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give Him glory...”

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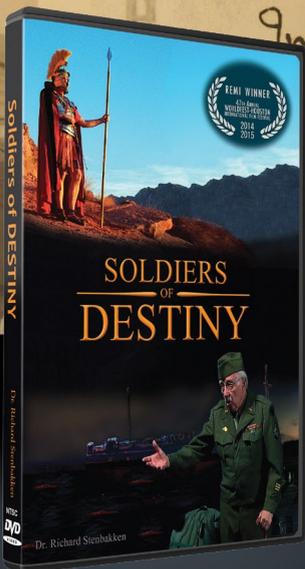
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International Journal for Pastors
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Vol. 93, No. 1 © 2021

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+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

COVER

316 Creative

LAYOUT

316 Creative

SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99;
Canada and overseas US\$47.00.
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Ministry® has been published
monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial
Association, General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists®. Ministry is a

peer-reviewed journal.

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Printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn.,
1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687
Standard mail postage paid at Nampa,
Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

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“Each article had poignancy and constructive ideas. I admit that it’s rare for me to digest them all, but this month’s breadth of topics and ideas made me break the tradition!”

Like father . . .

My father was a pastor and subscribed to the magazine. It meant so much to his ministry, I’m excited to follow in his steps and join the *Ministry* family.

—Dr. Milton Hathaway, *New Covenant Community Church, Quinton, Virginia, United States*

September, great! But . . .

I found much to appreciate in all three articles on Stewardship by Bonita Shields, Skip Bell, and Aniel Barbe (September 2020). However, there is a caution to be observed in Barbe’s article, “Building a Culture of Liberality in the Local Church,” where he cites McIver’s research indicating that people who pray regularly, study the Bible and their Bible study guides daily, and attend church services

weekly were more likely to give. Barbe concludes that to increase liberality we need “to encourage more members to study their Sabbath School lesson and attend Sabbath School.” While it may be true that study of the Sabbath School lesson could be predictive of a member more likely to give, I do not believe it is a causative factor.

Simply promoting church attendance and Sabbath School study

does not increase giving. Teaching the development of a wholistic life of discipleship and living in the full joy of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every part of my life is where heartfelt liberality is generated.

—Ray Hartwell, *director of Grateful Living, the Stewardship Ministry of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, Calhoun, Georgia, United States.*

The September issue of *Ministry* was “one of the best” ever. Each article had poignancy and constructive ideas. I admit that it’s rare for me to digest them all, but this month’s breadth of topics and ideas made me break the tradition!

—Harley Stanton, *Youngtown, Tasmania, Australia*





Pavel Goia,
DMin, is
editor of
Ministry.



The final inspection

A few years ago, while I was pastoring in Kentucky, United States, my wife, Daniela, was owner and director of a small nursing home for veterans of war. The social workers in charge of that district came monthly to see how well she cared for the veterans. The social workers would always call and announce their inspection. But each year, there was an annual inspection—and that visit was never announced.

About five people from the state came. They inspected everything related to the care of the veterans: the quality of food and medication charts, the house and water temperatures, and the fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. Business owners were afraid of this inspection because invariably the state inspectors found something to be corrected. Large errors would result in a fine or even closure of the facility.

Every time they came to inspect my wife's business, the process was the same—and so was the result. After checking every detail thoroughly, they would express appreciation for her work. For many consecutive years, she received certification and recognition for running the best state facility in its class. They would remark, "We don't understand how you do things so well. Weren't you anxious about the inspection?"

"No," Daniela would reply, "because I make sure I prepare for it."

They would ask, "How do you prepare for the inspection, since you don't know when we are coming?"

She would respond, "I prepare as if every day is the day of inspection. We treat our veterans with love and respect."

Eternal gospel

When I read the first of the three angels' messages comprising the eternal gospel, I can understand why some may be anxious about an inspection. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV).¹

This passage mentions preaching, but it is not limited to preaching. "Much more than mere sermonizing is included in preaching the gospel." "You are with one hand to reach up and by faith take hold of the mighty arm which brings salvation, while with the other hand of love you reach the oppressed and relieve them."²

"He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." Matt. 25:31,32, NKJV

Eternal life

Revelation 14 also mentions a judgment, but it is based on an inspection taking place now. "When the nations are gathered before Him [Christ], there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering."³

So I understand why Jesus' words may cause fear: " 'Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect' " (Matt. 24:44, NKJV). But I also understand why John's words may bring hope: "There is no room in love for fear. . . . Fear of death, fear of judgment" (1 John 4:18, *The Message*).

Love and care for the vulnerable have always been a priority for God. They are key to what it means to worship Him—and key to passing the final inspection.



- 1 See p. 28, Dateline, "Renewed Emphasis on the Three Angels' Messages."
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 32, 31.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), 637. Matt. 25:31-46.

NO FEAR



George W. Brown, DDiv, is a retired president of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. He resides in Avon Park, Florida, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Editorial note: This is a condensed transcription of Dr. George Brown's devotional message for the General Conference and Division Officers Meeting, October 5, 2020.

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV). And one of the things that had happened to ancient Israel is found in the story of the Exodus. We know the story.

The Exodus was off to an uncertain start. The army of the world's superpower at that time was in hot pursuit. People were trapped between the army and the Red Sea. What could they do? Surrender and return to slavery or fight and be slaughtered?

Some were murmuring, crying, bemoaning their fate; others were praying—and they escaped. God intervened. The same God who intervened for Israel at that time is willing to intervene on behalf of His people today. The same principles that inspired the people of God then can inspire the children of God now.

"And Moses said to the people: 'Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.'

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward' " (Exod. 14:13–15, NKJV).

Three imperatives from this passage cry out to be heard.

Do not be afraid

At a time when we are confronted with a monumental global crisis, we have a tendency to be afraid. But the first imperative is validated by the promises of God. The invincible God, the mighty God, the God of miracles, says, "Don't be afraid, for I will fight for you."

And, as modern leaders in spiritual Israel, we can claim that promise as well. God is our

Deliverer; God is our omnipotent Defender; He is our unfailing Protector. All His promises are guaranteed by the blood of Christ. Therefore, in the midst of the pandemic and all the problems we face, He says to us, "Do not be afraid. Look up; I will fight for you; I will defend you; I will deliver you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Don't be afraid of your modern Red Seas—the social unrest, the political chaos, the escalating violence, global terrorism, the natural disasters, the fires and the floods, and the rest of it. Which of these things is greater than our God? None!

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teachings in our past history."¹

Stand firm

The second imperative is equally powerful: "Stand firm, and see" (Exod. 14:13, ESV).

This standing firm is not a state of passive resignation but a posture of steadfastness, spiritual alertness, faith, and unyielding confidence in God, who has led us in the past and who continues to lead us today. To stand firm is to resolve to be unshakable in our faith. We are to stand firm on the platform of the eternal truth that God has given to us. "Hold to the sure pillars of our faith. . . . They have made us what we are."²

"Standing firm" has many dimensions. Stand firm on the never-failing promises of God. Stand firm on the verity of the fundamentals of our beliefs. Stand firm on the urgency of our global redemptive mission. Stand firm in the sure knowledge that God is leading His people. Stand firm in accepting, practicing, and proclaiming the good news of the everlasting gospel. And stand firm in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

No wavering, no equivocation, no doubting. Like Paul, let us go forward, forgetting those things that are behind and pressing toward the goal of the high calling in Jesus Christ (see Phil.



3:13, 14). In an age of moral relativity, of religious pluralism, of neo-paganism, the appeal from the Word of God to church leaders is, “Stand firm on the solid rock of our message.”

Go forward

The third imperative is, perhaps for us now, the most crucial: “Go forward.”

The final imperative is, perhaps for us now, the most crucial and action-packed; it is dynamic. God said to Moses, “Say to the children of Israel: ‘Go forward.’” The New International Version renders it, “Tell the Israelites to move on” (Exod. 14:15).

The message to God’s church today during this terrific global crisis is, “Go forward in faith.” Don’t remain trapped, terrified, and paralyzed by the fear of our modern Red Seas. Let us move on, let us go forward. And let us remember, too, that prayer and faith are no substitute for action when God tells us to move on.

So, go forward in faith and courage in the proclamation of the three angels’ messages, giving the good news to the world. Go forward in spiritual growth; go forward in discipleship; go forward in leadership that is patterned up to the leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ. If Israel did not go forward, there would not have been the miracle of crossing the Red Sea. And if we go forward, there can be no turning back, for God has won the victory for us.

“Thanks be unto God, who keeps on giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57, author’s translation). Ellen White wrote, “By [God’s] grace [leaders] [are] to go forward, despairing of nothing and hoping for everything.”³ “If we will move forward in faith, believing in the all-sufficient power of God, abundant resources will open before us.”⁴

Let there be no uncertainty about our salvation; let there be no misgiving about our mission. Let there be no mistake about our doctrinal solidarity. There must be no biblical detours, no drifting from the faith, no Laodicean apathy, no love affair with our status quo. We are encouraged in these challenging times to move on, to go

forward under the guidance of our commander, Jesus Christ.

David Livingstone is said to have stated, “I will go anywhere, as long as it is forward.” How aptly does this apply to us?

No turning back

About 2,000 years ago, the Romans invaded Britain. And during that invasion, the commander-in-chief said to his men, “Let us burn all the ships in which we traveled to England.” One of the sailors turned to his commander-

in-chief and asked this question: “If we burn the ships, what shall we do in the event of a retreat?” And the commander-in-chief answered, “There shall be no retreat.”

The message to church leaders is obvious: there shall be no retreat. We should have no reverse gear. We are called to go forward in faith in this twenty-first century, even with its daunting Red Seas, crises, challenges, and difficulties. By God’s grace, there shall be no looking back,

no hesitation, no murmuring, no doubting, no uncertainty—but only going forward by faith.

The imperatives that the Lord gave Israel—do not be afraid, stand firm, go forward—He gives to us today. With arms stretched straight, eyes fixed forward, and heads held high—with hearts merged with mercy, hands joined with justice, and feet clothed with compassion—we are moving toward the celestial Promised Land and not retreating to Egypt. Healing and helping as we go, teaching and preaching as we go, we are marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God.

THE LORD TOLD ISRAEL, “DO NOT BE AFRAID; STAND FIRM; GO FORWARD!” IS IT STILL RELEVANT?



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), 196.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 201.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 23.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 371.



Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach

Frank M. Hasel, ed., *Biblical Research Institute Studies in Hermeneutics*, vol. 3, Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020.

Biblical *Hermeneutics* is a response to a request placed at the 2015 General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists in San Antonio, Texas, to do further work on biblical hermeneutics. While this request was triggered by a particular question about ordination, the issues we face as a church in hermeneutics are much larger. Therefore, it is appropriate that the authors of this significant volume address the wide range of hermeneutical issues encountered by students of Scripture with a resultant harmony of theology and praxis.

After an introduction presenting a general overview, 14 chapters follow addressing the interpreter's presuppositions (chapter 1); the trustworthiness of Scripture (chapters 2–4); Scripture and culture (chapter 5); faith and science (chapter 6); biblical interpretation (chapter 7), including how later Bible writers interpreted earlier passages (chapter 8); prophetic interpretation (chapters 9, 10); and the relationship between the gift of prophecy and *sola scriptura* (chapter 13). Other chapters present Genesis 1 as a test case for hermeneutics (chapter 11), a historical survey of Adventist presuppositions and methods (chapter 12), and an overview and evaluation of current trends in biblical interpretation (chapter 14). An appendix on "Methods of Bible Study" presents the Seventh-day Adventist Church's official statement on the subject, voted in 1986 by the Executive Committee of the General Conference.

The historical and literary features of the text receive careful examination. In contrast to critical approaches that reconstruct the meaning *behind* the biblical text, or postmodern reader-response approaches that seek the meaning in the reader *in front* of the text, the authors endorse the decisiveness of the actual biblical text for its proper

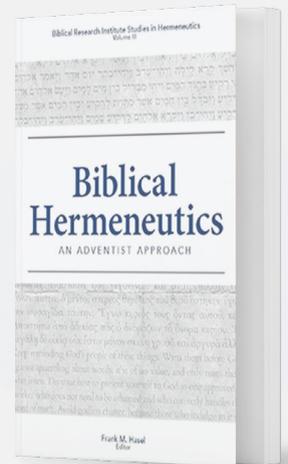
interpretation. This also requires the interpreter to identify from Scripture itself culture-related or conditional elements that were specific to Israel, as well as universal elements that are still normative for us today.

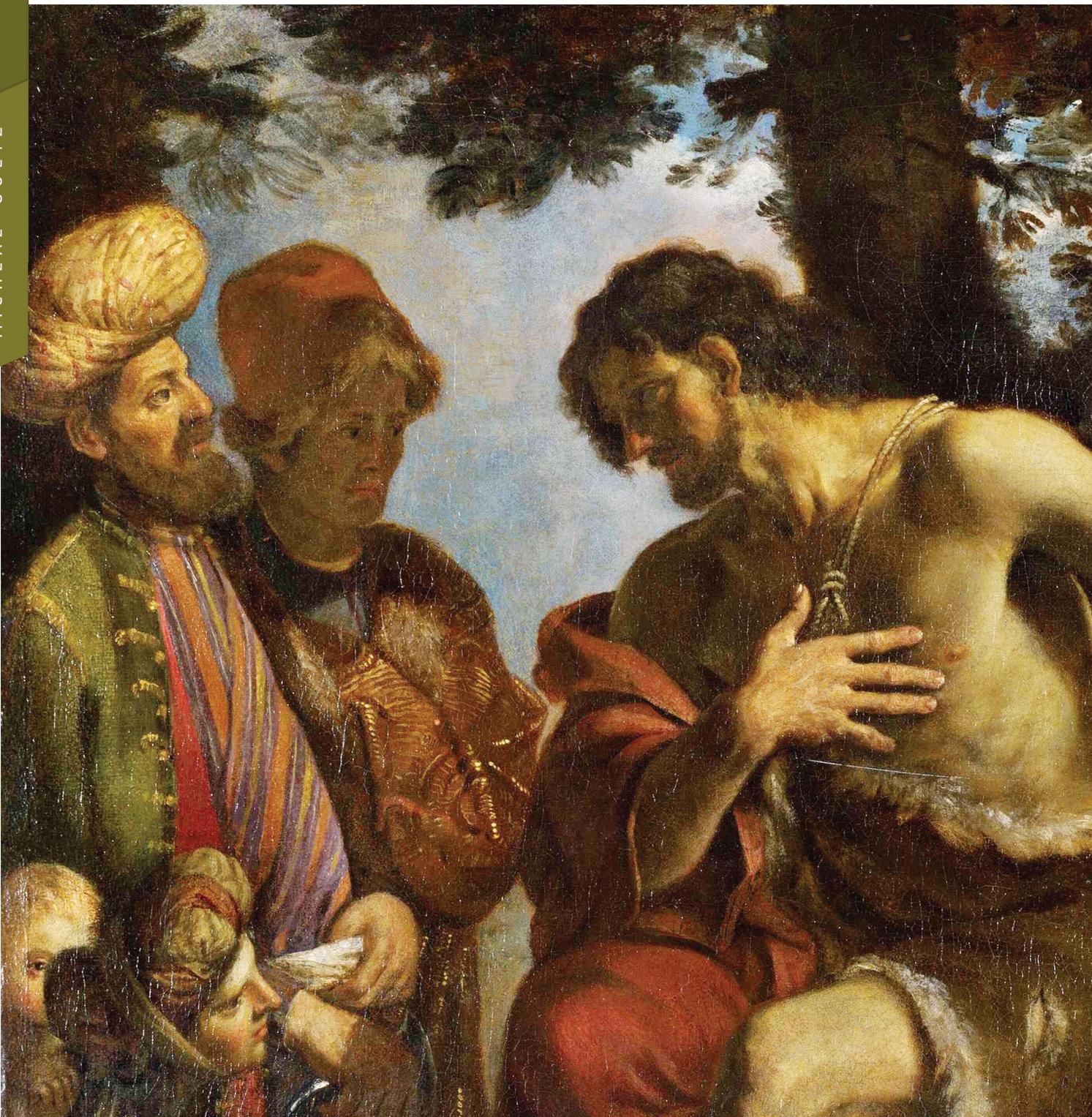
Each chapter is thoroughly researched and documented. The authors allow Scripture to shape their presuppositions, accepting Scripture as divinely conditioned but historically constituted, providing us with a trustworthy account of God's will. They affirm the divine authority of Scripture and make clear that, for a proper understanding of the Bible, the interpreter needs to approach it with humility, an open mind, and an obedient heart.

The book explores current issues in greater depth and investigates important questions that have not received adequate attention in previous volumes. It thus advances our understanding of the hermeneutical process and may conveniently be used as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate theology students. Although written from an Adventist perspective, this book is, as its title indicates, a truly biblical hermeneutic. While academic in scope, this book is written in such a way that any serious student of Scripture will profit from it. As such, I highly recommend this volume for any person, be it a scholar, theologian, minister, or lay elder, who is seeking to better understand the meaning of the Bible in a way that is faithful to Scripture itself.

It is hoped that this volume will help others better understand the richness and beauty of biblical hermeneutics. It has the potential to lead scholars and theologians of all backgrounds toward greater unity in their biblical interpretation. Its chapters challenge us to allow Scripture to speak for itself rather than to superimpose outside categories or predetermined conclusions on the biblical text. May it help us continue to affirm Scripture as our "only creed," the basis of our theology, message, and mission. 📖

Daniel Bediako, PhD, is vice-chancellor of Valley View University, Accra, Ghana.





THE BAPTIST: STILL PREACHING



Michael Goetz, DMin, is the lead pastor of Campion Seventh-day Adventist Church in Loveland, Colorado, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

In Liverpool, Pennsylvania, near the Susquehanna River, lies a little cemetery. One wet, gray afternoon, I was there as a new pastor to say a few words in memory of a church member's infant daughter. The baby had been just a few days old, and her casket was the size of a shoebox. I watched as the mother and father held the tiny box and each other before kneeling and putting it into the ground. I had never buried a baby before—and I will never forget that experience.

My pain was even more acute when I read about Kyle Bosworth, former football player for the Jacksonville Jaguars and Dallas Cowboys. His wife, Kara, was due with their second child in early April 2020. During delivery, the baby experienced shoulder dystocia, becoming lodged in the birth canal and deprived of oxygen. After

minutes that must have felt like hours, medical personnel freed the baby and rushed him to a special care unit in the hospital. Tragically, six days later, they took little McCoy off life support. As I looked at the pictures of Kyle holding his newborn son, face pressed against the brain-dead baby, I saw my own son. My chest hurt, and tears began to flow. I asked myself, to what extent are we called to feel the pain of someone else?

Scripture declares, "Among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28, NKJV). William Simmons comments, "Apart from Jesus Christ, John the Baptist is probably the most theologically significant figure in the Gospels. As was the case with Jesus," Scripture meticulously recorded his birth; Divine intervention and an angelic proclamation marked his entrance into the world.¹

John first met Jesus at an early age. While still a fetus, John leaped when the Holy Spirit gave him the recognition of the presence of the Messiah. The incident so impressed Doctor Luke that he recorded it twice (Luke 1:41, 44). Although he lived his formative years in obscurity in the desert, Simmons declares that John the Baptist's public ministry ended nearly four hundred years of prophetic silence. He came in the spirit and with the message of Elijah. His was the voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way for the coming Messiah. In this sense, his ministry marked the culmination of the law and the prophets but heralded the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. Simmons concludes, "John was truly a transitional figure, forming the link between the Old and New Testaments."²

A message of preparation

The Baptist's role had deep prophetic roots, first announced in Isaiah 40:3–5 and repeated in the Gospels: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. . . . And all people will see God's salvation'" (Luke 3:4–6, NIV).

Before giving his prophetic promise of the one who would introduce Jesus, the prophet cried out for the comfort of his people. John's prophesied role would have both an eschatological and a temporal impact.

His call for his listeners to repent because the kingdom of heaven was near galvanized many. He was straightforward in his summons to turn from sin and selfishness because eternity looms before all of us. Later, John the disciple used "beloved" to address his audience. But not the preacher on Jordan's bank; he employed the strongest negative label appearing in the New Testament: "vipers!" (v. 7, NIV).

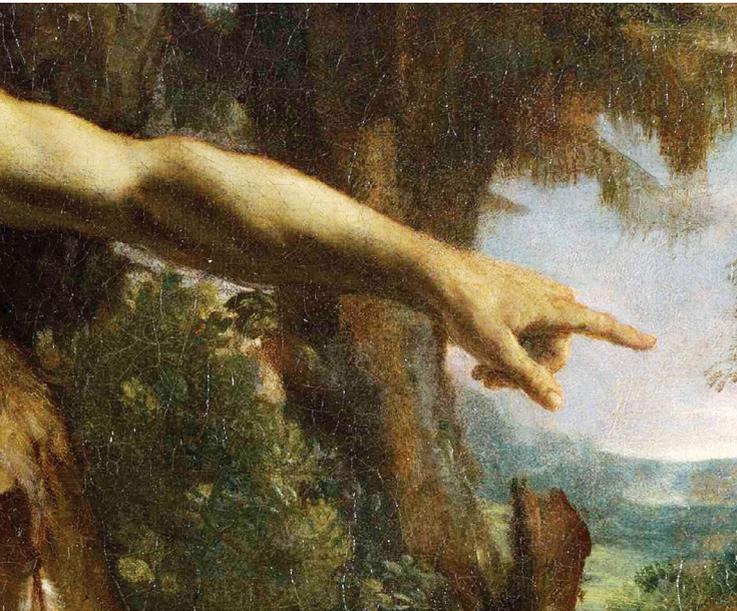
of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (vv. 7–9, NIV). His challenge led his listeners to consider what would happen in their future. Luke says that they "were waiting expectantly" (v. 15, NIV).

John was an end-time prophet. He conducted his ministry with eschatological authority. When he taught that judgment was at hand, it caused people to think about what awaited them.

A message of proclamation

And it was that preaching—of judgment,⁴ of a coming God with His kingdom—that changed their immediate behavior. Luke reports the crowd as asking, "What should we do then?" (v. 10, NIV). That is, in light of the coming Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom, what should we do?

"John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same'" (v. 11, NIV). Speaking to tax collectors, he said, "Don't collect any



SUCH APOCALYPTIC PREACHING, CENTERED ON THE LAMB OF GOD, DID NOT RAISE THE QUESTION "WHEN IS THE END OF THE WORLD?" BUT "WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?"

For decades, the forerunner of Jesus had grown and studied in semiquarantine. Now he was attracting more listeners than the Jewish leaders did to their services. The theme of the preacher on the bank of the Jordan was one of change,³ and it caught the attention of everyone standing on the banks of that river. John was calling everyone, including national and spiritual leaders and Roman soldiers, as children of the devil.

John declared, "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? . . . The ax is already at the root

more than you are required to" (vv. 12, 13, NIV). As for soldiers, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay" (v. 14).

Such apocalyptic preaching, centered on the Lamb of God, did not raise the question "When is the end of the world?" but "What should I do now?" A message of the end of the world, of prophecy being fulfilled, of judgment, did not create a community out of touch with the world but one that led its members to examine their personal involvement in the world.

We find confirmation of this in an oft-quoted, first-century, Jewish-Roman historian, Flavius Josephus, who wrote that John the Baptist “commanded the Jews to exercise virtue; both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God; and so to come to baptism. . . . [Many] others came in crowds [*sic*] about him; for they were very greatly moved . . . by hearing his words.”⁵

The voice preparing the way for the first advent of Jesus, faithfully preaching the eschatological message to every class and culture, raised up a community intent on making a difference in the world around them by helping the hurting and caring for those in need. Such a result will surprise some, as many will conclude that such preaching only will bring to being a people “too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.”⁶

It was this very message that mobilized my community of faith, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, to establish hospitals, schools, and community service centers. Could it be that the message that pointed the world to the coming Messiah is the same message to be given before that same Jesus comes back in the clouds—with the same results?⁷

Matthew tells us that when John the Baptist was in prison, his disciples went to ask Jesus if He was the “Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matt. 11:3, NKJV). Although not replying immediately, Jesus finally said, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (vv. 4, 5, NIV).

Jesus knew that John would recognize the tension between the eschatological and the immediate. Jesus knew that John would understand that the hope of eternity breeds not an indifference to the present world but a greater dedication to it.

Tragically, John’s death silenced his call for both readiness and action on earth. After burying his body, John’s disciples reported to Jesus. “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. . . .

“Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat’” (Matt. 14:13–16, NIV).

We know what happened next. Thousands were fed in the only miracle recorded in all four

Gospels. Its appearance in all four has led some to conclude that it was the most important of Jesus’ miracles.⁸

The one who had preached the coming Messiah and His judgment was dead. The devil hated the impact that John’s message of hopeful anticipation and immediate action had on people. To honor the greatest prophet,⁹ Jesus threw a banquet on the hillside. This greatest of Jesus’ miracles “anticipates the great eschatological banquet at the end of the age. . . . The miracle also demonstrated Jesus’ holistic ministry that recognized the physical and economic needs of His people.”¹⁰

The feeding of the five thousand reminds the whole universe that the gospel is a perfect tension between both what is coming and what currently is. The banquet that afternoon looked toward both the *then* and the *now*. It warned Satan that the messages of John and the Voice that gave them would not be silenced.

A message of expectation

There will be a movement that has its eyes on the great supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9), but instead of distracting them, global crises actually cause the church to practically engage in its world, not simply with social media posts and formal statements. The expectancy of eternity, through Lamb of God–focused apocalyptic preaching, can and will mobilize us today as it did on the banks of the Jordan 20 centuries ago. We will, with hands stretched, hearts touched, and homes open, reach out to a hurting world.



1 Adapted from William A. Simmons, “John the Baptist,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 1996, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/john-the-baptist.html>.

2 Ibid.

3 Luke 3:8 does not leave the listener condemned but speaks of producing fruit in keeping with repentance. It employs language calling for and pointing to their potential for change.

4 See also Luke 3:16, 17.

5 Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities*, book 18, trans. William Whiston (London: 1737), <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/ant-18.html>.

6 Credited as first having been said by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

7 See Acts 1:9–11.

8 *Andrews Study Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), notes on Matthew 14:13–21.

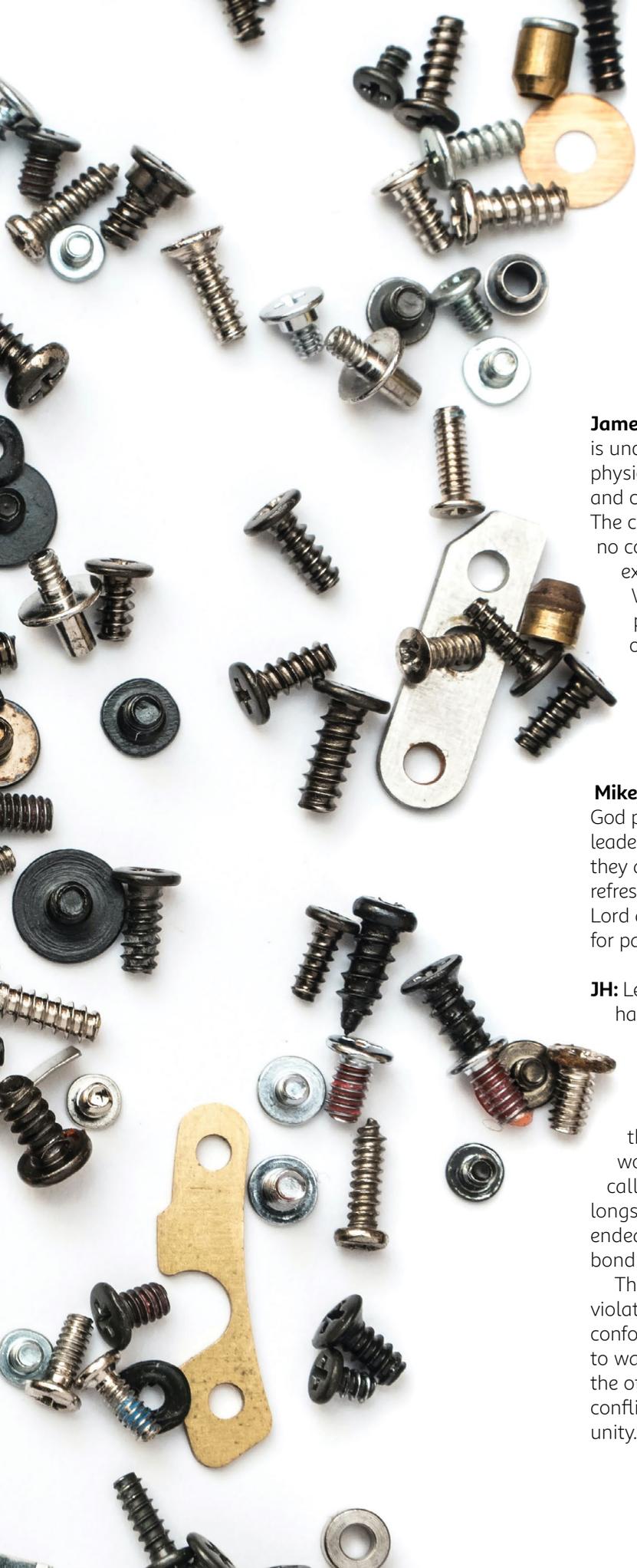
9 See Matthew 11:11.

10 *Andrews Study Bible*, notes on Matthew 14:13–21.



The nuts and bolts of ministry:

An interview with
Mike Wells



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James Howard (JH): The body of Christ, the church, is under attack on many social, spiritual, and even physical fronts. Satan's plan is to shake the church and cause her to be less effective in these last days. The church must stand forth and continue with no compromise to the teachings, commands, and exhortations of God, as revealed in His precious Word. Pastor Mike, many look up to you as a pastor of principle and passion. You are pastor of New Covenant Church in Valdosta, Georgia, and a leader in the nondenominational Christian Alliance Ministries, serving pastors, missionaries, and other leaders. What is the passion that drives your ministry?

Mike Wells (MW): Our focus is to have the love of God poured out in great measure to all our Christian leaders, so that they know, without a doubt, that they are loved. The time together is for leaders to refresh themselves and love on one another in the Lord and be there for one another. We provide tools for pastors to use in building up their congregations.

JH: Let's talk about local congregations. How do you handle conflict resolution within the church?

MW: Matthew 18:15–18 gives the blueprint in dealing with conflict. But the bottom line is to live Ephesians 4:1–3, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with . . . lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" [NKJV].

The church is to walk in unity, and conflict violates that unity and hampers the calling to be conformed to the image of Christ. We must learn to walk in the Spirit of love and forgiveness and let the others see that while the world is vexed and conflicted on all fronts, we can be at peace and unity. According to Jesus, we are to shine as light

in unity, but when conflict arises among us, that light can be dimmed.

JH: What methods do you have to help new believers grow in the grace and knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus Christ?

MW: I believe, as do the other leaders of the church, that those just receiving Christ need to be grounded in the Word of God. That is vital to growth. New believers must be led through basic doctrines and teachings of the Word of God. They may, therefore, grow to be healthy Christians and fulfill God's calling on their lives. Many times, those just coming to the Lord are left to grow up on their own, and we as a body believe that people are especially vulnerable when first "born again." They need direct teaching to be grounded in truth from the beginning.

Paul taught much on foundational truths. Romans is an in-depth look at salvation by grace alone. In Titus, he teaches us that faithful preaching leads to growth in the Word and the Spirit. One-on-one discipleship is very effective. We employ this in the church. People can then be allowed to ask questions and gain greater understanding of the Word.

JH: How do you handle the issue of time management with all the different people and issues pulling on your time?

MW: Time can be a friend or an enemy of a pastor. With all that a pastor must do to effectively lead a church, he or she has to be a time manager. He or she must, first and foremost, spend time with God. A pastor cannot effectively minister to the people unless he or she follows the pattern of Jesus. He or she must spend much time with God. His or her family must come right after that. Many times, pastors use their time ministering to the hurt to the detriment of their own family. The Word says if a man cannot handle his responsibility to his family, how can he lead the church of the living God? So, my wife and children must occupy quality measures of my time.

Another way for a pastor to manage time is to delegate authority. Many times, pastors feel that they must do it all, and that leaves the church hurting. A good time manager delegates different parts of the ministry. He or she has trusted people running different areas; delegates worship leaders, usher leaders, deacon leaders, elders, maintenance leaders, office managers, and



**We rejoice,
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anointed them.**

administrators. When all these parts are running smoothly, then the pastor can be free to pray and seek which way to carry the church by the leading of the Holy Spirit. A pastor must be one of vision and work with that vision for greater good and growth of the body. No minister is an island unto himself or herself, and time is critical. It is short and must be managed for, as the Word says, life is but a vapor (James 4:14).

JH: What is your conviction on lay training?

MW: I really don't like the distinction of clergy and laity. I know in the Old Testament that the Levites were set apart from the rest. They didn't have land, and they got their food from the sacrifices. God had set forth that the Israelites were to be ministers. Exodus nineteen, six, says, " "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel' " [NKJV]. We read later where John speaks of what Jesus did. Revelation one tells us, "And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" [v. 6, NKJV].

Every member of the church is a minister. They may not be in a pulpit, but they are



ministers in the marketplace, in their neighborhoods, wherever they go. The fivefold ministry has a specific role, and that is to train and equip these ministers. Ephesians four, eleven and twelve says, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” [NKJV].

From these Scriptures, the leaders are to train up and send forth each person as a minister in their sphere of life. We believe in training people and then sending them forth into the vision of ministry that God has given them. We rejoice, as leadership, when someone or a family goes forth after sitting under the ministry here to accomplish the things for which God anointed them. Ephesians two, ten: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” [NKJV]. We stand to bring out that work for God in each person as ministers.

JH: How do you define continuing education?

MW: It is written out in Ephesians 4, and I want to quote from Scripture the whole passage. It is vital to church edification and education in the things of God.

“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; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love,” verses thirteen through sixteen [NKJV].

The focus of the church and leadership is to have a pure doctrine, unity in the Spirit, and each person doing their part. We see from Scripture that the church should be educated and have growth. Today, many false teachings run rampant. The pastor and leadership have to confront this and not allow it inside the church, for it is

dangerous and grows rapidly. I personally guard what teaching and doctrine are allowed in the body.

JH: What does administration look like to you in the church?

MW: An anointed administrator is the lifeblood to the church—one who can take the pioneer spirit and vision of the pastor and make it a reality in concrete application. The administrator must be the supply line for the pastor. If a pioneering, visionary pastor doesn't have a focused and God-led administrator, then the supply lines to the church suffer greatly. I am truly blessed to have an administrator who can take the vision and spirit I have for the future of the body and make it happen. It relieves me of unnecessary concern, and I can focus on pastoring. The administrator is a hire that can be a blessing or a curse.

JH: Is there anything more you would like to convey?

MW: I want it to be known that pastors and leaders aren't to be looked upon as better or more gifted than anyone else. They are to shepherd the sheep; they are to concern themselves with the souls of the people that God had entrusted to them. A humble spirit and a great desire to serve must be the catalyst to drive a pastor. Having the call and responsibility of being a pastor is an awesome undertaking, and the heart of the pastor must be that of a servant and not of a tyrant or despot.

Peter summed it up in 1 Peter 5:1-4: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock, and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” [NKJV].

To bring all I have said into focus, the church is a living, breathing organism of God, by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Each person in the church who is born again has something to do in ministry and for the Lord. This is so the church may grow and sustain herself in love. I am thankful God has given me the work of the ministry, in helping to see others go forth and do as God has called them. Ministry is a serious matter to the Lord. 🙏



The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide community driven by the mandate to “‘go and make disciples of all nations’” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Today, more than ever, the global church has turned into a colorful tapestry composed of people from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, the Pew Research Center identified the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the most diverse religious group in the United States.¹

Diversity has a large impact on communal worship because worship is an activity that occurs at a community level and entails human relationships. Never in the history of Christianity has the practice of communal worship experienced more challenges than at present. Yet, when we approach the Bible in hopes of finding a list of right and wrong styles of worship music, we find none.

God created music, which is this wonderful language that goes beyond what words can express. However, God does not say anything concrete in the Bible about music styles. So we try to offer Him our best, but often our best is so different from our brothers' or sisters' that we cannot worship together. According to Faith Communities Today (FACT), around 70 percent of Christian churches in North America cannot

worship together due to music stylistic preferences.² There are even talks of “worship wars.”³

Are we, then, left with no biblical guidance? Not quite. We can find some guidance from the apostle Paul on this subject. Paul is the author of the Bible that writes the most about worship. In the Scriptures, the word *worship* implies to fall down, to submit ourselves to someone superior.⁴ Paul had to fall from his self-righteousness, his ethnic-centered religious mindset, his own understanding of everything, to find Jesus Christ.

Though Paul had written hundreds of verses centered on Jesus and the good news of salvation, he wrote only two verses concerning music in worship. But they are instructive. What were those verses, and what can we learn from them that might help in regard to the issue of music in worship?

Psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit

Paul writes, “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Col. 3:16, NIV). Here, Paul does not give us details on musical modes, scales, or styles; but, rather, he explains in detail how we should treat one another. Paul's

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PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SONGS FROM THE SPIRIT:

Paul's formula for congregational worship

focus is on how God's people, in Christ, should live—singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are an outflow from that. Once we are clothed with love and bound together in perfect harmony (see Col. 3:14), then we sing together. Music does not produce unity within the church; only the Holy Spirit does.

Paul adds that Christians should be “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19, NKJV). Hence, in both texts, we have the same three types of music: psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit. Let's look at each, for, as we analyze these three song forms, we can find an effective formula for congregational singing.

1. Psalms. The first style, or form, of music that Paul names is the psalm. The book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, comprising 150 songs from different composers. In a sense, it was the “hymnal” used in Jewish worship for centuries. Psalms was the compilation of songs written by patriarchs, prophets, and kings of Israel. Looking to the Psalms from a biblical perspective, we can notice the freshness and innovative spirit of these pieces of art. Psalms are, in fact, poetry.

When we think of sacred music or a *pure* sacred style of music, we think of the Psalms.

But, when we study how pagan cultures used the same scales, same instruments, and the same forms that (according to some scholars) the psalms refer to, we realize that even the psalms in the Bible had something old, something new, and something borrowed from contemporary cultures.

Bob Deffinbaugh offers this insight: “We can see the hand of God in the preservation of the Psalms as a universal form of poetry, and in the providential ‘loss’ of the musical score. The words have been given us, but the music is ours to compose. Each generation and each culture must come to the Psalms and compose afresh the musical forms which best facilitate worship and praise.”⁵

Several times in his psalms, David invites us to sing a new a song to God and to do it “skillfully”⁶ because he created fresh, high-quality compositions that were professionally performed. However, David was just one of the many composers of Psalms, which also include a collection of old songs written by Moses and other people. In their repertoire, there were also old and new, traditional and contemporary musical pieces.

2. Hymns. Paul could have said, “Jesus affirmed that salvation comes from the Jews!”⁷ So let us keep singing Jewish musical forms!” After all, Judaism had been using psalms as their style of

music for over ten centuries. Additionally, psalms are a part of the Word of God. Paul could have said to the early Christian church, “Let us keep singing psalms because it is *our* heritage, and it is the *right* style of music.”

Nevertheless, this is not what Paul declares. He adds hymns and songs from the Spirit to the list. Why? What is a hymn, and how is it different from a psalm? We said that a psalm is poetry, a song form, an expression of praise and adoration. Within the “psalm” category are different forms. The “hymn” is one of them.

The hymn is a style or song form that has always been a great educational tool. It teaches the truth. Hymns were meant to teach the new message to the new believers. Even though it is not entirely different from a psalm, a hymn—because of its educational character—is usually easier to sing, has a more solid symmetrical structure, and employs a simpler melody. It can be learned quickly.

In pagan culture, hymns were a familiar style of music. Greeks had hymns that were used in their ritual sacrifices. Scholars agree, for example, that there were hymns for Dionysus—the God of wine and drunkenness—and hymns celebrating Apollo were also common. “Christian music and musical practices were influenced by various Jewish communities and an assortment of Greek and Roman cultic practices.”⁸ So, when Paul invites new Christians to sing not just psalms but also hymns, he extends an invitation to embrace a musical form that is also used in non-Jewish cultures.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has acknowledged that “sacred music” does not embrace eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon music styles only. As the church grew, so did the volume and diversity of its musical offerings. Paul Hamel writes: “The importance of church music in the lives of nineteenth-century Seventh-day Adventists is clearly indicated by the fact that between 1849, when the first Adventist hymnal was published, and 1900, when *Christ in Song* came into use, they published 23 song-books.”⁹

Adventist pioneers had a vision for the church on music and worship that is sadly lacking in the contemporary body of Christ. They were proactive in creating and compiling new psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They published a new hymnal almost every other year, an acknowledgment that there are positive, uplifting values in music from cultures all around the world. It

is the task of professional musicians, especially Christian composers, to embrace various musical styles and create uplifting, edifying sacred music that conveys the Word of God in a way that God will be praised and people will connect to the message.

3. Songs from the Spirit. The spiritual song is even more a song of the moment than a psalm. The spiritual song, or “song from the Spirit,” consists of spontaneous melodies and words inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Bible has many examples of a person making music after being filled by the Holy Spirit.

In the first chapter of Luke, we find Mary and Zechariah being filled by the Holy Spirit and praising God through songs. We can call this expression a song from the Spirit, or a spiritual song. It is interesting that in Arabic and African cultures, this is still a predominant musical form. Sacred music often has an impromptu and improvisational character.¹⁰ In the context of the Negro spiritual tradition, songs are expressions improvisational in character but deeply rooted in faith. Negro spirituals are great examples of songs of the Spirit.¹¹

Some segments of the church emphasize worshipping in Spirit. Worship is, then, spontaneous and Spirit-led. Other segments of the church emphasize communicating truth. So, worship is more orderly and structured. How do we achieve a balance?

John states, “But the time is coming—indeed, it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23, NLT). If our congregation is attracting people who feel the gospel but do not allow the Spirit to lead us into the whole truth, we are not keeping that balance. On the other hand, if the worship service in our congregation attracts only intellectual people but there is no room for the Spirit to work through the dry and formal rigidity of agendas, it is time to rethink our worship.¹²

We sing because . . .

According to Colossians 3, we sing because the Word of God, the message of Christ, dwells among us richly (v. 16). We sing because we no longer live, but Christ lives within us (v. 3). We sing because we are His body, and His love binds us all together in perfect unity (v. 14). We sing because the Word of God does not just pass

through us—does not only visit us sometimes—but dwells among us *richly*. That is why we sing—what we have to express is not about us anymore: it is all about Jesus.

In the Bible, the act of worship is a response to God's love and character. Congregational singing—whether through psalms, hymns, songs of the Spirit—is just the expression of our spiritual journey, our experience with God as His family. That implies that when we sing, we also care about our brothers and sisters who are engaging in the experience.

Do they understand the song? Do they relate and connect to it? Is it edifying for the congregation? Is our song more focused on reaffirming our cultural background rather than our testimony? Is the congregation ready to integrate this new instrument? If not, why? Can we talk about it? Can we pray about this together as a community of God's chosen people, as a community of love, compassion, humility, kindness, and patience? (see Col. 3:12, 13).

Something for everyone

In his letters, Paul addresses a diverse community of Jewish, Asian, Greek, and Roman people who were looking for a new identity when it came to liturgy. Similarly, most of our churches today are multicultural, and our challenge is to engage the whole congregation. They need new psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit! They need music ministries training our young people as contemporary Levites. They need biblical principles of music and worship and instruction on applying them in their local congregations.

It is during collective worship that we need to find effective formulas that will be convenient and edifying for the diverse congregation we worship within. It is then that we need to focus on how to be God's chosen people, His community of love, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, and we should use music as a tool, as a means to bring people not to our way of doing church but to the person of God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

It is time to reflect on the fact that when we worship as a church body, we can engage people in our own traditions and cultural preferences rather than in an experience of God. So, we need to evaluate our traditions of worship practices in light of Scripture rather than Scripture in light of our traditions and biases.

When pastors and musicians come together to find effective formulas for communal worship,

specifically congregational singing, we need to remember to look at the issue from a biblical perspective. Though finding a repertoire to sing together as a congregation may be challenging, the real challenge is in being a loving, compassionate community bound by God's love.

To facilitate the Word of God dwelling among us in song, we have to be able to experience, understand, and properly convey the Word of God—who is Jesus. The biggest challenge that faces congregational singing today is keeping Jesus at the center, not just of our music but of our lives. But we can. Psalms, hymns, songs of the Spirit—enough is there for everyone to be able to sing together in praise of our Lord Jesus Christ.



- 1 Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015, [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/).
- 2 David A. Roozen, "A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000–2010," Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey series, 2011, faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Decade-of-Change-in-American-Congregations.pdf.
- 3 Shawn Brace, "Worship Wars? We Grow, We Change. Only God Never Changes," *Adventist Review*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.adventistreview.org/1903-28>.
- 4 See the appendix, "Nine Words Translated 'Worship'—Three Hebrew and Six Greek," in Cheryl Wilson-Bridges, *Levite Praise* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2009), 161.
- 5 Bob Deffinbaugh, "What Is a Psalm," Bible.org, May 27, 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/what-psalm>.
- 6 "Sing a new song of praise to him; play skillfully on the harp, and sing with joy" (Ps. 33:3, NLT).
- 7 John 4:21–24: "Jesus replied, 'Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth'" (NLT).
- 8 Stephen G. Wilson, "Early Christian Music," in *Common Life in the Early Church*, ed. Julian Hills (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 398.
- 9 Paul Hamel, *Ellen White and Music: Background and Principles* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), 76.
- 10 "Arabic Musical Forms," Maqam World, accessed November 26, 2020, <http://maqamworld.com/en/forms.php>.
- 11 Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977)..
- 12 Lilianne Doukhan, *In Tune With God* (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House, 2010), 150.

Charging your spiritual device:

The power of biblical journaling

It hit me when I least expected it. While undergoing an extensive church building project, I discovered an eight-page handwritten letter from my wife, Judi. She pleaded, “I feel like you’re married to the church. The children and I get the leftovers. Something has to change.” I knew it had—because early in ministry, I sensed that my zeal for church was ignoring boundaries—even God was getting the leftovers.

Have you ever felt drained by the stresses of ministry? While you realize the need for meaningful quiet time with God, you never seem to be able to fit it in. According to a recent study by the Barna Group, half of all pastors wrestle with finding time for their own spiritual development.¹ I would like to recommend a method of Bible study called biblical journaling that can keep your spiritual device (soul) fully charged and enable you to communicate with God on a deeper level.

How to get started

Biblical journaling is a spiritual diary. With it, you record your daily encounters with God in His Word. Here’s how it works: First, download a Bible app with a notetaking feature such as Logos,² or create a new document file in your preferred word processor and label it “My Bible Journal.” You can also buy a physical journal in which to write your conversations with God.³ Pick a book of the Bible that will be especially meaningful during this particular season of your life. Then begin reading, verse by verse. Each day, record the verse(s) under consideration at the top left margin of the page and the current date at the top right margin (see figure 1).

Once you get started, you should employ the following three steps for daily biblical journaling.

Apply your head in discovery

Ask God for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to understand His Word.⁴ Carefully

look at the historical, grammatical, and literary context of the passage. What issues does it address? What is the main thought, principle, insight, or homiletical point that God sought to get across to the original audience? (See the top half of figure 2.) This process helps you determine the author’s original intent (exegesis) instead of imposing your own interpretation onto the text (eisegesis). You can look up key or difficult words in a Bible dictionary or lexicon and use a Bible commentary for helpful insights.⁵

For instance, John 3:16 is probably the most well-known passage of all time. Yet, it took on new meaning for me seven years into my ministry when I received the letter from Judi. That next



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Figure 1



morning I just “happened” to be journaling on John 3:16 in my verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of John: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (ESV). As I pondered the passage, the key insight that hit me was “True love is active.” God did not just lean over the armrest of His celestial throne and yell to humanity, “Hey, I love you down there.” Rather, He so loved the world that He did something about it: He gave his only Son to die on Calvary’s cross. As God spoke to me through this passage, I recorded my insights in my journal.

Apply your heart in application

Once you understand what the text is saying, ask, “Lord, what are You trying to say to me through this passage?” Take the key principle that you pulled from the verse and apply it to your own life. (See the bottom half of figure 2.) Romans 15:4 reveals, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (NKJV). God did not inspire the writing of the Bible just for men and women in antiquity. He has something specific He wants to say to us today (see 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Ellen White adds this poignant insight: “We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word. We should take *one verse*, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should

dwell upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know ‘what saith the Lord.’”⁶

That quotation revolutionized my own reading of God’s Word. I used to see how “far” I could read during my devotional reading, but I was being urged to slow down and see how “deep” I could read. I was being nudged to take one verse and meditate on it until I could discern what God has put in that verse for me.

For me, that means mining. Two basic types of mining exist: (1) strip-mining, in which the machinery eats a broad swath across the surface of the earth,

and (2) deep-shaft mining, in which miners drill straight down into the heart of the earth. Reading through the Bible in one year to grasp its breadth may have its place, but this recommendation involves deep-shaft mining to discern Scripture’s depth and its relevance to your own life.

So ask, What does this passage reveal about who God is and what He’s like? How does it relate to my hurts, needs, struggles, and challenges? As you reflect, God will whisper through His Word. Record your insights in your journal. As God reveals Himself to you, do not be afraid to pour out your joys, fears, needs, and concerns to Him.⁷

To help you get started, you may want to divide your journal page into two parts. At the top, write, “God speaks to me.” Halfway down, put, “I speak to God.” (See figure 1.) Remember that as you open your journal and begin to write, you are in direct conversation with God. “The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears.”⁸

One cautionary note: keep the focus on God’s Word. As you “individually hear Him speaking to the heart”⁹ through His “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:11, 12), remember that God’s voice will never contradict His Word. Let Scripture be your safeguard against counterfeit forms of spiritual enlightenment and experience.¹⁰

Apply your hand in response action

Now that you have heard God’s voice, carry out His commands. Only as we act on God’s Word will it take on real meaning in our lives (see John

2:5; James 1:22, 23; Rev. 1:3). In the case of John 3:16, I shared my discovery with Judi and asked for her forgiveness and input on a new action plan. I scheduled daily “daddy and couple time,” as well as a monthly date night. I saw that God desires His written Word to become the living Word that will transform lives (see John 17:17; Eph. 5:26).

Benefits of biblical journaling

When I began my first pastoral assignment in the Gulf States Conference in January 1986, I felt overwhelmed. It drove me to God’s Word for encouragement and strength. I bought a spiral notebook and began logging insights into my journal. That launched a 34-year adventure in biblical journaling with 25,000 logged pages.

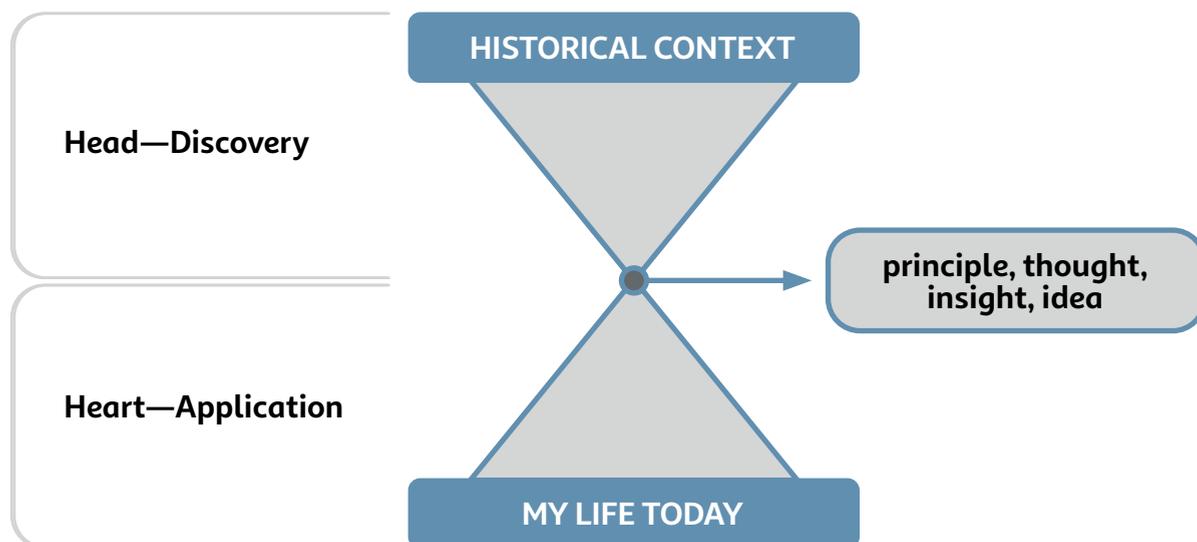
Here are some of the benefits of biblical journaling that I have discovered through the years:

1. Journaling *facilitates* heart-to-heart communion with God. Thousands of times, He has whispered to me through His Word, and I have poured out my heart to Him in exchange. I have learned to trust Him more deeply through such transparent interchange.
2. Journaling *fuels* spiritual growth. God uses His Word to encourage and exhort (2 Tim. 3:16) as well as to heal (Ps. 107:20) and break (Jer. 23:29; Heb. 4:12, 13). The process of biblical journaling stretches me to become more like Him.
3. Journaling *focuses* the attention so that the mind will not wander. I used to have difficulty

concentrating while reading the Bible, but it’s hard for the mind to wander while you actively write your conversations with God.

4. Journaling *forms* a permanent record of God’s leading. I can browse back through the past 34 years of journaling and see God’s distinct hand in my life. It then encourages me to trust Him in my present circumstances as well.
5. Journaling *feeds* witnessing, ministry, and preaching. Many have asked whether I conduct my personal devotions (biblical journaling) and my sermon preparation together or separately. It works best for me to separate the two because I want to stay focused on what God is saying to me and not to my congregation. However, after I have journaled on Ezekiel or Ephesians, for example, I will then preach a sermon series on those books with the bulk of my exegesis, illustrations, and application already completed. Also, I am frequently able to share a thought with someone that I gleaned from my morning journaling (see Isa. 50:4). That keeps my witness and ministry fresh and alive.
6. Journaling *fosters* rich communication skills. I am naturally an introvert and initially ran from God’s calling to the ministry because I felt inadequate as a speaker. But years of pouring out my true thoughts, feelings, and needs to God in journaling have made me a better communicator with people.
As I contemplated God’s basic message in John 3:16, “true love is active,” I penned the following in my journal: “Lord, I really love my wife and

Figure 2



children with all my heart, but this morning it hit me that I'm not expressing it in a tangible, active way. Please help me to love my family in a new way so they can grasp it!" Journaling can keep

your spiritual device fully charged. It is a valuable tool for communicating with God at the deepest level. Try it! It may become the most meaningful experience of your life.



- 1 *The State of Pastors* study (April 15, 2020) was conducted to find out how pastors and their congregations were faring in their mental, emotional, and spiritual health during the coronavirus pandemic. Fifty-one percent of the pastors reported that it has been easy (23 percent very, 28 percent somewhat) to find time for personal spiritual development, while another 49 percent have found it difficult (10 percent very, 39 percent somewhat). For context, the results are similar to other seasons of ministry. A 2016 study conducted in partnership with Pepperdine University, *The State of Pastors*, showed similar results. Forty-seven percent found it difficult (40 percent somewhat, 7 percent very) to find time for their spiritual growth. Barna Group, "The Mental and Emotional Health of Pastors and Their Congregants Amid COVID-19," Barna, *State of the Church 2020*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/mental-emotional-health-among-pastors/>.
- 2 Logos is a premium Bible study tool with an excellent note-taking feature (<http://www.logos.com>). For a free Bible app with a great "notes" feature, consider something like YouVersion.
- 3 While the electronic journal is better for convenience, storage, retrieval, search, and sharing capabilities, I still prefer the handwritten journal because it seems more personal and impactful. Use whatever method that works best for you.
- 4 Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. God wants to show us deep and hidden treasures in His Word, but without the aid of the Holy Spirit, we will miss those gems (1 Cor. 2:9–14).
- 5 You can use BibleHub.com as a free resource or invest in an online source such as Logos. The Logos 8 Seventh-day Adventist Gold edition contains more than 1,640 resources, including *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 390; emphasis added.
- 7 Psalm 62:8 invites, "Pour out your heart before Him" (ESV). Also, "Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. . . . Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds." Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 100.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *My Life Today* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 283.
- 9 The complete statement is: "We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God." White, *Desire of Ages*, 363.
- 10 An example of counterfeit spirituality is New Age/Eastern spirituality that emphasizes a "god within"—a "spark of divine" inherent in each soul. Hence, to find truth, one only needs to look within to the "inner light" (in a pantheistic sense) rather than to the ultimate source of authority, God's Word (Ps. 119:105; John 17:17).

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Do you trust God at least as much as you trust yourself?

Our first pregnancy was particularly difficult. My wife's nausea persisted right into the second trimester. A heavy traveling schedule caused many unpleasant episodes where it was hard for Judy to hold down her food. All of these factors made her lose weight, causing us, as first-time parents, to worry.

Her cravings

The weeks of famine were followed by weeks of abundant and very specific cravings. For example, whenever my wife craved cake, it had to be *birthday cake*—whatever that meant. As the pregnancy progressed, life began to change. One of the obvious changes was her limited mobility. Another was the onset of fatigue, especially after working long days as a teacher. By the final trimester, the baby pushed against her bladder, requiring more frequent trips to the restroom.

Adjusting to these changes was as comical as it was stressful. I had to make trips to the bakery with the request to write “*Happy Birthday*” on the random cakes. Often I would purchase items in abundance that I thought were close enough to her cravings, only to discover that my assumptions were miles short of the actual standard. This usually resulted in my having to eat specialized craving snacks rejected by my wife's strictly adjusted pallet. I must admit that there were moments when I even felt sorry for myself. I wondered whether other dads-to-be had it as bad as I did.

My turmoil

Perhaps the apex of our experience came late one evening when Judy woke up very thirsty. Maybe I was more tired than usual. In my weary stupor, I asked her (several times) if she was sure that she was, in fact, experiencing thirst. Perhaps it was the illusion of thirst? Maybe she was experiencing a thirst for sleep? She assured me that she was pretty certain that she was, in fact, thirsty for water.

Once her condition was determined, we began to discuss treatment. If she drank the water, she would soon be dealing with the side effects—namely, having to get up to use the bathroom later. She seemed willing to take the risk. As the conversation went back and forth, there were moments when she was at the point of getting out of bed to get her own glass of water. Too smart to let this happen, I pleaded with her to stay in bed and talk this thing out like reasonable human beings.

Finally, something happened! I realized that it would take less time for me to grant my wife's request and go back to sleep than it would for me to try to convince her that she did not want to drink water even though she was very thirsty. I quickly jumped out of bed, ran to the kitchen, got her a glass of water, and delivered it into her hands.

However, I didn't easily go to sleep. I realized something profoundly sad and true: what I would not do out of love for my wife, I was more than willing to do out of love for sleep.

Our willingness

Luke says that we are evil, yet we know how to do good things for our children (Luke 11:13, KJV). Sometimes, we will do good things for others even though our motivations are the opposite. We understand that what we will not do out of love for others we will surely do out of love for ourselves.

But when it comes to a God who is good, we question whether He is willing to help us on our journey through life with Him. He asks one of the most profound questions in all of Scripture: “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13). The Holy Spirit is the universal gift—whatever we need, He can provide. He gives guidance, comfort, direction, power, and anything else we need. God says, at least give Me, a good God, the same level of confidence that you, an evil parent, place in yourself.

If we just did that—we would be OK. 🙏



Renewed emphasis on the three angels' messages

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

A multipart presentation during the annual business meeting of the Executive Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist Church zeroed in on what Adventists historically have known as “the three angels’ messages.” Representatives of the world church discussed what they are doing or planning to do to highlight the importance and timeliness of the messages found in the Bible in Revelation 14:6–12.

During the October presentation, former Bible Research Institute director **Ángel Manuel Rodríguez** introduced a theological summary of the three angels’ messages by explaining how those special messages from God are framed within the story of salvation. “The three angels’ messages,” Rodríguez said, “are all about the gospel, the Lamb of God being sacrificed for the redemption of the human race.” Adventist prophetic understanding connects the symbols to specific historical movements, powers, and events. It also places those three messages at what is known as “the time of the end,” near to the glorious return of Jesus to this earth.

The presentation highlighted initiatives to take the three angels’ messages, so to speak, to the marketplace. Biblical Research Institute director **Elias Brasil de Souza** reported that the upcoming Week of Prayer readings and a *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* would focus on the three angels’ messages. General Conference Children’s Ministries director **Linda Koh** explained that animated books are being designed for children that will connect the three angels’ messages to Creation and Redemption. This new resource is expected to be available in English, Spanish, German, and French. At the same time, Adventist Laymen’s Services and Industries member **Dan Houghton** mentioned the development of a curriculum for children across the North American Division that seeks to help Adventist children as young as five to understand the three angels’ messages.

Sam Neves, the associate director of the Communication department of the General Conference, shared that church communication leaders are connecting with writers, artists, graphic designers, and other artistic talents from around the world to devise innovative ways of delivering these messages.

The goal is to bridge the generational gap, showcasing biblical messages from the New Testament in a language that new generations can find relatable and meaningful. [Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*]

Help through project “Humanitarian Support COVID-19”

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

In the 32nd week of implementation of the project “Humanitarian Support COVID-19,” the ADRA team reached 1,455 beneficiaries, as follows: 1,236 people received basic food to ensure a decent living and to be able to get through these days of crisis more easily, of which 75 received a hot meal at home every day; 120 people received food and hygiene products, medicines, or protective equipment; 50 families received kits for babies; 30 people received shelter; and 9 people benefited from social assistance and psychological counseling.

“As the alert state has been extended, efforts by ADRA offices to support the implementation of European-funded programs have become increasingly necessary,” said **Norela Costea**, assistant manager of Acquisitions for ADRA Romania.

Alexandru Clodeanu, the administrator for ADRA Romania, declared, “We are on the front line with the volunteers and all those who are involved, and we are moving forward, regardless of the consequences that await us. Each project brings relief, hope, and support to those in need.”

May God bless the work of ADRA and those of us involved in giving a helping hand to our beneficiaries.”

Within the project “Humanitarian Support COVID-19,” specially created for the current situation, ADRA Romania aims to reduce the risks generated by the COVID-19 virus among the population. The objective is achieved by promoting prevention measures and socioeconomic adaptability and ensuring the provision of needed commodities to maintain safety.

ADRA Romania is a part of the ADRA International network, the global humanitarian organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one of the most widespread nongovernmental organizations in the world. The network

is active in more than 130 countries, and projects are implemented under the philosophy that caring combines compassion with the practical spirit by addressing people in need, regardless of their race, ethnicity, political orientation, or religion, just to provide a human service so that the world can coexist.



Photo: ADRA Romania

Auburn City church meets a need

AUBURN, WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES

Bright and early every Tuesday morning, **Pat Bailey** shows up at Auburn City Adventist Church to direct cars into the church's food bank line, the COVID-19 testing line, or both.

"I meet every car that comes in," Bailey says. As a community health-care consultant for Auburn, Washington, she helped negotiate plans for the church site to serve as a COVID-19 testing location in the suburbs between Seattle and Tacoma.

"It's a good relationship that really helps the community," Bailey says. "People come from all over Auburn and beyond. All ages. All ethnicities. People are so happy and appreciative."

Typically, 190 tests are administered each week, and tests are free for those without insurance.

At the beginning of the pandemic, pastors **Ofa Langi** and **Tommy Tamalea'a** saw a need but could not figure out the logistics. The church then embarked on a 40-day prayer journey through the initial weeks of the pandemic. And then it became 100 days of praying.

Before COVID-19, Langi was praying for a music leader, a youth- and young-adult leader, and other specific leaders where the church had

gaps. With the weekly interactions, new leaders started emerging, and new friendships formed.

Mata and her husband, **Patrick**, showed up to help their community. Patrick now takes Tuesdays and Saturdays off so he can help at the Auburn city church. Their four children were dedicated to God—and Mata got baptized.

"We're making new friends for the church every week between volunteers, clients, and the health-care team," Langi says. "Everyone wants to be here. They like being here. The volunteers, especially with the testing team, don't want to go anywhere else." [Heidi Baumgartner, Northwest Adventists News] 



Photo: Heidi Baumgartner



Jack S. Veltkamp is a high-school student residing in Rock Hill, South Carolina, United States.

We need to inspire religious study*

In today's society, the most respected member of the community is the scientist. The Nobel Prize is one of the most influential and honored awards of this time. But what about theologians and religious philosophers? Every day fewer and fewer people are interested in pursuing a life of faith and biblical reflection. Where are the John Calvins and Martin Luthers of today?

I say it is up to the ministers and leaders of the church today to inspire the hearts of the people. When I joined middle school, my family left the church we were frequenting, and I lost my zeal until the minister in my new church gave a sermon that stuck in my heart. He said that to truly understand God, you must learn about Him. He continued with this topic and encouraged everyone to read and write about the Bible. This is what inspired me to start my Christian writing career. I have decided to write this because I want everyone to feel the grace I felt that Sunday.

The essentials

The point I want to convey is that it is essential for ministers to inspire biblical reflection and study. It is important to let your followers learn about God in their own surroundings and to understand how they want to understand God. Only then can they truly have God in their hearts. It is even more important to do this with the young Christians of today.

If we teach children to learn about everything in Christianity to the same extent that schools teach about science, then we can inspire them to choose a life of theology and philosophy. This is why it is crucial to have in-depth teachings of the Bible with children, tailored to a proficiency level which they are at. One of my closest friends, from another denomination, told me that his church conducts seminary for kids in high school every weekday. My friend loves to discuss and debate the Bible and I can tell that he knows what he is talking about and he loves what he is talking about.

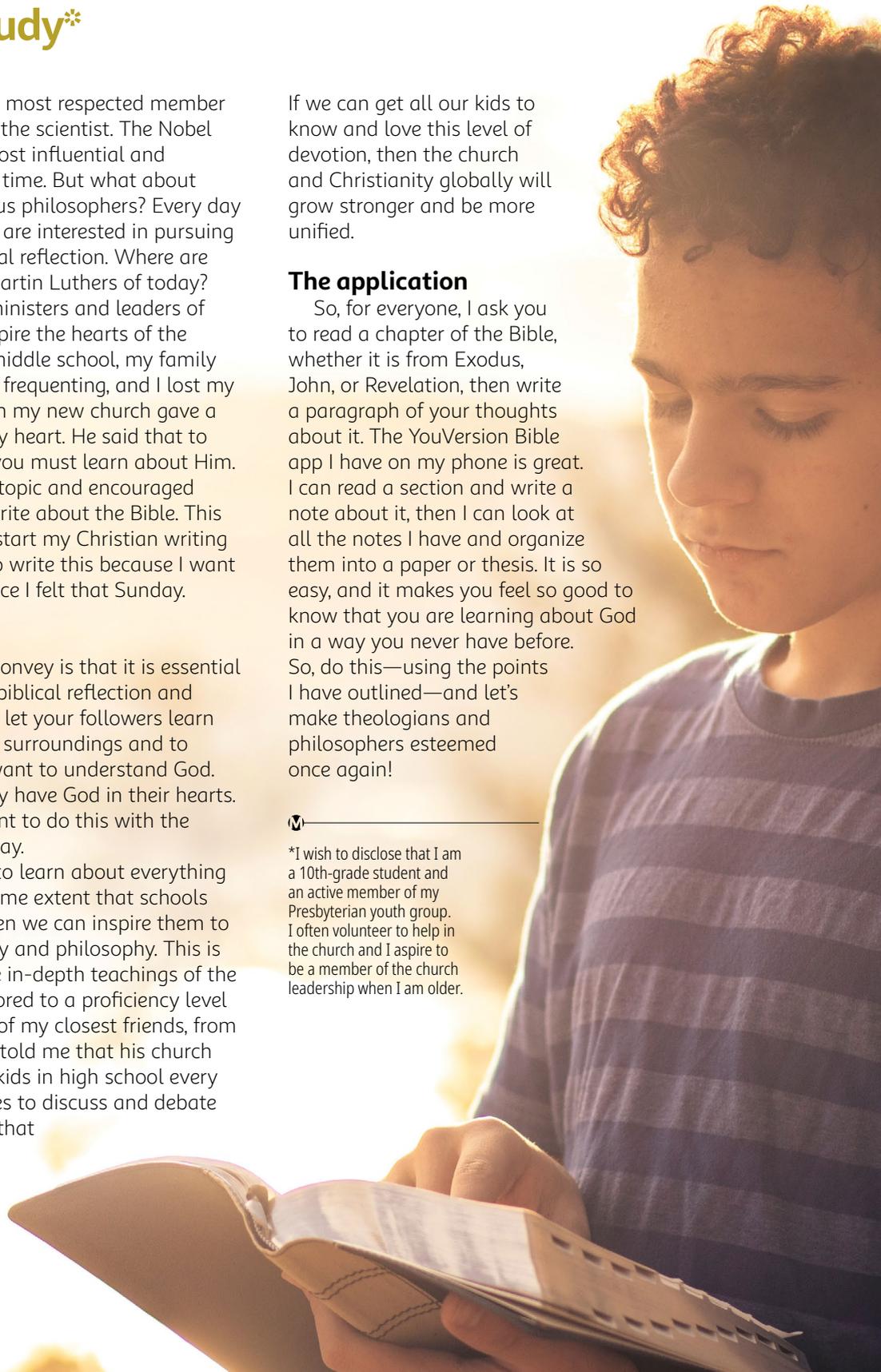
If we can get all our kids to know and love this level of devotion, then the church and Christianity globally will grow stronger and be more unified.

The application

So, for everyone, I ask you to read a chapter of the Bible, whether it is from Exodus, John, or Revelation, then write a paragraph of your thoughts about it. The YouVersion Bible app I have on my phone is great. I can read a section and write a note about it, then I can look at all the notes I have and organize them into a paper or thesis. It is so easy, and it makes you feel so good to know that you are learning about God in a way you never have before. So, do this—using the points I have outlined—and let's make theologians and philosophers esteemed once again!



*I wish to disclose that I am a 10th-grade student and an active member of my Presbyterian youth group. I often volunteer to help in the church and I aspire to be a member of the church leadership when I am older.





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