day occurred on the Sabbath, it was extra-special and holy. Jesus could not have picked a better day to challenge the pious frauds of His day (Lev. 23:34-43; Num. 29:12-38; Deut. 16:13-15).

- "There is." These words are in the present active tense, which suggests that at the time of John's writing, the pool was still open, and thus the destruction of Jerusalem had not yet occurred. How is that significant? It tells us that John's Gospel was written before 70 A.D.

- "Sheep Gate/Market." This was a gate in the wall of the city of Jerusalem used for sheep. Sheep can't be mixed with other animals because they get distracted and are then hard to herd.

- "Bethesda." This was a medicinal pool that people flocked to for healing. It was very popular, overflowing with people desperately seeking relief from their ills. The pool is located in the north part of the Temple Mount, near what was called Sheep Gate—just as the Bible described.

- "Invalid." In this case, the invalid was someone suffering from an unknown sickness that immobilized him and prevented him from walking well enough to get where he wanted or needed to be.

- "Thirty-eight years." It does not mean that this man lay at the pool for 38 years; rather, it tells us that he had been ill for 38 years.

- "Do you want to get well/made whole?"

This seems like a strange question, for who would not want to be healed or restored to a better place in life? However, you cannot help someone who does not want to be helped.

- "I have no one to help me." The man seemed to have the desire to be healed but not the means.

- "Water is stirred/moving." This refers to a local legend that an angel would come to stir the pool with "supernatural power" (See *The Desire of Ages*, 201).

- "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Miracles are mainly meant to prove Christ's claims and Lordship and His power to transform our lives. Even if Jesus heals us, we have to rise up and follow through (Isa. 35:1-7; John 11:43).

- "Cured/Healed." Although faith is usually required in cases like this one, it seems that faith was not required here. Rather, Jesus used this man's situation to show His position and power and allowed this man the grace he did not deserve and would later reject (Matt. 9:22; 13:58; Mark 6:5-6).

- "Law forbids." This refers to the religious regulations of the Pharisees, such as providing medical help that is not life-saving on the Sabbath. The Law said that the men were to keep the Sabbath and not do any work on that day.

- "Carry your mat." If the sick man had stayed on his mat, he would have held on to his past identity and problems. The mat would have become the chain to pull him back—back to despair, back to hopelessness.

- "Man who made me well." This was an evasion of gratitude and responsibility that led to a slippery slope of betrayal, which would lead to our Lord's conflict with the religious leaders and eventually to His crucifixion.

- "At the temple." The man went to the temple because the Law required anyone who had been healed to make an offering of thanksgiving. Jesus knew where to find the man who received this incredible gift of healing (2 Sam. 4:4; 1 Kings 14:4).

- "Stop sinning." This is a call not to return to whatever we have done in the past that has kept us in sin or oppressed or sick. Jesus wants us to succeed in life, and we do this by desiring to grow in His way, removing the distractions and problems that become barriers to hold us back.

- "Something worse." This refers to the consequences of sin with current relationships and also with eternity (John 9:3; 1 Cor. 11:28-32).

II. DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

True healing is all about the transforming work Christ does in us. Physical healing is an insignificant shadow to God's important redemptive work and how we incorporate Him in our lives.

How can someone not want to be healed? To continue to be sick is a powerful chain that holds us down. Sometimes, it is all we have and all we know, and we fear to venture into wellness. Of course, our willpower and desires cannot always help us. Nonetheless, whether we are in a spiritual encounter, a medical surgery, or in therapy, the desire to get well or grow is powerfully important.

People who are weak in faith or stagnant in their spiritual growth are that way (for the most part) because they do not want to receive divine help with their problems. They do not see God as the equipper and sustainer of their lives. They do not want to be helped out of their weakness; they either think they can do it on their own or have given up. They love their weakness; their helplessness is their comfort and identity. The result is stagnation and ignorance of the One who can bring them comfort. We have all been there at one time or another—I know I have been! But I also know that there is healing and power in Jesus Christ.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does this passage say or mean?
2. What is God telling me?
3. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. How can I be changed so I can learn and grow?
5. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?

FURTHER READING:

The Desire of Ages, chapter 21, "Bethesda and the Sanhedrin," 201-213.

WE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Matthew 5:13

In the Bible, God refers to His children in various ways: sheep, brethren, little ones, etc. When Jesus refers to us as “salt,” He is reminding us that we have the opportunity and the responsibility to be an influence in the world. It is interesting that Matthew 5:13 follows the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes, Jesus lists some qualities that ought to be present in every citizen of His kingdom. When we possess these characteristics, we will be a positive influence and make a difference in the world around us.

Light is an external element that enables one to see. Just as a glistening, limestone city high on a hillside cannot be hidden for the light coming from its walls, so the Christian who shines with the brilliance of the Lord Jesus cannot be hidden from the view of the world. In other words, your testimony will be used by God; those around you will see it and be touched by it.

I would like to focus on the idea of our being called “salt.” In this one verse, Jesus makes three statements that need to be considered and understood by every child of God today. Let’s look together at them as we consider the statement, “Ye are the salt of the earth.”

I. A DESCRIPTION TO ANALYZE

In general, people do not realize the importance of salt in maintaining the life and health of their bodies. An exact percentage of salt is always present in our bloodstream, and any great deviation from this amount can result in sickness or even death.

Salt is a sustainer of other life, too. For this reason, sea water will support many more organisms than fresh water. As a preservative, salt retards spoilage. Also, it is a splendid condiment, adding zest and flavor to our food.

Salt in the Scriptures is said to be:

- A symbol of a binding covenant (Lev. 2:13)
- A healing and cleansing aid (2 Kings 2:20, 21)
- An stimulant to the appetite (Job 6:6)
- A preventive of decay (Luke 14:34, 35)
- A promoter of peace (Mark 9:50)
- A stimulant to our testimony (Matt. 5:13)
- An evidence of grace (Col. 4:6)

We are called “salt” because of:

A. *Our preserving ability.* Salt wards off rot and decay. It is rubbed into meat in an effort to preserve it. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been saved by the preserving influence of just 10 righteous men (Gen. 19). I am convinced that the presence and the prayers of “salty” Christians have done more to preserve this world than anything else we could name.

B. *Our penetrating ability.* Salt will penetrate and infiltrate whatever it touches. It is an aggressive substance (Acts 8:1, 4; 17:6). I believe that we have been called by the Lord to be an active force in the world around us.

C. *Our purifying ability through the blood of Jesus.* Salt has remarkable cleansing abilities (2 Kings 2:19-22). Elisha added salt to the waters at Jericho. Christians have a purifying effect on the world around them because of the purifying power of Jesus’ blood.

D. *Our pleasing ability.* Salt blends and adds flavor, bringing out the best in food. In fact, some foods are better off uneaten if they don’t have salt! In the same way, Christians should flavor the world around them. As salt, we are to live our lives so that we bring out the best in those around us (Phil. 1:27).

E. *Our promoting ability.* Salt creates a thirst for water in those who are exposed to it. As salt, Christians have a wonderful opportunity to promote in the world a thirst for Jesus. Remember what the Lord told us? He said that out of our bellies would flow rivers of living water (John 7:37, 38). When we take the call of Jesus seriously and live right, look right, act right, talk right, worship right, dress right, etc., then we have the ability to create a thirst for Jesus in the hearts of those around us.

F. *Our proven ability.* Salt changes nearly everything it touches—food, ice, and so on. We are called to be thermostats, not thermometers, in the world around us. We are to be the instruments that God can use to implement change in a wicked world.

II. A DANGER TO AVOID

A. Salt was very valuable in the ancient world—in fact, the Roman Legions often paid their wages in salt. This payment was called a “salarium.” This is where the expression “not worth his salt” comes from.

B. In ancient times, it was possible for salt to lose its flavor. The salt in those days was far different from the salt we use today. Our salt is a chemical compound called chloride of sodium or sodium chloride.

C. It is possible for Christians to lose their saltiness as well. This happens to us when, just like salt in ancient times, we get too close to the world. When we allow our wells to be filled with the world’s junk, we are practically useless to the Lord and His kingdom’s work!


III. A DESTINY TO ABHOR

A. In ancient times, when salt lost its savor, it was taken out and cast into the footpaths. It was used much as gravel is used today. Its only purpose then was to kill the weeds that might grow in the road and for men to walk on to keep their sandals out of the mud. Literally, it was to be trodden under the foot of men.

B. Every Christian needs to understand that when we lose our saltiness and when we cease to function as salt in the world, we have become good for nothing. We can most certainly lose our usefulness to the Lord and His work. When this happens, we have become something to be trodden upon and treated with contempt. Ellen G. White says: “When Christians do not reveal Christ, of what value are they? Are they not like savorless salt, ‘good for nothing’? But when they reveal in their lives the saving principles of the truth, poor, sin-hardened souls are not left to perish in corruption. Good works are seen; for the living principles of righteousness cannot be hidden” (*The Review and Herald*, October 15, 1901).

CONCLUSION

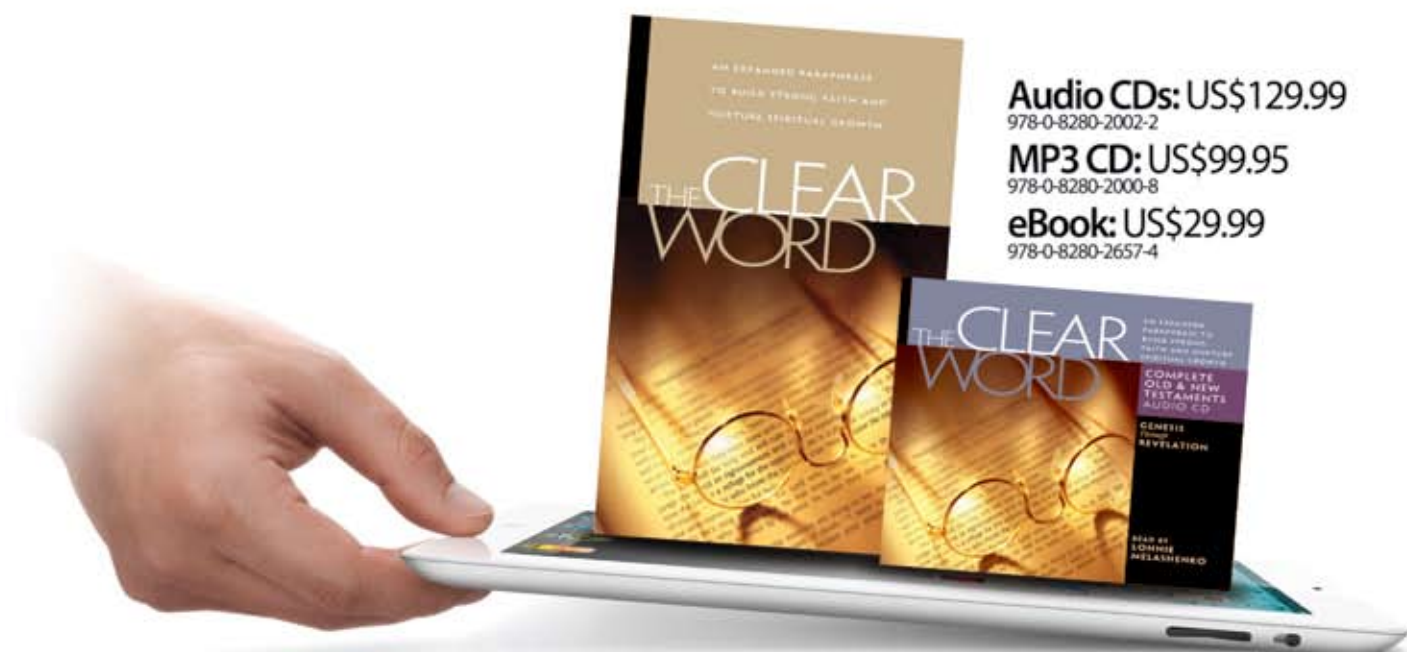
I don’t know about you, but I want my life to be useful to God. I want Him to be able to use my life to bring others to Him. I want to be a blessing and a light for the Lord.

There is a tremendous need today for every child of God to be all that God wants him or her to be. We need to be focused on the business of purifying, preserving, penetrating, pleasing, and promoting so that the Lord can use our lives and our testimonies for His glory. May God help us to be salty Christians! 

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CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH?

Conflict can develop in many areas of the church. Most conflicts fall into one of three categories: (1) conflict due to blatant sin among believers; (2) conflict with leadership; and (3) conflict between believers. Admittedly, many issues can cross over and involve two or more of these categories.

As described in 1 Corinthians 5, believers who blatantly sin pose a problem for the church. The church that does not deal with sin among the members will open the door to more problems. The church is not called to be judgmental of unbelievers; the church is expected to confront and restore believers who are unrepentant of sins such as those listed in 1 Corinthians 5:11: “Anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler.” Such individuals are to not be accepted by the church until they are willing to repent. Matthew 18:15-17 provides a concise procedure for the confrontation and restoration of a believer. Confrontation should be done carefully, meekly, and with the goal of restoration (Gal. 6:1). Churches that lovingly discipline sinners will curtail a great deal of conflict in the church.

At times a believer might not be content with the direction or actions of church leaders. This was the case early in the history of the church (Acts 6:1-7). Complaints about the lack of care of a certain group in the church were taken up with the leaders. The problem was remedied, and the church grew (verse 7). The early church used conflict to improve its ministry. However, when churches do not have a clear process for dealing with such concerns, people tend to create their own platforms. Individuals may begin polling others in the church, get involved in gossip, or even develop a block of “concerned people.” Leadership can help avoid this by acting as selfless, loving, servantlike shepherds rather than leaders who lord over others (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Those who are frustrated should respect their leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17), be slow to accuse them (1 Tim. 5:19), and speak the truth lovingly to them, not to others about them (Eph. 4:15). When it appears that a leader is not responding to a concern, a person should follow the pattern outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 to ensure that there is no confusion as to where each stands.

The Bible warns that people in the church may have difficulty with conflict. Some conflict is due to pride and selfishness (James 4:1-10). Some conflicts come about because of offenses that have not been forgiven (Matt. 18:15-35). God has told us to press toward peace (Rom. 12:18; Col. 3:12-15). It is the responsibility of each believer to seek to resolve conflict. Some basic steps toward resolution include:

1. Developing the proper heart attitude:
 - a. Meek (Gal. 6:1)
 - b. Humble (James 4:10)
 - c. Forgiving (Eph. 4:31, 32)
 - d. Patient (James 1:19, 20)
2. Evaluating your part in the conflict. You must remove the log from your own eye before helping others (Matt. 7:1-5).
3. Going to the individual (not to others) to voice your concern (Matt. 18:15). This is best done in love (Eph. 4:15), not just to get something off your chest. Making an accusation tends to encourage defensiveness; therefore, attack the problem instead of the person. This gives the person a better opportunity to clarify the situation or seek forgiveness for the offense.
4. Trying again (if the first attempt was unsuccessful) with another person or persons who can help with mediation (Matt. 18:16). Remember that your goal is not to win an argument; the goal is to win your fellow believer to reconciliation; therefore, choose people who can help you resolve the conflict.

Conflict is best handled when individuals prayerfully and humbly focus on loving others with the intent of restoring relationships. Most conflict issues should be manageable if the biblical principles outlined above are followed.



This article was taken and adapted from GotQuestion.org

If you have a question about church policy or procedure, let us know! Every quarter we address these issues in our “Question and Answer” column, and we would love to hear from you! E-mail us at eldersdigest@gc.adventist.org.

SPEAKING CLEARLY

A word cloud featuring various synonyms for the word 'encourage'. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with 'encourage' being the largest and most central word. Other prominent words include 'inspire', 'hearten', 'strengthen', 'revitalize', 'renew', 'awaken', 'soothe', 'invigorate', 'rejuvenate', 'rekindle', 'animate', 'cheer', 'refresh', 'enliven', 'galvanize', 'spur', 'reinvigorate', 'renew', 'awaken', 'soothe', 'invigorate', 'rejuvenate', 'rekindle', 'animate', 'cheer', 'refresh', 'enliven', 'galvanize', 'spur', 'reinvigorate'. The words are in various colors including shades of blue, green, yellow, and red.

**“WORDS HAVE
INCREDIBLE
POWER. THEY CAN
MAKE PEOPLE’S
HEARTS SOAR, OR
THEY CAN MAKE
PEOPLE’S HEARTS
SORE.”**

DR. MARDY GROTHE

Simple Speech and Clarity of Expression. The Lord wishes you to learn how to use the gospel net. Many need to learn this art. In order for you to be successful in your work, the meshes of your net—the application of the Scriptures—must be close, and the meaning easily discerned. Then make the most of drawing in the net. Come right to the point. Make your illustrations self-evident. However great a man's knowledge, it is of no avail unless he is able to communicate it to others. Let the pathos of your voice, its deep feeling make its impression on hearts. Urge your students to surrender themselves to God. . . .

Make your explanations clear; for I know that there are many who do not understand many of the things said to them. Let the Holy Spirit mold and fashion your speech, cleansing it from all dross. Speak as to little children, remembering that there are many well advanced in years who are but little children in understanding.

By earnest prayer and diligent effort we are to obtain a fitness for speaking. This fitness includes uttering every syl-

lable clearly, placing the force and emphasis where it belongs. Speak slowly. Many speak rapidly; hurrying one word after another so fast that the effect of what they say is lost. Into what you say put the spirit and life of Christ. . . . To those who hear, the gospel is made the power of God unto salvation. Present the gospel in its simplicity.

Preach Realities of the Message. On a certain occasion, when Betterton, the celebrated actor, was dining with Dr. Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop said to him, "Pray, Mr. Betterton, tell me why it is that you actors affect your audiences so powerfully by speaking of things imaginary." "My lord," replied Betterton, "with due submission to Your Grace, permit me to say that the reason is plain; it all lies in the power of enthusiasm. We on the stage speak of things imaginary as if they were real; and you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary."

This article is excerpted from the book *Evangelism*, pages 174-179, by Ellen G. White.

STATEMENT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OCCURS WHEN A PERSON OLDER OR STRONGER THAN THE CHILD USES HIS OR HER POWER, AUTHORITY, OR POSITION OF TRUST TO INVOLVE A CHILD IN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OR ACTIVITY. INCEST, A SPECIFIC FORM OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, IS DEFINED AS ANY SEXUAL ACTIVITY BETWEEN A CHILD AND A PARENT, A SIBLING, AN EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBER, OR A STEP/SURROGATE PARENT.

Sexual abusers may be men or women and may be of any age, nationality, or socio-economic background. They are often men who are married with children, have respectable jobs, and may be regular churchgoers. It is common for offenders to strongly deny their abusive behavior, to refuse to see their actions as a problem, and to rationalize their behavior or place blame on something or someone else. While it is true that many abusers exhibit deeply rooted insecurities and low self-esteem, these problems should never be accepted as an excuse for sexually abusing a child. Most authorities

agree that the real issue in child sexual abuse is more related to a desire for power and control than for sex.

When God created the human family, He began with a marriage between a man and a woman based on mutual love and trust. This relationship is still designed to provide the foundation for a stable, happy family in which the dignity, worth, and integrity of each family member is protected and upheld. Every child, whether male or female, is to be affirmed as a gift from God. Parents are given the privilege and responsibility of providing nurture, protection, and physical care for the children entrusted to them by God. Children should be able to honor, respect, and trust their parents and other family members without the risk of abuse.

The Bible condemns child sexual abuse in the strongest possible terms. It sees any attempt to confuse, blur, or denigrate personal, generational, or gender boundaries through sexually abusive behavior as an act of betrayal and a gross violation of personhood. It openly condemns abuses of power, authority, and responsibility because these strike at the very heart of the victims' deepest feelings about themselves, others, and God, and shatter their capacity to love and trust. Jesus used strong language to condemn the actions of anyone who, through word or deed, causes a child to stumble.

The Adventist Christian community is not immune from child sexual abuse. We believe that the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist faith require us to be actively involved in its prevention. We are also committed to spiritually assisting abused and abusive individuals and their families in their healing and recovery process, and to holding church professionals and church lay leaders accountable for maintaining



their personal behavior as is appropriate for persons in positions of spiritual leadership and trust.

AS A CHURCH WE BELIEVE OUR FAITH CALLS US TO:

1. Uphold the principles of Christ for family relationships in which the self-respect, dignity, and purity of children are recognized as divinely mandated rights.
2. Provide an atmosphere where children who have been abused can feel safe when reporting sexual abuse and can feel that someone will listen to them.
3. Become thoroughly informed about sexual abuse and its impact upon our own church community.
4. Help ministers and lay leaders to recognize the warning signs of child sexual abuse and know how to respond appropriately when abuse is suspected or a child reports being sexually abused.
5. Establish referral relationships with professional counselors and local sexual assault agencies who can, with their professional skills, assist abuse victims and their families.
6. Create guidelines/policies at the appropriate levels to assist church leaders in:
 - a. Endeavoring to treat with fairness persons accused of sexually abusing children,
 - b. Holding abusers accountable for their actions and administering appropriate discipline.
7. Support the education and enrichment of families and family members by:
 - a. Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.
 - b. Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.
 - c. Fostering Christlike relationships between males and females in the home and in the church.
8. Provide caring support and a faith-based redemptive ministry within the church community for abuse survivors and abusers while enabling them to access the available network of professional resources in the community.
9. Encourage the training of more family professionals to facilitate the healing and recovery process of abuse victims and perpetrators.

ED

The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Lev 18:20; 2 Sam 13:1-22; Matt 18:6-9; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 5:5-8.

This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on Tuesday, April 1, 1997, in Loma Linda, California, USA.

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WHAT'S YOUR DOMAIN?

YOU PROBABLY KNOW THAT A “DOMAIN” IS A CODE THAT APPEARS AT THE END OF A WEB ADDRESS—.NET, .ORG, .COM, AND SO ON. THE PURPOSE OF THIS CODE IS TO IDENTIFY THE NATURE OR PERSONALITY OF THE ORGANIZATION. FOR EXAMPLE, IF WE TALK ABOUT A GOVERNMENT WEB SITE, IT’S .GOV; A NON-PROFIT WOULD BE .ORG. THE PURPOSE OF THE ORGANIZATION IS REFLECTED IN ITS DOMAIN.

Use your imagination when deciding what domain would best describe your church’s mission, personality, and nature.

Churchname.TV

These churches exist for the purpose of performance. Every hair is in place, and every line is rehearsed. While there is nothing wrong with high-quality programming, the programs can become the main focus, and community outreach may be neglected.

Churchname.ORG

These churches focus primarily on protecting the organization to which they belong and its name; in other words, their name is everything. They are not involved in or corrupted by anything that is not sanctioned, funded, or promoted by the organization.

Churchname.MIL

These are dominant churches with a high emphasis on discipline and conformity, similar to a military regimen. People with different ideas, methods, or lifestyles are not welcome. These churches sever ties immediately with any recruits who fail.

Churchname.EDU

These churches are passionate about expounding on the latest theological trend, book, or emerging theory. They enjoy deep exegetical study, which sometimes reflects very little on the real life their members are experiencing.

Churchname.COM

Although the real meaning of this domain is “commercial,” I suggest that we use it instead to mean “community.” Churches with a .com domain have an outward focus. They dare to look outside their walls. They hold three guiding principles:



1. Community—They seek to understand who belongs to the community that surrounds them. They ask themselves the following questions:

- a. What are their needs?
- b. What are their dreams?
- c. What are their hurts?

2. Organization—They are organized not merely to keep the programs going or to stay occupied; they discover and use their gifts to serve.

3. Mission—It is the bridge that connects the community with the organization. They are not just interested in making healthy sinners; they strive to make a connection between spiritual and felt needs.

What is your domain name?

ED

Adapted from *Best Practice*, April 27, 2011.

Juan Miguel Pacheco writes from the Oregon Conference, USA.

UNHOOKING FROM HABITS THAT HURT

Every so often I receive an email or a phone call from someone who has questions about whether or not alcohol and caffeine are truly harmful substances that warrant our abstinence. With studies suggesting the benefits of wine, coffee, or dark chocolate, many wonder whether the Seventh-day Adventist Church should rethink its teaching of abstinence from harmful substances and focus instead on moderation. It is easy sometimes to find the evidence when we want to support our own preferences and desires, not realizing that we may be opening ourselves to being “hooked” onto something that may lead to brokenness and pain.

It is easy for us to deny the fact that some church members, leaders, and pastors have addictions. We forget that without Christ, we are all addicted to sin, and our enemy is trying to hook us onto habits that not only harm our health but also impair our thinking process, our emotions, and our relationships with people and with God.

But it is not easy to talk about addiction. We don’t want to believe that many who attend services regularly may be hooked to practices and behaviors that will destroy their bodies, damage their ability to discern good from evil, and result in illness and brokenness.

The good news is that there is hope. God has lovingly given us the road map to recovery. In Christ, we have all we need not only to discern what choices are best for our well-being but also to get the power and strength to become unhooked from these habits that may seem innocent and “beneficial” but, in fact, eat away at our spiritual and mental vigor.

As spiritual leaders, elders need to be realistic about the issue of addiction and become educated in the process of recovery from it. We are talking not only about “high-profile” addictions like smoking, tobacco, or drugs, but also about pornography, gambling, the Internet, and food. Unless our leaders understand how and why people become addicted and how the process of recovery works, many individuals and homes will remain broken, drifting farther away from Jesus.

Does your church care about this issue? Does it have a ministry in place that can help people who are seeking the path of recovery? Adventist Recovery Ministries (ARMin)



exists to address this need. This ministry aims to provide training and resources for church leaders and members who care about this issue. Some of its resources include:

- A new 12-step resource called *Journey to Wholeness*, available for churches who would like to initiate a support group or small group focusing on the path to recovery.
- A free newsletter called *Journey to Life*, which educates people about this very important need and is available in English, Spanish, and French.

For more information about this ministry and these resources, visit www.adventistrecoveryministries.org.

As we continue to focus on Revival and Reformation, the Holy Spirit calls us to advance in our own journey to wholeness. As we do, we will be better equipped to meet the needs of the individuals, families, and communities around us who are crying for a way to be free and unhooked from those things that hurt them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The path from addiction to recovery can be challenging at times, but the process is ultimately freeing. We must follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance to discern when to abstain and when to use moderation.

Christ “has shown to us the path of Life” (Ps. 16:11). Let us walk in it as we recover from our brokenness and destructive habits. And let us also invite others to join us on this journey to wholeness and become better equipped to help them along the way. In Christ we are healed.



Katia Reinert is director of the Health Ministries Department for the North American Division.

KEEPING “YOUR COOL” DURING HOT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

THERE’S A RIGHT WAY AND A WRONG WAY TO HANDLE FRICTION

If you’re involved in church committee work as a congregational leader (as I am) and have experienced times of tension when discussing ideas and making decisions, this article is for you.

Throughout my years of serving on church committees I’ve learned that where several people are working together for a period of time, differences will arise, factions will form, and political dynamics will come into play. Unfortunately, this problem is nothing new; these differing factions and political dynamics occurred in the early Christian church (see Acts 15), so we shouldn’t be surprised to see them manifest in our generation as well. Much like gravity, they are inevitable and are capable of creating undesirable consequences. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, however, they may be harnessed to bring about positive goals and outcomes.

NOT ALL BAD

Committee member differences and the friction and tension they bring with them can actually be helpful. They challenge members to stay on their toes, to keep thinking about their values, to attempt to explain their position to others, and sometimes to grow in their understanding of God’s ideal. Committee decisions made in this climate are examined from all perspectives and often evidence godly wisdom for having gone through a process of prayerful and thorough consideration rather than approval by assumption.

If we can avoid taking the cross fire between factions too seriously or personally, we may be able to see the greater good that can come to the group over time: competition over ideas can lead ultimately to a stronger organization. We may then find the courage to conquer the feelings of dismay and distress that can result if these political debates simmer on or at times boil over into open conflict, and begin to harness the potential benefits of disagreements.

Some individuals feel so distressed and uncomfortable when there is disagreement that they can misidentify the situation as a sinful lack of unity, erroneously believing that if we were all true believers we would not experience conflicting opinions.

Consider again the early Christian church and notice the serious disagreements among eyewitnesses of Christ’s ministry and life—all of whom were true believers. Was this a fatal failure on the part of the early church? No; their disagreements were apparently discussed together in an animated but civil enough manner, strategies were agreed upon, and functional unity was preserved. Instead of failure, perhaps a more insightful interpretation is that these differences of opinion were manifestations of the inevitable competition for ideas in an open society with growing and diverse members, and that they brought about a useful pattern of growth that benefited the early church and even the church today. Ellen G. White spoke of this dynamic as a positive phenomenon.* Short of a miraculous intervention, such as Peter’s rooftop vision, prayerfully guided vigorous debate could be one of the ways that God inserts His agenda and values into our minds.

SKILLFUL GUIDANCE IS KEY

A battle of ideas is commonplace and ongoing, but there are critical junctures in a group’s history during which this rivalry could conceivably result in great harm to the organization. The skill with which leaders and members handle the tension is key to limiting the damage and maximizing the benefits. The godly wisdom of church leaders in the past has often guided various frictions in such a way that disaster was avoided, and a healthier church organization usually emerged.

Handled appropriately, internal church disagreements may mirror those experienced in many marriages. When disagreements are managed in a respectful, trustful, and loving



manner, husbands and wives come to understand each other better and are able to form a more perfect, lasting, and higher-functioning union.

Here are some points of spiritual wisdom that can be helpful in working through committee disagreements and achieving mutual benefits:

- Avoid demonizing others who hold a different point of view from yours through not only your choice of words and the tone you use to express them, but your thoughts as well.
- Treat others whose opinions differ from yours as legitimate members of the organization.
- Attempt to view things from various perspectives in order to understand better the arguments under consideration; in other words, try to see things through the eyes of others.
- Identify and affirm consensus achieved on relevant points; this solidifies at least some commonalities on which to build trust and respect among participants.
- Isolate the elements of a disagreement that actually differ and are not simply different words for the same ideas. After having isolated the real differences in context, evaluate all sides of the issue together to see if there is movement toward consensus.
- When it doesn't violate your Bible-informed and Spirit-guided conscience, explore compromise positions, a third solution. Remember that although compromise is not comfortable, discomfort in itself is not a sin.
- Expect all involved to follow agreed-upon processes of decision-making, such as consulting criterion authorities (e.g., the Bible, Ellen G. White, the *SDA Church Manual*, etc.) and using standard discussion procedures (e.g., in more formal discussions, *Robert's Rules of Order* or other debating rules). This may seem silly to some, but such rules encourage civility and fairness of discussion, and help to avoid the tendency to allow the loudest voices to prevail.

- If consensus is not feasible, then agree to disagree and continue to respect one another.

- When necessary, learn to live graciously and charitably with unanswered questions and without consensus.

STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

Although it's appealing to imagine an organization that never has conflict, such religious organizations usually are found to have a powerful, central, controlling authority that simply does not allow disagreements. These groups do not function as open societies and usually do not stand the test of time (consider the horrific example of Jim Jones in Guyana). In free societies with large memberships over long time periods, differences of opinion are an inescapable and fully human phenomenon, having the potential of being a force for good if handled wisely.

We shouldn't be surprised or dismayed by the existence of tensions and disagreements in committee meetings; they are nothing new. But let's strive to handle them wisely. Sometimes we should just take a deep breath, open our hearts in prayer, ask for Jesus' agape love for those who don't see things the way we do, receive from God His promised wisdom that seeks the good in every situation, and imitate the humility of Christ. Surely God would be honored in this.

By His grace, our disagreements can result in wiser decisions and church committees that more fully can fulfill their function and calling.



* See Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 26, 1892.

Robin Erwin is an elder in his local Seventh-day Adventist church in Buffalo, New York. He has served as a member and chair of numerous church, conference, and workplace committees. This article was originally published in the March 8, 2012 issue of the *Adventist Review*. Used by permission.

“HOW TO BE A GOOD FARMER—EVEN IN A CITY: CREATING A COMMUNITY-BASED MINISTRY” APPEARED IN THE JANUARY – MARCH 2011 *ELDER’S DIGEST*. THIS ARTICLE PROPOSED “TEN FARMING COMMANDMENTS” WHICH SYSTEMATIZED JESUS’ MINISTRY METHOD INTO 10 INTENTIONAL ACTION STEPS FOR OUR TIME,¹ AND SERVED AS AN INTRODUCTION TO A SERIES OF *ELDER’S DIGEST* ARTICLES IN THE COMING MONTHS THAT WILL UNPACK THESE 10 COMMANDMENTS IN MORE DETAIL.² BELOW IS THE THIRD IN THE SERIES. THIS ARTICLE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOURTH AND FIFTH “FARMING COMMANDMENTS.”

HELP, LORD! I’VE BEEN ASKED TO PLANT A CHURCH!

A local conference asked Frank, a young church leader, to plant a church in a section of a large city that had virtually no Adventist presence. This was a new thing for him, and he prayerfully considered what steps he would take to carry out this assignment. First, he consulted a map and determined the boundaries of that section of the city. Wanting to know more about the people he was planning to serve, he visited the local library to research demographic information about them. He was able to discover the area’s major cultural groups, average income, religious affiliations, etc. Then he parked his car in the busiest part of the neighborhood and began going from business to business asking questions about life in that area. He visited with political, business, and social agency leaders, asking questions about the greatest needs in that community. He made friends with some of the local residents, who invited him to join the local Rotary club.³ In that setting he discovered other community leaders who opened the way to rent the annex of a local Presbyterian church. Rotary Club members provided seed money to buy paint and cleaning supplies to refurbish the annex to use for community services. Interviews with community leaders indicated that health was an important felt need in the community. Therefore, Frank brought together a team of volunteers who ran in the annex various health screening programs and follow-up meetings for community residents. Those who benefited from the screenings and programs paid a modest fee, which helped pay the expenses. Almost immediately a branch Sabbath school was started and some of the residents began to attend. This community-based

ministry eventually spawned a church that currently has 140 members—an example of planting a ministry first, and growing a church out of that ministry. When you plant a ministry first, meeting real needs in the community, the resulting church will likely be more focused on ministry/outreach and not just on the church itself.

Frank’s true story introduces more steps in our “Farming Commandments” series. This time, we will explore ways to carry out “Farming Commandments” four and five.

4. THOU SHALT CHOOSE AND NARROW DOWN THY TERRITORY.

After you have determined approximately where to focus your ministry efforts, how do you decide the boundaries of your target territory? First, get a good map that shows the larger region and specific neighborhood(s) where you will focus your ministry. Look for a map that also is marked with boundaries of towns, cities, counties, and postal codes (e.g.



ZIP Codes in USA). Such maps can be found in some bookstores, city/regional planning departments, etc. Mark on the map the location of your church or proposed ministry. Also indicate where other Adventist churches and institutions are located. Ask yourself what kind of neighborhood is your target area. Is it in the center of a large city, an old industrial area, in a suburb, in a small town, or a rural area? To define your ministry area draw a circle on your map that is based on the distance the people are likely to commute to your community outreach events. Research shows that people will commute only 15 minutes at first to visit a new church. Use the location of your building/church as the center point. (1) If your building/center of operations is in an urban community, this circle should only be about three miles out from this building/center. In a more densely populated urban community—maybe only 20 blocks. (2) If your building/center of operations is in a suburban community, draw a circle nine miles out from the center. (3) If your building/center of operations is in a small town or rural area, this circle should be about 15 miles out from the building/center.

Once you have drawn the circle on your map, notice what postal codes/Zip Codes are largely in the circle. If the line runs through the middle of a Zip Code/Postal Code, you will have to use your judgment. For example, the Zip Code may cover a large area, but only a small portion may have lots of streets. If this densely populated area is within your circle, include all that Zip Code/Postal Code as part of your territory.⁴ You also should factor in the location of other Adventist Churches and institutions when finalizing on your territorial boundaries. Once you have determined the Zip Codes/Postal Codes that are in your territory, you are ready to carry out “Farming Commandment” number five:

5. THOU SHALT DO A DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS ON THE CHOSEN TERRITORY.

Demographics are about documenting people. When Frank was laying the groundwork for his church-planting project, there were so many unknowns. Since he wanted his connections with and ministry to the community to be relevant, he was wondering: How many people live here? How many households and what kinds? What is their median age? What about gender, ethnicity and immigration? How do people make a living? What is the economic situation of the people? How much poverty? How much education do they have? What kind of houses do they live in? What religions are they affiliated with? Frank’s trip to the library provided him with information available at that time. Now demographics are much more accessible and detailed. In addition to the census or official statistics provided by your national government, or using Google or Yahoo to research your target area, websites such as the following are helpful:

www.statoids.com (This website is good for international demographics).

www.epodunk.com (Useful within the United States).

www.sdacmm.org (This is the website for the Center for Metropolitan Ministry [CMM]. If your territory is in the USA or in other countries, you can order from CMM detailed printed demographics and maps analyses based on the Zip Codes or postal codes of your chosen territory).

www.Link2Lead.com (Information about Percept, a resource that specializes in supplying churches with demographics and other resources for planning within their mission context).

So, there you have it: two more important steps in planting a relevant ministry in your community. If your Social Action Leadership Team (SALT)⁵ follows these steps, they will be off to a good start in positioning your church for effective Gospel Farming. As elders, you have a major role in supporting this intentional and crucial process of preparing the soil of your target community to receive the seeds of the Gospel.



The next article in this series will discuss the sixth and seventh “Farming Commandments.”

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¹ The 10 Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus’ ministry method and pray for...; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a **Social Action Leadership Team (SALT)**; (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them; (8) Thou shalt earn “Social Capital;” (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the resources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate.... AND an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to *Reap* where thou hast farmed and *keep* what thou doest reap (disciple—preserve the harvest)!

² So far, these follow-up articles have appeared in *Elder’s Digest*: (1) “Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand...” (Oct.-Dec. 2011); and (2) “Our Community Does Not Know Us...” (Jan.-March 2012). To access these articles online, go to www.sabbath-schoolpersonalministries.org/acsi. Click on “Articles & Media.” To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on “Resources” and “ACSI Curriculum.”

³ Go to www.rotary.org for more information.

⁴ Adapted from Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*, Version 2, (Lincoln, Nebraska: Center for Creative Ministry, 2004), 29-31.

⁵ See “Farming Commandment” number three. SALT is a team of four to six members in your church who will help implement the 10 Farming Commandments in your community, launching your current church into relevant community-based ministry—or planting a new church.

Three Days to Kathmandu

To get to one of his jobs, Nurpu Lama must travel for three days. That's in the dry season; when the rains begin, the journey can stretch to six days—one way. Many of Adventist World Radio's program producers work within very limited resources, but Lama's routine requires particular tenacity.

Lama is one of AWR's newest producers. He lives in Tibet, a mountainous province in China with no organized Seventh-day Adventist Church structure and very few church members.

He received training from AWR's long-time producers and technicians in the neighboring country of Nepal, where he learned the equipment and voice announcing skills. The Nepali team provides him with a supply of their scripts, which he translates by hand and contextualizes for the Tibetan people. He must travel back to the AWR Nepal studio to record his programs, an exhausting trip that involves a long walk (from Lama's hillside home to a larger town), a bus ride, a full-day walk to the Nepali border, and a day-long bus ride to Kathmandu.

The rest of Lama's life is not easy either. Although his home does have electricity and he is able to use the

laptop computer provided by AWR to access e-mail, he must hike down the mountainside to a lower village to visit an Internet café. His days are very full as he raises some animals and food for his family, and also works as a Gospel Outreach pioneer.

"After a two-year search for a producer, we are thrilled to have started our first shortwave programs in Tibetan," says AWR president Dowell Chow. "Nurpu's voice can be heard across Tibet, as well as in nearby countries, through one of the best shortwave signals on our entire schedule. Tibetan listeners worldwide can also access the programs online, through awr.org and iTunes."

AWR is working to make its shortwave signals in Asia even better by undertaking a multi-million-dollar upgrade of its shortwave station on the Pacific island of Guam. When that is completed, listeners in more key countries will simultaneously receive programs in their own languages during prime-listening times. For more on this project, please see awr.org.

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– Listener in Asia

THE HEARTBEAT OF THE BELIEVER



Recently I was talking to a group of church leaders and started my devotional thought by asking the question, "What is worship?" People equated it with the sermon, evangelism, revival, truth, praise, and adoration. Yet no one mentioned that it's about God, about making a commitment with Him, and giving Him worth, honor, and glory.

Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. Instead of being passive, it's participative, not simply a mood or feeling, but a declaration of our awe and wonder. It's attributing worth to God, in giving, ministry, and praise.

Worship is about God showing up and breaking through inside of us by His presence and grace. At its core, it's about being so moved by the majesty of God that we kneel down in obedience and devotion, and rise up in a holy life.

The health and vitality of the believer rises and falls on making adoration the center of their experience. According to Revelation 14:6-12, it is the commemoration of creation and celebration of the redemption. It is the believer's response to the mercy and goodness of God in the act of adoration, thanksgiving, and submission. We worship because of who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do through His Son and His Spirit.

A par excellence model on the meaning of true worship is found in the life of Isaiah. We discover that true worship takes place when believers seek the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind. Isaiah went into the temple seeking the Lord, and was rewarded by seeing His glory. Worship always focuses on God (Is. 6:1).

We must enter into worship not so much to have our needs met, but to have an encounter with God. Thus the most common mistake Christians make in worship today is seeking an experience for an hour a week rather than seeking God. In true worship we are the performers, the pastors and worship leaders are the directors, and God is the audience.

Second, true worship always begins with an awareness of God's holiness. "And one [seraphim] cried to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory'" (Is. 6:3 NKJV). In recent years, we have emphasized the personal nature of God, His love and joy, to such a degree that we've forgotten that our God is also a Holy and Awesome God. We have almost made Him into a "little buddy." We need a balance in our worship between the holiness of God and a loving personal God. When Moses was aware of God's presence in the burning bush, he was afraid. When we are aware of the presence of God, we become filled with awe, reverence, and even fear (see Hebrews 12:28).

Third, true worship also helps us understand ourselves, our shortcomings, and need to seek God's forgiveness. After having encountering a holy God, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips . . ." You cannot come into the presence of God without becoming aware of His holiness and our own ungodliness. Our confession always results in forgiveness. When Isaiah senses God's holiness it compels him to acknowledge his own sinfulness and to confess. That confession leads to the free forgiveness of sins. As a symbolic gesture the angel takes a hot coal and touches the lips of the prophet to declare his sins forgiven.

Through worship we experience forgiveness. We need to hear the same message the Prophet Isaiah heard: "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Is. 6:7, NIV).

Finally, worship motivates us to live a holy and righteous life filled with service, ministry and blessings.

When Isaiah hears God saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah is moved and responds, "Here am I! Send me." We cannot enter into the worship of the Almighty, without departing into the world to serve and make a difference.



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