

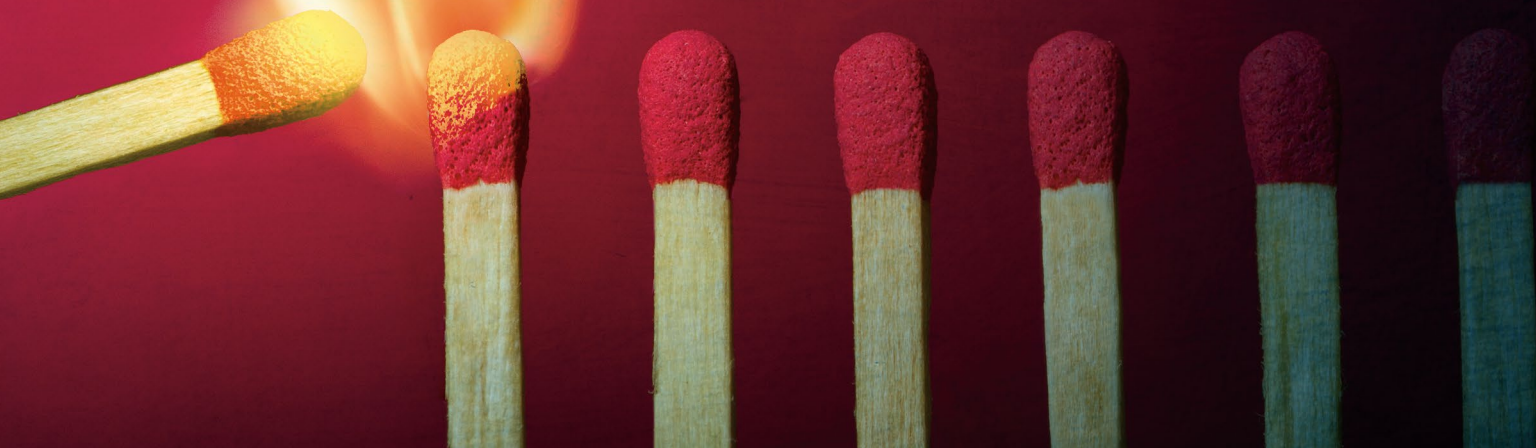
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06 Seven witnessing styles to attract people to Christ

David Hartman

Learn how Christian witnessing means giving the fish the bait they like, not the bait you like.

10 The making of a Christian leader

Clinton A. Valley

Leadership is not about politics, popularity, or power. Neither is it about position. How about we start with prayer?

14 Divine appointments

S. Joseph Kidder

Disappointments, frustrations, and interruptions are often God's way of saying, "One of My children needs you just now."

18 Missional versus attractional: An argument the church cannot afford

Jesse Wilson

When it comes to saving souls, there should be no debate about the method to be used—read on!

21 The Great Commission

Victor Jaeger

Preparing, sowing, and reaping. If it worked for a church like theirs, it can work for a church like yours.

24 What the church can learn from the age of Amazon

Chad Stuart

Can the church learn anything from the business world about reaching more "customers"? Read it—from one of the best.

04 Letters

05 Editorial

17 Revival and Reformation

27 Resources

28 Dateline

30 Practical Pointers

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We need to treat the youth not as the church of tomorrow but as the church of today. The Adventist church was founded by young people and the youth should be a critical hub (not just a token) of the church.

Church of today

Now this (“Winning with Young People: Five Things Every Pastor Should Know Do,” June 2018 issue) is a great article! Talk about real advice from a pastor who is really connecting with the youth!

—Eric Herve Jean-Baptiste, web response

Great article, Pastor Pako. We need to treat the youth not as the church of tomorrow but as the church of today. The Adventist church was founded by young people and the youth should be a critical hub (not just a token) of the church. The challenge is that many older people do not trust the youth with responsibility. Just look at the preaching roster of the average local church.

—Almasarira, web response

Very impressive, Pastor Pako! More grace to you.

—Stanton A. Witherspoon, web response

Unique message?

I am writing because I have just received your magazine today (April 2018 issue), and I was quite intrigued as to where you would be going with the theme of the magazine proclaimed on the front of it: “Distinctly Adventist.” But having looked through the magazine, I was unable to find anything that really connected to that particular theme, per se. Can you help direct me? Have I missed something (I did note the word “distinctive” in the Editorial, but that was about it)? Thanks for any help you might give me in this. Lord bless.

—Jerry Smith, pastor in South England Conference

Response from the editors

Historically, the cover of *Ministry* has been linked just to the editorial and the lead article. In this case, the *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary* lead article was selected as being distinctly Adventist.

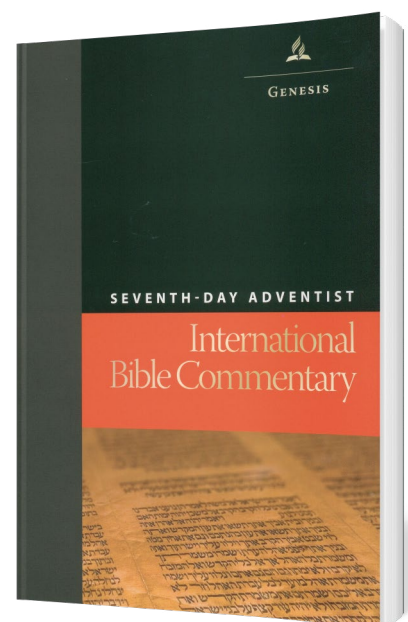
But we also chose to add other articles with a distinctly Adventist flavor, such as those concerning the year-day principle, the relationship between Ellen G. White and H. M. S. Richards, the relationship between Ellen G. White and J. N. Andrews, and leadership succession from the Bible and Ellen G. White writings. We would be honored to receive from you some topics of interest and an article in your area of passion, 2,000–2,500 words. We hope to hear from you!

The new *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Ministry, April 2018) sounds very exciting. So *Genesis* is now available. How does one get the *Genesis* commentary?

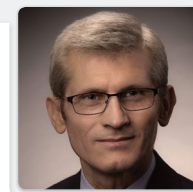
—Ovidiu Radulescu, by email

Response from the SDAIBC team

Thank you for your question, Ovidiu. You can purchase the new commentary on *Genesis* at the Adventist Book Center or online at adventistbookcenter.com/sda-international-bible-commentary-genesis.html. Blessings.



Pavel Goia, DMin (ABD), is editor of *Ministry*.



People, programs—and prayer

I asked my father one day what methods I should use to develop my business and be successful. He answered, “Methods are good and necessary, but without God, all is worthless rubbish. You need serious prayer to seek God’s plan, leading, and presence, and then you will be successful.”

Years later I asked him what programs and strategies to use to make a church grow and be healthy. He answered “Son, programs are good and necessary; we need to be organized. But they are all rubbish, worthless, without God. It is ‘not by strength nor by power, but by My Spirit’ says the Lord of All” [Zech. 4:6, NLV]. When we receive this promise, we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes when we are committed to prayer. Prayer is the tree of life.”

The apostle Paul counted all worldly things rubbish (Phil. 3:8, NKJV). The word *rubbish* used here, in Greek, is σκύβαλον—*skubalon*, which means “refuse, excrement of animals, rubbish, worthless.” However, through dedicated prayer they become useful compost, by God’s grace.

I took my father’s advice, and, praise God, the results were better than I could imagine. To discover practical examples of how prayer can change a church, look in next month’s issue.

There are times in history when prayer has changed great crowds of people, even influencing whole nations. Moses’ prayer saved Israel (Exod. 32). Jehoshaphat’s prayer gave Israel victory over its enemies (2 Chron. 20). Another instance where prayer made a great impact is the story of Jeremiah Lanphier.

In 1857 Jeremiah Lanphier invited people to pray. Initially, just a few

answered, but the number slowly increased. When the stock market crashed, tens of thousands started to attend the meetings. Lloyd Stillely says that “in 1858 this prayer movement leaped to every major city in America. . . . Estimates are that a million Americans out of a population of 30 million at that time were converted in less than two years. And it all started with prayer, and it was based on prayer.”¹

In the book of Acts, the disciples followed Jesus’ command to pray, wait for the Holy Spirit, and then go and work (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). About 120 disciples were in the upper room praying with dedication without ceasing. The Bible says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer” (Acts 1:14, NKJV). It seems that prayer was the means God used to transform them and the church; to bring unity, commitment to God’s work, and power for the mission Jesus gave them and thus accomplish things otherwise impossible and beyond their imagination.

Human power, wisdom, and methods alone cannot do God’s work. It takes God’s power to do God’s work, and that power comes through real, dedicated prayer. Ellen G. White underlines that “a revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.” Then she says, “A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer.”²

Most churches often struggle with growth due to problems like internal tensions, lack of involvement, lack of finances, and a lack of power and joy. It is one thing to believe in prayer, to agree with it, and something entirely different to really be about prayer—to make it the heart of both the church

I’m glad I listened to my father on earth, and I’m glad I listened to my Father above.

and the individual. “We may be assured of this—the secret of all failure is our failure in secret prayer.”³

Can meaningful growth (spiritual and numerical) really be accomplished? If so, how? Most programs, regardless of how thorough, may help a church here and there, yet most of the time these programs do not make much difference. Often church members get tired of programs and lose faith that anything can or will change the church. Sustainable fruitful programs function only in the presence of dedicated prayer.

I’m glad I listened to my father on earth, and I’m glad I listened to my Father above. This month, we are sharing methods to help pastors equip church members to witness wherever God places them. As we read each article, may we bathe these methods in prayer, humbly and diligently praying for God to reveal how best to reach the world around us. ☞

- 1 Lloyd Stillely, “Sermon: The Priority of Praying Together—Acts 6,” LifeWay, Jan. 27, 2014, lifeway.com/Article/sermon-when-the-church-prays-the-priority-of-praying-together-acts-6-1-5.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 121.
- 3 An Unknown Christian, *The Kneeling Christian: A Timeless Classic on Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2013), 6.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.

David Hartman, DMin, at the time of writing, was the ministerial and evangelism director for the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He recently has become a professor in the school of religion at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States.



Seven witnessing styles to attract people to Christ

My wife, Judi, and I lived in a rental home in the Northpointe subdivision in Florida, United States, while we awaited the construction of our new home across the causeway in Pace, Florida. The week before the big move, we had a garage sale to discard our unwanted belongings. As I sat in a lawn chair in the driveway watching people pull up to the curb and rummage through our stuff, it dawned on me that many of these people were our own neighbors, but I did not even know their names. That is when God gently implored, “David, you’ve lived in this neighborhood for twelve months. You’ve driven past these homes hundreds of times to conduct preaching services and board meetings, visit parishioners, and give Bible studies across town, but not once have you walked across the property line to get acquainted with your neighbors!” Right then and there I confessed, “God, You’re right. Please give me another chance. Show me how to be a better witness for You.”

Christians’ reluctance to witness

Just before Jesus ascended to the Father, He challenged His church to “‘go and make disciples’” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). This work of leading others to Jesus is the highest priority of Christ’s followers. Yet, let’s be candid; it is one

of the hardest things God ever asks us to do. Most of us would rather run a marathon than cross the street to greet our neighbor. We are plagued with feelings of fear and inadequacy and with the realities of being too busy. This is true not only for church members but also for pastors. According to one study by Thom Rainer, 53 percent of pastors have made no evangelistic effort to share the gospel with unbelievers during the past six months.¹ It is easy to become sidetracked by the “tyranny of the urgent” and ignore the evangelistic mandate of Christ. The reality is, pastors must first model the evangelistic value that lost people matter to God before their churches will ever emulate it.² As Alvin Reid puts it, “Your church collectively will not be more evangelistic than you are personally.”³

Discovering seven witnessing styles

When I was in Pensacola, Florida, I used to stroll along the fishing pier and watch the people fish. It was interesting to note that they used different kinds of bait to catch different kinds of fish. You involve more members with a multidimensional evangelistic approach because each member uses a different witnessing approach. And you reach more people because different people are better attracted to different styles. This loaded “tackle box” creates a win-win

situation. It involves more members and “catches” more people for Jesus Christ.

I will never forget one of my first doctor of ministry assignments. Our professor, Dr. Joseph Kidder, instructed us to take our Bibles, scan through the book of Acts, and look for the different methods of evangelism that were used by the early Christian church. I was a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist who grew up as a preacher’s kid (PK). I knew this message backward and forward. My stereotypical view of evangelism was public reaping meetings by a professional evangelist, with the four beasts on the screen. But we prayerfully made up our individual lists and then compiled our collective list on the whiteboard, filling the board with more than 40 evangelistic methods. Though Ellen White had attested that “different methods are to be employed to save different ones,”⁴ this exercise was a great eye-opener for me. I subsequently grouped the methods into seven witnessing styles:⁵

- 1. Prayer**—Interceding for the salvation of friends, family, and work associates.
- 2. Friendship**—Forming relational bridges to communicate the gospel in a low-key, nonthreatening way.
- 3. Service**—Demonstrating God’s love by doing practical acts of service with no strings attached.

4. **Testimony**—Relaying from one's own personal experience the great things God has done.
5. **Invitation**—Inviting family, friends, and acquaintances to social events, service projects, culturally relevant seminars, or spiritual events where Jesus and His gospel and truth are introduced.
6. **Conversation**—Utilizing casual conversation to introduce people to Christ and His truth.
7. **Proclamation**—Declaring the absolute truths of God's Word in an authoritative, non-judgmental way through teaching or preaching.

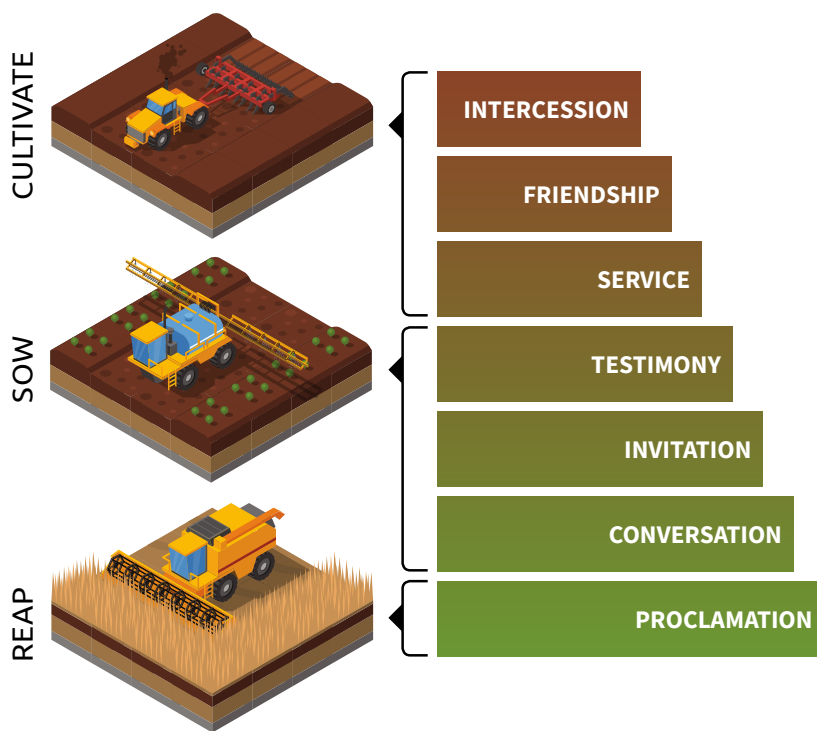
Personalizing the witnessing styles

Just as every organ in the body has a unique design and specialized function, so it is with every member of the body of Christ. God distributes different spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:7–11; Eph. 4:11–16). He, likewise, dispenses various witnessing styles to reach people for Christ. This is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 3:5–11 by the use of two metaphors: agriculture and construction. In farming, different hired hands have different roles to reap the harvest—some plant and some water. Likewise, in building, some subcontractors pour the foundation, while others frame the walls. In both cases (farming and building), all workers are needed, each with his or her own specialized role, in order to complete the task.

The same is true in the work of soul winning. Some are better suited for cultivating the soil (through prayer, friendship, or service); others are more proficient at sowing seed (through sharing their personal testimony, inviting people to community seminars, or engaging in spiritual conversation). And still others are better equipped to reap the harvest (by sharing the truths of God's Word through teaching or preaching).⁶ All roles in the soul-winning process are vital to bringing lost people to Christ.

It must be noted that while God outfits each of us with a preferred

Figure 1. Correlation of witnessing styles with harvest cycle



witnessing style, we should not restrict our witnessing to just one style. There are examples in the Bible of people (such as the apostle Paul) who used

As we faithfully practice the witnessing styles that God entrusts to us, He will add new styles to our repertoire so that over time we will become pro-

In our daily interactions with people, we should be willing to use the style that best fits the faith journey and receptivity level of the one we are sharing with, regardless of our own personal preferences.

multiple witnessing styles. The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) reveals that talents used are talents multiplied, and talents squandered are talents lost.

efficient in the use of multiple styles. Although we will usually default to our preferred style, the Holy Spirit may, at times, empower us to use styles that

are outside of our comfort range for the sake of the one we are witnessing to. In our daily interactions with people, we should be willing to use the style that best fits the faith journey and receptivity level of the one we are sharing with, regardless of our own personal preferences.

Different strokes for different folks

One of the common mistakes we make as Christian witnesses is to treat everyone alike and use the same witnessing approach on everyone. In Christ's parable of the sower in Mark 4:3–20, the four types of soil represent four types of hearers or different levels

of receptivity to the Word of God. This shows that not all lost people are at the same stage of their spiritual journeys or distance from God. People vary in their understanding, attitude, and need of God. Some are antagonistic; others are receptive. Some have never heard the name of Jesus, while others have a working knowledge of Scripture. Our role as Christian witnesses is to discern an individual's faith stage, or receptivity level, and then witness accordingly.

These faith stages can be plotted on a linear graph known as an Engel Scale.⁷ This scale represents an individual's spiritual pathway starting from the far left with antagonistic (–5), resistant (–4), indifferent (–3), receptive (–2),

seeking (–1), and finally, to conversion (represented by the cross). One analogy that helps to explain the different faith stages is the open and shut doors.⁸ For the person who is antagonistic (–5), the door is shut and padlocked. The person who is resistant (–4) has a door that is cracked. The person who is indifferent (–3) has a door that is partially open. The receptive (–2) person has a door that is mostly open. A person who is seeking (–1) has a door that is wide open and is begging, "Please share Christ and His truth with me!"

The important point to remember is, the further one is from having faith in Christ, the more we need to use the earlier witnessing styles (prayer, friendship,

Implementing the personal styles: *A case study*

What happens when a church transitions to a multi-dimensional approach—training members to use the various witnessing styles?

When I completed my doctor of ministry degree from Andrews University in 2007, as well as a project on the personal styles of evangelism, God impressed me to implement the harvest cycle and witnessing styles in my local Highland Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portland, Tennessee, to see whether it would positively affect evangelism. After participating in scores of reaping meetings during my 24 years of ministry (up to that point), I was convinced that merely running the harvest combine through the fields without first breaking up the ground and sowing was not the way to have a successful harvest. Consequently, we planned a reaping series with Amazing Facts evangelist Jason Sliger in the fall of 2008. However, this time we engaged in proper preparation by emphasizing the witnessing styles, especially the first three that "cultivate" the soil (prayer, friendship, and service).

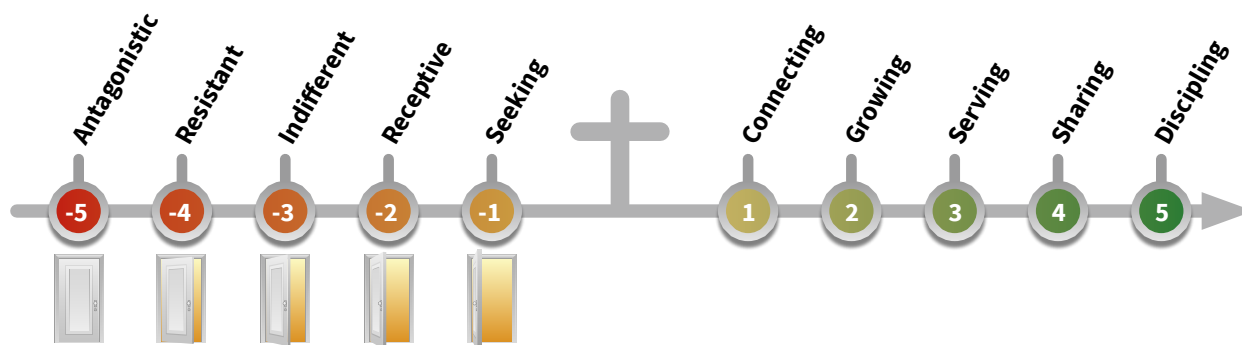
Nine months before the meetings began, I emphasized a different witnessing style each month at the Highland Church. In January we talked about intercessory prayer; in February, the value of friendship; and in March, the need for service in our community through practical acts of kindness, and so on. Along with preaching on the witnessing styles, I also showed short video clips demonstrating the proper use of the styles. I urged

members to use the cultivating styles, or "keys to the heart," in their daily interactions with others, and we featured testimonies of members who were exercising the styles. The church also made prayer a special focus during this preparatory time. As a result of the reaping series, 20 people took their stand for Jesus and were baptized. Sixteen of the 20 came as a direct result of church members using the keys. Only 4 came exclusively from the handbills.

As a pastoral family, my wife and I used the friendship and invitation styles with our neighbor, Susan. Somewhat jaded by Christianity, Susan declined Judi's and my initial invitations to come to church. But she eagerly joined us for Sabbath lunch and a hike at the state park. Over time, she commented, "You folks have so much peace. There's something different about you." She commented, "You never cut your grass on Sabbath—how come? Tell me about this Sabbath."

The joy and gratitude that filled Judi's and my hearts were unspeakable. We can attest that the witnessing styles really work, especially when you combine the relational styles (1–6) with the proclamation (7). It makes for a winning combination. After two and a half years of our steadily loving Susan with prayer, friendship, and acts of kindness, Susan's heart was gradually opened for something more. She ventured to the Highland Seventh-day Adventist Church. She attended the meetings. She joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Figure 2. Engel Scale with open and shut doors



and service). As an individual's heart becomes receptive, we can use the later witnessing styles (testimony, invitation, conversation, and proclamation). Again, we need to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit by discerning where a person is on the faith scale and then giving them that next gentle nudge toward Christ through the appropriate use of the witnessing styles.

This gentle nudging is comparable to a golf game, where the object of the game is, through a series of strokes with various golf clubs, to get the ball from the tee to the hole—first stroking the ball

down the fairway, then onto the green, and eventually into the hole.⁹ This is not to say that we should “club” people along the spiritual pathway (this is obviously where the metaphor breaks down); rather, we should gently nudge people along their pathway. Just as golfers use different clubs (drivers, long irons, short irons, and putters) for different strokes, depending on the distance of the ball from the hole, even so, soul winners use different witnessing styles for different individuals, depending on their distance from Christ. Using this same golfing analogy, we do not deem the putter to be

more important than the driver because it sank the ball in the hole. Neither should we consider the proclamation style more valuable than the friendship style because it nudged the individual into the baptistry. No, each club or style has its essential role, and consequently, each is of equal importance.

I am thankful that God has given me many more chances to share His love with others since that epiphany during my moving sale 26 years ago. God will use you, as well, as you use the various witnessing styles and train others to do the same. 🙏

For more on the topic, see David L. Hartman, *Winning Ways to Witness: Seven Witnessing Styles That Attract People to Christ* (Collegedale, TN: College Press, 2018).

- 1 Thom S. Rainer, “The Dying American Church,” *The Christian Post*, April 18, 2006, christianpost.com/news/the-dying-american-church-6685/.
- 2 Lee Strobel, “Helping Churches Become Stronger Salt and Brighter Light,” presentation at Southern Union Pastors’ Conference, January 10, 2018, in Orlando, Florida, United States.
- 3 Alvin Reid, “Creating an Evangelistic Church,” *Center for Great Commission Studies*, September 15, 2016, thecgcs.org/2016/09/creating-an-evangelistic-church/.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 106.
- 5 The idea of a variety of witnessing styles is not original with me. In 1994 Mark Mittelberg and Bill Hybels proposed six styles of evangelism in their witnessing manual, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 119–132; see also Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Leader’s Guide*, rev.

- ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 70–95. Their list of styles includes direct approach, intellectual approach, testimonial approach, interpersonal approach, invitation approach, and service approach. I was not aware of the *Contagious Christian* resource at the time of my discovery of the evangelism styles in Denver and subsequent decision to write my doctor of ministry dissertation on the evangelism styles, but it is interesting how God has led different individuals to discover the various evangelism approaches from the same original biblical source. During the process of writing my dissertation, I became aware of the *Contagious Christian* resource and was greatly blessed by its content. I took the basic principle that believers should specialize in the evangelism style that best fits their unique temperament and then developed a system that integrates the evangelism styles and the faith stages of conversion to optimize the evangelistic opportunity.
- 6 For more resources on the correlation of temperament types and witnessing styles, see Mike Bechtel, *Evangelism for the Rest of Us: Sharing Christ Within Your Personality Style* (Grand Rapids, MI:

Baker, 2006); David A. Farmer, *Power Witnessing: How to Witness to Different Personalities* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1999); and Mels Carbonell and Stanley R. Ponz, *My Personal Mission Profile* (Blue Ridge, GA: Uniquely You Resources, 2006) available at the uniquelyyou website, uniquelyyou.org/content/personalizing-my-faith-my-personal-mission-profile.

- 7 This graph was originally developed by Dr. James Engel, who served as chairman of the Communications department at Wheaton Graduate School in the 1970s. See the original Engel Scale in James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 83. The scale was later refined by Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources. See Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 20, 21.
- 8 Rainer, *The Unchurched*, 21, 78, 102, 126, 150, 1172.
- 9 See an extensive explanation of the golfing metaphor in Steve Sjogren, David Ping, and Doug Pollock, *Irresistible Evangelism: Natural Ways to Open Others to Jesus* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004), 73–88.

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Clinton A. Valley, EdD, immediate past president of the University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, is a leadership professor and church leadership consultant residing in Atlanta, Georgia, United States.



The making of a Christian leader

I grew up as a member of the Roman Catholic Church and served as an altar boy—an assistant to the priest.

I had plans to become a priest. In my early years, I read prayers, recited novenas, and attended Mass every Sunday. But while I went through the rites and rituals of religion, I did not know what it was to have a personal relationship with God.

Thankfully, Seventh-day Adventists came to my small town and began a series of evangelistic meetings. It was there I met Jesus as a personal Friend and Savior, and life has never been the same! I became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, prepared for pastoral ministry, and served in church leadership roles as a pastor, educator, and administrator. From my almost 40 years of denominational service, I can affirm that the first prerequisite to be an effective and authentic Seventh-day Adventist Christian leader is that you must first be a Christian.

Although this may seem obvious, it is not. To be a Christian means that you are following Jesus, modeling His lifestyle, and reflecting His values. You are in love with Him and guided by His Word. Seventh-day Adventist leaders must continue to experience the fullness of God's love in their personal lives. They must know experientially the joy of forgiveness and the depth of His grace. In the words of Rod Culbertson, I

must ever be “captured by his love and gripped by his grace.”¹

But there is a danger that the gift of our salvation can be forgotten as we become involved in the work of the church. Getting busy with our office work, programs, committees, and travel, we can lose sight of why we are doing what we are doing. Once appointed as conference officials and institutional leaders, we might assume that we have arrived at the pinnacle of ecclesiastical power. Most dangerous of all, we forget that it is not about us but about a God who loves us in spite of our imperfections and who willingly permits us to be used for His glory. But as exhibits of His amazing grace, He calls us to humbly reflect His character, witness about His grace, and be advocates for His kingdom. What a privilege! I never want to forget this as a Christian leader.

I remember the first Sabbath I went to a church as the new pastor. One of the senior elders approached me saying that he loved to give pastors “trouble.” Smiling, I replied that I loved elders who gave me “trouble.” Not satisfied with my response, he repeated his assertion with greater emphasis. Unmoved, I repeated my statement—also with greater emphasis. We then repeated the cycle with no change in stance from either of us. Finally, recognizing that he was getting nowhere, he sullenly

walked away. Interestingly, he became one of my trusted leaders, and his wife loved sending me her homemade cakes—delivered to my home by her husband.

For Christian leaders, it is important to maintain that first love and daily build on our relationship with God. Over the years I have learned some critical lessons about growing as a Christian leader. Let me share three of them with you.

1. Christian leadership is about my walk, not my talk

As a Christian leader, I take seriously the words of Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy: if a man desires the office of a bishop or leader, he aspires to something wonderful (see 1 Tim. 3:1-13). It is good to have a holy longing to serve as a Christian leader. But Paul reminds us in this passage that the truly effective, Spirit-filled leader possesses what he or she professes. Such leaders are moral exemplars, transparent in their relationships, and known for their personal integrity.

Leadership theorists have long indicated that effective leaders are adept at casting a compelling vision for their organizations. They are also persuasive communicators because followers first love the messenger before they love the message. But gifted visionaries and

communicators, devoid of the Spirit of God, can lead us into some very dark places. One prominent example of this occurred several years ago when an invitation to a popular and charismatic leader on the schedule to speak at a General Conference pre-session had to be removed when church officials conducted further investigation of him. While I am certainly no paragon of virtue, I have had cause to question the Christianity of some leaders based on the strange views they have advocated.

Above all else, the spiritual leader knows how to pray. The psalmist pleads in Psalm 139 for God to search his heart and his thoughts to see if there is any

Government office indicating that the university's check for student assistance was available and ready for collection. The check was more than sufficient to cover payroll. It is so reassuring to know that as Christian leaders, we do not walk alone

2. Christian leadership is about righteousness, not rituals

Rituals refer to all the rites, ceremonies, and other activities that we as a church engage in on an ongoing basis. I grew up in a church steeped in rituals. As an altar boy, I wore a satin robe, burned incense, said novenas, attended

the LORD looks at the heart' " (1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV).

The prophet Micah (Micah 6:6–8) tells us that God is not interested in all the rituals, sacrifices, and, dare I say, the long-standing, seemingly irreconcilable debates in the church. Micah gives us three essentials for living as a spiritual leader:

Act justly. In other words, do all things with fairness, honesty, and integrity. Micah had a special concern for justice, primarily because he saw so little of it. What God requires of us is that we do what is right and fair in our relationships with other people. As a leader, I strive not to prejudge a

He encouraged the rotation of leadership to give younger persons an opportunity to serve. This approach may be one for all leaders to consider.

wickedness in him, then to lead him in the way everlasting. Doubtless, the psalmist is referring to what I teach my doctoral students as reflective practice. The prayerful experience of daily spending time with our thoughts and our God is critical to our growth as authentic and self-aware Christian leaders. Paul cried out: "that I may know Him" (Phil. 3:10, NKJV). I must first know Him if I am to live and speak for Him. The Christian leader's relationship with God will manifest itself in his or her home and will be evident at work, at church, and in the marketplace of life.

I remember one administrative meeting when I was president at the University of the Southern Caribbean. Salaries were due in a few days and the University could not find the funds to meet the payroll. I led out in a devotional, then as leaders we committed the matter to the Lord in prayer. That same afternoon, our finance VP got a call from the

mass, used my chaplet to recite prayers, and kissed the ring of the bishop at my confirmation in the church. I went to weekly confessionals in which I told the priest all my sins and faithfully fulfilled the penances he decreed.

But even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, some of our practices generate more passion than our worship experiences. We pick our hobby horse and make it our religion. Through the years, I have witnessed lively and often contentious discussions on how many kernels of nuts to eat, whether women should wear hats to church, what is acceptable church music, or who should be ordained to the ministry. We get embroiled in so many controversies about rituals and practices in the church. While I am not against healthy discussions, necessary in any democratic organization, we must not label, denigrate, or ostracize people if they do not share our views, "for man looks at the outward appearance, but

situation but to listen objectively to both sides before coming to a decision. Many leaders tend to instinctively circle the wagons in support of decisions taken by other leaders even if they were bad decisions and caused hurt. Nobody is always right, and nobody is always wrong.

Some years ago, a family dispute arose, and my four siblings found themselves equally divided on the matter. They were all calling upon me to support their position. But I saw the strengths and challenges of both sides, and I shared that with them. When I remained neutral, they called me "Switzerland"—nonaligned. As Christian leaders, we should be prepared to lovingly but clearly express our convictions, even at the risk of financial, social, or career consequences. We need the courage to look at compromising moral, ethical, and social justice issues and say humbly, "In my opinion, that isn't right!" One should expect

nothing less from a follower of the Man from Galilee.

Love mercy. When we read about the good Samaritan who went out of his way to meet the needs of another person, or a father who accepted his prodigal son against the expectations of almost everyone, or Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery, or the dying thief on a cross who reached out in faith and found mercy and love from an ever-loving Lord—in all these stories we find mercy revealed by an all-compassionate God, a compassion that goes way beyond the letter of the law. This is the kind of grace and mercy we should seek to model as Christian leaders.

I believe in our organization, in its divinely-ordained mission, and how that mission needs to be advanced through our multifaceted ministries. But our people are central to performing our mission. Every worker has worth and is to be respected and valued. Our policies, procedures, and various committee actions must align with this high view of our employees.

Southwest Airlines's "People first" approach places primary emphasis on employees, and the company believes that it has significantly contributed to it being one of the most successful airlines in the industry, with a profitable margin 44 years in a row. At Southwest, it is not surprising to "hear stories about flight attendants picking up trash, gate agents tracking down borrowed staplers, or pilots cutting back on fuel usage precisely because they know that will impact their company's profits."²

I have also seen numerous examples of passionate commitment to mission within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Satisfied employees give their best service. Wherever possible, let us facilitate and not frustrate workers. Peter wrote, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8, NKJV).

Walk humbly with God. A right relationship with God always begins with

humility. Recognizing my deficits, I acknowledge my inadequacies and admit that I am who I am only because of His grace. But some leaders seem to care more about policies than about people, more about rules than righteousness, more about sitting up front than sitting at the feet of Jesus, more about the work of God than the God of the work, more about position, power, and popularity than about prayer, praise, and being at peace with God and His people.

Fellow leaders, we are to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. "He is most fit to carry responsibilities and command who most resembles God in character."³

3. Christian leadership is about heavenly, not earthly power

As a young intern attending my first constituency meeting, I got an unfortunate introduction to church election politics. A senior worker approached me and proposed that he would recommend me for the nominating committee, where I would then support him for the executive committee. I accepted, but it was not of God. Thankfully, it fell through at the first hurdle, for I did not get on the nominating committee. Since then I have regretted my consent to his plan, especially as I have seen through the years how God works amazingly and miraculously to accomplish His purpose through the play and interplay of human will, events, and passions. I have learned that God does not need my help to get it right.

In order to prosper, our church must have men and women leaders upon whom it can rely; men and women who are as firm as steel to principle; unselfish men and women who have the interest of God's cause closer to their hearts than any concerns for worldly power, popularity, or financial benefit. All I have and all I am are to be dedicated only to His glory. In Jeremiah the prophet advises his protégé Baruch: "Should you then seek great things

for yourself? Do not seek them' " (Jer. 45:5, NIV).

We must be wary of those who have an untamed ambition for church leadership. An unholy desire to lead, control, and decide the fate of others could spell grave danger. The church rightly needs to be concerned about any who seek office merely for its own sake.

Finally, I urge fellow administrators to share leadership with others. We do not need to hog the limelight. Rather, let us trust and train others to lead. "It is your duty to train others to stand in responsible positions."⁴ None of us are indispensable. We should balance the need for stability and continuity in the organization with that of empowering a broad range of talented potential leaders from our diverse international constituency. One of my experienced elders determined that he would not serve as first elder for more than two terms at any one time. He encouraged the rotation of leadership to give younger persons an opportunity to serve. This approach may be one for all leaders to consider.

Sinners saved by grace

The apostle Paul reminds us, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV). I am a trophy of grace. I have nothing to boast about, nothing to commend myself before God, nothing to flaunt and be arrogant about. As a sinner saved by grace, I am still under construction, growing "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13, NKJV). This keeps me real, tolerant, forgiving, and humbly walking with my God.

1 Rod Culbertson, *Do I Love God? The Question That Must Be Answered* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 74.

2 Darren Dahl, "Why Do Southwest Airlines Employees Always Seem So Happy?" *Forbes*, July 28, 2017.

3 Ellen G. White, *Christian Leadership* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), 12.

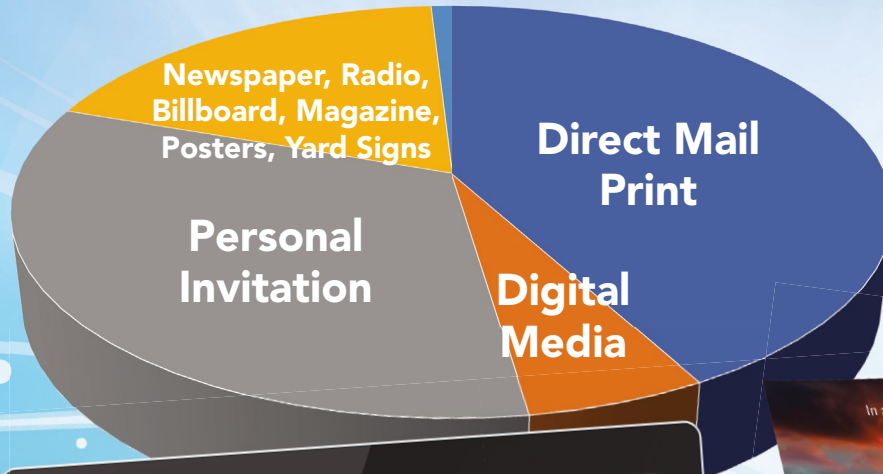
4 *Christian Leadership*, 46.

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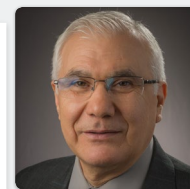
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Divine appointments

On my flight back from Fiji I had the aisle seat in a four-seat row. The seat next to me was the only empty one on the plane. A young lady, whom I later learned was Christina, approached me. She explained that she had been sitting in the back of the plane with a university group that had gone to Fiji to do medical work. Feeling a need to break away from her group to have some time by herself, she announced that she wanted to change her seat to the empty one next to me.

Although I had been hoping that nobody would sit next to me for the 11-hour trip, God had other plans. As it was late at night, most passengers fell asleep. About four hours before our arrival in Los Angeles, the crew woke us up due to a turbulence, and breakfast was served. Introducing myself to the young lady next to me, I asked what she was doing in Fiji. In turn, she also inquired what I had done there. I told her I had gone there to speak to pastors and church members on the island.

At that moment, she became sad. She told me that a few years before, she had given her heart to Jesus and lived a Christian life. Those few years, she believed, had been the best of her life. Christina had felt joy, purpose, and excitement. Then she went to college, and the secular atmosphere pulled her away from her relationship with Christ.

Taking the opportunity to talk to her about God, I spent the next three hours sharing Scripture and tips and ideas for how she could reconnect with God. I

also gave my own personal testimony. Then I asked if I could pray for her. “Please, please pray for me,” she said. “I need it. I want that experience back in my life.” When I opened my eyes at the end of the prayer, I saw Christina crying. Giving me a hug, she said, “This was a divine appointment. There are 340 seats on the plane, and the only empty one was next to you. God was leading me to sit over here. He brought us together for a purpose.”

I realized through this encounter, and others like them, that God works through us, sending us out to share His love—a divine appointment. Our words and actions are powerful, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant.

A divine appointment is a meeting with another person(s) that God has specifically and unmistakably arranged. The Holy Spirit sets up such encounters because someone needs what He can offer them through you. You are one conversation away from God bestowing His favor on them as you act as His channel of blessing. Often that encounter will be with someone you have never met before.

Our prayers for God’s will to be done open up divine appointments, conversations, and blessings. Filled with God’s favor, such meetings will bless everyone involved and change the course of their lives.

Have you ever had a coincidence that was so special that it seemed as if God had to be involved in it? God is sovereign, all-knowing, and all-powerful. He wants to bless both us and other

people. If we are willing to let the Holy Spirit lead us, great things are possible.

Biblical background

Throughout the Bible we find examples of divine appointments. Time after time, God leads the faithful to cross another person’s path, resulting in amazing things.

Scripture declares that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Ps. 37:23, NKJV). God orders, arranges, and establishes the details of His children’s lives, including some unexpected divine appointments. After decades of walking with God, I can tell you that seeing Him set up such “appointments” is a thrill without comparison.

How often do we experience delays, changes of plans, or redirections and regard them as intrusions? It could be that God is detouring us so that we can do something different or new for Him. Consider Paul’s trip to Philippi in Acts 16. He had gone to Macedonia because of a God-directed vision (vv. 9, 10). How could he know that he would end up in prison there? But even that trip to jail was God-led because He used Paul to bring salvation to a jailer and his family (vv. 25–34).

The Bible records many such divinely directed appointments. The story of Phillip and the eunuch is a beautiful illustration of the special encounters that God orchestrates for the Christian who walks in the Spirit (see Acts 8:26–39). Philip could have ministered just to the crowds in the

cities and village, but God sent him to the desert for a divine appointment with a single individual. We must always seek God's leading and let Him determine where we are best suited to serve Him. It is a wonderful thing to walk in the Spirit as He makes appointments for us to cross the paths of those who need help and salvation.

Set yourself up

God has a divine purpose for each one of us, and when we allow Him to fulfill it, we will be involved in divine appointments. You may be waiting on a special word from God without realizing that, by living your everyday life,

the tanner, whose house is by the sea' " (Acts 10:4-6, NIV).

Meanwhile, Peter had a vision about a basket filled with clean and unclean animals. "While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them' " (vv. 19, 20, NIV).

Through the vision of the basket and the invitation initiated by God to meet Cornelius, the Gentile, Peter realized that God accepted the Gentiles. Peter went to the house of Cornelius. "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does

Annoyed by the woman's persistence, Jane finally chose one of the flower pots and put it in her cart. As she started walking away, the woman followed, still talking. Although Jane tried to be polite, she just did not want to talk to her.

After the strained conversation had gone on for about 30 minutes, it finally dawned on Jane that maybe God had sent the woman to her. Beginning to question the woman, Jane discovered that her father had died recently. Jane shared comforting words and testified of her faith in Jesus, our Comforter.

Exchanging phone numbers and email addresses, they began talking

"God brought us together from two different sides of the plane so that you could explain many things to me."

you are not only fulfilling His purpose for your life but also influencing those around you. Whether it be close friends or just a passing stranger, God directs our paths to cross with those of others, all in His perfect timing.

Here are three specific things to help you capture divine opportunities:

1. *Pray for divine appointments.* How does a Christian allow the Holy Spirit to make such appointments for him? The answer is to *pray*! Every morning when I get up, I bow beside my bed and pray to the Holy Spirit to give me a divine appointment. In fact, I do it several times a day.

Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile who had a heart for the poor, was praying one day when an angel told him, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon

not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right' " (vv. 34, 35, NIV). Peter baptized Cornelius and his family. Thus, two men, praying, resulted in an unexpected divine appointment that changed their lives and those of the Jewish and Gentile nations.

Annoying or anointed appointment?

Jane, a pastor's wife, feeling the need to share her faith, started to pray about it. One day several months later, she went to Walmart to buy a pot of flowers. As she knelt down to look at one of them, a voice from behind her commented, "This kind of flower does not survive. It needs a lot of attention. I bought one a couple weeks ago, and it died on me even though I am good with flowers." Jane glanced back and said, "Thank you." The woman kept talking and giving her advice about flowers.

regularly. After they had met at cafes a few times, Jane eventually invited the woman to her house. When the woman arrived, Jane was startled to discover that the woman had brought her husband and children with her. Jane's husband connected with the other woman's husband, and the children from both families played together. The woman and her family began coming over every week.

The woman and her family asked the Adventist family about what they believed, resulting in Bible study. The family began going to the Adventist Church and eventually were baptized.

Sometimes, when we are in a hurry and something interrupts and annoys us, we might miss what God has for us. Jane did not understand what God was doing until she took the opportunity to minister to the woman.

2. *Prepare for divine appointments.* The Bible says in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach

the word; be prepared in season and out of season” (NIV). Also, in 1 Peter 3:15, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (NIV).

If we all start looking for those “divine appointments,” we will find them. By making ourselves available to God, we will see things happen that we would have never expected.

Upgraded for a divine appointment

My flight from Chicago, Illinois, to San Antonio, Texas, in the United States was oversold in coach, so I got upgraded to first class. But the seat next to me was still empty. A few minutes later, the gate agent entered the plane and told a flight attendant that the man booked to sit next to me was on a delayed flight, so they were going to move someone from the back of the plane next to me.

At the time I was frantically working on a presentation I was scheduled to present. Then the pilot announced, “We have to be deiced. It is going to take half an hour, but don’t worry, we will still get you there on time.” Two minutes later I felt a compelling urge to talk to the man, Cody, who had been shifted next to me. Not knowing what to say to him, I made the obvious observation, “Isn’t this interesting that we will be delayed half an hour with deicing but still make it to our destination on time?” Ignoring my comment, he asked whether I lived in San Antonio. “No, I live in Michigan,” I replied. “I am going to some Adventist churches to speak on church and spiritual growth.” When he inquired whether I was Seventh-day Adventist, I explained that I was an Adventist pastor.

He started asking a series of questions, beginning with, “What do you believe about Christ?” Then he raised the topics of the Sabbath, what happens after we die, hell, and the

sanctuary. This went on all the way from our departure from Chicago to when we parted ways in San Antonio, almost three hours later. Finally, he told me, “My neighbor was an Adventist and shared with me some of that stuff. He moved out of the area, but I have been thinking about some of these things ever since.”

As we parted in the airport, Cody said, “This was a divine appointment. God brought us together from two different sides of the plane so that you could explain many things to me. You gave me a lot of food for thought, and I need to think about what I should believe.”

Like the conductor of a symphony, God orchestrated circumstances to bring us together so that I could answer the man’s questions. It was truly a divine appointment.

3. *Act on the opportunity of a divine appointment.* The story of the Samaritan woman is another example of a divine appointment (see John 4:5–42). Jesus met the woman at Sychar’s well and seized the opportunity to minister to her. The result was that she and the whole village believed in Him, and it changed all of their lives. We know that this was truly a divine appointment because of the results. I believe that Scripture recorded this story for us to realize that God desires divine appointments in our own lives. He wants us to realize that they happen in the regular course of events, but we need to be prepared. They will be the most satisfying experiences that we will ever have.

An appointment for hope


A few years ago, when I went to speak to the pastors of a local conference, its executive secretary met me at the airport. After he picked me up, he said, “The meeting starts at seven o’clock. I will take you out to dinner at five o’clock before we drive to the meeting place, but between two o’clock and five o’clock we have plenty of

time. I know you are into prayer. There is something I have been wanting to experiment with for a long time. I would like to knock on doors and get at least ten people to respond whether they would like prayer or not.”

We went from house to house until we got our ten, asking whether we could pray for them. All said yes with various degrees of enthusiasm. The last one was a young woman. When we offered to pray for her, she started to weep. “I just lost my baby son to SIDS [sudden infant death syndrome],” she managed to explain.

We ended up spending two hours there, comforting her, trying to give her hope, and sharing with her that God loves her and cares for her. She had drifted away from church, but not God. Then she told us that she did not have any support system. Her parents lived far away, her husband worked long hours, and, being new to the area, she did not have a lot of friends. “The pain today was so strong,” she said, “I prayed the whole day that God would send someone to comfort me. God sent you both here today to do that. It was a divine appointment.”

We left at six o’clock, having missed dinner, but it was worth it. My friend and I were not trained counselors, but what the woman needed was someone just to listen to her. So we offered her the ministry of presence, and through our presence and prayers, we brought her the presence of Jesus. God cared about this woman who had no support system, so He sent two strangers to comfort her.

Divine appointments are about how much God cares about His people. Look for such opportunities and moments in your life when God is using you as a divinely appointed son or daughter to be a source of hope, comfort, and love. 

For more on this topic, see S. Joseph Kidder, “Divine Appointments: God’s Miraculous Encounters That Changed My Life,” in S. Joseph Kidder, *Out of Babylon: How God Found Me on the Streets of Baghdad* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 9, 10.

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The church that wouldn't sell

Revival & REFORMATION

I sat alone in the gathering of pastors as the topic of our evening meeting turned to the subject of prayer. This was not an uncommon occurrence in our conference ministerial meetings, but this time something moved me. One of my colleagues began to share a story of how he gathered his elders early in the morning once a week to intercede for a person in desperate need. The situation was grave. As a result of their pleading, God intervened in a miraculous way.

As I listened to his account, I sensed God's call to take action.

Our congregation had recently purchased a new building. The former church facility sat on a postage-stamp parcel on a busy street adjacent to the city fire department. While the quaint white church was a historic landmark in our town, the cramped facilities, lack of parking, and occasional wailing fire truck were more than occasional inconveniences.

Our spacious new church building had a dated interior and required a number of maintenance projects. But it sat on two acres, had an accommodating parking lot, and included a parsonage next door. Originally listed for \$785,000 just three years prior, our congregation purchased the facility for \$185,000—a discount of \$600,000! God heard the prayers of our congregation and abundantly provided for our needs.

Our first Sabbath in the new facility was Mother's Day weekend. By Labor Day, we realized we had a problem. The old church just wouldn't sell. Utilities and maintenance costs on two churches combined with mortgage payments to the union revolving fund

were beginning to challenge our church budget. With the winter looming, we knew that something had to give.

After hearing my colleague's story and his emphasis on sacrificial, united prayer, I sent letters to my entire congregation inviting them to take part in something radical. I asked our membership to join me twice each week at five thirty in the morning to pray for about an hour and a half. We followed the simple united prayer model that we'd discovered while participating in the Ten Days of Prayer initiative for two consecutive years.

At first, 15 people attended. Then it dwindled to 10. When the snow started to fly, we settled on 5. But we persisted. Shortly after the dawn of the new year, our old church sold—for the exact price that we had purchased the new building: \$185,000. Of course, there were fees on the purchase of the new church and the sale of the old, but the symbolism was too clear to miss. God swapped churches for us and got us into a facility that allowed us to better serve and minister to the community.

I'll never forget our last business meeting in that old, unheated building. A contractor had purchased the facility to turn it into a lavish single-family home. He graciously allowed us to meet there one last time. A small crowd gathered in the cold to reminisce over the weddings, funerals of loved ones, and baptisms that brought new life into the congregation. We sang a song and thanked God for what He had done to sell the old church.

But that was not the end of the story. As we continued to pray, we saw people surrender their lives to Christ

who had formerly struggled to make a decision. And in the congregation's sister church, a small group of men began gathering each Thursday morning to pray for their church's ministry in the community. The following year, that little country church was blessed with its own spiritual and numerical growth.

*As we continued to
pray, we saw people
surrender their lives
to Christ who had
formerly struggled
to make a decision.*

Through these experiences, God taught me many things about united prayer. Numbers aren't everything, but consistency is. Prayer is not about convincing God to bless us as much as it is God preparing us to receive the blessings He has for us. And when God's people set aside time to pray—especially when accompanied by a personal sacrifice—we have His attention, and He will move on His own behalf to glorify Himself. 🙏

—Jarod Thomas, a previous pastor in Michigan, now serves as communications manager, General Conference Ministerial Association, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

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Missional versus attractional: *An argument the church cannot afford*

For years a religious battle has raged that you probably were not even aware of. It is a controversy over the most effective way to expand the kingdom of God. Two scenes will help illustrate some of the issues involved.

Scene one: I am listening to Reggie McNeal, church planter and author of *Missional Renaissance* and *The Present Future*, and he is in rare form. Railing against the shortcomings of the traditional church, his PowerPoint presentation is an all-out assault against the “attractional” church, offering the “missional” church instead. His beaming devotees consider his arguments beyond dispute.

Fast-forward a few months, and it is scene two: I am in the Gwinnett Center just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, United States, and 13,000 people have jammed the place for the Catalyst Conference hosted by Andy Stanley and the North Point Church. I listen to powerful messages from Francis Chan, Matt Chandler, Christine Caine, and a host of others. Stanley’s remarks and passages from his latest book, *Deep and Wide*, particularly intrigue me. It seems that a significant percentage of his membership had no church history or religious involvement prior to

joining North Point. The congregation has taken an aggressive and unconventional approach that has been reaching Anglo youth and young adults in large numbers. What interests me even more is Stanley’s contention that his local church is “unapologetically attractional.”¹ The Catalyst Conference itself is proof of that.

In one corner I find Reggie McNeal, Alan Roxburgh, and the heavyweight supporters of the missional church. In another corner are Andy Stanley and the prominent advocates of the attractional church. How do we make sense of these conflicting characteristics, claims, and models for the church as a whole? While it is an extremely important discussion, if it in any way hinders approaches that are legitimately expanding the kingdom, it is an argument we cannot afford. Winning arguments is a lot easier than winning people.

Missional church

The missional church is an idea whose time has come. Actually, it is an approach to doing church whose time has never really left. Although some disagree over the actual definition of “missional,” or missionary, church, few argue with the following three core characteristics of the missional church

as expressed by the Missional Church Network.²

1. *Missional church is about the missionary status of God and His church.* If a single word seems to sum up God’s activity on earth, it is that of “sending.” One of the greatest contributions of the missional imagination is a clear understanding of the very nature of God as it relates to His “evangelistic pursuits.” Actually, the missional church is not about the church itself as much as it is about God. Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren effectively lay out this premise in their book *Introducing the Missional Church*.³ The missional church assumes that God is already actively at work in the world to redeem and restore fallen humanity. The role of the church is to determine how to become part of that divine agenda.

2. *Missional church is about incarnational ministry.* Missional churches see themselves as reflecting the ministry of Jesus by becoming part of the life and culture of the community. Just as Jesus came into the world as one of the world, the missional church wants to enter the community as part of the community. The idea is to engage non-believers in a way that both is authentic and identifies where God is already at work. Supporters of the missional

imagination see this as the “go and be” approach as opposed to the “come and see” concept of kingdom building.

3. *Missional church is about actively participating in the missio dei, or mission of God.* God’s mission on earth is to redeem lost humanity to Himself. The church’s responsibility is to participate in that mission, first by observing God’s movements in the community. Jesus said in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day” (NABRE). The passage implies that God is at work in the lives of nonbelievers before we reach them with a handbill or Bible study. This idea of actively participating in the *missio dei* illustrates the difference between a church with a missions program and that of a missional church.

These are just three of a number of compelling characteristics of missional churches. The attractional church also has its characteristics and exponents.

Attractional church

1. *Attractional church hungers for lost people.* Some have been skeptical of the seeker-sensitive church model and believe that the attractional approach gives too much attention to so-called “lost people.” Maybe we ought to be glad when *any* group focuses on nonbelieving people, loved by God. It pushes us to be outwardly focused. Chuck Lawless maintains that, “Too many churches are *neither* attractional nor missional because they have little commitment to reaching the unchurched anyway. An attractional approach is at least an intentional start.”⁴

2. *Attractional church believes in worship excellence.* Some may be put off by what they consider to be external cosmetics and “rock-concert” aesthetics, but no one will doubt its striving for excellence. I think we’ve all seen services with last-minute coordination, devoid of preparation, quality, and even logic. Few believe that such worship services can be pleasing to God. Attractional approaches believe that God works through excellence,

and when that unchurched person enters our facility, sometimes after much hesitation and often with much trepidation, the message of the gospel and the claims of the gospel must be presented in the best and clearest ways possible. As Len Wilson says, “A powerful ‘attractional’ worship event serves to create followers of Christ and sends people back out in mission to others.”⁵

3. *Attractional church creates a loving community.* The attractional church prioritizes warm and welcoming relationships. This is true in the church sanctuary, but it is present in the church lobby, and it may even be found in the church parking lot. It’s less a case of finance and more a matter of intent. Lawless states, “There’s something awfully attractive about people who are generous with their time, energy, and resources, particularly for people beyond their huddle.”⁶

What is the problem?

Since it is absolutely clear that the missional imagination is on solid ground theologically, biblically, and methodologically, where could it possibly come under fire? From my observations, the critics of the missional church movement have consistently identified two potential problem areas.

Potential problem one: Lack of respect for other ministry models. The absence of humility and objectivity displayed by a number of the missional movement “missionaries” disturbs some. The call to missional ministry is a fundamental summons to every follower of Christ, regardless of ministry models. It takes all kinds of churches and ministries to reach all kinds of people. When those in the missional movement describe the challenge of doing meaningful ministry in attractional churches, I know what they mean! I have pastored attractional churches, and many of my friends belong to them. But attractional churches, at their best, still have missional elements at their core. Regarding themselves as churches both gathered and scattered, they see themselves oriented as “come and

see,” “come and be,” and “go and tell.” Thus, attractional churches can also be missional.

Potential problem two: The lack of missional fruit from the missional model. The missional church criticizes

The passage implies that God is at work in the lives of nonbelievers before we reach them with a handbill or Bible study.

the attractional church for measuring success with numbers such as those of souls and goals. But the missional church doesn’t seem to allow itself to be measured. How is one to evaluate success when it comes to the missional church? Could the lack of fruit be worthy when fruitfulness seemed important to Jesus and His early church? What is the fruit of the missional church?

Dan Kimball is the author of *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, *Off Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders*, and a number of other volumes popular with the missional crowd. He ignited a firestorm when he published an article in *Leadership Journal* questioning the claims of the missional movement that he champions. Here are a few of his observations:

- “I have a suspicion that the missional movement has not yet proven itself beyond the level of theory.”
- “Some say that creating better programs, preaching, and worship services so people ‘come to us’ isn’t going to cut it anymore. But here’s my dilemma—I see no evidence to verify this claim.”
- “Given their unproven track records, these missional churches should be slow to criticize attractional churches that are making a measureable impact.”⁷

I consider this good advice, but I’m surprised that it comes from a missional supporter. The missional church’s passion for incarnational, *missio dei*-driven, missional outreach also appears in many attractional churches but is expressed in different ways—not perfect ones, perhaps, but different.

And that raises another important issue. It is obvious that we live in a consumer, media-driven Western culture, one that we could label “attractional.” No wonder attractional approaches to outreach are still very effective in reaching millions. Is the missional model simply countercultural? Or is the attractional church in an attractional culture particularly able to lead an overstimulated generation to more substantive and spiritual answers?

The search for common ground

Effective attractional and missional churches have much in common.⁸ In Colossians 4, the apostle Paul champions three characteristics that both church types effectively illustrate.

Pray for unbelievers. Paul wrote in Colossians 4:2 that our prayers should be steadfast, watchful, and thankful. He then requested prayer for an open door to share Christ. Though he was then in jail, that didn’t cancel his mission to expand God’s kingdom. Even under the most challenging circumstances, we can advance it through the power of prayer.

Prayer must be the cornerstone for all outreach. We must make it our

practice to pray *for* people and *with* people if we want what we do to be successful. Prayer not only connects us to divine power and wisdom, it is one of the most effective ways to engage nonbelievers because of their openness to prayer. Many people may reject a Bible study, but few of them will refuse your offer to pray.⁹

Live with unbelievers. Paul prayed that Christians would conduct themselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of every opportunity (Col. 4:5). That combines the incarnational approach of the missional church with the evangelistic urgency of the attractional church. I like the combination!

The apostle charged his readers to be wise in their conduct and contact with unbelievers. Our call is to be salt and light without losing our distinctive witness. Sowing is an “inside job.”¹⁰ Most of the biblical heroes that we sing and preach about were “insiders.” They lived and worked in the midst of a particular culture and thus made a tremendous difference for the kingdom. Nehemiah was an insider, as were Esther and Daniel. Most of our church members are insiders who spend the major part of their day in some work-related activity—going to work, working, returning from work, planning for work, and so on.

We need to be more intentional about training them to function in the world—where they work—instead of just in the church! Since they spend the lion’s share of their time in the marketplace and not at church, why does so much of the church’s training focus on their church responsibilities? Many churches offer choir training once a week but may prepare members for the marketplace only once in a lifetime!

Speak to unbelievers. In Colossians 4:6, Paul wrote about the importance of our words as we live a missional life. Words can be misleading, meaningless, menacing, or mistimed.¹¹ What we say and how we say it are equally important. The power of our personal narratives—our stories—could be the best way to speak to unbelievers. As we walk intentionally among unbelievers,

nothing is more compelling than our personal reflections, testimonies, or experiences in God’s kingdom.

A better cause

The missional-attractional debate is helpful to the extent that it spurs us to more effective approaches and ideas for expanding God’s kingdom. But why settle for making a point when God calls us to make a difference? For example, if my son or daughter is lost, I do not care whether their initial entry point to the kingdom is the front door of an attractional church or the side door of a Starbucks. I want someone to tell them about Jesus!

We can debate the effectiveness of various attractional and missional approaches, but not their orthodoxy. That being the case, lost souls are too important for us to be wasting valuable time. It is an argument that we cannot afford—and even less so, our lost family and friends. ☞

- 1 Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 16.
- 2 Missional Church Network, missionalchurchnetwork.com.
- 3 Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).
- 4 Chuck Lawless, “7 Things we can learn from attractional churches,” chucklawless.com/2017/01/7-things-we-can-learn-from-attractional-churches/
- 5 Len Wilson, “The demise of the attractional church is greatly exaggerated,” lenwilson.us/demise-attractional-church/
- 6 Lawless.
- 7 Dan Kimball, “Missional Misgivings,” *Leadership Journal*, Fall 2008, accessed April 24, 2013 at christianitytoday.com/le/2008/fall/14.112.html.
- 8 See, for example, Eddie Cole, “Missional or attractional? The value of embracing a both/and mentality,” *Christianity Today*, August 2017. christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/august/missional-or-attractional-value-of-embracing-both-and-mentality.html
- 9 See Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People: Sharing the Good News Naturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
- 10 Tim Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate With Those Outside the Christian Community—While We Still Can* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 82.
- 11 William Carr Peel and Walter L. Larimore, *Going Public With Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 100, 101.

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The Great Commission

Before entering the ministry, I was an engineer for a Japanese corporation in the acoustic elements field, specifically for the cellular market, in McKinney, Texas. From the first day, the CEO, Mr. Mike Nomura, taught us the company's mission statement—that is, their vision and their goals. “If you follow this mission statement,” he told us, “you should have no problems and nothing but a successful career with us.”

Years passed in the immersion training period while we learned more about our acoustic elements products. The time arrived when I entered the international marketing sales team and started visiting different manufacturing plants around the globe. In every country, at the various manufacturing sites I visited, I found the company's mission statements posted prominently in the foyer of all the company's buildings. It was impossible to miss them. I discovered there was a close link between following the company's mission statement and success in sales.

I entered the ministry because I was magnetized by another mission statement—minted by Jesus Himself. It is expressly stated in Matthew 28:18–22, “‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”¹

In the Great Commission, God gave us all the authority (Greek ἐξουσία, *exousia*, which means “the power to

act”) that we need. We have never been called to be philosophers of His divine commission but, rather, disciples in action. The Scripture says in 1 John 3:18, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” The Greek word used here for “deed” is ἔργον, *ergon*, which means “action.” It is very easy to say God is love, but that message has power only when it is demonstrated by actions. In James 2:24 we are reminded, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (NASB). We're not talking salvation by works; we're talking, instead, about a salvation that works—that works for the saving of others, as we have been called by Jesus to do. Anything less is unfaithfulness to the gospel.

After pastoring a university church in Peru with 3,000 members and 5,000 students, I received three calls to pastor

Hispanic churches in California, and a call to pastor a largely English-speaking congregation in Indiana. I knew I had to give God a chance in Indiana, so that if success came it would be “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6, NKJV). This church had not conducted public evangelism for 30 years. Over the course of time, the average number of baptisms in the church went from 1.2 per year to 12.75 per year. Tithe increased from \$253,000 to \$465,000. Our secret? No secret. We instituted the slogan “Don't die without bringing someone to Christ.” We wanted to fill members with the desire to make their walk with Christ tangible by bringing someone to Christ. We made evangelism intentional instead of accidental. We followed the phases of discipleship based on the cycle of agriculture: prepare, plant, cultivate, harvest, and preserve.²

Cycle of agriculture³



Phases of discipleship⁴



1. *Prepare: Be prayerful.* Ask the Lord for guidance. He will give you specific details—His plan for your church. I have been a full-time church planter for 11 years, but my last two churches have been a totally different scenario. These were established churches. My current church has existed for 160 years. They planted a Hispanic congregation in our town a decade ago, and currently we have a Karen-Burmese group. Unfortunately, they did not plant another English-speaking congregation but, in fact, stopped doing public evangelism for a very long time. This led me to a time of prayer and fasting and asking God to give me a clear insight as to the best plan for this church. The two areas of church planting and evangelism are dear to my heart, so I could not surrender to the DNA of the local church.

2. *Plant: Be exemplary.* Continuously preach on the need of reaching the lost, but then, pastors need to inspire people by their own example. People can read us from a distance if we are passionate about what we preach. Time and again, I asked myself, Why does God use weak, erring human beings to proclaim the gospel? Ellen

White reminds us that “God could have reached His objective in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”⁵ The veracity of the Great Commission is that it was established for our own benefit. So my members were encouraged to make a list of friends, neighbors, and coworkers and pray daily for each person on the list. They were to pray for an opportunity to perform an act of kindness⁶ for each person and then to invite the person to an event planned by the church.

3. *Cultivate: Be persistent.* Our church’s first official campaign for decades was an eye-opener for some. The guest evangelist and I did most of the work. That was when I noticed that the church needed training on how to reach people. I asked that each member bring one person to the meetings. If a member didn’t have a friend, then, I said, I needed that member to visit the psychologist. And our plan was to never give up. We claimed Joshua 1:9. Today we live in a culture that likes to see fast results.

We have fast food, fast computers—everything is fast. It was important for us to remember that God does things in His own time. When things did not go according to plan, we refused to quit on our first or even second attempt.

4. *Harvest: Be humble.* Rather than renting a venue, we chose to use our local church. We wondered how many would attend. God blessed our first official evangelistic series with 108 visitors over three weeks. At the conclusion, 14 persons were baptized, to the glory of God. First, *humility must precede or herald the harvest.* Genesis 5:22 tells us that “Enoch walked with God.” God walks with humble people. In fact, “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”⁷ Second, *humility must succeed or follow the harvest.* This quote has inspired me: “Those who have been successful in soul-winning were men and women who did not pride themselves on their ability, but who in humility and faith sought to help those about them. Jesus did this very work. He came close to those whom He desired to reach.”⁸

Chuck’s Story

I met Chuck on a Friday night in 2014 at a small health-group meeting. He was one of the first people I met in Fort Wayne when I arrived. He was an American who had grown up without a specific knowledge of God. His way of speaking and expressing himself on all kinds of topics quickly caught my attention. This man was not afraid to speak what he felt was right. He was very aggressive; his language—colorful. He came to be in the health group because of severe heart problems. Chuck learned how to adopt a healthy lifestyle. He made new friends in the group, and eventually they became part of his inner circle of friends.

When I had known Chuck for a few weeks, I invited him to our church. He responded by telling me that one day he would surprise me. One day Chuck came to church, just to fulfill his promise. But he liked it and kept coming back. We became good friends and regularly ate

lunch together. He started attending Bible studies twice a week. The change in Chuck was slow but definitely recognizable as he got healthier; not only in the physical sense—his language and behavior improved as well. One day he requested baptism, and that request became a reality in May 2016. Today he is a transformed person. He is a living testimony of the power of God.

Not too long ago we started a discipleship training in our church with 21 people. Chuck was one of them. He shared with me the impact that a statement from one of my sermons had made on him. “I heard you say, ‘Do not die without bringing a person to Christ.’ That statement entered my heart, and that is why I came to this training; to learn how to bring someone to Jesus in my seventies. I want to have that experience.”

This to me is what fulfilling the Great Commission is all about. This is following our mission statement.

Basically, successful soul winners are not the ones who are utilitarian but the ones who have no pride in themselves.


5. *Preserve: Be consistent.* We began the process in 2014 and started to see His blessings in 2015, 2016, and especially in 2017. We started a discipleship training on Wednesdays and Sabbaths, using the comprehensive Amazing Disciples series to disciple new members, not simply keeping them in the church but training them how to conduct Bible studies. Our plan is to involve all faithfully attending members in befriending visitors and giving Bible studies. We have 111 Bible studies in preparation for our next public evangelism; most are English-speaking people. I have 65 visitors from last year's meetings whom we will invite again to this September's campaign. The millennials in our church remarked, "We have never seen this happen here before." We are

now preparing the field for evangelism to be conducted every year.

Conclusion

Think again if you believe that evangelism is something to be accomplished only by large churches, or overseas missions, especially in the developing world. It must be our experience, wherever we are. To be sure, some fields more than others require us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Nevertheless, any church that doesn't do evangelism will flounder and eventually die. It may happen slowly, but it will happen. Evangelism is a great benefit for church members. When they participate in evangelism and it becomes a lifestyle, miracles start happening.

I think all of us as pastors would vehemently deny that we have lost our sense of mission. But is it possible to have a passionate commitment to the mission and yet have a casual

connection to the mission statement? God asks us to be intentional, systematic, and persevering. No question, if we follow this mission statement, we will be successful in what our Lord has called us to do. 

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from The New King James Version.
- 2 See Jim Howard, et al. *Discipleship Handbook: A Resource for Seventh-day Adventist Church Members* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2018).
- 3 Graphic from "How Rice Grows," California Rice, calrice.org/industry/how-rice-grows/.
- 4 Graphic adapted from "Grow Michigan: The Harvest Is Great," Audioverse, Feb. 27, 2007, audioverse.org/english/blog/344/grow-michigan-the-harvest-is-great.html. See also www.grow.adventist.org.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 142.
- 6 See Ashton O'Neil, *Every Member, Everyday Witnessing, Deposits for Jesus* (Booklet prepared by Caribbean Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, nd).
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 189.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 194.

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What the church can learn from the age of Amazon

I love business books. Not because I am in the business world. Nor because I have a desire to be in the business world.

I love business books because I learn from them about leadership, organization, systems, vision, and management. These are all essential things for a pastor to know about and grow in.

Yet, while I love consuming business books, at the same time they sadden me. I am saddened because I read stories of men and women willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of their vision. They devote their money (most of the great companies had someone who invested their life savings in the beginning), time, thoughts, and energy to the business. Yet I wonder why all of us as pastors are not willing to do the same for our church or churches.

I am saddened because I read about how vision and mission drive the direction of these companies and their leaders while, at the same time, I see so many churches shackled by tradition and sacred cows.

Furthermore, I am saddened because I read about leaders constantly looking to grow, improve, and be the best in their field, but so many of us as pastors are content to remain at our current level. We do not read books, go to conferences, seek mentorship, or look for the best in the field so as to improve. So many of us are satisfied with

the status quo. Even worse, so many churches allow us to be that way, or do not realize that they deserve better.

All of this saddens me because we serve a cause much more important than any secular enterprise. We have a power on our side much greater than any man-made method or model—the Holy Spirit. And we have a mission much more vital than money—the salvation of humanity!

We could learn much from our business world counterparts. Every time I read a business book, I gain new insights and am grateful for them. That was my experience with Brad Stone's *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon*.¹ Amazon is currently the largest retailer in the world. Can church leaders learn from Amazon? Here are nine concepts I have gleaned for my ministry.

1. Balance between the member and the not-yet member

Amazon's passion is customer service. Vigilant about retaining their committed customers (think members), they are even willing to sacrifice revenue at times to avoid making the customer feel unappreciated or uncomfortable. Yet, they never take their eye off of their ultimate goal, which is to win other people to their family, to create new fans of Amazon. They work to keep both goals in harmony with each other.

I find that many churches struggle with the balance that Amazon has seemed to achieve. In the larger churches I have been a part of, I have found that we tend to focus on attracting new people, but the already committed members silently slip out the back door without anyone really noticing. We state that our membership in North America is 1.2 million members, yet we know that only half, if even that many, actually attend church on a consistent basis. We never see an article on the cover of the *Adventist Review* titled "Membership at 1.2 Million . . . But We Have No Idea Where 623,000 of Those Members Are." Do we care more about the growth of the number 1.2 million than its retention?

On the other hand, I have worked at smaller churches that seem to enjoy their close-knit community so much that they do not really have a great desire to attract new "customers." The new disrupts what already is and, for many, to allow this is tantamount to apostasy. While they will not always emphasize their numbers, they will brag about how they know everyone's name in the church. Of course, it is not hard to remember 30, 40, even 75 names. Obviously, I have seen large churches that are great at retention and small congregations that are highly successful at evangelism. But Amazon shows me how we are all better off when both are in balance.

2. Word of mouth evangelism

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos's goal is one day to be able to completely eliminate Amazon's marketing department and just grow by word of mouth. In fact, he believes that the best evangelism—the best way for a company to grow—is when customers share their experiences with others through word of mouth.

The church needs to develop the same attitude. Amazon is committed to their customers because of its belief that such people will become personal evangelists for the company. Our churches and church members need to embrace this same idea as the best form of evangelism. Bring a friend to the “store,” please!

3. Complaining is not a strategy, but hard work is

Nothing changes just because of complaining. If someone wants to transform situations, they should apply Amazon's concept that “hard work is strategy.” If you want things to be different, you should work hard to be a part of what you want to see.

Oh, how the church needs to learn that instead of more letters and phone calls, more active involvement will move things in a positive direction! This applies to us pastors, not just our members. Far too often we spend so much time complaining about our bosses rather than really working for positive change. I have found that most people will, if they see pastors working hard and being committed to the growth of God's kingdom, pay greater attention to the ideas of these hard-working individuals. “Complaining is not a strategy.”

4. Innovate, innovate, innovate

Human beings normally fear change. But in the church, a far greater fear should be stagnancy. Without change, which comes from innovation, a stagnant church and then, eventually, a dead church will be the result. Innovation is not the creeping compromise that some think it is. Many

were not comfortable with the innovations that H. M. S. Richards initiated decades ago through his radio ministry, the Voice of Prophecy. They had an overall fear of technology, especially the potential evils of associating with radio and, eventually, television. Yet even so-called conservative groups within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, such as Amazing Facts and 3ABN, are embracing, endorsing, and funding what was once thought a potential evil, liberal compromise. Jeff Bezos said, “What is dangerous is to not evolve.”

5. Imitate what works

“We watch our competitors, learn from them, see the things that they were doing good for customers and copy those things as much as we can,” Jeff Bezos has stated.² Our churches are often far too scared of imitating methodologies from those outside our own movement. If something does not violate our theology and is clearly working elsewhere, we should grab it and run with it. In our church we have incorporated many an idea that came from a business book I have read or a church growth book by an author belonging to another denomination. In no way has this watered down our theology. While we do not imitate theology, we do borrow some methodologies (obviously within reason, of course). We also try to learn from our fellow Adventists—another area in which I feel we have drastic deficiencies as a church. Sharing, receiving, and implementing the best practices, even within Adventism, will help us accomplish more and grow.

6. No one is more important than the vision

In Amazon's culture, this means that no one gets to keep their job simply because they were there from the beginning. No one hangs on to their position because it is going to cause tension to replace them. And no one stays just because they are doing an adequate job. The vision reigns supreme, and if anyone does not want to run with

the vision, then the vision will move on without them. Many a church finds itself hampered by someone who feels entitled to a position, entitled to be the roadblock to change. Amazon has only one irreplaceable individual—Jeff Bezos—maybe. The church has only one irreplaceable person, and that is Jesus.

Sharing, receiving, and implementing the best practices, even within Adventism, will help us accomplish more and grow.

Any pastor, any teacher, any administrator who does not charge ahead with the vision should be removed. And any elder, deacon, or church treasurer not on board with the vision should be willing to step aside. That does not mean that everyone will see eye to eye. But if the overall vision and mission of Jesus “to seek and save the lost” is not embraced and thoroughly pursued, then it is time for a change.

7. Take little steps every day to get better

I think that many churches have far too many “major” initiatives. I will include myself in that observation. One point that I appreciated in Stone's book was the idea of incremental changes being made daily to pursue the goal of being the best one can be. It has not been the big moves, such as the introduction of the Kindle or Amazon Prime, that have pushed Amazon to the top, but the daily unseen changes

that have enabled it to reach the retail mountaintop. Bezos demands of himself daily growth and expects nothing less of those around him. What would happen if every pastor, conference administrator, elder, Bible instructor, departmental director, teacher, and member said they want to learn one thing today that will help them to be a better witness for Jesus than they were yesterday? I think that would revolutionize the church, perhaps even more than initiatives such as “Let’s Talk,” “Compassion,” or even “Revival and Reformation.” These have their place, but I fear that far too many of us may be satisfied with the status quo.

8. It is OK to be misunderstood


I would love for more of us as pastors to live by this principle. Far too many of us worry about what others, primarily our church members,

think about us. We capitulate to the complainers, often afraid to step out for fear of losing our job or influence. Amazon has been misunderstood at the point of every major positive step they have ever taken. They are OK with that, content to be misunderstood rather than avoid being bold for their cause. Pastors, would it not be better for us to be misunderstood than to be stuck in a rut? Now let me share one caveat, pastors: if everyone misunderstands you, do not use this as an excuse. If you look around and realize no one is following, it is no longer about being misunderstood; it is, rather, about being a bad leader. But do not back down to the few. Run with the many even if it means being misunderstood.

9. “Make history!”

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos wants to “work hard, have fun, and make history.” The church is of no value if it

is not making history in our world, communities, and the individual lives of both our people and those we are reaching.

Stones’ back cover quotes Walter Isaacson as saying, “Jeff Bezos is one of the most visionary, focused, and tenacious innovators of our era.” Jesus Christ was the greatest visionary and innovator of the ages. When the history books are written and the book of life is opened, I hope we will be known as the tenacious pastoral innovators of our era. I hope it can be said of us, as was said of some pastoral visionaries of old, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (Acts 17:6, NKJV). 

- 1 Brad Stone, *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).
- 2 BusinessNews Publishing, *Summary: “Amazon.com. Get Big Fast”: Review and Analysis of Spector’s Book* (Troy, MI: Business Book Summaries, 2016), 27.

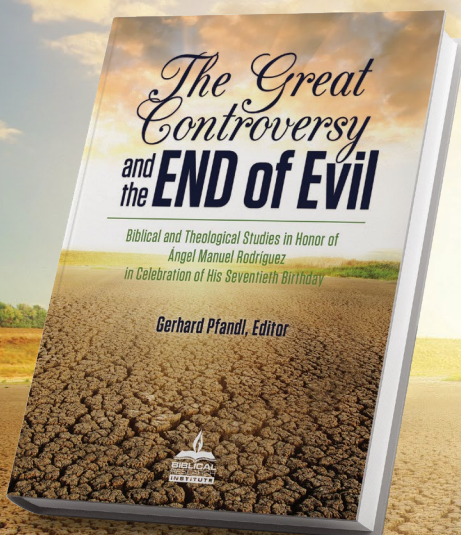
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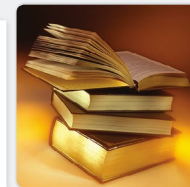
If God is good, why is there so much suffering and evil?

This is one of the issues addressed in this special book, published in honor of retired BRI director Ángel Manuel Rodríguez. A total of twenty-seven chapters examine our understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the sanctuary, salvation, and the end time from biblical, historical, and theological perspectives.

This uniquely Adventist contribution to these vital topics represents a timely resource for every pastor, Bible teacher, and church leader.

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The King Is in Residence

by Charles E. Bradford, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018.

The *King Is in Residence* is a small book packing a powerful message. Former North American Division president C. E. Bradford insists that the most urgent theological task today is to understand the role of God's church in its local context. You will hear "Brad" preach again in these pages. He peppers his message with "Bradfordisms" (phrases/stories that are exclusively and uniquely his) and wonderful quotations from both twenty-first century theologians and Ellen G. White.

Bradford maintains that the health of the local church determines the vitality of the entire Seventh-day Adventist movement. The cover has a lovely, almost life-sized picture of Bradford, with his smile and penetrating eyes. Each chapter reveals Bradford's passion for his God and his church.

Chapter 1—God's Strategy. Bradford quotes Ellen White: "Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of the slaves in America, who have suffered."* Bradford's family history with Ellen G. White makes this quote both personal and foundational for his ministry. The Black church has something to share with the world church!

Chapter 2—The Man Who Made the Devil Quit. Earth was not left without warnings. There were always believers whose lifestyles were counter to the vast numbers of unbelievers. Bradford creatively unravels the problem of retributive judgment and shows how Job's experience is a template for all who follow God.

Chapter 3—Unroll the Scroll! God Communicates His Plan. The Bible is God's inspired playbook for His salvation plan. Bradford deftly explains how the prophets confront sin, uphold justice and righteousness, expand our vision, and make us participants in God's plan by calling us to a covenant community.

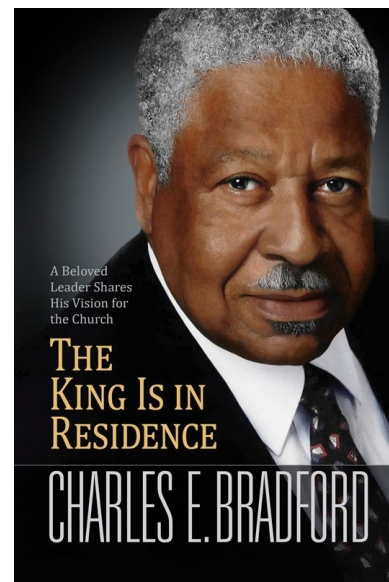
Chapters 4 and 5—The Prophets and the People of God, Part One: From Promise to Exile; Part Two: The Postexilic Community. In these chapters, Bradford expertly discusses God taking the initiative and calling out a people to fulfill His original intention for the church. After the exile, Israel made a complete reversal toward isolationism, selfishly building walls of separation between themselves and their neighbors. Now the prophets preached a message of inclusion: the stranger and the foreigner were now part of the body of Christ.

Chapter 6—The Christ, the Cross, and the Church. The Cross made way for the church, states Bradford; now the church preserves the work of the Cross. The blood of the Cross certifies the new creature for membership in the body. But after the Cross came the resurrection and the ascension. The author skillfully explains how a work of rescue and renewal remained for the church to complete the plan of redemption.

Chapter 7—The Gift-Driven Church. The church is gifted and gift-driven. Bradford is unreservedly fervent in declaring that every gift is needed. Every member is gifted, and every gift will be operative in the remnant. The total gifted community is responsible for a ministry to and for the world.

Chapter 8—The Local Church: The Rainforest of Adventism. Bradford's comparison of local fellowship, where two or three come together in His name, to the rainforest is refreshing. The local church is the living cell that reinvigorates, refreshes, and renews the body of Christ.

Chapter 9—The Secret of Unity. Here the twenty-first century believer is called to witness in a time of racial conflict, ideological struggles, worldwide violence, and social revolution; a time of fierce hatred, bitterness, and despair. But the church is, in every respect,



a society of equals. Nothing should divide it—neither geography, language, culture, race, or any other man-made barriers. Bradford pastorally emphasizes that ministry is the business of all and should unite God's people.

Chapter 10—The Emerging Remnant. As we live between the two comings—Old Bethlehem and the New Jerusalem—there is much to do. The heart of Bradford's appeal is for Christ's people to reflect His character so that He might present His church without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27).

Pick up a copy of Elder C. E. Bradford's book to be invigorated spiritually and inspired to share Jesus' love with the world. This is the time for us to spread the gospel message and be tools for God to add residents in the kingdom so that His house may be filled! 📖

—Reviewed by DeWitt S. Williams, EdD, retired director of Health Ministries, North American Division.

* Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), 42.

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► Baking ministry leads people to the Bread of Life in Australia

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia—“If there’s one thing Polish people know [how to make], it’s good bread,” **Richard Glowacki** tells me confidently. Although he and fellow church member **Joel Breski** have full-time jobs, they are passionate about baking and will choose homemade sourdough over store-bought loaves any day.

In 2016, Richard heard a Sabbath School mission story about troubled kids nobody wanted to work with. It touched his heart, and he began wondering what he could do to bring new people into his church family at Pendle Hill Polish Seventh-day Adventist Church, a church of mostly Polish, Czech, and Slovak immigrants outside Sydney in New South Wales, Australia.

The answer: to meet his community’s physical needs for bread before he met their spiritual needs. He and Joel decided to run baking workshops for the community. They charge a small fee to cover the cost of ingredients, but otherwise, it’s a labor of love.

With the full support of their church, Richard and Joel advertised their baking workshops on Facebook and through the local Polish community. Between 30 and 40 people attended the first workshop, and the word has spread since.

“One woman asked for Bible studies after attending our workshop,” recalls Joel. “She began attending our Sabbath School and mentioned that she had four friends who would be prepared to pay money to have a Bible study. We

were amazed and told her there was no need to pay—studying the Bible was free!”

Workshop attendees are also invited to join the church for Sabbath lunches (outdoors if the weather permits). It gives them the opportunity to learn more about healthy eating and make friends with the church members. The process has proven so successful that Richard and Joel have now partnered with several churches around Australia.

“People have asked us where they can buy our bread,” says Richard. “You won’t find it in any shops. Our goal is to teach—we want to equip people with the knowledge of how to make healthy bread for themselves. Then we introduce them to the Bread of Life.” [Linden Chuang, *Adventist Record*]

► Evangelistic series results in over 19,000 baptisms in Tanzania

Mwanza, Tanzania—More than 19,000 people were baptized in Mwanza, Tanzania, many of them on June 2, 2018, after attending a *Revelation of Hope* evangelistic series. It was the crowning act of a three-week evangelism series with Pastor **Mark Finley** as the main speaker.

Watching thousands wade into the waters of Lake Victoria for baptism, Finley said, “I will never forget the time God allowed me to witness so many miracles of salvation.”

His wife, **Ernestine Finley**, who shared health talks during the three weeks, said she was excited and happy to see how people began to apply the health principles they learned immediately after they heard of their benefits.

All presentations were broadcast live on Hope Channel Tanzania. More than 4,000 sites in Tanzania and neighboring countries received the signal.

The CCM Kirumba Stadium, where the meetings took place, was

transformed into a health center. Before the meetings closed, it was reported that 9,000 patients were treated.

Also, many people who said they were tormented by forces of evil came and asked for prayers to be free. Tanzania native and Adventist General Conference vice president **Geoffrey Mbwana** said that many who were struggling with evil spirits found victory in Jesus.

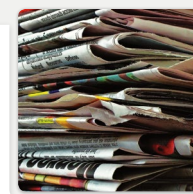
“Some came to our prayer booth with lacerated bodies; others had been hopelessly captive to incurable diseases, but Christ set them free,” he shared.

The success of the meetings depended upon the involvement of church members who contributed their time and resources. Besides visitations and invitations, some offered to refuel vehicles that were used during the series. Others freely accommodated pastors and translators in their apartments, and others equipped the stadium with powerful sound equipment. “It was total member involvement in action,”

said Finley in a nod to a world church initiative that invites every member to get involved in sharing Jesus.

Northern Tanzania Union Conference president **Godwin K. Lekundayo** reminded members that the important task of nurturing and retaining the newly baptized lies ahead. “As a mother after giving birth can’t abandon the baby, so we cannot afford to lose them,” he said. [Prince Bahati, East Central Africa Division News & *Adventist Review*]





► Ordinations, baptisms, and a clean water supply

Papua New Guinea (PNG)—Seventh-day Adventist Church members attending Mission 18 in Awan village, Onga Waffa LLG (Markham district, PNG), built a community water supply in just one week.

Funds for the water initiative were collected through offerings and contributions by Adventist churches. The project was estimated to cost almost K100,000 but was built at half its estimated cost.

“This kind of project will take a company months to bring to completion, but it took us a week. To God be the glory for the miracle we’ve seen,” said Morobe Mission president Pastor **Blasius Managos**.

A baptism was also conducted on the Sabbath with 81 candidates from across Morobe Mission.

The program was an initiative of the Morobe Mission aimed at meeting both the physical and spiritual needs



of the people. [Adrian Ales, *Adventist Record*]

► After Japan, major evangelistic drive planned for Northern Asia

Seventh-day Adventist leaders intend to hold evangelistic meetings at 2,019 sites across the entire Northern Asia-Pacific Division in 2019.

Division leaders approved the ambitious plan during midyear meetings on May 22–24, just as the bulk of Japan’s evangelistic meetings wrapped up. The Northern Asia-Pacific Division has about 720,000 church members living among a population of 1.6 billion people.

“Two thousand nineteen sites might be too humble when we think of one point six billion inhabitants,” said **Si Young Kim**, president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. “But as church leaders and members go forward with united hearts and with the TMI [Total Member Involvement] spirit, we believe the Lord will pour out His great blessings.”

Adventist General Conference president Ted N. C. Wilson pointed out that “the Northern-Asia Pacific Division has embarked on what every division, union, local field, church, and church

member around the world should be doing, and many are doing, as we look forward to Christ’s soon return.”

South Korea is expected to host the largest number of sites—1,000—in 2019. The sites will be scattered across the

political restrictions, exist in the territory. But we cannot stop mission to one point six billion people.”

Gerson Santos, an associate secretary for the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, noted the challenges of reaching Japan’s largely non-Christian population but expressed hope that immigrants could help make inroads in sharing the gospel.

“I think a revival among immigrants could bring support to the work among the Japanese,” said Santos, a Brazilian native, who preached at a Portuguese-speaking church in Kakegawa, Japan. “It takes a while to be integrated in a close traditional culture like this,” he added.

“However, I believe the children of immigrants might be able to create a bigger impact in the future of the church as they learn the language and become more integrated in Japanese society.”

The key to any evangelistic effort is prayer, church leaders said. [Andrew McChesney, *Adventist Mission*]



division’s territory, including 110 sites in Japan, 110 sites in Taiwan, 29 sites in Mongolia, and 20 sites in Hong Kong.

“We believe God will be with us in our plans,” Kim said. “The Northern Asia-Pacific Division is a challenging field in terms of mission. Huge waves of secularism and materialism, including

Friendship Evangelism

Clay Peck is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who promotes friendship evangelism. In the Davenport, Iowa church he held meetings that yielded 30 baptisms. “More than half were from small groups,” he reports. “The rest were from friendship evangelism—every one.” The congregation had worked at a relational strategy for evangelism for three years prior to the meetings and had 80 or more people participating in a dozen small groups each week.

The unchurched are not necessarily unbelievers, but most are not likely to have participated in any religious activity. They can be reached only at a personal level through a relationship with someone whom they trust and respect. In secularized, urban societies, friendship evangelism may be the only avenue to reach large numbers of people who are resistant to religion.

Friendship evangelism recognizes the fact that most converts to Christ and the church are won through the ministry of friends or relatives. Gottfried Oosterwal says that 57 percent of adults who join the Adventist Church list friends and relatives as the most important influence in their decision, and 67 percent say this was the avenue through which they first became acquainted with the Adventist message.* Other global surveys indicate that the percentage may be as high as 80.

Three elements of friendship

Friendship evangelism consists of three elements. Each can be seen as a “layer” of solid foundation in Christ, and each builds upon the other.

First, the Christian demonstrates caring and compassion through

a genuine friendship that is unconditional—not allied with any expectation of the nonbeliever. I do not expect my friends to accept Christ or join the church, because they may never do it, no matter how much I would like it. I do not expect my friends to do anything for my ego, pocketbook, or career. I accept them as they are.

Second, the Christian seeks to understand the needs of unchurched friends. I do not make a theological judgment or a Christian analysis of their need, but accept their feelings as they understand them. I am aware that their needs will eventually push them toward a readiness for the good news about Christ.

Third, the Christian finds opportunities to share the possibility of faith by meeting the felt needs of unchurched friends. Such openings are often brief and fragile, and they are always highly personal moments. In the lives of some, they are rare. Usually they are related to some aspect of life in which their secular values fail to provide genuine substance and inner strength.

Focusing on real-life cases

If an unchurched friend has just confided discouragement about his or her career, and answered my readiness question in a way that indicates openness, I might respond by simply saying, “Have you thought about the possibility of establishing a serious faith in Jesus? If you were to do so, that relationship would provide you with a different standard against which to measure success in your career. You would have the feeling that a life of service is more rewarding than winning a promotion in the corporation.”

Jesus uses this type of verbal witness in John 4:13, 14. He tells the woman that the solution to her deep, inner thirst is the “water that I shall give.” It has the advantage of quenching thirst forever, so that those who receive it “never thirst.” And the specific benefit of becoming in the woman “a spring of water” (NIV), or source of eternal love. Many church members are learning to apply this model in their everyday contacts with unchurched friends, relatives, neighbors, and work associates.

People in evangelism

Does your local church have a systematic strategy to encourage and support members in “working their networks” through casual, everyday opportunities for witness? Educate church members in some basic concepts beyond just skills in Bible study and verbal witnessing. These include (1) how to relate to secular people in love and compassion, (2) how to listen to their perceived needs, and (3) how to share faith in a way that it makes sense.

If, in each local congregation, the majority of members practice friendship evangelism while 10 or 20 percent become active in lay Bible ministry or other witnessing programs, a real evangelism explosion would ensue! ☛

* *Patterns of SDA Church Growth in North America* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1976), 40. This is corroborated in research by Kermit Netteburg et al., *The North American Division Marketing Program, vol. 1* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, 1986), 54.

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