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RAMON J. CANALS

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Church member or disciple: Is there a difference?



I grew up in communist Romania knowing both of my grandfathers—both church members. The grandfather from my mother's side was very affluent. He owned a big, prosperous farm and two homes. He had plenty of money, yet he was very greedy, never satisfied, and never happy. Easily angered, he punished anyone for any little infraction.

The grandfather from my father's side was a carpenter with modest means. He was always singing, friendly, humble, and patient. He would pray for people, help those in need, and was always happy and kind. He would go from place to place and give Bible studies, distribute books, and talk about Jesus. The police caught him a few times. They beat him but they could not stop him. He kept on preaching, canvassing, and singing.

Two grandpas, two different types of church members.

Two categories

Luke 6:17, 18 says that Jesus “stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, . . . who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases” (NKJV). We see two categories of church people here: the multitude and the disciples.

The multitude are church folk from Judea and Jerusalem who go to the temple on the right days to worship and bring sacrifices. They go where Jesus is to see a miracle, get bread and fish, and be healed. They attend church when they ought to, sing “Kumbaya” when they're supposed to, and even do some sacrificial things when it doesn't affect them much. They want to hear a good sermon and be healed, blessed, fed, served. They want to receive, consume, and benefit.

The disciples, on the other hand, don't just go to the temple once a week; they follow Jesus everywhere—daily. Following Jesus' example, they serve, work, give, and sacrifice. They are not necessarily looking for a blessing; they are there to bless others. They have left everything and surrendered all. The disciples are constantly trying to learn from Jesus and become more like Him.

Be blessed versus be a blessing

These two types of church people will be around until the Second Coming (Matt. 25:31–46). As Jesus addresses them, one group is under the impression that they should be OK. They think, *We preach, we do evangelism, we lead out in church boards, we give tithes and offerings.*

This group, we'll liken them to the multitude, wants to be around Jesus but only when it's



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

convenient and comfortable. They want to be fed and to be served. They don't want to put much effort into anything, but they do want a blessing.

The other group, the disciples, wants to always be with Jesus. They want to absorb all they can from Jesus, just to be like Him. Ready to leave all and sacrifice everything, their passion is to serve and be a blessing.

The multitude wants to model God after their plans. The disciples give up personal plans and follow His plans. The multitude wants Jesus to answer their requests. The disciples are ready to follow Jesus' requests.

Which are you?

The practical question is, are you a disciple or part of the multitude? How much are you willing to surrender? The things you have a hard time giving up are the things that limit God's work in and through you. To the degree you are willing to surrender, to that specific degree God is willing to control your life and bring heavenly results. He who wants to save his life will lose it, and the one who is willing to lose it for God will save it.

There is nothing wrong with receiving a blessing as long as you keep passing it on, giving it away, and sharing the blessings with others. But if you are part of the group that has a hard

The multitude wants to model God after their plans. The disciples give up personal plans and follow His plans. The multitude wants Jesus to answer their requests. The disciples are ready to follow Jesus' requests.

time fully surrendering all, fully committing, and joyfully serving, you won't grow, and God won't know you.

Follow the leader

As a leader you cannot expect the people you lead to fully commit to God if you don't fully commit. You cannot expect them to get to a specific point if you aren't there yourself. They follow the leader—you.

Jesus is coming soon indeed. God is calling you and me to seriously search our hearts and make sure we belong fully to Him. Not only in action, but fully living for Him. We are called to know Him, love Him, and fully commit to Him. If you want results, you need to fully surrender. The time is short! Jesus' true disciples follow Him everywhere and live like Him and for Him. Be a disciple! 📖



It's about time

Question: Did Sunday-keeping Methodists, Baptists, and others, led by a Baptist lay preacher named William Miller, say that Jesus was coming in 1844? Answer: Yes. While many Christians walked away from the prophetic aspects of Scripture because of the failed prophecy, other Christians studied to find out what the Bible really said about the time of the second coming of Christ.

These believers saw that no one would know the exact time when Jesus would come back but that it would be soon (Matt. 24:36). They also saw that His coming would be accompanied by a verdict (Rev. 22:12). The books of judgment would therefore be opened *before* Jesus returns to give us our reward—everlasting redemption or everlasting damnation (John 5:28; Rev. 20:12). But for right now, as they saw, Jesus is interceding for us in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, and our only hope is total faith in Him (Dan. 8:13, 14; Heb. 8:1, 2; Acts 7:56; John 14:6).

These believers saw that humanity had been evicted from the tree of life for disobeying God's commandments. However, humanity could be accepted at the tree by obeying God's commandments (Rev. 22:14, KJV). They saw that it was futile to believe that the traditions of humans could ever replace the commandments of God (Matt. 15:9) and that it was futile to believe that

some commandments were optional. "You can't pick and choose in these things, specializing in keeping one or two things in God's law and ignoring others. The same God who said, 'Don't commit adultery,' also said, 'Don't murder' " (James 2:10, 11, *The Message*).

These believers saw that they had a duty to "prophesy again before many peoples and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev. 10:11, KJV). John characterized this prophetic message as three angels globally delivering "the everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6). These believers understood, "If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9, NKJV). They realized that their message was to reemphasize the gospel in the context of time running out.

In 1863 these believers, from differing denominational backgrounds, called themselves Seventh-day Adventists.

At the beginning of time, the world was attacked by a serpent spewing an infernal threefold poison: passion, power, and pride (Gen. 3:6; 1 John 2:16). Praise God, there would be an inoculation: Jesus Christ the Righteous (Gen. 3:15; 1 John 2:1). And at the end of time, the world would be attracted by a church preaching an eternal threefold antidote: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13; Rev. 14:6–13).



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

**From the pulpit to the
pew, men and women
are choosing truth over
tradition. Babylon—literal
and spiritual—has indeed
fallen (Rev. 14:8).**

First angel's message (Rev. 14:6, 7, 12)—the love of God

Choose love of God over love of the world.

Love for God is expressed by obeying His commandments, including observing the seventh-day Sabbath, acknowledging God as Creator, and caring for ourselves and all of God's creation, especially people who are oppressed (Isa. 58:6–8, 13, 14; John 15:13; 1 Cor. 6:18–20; 1 John 2:15–17; 4:20, 21; 5:3).

Second angel's message (Rev. 14:8, 12)—the faith of Jesus

Choose trust in the sinless Savior over trust in sinful systems. Jesus' perfect life, followed by His death and resurrection, qualifies Him as the one and only mediator between God and humanity. Trust in Jesus replaces our sinfulness with His righteousness, gives even the so-called worst of us grace to live free from sin's addictions, and offers us abundant life in this world and eternal life in the world to come (John 3:16, 17; 10:10; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:5; Titus 3:3–8).

Third angel's message (Rev. 14:9–13)—the hope of the Holy Spirit

Choose the Holy Spirit's seal over the devil's mark. The seal or mark denotes whom you belong to—who/what you are holding on to or

who/what is holding on to you. Jesus is about to come. Those who love and obey God will receive their reward—the disobedient will too. Hold on tightly to Jesus and His truth. This is our only hope (Ezek. 9:3–6; Matt. 25:41–46; Eph. 1:13, 14; 1 Thess. 5:19–21; Rev. 13:15–18; 22:11).

Together again

This everlasting gospel movement began with people from many denominations studying the prophetic word and embracing the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12; 12:17; 19:10). That is how it will end. From the pulpit to the pew, men and women are choosing truth over tradition. Babylon—literal and spiritual—has indeed fallen (Rev. 14:8).

Congregations and clergy are coming out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4). Regardless of age, gender, race, or ability, total involvement is needed to preach and live out this everlasting gospel of love to all the world, because Jesus is about to come (1 Cor. 13:4–7; Gal. 3:28; Rev. 1:3). If you are a pastor reading this—from whatever denomination—the Lord needs you. It's about time. 📖

How to develop mission-minded churches



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

When I was baptized, my pastor said, “Now you are a missionary for Jesus.” At the time, I did not fully understand what he meant. Like many new believers, I had read stories of missionaries traveling overseas. Though admiring their courage, I lacked a clear understanding of how I could personally contribute to the mission. Over the years, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and experience, I have learned about the importance of being involved in pointing people to salvation in Jesus. Reflecting on my journey, I realize how much more effective my efforts could have been if I had received proper training from the beginning. This realization highlights the importance of equipping church members for mission work and fostering mission-minded congregations. “There is no limit,” wrote Ellen G. White, “to the usefulness of the one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.”¹ This statement highlights the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in mobilizing individuals for mission. Pastors, of course, must play a pivotal role in cultivating this mindset within their congregations.

What are some strategies for developing mission-minded churches? Drawing on biblical principles and successful models like Total Member Involvement (TMI), this article shows that—by engaging members, providing training, and fostering a culture of action—pastors can lead their congregations to fulfill their God-given mission.

A biblical and practical framework

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not merely a social-religious institution; it is a movement called to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ. This mission is rooted in the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV).

“The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”² This rallying of effort requires intentionality in mobilizing every member.

For years church participation has been characterized by the Pareto Principle (20 percent of the members doing 80 percent of the work). However, the TMI initiative was launched in 2016 by the General Conference with the aim of reversing this trend. TMI’s emphasis is 100 percent member participation in mission, maintaining that when every member is engaged, churches experience remarkable growth and make a greater impact on their community.

Developing mission-minded churches

Pastors must focus on three essential steps to create mission-minded churches: inspiring members to engage, providing training and resources, and fostering a culture of action.

1. Inspire members to get engaged. The best way to inspire members to get engaged is for pastors to model enthusiasm themselves. A leader’s passion for mission can ignite a similar zeal among members. Begin by praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a heart burdened for the lost. As Ellen White records an angel’s words regarding prayer, “Press your petitions to the throne, and hold on by strong faith.”³

Members gain motivation and purpose when they understand the “why” behind their mission. The apostle Paul’s example in Philippians 1:12–14 demonstrates this principle: Despite his imprisonment, Paul’s joy and determination inspired others to proclaim the gospel boldly. Paul wrote that though he was in jail, his imprisonment was “unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12, KJV).

Why should members get involved in mission work? Here are five compelling reasons:

- a. Mission work brings joy to the believer. Jesus states, “These things I have spoken to you, that

My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full' " (John 15:11, NKJV). Ellen White comments, "There is no greater bliss on this side of heaven than in winning souls to Christ."⁴

- b. It provides an opportunity for salvation. Sharing Jesus gives others a chance to respond to the Holy Spirit's call (1 Tim. 2:3, 4).
- c. It brings joy to God's heart. Heaven rejoices over every sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).
- d. It shapes us to be like Jesus. Jesus' mission was to seek and save the lost, and He calls His followers to do the same (Matt. 4:19).
- e. It fulfills God's command. The Great Commission is not optional; it is a mandate for all disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20).

2. Provide opportunities for training and resources. Nothing great ever happens in the church without enthusiasm. But enthusiasm alone is not enough. Members need training, resources, and practical tools to participate in mission work effectively. Preparation involves equipping members to

- give a short, powerful personal testimony;
- give Bible studies;
- lead small groups;
- visit homes and connect with community members; and
- organize and deliver evangelistic meetings.

"In every church, the members should be so trained that they will devote time to the winning of souls to Christ. How can it be said of the church, 'Ye are the light of the world,' unless the members of the church are imparting light?"⁵

Continuously train, educate, and equip the members. Prepare them for the battle against the forces of evil and provide them with the tools they need. This training should be ongoing with opportunities for members to develop their skills and grow in confidence.

Practical preparation also includes creating discipleship pathways for new members. Successful models, such as those implemented under the TMI initiative in Rwanda, involve the following:

- Assigning spiritual guardians to new members
- Offering six-month discipleship classes
- Integrating new members into small groups and choirs
- Encouraging every member to give Bible studies and lead someone to Christ

This comprehensive approach equips members, strengthens their faith, and fosters retention. In Rwanda, two years after the most significant baptism in the church's history, over 80 percent of new members remained active because they were immediately involved in mission work.

3. Foster a culture of action. Church leaders must constantly try to get the members involved in mission. The Great Commission Jesus gave to His disciples was simple, straightforward, and powerful: "Make disciples." This is a call to every church member: get involved in His mission to save the world.

When starting my ministry as a district pastor, I began to feel that the demands of ministry were overwhelming. I was racing from one church to the next without achieving much. Additionally, understanding that the church is organized for missionary purposes, I wanted to hold evangelistic meetings in my congregations. It seemed like an impossible task. How would I navigate the demands of ministry without jeopardizing my health and sanity? After all, pastors are expected to preach, teach, visit, counsel, administer, and lead Bible studies.

This situation leads to a crucial point: help! I thank God that I asked for help. Never be afraid to ask for help when needing it. Help can determine the success or failure of a pastor. Sometimes we are too proud to ask. We have been conditioned to believe that we must have an answer to every problem. And when we do not, we feel hopeless. But it does not need to be that way. We must ask for help from the right people.

I praise God that I had an excellent mentor who, in his previous professional life, had been the CEO of one of the largest car manufacturing companies in the world at the time. I asked him, "How do you survive ministry when there is so much to do?"

He said that the key is to get people involved. He began: "It would help if you did not try to do it alone. You need to train the church members to do various jobs. The first thing you need to do is create a survey to ask members what they want you to do. Then develop a second survey that asks them what they want to do in the church. After creating those surveys, meet with the elders and plan a business meeting for Sabbath afternoon. In worship preach a sermon about the mission of the church. Then ask the members to organize a meal. After dinner conduct the pastor's and members' surveys. These meetings will be a clear blueprint for the church. I have always followed this plan with great success and satisfaction as I see many goals being reached."

Preparation must lead to action. As Ellen White exhorts, “Let those who have charge of the flock of Christ awake to their duty and set many souls to work.”⁶ This means the pastors. We must send many to work. Action begins with pastors developing a clear plan:

- Conduct surveys to identify members’ interests and talents.
- Organize ministry teams to address specific community needs.
- Plan evangelistic campaigns and small group initiatives.
- Set measurable goals for outreach and regularly assess progress.

Encourage members to start small by inviting friends to church, participating in community service projects, or sharing their testimonies. As members see the impact of their efforts, they will be inspired to take on greater responsibilities.

The unity that comes from working together is another decisive outcome of action. Total member involvement fosters a sense of purpose and belonging within the church. When members collaborate to advance the gospel, they experience personal growth and strengthen their relationships with one another.

The transformative power of total member involvement

The success of the TMI initiative demonstrates the transformative potential of full member engagement. Since its launch, TMI has had the following outcomes:

1. Increased participation in mission work worldwide.
2. Boosted baptism rates, with more than 700,000 baptisms in the East-Central Africa Division alone. More than 300,000 people were baptized in Papua New Guinea.
3. Fostered greater awareness of community needs, shifting the perception of Seventh-day Adventist churches from “What they do not do” to “What they do.”
4. Improved retention rates through intentional discipleship.
5. Unified members in purpose and vision.

These outcomes highlight the importance of mobilizing every member. The church was organized for mission, and, as Ellen White states, “The churches are withering up because they have failed to use their talents in diffusing light.”⁷

Total Member Involvement fosters a sense of purpose and belonging within the church. When members collaborate to advance the gospel, they experience personal growth and strengthen their relationships with one another.

A calling for all

The church’s mission is clear: prepare the world for the second coming of Jesus. Achieving this goal requires the active participation of every member. Pastors are vital in inspiring, equipping, and mobilizing their congregations. By getting members engaged, trained, and mobilized, pastors can develop mission-minded churches that reflect Christ’s love and fulfill His great commission. The TMI initiative provides a practical framework for this work. It reminds us that the task of saving souls is not the responsibility of a few but a calling for all.

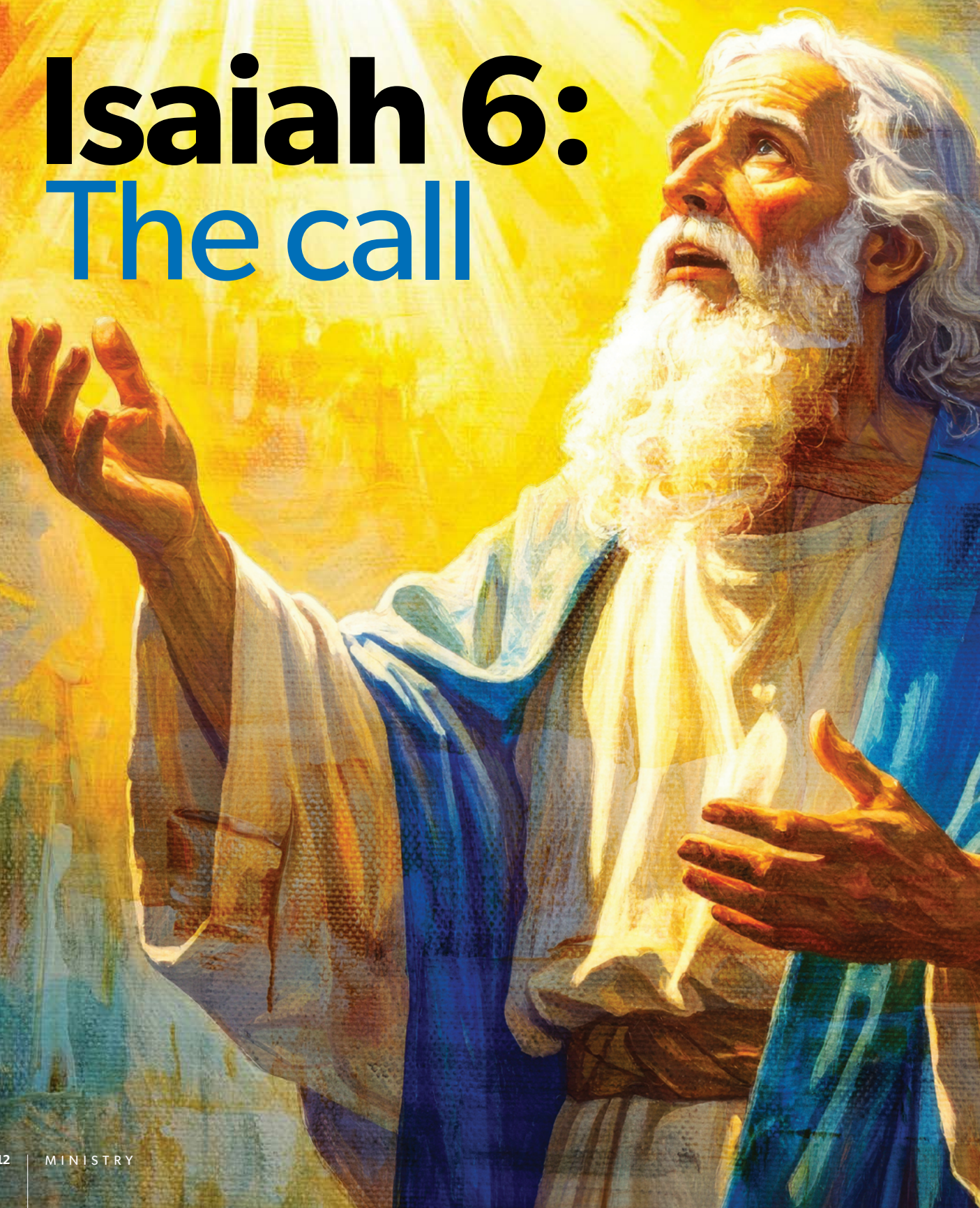
May we, as pastors and leaders, partner with God in this great mission. If we don’t, who will?



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1904), 19
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), 117
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1882), 73.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 333.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1900), 436.
- 6 White, *Testimonies*, 6:436.
- 7 White, *Testimonies*, 6:431.

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Isaiah 6: The call



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

The book of Isaiah is fascinating. Especially intriguing is the (so-called) call of Isaiah and its location in the book itself.

Scholars have speculated about why the call of Isaiah is placed in chapter 6 rather than in chapter 1.¹ Why? Though Isaiah 6 describes Isaiah's call to ministry, a closer examination reveals more than just a prophet's call. Isaiah 6 also brings in a prominent theme found throughout the book: judgment (cf. Isa. 1). Could it be, in fact, that Isaiah 6 is more about judgment than about Isaiah's call?

Isaiah's call

Except for Isaiah 53, more sermons have been preached on Isaiah 6 and Isaiah's call than on any other passage in the book.² Usually interpreted as revealing how God calls us to His mission field and often used to encourage preachers to follow God's call in their lives,³ Isaiah 6 contains four components crucial to that call: know whom you serve; know your condition; know that you are forgiven; and, finally, through God's grace, know what you can do.

Know whom you serve

Isaiah's call came when the king of Judah died in 734 BC. Isaiah 6:1 says that King Uzziah is dead and that Isaiah then sees the real

King of Judah, the Lord. King Uzziah did great things for Judah: he built towers in Jerusalem, he was a well-trained captain of the army, and he provided armaments. However, Uzziah's pride brought his downfall when he offered incense in the temple, for which he was plagued by leprosy until death (see 2 Chron. 26).

Uzziah was well-respected, but after his death, God showed Isaiah the true King of Judah, who sat on His "high and lofty" throne (Isa. 6:1), whose robe filled the temple (v. 1), and whose glory filled the earth (v. 3). His sovereignty is demonstrated by showing that no one, and certainly no earthly king, is equal to Him. God revealed Himself to the people who had lost sight of Him, and He attested that, as the King of the universe, He takes care of His people.

The loss of the earthly king provided an opportunity to reveal the real King, whom they did not know.

The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand
(Isa. 1:3, NRSV).⁴

The people of Judah attributed their success and power to their earthly king, but now Isaiah sees the true King, omnipotent and omniscient.

Know your condition

Now that Isaiah has seen the King of the universe and knows who is in charge of the world, he is faced with a question that all of us will ask at some point in our lives: *What is my condition? Am I sinless or sinful?* The question *Who am I?* entails more than just knowing where I come from; it is also a question of knowing my condition. In the first five chapters of Isaiah, the prophet proclaimed the

condition of the inhabitants of Judah. He pointed out the people's sins and shouted six woes to the people in chapter 5. Now Isaiah exclaims in a shocking exclamation, "Woe is me!" (Isa. 6:5, NRSV).

This seventh woe is the apex of all the woes, revealing the condition both of the people who received the message from the prophet and of the prophet himself. In this case the prophet is not exempt from uncleanness even while proclaiming a message of woe to others. Isaiah, too, needs to know his condition. That condition is quite clear in the remainder of the verse: "I am cut off/destroyed! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (v. 5). His condition means that he cannot be in the presence of the royal King and should lose his life for being in the presence of the God of the universe. The "unclean lips" of the prophet reveal the condition of his heart (cf. Isa. 35:8; 52:1; Lam. 4:15) and utter the inconsistency of his being. These lips are unclean, suggesting unholiness. The term *unclean* is often found in the context of the book of Leviticus, in which it refers to the unholy. Thus, the lips of Isaiah are the opposite of God, the unholy opposing the holy. Do you know your condition?

Know that you are forgiven

Isaiah has learned whom he serves and his condition; next, he learned about forgiveness. Isaiah talks about forgiveness while giving his proclamation of coming judgment to the children of Judah in the first chapter. In Isaiah 6, however, this concept of forgiveness is directed toward Isaiah. This chapter continues its trajectory of focus on one individual to a crescendo.

In Isaiah 6:6 the flying seraphs reappear. This time one of the seraphs attended Isaiah rather than attending God, as in the first section of this chapter. The seraph flew purposely toward Isaiah; the preposition *ʾil* (meaning to, toward) suggests a direction from one point to another point. Before we know why, we are told what the seraph has in his hand: a glowing coal.

This term for coal is used only once in Isaiah; however, it is used a few times in the remainder of the Old Testament with a variety of meanings. In Ezekiel 40:17, 18; 42:3 the same term occurs, but it is related to a "stone pavement" or "flagstone floor." In 2 Chronicles 7:3 this term occurs when God appeared in the temple in the form of fire and people bowed their faces toward the "stone pavement." Thus, the Hebrew word suggests

something of a glowing color. In Isaiah 6:6 we can be certain that it is a live coal since it is taken from the altar (cf. 1 Kings 19:6).

The seraph touched the lips of Isaiah with the glowing coal and declared, "Behold, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity will depart and your sin will be atoned" (Isa. 6:7; cf. 22:14). This verse is at the center of the message of Isaiah 6 and concludes the first part, which consists of the heaven scene in the first seven verses. At this juncture we find that Isaiah is being forgiven: the lips are touched as a symbol of his heart or being, and those mortal lips are not pure enough to speak holy words (cf. Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45). Then a two-part solution is declared: "iniquity will depart and your sin will be atoned" (Isa. 6:7). This suggests a total resolution of Isaiah's sin: the iniquity is removed, and the sin is wiped off.⁵

The analogy reveals temple language, which demonstrates what happens to the sins of Israel. Here the sin of Isaiah is purged, and he is now able to proclaim a message from God that reveals His character of holiness. Thus, atonement is the representation of God's holiness and what He does for His people. God wants to make His people like Him, with the same character. Do you know that you are forgiven?

Know what you can do—(Isaiah 6:8–13)

The second section of Isaiah 6 is about what Isaiah can do after learning who God is, knowing his condition, and knowing that he is forgiven. In verse 8 God speaks for the first time in this chapter. Isaiah had the privilege of seeing God, and now he hears the voice of God introducing the call of Isaiah. Two significant questions are asked: "Whom will I send?" and "Who will go for us?"

First, in this verse God uses a no-force approach; He simply asks questions and depends upon a totally voluntary response from human beings. As pastors we often work with volunteer church members, just as God works with volunteers and human beings with free will. But in contrast to God, humans tend to pressure others or coerce them into doing things for us. God does not bribe or coerce but expects our full trust that He will provide the necessities.

Second, these questions imply that God is the One doing the sending, not human beings sending for God. God is the One who convinces hearts, and He does so by having human beings encounter Him, know their condition, and know that they are forgiven. The sending follows naturally.

The second question (“Who will go for us?”) also suggests that God empowers those who go because human beings go on behalf of God. God alone can give the necessary resources to do His work. Human skills and resources are inefficient in accomplishing what God is sending us to do. Only God’s methods will achieve His goal.

Third, these questions illustrate that God does not send volunteers out alone; He goes with them, accompanying those who are sent. Verses 9 and 10 show that they will face hardship, as not everyone will accept the message proclaimed, but God remains beside His messengers. Rejection does not mean that the message or the messenger is incompetent. The people who hear the message/messenger also have the free will to choose God or not; just as God asks for volunteers without coercion, He does not force anyone to accept His message.

Isaiah’s response to the question is favorable: “Here I am; send me” (v. 8). His willingness comes from his relationship with God and his gratitude to God for forgiving his sin. Isaiah’s renewal of heart comes first from walking with God, followed by a willingness to serve God. Isaiah’s call comes from seeing God and knowing who He is. Second, his call comes from realizing his condition. Third, his call comes from experiencing the forgiveness of his God. Only in this light is someone willing to respond to God’s call, “Whom will I send? And who will go for us?”

In the first part of verse 9, Isaiah’s positive response is followed by an immediate order: “Go, say to this people.” As soon as Isaiah was willing, God gave the order. In the book of Isaiah, the order does not come before the willingness of the servant, and the message that Isaiah proclaims comes from God and not from Isaiah. This message is found in the second part of verse 9 and in verse 10 and is more for Isaiah than the people.

God described to Isaiah how people would react to his message. He warned that people would not heed the message. But even when they did not, the messenger’s responsibility was to share it anyway. The heart of Isaiah is shocked by this task, and—like many other prophets—he asks the following question, as did most prophets when they were shocked: “How long, my Lord?” (v. 11).

Perhaps as expected when sharing a message from God, the initial response is not promising: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitants and houses without people, the land lies waste and desolate” (v. 11). Verse 12 says something similar, but verse 13 offers a message of hope: while

many will reject the message of God, some will accept it and repent.

For this reason the children of Judah will continue the lineage of David from which the Messiah will come: “It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak, of which stumps are left even when they are felled: its stump shall be a holy seed” (v. 13, NJPS; cf. Isa. 11:1–5). Do you know that God can take what’s left—God can take a stump—and use it for His glory?

By God’s grace

Isaiah 6 challenges us—particularly as pastors of the flock—to know whom we serve and for whom we speak. As God made Himself known to Isaiah, Isaiah learned a number of things. First, he sees this God as the true King of Judah and of the universe. Second, Isaiah discovers his condition, which is unholy before God, the same as the people of Judah. Third, he knows that his condition can be changed by God’s grace, which brings forgiveness. Finally, when Isaiah learns the previous three components, he knows what he can do for his Lord, and he is ready to do it.

Isaiah 6 remains relevant, especially for ministers of the gospel. We, too, are called to know our God; to know our spiritual condition; to know that, by God’s grace, we are forgiven; and finally, to know that God calls us to minister to His people.



- 1 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 19 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 223.
- 2 See John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 172, 173.
- 3 A Google search for sermons on Isaiah 6 finds many of them centered on the call of Isaiah. For example, see “Isaiah 6 Sermons: Embracing God’s Call and Vision,” Sermon Central, <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/scripture/sermons-on-isaiah-6/?keyword=Isaiah+6>.
- 4 Unless noted otherwise, Scripture is the author’s translation.
- 5 For more information how the concepts of “atone” and “sin” are used in the book of Leviticus, see Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 160, 161; 191–197; 217–302.

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Reclaiming the next generation:

Strategies to combat youth decline in the church

While youth are the lifeblood of the church, many congregations lack young members. It raises the question of the church's future when so many of its youth are no longer actively involved. Research shows that 64 percent of young people in the United States who are 18 to 29 years old and who grew up attending church no longer attend.¹ The lack of youth in the church is also a problem worldwide.

Case studies reveal that a “significant numerical decline over the past ten to twenty years and a lack of new members are two prominent symptoms of a very sick church.”² Today many churches are very ill, and if they do not address their current condition, they will eventually die. Nevertheless, there is still hope. Purposeful action can reverse the current trend in youth attrition.

Diagnosis

Before prescribing treatments for the church's condition, we must first identify the cause of its illness. A longitudinal study on youth retention in North America, for example, unearthed several factors contributing to the loss of young people in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³ Irrelevant and uninteresting religious education programs, lack of involvement in church life, lack of opportunities for creative



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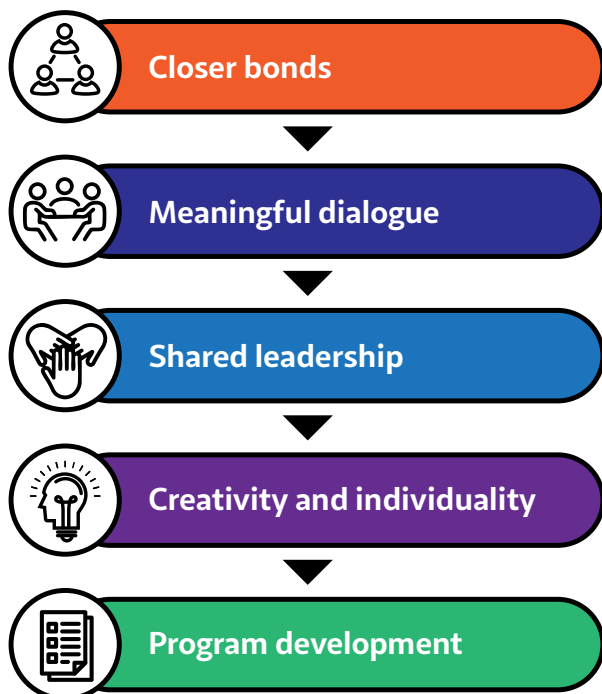


expression, and a sense of disillusionment concerning church doctrines all adversely affect the attitude of youth toward the church.

Young people appreciate stimulating and engaging programs in which they regularly take leading roles.⁴ Intrinsic religiosity, doctrinal orthodoxy, and having a personal relationship with God all serve to increase their sense of satisfaction and loyalty toward the denomination. Intrinsic religiosity views religion as a worldview that directs a person's perspective and entire approach to life.⁵ Such a worldview is particularly important because young people become disenchanted with the church when the older members do not exemplify Christian values in their daily living and when a church lacks intentional plans and attempts to involve youth in its life.⁶

Prescription

To address the issue of youth retention, we need to (1) strengthen community bonds, (2) discuss church standards, (3) involve youth in leadership, (4) support individuality and creativity, and (5) develop engaging religious programming.



The flowchart above depicts the five components of a youth retention program. Each succeeding piece builds on the previous one, thus creating a new youth-focused culture. Quality relationships allow for more meaningful dialogue

in a context where leadership is shared. Youth need to have the freedom to infuse their creativity and individuality in producing engaging programs. We will now explore and expand on each part of the above model.

Foster closer bonds

The first component of our youth retention program focuses on “establishing or strengthening healthy vertical and horizontal relationships.”⁷ Like the new believers in Acts 2, we must nurture relationships with God and each other (v. 42).

To this end, leaders should conduct a youth retreat annually in which young people can connect with God and each other. Such retreats will celebrate God's work in their lives and challenge them to build a deeper relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, and service. Participants also engage in relationship-building activities. After the retreat, these relationships should continue to be nurtured during regular youth services.

Additionally, to foster better connections between the youth and the senior members of the church, leaders can assign older members to serve as mentors and prayer partners with the youth. Each young person will then have a senior mentor.

A monthly social activity should also be planned to enable them to know one another better. Such initiatives can help our youth become anchored in Christ, forge closer ties with their peers in the church, and receive the support they need in their Christian walk.

Meaningful dialogue on church doctrines

A stronger relationship with our young members enables us to engage them on church doctrines more effectively. Due to challenges posed by metamodernism and moral relativism, many youth question the core tenets of our faith. The church must offer a safe space for young people to express their doctrinal concerns without judgment. The prevailing view of truth being relative contrasts sharply with the church's stance on absolute truth, creating a dilemma for our young members immersed in secular ideologies. To address the challenge, the church must foster meaningful dialogue that aims for mutual understanding rather than winning arguments. One of my churches initiated monthly youth rap sessions, inviting experts to discuss various topics.

In addition, they sought to help the young people use proper biblical hermeneutics to explore doctrinal questions thoughtfully.

Share leadership

Some leaders have difficulty sharing leadership with persons who lack spiritual maturity or seniority. However, when Jesus chose His team, He selected individuals whom we would consider immature and doctrinally unskilled. Despite their shortcomings, Jesus actively involved them in His mission. Shared leadership builds greater trust and harmony and can decrease discord. By employing the shared leadership approach with His disciples, Jesus trained and empowered them to continue the work He started. His discipleship model allowed Him to retain 11 of His 12 disciples. They then became apostles and led the church from its inception. The same pattern appeared in the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as young people learned to be leaders.

Scripture affirms that youth will play a pivotal role in preparing the world for the imminent return of Jesus. God promises to give visions to His young people who consecrate themselves to Him:

“And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions”
(Joel 2:28, NIV).

Today leaders must involve young people in all aspects of church life. When conducting church elections, we need to include them as church officers. We also need to invite youth to participate in crafting the church's strategic plan. If we value the voice of our young people, we will ensure they have a seat at the table.

Encourage creativity and individuality

Sharing leadership necessitates giving our youth the latitude to use their creativity and individuality. Creativity is a necessary process for developing new ideas, while innovation focuses on their practical implementation.⁸ Both creativity and innovation are necessary in problem-solving. In essence we do not simply want to plan *for* the youth; we want to plan *with* the youth. Leaders should, therefore, strive to create an environment that supports the free expression of their ideas for programs in the church.

For Global Youth Day I encouraged youth leaders to develop the program for our district outreach initiative. I did not dictate its activities but simply shared the general objectives for the day and gave the young leaders the latitude to plan how they would manage the program. They arranged food distribution in three communities, lunch, and a joint youth session. At the event's conclusion, many lauded the organizers for the impact their program had on our congregation.

To encourage creativity and individuality, older leaders must consult and collaborate with the youth to solicit their input and participation in designing and executing programs for the church. Such an approach is vital because when we include the youth as necessary change agents, we can implement a “sustainable solution.”⁹

Create engaging church programs

Finally, listening to and partnering with the youth can improve the quality and relevance of our services. When I interviewed some young members, I learned that several of them did not return to church after the COVID-19 lockdown because the church's programs did not appear as creative as the ones provided by other churches online. The COVID-19 pandemic helped us to be more aware of the need to create more exciting and innovative programs for all our members and our youth in particular.

To create more engaging services, discover the specific needs of your young people. Then, brainstorm ideas to develop programs driven by those needs. First, solicit as many ideas as possible that address program content and related issues of venue, personnel, promotion, and so on. Then, narrow them down into a program shortlist. Finally, execute those plans and review the effectiveness of each program. As we study them, we need to ensure that we have the resources to help us improve our program delivery.

When implementing such programs, we should vary the venue, personnel, and format to keep the youth interested and involved. As we modify the program design, we must keep in mind that social networks decrease face-to-face contact, therefore diminishing emotional attachment, which counteracts the earlier aim to foster closer bonds.¹⁰ So we must prioritize in-person services over virtual ones.

Oversight

Paul admonished the leaders in Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which

the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28, NIV). As leaders, we are responsible for the flock for whom Christ died. Each member is of immeasurable value in God's sight; therefore, we must do everything within our power to nurture and conserve all members, especially the youth of our church. To reclaim the next generation, we must create more tightly knit bonds with them, encourage meaningful dialogue on church doctrines, share leadership with them, facilitate creativity and individuality, and develop more engaging programs.



- 1 "Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%—But What About Those Who Stay?" Barna, September 4, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/>.
- 2 Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church + 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014), 93.
- 3 Roger L. Dudley and H. Phillip Muttersbaugh, "Social Attachment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Among Young Adults," *Review of Religious Research* 38, no. 1 (September 1996): 38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512539>.
- 4 Chang-Ho C. Ji and Tevita Tameifuna, "Youth Pastor, Youth Ministry, and Youth Attitude Toward the Church," *Review of Religious Research* 52, no. 3 (March 2011): 309, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23055554>.
- 5 Kevin S. Masters, "Intrinsic Religiousness (Religiosity)," in *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine*, ed. Marc D. Gellman and J. Rick Turner (New York, NY: Springer, 2013): 1117, 1118, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1005-9_1585.
- 6 Alindo George McCallum, *I Want to Stay, Help Me: Over 100 Recommendations for Youth Retention*, (Mandeville, Jamaica: Northern Caribbean University Press, 2021), 14.
- 7 Arthur David Canales, "Models for Adolescent Ministry: Exploring Eight Ecumenical Examples," *Religious Education* 101, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080600640202>.
- 8 Yijing Huang, Fernando A. F. Ferreira, and Zheng He, "Impact of Workspace Environment on Creativity and Innovation: Empirical Evidence From a Makerspace in China," *R&D Management* 53, no. 4 (September 2023): 620, <https://doi.org/10.1111/radm.12504>.
- 9 Nina Vasan and Jennifer Przybylo, *Do Good Well: Your Guide to Leadership, Action, and Social Innovation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 146.
- 10 Marissa King, *Social Chemistry: Decoding the Patterns of Human Connection* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2020), 59.

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REVIVAL & REFORMATION

Haplotés: The joy of giving of yourself

She lifted her weary head from the pillow and listened, tilting her head to one side, sending her thin gray hair flowing across the pillow. Another blizzard shook the old parsonage. Alice Green, a Presbyterian pastor, had seen a few blizzards in the 52 years she had served in Savoonga on the northern edge of the Arctic, beyond the rising sun. She had finally gotten to bed a couple of hours ago, for last night had been a tough one. Thor, a handsome 26-year-old youth, had committed suicide, hanging himself from the rafter in the laundry room.

Thor had attempted suicide six months ago; however, his girlfriend happened to come in and grabbed his legs, holding him up till help came. This time there was no one to help. Suicide among the Inuit youth was an all too frequent problem in the long winter in this forbidding arctic wilderness, and Pastor Alice had seen enough to make her weary. We were about to witness it ourselves.

My wife and I were newly married and recently arrived missionaries to the Inuit people in a remote village with a population of six hundred. On the island, lying above the Arctic Circle and 35 miles (56 kilometers) off the coast of Siberia, we were the upstart church in the village. At the turn of the last century, the state of Alaska had been divided up by the American Council of Christian Churches, and the remote, windswept island was given to the Presbyterian church. That was a century ago, and now the whole village was Presbyterian. Our little Seventh-day Adventist church was only a few years old, started by an old Inuit elder who learned about the Sabbath on the radio while sick in the hospital.

For the first month in Savoonga, I observed Pastor Alice from a distance, a

little too shy to be assertive or friendly. But she was open and accepting, and before long she began to include us in her little parties where she made her specialty, homemade ice cream. One bleak, dark morning, she stopped by our little one-room cabin for a visit. As the conversation warmed up, I blurted out, “Pastor Alice, you are amazing. You have served these native people for fifty-two years—why do you do it?”

“Why not?” she said, as if it were a needless question. Then she paused in reflection. I leaned in as she almost whispered the answer as if thoughtfully speaking to herself. “I guess it’s because they need me.”

That week I sat alone in my little homemade office that doubled as a children’s room on Sabbath. I was working on my first sermon as a missionary pastor, but I could not get Alice out of my mind. She was not a charismatic person nor a natural leader, but she had given her life in service. She had never married nor adopted children; the people of the village were her children. I reflected on her 52 years as a pastor—the children she had seen born, the funerals she had conducted, and the people she had grown to love—our paltry commitment of 2 years as missionaries seemed just plain insignificant.

As I studied for my sermon to my little congregation of three church members plus my wife, I was drawn to Romans 12 and the emphasis on spiritual gifts. The second spiritual gift, listed right behind prophecy, is service, and it must have been significant to Paul to place it there. A child of God may not be able to prophesy, preach, or teach, but they can show their love for Jesus in loving deeds of service.

A little later Paul used an interesting Greek word, *haplotes*. It’s a bit difficult to translate, but in today’s language, it probably means “the sheer joy of giving of yourself,” either seen or unseen and with or without

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recognition, praise, or acknowledgment. Few today realize that *haplotes*, simple kindness or just humble hospitality, is the lifeblood of the body of Christ—and it was the lifeblood of Pastor Alice.

Pastor Alice had made a significant choice, a life-altering choice, to practice *haplotes*, the joy of giving of yourself, for 52 years on a remote island to the Inuit people who needed her. Her commitment carried in its wake a profound practice of sacrifice that came from a heart that said, “I guess it is because they needed me.”

As our perfect model, Christ was a steward of the grace of heaven on earth—because we needed Him. He came to serve, to minister, to love. The words He spoke were profound, even compelling, but the deeds of love were life-altering, and it appears that He spent much more time in deeds of loving service than in words of love, although both were partners in grace. Pastor, can you imitate Jesus’ example of love, service, and self-sacrifice? Are you willing to practice *haplotes*? 🍷



More than numbers:


The metrics of success in mission and ministry



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SCAN FOR AUDIO



An ordinary trip to a youth conference turned out to be a valuable lesson on intercultural mission work. While traveling to the host country in Asia, I remembered that one of my doctoral professors had been a missionary in that place decades ago. At first I had no expectation of encountering his family, but after casually mentioning their names to some local church leaders, I sensed I could trace the impact of their work in that field. How successful had they been in their mission work? For that matter, how can one measure success in ministry?

Historical background



Through the years, the professional literature has suggested different metrics for gauging the impact of mission and ministry. Historically, William Carey's influential booklet in 1792, *An Inquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, offered one of the first assessments of the global progress of Christian mission in modern times. His strong appeal to fulfill the Great Commission included data (not necessarily precise) about the number of world religions adherents and observations about the Christian presence in different regions of the globe, the need for the Bible in local languages, and anti-biblical cultural customs. According to Carey, "All these things are loud calls to Christians, and especially to ministers, to exert themselves to the utmost in their several spheres of action and to try to enlarge them as much as possible."¹

More recently, during the second half of the past century, Donald McGavran's church growth movement arose from the perception of a lack of growth among

churches in the Southern Asian mission field. Peter Wagner translated such understandings into the North American reality, and it became "the most influential movement in the American churches in the 1990s."² McGavran emphasized the accountability of numerical growth alongside the principles of receptivity and homogeneity.

In 1996, as part of the same movement, Christian A. Schwarz sought to bring balance to mission and ministry assessment by proposing the Natural Church Development (NCD) model, whose first characteristic was a focus on enhancing the quality of a church rather than solely pursuing numerical growth.³

Around the year 2000 a new response emerged in North America, known as the missional church movement, which highlighted the need for a more biblically grounded ecclesiology. Considering the declining statistics of traditional denominations, missiologists such as Paul Hiebert and Alan Hirsch advocated for a shift from the concept of church as a "bounded set" to understanding it as a "centered set". This perspective emphasized discipleship as encompassing more than mere conversion or membership. The suggestion is that the single most important metric for evaluation is the number of fully trained disciples being developed in the church.⁴

During the past two decades, numerous publications have addressed the challenge of recalibrating ministry and mission metrics. Examples of such metrics include the number of people reporting improved marriages over time, enhanced friendships, those being mentored or serving as mentors, being able to articulate life mission, serving other people in some venue, practicing intentional blessing strategy

for those around them, and growing in financial giving to kingdom causes.⁵

Mission and ministry metrics

While the issue of mission and ministry metrics has been the subject of significant research, discussion, and experimentation, it has been observed, however, that, for many churches today, the prevailing notion remains the simplistic idea that “growth is the goal, and membership is the measure.”⁶ Alongside worship attendance and fundraising levels, they are the three top areas, often referred to as ABC metrics—attendance, building, and cash.

On the one hand, church metrics are important because they provide tangible evidence of the impact a church has on its members and the community it serves. They assist leaders in making data-driven decisions and evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies and programs—it establishes accountability.⁷ On the other hand, there is a risk of becoming overly enamored with the statistics to the extent of losing sight “of the ministry and the people behind them.”⁸

Contemporary mission and ministry metrics

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has also implemented several metrics related to mission and ministry, many of them included in the regular detailed annual statistical reports produced by the General Conference’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. The reports provide information on accessions (baptisms and professions of faith), membership, and tithes and offerings, as well as details about various institutions. Additionally, they contain information about missionaries.

If for many years the church seemed to lack an operational comprehensive metric,⁹ lately it seems that there has been greater intentionality in considering what data to collect and measure as well as how it should inform the church’s strategic planning for mission.

At the end of 2023, a report outlined the proposed strategic plan for the next quinquennial period (2025–2030). David Trim, the director of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, shared extensive research detailing the importance of data analysis in selecting plans for the church. His report highlighted key facts regarding the spiritual practices and doctrinal beliefs of Adventist members.

Six measurable goals related to mission Trim mentioned seek to increase (1) the number of

church members sharing the gospel and making disciples; (2) the work of spiritual nurturing and evangelistic training after baptism so that new believers become part of total member involvement in the mission of Christ; (3) new groups of Seventh-day Adventist believers worldwide, particularly in urban areas, in the 10/40 Window, and among post-Christians; (4) mission by young people and to young people; (5) mission engagement by all church entities through promoting wholistic health, humanitarian care, education, and outreach to displaced persons; and (6) the use of traditional and new media to proclaim the three angels’ messages and connect people to Adventist worshipping groups.

The test of time

After arriving in the country where my professor had served as a missionary, I sent him a message to inform him of my whereabouts. To my surprise, he replied, encouraging me to meet some of his friends who lived near my accommodation. His friends had been young Buddhist monks who served the community in the surrounding villages. The missionary family would host the monks in their home, provide them with meals, and support their work. In turn, the monks became good friends with the Adventist community and supporters of the Adventist institutions in the area.

After many years, the same monks had risen to become the top leaders in the regional Buddhist office and school. When I introduced myself as an envoy of the former missionary, they treated me with great deference despite my being a stranger to them. The most senior leader even made a point to visit me.

I wish you could witness the emotions in their voices and eyes as they described the details—many of which I had not heard from my humble professor—about their relationship with their old friend of four decades: the Adventist missionary.

A prevailing sentiment is that the Adventist community could significantly improve its relationships with those religious leaders. Yet very few people have met or had any contact with those prominent Buddhist leaders.

Besides the incredible experience, I left that country reflecting on the effectiveness of my own mission and ministry. How am I treating the young leaders in my community? What kind of attitude am I displaying toward people of other world religions? What has been my intangible influence on those I encounter? What will they remember about me in a few decades?

I truly enjoy discussions about mission and believe that further development can be achieved from various perspectives and in different contexts. Perhaps the test of time should also be considered as a dimension of the metrics of success in mission and ministry.

God's commission, our collaboration

As missiologists have noted, there is a persistent need for a comprehensive mission metric to more effectively measure the progress and growth of Adventist Mission.¹⁰ As the saying goes, "You are what you measure." If the church does not measure something, it likely does not value it. As the world scene becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, the church can leverage technology to gather and access more reliable information, making this an essential ongoing discussion.

While God's initiatives in mission are perfect and powerful, human collaboration is another matter. It must be continually assessed and improved. Therefore, intentionally evaluating mission and ministry will provide a clearer picture of the observable aspects of what God is doing while also guiding the faithful response of His human representatives.

It is also essential to avoid the detrimental

divide between quantity and quality in church measurements while recognizing the limitations of any metric model employed, particularly the traditional ones. Qualitative approaches that do not rely on numerical data can also provide valuable insights into the church. In my doctoral dissertation, I chose to examine the character of the Adventist movement through an analysis of its ethos.¹¹ Guiding questions included What does it mean to be faithful to God's commission? What metrics will assist the church in achieving what is important?

Equally important is that the understanding reflected in the mission and ministry metrics be shared at all levels. It will help bridge the gap between committees, academia, and church members. "The church is a community of people, living in a loving relationship with God, one another, the wider church, and the world. A simple framework for rethinking metrics should focus on real flesh and blood, matterized people," and their relational dimensions.¹²

The borrowed title
from David

While God's initiatives in mission are perfect and powerful, human collaboration is another matter. It must be continually assessed and improved.



Yonggi Cho's famous church growth book should remind us that ministry and mission are always about "more than numbers." Ultimately, the path to success is to display thoughtful, biblical, and urgent yet patient faithfulness to God's commission and be ever attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit until Jesus returns.



- 1 William Carey, *An Inquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, updated (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2022), 23, <https://www.chapellibrary.org/pdf/books/enqu.pdf?srsltid=AfmBOowSMI3cNOE2QPSBSC hNjSY4sLjDWinaZFHVx2PygtHlv71ll>.
- 2 Os Guinness, "Church Growth: The Movement of the Nineties," *Ligonier Ministries*, December 13, 1991, <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/church-growththe-movement-of-the-nineties>.
- 3 "Welcome to Natural Church Development (NCD)," NCD, accessed on Jan. 17, 2025, <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/>.
- 4 Ken Adams, "The Most Important Metric," *Discipleship.org*, accessed Jan. 17, 2025, <https://discipleship.org/blog/the-most-important-metric/>.
- 5 Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).
- 6 Zach First, "What to Measure If You're Mission Driven," *Harvard Business Review*, July 9, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/07/what-to-measure-if-youre-mission-driven>. More recently, while living in Asia, I have come to realize that even a definition of member is often unclear. What qualifies someone to be a member, both in theory and in practice?
- 7 Brett, "Church Metrics Breakthrough: Unlocking Success in Ministry [2024]," *Clickmill*, accessed Jan. 17, 2025, <https://clickmill.co/church-metrics/>.
- 8 Thom S. Rainer, "If I Had to Choose Five Church Metrics to Measure and Follow . . ." *Church Answers*, November 25, 2024, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/if-i-had-to-choose-five-church-metrics-to-measure-and-follow/>.
- 9 Clyde Morgan, "Measuring Our Mission Progress," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 10, no. 1 (2014): 135–149, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1258&context=jams>.
- 10 Bruce L. Bauer, "Needed: A New Metric to Assess Adventist Mission," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 13, no. 1 (2017): 98–107, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=jams>.
- 11 Marcelo E. C. Dias, "An Analysis of Adventist Mission Methods in Brazil in Relationship to a Christian Movement Ethos" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016), <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2865&context=dissertations>.
- 12 Michael Adam Beck, "Maintenance Is NOT the Mission: Matters of Measurement and Measuring Matter," *Passional Church*, Dec. 19, 2024, <https://passionalchurch.substack.com/p/maintenance-is-not-the-mission-matters>.

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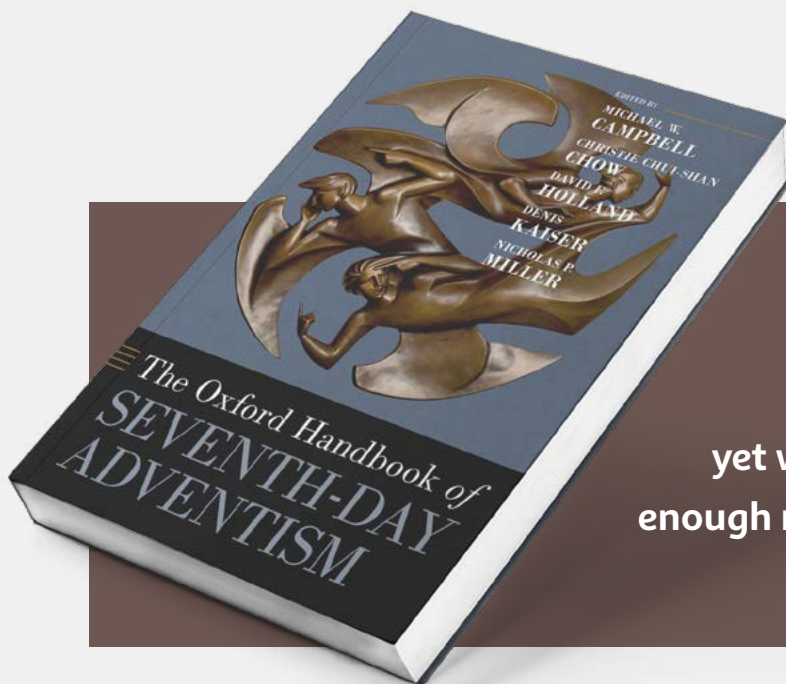
The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism

edited by Michael W. Campbell, Christie Chui-Shan Chow, David F. Holland, Denis Kaiser, and Nicholas P. Miller, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2024.

What if everything you wanted to know about Adventism could be distilled into one volume? Impossible? Of course. But that has not stopped Oxford University Press from trying, and the editors have done a remarkable job.

Weighing in at about 2.5 pounds (a little over a kilogram) and 605 pages, the book is a 38-chapter reference book. While not a page-turning novel, the subject is compelling not only because it profiles the largest denomination to emerge out of the Millerite movement but also because, personally, as a fifth-generation Adventist and having served in the ministry since 1978, it is a huge part of my life, identity, and vocation.

The handbook is like looking at earth from space, orbiting the continents of "History of Adventism," "Scripture, Inspiration, and Ellen G. White," "Theology," "Worship, Preaching, and Ordinances," "Organization and Ministry," "Global Church," and "Culture, Ethics, and Politics," with the ability to drop out of orbit and land on individual chapters within each continent. Despite my Adventist background, my exploration was filled with surprise discoveries. Who knew that the first director of the Negro Department of the General Conference was a white man, or that the Adventist tradition of a cappella music was



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To cover the massive scope of the project, the writing is crisp and concise, yet with generous endnotes and enough rabbit holes to satisfy those with insatiable curiosity.

scandalized when James White brought a small reed organ to camp meeting, or that Adventists occupy the office of prime minister in more than one country in the world?

There is a tasty scholarly compendium stew in the variety of authors: Adventists, employees or former employees, men, women, writers from other faith traditions, those rooted in the US, and those outside the US. Furthermore, the diversity in writing styles, worldviews, personalities, passions, fields of expertise, and tone simmer together and are perfect for the varied appetites of the intended readers.

For example, Sigve Tonstad expands on historical Adventist Sabbath theology by incorporating contemporary perspectives on the Sabbath from various scholars of different faiths. Taking a complex subject such as righteousness by faith, John Brunt breaks it down to basic, easy-to-understand concepts. For those who love deep and dense, Martin Pröbstle's microscopic approach to the sanctuary should be satisfying. Boubakar Sanou's honest reflection on Adventists in Africa and Wendy Jackson's assessment of church structure open the door to uplifting critical thinking.

To cover the massive scope of the project, the writing is crisp and concise, yet with generous endnotes and enough rabbit holes to satisfy those with insatiable curiosity. This book is particularly beneficial for pastors, especially those who did not have the opportunity to earn a formal degree in pastoral training from an

accredited Adventist school. Additionally, for individuals like me whose formal education is decades old, the book is invaluable as it incorporates some of the latest scholarly research on the vast landscape of Adventism.

Much of our work as pastors revolves around preaching and worship services, including ordinances and rituals. These skills and practices have a fascinating history. Jud Lake's "Adventist Pastoral Ministry and Preaching," David Williams's "Adventist Hymnody and Music," and Darius Jankiewicz's "Ordinances and Rituals" each give insights into the origins, development, growth, conflict, and diversity of these pastoral skills.

The greatest drawback of the book is the price of around US\$150, but there are solutions for obtaining this one-volume library. If you are a student, *The Oxford Handbook* can be viewed online through many libraries, including Adventist academic institutions. If possible, a hardback copy is more convenient and a great value considering that collecting the content of the handbook from all the sources would take a lifetime, cost thousands of dollars, and take up a lot of shelf space. Many congregations follow the tradition of celebrating pastoral appreciation month in October. Maybe you could drop some hints.

I highly recommend this book for pastors and administrators of all faith traditions, including those who are privileged to serve in this enigmatic, complex, storied, and wonderful denomination. 📖

Standing in the gap:

The power of
intercessory
prayer





David L. Hartman, DMin, pastor, evangelist, and administrator, is a professor of evangelism and church ministry at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

In 509 BC, before Rome became the capital of a mighty empire, the Etruscan army marched toward the city.¹ The Etruscans numbered in the tens of thousands, with foot soldiers and cavalymen, their swords and spears gleaming in the afternoon sun. The ill-prepared Roman army fled into the city. Only one obstacle stood between the Etruscans and sure victory—they had to cross the Tiber River on a narrow footbridge. The Romans' only hope to ward off the enemy and save their city was to destroy the bridge. Feverishly, they swung their axes, racing against time as the Etruscans drew closer. Soon it became evident they would not quite finish their task in time.

Sensing the gravity of the moment, a young Roman soldier named Horatius stood in the gap between the advancing Etruscans and the foot of the bridge. With sword in hand, he fought valiantly, trying to buy his compatriots precious moments to complete their work. Finally, the bridge collapsed into the rushing waters. Rome was saved because one man was willing to stand in the gap.²

Today the “enemy comes in like a flood” (Isa. 59:19)³ to our homes, churches, and communities. God earnestly seeks those who will stand in the gap on behalf of a doomed generation. In the days of Ezekiel, God unfortunately found “no one” willing to intercede (Ezek. 22:30). Hopefully, He finds intercessors available today.

Intercessory prayer is the cornerstone of pastoral ministry that directly affects the church's spiritual vitality and evangelistic impact in the community. This article explores the biblical foundation of intercessory prayer, provides practical guidance for its implementation, and highlights its transformative influence.

The power of intercessory prayer

Intercessory prayer seeks divine intervention for the salvation of others—friends, family, neighbors, and even strangers—so they might come to know God's truth and experience His saving grace.

The Bible is replete with examples of individuals who stood in the gap through prayer: Abraham interceded for

Sodom, pleading for its residents to be spared (Gen. 18:22–33). Moses prayed for wayward Israel at the time of the golden calf (Ps. 106:23; Exod. 32:11–14, 32), and God averted His judgment. Daniel’s sincere confession and repentance on behalf of Israel led to their release from 70 years of captivity (Dan. 9). The New Testament highlights Elijah’s fervent prayers as a model of effective intercession (James 5:16–18). When the widow’s son died, the prophet carried him to the upper room. There he labored in prayer until God restored the boy to life (1 Kings 17:19–22). Later Elijah prayed on Mount Carmel, asking God to revive a spiritually dead nation, and the Lord responded dramatically (1 Kings 18). Such examples show what will happen when we carry our “dead” loved ones to the upper room or summit—God will restore them to life again because of fervent prayer.

The ultimate example of standing in the gap is Jesus Christ. Isaiah 59:2 reveals that our “iniquities have separated [us] from [our] God” and that salvation is “far from us” (v. 11). Jesus looked upon our desperate dilemma and noted there was “no man” or “intercessor” (v. 16), so He voluntarily offered to become that “Man.” Christ donned the vestments of salvation (vv. 16, 17) and plunged to earth to become our Horatius. He hung on Calvary’s cross, suspended between a holy God and an imperfect people. “Father, forgive them!” He cried. “Let My name be blotted out of the record book, rather than theirs” (cf. Exod. 32:32; Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:24).

But Jesus did not intervene to appease an angry Deity, for “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The whole Godhead sacrificed themselves to rescue fallen humanity from the onslaught of the evil “Etruscan” forces. Today each of us is saved because of that one Man who stood in the gap!

My personal prayer journey

Intercessory prayer holds special significance in my life. I owe much of my spiritual journey to the prayers of others. When I was a theology student at Southern Adventist University, I took a class from Minon Hamm, an extraordinary English teacher who prayed over each desk before class, asking God to draw her students to Christ. As a result, I attribute my conversion largely to her prayers and others who stood in the gap for me.

Today, as a professor at Southern, I strive to continue this legacy. I pray over a printout of my students’ thumbnail photos, lifting each one up by name. Every semester I witness students making decisions for Christ and baptism—a testament to the power of intercessory prayer.⁴

A rude awakening

As a young ministerial intern in Birmingham, Alabama, I was eager to achieve record baptisms. I conducted Bible studies, led youth ministry, and directed the Pathfinder Club. Yet halfway through the year, I felt disillusioned. My efforts seemed fruitless, and I questioned my calling.

One day, after a disappointing Bible study visit, I parked under a shade tree and cried to God, “Lord, show me what is lacking in my ministry.” Turning to 1 Timothy 2:1, I read, “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.” The word *first* struck me. Before anything else, prayer must take precedence. At that moment I realized I had been relying on my efforts without prioritizing prayer.

That week I began creating a prayer list and earnestly interceding for others. Miraculously, change occurred—first in my own heart. God gave me a shepherd’s heart, a passion for people, and a genuine desire to see souls saved. As I prayed, conversions and baptisms followed. I am convinced that when we work, little happens, but when we pray, God goes to work, and miracles take place!

The purpose of prayer

Prayer is transformative, both for the ones praying and those being prayed for. First Timothy 2:4 reveals that God “desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Prayer tears down spiritual strongholds, dissolves arguments, and opens hearts to the gospel (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). Ellen White underscores the need to claim God’s promises and intercede fervently for souls. She urges, “Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God. . . . As you do this, you will see that God will give the Holy Spirit to convict, and the power of the truth to convert, the soul.”⁵ Intercessory prayer is indispensable in soul winning.

Practical tools for intercession

Here are some practical tools for enhancing one’s personal prayer life.

Create a “10 Most Wanted” list. One effective way to focus your prayers is to make a “10 Most

Wanted” list—a roster of individuals for whom you pray earnestly. While you pray, claim God’s promises and recite God’s Word back to Him because this appeals to His sovereign will and omnipotent power. For instance, “God, You have said, You are ‘not willing that any perish but that all should come to repentance’ (2 Pet. 3:9). Therefore, unleash the arsenal of heaven to save Jennifer.” You can also reach out to Jennifer, share that you are praying for her, and ask if she has any specific requests. Periodically check in to build connections and open doors for further ministry.

Start a prayer journal. A prayer journal can help you stay consistent in your intercessory efforts. I use a three-ring binder with five tabs for various prayer categories:⁶

1. Personal—Prayers for personal growth or my family’s needs.
2. Church—Requests for the local and global church.
3. Outreach—Intercessions for those who need a saving relationship with Christ.
4. Special needs—Petitions for medical, financial, or relational challenges of others.

For each of these four categories, keep a running list of prayer entries in “list” format, along with the date of entry and a simple request per line.

5. Daily—Write out your prayers in “paragraph” format. Each morning, scan one of the “list” categories and ask the Lord to show you which items need to be “labored” over in prayer. Write these expanded prayers as a form of pouring out your heart to God for those individuals or needs.

When prayers are answered, circle and date them, creating a record of God’s faithfulness. Alternatively, you can use prayer apps such as Prayer Mate or other digital options.⁷

Prayer in crisis

Intercession becomes especially vital during crises. In 2013 my brother, John, was involved in a head-on collision. The first responders cut him out of his truck with the Jaws of Life and rushed him to the University of Tennessee Medical Center. There he lay in a coma for two and a half weeks with fractured bones and battered organs.

That next morning I sat by his bedside and listened to him gurgle through a breathing tube.

I feared that I would never see him whole on this earth again. However, in my despair, God impressed me to claim Ezekiel 37 about the “valley of dry bones.” He prompted, “David, if I can resurrect a valley of dry bones, I can heal your brother physically and spiritually.” Consequently, I prayed fervently for both physical and spiritual restoration, and I witnessed a miracle as God healed John’s body and began restoring his soul.

Will you take the journey?

Who in your life is in the spiritual “intensive care unit” and needs someone to stand in the gap? Perhaps it is a family member, friend, neighbor, or parishioner heading toward a Christless eternity. What are you going to do about it? Will you intercede for them?

Jesus, our ultimate intercessor, invites us to join Him in this intercessory role. Hebrews 7:25 promises that He “ever lives to make intercession for [us].” When we pray, we stand with the mightiest Prayer Warrior of all. Will you stand in the gap with Jesus and not quit until the earthly ties (“bridge”) of this world are cut away and we are safely home in heaven?

Ideas for corporate prayer

Here are several ways to create a culture of intercessory prayer in the local church:

1. *Prayer resources.* Utilize resources such as Dennis Smith’s *40 Days* book on prayer,⁸ Melody Mason’s *Daring to Ask for More*,⁹ and Philip Samaan’s *Christ’s Way to Pray*¹⁰ for prayer meetings or small groups, encouraging members to pair off and pray for each other’s lists.
2. *Ten days of prayer.* Organize a dedicated season of prayer around such themes as repentance, the Holy Spirit, and revival.
3. *Prayer room.* Designate an “upper room” where individuals can gather for prayer.
4. *Prayer vigils.* Conduct 24-hour vigils where members sign up for 30-minute blocks of quiet time with God. Take turns praying at the “altar” with instructions and lists of people and needs.

5. *Prayer walks.* Create stations with themed prayer prompts, such as forgiveness, outreach, and church revitalization. Initiate a prayer walk on Sabbath mornings when prayer warriors pray over the pulpit, sanctuary, foyer, and every classroom. Walk through the community and pray for homes and businesses.
6. *Prayer groups.* Establish prayer groups focused on intercession. They can meet weekly to pray for church members, community needs, and global concerns. Also designate a prayer coordinator for every Sabbath School class, church department, or ministry.
7. *Prayer ministry technology.* Create prayer chains through messaging apps, host virtual prayer meetings, or develop a digital platform on which members can submit prayer requests and receive updates.¹¹



- 1 This article is adapted from David L. Hartman, "Style #1: Standing in the Gap," in *Winning Ways to Witness: Seven Witnessing Styles That Attract People to Christ* (Collegedale, TN: College Press, 2023), 75–83.
- 2 See, for example, *Britannica*, s.v. "Horatius Cocles," <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Horatius-Cocles>.
- 3 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 4 See Amanda Blake, "Students Commit to Baptism During Religion Class," *Southern Tidings*, June 2023, <https://www.southerntidings.com/news/students-commit-to-baptism-during-religion-class/>.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1963), 244, 245.
- 6 For detailed instructions on prayer journaling, see appendix C of *Winning Ways to Witness*, 228–231. I am indebted to Melvin Santos and his Masterplan of Discipleship for this prayer journal method.
- 7 See PrayerMate at <https://www.prayermate.net/app>. Another option is Echo Prayer at <https://www.echoprayer.com/>.
- 8 Dennis Smith, *40 Days: Prayers and Devotions to Prepare for the Second Coming* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009).
- 9 Melody Mason, *Daring to Ask for More* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2014).
- 10 Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Pray* (pub. by author, 2006).
- 11 See, for example, Prayer Box at <https://www.prayerboxapp.com/>.

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RESOURCES

Exploring the Trinity: Questions and Answers

edited by Clinton Wahlen and John C. Peckham, Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2025.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a foundational belief in Christianity, rooted in the Bible and essential to the faith of believers worldwide. Over the years, countless academic articles, theology books, and studies have explored this subject. However, despite the wealth of biblical evidence and scholarly research, the nature, existence, and role of the triune God continue to be debated and questioned by believers. The primary area of disagreement revolves around the origin of the Son and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

The *Exploring the Trinity: Questions and Answers* volume, edited by Clinton Wahlen and John C. Peckham, offers a comprehensive yet accessible exploration of the biblical truths about the triune God. Its engaging, conversational style makes it easy for readers, even those unfamiliar with theological terms, to understand the profound, multi-dimensional answers to common questions about the Trinity.

What's inside

At first glance the book may seem overwhelming because of its size and number of chapters. However, its well-organized structure allows readers to easily navigate and explore the topics from different angles. The book begins with general questions about the Trinity, such as whether belief in the triune God matters and how the divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is evidenced.

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The following sections delve into various questions arising in the Old and New Testaments. The authors present these complex biblical teachings in a clear, straightforward way, avoiding unnecessary scholarly jargon. For example, they explain Old Testament concepts of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They provide foundational answers to long-standing questions and set the stage for deeper biblical study.

In the New Testament chapters, the book addresses a wide range of topics, including baptism in the triune name, Jesus being called the “firstborn,” the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, the Trinity in the book of Revelation, and so much more. These chapters are rich with biblical insights that challenge and enhance the reader’s understanding.

Additionally, the book examines major concerns from a historical perspective, exploring the views of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions. It also covers the development of Adventist thought, including the contributions of early pioneers and Ellen G. White’s progressive understanding and usage of the Godhead.

The book concludes with chapters that address theological and contemporary questions, offering a thoughtful and well-rounded conclusion to the subject. Moreover,

numerous indexes of biblical references, ancient sources, and modern authors close the volume.

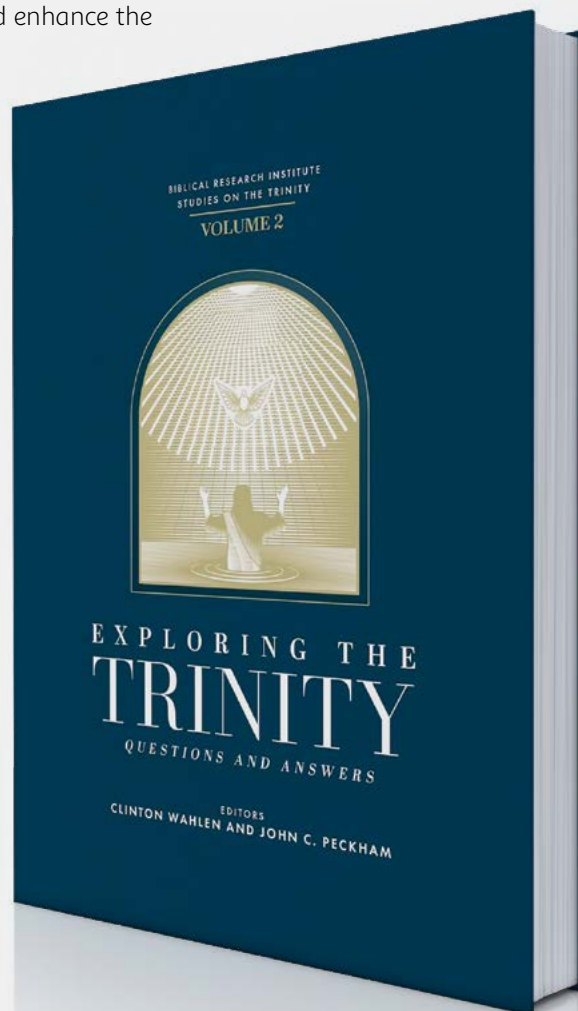
What stands out

One of the book’s key strengths is the fact that sixty-three authors from around the world contribute their perspectives on the same topic, creating a unified yet diverse exploration of the Trinity. This collaborative effort highlights both the harmony of thought and the deep purpose behind the book’s comprehensive and nuanced presentation of the triune God.

Another strength is a clear distinction between the biblical teachings on the Trinity and speculative ideas that have developed over the centuries.

The book effectively answers questions within the scope of biblical, historical, and contemporary contexts.

However, the impact of this comprehensive volume goes beyond just being informative. It offers a life-changing experience because it focuses on the nature of God Himself. The book draws readers into a deeper understanding of the triune God, inviting them to embrace His mystery and revelation, His creation and redemption, His sacrifice, and His transformative work in the lives of individuals and His church. It encourages readers to engage with the living God—Three in One—in their daily lives. 🙏



Telling the world about Jesus:

An interview with David Klinedinst

Editor's note: David Klinedinst, MDiv, is the director of evangelism and church growth for the Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He trains and equips pastors and lay leaders in evangelism and is the speaker for the Forecasting Hope evangelistic series.

Pavel Goia (PG): Many people say public evangelism does not work in our society today, especially in first world countries. Why is public evangelism still important?

David Klinedinst (DK): I've been a pastor, evangelist, and departmental director for twenty-seven years and am grateful for all the experiences I've had in ministry. I can safely say public evangelism definitely still works when it's done as part of a full cycle of evangelism. However, if a church just conducts an evangelistic series as an isolated event with little or no preparation of the field, the results will be limited. Like you always say, Pavel, how can we expect to harvest tomatoes if you never planted any tomatoes? When a church has been planting seeds, building relationships, and ministering to people in the community all throughout the year, then public evangelism will work beautifully because the necessary preparation has been done.

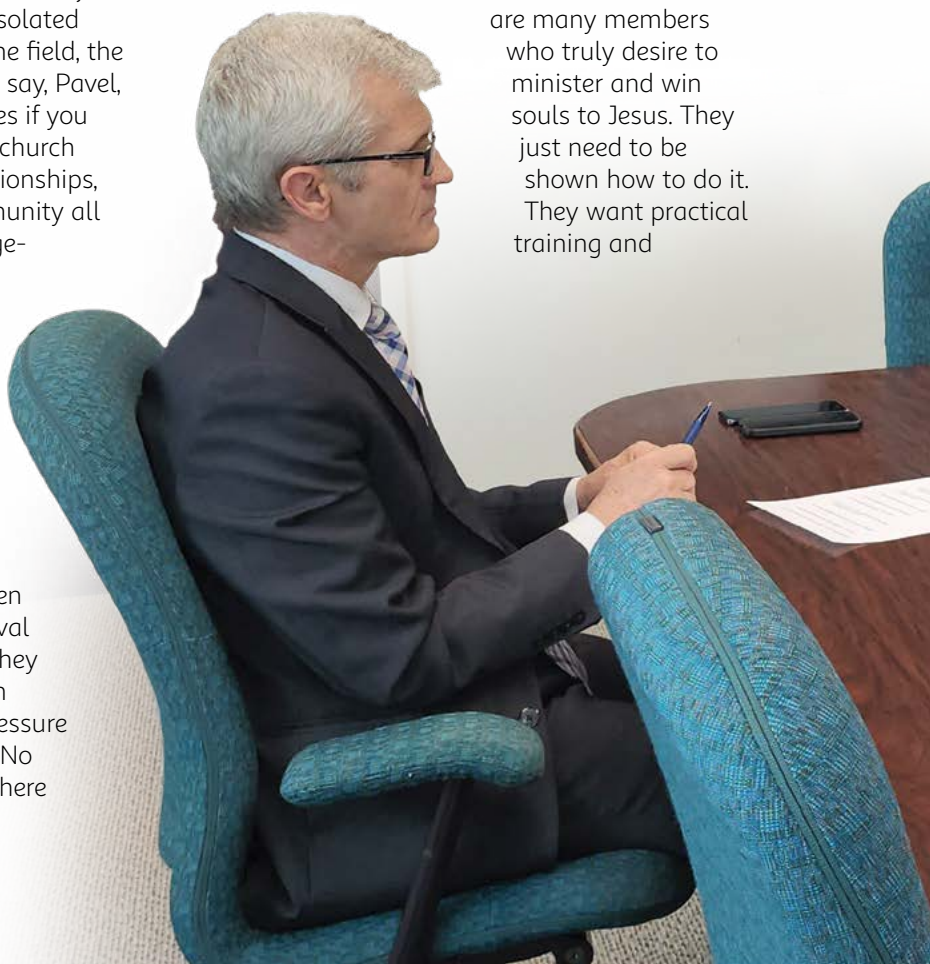
PG: What is this cycle of evangelism you are referring to?

DK: Developing an effective twelve-month cycle of evangelism in the local church entails three or four stages. Stage one involves revival. When members experience true spiritual revival and a deeper relationship with Jesus, they naturally want to share their faith with others. I don't have to coax, guilt, or pressure them. It's the natural result of revival. "No sooner does one come to Christ than there

is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart."¹ So in this stage a church can organize small groups and study materials about revival and reformation. This might be the focus for the first quarter of the year—from January to March.

Stage two involves training and equipping members in ministry skills.

I've found that there are many members who truly desire to minister and win souls to Jesus. They just need to be shown how to do it. They want practical training and



equipping in the principles of soul winning. So in this stage a church can provide training seminars for its members to teach them various ministry skills and the principles of personal evangelism. This might be the focus for the second quarter—from April to June.

Stage three involves conducting bridge events in the community. What's a bridge event? It's a ministry meant to meet people's needs and build relationships with the community. It's a bridge to connect with people that is not directly spiritual in nature. It could be a health seminar, a depression seminar, a single moms' group, a basketball or soccer league at the church, a financial health seminar, or even a garden club. You can be as creative as you like. The purpose is to build relationships with people and plant seeds in their hearts. We have to remember—relationships are a big part of soul winning. These bridge events might be your focus in the third quarter—from July to September.

Stage four is reaping. This is where you harvest the seeds that you've planted and invite people to follow Christ by conducting a reaping series or evangelistic meeting. You've built the relationships

and gained trust. Now you're giving them an opportunity to choose Jesus. Your evangelistic meeting may look different depending on your context. It might be two weeks, three weeks, four weeks. The point is you have to ask people to make a decision for Christ. In the first three stages of the cycle, you have gained trust and connected with their heart. Now, in stage four, you are sharing spiritual truths with them and inviting them to act. The reaping might be your focus in the fourth quarter—from October to December.

Churches that develop a cycle of evangelism will eventually become multiplying churches that are successfully making disciples for Jesus.

PG: I see in your evangelism cycle that friendship and relationships are a big part of soul winning. Why is it so essential?

DK: Trust is not negotiable. You will never win someone to Jesus who doesn't trust you first. I can't just throw doctrinal information at them from a distance. I have to engage with them, connect with their heart, and interact with them. That's what Jesus did. He didn't just preach in

Photo: Sheryl Beck

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



SCAN FOR AUDIO

the synagogue. He had a very personal ministry. There is a big difference between someone who is simply a lecturer throwing out truth from a distance and someone who seeks to reach the heart, not just give information.

PG: How do you bolster the spiritual health of a church and prepare them to welcome and love the new attendees and seekers?

DK: One of the best ways is what you speak about all the time, Pavel—develop a prayer ministry where the church gathers together to pray for family, friends, neighbors, and other interests—in an intentional and organized way. When you pray for people, you become invested in their lives and intensely interested in their salvation. The natural result is that when a member is personally involved in ministering to others, they then care a lot more about their church being a safe place. Another way is to get attendees and new believers involved in mission and outreach right away. When you get people involved in service, they become much more interested in making sure their church is a loving community that will help people in their spiritual journey.

PG: What kind of follow-up should be done to retain new believers and seekers?

DK: When I conduct an evangelistic series, I insist that the church have a follow-up class that meets at least once a week after the evangelistic series is over. The class enables you to continue to build solid relationships with guests and provides a way to disciple them. Many of the guests who didn't make a decision during the evangelistic meetings will make decisions during the follow-up class and beyond. But the class needs to be on the same theme as the evangelistic meetings. For example, if the theme of the evangelistic meetings was Bible prophecy, then your class should be on the same theme. That theme attracted them in the first place. Why would you change it?

Another important way to retain people is to get them involved in the ministry of the church—even if they are not members yet. Give them something to do—even if it's as simple as being a greeter at the door or handing out Sabbath School quarterlies. People who are involved and given a job usually stay connected. It is when a person is isolated and alone that they fall away. This is the key to retention.

PG: Are there any resources that will help a church conduct an effective evangelistic series?

DK: Yes, there are a few. We recently partnered with SermonView and Advent Source to create a brand-new evangelism kit called Forecasting Hope, which equips pastors and lay leaders with everything they need to plan and conduct a powerful evangelistic series.² It Is Written, the Voice of Prophecy, and ASI [Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries] have also developed evangelism kits to provide necessary resources to churches.

PG: You have done a vast amount of evangelism training throughout North America. What kind of seminars and teaching resources do you provide?

DK: We provide training on the principles of soul winning and how to create the culture of evangelism in the local church, develop a cycle of evangelism, make personal and public appeals, reach the heart, preach Christ in the doctrines, help people make spiritual decisions, get decisions and recognize conviction, and visit people, just to name a few.

My greatest passion, though, is to equip pastors and leaders on how to present the topics of an evangelistic series in a Christ-centered, positive, and relational way.³

We also help conferences provide in-person training to pastors and lay leaders through something called Proclaim Evangelism cohorts. These are twelve-month cohorts that meet four times a year (once a quarter) to disciple pastors and lay leaders in effective



evangelistic methods. A cohort usually consists of twelve to twenty people, and each of the four modules focuses on a specific aspect of effective evangelism. We can help a conference start these cohorts in their territory.⁴

When you equip people with powerful evangelistic skills, it creates a mission-driven, lay-led church reaching people for Christ. It multiplies soul winners. Jesus said, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few” [Luke 10:2, KJV]. We want to equip and disciple more laborers!

PG: Do you have any final words for pastors wanting to conduct fruitful evangelism?

DK: Let me conclude with an inspiring story of what God can do in a local church committed to fostering a culture of evangelism and developing a cycle of evangelism.

A few years ago I was asked to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings in a small town just outside a large urban area. It was a smaller church that struggled to survive in past years. But the church had a new vision led by a lay pastor. This lay pastor worked forty hours a week at another job. But he and the leaders worked diligently to develop a full cycle of evangelism that included building relationships in the community, conducting bridge events regularly, meeting people’s needs, and giving people Bible studies. When I came to conduct the evangelistic meetings, they

already had many interests from the community who came to the meetings and made decisions. Because the church had already been working with them, all I had to do was simply call them to make a decision. This average-sized Seventh-day Adventist church of thirty to forty members became the fastest-growing church in the conference. That can happen in any church!

In every city there are people whose hearts are open to truth. In every town or village, there are people who are searching for something better. God wants to connect them with your church. God calls us to reach them. There is no other option—Jesus is coming soon! Every church must be mission-driven, and every member a soul winner.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 87.
- 2 For more information about Forecasting Hope, visit the SermonView website at <https://www.evangelismmarketing.com/forecastinghope>.
- 3 For a list of David’s evangelism training topics and resources, visit the Proclaim Evangelism Models page on the Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists website at <https://www.ccosda.org/david>.
- 4 See the Proclaim Evangelism Modules page on the Chesapeake Conference website at <https://www.ccosda.org/proclaim>.

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Photo: Sheryl Beck



Discipling emerging adults:

A mentoring manifesto

At age 57, I have now reached the median age of my profession.¹ Although I do not mind the gray hairs so much, the aches and pains of a well-traveled life do remind me that more days lie behind me than before me. At this stage of my pastoral ministry, I realize that if I neglect to mentor the next generation, I could very well be culpable for rendering my profession obsolete.

On many fronts, pastoral ministry challenges are daunting. From my vantage point this is especially true when it comes to emerging adults (aka young adults). After graduating from high school, half of them will drift away from our faith communities. While many of them may still endorse faith in the person of Jesus Christ, some will indicate no religious affiliation at all.² The twenty-something years are filled with major transitions and decisions during which young adults shape their future.³ The local church is experiencing a fading influence in the looming generations and, potentially more alarming, in our own young adult children.

What's needed to be effective

Methodologies and strategies so far have had limited success in stemming the hemorrhaging of young people from our congregations, yet much of our current ministry practices remains unchanged. The contemporary context that emerging generations face continues to grow ever more complex. At the same time, the typical local church remains committed

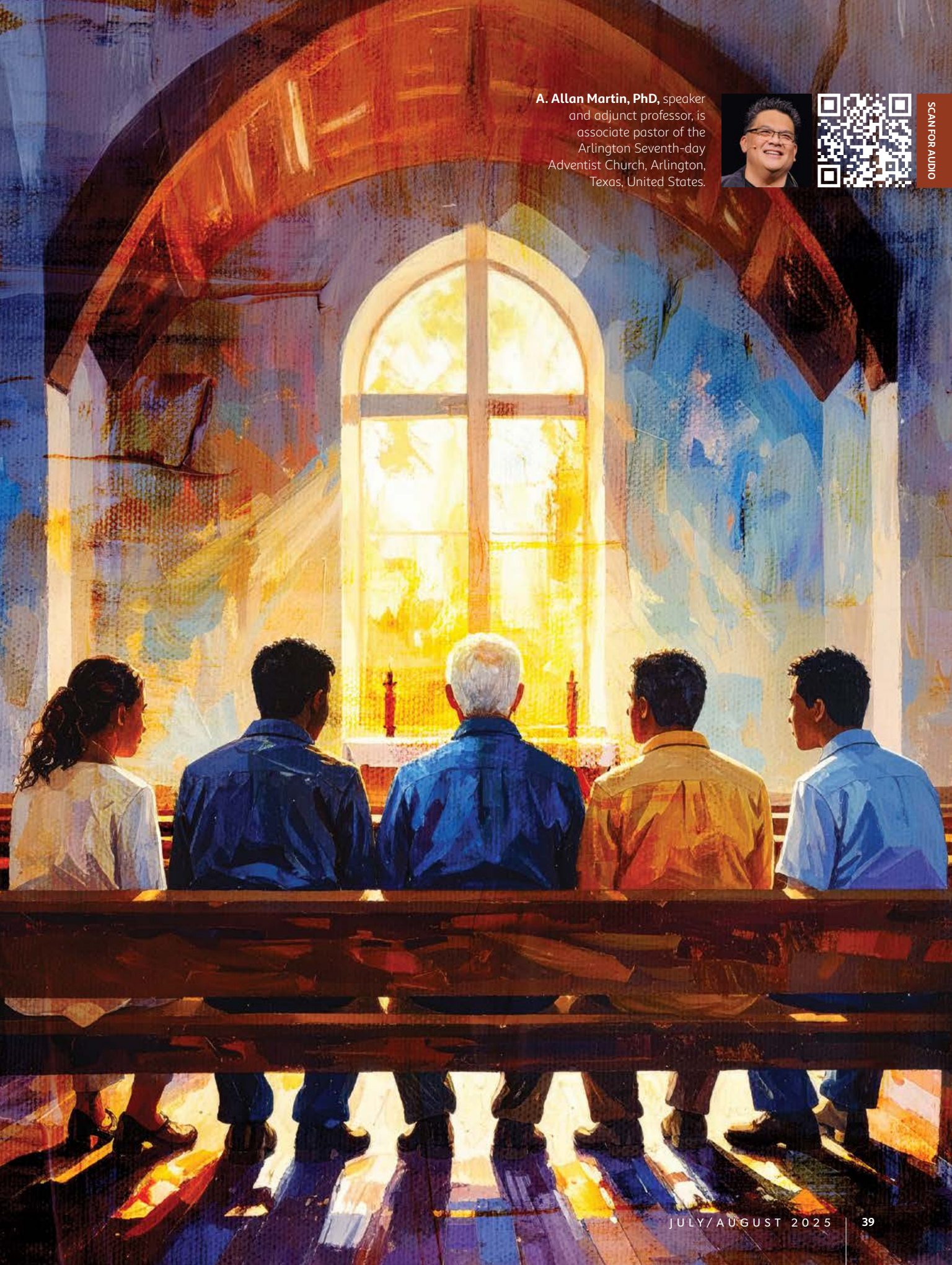
to traditions that have little to no current relevance to young adult life.⁴ Scott Cormode cautions, "The church is perfectly calibrated for a world that no longer exists."⁵

Dear fellow pastors, my hope is that you and I will bravely investigate and deal with these realities with spiritual boldness. May we engage the next generations with an authentic desire for meaningful relationships.⁶ Our leadership is still valued and important.

Three-fourths of church members and pastors surveyed endorsed *leadership* as the primary means of church effectiveness with young people.⁷ In a quantitative and qualitative study of more than 250 churches effectively involving and retaining young people (ages 15–29), more than 75 percent of the members named leadership as the "secret to their effectiveness."⁸ But I have a far more personal question I want to pose to you, fellow pastors: What is your succession plan?

Apprenticing relationships

The admonitions of the apostle Paul to his protégé Timothy may feel more like an ancient biblical exhortation than an applicable premise for contemporary pastoral praxis: "Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:11, 12, ESV). Might pastors in the twenty-first century also take such a mentoring posture with emerging adults?



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Six core commitments were identified in “churches that were growing in involving and retaining young people bringing overall vitality to the whole church.”⁹ Notable for me among them were keychain leadership and prioritizing young people everywhere.

Keychain leadership describes giving responsibilities and roles to young people that transcend tokenism and serve as an essential influence and consistent engagement of healthy church life.¹⁰

On Paul’s behalf, Timothy was to assume leadership in the local congregation, despite the pushback that he might encounter given his age. Such a keychain leadership role involved a wholistic approach, including, but not limited to, behavioral modeling, grace-oriented compassion, and aspiring toward virtuous, Christ-centered ideals.

Throughout the Scriptures, and explicitly in Jesus’s relationship with His disciples, we see constant illustrations of the teacher-student apprenticing relationship. Why is it so absent from contemporary pastoral practice? Paul’s teaching and instruction afforded Timothy pastoral leadership and authority, even with Paul absent (1 Tim. 4:13). Through it the apostle anticipated growth in both the congregation and Timothy himself (vv. 15, 16).

This type of intergenerational leadership training, maintains Steve Argue, associate professor of youth, family, and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, is a powerful conduit in helping new generations constructively pursue answers to life’s most poignant questions. Argue also asserts the importance of identity, belonging, and purpose for young adults.¹¹ If local pastors would consider apprenticing young adults as a succession strategy, the apprentice, the local church, and the pastor would all benefit.

Advocates for young adult engagement with pastors and church leadership include Filip Milosavljević, young adult pastor at Loma Linda University Church, who notes that such mentorship between generations affords beneficial partnerships and increased effectiveness for all parties.¹² Instead of burnout and irrelevance, the local pastor may find active mentoring to be a way of magnifying ministry effectiveness through the life lens of the next generation.

Building strong relational rapport

Many of our local churches deploy ministry in a departmentalized fashion, often siloed except for occasional special emphasis weekends. While such a structuring of age groups does offer

some benefits, the practice has left many of our churches languishing in their sense of community and connection. We can find the local church member completely ignorant of those outside of their own age demographic or stage of life, or worse, prejudicial because of society’s fixation on generational stereotypes.¹³

Given the increased complexity that emerging adulthood poses, young adults may feel alone, neglected, or even abandoned.¹⁴ Many local churches, in clinging to their antiquated ministry departments, do not know what to do with young adults, especially considering that they are postponing marriage and having children later in life compared to previous generations.

The core commitment of “prioritizing young people everywhere” is crucial for establishing vibrant congregational practice.¹⁵ Often, such next-generation engagement gets relegated solely to youth ministry. If any young adult ministry does exist at all, often it may be restricted to singles ministry, with its intrusive question of marital status being the only point of conversation.

The simple sharing of stories between the generations in a church can bring a stronger relational rapport between the various age groups.¹⁶ Learning to empathize and foster relational warmth creates vitality for the whole church. The local pastor who enables such interpersonal connections, especially with young adults, creates powerful bonding in the areas of identity, belonging, and purpose.¹⁷

The proverb “Train up a child in the way he should go . . . , even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6, AMP) serves as a template for communal relationships between young and old. Such collaboration among parents, relatives, congregants, religious educators, ministry leaders, and pastors for the benefit of the next generation will foster a robust faith-forming web that imprints lasting biblical virtues in young lives.¹⁸ Young ones being “trained up” in the local church will have the most resilient faith for life.

If the local pastor, parents, and other church leaders leave the discipling of youth exclusively to the teen program, our young people will continue to graduate and leave not only high school but also church life. Conversely, if in your pastoral leadership, you implement a succession plan that prioritizes the mentoring of young people, it will offer them responsibilities and equipping that will provide spiritual kingdom expansion and relational continuity from generation to generation.

A thrilling venture

In our local congregation we have launched internship, residency, and apprenticeship initiatives in which I engage with youth and young adults in both ministry mentoring and vocational discipleship.¹⁹ It is a thrilling venture, but not without its pitfalls.

In all candor, even considering a succession plan has at times felt like a threat to my value as a local pastor, especially in areas where I seemed most important, most needed. I was struck to the core as Cormode quoted leadership expert Ronald A. Heifetz as saying, “What people resist is not change per se, but loss.”²⁰ Would a succession plan affect my power, my significance?

If you relate to this fear, you are not alone as you consider your succession plan. I also struggle, yet I am encouraged that servant leadership is a blessing, a remedy, and a prophetic solution. As the apostle Peter declared:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, 18, ESV).

Learning to empathize and foster relational warmth creates vitality for the whole church. The local pastor who enables such interpersonal connections, especially with young adults, creates powerful bonding in the areas of identity, belonging, and purpose.

Dear fellow pastors, I am praying we will take the posture of servant leaders with a relationally rich succession plan. I am anticipating the powerful Spirit of the Lord being poured out on all generations, fueling the next generations to succeed. As a median-age pastor, I reflect on days gone by, but I also have dreams of what succeeding generations will accomplish for God's glory. In these last days, may we enact a ministry succession that mentors and empowers our sons and daughters until the day of His promised return.



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- 3 Meg Jay, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter and How to Make the Most of Them Now*, updated ed. (New York, NY: Twelve, 2021), 242.
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- 7 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 56.
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- 13 Milosavljević, 8, 9.
- 14 Jay, *Defining Decade*, 173, 182, 183.
- 15 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 200–203.
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- 17 Argue, *Young Adult Ministry Now*, 42–54.
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- 20 Cormode, *The Innovative Church*, 182.

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Facing your future with assurance:

An invitation to embrace the unknown

Hensley M. Mooroooven, MA in leadership, is the undersecretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

We stand at the threshold of uncharted territory.¹ As church leaders, we have traversed many roads, faced countless trials, and experienced moments of triumph and despair. But life itself carries with it an air of uncertainty and an invitation to embrace the unknown. Amid this uncertainty, we can know that the Lord will be with us so that we can face our future with assurance rather than with anxiety. The timeless wisdom found in God's Word provides us with valuable insights on how to face our future with assurance.

Focusing too much on the past can lead to depression, focusing too much on the present often triggers stress, and concentrating too much on the future may provoke anxiety. What is the answer to such a dilemma? Only one: trusting in the sovereign Lord.

Here are three lessons to remember about our all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise God as we face the unknown future.

The God who was with us yesterday

In the context of the children of Israel about to enter Canaan, the Lord said to them through Moses: "You shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness" (Deut. 8:2).² He has been with you in your past as well.

When the Israelites prepared to take possession of the Promised Land, they faced uncertainty and challenges. You likely already know that the Lord cared for His people for 40 years in the wilderness. Yet maybe that knowledge is, precisely, the problem: having come

across this information so often, we forget what it really means.

How do you supply such a crowd with food and water in the wilderness? Some Bible commentators believe that approximately 2.6 million people left Egypt for the Promised Land. To survive one day in the desert, a single adult would require about three gallons (11 liters) of water for hydration, food preparation, and hygiene.

Therefore, 2.6 million people would require 7.8 million gallons (29.5 million liters) of water for one day in the desert. How do you convey to a single spot 7.8 million gallons of water? They could not just open a tap. In the United States the largest tanker (with a trailer) carries up to 11,600 gallons (44,000 liters) of liquid. To transport 7.8 million gallons of water would require 673 of these tankers per day. The average tanker is 42 feet long; 673 tankers would cover 5.4 miles (8.7 kilometers).

Yet, without requiring a single truck, God gave His people water for 40 years in the wilderness. How? The Bible declares that water gushed out of the rock.

And food? To feed a crowd of 2.6 million people, you would require approximately 1,600 tons (1.4 million kilograms) of food—*per meal*. How do you convey to a single spot 1,600 tons of food? They did not have any grocery stores. To feed them would require two trains a mile (1.6 kilometers) long each, per meal. God, however, gave His people food for 40 years in the wilderness without requiring a single wagon. How? The Bible declares that food came down from heaven.

Another important component of their sojourn was the pillars of cloud and fire. Imagine a vast desert, a multitude of people, uncertain terrain, and an uncharted path ahead. Amid this uncertainty, God

provided a visible manifestation of His presence—a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

The pillar of cloud served as a GPS for the Israelites. Besides revealing the path to follow, it also provided shade from the scorching sun, a clear indication that God was with them every step of the way. Similarly, the pillar of fire illuminated their way by night. Apart from that, in the desert, where temperatures plummet during the night because of the poor heat-retaining properties of the sand, the children of Israel found a source of warmth and comfort in the pillar of fire.

Whenever you face a situation that you have never encountered before, remember that the Lord your God was with you yesterday.

The God who is with us *today*

Yet we do not serve a God of only yesterday. The past is but a place of learning, not a place of living. We face real challenges now.

In Joshua 3:7 “the LORD said to Joshua, ‘This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.’” However natural it is for us to worry, the Lord who was with you yesterday is also with you today.

Some of us are chronic worriers. If worry were an Olympic discipline, we would be gold medalists. The book *Christian Leadership* reminds us: “Worry is blind and cannot discern the future. But Jesus sees the end from the beginning.”³

I cherish two definitions of *worry*. First, worry is looking into the future without God in the picture; second, worry is the dark room where negatives are developed.

Our problem is not our problem; it is the way that we look at it. Our challenge is not our challenge; it is the way that we apprehend it. If we train our eyes to see our challenges through the lens of God’s sovereignty, we can then stop worrying.

Whatever the uncertainties, remember that God was with you yesterday and is with you today.

The God who will be with us *tomorrow*

I love the Word of God. The Bible does not need to be rewritten but reread. Let us reread Joshua 3:5. Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you” (NIV).

Whenever you encounter a new situation, remember that God will not only be with you tomorrow but also perform wonders in your life tomorrow.

Our problem is not our problem; it is the way that we look at it. Our challenge is not our challenge; it is the way that we apprehend it. If we train our eyes to see our challenges through the lens of God’s sovereignty, we can then stop worrying.

Yet, according to Joshua 3:5, this promise comes with a requirement: “Consecrate yourselves.” To face the future with assurance, we must set ourselves apart for God’s purpose and dedicate our hearts and minds to Him. Let us remember that our first step toward assurance is drawing near to God and—based on daily personal prayer, Bible study, and applying the divinely inspired instructions from the Spirit of Prophecy—growing as disciples.

Whatever challenges arise, remember that God was with you yesterday, is with you today, and will be with you tomorrow.

Assurance

There is no need to be depressed about the past, because God was with you yesterday; no need to be stressed about the present, because He is with you today; and no need to be anxious about the future, for He will perform wonders in your life tomorrow.

Let’s remember that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). God never changes, and His promises are true. So, we can face our future with assurance. With God our past is redeemed, our present makes sense, and our future is secure.



1 A version of this article was first published in *Adventist Review*, January 1, 2024, <https://adventistreview.org/magazine-article/facing-your-future-with-assurance/>. Used with permission.

2 Unless noted otherwise, Scripture is from the New King James Version.

3 Ellen G. White, *Christian Leadership* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), 77.

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Tools for the mission of the church:

An interview with Wintley Phipps

Editor's note: Wintley Phipps, MDiv, is a world-renowned singer, an evangelist, an entrepreneur, and an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He travels the world sharing God's love through his preaching and singing.

Jeffrey Brown (JB): Pastor Phipps, you are world-renowned for your decades of music ministry. You have sung before royalty and presidents. And you were part of the Billy Graham Evangelistic team—is that correct?

Wintley Phipps (WP): I gave my life to Jesus at sixteen years old while attending Kingsway College in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. Under deep conviction I promised the Lord that for the rest of my life I would sing only for His glory.

God said to me, “Son, if you can just be faithful, to the best of your ability, I will take your life down an unusual path. You will sing to the masses, and you will speak truth to people of influence and power.” Little did I know I was hearing God speak into my soul—a calling, a divine mandate that would become the roadmap for my life and ministry.

I remember one day I was singing in Washington, and a gentleman came in with his entourage. I extended my hand and said, “Sir, I would like to introduce myself.”

“I know who you are,” he said. “I am a fan.” It was His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, sharing with me that his life had been touched by my music ministry.

Because of the power of God, I’ve been honored to sing for seven presidents of the United States of America. In 1992, I was blessed to have been invited by Billy Graham to sing “How Great Thou Art” along with a five-thousand-voice Russian choir in the Olympic Stadium in Moscow. And I can never forget the feeling of being in the crowd that welcomed Nelson Mandela when he came out of prison.

I only share this as a testimony to say that our God can do anything and to remind everyone that God keeps His promises to young people who seek His face and dedicate their lives to Him. My ministry experiences have been rich and memorable. But back in 1972, when God said I’d be singing to the masses, you must understand—that was before the internet as we know it today would make it possible for a pastor of a small church to reach millions through technology.

JB: Yes, many may not know that you are a local church pastor.

WP: I have been a church pastor since 1978. In Washington, DC, God allowed me to minister at the Capitol Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church to some of the most powerful people in

America—from senators and congresspeople to several who sat in the Oval Office.

The church I pastor now, the Palm Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in Palm Bay, Florida, is a very loving and supportive church, and it has been my honor to proclaim the three angels’ messages from the Palm Bay pulpit for twenty-three years, more years than all of the other churches I pastored combined.

JB: What have you found to be the most demanding task in ministry?

WP: I think the most demanding task in ministry has been preparing relevant, Christ-centered sermons and devotionals every week to help my members grow to be more like the character of Christ.

In the seminary at Andrews University, they taught us that for every minute you preach a new, well-researched, inspirational sermon, you need an hour of preparation.

Tending to the spiritual and emotional needs of a congregation can be very demanding, and striking the right balance is always a work in progress.

It also can be intimidating when you realize that, because of the technologies used today, every sermon you preach will be archived and shown around the world until Jesus comes again. Long after you are gone, somebody’s life will be touched or transformed by the Spirit-led moments you spent praying and studying God’s Word.

Truly, no time spent in service to God is ever wasted, and every minute you invest in preparing to teach and preach has eternal implications.

JB: In this modern era, what tools have you discovered that are time-saving but still thorough?

WP: First, I thank God for the arrival of word processor technology. That meant I no longer wrote my sermons out by hand and had to rewrite them over when I made mistakes. I was an early adopter of Bible study software programs like Logos, e-Sword, and YouVersion. These have been a blessing, but I really wanted something that was totally aligned with Seventh-day Adventist theology and doctrine.

I learned that Charles Spurgeon, the most prolific preacher in modern history—who preached about four thousand sermons in his lifetime—developed a time-saving method to

help him in ministry. When he chose the topic on which he wanted to speak, he would send three or four assistants to his library to research the topic and leave the open books on his desk, so his time would be spent in study and not searching for the content to study.

Because I did not have assistants like Charles Spurgeon, I knew I had to utilize every available technology in my research and preparation. Having flown about four and a half million miles alone in ministry, most weeks of my life I was on an airplane, so I did not have access to my reference library.

There are many resources, like Sermons.com, out there. One day, though, in the late 1990s, out of sheer desperation, I decided to do something different and tore apart the books I used most often for sermons and devotionals. I bought two rudimentary scanners and spent a year and a half scanning hundreds of thousands of pages into text files.

I secured a license for a search engine, imported those text files into my search engine, and built my own personalized Phipps CD-ROM. I was then able to take my reference library on the road and study and research for sermons and devotionals on my laptop—often at forty thousand feet in the air.

When I was preaching on grace, the technology allowed me to have virtual Spurgeon assistants working on my behalf, searching for the content I would then study and pray about.

JB: Now that AI technology has arrived, how is it helpful to pastors?

WP: Pastors must be meticulous when using general AI technology. When you ask AI like ChatGPT to research and build a presentation on a question of faith and Bible teaching, you have to watch carefully to make sure the responses are in line with biblical teaching and our doctrinal beliefs.

My team and I recognized that and decided to develop a sermon research building tool called Gospel Truth AI. It is different from other large language models like ChatGPT, Copilot, and Claude in several key ways. I liken ChatGPT and other large language models to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That's because, at super speeds, it has read almost everything—good and evil—and has in its memory bank content that does not align with biblical teaching.

We trained Gospel Truth AI to only give responses that are in line with the Bible. We have also trained it to only search from vetted, trusted Adventist resources like the SDA [Seventh-day Adventist] Bible Commentary and Ellen White's writings. It then organizes the information gathered from these trusted sources and presents it to you in a coherent fashion.

Gospel Truth AI has become the most powerful inspirational tool I have ever used in the preparation of my sermons and devotionals.

JB: What about pastors who preach series—how can AI tools help?

WP: If you ask most language models like ChatGPT to tell you more on the same topic or theme of your original search, you will soon find they begin to flounder. That is because they skim the surface for content gems; they do not mine and dig deeper.

Through the use of a particular linguistic search algorithm, Gospel Truth AI is able to dig deeper with each search for more nuggets and biblical grounded perspectives. Every time you ask it, "Tell me more," it finds more angles and views to enrich your series of sermons and devotionals.

Most people who use it say that it performs much better than other large language models by staying true to biblical values and doctrines.

JB: So appropriate AI tools can truly be time-saving?

WP: Considering that it takes thirty to forty hours of preparation for each new sermon, appropriate AI tools can save you up to twenty hours each week and enhance the quality of content. For example, with Gospel Truth AI you can actually create sermons and devotionals in almost any major language on earth—like Spanish, French, Portuguese, Hindi, Russian, and Chinese. You can also have the sermons and devotionals read to you in those languages.

We trained it to write using the dimensions of communication and literary approaches and language methods Jesus used in His sermon on the mount, increasing the impact you can make on the hearts of those listening to your presentations. Each month there is the ability to create a hundred sermons and devotionals. Just creating five or ten on the same topic provides you with tremendous research on the theme you are preaching on.¹

JB: What final words do you have for pastors today?

WP: I was so inspired when I learned that when John the revelator was banished to the Isle of Patmos, it was after he had grown old in the service of his Lord that he received more communications from heaven than he had received during all the former years of his life. And they were communications for the church for all future time.

That means to me that John the revelator, from the Isle of Patmos, was able to reach and impact more people for the Lord than in all of his previous years of ministry combined. The technology that aided John to reach us—who would live in his future—was the technology of the printed page. Thank God for the technology of the printed page. If John only reached the residents who lived on Patmos, we would not have today the three angels' messages.

I believe technology is only a tool, and we must ask the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us as we proclaim the Word of God in these last days. And we must bear in mind that as we near the second coming of Jesus—like John the

revelator—what we create in minutes can now reach millions of people in seconds. With access to these technologies, every pastor, from any corner of the globe, has the potential to reach more people for the kingdom of God than all the previous years of their ministry combined.

Pastors, I appeal to you, that just as we adopted radio, television, and internet technologies for the kingdom of God, will you ask God to show you how to use these emerging technologies—that are now at our disposal—responsibly and prayerfully?

May God use all of us to fulfill the promise of Jesus found in Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Maranatha; even so, come Lord Jesus.



1 Learn more about Gospel Truth AI at <https://www.gospeltruth.ai/>.

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Our need for **total reliance upon God**

CHARISSA TOROSSIAN



The news hit everybody like a sonic boom. Second Chronicles 14:9 reports, “Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah.”¹ For 10 years, the sirens had not sounded in Judah. Now they screamed of the enemy’s advance from every corner. Nearly twice the size of Asa’s army and stopping just about four miles (six kilometers) short of the capital (Jerusalem) in Mareshah, Zerah’s forces threatened Judah with obliteration.

So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. And Asa cried out to the Lord his God, and said, “Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!”

So the Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled (vv. 10–12).

When life knocks you to your knees, pray there—for the right thing. Asa had an army filled with “mighty men of valor” (v. 8), choice men, armed with the finest weaponry. The king could have relied on his military might, but instead he fell on his knees before God, declaring, “Armies are not the decisive thing, oh God. *You* are!”

God broke their power

In answer to Asa’s prayer and complete reliance upon the Lord, God broke the power of Ethiopia. And as Judah’s rejoicing troops returned to Jerusalem, laden with spoil, a man filled with the Holy Spirit met them.

Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. . . . But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord (2 Chron. 15:1–8).

Azariah, whose name means "Yahweh has helped," tells Asa that because he had made it his lifestyle to seek the Lord, God had been able to bless him. God had fought for Judah and won. Therefore, the victory and the glory were all God's. And it still is all God's. There has never been, nor will there ever be, room for human glory in the spread of the gospel.

It is important to notice Azariah's instruction to Asa: "Be strong and do not let your hands be weak" (v. 7). The Christian's strength lies always in seeking and clinging to God. It was the key to revival in Asa's day, and it has not changed. Asa was so encouraged by the "preaching" of God's prophet that he threw himself into the work of purifying Judah. Israelites longing for godly leadership in the Northern Kingdom flocked to Judah to join in the movement.

Pentecost

Scripture reports that they gathered for a national convocation on the fifteenth day of the third month. According to the Bible, Passover always occurred on the fourteenth day of the first month. Exactly 50 days later, or whenever the barley and wheat harvests were ripe (Lev. 23:15–21), the Feast of Weeks convened. This means that the convocation described here during the third month was most probably the occasion for the Feast of Weeks, otherwise known in Greek as Pentecost (meaning "50").

Now when we think of Pentecost today, we remember 120 believers of one accord, in an upper room, with tongues of fire above their heads. But the first Pentecost marked Israel's earliest national convocation after the Exodus, when God presented the Ten Commandments to Israel on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:1). There He proclaimed the Ten Commandments to make clear three things to His people:

1. The nature of sin—"for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV).
2. The qualities of the law of righteousness (Rom. 9:31).
3. The inescapability of the judgment (James 2:12), for we shall all be judged by the perfect law of liberty.

In the book of Acts, on the last day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church in response to Jesus' promise, reinforcing what happened at Sinai. He came "to convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8).

The plot thickens

Returning to Asa's time,

Then they [the people of Judah] entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. Then they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around" (2 Chron. 15:12–15).

For 20 more years, God's sunny providence shone upon Asa in every direction. For 35 years, the king walked with God and enjoyed the blessings of an abiding relationship with Christ! Even though I have never been one for fairy tales, I want so much to be able to say, "And Asa lived happily ever after." But, instead, the plot thickens.

One day, Baasha, king of Israel, barricaded Judah by fortifying Ramah, a city just 7.4 miles (12 kilometers) north of Jerusalem. The military blockade had the potential of seriously crippling Judah's economy. Something had to be done, or the nation would starve because Ramah was right along a vital trade route.

Being a fool

Unfortunately, no prayer meeting took place this time. Instead, 2 Chronicles 16:2, 3 tells us that Asa bribed Judah's archenemy, the king of Syria, with temple money to attack Israel from the north as a distraction and get Baasha off his back. Did it work? It did. "Now it happened, when

Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work" (v. 5).

Asa's "two-front war" plan forced his enemies' withdrawal. He avoided war, made strategic allies, and established himself as a great leader, and he did it all by himself! I can see him now, having a Nebuchadnezzar moment, thinking: "Is not this great Judah that I have saved?" Strategically, politically, and militarily, it had been a brilliant move. But spiritually, it was a disaster. The prophet Hanani came and said to him, "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. . . . For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars" (vv. 7–9).

They say that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and Asa was such a fool. Oh yes, news analysts might have crowned him "the most brilliant politician in Judah's history." But heaven assessed the situation differently. Nothing is hidden from God. In the entire world there is not one heart that can escape His gaze. "At a glance He takes in our position; not a sorrow, trial, or temptation visits us without exciting His notice and sympathy."² And God is always looking for the same kind of people—those who have a heart completely surrendered to Him. "It is for lack of this that we remain unhelped, and spend our days in the midst of wars."³

Refusing correction

Norman Vincent Peale stated, "The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism."⁴ This was Asa's problem. Asa should have fallen to his knees, confessed the error of his ways, and prayed for repentance. Instead, Scripture records, "Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time" (v. 10).

Asa did not just get angry with Hanani the prophet; in the haughtiness of his heart, he even put the prophet in prison! But you cannot abolish the message by getting rid of the messenger. It was all downhill from there. No wonder author Ellen G. White wrote, "I have been shown that the greatest reason why the people of God are now found in this state of spiritual blindness is that they will not receive correction."⁵

Some pleaded with Asa to listen to the prophet, so the king oppressed them too. What began as just a bad day turned into a fundamental characteristic of his life.

And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.

So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign (vv. 12, 13).

His feet told the story of his heart. A once mighty monarch who had walked with God now walked away from Him and never walked again. Nothing is worse than losing God. Asa was not the first general to win the battle but afterward lose the war.

Finish well

A great lesson is to be learned here. Like Asa, we are at risk the moment we start taking for granted our desperate need for God. "It is not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of self is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. . . . Therefore, there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the soul before Him. *Only by constant renunciation of self and dependence on Christ can we walk safely.*"⁶

God's desire for us, especially as pastors, is to finish well. Asa did not finish well, but by God's grace we can. How? We simply need to rely fully, daily, upon the Lord in our ministry or whatever we do. All the resources of heaven are available to support the person whose heart is fully committed to Him. If we seek Him, He will be found.



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 F. B. Meyer, "Devotional for November 27," *Our Daily Homily*, oChristian.com, <http://devotionals.ochristian.com/F.B.-Meyer-Devotional.-Our-Daily-Homily/1127.shtml>.
- 3 Meyer.
- 4 In C. Westerhaus-Renfrow, "How to Successfully Give Constructive Feedback," *Indianapolis Business Journal* 39, no. 34 (2018): 7.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1885), 255; emphasis added.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 159; emphasis added.

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Revival series kindles spiritual renewal at Andrews University and beyond

BERRIEN SPRINGS, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES

Hundreds gathered for the in-person MORE+ revival at Andrews University's Pioneer Memorial Church, in Berrien Springs, Michigan, engaging in prayer walks, testimonies, and worship. The weeklong experience culminated in deep spiritual commitments, including a powerful student baptism.

The journey for MORE+ began in March 2024 when **Esther Knott**, associate ministerial director for the North American Division, attended a Back to the Altar retreat. Back to the Altar is an initiative spearheaded by **Dwain Esmond**, an associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, and now being conveyed worldwide by the General Conference Ministerial Association.

At this retreat Knott was especially blessed by fresh concepts of revival and discipleship from **Don MacLafferty**, president of In Discipleship Ministries and a volunteer for the General Conference Back to the Altar initiative. After weeks of extensive travel and personal spiritual struggles, Knott found herself yearning for more of God. She and her husband, **Ron Knott**, director of the Andrews University Press, committed to deepening their spiritual walk and making changes in their worship habits, media consumption, and time spent on electronic devices.

Taking the Back to the Altar challenge to heart, the Knotts shared the experience with **Shane Anderson**, pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church, and that church's co-head elders. This initiative grew into a movement, leading small groups through the

revival and discipleship experience. By September and October, 30 Pioneer Memorial Church elders had participated, laying the groundwork for a broader churchwide revival. Under MacLafferty's leadership, students, faculty, church members, and visitors were brought together in an inter-generational experience of prayer, testimony, and worship.

From daily prayer walks at 7:30 A.M. to transformative evening meetings, attendees immersed themselves in a movement of faith that emphasized deep surrender to Christ. The week included interactive Scripture study, small group discussions, and a special service at Andrews Academy, where students were challenged to share their faith within 24 hours. The experience culminated in the baptism of a senior who felt God's call in a powerful way, reinforcing the revival's lasting impact on the next generation. MORE+ was more than a conference—it was a spiritual awakening,



Don MacLafferty (center) at Andrews University

Photo: Darren Henslop

urging all who attended to pursue more of Jesus in their daily lives.

The foundation for the MORE+ revival was laid long before the first meeting began. Dedicated intercessors covered the Andrews campus with



prayer for months, paving the way for God's movement among students, faculty, and community members. MacLafferty emphasized the critical nature of this preparation, stating, "Without inviting God to move powerfully eight months before, this would have been simply an interesting, interactive meeting but with no power."

A team of 131 prayer partners committed to praying for 10 Pioneer families each day throughout February and March. Two days before the revival, MacLafferty invited these prayer partners to an afternoon meeting. Expecting around 20 attendees, Knott was overwhelmed when 70 people showed up, signaling an unprecedented hunger for revival.

It was clear from the opening night that the Holy Spirit was at work. Attendance surged as the week progressed, with more than 500 people attending nightly—twice surpassing 600. Each evening was filled with worship, in-depth Scripture engagement, and prayer sessions. Attendees, young and old, were not just spectators but active participants in a journey of revival.

Challenges and triumphs in planning the revival

Conflicts with university events became apparent as the revival approached. Recognizing the significance of the movement, **John Wesley Taylor V**, president of Andrews University, adjusted the university's schedule to accommodate the revival. His willingness to prioritize spiritual renewal underscored the deep need for revival across the campus and community.

Looking back, Knott sees God's providence at work. "When I was a student at Toronto Junior Academy in the early seventies, there was a revival at Andrews University, and students from Andrews came to my school to share their testimonies about Jesus. That experience had a profound impact on my young life and laid the foundation for my answering God's call to pastoral ministry in 1980. For decades Jesus has been waiting for us to cry out to Him so He can answer our prayer to 'do it again.' We have a people who are hungry and thirsty for more." [Stanton Witherspoon, freelance journalist, *Lake Union Herald*]

Prophecy Odyssey: Divine keys for city evangelism

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES

Prophecy Odyssey began with a question: "If you were going to broadcast an evangelistic series to the world, where would you host it?"

Doug Batchelor, president of Amazing Facts International, asked **Ted Wilson**, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Wilson never hesitated: "New York City. I have a great burden for the cities of the world."

Neither man had the resources needed, but they recognized God's call and decided to go forward by faith. They were guided and encouraged by Ellen White's insistence that the world's cities must hear the three angels' messages. She said the most about New York, stating that the work done there should be a "symbol of the work the Lord desires to see done in the world."¹

Wilson, who worked in New York City as a young pastor and launched the Mission to the Cities initiative there, said, "Cities are not easy places to work, but it is a great blessing to share Christ with the people of the city. I am delighted that Amazing Facts accepted the burden for New York City."

Prophecy Odyssey, a fifteen-part Bible prophecy seminar, was held in downtown New York in collaboration with the Greater New York Conference (GNYC) and General Conference from September 20 to October 5, 2024.

"We started praying. A lot!" Batchelor said. "The Lord opened the door for us to return to the Manhattan Center's largest venue (instead of the smaller one where I preached Millennium of Prophecy twenty-five years ago)." Batchelor's engaging presentations, illustrated by virtual reality graphics, brought the truths of Daniel and Revelation to life for all who attended.

"I haven't missed a day," said **Ronald Benjamin**, who grew up as a Seventh-day Adventist and recently returned to the faith. "Pastor Doug



Photo: Allen Ho

Prophecy Odyssey meetings in New York

explains things clearly. It's been eye-opening and reinforced what I already knew, but it's helped me put more emphasis on it. I wish this could happen more regularly. People are hungry for it."

Over 800 attendees gathered at the Manhattan Center on weekdays. Weekends brought 1,400 church members and their guests. Over 500 New Yorkers joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church through baptism or profession of faith, and two churches, Chinese and Spanish, have been planted.

"We're seeing results in parts of the city where we've never had growth before," said **Alanzo Smith**, president of the Greater New York Conference. But in addition to bringing Bible truth to the people of New York, Prophecy Odyssey was broadcast live in English and Spanish on 3ABN, AFTV, and Hope Channel International, touching an international audience of potential millions. The meetings were also posted on Facebook and YouTube, amassing over 48 million views worldwide.

For the first time, Amazing Facts utilized advanced artificial intelligence to translate the

series into 17 of the world's most common languages, providing a "day of Pentecost" experience for viewers around the globe.

Thousands of people expressed their appreciation as they watched online. One viewer wrote: "I was suicidal as this series started. Watching has completely turned things around for me and has given me hope and something to look forward to and believe in. From the bottom of my heart, thank you."

Just the Beginning

Prophecy Odyssey was designed to make it easy for churches to use in local evangelism efforts. The Prophecy Odyssey recordings are available free of charge to any church or group that wants to host the 15-part evangelistic series for their community. The up-to-date messages and Bible lessons make it a perfect option for churches wanting to reach out in today's world. All meetings are available in 18 languages (with more coming). Companion Bible studies are available in English, Spanish, and many other languages.



Amazing Facts also offers a set of curated marketing and planning resources to help churches conduct successful evangelistic outreaches with Prophecy Odyssey. “We are excited to be able to offer these free resources to churches as an evangelistic tool,” says **Teri Fode**, Amazing Facts marketing director.

“I am convinced that what we have seen so far is just the beginning of all God is going to do through these meetings,” Batchelor said. “People will watch them for years to come

online, and churches can use them for local evangelism. There will continue to be a great harvest from Prophecy Odyssey.”

“I pray that every church member will have a burden for the people of the cities,” Elder Wilson states. “Jesus is coming soon!” [Shenalyn Page, Amazing Facts International]

1 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 385.

Attendees excited for Prophecy Odyssey meetings



Photo: Alden Ho

John Bradshaw celebrates the North American Division 2025 emphasis on evangelism

STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT, UNITED STATES

Abraham Jules, president of the Atlantic Union Conference, welcomed attendees to the 2025 SEEDS Festival of the Laity on March 29 and introduced guest speaker **John Bradshaw**, president of It Is Written.

“The Bible says we are in a war, and . . . if this doesn’t sober you up, nothing will,” said Bradshaw. He then called every church member to recommit to the cause of sharing the gospel and to join efforts to reach others for Jesus.

“There is a great work for all of us to be doing,” Bradshaw emphasized. He then shared how happy he is about the North American Division’s Pentecost 2025 initiative. He reported that so far, 5,200 local churches are conducting outreach and evangelism activities, well above the goal of 3,000. “[There are] churches and groups already baptizing people,” he said. “And the church is putting millions into this initiative. [People] are not just talking about it; they are



Photo: Marcos Paseggi

It Is Written president John Bradshaw

doing it and anticipating great things are going to take place.”

A presentation by pastor and author **Walton Rose** sought to help understand the modern complexities of sharing the gospel in a society that “increasingly functions without reference to God.”

“How can the church communicate God’s message to younger generations, which view organized religion differently, as they seek authenticity over tradition?” Rose asked.

How do we reach others in an environment in which “religious apathy and active skepticism are rising” and in which “many view faith claims with suspicion rather than interest”? he wondered.

Rose called Adventist Church members to “reset evangelism,” to learn to share “good news, not fake news,” with this generation. Among several tips, one way of doing it, he explained, is to initially focus on the first angel’s message of Revelation 14, which calls us to share the everlasting gospel by helping people to learn how to worship God and “give him glory” (v. 7, NIV).


“I think we have taken for granted the good news of the first angel’s message,” Rose said. “But congregations who have learned to share the everlasting gospel are growing by leaps and bounds.”

In that sense, “Jesus Christ must become the center of our sharing, no matter the specific doctrine we are discussing,” he emphasized.

Rose quoted Jesus’ promise in John 12:32: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (KJV).

Bradshaw reminded festival attendees that the Adventist Church “is about the power of those in the pews.”

Bradshaw stated, “If we can get out of the pews and into the mission field, [mission] work will blow up, and we will be hastening the return of Jesus Christ!”

He concluded, “The good thing about Pentecost 2025—or not—is that God can use and will use anyone, no matter your age, your race, your educational background, your talent or lack thereof. God can use every one of us to make a significant difference for the kingdom of heaven.” [Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*] 



How to lead a smooth church board meeting

L leading a church board meeting can be intimidating and daunting. But with some practical tips and careful planning, it does not need to be. By following the following steps, you can run an efficient, smooth, and positive meeting.

1. Prepare thoroughly

Preparation constitutes at least 50 percent of a successful board meeting. Do your due diligence in advance: Pray, make the necessary calls, bring people on board, understand the issues at stake and the history of the issues to be discussed, and ensure you are ready with the background information. Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.

2. Be informed

Lacking accurate information or being misinformed can undermine your credibility and prevent you from attaining the desired results. Be the most informed person in the room. Prepare thoroughly by gathering reliable data in advance—solid facts often resolve conflicts and drive results. As someone wisely said, “Having the right data is everything; all other arguments are merely supplementary.”

3. Create an agenda

Arriving at the meeting without a well-thought-out, well-organized agenda not only shows your lack of interest and lack of experience but also asks for trouble. As the pastor and board chair, you hold the privilege and responsibility of setting the agenda. Members can request agenda items to be included, but make it clear that last-minute agenda items will not be entertained. Ask board members to submit agenda items the week before the meeting but no later than two days prior. A well-thought-out agenda will help you be organized, keep on track, and avoid unwanted or unvetted issues.

4. Prioritize discipleship and evangelism

Start your agenda with the topic of “evangelism” before moving on to other agenda items. The *Church Manual* says, “The board is responsible to: 1. Ensure that there is an active, ongoing *discipleship* plan in place, which includes both spiritual nurture and *outreach* ministries. This is the most important item for the board’s attention.”¹ “The board should permit no other business to interfere with planning for evangelism.”² Following these instructions keeps the focus on the church’s mission, sets a constructive tone for the meeting, and shows the clear priority of the pastor.

5. Meet with elders in advance

There is nothing more challenging than arriving at the board meeting to find that your elders—the foundation of your board—are not aligned with you or, even worse, are opposed to your ideas. Building consensus and securing their buy-in before the meeting is crucial. Take the time to discuss the agenda with them beforehand, ensuring they understand the issues and provide feedback. When elders see that you have considered their input and invested in thoughtful discussion for the good of the church, they are far more likely to support you and your initiatives.

6. Schedule monthly meetings

In today’s fast-paced world, people have busy schedules, so a monthly church board meeting is typically sufficient to address church business effectively. Meeting too often can lead to burnout, causing members to lose interest or even resign. Also keep meetings concise and focused, lasting no more than an hour to an hour and a half. Avoid turning board meetings into extended sermons, Bible studies, or prayer vigils. Instead, maintain a clear agenda and ensure discussions remain productive and on-topic. Respecting members’ time fosters engagement and long-term commitment.

7. Church board members are volunteers

Church board members are not your employees but volunteers. They willingly offer their time,

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energy, and resources out of love for the Lord and the church, not for a paycheck or obligation. As a pastor, avoid treating them as subordinates. Instead, honor their dedication by treating them with respect and gratitude. Acknowledge their hard work, thank them sincerely for their contributions, and affirm the value they bring to the church.

8. Establish and follow rules

Church boards, like any board, function best when order is established. Familiarize yourself and the board with Robert's Rules of Order. Ask members to raise their hands to speak, allow time for comments, and take votes as needed. Lead with a balance of firmness and grace to keep things on track.

9. Avoid confrontation

Avoid confrontations at all costs. The pastor should never engage in strong disputes during a board meeting. The problem is not having

disagreements during the board but *how* you handle them. Handle disagreements with professionalism and grace to set an example of Christlike behavior.

10. Ensure balanced representation

Aim for a balanced board that includes representation from various departments and generations, including women, youth, and young adults, to bring diverse perspectives to the table.

These pointers are not exhaustive, but they will help keep your board meetings productive, smooth, and conflict-free. Remember to pray for God's guidance—His presence is essential for a fruitful meeting. Start preparing today (number one on the list!), and . . . lead with confidence.



1 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 20th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2022), 137; emphasis added.

2 *Church Manual*, 138.





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It's time to go home

With a shattered heart, Olivia walked through the rubble of what had once been her home. A terrible category 3 hurricane with sustained winds of 115 miles per hour (185 kilometers per hour) had destroyed everything—her house, peace, and hopes for the future. Tears filled her eyes as she searched the debris for anything to hold on to. Overwhelmed with grief, she cried, “I can’t believe it. It all happened so fast. My house is gone. I’m tired and cold. I want to go home, but I have no home.”

Watching this scene on the evening news, my heart ached. As pastors, we need to tell her—and our communities—you do have a home! Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In My Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1–3).¹ What an assurance! We are not forsaken. Jesus is coming to take us home.

The Bible reminds us: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20). On this earth disasters can destroy even the most beautiful home. That is why our focus must be on our eternal home.

The promise of Christ’s return

The Bible describes Christ’s return as spectacular and visible: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him” (Rev. 1:7). Some misunderstand this event because they interpret the Bible without allowing it to explain itself. Jesus said in Matthew 25:31 that He will return with all the angels in a great display of glory and power. He further describes His coming as visible, audible, and powerful: “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:27, NIV).

Pastor, the Bible leaves no doubt. The first time Jesus came, He arrived as a baby in a manger. But when He returns, He will come with power, fulfilling prophecy: “Then will appear the sign

of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30, NIV).

This verse reveals four truths:

1. We will see Jesus when He appears.
2. He will come on the clouds of heaven.
3. His return will be a display of power.
4. He will arrive in great glory.

Jesus will not return as a helpless child nor as a lamb to be slain. He is coming in power, and every person will witness it.

A day of joy and reunion

This is the great hope that is our privilege and duty to share. Whatever struggles we face today, all suffering will soon end. There will be no more sickness, no more pain. For those who put their trust in Jesus, disease will be eradicated, bodies will be restored, and we will rejoice because tears will be ended (Rev. 21:4).

If we could gather all the tears shed throughout history, they would form a river encircling the world. But suffering will end when Christ returns.

It is time to go home. But before we do, Jesus has given each of us, including pastors and church leaders, a mission—go and share the good news with the world. Every person, city, country, tribe, and language must hear the message—Jesus is coming again!

Let us prepare ourselves, our families, and our congregations to go because Jesus is coming soon.

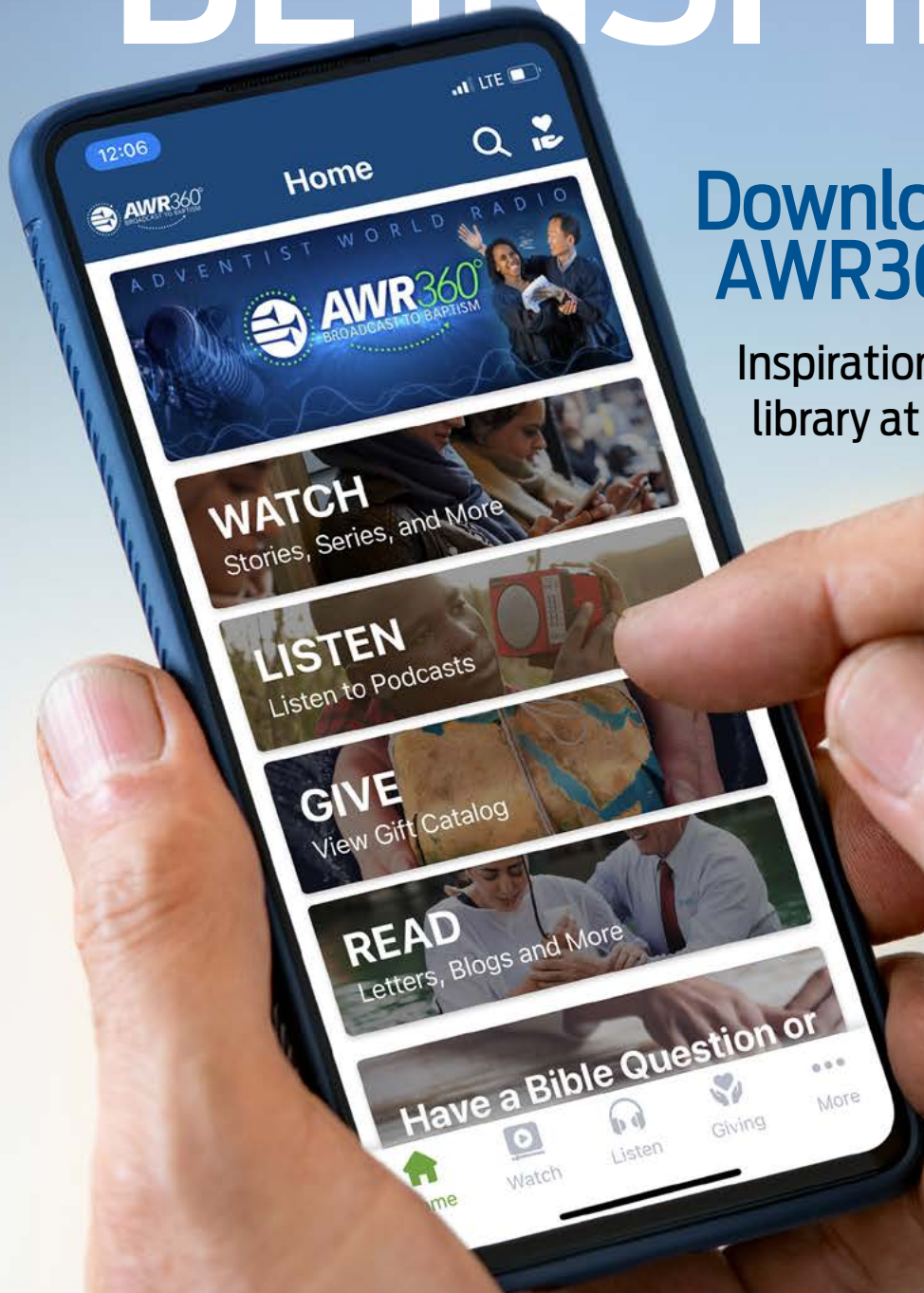
He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.”

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:20).



¹ Unless noted otherwise, Scripture is from the New King James Version.

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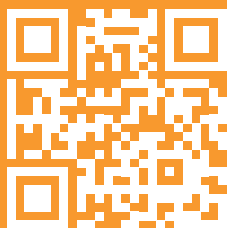
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