

# MINISTRY<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS  
SEPTEMBER 2009



## COVERED WITH BLOOD

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF EXODUS 12:7

# THE WORD... FOR THESE TIMES

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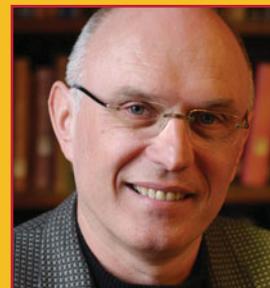
**Lawrence Geraty** is the President Emeritus of La Sierra University. He grew up as a citizen of the world in a Christian missionary family who ministered in China, Burma, Hong Kong, and Lebanon. Educated in seven different countries and various states across the USA set him on a lifelong course committed to the values of diversity. Lawrence Geraty earned a PhD with distinction from Harvard University in Hebrew Bible and biblical archaeology, taking examinations in 10 languages. In his notable scholarly career, Dr. Geraty has received numerous honors, including a Fulbright Fellowship and serving as advisor on archaeology to former Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan. As well as being president of several scholarly societies, he has also served as Professor of Archaeology and History of Antiquity at Andrews Theological Seminary, President of Atlantic Union College, and more recently President and Professor of Archaeology at La Sierra University.



**Marguerite Shuster** is the Harold John Ockenga Professor of Preaching and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. She joined the School of Theology faculty in 1992 after serving as an adjunct assistant professor. Her courses include Homiletics, Systematic Theology, Making Doctrine Live, and various preaching practica. Marguerite Shuster's published books include *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (2004), *Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett* (1991), and *Power, Pathology, Paradox: the Dynamics of Evil and Good* (1987). She also edited and completed Jewett's *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human* (1996) and has published many articles, sermons, chapters, and reviews. She is currently working on a long-term project on the doctrine of divine providence. Marguerite Shuster is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and served as an associate pastor for six years then a solo pastor for five years.



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## “THANKS FOR PUBLISHING THIS HELPFUL ARTICLE. IT IS WORTH READING MORE THAN ONCE.”

### Preaching

I appreciated the excellent article by Loren Seibold titled, “The Big Positive Purpose” (May 2009). Seibold identifies a common flaw in much preaching: a lack of clarity both in terms of the single dominant thought and the purpose for preaching the sermon.

I still remember the comment of a local church leader who was anxiously awaiting the arrival of a new pastor. He said, “Our former pastor was a good man, but he would speak for thirty minutes; and when he was done I had absolutely no idea what he was trying to say.” That’s tragic. As Seibold observes, people come to worship with real needs, real challenges, and real hopes. Preachers have a moral obligation to share a biblical message that is clear and relevant. Muddled preaching that lacks clarity of thought and purpose is totally unacceptable. Thanks for publishing this helpful article. It is worth reading more than once.

—Derek Morris, Apopka, Florida, United States

### Pastoral leadership

My thanks to Professor Patterson for his important article, “The Pastor as Proactive Leader” (May 2009). Reactive leadership is an oxymoron. It suggests that the leader is the one being led.

I’ve struggled with this issue as a new pastor, having this strong sense that I’m called to bring about meaningful change in my churches. However, I’ve found that the expectation of some is that I be little more than an inspirational speaker, visitor of the elderly, Sabbath School teacher, and board meeting chair. When I became a pastor, I did so in

order to lead the church in bringing the gospel to the world!

We need leaders who have the boldness, vision, and faith not to bend to the demands of the vocal minority; rather, to encourage pastors to make God-sized plans for their churches and mentor them as they execute these plans in a Christlike, compassionate way.

—Jonathan Martin, email

### Forgiveness

While reading Colin T. Richardson’s article on the topic of forgiveness (“Forgiveness: An Essential in Christian Life,” March 2009), I failed to find any reference to two crucial passages: Matthew 18:15 and Luke 17:3, 4. In these verses, Jesus plainly states that apologizing is a condition for being forgiven. Why was this not mentioned?

If we forgive every unrepentant perpetrator of inhumane acts, we simply appear to condone their behavior and make them think they have nothing for which to apologize. This applies to those who *know* they have done wrong. When Jesus prayed for the soldiers at the cross,

they did not know what they were doing. That is altogether different.

—H. L. Wipprecht, email

### Involving children in worship services

I just read Karen Holford’s wonderful article, “Simply Creative: Ways to Involve Children in Your Worship Services” (May 2009). Well written and practical, with references to resources from which I can gain more ideas.

Thank you for this helpful article. More practical articles like this would be great!

—Marilyn Östring, email

*Editor’s note: Ministry will publish a follow-up article, also written by Karen Holford, in an upcoming issue.*

### Demands placed upon pastors

James Cress’s article on visitation (“Visitation Expectation,” May 2009) was succinct yet powerful. As a pastor’s wife, I watch my husband put long and tedious hours into his ministry. Yet some people still make remarks about how “easy” the life of a pastor must be.

While it may well be that case somewhere (there may be a few pastors who collect a full-time paycheck for a ten-hour workweek), it certainly doesn’t depict most pastors. When members make derogatory comments about your spouse, the pastor, it’s difficult to respond in a gracious fashion, knowing that you really wish you could see your spouse more often.

Thank you, Pastor Cress, for this article.

—Sarah K. Asafei, Marietta, Georgia, United States





# Look for the blessings

Some days we feel as though challenges face us every moment. That whatever we touch, do, plan, or say presents another challenge. Sometimes it's true both for personal and ministerial responsibilities. What do you do on such a day?

"Look for the blessings," one of my good friends said to me recently. As he spoke those words, I listened to him respectfully, not only because he has lived more than 90 years or because we have been good friends for many years but because he has been a capable minister during his years of service.

PERHAPS WE JUST EXPECT THEM TO SPEAK WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND FAIL TO PAUSE LONG ENOUGH TO REALIZE THAT THEY LIVE AS A SOURCE OF BLESSING TO US.

## When to look for the blessings

When we are facing challenges, we must look for blessings, for if we don't, those challenges will overtake us. In fact, we should focus on blessings at all times. Blessings come from God who knows our needs, capabilities, and future.

Look for blessings when the situation seems hopeless, such as what the Israelites experienced when

they were slaves in Egypt. However, in the midst of their hopelessness, they celebrated the Passover. The Passover was much more than a ritual; it was God's way of blessing them in the midst of a crisis. (I invite you to read our lead article by L. S. Baker Jr., for an insightful interpretation of the Passover experience.)

We are two-thirds of the way through 2009, and perhaps you are tempted to dwell on all the reasons that exist to be discouraged. Focusing on the blessings will provide hope for our lives and call to ministry.

## Where to look for the blessings

Where do we find these blessings? Although we do not always see it, one of the sources includes the churches in which we serve. Every minister faces challenges; yet we all can testify that there are members in our congregations who go out of their way to bring blessings to us. I recall, in one of my churches, an older woman who went out of her way to always speak a word of encouragement. Perhaps her many years of living close to the Lord brought assurance to her own life, and she wanted to share God's blessings with me. I looked forward to hearing her words of encouragement.

There are also people in our communities who bring blessings to us. I recall a man in our New York City area neighborhood who never joined or even attended our church as far as I can remember. However, when he passed by the church, he would stop and speak words of encouragement to me. He thanked me for the ministry that the church was providing to the community. Now, years later, in my mind I can

still see his face and cherish those words of encouragement.

Often neglected sources of blessings in our lives are our families and friends. Perhaps we just expect them to speak words of encouragement and fail to pause long enough to realize that they live as a source of blessing to us. Listen to their words as they speak to you.

God, the One whom we worship, the One who has called us to ministry, is the ultimate Source of blessing. Let's face it. There are times when God is the only Source of blessing in our lives. The day I wrote this editorial, I read a story about a clergyman whose denomination and local congregation have been experiencing great difficulty. I empathized as I read the challenges they are facing—for all of us have faced challenges in our ministry. The challenges he faces seem insurmountable, and it will be hard for him to find blessings other than from God Himself. To him and to all, I remind us of the words of Proverbs 10:6, "Blessings crown the head of the righteous" (NIV). That kind of blessing comes from God alone.

"Look for the blessings," says my friend. Sometimes they are hard to find. I am one of those individuals who can go to a store to find a certain food item and walk up and down the aisles looking for it, but I just can't find it. At times I have stood at the very area that the product should be and actually is, but I still don't see it. I'm tempted to look somewhere else even though I know I'm standing where the product should be. If I stay where I belong, I will find the product. If I look to God for the blessings in my life, I will find them.

Look for the blessings, and you will find them. 

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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# Covered with blood:

## A better understanding of Exodus 12:7

Have you ever wondered why God asked the children of Israel to paint blood on the lintel and two doorposts of the door to their houses prior to the tenth plague (Exod. 12:7)? *Sure, you answer, it was to serve as a sign for the angel of death to pass over their houses* (Exod. 12:13).

That's true. But why the doorposts? Since no one is kept out of a dwelling by doorposts, why not paint something like a big cross on the door itself?

Egyptian archaeology provides an answer; one that can teach us a powerful lesson about salvation by faith alone.

### A corrupted nation

One source describes the Israelites as a people who "kept themselves a distinct race, having nothing in common with the Egyptians in customs or religion"<sup>1</sup> and thus retained knowledge of the Lord. This distinctiveness changed quickly after the death of Joseph and, by the time of the burning bush, Moses had fretted over the "blindness, ignorance, and unbelief of his people, many of whom were almost destitute of a knowledge of God."<sup>2</sup>

Also, according to the biblical record, by the time of the Exodus, the Israelites were no longer nomadic but were dwelling in houses (Exod. 12:22), an Egyptian custom that they had adopted. In short, the Israelites were becoming very much like the Egyptians. This point is important for understanding what follows.

### State of the dead

The Egyptians believed in an eternal afterlife, and their building practices (that the Israelites adopted) reflected this belief. Egyptians built their dwellings—from the lowly slave houses to the luxurious palaces—with the same building material, mud brick. Because this present life was temporary, they used temporary building materials for their homes; in contrast, they built their temples and tombs out of stone, reflective of an eternal afterlife. Any building that was to be used for the afterlife (temples and tombs) had to be made out of a material that would last forever.

The only exception to this architectural rule was the doorposts and lintels of their mud-brick homes. These were made out of stone. This construction reflected their belief in what constituted a human being. Egyptians believed in five parts of the human being.<sup>3</sup> If any of these parts ceased to exist, the person would cease to exist forever.

The physical body was one part and this is why mummification was important. The body had to survive death if the person in the afterlife was to survive. The shadow was another. They believed that the shadow demonstrated reality and was a very real part of a person's being. Another part was the *ka* or "life force." Christians call the force that gives us life "the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7). The fourth part of a person was the *ba* or "character traits." The last part of humanity in Egyptian thinking was the name.

### What is in a name?

We must not underestimate the importance of names. To the ancient Egyptian, the name was a very real part of a person. Therefore, any modern visitor to Egypt will find examples of names having been chiseled off the remaining statuary. Hatshepsut, for example, lived just prior to the Exodus and ruled Egypt for about 20 years after death cut her husband's reign short. Sometime after her death, however, Hatshepsut's name was scratched off many monuments, a clear effort to erase her from the afterlife.

This rationale appears in the writings of Moses, who was trained in the Egyptian way of life. When depicting the Exodus, he never mentions the name of Pharaoh, but deliberately gives the names of the two Hebrew midwives who were loyal to God (Exod. 1:15). They would live in the real afterlife, and so their names mattered; Pharaoh, who had rejected God (Exod. 5:2), would not. His name was, therefore, not important and could be forgotten in history.

To combat the potential loss of their names, royalty and nobility built great stone monuments with their names etched in as many places as possible. The less wealthy, of course, could not afford to do this. Instead, their houses, although primarily mud brick, were constructed with stone doorposts and lintels. On these were inscribed the name of the one who lived inside. Even if the house was destroyed, the chance of the name existing through the survival of the stone was very good.

And they were right—at least on their name surviving over time. As more and more of these doorposts and lintels are excavated, the names of their ancient owners remain intact. Egyptologists excavating the Delta region of Egypt (the northern marshland where the Israelites were dwelling) have discovered many of these early New Kingdom doorposts and lintels (dating to the time period of the Exodus).<sup>4</sup> The Delta region is very damp, so little besides stone has remained.

### Names covered in blood

When the Hebrews immigrated to Egypt, they lived in tents. However, over time they learned how to construct houses (probably as part of the labor they did as slaves) and used that knowledge to build their own more permanent structures, probably no differently than the Egyptians built theirs. When Moses returned to Egypt, he found his people living in houses, not tents. They had much to unlearn, and the

plagues were going to be part of that learning process.

The children of Israel had to learn of God’s superiority over the gods of Egypt, to which they had been exposed for four generations. God slowly taught them to trust Him, but after nine plagues, He had one more object lesson to teach.

When God required the Israelites to paint the blood they collected from the Passover lamb on the doorposts and lintels, He was asking them to cover their names with the blood of the lamb. By doing this, they were taught the rudiments of salvation. Their names on stone did not ensure life in the hereafter; only the blood of the Lamb could do that. In fact, at least one member of their family would not survive the night without it.

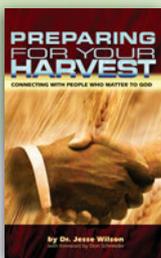
We, of course, have to learn the same lesson. It matters where our name is written. “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15, NKJV). This book is also called, “the

Lamb’s Book of Life” (Rev. 21:27). To have our names written in that book is not hard; we simply need to accept the Lamb’s blood, which takes the place of our own.

Of course, there is more to our walk with God than this, but it all starts here. The Israelites began their Exodus out of Egypt by putting the blood of the Passover lamb over their names, and then began their journey following God. It is the same for us. Our path may be long and hard, but we can avoid destruction the same way the Israelites avoided destruction—by beginning our journey with our names covered with the blood of the Lamb. 

1 Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets: As Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 242.  
 2 Ibid., 252.  
 3 For an informative essay on this topic, see James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 79–81.  
 4 For some examples of these, see Labib Habachi, *Tell El-Dab’a I: Tell El-Dab’a and Qantir the Site and Its Connection With Avaris and Piramesse* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001), 40–43, 53–55.

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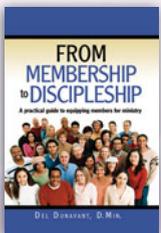


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Mark A. Finley is a vice president at the Seventh-day Adventists world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



# Evangelism's big picture: From baptism to discipleship

Christ's great commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) involves much more than baptizing new converts. Any approach to evangelism that focuses primarily on the number of people baptized misses the mark. Jesus' commission to His followers was not merely to baptize, but to make disciples—to develop faith-filled, praying Christians who are daily growing in grace, studying His Word, worshiping with His people, and witnessing to the glory of His name. When the church fails to nurture new converts, the church fails in the mission of Christ. Evangelism is incomplete without a comprehensive strategy of nurture and discipleship.

The Annual Council<sup>1</sup> of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2003 voted on a document on evangelism and church growth titled, "Evangelism and Church Growth—From Baptism to Discipleship." The document sounded this note of alarm: "There is ample evidence and growing concern that evangelistic success does not always translate into proportionate growth in discipleship. In far too many instances there has been a dramatic loss of attendance and membership within a relatively short time following the evangelism."<sup>2</sup>

Baptism is not some magic formula to solve all spiritual problems or some panacea to deliver people from all their difficulties. Baptism does not signify the end of a spiritual journey but the beginning of a new life of fellowship with Christ in the context of His church.

## The Acts model

The New Testament church exploded in growth. Three thousand were baptized on the Day of Pentecost alone (Acts 2:41). The evangelistic zeal of these early Christians was unabated as "believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5:14).<sup>3</sup> These committed believers were so passionate about sharing the story of their resurrected Lord that "daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). Their teaching and preaching powerfully impacted first-century society, and "the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly" (Acts 6:7).

In Acts, chapter 7, Stephen chose to die rather than cease sharing the Jesus he loved so deeply. Even in death, he witnessed for his Lord. The disciples placed priority on winning the lost as Acts 8:25 declares, "So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."

The church grew so rapidly that new churches were planted throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31), and within a few short years, the Christian church grew from a small band of believers to tens of thousands. This rapid evangelistic growth necessitated a carefully thought-through process of nurture to enable new believers to become strong disciples. Luke consistently records, not only baptisms in Acts, but the methodology of the

early church in nurturing these new converts to Christianity.

After the Pentecostal baptism of 3,000, Luke states, "[T]hey continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). This passage lists three clear elements of New Testament nurture: repeated doctrinal instruction, social fellowship, and a personal devotional life of prayer. Verse 46 adds a fourth element: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple." Corporate worship was a vital part of the nurturing process. These new converts were not baptized and left on their own but were nurtured by the church. When Paul was converted, he was led to Ananias who mentored him for three years in Damascus. Similarly, Cornelius was led to Peter to be nurtured and to grow in his newfound faith. Throughout Acts, strong evidence shows that the disciples genuinely cared for the large number of new converts who were coming into the church. The disciples nurtured these new believers in small groups, prayer, and Bible study. They emphasized the importance of corporate worship and praised God together (Acts 2:42; 4:31, 32).

The disciples also were concerned about the social and physical needs of these new converts. The early Christian church was a caring church, with members revealing love in action as they met one another's needs (Acts 6:1–7). The more they shared their life and faith, the more the church grew. It is a divine law of spiritual life that the more we give our faith away, the more it increases.

## God is a nurturing God

Nurture flows from the heart of a loving God who desires to see those who have just come to faith grow in Him. He is the dedicated Physician who tenderly cares for His patients. He nurses each one to health. He applies the healing balm until they are whole (Jer. 8:22). He is the loving Parent who instructs, guides, corrects, and disciplines His children. Even if they fail, He never gives up (Isa. 49:15). He is the Good Shepherd who cares for His flock, and battles against the ravenous wolves who want to destroy the sheep. His overriding concern is the safety and well-being of His flock (Ps. 23; Luke 15:1–7; John 10:11–16).

Thus, nurture is deeply embedded in the very nature of God's character because He is more concerned about making disciples than counting baptisms.

## Discipleship: A process

Discipleship is a process. It does not occur instantly at conversion and is not complete at baptism. Any evangelistic plan that does not include a comprehensive strategy to nurture and disciple new converts is incomplete. When the number of people baptized becomes the criterion for success rather than people growing in Jesus as disciples, the Great Commission becomes distorted.

If the goal of evangelism is to develop disciples, how can the church implement the principles of Acts in the twenty-first century to nurture new believers? Luke makes one thing clear in Acts: it is possible to have large numbers of converts—tens of thousands—and not have high apostasies. We cannot excuse our complacency about winning the lost with the excuse that we are more interested in quality converts than the number we baptize. It is not either-or. It is both-and.

A careful study of the Acts model reveals three critical aspects in the life of the new believer: the convert's relationship with God, with the church, and with the community.

*Relationship with God.* If new converts are going to grow into faith-filled, productive disciples, their relationship with God is paramount. This relationship grows through our private devotional life and in fellowship with other Christians as we pray and study God's Word together. When the personal devotional life is weak, with little serious Bible study, the spiritual life withers and dies.

For the last 40 years, I have been conducting major evangelistic meetings around the world. During this period of time, I have seen thousands come to Jesus and rejoice in His truth. When local congregations have implemented the discipleship principles outlined in Acts, apostasies generally have been quite low.

Here are some things we have discovered about helping new believers in their relationship with God. Immediately after baptism, we seek to find a spiritual guardian for each new believer. Our goal includes finding spiritually minded church members with like interests and a similar background to the one baptized. The established church member becomes a friend and mentor for the new member. The week after the individual's baptism, the spiritual guardian visits the new member's home and delivers the book *Steps to Christ*.<sup>4</sup> He or she shares what Jesus means to him or her and encourages the new believer to begin reading a few pages from *Steps to Christ* each day. We find *Steps to Christ* especially helpful for new converts. The first six chapters deal primarily with justification and the assurance of salvation, while the last seven deal with sanctification and growth in Christ. The spiritual guardian offers to visit the new convert weekly to study selected pages and pray together. The spiritual guardian may also invite his or her new friend to a small Bible study group to participate in weekly studies on Christian growth.

To also help new believers in their relationship with God, enroll them in a new believer's class to re-study the great teachings of the

Bible. Although they may grasp the essential truths of Scripture the first time around, at least some of these truths will be hazy in their minds. Do not assume that merely because an individual has been recently baptized that they understand each new biblical truth fully. Repeating these truths a second time fixes them in the mind of the new believer and anchors their faith.

In all of our evangelistic meetings, we recommend that pastors begin either a midweek Bible class or a Sabbath morning class for new converts to review the message. Often they use the book *Studying Together* as a tool to help these new believers mark their Bibles on the key Bible truths. In our small group ministry, we have used *Unsealing Daniel's Mysteries*, a series of lessons in pamphlet form on the book of Daniel, focusing especially on the character of God and the character qualities necessary to live in the end times. These studies deepen faith, encourage faithfulness, and enrich the devotional life.<sup>5</sup>

*Relationship with the church.* The early church was a worshipping church. The believers met together to hear God's Word, sing praises to Him, pray together, fellowship with one another, and share what God had done in their lives. These times of worship, praise, and fellowship were moments of great encouragement for these new believers (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 13:44; 14:27; 16:13; Eph. 5:19, 20). If new converts consistently miss corporate worship and Sabbath worship, their spiritual growth will be stunted and their faith will be aborted. God's plan includes believers growing in the context of a community of faith. All successful plans for the nurture of new converts involve ensuring the new converts' attendance at weekly Sabbath worship services. This necessitates attendance tracking.

The Good Shepherd knew the difference between 99 sheep and 100 sheep. You cannot tell the difference between 100 sheep and 99 sheep by merely looking—you must

count. After each major evangelistic series, we print out the names of each person baptized and check each Sabbath morning to see if they are in church. If they miss even one Sabbath, we call them to pray for them. If we detect there are any problems at all, we visit that very Sabbath afternoon. A Seminary professor once told our class this story: After the baptism of a couple in his local congregation, he invited them to join his small Bible study group. They attended weekly. They were making good progress growing in Christ until they had a disappointing experience in their lives. Discouraged, they missed church. The professor noticed they were not there and visited them that Sabbath afternoon. While he was in their home, encouraging them, the doorbell rang. Two members of their study group dropped by to see them. Within 30 minutes, the doorbell rang again. It was another couple from the group. The discouraged new converts were surrounded by love. The small group members offered them the support they needed, and they were back in church the very next Sabbath.

Many converts are lost because members do not visit them when they miss church. They feel isolated and alone in facing their problems. Visitation is critical if new members are going to feel like they belong in their new church home. A new convert may possibly be doctrinally convinced but not socially integrated into the church. Although they have been baptized, they feel like an outsider. They still feel somewhat uncomfortable with this new group of people. How can we make them feel at home? Discover what they enjoy and connect them with a like group of people in the church. Be sure they have personal invitations to the church's social events. Remind them when a fellowship dinner is taking place and encourage them to attend. If they come to church late and leave early, this is a sure sign

that they are not socially integrated into the church. If they have children, introduce them to other parents with children. Ask one of the committed teenagers in your church to invite the teenagers of your new converts' family into the church's youth group. Develop a hospitality committee to watch for new converts and visitors to be sure they are warmly welcomed and invited home for dinner.

Someone has said, "You know you belong when you feel needed." As soon as possible, find something for a new convert to do. Ask them to help. It might be something that needs to be done around the church, assisting in setting up tables for the fellowship dinner, working with the audiovisuals, picking up a shut-in to bring to church. The task may be simple but helps them feel needed. The more a convert feels needed, the more they will not want to miss one Sabbath.

*Relationship with the community.* New converts grow in Christ as they have something to share with people who do not know Christ. Christian growth and Christian witness are indissolubly linked. The Samaritan woman immediately shared what she had learned about Jesus. Our Lord said to the delivered demoniac, " 'Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you' " (Mark 5:19). The New Testament church was a growing church because it was a witnessing church.

Converted hearts have a story to tell of God's grace and power. Encourage new converts to join a witnessing class at your church. They will need guidance, but they will grow as they tell the story of God's grace. Help each new convert become actively involved in some form of witnessing. They may be involved in literature ministry, visiting the sick and shut-in, small group Bible studies, health ministries, or youth or evangelistic ministry. Supply them with literature, CDs, and DVDs to give

to their friends. Encourage them to participate in some form of outreach.

There are at least two decided benefits in getting new believers involved in soul winning. First, soul winning drives people to their knees, and they become dependent on Scripture. Soul winning will dramatically strengthen an individual's faith. The questions others ask will lead them to study God's Word more deeply themselves. Second, new converts have a network of friends that can be won. They have family members who will be eager to know what they believe. Witnessing believers generally do not leave the church, for participation in soul winning strengthens the faith of those who shares their faith.

## Conclusion

Nurture and discipleship do not happen by accident but must be carefully planned. Without a strategy of discipleship in place, apostasies will be high. If the church does not provide nurturing opportunities for new believers, they will either be weak in the faith for years and create problems in the church or leave the church altogether. When discipleship is a way of life for pastors and local congregations, new converts become strong, faith-filled Christians, growing in their knowledge of the Word, and witnessing for the glory of the Lord. The time, effort, and energy put into new converts is well worth it as they become church leaders in the future and nurture others to become disciples of the Master. ☑

- 1 A meeting of Adventist clergy and lay members from throughout the world.
- 2 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Evangelism and Church Growth—From Baptism to Discipleship," General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, [http://www.adventist.org/world\\_church/official\\_meetings/2003annualcouncil/1566.html](http://www.adventist.org/world_church/official_meetings/2003annualcouncil/1566.html).
- 3 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956).
- 5 See Mark A. Finley, *Studying Together: A Ready-reference Bible Handbook* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1995); for more information on *Unsealing Daniel's Mysteries*, visit [www.itiswritten.com/store/products/unsealing\\_daniel\\_s\\_mysteries\\_lessons](http://www.itiswritten.com/store/products/unsealing_daniel_s_mysteries_lessons).

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# Pastoral care of veterans and their families

Veterans have been returning from wars for countless centuries in almost every corner of the world. Battles were and are being fought in localized insurgencies, revolutions, civil wars, regional conflicts, and, at least in the twentieth century, in two World Wars. Of the veterans who do return, many are badly injured, physically and/or mentally.

As a chaplain, I was responsible for dealing with the spiritual needs of veterans, their families, and those who cared for them in the hospital. This article is intended to alert pastors to some of the spiritual consequences that military veterans and their families often live with. I am confident that military veterans of other nations suffer similar consequences, but I can speak only about American veterans. My hope is that, having been alerted to some of the spiritual consequences of war, pastors will seek to understand the spiritual needs of the veterans in their congregations.

## Church attendance

One big problem for pastors in seeking to minister to veterans is that many Christian veterans do not attend church.<sup>1</sup> My impression is that combat veterans in particular do not attend church for three reasons.

The first includes a sense that the church does not understand what they endured in war. In nearly sixty years of attending Christian church worship services, I have never heard a local church pastor even ask about what veterans endure in the military, in general, and in war, in particular.

(Unfortunately, I did not raise the subject when I was a local church pastor, either.) Only when I became a Veteran's Administration (VA) chaplain did I begin to learn and speak out about the spiritual consequences of war.

A second reason why combat veterans do not attend church is guilt. The reality is that many of the combat veterans I met did things in war that they cannot reconcile with, find difficult to talk about, and which most church people would not want to hear.

The third, and perhaps most frequently offered, reason given by veterans for not attending church is what they refer to as *the hypocrisy of most churchgoers*. Many veterans see churchgoers as sinners during the week who find religion for an hour or two on their day of worship. This may very well be a projection of the veterans' guilt onto others. At the very least, this claim raises the theological question of whether the veterans who make this point can stand being near a church that preaches about a God who loves them and us, despite our sin.

## The spiritual issues

Have the churches avoided dealing with spiritual issues experienced by veterans? Perhaps. Some groups, of course, are completely against war and deal with the issue very directly (Mennonites, Quakers, Church of the Brethren). Other denominations in the United States of America are either tolerant of war or speak out only when it comes.

The veterans are left to struggle with the question of the morality

of war—especially of killing. Many combat veterans spoke to me about the commandment: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17). The veterans may or may not remember the rest of the commandments, but they remember that one. Once having killed, the veterans are often unable to process the guilt. Notable exceptions to this problem are the veterans who fought in World War II, often seen as the last “good war.” Many believe that the killing they did in that war was necessary and morally justified.<sup>2</sup>

Some combat veterans wonder if they have committed the unforgivable sin. Who is there, in the church, to listen to their anguish or offer them help? Many pastors do not even include a prayer of confession in their worship. Others seem to focus more on the punishment due to sin and less on God's mercy.

We can begin by using prayers of confession, not directed at veterans or at war, but at our human tendencies to sin. Pastors can preach about God's love and forgiveness at least as often as we do about God's judgment. William Mahedy, a combat chaplain in Vietnam, suggests in his book, *Out of the Night*, a service of reconciliation that can be used to help veterans reconnect with God's mercy.<sup>3</sup>

Grief is another issue faced by veterans. In fact, grief can accumulate so rapidly during combat, as one's friends are dying all around them, that there simply is no time to work through the sorrow. The lack of time to grieve may result in the grief becoming chronic—it never ends.

Veterans may get stuck in any stage of grief but many whom I have known are stuck in anger. People who are angry are often difficult to be near. Angry veterans can be particularly difficult to be around because their anger is often directed at forces that average Christians, even pastors, have no way to do anything about, especially in the short run (i.e., the military, the VA, the politicians who went along with starting a war, the entire government, etc.).

Also, anger in many churches may be considered as everything from “not nice” to sinful. That makes it difficult for churches to deal with anger other than in a confessional way. In my experience, veterans have legitimate reasons to be angry, and someone must listen. Perhaps the worst of the anger must be dealt with in therapy groups in VA hospitals, but the church still has a role to play as well in providing a safe place for people to talk about their anger and, eventually, ask for prayerful support in healing from their anger.

If no one listens, then the anger can surface in really hurtful, dysfunctional ways. It erodes and eventually destroys relationships even with the people who love the veterans the most. One of the driving forces for anger was explained by our ethics professor in Seminary. He said, “Anger is the normal reaction to an injustice.”<sup>4</sup> If injustice in war exists, then anger, even lifelong anger, could be expected as the normal reaction.

### Dealing with death and addiction

Another spiritual issue raised by war is the reality of death. The sights, sounds, and smells of death can be so overwhelming that the veteran is left with terrible memories that may never go away. Veterans who had the duty either of gathering body parts after a battle or inspecting the body bags are often unable to forget the experiences.

This kind of unforgettable scene, among others, raises the question of

“Why?” “Why did so many friends die?” “Why did the person next to me die while I survived?” This is the issue of “survivor guilt.” There may be no good answers. Still, someone must listen so that the veterans do not have to carry the pain alone.

Another problem that many veterans suffer from is addiction. Alcohol and drugs offer ways to avoid remembering, at least for a while. During my first year in Seminary, I met a Vietnam vet. He lived across the street from us, and we became friends through sharing a car battery charger on a bitterly cold winter day. I knew that John<sup>5</sup> was a heavy drinker. He was on his third marriage and couldn’t work. One day he told me about his experiences. He flew as part of the crew of a B-52 bomber that made long flights to drop bombs on Vietnam. Because the planes were always flying at an altitude of fifty thousand feet, John never saw the effects of the bombs. But after he got out of the Air Force, he wasn’t able to cope with his role in the bombings. Thus he drank to forget, and the drinking got worse and worse.

Of course, one of the problems with drinking to forget is that sooner or later the memories come back—at least until so much brain damage exists from the alcohol that the person forgets almost everything. If you know people who drink too much, you might consider the possibility that they are drinking to forget and need God’s grace in place of the alcohol or drugs.

Alcohol is not the only way that veterans cope. A good friend, Frank, was one of the most gregarious, outgoing, and seemingly happy people that I have ever met. It wasn’t until one night when we were working together in his pharmacy in 1965 that I learned of his experience in the military. He had been a medic in the Korean War, and spoke of having to change the dressings on wounded men.<sup>6</sup> Just viewing, much less treating, those wounds sounded like a traumatizing experience. However, listening to his infectious laughter,

one would never know that Frank had been exposed to such sights. Humor can be a helpful tool in coping with many of the stresses of life, but humor can also cover up a lot of emotional and spiritual wounds that need to be treated—or at least shared with a pastor trained to listen in a nonjudgmental manner.

Combat veterans, unlike most of us, live with the awareness of what human beings are ultimately capable of doing. It is a frightening reality to live with and difficult to believe that the people who love us (family, friends, and churchgoers) can accept us. The church needs to reach out to veterans to reassure them that the good that God can do is far bigger than whatever they have done or are afraid they might do again.

To realize that women served and still serve in the military is also important. Their suffering was often severe too. The ten thousand or so nurses who served in Vietnam saw the broken and dying bodies of men hardly as old as they were. Other women were traumatized by sexual assault in the military, frequently by our own troops. All too often no one listened to their stories.

### Practical tips

A local church can conduct an anonymous survey of its members to determine how many are veterans and, in particular, how many are combat veterans. Then, with the support of the church leadership, a local VA chaplain could be invited to preach or give a talk about the spiritual needs of veterans. If the congregation is too distant from the local VA hospital, the church could search for a retired VA or military chaplain living in the area. Another possibility would be to contact a pastor who was in the military before becoming a pastor. At least five of my colleagues in ministry were in this latter category.

Whether or not a VA chaplain is available, the church can be supportive of the veterans and their families by encouraging them to go to “Vet Centers.”<sup>7</sup> These facilities,

usually some distance from the grounds of a VA hospital, are staffed with trained counselors (many, if not all, of whom are veterans) who can provide psychotherapy to help stabilize relationships, help veterans cope with the stress of living with the consequences of war in general and combat in particular, as well as deal with sexual trauma.

A pastor can prepare to deal with the spiritual needs of veterans by enrolling in at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in a hospital setting.<sup>9</sup> This is usually easiest to do when still in Seminary. However, depending on location, it is possible

to take a unit of CPE at a VA hospital in a later stage in our ministry. At the very least, such training can help the pastor be aware of their feelings as well as the issues of health care as they encounter patients, families, and the hospital staff.

When it is not possible to take part in this kind of training, pastors may address their need to learn about veterans' issues by forming a study group. If a VA chaplain or retired military chaplain is available, they could ask such a person to help them explore the spiritual issues that veterans face. They may also find a book or article on the needs of veterans and discuss it without a leader.

### Resources for ministering to veterans

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- Dina Greenberg's blog: [dinagreenberg.blogspot.com/](http://dinagreenberg.blogspot.com/)
- Mahedy, William, *Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).
- National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: <http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/index.jsp>.
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### Listen with respect and love

What else can we do as pastors? At a minimum we can encourage our churches to recognize veterans on Memorial Day and Veterans' Day or similar days designated for such occasions in your area. Perhaps we could offer veterans the opportunity to take part in a discussion period after worship for those willing to listen to stories about the veterans' experiences.

As the veterans are telling their stories, we can listen with respect and love. We can be patient enough to not rush in with assurances that "God forgives you." While God does forgive anyone who wants to be forgiven—combat veterans, in particular, often need for their stories to be heard before they can move on to further stages of healing. If they choose to confess something to a pastor privately, that pastor should maintain the confidentiality expected of them unless there is an imminent threat to the veteran's or someone else's well-being.

If your church is near a VA hospital or a veterans' nursing home, you could contact the office of volunteers to arrange for ways for church members to reach out to veterans. Churches could provide people to assist with transport of

veterans from one part of the hospital or nursing home to another, read to a veteran with impaired vision, or write letters for those who need help in this area. Members can come and sing during the year, especially at Christmastime. Church families might volunteer to attend VA hospital or veterans' nursing home worship services. It might even work to host a lunch or supper on Veterans' Day to honor veterans and their families. Also, pastors who are willing to officiate at funerals for people who are not active in church may discover opportunities to minister to the families of veterans.

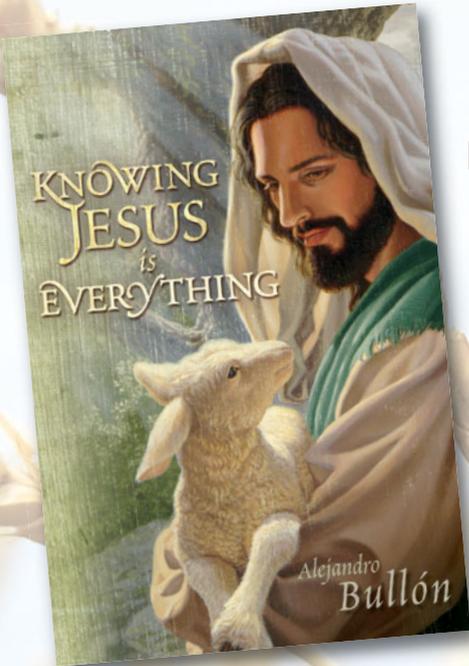
If a VA hospital is nearby, pastors of local churches can establish a relationship with the staff chaplains. Pastors may visit their own parishioners when they are hospitalized in VA hospitals and veterans' nursing homes as well as nonveteran facilities. Finally, pastors can attend, and even offer to participate, in local community Memorial Day and Veterans' Day programs at a VA medical center. This becomes an excellent way to convey the message that we care about veterans and their families and are available to them.

On a marble lintel over an inside doorway at the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital, where I served as a chaplain for twelve years, a message is inscribed, "The price of freedom is visible here." These men and women have sacrificed for us; we need to be there for them. ❏

- 1 In a survey of 125 veterans at White River Junction, VT (VAMROC), I conducted, it indicated that approximately 90 percent of that sample did not attend church. Lawrence L. LaPierre, "The Spirituality and Religiosity of Veterans," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, vol. 4, no. 1, 80.
- 2 Personal conversations with dozens of combat veterans of World War II, White River Junction, VT, VAMROC, 1989–2001.
- 3 William P. Mahedy, *Out of the Night—The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Veterans* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1986), 229–234.
- 4 Marvin Ellison, class discussion in an ethics course at Bangor Theological Seminary, Bangor, Maine, U.S.A., 1981.
- 5 Pseudonyms have been used in this article to protect the person's privacy.
- 6 Personal conversation with a Korean War veteran in Leominster, MA, 1965.
- 7 Veterans Readjustment Counseling Centers.
- 8 For listings on CPE Centers, visit [www.acpe.edu/DirectoriesRegions.html](http://www.acpe.edu/DirectoriesRegions.html).

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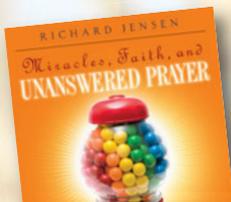
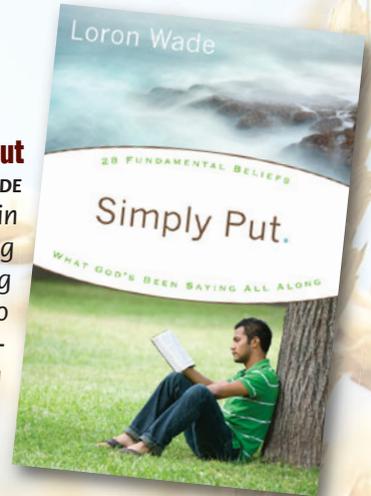
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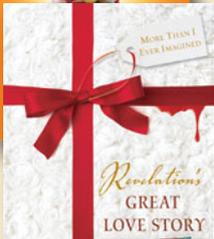
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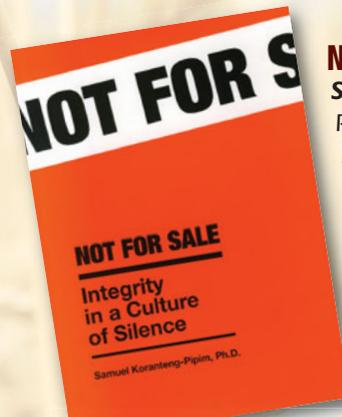
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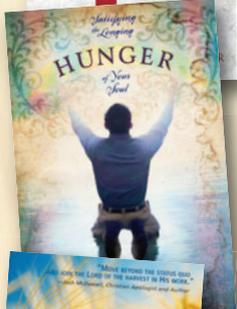
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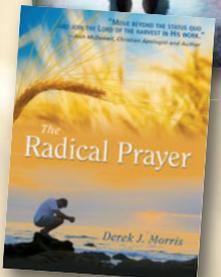
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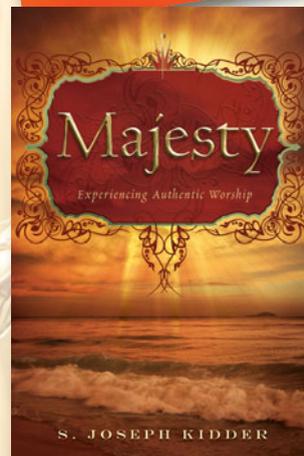
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Tom Hoehner, MDiv, is pastor of the Covington United Methodist Church, Covington, Indiana, United States.



# Ten things to be learned in pastoral ministry

Whether it's late-night talk shows or sports programming, it's popular to have a list of items that are counted down from ten to one. I suggest such a list of lessons could be learned in pastoral ministry.

**Number 10: It's easy for the gospel to get lost in a church.** Between programming, administrative needs, and the personal needs of the congregation, the gospel can get lost. People want to hear sermons that will make them feel good, and the message of repentance and faith that leads to eternal life can find itself on the shelf. If so, you will struggle your whole ministry to focus on what's most important.

**Number 9: You must sometimes define your ministry by what you refuse to do.** If you try and do everything, a congregation can become lazy. We eventually need to learn to say No. The demands of a congregation will increase until your role as a pastor becomes established, and it will only be confirmed when you say, "I cannot do that." Launch this understanding early in your pastoral assignment so that your expectations and theirs can match as best as possible.

**Number 8: People are, for the most part, often going to do what they want to do.** Some people will often start a project with vision and zest, only to find that their heart was really not into it. We have a hard time knowing our own hearts. We must continue to love people who continue to disappoint us.

**Number 7: You will have as much authority in a church as**

**people give you.** Those you serve in a church can limit your authority. Authority is like a bar of soap, the more you use it, the less you have, so use it wisely. Time and trust add to your authority, so take the time and build the trust, before you exercise too much authority.

**Number 6: You will be heard with authority to the degree that you are willing to stand up for a principle.** There comes a time in every ministry when you must deal with issues that you just don't want to address. God tests every minister with this question: *Do we want to please people, or do we want to please God?* Power structures exist in most churches that would rather replace you than do what God really calls them to do. My experience has been that every time I get knocked down I must get right back up, but you have to be willing to lay your life on the line for what you know is truly right.

**Number 5: You will never do the will of God in a church if you allow people with money to control you.** Every church needs to change, and change usually costs money. People with money in a church may be the first to resist change. And yet, without change, old things will not pass away, and all things will never become new; and you will stay in a rut. I always make it my practice not to know who gives what in a church because I tell my congregation that I choose not to relate to people on that basis. Then, all new ideas in a church can be judged on merit alone.

**Number 4: You have to work with the team you have.** The best motif for ministry is that of a coach who encourages the team

rather than a military officer who only issues commands. You can't produce ten talents from a five-talent church. You will face the challenge many times: Do I start a ministry with leaders who are unable to do a really good job? Sometimes the answer is *Yes*, and sometimes the answer is *No*. When Jesus hands out rewards, the criteria are *good* and *faithful* (Matt. 25:21). Faithfulness is half the grade. It does not matter how bad things are, if we are faithful, this impresses God. To whom much is given, much is required. The servant with the ten talents and the one with the five talents both received the same reward because they were both faithful in fulfilling what they could do, and Jesus called them both good. Play with the team that you have and manifest love with them, not frustration (even if you *are* frustrated).

**Number 3: Prayer carries the church where God wants it to go.** In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build my church." The legitimate spiritual building of a church resides in the hands of God. That makes prayer the most important ministry in your church. You can have all the programs in place and all the organizations on line, but if God's Spirit does not touch the work, it will, at times, stagnate. A sincere, intentional prayer focus will involve the Spirit of God in His church. Other than prayer, any foundation in a church is a faulty one. Regardless of where your church goes, you always need to come back to prayer. "Your kingdom come, / Your will be done, / On earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, NASB).

**Number 2: There may be people in a church who are instruments of opposition in a congregation.**

These may be good people, well-meaning people, but people who do not want to see the church really move ahead. When there is not much going on in a church, these people just blend into the apathy. But the minute new life emerges, they are there to monitor and try to control things. Mark 8:33 is a fascinating verse. Peter does not want Jesus to go to the cross and tries to talk Him out of it. Jesus' response is less than cordial: "Get thee behind me, Satan." People who oppose the move of God in a church must be opposed, and, as a result, you will probably lose these people. According to John 15, every branch that bears fruit He purges, so that it might bring forth more fruit. We are often afraid to let God purge His church, but if He does, the promise brings more fruit. How can we be a loving pastor and facilitate the

purging of God's church? It's not easy, but it has to be done.

And the number one thing that must be learned in pastoral ministry, if you have not learned it already is . . .

**Number 1: Never take too much credit for your successes or too much blame for your failures.**

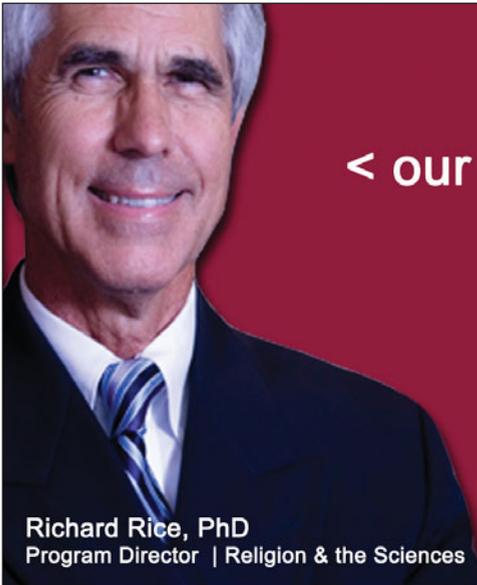
With the right atmosphere in a church, the church will grow. Good things will happen, God will show up, and the church will be blessed. And if things are not right in a church, prayer, especially, becomes the key. Because Paul said that *we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities* (cf. Eph. 6:12), and because Jesus said that *whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven* (cf. Matt. 16:19), we need to pray against the spiritual forces that keep God at bay in a church. If the church becomes stagnant, we need to ask God to show us specifically what is keeping the church from moving ahead and gear our prayer in that specific direction.

Despite the frustrations of ministry, it is the highest of callings. I leave you with 1 Timothy 1:12 "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." Jesus is our Great Enabler. 

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**Nick Howard, PsyD**, is the founder of Cypress, a leadership development firm that specializes in providing coaching and training services for Christian leaders and executives.



# A closer look at Christian leadership coaching

The call to Christian leadership invites individuals into privileged territory—the opportunity to carry the torch handed down by Jesus. The call centers on building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:13; Matt. 28:19, 20) and includes growing in gifts that build up the church (1 Cor. 14:12). Responding to that call fills our hearts with anticipation, commitment, and gratitude. However, seasoned leaders know that Christian leadership can be very difficult. Struggles with overextension, isolation, and personnel problems can create demands and drains that are often overwhelming, and with that, the hope of fruitful labor (John 15:2, 6; Phil. 1:22, 25) can seem more and more remote.

As one moves into positions of greater responsibility, the challenges become more complex, and often the solutions that worked in less demanding roles no longer fit. Leadership books and seminars do have value in helping leaders grow and navigate through difficult times, but they are limited. They are not able to provide personalized feedback for a leader's unique context nor do they speak to a leader's unique dreams.

All of these realities demand a new avenue for helping leaders bear fruit and grow in their gifts in today's increasingly complex world. That new avenue is *Christian leadership coaching*.

## Why coaching works

Coaching works because it addresses the biggest hurdles that hinder effectiveness in demanding leadership roles: overextension,

isolation, and a lack of clarity. The combination of these three can put even the best leaders in a reactive, maintenance mode where the vision and mission become mere wishful thinking.

Speaking to these daunting hurdles, there is something profound about the importance of not going through life—or any major challenge—alone. God addresses this need for sounding boards in leadership through examples like Jethro and Moses (Exod. 18), Ahithophel as a counselor to David (1 Chron. 27:33), and Jesus sending out the disciples two by two (Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 2).

At a deeper level, good coaching works because the pattern follows how Christ entered our world and came alongside us filled with grace and truth (John 1:14). As humans, we thrive when we are relationally connected in healthy ways. We struggle when we are isolated and overwhelmed.

Christian leadership coaching can be defined as a relational process between a coach and a “coachee” (the one receiving coaching) that creates a unique context for leaders to gain greater clarity about their values and vision, identify priorities, and process obstacles. Leadership is about coming alongside a leader and skillfully drawing on grace and truth skills to support God-honoring visions and helping a leader gain greater clarity, confidence, and effectiveness, over time, in growing God's kingdom.

In good coaching, the coachee feels connected, safe, honored, and supported. They feel free to talk

candidly about struggles and hopes, dreams and drains. That kind of a relationship, perhaps more than anything else, creates a context for new possibilities, growing gifts, and a greater impact.

## How coaching works

The format for Christian leadership coaching involves building around a series of regularly scheduled conversations called *sessions*. Depending on the approach of the coach, sessions can last between 30 minutes to an hour. Ideally, the coach and coachee talk twice a month for growth, although sessions can happen once a month as well, depending on time or financial realities. Coaching is done over the telephone on most occasions although sometimes in person. The conversations are confidential (within limits), which creates a sense of freedom and safety for the coachee, and allows for more authentic sharing.

Early in the coaching process, the leader's personal values and vision are clarified through a few exercises. These exercises help the leaders begin tapping into what matters most to them and what brings energy and hope to their dreams. Vital to the coaching process, these exercises help the leader orient around the most important priorities in their role. When this work is done well, it creates a unique kind of energy that enables the leader to increasingly engage their work from a place of strength and commitment.

After the values and vision are clarified, the next step, typically, is for the coachee to set short-term goals

based on top priorities. This brings greater structure to the coaching conversations and provides an excellent context for future work.

From that point forward, the coaching process unfolds very naturally. As the coachee feels increasingly comfortable, they are able to discuss what is most important to them at the time of the coaching conversation. Often a conversation will start with a brief review of what has transpired recently, or with some things that have gone well, and then the focus shifts to a substantial challenge or obstacle that needs to be addressed in order for the coachee to move forward in their role, and move closer to their vision.

As time goes on, the conversations proceed to deeper levels that strengthen the coachee's confidence and identity as a leader. By engaging in the coaching work over a span of time, from six months to a year or more, the gains increase as the coachee continues to grow, resulting in greater internal resources that can be drawn upon when pursuing greater challenges.

Three major tenets set Christian leadership coaching apart from other forms of relational ministry:

*The coachee sets the agenda.* The coachee decides what to talk about. The coach spends the bulk of the time listening, summarizing, and asking exploratory questions that are designed to help the coachee get to the heart of the issue being tackled.

*The answers to the coachee's struggles are found in the coachee.* The coach cannot be classed as a problem solver or solution provider. The coach's role is to help the coachee discover the answers, and share perspective and perhaps suggestions—only after the coachee has really “tilled the soil” in pursuing a deeper understanding of their challenge.

*Coaching focuses predominantly on the present and the future.* Coaching is thus distinct from therapy, which often focuses on the present and the past. Further, therapy concentrates on individuals who are really struggling, whereas coaching works

well for those who are in a good place and motivated to take their life and ministry to a new level.

### **The common flow of a coaching conversation**

In a typical coaching session, coachees “think out loud” or share a complex or challenging problem that they don't have clarity on—such as a personnel issue. The coach listens, empathizes, and asks questions that help the coachee move further into the heart of the issue. As the process continues, greater clarity tends to emerge. As the core issue becomes clearer, the issue is eventually “named” (a way of saying the core emotional and logical aspects of the issue are distilled in a manner that creates clarity and often illuminates the wisest course of action). Susan Scott, the author of *Fierce Conversations*, notes that “a problem named is a problem solved,” which often brings confidence and strength to the coachee.\* After the issue is named, action steps are explored with a timeline developed to help hold the leader accountable for the desired steps. As appropriate, the coach may then share other things to consider about moving forward well or affirm the coachee in ways that will encourage positive movement.

By continuing in this process, leaders emerge with greater clarity and confidence to tackle tougher issues that are often neglected in their work—issues that can seem insurmountable without a place to process them.

To make this process clearer, let me provide a real-life example of how this works. Joe, who was a congregational pastor, had recently been placed in an administrative position. As a pastor, he had found a way to have a healthy rhythm in his role. He had his day off in place, had developed a strong set of lay leaders, and was bearing fruit in his ministry. The change to administration was a lot tougher than he expected. He told me that his new job made pastoring feel easy in comparison. Now, there were so many more expectations and responsibilities that he was often

overwhelmed, not to mention the travel demands that swallowed up hours at a time. Before long, he wasn't exercising, wasn't having date nights with his wife, and wasn't maintaining his devotional time.

In the first few sessions of our coaching experience, Joe focused a lot on how overextended he was and how hectic his schedule felt. He was stunned by what had happened to his life. As I followed the coaching process by listening, empathizing, and asking questions, it became more clear to him that his pace just was not sustainable and that his capacity to lead would be truly compromised if he did not begin to set better limits on his schedule. He also expressed clearly that he didn't want his marriage or his wife to suffer over the long term.

Having the chance to talk out loud in our coaching sessions about what was going on, and hearing himself describe how out of balance his life was, helped Joe gain clarity and develop a positive resolve for healthy change. From there I asked about what steps he could take to change things around. He decided to schedule a new day off, resolved to communicate that to his boss, and committed to carving out time for his wife, his devotions, and exercise.

Since we began the coaching process, his schedule can still be hectic, but Joe has moved much closer to a more balanced schedule. He enjoys his role much more and feels more grounded and effective as a leader.

One may ask the question, “Couldn't Joe have just figured this out on his own?” Yes, he could have. But it likely could have taken him much longer to acknowledge the problem and develop the resolve to make the necessary changes on his own. In my experience, many leaders do not find a way to set appropriate limits and grow in effectiveness over time when they do not have an accessible ally to help them talk about their experiences and find ways to overcome role or cultural expectations that push so hard for overextension.

The point is, Christian leadership coaching provides a supportive

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Dr. Nixon earned a BA in Theology from Oakwood University, an MA in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a DMin from the Adventist Seminary at Andrews University.

Dr. Nixon is married with three adult children and two grandchildren.

## Schedule & Topics

### Sunday, October 11, 2009

Theme: Preaching as Encounter  
1:00 p.m.

Lecture #1: "Encounter With God"  
4:00 p.m.

Lecture #2: "Encounter With God's People"

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and challenging context to address positively the kinds of issues that can make a substantial difference in one's effectiveness and fulfillment as a leader. Coaching creates a chance to be heard and grow in ways that would be much more unlikely without it.

## Finding a coach

If a leader or conference decides to pursue coaching, finding the right coach or group to work with becomes very important. At this point in the profession, there are no formal requirements that must be met in order for a person to call themselves a "coach." Most people who enter the profession of coaching come from the field of human resources, mental health, or have already had successful leadership careers. Ideally, a coach has at least obtained a certificate in coaching from a reputable coach training institute or received extensive training from a skillful coach. (As coaching skills are increasingly recognized as valuable for leaders to possess, coach training is becoming more common for leaders as well.)

From my vantage point, a good Christian leadership coach embodies all of the following: is mature emotionally and spiritually; is able to enter a person's world well; has a rich understanding of leadership, systems thinking, psychology, and spiritual formation; and has the skill required to help people grow.

After finding a list of qualified coaches, the next step would be to contact a few of them and set up a brief discussion to learn about their respective approaches. The goal is to see which of them the coachee would most naturally engage with. After a coach has been decided on, the coach and coachee should discuss expectations and their respective roles. Then the coaching process begins.

That coaching is not a quick fix for deeply entrenched problems must be highlighted. Nor does coaching become a vehicle for growing as a leader overnight, but a process that allows a leader to grow *over time* in gaining stronger skills, deeper insights, and greater maturity,

enabling them to bear fruit in more powerful ways.

While I do not believe this is commonplace, a coach must recognize the importance of being careful not to slide into a problem-solver mode or an advice-giving posture that effectively stalls the process of helping the coachee grow through the conversations. It is also important that the coach spends 70 percent or more of their time listening, summarizing, and asking questions. The session should not become a forum for the coach to fill with their stories.

## Ideal outcomes

When a skillful, insightful coach connects really well with a leader who has a strong thirst to grow, powerful things can happen. In my experience working with pastors and administrators, substantial growth can take place in as little as six months, and can continue over the span of years.

When the coaching goes well, certain common outcomes are expected. The leader gains a capacity to set better limits in dealing with overextension. They gain skills and insights in confronting personnel issues and become more vision and priority focused. As the work goes past the year or two mark, a deeper level of peace and confidence in one's leadership often emerges, and the leader becomes able to engage their top priorities with greater effectiveness, develop their key reports with greater skill, and move into a greater awareness of God's leading in their life.

In summary, through the avenue of Christian leadership coaching, some of the main tactics Satan uses to drain and overwhelm leaders are chipped away, allowing them to carry more faithfully and fruitfully the torch in growing God's kingdom for their generation and beyond. **M**

\* Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success in Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time* (London: Piatkus Books, 2003).

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**Engin Obucic** is affiliated with the national interreligious dialogue in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and works as a real estate portfolio coordinator for Unipromet d.d. Sarajevo.



# The strength of the covenant

**A**ncient covenants formed the basis for contemporary legal contracts that regulate relationships between two or more parties. Covenants in the ancient world were usually closed by an oath and assumed vassal treaties. Both parties participating in a vassal contract were obliged to take an oath and swear in the name of a higher authority, thus making the oath authentic and effective.<sup>1</sup>

Following the ancestral succession of various covenants similar in form and nature to the vassal treaties mentioned, the Jewish people entered into an identity-forming covenant. At Mount Sinai, Israel made preparations to enter the covenant that would constitute it as a unique nation—a people exclusively dedicated to God.

The generation that left Egypt, stood in close proximity to Mount Sinai and listened to Moses' reading of the words and laws that he had received from God. It was upon this utterance that the promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continued. As a sign of acceptance of the contractual terms, having heard the prescriptive contents conveyed by Moses, the contract mediator, the people verbally affirmed, "Everything the LORD has said we will do" (Exod. 24:3).<sup>2</sup> The people's verbal acceptance of the contractual terms warranted the covenant (contract) signature preparation: burnt offerings and bulls were sacrificed and the blood was used as the contractual medium. Half of the blood was placed on the altar, and the other half sprinkled on the people. "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exod. 24:8).

## Blood and words

Two elements that dominated the signed contract immediately draw attention: *blood* and *these words*. The blood of the bulls was necessary to express the level of seriousness involved in the contractual relationship. Namely, should the contractual terms fail to be honored, the shedding of the bulls' blood would set the equivalent penalty for any inconsistent contract signatories. The fact that there was no atoning sacrifice allocated to those who intentionally violated the words of the covenant solidified the penal measures.

*These words*, or simply *words*, is a technical phrase that refers back to the Ten Commandments. Translators of the New International Version inserted a footnote to explain that the term *words* is "a technical term for '(covenant) stipulations' in the ancient Near East (e.g. among the Hittites . . .). The basic code in Israel's divine law is found in [Exodus 20:]2–17, elsewhere called the 'Ten Commandments'. . . the Hebrew words for which mean lit. 'Ten Words.'"<sup>3</sup>

## "Those who are not here today"

Since the covenant was initially made with Moses' generation of Egyptian refugees, God added an extended clause, rendering impossible the potential exclusion of their offspring: "I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not [*yet*] here today" (Deut. 29:14, 15).

"Those who are not here today" fall into two groups: the first group included the direct descendants of those Israelites "standing here . . .

today." The second group included non-Israelites, individuals who did not have an ethnic origin in Israel. They were the proselytes, woodcutters, and water drawers: "All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God—your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water"<sup>4</sup> (Deut. 29:10, 11).

According to the rabbis, these foreigners entered the tribes of Israel either intentionally (i.e., motivated by religious interest) or involuntarily (i.e., sold as slaves). Regardless of their social standing or ethnic origin, however, they, too, were included in the covenant obligation between God and Israel and thus assumed the legal right to participate in the contractual relationship.

These non-Israelites who signed and kept the contract by oath were described with great respect by Israel's prophets. In the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, they—the eunuchs and foreigners who decided to participate and consistently honor their contractual obligations—were described by God as individuals whose "burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar" (Isa. 56:7).

Including the offspring and foreigners highlighted the openness characterized by that contract. The existing universal dimension of the contract reached a particular expansion with the coming of the Messiah. Namely, the coming of *Yeshua*, the Messiah, signaled further public replication of the already available contract. Corresponding to the formula of the contractual invitation (first the Jews, then the Gentiles), the Messiah

strengthened the contract with *rabbim* (many)—first with the Jewish offspring as expected, transferring it then to the Gentile offspring. Jacques B. Doukhan explains the context: “It is noteworthy that the prophet Daniel does not describe the work of the Messiah as a ‘new covenant,’ but rather as a strengthening of the original covenant. The passage uses the word ‘confirm’ (NIV) or ‘strengthen’ (*higbir* from the root *gbr* denoting *strength*).”<sup>5</sup>

The presence of the technical term *rabbim* is indicative of the availability of the contract. The covenant was not only strengthened with “many” Jews but also equally strengthened with “many” foreign nations.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the full horizon of the contractual strength emerged in the work of the Messiah.

### The Passover, the Sabbath, the name

The Messiah strengthened the contract in three ways: He specifically requested the eating of the Passover meal in remembrance of Him; He carved the Sabbath sign into the body of time, making it a permanent signal of His blood sacrifice; and He announced the presence of the name of God in the contractual relationship.

Apart from the roasted lamb, unleavened bread, wine, and bitter herbs, the principal theme of the Passover meal was blood. Placed on the wooden doorframe, this is the blood of the lamb that saved the Israelites from the final plague. The Messiah provided clarification as to the meaning of the Passover blood represented by wine. Namely, the Messiah equated the wine with His own blood, insisting that the wine represents “‘my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’” (*rabbim*) (Matt. 26:28).

Moreover, the Passover blood of the covenant was poured out to indicate the manner in which God makes people holy. Namely, since the religious life of contractual people was centered on the sacrificial system, the shedding of judgment and Passover blood was a daily requirement that meant the difference between life and

death. The mystery underpinning the shedding of the Passover is revealed in the Messiah’s own sacrifice: “Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood” (Heb. 13:12).

The conclusion is unequivocal. Through the Messiah’s Passover blood, the people were made holy—a mystery that cyclically returned every seventh day. Specifically, the activity of making the people holy stood fixed “for all generations” by way of a transhistorical semiotic sign that endures through time. God stated the duration of this sign: “‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy’” (Exod. 31:13).

The shedding of the blood comes as a strengthening of the contract that God, by means of Jeremiah, promised to the contractual people. Through the repetition of the personal pronoun *I*, the Speaker uses the tetragrammaton (YHWH), or His name, to announce the physical connection with His people: “‘I will put my law in their minds / and write it on their hearts. / I will be their God, / and they will be my people’” (Jer. 31:33). In the contractual context, knowing God’s name meant that God Himself was intimately and physically present in the relationship. The implication is both clear and terrifying: the intimate and physical presence of God among His people was fully realized in the body of Immanuel who exemplified His identity in the following statement: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58, KJV). The *I am* identification represents a direct reference to the tetragrammaton, YHWH—the name of God revealed to Moses and the people.

Therefore, the Passover blood, the Shabbat, and the tetragrammaton mediate the eternal permanence of the contractual responsibility between God and His contractual people.

### The forming Jewish-Messianic community

The continuity of the contractual relationship represented itself in forming the Jewish community of Jerusalem that accepted Yeshua as the

Messiah. Although those Jews who accepted Yeshua as the Messiah continued to pray regularly in the temple and synagogue, conflicts followed. Due to their views, they were not allowed to fully participate in regular synagogue services through prayer leadership and synagogue management; and with time, a stronger division between the two Jewish groups was cemented. This happened because the Jews who upheld Yeshua made bold Messianic claims that inspired constant controversy and occasional rejection. Such friction prompted the group to gather in private houses for prayer, reading, and sharing of the Passover meal in remembrance of their Messiah. In addition, instances of persecution by fellow Jews as well as other nationals to whom they preached the message of Messianic salvation were not rare. Although their complete excommunication occurred in the fourth century,<sup>7</sup> the period after the destruction of the second temple witnessed an event that brought about significant changes.

Hans Küng explains, “The definitive break was brought about after the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, by a Jewish council in Jamnia (near Jaffa), which was composed of Pharisees: this was the formal excommunication of the Christians, a curse on heretics which was to be repeated at the beginning of every synagogue service.”<sup>8</sup>

Küng’s statement exemplifies the sentiment expressed towards the Jews who accepted Yeshua’s Messianic commission. Namely, the curse reflected the existing attitude towards Yeshua’s followers, thus stimulating the beginning of a serious process of separation between the two collectives that had no realistic, long-term prospect for integrated coexistence.

### The covenant, not the Messiah

Yeshua’s Messianic identity, although contentious, was not the primary cause for the separation; rather, it was the controversy over contractual obligations placed on the Gentiles that accounted for the separation. In

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The 15 accredited Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America are working together to create a broader awareness of the benefits of Adventist higher education. "The Adventist church looks to our colleges to supply a steady stream of leaders—pastors, educators, healthcare professionals, as well as well-rounded and ethical professionals in a variety of fields," states Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University. "We want to make sure our young people are aware of what we offer as a system of Adventist colleges."

To better understand what Adventist students are looking for, focus groups were facilitated on the east and west coasts, and a nationwide telephone survey was conducted. These conversations revealed a general lack of awareness about Adventist college options, especially among students who don't attend an Adventist academy.

Further research\* showed Adventist colleges promote the faith factor—the ability to find friends, peers, mentors, and teachers who believe and reinforce a common faith. These students, whether they attended an Adventist academy or not, also stated that Adventist colleges offered the chance for personal attention and meaningful interaction with professors that may be hard to find at other larger educational institutions. Additionally, all groups of Adventist students regard Adventist education as providing quality academics.

Adventist colleges have joined together in a coordinated effort to help young people, their families, and local church pastors, understand the benefits of a Seventh-day Adventist education. A direct mail campaign, print advertising, e-mails, and a website, [www.adventistcolleges.org](http://www.adventistcolleges.org) are some of the methods being utilized.

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## Accredited Colleges/Universities in North America

- Andrews University, Michigan
- Atlantic Union College, Massachusetts
- Canadian University College, Alberta, Canada
- Columbia Union College, Maryland
- Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, Florida
- Griggs University, Maryland
- Kettering College of Medical Arts, Ohio
- La Sierra University, California
- Loma Linda University, California
- Oakwood University, Alabama
- Pacific Union College, California
- Southern Adventist University, Tennessee
- Southwestern Adventist University, Texas
- Union College, Nebraska
- Walla Walla University, Washington



**Adventist Colleges and Universities**

particular, it was the issue of Gentiles' religious integration in the Jewish community that caused aggressive divisions within the community itself. The divisive milestone occurred when Peter, in a confronting vision, received instruction to visit the Roman officer's household (Acts 10:9–20). While there, Peter preached, Gentiles listened and accepted Yeshua, and unexpectedly received the Holy Spirit. This chain of events prompted Peter to conclude that the sealing presence of the Holy Spirit authorizes the Gentiles to participate in the contractual relationship.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequently, this realization raised a question pertinent to the Gentiles' contractual obligations. Namely, *Do Gentiles need to observe circumcision and all precepts?* Some Judeans in Antioch were clear—unless the Gentiles get circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, they could not be saved (Acts 15:1).<sup>10</sup> Others disagreed. Sharp differences in opinion prompted the community to send Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, Barnabas, and other local community members to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the leaders of the community.

Having carefully listened to Saul's and Barnabas's reports detailing God's manifestation among the Gentiles, the leaders in Jerusalem were impressed yet divided. Both views for and against were represented. The Pharisees and the Law mediated by Moses demanded circumcision while others held more flexible views.<sup>11</sup>

After much discussion, the dispute was solved and the following compromise reached: the Gentiles shouldn't be burdened with the full requirements. Four commandments would suffice—abstinence from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). Although James and the apostles were opposed to the full requirements dictated by the decrees and laws that regulated life in the Promised Land, they certainly implied that the Gentile offspring should sign the contract based on the “words”—the Ten

Commandments—as the basis for the contract very familiar to the Gentiles in the preaching of Moses in the synagogues every Shabbat. Stating that the four mentioned commandments were the *only* commandments prescribed to the Gentiles would entail contractual irregularities and relationship absurdities. This line of reasoning would connote a *reductio ad absurdum*, untenable consequence since the converted Gentiles were certainly obliged to worship the God of Israel as opposed to engaging in the polytheistic practice of worshiping foreign gods, to consequently eliminate graven images, to avoid the misuse of the name of God, to observe the Sabbath, to respect one's parents, to stop killing, committing adultery, stealing, lying, coveting, etc.

By making the aforementioned decision pertaining to the Gentiles, the apostles and elders thus effectively regulated the Gentiles' concessional proselytic status within Judaism of the time.

## Conclusion

Although we were not present at the time of the signing of the contract, we—the Gentile and the Jewish offspring—enjoy the same entitlement in assessing, with a sense of maturity, its terms and conditions. Should the terms and conditions be accepted, we ourselves will enter “into the *covenant* of God your Lord, and [accepting] the *dread oath* that He is making with you today.”<sup>12</sup> The “dread oath” alone indicates the seriousness of the contractual acceptance. Since the covenant is strengthened with the Messiah who shed His holy blood for many, the *blood* could mean either death or life for us depending on how seriously we approach our contractual commitments. The newly signed covenant will become effective only when contractual commitments have been honored—commitments we vowed to honor when we expressed our faith, were immersed in the water, and received the Holy Spirit. In this manner, the covenant between God, the

Israelites, and the Gentiles will reach its full expressive form. The full number of the Gentiles will come in so “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). 

1. Vassal treaties demonstrate that a “vassal was bound by an oath in the names of several gods to keep the stipulations of the treaty. If the treaty should be broken, the incorporated curses would take effect.” This relationship “can be seen in the Hittite vassal treaties, the Assyrian vassal treaties in Esarhaddon, and the Aramaic vassal treaty of Sfire.” Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), s.v. “oath.”
2. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version (NIV).
3. Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *The New International Version Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 171n20:1. The following instances exemplify the occurrence of the term in *The Living Torah* (New York: Moznaim Pub., 1981), by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan: (a) Exod. 20:1, “God spoke all these words [The Ten Commandments]” (all emphasis added); (b) Exod. 34:28, “[Moses] remained there with God [on the mountain] for 40 days and 40 nights without eating bread nor drinking water. [God] wrote the words of the covenant, consisting of the Ten Commandments, on the Tablets” (brackets in original); (c) Deut. 4:13, “He announced to you His covenant, instructing you to keep the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two stone tablets”; and (d) Deut. 10:4, “[God] wrote on the tablets the original script of the Ten Commandments which He declared to you from the mountain out of the fire on the Day of Assembly” (brackets in original).
4. Rabbinical comments elaborate on this detail: “Some say that these were Canaanites who came to embrace Judaism, just as in the time of Joshua [*Tanchuma* 2; Rashit]; cf. Joshua 9:21-27. Others say that they were the mixed multitude [Exodus 12:38; Ramban], or the Israelites' slaves [*Baalot Tosafot*; Chizkuni].” Navigating the Bible II, “Deuteronomy 29,” World ORT, <http://bible.ort.org/books/pent2.asp?ACTION=displaypage&BOOK=5&CHAPTER=29>.
5. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 150, 151.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Interview, “Mordechai Arad,” *Shabbat Shalom* 51, no. 2 (2004): 7. Arad explains that coexistence ceased to be feasible in the fourth century *a.d.* due to the accumulated layers of cultural, political, and theological differences.
8. Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 14. What Küng refers to is the *birkat haminim* (the curse against the heretics) in the *Amidah* (an essential prayer of Judaism). A second-century text, *Tosefta Shabbat* 13:5, confirms an existing animosity between the two groups: “Mordechai Arad,” *Shabbat Shalom*, 7.
9. Hence Peter's affirming statement concerning the Gentiles in Acts 15:8, 9: “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.”
10. Rabbinical commentary explains the background: “From here our Sages learned that our ancestors entered the covenant with circumcision, immersion (in a *mikvah*), and the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice on the altar, for there is a law that one may not sprinkle blood unless immersion has preceded it.” Chaim Miller, *Chumash: The Book of Exodus*, Gutnick ed. (New York: Kol Menachem, 2005), 174.
11. James, for example, wanted to avoid burdening these individuals with hundreds of commandments in conjunction with extratextual rabbinical precepts, advocated four simple commandments: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19–21).
12. Jconnect Seattle, “Deuteronomy 29:9-20, ‘Nizavim,’” Hillel UW, [www.jconnectseattle.org/Documents/Deuteronomy\\_29\\_9-20.pdf](http://www.jconnectseattle.org/Documents/Deuteronomy_29_9-20.pdf) (brackets in original).

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At the time of writing, Patti Ecker was a student at Lincoln Christian Seminary in Lincoln, Illinois, United States. Now she is a mental health therapist at Crosspoint Human Services, a community mental health agency in Danville, Illinois.



# Forgiveness: A part of the journey to healing

In nine years of working with divorce recovery groups, I have found that the topic most people do not want to talk about is *forgiveness*. Invariably someone will ask, “Do I *have* to forgive my former husband or my former wife?”

“No,” I respond, “you have to forgive *only* if you want to heal.”

What is forgiveness, why should we forgive, when should we forgive, and—most importantly—how do we do it?

## Why we resist

People going through divorce want to stop hurting, but they often resist the most effective treatment for their pain—forgiveness. Often people resist because they do not understand what forgiveness is—and what it is *not*. Forgiveness is *not* saying that the offenses your former spouse committed against you were OK. Many of the things that occur between a husband and wife when a marriage collapses are, in fact, sin: adultery (Matt. 5:27, 28), anger (vv. 21, 22), lying (Prov. 6:16, 17), selfishness (James 3:16), violence (Mal. 2:16), and arguing and slander (Eph. 4:31). Likewise, forgiveness does not minimize the offense, or say, “It wasn’t that bad.” Neither does it let your spouse off the hook.

Forgiveness also does not say that you must trust your former spouse again. A spouse who has been violent or committed adultery or lied to you repeatedly, will need to regain your trust by demonstrating that they have repented and are working on making restitution (if necessary).

Similarly, forgiveness is *not* forgetting the offense. In fact, forgetting may even be counterproductive, for we cannot forgive a wrongful act that we do not remember.<sup>1</sup> Thus we may be reminded of an offense that was committed against us, but if we have forgiven the offense, the reminder is like a scar. When we see it, we remember there was once a wound at that spot and that the wound used to be painful or tender. But now, healing has taken place, and our wound no longer hurts, even though seeing the scar causes us to recall how the wound occurred.

Another reason we resist forgiveness is that it is not natural. If it were natural, God would not have to tell us to do it (Luke 17:3). After all, He does not have to tell us to eat or drink. These activities come naturally to us; we feel like doing them. We sometimes do not feel like forgiving; but He commands us to forgive anyway (Matt. 18:20, 21).

Our pride also causes us to resist forgiveness; indeed, pride may be the biggest hurdle. Pride results because of our failure—perhaps even refusal—to “seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).<sup>2</sup> Instead, we build kingdoms of our own where we are in control and get to decide who deserves to be forgiven and who does not. In our kingdoms, we will be the ones who mete out justice (after all, we are not sure God can be trusted to punish our former spouse as they deserve).

Likewise, our pride prevents us from seeing ourselves as we really are—sinners desperately in need of

a Savior (Rom. 3:23). Instead, we compare ourselves to others and conclude that we are not so bad, that what our former spouse has done to us consists of an action far worse than anything we may have done to them. But the Bible cautioned, “those who are pure in their own eyes” (Prov. 30:12) to examine themselves more closely (Luke 6:41), and Paul warned us against thinking of ourselves too highly (Rom. 12:3).

Finally, we may resist forgiveness because we do not want to appear weak.<sup>3</sup> But because “[God’s] thoughts are not [our] thoughts, / neither are [His] ways [our] ways” (Isa. 55:8), what appears to be weakness is really strength (2 Cor. 12:10). Forgiveness, then, becomes powerful—so powerful that it can break the chains of bondage. When you forgive, “you set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself.”<sup>4</sup>

## Why forgiveness?

Forgiveness offers many benefits. For one thing, you feel better, both physically and emotionally. From a physiological standpoint, forgiving can reduce the severity of heart disease and may even help cancer patients live longer.<sup>5</sup> Forgiving also may reduce anxiety and depression and improve counseling outcomes.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, refusal to forgive may contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, depression, alcoholism, and drug addiction.<sup>7</sup>

Forgiveness also helps in our interpersonal relationships. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one

another" (Col. 3:13). A forgiving spirit may protect us from those who seek revenge against us, as David learned when he spared Saul's life in 1 Samuel 24.<sup>8</sup> It also opens the way for us to receive forgiveness as we "do to others as [we] would have them do to [us]" (Luke 6:31). In "keep[ing] no record of wrongs," forgiveness also becomes a mark of love (1 Cor. 13:5). In contrast, withholding forgiveness allows a judgmental spirit to take root,<sup>9</sup> because we ourselves decide whether our former spouse deserves to be forgiven (James 4:12). Similarly, it sets us up for judgment by our ex-husband or ex-wife (Matt. 7:1).

Most important, though, are the spiritual benefits of forgiveness. First, we are obedient to God when we forgive (Luke 6:37). Second, we become more like Christ as we extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us (Luke 23:34). Then, as we "participate in the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), forgiveness offers us an opportunity to partner with God in what He wants to do in our lives as well as in our former spouse's life. And one of the things He wants to do is to bring healing; in fact, that is why He sent Jesus (Luke 4:18). When we forgive our former spouse, we experience the "peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

### When to forgive

When people experiencing divorce ask, "Do I *have* to forgive my ex?" they often are still experiencing pain. They may be still in the heat of the battle: working out a settlement, deciding child custody issues, talking with lawyers, appearing in court, facing almost daily some new consequence of the sins that have been committed against them. They cannot imagine forgiving their soon-to-be-ex-spouse, and at this point, it *would* be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to forgive. One researcher says that before forgiveness can occur, "the offending act must be past."<sup>10</sup>

But once life has assumed some new semblance of order, the individual who wants to heal (John 5:6) should begin to consider forgiveness.

Recognize the importance of not waiting until you feel like forgiving because—you may *never* feel like it. Besides, forgiveness is not a feeling but a decision. When God says, "I will forgive their wickedness / and will remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:34), He does not mean that He cannot remember them; He means that He has decided to act toward us as though He does not remember them—and this He asks us to do when He commands us to forgive (Eph. 4:32). He asks us to decide to behave as though we have forgotten what our former spouse has done to us. You will make that decision "when you don't want to hurt any more."<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes people say, "My ex has never said they're sorry for what they did." But you do not need to wait until they ask for forgiveness. Once you know the benefits of forgiveness, why would you wait to reap them? Besides, what if your former spouse suddenly did ask for forgiveness? If you have not begun to work through the process, you will be broadsided. You might say something you will regret later—"Never! I'll never forgive you!" If you have begun the process, you will be able to respond in a more reasoned way, perhaps saying something like, "I'm working on forgiving you; I'm not quite ready yet to say I've forgiven you, but I am working on it."

Until you forgive, you are allowing your former spouse to control you—how you feel and your physical and emotional well-being. You are "surrender[ing] [y]our future" to them.<sup>12</sup> Not forgiving is "like drinking poison and then waiting for the other person to die."<sup>13</sup>

### How to forgive

The process of forgiveness begins with the decision to let go of the offenses your former spouse committed against you. Remember, you are not saying that what they did was acceptable; you are simply saying that you will no longer hold it against them. You are surrendering your right to get even.<sup>14</sup>

Begin praying about your decision (Matt. 7:8). Be honest with God. Tell

Him how badly you hurt.<sup>15</sup> Confess what you are feeling: anger, hatred, resentment, jealousy. Ask God to remove these feelings and bring healing. If you are not ready to forgive, ask Him to help you to become willing. Talk with a counselor or a trusted friend (Prov. 15:22). Ask them to pray for you too.

When I began the process of forgiveness after my divorce, I found it helpful to ask God to show me the offenses I needed to forgive. It had occurred to me that I might forgive my ex-husband for divorcing me, but then I might think of something else later and be tempted to withdraw my forgiveness. Throughout 20 years of marriage I had harbored an unforgiving spirit, although I had not recognized it then; now I wanted to be fully cleansed, fully at peace. I fasted and prayed and, as God responded, I began to make a list of those offenses. I filled ten pages on a legal pad, beginning each line, "I forgive [my ex-husband] for . . ." To me, it was important to write those words for every offense. When I was finished, I felt like I was, indeed, "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Another question we frequently hear is, "Do I have to tell my ex I've forgiven them?" Lewis Smedes, probably the foremost Christian writer on forgiveness, says, "Forgiving is essential; talking about it is optional."<sup>16</sup> I believe in the importance of examining your motive in telling them. Be sure that your asking their forgiveness does not consist of a self-righteous act (Luke 18:14), or intend to prompt your former spouse to extend forgiveness to you, too, perhaps before they are ready. Ask God to show you whether your motive is pure and the timing is right. If you decide to tell them, Smedes recommends that you "make it short [and] keep it light."<sup>17</sup>

### How will you know if you have forgiven your former spouse?

One indicator that forgiveness is occurring is that you will be able to let go of the outcome of the situation;<sup>18</sup> you will no longer feel

the need to control or manipulate, but are willing to trust God to deal with your former spouse. A lingering desire for revenge would suggest that you have not forgiven.

When you can extend compassion to your former spouse and no longer want to see harm come to them, forgiveness is taking place.<sup>19</sup> Being able to pray *for* them, not just *about* them, remains a good sign that you have forgiven them. For example, if your divorce has caused your former spouse to move away from God and you can pray for that relationship to be restored, or if your former spouse was not a Christian and you can pray for their salvation—then you can know that your forgiveness is real.

Just as forgiving an offense is not the same as forgetting it, forgetting it is not a test of having forgiven it.<sup>20</sup> I am convinced that when Jesus commanded us to forgive often (Matt. 18:21), He did not necessarily mean that our brother (or ex-spouse) would sin against us over and over. I believe He knew that we would remember a person's single sin against us many, many times, and He was telling us that every time we do, we must choose again to forgive.

### Seeking forgiveness

Of course, we would like to believe that our former spouses were completely at fault in our divorce while we were the perfect mate. But the

hard truth is, we committed offenses against them, too, and we need to seek forgiveness.

Chances are you do not remember all the ways you have offended your former spouse. Or you may have said or done things that you did not, and perhaps still do not, realize were hurtful. Therefore, the first step in seeking forgiveness is to ask God to show you the things for which you need to seek your former spouse's forgiveness.

You will know that you are ready to seek forgiveness when you possess genuine sorrow for your offenses. You also should feel empathy for them, some sense of the pain they must have felt when you hurt them and may yet feel. Finally, you should have an attitude of repentance, even a desire to make restitution, if necessary and possible.<sup>21</sup> If any of these are missing, ask God to create within you that sorrow, empathy, or repentant spirit (Ps. 51:10).

### Conclusion

Forgiveness becomes crucial to healing in divorce. But divorce also is one of the areas in which forgiveness is most difficult. Because of God's design for marriage, in which a man and woman "become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24), a husband and wife achieve the greatest level of intimacy possible between two human beings. The depth of that intimacy, however, also makes them more vulnerable to one another than to any other individual.

Our spouses know those places in our hearts that are most tender, most easily bruised—and when the marriage covenant has been broken, the wounds we inflict on one another are especially deep . . . so deep that we really do *not* deserve to be forgiven for having inflicted them. Yet, by the amazing grace of God, we can be. And just as we can be forgiven, we, too, can learn to forgive. 

- 1 Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 39.
- 2 All Bible references are from the New International Version.
- 3 Bob Jones, "When Forgiveness is Hard" (Lancaster, CA: Central Christian Church), retrieved April, 22, 2006, from <http://www.centralchristianfamily.org/Counseling>.
- 4 Smedes, op.cit., 133.
- 5 Campaign for Forgiveness Research, "Research Into the Strength of Forgiveness"; retrieved April, 22, 2006, from <http://www.forgiving.org>.
- 6 Scott Heller, "Emerging Field of Forgiveness Studies Explores How We Let Go of Grudges," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 44, no. 45 (July 17, 1998), A18-A20; retrieved April 22, 2006, from <http://chronicle.com/temp/reprint>.
- 7 Tara Roberts, "Why Forgive?" *Essence* 36, no. 12 (April 2006), 180; accessed April, 22, 2006, from *Academic Search Premier*.
- 8 Bob Jones, "Benefits of Forgiveness" (Lancaster, CA: Central Christian Church), retrieved April, 22, 2006, from <http://www.centralchristianfamily.org/Counseling>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Heller, op. cit.
- 11 Lewis B. Smedes, *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive and Don't Know How* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), 66.
- 12 Ibid., 178.
- 13 Actress Carrie Fisher is credited with this expression in reference to resentment. Retrieved December 27, 2007 from <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/39439.html>.
- 14 Smedes, *Art of Forgiving*, 7.
- 15 Ibid., 139.
- 16 Ibid., 178.
- 17 Ibid., 146.
- 18 Beverly and Tom Rodgers, *Adult Children of Divorced Parents: Making Your Marriage Work* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 2002), 132.
- 19 Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 29.
- 20 Ibid., 39.
- 21 Rodgers, 133, 134.

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## RESOURCES

***Life Is Mostly Edges: A Memoir*** by Calvin Miller, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

If you've ever wondered why you're a pastor, you will enjoy reading Calvin Miller's *Life Is Mostly Edges: A Memoir*. If you're like



I am, you don't question your call to ministry; but sometimes you question God about the people to whom you are called to minister.

You also thought that you were a pastor when they gave you your first church or when they ordained you. Miller will free you of such notions. He shares his life with us not only as a pastor but as a human being who survived the pastorate, even thrived. Miller talks about the pastor who is still becoming a pastor.

Continued on page 28 ▶





Continued from page 27 ▶

Reading Miller, you see yourself. You identify with people and problems, joys and hopes—and come away with confidence in God and His call for your ministry. I consider *Life Is Mostly Edges: A Memoir* as not only a pastor's manual on how to live life as a pastor full time, but more importantly, living a great life as well. His writing integrates the pastoral office and the human life. He paints the picture for us of a life lived well and happy over much of the twentieth century and into the current one, all the while serving as

pastor of a church that he founded and loves.

The picture, while not always attractive, is powerful because the story comprises an honest account of a pastor's life. His memories become way marks on *your* journey. Many of his experiences are universal to all pastors, and I'm fairly certain that every pastor who stays at it for a while will find relevant wisdom in Miller's open book.

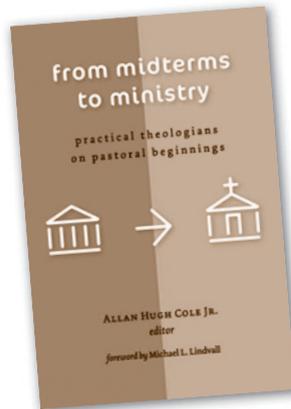
The temptation to deny our calling to ministry infiltrates our lives in dozens of ways. One of them

includes being consumed by the pastorate, thereby living the other parts of our lives in poor fashion. As I read Miller, I hear the voices of pastors whom I know. They look back over the years and events of their lives, wondering if they could have done better. And I think of life's true goal: living at the edges *as well as* the center—not satisfied that my pastoral role alone is living a true and fulfilling life.

—Reviewed by Marty Thurber, pastor of the Fargo Seventh-day Adventist Church, Fargo, North Dakota, United States.

### From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings

by Allan Hugh Cole Jr.  
editor, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.



Haddon Robinson once told a Seminary class that he would gladly pay the price of a book if it produced just one great illustration. This volume easily exceeds that guideline. The editor, Allan Hugh Cole Jr., has assembled two dozen pastors who offer short chapters on their personal perspectives of transitioning from Seminary to ministry. Few books exist that address this unique niche in the life of an evolving pastor. Three audiences in particular would benefit from Cole's contribution: Seminary professors, Seminary students or early graduates, and ministry employers, i.e., church administrators and ministerial leaders.

Repeatedly and from various perspectives (all authors have recently been or still are pastors), these writers address what various constituents believe Seminary education should accomplish and compare that with their own experience. What

becomes clear is the misperception that exists, across denominations and Seminaries and among most church members and non-Seminary trained pastors, about what Seminary does and does not do.

Clarity on this issue would transform the Seminary experience itself as well as focus on ongoing post-Seminary pastoral development.

The editor correctly identifies the target of his compilation as "principally for new ministers or those who soon will become new ministers." The so-called gap existing between Seminary and actual ministry is maintained to be real and acknowledged as such, not made dichotomous of each other. Indeed "good ministry is found, rather, where pastors stand with one foot firmly planted in their theological education and the other foot just as firmly planted in the parish, and allow the resulting tension to shape their pastoral practice."

Special attention should be given to the chapters by Thomas Long, Ray

Anderson, Craig Barnes, Karen Yust, Anthony Robinson, Wallace Alston Jr., and William Willimon. In fact, Willimon's article should be required reading for all Seminary students and professors. For example, he aptly states, "when seminaries appoint faculty who have little skill or inclination to traffic between academia and church, is there any wonder why the products of their teaching find that transition to be so difficult?"

While it is easy to cast cheap stones at advanced theological education, the reality of current ministry demonstrates the long-term benefits of adequate preparation. Over a lifetime, today's pastor, engaged in eschatological ministry, will encounter more transitions and challenges than any clergy in history. As Willimon concludes, "if you don't define your ministry on the basis of your theological commitments, the parish has a way of defining your ministry on the basis of their selfish preoccupations and that is why so many clergy are so harried and tired today."

—Reviewed by Walton A. Williams, associate ministerial secretary and coordinator of off-campus continuing education for North American Adventist clergy from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. ☑



## "KIDS" engages in the Middle East

**Beirut, Lebanon**—June 18–21, 2009, was dedicated to the "Kids in Discipleship" (KIDS) training seminars in Lebanon.

The mission of KIDS is "Mentoring Kids as Empowered Disciples of Jesus NOW!" with a vision described as "Equipping parents and mentors to disciple kids to Jesus and to empower each child to use their gifts in worship and ministry."

Five teams were organized, including pastors, elders, and members traveling from Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Qatar. Three main presenters and six coaches instructed and trained the teams throughout the four days of the gathering. In all, a group of more than 30 people met each day. There were many brainstorming activities, planning sessions, and other exercises designed to lead the participants step-by-step to learn how to reach their goal.

"This was a really inspiring and rewarding training event," said **Anne-May Wollan**, Children's Ministries Director of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists. "We had some really wonderful and dedicated coaches that were wholeheartedly engaged in the training." [*Aranka Bajic/TED News Staff/TED News*]

## Handwritten Bible brings insight to participants

**Crieff, Scotland**—Inspired by the 66-language Bible traveling the world leading up to the General Conference session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be held in Atlanta, Georgia, United States, in the summer of 2010, Scottish Seventh-day Adventists decided to have their own personalized,

handwritten Bible. Members from all the churches in Scotland submitted handwritten passages of Scripture that were compiled into the "Scottish Adventist Bible."

The Scottish Adventist Bible attracted considerable attention at the Scottish Mission Day of Fellowship as members poured through the pages to see who had contributed and in which languages. More importantly, as part of "Follow the Bible," Pastor **Llew Edwards**, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Scotland, hopes that this initiative has helped Adventists in Scotland appreciate their Bibles more, not just as a historical heritage, but as a life-changing book worth cherishing and sharing.

For more about the Bible in 66 languages that is traveling the world, see the interview in the January 2009 issue of *Ministry*, titled "Follow the Bible: A Journey to Spiritual Renewal." [*BUC News/TED News*]

## Adventist Church moves to strengthen partnerships with health organizations

**Geneva, Switzerland**—On July 7, 2009, the Seventh-day Adventist world church president called on Adventists to partner with other health organizations in offering primary health care globally—a request that urges the denomination's members and institutions to shed individualistic approaches in offering care to communities.

**Jan Paulsen's** remarks came on the opening day of a global health conference, which explores ways to achieve public health goals through partnerships and the role faith-based organizations (FBOs) play in such an effort. Church health leaders also hope to demonstrate the role that spirituality and holistic living can play

in primary care and find common ground when working with partners.

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO), a United Nations agency, sought to bolster partnerships with FBOs, which deliver as much as 40 percent of primary care in some nations.

In his keynote address, Paulsen urged community involvement as a way for Adventists to express their own values in an age of globalization. Such involvement, he said, would define the public's perception of the church's approach to primary care.

"An individualistic, inward-looking conception of Christianity is utterly at odds with the Savior who reached out to restore blind men's eyes, cured lepers, and healed an emotionally broken woman," Paulsen said. "We cannot express our faith, our desire to imitate Christ, in seclusion."

Paulsen said the church would continue to prioritize facilitating, funding, and supporting professional medical health care through its network of more than 600 hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries. The denomination's 150-year health focus also emphasizes health education, advocacy of vegetarianism, and living alcohol- and drug-free.

Paulsen also addressed concerns that partnerships would be at odds with the church's mission, saying, "Some have been critical, and rightly so, of an eschatological perspective that serves simply to reconcile us to current miseries. Awaiting [Christ's return] is not a passive exercise, but something that demands action [in] the present."

The church's emphasis on health, Paulsen said, should not just be one of treating disease, defining what is healthy to eat or drink, or the training of medical professionals. "Our approach to health is a concept that encompasses all that contributes to the fullness and completeness of human existence." [*Ansel Oliver/ANN*] 



## Memorial Day recovery

Memorial Day, America's first of the summer holidays—celebrated at the end of the month of May—is a time to remember our fallen soldiers, share family reunions, and enjoy picnics, baseball, popcorn, and the arrival of summer's warm weather.

This year, Sharon and I would have much preferred visiting a location where we could have remembered her father, Ewell Wyatt, a genuine hero pilot of World War II's greatest generation, who died just over a year ago. Or we could have shared the day with good friends and a backyard cookout commemorating our wedding anniversary that always falls just a few days after the holiday. This year I had planned to install a birdbath fountain in our garden to honor our 39 years of marriage.

However, instead of fun in the sun, I was convalescing at home after 15 days in the hospital and watching from my sickbed as Sharon valiantly installed the birdbath on her own.

I feel fortunate to be alive. After months of ignoring a low-grade infection, the problem suddenly turned vicious. While Sharon was traveling, I was left alone, unconscious on our bedroom floor for over 12 hours with a fever and disease compromising virtually every bodily system coupled with hallucinations wilder than any drug-induced trip could have produced. When my coworkers alerted Sharon of my absence at appointments, she telephoned our neighbors to search for me, and I was rushed by emergency squad to the hospital.

Although the reasons for my predicament were my own fault—a vastly overextended travel schedule, long hours in the office during too-short interludes between itineraries, neglecting exercise, disregarding a balanced diet and sufficient rest or

even a vacation break—the consequences of this rampant infection spread until our whole family suffered as the doctors battled the disease.

I believe I have learned some serious lessons. Please pray for me as I resolve to change my behavior. I am on a new exercise regimen aimed at weight loss, glucose control, blood pressure reduction, and regaining strength.

My experience has been a particularly bitter education since I had mistakenly presumed that I was the exception to what I understood and preached. I have always taught and proclaimed grace; but I have worked as if I believed that earnest labor would somehow merit God's protection from the consequences of disobeying His natural laws of rest, balance, health, and exercise. So, when the crash came, it was more than physical as I grappled with the reality that my treatment of the Holy Spirit's temple in my body had been disgraceful. More than my blood chemistry being out of balance, my entire being had been compromised.

During my month-long absence, my associates performed outstanding service in carrying the workload; and my trust of their judgment and competence was greatly rewarded. The spiritual care I needed was also abundantly supplied as my pastor and the hospital chaplains visited and prayed with me, and prayer chains across the globe included me in their petitions. One group from another denomination even heard of my plight and convened a special Communion service to focus their prayer and fellowship on my needs. How gracious and kind!

Beyond these generous outpourings of thoughtfulness from family, loved ones, and individuals whom I have never met, Sharon and I were particularly blessed by two

dear friends whom we requested to spiritually minister to us. As they prayed and read wonderfully assuring Bible passages, waves of gospel joy flooded into my mind and body with reassurances as I once again felt the good news applied to my own soul.

And I cannot sufficiently express love and appreciation for Sharon's patience and partnership in this long process. Beyond her already-too-heavy load, she undertook many extra detailed responsibilities and functions—in addition to the stress of having a sick spouse whom she describes as “not a good patient.”

If I am not a good patient, I must add that Sharon is not a “natural nurse”—along the model of the good Samaritan who applied sweet oils, bound up lacerations, and tenderly cared for the wounded victim. Instead, Sharon chooses a more direct style. Paraphrasing Jesus' own command, she says, “Get out of your bed and walk!”

So as I attempt to implement her directive with significant changes in dietary, exercise, rest, and workload factors that sanity should have altered long before this, I solicit your prayers both for me as well as for too many other pastoral colleagues who need this cautionary counsel about rushing down the same destructive path. ❏



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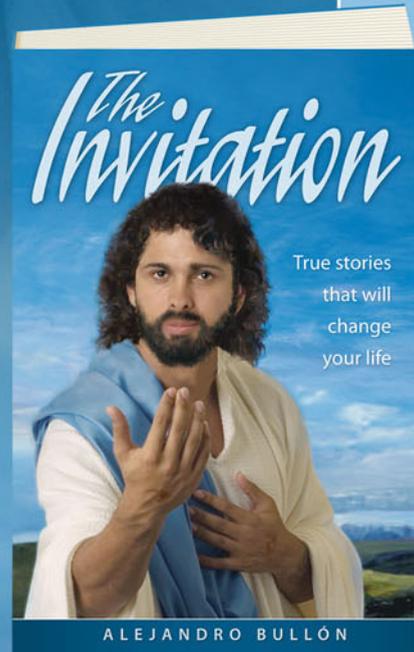
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