

MARCH 2021

Ministry[®]

INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

THE PASTOR'S MENTAL HEALTH AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

PAGE 6

10

THE INCOMPARABLE
"ALPHA AND OMEGA"

16

CHANGE THE
QUESTIONS, CHANGE
THE WORLD

20

IMPROBABLE HERO

TELL STORIES. CREATE CHANGE.

Earn your **Master of Arts in Cinema, Religion, and Worldview**.

The master of arts in cinema, religion, and worldview explores the common ground between film and related media, theological studies, and the art of communicating with a variety of audiences. This unique program focuses on creating skilled storytellers with a powerful message to share.

4 reasons this degree enhances your ministry:

- 1 It gives you the skills needed to connect with today's audiences.
- 2 It connects you with a supportive network that shares your passion.
- 3 It teaches you relevant filmmaking techniques.
- 4 It bridges the gap between theology and on-screen storytelling.

Join the two-year, online program and let our experienced faculty mentor you to tell stories that matter and achieve your career goals.

Learn more about our program at film4him.org where you can also view our films. Applications for the summer 2021 cohort will be accepted through May 1, 2021.

Seating is limited, apply today for free using discount code: **Ministry**

► Read the blog: film4him.org/news/pastor



06

The pastor's mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic

MARLON C. ROBINSON

During this unprecedented time in our contemporary landscape, use these pointers on how best to keep mentally fit.

10

The incomparable "Alpha and Omega": God's speeches in Revelation

LASZLO GALLUSZ

We have focused heavily on the visual aspects of Revelation, but what about the auditory aspects?

16

Change the questions, change the world

SUNG KWON

Can we afford to continue in our "come and see" ways, or is it time for a "go and help" approach instead?

20

Improbable hero

JOHN WESLEY TAYLOR V

What a brave Bible character Ebed-Melek was. Never heard of him? Check out this real-life hero story!

24

Our daily work: God's idea

ELIZABETH OSTRING

Teach your members how to connect two key segments of their lives: church and work.



4 | REVIVAL & REFORMATION



5 | EDITORIAL



14 | RESOURCES



27 | DATELINE



30 | PRACTICAL POINTERS

Ministry

International Journal for Pastors
12501 Old Columbia Pike,
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA
www.ministrymagazine.org
ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org
[@MinistryMagazine](https://www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine)
[@minmag](https://twitter.com/minmag)
[@ministrymagazine](https://www.instagram.com/ministrymagazine)
[ministrymagazine.org/podcast](https://www.ministrymagazine.org/podcast)

Vol. 93, No. 3 © 2021

EDITOR

Pavel Goia

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Jeffrey O. Brown

CONSULTANTS TO EDITOR

John Fowler, Clifford Goldstein,
Gerald Wheeler

EDITORIAL SPECIALIST

Sheryl Beck

FINANCE AND TECHNOLOGY MANAGER

John Feezer IV

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Jonathan Walter

SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANT

Gloria Massenburg

INTERNATIONAL EDITORS

Chinese—Robert Wong
French—Bernard Sauvagnat
Japanese—Masaki Shoji
Korean—Soon Ki Kang
Portuguese—Wellington Barbosa
Russian—Michael Kaminsky
Spanish (Inter-America)—Saúl Ortiz
Spanish (South America)—Marcos Blanco

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORS

Lucas Alves Bezerra, Ron Clouzet,
Darius Jankiewicz, Patrick Johnson,
Thadi Johnson Jacob, Victor Kozakov,
Wendell Wilcox Mandolang, Geoffrey
G. Mwana, Musa Mitekar, Passmore
Mulambo, Daniel Opoku-Boateng,
Josney Rodriguez, Rainer Wanitschek,
Ivan Williams, Ted N. C. Wilson

LEGAL ADVISOR

Todd R. McFarland

ADVERTISING

advertising@ministrymagazine.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS/ RENEWALS/ADDRESS CHANGES

subscriptions@ministrymagazine.org
+1 301-680-6511
+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

COVER

316 Creative / Shutterstock

LAYOUT

316 Creative

SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99;
Canada and overseas US\$47.00.
To order: send name, address, and
payment to Ministry® Subscriptions,
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver
Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA.
www.ministrymagazine.org/subscribe.

DIGITAL DELIVERY

Print subscribers can sign
up for digital delivery at
www.ministrymagazine.org/digital.

TO WRITERS

We welcome unsolicited manuscripts.
Before submitting, review the writers'
guidelines at www.ministrymagazine.org.
Please send manuscripts via email to
ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

Ministry
in Motion

Host: Anthony Kent
Cohost: Ivan Williams
www.MinistryinMotion.tv

Ministry® has been published
monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial
Association, General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists®. Ministry is a

peer-reviewed journal.

MINISTERIAL SECRETARY

Jerry N. Page

ASSOCIATE MINISTERIAL SECRETARIES

Jeffrey O. Brown, Robert Costa, Pavel
Goia, Anthony Kent, Janet Page

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.

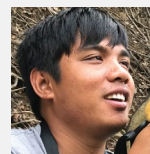
Adventist®, Seventh-day Adventist®, and
Ministry® are the registered trademarks
of the General Conference Corporation of
Seventh-day Adventists®.

PRINTED IN THE USA.

BIBLE CREDITS Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NIV are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are from the New King James Version®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



Jasper Ivan Iturriaga is a missionary, pastor, landscape photographer, and content creator.



Our first calling

Exhausted from a series of preaching, I retreated to the silence of my hotel room. As I crashed into bed, I looked back to how I got here—preaching in a country more than five thousand miles from home.

For the past several months, I had thrown myself into a never-ending cycle of jumping from one country to another, to a point where my life fit into a suitcase. My identity was now synonymous with travel, photography, filming, and preaching. Fatigue would occasionally creep in, but I kept going, thinking that everything would be worth it. But as I lay on the hotel bed, just moments after preaching a sermon that I believed brought a lot of hearts to Jesus, a nagging question ate at my own heart—*Why do I still feel empty?*

I was lost

With everything I had sacrificed for ministry, I expected to at least feel fulfilled. People say that you have to do what you love to have fulfillment. But the more places I traveled to, the more photos I took, the more videos I filmed, and the more sermons I gave, the more empty I felt.

"That's a great photo, as always," people would say, or, "We were so blessed by your sermon!" But God reminded me of Revelation 2:4: "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first" (NIV). This is when it hit me. Travel, photography, filming, preaching—none of these was my first love; Jesus is, and always will be.

My first love

I was so focused on doing the work that I forgot what really mattered. It's easy to get lost in the romance and glamour of service. Many times, I did things—a photo here, a sermon there—just because it was what people expected of me. But no amount of ministry will give a person fulfillment and peace—only Jesus will.

During this time, a commentary on Revelation's letter to the church at Ephesus really spoke to me: "God calls upon this church to make a change.

People say that you have to do what you love to have fulfillment. But the more places I traveled to, the more photos I took, the more videos I filmed, and the more sermons I gave, the more empty I felt.

They had a name to live, but their works were destitute of the love of Jesus. Oh, how many have fallen because they trusted in their profession for salvation! How many are lost by their effort to keep up a name! If one has the reputation of being a successful evangelist, a gifted preacher, a man of prayer, a man of faith, a man of special devotion, there is positive danger that he will make shipwreck of faith when tried by the little tests that God suffers to come. Often his great effort will be to maintain his reputation."¹

All I was doing was *maintaining a reputation!*

When Paul fell to the ground and was blinded by a bright light that questioned everything he had done, he didn't say "Lord, where do You want me to go?" or "What do You want me to do?" His response was, "Who are You, Lord?" Paul's first calling—our first calling—is not to serve but to have a relationship with Jesus.

I still do the things I love, using the gifts God has blessed me with. It's exhausting and, many times, stressful. But when I get lost in the many distractions that the ministry brings, Jesus reminds me to find Him. And it's during these quiet moments when I spend time with Him that I am fulfilled and at peace.



¹ Ellen G. White, "Ellen G. White Comments—Revelation," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol, vol. 7 of the Commentary Reference Series (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), 958.



Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is associate editor of *Ministry*.



Evangelism is canceled

The popularity of the British prime minister was gravely jeopardized by the statement “Christmas is canceled.”¹ The persistence of the COVID-19 virus was strengthened by the presence of a new variant. But would Christmas really be canceled? Or could it be that the heart of Christmas—to share with someone you love and help someone in need—might actually be given a chance to shine?

The popularity of any pastor or church administrator would be severely jeopardized if he or she declared, “Evangelism is canceled.” But what if what is often called evangelism—augmenting numbers rather than addressing needs—was canceled? Could it be that the real heart of Jesus might get a chance to shine? Perhaps our current crises afford us the opportunity to restore God’s original intent for evangelism—to love our neighbor as ourselves.

How do we want history to remember the church’s response to COVID-19? Some say nothing must distract us from the gospel—yet pandemic viruses, economic crises, and racial injustices are opportunities for the gospel. Some are victims of oppression, and others are victims of abuse. Some have fallen on hard times, and others have fallen ill. But fallen people are our mission.

Fallen people and fallen systems are nothing new to God. Centuries ago, Jeremiah declared, “Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed” (Jer. 51:8, NKJV). Somebody said that the Old Testament speaks, and the New Testament says amen. So, John echoes, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Rev. 14:8, NKJV). Look at the false teachings and oppressive practices of church and state throughout the centuries, and you will recognize Babylon. People have fallen down in religious and secular systems that are destructive, but before they can get out, they must be helped up.

In Isaiah, God had a message for an ancient, despairing world. He asked, “Whom shall I send,

and who will go for Us?” A young Isaiah replied, “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8, NKJV). Isaiah told church people that while fasting down on their knees was beneficial, helping people up onto their feet was essential. While keeping Sabbath was biblical, ending oppression was critical (Isa. 58:6, 13).

In Revelation, God has a message for a contemporary, despairing world. It parallels Isaiah’s message and is called the eternal gospel—because the Old Testament speaks, and the New Testament says amen. Hans LaRondelle states, “The basic motive of the threefold message of Revelation 14 is that of restoration! It serves the same purpose as Isaiah’s call to a backsliding Israel [in] Isaiah 58:1.”² This everlasting gospel is both spiritual and practical.

My wife, Pattiejean, sent her hairdresser, Arelis, a gift of fifty dollars. Arelis was very appreciative because her business was hit hard by COVID-19. Pattiejean followed up by informing her that our church offered free COVID testing on Sunday mornings, as well as a grocery giveaway. If, through such helping, people embrace the Christ we worship, praise God. But our helping, as George Webber says, “will not be for the sake of getting new members or winning converts or taking scalps for Christ. Simply, we live in the style of our Lord: where there is hunger—seeking to feed, where there is sickness—seeking to heal, where there is loneliness—offering our love without any ulterior motive.”³

Evangelism shouldn’t be canceled—it should be restored.

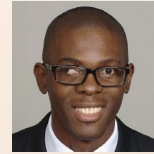


1 BBC News Staff, “Newspaper Headlines: ‘Christmas Cancelled’ and ‘Surging Mutant Virus,’” BBC News, December 20, 2020, [bbc.com/news/blogs-the-papers-55382075](https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-the-papers-55382075).

2 Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: A Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 358.

3 George W. Webber, *Today’s Church: A Community of Exiles and Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 94.

Marlon C. Robinson, PhD, is an American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy–approved supervisor, board certified chaplain of the Association of Professional Chaplains, and Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries–endorsed pastoral counselor and chaplain. He serves as director of pastoral care at AdventHealth Manchester, Manchester, Kentucky, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Most people agree that COVID-19 has drastically altered their lives compared to what they were before the pandemic, redefining in so many ways what clergy members now call life in this new normal.¹ As of January 25, 2021, COVID-19 has claimed the lives of over 2.1 million people worldwide,² infected millions of others, turned the world upside down, and exposed pastors to a new type of burnout. Clergy members and the rest of the global population have experienced disruptions in personal health habits, family life, occupation, economic stability, social connections, and the health of their loved ones.³

The COVID-19 crisis has displaced members from their usual places of worship and altered *koinonia*, the fellowship of believers. It has led to the adoption of online religious service in various forms, small-group fellowship, and house worship. Few, if any, seminaries prepared pastors for the challenges of running a virtual church—especially the challenges involved in operating a single virtual church, let alone a virtual multiple-church district.

Additionally, changes in the medium through which clergy members provide religious services have increased their workload, destroyed many of the boundaries they had in place before COVID-19, and put in disarray the solace they usually experienced in homes now transformed into primary workstations.⁴ Ministers who are inundated with phone calls, emails, text and WhatsApp messages, and communications through a host of other platforms, identify with Monmouth University's poll showing that 55 percent of the general population reported higher stress levels.⁵

Clergy mental well-being

Mental health is vital during this COVID-19 crisis, not only because it is extremely necessary for quality human life⁶ but also due to the notion that “mental illness has been called the pandemic of the 21st century.”⁷ Hence, we do a disservice to pastors if we talk about health without considering mental health. Ideally, there can be no true health without it. The million-dollar question is,

how are pastors taking care of their psychological health during the current pandemic?

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other important activities.”⁸ The COVID-19 disruptions cited above will likely produce significant distress, the precursor for mental disorders. As pastors, it is vital to understand that mental illness does not discriminate based on religion, age, gender, disability, color, race, nationality, financial status, genetic heritage, occupation, political ideology, marital status, or any other categories or characteristics. In other words, mental illness is no respecter of persons.

Two pastors describe their COVID-19 experience “as an overwhelming sensation of busyness” and having “new levels of irritation and stress.”⁹ In a study conducted during the pandemic with 400 pastors, clergy members indicated that they are worried about finances (26 percent), technological challenges (16 percent), offering remote pastoral care (12 percent), and the members’ lack of access to technology (11 percent).¹⁰ According to the clergy recruitment and development coordinator for the Great Plains Conference, pastors’ “pangs of anxiety and depression, which are normally higher [than the average population] anyway, are higher even yet.”¹¹ Such findings indicate that pastors are experiencing intensified stress levels that will put them at increased risk for developing a mental illness.

The current crisis makes pastors even more vulnerable to illness on account of traumatic events arising from within their personal and family situations. Clergy members are also at increased risk because of their repeated exposure to the

A man with dark hair, wearing a light blue surgical face mask, is shown from the chest up. He is holding his right hand to his forehead, with his fingers spread, suggesting a gesture of stress, exhaustion, or despair. He is wearing a blue and white patterned button-down shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

THE PASTOR'S **MENTAL HEALTH** AND THE **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

traumatic information shared by their parishioners, arising from their increased need for pastoral care. Consequently, it is vitally important that pastors implement strategies to care for their mental health during this time of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty.

Strategies for mental well-being

As professionals, pastors need to recognize that if they do not care for their mental health, they will not have the psychological strength to adequately care for anyone else. In other words, if ministers fail to protect themselves, they will lack the quality of health to help others.¹² While the negative impact of COVID-19 is a unique type of burnout or psychological stress, there are eight strategies that can reduce its adverse effects and improve overall psychological well-being.

1. Maintain a work-life balance. The fact that pastors “often put the needs of others above their own”¹³ is a clear indicator that they require work/life balance. Work/life balance reduces medical costs,¹⁴ builds commitment,¹⁵ enhances job satisfaction,¹⁶ and improves productivity,¹⁷ which will likely reduce the pastors’ stress level and improve their psychological well-being. Such work-life balance will look different for each pastor, based on his or her family life-cycle stage. Work-life balance also increases profitability¹⁸ and affects employee retention.¹⁹ Consequently, faith-based organizations that put in place policies to support pastoral work-life balance, benefit both employee and employer.

2. Manage stress and crises effectively. Proper stress and crisis management includes adaptability, admitting to and seeking help with problems, seeing crises as challenges and opportunities, growth through crises, openness to change, and resilience.²⁰ Stress handled effectively can lead to happiness, health, effectiveness at work, and less mental illness.²¹ Hence, it is paramount that pastors regulate their stress levels and manage crises successfully.

3. Find a ministry buddy. Having a colleague in ministry that a pastor can talk with *openly* and *safely* is extremely important to his or her mental well-being. Social support from a trusted colleague is a possible safeguard against job stressors.²² I have personally found this to be extremely important for stress management, brainstorming, constructive feedback, and peer-to-peer support.

4. Practice the attitude of gratitude. The Bible encourages us to give thanks in every circumstance (1 Thess. 5:18). Thankfulness is associated with better mood and sleep, less fatigue, and more

self-efficacy,²³ as well as better mental well-being, greater social support, and adaptive coping.²⁴ Gratitude is essentially “a positive emotion beneficial for positive functioning, as well as broadening and building other positive emotions, which, in turn, result in an increase in emotional well-being.”²⁵

5. Exercise. A physical workout of 30 to 60 minutes is a stress reliever and producer of endorphins, the happy hormone. Pastors who exercise at least three times weekly reduced their risk of high emotional exhaustion by 25 percent.²⁶ A study on exercise and mental health found that individuals who exercise had about 1.5 fewer days of poor mental health in the previous month compared to those who did not exercise.²⁷ All forms of exercise have shown links to a lower mental-health burden than no exercise.²⁸ Clearly, exercise is a stress reliever vital to pastors’ mental health.

6. Take a sabbatical. Seventh-day Adventists understand the importance of taking a weekly day of rest, the seventh day. I am aware that the church does not have a sabbatical policy for pastors. Therefore, I hope that the denomination will develop a program that gives pastors at least three months of sabbatical every seven years of ministry, comparable to the rest that the land enjoyed in Old Testament times (Lev. 25:4; Exod. 23:11). A sabbatical can help pastors destress,²⁹ retool, refocus their ministry, and deepen the connection with their most important earthly asset, their family.

7. Seek mental health services. Talking with a mental health provider is essential to clergy members’ psychological health. Psychological distress is to mental health professionals as pain in the body is to medical doctors. If ministers’ psychological distress interferes with their relational, occupational, and social functioning or other important activities, they are probably overdue to see a mental health professional. It is imperative to note that mental health services are not just for a person with a mental disorder but also for all those who need help dealing with issues such as life transitions, grief and loss, parenting concerns, personal goals, and occupational choice.

8. Be hopeful. Hope is defined as “the belief that your future can be better than your past and you play a role in making it so.”³⁰ Such hope is linked to overall psychological well-being and resilience.³¹ It buffers stress and adversity, mitigates the negative effects of trauma, and is the best predictor for a life well-lived.³² Pastors can find hope in God (Ps. 71:5), His Word (Ps. 119:114), His mercy (Ps. 147:11), and ultimately in the Second Coming (Titus 2:13). It is essential for

clergy members to understand that they can live without food for three weeks, water for three days, and oxygen for three minutes, but they will not be

able to live a second without hope. Hence, I say to pastors, speak hope, walk in hope, think hope, preach hope, and immerse yourselves in hope.



- 1 See David Burke, "Pastors facing additional stress, depression, anxiety during pandemic," Great Plains United Methodists Conference, June 16, 2020, accessed September 10, 2020, <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/newsdetail/pastors-facing-additional-stress-depression-anxiety-during-pandemic-14026573>; Tess Schoonhoven, "Pastors Face Mental Health Challenges in COVID-19 Pandemic," *Kentucky Today*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.kentuckytoday.com/stories/pastors-face-mental-health-challenges-amid-covid-19-pandemic,25462>; David C. Wang, "Coping and Caring for Oneself During COVID-19: Practical Steps for Pastors and Christian Leaders," Humanitarian Disaster Institute, accessed September 10, 2020, <https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/tip-sheets/Final-pastor-self-care-during-COVID-19.pdf>; Kate Santich, "COVID-19's Latest Toll in Central Florida: Rising Drug Overdoses, Mental Health Issues," *Orlando Sentinel*, September 18, 2020, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/coronavirus/os-ne-coronavirus-big-increase-in-substance-abuse-mental-health-20200918-kuesqudc2vb6rkoyph2nuwjgbi-story.html>.
- 2 "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Deaths," Our World in Data, January 25, 2021, www.ourworldindata.org/covid-deaths.
- 3 Burke, "Pastors Facing Additional Stress"; Schoonhoven, "Mental Health Challenges"; Simon Dein et al., "COVID-19, Mental Health and Religion: An Agenda for Future Research," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 23, no. 1 (June 2020): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2020.1768725>; Aaron Earls, "Most Churches Have Stopped Gathering, Few Plan to Meet on Easter," LifeWay Research, April 2, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/04/02/most-churches-have-stopped-gathering-few-plan-to-meet-on-easter/>; Wang, "Coping and Caring," 2020; Insider NJ, "Monmouth Poll: Covid-19 Impact Intensifies," *Insider NJ*, April 13, 2020, <http://www.insidernj.com/monmouth-poll-covid-19-impact-intensifies/>.
- 4 Burke, "Pastors Facing Additional Stress"; Schoonhoven, "Mental Health Challenges"; Wang, "Coping and Caring," 2020.
- 5 Insider NJ, "Monmouth Poll."
- 6 Marlon Robinson, "In Pursuit of Self-Care: Health and Well-Being for the MFT," *Family Therapy Magazine* 14, no. 4 (July 2015): 27.
- 7 Andrea K. Witterborn et al., "Strengthening Clinical Research in Marriage and Family Therapy: Challenges and Multilevel Solutions," *Family Therapy Magazine* 18, no. 1 (January 2019): 20–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12338>.
- 8 American Psychiatric Association, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 20.
- 9 Schoonhoven, "Mental Health Challenges."
- 10 Earls, "Most Churches Have Stopped."
- 11 Burke, "Pastors Facing Additional Stress."
- 12 Robinson, "In Pursuit of Self-Care," 25.
- 13 Crystal Mary Burnette, "Burnout Among Pastors in Local Church Ministry in Relation to Pastor, Congregation Member, and Church Organization Outcomes" (PhD dissertation, Clemson University, 2016), 41, https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/1745/.
- 14 Sunday Azagba and Mesbah Sharaf, "Psychosocial Working Conditions and the Utilization of Health Care Services," *BMC Public Health* 11 (August 2011): 642, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-642>.
- 15 Azagba and Sharaf, "Psychosocial Working Conditions."
- 16 Michelle M. Arthur, "Share Price Reactions to Work-Family Human Resource Decisions: An Institutional Perspective," *Academy of Management Journal* 46, no. 4 (August 2003): 497–505.
- 17 Mental Health America, "Work Life Balance," accessed July 12, 2020, <https://mhanational.org/work-life-balance>; E. Jeffrey Hill et al., "Influences of the Virtual Office on Aspects of Work and Work/Life Balance," *Personnel Psychology* 51, no. 3 (December 2006): 667–683, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1998.tb00256.x>.
- 18 Pilar Roho, "Work-Life Balance Policies: A Profitable Move for Business," IE University Insights, December 22, 2016, <https://www.ie.edu/insights/articles/work-life-balance-policies-profitable-move-for-businesses/>.
- 19 See Azagba and Sharaf, "Psychosocial Working Conditions," 642; Vivienne Luk and Raymond Stone, "Family-Responsive Variables and Retention-Relevant Outcomes Among Employed Parents," *Human Relations* 51, no. 1 (January 1998): 73–87; Mental Health America, "Work Life Balance."
- 20 Sylvia M. Asay and John DeFrain, "The International Family Strengths Model" (presentation at World Congress of Families, Madrid, May 26, 2012), <https://www.scribd.com/document/386726913/Sylvia-Asay-the-International-Family-Strengths-Model-ENGLISH>.
- 21 Eluned Gold et al., "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for Primary School Teachers," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 19, no. 2 (April 2010): 184–189.
- 22 Burnette, "Burnout Among Pastors"; Wang, "Coping and Caring," 2020.
- 23 Paul J. Mills et al., "The Role of Gratitude in Spiritual Well-Being in Asymptomatic Heart Failure Patients," *Spiritual Clinical Practice* 2, no. 1 (March 2015): 5–17, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000050>.
- 24 Chih-Che Lin, "Impact of Gratitude on Resource Development and Emotional Well-Being," abstract, *Social Behavior and Personality* 43, no. 3 (April 2015): 493–504, <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2015.43.3.493>.
- 25 Lin, "Impact of Gratitude," abstract.
- 26 Benjamin R. Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors Upon Burnout Among Parish-Based Clergy," *Journal of Religion and Health*, 49, no. 1 (March 2010): 88–95.
- 27 Sammi R. Chekroud et al., "Association Between Physical Exercise and Mental Health in 1.2 Million Individuals in the USA Between 2011 and 2015: A Cross-Sectional Study," abstract, *The Lancet Psychiatry* 5, no. 9 (August 2018): 739–746, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(18\)30227-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(18)30227-X).
- 28 Chekroud et al., "Association Between Physical Exercise," abstract.
- 29 See H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003); Wayne Cordiero, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009).
- 30 Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman, "Dr. Seuss, Resilience, and the Science of HOPE," Alliance for Hope International, May 27, 2018, <https://www.allianceforhope.com/dr-seuss-resilience-and-the-science-of-hope/>.
- 31 Ricky T. Munoz et al., "Adverse Childhood Experiences and Posttraumatic Stress as an Antecedent of Anxiety and Lower Hope," abstract, *Traumatology* 24, no. 3 (2018): 209–218, <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000149>.
- 32 Gwin, "Science of HOPE."

The incomparable "Alpha and Omega": God's speeches in Revelation

The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic work with vivid visual symbolism, which is why interpreting the book's imagery is important for understanding its message. However, the book's auditory aspects also deserve close attention because the voices and speeches determine, to a significant degree, the book's theological outlook.¹

The basic portrait of God

The key title of God in Revelation is "the One sitting on the throne." This formula functions as "a circumlocution for the name of God"² because His naming and description are avoided. The focus in the formula is "on the throne" itself which, in accordance with the Old Testament background, is the symbol of divine rulership.³ The title occurs 12 times in the book in slightly different grammatical forms;⁴ the number of completeness, the perfection of God's sovereign authority over human history.

While all the divine interventions and judgments in Revelation are seen as coming from the heavenly temple, God the Father generally does not speak. In the opening salutation, He—together with Jesus Christ and the Spirit (Rev. 1:4–6)—sends greetings to the recipients, the seven churches, but God is surprisingly silent throughout almost the whole book.⁵

God is closely associated with His throne, which functions as the axis mundi, the immovable center of reality and, though things on earth happen as the result of decisions made in the heavenly temple, God remains seated. He is never dramatized as a figure actively involved in the course of events, conveying not passivity but rather a strong theocentricity. The impression given, as Alan Johnson notes, is that "Nothing happens, nothing exists—in the past, present, or future—apart from God's intention. Whatever authority is given . . . is given by God."⁶

The emphasis on theocentrism is foundational to Revelation's message. This message was given to the churches in Asia Minor by the end of the first century as they went through crises due to internal divisions and external pressures from society. They needed assurance that God is in control.

Only two speeches of God are recorded in the book, both at strategically significant locations: one in the prologue (v. 8) and the other almost at the end (Rev. 21:5–8). The two speeches are closely related thematically, and their position in the narrative flow of Revelation is not accidental. The message of both speeches resonates strongly with the theological perspective conveyed by the picture of the silent God sitting on His heavenly throne.

The first speech

God's first speech in Revelation appears in the prologue's final statement (Rev. 1:1–8). Following the foreword (vv. 1–3), the epistolary greetings (vv. 4, 5a), and the doxology (vv. 5b, 6), the prologue ends with a two-part thematic motto (vv. 7, 8) that introduces the basic apocalyptic perspective of the book. The first statement of the motto is given in a style of prophetic annunciation (v. 7) while, in the second statement, God Himself gives a brief self-revelation (v. 8). His words are a fitting climax of the prologue because they point to the identity of the originator of the book of Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (v. 8, ESV).

God speaking in the prologue is of major theological significance because His short self-declaration is the first recorded speech in the book. The fact that God speaks before anyone and anything highlights His privileged position, worthy of undivided attention. As James

Laszlo Gallusz, PhD, is
a senior lecturer in New
Testament studies, Newbold
College of Higher Education,
Binfield; Bracknell, Berkshire,
United Kingdom.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

THE REVELATION TO JOHN (THE APOCALYPSE)

the revelation of Jesus Christ, which
he gave him to show to his servants
the things which must soon take place; and he made
known by sending his angel to his
servant John, ² who bore witness to the
things which he saw, and to the testimony of
the book which he saw. ³ And he says,
Blessed are they who read the
prophecy, and blessed are
they who keep what is written in
the book, for the time is near.

and with a golden sash around his chest,
his head and his feet were white like
white wool, white as snow. His eyes
were like a flame of fire, and his feet
were like fine gold. He held a book
open in his hand, and he said,
Come, and I will show you the things
which must take place. And I fell
down at his feet to worship him. But
he said to me, Do not do that. I am
your fellow servant and of your
brothers who keep the words of
the book. Worship him. And he says,
I am Jesus. And the Spirit and the
bride say, Come. And he who hears,
let him come. And he who is thirsty,
let him come. And he who desires,
let him take the water of life free of
charge.

even churches that are

peace from him who
is the source of
life and of
the water of life.

the Spirit and the
bride say, Come.
And he who hears,
let him come.
And he who is
thirsty, let him
come. And he
who desires, let
him take the
water of life free
of charge.

Resseguie points out, this theocentric speech provides “theological context for all that follows.”⁷

The theme of God’s speech in verse 8 is His own divine identity, as indicated by the presence of the Johannine *egō eimi* (“I am”) formula: “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” The reference to the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet functions as a merism, a figure of speech that expresses the totality by references to polar opposites. The Old Testament background of this wordplay lies in Isaiah 41–48, where God is portrayed in the context of a polemic against the idols of Babylon in a similar fashion, as the only Creator and sovereign Lord of history:

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
“I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god” (Isa. 44:6, ESV).

The fact that the formula occurs three times in the context of the polemic (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12) points to its emphatic nature.

The Jewish alphabet symbolism throws additional light on the merism of Revelation 1:8 because the Hebrew *emet* (“truth”) has been understood as a way of designating God as the beginning, middle, and end. Namely, the Hebrew term consists of three letters: *alef* is the first, *mem* the middle, and *tau* the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.⁸ Against this background, the Alpha–Omega merism in Revelation appears to stress the sovereignty of God, who controls the beginning as well as the end and everything in between.⁹ God’s first speech in the book is short: only seven words in the Greek text. The numerical symbolism hidden in this statement, however, highlights the perfect harmony of God’s divine being, which embraces and transcends all at the same time.

“The Alpha and the Omega” title is juxtaposed in the same verse with three other divine names: (1) “Lord God”; (2) “who is and who was and who is to come”; and (3) “the Almighty.” Richard Bauckham considers these three titles, together with “the One sitting on the throne,” to be among the most important designations for God in the whole book.¹⁰ They all carry the sense of divine sovereignty. Their appearance together within a single statement underscores the strategic significance of the text. The concentrated package at the climax of the prologue serves the purpose of projecting a foundational theological outlook for the work: that the sovereign God is Lord over history, and nothing happens without the

awareness of the One who will put things in their proper place. The universe has a moral structure, and God will restore the created order on the earth, which will be fully realized in the new creation. As G. K. Beale notes, “It is only with the presupposition of an omnipotent God that such a confident assertion about the consummation of history can be made.”¹¹

The second speech

God’s second speech in Revelation is located at the climactic part of the “thesis paragraph” of the new creation vision (Rev. 21:1–8). This passage, together with the speech of the unidentified voice in the immediately preceding texts (vv. 3, 4), “captures in a nutshell the meaning of the entire book of Revelation.”¹² While God’s second speech is considerably longer than the first one, the almost verbatim reappearance of the Alpha–Omega self-declaration from Revelation 1:8 in Revelation 21:6 indicates a close connection.¹³ However, the original formula is supplemented here with an additional title—“the beginning and the end”—which functions as the interpretation of the original self-declaration.

The text of God’s second speech in Revelation reads, “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death’ ” (vv. 5–8, NRSV).

The speech consists of seven statements. The numerical pattern is not accidental: God’s first speech consists of seven words and the second speech of seven statements. Whatever God says, its hallmark is harmony and meaning. In contrast to this literary feature, God’s archenemies, such as the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, Babylon, and the prostitute, never speak in the book. Their muteness points not only to the idolatry that they proclaim (in the Old Testament, idols are mute)¹⁴ but also to the fact that they do not have anything meaningful to say other than to deceive people.¹⁵

The basic context of God’s second speech is the new creation. The fact that God’s “I am the Alpha and the Omega” self-declaration is the

middle statement of the entire speech has not been highlighted by the scholars. Among the seven statements, it appears as the fourth one, sandwiched by three statements on each side. The first three statements point to the divine side of the new creation promise while, in the last three, attention is shifted to humanity's destiny in the face of this climactic event. The focal Alpha–Omega statement centers on God's character as the sovereign Lord of history, the originating Cause from whom the eschatological new creation emanates.

The significance of the relation

There is a clear theological link between God's two speeches in Revelation. The Alpha–Omega self-declaration near both the beginning and the end of the book reveals purposiveness on the author's part. It not only forms an *inclusio* around the work but also frames its theological message. As Adela Yarbro-Collins points out, such a literary feature “implies that all things in time and space are part of divine providence.”¹⁶ The appearance of the Alpha–Omega title at the two opposite sides of the book underscores God's absolute control over the totality of the events portrayed between Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 21:6.¹⁷ Thus the title proclaims a strong theocracy, since “the One sitting on the throne” has the first and the last word. His purpose is coming to be fulfilled both in the advancement of history (Rev. 1:8) and in the new creation at the eschaton (Rev. 21:5–8).

As the omnipotent God, He guides the entire course of history from beginning to end. He had the first word in the Creation, and He will have the last word in the new creation, in which His “will [will] be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Ultimately, God is the Origin and Goal of history in its entirety, since human existence finds meaning in Him.

So what? Implications for pastors

The book of Revelation has often been preached and taught with a focus on prophecies in light of history and current political events. The book's fulfilled prophecies have often been seen as an effective tool for convincing people about the truthfulness of the Bible and as a means for propelling them to accept the message of the everlasting gospel. Revelation is, however, much more than a prophecy treasury in the hand of an evangelistically minded pastor.

As we have seen, the book's primary focus is on God Himself, sovereign Lord of history who wishes to be “Alpha and Omega” in the life of the pastor's

preaching and teaching of Revelation. Because Revelation is primarily about God, not about prophecies, the pastor's task is to point, first of all, to the Lord. The prophecies are to reveal God, who is at work in history. The main emphasis is not on “what will happen” but on the fact that “it will happen” because God is active in His created reality. While the predictive character of Revelation is not to be disputed (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), the book's doctrine about God needs to be restored as its heart.

Responsible handling of Revelation necessitates Christ-centered preaching and teaching of Revelation that, before anything else, makes God's personality and His intentions toward humanity first priority.

Responsible handling of Revelation necessitates Christ-centered preaching and teaching of Revelation that, before anything else, makes God's personality and His intentions toward humanity first priority. Everything in Revelation, including the prophecies, is secondary to the book's “theology,” which is its teaching about God. Such an approach to Revelation will have profound implications on a pastor's interpretation and presentation of Revelation.

Though in Revelation God is generally transcendent and silent, He is not detached. Defining Himself through the Lamb, He is close to humanity. He expresses His feelings and intentions toward us through the One who “loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev. 1:5, NRSV). Such a God is trustworthy and worthy of worship.

God is presented in Revelation as the utterly incomparable One to whom everything is subjected. Because God is “the Alpha and the Omega,” His purposes triumph in history. While demonic forces make strong efforts to frustrate His plan for humanity, He has the first and the last word in history. The primary purpose of the book of Revelation is not to inform us about the future (though the predictive prophecies of the book are important) but to reveal Him as the incomparable, mighty God who has full authority over the heavenly, earthly, and cosmic forces.



- 1 The most profound study on the topic has been done by M. Eugene Boring ("The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 34 [October 1992]: 334–359), who identified 141 speech units around which quotation marks can be put. Here, not only divine voices are heard but also voices of heavenly beings and earthly characters participating in the drama of Revelation. Even voices from animals, an altar, and the seven thunders are recorded.
- 2 David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), 284.
- 3 For the significance of the throne motif for the theology of Revelation, see Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies (London, UK: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014).
- 4 Rev. 4:2, 9; 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5. The grammatical variations are not significant for the meaning of the expression.
- 5 For the significance of the temple motif for the structure and theology of Revelation, see Jon Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 33, no. 2 (1995): 245–264.
- 6 Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 66.
- 7 James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, Biblical Interpretation Studies, vol. 32 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 106.
- 8 For the idea in Jewish literature that the first and the last letter of the alphabet denote the whole extent of a thing, see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 3 (Munich, Germany: Beck, 1922–1961), 789.
- 9 This interpretation has a long tradition. See, e.g., Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.18; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6.360; Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, TEG 8.268. Interestingly, Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.190) uses a threefold formula for God: "He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things."
- 10 For a detailed study of these titles, see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25–35.
- 11 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 199.
- 12 J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 235.
- 13 In Rev. 22:13 the same title occurs, once again applied to Christ. This implies high Christology: the unity of the Father and the Son, sharing the same divine nature.
- 14 On the muteness of the idols, see Pss. 115:5; 135:16; Jer. 10:5; Hab. 2:18, 19.
- 15 The motif of counterfeit is one of the central motifs in Rev. 12–22. For its cardinal aspects, see Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed., (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 376–382.
- 16 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, New Testament Message, vol. 22 (Dublin, Ireland: Veritas, 1979), 145.
- 17 Beale, *Revelation*, 1055.



RESOURCES

The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary

by Robert Alter. 3 vols. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2019.

Robert Alter's three-volume set of *The Hebrew Bible* and commentary may well take its place as one of the more original and unique contributions to the study of the Hebrew Bible in the English language. Alter's numerous scholarly publications and translations of individual Hebrew Bible books are evidence of his significant contributions to biblical studies. *The Hebrew Bible* translation, his magnum opus of 3,500 pages, is the result of more than two and half decades of work and completes and compiles the full translation of the Hebrew Bible corpus.

I first learned of Robert Alter when NPR's Terry Gross interviewed him. Alter explained that his purposes in his translations included taking account of the social, cultural, and historical context of each of the biblical books. He explained that he made it a point not to smooth out the Masoretic Text (MT) but to allow the English translation to reflect occasions when the Hebrew text was unintelligible or garbled. When the MT omits words or phrases, rather than guess what the word or words may have been, Alter reflects that lacuna in his English text.

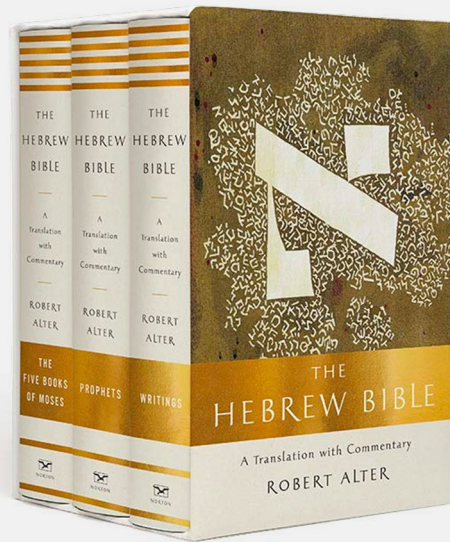
When alternative manuscripts to the MT, such as the Septuagint (LXX), Aramaic, or other ancient texts, provided a more logical word or phrase than the MT, Alter inserted that word or text in the English translation. The commentary provides an explanation when Alter deviates from the MT.

A brief introduction to many of the biblical books provides the reader with pertinent

Lawrence G. Downing, DMin, is a retired pastor and professor residing in San Luis Obispo, California, United States.



data that relates to the history of the era in which the book was written, the context in which it was written, and other helpful information that helps the reader better understand the book. The commentary at the bottom of each page brings together an abundance of interpretive information, the author's views, and pertinent scholarly data that help the serious reader understand the text.



Alter's work in the Psalms and the book of Job I found particularly insightful. The translator caught the cadence of the Hebrew poetry. He did not soften the psalmist's rhetoric nor gloss over the harsh intent evidenced in the imprecatory psalms. Classic passages such as Genesis 1:1 and the twenty-third psalm, have maintained their luster while expressing a different "read": "When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters . . ." (Gen. 1:1, 2). In the commentary, Alter explains the translations of *welter and waste*: "The Hebrew *tohu wabohu* occurs only here and in two later biblical texts that are clearly alluding to this one. The second word of the pair looks like a nonce term coined to rhyme with the first and to reinforce it, an effect I have tried to approximate in English by alliteration. *Tohu* by itself means 'emptiness' or 'futility,' and in some contexts is associated with the trackless vacancy of the desert."


"My life he brings back. He leads me on pathways of justice for His name's sake. Let but goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23:3, 6).

Those who have worked on translating any part of the book of Job know the challenges that lie within the Hebrew text. Alter has not solved all of the conundrums that face the translator, but he has smoothed out the path for those who

From a pastor's perspective, I find Alter's translation and his commentary an excellent resource that brings together a lively translation and a collection of insightful observations on biblical texts that might otherwise be ignored or misunderstood.

tread the bumpy spots that lie within the book. "The blighted man's friend owes him kindness, though the fear of Shaddai he forsakes. My brothers betrayed like a wadi, like the channel of brooks that run dry" (Job 6:14, 15). "Would then that my words were written, that they were inscribed in a book, with an iron pen and lead to be hewn in rock forever. But I know my redeemer lives, and in the end he will stand up on earth, and after they flay my skin, from my flesh I shall behold God" (Job 19:24–26).

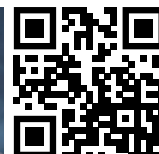
In the commentary, Alter explains that the passage's context is a legal trial, where the accused awaits the testimony of a redeemer, usually a family member.

From a pastor's perspective, I find Alter's translation and his commentary an excellent resource that brings together a lively translation and a collection of insightful observations on biblical texts that might otherwise be ignored or misunderstood. At the very least, Alter provides an alternative to more commonly available and used translations. 



CHANGE THE
QUESTIONS.
CHANGE THE
WORLD

Sung Kwon, PhD, DMin, is the executive director of North American Division Adventist Community Services, Columbia, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

When I was in Dayton, Ohio, I discovered that individuals struggling with substance abuse or who were mentally challenged but desiring to transform their lives would journey to Cincinnati, Ohio, because the city had developed a well-organized, systematic approach to help homeless people become self-sufficient and self-supporting within a year or two.

As they journeyed from their home to Cincinnati, they passed through Dayton, Ohio, about 50 miles north of Cincinnati. When they stopped in Dayton on their way to Cincinnati, they would contact the churches in the community for help (such as for food, clothing, gas, and a place to stay). Individual congregations would respond to those in need. But as we observed the situation, we noticed that some were not so truthful about their situation and were going from church to church, taking advantage of any compassionate ministry.

So, we united some Adventist entities together and contributed financial support to assist the homeless people in Dayton. We then approached local businesspeople (private sector—grocery stores, gas stations, motels, etc.), asking them to support our effort. We would pay one dollar for their two dollars' worth of contribution. More often than not, the merchants said we were doing a good work, gave us five dollars' worth of service, and we provided them with a simple donation letter. The free service vouchers we received from the merchants were then disseminated to the local police and fire stations (public sector). We asked them to distribute the vouchers according to the needs.

So, how does that work? When a homeless person contacts a local church, the church directs

them to the nearest police or fire station for vouchers for free services. What happens? Only individuals honest about their needs show up at the police or fire station for the vouchers. This model eliminated duplicated services through collaborative efforts. Soon, other faith-based groups joined the project, more merchants became involved, and it became a citywide, whole-community program. We simply connected the dots between the public, private, and nonprofit sector/church organizations.

A faithful presence

Ask yourself, "If your church were to close its doors, would anyone in the community notice or even care?" I believe that church is where disciples get developed, educated, equipped, and sent out to the local neighborhoods to make a difference in their immediate communities.

We, the church of God, must be careful not to forget our chosen responsibility as others before us sadly forgot their chosen role. We are to be God's recognizable, tangible, and visible witness and a foretaste of His dream for the world.

That is why Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, NIV). In fact, the thought that we could ever relate to another person in a way that glorifies God—that is an incredible privilege and sacred trust.

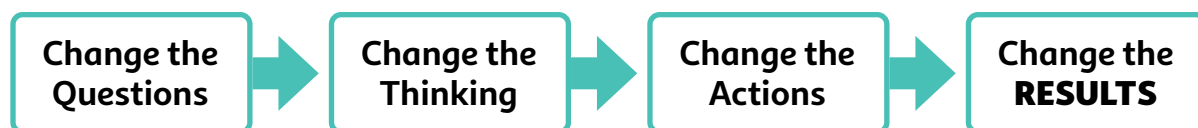
Therefore, God's calling should affect how we think and work in every aspect of our lives. So, instead of asking, "How do we attract people to what we are doing?" we should be inquiring, "What is God up to right now, right here, in our neighborhoods? What are the ways in which we need to change to engage the people in our community who no longer consider church a part of their lives?"

Our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly work was a lifetime commitment to the community—a matter of building relationships. Therefore, we must establish a faithful presence for God in our communities until the second coming of Christ. Christianity is the church connecting God with the community by using life-on-life evangelism.

Thus, I share with my colleagues that their church properties are not their presence in the community. Rather, their engagement in the community is their true community presence. Instead of asking people to “come and see,” let's change the questions. What are we known for in our communities? How are we relating to one another and to our communities? How have we positioned ourselves in our communities? We have to change our ways of thinking and working.

A new model

Buckminster Fuller is quoted as saying, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”¹ Therefore, changing the questions will help us shift our manner of thinking, transform the way we work, and alter the results, not only in quantitative success but also in the qualitative and collective impact. Where your measure is, there will your heart be also.



We cannot confine or limit the church just to a worship program. It is not just a place and time where we meet for a weekly appointment. Nor is the church only about keeping the traditions and maintaining the status quo. In fact, we must plant our feet on the tradition but then grow out of it. If we do not expand beyond our own traditions, we will be ineffective and inefficient.

We have to change our conversations. Instead of asking, “How big is your church?” or “What is your worship attendance?” we should inquire, “What is your church's collective impact in the community?” As this happens, heaven will be more populated with people from every nation, tribe, race, and language. Where there is change, there will be greater hope for the future of our faith. Therefore, instead of asking, “How can we be the best church *in* our community?” we

should ask, “How can we be the best church *for* our community [*with* our community]?”²

A missional model

The church must be a missional movement. Every congregation, educational institution, and health-care facility must be missional. For the most part, people are not coming to us—we have to go to them. Being a missional church requires that we continually adopt new ways of thinking and working. No longer can we stay inside the four walls of the church and shout at the community, “Come and see.” We need to remove this passive mentality from the church and be engaged proactively *for* our communities and *with* our communities.

How can you be a missional church? A Pathfinder club³ could approach a small, local grocery store to help the owners develop an innovative marketing strategy. The club members could also, with the aid of church members, renovate the stores. Those involved could include young adults and college students from various majors, such as engineering, interior design, and social work. They could work together to improve the condition of the store and its efficiency and to discover areas of community service the store could provide.

This relationship could be a lifetime commitment between the church and store owners.

Perhaps, if we continue this type of engagement with community members, we will soon begin to see the impact and positive results in student learning experiences, institutional reputation and growth, and the betterment of the community.

Questions to ask

Again, instead of asking, “How many people did we serve?” or “How many socks and underwear have we distributed?” we should consider the following questions when, for example, Pathfinders volunteer at a homeless shelter as a way to implement the critical consciousness of service-learning:

1. *Knowledge*—What were your first impressions of the shelter?
2. *Comprehension*—How was this shelter similar to or different from what you expected?

3. *Analysis*—What parts of the experience have been most challenging for you?
4. *Synthesis*—What have you personally learned about yourself from this service?
5. *Evaluation*—What ideas do you have to help the situation of homelessness?

Truly, it was God's inspiration that led us to this framework and the strategy we implemented in Dayton, Ohio.⁴ We challenged ourselves with bigger questions. Where is our compassion to end poverty? Where is our vision to stop world hunger? Where is our dream to stop human trafficking? Where is our desire to build happy homes? Where is our commitment to a life of integrity and humility and peace? Through this immersion in the community, I was privileged to receive the award, "40 under 40, Dayton's Brightest Young Business Leaders."

As Jesus reframes His mission in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (NIV), so God has chosen us to serve Him and His people. Let's change the questions so as to change the world.

NO LONGER CAN WE STAY INSIDE THE FOUR WALLS OF THE CHURCH AND SHOUT AT THE COMMUNITY. "COME AND SEE."



- 1 J. Baldwin, *Bucky Works: Buckminster Fuller's Ideas for Today* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 1997).
- 2 Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw, *The Externally Focused Quest: Becoming the Best Church for the Community* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).
- 3 A Pathfinder club is a coeducational group within Seventh-day Adventist churches that helps develop the cultural, social, and religious knowledge of children and early teens.
- 4 Tania D. Mitchell, "Critical Service-Learning as Social Justice Education: A Case Study of the Citizen Scholars Program," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 40, no. 2 (2007): 101, 102.

BELIEVE HIS PROPHETS

Provided by Revival and Reformation

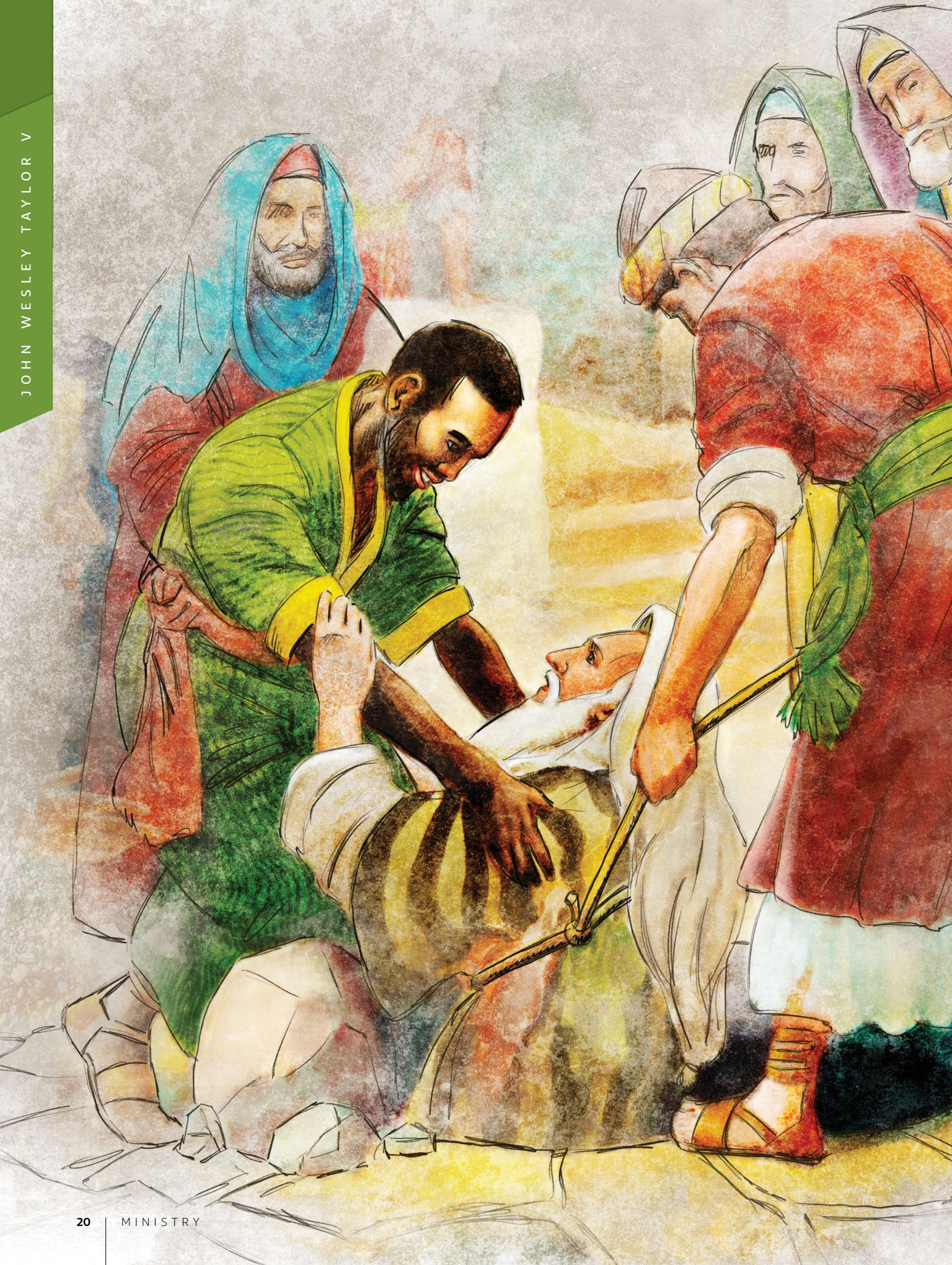
READ THE NEW TESTAMENT IN 2021.


Starts April 29.

Sign up at: revivalandreformation.org/BHP

Available in English, Español, Français, Português







**John Wesley Taylor V, PhD,
EdD,** is associate director
of Education, General
Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists, Silver Spring,
Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Improbable HERO

Many members of our churches do not occupy leadership positions. Not making decisions that directly affect the lives of others, they may wonder, *Does my life make a difference at all?*

The Bible contains a story showcasing the character of Ebed-Melek. Unlike the Davids, Pauls, and Peters, Ebed-Melek stands as a symbol of church members who, though not occupying positions of power, influence, or fame, can, indeed, make a difference.

Who was Ebed-Melek, and what can we learn from this “improbable hero”?

Jeremiah in a pit

The story begins in Jeremiah, chapter 37. Despite Jeremiah the prophet’s warnings, Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, enters into an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon responds by invading Judah in a 30-month siege of Jerusalem. Partway through the siege, Hophra sends an army from Egypt, and the Babylonians withdraw from Jerusalem to meet the threat.

During this lull, Jeremiah—accused of defecting to the Babylonians—is brought before a court of pro-Egyptian princes who throw him into prison. Meanwhile, the forces of Pharaoh Hophra are defeated by the Babylonians, and Nebuchadnezzar reimposes the siege on Jerusalem. King Zedekiah secretly sends for Jeremiah and asks, “Is there any word from the LORD?” (Jer. 37:17),¹ to which Jeremiah replies, “Yes, you will be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon.”

At the same time, Jeremiah asks Zedekiah, “What crime have I committed against you or your attendants or this people, that you have put me in prison? . . . Do not send me back . . . , or I will die there” (vv. 18–20).

Zedekiah allows Jeremiah to live in the courtyard of the guard. While there, Jeremiah receives further messages from

God that he proclaims to the city: “This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it” (Jer. 38:3). And “whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live” (v. 2).

When four powerful princes hear what Jeremiah has said, they come before Zedekiah and charge Jeremiah with sedition, declaring that “this man should be put to death” (v. 4).

Weak and vacillating, Zedekiah capitulates, saying: “He is in your hands. . . . The king can do nothing to oppose you” (v. 5). The princes cast Jeremiah into the dungeon of Malchiah. The dungeon is an old cistern no longer containing water, but the bottom is muddy and damp, and Jeremiah sinks into the slime.

When the princes drop Jeremiah into the cistern, it is effectively an execution. With Jerusalem under siege, famine is rampant. The plan is that Jeremiah will be left there until he perishes.

At that moment, Ebed-Melek enters the picture. *Ebed* means “a servant”; *Melek* denotes “king.” His name, then, simply means “servant . . . of the king.”² Though surely King Zedekiah has many servants, this one is identified as the Cushite, the Ethiopian. Ebed-Melek is a stranger, a foreigner, in the court.

When Ebed-Melek learns that Jeremiah has been put in the cistern, he goes to the king, who is holding court by the Benjamin gate, to plead for Jeremiah’s life. Zedekiah startles everyone by reversing his decision and authorizes Ebed-Melek to rescue him. The king even tells Ebed-Melek to take 30 men with him and draw the prophet out of the cistern.

Ebed-Melek stops by a room under the treasury and gathers some worn-out clothes. Lowering them to Jeremiah, Ebed-Melek tells the prophet to “put these old rags . . . under your arms to pad the ropes” (v. 12).

Jeremiah is pulled from the pit and receives a new lease on life. In short, Ebed-Melek, this otherwise unknown man, plays the role of a hero.

Traits of a hero

What qualities made Ebed-Melek a remarkable person?

Person of courage. When Ebed-Melek hears what the princes have done to Jeremiah, he acts without hesitation. He does not wait for a private audience. He goes directly to the gate where Zedekiah is holding court. Notice that he approaches the king immediately and publicly. In

front of the court, Ebed-Melek tells Zedekiah that Jeremiah’s accusers are evil men and “have acted wickedly” (v. 9). Ebed-Melek is challenging the real power of the land—the princes whom even the king dared not resist. This act took courage.

The king telling Ebed-Melek to take 30 men with him is evidence that Jeremiah’s rescue is dangerous. Thirty persons are probably not required to pull Jeremiah out of the cistern. Rather, given the bitter hatred of those who want to eliminate Jeremiah, there is a clear danger of interference.

In short, Ebed-Melek refuses to let others intimidate him. How easily he could keep his own peace and safety. Why jeopardize his standing with the king or make enemies of powerful princes by championing Jeremiah, a prophet despised by most in the royal court? Ebed-Melek, however, boldly approaches the king, reproaches the princes, and risks his own life in an act of mercy.

Person of integrity. In a place filled with selfish actions and immoral behavior, Ebed-Melek rises above his surroundings. At a time when basic dignity is degraded, when there is no respect for the inherent value of human life, Ebed-Melek is sensitive to someone’s rights being trampled.

Ebed-Melek is a person of steadfast character. He believes that people are important, that life is valuable.³ When an innocent person’s life is at stake, his own safety is not of the greatest consequence. He recognizes inequity and seeks to restore justice.

Person of compassion. As the cistern was deep and Jeremiah had sunk into the mire, significant force would be required to extract him. However, bare ropes would lacerate his armpits, probably bruised already from having been roughly lowered into the cistern.

Ebed-Melek wants to help Jeremiah but does not want to bring greater harm to the prophet in the process. So, he finds pieces of clothing and lowers these to Jeremiah, with the instruction to put the rags between his armpits and the ropes as a cushion. With compassion, Ebed-Melek tries to make the rescue as painless as possible.⁴

The rest of the story

What happened to Ebed-Melek? He believes Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jerusalem will fall to the Babylonians. As a palace servant, he could be taken captive or killed. He certainly feels anxiety for the future and fear of the unknown. And so, the Lord gives Jeremiah a special message for

Ebed-Melek. “Go and tell Ebed-Melek the Cushite, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city—words concerning disaster, not prosperity. . . . But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD; you will not be given into the hands of those you fear. I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life’ ” (Jer. 39:15–18).

How thankful Ebed-Melek must have been to hear those words. As he had valued Jeremiah’s life, so God would regard his life and preserve him. What made Ebed-Melek so remarkable a person? In verse 18, we find God’s explanation for why Ebed-Melek came to Jeremiah’s rescue. When God instructed Jeremiah to assure Ebed-Melek of special protection when the invaders entered the city, the prophet explains that this was “because you trust in me.”

Ebed-Melek had faith in God. And his trust in God was the secret of his noble life—a life of courage, integrity, and compassion.

Insights from the unlikely hero

What can we learn from Ebed-Melek? It requires courage to stand up for someone unfairly attacked, especially when unpopular to do so. It requires boldness to stand with those who refuse to compromise God’s message, especially when that message is mocked and despised. It takes courage to bravely stand for what is right when it involves personal risk, when your own reputation and future are at stake. But it is such courage that makes one a leader for God (Deut. 31:23; Josh. 1:9).

Many persons attempt to gain influence through wealth, threats, or intrigue. Ebed-Melek, however, was influential because of his integrity. His approach, his eloquent appeal to the king to release Jeremiah, indicates his commitment to justice. He stood firm for his convictions and did not allow the popular view to sway him.

We also must live our lives with integrity. When we do so, our thoughts and suggestions can be considered with respect. Even more important it is this commitment to integrity and justice that makes one great before God (Mic. 6:8; Jer. 22:3).

As Christ’s followers, we must have a heart for the hurting. We must be careful, however, that, when we try to help others, we do so with discernment and understanding, lest we cause more damage than good. We must do what is right with kindness. Tender compassion is a hallmark of God’s chosen people (Col. 3:12).

Convenience or courage

He was neither a prophet nor a prince—only a palace worker, an obscure servant.⁵ But when Ebed-Melek saw a great injustice, he acted, stepping out of his comfort zone. Then, with gentleness and compassion, he rescued Jeremiah.

Although surrounded by the godless and corrupt, Ebed-Melek stands out as a person of courage and compassion, committed to doing right. His sympathetic character and unwavering trust in God exemplify who we can be.

*MANY PERSONS ATTEMPT TO GAIN
INFLUENCE THROUGH WEALTH,
THREATS, OR INTRIGUE. EBED-
MELEK, HOWEVER, WAS INFLUENTIAL
BECAUSE OF HIS INTEGRITY.*

His story reminds us that faithfulness to God is not a matter of convenience. Rather, it involves courage and often costly choices. Such service, however, will receive a reward, sometimes in this life, as with Ebed-Melek, and always in the life to come. “God . . . will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them” (Heb. 6:10).

Although, like so many of our church members, Ebed-Melek was not a person of wealth, standing, fame, and worldly power, he was used by God in a great way. An unlikely hero—but a hero, nonetheless. So it may be with us. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all” (Gal. 6:10).



- 1 Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 2 “Ebed-Melech,” *All the Men of the Bible*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-men-bible/Ebed-Melech>.
- 3 John L. Kachelman, “Personalities of the Old Testament: Ebed-Melech—Help for those in the dumps!” Bible Topics in the Christian Library, 1999, http://christianlibrary.org/authors/John_L_Kachelman_Jr/people-ot/ebed-melech.htm.
- 4 “Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian,” *International Bible Studies*, Lesson for August 8, 1948, <http://dawnbible.com/1948/4808ib08.htm>.
- 5 Ken, Matto, “Ebedmelech and You,” accessed January 15, 2021, https://scionofzion.com/ebedmelech_and_you.htm.

Our daily work: God's idea

The church of my childhood encouraged a weekly report of “Christian” activities. When first given this report sheet, I surveyed the suggested activities in dismay. Virtually everything on the list was beyond my young capabilities. But amid Bible studies, giving out Christian literature, and so forth, I found “persons helped.” Yes, I could manage that. I totaled up what I thought had been helpful contributions to my parents, siblings, school-mates, teachers, and so forth and wrote “20” in the designated box. The youth leader was highly amused and even took the matter to my parents, who were embarrassed. How could anyone of my tender preteen age help 20 people? I tried to explain—but to no avail. What was wanted was *real* “Christian” activity.

Others have noted the same problem. Francis Ayres said, “The layman remains a second-class citizen, an assistant to the clergy, primarily a maintenance man in the institutionalized church.”¹ William Diehl, a member of the Lutheran Church that first recognized the ministry of all believers, wrote, “When it comes down to reality, my church sees lay ministry purely in terms of service to the institutional church.”² Is this biblical? Let’s review different examples, especially in the book of Genesis, for the answer.

God invented work

Significantly, work—none other than the work of God—begins Jewish and Christian Scripture.

The work of humanity is introduced in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve are given the task of caring for the garden (Gen. 2:15). The Hebrew words used, *abad* and *shamar*, are the same as those used to describe the Levites’ work in the tabernacle (Num. 3:7, 8; 18:7).

Claus Westermann noted this focus on work in Genesis³ and considered that human achievement is not only a significant theme in the primeval story but also one to which hardly any attention has been given.⁴ Even more significantly, Ian Hart suggests the focus on work in the prologue of Genesis (Gen. 1:1–2:3) suggests that work is a theme for the entire book.⁵

A Genesis solution

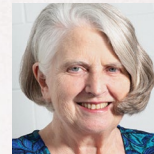
The Genesis narrative that introduces the concept of human work offers a simple solution to the value of ordinary human work.

Human work appears fairly negatively in chapters 4–11 in the Genesis narrative. The primordial narrative reaches what Gerhard von Rad called its capstone⁶ in the Tower of Babel pericope. This pericope is regarded by many as very carefully crafted.⁷ This widespread agreement regarding its care of construction and literary placement suggests that the author of Genesis took trouble with it because he meant it to be both noted and noteworthy.

The positioning of the tower narrative suggests that the author considered it vitally important to understand the issues that led to the call of



Elizabeth Ostring, MB ChB, PhD, a physician, theologian, and former medical missionary, resides in Helensville, Auckland, New Zealand, and works with the “Incredible Journey” Bible School and the Hope Channel Bible School.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Abram. There is much about the tower builders and their intentions that appears laudable to modern thinking: they were cooperative, industrious, inventive, and ambitious, to name just a few of their apparently commendable characteristics. However, what is most clearly described in the tower narrative is not their worship, or even their attitudes, but their work. They fit the description Habakkuk penned later: “guilty men, whose own might is their god!” (Hab. 1:11b, ESV). Perhaps it is because of this negative portrayal of work in the early parts of Genesis that the importance of ordinary human work has been denigrated.

But most of Genesis tells a different story. After the tower narrative, the author rapidly focuses on the call of Abram (Gen. 12:1–3). Bruce Waltke asserted that this famous call is the thematic center of the Pentateuch.⁸ Abram’s call states: “Now the LORD had said to Abram,

‘Get out from your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
And I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be
blessed.’” (Gen. 12:1–3, NKJV).

God repeatedly promises to bless Abram, emphasizing that blessing comes from God. But that blessing depends on separating from the surrounding social norms. Significantly, Abram is also called to be a blessing. Laurence Turner highlights the importance of this by observing that the Hebrew of “you will be a blessing” is actually in the form of a command, not a promise.⁹

Jonathan Bernis, a Messianic Jew, sees the Genesis 12:1–3 promise and command that Abraham was to bless “all the families of the earth” as twofold. First is the blessing Jewish people have brought to the world through their contributions in medicine, science, literature, and culture which, of course, has been achieved through their work. Second and more important, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, would come through the Jews.¹⁰

What is the perspective of the Genesis author regarding Abraham and his descendants being blessed and a blessing to all the families of the earth? “Blessing,” Hebrew *brk*, appears in Genesis 88 times, more than any other book in the Old Testament,¹¹ beginning with God blessing Creation and the Sabbath. Christopher Wright Mitchell made a detailed study of the meaning of *brk* and concluded: “The factor that makes a blessing a blessing is the relationship between God and the person blessed. . . . The type of benefit God actually bestows when he blesses is of secondary importance.”¹² Mitchell notes that “God’s blessing is a visible sign of his favor” and that other people



can say, “We have seen quite clearly that Yahweh is with you because God has blessed you (see Gen. 26:28; 39:2–6).”¹³

The patriarchal narratives illustrate how God not only blessed Abraham and his offspring, but also through their work, other families and nations were blessed. We note that Abraham and his descendants made many mistakes that were certainly no blessing to others, highlighting both the difficulty that all God’s people have in totally trusting His blessing power and a need for spiritual encouragement.

But Abraham was also noted to be a blessing to others. After his successful military work rescuing his nephew Lot and his Sodomite neighbors captured from the Vale of Siddim, Melchizedek met Abram and noted: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand” (Gen. 14:19, 20, NKJV). Years later, Abimelech, king of Gerar, requested a mutually beneficial peace treaty with Abraham because, he said, “God is with you in all that you do” (Gen. 21:22, 32, NKJV). In presenting the case for a bride for Isaac, Abraham’s servant noted, “The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great” (Gen. 24:35, NKJV).

The neighbors of Isaac asked for a covenant of peace, declaring, “We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. . . . You are now the blessed of the LORD” (Gen. 26:1, 12, 13, 26–29). Laban admitted to Jacob, “I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake” (Gen. 30:27, NKJV). And the story of Joseph shows just how extensive can be the blessing shared through daily work. The narrative focuses on both the excellent quality of Joseph’s work and the fact that God was with him. Potiphar’s house was blessed for Joseph’s sake because the Lord was with him (Gen. 39:5, 2). When Joseph was in prison, God made his work prosper (v. 23). As he listened to Joseph’s wise advice, Pharaoh recognized Joseph had “the Spirit of God” (Gen. 41:38, NKJV), and he gave Joseph both a noble work and a name that probably means “God speaks, and He lives.”¹⁴ In his daily work, even the menial and demeaning work of a slave and a prisoner, yet also that of the prime minister, Joseph was a blessing to “all the families of the earth” as God intended His people to be.

Pastoral encouragement

If pastors acknowledge the blessing potential of their members’ daily work, they will better be able to work with and for them. They will

appreciate their community value and be able to offer them support and witnessing assistance.

You can help your members understand that accepting the “call of Abraham” to work in God’s plan for blessing will separate Christians from a self-seeking, Babel-working mindset. Acknowledging that the opportunity to bless others is in response to God’s blessing us transforms daily work. Many poorly esteemed jobs are transformed when it is recognized how much they bless society. Many jobs, such as those in the building and decorating trades, teaching and health professions, and many others, offer powerful witnessing opportunities. Regarding work simply as an opportunity for blessing removes anxiety about any eternally transforming function it may have.

What can you do to help your members realize their potential for sharing God’s love to others in word and action in their workplace? The worth of all work, paid or unpaid, can quickly be assessed by its quality of blessing, both now and eternally.



- 1 Francis O. Ayres, *The Ministry of the Laity* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), 15.
- 2 William E. Diehl, *Christianity and Real Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), viii.
- 3 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans., John J. Scullion, SJ (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 86.
- 4 Westermann, 18, 51.
- 5 Ian Hart, “Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 315–336.
- 6 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., The Old Testament Library (London, UK: SCM Press, 1961), 143.
- 7 See, for example, von Rad, 143; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 234–238; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part Two: From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 226–234.
- 8 Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 208.
- 9 Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 64.
- 10 Jonathan Bernis, *A Rabbi Looks at Jesus of Nazareth* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2011), 72.
- 11 Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Meaning of Brk “to Bless” in the Old Testament*, SBL Dissertation Series 95 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 185.
- 12 Mitchell, 165.
- 13 Mitchell, 166.
- 14 Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., *Andrews Study Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), Gen. 41:45, margin.



Adventist professors' cutting-edge paper—20 years of research

KEENE, TEXAS, UNITED STATES

Every summer, **Jared Wood**, director of the Dinosaur Science Museum at Southwestern Adventist University (SWAU), and **Arthur Chadwick**, director of the Dinosaur Excavation Project at SWAU, along with **Keith Snyder**, chair of the biology department at Southern Adventist University, lead a dinosaur dig at the Hanson Ranch in Wyoming, United States. The dig is an ongoing, collaborative research project, and these scholars have gathered a large amount of data over the years.

Their approximately 20 years of research have led to the publication of a paper titled “Over 13,000 elements from a single bonebed help elucidate disarticulation and transport of an *Edmontosaurus* thanatocoenosis” for *PLOS One*, a peer-reviewed, open-access scientific journal published by the Public Library of Science (PLOS).¹

The primary research objective of the paper is a taphonomic examination of the deposit. Taphonomy is the study of what animals were doing when they died, how they died, and what happened after they died. High-precision GPS equipment is used to catalog every bone's location within a centimeter to learn more about how the bones ended up in their final locations.

“Everyone wants to know how thousands of bones ended up in one location. We are finally able to give

them a scientific explanation,” Wood said. “This paper will change how bonebeds are studied and remain important for years to come.”

The paper describes the method used for excavation and details the types of bones that have been found on the Hanson Ranch bonebed. The large number of recovered fossils has brought deeper insight into how so many bones ended up in one location. The authors hypothesize that all of the dinosaurs excavated from the main bonebeds were killed in one catastrophic aquatic event and subsequently relocated by a secondary event. Similar bonebeds deposited by flood events have also been documented in Canada.

The Dinosaur Science Museum features bones found during those summer digs and includes a catalog featuring every bone in the collection. SWAU became involved in the project in 1997 and began offering a dinosaur class two years later. Students and members of the community are invited to take part in the research projects. [Brisa Ramirez, Southwestern Adventist University]

¹ To read the research paper, visit <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0233182>.



Jared Wood shows a young patron some of the exhibit materials.

Photo: Southwestern Adventist University



In a first, Adventist chaplains appointed to the Australian Defense Force

RINGWOOD, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

Two Seventh-day Adventist chaplains were among those appointed to provide pastoral support for members of the Australian Defense Force (ADF) and their families for the first time in its history.

After an extensive recruitment process, which took more than 12 months, **Milijan Popvic** was assigned as an air force chaplain and **Gys Seegers** as an army reserve chaplain earlier in 2020.

An ADF spokesperson stated that, on average, the ADF receives 70,000 applications each year for all available positions in the navy, army, and air force. In the current financial year, they are looking to recruit only 22 chaplains across the ADF.

The first two years in a chaplaincy position are considered an induction period because there are academic requirements to learn about the ADF and chaplaincy. Both Popvic and Seegers are undertaking professional development to enhance their skills and knowledge of leadership, teamwork, ethics, psychology, counseling, and other courses and training programs. They will also be able to bring these skills to their local church ministry.

Popvic is currently posted at RAAF Base Amberley in Ipswich, Queensland, where he provides assistance for spiritual health and well-being, pastoral support, advocacy, and personal guidance to air force members and their families. He also provides advice to commanders on members' pastoral, religious, ethical, and cultural issues.



Chaplain Gys Seegers with his children.

Photo: *Adventist Record*

Popvic said he understands that "this is not a job. This is a call, and it is a passion. A passion for connecting, support, and walking with people who serve our country and their families."

Seegers is based at the Australian Army Cadet headquarters in Perth, Western Australia, where he provides chaplaincy support to full-time and reserve personnel. He is also the coordinating chaplain for the chaplains who support 33 cadet units throughout Western Australia.

Originally from South Africa, Seegers feels it is a blessing and privilege to enter into a new mission field on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He explained, "I am humbled by this opportunity to help raise the banner for Christ's kingdom within the ADF and the beautiful people who I'm getting to know—men and women of courage and respect who understand order and what it means to serve and sacrifice themselves for others."

Michael Worker, general secretary of the Australian Union Conference of the Adventist Church and the church's representative on the Associated Protestant Churches Chaplaincy Board (APCCB), said that "it's important as the Seventh-day Adventist Church that we are involved in all facets of ministry. Being part of the defense force chaplaincy gives us a chance to interact with and provide a positive point of contact for many Australians who would never otherwise come into contact with Adventists. It gives our pastors opportunities to have spiritual conversations with our service personnel."

Being a military chaplain is a strong ministry, and the Adventist Church around the world has a proud history of pastors serving as chaplains. [Lorraine Atchia, *Adventist Record* and *Adventist Review*]



Chaplain Milijan Popovic

A church district steps in to help fill gaps

KENOSHA, WISCONSIN, UNITED STATES

Not long after Kenosha was thrust into the international spotlight after a police officer shot **Jacob Blake** in the back, triggering protests that sometimes turned violent and destructive, local church leaders began looking for ways to help.

One Sabbath last August, they gathered in downtown Kenosha to pray for the wounded community. Later, they spread out into Kenosha to volunteer in local clean-up efforts.

Since then, Zack Payne, head network pastor for the Wisconsin Southeastern Network (WISN) Seventh-day Adventist churches, and his leadership team wanted to follow up the successful community outreach. However, with the pandemic raging across Wisconsin, their options for what they could do were limited.

As they scanned the area to see how best to help, they saw that several organizations were already making meaningful change and decided to join forces with them. Armed with donations, the WISN leadership settled on three groups to assist. A few days before Christmas, Payne and lay pastor **George Andrews III** showed up on the

doorsteps of three organizations with checks for \$1,500 each.

The Kenosha YMCA/Frank Neighborhood Project is putting the funds toward an after-school tutoring program at the Frank Elementary School. They are currently helping 72 students improve their math and reading scores. "This [donation] is a tremendous blessing," says Dr. **Rachel Mall**, the Y's Youth and Family director.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) Outreach Center offers several services, including providing diapers, personal care kits, and prescription vouchers. However, because of the pandemic, they're focusing on the immediate need to provide warm clothing. **Karl Erickson**, executive director of ELCA, said, "We already spent the funds on buying hats and gloves. We needed this!"

The Shalom Center of the Interfaith Network's mission is to serve the community by providing emergency food, shelter, and support in ways that meet immediate needs and respect human dignity. Through food, shelter, and guidance, they help people maximize their potential for self-sufficiency.

"We are just grateful to be a light to our community," says Payne. [Debbie Michel, *Lake Union Herald*] 📷



Photos: Wisconsin Southeastern Network



Matt Mason, DMin, is a chaplain at Crossroads Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison located in Cameron, Missouri, United States.



End-of-life care for inmates

Hospice to me is something special because it allows me to gain peace as I start to prepare to pass into eternity.” This statement was shared by a 59-year-old inmate. Serving 72 years for double murder, he had recently been admitted to the hospice unit. One in every five prisoners in the United States has tested positive for the coronavirus, more than four times the rate of the general population¹ Numerous health issues that had worsened over the last few years placed this offender in the high-risk category for COVID-19. He knew that, short of an absolute miracle, he was never getting out of prison.

With an increasingly aging prison population, end-of-life care for inmates is becoming a more prominent issue. Ultimately, every correctional facility will have inmates who are diagnosed with a terminal condition. These can be times of great sorrow, loneliness, confusion, and emotional pain for inmates.

The chaplain's role

What is a chaplain's role in the hospice process of a dying inmate? A chaplain should be seen as one who cares for all when it comes to pain and struggles. A chaplain is a person who cares for the soul and gives hope without discrimination. A chaplain should be able to communicate spiritual compassion, regardless of a person's religious beliefs. A chaplain's role in the hospice program is crucial because many people turn toward spirituality for comfort at the end of their life. The expert spiritual care and counsel a chaplain provides is paramount in helping patients come to terms with their condition and find peace.

Hospice chaplains are dedicated to providing patients with “care and spiritual counsel that meets their needs and is in accordance with [their] wishes. If a patient does not wish to engage with a . . . chaplain or [receive] any form of spiritual care, they do not have to.

“Chaplains do not seek to convert patients . . . [to] a specific religion but to instead meet the patient where they are on their spiritual journey and help the patient discover renewed meaning and spiritual peace. . . .

“A cornerstone of the hospice philosophy of care is that no one should be alone at the end of life. No matter the time of day or night, the hospice team, including the hospice chaplain, is dedicated to ensuring that no patient dies alone.”² To aid in this, many prisons have introduced hospice programs where fellow inmates are selected and trained to assist with dying inmates and become their daily living assistants. The chaplain makes sure these assistants are always at the bedside of a dying inmate to provide comfort and support.

Chaplains are not there to “fix” anything. They are there to listen to the inmates as they talk about what's important to them. Hospice patients talk about their impending deaths or about God, but mostly they talk about unfinished business, unanswered questions, regrets over their past, family issues, and their feelings of not yet being ready to die. “Listening to final inquiries like these has long been the domain of a family [pastor,] priest, or rabbi. But for a growing number of [older persons] who do not know a member of the clergy,”³ that bedside responsibility has now been given to the chaplain.

Some chaplains refer to what they do as fostering a more “caring and successful” experience by helping inmates gain peace in the final hours of their lives. In the hospice idiom, the job of the chaplain is to make dying easier. End-of-life care for hospice inmates is not about people becoming more spiritual or religious. It's about a shift in the way people are meeting the spiritual needs and the emotional needs of inmates before they take their last breath. It's about making sure that no hospice patient dies alone.



- 1 Beth Schwartzapfel, Katie Park, and Andrew Demillo, “1 in 5 Prisoners in the U.S. Has Had COVID-19,” *The Marshall Project*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/12/18/1-in-5-prisoners-in-the-u-s-has-had-covid-19>.
- 2 CRHCF, “What Is a Hospice Chaplain?,” Crossroad Hospice Charitable Foundation, April 12, 2017, <https://crhcf.org/insights/what-is-a-hospice-chaplain/>.
- 3 Paul Vitello, “Hospice Chaplains Take Up Bedside Counseling,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/29/nyregion/29hospice.html>.

Share Bible Studies Online!

Study the Bible with people in your community using your cell phone, tablet, or computer!



It's **FREE** and **EASY**

- 1** Customize your own webpage
 - Choose your study webpage name
 - Create your own welcome message or video message
 - Choose the Voice of Prophecy Bible guides you want to offer
- 2** Advertise your own unique URL—on social media, in print, wherever—and all requests for Bible studies will come directly to you!
- 3** You interact online with those studying the Bible and discuss their questions.

Start your own ONLINE DISCOVER BIBLE SCHOOL today!

Go to bibleschools.com/apply and our team will get you on your way.

For more information contact the Voice of Prophecy Discover Bible School
Phone: (970) 622-2990 | Toll Free: (877) 955-2525 | discoverschool@vop.com

 **DISCOVER**
BIBLE SCHOOL

Ministry®

1350 N. KINGS ROAD
NAMPA, ID 83687-3193

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Nampa, ID
Permit No. 147

Mack's favorite part of being a maintenance man? Bringing people to Jesus.

God gave Mack a calling.
SALT gave him the confidence.

SALT (Soul-winning And Leadership Training) is a dynamic evangelism training program from **Southern Adventist University** and **It Is Written** that equips you for a life of ministry, whether that means taking on a new career path or finding ways to better integrate witnessing into other aspects of your life. Defend what you believe and learn to better share your faith!

SALT Offers:

- Fully accredited classes
- Hands-on training at Southern
- Bible worker certification
- Scholarships available



To learn more about the program and registration:
423.236.2034, southern.edu/salt, salt@southern.edu



"SALT taught me about effective door-to-door witnessing and the wonderful blessings we can receive from it. God is willing to use anyone, regardless of age or experience!"

– Mack Ruff, **SALT** Graduate